



Helping the Homeless

What we discovered – Weymouth Family Church tell their story

One of the many ways a church can impact its community is by showing practical love and compassion for the disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Weymouth Family Church have been running a Saturday evening meal for people who are street homeless for many years.

What can we learn?

Here are a few key lessons that Pauline, her team and the church have learned along the way:

1. **Working in partnership:** it is imperative to work with those in authority in town. Some churches can get nervous about engaging and working with local authorities such as the council and the Police. Rather than seeing them as a barrier, Pauline and her team deliberately engaged with the council very early on in the process of establishing the soup kitchen, who helped with advice and support with siting and so on.

This has meant that it is a robust service, and that the church is seen by those in authority as part of the solution to a complex problem. This is especially noted with the longevity of the work which brings credibility and respect. Other groups have attempted to work independently and this has not been successful. Think strategic partnerships in the town!

2. **Keep the main thing the main thing:** focus on your core objectives - trying to be all things and meet all needs doesn't work in these situations which are very complex. You will drown if you focus on the complex problems! The core objective is the Gospel which will lead to internal transformation. Meeting the physical need is important; introducing people to Jesus is even more...
3. **Determine and invest in core values:** From the start, Pauline felt that generosity should be a core value of the ministry from using quality food to developing quality relationships in the team and those being served. Honouring people especially important. This needs an intentional change in language and expectations.

Be there for the long haul: Setting up a soup kitchen is one thing; maintaining it weekly is another. You need stamina and commitment to keep going. People are won by knowing they are loved. They know they are loved by the values! Because of the generous approach, because of the genuine friendship, and because of the consistency in their lives when very little else is.



4. **Make sure you have safe working boundaries:** It is easy to be naïve! There is wisdom in worldly knowledge too. The common grace of God gives us wisdom in working. Setting out boundaries keeps everyone safe. This needs to be clarified in training of volunteers, following recommended good practices.
5. **Gathering people with a heart:** Skills, boundaries and working practices can be taught; a heart for the work cannot. Anyone can be taught how to run a soup kitchen but it is a huge problem if you don't have the heart for it. It can cause huge problems in a team and also have huge consequences for the work as well.
6. **Think through strategically how people will be added to the church:** Working through how people from complex and vulnerable backgrounds does need careful thought and a plan. Pauline intentionally established a process for people who responded from the street to the Gospel to taking them to an Encounter camp, running a small group gathering and gradually introducing to the pastoral system of support in the church. Every church will be different but you need to think this through so as to be ready for when people do respond. Sometimes the rest of the church will take time to catch up with your vision!
7. **Relationship with church leaders:** This is vitally important – to submit your vision and passion to the leaders of the church. This will. Timing may not be as quick as you would like but having support from the leaders will keep it central to the church and not a bolt-on extra. There can be tension with leaders especially in the early days of a church plant but having a regular forum to share and have oversight is very important.
8. **Funding:** God provides! Need to trust for the provision of finance – starting small is the best way so as to be able to keep to promises made! Funding will be easier once something is up and running but it can be tough in the early days – so you need to know that God has called you to this.
9. **Spirit led:** probably should have come first in the list! To be prophetically led to a particular work is very important as it will help you in the difficult days – and there will be many of those! But Pauline and her team learned not to look to the left or right. It is helpful to see what others are doing of course and we can learn so much but God will give you a specific work in your specific context. If you are not sure where to start – pray for guidance...Pray for your town.

Web:

- Shelter: <http://www.shelter.org.uk/> (a bit of blurb)
- Jubilee+: <http://www.jubilee-plus.org/>
- Crisis: <http://www.crisis.org.uk/>
- Salvation Army: <http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/homelessness>