

Thornborough & Thornton W.I. Report for February 2016:



<http://www.puzzlecentre.org.uk>

Just up the road from here, in Middle Clayton in fact, exists a most important, independent, special provision catering for pre-school children. The nursery is managed by a specialist teacher who works in conjunction with a speech and language therapist to plan and deliver the foundation stage curriculum to meet the needs of children who are on the autism spectrum, or have other significant communication needs, at an age that is critical for their future development.

So said Alex Stanyard the director and founder of *The Puzzle Centre* who spoke at our first meeting of the year, a fitting beginning we thought, reminding us of the centrality of language in our lives. There we all were, listening and paying attention, afterwards commenting on and sharing thoughts on the fact that although pre-school life for ourselves is a long distant memory, the business of communication begins in the earliest stages of life and hopefully lasts throughout it. Not necessarily of course for a minority, and how blessed we are to live in a society that cares about those few who need help.

Alex's work began in 1998, where she became involved in a working group set up by the child development team in Buckinghamshire to look at the support offered to children on the autism spectrum following a positive diagnosis. At the time, there was no autism specific provision in place for families, and as such, the clinical psychology service set up a six-week pilot project. There were two key staff members – a specialist teacher and a speech and language therapist, which proved to be immensely successful. In 2004 Puzzle became a charity and moved to new premises in 2006.

Ten years on, this is a thriving provision, serving needs well beyond Buckinghamshire to a wide number of counties in close proximity to ours. Currently, *The Puzzle Centre* is still fee paying (beyond the statutory 15 hours free provision) but efforts are being made to fund raise and dig deep from limited Government sources.

Although this presentation from Alex Stanyard was the first on the W.I. calendar, in January we all met for a delicious, calorie-laden lunch at the Methodist chapel (thanks to the Methodists for use of their lovely space) raised money for one of our favourite charities and tried to answer fiendish quiz questions devised by Madge Carey who smiled benignly when we complained how hard it was to find answers. Sometimes it's easier to listen to our marvellous monthly speakers. There are some treats in store this year – so do come and join us, first Wednesday in each month for a mere £4.00 if you're not already a member.

Cath Sayer