

## The Conception, Birth and our first year

### The Community Chaplaincy on Great Western Park, Didcot

The project has been up and running now for just over a year, and I don't think either Libby or myself could possibly envisaged what God had planned for us, or how we have been integrated into the culture of the place and into people's lives.

This, to the best of our knowledge, is a truly pioneering ministry as it is a first- Chaplaincy on a new housing estate, with no church as our base, only Hope our motorhome. It was conceived some 5 years ago and a little over year ago it began on one of the biggest housing projects in the country- 3000 homes to be built with another 4000 promised.

In the first year not only has the physicality of the development almost become half as big, (2000 now 3000 homes) with the obvious population growth that brings, but there has been a huge explosion in the infrastructural provision to Great Western Park with the arrival of shops, including an Adsa, a much used Costa, a pharmacy, a dentist, a vets, hairdressers, take aways, a Secondary School and a retirement complex. These in turn have created spaces for new groups to start- Uniformed youth groups, opportunities to engage with school pupils, shop workers and meeting those in the retirement homes.

And it doesn't stop there- in the next few months sees a new Primary school and a Nursery open; and in the more long range future not one but two new community centres, and we hope a doctor's surgery.

The opportunities we have had to engage with people has ranged from simply walking around the estate, mainly talking to residents and sometimes to construction workers, to being a presence in some of the many groups meeting on GWP. We have become integral in the Residents Association, and will be helping at our second Activities Week in August (this time I will be an experienced candyfloss maker!) We have also been asked by local churches and their groups to talk about the Chaplaincy- this is particularly useful now we are actively looking to add volunteers to our number. As I am sure you appreciate, the place is growing at such a pace we two simply cant be everywhere!! We have also talked on the radio (well Libby has!)

So what is it we actually do? We are asked this a lot! To most people we seem to spend time hanging around at places mostly talking and listening sometimes over a coffee- in reality we give space for people to talk about anything on their minds and hearts, we listen, we don't try and help per se, we sometimes signpost and occasionally we refer- but we do it all with no agenda other than to love people, and in doing so show them that God loves them, just as they are- faith or no faith.

In a year we have had well over 1000 conversations, some more deep than others but we are becoming aware that even the insignificant ones can be important. Now we have reached so many people, new organisations/ institutions are beginning to actively seek us out to come and be their Chaplain.

We do get conversations that go deeper, and sure we can talk to them about our faith, but only if asked- our remit is not to proselytize. We are a guest ministry so we are there only by invitation and so far we have met relatively few people who didn't believe we were out to convert or have

some hidden agenda. In the meantime we continue to ask simple questions like “how's your week been?” as this seems to be a searching opening question, that allows people to pour out all that they need to get off their chests.

It has been a rich blessing to be a part of this project so far- its deepened my 30 year faith more than I could have imagined. It seems the more that I give; the more I get back; and I am continuously amazed at how God plants me in exactly the right place all the time (I am beginning to get less amazed but secretly smile Heavenwards and say OK I see!!) I can't wait to see what God has in store for the next 2 years... In the meantime thanks for all your prayers for GWP Chaplaincy.