

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2009

Celebrating 10 years of building safer communities together

## From Caterpillar to Butterfly

Freedom Social Projects helps most vulnerable members of society

The Freedom Centre in Barnstaple, run by the charity Freedom Social Projects is joining with Safer North Devon in celebrating 10 years of building safer communities together.

Working with vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, Freedom Social Projects helps to move people from a place of dependence to independence through building relationships and trust in a non judgemental environment. Starting from humble beginnings, the Centre now works with upwards of 1,000 people a year and anything up to 70 people a day.

Working with local support services and empowering people to take responsibility, the team at the Freedom Centre focus on breaking down barriers, providing support, building confidence and developing structure. This enables positive steps forward and empowers vulnerable people to take responsibility.

In 1994, Freedom Church began a small outreach project to help the vulnerable in the community. Working with the Community Safety Partnership, staff were trained in dealing with hard to reach groups and working with those affected by addiction. A soup kitchen followed when the project took on its first premises.



"Once we managed to acquire our own building in Trinity Street in Barnstaple we added a kitchen," said Phil Noall, Project Manager, Freedom Social Projects "The new building also meant we could start thinking, for the first time, about providing programmes to help people become stable and to get them back into employment."

In 2000, funds provided by the Drug Action Team and Community Safety Partnership enabled the first drop-in service, relapse support groups and structured day programme.

"We originally worked with 40-50 people a year in 2001 who came to the soup kitchen," says Phil Noall.

"This started going up to three or four hundred people a year and kept increasing as our programme

became recognised and very successful. We now see 50-60 new people a month and over 1,000 people a year. We also had 12,500 visits to the day centre last year.”

As well as providing access to meals, showers, clothing and advice Freedom’s services are now aimed at transforming the lives of those who use the centre. In 2006 the Freedom Centre was opened at Howard Avenue in a converted factory unit. Facilities include a Day Centre with internet café, training facilities, TV lounge and commercial grade kitchen. In addition, workshop space for training and social enterprise and a fully equipped fitness suite provide access to a range of services and opportunities that would normally not be available to these marginalised people.



Real results are being achieved through the Freedom Centre. "The new premises means we can not only meet people at their point of need with clothing, food and showers but also offer other services and help people get into work," says Phil Noall. "One person, for example, who has benefited from Freedom, is now running a local rehabilitation service and another one is a Harm Reduction worker. There are also numerous examples of people moving into part time and full time work after a period of support.”

The Freedom Centre now offers training to NVQ standards for those who have struggled to access mainstream education; works with the Probation Service to enable offenders to work their community sentences in a meaningful and useful environment; and provides volunteering opportunities to improve the skills and life chances of beneficiaries.

The centre has received support from the local authority, Government, local businesses, local service providers and support organisations. This includes partners such as Safer North Devon who provided funds for a Monday ‘all day breakfast’ resulting in 72 cooked breakfasts in one sitting at its peak.

“We have been working successfully with the Freedom Centre over the last ten years to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour,” said Amanda Palmer, Safer North Devon Manager. “Working together means we can make North Devon and Torridge a safer place to live and improve quality of life for all our residents.”

Having started as a small, unsupported project Freedom Social Projects has now transformed into a thriving and valuable asset in the community thanks to the support and foresight of organisations like Safer North Devon.