

MINUTES OF A HELP MMM GENERAL MEETING HELD AT THE BIBLIOTECA (CCSMU) ON 13 APRIL 2010

Before the meeting started Elaine reported that as no secretary was present it was proposed that the meeting be recorded. Nobody objected so the meeting was recorded.

Apologies:

Apologies were received from Bernard Ash, Janice Clark, Eric Brew, Marian Sharpe, Lawrence and Betty Tysoe, Bill and Sandy Saunders, Maureen Edgar, Barbara Holman, Chris and Barbara Hulme, Maggie Milne, Mary Christopher, Olivia Green, Sue Bayliss, Glynis Brookes.

The Minutes of the last meeting were passed as a true record

Matters arising

Caring Services.

Elaine reported that they were still waiting for somebody to volunteer for this post. There have been no applications so far and the post is being left open. Elaine asked for nominations from Members so that the committee could approach them.

Expenses for the Ball Committee.

Elaine reported that a concern had been voiced that the payment of expenses might outweigh the revenue. All committee members have filled in a sheet showing what they anticipated their costing to be and she did not foresee any problem with expenses, particularly in view of the fact that these are tied over 2 years, and do not come out in a lump sum.

New members

Elaine reported that Chris Hulme went into hospital yesterday for an operation so sent his apologies. He has told Elaine that there have been applications for membership from 3 new members, Ann and Johnny Morris and Grace Chapman.

With regard to the membership report, Elaine reported that Chris and Eileen were in the process of updating the database, which is a time-consuming process. The membership booklet was ready to go out except for the 'rogues' gallery' of Committee members' photographs, which could not be completed because of changes of committee members and the fact that they still were waiting for a caring services officer, but will probably be sent out with or without pictures as soon as Chris is fit to do it.

President's report

Elaine said that previously this report had largely been for information but this month it was to correct misinformation. Firstly the report that she had resigned. Earlier in the month Elaine had heard that a number of members were dissatisfied with her performance, particularly with regard to the AGM. Her response to this was to say that if the members were not happy they could do the job themselves. The management committee as a whole were satisfied and she was asked by them and other members not to resign. On reflection she thought that it was unfair to dump her work on to the already hard working other committee members without warning so at present she was still working, probably still making mistakes as she makes no claim to perfection.

However, if anyone feels that she is not a satisfactory president she asked that in the next three months they say so, find someone else to do the job and enable her to get her life back.

Secondly reports that they were buying a property on behalf of HELP. Not true. It had been thought that the current tenancy expired at the end of February next year which meant that they had less than a year to sort out their future premises. However she had taken advice and it seems that the lease was actually for 5 years and therefore they had got longer to look for premises than was previously thought. However, Maggie, Brian and herself had been investigating all possibilities, paying particular attention to the financial implications, the location, the size, the access, parking etc. When their deliberations are complete they will report initially to the management committee and then to the membership. Any member is welcome to ask about their progress but she repeated that no decision will be made without exploring all possibilities and anticipation of the final result is foolish speculation.

Thirdly Elaine had been informed by Sheila Merritt that she had received a phone call from a man who said that HELP volunteers at the car boot sale were putting huge amounts of goods into their own cars every week. If members had heard this story they may wonder if it is true. She had to tell the meeting that it is true, particularly Joan Mitchell. Brian, Joan and herself spent a whole day sorting out things that she had stored in her garage and loft, including sorting out clothes for the fashion show that Ziggi puts on for HEP and also winter stuff is stored for next year etc. Other people take clothes home to wash, some stuff is taken for raffles and tombola prizes, someone else takes home watches to repair and returns them, Maureen takes bags to neighbours and either returns them or brings the money the following week. Her own porch generally has many bags and boxes and there are not many workers who have not taken things home to try them on before either returning them or bringing in the money. The car boot volunteers are not the only ones guilty of this, because she knew that Pam, Maggie and Megan, Joyce and Derrick often have garages full of goods donated to HELP. She trusted that this information was made known as widely as possible. She had also heard that car boot workers are cliquey. Her dictionary defined a clique as a set of associates and a set of associates they certainly were, as were all members present today. Exclusive, yes, in so far as no one in their right mind would get up at an unearthly hour 2 or 3 times a week to stand for hours in the cold winter and the heat of summer to raise money which keeps this organisation going only to be accused of dishonesty. However, they were not so exclusive that if anyone wanted to join the clique they could discover how exclusive they can be.

She has also been told that car booters are not allowed to claim expenses. This was absolutely untrue; all volunteers are entitled to claim any legitimate expenses. She did not know where this one started from, but she did know that Brian was accused of telling car booters this and she knew for a fact that it was not so. Apart from anything else, he is constantly complaining because she doesn't take expense, which he says she ought to.

Finally Barbara had given them all a fright recently by being rushed off to hospital rather seriously ill. She came home and thought she was recovering but unfortunately on Sunday night she was taken back into hospital because of a couple of mini strokes. They wished her well.

Eric appeared to be improving; the decision was made not to operate on him but to treat him with medication and physiotherapy. Apparently the specialists are pleased with his slow progress. Chris Hulme has had an operation and hopes to be back in action shortly. Gerry had an attack of gout but is still carrying on contacting the press by computer. As you can see, our committee was somewhat depleted by illness. She would like to point out that Thelma has done an excellent job looking after the hospital visitors and when Diane is in the office still keeps an eye on the equipment although she has officially resigned from the job.

The post of vice president

Elaine was delighted that Pat Massingham had agreed to apply for the post. She had been asked, because Pat lives so far away, whether her expenses be enormous. Firstly some people do not realise that Pat brings a lot of input into HELP, not only through the work she does already but also by selling fruit taken from her son in law's trees and the money she brings in will go a long way to covering her expenses. Secondly she can do part of the job by telephone and email; she does not have to keep coming in all the time and racking up the expenses. Elaine said she thought that in any case she was worth the cost and knew that she would not claim for unnecessary expenses. All volunteers should be able to work without being out of pocket and no-one wishes to incur unjustifiable costs. A resume of her experience was placed on the stage at the start of the meeting from which members could see that she has had ample experience to fit the position. She asked Pat to come forward to answer any questions that members might have.

Pat asked if anyone wanted copies of her letter of application and passed these round. Pat said that since she joined HELP 5 years ago she had been an active volunteer in whatever capacity was necessary. She was in the office for a short while until her daughter became ill but she carried on with the car boot, did the tombola, and whatever else had been possible for her to do. She now has the time to devote to give Elaine all the support that she needed. She asked if anyone had any questions.

One member asked which position she had held had given her the most satisfaction and why. Pat said that would be her last one, a combination of working in a hospital and dealing with many people. She was in the admissions side where there can be many problems dealing with people and also enjoyed the marketing side of that job as well. She managed to combine the two at the same time and found the post satisfying. As she liked dealing with people she found it very rewarding. Gerry Sherry thought the marketing experience would be of benefit to HELP. Pat hoped so and even had signs for HELP in her car.

Eileen said that Pat was not on the committee when the previous president was on the committee. Her concern was regarding the expenses. There was an issue that was brought to the attention of the committee when he was in place. She had completed a task recently about the level of expenses and she asked how much she thought it was going to cost the charity in all honesty, because she lived further away than their previous president. Pat said that since the car boot had dropped to one day a week she had not claimed any expenses. She said she would not go to the office for 10 minutes. If she needed to go to the office she would make sure that it was value for money.

She did come over for her own purposes to see friends so she could combine the two, in which case she would obviously not claim. She now had internet at home; therefore if it could be done on the internet. She would keep expenses to the minimum but she could not say what that would be at the moment; however she had not claimed for the car boot.

Eileen said her other question was where she saw the charity being in 2 years' time, did she see HELP buying a building or did she feel that they should continue renting? Pat said that given the uncertainty when you are renting a building, it might be better to buy a building but it obviously had to be the right building. That could solve the problem they had with the car boot where suddenly it was only one day a week. If a property was purchased everything would be under the one roof, which would make more sense economically. Also every time they move it costs money.

Another member thanked her for standing up to answer questions. There was no criticism intended of anybody in the question but there had been vice presidents who have not moved on to president so the president has to come into the post not having served as vice president. In standing for vice president, at some time in the future was she prepared to stand as president. Pat said providing it was not immediately she would, provided she got the right support. However, she hoped to give Elaine enough support so that she will not wish to resign in 3 months' time.

Rita Keeligan commented that the car booters were a clique. Elaine said that it could be that it was just idle gossip. Elaine said that all suggestions from members are dealt with, if not in a letter then verbally. There was an argument between several people.

Linda Buck asked what Pat's position would be if Elaine was no longer president in 3 months' time. Pat said that hopefully at the end of 3 months she would know more about the workings of HELP and she would give it a go and see if she could get the support. If she did not get the support then she could not do it either.

Joan said that she didn't think anyone at the meeting realised how hard Elaine works behind the scenes, in fact all the committee members work very hard for HELP. The tittle tattle does not come from the car boot. A few of them got together and they talk about all sorts of things. This Sunday they were very busy and raised an awful lot of money and did not get a chance to sit down and talk. Another member said that when you think of how much the car boot raises for the charity it was totally unfair that people criticise the car booters because they are the mainstay of the organisation. There was applause. They are there week in and week out and she thought it was sad that they are criticised. Another member said that she took her hat off to the car booters, they all work hard in all weathers, but you will meet somebody who has heard something from somebody at the car boot. Elaine asked Thelma if some of the hospital visitors hear things through hospital visiting, which Thelma confirmed, yet the hospital visitors do not get any flack. Joan said she was ready to throw the towel in. More argument ensued.

Elaine said that at the moment they were supposed to be asking Pat questions before a vote was taken whether she should be appointed vice president. Diane asked Pat whether she would stick to what she believed in rather than go with the committee. Pat said that principle was something really important to her so if she really did not believe in it then she could not vote for it and would have to be against it.

Elaine said in the committee meetings they have had differences of opinion and her way of running a committee meeting was that she would go and ask each person in turn around the table what they thought, and they didn't always agree but they do reach a democratic decision in the end. Another lady thought that a tremendous job was being done by committee members.

Elaine said that the possibility of a secret ballot had come up recently with regard to the election of officers. She did not think it should be necessary to have a written ballot and didn't think there was much point in handing out voting slips, so what she was going to do was just ask Pat if she would go outside for a moment while there was a show of hands. There was a show of hands of 31 votes for Pat, which was unanimous. Pat returned to the meeting and Elaine informed Pat that she was unanimously elected.

Norman Young said he was very disappointed that a very small number of members had voiced the criticisms, slander and falsehoods that they had heard about from their president regarding the organisation. He thought it was a great shame and he would like to ask all the members to join him in thanking the president and all the committee, including those who were not here today through personal reasons, and he thought members owed them their full support. There was applause.

Treasurer's report

Elaine said they were in a difficult position in that Eric is just not able to attend on Tuesdays because that is when the hospital insists he has his treatment. He has tried but failed to change it to another day so that is why he cannot attend today. He did say that his treatment seemed to be progressing slowly. Elaine asked if anybody had got any questions on the treasurer's report that they give them to Eileen, who would put them to the treasurer and she would make sure that members got a reply. At the moment there was not much to say except that Eric had informed her that they were still in a very healthy financial position.

Office update

Eileen said that they would be conducting training sessions in the office sometime in May so anybody who was interested in attending should submit their names at the end of the meeting. They tried to be as open and transparent as they could be and hoped people who went into the office would attest to the fact that files on any subjects are open for members to view at any time. If anybody had any query regarding the running of the office she did not mind constructive criticism which she thought was very healthy, and she could assure members that she would not take anything personally. Everyone wanted the best for the charity.

Secondly there had been 84 Euros expenditure for the Ball Committee up to the present. There are still variances that need to be addressed but they were hopefully going to produce expenses for all of the areas every month, which would be on display for anybody to query.

They were going to visit 6 locations for the ball because of the hiccup regarding the La Manga situation. She went to hotel 525 last Sunday but was told that they did not have a function room, so would appreciate any comments if people had attended anything there.

They were going to be visiting other locations in early May so hopefully would be able to report back to members at the June meeting concerning the location of the ball.

Finally the constitution had now been presented this to the Committee and there will be consultation on this matter on 28 April. They hoped to bring it to the membership at the May meeting.

Cancer support group

Margaret reported that they were having an auction at 1.30 on 29 April at the New York Bar which is where they had the karaoke evening, with viewing between 2 and 3 and hammer down at 3. If anybody was going to the auction they could ring the office and get directions. There will be a Special Big Band Night with Swingtet on 19 May at the hotel Costa Narejos, Los Alzares, with proceeds going to the Cancer Support Group. Tickets are 5 Euros.

Caring services report

Elaine reported that although the caring services report was on the agenda, as they do not have a caring services officer Thelma will report on the hospital visiting group. Thelma said that she had an electric scooter in her back garden waiting for a suitable person, and asked members to let her know if they knew of anyone who might need it. She reported that the hospital visiting team was visiting between 5 and 6 patients a week. There has been a suggestion whereby they would consult the carer to see if they would like to go out for an hour whilst the hospital visitors were looking after the patient. However, she felt at the moment that that would be difficult because if they have 5 or 6 patients a week to visit that can take up until 6 o'clock in the evening, if the carers went out to do a bit of shopping etc. it would take even longer. She said they desperately need a caring services person, someone who she could consult, and she asked if somebody would like to be her boss. The hospital visitors enjoyed a lunch and get-together at the Novo Carthago on 16 March, which was attended by 28 members. Unfortunately she only had 5 hospital visitors at the moment that she could call on because of different reasons, and she desperately needed more volunteers. Megan said Thelma did an outstanding job but did not feel it was the hospital visitors' responsibility to sit with patients while their carers had a break. Thelma said that for security purposes you had to have 2 people and it maybe that both of them would not be able to stay for extra time. Linda did not think that hospital volunteers should be put in that position of responsibility; she thought another branch of caring services was needed, which would require specific volunteers.

Elaine said we cannot do everything that people want us to do.

Another member thought we should refer cancer patients to MABS. Thelma said they do. They don't ask patients what is the matter with them, but invariably that tell us if they have got cancer and then MABS will take over from them. She asked for contributions of up to date good quality magazines, men's' magazines particularly. Another member wondered if it was possible to get some of the basic leaflets translated into English.

Elaine said that subject came up this week and she was still trying to find time to arrange a meeting with the director of hospitals at which time she will ask him about this, because in some hospitals there is some information in English. That is on her list.

Social events and fundraising

Joan reported that the car boot had been very busy for the last couple of Sundays, and they had done extremely well with a lot of goods coming in. She thanked the volunteers who work so hard. Last Sunday they were so busy they didn't have time to think, never mind gossip. She was still very angry about some of the remarks but would try and curb that. This coming Saturday they are starting at a new car boot site at the garden centre near Sucina off the new motorway the RM1 and there are some leaflets available about that. . Joan was going to concentrate on the Spring Fair in the afternoon so it would be a very busy day. The car boot at Sucina was only a temporary arrangement until permission was received from the regional council to return to the Autocine. Members will be given updates about that. She asked for donations of bric a brac which flies off the shelf.

As mentioned in the newsletter functions held in March had raised funds for HELP. Diane's karaoke night raised a lot of money, as did Elaine's Quiz with a Difference and Chris Hulme's golf tournament had raised 997 Euros.

The next event was the Spring Fair on Saturday with a cake stall and many other stalls starting at 3 p.m. There is then the Barn dance at the Lo Monte Hotel on 15th May which is on the N332 at Pilar de la Horadada with music being supplied by Smithy. Tickets are 6 Euros each and you can bring your own food and drink. The International Fair at Las Claras is on 22 May and there will be our usual Tombola, books and Nearly New fashion show organised by Ziggi. Heather McElvey is organising another event on 27 May at Em's bar in Sucina which will cost 10 Euros. Tickets will be available at the next meeting.

Hot off the press, following a committee meeting it had been decided to hold a midsummer madness karaoke at Novo Carthago at Los Urrutias on 24 June. The cost will be 10 Euros each, which will be for a two course meal. Tickets will be available for the next meeting. Lastly, Joan said they were grateful for all the support given by the members and help for the events that they put on. This is what it is all about, keeping HELP going for people who are ill, who need wheelchairs etc. Norman Young made a suggestion that other future events be held at the Olympia Restaurant as he thought it was excellent venue. Joan said the venue was excellent for the quiz, but they cannot always use it for events as it was out of their area really.

Friendship Group

Pat reported that the ceramics course was well attended and raised 50 Euros for HELP. She thanked Joyce and Derrick yet again. More new people have asked to attend the next ceramics course.

Only 9 people went to see the Gondoliers in the end due to ill health but they had a lovely evening. The event in Calpe on 20 May to see the Pirates of Penzance was now sold out.

The trip to the Jalon valley is on 8 May, at a cost of 27 Euros, which included lunch at Monroe's. The coach will leave the Arches at 8 a.m.

She asked member to let her or Janice know if they were interested in attending. Janice and Pat also asked members if anyone would be interested in a trip to the burning of the effigies in Alicante in June. The cost will be 11 Euros which will not include food and it will be a late night. They have not got the exact date yet.

Pat said at the last friendship meeting they had a talk on the prison service and at the next one on 30 April there would be a lady coming to talk about vitamins and their effect on the skin.

Members' comments

Elaine said again that the suggestion box was there for members to use. If members commented on something of general interest she did try to address it at the meeting. Some comments also come through to her verbally, for example the possibility of extending hospital visitors' hours, and the question of translating leaflets into English at the hospital, and they were being addressed. Everybody else who has put a comment in the box had received a letter in reply. Elaine said she always welcomed comments. She thought that the only way to combat the nasty tittle tattle that goes around is for people to ask questions, and make suggestions. The Committee, as she kept telling members, work extremely hard but they are human, they do make mistakes and were only too happy to address them. However, there are so many things to do and she was not prepared to work 24 hours a day, even on her day off. On Good Friday she and Brian went down to the office twice, which was allegedly a holiday for everybody. She could not do everything and had to prioritise things. Because of the misunderstanding regarding the lease on the office she had been prioritising the question of looking into property thinking that HELP was having to get out within a year, but now that she knew it was definitely a further year she would not have to spend quite as much time on that and she would be able to do other things.

Diane asked some time ago if we could have a handle put on the bars of the office. As they thought they were not going to be there for long the cost was not justified but now that they know it is more than a year they will get on with that, so that every comment and every suggestion does get a response. She did want members to understand that sometimes things take a little bit longer than anticipated.

With regard to Any Other Business Elaine asked that if members want something put on the agenda which needed discussing by the Committee before the general meeting, that they let the committee have it more than a week before the general meeting, just in case they need to do some research.

A.O.B.

Jane Cronin talks

They had had two so far and she felt sure members would agree with her that they had been fantastic. Jane must be the only person in the world who can make politics sound interesting. The next talk is on 29 April at Las Claras and it is on the geography of Spain.

They had to book 3 talks and then another 3 and they have now booked the other 3 talks which will take place on Friday 21 May, 28 May and 4 June at Las Claras at 11 a.m.

Eileen mentioned that if any members had not been able to attend the British Consulate Open Day in March handouts were available to take home. Regarding voting in the UK elections Eileen said that people are eligible to vote if they have been living in Spain for up to 15 years. Eileen would be available after the meeting to give members the website to go on to register to vote.

Gerry said that if any members had items they wished to publicise and they had a photograph, the newspapers like to know what the event was, who the people are in the photo, and how much money was raised. He would like to get some photographs and insight into what HELP is about so that they can promote it in the magazine and individually in other ways.

Diana thought there was far too much equipment when you look at what was actually rented out and what was just taking up room. She thought it might be a good idea to ask how many wheelchairs were really needed. Eileen said that when looking at properties she did mention that a sensible figure assessment could be made of what equipment was actually needed. She thought that 2 scooters would be enough except for the fact that last summer 2 extra were required, and because everywhere has been quiet during the winter it was difficult to say what equipment was needed based on the winter.

Someone asked whether, if they were fortunate enough to find somewhere else to buy or rent, they be under any obligation to the present owner of the lease. Elaine said they were investigating that. She had asked Yolanda the estate agent whether we had to pay the rent for another 2 years if we found other premises, or whether the owner would be prepared to re-let it to HELP if they decided to stay there or sell it to us and if so how much, or whether we could temporarily use the premises we are in for a charity shop, which was doubtful.

Sheila wondered if it would be possible to take up her earlier suggestion that one wheelchair and one scooter sits outside the office during office hours with a notice in Spanish and English that you can have this on loan, because she felt that no Spanish people take advantage of HELP and that was one way she thought they could be informed about HELP. Elaine said the biggest problem was the slog of trying to get the scooters down on to the pavement, and also some of the bars are difficult to open and close. In addition, having wheelchairs on the pavement could present a safety risk.

Phil wondered if the wheelchairs could be stood behind the window with the blinds up. Elaine said the main reason they had not been doing that was because that room is the one where they count the money, although perhaps they could draw the blinds while the money was being counted. Elaine said that comments had been received previously that the front of their current premises was not terribly inviting, and that was something that needed to be taken into account when looking at HELP's future home. She was also investigating the possibility of getting the paperwork translated into German so that they can use our facilities.

The meeting concluded at 1.20 p.m.

31 members were in attendance
The raffle raised 34 Euros
11 members stayed for lunch

The "Speaker" was Mr Barry Walsh who is a meteorologist.

The next meeting will be on Tuesday 11 May 2010
First calling at 11.30pm for 12.00pm.

Signed..... President

..... Secretary