



Supporting those in addiction

What we discovered – Community Church Honiton tell their story

One of the many ways a church can impact its community is by showing practical love and compassion for disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The Community Church Honiton have a team of over 60 volunteers working in a wide variety of initiatives that are community transforming!

These include a food bank, debt advice, practical help, and a number of support groups. One of these groups – 'Walk the talk' is supporting those in drug / alcohol addiction – and their families. Steve and Dee Masters, who lead this work, outline some of the key lessons they have learned along the way:

What we discovered:

1. **Leadership** – the church leadership must be with you. They need to have overall ownership and vision for what you are trying to do. They will be able to provide support and guidance as they carry the responsibility and bigger picture for the church.
2. **Training** – this is vital. Accessing good quality training will shape the way you minister – particularly in learning how to support people appropriately. The church can be very kind, and have a big heart, but can inadvertently reproduce problems rather than helping people well. Training with 'Living Recovery' (see below) has enabled the team to be well equipped to support those with addiction who often have very difficult circumstances.
3. **Managing expectations** – for both those providing support and those being supported! Handling expectations well is important otherwise people are quickly disappointed – so define what the expectations of the team are early on. Overall we need to reduce our expectations of ourselves, and increase our expectation of what God will do.
4. **Prayer support** – make sure you have a team set up to pray for the work being done, and for the team. Having a prayer team is vital as there are often situations where Holy Spirit wisdom and insight are needed.
5. **Don't release people too early** – this is relating to team members – they need time to be trained and mentored themselves. There are real dangers of issues such as co-dependence and crossing of boundaries which can be very damaging to both the volunteers and those being supported. Deal with any pastoral issues that come up in the team – don't ignore them!
6. **Build relationship** – get to know the person you are supporting! While this may sound obvious, all our work is built on establishing good relationships. Statutory interventions (from,



for example, secular agencies) may be about changing behaviour. People need to know they are accepted and belong first! (Belong, believe, behave). Simply stopping on the street to ask someone how they are, and accepting them without judgement can make such a difference.

7. **Spend time with the Father** – Jesus withdrew to spend time with the Father – we must do likewise. This work is not dependent on us but on God – it is His work. We therefore must take time out, recognising that Jesus gives us everything. Otherwise we will try to do everything in our own strength, we will run short of resources and become wrecked! These ministries are not sustainable in our own strength.
8. **Understand what is going on in the town** – get to know what others are doing. What local services are there (statutory and other churches/charities)? These can change quite frequently! Don't replicate but strengthen. Network, build relationship with others providing support.
9. **Give hope** – above all we can offer hope to those we are supporting. It is good to ask people questions that will take their eyes off their current situation and look ahead. Asking questions like 'where do you want to be in 5 years', or 'if there could be a miracle in your life what would it be?', or 'what are your dreams' help do this, and put hope back into situations that otherwise can appear hopeless.
10. **Be a lifelong learner** – we'll never know it all – there is always more to learn and understand. There will be new methods, new ideas, and new intervention strategies. Always be looking for opportunities to learn. How can you do this practically? By attending secular training, visiting projects, and going to inspiring conferences
11. **Start small** – it's not about the numbers. Initially a problem can seem overwhelming – but tackling it by starting small and with what is in front of you will help you take the first few steps. Don't worry about the numbers – be careful with how you define the 'success' of the ministry with your team and church leadership.
12. **Don't always plough the demographic furrow you are from** - it is all too easy to stay within the 'bubble' of our own life experiences and to keep in friendship groups with people who are like us. Break out of this and get to know people who aren't like you!
13. **Don't take yourself too seriously!**