

December 2019

It was at the start of October '19 that the decision to stop using the Bus and move into permanent locations was implemented. As reported before this was not an easy decision to make and there were a number of concerns. We asked; How would it work out? Would the guests continue to come along? Would it prove to be the beginning of the end of Church on the Bus?

Well, a few months have passed since that "decision day" and we thought it would be helpful to provide a report as to what actually has happened. In order to do this a visit has been made to a typical evening at Chesterfield and to a Tuesday Lunchtime at Matlock.

Chesterfield

It was a bitterly cold night in November when I set off from home for Grace Chapel . My thoughts were that this was not a night to sleeping rough but a good night for a hot drink, some food and a time out of the freezing wind.



That night 9 volunteers were working hard to provide refreshment of hot drinks, sandwiches, (prepared by our home volunteers,) and fruit and snack from Greggs. There were 6 female & 23 male guests in attendance and in general the atmosphere was welcoming, relaxed and at times lively. Over the course of the evening I chatted to both volunteers and guests, trying to find out how the change of location had been for them.

In general the feedback was positive. Moving to Grace Chapel had provided access to a kitchen for hot water washing up and safe food preparation. It had provided more space to enable guests and volunteers to be together and have time to chat and respond to arising situations, guests tended to stay longer and were more relaxed chatting between themselves and with helpers and toilets are available. It was warm and dry and this was appreciated on such a cold night. Of course some were nostalgic for the bus feeling that it had a special place in their lives and that their time on the bus had impacted on their lives.



I would share 3 things I observed that night that made an impression on me;

(1) One guest was upset and anxious as he felt he had been treated badly by the housing providers. He expressed his frustration and became increasingly agitated. The volunteers took him to a quiet location and "talked through" to issues. The outcome was a positive plan to begin to address the situation as well as a short term solution with some temporary accommodation, with another guest, for the night.

(2) Another guest had been released from prison that day and had nowhere to go. He did not have suitable clothes for a cold night on the streets. It was not possible to find accommodation at such short notice but he was helped with clothing & a sleeping bag.

(3) Another came late, he appeared anxious and wary. No food was left and only a hot drink was available. When other guests found out about his situation they provided food from their store/bags to make sure he had something to eat. A clear of example of those who had very little for themselves being happy to share with another who, was at that time, in difficulties.



Matlock

Early Tuesday afternoon is when the Matlock Church on the Bus Meets in the “Upper Room” of Cornerstone Christian Bookshop. It’s a pleasant airy room with comfy chairs and a small kitchen area for making hot drinks and all the necessary catering. The afternoon I went there had been 10 guests, 5 of whom were female. The move from the Bus had initially seen a decline in numbers but it has soon built up again and is now back to the level of attendance for the Bus.



Chatting to the guests and volunteers it was again evident that now things were settling down they were able to identify many benefits from moving away from the bus. Generally people appreciated the extra space they now had, access to the kitchen area, especially not having to rely on flasks and being able to wash up. They were enjoying the sandwiches made by the 5 “homebased volunteers” but were a little disappointed the usual supply of cakes from a local bakery had

stopped. I am sure another way of providing cakes will be found! Another important factor was access to clean toilet facilities which has ended the need to walk up to the train station and pay to use poor facilities. Everyone seemed relaxed and settled and felt sufficiently comfortable to stay longer and chat with each other and the volunteers. The feedback was that the extra time and more relaxed environment was resulting in the



building of stronger relationships, a greater understanding of the issues and an opportunity to “signpost” guests to local support organisations including Church in the Peak for clothing and toiletries. The general direction is that of enabling guests to achieve in their independent living and support has included accompanying them to difficult appointments for medical and legal matters.

The afternoon drew to a conclusion with a time of worship lead by John Phillips and his guitar and a short time of prayer when individuals and their needs were brought before God. Some of the guests seemed a little reluctant to make their way out preferring to stay, chat, help clear up and play their part in this valuable work.



Matters for Prayer

- Give thanks to God for the guidance and resources made available to make the move to Grace Chapel and Cornerstone to enable the work of sharing God’s love to grow.
- We need to build on the positive start of moving away from the bus and build supportive relationships with Guests
- Winter is coming and for many these is a difficult time, so please pray for their health, the ability to access safe and appropriate accommodation
- A vision as to the way forward to provide a range of services with other that will begin to address to underlying issues and build a good foundation for change

Everyone who works with Church on the Bus would like to thank you for your continued support, care and encouragement over the past years. It is really appreciated. We would like to wish you a very Happy Christmas and New Year in which you will receive a blessing. We also look forward to your continued support.

For Further information

You can follow Church on the Bus on Facebook
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