

Churches Together in Harborough: Full Report 2021 – 2022

The Bower House

The Bower House team has shown amazing adaptability and resilience in the last year. The uncertainty and new ways of working that COVID brought have presented numerous challenges to the service, but our 70+ volunteers have continued to embrace them in all in order to provide what clients need.

As COVID restrictions began to lift, we have continued to grow as a team; two much needed support workers have joined us, and we have a couple of students being inducted into the service. The phones have been quiet since we contacted GPs to pause their signposting to us and the team have worked hard to offer sessions to those waiting. We anticipate that we will be able to open up the waiting list by writing to GPs again in the next few weeks.

All counsellors are required to have monthly clinical supervision for the work that they do, and the counselling team are offered an hour's free supervision per month at the Bower House. Our supervision provision has now been strengthened by the addition of four trainees who started their various courses last year. This has really helped to spread the supervision load and has made it easier to allocate supervisors when counsellors join us.

The Bower House, for the first time in its history, will shortly be re-locating to another venue. The Innovation Centre have agreed to house us, and we have been working with them to make the transition as smooth as possible for both clients and volunteers. After receiving grants from the Howard-Watson Symington Trust, The Bowden's Charity, and Council 106 funding (we feel very blessed to have been supported by the community and council in this way), we were able to commission builders to start reconfiguring the Bower House front entrance to improve access. Exciting times! This work will begin in June and so our commemorative area, Jenny's Garden, has already been relocated to the temporary safety of a support worker's garden in readiness. We anticipate returning to the house for a September re-opening and so will re-imagine Jenny's Garden on our return.

Our last coffee morning was cancelled due to Covid, but we are due to host a Jubilee fundraiser on the 21st May at Harborough Theatre. It will be great to hold an event where we are able to properly reconnect with the local community again and hope that many people will drop by for bacon rolls, tea, cake, tombola, and chat. It would be great to see you there if you are able to attend.

After years of dedicated service, Trish stepped down from the role of service co-ordinator last month. The Bower House Team gathered for tea and cake and to present her with gifts on her last, official day. Although we will miss her in this role, we are also very grateful that we will still benefit from her gifts and wisdom (she will remain as a volunteer counsellor and supervisor) and hope to appoint a new service co-ordinator to work alongside Cara in the near future. As always, we appreciate your prayers and support and feel upheld in the work that we do.

Cara Thomson

The Cube

The Cube continues to run 6 groups a week, which take place both at the Cube and in schools. The Wellbeing service has had a soft relaunch with 2 new counsellors joining us and taking on clients.

We are currently seeing around 50 individual young people across the groups, not including counselling, with school lunch groups drawing in significant numbers each week.

Ceriann has started making church visits to talk about where the Cube it is at now, and how people can get involved.

We recently held fundraising event at JAGA for an outside counselling space and have raised £640 so far!

We are going to be open on Carnival Day and would love for our local congregations to pop in and say hello.

Our Youth workers are seeing young people really opening up and beginning to share their lives with them.

Ceriann Kelly

Street Pastors

This is my first report as chair of Street Pastors, taking the post following the untimely and very sad death of our chair Liz Howe. The last year has been something of an unusual one partly because we were not able to patrol in the normal way due to the restrictions and other times found us walking around the parks and open areas during the weekend afternoons and early evenings. This proved rewarding in many ways, meeting up with families, children, and folk we would not encounter in the late time patrols.

There have been a number of changes within the group, both in Street Pastors and prayer support, some of us retiring, moving away, failing health etc. However, we have had some success in recruiting and are able to continue, BUT the need is greater than we can fulfil, so we welcome any interest shown in joining us. As we are self - funding we give a huge thank you to all those giving financial support, the churches, the council, groups, and organisations who raise money and the donations from private individuals.

Street Pastors are very grateful for the use of the Bower house as our base on our nights out, our sincere thanks.

I believe the St Pastor initiative is in good heart and with the presence and Spirit of God we move forward into the next year.

Jeannie Brightwell

Homeless and Asking for Help Project

Requests for help have been met this year with the continuing provision of hot food vouchers, Greggs' cards, and the occasional sleeping bag. In November, the CTH Homeless/Asking for Help Group met with Jacky and Sally of Beacon Care who work with the homeless and vulnerable locally. They told the group about their work and are now a valuable contact in enabling CTH to help local people who are homeless. Back in February Janet was contacted by Beacon Care on two occasions, for emergency sleeping bags and hot food vouchers for homeless people who had made themselves known to Jacky and Sally and the council. We were able to provide the sleeping bags from the Street Pastors who keep a couple for use at such times and hot food vouchers through the arrangement we have with the Cod's Scallops fish and chip shop on Abbey Street. There was then a further emergency request for food vouchers from Beacon Care for an individual who had been temporarily housed in the Travelodge and who had access only to kettle food.

Janet has also attended regular meetings during the year convened by the local council to pool resources and personnel from across the sectors in order to try and streamline our local response to helping the homeless and vulnerable. These meetings are ongoing.

Jubilee Foodbank Report

2021 was a busy year again with many families and individuals supported.

Our volunteers have worked tirelessly to make sure those referred are able to create meals. Sadly, the Jubilee team has lost several volunteers due to ill health. However, we continue to have many people interested in volunteering to help those in need.

Harborough District Council is our main referrer as has been the case for several years. However, since the changes due to the pandemic, referrals are made by other organisations through the Harborough Community Hub website. These include: Beacon Care, CAB, HomeStart, social prescribers (working with doctors), adult social care, schools and churches.

The need to provide food is not decreasing. In 2021, Jubilee Foodbank supported 329 households. On average, 4500 meals per month were

provided. 2021 referrals were 14% higher than 2019 (before Covid) levels.

The Harborough community, churches and organisations have donated in many different ways, helping Jubilee Foodbank to continue. Jubilee Foodbank is so grateful for your support as it encourages the Jubilee team to continue to volunteer time and efforts too. VASL (Voluntary Action South Leicestershire) volunteers have continued to deliver parcels enabling a wider range of people to be reached. The Well, Kibworth continues to support local villages with their foodbank too. The Eco Village is developing a Pay-it-Forward scheme for people who need food.

Becoming an independent charity has been challenging for various reasons, not least with the need to continue to maintain the foodbank at the same time. However, we have recruited new members who will become trustees once our charity application is approved. There is still a trustee position available for developing external links, including links with Churches Together in Harborough. Do get in touch if you are interested. Please continue to pray for all involved to make the right decisions in supporting people as more families and individuals in England struggle to make ends meet.

Liz Mills, Jubilee Foodbank, Chair jubileefoodbankmh@gmail.com

Harborough Action for Justice and Peace

We have mostly not met in person this year, though we have stayed in touch and continued to act on-line where possible.

However, we were able to hold the Peace Vigil in January this year. It was good to be able to stand together in the Square and pray in the silence for peace in our world. And considering the need to work for peace, we have been part of the support for Ukraine, both in terms of sending aid, and in seeking to support those refugees as well as refugees already here.

Our main concern this year has been to try and work out exactly what the way forward might be. We are aware that there are many groups in Harborough concerned with a wide variety of Justice issues – local; national; and worldwide. We believe that God is inviting us to seek ways of working together with people of all faiths and none, while maintaining our desire to offer these concerns in prayer and worship. There has been some delay in the conversations about this – partly due the pandemic restrictions, and partly due to the personal concerns of those involved. However, we are still working on it!

We continue to find helpful facts with additional information and reflection on the results of governmental policies (including those specifically relating to the pandemic) from the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team.

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk> It may also help people's praying to look at what is offered each day as a world prayer focus by them.

We continue to write to Neil O'Brien and others involved in government; we have written, emailed, and lobbied where that was possible; and we have been part of offering financial support, both at home and overseas. And of course, we have continued to pray.

Alison Tomlin

Communications Officer Report

There are three main ways of making CTH activities and needs known within the churches and wider community. One is via regular mailings to church representatives on the Forum mailing list and to church leaders, distributed by the CTH Secretary, Maureen Douglas. We ask recipients to pass this information in turn to their church members via websites, notice sheets etc.

The second is via our own CTH website managed by Dave Kennard who posts news and information as he is given it. We ask reps and church leaders to check it out regularly (www.harboroughchurches.org.uk).

We're grateful to Dave for his ongoing support and efficiency.

The third is via local media. The weekly *Harborough Mail* newspaper often includes both advance information and reports of CTH activities (and will do so for newsworthy items from individual churches if it has space). It continues to publish a weekly "Churches column" (generally a gentle spiritual "thought for the week" suitable for both church members and people who do not have any church affiliation) for which I organise a rota of writers most (but not all) of whom are church leaders linked in some way to CTH. The local radio station HFM usually mentions any major CTH coming events in its news updates. We are very grateful for the support of local media, which should not be taken for granted.

My role is to supply the website and media with relevant information, liaise with others over publicity for CTH events, and to assist the Executive Committee in its day to day planning.

Derek Williams

TREASURER'S REPORT

At the time of writing, the accounts are with Katherine Bentley (of E T Peirson and Sons Accountants) to be examined.

Balance Carried forward:

CTH own funds	£4084.56	
Holiday at Home	£1233.77	
Homeless and asking for help	£722.53	£6040.86

Breakdown of Profit and Loss

CTH Income	£1667.10	
Less Expenditure	£955.67	£711.43
Holiday at Home	£673.30	
Less Expenditure	£630.00	£43.30
Homeless and Asking for Help	£150.00	
Less Expenditure	£88.00	£62.00

No adjustment to Churches subscriptions is felt necessary for the coming year and the relevant invoices will be sent May/June

Jackie Melhuish

Chair's Report

Our lives and CTH activities have continued to be largely influenced by the effects of the pandemic during this last year with the ongoing uncertainties of the COVID infection rates locally and nationally meaning that the overwhelming voice of continuing caution and felt responsibility towards church congregations rightly prevailed. However, there were opportunities to celebrate and remember in different ways using Zoom and live streaming as well as an increasing return to in – person meetings and activities.

This last year has seen new church leaders welcomed to our town. In September and October, I attended the inductions of Stuart Allen and Stephen Jack and the licensing of Hils Corcoran on behalf of Churches Together as they came into leadership at Christchurch, Harborough Community Church and St Peter and St Paul's Church at Great Bowden and Tom Grant was welcomed to the Anglican Team as a church planting curate. We also said goodbye last summer to James Pickersgill as he moved to pastures new as Chaplain to the Bishop of Leicester.

Thus far, 2022 has seen CTH getting back to some sense of normality and returning to our more usual rhythm of events and activities in our life as churches together. We held our traditional Peace Vigil on the Square in January and of course more recently, Holy Week saw the welcome return of the Good Friday service and witness on the Square. In many positive comments received afterwards, one summed it up like this, **"It was such a positive witness to those on and around the Square about Jesus and the work of Churches Together,"** and indeed it was! It also felt great to be able to utilise the LED screen that we had first hired back in 2020.

Our affiliated organisations too in recent months are getting back to more usual working patterns. It is exciting to see and hear what is planned for the Cube in its continued support of our young people, to see Street Pastors patrolling our streets again on a regular basis and to share the excitement of the Bower House as it embarks in the next few months on some building work to enhance access to the building which has been its home for so many years.

A review of the CTH Constitution last autumn saw the Review Group propose some minor changes which will be implemented going forward. However, what has not changed are the three objectives that remain at the heart of CTH. They appear at the top of each Forum agenda as a reminder to us all of what we are about. They are - firstly, **to be a visible sign of the churches' commitment to one another**. Secondly, **to facilitate common witness to Christ** and thirdly **to respond to the needs of the community in shared service and outreach where this is appropriate**.

I am greatly indebted to my fellow Executive Officers and thank Andy Murphy, Derek Williams, Maureen Douglas, Rose Williams, and Jackie Melhuish for their unstinting support during this last year. Thanks also go to Angela Zemlak for her four years of service as our efficient Minute Secretary, who is stepping down and to Dave Kennard our webmaster for his technical support over another year. I am sure that CTH will endeavour to continue to meet its objectives as it navigates a world undoubtedly changed by the pandemic but nevertheless always moving forward in hope, along with a sense that we will always seek to find more within our faith that unites rather than divides us as Christians in this town as we continue to share God's love with others in mission and service.

Janet Smith