

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

**Sept 2020 – May 2021**

I think it is fair to say that the first chapter of my new role as the Centre Manager was not what we could have ever anticipated. Taking over the post in September 2020 during a worldwide pandemic has certainly tested my skills of creativity and resilience. It was however a joyful start to the job as we signed off the completion of phase one works with a new roof being put on the centre. Amazingly as outdoor construction could continue during the first lockdown the work was completed on time.

Taking over for phase two, the internal renovations, my priority initially was to prepare the centre with a view to use it for church to gather temporarily as restrictions were lifted. We had previously been able to use a small community centre on the estate owned by the local council, but it was clear from the beginning of lockdown that for safety purposes they had no intention of letting groups use the centre and to this day it has still not opened for use.



It was important that we try to stay connected with the community to keep the vision that the centre is a place that they feel ownership of. Clearing out the centre that had 40 years of use in it was a huge task that required people power, skips and lots of tip runs. Organising COVID safe volunteering days were hard work but a lot of fun as we started to see the potential of the building unfold before our eyes. Finally, in autumn and with support from the diocese, some remedial work on the electrics and a good risk assessment we were given access to use the centre for worship services only, our first service in the Freedom Centre after a long period of being an online church was very special.

Another of my responsibilities was to assist Rev Linda with the burden of fundraising and grant writing and take from her the responsibility of liaising with architects and contractors. This allowed Linda to focus more on getting on with the ministry that she is called to do especially during a period of restrictions imposed by the pandemic. We appointed the architects for the internal refurbishment and work went out to tender. In the background I organised community fundraising events including zoom bingo nights, toilet twinning initiatives, raffles and a Christmas fair that included a Mereside's got Talent competition. It was also important to raise the profile of the centre which now has its own social media presence where updates on the progress and plans are uploaded.

My resilience was certainly tested when the tenders came back with financial figures that were beyond our reach, in a time where we have witnessed businesses fold, grant funders stop funding and hard financial times for a lot of people it was heart-breaking to see these figures. However, we know that this is God's plan and all the resources of heaven and earth belong to him. We held a meeting with the Architects and revisited the plan asking the question – what works do we need to do to get the centre to a point of opening? The urgency for this was compounded by the need to re-build and support community post COVID where we have witnessed some of the more deprived areas of our country and indeed our community hit hard. We decided to change the plan to a 3-phase operation, with the roof complete at phase one, the immediate works to get the centre to the point of opening would be phase

two and phase three would now be the completion of the works after the centre was open and supporting the community.

Feeling more optimistic we were able under my guidance to get on with some of the tasks that would not be included in phase two, painting, scrubbing floors, fighting with bramble bushes and for the brave souls cleaning some pretty big cobwebs out of the centre ensued. One of our visions for the centre is to have a small charity shop supporting the community. People have been extremely generous in donating items



that we have initially started to sell online, and this alone has brought in almost £2,000 in revenue in the first six months and now has volunteers from our community running the online shop. It was clear from the start that storage was imperative, so we now have a great system in place for that too.

In March we received the tenders back and with £47,000 in the bank we only had half of the funds needed for phase two to progress. Another day of soul searching was needed and after a period of prayer and a series of events including grant returns and donations that could only be God given, 10 short days later the funds were available to appoint a local contractor to commence the work.

As I write this report, we are now 3 weeks into the work on site and the changes already are huge, we are hopeful that phase two will be complete at the beginning of June, this will give us 3 more weeks to finish off any painting, to furnish the centre and ensure all of our policies are in place for a potential grand opening at the end of June.



As for the future, alongside planning for sustainability I am already focussed on phase 3. Fundraising continues with more grant writing and we have persuaded (very easily) Bishop Phillip to get involved as he will be doing a sponsored walk early June from Chipping to Blackpool visiting nine Churches along the route, raising our profile, and bringing in much needed finances. Alongside this I continue to seek grant funding, plan fundraising events and am forming a steering group who will meet to ensure the running of the centre is a success and become sustainable in the long run.

I am without doubt that without a Centre Manager role we would not have achieved so much in such a short time under difficult circumstances. I would like to thank the fellowship for their continued support to our ministry on this estate, as we continue to partner with you, we are witnessing the transforming power of Jesus Christ in the lives of those we have the privilege to serve.