

# Shaking off the city: The Great Escape Summer Festival 2011

What a fabulous idea. Fundraise for 200 people with disabilities who hardly ever get the chance to leave London – even less to enjoy a regular holiday – to pack their rucksacks and enjoy some country air, new friends, activities-a-go-go, tasty food and a break from the usual routine.

Bliss. That was more or less the verdict from everyone who joined us at Woodrow High House in Buckinghamshire for the Camden Society's first ever summer festival and outdoor AGM from 15 to 21 August.

Excitedly checking into the festival site, an historic manor house set in 24 acres of Chilterns countryside, some of our adventure seekers chose to keep it open air with tent life in the grounds, others booked rooms in the house itself while some people joined us for just one day.

Suitcases unpacked, the week's activities began. As an art hang out to rival anything in Hoxton, our artists got busy with photography, filmmaking, natural sculpture, painting and crafts while sports activities on offer in the grounds included nature walks, swimming, football and archery.

Even by the end of the first day, our Great Escapees left sessions sporting handmade jewellery, proudly twirling new kites, buzzing by a bullseye hit and parading their latest paintings.

But, one of the best things about the festival was that it gave people a chance to meet new friends from other parts of London and Oxfordshire. As people came together over walks, campfire sing songs and pub nights, many new relationships were made, with people making plans to keep the happy memories alive and meet up in London on their return.

These were hot tickets so, as we're not ones to leave anyone out, we held our 2011 AGM during the festival which attracted a further 300 Camden Society people, trustees, partners, staff, volunteers and supporters. With Beverly Dawkins from Mencap and Keith Shortman co-chairing the meeting, trustees were voted in, the accounts signed off and congratulations on a year of achievements made before we got down to what we're famous for – food, music and dancing.

Even The Great Downpour didn't faze us. As the rains began, sleeves were rolled up, a team spirit pervaded and everyone pitched in to move the outside in.

With BBQ delights from Amy McParland leading a team of our cafe apprentices and volunteers, and live music from The Autistics, The Unknown and Keeley Filgo – thanks to Simon Nelson-Smith our sound maestro – Woodrow High House rocked.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make The Great Escape happen. For so many people, it really was just that.

Gallery of the Greats - see the rest online at [www.thecamdensociety.co.uk/greatgallery](http://www.thecamdensociety.co.uk/greatgallery)



Tony Poole gets hula happy while David Raybould considers his next spinning plate move



The coolest shirt this summer? Carlos Arnold sports 'Great' fashion



Thumbs up for tent life from Claire Wootton



Ori Ogbonnia, Sarah Douglas, Angela Davies, Jide Akinbiye and Claire Wootton jump for festival joy



Dave Hogan - definitely the face of the festival



No fear. Shaun Hill and Simon Liu take on the task of cooking for 250 at our AGM lunch



Irene Farrington, Steven Morris and Darren Fortune perform a few karaoke numbers



Tim Nixon and Yuan Gu enjoy a sunny afternoon of art-making



Sarah Mohammed and Karen Brown with the biggest smiles at the AGM



Campsite songs. Ben Hyde strums a tune or two for Keeley Filgo



Donald Bowyer and David Hollingsworth loving the food in the country house dining rooms



Sarah Douglas breaks from football

## The Great Thank You

Of course, none of this fun would have been possible without the amazing efforts, generosity, team spirit, hard work and perseverance of our lovely supporters, funders, staff, volunteers, triathletes, marathon runners and all individual donors who contributed to our fundraising campaign. Thank you so very much for helping us raise the £9,000 to run The Great Escape - we are overwhelmed to have received such mountains of support.

We'd especially like to thank the following for their fundraising support:

- Chris Taylor who ran the London Marathon for us
- Simon Liu, Lucy Collins and Andrew Omoding - our Virgin London Triathlon fundraisers and their supporters in Team Camden Society

- The Co-operative Community Fund
- The Sir Jules Thorne Charitable Trust
- The Forbes Charitable Foundation
- The Bishop and Sewell Charitable Foundation

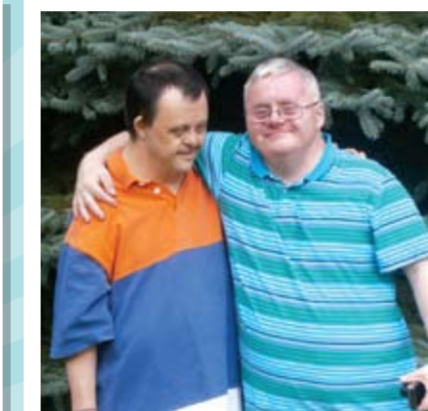
And also the fab people who helped to make it all happen:

- All our Great Escape volunteers and staff
- The staff at Woodrow High House
- Rachel Halliwell & Everton Cameron, who put in months of hard graft as the people behind the entire event
- Kate Whittle who managed the transport logistics with supreme organisational skills

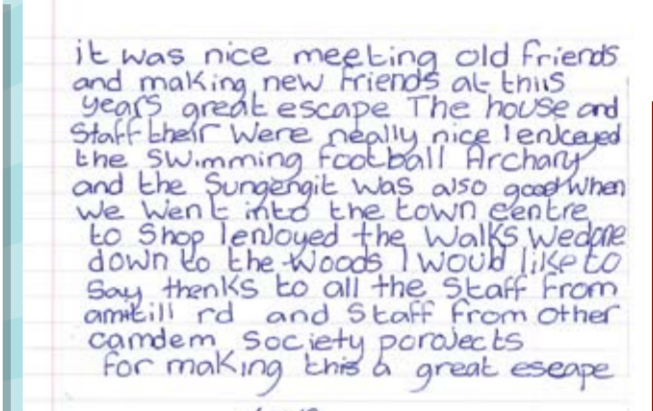
The cooperative membership Community Fund



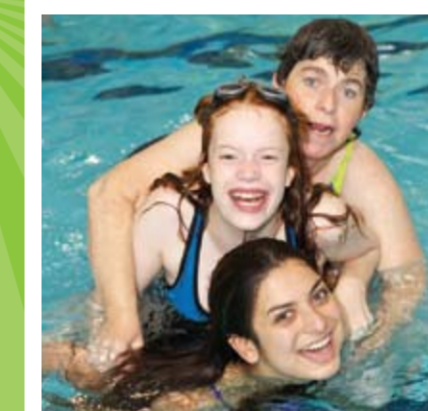
Michael Crawshaw, volunteer extraordinaire, after kindly helping to set up camp



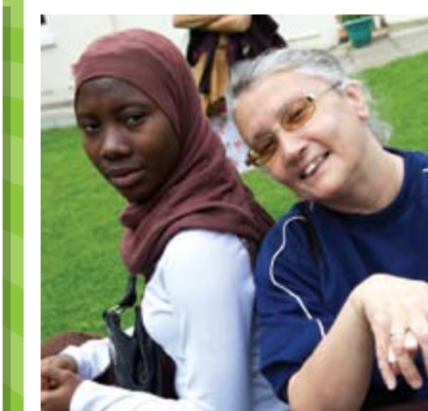
Darren Fortune and Dermot Gray on a nature walk through the grounds of Woodrow High House



"I really liked the place and the food was fantastic. Next year, I'll go into the house for the whole week in case it's wet. I had a great time and would like to thank all the staff who helped out there."  
Michael Crawshaw



Angela Davies, Chelsea Dutton and Natalie Armitage in a synchronised fun formation



Tida Mendy and Maureen MacDonal at the AGM enjoy the sun before The Great Downpour



Andreas Lopez-Muro entertains the AGM crowds with his own brand of electronica

"I did some filming just after I arrived. I enjoyed going shopping to Tesco in the minibus because it helped everyone to get their food." Michelle Cigie

"I've done art, you name it, I've done it here. With archery I hit the bullseye first time. The food's been brilliant." Maureen MacDonal



New friendships. Carlos Arnold and Irene Farrington



John Crawford gets crafty in an open air art session



Maureen MacDonal, Michael Brookstein and Beatrice Bourton drum up some beats

"I've been here as a volunteer. I think we should come back next year. It's been nice working in the kitchen, chopping up the food." Simon Liu

"It was good, they had nice rooms and I liked the walking and music. I would like to go again." Donald Bowyer

## My Great Escape

### Malcolm Davies

Malcolm joined us for a three day holiday, staying in one of the rooms at Woodrow High House. Society People caught up with Malcolm to find out what the break meant to him.



Hi Malcolm, so what's your verdict on The Great Escape?

It was good, really exciting. I don't usually go on holiday; it's been 8 years since I last went away. It was really great to get out of London for a while and relax.

What was the best bit?

I loved the art sessions – I did a really good picture of the house which I've taken home with me and put up on my wall.

Did you fit in loads of activities?

Yes, the art was my favourite, but I did so many activities it's hard to remember. I tried drama

and archery, which I'd never done before but was good at, and got involved in the campfire and ghost stories at night – they were good! It was all so exciting.

Glad to hear it! And what about Woodrow High House – were the beds comfy?

I really liked the house, it was like a hotel! The food was good too, but there was so much. I don't know how people eat all that. I really liked it; it was good fun to be there with all my friends and I met lots of people I hadn't seen before.

And the big question... Would you go again?

Yes! Next year hopefully.