



## The run up to Christmas for a Church Related Community Work Minister

Each Church Related Community Work initiative tends to be different, after all, community development is all about working with people where they are, not where we think they should be. So, each initiative, each church, each community, each context is different but the way we work is the same.

Assets for Life: Building Community in your Neighbourhood (URC, 2004):

“Community development is best used to refer to a process, or a way of doing something, which entails the mobilisation, participation and involvement of local people about common issues that are important to them.”

So, for some Church Related Community Workers the run up to Christmas can be even more busy than usual, for others it can be a lot quieter than normal, as Christmas takes over and for others still, it is somewhere in-between! Here are some snippets from my activity as a CRCW during two weeks over the past month.

During the last week in November I continued to support a community member as she has begun to facilitate a social justice discussion group, with a Biblical Basis. This week our topic was *stories and experiences of living with debt*.



Last year both church and community members helped us to knit a mix of large and small characters from the Christmas story,

enough for 11 nativity scenes. This led to us making 7 story bags for the year 3 children in a local school and offering 3 class display sets too. This



idea came as we adapted the Travelling Nativity idea, found in the book Messy Christmas. This was so well received when we piloted it last year that I was invited in to launch it again this year, which I duly did in the run up to Advent. Each child takes a travelling nativity bag home for a couple of days during Advent. The bag has a leaflet which introduces the bag, contains a couple of prayers, the words of Away in a Manger and diary pages for the children to complete, the characters to play with, a book telling the story and a gift bag with a lamb to keep. I went into the class to tell the story in an interactive way, launch the bags and answer the children's questions. This was great fun!



Currently as the worker for the Building Bridges project, I am serving as the Chair of the Tonge with the Haulgh Big Local Partnership, a way that the Lottery has developed to award deprived areas of the Country a million pounds over ten years. This year I Chaired a partnership meeting and attended a training session entitled 'Bringing the economy into the Big Local.' Both events made me think about my work, the work of both the Building Bridges project and the Big Local Partnership, and the changing context of our area.

Local Trust | Big Local



This week our social discussion group talked about Foodbanks, our volunteer facilitator delivered a powerful meditation where she took the participants on a journey to the Storehouse, Bolton's foodbank, initially as a service user and then as a volunteer. This led to one of the participants telling us that her understanding had grown, a very healthy discussion about the pros and cons of foodbanks, and ideas coming forward of what we could do, in time to make a difference ourselves.

I had a day in York with other CRCW's, where we shared a meal and experiences. This is a very important form of support for any of us serving in this different and challenging form of ministry.



On the Friday of this week I had great fun with our partnership lunch club (Age UK, Church at the Centre and Tonge Children's Centre) before I find myself acting as entertainment officer for a local community group: FUSION. I support this group as did my predecessor, Pat Oliver, who helped form the group. This evening they held their Christmas dinner, 4 courses, for 30 local residents. Luckily another CRCW kindly shared some quiz questions with me, thanks Mal! Also, another Community Development Officer, who works for a local housing provider, shared her daughter's karaoke machine, so a great time was had by all!



Finally, on the Saturday I led our informal prayers, and chatted with local people at Church at The Centre's (Tonge Moor URC) Saturday Café before going on to a consultation event for the Big Local where I face painted, as they were telling us what they thought about our area and how we could make a long-term difference here.

My next location was St Andrew's, a partner in the Building Bridges project, where I facilitated another quiz as part of their Messy Church. What a busy day!

