

What's on

Our selection of the best in and around Stoke-on-Trent



THEATRE Blood Brothers can be seen at The Regent Theatre in Hanley until Sunday. Set in Liverpool, Willy Russell's musical tells the story of a single mother who strikes a deal with her employee, with tragic consequences. Stars Linda Nolan, above. Call the box office on 0870 080 6640 (see review page 19).

THEATRE Over My Dead Body opens at Barlaston Village Hall tomorrow night, and can be seen there until Saturday. The amateur production of David Benfield's latest comedy will be performed by Barlaston's Proscenium Players. It deals with the differences between men and women when it comes to domestic matters. Call the box office on 01782 372517.

CINEMA Tenham Gardens Ballroom was one of the finest dance halls in the area. Tomorrow night, Staffordshire Film Archive Footage will be shown at the Stoke Film Theatre, in Shelton, documenting its history from the early 1930s to its use by the Bank of England during the Second World War, to The Last Waltz, which took place in 2002. Starts 7.45pm. Admission free. Call 01782 411188.

MUSIC Singspinner will be providing live music at The Full Moon in Newcastle tomorrow night. Call 01782 617926.

MUSIC There will be a folk singaround at The Roebuck in Hillierstone tomorrow night. Call 01538 306040.

MUSIC Booking Kraftwerk will be paying tribute to German pioneers of synthesiser music Kraftwerk, with covers of tracks such as The Model, Pocket Calculator and Autobahn, together with a stage show, at The Lighthouse Club in Crewe tomorrow night. Call 01270 251929.

For the full weekly listings see Friday's

GO

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Project to teach about gardening has been a success

A growing sense of pride in allotments

BY NATASHA GLENVILLE

A GROUNDBREAKING gardening scheme which helps integrate people with mental health problems back into the community is throwing open its doors to members of the public.

Growthpoint is staging an open day at allotments which have been transformed by people taking part in the project over the last seven years. The group revamped eight run-down allotments on the site they own on Leek Road, in Hanley.

As well as the nursery project, with its greenhouse, poly-tunnel, raised flower beds, paved area and pool, the volunteers also carry out landscaping and maintenance for nine properties, and have a handyman project which makes bird tables and nesting boxes.

Growthpoint runs the programme five days a week, and it centres around horticultural and landscaping activities, with an opportunity for some people with mental health problems to gain qualifications.

Organisers hope that the open day will be a chance for the group to show off some of the work they have done, and to mix with the local community.

The event - the first of two open days - will be running from 11am until 3pm, at the allotments behind the Rep Theatre, on Leek Road in Hanley.

Plants will be for sale on the day, and there will also be a barbecue where visitors can trade a packet of seeds for a burger. The money made at the event will be put straight back into the project. The second open day is to be held in August.

People taking part in the scheme are referred to the group from health professionals, social workers and partner agencies of the scheme.

The group runs four different skill areas in landscaping, nursery and recreational, and the college day, which gives service users the chance to gain some qualifications.

After doing a six-week induction period, where new users get to experience everything on offer, they can then choose any of these areas to continue taking part in.

Four of the service users have left the scheme with NVQs in horticulture. On offer at the moment is the chance to take Level One in horticulture at Stoke-On-Trent College, as well as skills for life and numeracy and literacy qualifications.

Geoff Yardley, project co-ordinator, said: "Growthpoint is very hands-on. We have about 40 service users, but we don't like them to be in every day of the week, because we don't want the scheme to become everything for them.

"Many users have part-time jobs,

but still rely on us for support. Some have left the scheme to have full-time jobs, and others have gone back into education.

"It's not just about gardening, the users can gain qualifications and learn to use the machinery we have.

"The open day is a great opportunity for people to talk with Growthpoint volunteers and find out more about what they do."

Two out of five days at Growthpoint are held away from the allotment site. The group is carrying out one of its landscaping projects at Hillcrest residential hostel, where service users will be doing woodwork, painting and decorating, and building flat-pack furniture.

Growthpoint is a recreational, vocational and social horticulture project managed by Stoke-on-Trent mental health services, in partnership with Combined Healthcare NHS Trust, Richmond Fellowship Employment and Training, and the American Clubhouse for adults with mental health problems.

GREEN FINGERS:

Mick Ely and, bottom left, Martin Bradley and Bridie Kellan.

Picture: Shaun Smith

'It's like being in an oasis within the city'

ONE of the biggest success stories for Growthpoint is Jon Harris. Jon was a service user for eighteen months with the scheme, and is now working there as a member of staff, leading the handyman programme.

Jon has been working for the group for the past 12 months. The handyman scheme focuses on woodwork and building objects. The group has recently built a toilet for the allotment. The handyman programme is also a big part of the work at Hillcrest, and Jon has played a major role in this.

Geoff Yardley recruited Jon to Growthpoint while Jon was an outpatient at hospital. During his time on the programme, Jon got a part-time job as a gardener in a residential home before applying to work at Growthpoint.

Jon said: "I was supported by Growthpoint when I was working part-time. The scheme helps people to begin mixing with others again, and gives them the confidence they need. The allotments are like an oasis within the city."

Since working for the project, Jon has gained his certificate in community mental health, which all workers have to have. The certificate aims to give information and an understanding of mental health issues.

