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POINTS OF VIEW

Worthy organisations bind our community

I THINK it would be a bit weird if I wrote this week's column and didn't at least mention the news that there's a General Election happening on July 4.

But then again, I'm sure it's not really news to anyone reading this. Nobody could have failed to notice it. Our newspapers, TV screens and radio stations will be full of it for the next five weeks and probably beyond.

So yes, I'm the Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate for Chelmsford. Yes, we have a genuine chance of an historic win here. No, it won't happen by accident, so please do lend me your vote this time around in this very special, once-in-a-generation election.

And for the moment, that's all I'm going to say. Instead, I'd really like to tell you about some of the things I've been up to over the past week or so. These sorts of things are going to get drowned out by all the talk of the General Election, so while I've still got the chance I'd like to let you know about them.

Firstly, I'm taking the slightly unusual step of telling you about a fabulous charity I visited last week that isn't based in Chelmsford. But as they help families from all over Essex, including in Chelmsford, and they provide vital support, I think you should know about them. They're called SNAP and they're based in Brentwood.

SNAP stands for Special Needs And Parents. It's a charity that was founded by a small number of parents 30 years ago who were faced with the knowledge that there was little support for them and people like them - families with children who have special educational needs or disabilities and need extra help.

Since those humble beginnings, they have grown massively, currently supporting more than 4,000 families across Essex, and have a variety of services that aim to plug gaps in provision while providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for the whole family.

SNAP say they partner with parents who have a child with an additional need or disability, making sure each family has the informa-



Opening the Essex Global Summit with Essex Chambers of Commerce at Hylands House



Taking part in a morning dance class at the City of Chelmsford Mencap (CCM) centre in Mildmay Road



Visiting Brentwood charity SNAP, which supports families with children who have special educational needs or disabilities across Essex

tion, support and confidence they need to champion their child.

I love the way they describe the work they do: working in partnership. It's a reminder that supporting someone isn't about telling them what to do. Successful support recognises that everyone is different, that everyone has different experiences and different needs. Partnering and working together acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach is rarely the right way to go - it rarely leads to the most successful outcomes.

Families in Chelmsford are accessing SNAP through distanced support such as its helpline, information network and online direc-

tory. There is also a variety of in-person services and activities for their child at The SNAP Centre in Brentwood. SNAP is celebrating 30 years of supporting local families. If you or someone you know needs support, please contact SNAP on 01277 211300.

As the rumours began swirling around political WhatsApp groups and social media that a General Election was going to be announced later that day, in the morning of Wednesday last week I was at Hylands House preparing to give a speech to open the Essex Global Summit with Essex Chambers of Commerce.

Sponsored by Chelmsford City Council, this was an event attended by more than 100 representatives from small and medium-sized businesses across Essex, along with industry leaders and experts to discuss international trade.

Small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of the Essex economy. I'm proud to be the deputy leader of a council that understands the importance of supporting them and working in partnership with excellent organisations like the Essex Chambers of Commerce.

Together we can create opportunities and an environment in which businesses can grow and thrive. Long may that continue.

You can find out more about the work of the Essex Chambers of Commerce on its website at www.essex-chambers.co.uk

And finally, despite the sudden, all-hands-on-deck nature of kicking off a snap General Election campaign, I was really pleased to still be able to honour a commitment to visit City of Chelmsford Mencap (CCM), which is based in my own ward of Moulsham & Central, right in the heart of our city.

I've mentioned CCM's work before - notably when I joined them on a visit to All Things Alpaca at Lathcoat's Farm on Beehive Lane, but this was (surprisingly) my first visit to their centre in Mildmay Road.

I was given the guided tour by one of their trustees and even got to join in with their morning dance class - what better way to loosen up and de-stress?

CCM is an independent charity that provides services for people affected by learning disabilities. Although they are based in Chelmsford, they welcome people from across Essex.

For their service users, their families and carers, the work they do is incredibly important, ensuring they receive the care and support they need to live life to the full.

As with so many charities, though, they struggle with the costs of providing their service, and balancing that with the needs of those they serve. And they are always on the lookout for volunteers.

The work they do is so enriching for those they help and, from what I've seen, it's a lot of fun too. So, if you fancy volunteering somewhere, you could get a lot of enjoyment out of being part of CCM.

Find out more at www.cityof-chelmsfordmencap.org.uk

There are so many wonderful organisations out there supporting our community. It's a genuine privilege to visit them and to learn about what they do.

It's something I intend to continue in whatever role I find myself carrying out after July 4.

Keep well and thanks, as always, for reading.

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