**CENTREPIECES’ FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

On 22 June 2016, Centrepieces held its first Annual General Meeting since it was registered as a charity. The meeting was opened by the new Mayor of Bexley, **Councillor Eileen Pallen**, and there were 40 members, trustees and other guests in attendance.

The Mayor described how she had been involved with Centrepieces since it was set up 17 years ago and said how proud everyone should be of what had been achieved over that time and how much the efforts of members and volunteers were appreciated.

**Andrew Grieve**, the Chairman of Centrepieces, presented his first Annual Report. He thanked the Co-ordinator, Geoff Norris, for all his hard work, and all the volunteers and Trustees. He gave a special mention to Dawn Tomlin, who had given up so much of her time as Assistant Co-ordinator and will be much missed now that she is moving on.

Andrew announced a new artistic award scheme called the Jackie Inspire Awards in memory of his late wife, Jackie Grieve, who was a founder member of Centrepieces. The awards will be presented annually in 3 categories, most likely the person who has made the biggest contribution, the best newcomer and one other category.

**Mike Ellsmore**, Trustee and Finance Director, presented the finance report. Centrepieces is almost entirely reliant on volunteers, donations and income from the sale of artwork and has enough in its reserves for the next 2 years. The challenge will be to secure affordable accommodation when the lease of The Lodge runs out in 2017. Mike thanked Jean Lyon and Annie Greywoode for their help with the accounts and finances.

**Geoff Norris** paid tribute to the all the past and present volunteers and trustees, as the charity wouldn’t be able to function without them. However it is now time to find funding to appoint paid staff, so that the charity can move forwards more strongly. He thanked all the talented artists who use the facilities of The Lodge, saying they are great to work with and learn from.

There was some **official business** to be done – Andrew stood down as Chairman but was re-elected unopposed. Trustees Don Boyle and Lucy Mortimer retired and were thanked for their contribution. Guy Tarrant also stood down as trustee, but was re-appointed. All the other current Trustees remain in place for the next year.

A number of artists and volunteers from Centrepieces then spoke movingly about their experiences and how much Centrepieces means to them:

**John Exell** has been a member for 17 years, and has always found Centrepieces to be a welcoming and therapeutic environment that produces amazing art work. He believes that many great artists were mentally ill when you look back on their lives. He worked with Jackie Grieve and Vietnamese and Somali teenagers on a project to create totem poles with ethnic identity, and on other public art projects.

**Dawn Tomkins**, a member since 2000, finds that Centrepieces allows her to express herself through art and to build up her self-confidence. She has been featured in the Big Issue and has sold artwork in the USA.

**Annie Greywoode** has been a volunteer for 10 years as Finance Assistant. Working at Centrepieces has improved her mental health, self-confidence and self-esteem, and has allowed her to put her accountancy skills to good use and develop her CV. She feels that Centrepieces gives her a reason to wake up in the mornings.

**Christie Cassisa** described how art was a lifeline for her in a confusing childhood followed by depression and a breakdown. Centrepieces became like a home and extended family for her and she now has pride and confidence in her work as a project leader. Her complete speech is posted separately on the blog.

**Ann Cronin** has been a member since the early 2000s. She used to be a scientist but collapsed in her 40s due to overwork. She took up art as a therapy, and found it a great support when her friend died. Centrepieces is non-directional and inspires everyone to make their own journey.

**Guy Tarrant** has been a project leader since the 1990s and is now also a Trustee. He gave a presentation about Centrepieces’ involvement in public art in Bexley and showed slides of the art works. He believes public art should be created with community participation and not sponsored for commercial interests. It should empower and engage the community and allow people to use dormant skills and ideas and have fun.

Pictures of Centrepieces’ public art works and their history will be posted elsewhere on this website but these are Guy’s highlights:

**The Worrier** – a play on Rodin’s The Thinker, it was a sculpture of a man worrying about urban life. It was unfortunately damaged by a tractor during the regeneration of Crayford.

**The Emotional Spiral** – a planted frame commissioned by Oxleas that celebrates recovery and well-being.

**Identity Poles** – breeze blocks carved by Indian, Vietnamese and Somali teenagers then assembled as identity or totem poles. The project was funded by Bexley Council for Racial Equality and attracted awards and press attention.

**Magpie Project 1** – an upcycling and recycling project where Vietnamese children made tin dragons and mini-robots from junk and electrical stuff.

**Animal Stepping Stones** – animal mosaics made by the children of Upland Junior School and placed in animal habitats in their wildlife garden.

**The Nest** – funded with compensation for the damage of The Worrier, a refuge made of natural materials near the river and bird viewing shelter in Hall Place Gardens

Centrepieces would like to thank Bexley Heritage Trust, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust, the London Borough of Bexley and William Kendall’s Charity for their continuing support and The Learning Centre, Bexley for providing the space for the meeting in their Brampton Road centre and the excellent lunch that everyone enjoyed afterwards.