

Coffee shop just their cup of tea

Our Community Champions series celebrates the hard graft of residents who work tirelessly to better their community and the lives of others across the globe. It has been backed by Prime Minister David Cameron who challenged the city's 'Big Society' to further grow and prosper. This week **Charlotte Orson** speaks to a group of villagers who have pulled together to provide a heart to their community...

CambridgeFirst



The cafe is for all: Ella Kelso, three, enjoys an orange squash and a Kit-Kat

A TEAM of villagers ranging from teenagers to pensioners are giving their time freely to ensure their new community cafe is a success.

A dwindling congregation at the former Cottenham Methodist Church has seen the attractive 19th century chapel undergo a £180,000 refurbishment to transform it into a stylish coffee shop and adjoining community hall - for the people of the village.

The Cottenham Community

Centre (CCC) coffee shop opens six days a week and is run by volunteers, with the exception of a single paid manager.

And the thriving facility - providing a meeting point for both young and old - was officially opened yesterday, two months after the first cup of coffee was served.

Villager Eddie Murphy is chairman of CCC and was at a meeting in 2007 where the future of the Cottenham Methodist Church was discussed after a decision was made to ask the remaining congregation to attend the Methodist chapel in nearby Histon.

He said: "I had a conversation with one of the younger members of the village a few years ago who was thinking about starting a coffee shop and we were discussing it as a good idea but it never happened.

"Then it came to what we were going to use this space for and the coffee shop idea sprang immediately to mind.

"We're not short of community halls but what we did not have was a coffee shop.

"There was not a place that wasn't a pub where people could just meet.

"We were flabbergasted when it opened.

"We all had a degree of confidence but did not realise it would spring to life as soon as it opened.

"A lot of times you have to wait for a table at lunchtime."

Mr Murphy said the opening of the coffee shop and community hall - home to a dozen community groups ranging from a knitting group to a yoga class - did not happen without hurdles to jump when it came to funding.

But a £50,000 Big Lottery grant awarded on ITV People's Lottery show changed the fate of the project.

"It really gave us kudos when



Jane Hackshaw, 42, prepares a well-filled baguette as David Steer, 62, makes coffee in the village cafe

applying to other organisations for community grants," said Mr Murphy.

Village fundraising efforts also raised thousands of pounds to cover initial running costs of the CCC and volunteers chipped in to help decorate the building which has been transformed into a high-ceilinged open space with original features of the chapel and its adjoining schoolroom retained.

Jane Hackshaw has been recruited as the coffee shop's only paid member of staff and oversees initiatives such as mother and toddler groups and Dads' Play on Saturday mornings where dads are encouraged to go along and meet one another and read the papers while their toddlers play.

Born and bred in Cottenham, Mrs Hackshaw said it was not just young people benefiting from the coffee shop.

She said elderly people, often recently bereaved, are increasingly coming through the doors alone for a chat with volunteers while treating themselves to a slice of cake baked that morning.

She said: "Everyone is so

enthusiastic and I was thinking that it might just be the first couple of weeks when there was the wow factor.

"But it has lasted beyond the honeymoon period and has been thoroughly supported by the village.

"People who come in for coffee often end up volunteering their services."

Volunteer David Steer, 62, started out doing DIY jobs at the coffee shop before serving coffee and washing up on a weekly basis.

"It's good fun and as long as it doesn't interfere with the golf then I'm happy," he said.

"You like to think you're serving the community and they are a great bunch of volunteers."

Cottenham villager Sarah MacDonald, 41, was out for lunch at the coffee shop with her daughter Abbi MacDonald, 16, earlier this week as she had an early finish at school.

She said: "I don't drive and if you want to go out for lunch at a café you have to get on the bus so it's great to be able to walk here."

Abbi said: "I brought my friends here once and someone welcomed us and said it was nice to have teenagers here."

The CCC coffee shop opens from 10am to 2pm from Monday to Saturday and offers free wi-fi.

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- Eddie Murphy, chairman Cottenham Community Centre