

The Othona Community, February 2024.

Welcome to the month with the extra day! Thursday 29th February has no special activity programmed for Othona, but how about making the most of that day by visiting for a cuppa, or even volunteering to do a couple of hours in the garden, or spring cleaning.

As usual, January was a quiet month, giving the resident team and volunteers time to take stock over the last year and finalise the planning for this year. Shared stories trigger memories for long-time visitors, and keep the spirit of Othona live for those who have found the community more recently. One of our newest arrival, little Ivy Joy, rolled into the centre in mid-January in a pram first brought here by our founder Norman Motley's brother Reg and his wife Brenda as each of their three daughters made their earliest visits – the pram then passed to Jan and Trevor, long-term volunteers, for their baby daughter Maddy, now grown up, married to James –with a little daughter of their own, Ivy.

Our 2024 programme is now out on the website and ranges from Art to Nature, watercolour painting to woodland maintenance, voice projection to coping with grief. Hopefully there should be something for everyone. Here is this month's Programme:

February Half Term Week 1: Mon 12 Feb - Fri 16 Feb 2024 Family Activity Week

February Half Term Week 2: Mon 19 Feb - Fri 23 Feb 2024 Family Activity Week

Into the Wilderness: Fri 1 Mar - Sun 3 Mar 2024 A retreat for Lent led by Revd.

Brigid is also running a Quiet day (A Quiet Space in Narnia) on the 23rd July

As well as running an open programme for all, Othona is host groups from various places (Churches, schools etc.) January and February have been a period of hosting groups for their strategic planning for the next year. Our work with groups outside of our own programme is an important part of Othona, supporting faith groups, marginalised people, young people, and those with mental health problems etc. As part of our mission set out by our founder Norman, we are tasked with promoting and supporting the training of clergy. To this end we were pleased to host a residential trip from Chelmsford Diocese of Year 3 incumbent and pioneer path curates. 27 curates were here on a Next Steps retreat to consider what their next placement should be and how to go about the process; we also hosted the local Deanery away day.

Othona recently welcomed the Trustee board of “The Other MA” (TOMA) here for their planning meeting. This organisation is an artist-run education model and exhibition programme based in Southend, which supports artists who have faced barriers accessing art education. They very much appreciated the space, peace and beauty of Othona.

We are currently working with St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation (<https://stethelburgas.org/>) on a hedge planting project. We hosted one weekend of planting here in December with some of their Trustees and the second one in February with two disparate groups of volunteers here to help with the second batch. This project is about promoting understanding between different groups (faith groups,

refugees etc.) as much as about the hedge planting. Continuing our work with like-minded groups, we have many visits from residents of the YMCA to provide a holiday and a break from living in the sometimes stressful environment of hostels in London. We have the senior staff here planning retreats to improve the quality of these residential visits and to look at a pathway to residents volunteering here.

Finally we are in the stage of planning our 3rd Essex Green Weekend, which will be from the 14th- 17th June this year. Please put it in your diaries. We hope this will be even bigger than the last two.

Debbie and Richard Sanders are our Wardens, supported by resident team Phil Peter, Amanda and volunteers. Website: www.othonaessex.org.uk, contact bradwell@othona.org, telephone 01621 776564, or visit via the wind-powered electric gate, collect an exit token to leave.