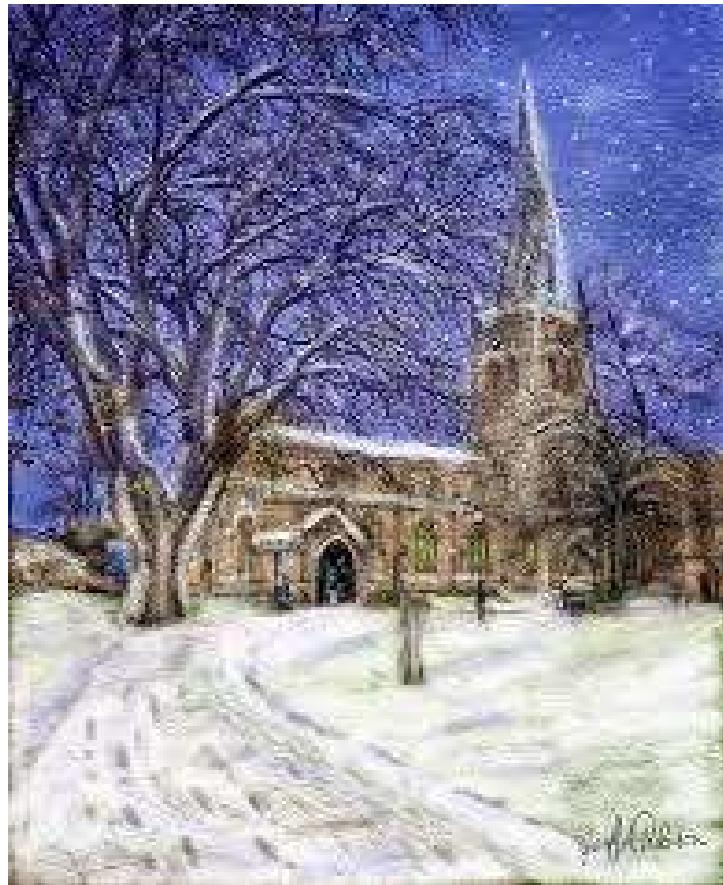




Newsletter, December'25

Merry Christmas



We would like to start by wishing all a Very Happy Christmas and express our thanks for all your support and interest over the past year. Church on the Bus has continued throughout the year to provide care and support to the homeless and vulnerable of Chesterfield with a programme of two evening meetings per week. This has only been possible with the hard work and dedication of all our volunteers. We continue to be grateful for their commitment, energy and willingness to be part of the team. We would also acknowledge all the support we receive from those who care by their prayers and practical support. Together as a team we can continue to provide a service that meets a continuing need.

In this Newsletter we will have input from both a volunteer and a guest to show what Church on the Bus means to them and how it continues to be relevant and meet a very real need.

Spotlight on a Volunteer.

Maureen Saxton

Maureen has been a volunteer with Church on the Bus for many years. She attends regularly and has experienced several changes as well as some challenging situations.

I wanted to find out a little more about why Maureen is so committed to the work and what impact it has on her and those she seeks to care for. I sent Maureen 9 questions and asked her to respond with one sentence answers.



1. What sort of work have you done?

I am now happily retired. My last job was with the Inland Revenue.

2. What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

From childhood I was always taught if in doubt to pray about it. Something I always do before making a major decision.

3. What is the most important lesson you have learnt?

Trust your instincts, they are usually right.



4. How do you recharge your energy when feeling down?

Watch some rubbish TV programme, dare I say with a glass of beer to hand.

5. How long have you been involved, and what is your role with Church on the Bus

About 3 years and 8 months. Currently as a team leader on 2 teams

6. Why do you work with CotB

I was involved with homeless night shelter etc with Christian Action. When that wound up working with CotB seemed the logical next step.

7. Can you recall a significant incident that happened at CotB, how did it make you feel?

Myself and a guest were subject to serious abuse. I nearly gave up but after prayer, realised I was where God wanted me to be.



8. What piece of advice would you give to a homeless person

Never give up hope. There is always light at the end of the tunnel (Psalm 23)

9. How do you think you would cope with homelessness?

Never thought about it. I realise working with the homeless how lucky I was to have a, not rich, but loving upbringing giving me a secure future.

Thank you, Maureen, for your honesty and openness in responding to these questions. What shines through is your commitment and resilience in working with CotB and your support for those who are at present struggling with all the demands of life.

Rowan's Story

Have you ever wondered if Church from the Bus really does make a difference to our “guests.” Perhaps you have questioned is just another “soup kitchen” that focuses on the “here and now” without the resources or ability to be part of a process of changing lives. To investigate this Ian Macleod and I met up with Rowan to find out about his “backstory,” where he is now and what, if any, help Church from the Bus has been in enabling him to take the risky steps of making changes in his lifestyle.

Rowan is 43 years old and has been coming along to CotB for some time, in fact he first started to attend when Capt Alan was parking the Bus near the town hall and soup and cobs were provided.

Like all of us Rowan's journey starts with his early days and family. He comes from a large family with numerous brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts. He recognises that his mother and grandmother were the ones that held the family together with limited input by the father figures. All seemed to go well until he reached his teenage period. He had difficulties in settling in school and often acted out to be disruptive and as the “class clown.” Unsurprisingly this soon led to being suspended from school and the need to attend the “naughty kid’s college,” that did not work. Rowan absented himself from education at about 14 and grew distant from his family. As so often happens he fell in with others in a similar position and trouble followed. They looked for excitement and thrills by stealing, committing burglary, and taking cars to joyride. The inevitable followed with police involvement, court orders, and time in Young Offenders Prison.



Little changed, as Rowan grew so did his distance from family and support, his offending increased. This was partly driven by escalating drug misuse leading to heroin dependency and an itinerant lifestyle. Rowan had no stability in his life, he was homeless, needed money to feed his drug habit and had no real friends. He recalls sofa surfing for accommodation and often sleeping rough. He would break into a scrap yard to sleep in the wrecked cars. He had no direction or purpose in his life. With his increased offending came increased sentences resulting in 22 months in prison.



Rowan had touched “rock bottom” with no idea of where to turn or go. He states that he called out to God in a prayer questioning if He was there and could do anything to help him. Initially nothing happened but after a while he began to attend CotB. His self-esteem was low; he was using drugs and had no prospects. Rowan says that at CotB he was valued as a person and treated with respect. He was encouraged to talk and given support and advice to see how things could change. He knew that change would be a slow and risky process and that he would need a lot of help.



Every journey begins with the first step. CotB enabled Rowan to take that step. Over time he began to view himself differently and believe that change could happen. He was helped to secure accommodation and provided with furnishings and support to manage independent living. With time he addressed his drug use by the use of Methadone. He also states that he wanted to know more about why Christians wanted to help him and what lay behind their actions. He also began to read the Bible and ask questions.

It has been a long difficult process but Rowan has grown and matured into a confident and capable individual. He has lived by himself for some 7 years. He has managed to be free of methadone for some 8 months and is enjoying a lifestyle free from things that held him back.

The journey does not end there. As a result of encouragement from a CotB volunteer Rowan is now becoming involved with St John's church where he is receiving support and attending an Alpha course to find out more about God and faith. He still comes to CotB but is confident that there is a positive and bright future for him.



So, has CotB played a significant part in supporting Rowan to make the changes in his life?

CotB has;

- Provided non-judgemental acceptance
- Provided advice and support to make changes. This support has come in the form of practical provision, objective reviews of situations and helping him to manage when things go wrong.
- Valued Rowan as an individual
- Pointed Rowan to God who has the power to change lives
- Just been there when he needed it!
- Listened
- Confirmed to Rowan he has a future.

Well, was it worth it. The answer must be a resounding Yes. CotB provides a unique pattern of support that relies on its members generosity with their time, money and care. It also involves the role of faith in the process of change and moving towards a positive and rewarding lifestyle

A Prayer for Hope



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"Heavenly Father, we lift up those living without homes, especially in this cold time.

You are our provider, so we ask you to meet their daily needs for food, clothing, and medicine.

Guard them from harm and despair.

Fill their hearts with your peace, replacing loneliness with your enduring love, and grant them hope for a brighter future.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen."



A short quiz with a Christmas theme! No prizes just a warm feeling for being so clever.

Please don't let any disputes about the answers spoil your Christmas dinner!

Questions

1. What did the other reindeer not let Rudolph do because of his shiny red nose?
2. How many ghosts visited Scrooge in A Christmas Carol?
3. Where was the baby Jesus born?
4. What are you supposed to do when you find yourself under the mistletoe?
5. Which country started the tradition of putting up a Christmas Tree?
6. What did my true love give me on the eighth day of Christmas?
7. What is the best-selling Christmas song ever?
8. In which modern-day country was St Nicholas born?
9. Which real life person is Santa Claus based on?
10. What words follow "Silent Night" in the carol?

Answers: 1. Join in their games. 2. Four 3. Bethlehem 4. Kiss 5. Germany 6. Eight maids a milking
7. White Christmas 8. Turkey 9. Bishop St Nicholas 10. Holy Night



Financial Help: Regular or one-off donations can be made to our Co-op Bank Account:

The Church on the Bus. Sort Code: 08-92-99; Account: 65923339

We also have a Just Giving Page at www.justgiving.com/church-onthebus

Or you can use "Give As You Live" (www.giveasyoulive.com) which gives you access to many major retailers and high street stores. When you shop through this site your nominated charity receives a donation from the retailer, and you can nominate Church on the Bus if you wish.

Gifts in Kind: We distribute donated clothing and hygiene items (Gifts in Kind) when specifically asked by guests and we especially need small items for personal hygiene that can be easily carried, good trainers and walking boots, jeans and jogging bottoms, socks, thermal hats and gloves for winter, and new underwear. We can also use sleeping bags but not Duvet's.

Email churchonthebus@gmail.com ; Website: [https://www.churchonthebus.org.uk](http://www.churchonthebus.org.uk)