First Base Day Centre celebrates grant to restore home and help homeless

15/11/2010

This exciting five year project will give service users, together with local schools and the wider community, the opportunity to get involved in an education and activity programme that will bring to life the history of St Stephen's Hall through historical research and practical conservation workshops, while investigating the history of homelessness and the welfare state in Brighton. The project will complement the major refurbishment currently taking place at First Base, funded by the HCA (Homes and Communities Agency) and in partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council, to provide new and improved facilities to service users.

A Grade II listed building dating back to 1766, St Stephen's Hall became the First Base Day Centre for homeless and vulnerable men and women in 1974. Originally designed by John Crunden as a regency ballroom in Castle Square, the building became St Stephen's Chapel of the Royal Pavilion in 1821 and George IV, William IV and Victoria all worshipped there before it was moved to its present site in Montpelier Place in 1852.

The project will involve service users in research activities exploring the history of homelessness and the issues associated with it throughout the lifetime of St Stephen's Hall. It will look at the changing profile of a homeless person, workhouses and other 'poor' institutions; laws, diet, disease and the development of the welfare state. The research will be used to produce educational materials for use by schools and other groups visiting First Base to learn more about issues surrounding homelessness and the heritage of the building.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the South East, explains how the project hopes to benefit both the building and the people that use it: "The First Base Heritage Project will give service users a wealth of exciting opportunities to learn not only about the social heritage of the building they visit every day, but also the chance to gain skills by taking part in construction and conservation activities and master classes with conservation professionals, including hands-on sessions such as helping to restore the pillars and friezes and re-moulding and plastering damaged areas."

BHT's Director of Homelessness Services, Nikki Homewood, said: "We are thrilled to have the chance to involve service users in the restoration of the building to its former glory. We believe the research project will discover fascinating stories and facts about the building, and about homelessness over the past 250 years, and will provide a wonderful opportunity to explore this hidden heritage."

Service users will also be trained to help deliver education sessions for schools and community groups, including role play, cookery lessons and handling artefacts, in addition to helping to run Heritage Open Days, when the doors of St Stephen's will be opened to the public so they can enjoy its splendour whilst learning about its varied history.

Commenting on the award Brighton & Hove City Council Councillor, Maria Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing, said: "This is great news - work and learning sits at the heart of our approach to tackle homelessness in the city. This additional funding for the First Base Day Centre means we can install state of the art work and learning facilities to enable local homeless people to benefit from new skills that help them into further training or employment. This centre works with around 50 homeless residents a day and having the latest computers and training equipment means our new

generation day centres can be places that deliver real change for the most vulnerable, as well as providing additional value as a wider community resource."

Mike Weatherly, MP for Hove and Portslade, said: "First Base Day Centre, which sits on the border of my constituency, brings together the historic past through the amazing architecture of the building and the future well-being of the men and women who will use the training and work experience opportunities provided by the Centre. The financial support provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund will strengthen Brighton Housing Trust's ability to improve the life chances of the most excluded in our city while preserving one of our most interesting historic buildings."

Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion, added her support for the project: "I'm delighted to see this project has had a successful award from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Not only will the wider improvement works enable the First Base Day Centre to continue to provide an invaluable resource for some of our city's most vulnerable people – the lottery funding will also mean that they can engage in preserving the buildings' heritage, helping to protect its treasured historical features for future generations and learning new transferable skills in the process."

A press call and tour will be held at St Stephen's Hall, Montpelier Place, Brighton, on 15th November 2010 to celebrate the award.

Time: 9.30am – 10.30am
Location: St Stephen's Hall, Montpelier Place, Brighton, BN1 3BF
What: Cllr Maria Caulfield, Cabinet Member for Housing B&HCC and Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion, join service users, staff from the Brighton Housing Trust, and the architects directing the restoration project for a tour of the building, photo and interview opportunities.

In attendance:

Cllr Maria Caulfield. Cabinet Member for Housing B&HCC Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion
Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the South East
Patrick Allen, Chair of the BHT Board
Andy Winter, BHT Chief Executive
Nikki Homewood, Director of Homelessness & Complex Needs, BHT
Chloe Hobden, Camillin Denny Architects
Service users

Itinerary: 09.30 – tour or site; 10.00 photo opportunity; 10.15 interviews; 10.30 end.

Notes to editors

The HLF grant to the project First Base Heritage & History Project is for £319,600 (72% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, since 1994 the Heritage Lottery Fund has not only revitalised hundreds of museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself. People from every walk of life are now involved with the heritage that inspires them, making choices about what they want to keep and share from the past, for future generations. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £428million to more than 3,000 projects across the South

East England region alone.

To date, 118 grant awards have been made in Brighton & Hove worth just over £15.5million.

Brighton Housing Trust is dedicated to combating homelessness, creating opportunities and promoting change. The Trust enables people (service users) to live independently, through the provision of services which seek to address the causes and effects of homelessness, poverty, vulnerability, discrimination, abuse, addiction and poor mental and physical health.

Further information

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