



The History of Essential Needs

The original furniture store started in 1960, thanks to the efforts of local Harrogate organisers who were foster parents to the local Moral Welfare Home for Girls. When the girls left the home, the babies were kept for six weeks before they could be fostered. Some of the girls wished to keep their babies however, and they were then in need of prams and other essentials. The next requirement was a place to stay, and furniture to put in it and this was the start of it all.

Essential Needs began in a garage on Woodfield Drive, later expanding to a second garage on Gascoigne Crescent. By early 1982 the need for a properly funded Community Workshop was becoming increasingly obvious.

Pressures on the organisers, who had worked on the scheme from their own home, had become too great. This prompted them to approach various organisations in Harrogate for help, and a committee was established, to work towards the setting up of a furniture store and workshop. After numerous false starts, caused by the difficulty of finding suitable premises, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) was approached and agreed to consider such a project as part of Harrogate Borough Council's Community Programme.

In time, the Council made available a small, centrally located building and yard on Robert Street which, although lacking any services and in need of considerable renovation, was on a potentially good site.

Once the lengthy process of obtaining the necessary consents had been completed, the building finally became available in August 1984. An MSC team began repair work, and when essential maintenance work had been carried out, it was possible for them to recruit staff. By September, it was adopted by the MSC and incorporated into their Community Programme for Harrogate, and they began collecting and delivering goods.

By September 1985, the scheme was being grant-aided by North Yorkshire County Council, which helped to meet the shortfall between the MSC contribution and the running costs. In October 1987, the future of the workshop was in doubt as the MSC were not able to support the project indefinitely. By the spring of 1988, the workshop had ceased to be run by the Youth Opportunities Community Programme, which had to concentrate on placements in the clerical and catering field. Employment Training took over the role of management, employing a full time organiser and up to six trainees (unemployed people who were paid £10.00 per week over and above their benefits to work on the scheme and gain driving experience before taking their HGV license).

In September 1989, it was thought that the Community Workshop would have to close, because of the problems of funding. An appeal was put out through the Council for Voluntary Service, for an organisation to volunteer to take on the running of the workshop. They had two responses, one from the YMCA, and the other from the Harrogate Brigantes Rotary Club. After consideration, the YMCA decided that they had insufficient manpower to run the scheme. At a meeting in February, notice was given that, regrettably, the workshop would have to stop trading on the 13th February 1990. At this meeting, the proposal from the Rotary Club was discussed, and they took over the helm on the 1st March 1990. By September of that year, however, the Robert Street site was put up for redevelopment, and the store closed down.

The need, however, had not gone away and people continued to contact the original organisers. A meeting of all interested parties was held and a garage with a compacted earth floor was offered by the Council on Claro Road. In 1993, the co-ordinator had to leave due to ill health and another volunteer took up the post. In December 1993, a new partnership group was established, comprised of Harrogate Borough Council, Harrogate and Area Council for Voluntary Service, the Probation Department, and the Furniture Store. An application was put forward to Joint Finance (money available from North Yorkshire Health Authority) in August 1994, to enable the employment of a full time organiser, and to locate to more suitable premises. Harrogate Brigantes Rotary Club became involved in a practical way with the support of the Social Services Department. The application was successful, and the Store was awarded funding "tapering" over 5 years.

A Management Committee was elected at a Special General Meeting on 26th April 1995, and a Constitution adopted with the aim of obtaining Charitable Registration. Harrogate Borough Council helped in the search for new premises, a Project Manager was appointed on the 1st July 1995, and the premises were signed over in October 1995. The official opening took place on the 5th December 1995, when the new furniture store under the name of Essential Needs was launched. After opening, demand for our service exceeded all expectation, and the charity has continued to grow each year. We were not in the premises long before the shortage of space in the warehouse became apparent. Negotiation to rent a small back room adjacent to our premises were successful and, in September 1996, an additional lease was signed and plans put in hand to reorganise the store. A local trust kindly gave us some money to provide lighting, and the room became operational.

Our next major alterations were to improve our office facilities, and provide a comfortable staff room for our hard working volunteers. We also re-evaluated the running of the store, and decided that we needed to open up the back room by providing two sets of double doors, one into the back room, and the other into the warehouse. Our gas and electrical test bed was to be moved through into the room, which would be far more satisfactory from a safety point of view. Quotes were arranged, funding sought, and building got underway. Our office extension was built with the assistance of Harrogate Probation Services, and a commercial firm was brought in to knock the holes in the walls. All work was completed for our open night on 24 June 1998.

A new five-year lease was negotiated and signed in the summer of 2000, and in 2003 a toilet for the use of the disabled was installed. Space is still very much at a premium, however, and we have recently completed a further reorganisation to make better use of what we have.

Throughout 2004 the Charity Trustees had considered the merits of incorporation, a status most trading charities have adopted. The major advantage is the ability of the Charity/Company to enter contracts on its own account e.g. Leasing and Hiring Agreements. Previously such agreements were entered into by the Trustees. During March 2005 it was unanimously agreed in an Extraordinary General Meeting for the net assets and undertaking to be transferred into ESSENTIAL NEEDS, a company limited by guarantee."

Despite one or two setbacks, we continue to grow. We look forward to our forthcoming official 10th birthday in December 2005 with enthusiasm, confident that we fulfil a demonstrable need in the community.

Essential Needs

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