

The Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health

# Being Alongside

## Summer 2024

Image: Sunflowers Café, Freemantle Baptist Church



# Fancy a cuppa?

**INSIDE:** From wellbeing cafés to addiction recovery groups...the six new projects started in the past year with *your* support

# Being Alongside Summer 2024

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Editor and design: Trevor Parsons  
Commissioning editor: Jamie Summers  
Printed by Printinc Ltd, SM6 7AH

## Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health

E&W Registered Charity: 1081642

Patrons:

The Right Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani  
Dr Larry Culliford

We are a faith-inspired, voluntary association of individual subscribers and affiliated groups who recognise the importance of spiritual values and support in mental health.

We have a network of supporters throughout the United Kingdom. We welcome and encourage people whatever their faith or belief system.

We are primarily concerned to promote and encourage 'being alongside' people experiencing mental or emotional distress.

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# Grant scheme a great success

**Our £20,000 two-year grant programme was designed to encourage new initiatives. And it's working.**

Last year the trustees of Being Alongside took the decision to release some of the charity's long-held assets to encourage new initiatives that directly deliver our objective of being alongside those experiencing mental health issues, in a local setting.

Chair of trustees Ben Wilson writes: "As the list of successful projects shows *[see p6]*, we've been able to support schemes right across the country, organised by a number of different Christian denominations.

"We consider applications carefully to see that they have identified a clear local need and have a viable plan to make a difference. This includes assessing the sustainability of the project over the longer term, after our funding runs out. We take into account things like matched funding and support in kind offered by churches or other local organisations, and whether there is a realistic plan for recruiting, training and retaining volunteers.

"The response to the scheme has been fantastic and we're keen to continue spreading the word. We are also determined to stay in touch with the projects we support, and you'll be able to read about their work in future editions of this magazine as well as on our website. In time, we hope that some of the projects will decide to affiliate to Being Alongside. To encourage this, last year the trustees decided to waive group affiliation fees for two years."

"Towards the end of 2025 we will need to take a decision on whether the scheme should be extended into future years. While we would love to be able to commit to this now, the sensible thing is to review not only how the projects themselves have fared over the two years, but also the extent to which the charity's supporters have felt moved to replenish our national funds. £20,000 is not a small commitment, but it is one we took in faith and confidence. Giving away more to promising local projects will in part depend on whether we are able to secure more donations nationally."

**Please donate at [beingalongside.org.uk/donate](https://beingalongside.org.uk/donate) or by cheque to "APCMH" at the address opposite**

***"The response to the scheme has been fantastic"***

***Ben Wilson,  
chair of trustees***



## CONFERENCE REPORT

# Rich experience

**Trustees, supporters, affiliates and branches gathered this Spring to reconnect, listen, reflect, and plan for the future**

This year's annual conference, held on 9<sup>th</sup> March in the wonderful setting of St Peter's, Battersea, at the heart of the Winstanley Estate, explored different ways that churches and other community groups can effectively 'be alongside' those experiencing mental health challenges. Drawing on the rich experience of our affiliate groups, the gathering enjoyed stimulating presentations from various examples of community-based pastoral support, and lots of opportunities to chat about how these beacons of good practice could help inspire other such projects.

The day began with an opening address by Dr Larry Culliford, who is Being Alongside's new Patron. Larry reflected on his experience as a psychiatrist, in particular in training new practitioners to respond attentively to the needs of their patients. Larry stressed the importance of 'being' rather 'doing'; and of sitting in true company with those who are suffering. He reflected on the role of spirituality as part of the human experience, and the value of meditative practice.

Larry concluded with a fitting quotation from Thomas Merton on the importance of trusting God on the journey—wherever it leads us. *[Turn to page 18 for an edited version of Larry's address.]*

Next, Canon Andrew Wilson, Vice-Chair of Croydon APCMH, introduced the organisation's work supporting residents of Croydon and surrounding areas. The group has been active since 1989, offering various drop-in sessions and weekly activities for those experiencing mental health challenges.



Conference deep in discussion after Dr Larry Culliford's presentation

## CONFERENCE REPORT

Andrew spoke of the need for all such projects to accept their limitations, reflecting that ‘small is beautiful’—and the value of being realistic about the operating environment of the organisation, while being open to surprises.

At present, Croydon APCMH is hosting a Friday group offering a two course hot lunch, a chance to reflect and pray together, and opportunities to get involved in different creative activities. Andrew offered beautiful reflections on the nature of the charity’s ministry in journeying alongside those in need.

Andrew ended his remarks by quoting Rowan Williams on the value of compassion and understanding between people—and in “sharing common, mutually assured wellbeing, poured out by God and shared”.

After an enjoyable sandwich lunch, attendees reconvened to hear about Being Alongside’s grant scheme, which enables local organisations to apply for seed corn funding for new projects that help those with mental health difficulties. BA Chair Ben Wilson listed the projects which had already secured funding through the scheme, with beneficiaries spread from Axminster in Devon to Frodsham in Cheshire [see map of projects overleaf]. Ben set out how applications are being considered quarterly, and attendees were encouraged to spread the word about the availability of the grants.

As a further example, BA Treasurer John Vallat spoke about an emerging project in Godalming, Surrey, where a longstanding church-backed community café is now offering a specific slot in the week when those with mental health challenges can drop in and be assured of a safe, warm space and a friendly ear. BA has recently awarded a grant of £1,250 to the Cellar Café to develop and grow this work [see p16].

To round off the day, Sarah Rackham, Chair of Battersea Befriending Network (BBN), introduced the work of the charity, which links up those keen to forge a supportive connection with someone local to them in the south west London borough. Sarah and some of her fellow trustees described the steps they have undertaken to ensure its proper governance, and spoke with great warmth and appreciation of the skills and time their fellow volunteers offered, both as trustees and as befrienders. Their presentation included a moving insight into the value of befriending relationships, with contributions from David, Nayani and Elsie who are all variously involved in the the charity. David and Nayani talked about how they were matched and the friendship that has grown since; and Elsie spoke about the benefits of BBN’s work both to individual volunteers but also to the wellbeing of the wider community. It was an eye-opening and inspiring presentation, and attendees at the conference were hugely grateful for the time that each speaker kindly gave to contribute to the day.

Overall the day was a great success, providing an opportunity for those who have been involved both in the national charity and its various affiliates and branches to meet, reconnect, swap experiences and plan for the future.

We look forward to the next such occasion!



**You can listen again, or for the first time, to recordings of our Spring conference on our website - [beingalongside.org.uk](https://beingalongside.org.uk) - where you can also hear fantastic talks from the three previous conferences we have held in recent years. Well worth the listen!**

**Frodsham**

'Bee Friends'  
mental health  
drop-in coffee  
mornings  
+ a men's group

# The new projects you've helped start

**Tiverton**

a Kintsugi Hope group  
at One Life Church

**Axminster**

drug and alcohol  
recovery project at  
Pippins Community  
Centre

## SOWING SEEDS

### Nottingham

Samaritans listening course  
based at St Andrew's church,  
Langley Mill

The two-year grant programme we announced last year has attracted a great deal of interest from around the country, and a total of six brilliant new projects are benefitting from Being Alongside's start-up funding totalling around £10,000 so far.

**Donate** to help us do more.

[beingalongside.org.uk/donate](https://beingalongside.org.uk/donate)

### Southampton

Sunflowers Café,  
a Renew Wellbeing  
Space at Freemantle  
Baptist Church

### Godalming

mental health drop-in  
at the Cellar Café,  
run by Warehouse  
Christian Trust

## SOWING SEEDS

# Sunflowers



**Anita Pike** of Freemantle Baptist Church in Southampton introduces the new drop-in they've set up with help from Being Alongside

**W**e launched Sunflowers Café in November 2023, and are open for three hours every Wednesday afternoon, following the model and practices of Renew Wellbeing [see 'Who Else?', p23].

Our doors are open to anyone from the local community, with hot drinks and a selection of delicious homemade cakes on offer. We start and end each session with a short time of prayer in our prayer corner.

The grant from Being

Alongside enabled us to set up the café by funding the purchase of a banner for outside the building, a coffee counter from IKEA, a mobile craft organising unit, two airpots for hot water and coffee, and other equipment such as stationery and craft materials.

In the early months Sunflower Café has been used mainly by church members who find the prayer time very valuable, and enjoy meeting for coffee and a chat. Many of them live alone, and a few have serious mental health issues. They find it a great resource midweek to be able to grow in their friendships, and enjoy some simple fun activities.

We also have a few parents who bring their toddlers and babies on a fairly regular basis, and it has been a great meeting place for anyone who lives locally to come in and see the church in action in a friendly and non-threatening environment.

The cakes are provided by volunteers from the church, and we have a pot for voluntary donations, to help cover the cost of tea, coffee etc.



## SOWING SEEDS

At Christmas we made festive light garlands and fingerprint Christmas cards. People have brought knitting and crochet projects along, and we usually have a jigsaw puzzle on the go.

In May, we invited local artist Will Rosie, known as 'Mr Mosaic', to join us to lead a mosaic project. He designs and makes mosaics which are placed in various outdoor locations in Southampton, and we are making a large sunflower-themed one to add to the side of the church building. Anyone who comes to the café is invited to join in and we will be showcasing this at our upcoming Family Community Fun Day.

The café has a lovely, friendly atmosphere, and those who attend say it is a safe, welcoming place where they feel valued as individuals. It has a positive, wellbeing focus which is appreciated by those who are able to come even if they are having a bad day and are struggling with their mental health.

What of the future? Well, over the year ahead we are hoping to continue to raise awareness in the local community in order to invite new people to attend. We are planning to replace our solid front doors with some glass ones that will make the entrance to the church more welcoming and accessible. We are not in an area with very high footfall, so the growth of the café will rely on promoting it via our website – [freemantlebaptist.org.uk](http://freemantlebaptist.org.uk) – and Facebook, plus leaflet drops and word of mouth.


*“The café has a lovely, friendly atmosphere”*



Sunflower Café attendees working with 'Mr Mosaic'

SOWING SEEDS

# Pippins says thanks



One of the beautiful spaces at Pippins

“A huge thank you to **Being Alongside** from Pippins Community Centre here in Axminster, Devon, for your support and for granting us £1,500 so that we can cover room hire costs for our mental health teams and for refreshments. Providing a safe space for people as well as hospitality is really important to us here. We have several tea and coffee points around the centre where people can make a cuppa and sit for a while.

With your funding, the agencies we've been able to offer free space to have been our local mental health team from Haydons Court NHS clinic who have been alongside our drug and alcohol recovery project; our social prescriber and health and wellbeing coach from our local doctor's surgery; and also Headlight, our local mental health charity for young people, which is based in the building. Headlight has been having a fallow year to reduce their costs so this grant has also been a blessing to them.

It's been amazing to be able to provide space for all of these agencies to support our lovely people who are already here at Pippins engaging with a variety of groups, particularly our drug and alcohol recovery project. It has made a huge difference to our people and we can see that people's self-esteem is improving. People are making wise choices about looking after their own mental health and wellbeing, and some are even getting involved in other projects such as our new community garden project, our housekeeping team and our pantry team. It's amazing!

We have also been able to offer free space to Learn Devon who have just completed a 12 week Level 2 mental health course looking at the effects of

## SOWING SEEDS

drug misuse and social media on mental health. This course has equipped and encouraged six people from various teams here at Pippins which now has a ripple effect into centre life.

It feels like your grant has catalysed us to share space with some really important agencies who are vital in supporting our people here on the ground and trust that the money to pay the bills will come in. It's important to us that our people are able to access support in a building that they are familiar with and feel safe within. We have therefore continued to offer the free space for the agencies already described and Learn Devon have now been in conversation with us about being a long-term partner.

Our Baptist community celebrated our sixth birthday on Friday evening on the beach. One of the activities was tying ribbons of gratitude onto a 'wreath of gratitude' to say thank you to God for so many blessings in our six years of life and work here at Pippins Community Centre. One of the ribbons represents all the provision that has been made for Pippins in beautiful and creative ways such as yours. We are so very appreciative of your generous support.

*“It feels like your grant has catalysed us to share space with some really important agencies”*

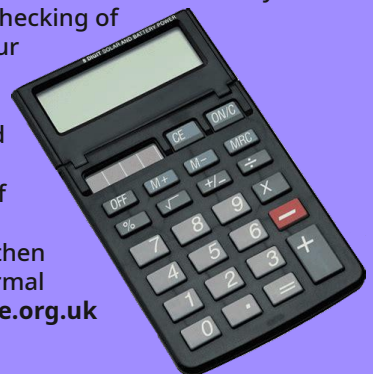
”

## Treasurer needed!

Being Alongside's honorary treasurer, John Vallat, is stepping down later this year after many years of dedicated service to the charity (a fuller tribute to John's contribution will follow in a future publication).

John's departure means the charity is looking for a successor who can work with our administrator on the proper financial running of the organisation. The responsibilities are not onerous: we need someone to verify online bank transfers, undertake some basic double checking of certain calculations, and work with Lucy to produce our annual financial accounts and budgets.

No formal accountancy training or experience is necessary, though clearly it would help to have a head for figures, and proficiency and confidence with both online banking and Excel spreadsheets. If you know of anyone who might be interested in taking on this voluntary position (or you personally are interested), then our Chair Ben Wilson would be happy to have an informal discussion. Please email Ben at [chair@beingalongside.org.uk](mailto:chair@beingalongside.org.uk)



## BEARING FRUIT

# Arnold turns eight!

Set up in August 2016 with the help of seed funding from Being Alongside among others, the mental health befriending and support group at Arnold Methodist Church in Nottingham has been going strong for eight years now.

The overall aim of the group is to support and befriend those with mental health problems, the lonely and marginalised, their carers, families and friends. Tea, coffee, juice, biscuits, soup and rolls are served, and the group offers therapeutic activities, crafts, knitting, games, jigsaw puzzles and art with its own volunteer artist. But there's no pressure to do anything—clients can just arrive and enjoy the company. A volunteer counsellor is available for people to speak to, and between noon and 1pm one of the volunteers leads a spiritual group called “thought for the day” in a quiet adjacent room. There is a Christian resources corner with a prayer request box, and prayer ministry is offered on request.

“We are not a mental health service,” says co-ordinator Sue Clayton, “but we offer friendship and listening, preventing social isolation, improving mental health in individuals, preventing relapses and people developing further mental ill health. We offer a wealth of information directories, leaflets about various mental health conditions and other services in the district. We also signpost to a variety of other services across the community that people may find useful for their needs. We work with the health trust, other churches, GPs, social services etc, and often invite guest speakers and integrated services to give talks, information and interaction with our clients. If we believe more professional help is required we refer our clients to statutory services. We also work with a local food bank.”



Co-ordinator Sue Clayton (centre), with members and volunteers

## BEARING FRUIT

*I very much enjoy coming to the group. Everyone is so kind. Nadea, Syrian refugee*

Sue has a background in counselling and mental health work, and she and husband Phil worked for years to develop the vision for the group, with much prayer. Phil acts as secretary of the group. They both have long experience in the mental health field, including volunteering for the Nottinghamshire Mental Health Trust. Sue was a public governor for the trust for eight years, as well as a volunteer and inspector for the Care Quality Commission. Phil has worked as a volunteer for five years on an acute ward. They have both been long-term carers for their son who has enduring mental health issues.

The group's other volunteers come from Christian and non-Christian backgrounds, some with a history of mental health problems, others with qualification in mental health services, and others who are carers and friends for those with mental illness.

We get as much out of this group volunteering as the clients do.

Sheila, Di, Naomi and Kathy

All volunteers have regular safeguarding training and are DBS checked. At their annual general meeting, the group's volunteers review the effectiveness of their work and how it can be done ethically and safely. Additionally, Sue is accountable to the Church Council, delivering quarterly reports and updates on the operation of the group. Over the

past eight years it has grown exponentially and has received both national and local recognition for its work, winning national competitions both in London and locally. Sue was the overall winner of the "Mayor of Gedling Women Who Care" award for international women's day. The group has also helped set up two other similar hubs in Nottinghamshire.

"We have become a family," says Sue, "but we do encourage clients to develop tools to enable independence in their own lives rather than become overly dependent on others. We have a group of faithful core members and also continually welcome new members. We managed to maintain contact throughout COVID-19 and many of our regulars returned when we re-opened again. Many services across Nottingham signpost clients to our group but people also self-refer to us."

"Over the years we have been very grateful for ongoing donations from councils, other agencies, personal and anonymous donations which have enabled us to provide buffets, Christmas parties and special occasions such as special birthdays and anniversaries, as well as an annual summer trip. We also receive tickets to the Pantomime courtesy of the Nottingham Playhouse."

It is so heartening to see the Arnold group continuing to thrive. We wish Sue, Phil and all of the group's members and volunteers all the very best.

We would miss this place a lot if it wasn't here. Janet and Pauline

It's different from other groups I go to and the Christian input from "thought for the day" impacts me most. Nigel

I'm having a lovely time, this is the first time I've ever been on a boat or a holiday cruise (on the river cruise) Annette

There are nice people here and I have made new friends David

# What is 'being alongside'?

**John Vallat** shares his thoughts on the meaning and practice of our association's operational name

As readers will know, "Being Alongside" is the operational name which was adopted by The Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health some years ago. The meaning and practice of "pastoral care" may be the subject of debate. In this short article I am expressing my own views. My hope is that it may encourage others to in turn share their own thoughts, perhaps for future publication on these pages.

I believe that an important element of pastoral care or support is "being alongside". But what does this mean? One illustration is in the Servant Song written by Richard Gillard in 1977. It has been described by Charles Parvey, choirmaster at Holy Trinity, Malvern as being "an expression of the Christian call to community and friendship, marked by selfless service, walking alongside and bearing one another's joys, sorrows and fears". Here are some verses from the Servant Song:

*"Brother, sister, let me serve you; let be as Christ to you; pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too."*

*"We are pilgrims on a journey; and companions on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load".*

*"I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you; I will share your joy and sorrow, till we've seen this journey through"*

These verses emphasise the journeying together, the mutuality of the relationship and the giving and receiving on both sides. That illustrates my idea of "being alongside".

## The Need

Over the years I have used the mnemonic '**ALIVE**' to remember some of the key aspects of "being alongside" someone as we journey together. We all benefit when we are:

- Accepted
- Listened to
- Involved and Included as an Individual
- Valued
- Encouraged



With that support we may feel more “alive” and able to enjoy life more.

While this may have some truth for everyone, I feel that it is particularly true for those of us who have struggled or are struggling with mental health issues. I speak from experience. After my psychiatric hospitalisation and forced retirement from my professional career was the acceptance and understanding that I received from the Cellar Christian Café in Godalming and being included in its management. It gave me a new purpose and I felt valued and encouraged to use my experience in a positive way. It was in contrast to the attitudes of many others towards someone seen as “mentally ill” and unacceptable.

I also recognise the need that most of us want to give as well as to receive love and kindness. The first verse of the Servant’s Song (above) highlights the point that we should be willing to receive as well as to give. That is the essence of a good relationship.

### **Examples of “being alongside”**

There must be numerous examples of “being alongside” amongst the supporters of this charity. As individuals we can be alongside anyone we meet. As churches and faith communities, we can create a welcoming environment

## REFLECTIONS

and involve those who may not be so well accepted elsewhere. And there are many examples of group projects. At Being Alongside we have, over the years, developed different ways of meeting this need. These have included drop-in sessions, befriending schemes, hospital visiting, outings, retreats, seminars, courses and prayer and worship.

### **The café model and the Cellar in Godalming**

In our last magazine, our administrator, Lucy Roose, told us about her experience of sharing a table in a café with anyone who wanted to join her. There was a specific weekly day and time that she would be there.

For some 20 years there was a weekly meeting on Friday mornings at Haslemere Methodist Church when the BA Grapevine Group joined the church's Open Coffee morning. The group had its own table or tables but became part of the community and got to know others, helpers and customers. Importantly, friendships were formed and some of those who came to the Grapevine also met at other times.

Last Autumn I approached the Cellar Café and it became affiliated to Being Alongside. Our intention was to establish links with GP's surgeries so as to encourage those who might benefit to come and be welcomed in the café. Since then I have been attending a weekly management meeting which includes a time of prayer as well as operational discussions.

It soon became clear to me that the staff and volunteers already understood the concept of "being alongside" and that many of the people they were supporting had mental health issues. Maybe the GPs already knew about the café, but we persevered with our approach to the surgeries. After just over a year, some progress has been made. We are working with Care Coordinators and a Medical Assistant from two separate surgeries. Through them, we hope to have contact with the local social prescriber. We have started a monthly Being Alongside afternoon when tea and cakes are offered and we have a chance of getting to know new people and how they feel we might be able to support them. There remains the question as to how best to encourage people to take the first step to come and visit the café. We are also uncertain whether to provide specific sessions for those with mental health needs or whether it is better to encourage integration. We do not know how, if at all, this might develop. We may not achieve the original aim. At least we have tried and continuing to try to "be alongside". And we have journeyed together!

### **Other projects**

It is valuable and encouraging to hear about other projects. Please let us know what is happening near you. I would very much like to see other contributions to our newsletters, website and magazines. We have so much to learn from each other.

And it is really good news that Being Alongside's new grant scheme has been able to make awards to various projects over the last year, as you can read about elsewhere in this edition. We look forward to hearing how they develop.



# Someone's...

**Fr John Cullen** reviews the “heartbreaking, yet hopeful” film *Someone's Daughter, Someone's Son*

The May 1997 edition of the *BIG ISSUE* contained a photo of a 15-year-old girl who had been out of contact with her family for two months. Lorna Tucker spent 18 months on the streets before finding a way out. Now a successful filmmaker, she released this documentary about homelessness in February 2024.

It's a clear-eyed look at the problem, recognising its severity and complexity, and emphasising the possibility of change. Poignantly narrated by Colin Firth, it unfolds stories which show that homelessness is definitely not a personal lifestyle choice, as a government minister claimed last year.

Lorna recounts her own troubled teenage years in various segments. She also shares illuminating stories with past and present homeless people. These stories share incidents about children fleeing broken homes due to violence and addiction and women forced to choose the vulnerability on the streets over a domestic abuse situation. The film highlights the lack of safe options for people who are searching for safety, security and shelter.

Lorna's interviewees are open, thoughtful, reflective and endearing. We hear from Earl Charlton who, due to drug addiction, was homeless for 18 years. He is now a case worker for the homeless in the north-east of England. It is profoundly moving to watch Earl fight back the tears as he recalls the inner pride and personal dignity that he felt when he was given the chance to train as a barista and earn his own wages. He gets a laugh when he admits that his initial response was, “I'd be a brilliant barrister!” The dignity of work and the value of listening to people as well as investing in them with a sense of self-reliance are key themes.

In the final 20 minutes, Lorna meets charity workers and volunteers to debate and discuss what can be done by Government and policy-makers to address in a holistic way the issue of homelessness.

*Someone's Daughter, Someone's Son* is a conversation starter. The film gives the homeless a space where they can tell their stories to forge a connection between the audience and the people we walk past every day.

*I dedicate this film review to Anne Delaney—a daughter, a sister, a mother, a nurse and a friend to many, who was homeless for seven years and died on a Dublin Street at the age of forty-seven on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2024.*



Find out more at [somedonesdaughterfilm.org](https://somedonesdaughterfilm.org)

# Be what you are



Addressing our conference in March, our new patron **Dr Larry Culliford** revealed how he learnt to become what he is

Here's a true story. I once created a training programme for medical students, and would ask them to interview a patient and 'take a spiritual history', making use of two sets of questions: "Are you religious or spiritual in any way?" And, "Where do you turn for inner strength, courage and hope when things are not going well?" One young man spoke movingly afterwards of how an elderly lady spent a whole hour talking about love. A young woman reported that, in three years as a student, this was the first time

she'd come away thinking she'd actually helped somebody. So, just broaching the subject of spirituality can be helpful, and in both directions; for the interviewer as well as the interviewee. To my way of thinking, being alongside is like that. Importantly, it is not doing... It is being.

I prefer the term 'patients' to 'service users'. Its Latin origin means, "The one who suffers". The word 'compassion' has a similar root and means 'suffering with'. Being Alongside, both the notion and the charity, speak, do they not, of compassion, of engaging with and sharing the suffering of others?

I began thinking about spirituality during my training in psychiatry in New Zealand and Australia. At medical school, we learned first about the healthy body, then about what went wrong; but, in psychiatry, we were taught about mental illness from the start, both symptoms and treatment together. So the key question arose for me: "What is mental health all about?" I've been reflecting on that ever since, and quickly realised that one needed to consider a spiritual dimension, as well as physical, biological, psychological and social dimensions of human experience and understanding. I also became convinced that mental

## BEING ALONGSIDE PEOPLE

health involved growth towards wisdom and spiritual maturity, concluding too that facing loss, and the threat of loss, can stimulate such growth.

Years ago, papers were published about a hybrid condition, so-called 'schizo-affective disorder', when schizophrenia sufferers became depressed. Thinking about it differently, I noted that the illness often occurs in teenagers, interrupting education, damaging job and earning prospects, spoiling family relationships, reducing the chances of finding a life partner and having a family. Before you even consider the illness itself, you therefore have a person who is grieving over a massive loss of potential. It helps to expose this aspect, because nature provides a healing process leading to growth.

Consider also spirituality and the addictions; not only gambling, drug and alcohol dependence, but other common addictions: eating, shopping, sex and pornography, social media, gaming, and violence, for example. Note the success of the spirituality-based 'twelve-step' method introduced by Alcoholics Anonymous. People with destructive levels of craving are seemingly trying to fill a 'black hole', an unfillable negative space, the only lastingly effective remedy for which involves the experience of a deeply personal spiritual connection. The vast emptiness can be filled only by the boundless magnitude of the Holy Spirit.

I have been guided spiritually since boyhood. My family were not religious, but I discovered Christianity at boarding school, aged eight. However, by the time I got to university, I had stopped attending services. Medicine took the place of religion, until a number of events brought me back to the Christian fold.

Back in England, I eventually bought a house five minutes walk away from a big church. One Sunday, I went there, as the service was about to begin, finding it remarkably packed. I squeezed quickly into a pew at the back; then, just as I sat down, had to stand up again because the organ started and in came this enormous procession and choir, brushing past. At the back was a bishop with a crozier, a shepherd's crook. Well, I'm Larry the Lamb, aren't I? So this was me being gently shepherded back into the church. And since 1988, when I was appointed to my post in Brighton, I have been regularly to the beautiful 12<sup>th</sup> century church in the town where I live.

An earlier experience of guidance followed from my great interest in the wisdom of other faith traditions. Before resuming Christian worship, I spent time with Tibetan Buddhist monks, who taught me to meditate. I studied some wonderful Buddhist, Hindu and Taoist scriptures, and made several pilgrimages to holy places in India. After my return to England from Australia, unemployed and unsure about psychiatry, I was undecided about a career. At a retreat in a Buddhist centre on the banks of Morecombe Bay, I began wondering about joining a religious order, but knew I wasn't a Buddhist, and didn't then know anything about Christian monasticism.

*“What we  
have to  
recover is  
our original  
unity. What  
we have to be  
is what we  
are...”*

*Thomas Merton*

## BEING ALONGSIDE PEOPLE

On the final afternoon, I strolled down to the bay. Sitting on a stone bench in that beautiful place, I went into a meditation and lost myself. I don't know precisely how long I was in that happy state, but when I came back to myself I was being addressed, given instructions. It was both like and unlike a voice; not out loud, but equally not exactly within my head. It was clear though, saying, "You are a psychiatrist, Larry. That is what you have trained to do. Go and do that!" Instantly, and unequivocally, I thought, "Oh, yes! That is what I will do... But how?"

A few days later, in the advertisement pages of the British Medical Journal, I found my next job, a training position, which I needed before sitting the British psychiatry exams. I sought an appointment with the Professor of psychiatry at St George's Hospital, where his secretary said, "Well, he's next door, and he's not doing anything. Shall I ask if he can see you?" The Prof invited me to apply and that was that. Doors opened. I got the job.

Back in psychiatry, I discovered no-one paying attention to spirituality until I joined the Scientific and Medical Network, through whose meetings I did meet some others, and through them Andrew Sims, an earlier patron of this charity. As a group, we decided to set up within the Royal College of Psychiatrists a 'Spirituality and Psychiatry' special interest group (SIG). Thinking it would be a subversive little coterie of like-minded people, coming together to discuss this topic quietly among ourselves, we were doubtful of our prospects initially, because we needed three hundred support signatures from other College Members. Fortunately, though, these came through within a week. Now there are over four thousand members of the SIG, out of a total College membership of about twenty-five thousand. We began holding day conferences. We contributed to the College a leaflet on 'Spirituality and Mental Health', a version of which is still promoted on the College website; and there have been two books on spirituality and mental health, originating with the SIG and published by the College.

In conclusion, I feel blessed and guided by the Holy Spirit towards making the kind of contributions I've mentioned. It's delightful to find fellow-travellers along the way; and it's now a very heart-warming and exciting development to join you, the Being Alongside community.

I would like to finish with reference to the Cistercian monk and spiritual writer, Thomas Merton, who has been a great influence on me. One of his quotes seems to encapsulate the holistic vision I am recommending and seek to espouse: "We are already one, but we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are..."

I will end with Merton's prayer [*see back page of this magazine*] which applies perfectly to me, and may apply to the charity also. I will let you judge for yourselves. Thank you all.

More information about Larry, his books, journal papers and blog details, can be found on his website: [www.LDC52.co.uk](http://www.LDC52.co.uk)

# Looking back

The ever devoted **Jamie Summers** reflects on almost 30 years of involvement in our charity

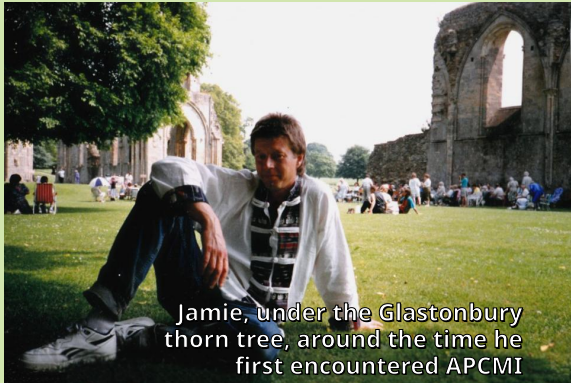
In the early nineties I was running a drop-in centre linked to Hammersmith & Fulham MIND attracting up to 100 people a day, known as Consumer Forum. I had undergone a traumatic time in early 1992 being admitted to Springfield Hospital with cannabis psychosis—my treatment led to my changing career to work in mental health. Visiting the hospital's chapel, which reflected my Christian faith, was then dismissed by some psychiatrists as symptomatic of mental illness. It seemed to me that my mental turmoil was tantamount to a tussle with God, who came to my rescue. In Autumn 1995 I met the charismatic Jeremy Boutwood, then Chairman of APCMI (Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Illness), and Pam Freeman at a Guild of Health seminar. APCMI's ethos mirrored my conviction that much of mental ill health has a spiritual core.

Jeremy and Pam invited me to listen to Jean Vanier speaking at Friends House and I reciprocated by asking them to speak to my Consumer Forum people one Sunday in Hammersmith. Both events were inspirational and soon I joined the APCMI Committee, rising to become its unofficial Vice-Chairman soon after.

When after a few years I no longer worked directly in mental health, I took a back seat until 2013. When work commitments lessened, I rejoined the Committee of APCMH (Pastoral Care in Mental Health), now with the added soubriquet Being Alongside. At this time we were meeting in rooms at St Paul's Church, Marylebone, sometimes enduring four-hour sessions! There were moves to enrol our charity onto social media sites which I resisted, not being a fan. Who needs abuse from trolls?

Soon after a think-tank session at a residential retreat, notable for disappointing quarters but excellent lemon drizzle cake courtesy of our Administrator, I took on the role of Chairman, doing a five year stint ending in 2019. My three elder sisters weren't as impressed as I might have hoped, but for me it was an honour to be appointed Chair of a national mental health charity.

I undertook to visit all the drop-ins, cafés and befriending schemes associated with us, and enlisted Suzanne Heneghan (an ex-Chair herself) as my Vice-Chair. Her help was invaluable and we together revamped our tri-fold information



Jamie, under the Glastonbury thorn tree, around the time he first encountered APCMI

## RETROSPECTIVE

leaflet and info sheets. Persuading Canon Roger Royle (of BBC Radio 2 fame) to become a Patron when Bishop Stephen Sykes died was beneficial. Roger had been one of the vicars at my school.

We twice took stalls at the annual Christian Resources Exhibition at Excel in London, even though it cost us some £1,000 a pop. Suzanne sourced shoulder bags and pens with our logo and we distributed scores of magazines and info sheets to delegates. Whether our attendance was worthwhile is a moot point but we *were* the only exhibitors addressing mental health issues in a church environment. Suzanne, Miriam Reyes, Margaret Rainbird and I manned our stalls, and in the second year we exhibited paintings by Adam Boulter.

During my tenure we made the key appointment of Trevor Parsons to edit and produce our magazine, *Being Alongside*, after the many years of diligent service in that role by Steve Press. Trevor also took on the task of migrating our website to a more modern system that makes it easy for staff and trustees to update. Nick and Gail Cotton, the extraordinary couple devoting every Wednesday evening to run the Forest Hill drop in, were particularly helpful in Trevor's recruitment.

A couple of disappointments were that I didn't manage to interest a Burgess Hill church in starting an APCMH affiliated café; and that, despite many hours of hard preparatory work by Mary Wright (formerly Hillier), we did not succeed in publishing a separate tri-fold leaflet aimed at encouraging UK churches to do more for the mentally distressed. There may have been some relief when I returned to being a Trustee without portfolio after my five-year stretch, as relationships were sometimes difficult. Nevertheless it was an honour to have served as Chairman, and gratifying to have encouraged sufficient donations to our cause over the years to ensure that APCMH/BA was in a healthy financial position when I retired from the role.

Temporarily Gail Cotton took over as Chair before Richard Allen stepped in in 2020. Marlene Collins, the Administrator, after many years of devoted service decided to retire in early 2021. Geoff Shorter, Helen Trout and I advertised the Administrator's position in the *Jewish Chronicle*, the *Church Times* and elsewhere. We were delighted when Rev'd Lucy Roose accepted the post and she has subsequently become vital to our charity's progress, not least by securing a change in our banking facilities—a bit of a challenge these days, ask Nigel Farage!

New additions to our Committee were Ben Wilson and Stafford Cunningham who encouraged the restarting of conferences post Covid lockdowns—something we hadn't done since John Vallat's days in the '80s and '90s. In 2021 I was asked and agreed to become Chair again for a year. At this time some were doubtful about APCMH's viability and thought we might have to close down and gift our assets to some other like-minded charity. I argued strongly that our Christian based ethos is unique, and that our message should not be dissipated. With John's support my viewpoint prevailed, and APCMH rededicated itself to its work.

I remained as a Trustee on the Committee for the permitted nine years until late 2023. We are now in the safe and secure hands of the superb and dedicated Ben Wilson as Chair and the indispensable Lucy as Administrator. May God continue to bless our work.

*Floreat Being Alongside! Florebit!*

# RenewWellbeing

Continuing our series looking at groups with similar aims, let's meet the dynamic Christian charity **Renew Wellbeing** which, in less than a decade, has grown a network of 260 wellbeing spaces and places where it's OK not to be OK

**I**n 2010, full-time primary school teacher, mother of three, and enthusiastic Baptist church member and leader Ruth Rice had a breakdown. Suddenly, seemingly inexplicably, it was all too much.

With all that was going on in her life—all which she loved doing—she had simply “forgotten that I was a human being. Nobody else was terribly surprised when I had a breakdown, but I was! Because I hadn't looked after myself very well. I'd been burning the candle at both ends, and to be honest, church was a big part of that. I wanted to change the world, and I wanted everybody to come to know Jesus, and I wanted to be the best mum and the best wife. And I wasn't the best anything. And there was a day came that I just couldn't get out of my bed.”

Recounting her story at a Renew Wellbeing training course for churches organised by the Diocese of London, Ruth says: “The straw that broke the camel's back—and it still makes me laugh thinking of it—was just trying to think ‘what shall we have for tea?’ I slid down onto the kitchen floor and cried for an hour. I remember thinking: ‘This isn't right—I'll just have a little rest.’ And as it turned out I couldn't function in my life for about a year.”

One of the things she found most challenging in this time was how to deal with the way she was used to experiencing her practice of religion. As a church leader, it had all been about “busyness is next to Godliness”, and serving the Lord at a breakneck pace. “I'm glad for it,” she says, “but it turned into a work ethic that made me forget that I was a human being first.”



Renew Wellbeing spaces encourage crafts and hobbies

## WHO ELSE?

Ruth found she couldn't even remember passages she had just been reading from the bible. She couldn't pray because she had no words. It felt like God was nowhere. And she couldn't face going to church because, however sympathetic everyone was, all the patting of her shoulder and unsolicited praying was hard to bear, and it didn't make her feel better.

"So I stopped going to everything and I got very isolated, and I realised I wasn't the only person who felt like that. And that one in four people, even before a global pandemic, is struggling at some point in their life with their mental and emotional health. And all the ways we were working hard as a church—and we were working hard—were not having much of an effect on that quarter of the population."

What began to help Ruth was learning to "slow down, shut up, and do some hobbies." Hobbies like painting stones—"Don't judge me!"—crochet, furniture restoration, and a bit of gardening. She found that these were things that did her good. As for God, she knew He hadn't left her. She just had to find a different way of talking to Him.

***"I made this habit of meditating on a phrase from the psalms when I was having my cuppa in the morning"***

Coming out of a fairly charismatic background, Ruth started to re-engage with the unfamiliar, in the form of contemplative prayer, and liturgy. "I found it really beautiful to read a psalm. Because he's really not OK a lot of the time, the guy who wrote the psalms! And with the psalms I can *always* pray. Even if I'm feeling rubbish I can pray, because this gives me permission to. And I found I could take a little phrase from a psalm that was good and true, and fix it in my mind, so that I didn't have my mind going over and over how rubbish I was, and how rubbish it was not being able to get out of bed. All the things I couldn't fix. I found I could replace these, for a time at least, with these words that were good and true.


"I made this habit of meditating on a phrase from the psalms when I was having my cuppa in the morning, sitting holding my cup, knowing my life was held... my life like a cup in God's hands. Held in His

hands—that's wellbeing for me. So having this practice of constantly attaching a spiritual inner practice to an outer habit, I just found it really helpful."

Ruth started wondering whether anyone else might like to practise this same method of meditation with her. She mentioned it to a few people. It didn't take long before her house started filling up. They called it the cup group, sitting with their cups, meditating on their phrase from a psalm. "My neighbour came, and her sister came, and a lady came who wasn't Christian, and we all were quite happy to just sit and do this thing together."

This type of contemplative, rhythmic practice was on offer if you went out of your way to look for it, at retreat centres hundreds of miles away, and Ruth loved the experience when she could get to one. But she started to think: "Shouldn't every place where there are God's people be a place where people can find this peace? Shouldn't that be our priority?"





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Renew 37— the first Renew space, set up in 2015 by Ruth with New Life Baptist Church in Nottingham

Those simple components were Ruth's long journey back to "some sort of emotional recovery", as she puts it. "I still walk with an emotional limp, and I think I always will," she says, "and I'm quite glad of it. The way I was living before wasn't very healthy. And as a leader, I wasn't really leading, because I was going for a walk on my own, and people were miles behind me. This slow-down enables you to be there with the people who don't go that fast. The showing up enabled me to have a hobby, something that was fun, that was good for my soul and my body, and that other people could join in it. And the praying... that's our whole language isn't it? That's our best offer into the wellbeing conversation as church."

Ruth's informal sharing of the discoveries of what worked for her started to grow into something bigger. "It wasn't about setting up a charity," she says. "It was about me trying to authentically live well in my own skin, and then my heart breaking from the fact that there were people around me who didn't know that God loved them that much." She became newly aware of how unconditional and unearned God's love was for her, and had rid herself of the feeling of pressure to get things done. And ironically this made her feel liberated to get to work on something that turned out to be quite important.

"Renew 37 was our first space, and it came about for selfish reasons on my part. I really fancied us having a place where it wasn't my front room! And where there were some boundaries of time and place." The place turned out to be a little shop on the high street in West Bridgford, Nottingham, next door to an existing tea shop that was run by two Christian women who offered to share the space with Ruth. They were worried about people being isolated, and wanted to partner with

## WHO ELSE?

her church. So they arranged that four days a week the church would run it, and the other three days a week the café would use it as extra space.

By this time Ruth had given up teaching, for the sake of her mental health, and, remarkably, her church took her on to lead the project full time. At first there was talk about making Renew 37 into a multi-function space, to include church meetings, but Ruth was clear that it had to be just somewhere where people can drop in, where someone knows your name, where you can bring or share a hobby. Something more like a front room than a church. She felt sure that would help people get through the door. And it did.

Again, for her own benefit as much as anyone else's, Ruth opened up another room next door to the main café area, as a place to go and pray and meditate. "Because I can't be present with people for that long without having to go off and spend a bit of time with God!" So the quiet room was established, where people could go any time, but soon a rhythm emerged of prayer together at the beginning and end of each session of the café.

"We realised that the choice of social space and quiet space was all that people needed. The option to walk into the God story or not, and just to have some company, meant that people felt in control. And actually it was really popular. And the best thing was, it felt good for *me!*"

A big breakthrough in expanding from a successful one-off to an inspirational national network came in 2016, a year after setting up Renew 37, when Ruth approached the Cinnamon Network, an organisation that promotes social action within churches, with an emphasis finding existing projects that have already demonstrated their value and efficacy, and replicating them.

Ruth talked to Cinnamon about the personal experiences that had led her to Renew 37, and presented her vision for helping churches to set up similar spaces where it was OK not to be OK. They went for it, and provided start-up funding for her to work part-time to set up the charity. Cinnamon also guided her through the



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development of the structure, governance, funding and franchising model for Renew Wellbeing. The idea was always to make sure that the principles were “multipliable and simple”.

Renew Wellbeing certainly has multiplied since then, and it is now in partnership with an amazing 260 wellbeing spaces, as well as ten more that are aimed specifically at families. So what's different about Renew Wellbeing's approach? After all, coming in to a Renew space will seem very familiar to anyone who has been involved in Being Alongside, whose branches and affiliates have been running drop-ins along similar lines since the late 1980s.

Part of the charity's success is certainly the personal appeal of its founder, who is such an excellent and engaging advocate, both in person and via her books, of which she has written three. (The first of those, *Slow Down, Show Up & Pray* [see right], tells the whole story of Renew Wellbeing and contains the manual for how to create a Renew space).

But probably the key factor in Renew Wellbeing's popularity is its tested formula, which is simple enough to grasp but still provides a sturdy enough framework for churches across the UK who have already identified the need for a quiet shared space to help people with their wellbeing, and are searching for guidance on how to go about serving the community in this way. If churches agree that their spaces will be guided by Renew Wellbeing's three core principles—being prayerful, being present, and being in partnership—the charity will gladly start them on the journey, with visits to existing centres, introductory webinars, training videos, and sessions with regional co-ordinators.

It is notable that the third core principle, that of being in partnership, does explicitly encourage the establishment of links between Renew spaces and statutory services in their locality.

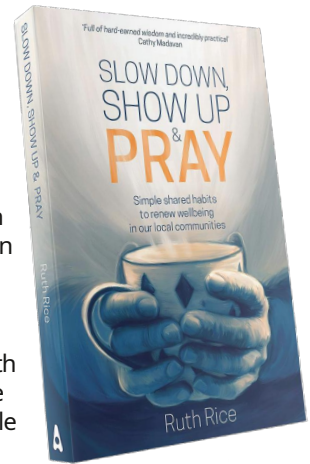
Once up and running, Renew spaces are encouraged to network with others in their region, to share good practice and prayer, and volunteers can attend retreats locally, as well as an annual national retreat.

Renew Wellbeing's current goal is for 10% of churches to have a wellbeing space on this model. There does seem to be great enthusiasm for Renew Wellbeing, and maybe this will be the vehicle that brings the drop-in, wellbeing space, or whatever you like to call it, fully into the mainstream of church life.

The Church of England certainly seems keen, and is currently running a centrally funded pilot scheme for dioceses to set up Renew Wellbeing spaces in churches.

How wonderful to see an initiative that came from a Baptist church being embraced across denominations. After all, if it works, who cares who gets the glory... but God?

[renewwellbeing.org.uk](http://renewwellbeing.org.uk)



*My Lord God,*

*I have no idea where I am going.*

*I do not see the road ahead of me.*

*I cannot know for certain where it will end.*

*nor do I really know myself,*

*and the fact that I think I am following your will*

*does not mean that I am actually doing so.*

*But I believe that the desire to please you*

*does in fact please you.*

*And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.*

*I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*

*And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,*

*though I may know nothing about it.*

*Therefore will I trust you always, though*

*I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.*

*I will not fear, for you are ever with me,*

*and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*

*Thomas Merton (1915-1968)*