

Fred hands over care of Christchurch Station to neuro-diverse young adults.

After 16 years' planting and caring for Christchurch Station, Fred Neale is handing over his tools to the enthusiastic and highly-committed young adults from Autism Unlimited's Futures programme.



Fred, 76, a former Mayor and Councillor of the Borough of Christchurch and recently the new Town Council, joined Councillor Josephine Spencer and others in officially 'adopting' the station from South Western Trains in 2007.

Fred went on to lead a committee of Trustees and volunteers to transform the previously scruffy and unkempt station into a smart and welcoming gateway to the historic town, with an array of colourfully-planted old whisky barrels and raised garden beds.

He also opened a small café, hosted events and won South and South East in Bloom awards for over 10 years, including a Gold Cup and a Community Rail Award for holding a celebration of 150 years of the train line coming to Christchurch.

Fred said: "Sadly, over the years, volunteer and Trustee numbers have dwindled and Covid obviously put paid to a lot of our work.

"I still manage to keep it up together and tend to the planters and litter picks. But I had a stroke two years ago and I really need to pass it on to some younger people - so I was thrilled when Futures said they were interested."

The Futures programme, based in Manor Road, Christchurch, is operated by leading charity [Autism Unlimited](#) and empowers neuro-diverse people aged 18-25 to fulfil their potential and become active in their local communities, through learning, work placements, employability skills and supported housing practice.

Tilly Larment, Futures Manager said: "I went to a conference and was talking to someone whose school had adopted a station under the Community Rail Project. We love gardening, horticulture and conservation at Futures, so we volunteered to help Fred at Christchurch Station.

"When we found out he wanted to retire, we jumped at the chance to take over this amazing community project."

She continued: "It's a big responsibility, but it's also such great opportunity to both learn and work as a team.

"We already have plans to renovate the existing tearoom, create a mural near the platform and transform another derelict room into a small café and a community bookshop.

"Fred will still be visiting us and advising us when needed and we are looking forward to making the station an even more welcoming place for people to use."

Futures learner Alex Dredge said: "So far, we have been weeding and have done some planting. We will also be picking up some litter later. I am going to enjoy seeing our plants grow."

Learner Lucas Murray, who is visually-impaired agreed: "It varies what we do, but it's interesting and we have lots of plans. I like learning how to care for the plants and also being on the station as the trains go by."

Ends

Picture captions:

[station1] Fred Neale (centre) with learners and coaches from Autism Unlimited's Futures.

[station2] Learner Lucas Murray waters one of the station's planters with Autism Unlimited admin assistant Alex Wigmore.

[Autism Unlimited](#) is now accepting new applications for Futures. For more details contact email: futures@autism-unlimited.org or phone: 01202 485305.

Christchurch was the first station run by South Western Trains, to be adopted. There have now been 100 station adoptions under the current South West Railways portfolio.

