



SAS veteran became Christian evangelist

SAS veteran and now Christian evangelist, **Kevin Charles-Thompson**, launched his book *SAS Evangelist* at The Forum in Norwich recently, which describes his time in the British Special Air Services and his journey from atheist to evangelist. **Keith Morris** reports.

Growing up in a deprived council estate in the northwest of England, Kevin, aged 43, learnt how to fight on the streets in a world of gangs, drink and drugs.

He ended up taking drugs and stealing cars and consequently left school with nothing to show for his education having rebelled against parents and teachers. “All I wanted to do was to join the Army and get away from it all,” writes Kevin.

At the age of 16, he ended up standing at a train station with a small bag and a rail travel warrant and heading to Scotland for three months of intensive training.

“I had no idea that I was about to start a journey that would take me around the world to some of the most hostile places known to man, face life-threatening situations that I could not even imagine.”

He served in Bosnia and Northern Ireland including helping the over 200 casualties after the Omagh bombing which claimed 29 lives. He also first met members of the SAS here, which started his dream of joining them.

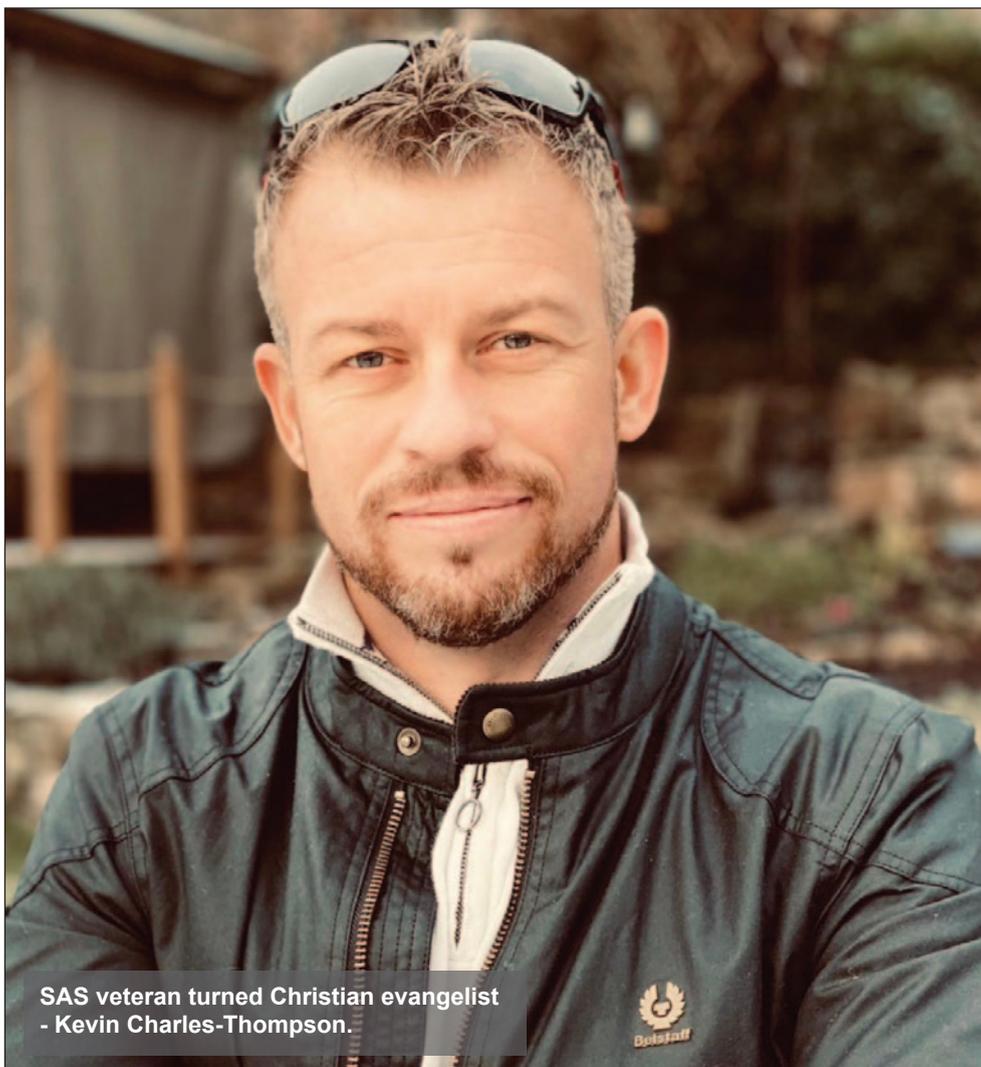
After five years, at the age of 21, Kevin left the Army, to work in warehousing and catch up on the nightclubs he felt he had been missing out on. He got into fights and was arrested for a nightclub brawl, but escaped a jail sentence.

“Something serious was happening inside me during those years,” writes Kevin. “Anger would gradually build up and become an inner rage within me. At the click of a finger I would become uncontrollable.”

Money trouble followed and he was declared bankrupt. An opportunity arose to join a maritime security team escorting ships past Somali pirates and then as a close protection officer in Baghdad.

But the desire to try to join the SAS was growing stronger and, back in the UK, Kevin tried three times over three years and ending up almost dead and in hospital on one occasion before finally succeeding.

In his book, Kevin describes night-time missions in Helmand province, Afghanistan, when, under fire and with his dog Sep he would leap out of helicopters in operations to capture senior Taliban commanders. He lived to tell the tail, unlike his first dog Dackx.



SAS veteran turned Christian evangelist - Kevin Charles-Thompson.

“Nothing comes close to jumping out of a place at night on a hostage rescue mission – I was living the dream in the SAS – Who Dares Wins,” writes Kevin.

The SAS became global leaders in hostage rescue after the daring operation to release captives in the Iranian embassy siege in Kensington, London, in spring

“Nothing comes close to jumping out of a place at night on a hostage rescue mission – I was living the dream in the SAS.”

1980. Most of the terrorists were killed and hostages released in a rescue captured live on TV when the soldiers abseiled from the rooftop down onto small balconies and into the building.

“The SAS is the world’s most elite special forces. I pushed myself physically, mentally, and emotionally to the limits a man could go to. In the unrelenting pursuit of

the truth I pushed myself to my spiritual limits, as I was taken on a life-changing journey from the darkness to light,” said Kevin.

It was whilst fighting against the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISIS that Kevin said he recognised something “quite evil” that he had not noticed before. “I was witnessing something dark and it wasn’t just another enemy force in a different geographic location – I could see the same evil working through them all, something not of this natural world. I realised that the enemy that I had been fighting against was demonically oppressed.

“I was not raised in faith, I was an atheist all of my life, I hated religion and had no time for it. Yet now I found myself in a debate on good and evil, heaven and hell, light and darkness and I started to question my view of whether God existed.”

While deployed to Iraq for six months, Kevin started to read the Bible and read of Jesus rising from the dead and conquering sin and its penalty – eternal death. And he started to talk to God and found a real hunger for him.

Kevin dreamt of climbing a mountain **Continued on page 4.**



Addicts’ help centre plan for Norwich

Christian addiction charity Teen Challenge London is planning to turn Drayton Hall near Norwich into its headquarters and a rehabilitation centre for men, after it was gifted the freehold of the hall by its owner, the Lind Trust.

■ With its panelled staircase, large historic rooms, luxury furniture and extensive wooded grounds, Drayton Hall will become home to men battling addictions and the ravages of traumatic backgrounds.

Teen Challenge run a programme that is half monastic and half boot camp to help them find freedom, purpose and hope. The therapeutic environment will be ideal for rehabilitation, says Steve Derbyshire, who is chairman of the charity and is pastor of City Gates Church in Ilford.

It is also a far cry from the charity’s roots in the east end of the city, adds Teen Challenge London project leader, Javier Lesta Candal.

“The east end is a tough area and I could see the needs all around me from the moment I arrived there in the early Nineties,” says Steve, himself a former heroin addict.

Teen Challenge London, he says, started with a single decker bus which went out around Ilford and Barking for 25 years, the outreach grew and went out to other areas including, Whitechapel, Hackney, Brixton, Ealing and Waterloo weekly giving out up to 20,000 meals per year.

“We also went onto the Gascoyne estate, which had the highest suicide rate in east London among young men at the time. Some of the stories we heard were horrific, with terrible situations of abuse.”

A more permanent ministry grew as the charity acquired buildings to develop as a crisis centre. Over the years, the site expanded as it built residential facilities to house 29 men.

Through its programme, the charity is transforming the lives of men who come to it via its street outreach programme

■ **Continued on page 10.**

GOOD NEWS

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A group of churches in Dereham have launched an ambitious project which aims to meet needs in the town, including the provision of food and skills training.



Keith Mersh and Athena Poole with the community fridge in Dereham.

Dereham churches help people help themselves

See Mini-beasts

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At the moment, the focus is on a community fridge, and Athena Poole, the Love Dereham coordinator, explains how the process works. “We receive food, close to its use-by date, or food from supermarkets and other retailers with damaged packaging. There are also generous gardeners and allotment holders, who bring in their excess produce.”

Though the doors do not open until 10am, a queue builds up on Monday to Friday from 9am, as people wait for free food. Part of the idea of the national programme Community Fridge is to prevent food waste. However, Love Dereham is finding that a large percentage of those using their scheme are in some sort of financial need. The need is so apparent, that it is now planning to use part of the space to develop a small Social Supermarket, where those in need can buy shopping essentials at reduced prices.

Though Love Dereham started as the social action arm of Dereham Baptist Church, the trustees of the charity now include three people from other Christian groupings in the town, including Youth for Christ. The latest to join as trustee is Major Michael Barwise from the Salvation Army, recently arrived from Lowestoft with his wife Major Jennifer Barwise.

Chair of Love Dereham, Keith Mersh, shared the story of how the project

began. “Starting in February this year, God spoke through a series of dreams, visions and remarkable God-incidences, showing that we should establish a centre where community action would be focused for those in need in our town.”

He had a strong sense that the vision was not just for his church but for also for other churches in Dereham. “There is a strong sense of unity across the entire local Christian community. This is not

“This is not just about churches working together but also about being a catalyst for community action amongst those of all faiths and none in our town.”

just about churches working together but also about being a catalyst for community action amongst those of all faiths and none in our town.”

Love Dereham’s vision includes not just a food hub but also energy conservation teaching, assistance with

form filling and general advice. The team is looking towards establishing a life skills type course, where those who ask for help can be given guidance on wiser shopping and cooking skills, as well as concepts of good budgeting.

“We can take action on many aspects of our vision by using existing resources,” said Keith. “These include a social supermarket and a children’s clothing bank. However, other initiatives will need a dedicated building. Conversations are ongoing about the use of a building in our town where many types of support can be provided for those in need – the ‘go-to’ place. We have had encouraging conversations with local politicians and I am hopeful that the facility we need will soon be available.”

Refugee Erica finds the strength for charity vision

Despite twice being a refugee from her home country, UEA Development graduate Erica Gateka found the boldness and strength to set up a charity helping young people in Rwanda. **Eldred Willey** reports.

O riginally from Burundi, Erica did a Masters degree in International Development at the University of East Anglia and graduated two years ago. It was a massive achievement for someone who twice had to flee her home country.

However, the painful journey had taught her some powerful lessons. "Sometimes it's not just about you," she says. "You can be a blessing. Sometimes we feel we are the person that everyone should be helping. But God says that we have so much to offer."

Erica was born in Burundi, but her parents had to flee when she was only one year old, and she grew up in Zambia. Then when she was 18, she decided to go back to Burundi for her university studies.

"There were so many things going wrong with my country," she said, "and I thought someone ought to do something about it. But I was convinced it wasn't going to be me."

She had been born with an eye condition called strabismus, which meant that her eyes didn't look in the same direction. As a result, people always made fun of her. "They made me feel I was not good enough, not worthy of love."

Although she grew up in a Christian family, her church put the emphasis on avoiding sin and did not address the inner struggles about her appearance. "I found myself hiding and feeling like God could not use me. I thought I was not beautiful."

So when there were opportunities to serve, she only followed other people. "I never took the bold step for myself. Who would want me to be their leader? I'm not good enough," she thought to herself.

"However, God had been working on me, and finally gave me the boldness to step out." Erica went to her headteacher and asked if she could host students from other schools and tell them what they could do to change the country.

"I gathered 20 young people and we just talked about our passion for Burundi and what we could do to change our communities. I was surprised that people would listen to me."

Around this time a medical missionary came to her village and did surgery on her eyes, which boosted her confidence. However, in 2015, a political crisis engulfed Burundi and she had to flee again, this time to Rwanda.

"I remember feeling overwhelmed, as if God had let me down, and I spent some time not praying. But God has His own way of doing things. He wants to work on you, and if takes a drastic move, He is going to do it."

For the first months in Rwanda, she was depressed and struggled to fit in.

"But God was speaking to me and opening my eyes. He reminded me that I had received opportunities, that I could speak English, and that now I could bless others by teaching them what I knew."

She was looking for a job, but in the meantime started to teach children in her community who were out of school how to read and write English.

"I had 25 children, then 50 children, and the



UEA Masters student and charity founder Erica Gateka.

project grew."

Through the teaching she became exposed to challenges within the community. Some children had not eaten for two days. Others were sick because their parents could not afford health insurance, even though this was only three dollars.

With volunteers from her church, she set up a centre where children could come and learn and connected with a Christian programme which taught her how to work better with communities.

"Sometimes when we step into a community, we take away its space to act for itself. But it takes less resources to believe in someone than to invest all the money you don't have."

To describe her initiative, she came up with the name 'Love and Hands'. "God showed me that everything should be done through love, and that He has put into our hands the gifts we need."

The work and team has grown, she has trained other young people to work with their communities and has now even ventured back into Burundi and over 1500 people have been helped.

If you would like to support Erica

with money, skills or prayer, you can contact her at ericagateka@loveandhands.com or find out more on

www.loveandhands.com

Article extracts from: <https://testify2222.com/podcast>

New name for Norwich church

■ A Norwich church has changed its name for the fourth time in its 170-year history, transforming from Surrey Chapel into City-Gates Church Norwich.

CityGates lead pastor, Andy Rees, said: "We were thinking about how do we reach people today in our community in NR3 with the good news about Christ."

"The name Surrey Chapel is not well known in Norwich and the name does not mean much to most people in the city. Neither the words Surrey or Chapel really represent us."

It is actually the fourth name for the church, which started off 170 years ago as Bazaar Chapel, then Ebenezer Chapel and then Surrey Chapel.

The church moved in 1985 from its former site on Surrey Street, where the John Lewis car park is now located, down to Botolph Street, the former site of the Shoemakers Guild building, which was extended.

"It has been painful for some people, as the name was very precious to the church family," said Andy. "We don't want to simply look to the past but to the future as well, so we looked for a name which is fairly neutral, which will not date but which puts us geographically where we are."

"We are close to two of the old city gates, within the old city walls."

"We want to be a place of safety and security where people can come with all their worries and concerns in life."

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Veteran SAS man turned into evangelist

■ Continued from front page and soon after he actually climbed the 3,000m mountain near where he was based. It was a very hard climb and he almost stopped several times. At the top he fell on his knees and cried out to God.

"I believe. I surrender my life to you Lord," he said to God. "The power of God hit me like nothing I had experienced before in my life and I knelt, broken-hearted and empty, in the glorious presence of Jesus as a fire went through my body. My mind was healed and my spirit set free from the darkness and brought into the light."

That day Kevin felt the call to become an evangelist for God.

Not long afterwards he seriously injured his knee while on deployment and despite spending a year in rehabilitation he was medically discharged from the SAS.

Together with wife Naomi, Kevin felt led by God to move to Cape Town, South Africa, where he spent two years helping to lead a new church. Subsequently they move to the United States to study at the Christ for All Nations School of Evangelism.

For the past few months the couple, with their two small children, have been working alongside pastors Sam and Hannah Collinson at Elim One Church in Norwich, holding evening revival meetings.

www.onechurch.uk

Norfolk church hub plan

Lighthouse Community Church in Sheringham is engaging in a number of activities which serve the local area in its mission to be established as a "Hub Church" for North Norfolk. **Tony Rothe** reports.

These activities include free meals, food hampers, children's shop, men's shed, community garden, bulb planting, as well as making its modern building available for several other groups, such as choirs, Pilates, theatre rehearsals, local clubs and societies to use during the week.

Ian Savory, senior leader at Lighthouse, said: "Not far from our church base are the beautiful ruins of Beeston Priory. In its heyday it was a place of worship, teaching, training, prayer and serving. It would have created business, inspired the arts, and celebrated God's creation with a prophetic edge soaked in intercession. Nowadays it would be called a Hub Church – and inspires us as to what Church can be."

Lighthouse Café is the base for some of the initiatives, such as Family Fridays, where local families can come and enjoy a free meal on a Friday teatime every fortnight along with a time of fun and games for the children. There is also a weekly community lunch, known as "Meet and Eat" on Thursdays offering a two-course meal for



Lighthouse members planting bulbs on Cromer Road in Sheringham. Picture by Gareth Gabriel.

only £5, which is open to anyone who wants to just meet up with other people to enjoy lunch together.

Café Manager Maggie Rothe said: "With rising prices starting to take hold, it is more important than ever that we do what we can to help the local community, and these meals are proving increasingly popular – they are available to anyone who wishes to join us."

With this in mind, the church has been giving out food hampers during some school holidays. The initiative started when free school meals were discontinued in school holidays during the pandemic, and has continued since then, with dozens of food parcels being

given out during the recent October half-term holiday.

Maggie said: "We have only been able to do this because of the generosity of our church folk and local businesses, but we are convinced it is meeting a real need."

Lighthouse is also taking part in the national Men's Shed scheme with Sheringham Shed in the town centre and Priory Patch, a community fruit and vegetable garden in nearby Beeston Regis. Separate workshops for men and women are available at the Shed, mainly on Tuesdays, and there has been a recent Christians Against Poverty Life Skills course.

Work at Priory Patch generally takes place on Wednesday mornings, where anyone can come along to help develop the community garden.

Daniel Ward, Lighthouse Community Pastor, said: "We have just held a family "Plant a Tree" day to plant over 100 fruit trees which will, eventually, provide the ingredients for jams and chutneys and maybe even home-made wine!"

Lighthouse has now opened a community shop selling pre-loved children's clothes, toys, and equipment. ThreadBear is open during the week from Tuesday to Friday, generally when Lighthouse Café is open ie 10.30am to 2.30pm daily.

Sue Savory, one of the leaders at Lighthouse, said: "Many families are really struggling at the moment, and if we can

help out by providing good pre-loved children's clothes, toys, games, etc at knock-down prices, then that should prove a real blessing in those situations."

There is also a recycling bin at the Cromer Road building for any unwanted clothing, shoes, fabrics, handbags etc, which is available for anyone to use. The church carries out occasional community activities on Sundays, instead of the usual morning service. In early October, people from the church planted hundreds of daffodil bulbs alongside Beeston Common and on Cromer Road.

Ian Savory, leader at Lighthouse, said: "As a church we want to take part in activities which will provide some benefit for our local community. Hopefully when these bulbs flower in the spring, they will provide a little colour and joy in everyone's lives."

Lighthouse has also partnered with the Christian charity Hope Into Action to house a homeless family in Sheringham, and plays a major role alongside other Sheringham churches in BeachLife, which provides free activities to children and young people for a week in the summer holidays and at other times.

Ian Savory said: "We want to be Kingdom Come in our immediate community of Sheringham, Cromer, and Holt, and in the surrounding villages and beyond. We are not the only thing God is doing in this area, but we do have our hearts set to the beyond, that we might be influencers of nations, inspired by the Holy Spirit and doing Church with the servant-heart of Jesus."

Contact details: hello@lighthousesheringham.org or visit lighthousesheringham.org

For Sheringham Shed and Priory Patch, email: office@sheringhamshed.org



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A warm welcome is promised

Churches are joining community centres and care homes across Norfolk to host 'warm spaces' where people can go free of charge to keep warm this winter and access other facilities such as hot drinks, advice and wifi. **Helen Baldry reports.**

Today the average household fuel bill is almost double what it was this time last year. Even with government interventions, more than three-quarters of households in the UK, or 53 million people, are expected to fall into fuel poverty by January 2023 (University of York).

In response to the cost of living crisis, warm spaces have been popping up across the nation. Jason Baldry who works for STN church in Norwich went looking for an online directory to register their location as a 'warm bank', but couldn't find one, so he decided to build one himself.

Jason launched warmspaces.org in September and dozens of venues have registered their locations on the website. There are many across Norfolk plus warm spaces further afield in Northern Ireland, Cornwall and Scotland.

Jason said: "Covid taught us the importance of collective action and communities working together. A central listing of warm spaces could be a lifeline for people



Pictured is the Corton House Warm Space and, below, website pioneer Jason Baldry.



who don't know where to turn to for help. People simply shouldn't have to choose between heating and eating. I've been overwhelmed by the response of venues listing

their facilities and it is fantastic to hear about the additional benefits such as friendships formed and reduction in social isolation."

Corton House, a Norwich based not-for-

profit care home and independent living site, is expanding its provision into the local community this winter with their Over 65s Community Hot Spot at the Jubilee Centre in Lakenham.

"Things are difficult for all age groups, but we were concerned that older people – who are already particularly vulnerable to colder temperatures – may feel a greater

sense of stigma around asking for help and find it more difficult to access services in a digital world which can exclude them," says Imogen Bowers, Marketing and Fundraising Coordinator.

Sessions will run every Tuesday throughout December and January, from 1-3pm, and there is no need to book – simply drop in. There will be 'ice breaker' activities such as Boccia, Bowls and Seated Exercises; alongside a free, simple hot meal; tea and coffee; and discretionary 'Warmth To Go' packs including items like blankets, socks and hot water bottles for people to take home.

Importantly, there will also be an advice hub, with an alternating roster of charity partners including Age UK Norwich, Age Healthy Norwich and Hear for Norfolk, providing access to relevant support alongside a wide range of information from other charity partners signposting people to longer term help.

Another venue listed on the Warm Spaces directory is Norwich Central Baptist Church which opens its premises as a warm space two days a week, offering hot drinks and free wifi.

New Hope Christian Centre on Martineau Lane is open on Wednesdays offering free food and drink and the ability to charge devices. Cromer Parish Church is open daily and offers a space for families with toys and books. The King's Glory Church in King's Lynn is an accessible venue open twice a week with people on hand to chat to combat loneliness.

Find out more warm spaces at: www.warmspaces.org

Warm places in Dereham

As rising energy prices make it harder to heat homes, churches in Dereham are leading the way in creating warm spaces where people can go.

■ The social action group Love Dereham has collated a list to let concerned residents know that support is available.

It comes as 'warm banks' – aimed at those who cannot afford to heat their homes – begin opening across the country.

On October 1, a rise in the energy price cap meant the average UK household saw their energy bill rise to £2,500.

Love Dereham's initiative, 'A Warm Place', brings together organisations including Dereham Baptist Church, Meeting Point and Dereham Cancer Care.

Keith Mersh, chairman of the group, said: "This is something happening under various names throughout the country. It seemed only right that we offered ourselves as being the people to collate the information for Dereham.

"We are using the term 'Warm Place' because it has connotations both in terms of

temperature and being welcoming for the community. A lot of the venues involved already exist and are offering their services, but it can help sometimes to assemble information like this in one, accessible place."

He added: "We see A Warm Place as another aspect of what we are seeking to do, which is to make life better for our community."

Dereham venues involved in A Warm Place are as follows:

Meeting Point, St Withburga Lane: 9am to 4pm, Monday to Friday (3pm on Thursday)

Dereham Cancer Care, Georges Road: 10am to 2pm, Monday and Tuesday; 10am to midday, Thursday

Green Pastures, Norwich Street: Let's Chat, 11am to midday, Monday to Thursday

Salvation Army, St Nicholas Street: 10am to 3pm, Tuesday

Toftwood Methodist, Chapel Lane: 10.30-11.30am, third Thursday of each month

Dereham Baptist Church, High Street: 1-3pm Thursday; 10am to 1pm Friday

Cowper Memorial Congregational Church, Market Place: Coffee morning, 10am to midday, every Friday

Dereham Library, High Street: 9.30am to 7pm, Monday to Friday; 9.30am to 4pm Saturday

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Sarah helps church snuff out exclusion

Churchwardens Angie Yeoman and Carolyn Cast from Wiggenhall St Germans have won a Through the Roof award after they appointed Sarah as Chief Snuffer.

■ Sarah used to feel a bit left out at church: "I have Down's Syndrome and severe hearing loss," she said. "As I do things slowly, people don't always know how to talk to me. I felt excluded because everyone had a job, and I didn't, even though I wanted to help."

Things changed earlier this year when Sarah's Churchwardens, Angie Yeoman and Carolyn Cast, spoke to Sarah to try to help.

"Angie and Carolyn asked me if there was anything I would like to do as they wanted to include me. I am now the 'chief snuffer'. I snuff out the candles after the service. I also read the Bible lesson sometimes, I like to do this. I am also part of the washing up team, we have a lot of fun while doing jobs."

Sarah was so pleased about having these roles in her church that she and her mum Lesley nominated Churchwardens Angie and Carolyn for a Luke 5 Award from Christian disability inclusion charity Through the Roof. The award certificate was presented in the Harvest festival on Sunday September 18.



Sarah snuffing out a candle.

Annette Stuart from Through the Roof said: "It's essential that every church and community not only serves disabled people, but also listens to and encourages everyone to serve in a role themselves."

Through the Roof trains and equips churches and other organisations to be inclusive of people with any disability. It publishes resource material, runs short term overseas missions, distributes refurbished wheelchairs in developing countries and runs accessible holidays, among other programmes. It also makes the Christian gospel accessible to everyone affected by disability – disabled people and their families.

To find out more about celebrating disability inclusion, and how your church could help, visit www.throughtheroof.org

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Playing Jesus world view up

Norwich actor **Dominic Rye** decided at the age of eight that God did not exist – then he ended up playing Jesus in a Passion Play, and his world view turned upside down. **Eldred Willey** reports.

The 34-year-old actor, who now calls big-sky Norfolk his home, grew up in the Midlands. His mother was a drama teacher and Dominic was only 12, when he tried his hand at acting for the first time, as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It was intoxicating. There was a mysterious alchemy, he discovered, for bringing the house down.

In August this year he had an opportunity to put on display locally his acting and musical skills when a group he belongs to called West End Has Faith came to Dereham and Aylsham. The troupe unites Christian professionals who work in showbusiness.

"The beauty of West End Has Faith is connecting Christian performers with each other," said Dominic. "We encourage each other and share advice. It's always comforting to be reminded that our worth is defined by God, not by the success (or otherwise) of auditions, especially in such a precarious industry."

It was not always obvious, however, that Dominic would become an actor. His parents talked him out of going to drama school and into something more sensible: a degree in languages at Leicester University.

By the time it came to a Masters, however, Dominic's sense of the ridiculous was beginning to kick in. Did anyone really want to read 30,000 words about how one work of Shakespeare was translated into French? Another gift now came to his rescue: music.

"I was eking out my student income at the time by accompanying 18-year-olds on the piano as they prepared auditions for drama school," he said. "They seemed to have so much courage in taking on the big city, and just to be so much more alive. In the end it was irresistible, and I decided to have a shot at it myself."

He won a place at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in Swiss Cottage. "It was a furnace of a formation," he remembers. "There was practice from eight in the morning until ten at night. Living in each other's pockets and learning to trade in the currency of emotion."

And the music came into play: violin, cello, accordion, penny whistle and learning to walk, legato or staccato, to the rhythm of the song silently playing in his head.



Dominic has performed Shakespeare in Brazil, played in the *Jungle Book* and as the Mad Hatter, and acted in a play in Derby with sign language before heading to China.

Dominic had been experimenting in a detached fashion with dating apps, but in September 2019 stumbled across a profile he felt excited about. The reality was even better than the avatar. "Jen was funny,

turns actor's side down

Norfolk actor Dominic Rye.
Picture by Ania Walisiewicz.



morphed into a stay with her family in Zurich," he said, "followed by one in a family cottage in Wereham, west Norfolk, and a seascape proposal on a rocky shore in Cumbria." In June 2021 the couple moved to Norwich.

When he was eight, it was the semi-finals of Euro 96 which had struck the death blow to Dominic's childhood faith.

He had prayed the England football team would win the penalty shoot-out against arch-rivals Germany, and they didn't. Evidently the universe was missing a deity.

Then one rainy night, when he was 17, he was driving fast along a road where foliage had overgrown a corner warning sign. Instead of the car following the laws of physics into a line of trees, it made a fish-hook manoeuvre through a soft bush and into a field. He couldn't explain his unexpected escape.

He started to believe in the concept of God, but it was not until he was doing his Masters that the spark jumped between his head and his lifestyle. At that point the courage to audition rose up, and it all came together.

Having moved to Norwich, Dominic and Jen joined The Garden, a network of small Christian communities which meet across the country and where he has plenty of opportunity to use his musical gifts.

Earlier this year, a friend who had played Jesus in a passion play in Surrey tipped him off that the company was looking for someone new to fill the role for the summer and Dominic auditioned successfully.

He played the role in a way which brought out the human struggles of Jesus, particularly in the Garden of Gethsemane scene, when Jesus is talking to God the

Father about whether he must really go through the suffering of the Cross.

"A dialogue grips the audience when the stakes are high," said Dominic, "and the Garden of Gethsemane became an agonising tug of war between Jesus and his Father. It could have gone either way."

Of all the roles Dominic has taken on, this is the one which has had the biggest impact on him both on and off stage.

and I knew that you can't be witty unless you are also clever," he said.

Flying off to China looked like an unpromising way to nurture a budding romance, but whoever wrote this scene had something else in mind. A month into a Sino-Shakespearean adaptation, Covid-19 hit and Dominic caught the penultimate flight out.

So Jen's planned visit to China

Matthew Project gifts to be doubled

This Christmas, Norfolk-based drugs and alcohol misuse charity, the Matthew Project, is raising much-needed funds through The Big Give Christmas Appeal.

■ From Tuesday 29 November to Tuesday 6 December, every donation is doubled with secure matched funds. This year, the charity stands to raise over £60,000 to go towards vital youth services, but they need your help.

The transition from child-to-adult is a challenge, but now young people face additional pressures. The Matthew Project supports children and young people with a range of issues including mental health, which, because of the Covid-19 global pandemic, has resulted in a rapid decline for many under 18s.

Even before Covid-19, disturbing trends in mental health were emerging across England. Growing child poverty, homelessness and food poverty have all contributed to an unprecedented rise in mental health problems. A staggering 1 in 6 children had a probable mental health condition in 2021, up from one in nine in 2017.

The Matthew Project seeks to support young people through one-to-one, outreach, group work as well supporting parents and carers. They offer young people the opportunity to build emotional resilience, boost self-esteem and increase in self-confidence. Together they find hope and look forward to a brighter future.

This festive season you too can bring hope to young people across Norfolk by donating to The Big Give Christmas Appeal. Scan the QR code below to double your donation, or visit the website:

www.matthewproject.org/thebiggive





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THE MATTHEW PROJECT
Finding hope together

City foodbank gives out 4,700 parcels

■ Norwich Foodbank gave out 4,793 emergency food parcels to people across Norwich in the last year – with 1,790 of these going to children.

Between April and September 2022 Norwich foodbank distributed more food parcels than in the same period last year and anticipates that this rise in need will continue as they prepare for what they expect to be the toughest winter yet.

Hannah Worsley, manager at Norwich foodbank said: "Like so many across the country, we continue to see an increase in the need for our service, but I know this is only part of the picture. In Norwich we have several Social Supermarkets, independent foodbanks and other food aid providers all seeking to help people in crisis.

"We are extremely grateful to the public and our communities for their support – volunteering, donating, prayers and facilities – but we are a sticking plaster and not a longer-term solution. We

have commissioned direct support from Citizen's Advice, Shelter, and British Red Cross to provide on-site support at our distribution centres as we know so many services are stretched and our vision of seeing an end to the need for foodbanks will only be realised in partnership with others."

Norwich foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust's network, which reports record levels of need in the last six months, with more than 1.3 million emergency food parcels given to people struggling to afford essentials between April 2022 and September 2022. Almost half a million of these parcels went to children.

The charity has warned that food banks are at 'breaking point', both physically and mentally, and are set to face the hardest winter yet as they expect to provide more than 7,000 emergency food parcels a day on average in the next six months.

norwich.foodbank.org.uk



Pictured at the CRE awards presentation are, from the left, Paul Renouf from Speaking Volumes with Irene Humphrey, Helen Cockburn and trustees Sheila Knowles, Christine Dive and chair Lance Birks.

National award for Christian bookshop

The Green Pastures Christian bookshop in Dereham has won a national award for providing boxes of Christian books to 21 local schools.

Green Pastures in Dereham is one of the very few Christian bookshops left in East Anglia. On October 13, managers Irene Humphrey and Helen Cockburn with three trustees were delighted to receive a national Community Impact Award at the Christian Resources Together event during the Christian Resources Exhibition at Sandown Exhibition Centre in Surrey.

Irene said: "The award was the result of being able to provide boxes of selected Christian books for 21 local schools' libraries through grants from the Speaking Volumes charity.

"Green Pastures processed the highest number of these grants in the UK in 2022. Speaking Volumes is an incredible scheme which means children of all ages have access to Christian literature – books full of love and hope! To receive the award at this point when so many bookshops are struggling, is such a privilege."

Green Pastures is located a short walk off the High Street in Norwich Street, Dereham and Helen added: "People tell us that as they enter Green Pastures they feel a sense of peace – we hope so! We try to put books and gifts in the window which have messages of love and encouragement, as well as quotes from the Bible to help people and to make

them think as they walk past.

"As another important part of our ministry we provide bookstalls for coffee mornings, churches, and other events so that those who cannot come to the shop have the opportunity to buy Christian books, Bibles, cards and gifts. This is a great help leading up to Christmas. Do contact the shop if you would like a bookstall at a forthcoming event.

"Those who come through the shop doors soon discover that Green Pastures is so much more than just a bookshop. In the community space opening from the rear of the shop, our partners, Dereham Baptist Church and Love Dereham, host a weekday morning 'Let's Chat' coffee time where anyone can pop in and enjoy a free cup of tea or coffee and find someone to talk to.

"Various clubs for our community, like Knit & Natter and Craft & Sewing, are also held regularly in that area.

The biggest draw for many in Dereham is the Community Fridge which has been a real blessing for our community! Together, we try to provide an atmosphere of love and encouragement for anyone who comes in."

Irene said: "Green Pastures has been in Dereham for many years and has never previously won an award, so this was a very special recognition of the team's dedication and hard work, for which we are immensely grateful."

The shop is open from 9.30am – 4pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 4pm on Saturday. The staff are always ready to help customers with enquiries in the shop or over the phone (01362 697953) and purchases can be made online at: www.greenpasturesdereham.org.uk

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Patrick brings a message of hope

Charity founder **Patrick Regan** brought his message of hope to a Norwich church recently after himself fighting back from depression and anxiety. **Eldred Willey reports.**

Bouncing Forwards was part of a national tour by the mental health charity Kintsugi Hope and St Stephen's church in Norwich hosted the evening, led by charity OBE recipient Patrick Regan.

Patrick used warm colours and music to create an atmosphere through which he could transmit his message of encouragement.

After a series of painful operations on his legs, Patrick had decided that the world would be a better place without him. In Norwich, on Saturday October 22, he explained why he is now a man of hope.

Patrick had been awarded his OBE for founding and growing the charity XLP, which supports young people at risk from knife crime.

However, after an avalanche of health problems for himself and his family, he fell into depression and anxiety, and recorded the experiences in his first book 'Honesty over silence'. The message was that 'It's OK not to be OK'.

"But I didn't want people to be stuck in not being OK," he told his audience at Stephen's. "So I decided to write Bouncing Forwards, a book about resilience.

"Most people think of resilience as bouncing back. But why would I want to go back to my pre-trauma self? I want to bounce forwards."

St Stephen's is among many churches across the UK currently running a 12-week Kintsugi Hope course, which explores themes such as honesty, shame, perfectionism, anxiety and anger. About two-thirds of people who join the courses are people of faith, but the courses are open to everyone regardless of world view.

Using humorous dialogues with his team, Patrick toured through many of the themes of his latest book: mental wellbeing, silencing the inner critic, having compassion on yourself, and thriving through life's challenges. Jess Cooper, the charity's communications officer, created a chat-show style to draw



Patrick Regan speaking at St Stephen's church in Norwich.

out his ideas.

He shared that after stepping down from the leadership of XLP he told God that he was willing to do anything except lead another charity: he never wanted to do fundraising again. He felt he heard God saying: "Don't think charity, think movement."

Kintsugi Hope is a movement which aims to create safe spaces where people can talk, be honest and process things. It derives its name from the Japanese art form Kintsugi which uses golden lacquer to mend broken pottery. The strapline of the charity is 'discovering treasure in life's scars.'

"Success," said Patrick, "is looking in the mirror and not wanting to change what you see." He shared a series of stories about how he and others had found courage to face life's challenges.

He recounted how his former PA, Ludivine Kadimba, had come up with a word for him: 'flawsome', meaning 'someone who embraces their flaws and is awesome regardless'. Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said to him: "Patrick, you make God smile."

"In his resurrected body, Jesus had scars," said Patrick, "so there are going to be scars in heaven. I can't rescue people. But I can see the grass growing in the cracks between the flagstones."

Patrick finished the evening by praying for the audience: "I thank you, God, for every person here. I pray that people will walk away from here with a bit more of a sense of hope, and knowing that they are loved and cared for, in Jesus' name, Amen."



Aseel, left, is a recent JAEP-assisted Midwifery student who is now volunteering as a midwife in Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem and hopes to find a job there.

Chance to support refugee students in Palestine

■ A Norwich educational charity, set up in memory of a Norwich Anglican priest, to support students from a Palestinian refugee camp, is inviting people to support its Christmas appeal – to be launched on November 29 for one week only.

The John Aves Education Project (JAEP) financially supports young people from Dheisheh Palestinian Refugee Camp in Bethlehem to study for an undergraduate degree at their local universities.

JAEP was set up in memory of Rev Canon Dr John Aves, an Anglican priest in the Norwich Diocese, who was living and volunteering in Dheisheh at the time of his unexpected death in January 2004. To date it has financially supported over 74 young people to study for an undergraduate degree and raised over £460,000.

The charity will launch its Big Give Christmas Challenge Campaign on Tuesday November 29, from 6pm – 8pm at the United Reformed Church, Ipswich Road, Norwich, NR4 6QR.

JAEP Secretary, Liz Magem, said: "We are delighted to report that JAEP was successful in the first stage of the Big Give Christmas Challenge. At the November event we will launch the next stage of the Christmas Challenge and aim to raise £2000 online in the week commencing November 29. If this is achieved, JAEP will have raised a total of £4000."

From November 29 to December 6, donations can be made at: thebiggive.org.uk (search for "funding Palestinian refugees undergraduate study") and any donations will be match-funded.

donate.thebiggive.org.uk/campaign/a056900002NEXUZAA5
During the launch evening, guests will hear more about JAEP students and its future plans, watch 'Ambience', a Cannes prize-winning film about Dheisheh refugee camp, and enjoy Middle Eastern light refreshments.

To see if any tickets are still available, email info@jaep.org.uk or ring 07976 040971. Tickets are £10 per person.

THE JOHN AVES EDUCATION PROJECT

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Why are we waiting?

Norwich teacher **Ruth Lilley** reflects that the period of waiting and preparing for Christmas can be of benefit to us all.



choose to arrive early.

During this busy season, I feel my changing mindset is going to be of benefit. There are not likely to be many spare moments as we journey through Advent to Christmas Day – sometimes it can even seem quite chaotic. I can sometimes miss the reason for the waiting.

Jesus came, at the perfect time, to share love and peace. These gifts are still needed as much today as they were at the time of His birth. This year, especially, I believe there are many reasons why we might feel distant from these gifts. For some, it might be really tricky to comprehend that love and peace can be freely given.

However, this Christmas time, if we simply tread the next step, taking care to not miss those moments where we can wait and be still, then we can open our hearts to receive the truth that Jesus is still here with us now.

I hope, as we move through this season, I will continue to choose to slow down and find time to appreciate those moments of waiting, and as I receive the love and peace of Jesus be willing to share that with others too.

■ To be honest, I often tend to rush, whether it is in order to get to somewhere or to get a job done. Recently, I have begun to wonder why it is that, if I have to be somewhere for 7pm, I will aim to get there for exactly 7pm! I have never been one to allow for unforeseen things along the way, and my mindset has always been one of not wanting to hang around if I arrive too early. What would I do with those minutes of waiting?

However, I am discovering that waiting is not necessarily a bad thing, and I am changing my mindset to appreciate those moments where I might just have to wait for five or so minutes because my journey went smoothly, or I purposely

Drayton Hall near Norwich – the new home of Teen Challenge London.



Addicts' help centre plan for Drayton Hall

Christian addiction charity Teen Challenge London is planning to turn Drayton Hall near Norwich into its headquarters and a rehabilitation centre for men, after it was gifted the freehold of the hall by its owner, the Lind Trust.

running by December 5 and Teen Challenge. Centre Manager, Sam Mooney, who lives in Norwich, said: "We are looking for support towards the adaptation of the fabulous building which, although in excellent condition, needs to be adapted for use as a rehabilitation centre."

The needs include: installation of showers, building of additional bedrooms and offices, double wardrobes, CCTV, Tannoy system, two new vehicles, gym equipment, new beds, mattresses, pillows, duvets and classroom desks.

Changing lives

■ Through its 17-month programme, Teen Challenge aims to free men from addiction and help them to become disciples of Jesus.

"Our goal is to help them live drug and alcohol-free lives, become effective in society, find salvation and walk in the purpose they were created for," says Javier.

During the strict 11-month first three stages, men are supervised and supported to give up smoking, drink and drugs.

Through 14 biblically-based studies they receive help to deal with the root problems of their addictions, with many coming from abusive and broken families.

"We help them deal with their self-destructive thinking and problems from their childhoods, then disciple them to put their trust and reliance in Christ so they can live free."

A structured programme offers classroom teaching of City & Guilds-recognised courses including English, health and social care, customer services, maths and employability. Meanwhile, Bible studies offer discipleship and the chance to tackle key issues such as forgiveness and rejection.

In the second stage of the programme, to prepare them to re-enter society, additional afternoon employment instils a work ethic in men whose addictions and backgrounds have often prevented them from holding down jobs.

"The Teen Challenge motto is 'putting hope within reach of every addict' and that's what we do; give them hope that Jesus can set them free and deliver them from their addictions."

■ Contribute to the JustGiving online appeal at: www.justgiving.com/campaign/tclondon
Find out more at www.draytonhall.org.uk
Article extracts: *Elim Direction Magazine*.

■ Story continued from front page or through local churches.

But while its programme helps men break free of addictions, gain an education and undertake work experience, its location in the poorest part of Redbridge was becoming an increasing problem.

"We had people outside our site smoking or taking drugs, fighting and screaming. Cars were coming past with music booming. The guys with us were trying to get away from all that. We needed to get them out."

So the offer of the freehold of the fully-furnished Drayton Hall by Norfolk charity the Lind Trust this year has proved to be a God-send.

"It's like a hotel," says Steve of the 36-bed facility that Teen Challenge London had initially thought to use as a centre for its county lines rehabilitation programme.

"Everything here is top notch and it's more conducive to the men because they won't be tempted to go back on the streets. It's in its own grounds and has a church, workshops, 600-year-old trees. It's phenomenal!"

The quiet, stunning environment is hugely conducive to rehabilitation, adds Javier: "It's surrounded by trees and we're close to canals and the sea, so we can do canoeing and kayaking."

"We've got a gym, a games area and a dining room too."

"We've gone from an industrial estate on the back of a very poor community to a serene facility with endless surroundings."

"It's a big step of faith coming out of London but it gives us more capacity and the men will do better in this environment. They'll be able to concentrate on becoming free of their addictions, learning and discovering faith."

Steve is also excited that in addition to the new facility, Teen Challenge London is already working with churches in Norfolk, including Eternity, Proclaimers, Soul Church and Hingham Christian Fellowship, to launch outreach in the area.

The plan is for the centre to be up and

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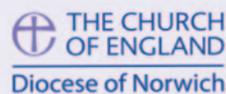
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Follow our adventures on:



Car salesman became Norwich church pastor

When his wife Jill became a Christian, car salesman **Vic Ready** from Taverham was determined that the same would never happen to him – then “he was hit with a holy sledgehammer” and ended up as a church pastor. **Eldred Willey** reports.

“I’d been married a year when my wife Jill became a Christian,” recounts Vic. “There was a quite dramatic change in her life. For the next five years she wanted me to become a Christian and, quite honestly, there was no way that was going to happen,” he said. “I really wasn’t interested.

“Besides, I thought I couldn’t be a successful car salesman if I was going to be a Christian, as perhaps car salesmen don’t always tell the whole truth.”

Vic did agree to read two Christian books though – ‘The Cross and the Switchblade’ by Nicky Cruz and ‘Nine O’clock in the Morning’ by Dennis Bennett.

“At the end of the Nicky Cruz story, I thought: ‘What has happened here is real’. For several months I was really convicted, and it reached a point where I felt I had to decide either for or against.

“One night when Jill was at church, I decided to ask Jesus into my heart just to see if it would make any difference. I knew I needed to be clean, so I thought it would be a good idea if I had a bath at the same time.

“Not much happened, but in the morning, I knew I had been born again. There was a complete change in me, as if I had been hit by a holy sledgehammer.

“I worked at a car dealer in Yarmouth, and as I drove to work it felt as if it were the first day of my life. I determined that when I got to work, I would tell everyone in the garage what had happened to me, so that is just what I did.

“When my boss came in, I told him, and he had a good laugh. He said: ‘I’ll give you a couple of weeks.’

“I honestly thought, I won’t be able to keep my job. How am I ever going to sell a car without... perhaps not telling the whole truth? But within 18 months I was the car sales manager.

“I felt incredibly light, and I had such a heart to read the Bible. My ambitions had

Car salesman turned Norwich church pastor Vic Ready with his wife Jill.



been to be successful, to make money and enjoy life. And now out of the blue I wanted to serve God.”

After finishing as a car sales rep, Vic became a bank rep and then went on to become a pharmaceutical rep. But in addition to this he started to lead a new church in Taverham.

“Taverham Evangelical Church, Tec, for which I am the Senior Pastor, has been blessing people now for over 30 years,” said Vic, “and we have had some wonderful times during that period. I am passionate about the church serving the local community, it is so fulfilling.”

Over the years, hundreds of people have been helped by the church. “Many have been born again, healed, and gone on to

serve the Lord in various ways. I am more excited about what God is doing now in the local church than I have ever been in my time of ministry.”

Although Vic hopes to be able to retire next year from being Senior Pastor at Tec, he says he will always be involved in church ministry. “Over the years I have experienced many miracles, and I hope to be able to share some of them by ministering whenever and wherever I am asked in the future.”

Vic mentioned particularly his latest answer to prayer. “For seventy years I have had asthma and on two occasions I was hospitalised with acute asthma attacks, one of them was very nearly fatal. I was very grateful for the drugs that changed my life but despite praying often for complete healing it simply didn’t happen.

“Three months ago, whilst in prayer once more about my breathing being worse since Covid, I felt the Lord tell me to stop taking the various drugs that I used every day. This I did as I was sure that I had heard correctly, that is now over three months ago. Since then, I have not needed or indeed taken anything for asthma, and I can do so many things now that before I couldn’t.”

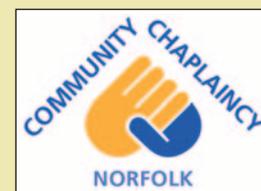
Article extracts are taken from: anchor.fm/testify2222
www.tec-church.com

Community chaplaincy offers support for ex-offenders

Community Chaplaincy Norfolk (CCN) is a Christian charity which provides Volunteer Mentors for ex-offenders of all faiths and none, supporting them to rebuild their lives after prison, as its team explains.

How does it work?

■ Based on a model established by national organisation The Community



Chaplaincy Association, CCN employs a manager: to recruit, train and support volunteer mentors; to assess potential clients; to liaise with the prison authorities, probation, and other relevant agencies; and to allocate clients to mentors, all based at St Stephen’s Church café in Norwich city centre.

“This has been one of the best things I’ve found to help with rehabilitation... I don’t think I would have made it on my own if I’m honest.” CCN Client.

The Client Journey

■ Our work is not time limited. Once a person has been accepted as a CCN client, a mentor will meet them several times in prison, to build up a relationship and identify the kind of support they need to achieve their goals.

On the day of discharge, we try to meet each client at the gate and accompany them to accommodation, probation, or other appointments. This is followed by regular meetings with their mentor to discuss progress and work through any challenges.

“It’s just helping that person to walk life’s journey, really.” CCN Mentor.

Volunteer Mentors

■ Our mentors come from a diverse background of life experiences and beliefs. They range in age and there is a good gender mix. All mentors undertake an initial training which is followed by additional training and group support sessions. All mentors are also supported by regular one-to-one sessions with the CCN manager. If you might like to become a Mentor for CCN, please look at our website and get in touch.

The Wider Community

■ Norfolk has a rich diversity of services available to help clients with applying for benefits, support agencies for addictions, and opportunities for voluntary positions, positive activities, training, education, or work. Mentors signpost clients to these agencies and explore options with them. We co-ordinate a quarterly forum for organisations working with people with convictions. If you are interested in the forum or to discuss partnership working, please get in touch.

A Christian ethos – open to all

■ CCN is not part of the prison system and, while it is a Christian charity, it is not attached to any one denomination. We welcome clients and mentors of all faiths and none.

■ Website: www.norfolkchaplaincy.org.uk
■ Email: info@norfolkchaplaincy.org.uk

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