

# **Goodies Café at Southside Community Centre to close as tender lost to commercial company**

**Southside Community Centre has confirmed it will bring the arrangement with the charity Goodies, which runs the café in the centre, to an end on 31 May.**

**Goodies is a charity which not only runs a café, but also a food pantry and the body redistributes surplus food from supermarkets through The Crannie on Cranston Street. The food used in the café is surplus stock from supermarkets such as M&S and Waitrose obtained through the Neighbourly organisation and Fareshare.**

**This food is provided to Goodies at no cost which the charity says is pivotal in providing meals in the café at reasonable prices. The menu changes daily according to the ingredients supplied and volunteer chefs – some from city centre restaurants – prepare different meals accordingly.**

**But the charity's base in Southside Community Centre, owned by the council and run by the Southside Community Centre Association, is key to its operation – and that is now coming to an end, after a period of some doubt.**

A spokesperson for Southside Community Centre said to The Edinburgh Reporter earlier this week: “The presence of the temporary Goodies café in the centre has been useful and welcome. We were pleased to be able to enter into a temporary agreement with Goodies SCIO to provide a café within the centre for period of twelve weeks, and to have been able to extend it further until 31<sup>st</sup> May 2024.

“The Board needs to give consideration to the longer term use of the café. This is a complex area that involves taking into

account the views of centre users, the legal responsibility of the charity's Trustees to act in the best interests of the charity, that a sustainable solution is found, and being confident that any café operator within the centre is able to operate in compliance of safety regulations .

“We continue to give the matter consideration as matter of priority.”

Farrah Maryam who runs the charity said: “I like the location here. We've already built something up although it's quite fractured now because of what the centre has done. I like this area because there is nothing quite like this community hub – we've got all kinds of people who come together. I am sad mainly for the community as it has become a staple for them. I am sad having to give them the news that we're closing.”



Farrah Maryam CEO of Goodies Charity



Farrah third from left with regulars at Goodies Café who will be sad to see it go

## Goodies

The charity was set up during the pandemic and last year ran a Monday café at the centre. Since then their operation has become a broader enterprise with a food pantry, and also some food sold at discounted prices, or for a donation. On Wednesdays in the café it is band day – a musical experience which helps members who may have mental health issues or other significant challenges.

John who has been a volunteer at Goodies for several months said: " I will miss this place if Farah loses it. Everyone who comes here will miss Farah's efforts in the café. She has an extensive menu."

Sandra goes to Goodies on Tuesdays for an art class and has her dinner in the café, enjoying the spaghetti bolognese and eggs on toast.

# **Southside Community Centre Association**

The board of trustees of the Southside Community Centre Association is headed up by Chairperson Professor Christopher Ludlam, and the board includes Fiona Harrison, MD Door Alam Rashid, Nahid Aslam, Nila Joshi and Treasurer, Susan Robertson.

One of the three members of the sub-committee which took the decision over the café is also the Chief Executive of the Centre, which Goodies say is a conflict of interest.

More than 250 people have signed a written petition placed in the café by customers expressing their discontent about the centre ending its arrangement with Goodies in favour of a commercial operation which they believe will mean higher prices.

On 6 May at a meeting of the Southside Community Centre Association, and according to notes taken by a representative of Goodies during the meeting, the trustees would not divulge who the other party to the tender process was. Goodies believed however (and it has since been confirmed) the successful party is a firm called Gopal.

## **Public Meeting**

One member of the association, Liz Jameson, told The Edinburgh Reporter that she had attended the meeting about the café and the tendering process on 6 May, but said she still has many questions over the procedure. She said: "What I understood about the process was that the Chairman of the Board of Trustees formed a subcommittee with just three people to develop the assessment process and to oversee it."

In January the association had indicated the arrangement with

Goodies would end on 31 May 2024, although even on 21 May in an email which The Edinburgh Reporter has seen, the Centre was non-committal over the date when Goodies would have to leave, and said they would provide an update “when appropriate to do so”.

In February three expressions of interest were received from parties who wished to run the café (including one from Goodies), but after one party dropped out only two written applications were made. Chairperson Christopher Ludlam said that the centre had just spent £6,000 on the kitchen, but Treasurer Susan Robertson rejected a claim from the floor that the association had in excess of £200,000 in reserves.

The CEO of the association explained the assessment process to the meeting saying that “essential” and “desirable” criteria were given equal weighting. But the charity feels that there was a lack of clarity over these, and in particular the finances.

Ms Jameson continued: “One criterion referred to financial aspects, but it had been vaguely worded. I don’t think there was an external review of the criteria themselves. There was an external adviser called in to review the process, but not to look at the criteria and whether they were fair. There was no evidence behind the answers in the bids. There was no weighting to membership feedback which had been given previously, and no reference to Farah running this so successfully.

“It’s not just about the food and the provision. I feel like the whole team have made an effort to get to know the people who come and form relationships with them.”

## **Local Councillors**

Cllr Tim Pogson who was at the meeting is reported to have said that “from where I am sitting it has been a very fair

process”.

Cllr Steve Burgess who represents Southside and Newington said to The Edinburgh Reporter: “Ward councillors were not party to this decision making. I did suggest they set criteria to judge applicants against and that they have an independent panel member to ensure fairness, both of which they did. I can understand the disappointment of the existing provider who was not chosen to continue.”

The trustees provided information about the process to local councillors as follows: “On Tuesday 9 April 2024 the Board of Trustees selected ‘Gopals Café’ as preferred provider of future café services within Southside Community Centre.

“This decision was made by Trustees following an open call for Expressions of Interest, which resulted in three parties making known their wish to possibly work within in Centre. The proposals submitted by these three parties were considered on Tuesday 5 March 2024 and all three were invited to resubmit taking into account twenty five criteria (twenty essential and five desirable). Two of the three interested parties made submissions which were assessed against each of the criteria. This assessment process was overseen by an independent observer from out with the Association, who reported that they were satisfied that the process of assessing the criteria was appropriate and fair.

“As a result of this process ‘Gopals Café’ was assessed as meeting a larger number of essential and desirable criteria. Trustees decided to open negotiations with ‘Gopals Café’ with the aim of agreeing a mutually acceptable contract for the provision of café service for users of the café in keeping with the aims of the Association.

“We entered into an agreement with Goodies SCIO to operate our café for a twelve week period from 22 January 2024, which was extended until 31 May 2024. We would like to thank Goodies for

their work in the café during this period and wish them every success for the future.”

A member of the Goodies team said: “Goodies has transcended its role as a mere café, evolving into a symbol of warmth, inclusivity, and support. Its affordable meals, free food pantry, and dedication to mental health awareness have made it a lifeline for many.

“However, the recent decision to award the tender to Gopal Café, a business entity motivated primarily by profit, has sparked outrage among café users. The trustees cited financial incentives as the driving force behind their choice, despite the glaring contradiction with the charitable mission of the Southside Community Centre funded by the Edinburgh Council.”

