

This blog is written by a member of the independent Commission. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Archbishops' or the Church of England.



In 2013, many people with multiple and complex needs came to Christ at St George's, based next to a homeless shelter in Leeds. As this number increased, Jon Swales – then a curate – realised that there was lots more they could do for this new group if they had a church based around their needs.

That's how Lighthouse began. Lighthouse is a fresh expression of church, specifically tailored to those who are battered and bruised by the storms of life. Many of their community have experienced homelessness, addiction issues, poverty and mental health problems.

Lighthouse has grown and grown. About 150 people now call Lighthouse their church, and around 80 attend on a Sunday for a service followed by food. Jon says "We don't force anyone to come to the service, they could come to the meal for free, but people still come. Over 70 people have been baptised from their community.

Alongside the church services, they provide pastoral support. Their work has lots of positive outcomes – helping with their mental health and bringing people to God – but one of the key things they identify is preventing homelessness. Because of the needs of their community, they place a great emphasis on street outreach, identifying people's needs and helping them to get them addressed.

However, preventing homelessness requires more than this. Jon explains that many people who have experienced homelessness end up back on the street. Although they are provided with housing, they don't have basics such as a kettle, or the support they need. By providing interesting activities, and helping people with their physical, emotional and spiritual needs, Lighthouse helps people to sustain their tenancy.

Because of their success, they are now commissioned by the council to provide this service.

**â€œI lived in a car park, injecting heroin and living in chaos and crime. In autumn 2014 I found Lighthouse and received love, practical help, prayer and heard the Gospel. Since then, I have been walking heroin-free, found life in Jesus, been baptised and can now contribute to Lighthouse and wider societyâ€• - Geery**

Jon believes that churches can provide something that mainstream services often can't. With a dozen volunteers giving twenty hours a week, they have staffing levels that would not be possible elsewhere. This provides flexibility â€” if relationships with a â€œclientâ€” break down in a standard caring service, the support can break down. At Lighthouse, another member of their team can work with this â€œbrother or sisterâ€”, making sure that progress is not lost. The final and key element of Lighthouse's success is love. Showing the love of God and of a large, welcoming community can help people stay in their homes when they're missing the camaraderie of the street.

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, Church and Community is encouraging churches to take a more preventative approach to homelessness. Lighthouse shows one way of doing that. They are eager to share their approach, so please get in touch with them, or look out for their evening course, *Mission, Theology and Ministry for the Margins*. Churches often help people once they're on the streets â€” let's do more to help them ~~before~~ before they end up there.

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#### **Notes:**

1. Lighthouse is funded by St George's, Leeds (a resource church), The Crypt (a homelessness charity set up by St George's) and the Diocese of Leeds.
2. They also receive about a third of their income from Leeds City Council's Adult Social Care Service â€” they are commissioned to care for specific individuals, and they use this income to fund their work.
3. When they find someone who is not receiving the care they need, they unconditionally help them to apply for funding for this from the council. Often, this leads them to choose Lighthouse as the commissioned body, but this is not always the case.
4. Lighthouse are often able to undercut other agencies because of their use of volunteers â€” which they do not hide from social care.
5. They also do not hide that they are a church, but because they provide the care required this meets the funding requirements.
6. Alongside Sunday morning worship, Lighthouse run a weekday bible study, which gets good attendance and engagement despite having no food element.
7. Lighthouse have three full-time staff, two part-time trainees and an intern. Their budget is about Â£150,000 a year.

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