Spring/Summer 2011 Newsletter No. 3

Isle of Wight STREET PASTORS

bringing peace to the community

Pastors Praised by Community Safety Partnership

Image courtesy of Kenneth Brown http://www.flickr.com/people/kenjonbro/

The Isle of Wight Community Safety Partnership is a group drawn from the three main emergency services and aims to find better ways of keeping Islanders safe. They are clear that Street Pastors have a positive impact on crime and anti-social behaviour issues: "One agency that has had a profound effect upon (our) strategic objectives...is the 'Street Pastor' scheme." (Stuart May, Chair, Community Safety Partnership)

The Partnership also comments on the "positive effect around the issue of alcohol related crime" and highlights that this also has a knock-on effect: "Street Pastors...have reduced the number of Police and Ambulance calls to these areas and allowed them to focus on dealing with more serious incidents. The Street Pastor scheme is a real success and an excellent example of people taking ownership of their communities."

What Street Pastors do

Street Pastors are Christian volunteers who go out on the streets of Ryde and Newport town centres each Friday evening as a positive presence, offering practical help or a listening ear to people around the town centre. Working until 2-3am, a typical evening could involve diffusing an argument before it escalates into violence, giving out flip-flops to revellers who can no longer walk in their high heels, calling an ambulance for someone who has fallen ill and talking to someone who feels lost and lonely.

Our care is offered without judgement – regardless of the causes of pain, sickness or danger each of the people we help is a human being, someone's daughter, or someone's brother.

As well as our regular evenings we also provide support to people during special events, including the Isle of Wight Festival, Bestival, Ryde Regatta and Cowes Week One of the questions we are most often asked on the streets is "Why do you do it?". As Christians we are called to demonstrate an unconditional love for people that Jesus modelled. Street Pastors have chosen to show that by providing practical care for people, something we believe gives a great benefit to society, helping make our streets better, safer places for people to live, work and enjoy themselves. We don't go out to preach to people, just to show that someone cares.

"love the Lord your God....love your neighbour as yourself" (The Bible)

Happy New Year

A phrase that's heard over and over again at the start of each year, but New Year often starts in less than happy circumstances, with many people ending up spending the start of a fresh year in the gutter or a police cell. Street Pastors were out in record numbers for this year's New Year celebration to try and make sure everyone had a happy and safe start to the New Year. As well as our regular patrols in Newport and Ryde, three teams were out in Cowes, which always sees a huge influx of revellers on New Year's Eve. All the teams had a busy night, and made a real difference out there.

We saw a young woman looking lost and on her own. "Good evening, are you ok", we asked , "No not really" she replied. "I've been split up from my friends and they are all at the Anchor, and I don't know where that is." "Would you like us to walk with you to find them?" we asked. Very gratefully she accepted our offer, saying that she wasn't comfortable walking through the town on her own. She took a chocolate, and we walked together to find her friends. Re-united she thanked us and we moved on. We saw 2 groups of lads shouting at each other. With a big smile we offered one group some lollipops saying how we didn't want them to get into trouble tonight. After a minute or so, they were laughing and joking with us and gave us a big hug.

These two interactions appear fairly simple and low-key. Irrelevant almost. The reality is that collectively these encounters lead to genuine change. A young lady's evening was saved through a simple action that enabled her to get back to her evening's fun without having to feel unsafe along the way. The early intervention to diffuse anger and aggression potentially stopped a situation escalating into violence, injury, damage to property and diversion of the police from other activities. Instead we had the opportunity to talk to this group of lads, relate with the real people under the "laddish" masks.

These changes are hard to quantify – how many fights do we stop? How many people do we leave happier then before we met them? What we do know is that crime has dropped in the areas Street Pastors operate, people report feeling safer with Street Pastors around, the police are adamant that we have a genuine positive effect.

Street Pastors Online

If you are online you can keep up to date with what we're up to, have a chat with us or let us know what you think of Street Pastors. We are on Twitter, Facebook and have our own website - all of which we try hard to keep up to date. We'd love to here from you, so logon and say hello.

twitter.com/iowstreetpastor

facebook.com/iowstreetpastors

www.isleofwightstreetpastors.org.uk

Help Street Pastors

While all the Street Pastors are volunteers and give their time freely, we still have a range of other costs, and rely on voluntary donations to keep going. We are particularly grateful to our regular donors who give £10 a month and ensure we can keep helping people on the streets each week. If you would like to join then, please visit our website or facebook page or contact David, Street Pastors Coordinator on 07545 242782.

Last year we...

Spent 87 nights on patrol. This equates to 1,993 man/woman hours on the streets. We had 408 meaningful conversations, not just "hello mate how are you", but conversations that impact on people's lives; dealt with 160 tense or difficult situations; gave away over 2,500 bottles of water; picked up over 600 bottles from the ground; gave out 400 pairs of flip-flops, 150 foil blankets, 8,000 chocolates, and 1,600 lollipops.

Supported by: Ascension Trust, Hampshire Constabulary, Isle of Wight Council

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Registered charity No: 1136110

Affiliated to: Rural Community Council