

CASE STUDY CREATING A WARM REFUGE FOR THE COMMUNITY



N.B. This case study considers only one possible approach, which will not be suitable for every church. Always seek professional advice.

Key Points

- Lobley Hill All Saints (Hillside) Church, Gateshead adapted their Joshua Tree café into a warm space that could serve their community, receiving support from the local council.
- They were able to utilise existing volunteer teams and set up to provide food, spiritual and emotional comfort to people who needed the shelter.
- Through this small change, and advertising through the local council, the number of people using the café and interacting with the church has increased.



1 The 'warm space' is hosted by the Joshua Tree café, located in the church hall.

2 The set-up for the Joshua Tree Café's toddler morning as part of the 'warm space'.

3 The church itself has been able to develop as a result of the scheme.

The context

Leading into the winter of 2022 as a result of high energy prices and particularly cold weather forecasts, a number of local authorities and community organisations began to explore the idea of offering 'warm spaces' for those without access to heating, or the financial capacity to afford it. Hillside Church responded to the call from Gateshead Council to offer their already running Joshua Tree Café, which runs in the church hall, as one such location throughout the difficult winter period.

For more information, visit the [church's website](#) or its entry on the [Church Heritage Record](#).

Background of the Cafe

- Prior to the need to offer it as a warm space, the Joshua Tree cafe at Hillside Church had run for the previous 18 months offering food, drinks and space to the local community alongside a toddler group weekly on Friday mornings.
- The café is run by a fixed team of volunteers who committed to running the café every week, including some members who are not part of the congregation but want to serve their community.
- The building used for the café still uses a gas boiler, however, it has been equipped in recent years with a timing system and now a smart (mobile phone controlled) heating system that maximises the efficiency of the system and keeps wasted energy to a minimum.

How did the church provide a place of refuge from the cold?

The 'hub' building in which the Joshua Tree Café is located was opened throughout the winter from 10am for as long as people needed (or wanted) to stay, usually closing at approximately 3pm. During that time a toddler session is run specifically for parents with young children alongside the other café activities.

Food and drink is provided by the team as well as offering conversation and companionship. Magazines, books, games, ipads and other hobby materials were provided to be available for anyone who needed them. This allowed those who used the Café to be able to mingle and talk with volunteers and other people or to spend time on themselves. This approach made the space both welcoming and inclusive to all members of the community including those with additional needs.

The beginning of the warm space programme was widely advertised within the community, Hillside Church being one of many offering the service. As well as the dissemination through local news of information on the opening times, details of the café were shared on the council website and social media.

How is the church helping its community to become more resilient in the future?

Throughout the winter at the Joshua Tree Café, Hillside church provided a space that anyone could use, but with a particular focus on targeting different groups from their community who may have been particularly at risk from extreme cold weather:

- Families with young children through an extension of the toddler group into the wider café.
- Refugees who were reached through existing outreach programmes.
- Older community members who may be more isolated through the churches existing networks.

Their participation in the warm spaces programme, and the advertising of that space by the local council, significantly increased the reach of, and attendance at, not only the Joshua Tree Café but other activities and services provided by and in the church. The Joshua Tree Café is now regularly attended by approximately 50 people weekly.

How was the transition to a warm space financially supported?

Hillside Church received initial grant funding from Gateshead Council of £500 for their participation in the wider warm spaces programme, which was used to make the host building of Joshua Tree café more energy efficient, through transitioning to LED lighting. In the long term this will save the church money and lower its carbon footprint. They also have access to another £500 grant from the council, for which plans remain undecided.

Additionally money for food, drink and other items has been provided variously through donations of both the items themselves and in a monetary form. The additional opening hours of the café represented a relatively small additional cost for heating.

What could others learn from this case study?

1. Churches might like to be aware of potential climate risks to their local community across all seasons of the year and the potential role their church building(s) could play in alleviating those risks.
2. Be proactive in responding to calls and grant funding that may be available from local authorities or other community groups to fund projects and aid other climate mitigation work.
3. Think about using the church building as a space of refuge from cold temperatures particularly at times when they are already going to be in use.

*“We’re providing spaces with respect, dignity and warmth...
those are values we want our church to be known for”*
Clergy, Hillside Church