Eastbourne Community Wellbeing Café – the development process and beyond…

The weekly Community Café at St Saviour's, Eastbourne is a partnership between St Saviour's Church, Together in Sussex and East Sussex County Council. As Mental Health Well-being Facilitator for Together in Sussex, I have taken the lead in negotiations, setting up the procedures and marketing the Cafe. What began by identifying a need has expanded to include a weekly writing class and Meal for One – a monthly meal for those on their own.

Stage One: Negotiations

The Café came about because I was asked by Fr Mark, St Saviour's Church, Eastbourne for advice. A client user (M) from Southdown Recovery Centre, looking for alternative community space for a drop-in café, had asked about using the hall at St Saviour's for a closed group for those attending the Recovery Centre. As part of their recovery journey, they wanted more time for peer support.

St Saviour's agreed to offer a weekly 2-hr slot, open to anyone with mental health problems - people of any faith or no faith but Southdown had no funding available for hall hire or refreshments. St Saviour's agreed to support this venture as part of their social response to the local community.

I contacted the Mental Health Commissioning Manager, East Sussex County Council, (ESCC) who fund the Wellbeing Service delivered through Southdown about the possibility of funding refreshments and advertising. Fr Mark, the Commissioning Manager and myself met again and I explained about TiS and my role in supporting churches and communities to respond effectively to Mental Health needs by working in partnerships.
Following our discussion, ESCC offered £5000.00 to support the development of the Community Wellbeing Café.

Stage Two: client engagement

I met the Wellbeing Client group to ask for feedback about the poster advertising the café, which was very helpful. They asked that the word 'problems' be changed to 'challenges,' which they felt better reflected they were moving forward on a recovery journey, rather than a mental health problem which kept them static.
The Café started on 27th October 2019, running from 2-4 every Tuesday afternoon and refreshments are available throughout.

Stage Three: Quarterly review

27 people have accessed the café. A core attends every week; others, who all identify with the group, come when they can.

The Café is supported by Elle Weaver, Mental Health and Wellbeing Facilitator, Together in Sussex, and Fr David. At present, we are supported by two or three volunteer helpers from St Saviour's, but the eventual aim is to have regular helpers with relevant experience. Fr Mark, Parish Priest at St Saviour's, also pops into the Café and wishes to become more involved, for himself and the parish.

Attendees: There is a wide range of attendees. Some have learning difficulties, some social problems. Others have experienced breakdowns at some stage in their lives. All see the Café has a place in their recovery. Most are from the Eastbourne area, but one travels in from Polegate. Most attendees share their journey experience, and talk about their current problems, while others have chosen not to, so far.

Activities: In the first quarter (October to December 2019) we focussed on settling people in, building relationships and sharing experiences. Some knew each other from other places – writing clubs, art groups etc. Others came to the café with no previous relationships with others. It could become a significant meeting place for the socially disconnected. Activities/games are provided, but so far people have wanted mainly to meet and chat. We are in the process of purchasing two lap-tops for attendees to use for casual use and information purposes.

Advertising: Posters and flyers are distributed electronically and locally in hard copies. *The Eastbourne Voice* is advertising the Café in their events section.

Comments: from clients:

"I only got out of bed this afternoon to see Taegan." (The Café's dog!) C

"it's good to know I am not the only one." S

"Can I talk to you?" S

"This started slowly but is building into a comfortable, pleasant and enjoyable environment, rathe like a club. Different people keep coming and all are made to feel welcome. Unlike other places, no one feels coerced to go to groups, as, after all, this idea was set up as a friendly drop-in and to that extent, it has already met its objectives. However, nothing in life stands still, so we are currently throwing ideas around as to how we might progress this and one idea is to start a creative writing group, which might start at an earlier time and overlap with the main drop-in." M

"It's brilliant, really nice place to come." R

"Elle and David are very supportive, warm and welcoming. They are providing a safe place to socialise and to help people's resilience and wellbeing." Ma

"Elle and Dave very welcoming, biscuits nice selection and fruit are provided. Friendly group." A

Can I help your Church?
My role as Mental Health and Wellbeing Facilitator has enabled the development of this positive church-based social initiative. This format has now spun-off into a weekly writing group at St Saviour's and the monthly Meal for One, where those on their own can meet and eat in company.

I have been able to facilitate relationships, alleviate fears and navigate the local mental health networks. St Saviour's Church now offers a safe, inclusive space for people with mental health challenges and is reaching out to those on their own. What began as part of our continual task to raise mental awareness and remove stigma around mental health is bearing fruit in the related areas of loneliness and isolation.

Can I support your church in building relationships with your local funding partners, to provide a safe, inclusive space for people with mental health and social isolation challenges?

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