

Gate Christian Outreach

True Love Waits

The story of the Gate Christian Outreach

"There are prostitutes in Southampton?" The disbelief on the face of the woman, an elderly churchgoer, stood in stark contrast to the everyday reality that Pam witnessed on the streets of her neighbourhood. "Yes there are," Pam replied, "but more importantly, there are mothers, daughters and sisters who are hurting. What are we going to do about it?"

It was 1984 and Pam Hand had grown accustomed to seeing prostitutes hanging around the streets of Newtown, Southampton, trying to earn a living. When students from her Baptist church began to spend time talking with the girls, Pam and fellow churchgoer Trisha Kenyon realised that the church had a unique opportunity to be a source of hope, rather than of condemnation, for the girls. They gathered a group of volunteers from Kingsland Baptist Church to go and meet with the prostitutes. "Some people thought it was dangerous, others thought it was brave," recalls Pam. "The important thing for us was that these girls were people with real needs."

The team of volunteers gradually got to know the girls, as they provided a weekly service of tea, coffee, friendship and prayer. With many of the women in dire straits, the volunteers found that offers of prayer were rarely declined.

"Since we began meeting with the girls, we have realised how important prayer has become for both ourselves and for the girls," says Pam. Over the following ten years, as sensational articles appeared in local newspapers and condemnations were uttered by public officials, the dedicated team continued to extend the hand of friendship to the girls working on the streets.

The volunteers also began to discover more practical ways of helping the girls, such as advocating on their behalf to the housing office, finding them emergency accommodation and visiting them in hospital or prison. By 1994, the team had grown to include volunteers from several local churches, with many receiving training on how to work with prostitutes. The project was also granted charitable status under the name the Gate Christian Outreach, as the volunteers continued the gradual and ongoing process of bringing hope into the lives of some of the city's most despised women.

One of these women was Mary, a 16-year-old drug addict working on the streets of Southampton when she first met volunteers from the Gate Christian Outreach in 1994. "I enjoyed taking to Pam and the other girls," recalls Mary, "but I didn't think that they could help me."

Mary had been working on the streets of British cities from the age of 14, making money to support a drug habit she had developed while living at a children's home.

By the time she met Sharon Hawkins, the project director of the Gate Christian Outreach, Mary was facing the possibility of a prison sentence for drug-related crimes.

"She had reached a real low point in her life," Sharon recalls. "The sad thing was that there was no one there to help her." Despite the obvious difference in lifestyle between the two women, they struck up a friendship that would have a lasting effect on Mary's life.

Over time, Mary began opening up and making herself voluntarily accountable to Sharon. Mary recently avoided a potentially crushing jail sentence after Sharon submitted a character reference for Mary to the court judge.

Through actions such as these, Sharon's relationships with Mary continued to grow, as she helped her see the possibility of a different way of life. In 2002, with the support of her friend and mentor, Mary succeeded in leaving her life of drugs and prostitution behind.

"She helped me get off the streets, but it's really been the little things that Sharon has done that have made all the difference to me," says Mary. Although she still faces difficulties in her life, Sharon believes that Mary is happier now than she has been i

New Hope Mentoring Programme

New Hope Mentoring Programme (NHMP) began in early 2003 following growing concern from police and other community groups that crime prevention strategies in south Birmingham were failing to target repeat offenders aged 18-25.

A police sergeant working in Balsall Heath decided to approach some of the local churches and mosques to identify ways in which they could work together to tackle this problem.

Inspired by the success of a similar programme in Boston, USA – which has seen police and churches work together to dramatically reduce re-offending rates over the past 15 years – a group of police officers and volunteers came together to form NHMP.

The programme aims to specifically target PPOs – Prolific, Persistent Offenders - who are very often sucked into a life of crime from a young age and tend also to be involved in drugs and gangs in some way.

By training committed volunteers, predominantly from local churches, NHMP has developed a large pool of mentors who are willing to spend time with ex-offenders - befriending them, providing them with life-skills training and being a source of moral

and emotional support as they look to re-integrate into society and leave a life of crime behind.

By developing good relationships with a number of local prisons, NHMP staff and volunteers are very often able to begin the process of mentoring while the offender is still behind bars. This relationship continues outside of prison, where mentors meet regularly with ex-offenders in informal settings such as public parks and Pizza Huts. The project also provides mentors with dedicated mobile phones, so that they can be contacted directly by their mentee.

One ex-offender recently claimed: "I would be dead without my mentor!" His mentor, a volunteer from a south Birmingham church, has helped him give up drugs, attend a college course, find a work placement, manage his money and even acquire second-hand furniture for his flat.

Since the project began back in 2003, 48 offenders have been referred to NHMP, who have succeeded in finding long-term mentors for 39 of them. A number of these offenders have come off the police PPO list since becoming part of the programme and West Midlands Police have acknowledged that NHMP is helping to reduce crime rates in the local area.

This unique partnership between local churches and the police, probation and prison services is demonstrating that when faith groups and professional agencies work together, the result is improved crime statistics, altered behaviour and changed lives.

Richmond's Hope

Richmond's Hope was chosen to receive the Spring Harvest Faithworks Award 2003 because the judges felt that of the 13 shortlisted projects, it most clearly demonstrates the Christian ethos and values of the Faithworks Movement. After two years of rigorous research and planning, Richmond Craigmillar Church, a traditional church with few resources situated in the midst of an area of multiple deprivation, has created a safe, attractive, purpose-built haven to help local young children come to terms with traumatic bereavement. An area of social need in which there is a woeful lack of provision, Richmond's Hope is demonstrating Christian love in action to some of its community's most vulnerable members, and has had an impact that is much appreciated by the wider community. Since the launch of the project in June 2003, this impact has been recognised by government and the media at local and national levels.

Richmond's Hope presented an outstanding response to the judging criteria for the Award, being:

- **A response to a local need** - The church's definition of 'local' committed it to serving a rapidly growing community. An openness and willingness to serve,

combined with extensive research into inhabitants needs, allowed the church to clearly identify a means of beginning to meet those needs.

- **A reflection of best practice and sustainability** - Flexible and equipping management, accounting and evaluation structures, combined with diverse funding sources mean that Richmond's Hope are well placed to continue, and expand, their provision of care.
- **Demonstrating innovation** - Richmond's Hope is a pioneering project, the only dedicated programme of its type in the UK. The use of therapeutic play and creative expression in a context of year-round, one-to-one care provides an innovative package.
- **Impacting on the local community** - In a community surrounded by demolition and reconstruction, the church is a symbol of stability and security.
- **Forging relationships with local government and other agencies** - Following liaison and interaction with the education department, the city council, social workers, health workers and teachers, a block release has been granted to any child accepted by Richmond's Hope. This progress was recognised by the local MSP Susan Deacon, formerly Minister of Health for the Scottish Parliament when she visited the project.
- **Receiving coverage in the local media** - The project has received coverage in the local, national press (Scotland) and Christian press as well as appearing on national and local radio programmes.
- **Planning to further develop its community work** - This young project, working to an operational business plan, has exciting plans to spread the care it provides to encompass entire families struggling to come to terms with traumatic bereavement and provide regular after-schools care for the children it works with.

For more information about the work of 'Richmond's Hope', please visit www.richmondshope.org.uk.

ACCEPT Mental Health Trust

ACCEPT is an evolving Christian charity whose vision is to bring hope to people experiencing mental health problems. Their work includes facilitating support networks and raising awareness of mental health issues within schools and churches.

ACCEPT's innovative approach to tackling isolation for individuals suffering from mental health-related problems includes the development of 'social support groups'. The social support groups consist of individuals referred to ACCEPT by the NHS and other mental health service providers.

Training is provided to volunteers from local churches, who take on the responsibility for weekly meetings where ongoing friendships are established. Group

members have often experienced isolation from families, friends and wider society because of mental health problems. These support groups meet in public places, such as pubs and cafes, empowering group members to become part of the wider community and begin the process of change in their lives.

ACCEPT was set up by occupational therapist and counsellor Aidan Lucas, who believes that the key to life is finding acceptance. "To accept that we are of significant worth and all experience times of poor mental health is the foundation on which the work of the charity is based," he explains.

ACCEPT ran a one year pilot project in 2004, responding to unmet needs in the field of mental health in Hinckley, Leicestershire. The pilot was a remarkable success, with ACCEPT receiving support from the NHS and input from a number of local professional staff from the community mental health team.

Part of ACCEPT's success is down to the projects focus on forming lasting relationships with group members. A number of people struggling with mental health problems have benefited greatly from being involved with ACCEPT's social support groups.

Having identified the need for mental health education in local primary schools, ACCEPT has also been instrumental in establishing an initiative known as Y4U?. The project involves providing thought-provoking and challenging mental health education to Year 6 pupils. Y4U? received a national award in 2005 for raising awareness of mental health issues to hundreds of young people through a drama called Two halves make a whole, written by a local scriptwriter.

ACCEPT is also unique in that it partners with a similar project in Nigeria, which supports adults with mental health difficulties in a country where those with mental health problems are often shunned entirely from their communities. ACCEPT has now secured an ongoing partnership between Edawu and the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust. This will provide opportunities for healthcare professionals from the trust to experience African culture and provide training to staff at the Edawu project.

As a local mental health charity, ACCEPT is exceptional in many ways. It has succeeded in winning the support of the NHS, local churches and the wider community. By situating many of its activities and support groups in public places such as pubs, with minimum input from professional staff, ACCEPT has been pioneering in showing that peer support in the community can be effective for individuals experiencing mental health problems.

St. Martin's Centre for Health & Healing

The Listening Church

The story of the St Martin's Centre for Health and Healing

“Frequently people tell us that we are the first people they have found who really listen,” says Mike Murkin, Director of the St Martin’s Centre for Health and Healing. “Often that is just what someone wants.” Giving visitors the time to be heard is one way in which the project run by St Martin-in-the-Bull Ring church is different from other service providers. As one former client explains: “When other people didn’t listen, St Martin’s offered a listening ear. They did not judge my problems, but gave me strength to overcome them in a friendly way.”

The Centre’s emphasis on listening to everyone who comes through its doors stands in stark contrast to the noise and busyness of its surroundings. Encircled by retailers and rough sleepers, businessmen and buskers, St Martin’s straddles the divide between rich and poor in city-centre Birmingham. Until recently, the church was a symbol of deprivation and decline in the Bull Ring area of Birmingham. As a result of large-scale regeneration project, the church has now become the resplendent focal point of Britain’s second largest city.

“The common memory of St Martin’s was of something tucked away, something a bit dark and grimy you didn’t want to go into,” recalls Canon Andrew Newman, the Vicar of St Martin. However, with the £500m Bull Ring redevelopment placing the church at the centre of Britain’s latest shopping complex, the church is expecting over 30 million people to walk past its doors every year. The development has given the church an unexpected opportunity to continue its historic commitment to being a safe haven for the lonely and marginalised of the city. As Canon Newman explains: “Many of those who gather around city centre churches are severely dispossessed, sometimes mentally unstable and almost always in great physical need. There are also those facing a life crisis, for whom the church still represents a symbol of help offered in times of need.”

St Martin’s began providing practical help for its visitors in April 2000, when the Centre for Health and Healing opened within the church. With funds from the Bull Ring redevelopment and various other sources, the Centre is able to offer visitors a helpdesk – providing listening, information, advice, advocacy and referrals - along with a professional counselling service, stress management sessions, complimentary health treatments and a homeless support team. Since opening over 15,000 people have used the services of the Centre for Health and Healing, with many visitors also making use of the recently opened learning and advice service and arts café.

With its growing range of services, the Centre provides a recognisable and co-ordinated Christian response to the complex needs faced by those who visit the church. The Centre estimates that approximately 80% of those who approach them for help are suffering from some form of mental health related difficulty, an issue that the project was determined to address from the outset. “Churches inevitably attract people with mental health problems,” says Mike. “They see it as a place offering acceptance and help. That it is why many people who come through our doors are in real trouble – their lives are falling apart.”

One person whose life was falling apart when she arrived at St Martin's was twenty-year-old 'Lucy'. Although she had been raised in an affluent and comfortable home, things had gone wrong after her parent's difficult divorce. The pain of their separation left a sense of guilt with Lucy, who concluded that she must have been responsible in some way for their break-up. In need of emotional relief, she began cutting herself on her arms to alleviate her pain. "I had been harming myself for over a year and just couldn't stop," recalls Lucy. After seeing a local G.P., she was referred to the St Martin's Centre for Health and

Trust, London

Di Martin, Manager of TRUST, a community project supporting sex workers in south London, gives an overview of the project that was recently awarded the 2004 CRE Faithworks Community Resource Award.

TRUST was founded in 1999 as a church and community-based project supporting women involved in, or recently exited from, prostitution in south London. The project came about through two local women regularly seeing women working in their neighbourhood and wondering what services were available for them. This led to meetings with the police and local agencies to get an idea of what was already being provided as well as determining the gaps in service provision.

This wide-ranging initiative now delivers services through street outreach, court work, one-to-one counselling and a drop-in facility, seeing on average 50 individual women each week. The drop-in service provides a place where women can come and have a break from the streets, get a hot meal, a shower, some clothes, and begin to address some of the issues they are facing such as homelessness, drug use, health issues, violence, etc.

Many women have been helped to access safe accommodation, drug treatment and counselling, and most importantly, have found a place where they can receive much-needed emotional support and friendship. Staff at TRUST adopt a flexible approach to their work, meeting women where they feel most comfortable and tailoring support to meet each woman's individual need.

We are committed to building long-term relationships of trust. We want to provide consistent support and encouragement for as long as it's needed. We want to be more than just a service provider to them. Many of the staff and volunteers at the project have a Christian faith, and all actively support the organisational ethos and the emphasis that TRUST places on relationships.

As a Christian, I want to follow the life and example of Jesus, which I believe is demonstrated by standing up for the socially excluded and making a noise where injustice is found. It also means being non-judgemental and providing opportunities that increase the choices women have to make changes in their lives. We aim to be a

prophetic voice, challenging the structures and social systems that perpetuate injustice and the oppression of women.

In terms of expressing our faith we feel this is best served by how we live our lives. It is known that we are a faith-based project but we do not discuss spirituality unless a client initiates a conversation. Many women have spoken to us about their own faith, shared with us their awareness of God and asked for prayer for themselves and their families. I have felt humbled when women, often homeless, struggling with so much in their lives, make comments about the goodness of God and how they feel God is watching over them. I find it hard to think that I would have such grace and gratefulness in the same situation.

Prayer is a key part of the life of the project and TRUST is linked with a number of local Churches and individuals who provide prayer support. Churches can also be a source of volunteers and financial giving.

The project has developed a reputation in the local area for being professionally run with a strong commitment to a multi-agency approach, partnering with a number of local organisations and chairing Lambeth's Prostitution Action Group. We enjoy working alongside other agencies, we all need each other to provide the best service to the clients and it's great when we can share resources and skills.

The project's development of a Court Diversion Scheme (November 2003) has been described as "innovative" and "a model of best practice", and was highlighted in two recent Government consultations, 'Paying the Price' (2004) and 'Solutions & Strategies' (2004).

This Home Office funded scheme places TRUST workers at Courts, where they are able to offer the scheme to women who have been charged with soliciting. The scheme is optional and if the women opt in and attend two appointments, their case is discontinued and there is no fine to pay.

Fining or imprisonment does not