



Ochil Tower School

Camphill Community

Annual Report & Review of the Year 2019 – 2020



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Introduction:

It is hard to believe that we are nearing the end of another school year. It has been such an unusual year in 2020 for Ochil Tower and for all of us across Scotland and the wider world. If anything the current situation that we face has served to underline our inter-connectedness with other people who have had to manage and cope with the demands of the health crisis that has impacted upon all of our lives.



As a school we have had to rely on the spirit that exists at Ochil Tower, and our staff team and co-workers remained resilient throughout the challenges that have come towards us. By doing so we have managed to retain our services at a level that has not had us operating at 100% capacity but as close to that as we can possibly be.

We have had to make significant changes to the way in which we work. This has brought with it some challenges but I believe that we have done very well to meet these whilst ensuring that our approaches are compliant with the evolving guidance that we have all had to adhere to through the Scottish Government and their advisors at Health Protection Scotland.

It is a good opportunity for me to thank everyone involved with the care and education of our students and their wider family and support networks. The way in which parents/carers, wider support teams around the children & young people and external bodies such as the NHS have rallied to support our exceptional team of carers and teachers has been fantastic. Through times of adversity very good things can emerge and the goodwill and understanding from across this wide range of people has been truly heartening. Everyone has done all that they can in the face of this challenge to ensure that our ethos and values are retained so that young people have continued to experience this either in person, or virtually through the on-line technology that we are very grateful for at times such as these.

The Wider Picture:

It is now more than two years since the school underwent very significant changes. The model of care was for many years delivered in a traditional Camphill way. With the evolving world Ochil Tower School and many other communities have moved towards full staff employment in place of the traditional volunteer model. These changes have enabled us to provide 43 weeks of care in addition to the more traditional 38 week model. This was a significant change and in 2019/20 we have embedded the 43 week model into the fabric of our school.

The new offering has been very well received and there is now great potential to build upon the increased demand for places. Moving forward there has been a great deal of preparation so that we can be equipped to successfully deliver 52 weeks of care so as to meet the needs of families and local authority partners. The success of the Life Skills Centre and the increasing of the age group up to age 21 is also an area that has been well received and there is scope to develop our young adult provision too.

Ochil Tower School will continue to develop plans to offer a more varied service and we will ensure that our staff teams, professional partners and families are kept up to date with how these ideas are progressing.

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Life Skills Centre & New School Development Plans:

The success of the Life Skills Centre has shown us what great benefits come from working in a space that is purpose built to meet with the needs of our young adults. The way in which they came to the centre and immediately made it their own was great to see. Over time the staff, co-workers and young adults have worked collectively to make the space more personal and have added all of the lovely touches and thought that one would expect from a Camphill Community.

During the early part of 2019 we received planning approval for the Coach House area to be refurbished and for a new school building to be created in the area behind the Coach House. Over the course of the year discussions were on-going and a Project Group was formed. This group was making really positive progress until mid-March 2020. As we are all well aware the world changed for us all at that time and the plans will be re-visited again just as soon as the mechanisms of more normal business interactions are re-instated.

The plans are very exciting and will represent a truly transformational phase for Ochil Tower School. Plans can be viewed on our website under our donations section. These show the way the buildings will look and how a refurbished Coach House will dovetail with the new build school/workshop space.

Activities & Special Events:

This past school year has as ever had a great variety of activities and events that the children and young people have enjoyed to the full. The Life Skills Centre was formally opened in August of 2019 by John Swinney, Deputy First Minister for Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Skills & Education. We were delighted that Mr Swinney came along to formally open the centre as he has such a close affinity to Camphill through his connections to Corbenic, a Camphill community for adults close to Dunkeld.



Throughout the year we have marked the calendar regularly to ensure that our traditional events that are at the heart of the Camphill ethos are celebrated appropriately. These events are a mixture of long standing festivals that help to mark the seasons, such as the Harvest Festival and Hallo'ween. This past year we also had a terrific bonfire night celebration with food, sparklers and a great fire with the help of Neil, Lewis & Veit.

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The Harvest meal was as special as ever with everyone getting together to eat and celebrate. Hallow'een was great fun with some strange beasties lurking in a "cave". When young people explored the cave they came out with a "custard pie" or lots of shaving foam on their faces for being so inquisitive!



There has been a huge amount of outdoor fun and engagement where our children and young people really get access to amazing opportunities to experience nature and feel the benefits from being connected to the beauty that is all around us. Our location in Auchterarder makes it easy for us to get to really beautiful spaces very quickly and the children and young people have their favourites. Each week in school there is a trip out for the classes and it has been great to see this past year the 43 week houses grow in confidence so that on weekends they are exploring in Perthshire and beyond providing a wide range of experiences for the children and young people.



This past year the young people have had various musical performances in school and have made great trips out of school to places such as the cinema and Blair Drummond Safari park.

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Fund Raising & Community engagement:

This year Sports Relief was a great success. The theme was 'being active for an hour' and everyone engaged in a variety of animal themed work out moves. Collectively the school raised over £130.



This year saw a very different action around our traditional apple juice making. Thanks to the very generous donation of a hydraulic press, pasteurizer and fruit chopper we were able to process all our apples into 186 litres of delicious organic apple juice with all hands on deck! Some of the juice we kept for our own use, and some we sold together with the scrumptious home baked bread by the Life Skills Centre in aid of the Charity 'Nourish Scotland – Making a living from local food'.



We achieved our 2nd Fair Achiever status this year and reviewed our Fairtrade policy. We have now added jam, chocolate, chocolate spread and rice to the list of things we will buy Fairtrade for the school. During Fairtrade fortnight we set up a Fairtrade shop together with a cafe for the whole school, Board members and parents/carers to celebrate all that is good about Fairtrade. Class Isla produced our very own Ochil Tower Fairtrade cookbook which we sold alongside cotton bags, chocolate, bananas and lots of cakes, teas and coffee. We raised a total of £201 for the Fairtrade Foundation.

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This is a wonderful opportunity for the children at school to learn about other cultures and how they live and work. The children learn how with support others can be treated fairly and equitably and be rewarded fairly for their endeavours in producing cocoa for chocolate production or growing bananas. There was great fun with massive inflatable bananas on that particular day!

Class Isla engaged in a big undressing challenge for Mary's Meals. Over a period for 7 weeks the class walked 5km every day. They walked a total of 163km and raised a whopping £500 for the charity!

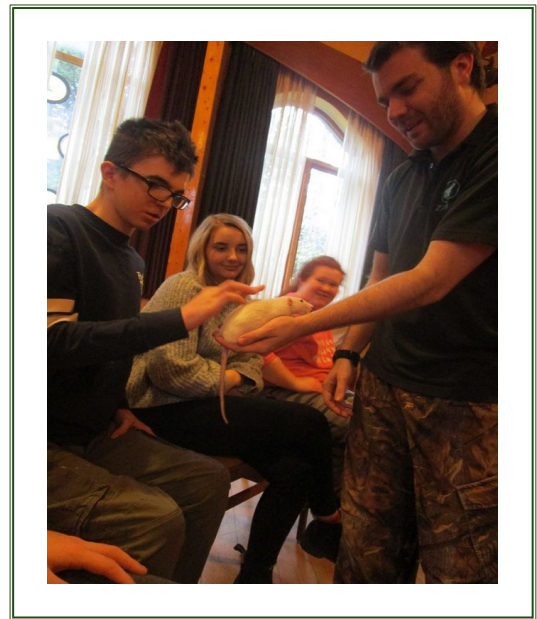


Lochay Class organized a Christmas Jumper day in aid of Save the Children and raised a total of £115.

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The Candle sale at Christmas raised £130 for the 'Sophie-Catherine Mills Foundation' charity. During the Reverse Advent Calendar, Lochay and Dochart class collected 6 boxes of essential food items between them for the Perth Food Bank and Home Start Stirling.

Over the course of the year we had our annual visit from Zoolab – where older children and young people get familiar with old friends such as snakes and bugs. For new children at the school it was their first experience to see and handle some very unusual creatures.



Live Music Now has for the 3rd year running gifted us with a 6 week workshop, this year with the traditional duo 'Aves o'May' playing the violin and the harp. Our young people enjoyed joining in with music making, listening to traditional tunes and exploring rhythm and sounds.

This year some of the staff and young people performed the Oberuferer Christmas Play, a very traditional Camphill nativity play which all the young people thoroughly enjoyed. We had many guests that day and older Camphill residents from Corbenic and Blair Drummond enjoyed the outing. For some adults that had attended Ochil Tower as children, these visits back are particularly important and special.



Together with all the young people we had our Carol Concert on the last day of term which sent us all away on our festive break with the real spirit of Christmas.

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Achievements, training and other activities:

As ever the focus is on children and young people having the opportunity to develop new skills both inside the classroom, but importantly for our community, to connect with nature and all that grows within Ochil Tower's spectacular grounds. Within the Life Skills Centre the young adults built upon their core work of weekly pizza and bagel deliveries, a laundry service, animal care, estate and garden work and arts such as felting. They have added to their culinary repertoire developing a range of salads and have also supported how goods are stored and delivered across the school campus.

The progress that can be seen within this group is hugely impressive and the range of life skills and steps towards increased independence is wide and varied. It is almost as if the Life Skills Centre is offering a college experience within a place that is safe and familiar for many of our young adults.

This year, the following qualifications have been achieved:

ASDAN: 8 Towards Independence and 1 Transition Challenge.
90 SQA National 1
2 Personal Achievement Awards – 1 Silver and 1 Gold

The Achievement Celebration for all pupils and the Leaving Presentations for the school leavers which took place at the end of June were valuable and memorable occasions, giving the pupils and co-workers a real sense of accomplishment.

Training

A wide variety of training opportunities were taken up this past year. Again we were very grateful that Perth & Kinross Child and Adult Protection teams came to visit us and tailor make a training day for all of our staff.

A range of people have accessed leadership training courses run through Camphill Scotland and we had great plans for an outside company called Animate to host three days of training for all of our staff teams – to help us shape the future aims and objectives of the school and to identify and agree on the guiding principals that would underpin the future Ochil Tower School. Due to the Covid-19 health crisis this work is currently on hold but I am hopeful that we can revisit and undertake this valuable piece of work.

Two teachers completed their PGCert in Inclusive Practice and have received their full GTC ASN Registration. Two further teachers are half way there.

Our in-house MAPA trainers continued to deliver training to staff so that we are better equipped to de-escalate situations so that they are better contained when someone may be in distress. We have seen a very significant drop in incidents year on year and that is testament to teams becoming more familiar with one another and with our students too.

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Our school topic for this year was Planet Earth. Each term a sub topic has been the focus for all the classes, covering landscapes, living things, and the solar system. Ongoing topics that we have as staples for our school are Waste Minimization, Switch off Fortnight and bio-dynamic gardening within Ochil Tower.

Regulatory Bodies – Care Inspectorate & Education Scotland

We were due to have an inspection just as the health crisis began. Our grades from January 2018 still stand:

4 for Care and Support
5 for Environment
5 for Staffing
5 for Leadership and Management

We were keen to see how we might have improved through our development of a more robust care and education plan but we will have to wait for this visit to take place later in the year hopefully. We had a joint visit from our two regulators and this was very welcome as we appreciate their joint input when we have specific questions or challenges. This is the value of the partnership approach that we foster with our regulators and we thank them for their ongoing support to Ochil Tower School.

Over the course of this past year we have introduced new young people to the school and again are expanding the number of authorities that we are working with. The fact that we have the older age group facility in the Life Skills Centre is a significant draw for us.

This year Anne-Marie led Belvidere and helped to develop and shape it into an excellent 43 week house. Leanne as House Co-ordinator, supported by Nikki are now leading the house after Anne-Marie decided to return to Glasgow. We are delighted how smoothly this change has occurred and the young people are really enjoying residing in Belvidere and the relationships that they are forming with the staff and that is best statement of all.

Rowan, Priory and Sycamore have been working really well this year and I thank the leaders within those services and the staff that support them in continuing to deliver fantastically caring services from within really homely environments.

A special thanks to our co-workers/volunteers this year. It was so disappointing that so many had to depart in mid March due to the corona virus outbreak. We understood very well the great dilemma that they faced and why they opted to return back to Germany. For a number that stayed we are really so grateful that you did and your help in the final term has been invaluable. For those that had to go home, we hope to see you again at some stage in what will be easier times I am sure. The children and young people loved to have you supporting them and you are welcome back at any time.

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Looking ahead to the coming year 2020/21:

From my own perspective I have really enjoyed the challenge that has been leading this phase for the last two years. From experiencing the loss of such a strong group of people that were pillars of the community for so long, the school has had to almost re-invent itself. That is where we welcome the new staff that I mentioned above who will play an important part in enabling our transition. They bring with them new ideas and a fresh perspective and we welcome their enthusiasm. As they grow in confidence they will have new impulses that will compliment our core of experienced staff and as a result the children, young people and young adults will benefit and thrive.

We thank all of those contributors and funders that helped to make the Life Skills Centre project a reality. This addition to the school is a very significant one. Children will be able to come to us at a relatively young age knowing that we have the potential to offer a continuum of consistent care and education that can last into young adulthood.

In summary, it has been quite a year. To all of our partners in the various Local Authorities around Scotland, Social Work and Education departments, our board of trustees, Camphill Central Scotland Trust, and of course families and friends we are hugely grateful for your continued support, we wish you all the very best for our new school year 2020/21.

Stuart Provan
Chief Executive
June 2020

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