

Address by Frank Fender, Alcohol Retail Partnership Officer and Bed:safe
Coordinator at Bedford Street Angels First Year Celebration, 06-Mar-10

I have been associated with the Bed:Safe initiative since its launch in March 2003, and I also worked with the North Bedfordshire Community Partnership beforehand, helping to make Bed:Safe happen.

Through its partnership work, then co-ordinated and managed by Gill Anderson, Bed:Safe has been heralded as a model of good and best practice by the Home Office, and has won National and local awards for its work in reducing crime and disorder during the night time economy.

This true partnership initiative continues to work very well and is proud of the way that statutory bodies, voluntary agencies and all associated with the licensed trade work alongside each other to make Bedford a safer place.

I am definitely not against new ideas being incorporated into the Bed:Safe initiative, but I must admit that I had some reservations when I was told, during the latter part of 2008, that the Church wanted to put Angels onto the streets of Bedford at the weekend..

I was aware that other towns across the country had this type of initiative running but I did not know how much trouble they got themselves into by trying to combine their work with people who were devoting their time to lager, alco pops, dating and kebabs.

I could also foresee that when the Angels got into difficult situations, the Police would have to come to their rescue – and I was concerned that this could create more work for the police, whereas Bed:Safe was supposed to be trying to reduce that workload.

My initial thoughts concerned me, but that did not stop Gill taking me along to this building to receive a presentation given by Richard Chewter, Town Chaplain for Watford, and very much involved in the Street Angel Scheme in that town.

Richard's excellent presentation, coupled with the obvious enthusiasm of his Church based audience, along with the commitment shown by Major Ian Loxley from the Salvation Army, silenced me. It made me realise that a Street Angel Scheme really can work and make a difference. I began to feel guilty about doubting the effectiveness of such a scheme – but of course the presentation was based on Watford, and this is Bedford. Bedford is different – isn't it???

During that presentation and subsequent questions, it became clear that Street Angels would soon become a partner in the Bed:Safe scheme. There was a gap in the work which the partnership was carrying out, a gap which meant vulnerable people were at risk. Street Angels had clearly identified that gap and wanted to do something about it, and Gill and I left that presentation with a determination to help

make that happen. My eyes were opened to something which could really make a difference to our town.

Bedford Street Angels became an agenda item on subsequent meetings of licensees, door supervisors and the taxi / private hire vehicles forums. When discussed at those forums, some members expressed views not too different to my initial thoughts. This time, I found myself promoting the Street Angels, requesting members of those groups to embrace the initiative, and to welcome the Street Angels into the partnership.

During the first couple of months on the streets of Bedford, I started to receive some feedback from licensees, door supervisors and taxi marshals. The feedback was all positive, without exception.

However, Major Ian Loxley was not content with this – he requested negative feedback in order to make their service better.

I then found myself in a position at various meetings of asking for negative feedback – a request which was met with silence. I tried prising negative feedback from licensees and door supervisors – and the best anyone could come up with was that the colour of their jackets was not bright enough to make them stand out in a crowd.

The positive feedback has been and continues to be excellent. CCTV operators communicate well with Street Angels, directing them to places where their services may be required.

Licensees and door supervisors have used the radio to call street angels directly to bring their attention to people who may need a bit of help.

Bedford Street Angels have been well and truly accepted into Bedford, and into the partnership work which makes Bedford safer during the night time economy.

This was superbly evidenced at the recent meeting of Bedsafe licensees, when they discussed how to spend monies which had been provided for licensees by BedfordBID, in order to promote the night time economy.

The licensees are fully aware of the 'Safer Space' initiative which Bedford Street Angels are looking to provide in the town centre. The licensees are also aware that such an initiative requires funding.

Following a discussion at that meeting, the licensees voted unanimously to donate £3,500 towards ensuring that the Safer Space initiative can move forwards to becoming real.

I am sure you won't mind me publicly thanking BedfordBID and the town's Licensees for supporting this initiative in this manner.

It is difficult to believe that it has been just over a year that Bedford Street Angels have patrolled in the town every Saturday night. We have seen from the footage how well they are received in the town - not only by the various partners and stakeholders, but more importantly by the public.

There is no doubt that you are making a difference in Bedford and your contribution towards making Bedford a safer place is excellent.

I very much look forward to seeing what the next year brings – it is clear from Adam's dedication and determination, along with the continued commitment of all Street Angel volunteers, that there will always be something on the horizon.

Congratulations and Thank You.