



19/03/19

Dear parents

As I'm sure you are aware, *Enrich* is here to "promote positive attitudes to self, others and God" and due to reasons outlined in this letter, we feel that we are not able to carry out this vision at our youth club in its current form. It is therefore with regret that I write to you to inform you that The Den youth club in Weston which your child/children attend or have attended in the past will be closed until further notice. It is not a decision we have made lightly. We would appreciate it if you would talk with your child/children about this and we will also communicate with them as we see them.

What's happening?

In recent weeks we have had several chats with the young people who attend the older Den about drug use, behaviour in Weston and the impact it is having as well as encouraging them to make positive lifestyle choices. However, not only have we not seen any improvement, the problems have increased. The main problems in Weston are:

- large groups of young people congregating which is very intimidating for people
- drug use
- drunkenness
- lots of noise
- excessive swearing
- playing loud music with derogatory content
- vandalism
- theft from Tesco

Residents on the High Street up to Eastfield Avenue are having a very difficult time of late and we have had more complaints in recent days. Most recently, the bus shelter near The Hub was completely smashed after The Den leaving shards of glass on the pavement and in the road which we were cleaning up until 10.30pm. The number of young people from outside of Weston hanging around in the village has increased and we feel this has contributed to the problems as well.

The main problem areas we are aware of are the High Street, the garages on Podgers Drive and the entrances to the All Saints Centre and the Weston Hub where users are entering and leaving the buildings. The Hub in general is a problem as there is a nursery that runs during the day and they are finding the young people congregating there very intimidating for the parents, the very young children and for the staff as well. The local residents are also finding the behaviour around the Weston Hub and ball court very difficult. There may be other places as well. There have also been issues with newly planted trees being damaged and pulled up on the Rec which we understand to be the work of some of the young people as well.

One community of every generation

Here at *Enrich*, we feel that we need to show solidarity with people in our community in saying that this behaviour is not acceptable. Staff and volunteers at *Enrich* all live in Weston so this is our community as well.

We don't want the young people to see the closure of The Den as a punishment but more of a consequence of what's happening in our and their community. I also want to emphasise that this is not an 'us and them' situation. We are very much advocates for the young people and want them to be heard and understood but we cannot condone this behaviour and we feel that this is a time for unity in our community. We hope the young people will work together with the rest of the community to make it a more positive place. We will always be there for the young people if they need us.

Promoting Positive Attitudes

Myself and Jo and some of our volunteers will be out on Monday and Thursday nights doing detached youth work on the streets instead of opening The Den where we hope to continue to engage with the young people. Please do look out for us if you wish to talk to us.

The after school drop-ins will remain open on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 3 and 4.30pm at The Hub and we obviously continue to be available for young people to meet up with if they have any issues.

To those young people who attend the older Den that are not involved, we are sad for them but are also aware that The Den has increasingly become a less enjoyable place for them to be. For those who attend the younger Den, we are very sorry but with the older young people turning up while the younger Den is on, we are not able to give them the attention they deserve. It has also led to some of the younger ones spending time with the older ones which is proving unhelpful and we don't feel that this is a healthy environment for them at present.

Finding a way forward

We do appreciate that young people want space to hang out with their friends. However, this is a very large group which is problematic. There can be groups in excess of 20 people together in the village which can be very intimidating for others in itself but which can also create a 'mob mentality' where people behave differently to how they normally would - even more so when factors like drugs and alcohol are involved. We are very happy to talk with the young people and the relevant authorities in trying to find a suitable safe place for them to meet.

We know that for some of you this may feel like a negative step as there will be even less for the young people to do in Weston. The closure of The Den is unlikely to result in immediate change but as a church, we feel that this is the right course of action to take for the wellbeing of the young people and the community as a whole.

We hope you will support us in this decision so that together we can promote a positive culture. If you wish to discuss any issues with us, then please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely

Clive



Enrich is run by All Saints Church in Weston