

SAINT CATHERINE'S COMMUNITY CENTRE
REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

Following a generous Grant from the Fellowship of Saint John the Evangelist, Margaret Richardson took up her appointment as Development Worker & Coordinator of the newly opened Saint Catherine's Community Centre on 29th April 2013. The appointment is part-time for twenty hours per week. The Coordinator is responsible for developing and publicising the Centre and oversight of its day-to-day activity, e.g. bookings, maintenance etc. In addition, the Coordinator leads on the Centre's partnership work with the local community and a good number of agencies thus fostering the Centre's sustainability and its value to all interested users. Other duties include on-going work to ensure the Centre becomes and remains a long-term viable facility for the Parish and its surrounding Community.

Much of the Coordinator's work is specifically tied in to Centre activities. The Coordinator manages the weekly Drop-in and Advice Session which is staffed by team volunteers; outside of official Drop-in hours the Coordinator also assists service-users with advice and sign-posting where necessary. The Drop-in is mainly used by the homeless and the unemployed. Many of the service-users have problems with substance and alcohol abuse. In addition many experience mental health issues and a good number have learning difficulties. Others are just looking for a safe place to go. Apart from advice, the Centre offers a free breakfast and lunch. There is the opportunity for a shower; the Centre is the only place in Burnley with a no-charge shower and washing facility. Service-users may also receive a free of charge change of clothes. Additionally free arts and crafts, games and walking opportunities are provided.

The Centre has developed a good reputation for its advice and signposting on matters concerned with benefit, housing, health and credit issues. The Centre works in partnership with 'Inspire' (a local Health Service, Probation Service and Community Partnership) which engages with offenders and vulnerable adults. By dropping in informally the local Police have also found that they are building-up good relationships with service-users. In addition other partners include Lancashire County Council Health Care Services (formerly East Lancashire PCT), Calico Housing and the local mental health services.

The Centre cooperates closely with the Burnley Food Bank ensuring those who are in need have access to food. Saint Catherine's Congregation also have a food 'drop-off' from which food parcels are made-up and distributed at the Centre. The Centre is also a recognised 'recycling' centre for furniture, clothing and household goods which these are distributed to service-users free of charge. We have developed a core of volunteers from the Church and the wider community. Some service-users also volunteer; this benefits both the individuals concerned, who gain work experience and a greater sense of self esteem, and the wider group with an enhanced sense of ownership. The volunteer contributions mean that we can facilitate a wider range of activities promoting health, e.g., regular led walks.

Future plans for the drop-in include opening for a Friday morning session so that we can 'touch-base' with service-users before the week-end. This session will offer advice, tea and coffee shower facilities and a place that is warm and dry. Long term we would also like to offer free breakfast and lunch at this additional session. As outlined above, many of the service-users we encounter are hard to reach members of the community. Thus we are plan to invite other agencies to attend this additional session in order to offer specialist advice regarding benefits, housing and health on a more personal basis in the Centre's informal, neutral atmosphere.

The Centre houses a weekly Play Group for local carers and pre-school children. The volunteers running the Group come from Saint Catherine's. We work in close partnership with the local Sure Start Children's Centre who train and supervise the volunteers. The Group is open to the local community and we try to engage with those from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The Centre is located in an area on the borderline between Asian and European heritage housing and is good place to meet. Sadly, Burnley continues to experience problems in trying to breakdown the social barriers between residents of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. We believe that our playgroup project, which engages local children and their carers, is making a significant contribution to this work.

The Centre also provides a weekly Luncheon Club attended by many elderly and isolated people. A two course hot-meal is served and there is a welcome opportunity for fellowship and the chance to chat. The Luncheon Club is entirely staffed by our volunteers. The 'Over Fifties' Group follows on immediately after the Luncheon Club and once again provides a welcome opportunity for elderly members of the local community to engage with one another.

Other groups meeting in the Centre include the Church Sunday School, the Boys Brigade & Girls Association, a Men's Group, a Ladies' Group and the monthly Sunday Lunch Club. A local dance group for young people has now started to use the Centre on a regular basis and a gentle exercise class for adults will start in mid-March. We hope in the future that Centre will host even greater use by those agencies promoting health and well-being, our local College, and the Workers Education Association (the latter provide vocational and educational programmes).

We take this opportunity to express our thanks to the Fellowship of Saint John the Evangelist for their faith in our Project and their on-going financial support. The Centre has now been open for ten months. People in the wider community are becoming more and more aware of its work and happily we have an increasing number of volunteers contributing in diverse ways. We have a solid foundation on which to build and we believe our work to date demonstrates we are capable of doing so with ongoing support.

Margaret Richardson
Development Worker & Coordinator

Father Roger Parker
Parish Priest