Churches Together Bower House Report – AGM Report 2024

The journey over the last year has been both joyful and busy. Since returning to the house after the completion of building work, it has been an opportunity to settle in, take stock and prayerfully consider next steps.

The team remains as committed and sacrificial as ever and we are so grateful for the 70 person 'job share' that facilitates the smooth running of the working week. Support workers remain the backbone of the service, acting as the first point of contact for new client referrals and queries whilst managing diary bookings and liaising with the counselling and supervision team. We would very much like to grow this part of the team and always welcome fresh enquiries. New Associate support worker roles have also been created to attend to discrete tasks and better address house needs (e.g. our house 'handyman' has proven himself invaluable).

Counselling supervision, an essential component of client and counsellor care, remains a pinch point for us, but we are in the process of extending our supervision team through 'home-growth'. One of our counsellors is coming to the end of their supervision training and we hope to develop others in this way over the next few years.

Students continue to pursue placement opportunities with us as they complete the final stages of qualification, some travelling from as far as London (!) to do so. It's a privilege to welcome them at induction and see them flourish and develop. We've introduced a new induction booklet and refreshed our safeguarding training to better serve them as they begin their counselling journey.

Our new online 'Counsellor Forum', led by our counselling team representative, also enables new starters to connect and embed into the team. It is a place to chat, celebrate good practice but also enables any Bower House issues to be raised in a supportive environment and can be anonymously fed back to Service Coordinators.

Our team 'Away Day' in March was well attended. This year's theme was 'Hope', a fitting topic for our 25th Anniversary year, marking the support of more than 4,500 clients over the 25 year period. Beautiful 'hope stones' were created by the team on the Away day. These were later distributed around the streets of Harborough for residents to find during the night of April 19th —the anniversary of the opening of Bower House. This was a special occasion which warranted closing the house to clients to enable a day (and night) of prayer. The rooms contained prayer themes and prompts, hope stones, a prayer tree, flowers and pertinent scriptures. Visitors scribed their prayers of thanksgiving and hopes for the future on the walls of the upstairs office before 5 of the team stayed overnight to continue the prayer vigil. It was a precious and blessed time.

We have also been busy fundraising. In March 2023 6 intrepid swimmers participated in the Market Harborough Rotary Club's Swimarathon in total we swam 91 lengths in 50minutes, which we felt was a great achievement and we won an award for most sponsorship money raised. In July we were delighted to support the Orchestra at the Congregational Church by helping to provide refreshments for the interval. You

might recall in November 2023, Cara and Loraine had signed up for a sponsored Fire Walk. We arrived at the venue and had a very thorough debrief on how to complete the task – basically walk quickly but not too fast so you don't churn up any hot coals. We were also encouraged to look at our destination – the other side of the coals and not down at the coals once we had reached the other side to stamp our feet so any loose embers would be knocked off! We were told that if anyone does get warm (hot) feet to use aloe vera gel on them as it will sooth any blisters or burns which were referred to as 'fire kisses.' All participants – there were around 30 firewalkers there - were offered a choice of walking 12meters or 20meters, of course Cara and Loraine went straight to the 20meter walk and did it twice! We are very pleased to report we escaped with very few 'kisses' and managed to raise over £1,200.00 for the Bower House.

We also held our annual Christmas Coffee morning at the theatre, which had a good turnout despite various other fundraising activities happening in Market Harborough on the same day. In January 2024, we were able to go to Café Onyx in Lubenham and speak to the people there about the Bower House and the service we provide. It was a lovely morning and they have supported the Bower House by donating a percentage of the sales to us from the coffee morning. We are also very grateful to our clients who are still supporting us even after they have finished using our service. One of our 'ex' clients ran the London marathon for us in 2023 and have asked if they can represent us again this year. Several people also raise funds for us at craft stalls and other such events and we are very blessed by their generosity. Cara and Loraine were invited to go to the Methodist Church in October 2023 and give a talk about the service. We are very thankful to have been nominated their Church of the Year. We are also very thankful for the support of Churches Together in Market Harborough both for the financial support offered and prayer coverage.

We are delighted to report we have been able to recommence offering continued professional development (CPD) to our team of counsellors and other similar services in the area. Since June 2023, we have been able to offer 3 CPD events. Topics have been working with survivors of sexual trauma, domestic violence, and the tree of life, we have another in June 2024 on sudden bereavement and more planned in the coming months. This not only helps our counsellors by having the opportunity to receive continued learning, but we are also able to fund raise by making a small charge for these events.

Friends of the Bower House are very important to us, and we have been looking at ways to strengthen these relationships. We have created a 'Friends' newsletter, which goes out via email on a quarterly basis and by holding 'Friends' events during the year, our most recent event was a breakfast which was well attended. We also want to strengthen our connection with the local community and have enhanced this through setting up a social media Facebook page and Instagram accounts.

We close this report by giving praise, glory and thanks to God for the past 25 years and the steady upward growth of the service and for the next 25years. We know the Bower House is in His very safe hands and we continue to seek His guidance and ask for His wisdom as we have the honour of overseeing the Bower House into the next

phase of its journey. We humbly ask for continued prayer in matters of the house especially for more student counsellors, qualified counsellors and support workers. We offer thanks to God as we induct new student counsellors to the service and a support worker. If anyone would like to volunteer as a support worker for 3hours one day a week (9am-12pm, 12pm-3pm or 3pm to 6pm) please do get in contact with us. Full training is given. We also ask if you can continue to pray for our clients and funding. We give thanks to God for His continued provision and always meeting our needs.

As always, we are so grateful for the support that you all afford us and thank you for the way you continue to undergird the work, both financially and in prayer. We pray for God's blessing on you and all that you do.

Every Blessing,

Cara and Loraine

Annual Report Jubilee Foodbank Churches Together Harborough New Premises Throughout this year we have been looking for new premises, the foodbank needs more space, better facilities and would particularly like to be able to invite people to collect their own food. With the right building there would be potential for better engagement and provision of services. We had put in an offer on a building but have had a disappointing response from the sellers who failed to contact us following our bid. We are still actively looking and if anyone from CTH knows of any suitable buildings for rent we would be very grateful. **Charitable Status** Early this year after much hard work from our Chair, Liz Mills and the team we obtained Charitable Status this will give us many financial and organisational advantages, such as tax exemptions and use of gift aid. **Trussell Trust** Throughout the year Jubilee have been researching the possibilities of joining the National

Foodbank organisation Trussell Trust, we have met with our regional coordinator and visited other foodbanks who work with the TT including local groups and one in Lambeth London. We are still in the process of ensuring that volunteers and Trustees have been given an opportunity to voice their views and will make a decision soon. **Referral Agencies** We have been adding to our bank of referral agencies this year and have included some excellent organisations, although sadly we have recently learned that Falcon who are based in Loughborough have reduced their services in Harborough, a great loss to the local community. They are seeking more funding for staff. **Social Media & Publicity** Our website is managed and updated very professionally and in September one of our Trustees gave an interview on Radio Leicester which was excellent publicity and also produced a generous response of donations of food and funds. Our newest Trustee has produced a useful and informative newsletter for our Referral Agencies. **Donations *Success and Needs*** As well as shoppers donating food into the supermarket donation baskets we have nearly 100 organisations ranging from sports and social clubs to schools and churches, businesses and building societies who regularly organise collections or contribute financially to the foodbank for which we are very grateful. However, earlier in the year our foodbank found that due to a big drop off in donations to the supermarket baskets we were running short of particular foodstuffs. People still love to buy tins of beans and soup but we were running short of jam and marmalade, tins of vegetables and legumes, tinned meat and pies as well as some other essential items. Despite our publicity, signage, 'Bank the food' App and website advice we are finding it difficult to get this information to the public. We have resorted to requests for help from South Leicestershire foodbank and buying in resources to complete donations. If any Churches for CTH would like to contribute any of these items we would really appreciate it. **AGM** Father Chris was kind enough to loan us the Catholic Church Hall and in June we held our AGM inviting all volunteers, referral agencies and other stakeholders to visit for a feast of Indian Snacks from Everest Lounge, one of regular supporters. Presentations were given by our Trustees and there was an opportunity for conversation, socialising and networking. **The Village (formerly Eco Village)** This month we have held another social to say thank you to our hard working volunteers, this meal and socialising opportunity was held at The Village who as a Community Business enterprise often engage with Jubilee over a variety of local issues. **Blood Brothers** One of our volunteers with connections at Market Harborough Theatre has managed to book us a Gala Monday night for the play 'Blood Brothers'. The Monday night spot will mean that after expenses all the profits will go to Jubilee, we have sold all tickets already and hope to make even more funds through refreshments and tombola. **Vouchers** Vouchers are useful for particular needs. We continue to supply hot food vouchers from Everest Lounge, Greggs, Blue Wave and Masterfry. As well as fresh food vouchers for the market. We will shortly be trialling Aldi shopping cards. **Welcome Event** We tried to reach out to the community with a welcome event in October, which was intended to be information sharing and support for those in food poverty, we also had some bags of food to distribute; but sadly the occasion was not well attended. **Community Collections** We are planning on a new campaign to encourage community groups to collect food and we are always looking for new ideas, any welcome! **Christmas 2023** We were happy that during this time when many referral agencies and collections points were closed, we support in the community we managed to have cover for emergency support. During the cold weather volunteers were knitting fingerless gloves to put into parcels. **The VAL Awards** *Celebrating volunteers, charities and community group in Leicestershire.* Liz and a volunteer were invited to a very prestigious event in Leicester where we were very excited to be finalists for County Charity of the Year and although we didn't win, we are able to put this on the banner for our emails. **Jubilee Funding** We are always looking for ways to help in the community and we are currently looking to finance some small food projects, for instance we are going to provide some funds for an emergency breakfast provision at a primary school and we are hoping to contribute funds to a 'healthy start' cookery class at Homestart, and similar at the Children and Family Wellbeing Centre. We must always be aware that our conditions as a charity mean that all revenue must used for those in food poverty. If CTH have any suggestions for other small community projects that help feed people and need support, than please let us have your suggestions. **Statistics 2024** In broad terms, this year the number of referrals continues to rise whilst the amount of food donated is falling. Since the start of the year we have already helped 190 Households and 30 of those families have had 4 or more parcels. Over 900 people have been referred so far with nearly half of those being children meaning that we have provided nearly 20,000 meals to people. In 2023 we were averaging monthly meals of approximately 4,500 and this year it has risen to 5,000. Now that the Falcon section of the Harborough Hub is reducing its services our main referral agents have been once again CAB followed by Churches, and the Renew Wellbeing café. This month the number of referrals is 30%

up on April of last year and maintains an average of 5 referrals a day although this can greatly and suddenly increase. Families with children make up over 50 % of our referrals and we have seen a slight increase in Pensioner referrals and we continue to help an increasing amount of the homeless. As some families are using our services more than once, we do try to monitor and report to referral agencies in case further support can be given to them. Sadly, we have a projection forecasting that 2024 could see the highest increase in demand for food parcels than since the start of Jubilee Foodbank.

REPORT ON HOLIDAY AT HOME FOR CHURCHES TOGETHER IN HARBOROUGH, AUGUST 2023 Holiday at Home is run by a group of volunteers under the auspices of Churches Together Harborough at the Methodist Church on Northampton Road. It is aimed at any senior citizens living in Market Harborough and the Bowdens of any religion or none who would otherwise not be able to go on holiday because of finance, loneliness or infirmity. It costs participants £6 per day to help cover the cost of the lunch. Free transport is provided for those who need it. This year Holiday at Home took place from the 7 August to 11 August inclusive. There were 47 participants during the week (an increase on last year). Some attended every day and others just a few days. Altogether there were 25 volunteers on a rota basis with some coming each day and 32 volunteer speakers, musicians and activity leaders as well as volunteers from the Methodist Church who cooked a meal on two days. **The programme for the week ran as follows**:- • Coffee/tea/biscuits on arrival • One hour of a choice of three activities per day. This year it included art, carpet bowls, beetle drive, quiz, cooking demonstration, craft making, arm chair yoga, board games, talk by Leicestershire Wildlife Hospital. • One hour talk or music session ('My Life as an Auctioneer', U3A Ukulele band, The Old Friends musical group and KUPE, a group of local musicians which include flute, ukulele, mandolin and guitars as well as the human voice. • A two course lunch with tea/ coffee. The feedback was very positive. One participant told us it was the highlight of her year and one woman explained that her husband was now too frail to go anywhere and that this really was a 'Holiday at Home' for them both. He loved the art sessions which gave her the opportunity to take part in other activities. A very popular talk this year was from a local woman about her journey to transition from a man. Those listening treated her with sensitivity and kindness. Participants included those accompanied by a carer or needing a mobility scooter/ walker to get around and those with vision impairments as well as the elderly well and active. It is wonderful to look around the room when the participants are having coffee or their lunch to see them chatting, smiling and laughing together. At the end of the week they were exchanging telephone numbers. It makes us, as volunteers, feel it is very worthwhile We consider Holiday at Home to be an important community initiative which enables senior citizens to come together to make new friends and undertake new experiences which lifts their spirits and confidence. A huge thank you to CTH for enabling Holiday at Home to take place this year. The following letter was given to the volunteers by a blind participant. "*Thank you all for making this week so good. It has been a great way of bringing those of us who may not have had a holiday together. I have enjoyed meeting old friends and making new ones. The hospitality given by all has been excellent. Hearing a familiar voice event before coming in meant a lot to me. Then just knowing there was always a helping hand available when needed There's more I could say but hope this sums up everything. Thanking you all again"* Carole Baldam Hon Treasurer, Holiday at Home .