

Jane, our President for the evening, welcomed members and introduced our speaker, John Ball.

‘Go Beyond – to do more than is expected or required.’

John’s opening remarks made us smile. He explained his talk would be more “radio” than “TV” due to a few technical issues!

John was a charming man who went on to talk about his involvement as a volunteer with a little-known charity, Go Beyond, previously known as Chicks, one of the smaller charities in this world of big names.

Go Beyond was established in Plymouth in 1992, when a group of teachers thought it would be a good idea to provide some respite for children who in effect, ‘didn’t have a childhood’ or had never had a holiday. Children who had many and varied difficulties in their lives including physical and mental challenges, suffered bereavement or were perhaps young carers of a parent or sibling with little time for socialising with friends.

Split into age ranges and initially camping in tents, which proved not to be good in bad weather, a farmer gifted them a nearby barn. There are now centres in other parts of the country. The children surprisingly from a variety of backgrounds are referred by organisations and professionals. There is, inevitably, a mix of children, some challenging, some you’d be happy to take home, (some you maybe wouldn’t want to see again), but all in need of some TLC. Some children have had violence in their lives which may be reflected in their behaviour but need to have been trouble free for six months before attending.

The children enjoy good, local grown food which they cook or prepare themselves, (some do miss the burgers and chips), and take part in a range of activities from horse riding to rock climbing or maybe just time on a beach. John told a very moving story of a one-to-one chat with a seventeen-year-old boy who was puzzled as to why the sea covered one part of the sand but then appeared to be further away. John said it had been his privilege to explain to the boy about the ebb and flow of the tides. He also mentioned a girl who had never had any contact with horses and who didn’t want anything to do with them but with kindness and encouragement she ended up walking the horse independently round the course and did go on to ride.

“Can a week make a difference?” John was asked. He explained that volunteers and staff often can’t help as much as they would like to but they can make a small difference or sometimes a huge difference and leave the children with an unforgettable memory of their time there.

John wanted to raise awareness of the charity he clearly holds dearly and tell others about the things they do and the help they need from volunteers and donations in order to carry on this valuable work. If you would like to know more the website is @gobeyond. Based in Tavistock they may not be the biggest charity on the planet but from John’s perspective they do make a difference to children’s lives and that is surely what matters most.

L Bailey