

Fellowship of St John The Evangelist Report – The Freedom Centre Manager

May 2021 – April 2022

Well, what a year it has been! As I wrote my last report, we were 3 weeks into the Phase 2 renovations which would get the Freedom Centre to the point of opening, and we were also in the planning stages for the final phase to complete the works to the centre.

July 24th 2021 will be a day etched in the memory of Freedom Church Mereside, with phase 2 complete and with some Covid re-scheduling we finally had our Grand Opening of the Freedom Centre.

Over 100 local community members attended the opening many of which had been on the journey with us fundraising and volunteering to help in the centre.

It was a very proud moment for me as centre manager to see all the hard work and planning come to fruition in what was such a joyous day. I was also honoured to be able to carry out the first shift in Martha's Kitchen (our café which is open 5 mornings a week).

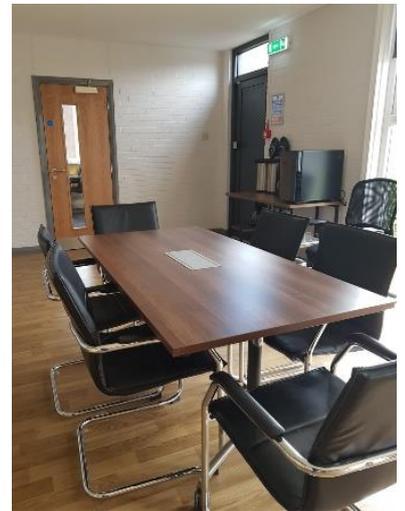
The centre also boasts a well-stocked charity shop which is run by 3 local volunteers who spend hours sifting through donations, cleaning, and pricing items before displaying them in the shop.



We were hopeful that the charity shop sales and the café profits would help towards the sustainability of the building. Without these social enterprises we would struggle to meet the costs of running the building. We have been pleasantly surprised just how profitable these projects are and I am pleased to announce that we are on target to make £10,000 profit in the first year which will go a long way towards paying the utility bills, insurance, servicing, and consumables needed to sustain the centre in the long term. We have been so busy that through the profits we are making we have been able to take on the services of a contract cleaner 3 days a week which has taken a lot of pressure off the team.

Alongside the Café and Charity shop The Freedom Centre facilities include Mary's Room which is a tranquil space laid out like a small living room. This is used for personal meetings and is available for one-to-one counselling. We often get asked why it is called Mary's room and occasionally we are asked who Martha is and does she run the café. It gives us the opportunity to tell the Bible story of Martha and Mary with Martha rushing around for her hosts and Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to him. In Mary's room you are able to escape from the hustle bustle of the centre and it really does feel like you are sitting at the feet of Jesus. It has become a very special space in the centre.

We also have a small conference room called Lighthouse (Named after our Sunday School), this space is available to hire for meetings or as a small training room. On Sunday it is transformed to a space used by our ever-growing Lighthouse Sunday School group. We are now well established in the community and take regular booking for room hire which include the main hall for birthday parties and the conference room for meetings. Alongside bringing in revenue this is ensuring we are getting the name of Freedom Church and the centre further out into the community and wider across the Parish.



It is difficult to portray to you just how amazing it has been to have this building not just as a spiritual home but also as a means of serving and supporting our community. But if I may let me give you a quick run down of a week in the life of the Freedom Centre:

Monday:

8.45am to 1pm	Café & Charity shop open.
1.30pm to 3pm	Experience a group for the over 50's (loosely) run by our community evangelist. You will find them chatting, crafting, doing quizzes, playing bingo or even going out on trips.
5.45 -6.45pm	Rainbows Uniformed Group hire the hall.
7.30 – 9.30pm	Mereside Community Gospel Choir practice (Led by Rev Linda)

Tuesday:

8.45am to 1pm	Café & Charity shop open.
10 – 11am	Church Coffee Morning
1.30pm – 3.30pm	Room hired by Headway who support people with brain injuries.
6.30pm – 9pm	M:Power leadership training for lay urban church leaders led by Pete

Wednesday:

8.45am to 1pm	Café & Charity shop open.
1.30pm – 3pm	Chatty Tots toddler and parent/carer group run by Freedom Church
7pm – 8.30pm	Freedom Church Bible Study

Thursday:

8.45am to 1pm	Café & Charity shop open.
9.30am – 11am	Freedom Church Foodbank. Weekly delivery of close to sell by produce that we distribute to the local community.
10am – 11am	Woolly Wafflers – Group for all who love wool craft.
2pm – 3pm	Quiet Communion Church Service
3.30pm – 5pm	Hangout – Freedom Church Youth Group meet in the centre
5.30pm – 9.15pm	Beaver, Cubs, Scouts hire the hall.

Friday:

Centre Closed for deep cleaning.

Saturday:

8.45am to 1pm	Café & Charity shop open.
10am – 12.30pm	Table top sale (Monthly)
1.30pm – 5.30pm	Hall available to hire for parties

Sunday:

09.15am – 11.45am	Disco Divas dance group for all ages
12pm – 3pm	Hall available to hire for parties
4.30pm – 6pm	Freedom Church Eucharistic Service
6.30pm – 9pm	Bingo Evening (Monthly)

As the centre manager it is my responsibility to ensure the smooth running of the Freedom Centre. We have trained 12 volunteers who run Martha's Kitchen on a Rota basis and it is my responsibility to manage these wonderful people. Our main emphasis is to provide a great service but more importantly a friendly place to chat. Our front of house volunteers are the ones who form relationships and offer signposting and support where required.



Alongside running the café I have also trained as a PAT tester to ensure that all of the portable electrical appliances that we sell in the charity shop or use in the centre are safe and that we meet with compliance. This has ensured we are not having to outsource this cost.

I also carry out the health and safety checks and fire checks within the building to ensure the safety of all users. In March 2022 we employed Surety Fire Solutions to conduct a further Fire Risk Assessment now that all the renovations are complete, the Fire Officer complimented the centre on both our procedures and the paperwork.



Alongside the important but sometimes mundane tasks of running the Freedom Centre one of the biggest blessings of this role has been building relationships with the local community and with other organisations who work in this community. It turns out that I am quite a good bingo caller! As such my services are utilised at our monthly community bingo nights that we run. These are fabulous evenings where we can relax with our community and enjoy the evening together. As you can see from the picture, they are very popular!

It has been a real blessing for Freedom Church to be able to employ a Centre manager, this vital role within the church leadership team has ensured that the ministry team can focus on reaching the community with the gospel knowing that the centre is being efficiently run in the background. The evidence that this is working is seen in the increase in numbers at both our midweek communion service and our main Sunday service. The new Church Family members have all joined the church because of relationships being built in either the café or the ministry groups we run during the week. Freedom Church has also planted out a new Sunday congregation in a community centre in another part of the Parish, after only a few weeks of meeting they also have a congregation of 16. Even with the building we remain outward looking.

I close this report by thanking the Fellowship for their continued support and trust in us all at Freedom Church. Your continued partnership is invaluable to the ministry here on the Mereside estate and beyond.