A MESSAGE FROM NEIL:
The last year has seen a flurry of activity, as we sow the seeds for a significant new chapter in our history. We have been working hard to grow our continuing care and learning services for young people beyond the age of 14, so they can continue living and learning at Harmeny up to the age of 18. Collectively known as ‘Acorn’, we have plans to refurbish a residential cottage and build a brand new vocational Learning Hub in the grounds of the school, supported by a major fundraising appeal.

Like many teenagers, however, Harmeny has been experiencing growing pains! By the summer, we had made great progress with our appeal and had planning permission for our new Learning Hub. But we were not prepared for what happened next… As a result of the perfect storm of Covid and Brexit on the building industry, tender results revealed costs had seriously escalated, and so we had to make the difficult decision to pause the build, in order to raise more funds. After much planning, we have agreed to proceed with the build in 2022, once the building industry stabilises.

Thankfully, we will still be able to launch Acorn in August 2022 as planned, with a refurbished cottage meeting the needs of five teenagers, and our Lodge building being adapted as a secondary base until the Learning Hub is completed. Local authorities, young people, and families are delighted.

Just as we were scratching our heads and wondering how we were going to raise the further funds, we received the amazing news that a legacy of over £300,000 had been left by the late Margery Browning, previous Chair of our Board. With the blessing of her family we have been able to allocate most of this to the appeal. Words cannot express how grateful we are for her donation; we know she would be delighted her donation would be going towards young people’s continuing learning.

In September, we had a celebration of Margery’s life through a tree planting ceremony in the grounds of the school, attended by her family, trustees and staff. The tree is located in a beautiful spot, in a field which will be known as ‘Margery’s Meadow’, and children will be able to admire the tree and know that a very special woman called Margery made a real difference to their lives.

What better symbol of growth is there?

With warmest wishes,

Neil

Neil Squires, 
Chief Executive

FUN – HARMENY’S INGREDIENT FOR GROWTH

No-one visiting our school can miss our emphasis on fun! From running off excess energy with games of tig in the venchie (our adventure playground), to ‘burn stomping’ as part of outdoor learning, or understanding electricity through creating our own live circuits, we grow our learning through fun. Here’s some news about the fantastic fun we’ve been having recently.

Through our Pupil Equity Funding last year we invested in some outdoor gym equipment, which is used to release some pent-up frustrations, chat with a buddy, focus on the health or simply as part of our P.E. Curriculum. It’s a crucial investment in times of such concern around the mental health of young people across our country.

Making learning fun allows our learners to feel confident to try new areas of learning, overcome the fear of failure and hook interests which will help them attain. They love trying new things and a visit from a Parkour specialist was so enjoyable that we introduced a 10 week programme of Parkour in the autumn for them all!

Growing fun in learning isn’t just about physical activity. We are also using a story telling resource - the “Mighty Writer” - where children use their creative imaginations in a fun way while also improving literacy skills. New “Playground Lines” have been painted around the school, taking learning outdoors to the next level! The lines help our young people learn by developing their problem-solving skills, increasing their knowledge of letter and number formations all while having … fun!

This year, for the first time, we’ll be educating and caring for young people beyond the age of 14 until they are ready to leave school. Through our great links with third sector organisations, Balerno High School and local businesses we’ll be providing young people with a variety of Youth Awards and a bespoke curriculum to meet their own needs, talents and interests. Our ultimate aim is to support them to move onto, and sustain, a positive destination, whether that be employment, training, or further education.

To help make our curriculum engaging for our learners, we’re delighted to welcome back our previous Head of Education, Judi Pollock. Thanks to funding from The Promise Partnership, Judi is our new Curriculum Development Officer, and is supporting the growth of our learning provision and strengthening links with partners for our new senior phase curriculum.

We are always delighted to welcome visitors to showcase our amazing living and learning provision. Why don’t you come along too…. Just make sure you are ready and up for having fun on your visit!

Mandy Shiel, Head of Education
GROWING HOLIDAY MEMORIES IN HOLLY COTTAGE

Covid affected everybody’s holiday plans and like every family in 2021, Holly Cottage adults were scratching their heads for what the holidays could look like and what fun we may be “allowed” to have. In Harmeny, forward planning isn’t always possible due to our children not always feeling safe or ready to take part in activities and adventures. Memories of last year’s ‘minimalistic’ summer activities also added pressure to make this a summer to remember.

The Holly cottage family grew their plans by being open and honest with each other and the children about what might be possible, within constant changes of isolation and government restrictions. Together, we decided that a number of organised day trips would make the most of the weather, the planning, the money and our readiness to enjoy ourselves, with the aim of spending good times and making positive and fond memories of our time together.

Did we achieve this? Absolutely! The boys enjoyed a trip to ‘the shows’ at Burntisland going on rides and getting a chippy tea. Those who were brave enough went on the ‘The Claw’, a fast and wild ride that left children screaming and laughing. The boys went to Deep Sea World spending the day looking for sharks and dreaming of working there “when I grow up”. As a family, Holly went to North Berwick to play in the outdoor pool, dig holes in the sand “for the first time!” and eat sandy sandwiches as part of our packed lunch on the beach. We took a BIG trip to Landmark Forest Adventure Park, all the way up in Aviemore, as well as a relaxed day at East Links Family Park. We went camping, kayaking, mountain biking and dog walking together, lighting camp fires and toasting marshmallows. We spent time ‘at home’ having water fights, den building, tree climbing, playing with friends and spending time BBQing in our garden.

Adults sometimes wonder what children will remember and what they enjoyed the most. So, this summer, adults made a big photo album of all our memories to look through together. Children were given different coloured pens to write in what they remembered and loved doing, which invoked lots of laughter and conversation. One of our boys wrote on the front page of the album “The Best Summer Holiday that Holly Cottage has EVER had”. If that doesn’t say it, I’m not sure what does.

Abi Barr, Assessment And Planning Worker
BUILDING BIRD-BOXES, GROWING FUTURES

Last winter I volunteered for The RSPB Edinburgh Swift City Project. Swifts spend most of the year in constant flight over Africa. In May, they migrate north to breed and we are fortunate to have a population here in Edinburgh. However, the UK population of swifts are in decline and conservationists are trying to find out why.

One of the most important tasks of the Swift City Project is to create and protect nest sites and install specially designed swift nest-boxes. At Harmony, we support children to transform their lives through learning and reach their potential - to recognise that they can make a contribution. I quickly realised this project would provide an ideal opportunity for them to have fun, learn and contribute. The Harmony community embraced the nest-box building project with enthusiasm; thanks to a kind donation of wood from Travis Perkins, the planks were cut into size, sets of ‘flat-pack’ nest-boxes were prepared and suitable nest-sites in Harmony were investigated.

The school closure in March due to Covid created an extra challenge, but the Harmony community took this in their stride and set to work. Despite the communication barriers of ‘lockdown’, beautifully crafted swift nest-boxes appeared from classes and cottages. Some were quite minimalistic, some were monogrammed and one was decorated with such finery, it was ‘fit for a Princess’! Some of the Harmony nest-boxes were gifted to the RSPB and have since been installed at various sites around the city, along with two gifted to our local community in Balerno. We were also thrilled one morning to look out of our classroom window and see three nest-boxes being fixed under the eaves of our main building.

As the cycle of seasons continues, I will look forward to emerging from this winter into a summer of swifts and Harmony can be proud of playing a key role in establishing Edinburgh as a ‘Swift City’.

Lesley Totten, Ospreys Teacher

A ROYAL VISIT – A VIP MEETS OUR VIPs

In July Princess Anne, The Princess Royal, was lucky enough to get another chance to visit Harmony, having last visited in 2000 to opened our new school facilities. She was treated to a tour by the best guides we have – the children themselves. Our resident experts showed her around our grounds, telling her about the bird boxes they had made as part of the Edinburgh Swift City Project, and to share their enjoyment of the extensive outdoor and therapeutic facilities Harmony has developed over the years.

Welcome to the school by Edinburgh’s Lord Provost, councillor Frank Ross, and Jennifer Scott, Harmony’s Chair of the Board, The Princess Royal also learned about Harmony’s plans for a new learning hub and services designed to help more young people rebuild their lives and reshape their futures.

Oscar, one of her guides describes the day: “My mum was really excited when she heard that I was going to meet Princess Anne and she told me all about her. On the day she arrived by helicopter, and I’m sure I saw the helicopter fly overhead. There were lots of extra police in Balerno to make sure she was safe and she had bodyguards too. The bodyguards were different to what I expected though, as I couldn’t see any guns!

I met Princess Anne by the venchie and we talked about how we play there before Summer and I walked her round to our cottage. In the cottage we had pictures of her last visits to Harmony over twenty years ago and she said, “Oh my!” When she saw them which I thought was funny. We talked about horses and ponies and our holiday to the caravan we had visited the weekend before. I like horses so it was easy to talk to her. After her visit to the cottage she then went to see the school. If I had the chance, I’d like to meet her again. If I could meet another royal, I’d like to meet Harry or the Queen!”

At the end of a visit in which a shared interest in outdoor activity and wildlife was very much the order of the day, it was no accident that The Princess Royal left Harmony not only with a strong impression of our commitment to supporting remarkable young people to overcome adversity, but also with a specially decorated bird box of her own.

Alison Acosta, Fundraising and Communications Manager
NEW SPACES AT HARMENY - DESIGNED BY EXPERTS

We’ve re-designed and re-purposed our boardroom following feedback from the children that they felt daunted by the spaces we used to host their meetings. The boardroom has now been transformed into a relaxed and child-friendly space for reviews and advocacy meetings.

Through our children’s participation group, all the children shared how they would like to change this room, creating pictures and drawings of what their new space will look like.

The children chose bright bold colours for the room, with lots of natural light leaving the room spacious.

The formal boardroom table and chairs have been replaced by modern and quirky orange sofas and bean bags. The introduction of a flat screen smart TV has really helped with virtual reviews held during lockdown, and is often used by the children whilst having a biscuit as a snack. There are plenty of books, activities and colouring to help ease anxieties and provide another focus during their reviews. The children have really embraced this space, with more participating in their reviews than ever before...

As one child said after their first review in the new room: “I feel listened to now.”

The space was created with the outcomes of the independent Care Review - ‘The Promise’ - at the forefront of our minds. Involving the children was really key to the success of this room, and their ability to feel that they want to use their space. The next task is helping the children to name the room; names are really important to the children, and I am sure that they will come up with something creative and fun. This space has really offered them alternative ways of connecting virtually to important meetings, feeling included, involved and safe enough to share their views.

Stacey Lawrence, Service Manager (Residential Services)

‘LEARNING FOR LIFE’ APPEAL UPDATE

Thanks to the incredible legacy from Margery Browning, our former Chair of the Board, and the support of our generous donors and funders, we are thrilled to announce that over £2.2 million has been raised towards the new Learning Hub!

The recent price rises and supply issues in the construction industry does, however, mean that we need to continue with our fundraising to reach the £3.1 million needed to make the new Hub a reality. Despite the challenges we have faced, we are determined as ever to reach the new goal and have been heartened by the messages of support from our donors, funders and the local community who are equally determined to help see the project through.

Team work makes the dream work!

In August we were thrilled to welcome back teams of volunteers from local businesses to help maintain our community garden and improve access to the estate. For many of the teams it was the first time they had seen each other face to face since the start of the pandemic, so there was lots of catching up to do while they got stuck in helping overhaul our garden beds and replacing old boardwalks and bridges.

To find out more and read the latest news about the appeal please visit our website or contact: fundraising@harmeny.org.uk

You can also support us by liking and sharing our posts via social media – this is a great way to help us reach our target. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram - @HarmenyEd

Alison Acosta, Fundraising and Communications Manager

The Harmeny Herald

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