

In brief

Fundraising garden party

IFIELD: A garden party is being held at Elim Church in The Mardens on Friday from 11am to 2pm to help raise funds for disadvantaged children.

The event is free to attend and money raised from the sale of food and drink will go to the Golden Lion Children's Trust.

The charity brightens the lives of disadvantaged children and those with special needs.

The party is being organised by the National Citizen Service.

Shed burglaries

CRAWLEY DOWN: A man has been arrested on suspicion of burglary after two sheds were broken into in the early hours of last Wednesday.

The two outbuildings in Furnace Wood were broken into and garden equipment was stolen.

Sergeant Graeme Prentice said: "Please check your outbuildings and make sure they are secure to help prevent this type of theft."

The 20-year-old man has been bailed until October 27 while officers carry out further inquiries.

Nissan missing

WEST GREEN: A grey Nissan that was parked at Crawley Hospital has been stolen.

It was taken at some point between 9.45 and 11.40am last Friday.

'I found my place in A Band Of Brothers'

Serial offender now wants to help troubled youths

Dave Comeau

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HE has a string of convictions for violent crimes and was released from jail for the fourth time in January.

With this in mind, it would be easy to assume that Chris Smith is not a role model for other young men in Crawley.

But the 23-year-old has undergone a remarkable transformation. The individuals who finally got through to him are a group of men called A Band Of Brothers, who act as mentors to young men who need to be brought back onto the straight and narrow.

Chris now believes he is the ideal person to steer troubled youths away from a life of crime – and is planning to become a mentor himself.

He benefited from the first Band Of Brothers course to be held in Crawley, which started in March and has just finished.

"I was on the streets at a young age committing crime with my friends," he said. "I was getting quite violent and fighting all the time from the age of about 14.

"I've been in prison four times, including young offender institutions. The prison system made me worse. I wasn't a serious

offender but I started meeting people who were telling me about their crimes and it teaches you new ways to commit crime.

"Then I started a training programme to help young kids and I thought, 'you know what? I want to do youth work'. I started changing but I didn't really have that push until I joined up with A Band Of Brothers."

The scheme is a 13-week course which young offenders can volunteer to take part in.

Mentor

A mentor meets with the young person once a week to talk about why they behave like they do.

They also take part in a group session once a week with the other people on the course. It provides young offenders with a male role model and someone to talk to who is not an authority figure and not linked to the Probation Service.

One of the scheme's organisers, Darren MacDonald, believes this is the reason it works. He said: "These are people who are very well known by the Probation Service and they may have been in prison. What's different about what we do is that it's voluntary. The guys don't have to sign up."

This is the first time anyone has



ON THE RIGHT PATH: Chris Smith and Darren MacDonald

managed to get through to Chris. He said: "I'm used to sitting in a room with someone asking me, 'why are you angry?'"

"But with A Band Of Brothers, once you get angry they let you get it all out of your system then help you learn how to channel it and help you find out why you're angry.

"I never had a positive male role model in my life before. That was missing.

"I get on really well with my mum. When I first got back after completing the programme I cried in front of her. That's something she'd never seen before.

"She was laughing and joking that they had finally broken me down."

During the 13-week course, which he took part in alongside seven others, Chris, who lives in Salvington Road, Bewbush, also helped plant the commemorative poppy seeds in Memorial Gardens and helped elderly people at Age UK in Tilgate tidy up their garden.

With a fresh outlook on life, he recently stood up in front of a room full of police officers and members of the Probation Service and explained how the

scheme helped him where others had failed.

And he now plans to become a mentor himself.

He said: "You're much more likely to respond to someone who has been there than someone in a suit who has read about it in a book.

"I can tell them the things I have done and show them that if they don't sort themselves out they are going to end up in prison."

Darren believes there are a lot of boys and young men in Crawley who would benefit from this scheme.

He said: "These are young men who feel like they are on the edge of the community.

"There's a saying that if a young man isn't initiated into the village that they will burn it down just to feel the heat. If no one cares about them they will make them listen.

"I believe that is what happened a few weeks ago in Bewbush when you had those 50 youths fighting. They are bored and frustrated and no one is listening to them."

The next scheme is being run in Crawley on September 12.

For more information, visit www.abandofbrothers.org.uk/ contact

Share what you think about the Local Plan

THE final stage of consultation on the plan detailing where homes will be built in Crawley over the next 15 years starts next week.

The town's Local Plan, called Crawley 2030, was finally approved in draft form at a full council meeting last month.

The draft submission includes the building of 4,895 new homes in Crawley between 2015 and 2030.

Of these, 1,900 would be in Forge Wood, a new development north of Pound Hill.

There is a requirement that 40 per cent of homes in all residential developments will be affordable housing, where viable.

The council also approved setting aside land at Broadfield Kennels for a potential travellers' site.

A pledge to push for retail and residential developments in the town centre is included as well.

Ifield Brook Meadows and Rusper Road Playing Fields will be designated as green spaces if the plan is approved.

Comment

The final public consultation begins on Monday, September 1, and will run until 5pm on October 13.

Residents, businesses and stakeholders will all be able to comment on any policy in the draft plan.

Comments must be based on whether you consider the plan to comply with legal requirements and whether the plan is sound.

All responses will go to a planning inspector.

The inspector is expected to hold an examination of the plan in public in March or April next year and the council anticipates receiving the inspector's report in July.

The council is planning on holding information events to help residents respond to the consultation.

Dates and venues for these are yet to be finalised.

To have your say and for more information, visit www.crawley.gov.uk/crawley2030

Comments can also be e-mailed to forward.planning@crawley.gov.uk



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Botanists bring rare plant to UK

BOTANISTS who travelled to Tasmania to collect seeds of a rare plant have completed a devil of a job in successfully getting them to flower in the UK for the first time.

A team from Wakehurst Place in Ardingly travelled to the other side of the world to collect the seeds from an almost inaccessible area of wilderness.

They were taken from a single five-metre tall tree near Scotts Peak Dam in the South Western National Park. The seeds are now being stored at the Millennium Seed Bank.

The fieldwork has allowed botanists to grow rare shrubs and trees from cold rainforests.

Garden manager Dr Chris Clennett said: "Over the last two years we have planted several young specimens of Banksia marginata near the mansion to increase our collection of Southern Hemisphere plants.

"We believe this is the first time this species has flowered in Great Britain. It's a tremendous achievement by the whole team to have these exciting plants flowering in the gardens.

"We may have a long way to go before they reach the size of their parent tree, but we have planted in our most protected places to give them a fighting chance."