

Holme is a rural village in Burton parish, South Lakeland, 10 miles from Kendal. The village has a population of around 1,200 and is fortunate to have a range of amenities, including a post office, shop, pub and church.

The thriving community work hard to support these facilities and to look out for each other. The weekly coffee morning in Holme Parish Hall is a brilliant example of how apparently small things can make a big difference, helping people connect and stay involved in the life of the village. The hall is proud to support a range of other activities which also help people socialise locally, without having to pay transport costs to nearby towns.

Background

The coffee morning has been running regularly for about ten years, and was initiated by an enthusiastic member of the village hall management committee who noticed that there were few clubs and activities for older residents. The idea was to invite people into the hall for a social gathering, and charge a small sum for simple tea, coffee and biscuits in order to cover costs.

Initially, numbers were quite small. However, providing tables and chairs, a warm welcome, and tea and coffee for a few people did exactly what was hoped, bringing together people who may otherwise have found little opportunity to socialise.

Numbers have grown over time and now the buzzy event regularly has 25 people attending. The hall committee are rightly proud of the value this routine has for the community.

The Project

There are usually two people responsible for setting up the hall and providing teas and coffees, three on a busy day or when there is something else going on.

Once a month a book drop from the Library Bus coincides with the coffee morning, so another pair of hands is useful then.



Regular coffee morning at the hall

Most of the people who come along are retired and the majority live in Holme itself, but some travel in from Milnthorpe and Carnforth.

“Many of our regulars pop to the Post Office and pick up their pension and a newspaper, than they come to us for a catch-up,” says Pat Fell, chair of the village hall committee. “Another great spin-off is that Thursday has become OAP lunch at the pub across the road, so some of them drift from here to there and have a sociable lunch together too.”

What has been achieved?

A steady success from the word go, last year the coffee mornings raised £1,500 for the village hall. Pat says, “This is a fantastic added benefit of the weekly gatherings,



Holme Parish Hall



Village hall notices highlight the activity to boost neighbourly connections

which have become an amenity the village would hate to lose. Getting people together is the main reason for doing it, but now it is thriving it actually makes money for the hall.”

The friendly meetings allow residents to keep an eye on each other. Pat tells of a lady with early stage dementia, who would come every week for a drink and insist on washing up her own cup. When one week the lady didn't come along, friends went to her house and found that she had fallen at home and needed some help.

On the look out for additional opportunities to engage the older residents the village hall now hosts: weekly seated exercise classes (run by Age UK volunteers); a monthly 'Holme Crafters' group; and the Library service book drop.

The Learning

- Start small and keep it simple: £1.50 for tea, coffee and biscuits all morning. The people who come will start to shape it to what they want.
- Sit people at one big table. It's a simple thing, but people talk better this way and when they arrive, simply sit where there is a space.

- When you are more confident, try adding new things. The book drop is very popular and we have regular bric-a-brac stalls fundraising for local charities. Some themed events work too such as Valentines Day, Christmas or if it's someone's birthday.
- Promotion can be simple and cheap. Word of mouth, local newsletters and posters work for us.
- It's not about the village hall doing all the work; link in with others who can help people connect and reduce isolation too, such as Age UK, and other local community groups.
- Don't be afraid to offer advice if people need it; we have helped people informally with attendance allowance and connected people to advisors who can help them with more complex issues.
- Welcome everyone. Whilst many who come to the coffee morning are older residents, there's a wide range of ages, needs, abilities and we all help each other.

Contact Details

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