

FAITH *in* ACTION

PASSING THE BATON

It may take more than a set of house keys for a homeless person to become settled. Revd Kenny Macaulay has been discovering a friendly programme that's making a big difference . .

CLERGY and people of every congregation will one day be faced with the problem of homelessness. It's on our doorstep whether we like it or not, whether we are aware of it or not.

Many people find themselves homeless after personal crisis, a breakdown, or after recovery from addiction. They may have B&B accommodation in your town or city, but they are still basically homeless.

Perhaps they have already had a go at maintaining a tenancy in the past, but have failed because of lack of support and feelings of inadequacy or isolation.

Getting keys to your house is one thing. Managing to set up a home and feel part of the community is quite another.

Passing the Baton is a service delivered by volunteers to help formerly homeless people settle into new tenancies, build relationships, and get plugged into their local area.

In St Augustine's Community Audit in Dumbarton, the problem of homelessness arose again and again. With the help of the Bethany Christian Trust we discovered, in Passing the Baton, something practical that we could do with a small number of volunteers.



A helping hand can turn a new address into a real home

Passing the Baton has a 98% success rate for maintaining tenancies six months on from initial resettlement.

Volunteers act as 'buddies' for members, helping them with DIY to make their homes look and feel comfortable and personal. The homeless person is referred to as a member, and members often go on to become volunteers after having been helped themselves.

Volunteers offer friendly one-to-one support to help members pursue hobbies and social activities that will get them out and about and involved in their community.

There is a commitment for a period of one year, by which time the member will have settled in ► PAGE 2

THIS publication has been produced by Glasgow & Galloway Diocese Development Team for Imaginative Outreach into Communities.

It showcases just some of the projects in the diocese where church folk are looking out for the needs of their neighbours with love, thoughtfulness and rolled-up sleeves. We hope you will find something in these pages to inspire action, prayer or both.

We want to emphasise that being active in your community is not as daunting as it seems. Often the

smaller the parish, the better! Often our wee parishes are more committed and more readily own what is going on. You are not alone. We are here to help.

Not done a Community Audit yet? Then just do it! Again, we are here to help!

The stories here are just a few little snapshots of some wonderful things going on in the diocese in big and small congregations.

Much more is happening. Next time let's be highlighting your projects!

The Team is here to support and en-

courage practical service to the wider community. Please contact convener **Revd Kenny Macaulay** if you would like advice on sourcing project funds, information or other resources; or if you are interested either in having a mentor for a new enterprise or being a mentor: frkenny@btinternet.com.

◆ Other team members are: **Ann Gault, Ann Glenesk, Jennifer FitzGibbon, Lionel Chambers, Paige Paterson, Rachael Samuel, Richard Horrell and Ron Hockey.**



PASSING THE BATON (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

gained self-confidence, and be fully integrated into the local community. In Dumbarton, we found another church willing to help in this way, and we are now training three teams, each of which will support a carefully selected person in a new tenancy. All you need is five or six people in your congregation who will give up two hours or so each week, and you have a team!

The local housing department work closely with us to ensure that the people we are supporting are committed to a long-term residency, and are no threat to volunteers.

The member can simply be taken for a coffee, brought to a social night in the parish, or even given a wee heck through the local shops if need be. Volunteers work in pairs, and your address or telephone number is never disclosed. If wanted, the buddy team will be provided with a mobile phone.

MADE IN HEAVEN

We need a match made in heaven, and Bethany, together with your housing department, will ensure that you are given just the right person for you!

The incredible thing is that it is all free. Bethany obtains disclosures; trains volunteers for the task, and provides continual support during the 12-month project.

All of our parishes, perhaps with ecumenical support, could respond by forming a Passing the Baton team.

The training sessions would involve six hours, either on a Saturday or on two weekday evenings.

It is giving homeless and vulnerable people a little chink of hope for the future, and congregations throughout Scotland have found their numbers swelling by a significant one as a result!

More information can be had from www.bethanychristiantrust.com.

If you would like to find out about getting your church involved as buddies, call Julie on 0131 561 8965 or email: juliegolding@bethanychristiantrust.com.

A POST OFFICE TOO FAR

The loss of the village Post Office was going to mean a four-mile trip to the next one.

Instead, as MARTIN AXFORD reports, joining forces with other churches to save it brought unexpected bonuses

IN 2011 the Post Office in Bridge of Weir disappeared. You had to go to Johnstone or Kilmacolm – four miles in either direction – and there were always long queues at both of them.

The three churches in Bridge of Weir – Freeland and St Machar's from the Church of Scotland and St Mary's Episcopal Church – held an informal meeting to see what could be done.

As part of the public-service cuts, Renfrewshire Council had already agreed to move the public library to the village hall and make the library building redundant. Local councillors pressed the council to delay the sale of the library building and let the community put forward ideas for its future.

COMBINED

It seemed a good idea to use it for a combined Post Office and community centre, and the churches sent out letters to every home in the village about the plans. The response – in just over a fortnight – was a magnificent £20,471.

The council reciprocated with grants that made the whole project possible. Experienced staff were appointed to run the Post Office.

The Bridge is now a limited company with charity status, providing a Post Office and community centre right in the middle of the village.

Everyone can pop in, buy stationery, post their parcels, and relax with tea or coffee from a small kitchen manned by a rota of 40-or-so volunteers. The churches have been joined on the committee by local community groups. Thanks to the council's grant, first-rate video equipment has been installed and a film club has just started. There is now a monthly service for hearing-aid users.

An Alpha course is just beginning, and a whole range of local activities and organisations are



starting to make use of the Bridge.

St Mary's has very much been the junior partner among the three churches; its financial contribution was half that of the other two, and its numbers mean that the work of the committee has been done largely by others. But the cooperation has greatly strengthened links between the churches and their knowledge of each other's life and work.

Challenges still lie ahead. The Post Office income covers less than two-thirds of the wage bill, and the income from shop and café does not match the shortfall. Stocking the shop, organising the community centre and film club, and arranging for the rota of volunteers, make heavy demands on individuals.

But the initiative has brought St Mary's into the community in all sorts of ways – as, for example, when the church hosted the first station of a Fair Trade Walk.

Nobody has any doubt that the Bridge will succeed, and that the churches lie at the heart of the community.

Martin Axford is the Lay Rep for St Mary's, Bridge of Weir

Faith in Action was published in September 2012 by the Scottish Episcopal Church, United Diocese of Glasgow & Galloway (Scottish Charity Number SC013925), 5 St Vincent Place, Glasgow G1 2DH.

Printer: Kestrel Press, Irvine.

Editor: Susi Cormack Brown.

Changing prison, changing lives

'NOT IN MY BACK YARD' is a common reaction to a new prison in the neighbourhood.

But more than 60 volunteers from local churches were ready and willing to help offenders and visitors at HMP Low Moss, Bishopbriggs, when it went into operation in March 2012.

Responding to an appeal from Mothers' Union, most of the volunteers had never been inside a jail. This new work was going to take them out of their comfort zone.

Low Moss was going to be different for staff and management too. Nearly all cells are singles, and each has a shower, toilet and washbasin. Most of the 700-or-so prisoners are expected to work a 35-hour week. The stated vision – 'Changing Prison – Changing Lives' called for a shift in approach for the experienced professional team who were preparing for its opening.

Visits to Low Moss before the prisoners arrived helped to settle volunteers' anxieties. The security procedure was explained and, importantly, volunteers met staff and witnessed their commitment to ensure that lives are rebuilt and reoffending is reduced. Training also helped volunteers to recognise the importance of their roles both for adults and children. Identification cards and Protection of Vulnerable Groups checks took place over time.

Each volunteer brings a unique talent. One is a gifted story teller. Others have applied their professional skills by setting up the Kelvin Guide and Scout Group which meets in the prison's visits hall. This means every Wednesday evening, young people can get involved in the same activities as that of a community group and then talk with their dads about what they have done.

One volunteer is setting up a website to improve the group's communications. Others are training to serve with the chaplains. Some have offered to visit prisoners who

don't get visits, and some just excel in their welcome and creativity.

MU Diocesan President Ann Glenesk sits on the Low Moss Children and Family Strategy Group and members help to coordinate prayer and group meetings. They've also established links with chaplains, Prison Fellowship, Families Outside, Faith in Throughcare, and people of other faiths and none.

Feedback suggests all volunteers enjoy serving at Low Moss. They help to provide visitors with a welcome and hospitality in the server; help fathers and children during weekday evening homework sessions; and play with pre-school children.

RELAXED

The attitude of staff and volunteers, along with the robust security measures, makes for a relaxed, warm and encouraging atmosphere in the visits hall, an area that wins favourable comment from prisoners, families and friends alike.

Evening sessions there can get noisy. These are the only times fathers are permitted to move from their seats. As a result dads and youngsters are often seen chasing each other as well as playing more sedate games. That interaction of fathers and children is something that staff are keen for volunteers to encourage.

For volunteers, the rewards can be simple. Seeing one dad having his photo taken with his child for the first time was a heart-warming



moment for one Glasgow MU member. She still feels sad, though, whenever the fathers have to say goodbye to their families.

For Kirk member Bill Findlay, also one of the Low Moss Community Volunteer Group, a highlight was the Low Moss 'Olympics' when parents and children took part together in the recreation field.

Knowing that prisoners who are visited are less likely to re-offend is one of the things that encourages Bill.

Prisoners and families alike respect the fact that most of the volunteers are people of faith. It makes an impression on management and staff too.

Glasgow & Galloway MU members also volunteer at HMP Kilmarnock and HMP Greenock. Members at Kilmarnock coordinate the distribution of Christmas cards to prisoners. And at Greenock, member Isabel Cameron has established a weekend crèche with ecumenical partners, friends and local members of a charity for people affected by prison.

If you would like to join in this work, contact family contact officer Dawn Cairney on 0141-762 9557 (dawncairney@sps.pnn.gov.uk) or Ann Glenesk (ann.glenesk@ntlworld.com).



Research, compassion and hope find ongoing growth at St Mary's

NOT many churches share their premises with a large team of family support workers. But that's what happens at St Mary the Virgin in Hamilton.

Don't get the idea, though, that this is just another ground-sharing arrangement where tenants conveniently fill spare space.

It's way more radical than that.

Here is a church that has worked hard to set up – and be part of – a partnership of agencies who are meeting a crying need in post-industrial Lanarkshire.

For more than eight years, St Mary's has been at the heart of two major projects that are turning families around from problems such as poverty, child neglect or abuse, addiction and imprisonment.

And already clergy and congregation are getting ready for a major expansion of the facilities so the work can carry on growing.

Back at the turn of the millennium St Mary's carried out research among local families with permission from the council's education department. The conclusion, as rector Ian Barcroft recalls, was that specialist family support linked with the schools was needed. High-risk families qualify for intervention from council

social workers with huge caseloads, but no-one was stopping the medium-risk ones from turning into crisis cases.

That was the kind of work that professionals at charity Circle Scotland specialised in – working intensively with a few clients for months at a time. All that was needed was someone with the will to bring the council service together with the charity. St Mary's did just that.

PERSUASION

Even so, it took another four years and lots more evidence-gathering and persuasion to set up the partnership and find funding for the new service. ("An example," Ian remarks, "of how hard it is for the local community with an identified need to seek a solution!")

Since then, hundreds of families have been helped by Circle Lanarkshire's team based at St Mary's - currently 12 project workers and two managers with three social work students on placement.

Even more have benefited from the child contact centre in a church-owned flat that was converted and equipped for the purpose around 2001. Staffed mostly by volunteers from St Mary's, it provides neutral ground for children to spend time with their 'non-resident' parent.

Does working alongside a Christian congregation make a difference? Ian Barcroft and local Circle manager Janet Stewart are unanimous.

"For all the families," says Janet, "meeting in a church environment feels less stigmatising and more comfortable than, say, council offices.

"The church setting and ethos add something that makes the meetings seem more friendly."

Church members providing presents for the children at Christmas-time is one manifestation of the connection.

But the relationship goes deeper and wider – revealing the church's values and purpose, as Ian observes:

"Those coming to the church can visibly see the link between the words we hear, the songs we sing and the basic human issues surrounding us."

"Without partnership working, involving faith communities and volunteering, many of the issues around poverty would not be seen or encountered.

"The Church has a duty of service to the most vulnerable and we have developed a capacity-building exercise that has offered compassion and hope to many.

"The reality is far more complex than just offering premises!"



Photo: RON BROWN. (Subjects are models, not clients)

CONTACT centres provide neutral, child-centred space for children to spend time with their 'non-resident parent', with arrivals and departures typically managed so that separated parents need not meet. The contact is usually decreed by a court. The hope in most cases is that contact-centre visits are a stepping stone towards a more permanent arrangement for meetings. The Centre at St Mary's operates only on Saturdays at present, serving up to six families. All volunteers go through basic training and PVG checks. About 13 of the current team are St Mary's members.

For more information on contact centres, visit www.relationships-scotland.org.uk.



Award for Chris . . .

CHRIS Cornfoot, vestry member at S Mary's, received a special award in 2012 for her voluntary work with Circle Lanarkshire.

Chris (right) is pictured with South Lanarkshire Depute Provost Pam Clearie who presented the awards at Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire's annual Volunteer of the Year ceremony.

Circle Lanarkshire manager Janet Stewart said:

"For the past seven years Chris has been an invaluable asset to our work.

She has been involved in groups to support children and young people who are under-performing within education.

She has assisted in supporting children when they visit their parents in prison. She has helped with women's therapeutic and homemaking skills groups.

"She has supported parents to access hospital treatments. This has not merely been about providing transport but also providing the emotional support which reduces anxiety and lessens feelings of isolation.

"She has rolled up her sleeves and helped lone mothers fix up their homes. She has helped with every family activity within our organisation from recovery events, children's arts and crafts groups and forest school to positive parent sessions and outings.

"Chris's willingness is an inspiration and her support freely and gladly given makes our families feel valued."

PHOTO: SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

BECAUSE St Mary's expanding services are already set to outstrip the space available at present, the church has just completed a nine-month research exercise. Members, people who use the premises, Circle Scotland, Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Child Contact Centre have been consulted by means of focus groups, questionnaires and workshops.

The outcome is a strategy for the future called 'St Mary's is for All'. This church is not just for Piskies; it's there to serve all the community. And that's the basis for bold new building plans designed to serve the 21st-century worship and community aspects of St Mary's.

Help to make the money stretch

WHILE a pawnbroker's shop plies its trade at one end of the street, there's a church just a few steps away offering a godlier way to manage money . . .

Right in the heart of the town, Ayr's Holy Trinity Episcopal Church is starting a deposit point for 1st Alliance (Ayrshire) Credit Union, one of the largest credit unions in Scotland.

Member Allen Matthews explained the thinking behind this new service: "There are people in our community who need help with their finances and there are those who would like to deposit money somewhere that is safe and secure with a welcoming face.

"With the assistance of 1st Alliance we'll offer savings accounts and loans just like a high-street bank."

Initially the credit union branch will serve regulars attending Broken Chains – an interchurch ministry hosted twice a week in Holy Trinity halls. Broken Chains provides a meal, activities, a worship service and a friendly gathering place for people coping with poverty, homelessness, addiction or other difficulties.

New changes to the benefit system mean monthly payments where recipients used to get them weekly. Those who struggle to budget will find it harder still.

Allen said: "The credit union can take their benefit cheque and ring-fence the money to cover monthly bills. After a few months, the saver will be eligible to apply for a loan at very low rates compared to a bank – never mind the army of money lenders who have sprung up on our high streets!"

Credit unions are not just for those struggling financially. They also appeal to those who want to bank ethically and benefit their community. As Allen said: "We need to have regular savers joining the credit union to enable us to offer help to those who are less fortunate, or less financially savvy, than ourselves."

At Holy Trinity, they're starting small with one session a week, requiring just two volunteers at a time. And there's an ecumenical link-up with another Ayr church, Riverside Evangelical, which has started a deposit point at its weekly Share & Care programme. So savers can deposit and withdraw at two places each week.

"The credit union bent over backwards to accommodate our rather unusual set-up," Allen added. "They arranged training for us and then said, 'Don't worry: we'll come along for the first few weeks until you are confident.'"

His advice for another church considering starting a credit union? "Go for it!"

Visit www.allianceayrshire.co.uk to learn more.

4,214% apr

Short-term and payday loans are legitimately offered at eye-watering four-figure rates. But if you don't have a payday, borrowing from unregulated lenders could cost you even more.

FAITH IN THROUGH CARE

THE first time a prison officer addressed Charlie as ‘Sir’, he didn’t respond.

“After years of being called ‘hey you’ in the jail, I thought he was talking to someone else,” he said.

Small wonder. Since teen days in borstal (where he finally learned to read and write) a large proportion of 56-year-old Charlie’s life has been spent in custody, stacking up a succession of short sentences.

Things are different now, though.

Within months of his release in 2011, Charlie was walking through prison gates again –not in handcuffs but as a volunteer with Faith in Throughcare (FiT), a charity with a proud record of helping ex-offenders to turn their lives around.

The former rectory next to St Matthew’s Episcopal Church in Possilpark serves as FiT’s Glasgow base and drop-in centre. It’s called The Place.

Downstairs, where two rooms have been knocked together to make a lounge and meeting/computer area, visiting feels like being welcomed to a well cared-for home. Letters pinned to the small notice board spill out words of gratitude for the help, trust and friendship ex-offenders have found in this space.

TENDER

Here, in one of Glasgow’s poorest neighbourhoods, are men who’ve toughed out dark experiences in and out of prison. Yet the tenderness of their concern for one another is instantly apparent.

Upstairs, where development coordinator Morag Sievwright has her office, she and Charlie explained how Faith in Throughcare works.

In Glasgow, they liaise with the prison chaplain at Barlinnie who has a list of the short-term inmates who are nearing their release dates. Those from Glasgow’s top postcode areas for re-offending are identified. After a risk assessment (FiT isn’t geared up for high-risk releases) they’re offered at least one visit from a FiT volunteer.

Ideally, that will be someone like Charlie who can speak from experience about the help FiT can offer.



TEAM-BUILDING... staff, volunteers and participants on an away day in Luss



He said: “From a young age most of my life has been full of mistrust. In prison you don’t trust anybody and nobody trusts you.

“But here people are full of hope for me. They showed me trust and I started trusting them.”

“We’ve all had problems with drink and drugs and difficult family relationships. We’re all from run-down areas. But you don’t have to fly with the crows.

“If The Place had been up and running years ago it would have saved me a lot of grief.”

With the help of FiT, Charlie found a flat to rent. Soon he’d progressed from being a participant with FiT to working as a volunteer at the drop-in centre.

Being handed keys to open up the building was another milestone in that trust journey.

Now he visits Barlinnie as a Throughcare representative to tell prisoners about The Place.

Those who accept FiT’s offer of support are met at the prison gates on release and given a lift straight to The Place – keeping them out of the way of dealers.

There, someone will put an action plan together with them. Finding suitable accommodation is typically top of the list. There is a strong link between homelessness and re-offending.

Perhaps it’s adversity that best demonstrates FiT’s strength. In March 2012 a participant was murdered in his own home. It shook everyone who had come to know him at The Place.

“In recovery from this,” Morag said, “we created a small memorial garden in the back: somewhere his family can also come to sit and think of him.

“We also took part in the North Glasgow 5k in April and raised over £800 for Kinship Carer. This lifted the participants and team as part of our getting back to normal.”

More FiT projects are emerging in the south-west. The newly opened HMP Low Moss, in Bishopbriggs, now gets visited, and Morag and her colleagues are in talks with local faith communities about potential developments in Kilmarnock and Greenock.

She said: “It is very exciting to work with them to see what shapes the models of Faith in Throughcare will be grown into, to meet the aspirations, capabilities and resources of each very different community.”

If you want to explore playing a role in the FiT movement, contact morag@faithinthroughcare.org (0141-336 7117) or visit www.faithinthroughcare.org.

Girls grow in confidence with new group



A chat over coffee was the starting point for a thriving new girls' group. ANNE DYER looks back at a busy first year . . .

IT all started with another mum and me having coffee in the living room while a group of young girls were squeezed into my daughter's bedroom, talking about the things girls talk about!

Their conversation touched on how hard it was to jump from primary to secondary school. We suggested starting a wee group to alleviate some of the fears of feeling like a small fish in a big pond.

We recruited another two mums and gained support from our rector, Revd Kenny Macaulay.

Twelve young girls came to an information evening and STAGG (St Augustine's Girls' Group) was open for business! January 2012 kicked off the full programme. Ideas came fast and furious: learning new crafts; confidence-building workshops; drama and role-play activities; and fundraising for a visit to see the pandas at Edinburgh Zoo.

And the vestry gave us free use of the hall – far better than a cramped bedroom.

As weeks passed, the girls took great pride in some of the topic areas they had been working on. With vestry approval, they moved their artwork from the hall to the church itself. Some had never been inside a church before. The leaders answered questions and allowed the youngsters time to soak it all in.

One Sunday morning service, they were invited to take over the sermon slot and tell the congregation about the group.

They have started helping at church events too, either in the kitchen or serving tables, and again they have been welcomed and enjoyed the experience.

Arrangements were made for a private tour of a recently restored historic building, Overton House, which was about to open as a place of support and respite for young women in need. Members and leaders agreed the winter programme would include gifts of crochet blankets for the babies who would become residents and possibly toiletries too.

A church outreach endeavour was now committed to reaching out to others in need!

We also took a trip to Cumbrae, cycling round the is-

land before visiting the College of the Holy Spirit and spending time in the Cathedral. The tour was a prelude for a weekend stay for which fundraising would be needed.

Another trip incorporated a charity-shop run in Helensburgh, seeking £5 outfits. All met the challenge inside the timeframe and surprised the leaders with their negotiation skills at the till.

Now, as STAGG embarks on the next session, we have invited the parents to come and check out achievements to date, share a coffee served by the group, and look over the collage of pictures gathered since the early stages.

We'll then enjoy a fashion show of those charity-shop clothes. Together we'll reflect on how these young women have grown in the last year, learning about themselves; about others in their own community and the wider world; and about the part they have to play.

The parents can see that all the efforts and commitment from the girls, the leaders, the church and their parents have been well and truly worth it.

All we needed was a mum and her daughter to be committed church members, and the rest followed easily. Just from a coffee, and a bit of eavesdropping!

DRUMCHAPEL HOST TO 'UNITED NATIONS'



Bingo at Friendship House

ENTER a certain former scout hut on a Wednesday and it's like opening a door to a gathering of the United Nations.

It is Drumchapel Episcopal Church in Glasgow West, writes *KENNY MACAULAY*, the home of a small band of faithful worshippers who have always been at the heart of things when community regeneration has been on the agenda, and action has been required from folk in the community.

Wednesday is Friendship House Day: a response to the growing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in the area.

It is a welcoming, supportive and safe place for families of every colour and faith to find refuge and encouragement, many of them coming from oppressive regimes where their lives were in danger. Some of their stories are dark ones, full of pain and bravery, and in this rickety timber building they are given support and encouragement to begin again in a strange land with strange customs and strange people.

Working in partnership with 3D Drumchapel – whose two salaried workers specialise in the **NEXT PAGE**

DRUMCHAPEL - CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

difficulties faced by those seeking asylum – and some members of the URC Church, this small congregation is making its mark, and benefiting many who are in need of friendship, support and comfort.

Popping in for lunch, you will be offered a wide variety of dishes as the weeks roll by, as the people who come commit themselves to opening up their own cuisine to the scrutiny of the others! Yes, they cook for each other and share their food and their stories.

“I feel I belong here”, says Moses, “I get encouragement, but the most important thing is that people here trust and respect me.”

A woman from Kenya tells me of the emotional support she has been given through the ‘days of despair’.

Another talks of Friendship House as being her social life:

“I live from one Wednesday to the next, and it was terrible when the place closed for a while during the summer holidays. I had nowhere else to go.”

The people here are involved in arts and crafts too, and there are always constructive things going on: jewellery-making, glass-painting, outings to the seaside. And the occasional game of bingo goes down a treat!

There is a vegetable garden in the grounds, too, and that helps to supplement the amount of food that’s eaten every Wednesday.

It’s all a wonderful model of the sort of thing a little congregation can do, working in partnership with statutory and non-statutory agencies.

A member told me: “So many congregations have good buildings which are locked and unused during the week. We just wish we didn’t have a building that’s falling apart.”

Some of the Friendship House folk have started coming to worship, and a special Messy Church-type of service is now being provided after the Eucharist on Sunday.

I came away feeling I had just visited a special place – a place where people loved and respected each other, and that I’d just been given a little glimpse of the Kingdom!

THE WELL

SOMETIMES the crisis is as dramatic as a family ripped apart by a kidnapping. More often it’s something mundane like gas-bill arrears.

Each day, clients bring a fresh set of concerns to the team at The Well in Glasgow’s Albert Road.

Founded by the Church of Scotland, The Well is now an independent multicultural advice centre serving the most ethnically diverse area in Scotland.

It’s still a charity and still has an all-Christian team of volunteers. Some look after drop-in clients and some run classes. Their role is not to proselytise but to offer hospitality, build bridges and show Christ’s love for the 150-or-so people who use the centre every week.

Vivian Davey is one of two regular volunteers from nearby St Ninian’s Pollokshields. The volunteers are backed by full-time manager Rhoda Gilfillan. They have quarterly team days when all the team get together and can discuss new developments such as changes in benefit arrangements. And there’s an annual retreat day.

New recruits shadow a seasoned drop-in volunteer for six weeks while they get to know the ropes – and decide if the work is right for them.

A lot of that work involves listening and supporting people as they discuss personal problems. These might involve domestic abuse, victimisation or other serious issues.



Vivian Davey



Maida Gibson

Sometimes The Well is the first resort for someone who needs to be referred to specialist agencies for help.

So it was for one client Vivian encountered: a recently widowed man whose in-laws had abducted his young son and taken him abroad. The Well staff contacted the race relations office at Strathclyde Police, who then drew on help at government level to secure the boy’s return. Every day during the months of his ordeal, the father would go to The Well for support and comfort.

REUNITED

Now happily reunited with his child, he still visits, both for support and for information on matters like schooling.

Less harrowing problems are more common, but can still cause much anxiety. Like when people fail to notice their utility bills have been underestimated, and suddenly are landed with a huge demand.

“We can negotiate with the company for the bill to be paid over a realistic period,” said Vivian. “It is so rewarding to see the relief on people’s faces when a burden related to debt is lifted from them.”

Helping with form-filling is a regular part of the work at The Well



The Well offers separate classes for men and women in English and in computing, a mother-and-toddler group and a women’s craft group. It’s also there for anyone who just wants to read the newspapers.

but, when the client struggles with the language, it’s far from humdrum, as fellow volunteer Maida Gibson, a member of St Margaret’s Newlands, can tell you.

“I have learned many coping mechanisms for these problems including occasionally doing drawings to illustrate what I mean. Anyone who knows my drawing ability will understand that this is a last resort!

“Almost without fail, however, our clients are grateful for what has been done for them.”

To learn about volunteering opportunities at The Well, contact project manager Rhoda Gilfillan: 0141-424 4523.