

Mel Brown – Overstone Pioneer Community Chaplain



The ending of November will be the third year Anniversary of our presence in Overstone. The aim of this project has been to be a Christian presence in the new housing developments in Overstone Leys and Overstone Green. We have been privileged to build connections within the community and make strong friendships with a number of residents. Our presence within the community is being felt and we have played a very relevant role in helping the community to build cohesion. Church and chaplain can play an essential role in bringing the community together, by being present in communities, offering support and service, helping the community to connect and engage in communal activities. (Justin Welby, 2018).

on almost 500 doors, welcoming new home owners, presenting them with a gift from the Methodist Church and sharing information about the work taking place on the estates. On my visits with churches in Park Avenue, Harpole, Road and Ascot, I have shared the Hello Bag also suggesting that they can be used in established estates where relationships have not been built. People are generally open to receiving an unconditional gift and gift giving can be a wonderful way to connect with a community.

The Walking Group started at the end of January this year, walking once per week on alternate Mondays and Saturdays. We have 17 members in the group (although not all have made an appearance), people of difference

ages, backgrounds and with varying life experiences. It has been wonderful to witness the strong connections and friendships which have been built in the walking group. The group is advertised monthly across the new estates, which has resulted in people connecting with people they most likely would not have met. We have engaged in conversations about faith, church, life challenges and experiences, the weather, and the cost of living. It is clear that people want to talk about faith and spirituality, and they will often raise these subjects and are comfortable discussing them or asking questions. This tells me that if we are present in community, conversations around faith, God and spirituality can happen organically.



Festive Activities

We continue to use festive celebrations to bring the community together and bless the community with gifts. Aldi have provided chocolates for our Easter Egg Hunts for 2 consecutive years, and they have welcomed requests for gifts for the community for our Carols by candlelight. On Valentines Day we posted gifts through letter boxes with an expression of love from the Methodist Church and the Anglican Church.



Summer Activities

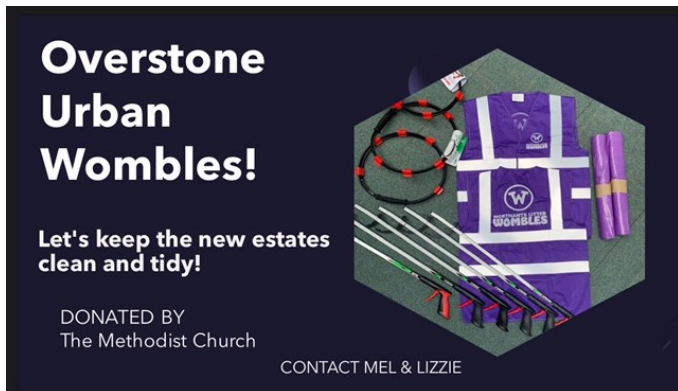
Over this year's summer holidays we'll continue to create a space on the green, with large outdoor activities, ball pits, tents, badminton and other games for children and teens. Families are encouraged to use the space on a Tuesday and Thursday afternoon on the Avenue and starting this year, on a Wednesday afternoon in Overstone Gate. These spaces allow the children a place to play together, and the adults to meet and have conversation. The activities that we provide are the only activities for children and teens in the Avenue estate. Last year the community expressed their thanks and appreciation for the play space that we created over the summer holidays. Here we have played an essential role in bringing families together; our presence there is visible and tangible.

Services at the Care Home

Katrina the Anglican vicar and I, hold a monthly service at the new Home for the elderly. The Home can house 66 residents, they currently have less than 15. Our visits have been welcomed with opened arms, as some of the residents are former church goers and they

thoroughly enjoy singing hymns and prayer . We have been given the privilege to play a part in the Home in the early stages and we hope to serve them in different capacities as they grow.

Overstone Urban Wombles



In response to complaints of rubbish being discarded along the A43 and within the new estates, we have launched a Wombles Group. From this we hope to encourage a shared vision of keeping the new estates clean and encouraging people to take care of their environment.

The Wider Overstone Community



I was recently invited to an event in the wider Overstone community, where I was able to display our vision and the methods we have been using to engage with the community. Our vision of being a Christian presence in the Overstone new estates is being realized and recognized. Residents are taking up leadership roles and they are actively promoting the groups and activities which are being run. Conversations and experiences of faith and church are flowing more organically due to the relationships which have been built. It is a complete JOY to serve in this community; we have prayed, dug the ground and planted seeds, and we can see that God is bringing increase.

St Matthew 5:14-16 expresses the vision for Overstone: *"You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I have put you on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to be opened with God, this generous father in heaven. The Message Bible*

As we continue to be a Christian presence in Overstone, we aim to be a blessing and pray for opportunities where faith and discipleship can be nurtured and grow.

Mel Brown

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Welby, J. (2018) *Re-imagining Britain: foundations for hope*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.