

Street Angels in Brighouse

Notes of a meeting 2 p.m. 27.11.08 @ Turning Point

Present:

Mr Paul Blakey (Halifax Street Angels) and three colleagues
Inspector Mohammed Nawaz (West Yorkshire Police)
Constable Ashley Smith (West Yorkshire Police)
Fr. Phil Fitzgerald (St. Joseph's RC Church)
Revd. Matthew Pollard (St John's & St. Matthew's CoE Churches, Rastrick)
Mr Alan Hoggard (St. John's CoE Church, Rastrick)
Revd. Ian Coverdale (Central Methodist Church & Churches Together)

Background

Street Angels have been operating in Halifax for three years. In May 2008 a similar initiative was started in Todmorden and it is hoped to start one in Hebden Bridge.

They gather at the start of an evening for a prayer and a briefing which the police sometimes attend. They then split into teams of three in mixed sex groups to patrol the town centre wearing high visibility jackets so that everyone knows they are there. The aim is to offer help and support to those who need it e.g. stay with people who are intoxicated, get them a taxi home, offer first aid and call at ambulance if needed.

They operate from 9 p.m. - 3 a.m. on Friday & Saturday evenings in Halifax. In Todmorden they only operate on Friday evenings and finish at midnight.

They work in close co-operation with the police and are issued with radios so that they can report suspicious activity, nevertheless they are NOT a form of policing. The first priority of the Street Angels has to be their own safety. If they don't feel comfortable in a situation they should back off and notify those who can take action. The police do not cut back their patrols because there is a presence by the Street Angels.

It was stressed that the Street Angels offer friendship, not an oppressive presence. Indeed they should not discourage groups of young people from gathering in the town centre as that would just relocate the problems to the residential areas where this is no CCTV to monitor things and where there are more residents to be disturbed.

After an initial wariness their presence is welcomed by revellers, shop owners, publicans & police alike.

While the Street Angels come under the umbrella of Churches Together they don't only get their volunteers from the churches. Volunteers are aged 18-76 and it was said that some youths relate well to older Street Angels.

The cost of running the Halifax scheme is about £10,000 p.a. for rent, taxi fares, tea, coffee, high visibility jackets etc. The police can't provide funding but there are grant making bodies that one can apply to. (Rotary and others have, for example, been willing to sponsor jackets.) The cost of running a scheme in Brighouse would be less.

The Need

Despite being the second largest town in Calderdale after Halifax, Brighouse is a relatively safe place. The pubs in the town centre are generally quiet. The only pub in Brighouse to have late opening, Baracuda, caused problems when it was first opened, but these now appear to have settled down. Furthermore the management of Baracuda have closed it for a refit at the moment. Despite this, the perception can be that it is not safe to go out into the town centre at night. The town does suffer from minor vandalism. The Street Angels could offer a reassuring presence on the streets. They are the eyes & ears of the community.

The issues that arise tend to come from youths aged up to 17 drinking in the parks, along the canal and behind the Rest Centre. On the evening when the Street Angels for Halifax patrolled Brighouse they had to provide first aid to a couple of teenagers. Also, because the door staff will not permit entry to anyone who is drunk there can be problems outside Baracuda.

Next Steps

	Action
Initially the Halifax Street Angels organisation is willing to be the umbrella under which Brighouse could operate. They could provide training, insurance cover and CRB clearance which they can get done for free.	
There is a Shop Watch radio system in Brighouse and it may be possible to provide the Brighouse Street Angels with radios through this so that they can call into the police or ask CCTV operatives to monitor particular situations. Until this is set up, mobile phones can be used.	
As a first step the Halifax Street Angels will provide a team to patrol Brighouse on Friday 12 December and Saturday 10 January. Potential volunteers would be invited to join them to see what is involved. This will also allow us to estimate the extent to which Street Angels are needed in Brighouse.	Halifax Street Angels
Central Methodist Church would be willing to offer a base for these evenings. Potential volunteers would gather there at 8 p.m. This needs to be advertised to the churches not represented at the meeting.	Ian Coverdale
It would also be advertised through the Halifax Street Angels website.	Paul Blakey
An article in the Brighouse Echo would also be useful.	Ian Coverdale to have a word with Jean Trotter
What we have learnt from the two evenings will be reported to Churches Together in Brighouse and Rastrick at their meeting on 20 January and if appropriate their support sought to establish a permanent scheme.	Ian Coverdale