



Oldham South Street Pastors

September 2020

As some of the TV soaps are currently showing past episodes, here are some of our stories from over the years. What isn't mentioned in these reports are the incidental conversions that take place because Street Pastors are Christian volunteers from local churches. Like many other Street Pastor teams we have had the comments as we exchange hellos with the regulars outside the pubs: "I don't have any time for that God stuff, but I like what you are doing!" We do share our faith in Jesus especially when people ask us why we do what we are doing and we will pray with people on the streets and in the pub.



Team members with our Police Excellence awards in 2013

CARING, LISTENING AND PRACTICAL HELP

Nov. 2012 The team were out and about when they had a call from an off duty Street Pastor advising that a young girl had collapsed near South Chadderton Metro stop. Her friends had already called for an ambulance and they didn't want any help but the team decided to make their way there anyway. When they arrived at the location some of the young people were quite drunk and very vocal and a paramedic had already arrived on his own in a rapid response vehicle but because of their behaviour he didn't feel safe attending until the ambulance crew arrived and was sitting in his vehicle talking on his radio. Two girls were by his car and one in particular was verbally abusing him loudly whilst a crowd of around twenty others were gathered around the girl further along the footpath which is quite lonely and isolated. Two members of the team approached the girl who was lying on the grass. They found out the girl's name whilst the third member calmly explained to the youngsters why the paramedic would not come and said if they would back off he would ask the paramedic to come and attend to their friend. This they did and he then went back to the paramedic to see if he would check the girl out if the Street Pastors accompanied him; he agreed and as he was doing this the ambulance arrived. The paramedics decided to take girl to A & E and one of the Street Pastor team managed to speak to the girl's mother so that she could meet her at the hospital. The girl was 15 years old and had apparently just consumed a full bottle of vodka.

April 2013 About 10.30 we spoke to a man who stopped us and said that he was just approached by a young woman on Hollins Road so drunk she offered to do anything for him if he took her home. When we got there, there was a police car already in the vicinity attending another incident. The police asked us if we would be able to sort the woman out because they needed to deal with

the other incident. As we approached the woman who was sat on the floor, an elderly man was talking to her and was very concerned about her welfare. The woman was very reluctant to tell us her name or anything, other than ask if the elderly man had left her some money for the taxi he had ordered for her, because she had no money to get home. She told us that she could not go back to her boyfriend's house because he would beat her up. She needed to get to her house which was in Hyde. We managed to scrape together some money between us and the elderly man left £5.00 for her too. Fortunately when the taxi arrived, it was from the local company and the driver agreed to take her home.

Sept. 2014 For all of us there will be certain incidents that stand out. One evening we spotted a group of five or six young people near the Waggon & Horses pub in Failsworth, among them was a girl leaning against the railings and bending over. She was quite distressed and was vomiting blood. It was apparent that she and some of the other girls had been drinking and they admitted had been drinking Vodka. We were unable to contact the girl's parents so we called an ambulance which arrived after about 15 minutes. None of her friends wanted to get involved so team-member Jodylee went in the ambulance with her to Tameside General Hospital. The girl's parents were contacted and soon arrived at the hospital; they were shocked – they thought their daughter was round at her friends sharing a pizza! They had a further shock when they saw her arms in the hospital gown, they could see she had been self-harming and she told them it was because she was being bullied at school. Her mum kept hugging and thanking Jodylee for helping. It turned out the girl was only 13 years old.

July 2015 Not all our incidents are the result of alcohol misuse. Such as the scene with Melissa and Andrew talking with a distressed young couple who had just had a falling out, while Sylvia nursed their young baby in her arms on Tesco car park in Failsworth.



Graham, Andrew and Sylvia take a break outside Tesco

Sept. 2015 onwards Up until this point we hadn't come across many homeless people on the streets in our area but our team bought some warm clothing and sleeping bag for a man sleeping rough and gave him some warm food. This had been a particularly volatile evening with youth in the area, but as the team watched on a couple of the lads came over to talk to the rough sleeper. They then came over to the Street Pastors and thanked them for their kindness to the man. In the years that followed we have built up relationships with several rough sleepers as numbers increased sharply. The reasons they end up in this situation can vary, and very often there are other underlying issues involved. We will usually try and provide something for them to eat and sign post them to other agencies and during recent winters to the Night Shelter project in Oldham.

Oct. 2018 Whilst Abi, Linda and Karl were out in Failsworth, they were told that a boy had collapsed at the tram stop. As they got onto the platform the young man was sitting up and a young lady who we later found out to be his girlfriend was sat with him. She told us that the young man was claustrophobic and had a panic attack due to the packed tram and then collapsed. He was white as a sheet and shaking hard, and we were initially concerned that he may have taken something but they both assured us that he hadn't and he did then start to calm down and the symptoms subsided. Linda put her jacket around the young man's shoulders, and we gave him some water and sweets to suck. He was now very anxious about getting back onto the tram to get his girlfriend home safely. We had a quick chat with the girl's mum over the phone and reassured her that everything was ok before driving them both home.

ACCEPTANCE

Feb. 2015 Very often it is the influence of the older volunteers in our team which has the greatest calming effect; we jokingly call it the "granny factor". The tense atmosphere was broken one particularly rowdy night when one 15yr old lad came across to us with his mates, and took a real shine to Sylvia, one of our team members, who he said reminded him of his gran. From there on it was group hugs and pictures taken on mobiles. In those situations we are then able to talk to them about their hopes and ambitions in life and perhaps the consequences of their actions.

Feb. 2015 Another Friday night particularly stands out as we stood amongst a group of around 100 youngsters drawn up in front of St John's Church on Oldham Road. A heavy police presence, police dog van and detached youth team were ready to intervene under the terms of a local dispersal order. We began to do what we do and be a calming influence and talking with the youngsters who seemed to accept our presence and began to disperse without it developing into a major confrontation.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DO WE MAKE?

Jan. 2013 Usually when we get involved in situations, they pass and we go home without realising the influence we may have had. There had been heavy snow when the owner of a local Off Licence in Chadderton explained to us that two older men had burst in and pelted him and his shop with snowballs. He said they'd been drinking and were not listening to common sense. Leaving the shop we met one of these men still armed with snowballs and determined to go back and annoy the man some more. We tried to persuade him to go home but he was determined to go back to the shop and spoke aggressively about his opinion of the shopkeeper. We felt it best not to inflame the situation further but we hung around to observe for a bit. He did, in fact return to the shop with a repeat of his early behaviour. We went back to check on the shopkeeper and to suggest he might want shut a bit earlier. He had already decided to do so but had also notified the police of the incident.



David and Carol pause to pose at the Freehold Metro stop

The following week we called in back again and owner reported that the man later came back to the shop to apologise for his racist behaviour, having sobered up and hopefully having had time to consider our conversation.

April 2013 As we made our way across Ashton Road West in Failsworth we heard a commotion over by the where the road comes down from the canal bridge onto the Tesco car park and where there was a group youths. We got there just before the security guard from Tesco arrived. We immediately engaged with the youngsters and explained who we were. One of the older ones, trying to shock us, asked "What would you do if you saw me having a 'P' in the canal?" The team leader said "Probably nothing" but then explained the possible negative consequences on his job prospects of getting a record if he was seen by police. We offered to buy chips for them which they declined and seemed surprised at the offer. We stayed with this group quite a while to allow everything to calm down as at one point a group of colleagues from Tesco came over to check on the security guard but they soon realised we were helping and went away again. The youths were quite high spirited but respectful towards us once we had explained our role and that we are all volunteers. Once the group had dispersed we spoke with the security guard who told us that they had been causing a nuisance earlier and the ring leader had caused them trouble before. Earlier in the evening he had intervened when the group had surrounded a minibus taxi filled with young female passengers. We realised afterwards that we had automatically placed ourselves between the youths and the Tesco staff and probably prevented a more serious confrontation. A week later we called in to check with the security guard who said that all had been quiet, he talked a bit about the events of the previous week, he said that the young people who had been involved in the incident had been back in during the week and they had been alright with him and said that they realised that they shouldn't have kicked the taxi. There have been no reported problems from this group since.

June 2016 We had already noticed that for several weeks, large numbers of young people had been gathering later in the evenings around the Metro stops in South Chadderton and Freehold. They had been drinking and were generally behaving rowdily. One particular evening things began to kick-off earlier. When the Street Pastors got to the South Chadderton tram stop there were about 20 youths already causing a nuisance and other folk on the platform were finding them very intimidating. The team stayed with a lady who was frightened and she boarded the tram with us. The teenagers also got on the tram and again the passengers felt threatened by the group's behaviour. The group all disembarked at Freehold, as did we. Again they continued to make a nuisance of themselves on the platform, jumping onto the tracks and kicking the fittings. When the Street Pastors tried talking with the group they did not want to engage, so the team remained, trying to give some reassurance to passengers. Among them were two young Asian lads who were waiting for the tram back to Oldham and were dressed in their best clothes for mosque as this was during Ramadan. We stayed and talked to the 2 lads until their tram arrived as they were scared. Eventually, after about 45 minutes, the group of young people moved off.

As we started out the following Friday, it seemed that we were in for a repeat of the previous week's night of hooliganism with youths already milling about outside one of the shops. When we went inside to check things, the shop-keeper asked us "what can you do to control this behaviour?" as he watched his CCTV. Our response always sounds a bit lame, "We cannot control it, but we try to be a calming influence". As we moved on by the park, a group of four girls came across having just got off the tram from Oldham. One of them advised us to stick around as there would be a lot of drinking later, but as they headed off the same girl remarked to her friends that we were alright and that we had helped her last week when she was "smashed". Things did quieten down, so we again made our way up to Freehold. A group of about 8 to 10 lads then came up to the tram stop and Hilary, who had been out the previous week, recognised them as being involved in the antics we encountered the Friday before. One of the lads who had again had been drinking, came across to speak to us and said to his mates, "You might think I'm a Muppet talking to this lot but, I'm telling you that this lady helped me last week when I was steaming!" Hilary was greatly surprised that he and the girls we met earlier could remember anything from the previous week as they had been so drunk. Once again the support of our prayer pastors cannot be overestimated and things calmed down a lot.

Whit Friday 2018

"Policing Operation is wide ranging across Saddleworth for this year's band contest. The Oldham Street Pastors team are fantastic and add a different engagement strategy for our young people."



Here Insp Anwar one of the Bronze Commanders is briefing the team in the Park at Uppermill –courtesy of GMP Facebook



Our Street Pastors supporting the newly formed Saddleworth team on their first patrol night at the Whit Friday Band Contests 2019

THE POWER OF PRAYER

April 2015 Sometimes there is a quick silent prayer for wisdom as we walk into such situations, but sometimes those prayers are answered quite spectacularly. There was a particularly rowdy Saturday night in Failsworth involving a group of youths and with the police in attendance. The youths then regrouped at a place where a road slopes steeply down from a canal bridge and sharply turns through the supermarket car park, where they began throwing missiles at the taxis cutting through to the supermarket. The team felt compelled to intervene and went across to speak with them, and the stone throwing did stop but the group did not disperse. Sensing that they were beginning to show off for our team's benefit the Street Pastors withdrew to their own car on the car park from where they were able to observe. As they sat in the car another taxi was mobbed as it stopped to pick up a group of girls and the team felt helpless and so bowed their heads to pray for peace. When they looked up again after a matter of just a few minutes the entire group had dispersed and the car park was deserted and peaceful, they had all suddenly gone home!

Nov. 2015 At the time there were still large numbers of youths gathering in Failsworth which could be rowdy and intimidating, but on the whole our presence was accepted by them. There had been a number of assaults which have involved young people on young people but in November we were caught up in a particularly vicious attack of one group upon another. The group we were talking with were suddenly ambushed by another group who came running around a corner and set into them. Fortunately none of our team was harmed and it was good to be able to go back afterwards for hot chocolate and prayer at Hope Methodist and were very thankful for the support of our prayer pastors that night.

Feb. 2019 Roy's first night out with us as an observer had been quiet so we decided to have one last visit the tram stop at South Chadderton before calling it a night. Shortly after we arrived there was a commotion and a man clearly in a drug induced frenzy was lunging wildly with a knife at a group of intoxicated youths who had surrounded him and were taunting him. All we could do was stand back, pray and call the police. Although they arrived very quickly everyone had melted away and fortunately no one was hurt. However, on our way back we came across that same group of youths and were able to engage with them. It was quite an introduction for Roy.

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

Aug. 2018 Sometimes when we are out, although the streets we walk are familiar it seems as though we have entered into a surreal world. We were climbing the steps to Freehold Metro by the looming hulk of the derelict Hartford Mill when a young man and woman came flying down the steps from the platform. They stopped to chat with us and we exchanged a little good natured banter. He was smoking a roll-up and she had a half full glass of beer in her hand. They offered us a spliff, which we politely declined. They seemed to know what Street Pastors were and asked if we had lollies, so we obliged. As they departed the man insisted on shaking our hands one by one. At that point two PCSO's and a PC came running down from the platform and shouting at the couple to stop. It appeared that there had been a confrontation with the PCSOs and the couple had

refused to give their details. The couple shot down the steps with the Police following but were apprehended at the bottom. If they hadn't stopped to chat to us they would have been well away, but it left us feeling that we really had a very different role and were viewed very differently to the statutory services.

Jan. 2019 It was already dark when we heard a cry for help, but could not see anyone. Down a dark alleyway was the entrance to the local park. A lady who had been walking a neighbour's dog in the park and was locked in after the gates were closed. She had been there for some time and was in a very distressed state and very grateful that we were able to assist her over the fence and escort her safely home. As they hurried to her assistance Paul and Graham, being of a certain age, couldn't help but picture the episode of 'Only Fools and Horses' where Del Boy and Rodney come running through the mist to a lady's rescue dressed in Batman and Robin costumes.

22nd May 2017 At the other extreme of emotion was the tragic event at the Manchester Arena which took the lives of twenty-two young people, adults and parents. In an instant so many lives were changed forever. The following morning, as the scale of loss and injury became clearer, local Street Pastor teams were asked to provide support at the vigil quickly arranged to take place that evening in Albert Square. Although at such short notice, our team were able to provide six volunteers. Albert Square and surrounding area was packed with many thousands, and for me the singing of the Oasis song "Don't look back in anger" seemed very fitting as Manchester's tribute to what had happened. As the vigil ended and we started to make our way back to our rendezvous point at Methodist Central Hall we were stopped numerous times by people wanting to talk and inevitably ask why? We prayed with several people on the streets as we headed back before returning again to Albert Square. Over the following days, as the floral tributes grew in St Ann's Square, several of our team members joined the Response Pastors, who are Street Pastors available at short notice to travel from around the country to such serious occurrences. During the week they continued to make themselves available to listen and pray with people and were also able to escort those who had brought flowers, through the crowds and mass of news crews to respectfully lay their tributes.

There have been so many volunteers who have trained and served with us over the years since our team started in 2008, indeed we still have some who have been part of our team since those early years. Already mentioned also is the vital role of our prayer pastors. Too many to mention everyone by name but I would like to dedicate this review to the memory of our dear team members Avril Hollinshead and Sylvia Holt.



The original Hollinwood Street Pastor team in 2008. In 2010 we became Oldham South Street Pastors with two teams.



Members of the Hollinwood team in 2013



Members of the Chadderton team in 2013