

# HOLT & DISTRICT FARMERS' CLUB

FOUNDED 1948

*President:* Richard Brooks

*Chairman:* Martin Jensen

*Vice-Chairman:* Andrew Ross

[www.holtfarmers.club](http://www.holtfarmers.club)

## POLLITT'S PIECE – HOLT YOUTH PROJECT 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2023 Members Shocked by Scale of Problems Facing Youngsters

An inspirational leader of pioneering and imaginative youth programmes had members of Holt & District Farmers' Club spellbound. The scale of the problems facing young people in north Norfolk was also shocking including a high risk of suicide and self-harming.

Former club chairman Stuart Ross, acting chairman of Holt Youth Project, who started as a volunteer in 2006, introduced the guest speakers and a trustee, north Norfolk veterinary surgeon Tom Hume.

Members applauded his fund-raising efforts for the project as Tom completed the 23-mile cross-channel swim in September – and with fellow swimmer Ed Sargent, of Thurning, raised a total of £50,000. It took him 16 hours and 49 minutes to reach the French coast after leaving Folkestone at 10pm. He had put his name down for the swim in June 2020.

Tom had planned to swim in July but the weather forced a postponement and then again in August but finally, he got his chance if he could be at Folkestone on Monday, September 9.

Julie Alford and husband, David, who set up the award-winning Holt Youth Project, almost 35 years ago, didn't pull any punches. At times, many in the 35-strong audience at Holt Rugby Club were shocked by the lack of official funding, especially from Norfolk County Council for young carers and especially for the project's support for young people with mental health issues. In fact, the project has been so successful that Whitehall officials have asked her team for guidance on developing more appropriate policies.

While North Norfolk Council has given some financial assistance, she voiced serious concerns about the county's strategy and policies, which seem to fund at best, limited, short-term help with a maximum of six sessions. "We know that sometimes it can take weeks and months to make a difference," she said. There was such demand for help that the project's small team had to turn away four and five requests for help.

Members were obviously moved by the young carers' initiative. There were about 147 young carers, all very young and of school age, who were looking after siblings or even parents. One child was "working" 52 hours a week.

**Julie Alford BEM**



**Co-founder and Manager of The Holt Youth Project**

Mrs Alford, who was born and bred in Holt, had attended the earlier youth club as a teenager. When she returned to the town, aged 30, there were no facilities. She started an informal youth club in her home – at one stage, she had 45 youngsters trying to watch television and eat popcorn in her living room.

In December 1996, she launched a campaign and after much heartache, a site was found on the edge of Holt in a former county council sand and gravel yard in Old Station Way. When even renting ~~on~~ a request for a peppercorn lease was rejected. They had to raise £30,000 to buy the site in 18 months – one kind supporter gave £3,000. Then, a further £200,000 was needed to turn the Holt Youth Project into a reality.

By 2004, the official opening was celebrated and hosted by 100 young people. In the past 20 years, the Project has grown and grown. Adopting a "can-do" approach, the range of activities and support has expanded.

The Holt Youth Project has generated support from local people, businesses and organisations. There have been accolades too – a meeting with the former Prince of Wales, now King Charles, at Sandringham and the award of the British Empire Medal to Mrs Alford.

Michael Pollitt

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