

The shop that helps make sweet music

Profits fund orchestra for disabled musicians

MELANIE BONN

A dynamic new shop has opened on South Street in Perth, giving an inspirational orchestra of musicians with disabilities the chance to shine.

The shop, run to benefit the Inspiration Orchestra, is a mix of boutique-standard new and nearly new clothes plus original cards.

People with disabilities contribute hugely to the shop, providing all the designs for cards, and operating the in-store music system.

The Inspiration Orchestra has been playing concerts in St Matthew's Church for a couple of years now with professional musician Ian White conducting and organising the group.

With some members only able to use a single finger to play their instruments and the majority having complex physical or learning constraints, the resulting music performed at their free concerts is indeed an inspiration.

Ian took over the vacant shop at 91 South Street recently and formulated a plan that would mean it was so much more than your regular charity shop.

He explained what the public would find inside Shop at 91: "We have a stunning card gallery with every colourful print created by a disabled artist, many living abroad, but all getting royalties



Radio tunes Ian White with regular visitor Jade Cheneau

from the sale of cards that reproduce their artwork and photography.

"I wanted people to buy these cards, not out of sympathy, but because they are genuinely top class cards. Initial buyers have been hugely enthusiastic.

"The 70 artists whose work we stock get 20 per cent every time one of their cards sells."

Ian personally put up the exterior sign - gold letters spelling 'Shop at 91'

referencing the address on South Street - and got down to the laborious job of grouting the floor of the former butcher's shop.

He got a little carried away and went out to buy gold grout.

"It may sound fanciful, but the gold grout between the floor tiles represents the golden moments I have experienced by working with everyone in the Inspiration Orchestra. They have each brought pure gold to creating music and the floor is a tribute to them."

The design of the shop is deliberately uncluttered, primarily to enable easy wheelchair access.

The clothes take up two central rails leaving wide aisles to view the cards.

Donations of clothes are most welcome

and the sale stock has a pleasing selection of top labels at tempting prices.

"We agreed we had to sell clothes to make money for the orchestra, but the shop is about more than that," commented Ian.

"People with disabilities find getting employment very difficult. We hope to help there.

"Every card sale is a disabled person benefiting from their work. One artist with a degenerative disease was only able to draw using a single muscle on her forehead, but her work is amongst the most admired in our collection."

Ian has designed a radio corner - dubbed Inspiration Radio - with a PRS licence and simple sound equipment, so that people can come in with their carers

or be assisted by an able-bodied person from the shop and be empowered to push the buttons and play a song of their choice to liven up the atmosphere.

"It is part of Shop at 91's aim to have people with disabilities book an hour between 11am and 3pm at the radio desk so they can enjoy being their own DJ."

One of those who's planning on making a regular date operating the radio station is Jade Cheneau (24). She is in a wheelchair but comes in from her home in Scone most days on the bus to see friends and visit the shops in Perth.

"The Inspiration Orchestra is great, I love to come to the practices and play electric guitar. It's a lot of fun.

"Now the shop is open, I will be coming in and working the radio desk. I love it, I can play my favourite tunes."

A group of volunteers have agreed to help in the shop and Ian would like more people to come forward and offer a few hours of their time.

One of the first volunteers was Margaret Benson, who is also a trustee for Inspiration Orchestra.

Her son has various disabilities and goes daily to the Upper Springland facility in Isla Road, and she's delighted with the happiness the orchestra has brought to residents and day patients there.

She's been hugely involved in setting up the shop.

Margaret said: "If you fancy giving us a hand, call me on 07790105406. Everything about this enterprise is amazing."

Another volunteer, Zoe Anderson has recently moved to Perth from Pitlochry.

"I am on maternity leave," she explained.

"It is nice to be able to contribute. I signed up a few hours when I passed the shop and saw Ian, who I've known for 20 years, up on a ladder putting up the sign. I just asked him if there was anything I could do. And I'm so glad I did."



Cards Margaret Benson (left) showing new stock to volunteer 060919CharityShop_03



Fashion Ian White and Margaret Benson review the rails

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