

Welcome inn

Sharon Baker describes the opening of a very unusual pub in a very unusual venue



'Bet Lynch' pulls a pint for the regulars at The Fountain Jolly Inn

If you ever make a trip to Smethwick in the West Midlands, you might pass the site of the Mitchell and Butlers (M&B) Cape Hill Brewery. Sadly, it's no longer brewing. But the chances are you won't come across Smethwick's newest 'pub', recently opened nearby. That's because the Fountain Jolly Inn is tucked into a corner of Fountain Court, a residential home for older people with mental health needs.

Fountain Court is a new building, opened in 2005 by Sandwell Council's adult and community services. It provides supported accommodation for 18 older people with mental health needs, including people with dementia. It is situated next door to the Pennmakers very sheltered housing scheme. The buildings are connected and share a large dining and lounge area, where residents from the two schemes meet for some meals and for entertainment and celebrations.

Manager Michaela Wilson noticed that a seating area around the connecting door from Fountain Court to Pennmakers never seemed to be used. She had the idea of creating a 'snug', reminiscent of a traditional pub, to make it more welcoming and interesting so that people would

want to spend time there. So she contacted STAA (Sandwell Third Age Arts) and Trudy King, creative arts officer for Sandwell's adult and community services, to see if together we could make her idea a reality.

The pub idea isn't completely new. The Northern Ireland Seven Oaks housing scheme for people with dementia has a pub. Its large entrance foyer has been designed to suggest a market square, with shops, including a hairdresser, and 'an authentically furnished, well-used, carefully monitored bar'.¹ On a more modest scale, the staff at Westlands Home in Rugby involved its residents in transforming a small lounge into a 1940s-style corner shop, named Bradshaw's.²

STAA is a charity providing creative opportunities for older people with mental health problems, including dementia, and their carers in Sandwell. Our philosophy is always to engage elders in the creative process, which for us encompasses the arts, music and dance. We believe that creative activities give people pleasure and enjoyment, and thereby contribute to improving their physical and mental well-being and enriching their quality of life. Engaging the residents was, for us, the most important aspect of this project – which also made it more expensive, of course. But STAA and the Creative Arts Unit were sure the benefits to the residents would make this money well spent, so we agreed to fund it, with Fountain Court contributing from their amenities fund.

The project comprised three elements: a series of artist-led workshops with residents to create artwork;



sourcing and purchasing brewery memorabilia for display in the pub, and constructing the pub itself.

We commissioned artist Paul Nocher to lead the project over an intensive six-week period in the autumn of 2006. For four of these weeks he worked with 13 of the Fountain Court residents, helping them create artwork with a pub theme, and trawling the internet and local junk shops for other pub-themed items to decorate the walls. For the last two weeks of his residency, he worked with staff to transform the area where the pub was to be situated. Local craftsman Luigi Cellella constructed the magnificent bar.

The residents created designs for personalised beer mats and advertising posters to reflect their favourite drinks and catch phrases. They made mosaics based on brewery logos. They created stained glass windows by sticking black tape onto acetate sheets and painting the designs with glass paint. They even cast and hand-painted their own toby jugs.

Paul did not interfere with what the Fountain Court residents chose to make. This is what gives the work its charm, character and meaningfulness, in a true folk art tradition. For example, one lady insisted on placing her mosaic tiles face down – they were the right way up, as far as she was concerned.

The staff at Fountain Court were all involved in the project, supporting residents to take part in art workshops, scavenging for objects for the pub, helping with hanging pictures – and steering residents round the taped off ‘building site’ during the construction.

Manager Michaela Wilson says even she was amazed by what the residents produced: ‘In all my many years working in the field of older people’s mental health, I have been taught that activity sessions need to be short, as service users’ concentration span is limited. That theory was blown away during this project. Once involved, nearly all of our service users didn’t want to stop, and would have continued to work on the project right through lunchtime, even after sitting there for two and a half hours already. I’ve watched Paul Nocher at work, but I’m still none the wiser as to how he got people involved and interested for this period of time.’

A lot of the brewery memorabilia was sourced locally from charity shops. Picture frames of different styles and sizes were used to frame artworks made by residents. Other items included bottles, jars, pub pumps and brasses, beer mats and beer labels, toby jugs and pub mirrors. We found some wooden standard lamps for softer lighting. Some items were purchased off e-bay – although ‘breweriana’ is popular among collectors, and some items were way beyond our budget. We also enlarged and framed photos lent by residents’ family members. Other images were scanned and the digital copy transferred to transparent adhesive to be fixed onto mirrors.

Paul was amazing. He managed to enthuse and engage the residents, spent hours researching the history of toby jugs, stayed up into the wee small hours bidding for items on e-bay, and spent his weekends touring junk shops in his quest to find items for the pub.

Luigi Cellella made a magnificent wooden bar, which was painstakingly finished using wood stain and flame retardant varnish – as was all the wooden panelling fixed to the walls and the other wooden surfaces in the pub.

The upper part of the walls was painted red, to give the area warmth and to contrast with the pale pastel walls elsewhere in the building. Staff from Fountain Court obtained furniture (rumour has it that one local pub in Smethwick is missing a couple of bar stools...).

The project cost £5500 in total: £2000 for the workshops, £2000 for the construction of the bar, £500 for construction and art materials, and £1000 for the collectors items, frames, mirrors, and brewery merchandise.

The pub was officially opened in November 2006, with Fountain Court’s very own Bet Lynch (care assistant Lisa Flavell) pulling pints behind the bar. The beer pumps are only for show and the bar isn’t actually licensed, but it does have its own fridge, and dominoes,



Artist Paul Nocher (top left) helps residents to create pub-themed artwork

games and a CD player are available for use. Support staff serve residents their favourite tipples, and organise quizzes and karaoke nights. Recently residents from another home came over for a ‘night out’. The area is now well-used, with some residents choosing to eat their ‘bar meals’ there. People never tire of looking at the pictures and artefacts on the walls.

This previously unused area has become a valuable resource, demonstrating how a little imagination, not a great deal of money, and a lot of energy and enthusiasm can transform an environment so it works to enhance the lives of the people who live in it. The pub area has doors that open onto the patio of Fountain Court’s secure garden. Tables and chairs are already in place, and the residents are looking forward to using their beer garden this summer. ■

Sharon Baker is co-ordinator of STAA. STAA won a NIMHE Positive Practice Award in 2005 for its work with older people with mental health needs (see MHT May 2006). STAA is producing a DVD on the making of the Fountain Jolly Inn, which will be available later this year. For more information, contact Sharon Baker t: 0121 500 1259/e: info@staa.org.uk To arrange a visit to Fountain Jolly Inn, please contact Michaela Wilson t: 0121 565 2427/e: Michaela_wilson@sandwell.gov.uk

- 1 Gibson F. Seven Oaks: friendly design and sensitive technology. *Journal of Dementia Care* 2003; 11, 5: 27–30.
- 2 Cavan K. Tight space and a tight budget. *Journal of Dementia Care* 2004; 12, 2: 16.