

Presentation of BSA Work

You will agree, a very difficult and painful story to share. We are hugely grateful to both of you for agreeing to do that interview as part of our first year celebration. A copy of that video is now available from the news page of the Bedford Street Angels website.

As we move onto our next part of the presentation, I want to address the question - what is Street Angels and where does Bedford sit on this national framework?

If we were to sum up Bedford Street Angels in a paragraph it would read - Bedford Street Angels are a part of the national Christian initiative to offer a non-judgemental, listening ear, and practical support to all the vulnerable in the town's night time economy.

As Paul has mentioned, The Street Angels Project has been run for a number of years in different towns and cities within the country. The leading project has been in Halifax, which was launched in 2005. Other key places include Portsmouth and Guildford.

And last February, Bedford joined that club... What has Bedford Street Angels found from doing its work this first year?

As a sociologist and practical theologian, I am keen not to always use statistics as a method of recording success and failure. I recall the statement of one famous politician who said 'there are lies, lies, damn lies and statistics'. However, there is a range of statistics which would support the general assumption that Bedford Street Angels has been a mechanism for good in this locality where it is operating.

- A growing reduction of Anti-social behaviour and Violent Crime.
- A developing friendly atmosphere in the town - only I believe through taking a partnership approach.
- We have had some excellent forging of relationships with Bedford Borough Council and the local police. It is good to see so many of you here today.
- 21% reduction in Anti-social behaviour each Saturday evening.

My favourite way of measuring how successful a project is has been through story, or narrative recording. Hearing how people have benefited from its work.

As one of our project principles is non-judgmental listening, anyone can share their experiences of life with us. This can be done without the fear of being forced to convert to Christianity.

As part of the high standard training programme that all Street Angels receive is appropriate support from outside organizations, such as Bed:safe in this town, to enable them to respond to the real and acute social needs which present themselves on a weekly basis.

Partnership is crucial to all that we undertake and at a event like today, we recognize and affirm that. It is good to celebrate the commitment of the local churches within the town, among a wide range of Christian traditions - from Anglican, Methodist and Catholic to the more charismatic and free churches. So we, have

All Saints Church, Kempston
Bedford Pentecostal Church
Bromham Baptist Church
Brickhill Baptist Church
Bunyan Meeting Free Church
Cotton End Baptist Church

Cranfield Baptist Church
Elstow Abbey
Kempston East Methodist Church
Kingdom Way
Priory Methodist Church
Russell Park Baptist Church
Rutland Road Church
Salvation Army
St Andrew's Church
St John's with St Leonard's Church
St Joseph and the Holy Child
Roman Catholic Church
St Mary's Church, Cardington
St Michael and All Angel's Church
St Paul's Church
St Peter de Merton
Turvey Abbey - Monastery of Christ our Saviour

It is that last name I would like to draw your attention to - last week we were given a cheque for £2,000 donated for the Benedictine Monks at Turvey Abbey. This is the second significant amount of money which we have received from them, and to which we are extremely grateful. It would not have been without the support of our friends at Turvey Abbey that we would have struggled to keep the project sustained, so thank you again.

It is only right, also to thank the Bedford Salvation Army, especially Ian for his agreeing to take this project on in the first instance, and then to Kevin Sandford, the Centre Coordinator for supporting the operational end of our work.

Since I came into post last autumn, we have been working on forging relationships within the new unitary authority of Bedford Borough. This is demonstrated with our growing link with Bed:safe, the operational arm of the night time economy. We are involved in the Safer strand of the Sustainable Community Strategy launched last November, and we working on a regular basis with Philip Scott, the new Community Safety Manager and her team.

We are working with Bedfordshire Police, and particularly Sgt Alistair McGaw within the Licensing and Night Time Economy team.

Through the connections with Tony Rogers, the Area Commander for North division, we are looking at growing links with Bedford and Luton Fire and Rescue Team.

We grateful to all those who work in the night time economy itself - the Taxi Marshalls, Night club owners and others.

There is also a growing partnership with YMCA Bedfordshire and we are grateful that once their move is complete, it is hoped that I and the new Volunteer Coordinator for Bedford Street Angels will be based there.

As a Christian organisation, we continue to work ecumenically with other Christians - mainly from All Bedford Churches Together and Hope Bedfordshire. We wholeheartedly endorse and support their work, and thank them for their fellowship.

As a voluntary organisation, we cannot continue without the work of key individuals; most of whose work is done behind the scenes. I hope in this first section, we can affirm our individuals and thank them for their continued support.

So, how can you respond today, in real and practical terms as individuals or organisation to continue the sustainability?

I believe there are four main ways -

1. By becoming a Street Angel patrol volunteer - there is always a need for members of local churches to join us in ensuring teams can be put out each week.
2. Join our prayer team - at home or at the base.
3. Give financially to the project - in the next couple of months, we are hoping to launch a 'Friends' scheme, looking for 365 friends to stand alongside us. Do ask Vee or one of her team at the information stall about this.
4. And finally, just spread the word among your friends, family and work colleagues.

In recent years, and in many contexts, we are called to think outside the box. This means looking at something in a slightly different way, or new angle. I think of Bedford Street Angels and those other projects across the country as doing that. Actually, we are doing that!

And how can I contact you?

- Please speak to someone who is already involved this afternoon - there will be opportunities to do this over refreshments in a few moments time.
- Visit our Face Book Group - 'Bedford Street Angels'
- Contact me as Project Director or Brenda Sackett, our newly appointed Volunteer Coordinator.

So, that's what we do in words - but how about the reality? At this celebration, we formally launch the Bedford Street Angels DVD of a typical night. Let us hit the streets.....