



**Community Project of  
St Michael & All Angels Church,  
Houghton-le-spring**

## **Our 'Next Chapter'**

### **Who are we and what do we do?**

The Space4 project is part of the community work of St Michael and All Angel's (Church of England) church based in Houghton-le-spring. The project works typically with people who rarely feel valued in society working with and being alongside them while seeking to 'to be a space for community to flourish'.

For the last 6 years the project has provided a 'drop-in' based on the high street running targeted group sessions and also providing a community foodbank and clothes bank. We have good relationships with other local service providers which ensure that vulnerable people can access necessary services. On average, we have had daily attendance of between 35 and 45 people in our building, representing a total of up to 100 individuals per week.

In recent months, the Covid crisis has caused a multitude of issues for already vulnerable people related to financial pressure and social isolation. In response to this the project has provided ongoing community support through telephone and online contact as well as expanded foodbank provision.

As we move through this 'recovering' phase of the crisis, we are seeking a Space4 Manager to work with our Project Board to help shape and lead us into the 'Next Chapter' of our project.

### **What is our Context like?**

We serve the community of Houghton-le-Spring in Sunderland and the surrounding Durham Coalfield areas. Houghton le Spring is 7,740 most deprived area of England (out of 32,844 neighbourhoods) – some relatively affluent parts of the town mask areas of severe deprivation with high unemployment, high numbers of households in and out of work reliant on benefits and foodbanks, high numbers of children entitled to free school meals, high levels of one parent families and families involved with social services, people dealing with domestic abuse, substance misuse, addiction issues, mental health and learning disabilities; all of which can lead to people feeling disconnected from and on the outside of the local community.

## What difference do we make to people's lives?

In the past, our approach has focussed on creating a welcoming and safe space within our dedicated Space4 building based on the high street. Our ethos empowers individuals to take control of their own lives and encourages them to work alongside others. Service users have gone on to become volunteers in the project and other local projects. Families and individuals that find themselves socially isolated can come along to the project for social interaction and intergenerational activities. Vandalism and youth disorder is a local problem our intergenerational groups empower young people to join in with community activities and see the consequences of their actions. In-house courses, which would not have been available elsewhere, increase skills and self-confidence right across the age spectrum.

There are opportunities in the building for people to have consultations with local councillors, social housing providers and other service providers in an environment where they feel safe. Many of those who attend often feel unable to access such services and by supporting and offering advocacy they feel enabled to take ownership for solving their own problems.



Increased community activity & participation have been a springboard onto other activities for people (including Houghton Feast, Sunderland City Festival of Light): this engenders a sense of belonging and self-worth. These are some stories from people who have been involved in our project...

**Ben** struggled for years with alcohol and drug addicted relating to long-term mental health issues that he suffered from. He was welcomed into Space4, he was taken at face value, understood the project had rules he needed to follow but says how he felt welcomed and valued as a person. He is now a regular at Space4 helping in lots of ways such as the weekly 'Greggs run' picking up donated food to distribute in the community. He describes the project as 'saving his life'.

**Ethyl's** husband died just over a year before she first found Space4. She was stuck at home and was becoming depressed and isolated from family and friends. This impacted her physical well-being and she became less able to get out of the house and get about. After an invitation to our 'cake and chat' group and help with transport she was persuaded to come and join us. After a while, she felt able to join in with activities and games and conversation. She became a 'grandma figure' to a number of young children of families who come along to the drop-in, some of whom do not have such positive role models. They'd simply do jigsaws or play dominos or cards together and she would always include and value and encourage the children. Ethyl's involvement in Space4 has been transformational for her personally making significant improvements to her own mental well-being and physical health. She is fully involved in Space4 and as well as supporting young families talks openly about her own grief which has helped others to deal with bereavement.

**Julie:** *Following a referral from one of our partner agencies, Julie, who was crippled with anxiety, found in Space4 a supportive environment where she was accepted and valued for who she is and what she contributes. She now volunteers regularly for Space4 helping especially in the Kitchen area of the project. She has massively grown in confidence and is responsible at Space4 for organising the cleaning of the building including arranging for cleaning supplies. She also now supports others struggling with mental health issues.*

**Carl,** *a regular came in to Space4 looking very distressed and knowing that he had been having issues with his job. During a private conversation with Space4 leaders, Carl broke down in tears, began shaking severely and said that he didn't think he could go on. He went on to say that all that had been going on with work, the employment agency and lack of money had made him think of killing himself. With Carl's consent, we helped him navigate through applying for Universal Credit, seeking help and support from agencies and helping him to seek help from his GP. Over the next few weeks Carl spent a lot of time in the project and started coming along to church where he received additional emotional and spiritual support. Carl continues to attend both on a regular basis and has said on several occasions that without the support of Space4 he wouldn't be here now and he means that literally.*

**Ruth, Adele, James & Serena** *Ruth Mum of three felt isolated and depressed, she heard about Space4 from a friend and decided to come in during one half term. The family had experience quite a lot of input from social services and at one point the children were placed into foster care. Ruth had had a challenging childhood and found playful interaction with her children (13, 4 & 9 months) difficult. During the Summer holidays the family came on trips and joined in activities that noticeably enhanced the wellbeing of all three children and Mum. Spending time with other children and interactive adults benefited the children, whilst Mum got to have conversations with other adults who weren't criticising or judging her. Ruth said "Coming to Space4 has turned our lives around, we have made friends, I feel relaxed enough to have fun with the children and we are part of something." Adele has become part of a group of young people who are working together to do a fund raising coffee morning for Space4.*

## **Our recent story**

The Coronavirus crisis has caused a big increase in demand for our service as many people are struggling with a multitude of issues related to financial pressure and social isolation. Being at the heart of our local community, we were able to change our delivery model to continue to be a positive presence for people. Using social media and also telephone contact we've been able to be alongside people who have struggled with loneliness and mental well-being – this included people already known to us and also others who have found or were referred to us. We've held an 'on-line' festival and produced some short films helping people focus on well-being during lockdown. We've recently started introducing 'creative-making' opportunities for adults and children (including the elderly who do not have access to technology) sending kits out to people in the post and being in touch over facebook and also telephone – these have been really popular with people who have received them and have been a source of occupation for people struggling to fill their days.

Demand for food parcels has, sadly, increased dramatically and to meet this we have moved our operations to a larger premises and increased staffing and volunteer levels to meet this increased demand. We typically now deliver 24 food parcels a week feeding 60-80 people. In addition, we have seen an increase in referrals from partner agencies including Jobseekers, local council and the local women's refuges – this has led to a need for emergency supplies of toiletries, nappies and basic baby clothing.

With our good community contacts we are anticipating further issues as a phased move from lockdown means people continue to face social isolation issues as well as further financial pressures as unemployment increases across the region. We are beginning to explore how we might help people through advice and advocacy.

### **The Next Chapter**

As we move through this 'recovering' phase of the covid crisis we believe there has never been a more important time for our project to strive to meet our vision of to be 'a space for community to flourish'.

In the short term we will continue to develop our on-line and remote ways of providing community based services as well as operating our expanded foodbank and planning how to establish an equivalent to the 'drop-in' part of our project and continuing to explore with partners how best to support people dealing with financial issues.

In addition to this, we are very keen to use existing and new relationships to listen to people and to identify needs while emerging from the Covid crisis. We want to use this to confirm the future goals of the project to further develop our plan and secure funding for the Next Chapter of the Space4 project.

We are seeking a Space4 Manager to work with our Project Board to help shape and lead us into the 'Next Chapter' of our project. With an Assistant Manager and Foodbank Coordinator and a team of dedicated and passionate volunteers this will be an exciting role for the right candidate.

For more information and an application form please contact Angela Slater:

email: [angelaslaterajs@gmail.com](mailto:angelaslaterajs@gmail.com)

or call: 0793 106 4891

If you think you could be the right person to fit this role then we'd love to hear from you.

