

## AGM 2023

### CHRISTIAN CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

#### A Presentation

#### GILLIAN

'Christian CARE in the Community' .... What is the relationship of Christian CARE to the community? ....What is the relationship of the community to Christian CARE?

Under the inspirational leadership of Bert Hyde, Christian CARE came into being 56 years ago to go out into the community. It has grown and developed and changed until it is now, as we have been emphasising tonight, a 'multibank' with so much more to offer within the community. As I was writing this I had phone call from a gentleman who was making an enquiry on behalf of a friend living in an empty property. Would he say that he had been searching the web for help, or that a friend knew of Christian CARE? No, this time it was the Salvation Army that had suggested he contacted us. As the call as coming to an end, he said 'I just want to say that I think what you and other charities are doing to help people like us is wonderful. It means such a lot.' Like one third of our referrals this past year here was a self-referral. We have seen a significant increase in self- referrals compared with the previous year. We are touching the lives of people right across spectrum from different cultures, social groups, - women, men and children struggling with a whole variety of circumstances. It was more of a confirmation than a surprise that this should be so in these post Covid times and in middle of a cost of living crisis.

More striking but again not unexpected was the evidence about the referral agencies from which the other two thirds of our referrals came. It was not from a host of different organisations but they originated almost exclusively from 3 groups –reflected in my choice of 3 members of the panel tonight – Karen Peter represents the NHS and Vanessa Robinson comes from the Wimbledon Guild, a key member of the Merton Community Hub. Unfortunately the representative of our major referrer, Merton Children's and Adult Services, has not been able to join us. Karen and Vanessa are joined by 2 people who have a wider perspective and were our referees when we were received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 6 years ago – we welcome Siobhain McDonagh MP for Mitcham and Morden and Paul Timmis minister of this church

In Christian CARE we are both reactive and proactive in our response to the needs of the community. My report has been a view from the inside.... looking out. Our panel tonight can I hope bring us their views on that relationship from the outside, looking in.

Paul, can we begin with you? For a decade now this church has been 'home' to Christian CARE. We are so pleased to be here. Can I ask you:

**In 2012 when we were about to become 'homeless', why were you keen to offer Christian CARE an Office in the church premises? What impact do you think this has had on the church and the surrounding community?**

## PAUL

“Committed to becoming a Church that prioritises **justice and dignity** for all, especially those who have previously been excluded, and a church which stands in active **solidarity** with those who need that most, the Methodist Church recently adopted a Justice, Dignity and Solidarity strategy. Our scriptures tell us that every person on this planet is made in God’s image. If we’re to follow Jesus then recognising that this Jesus treated each person he met with dignity, should inspire us to do likewise.

When I look at the gospels, I don’t see a Jesus telling people to subscribe to a belief system (in the, ‘if you don’t believe x, y, or z, you’re out of the club’ sense). I see a Jesus showing people how to live well because the God who loved us into being longs for us to live well. Jesus showed God’s love in his openness to all people. Time and again we see him breaking down barriers and reaching out to those who’d been marginalised. He was often criticised for keeping company with people others thought he should keep away from. Yet, in him, strangers became friends. There’s something about relationship here. And relationship is hugely important.

In the early days of my time here, I’d met Bert Hyde and heard something of Christian CARE’s backstory, learning how it had emerged from ecumenical house groups in which some of our church members had been a part. I’d met with Gillian and learned more about the ongoing work of the charity and some of the challenges that it was seeking to help people face, walking alongside them, helping them to have their voice heard. Justice. Dignity. Solidarity. Gillian may not have used these words but everything she said to me was shot through with them. Gillian came here to speak one Sunday morning. Christian CARE was already using our hall for its New Year children’s parties. So, there was already a relationship with Christian CARE in place. And I saw Christian CARE as a charity deeply committed to living out its faith in the Jesus way – the costly way of love.

I saw offering Christian CARE a room as being one small way in which we at MWMC could be involved in such a partnership, in such work, at some level. It would, I believed, provide people here with a focus for the outworking of their faith and/or their prayers. So, yes, I very much wanted this to happen – but this isn’t about me. In the end it was other people, most notably perhaps Mike Mortley, who did the work to make a possibility a reality – and I’m very grateful to Mike for that.

I’m not best placed to speak about the impact that having Christian CARE here has had on the wider community of Merton Park, but I can say that, over the past decade, the relationship between Martin Way and Christian CARE has deepened. We’re not a huge church, but a good number of church people have become or have been involved in the work of Christian CARE, taking on a variety of key roles within the charity. In their walking alongside some of the people that Christian CARE supports, those church members have had their own horizons widened and worldviews expanded – how could they not? – and, those experiences, I believe, have imperceptibly helped us to move on as a church community and encouraged us to look outwards more.

My hope, looking forwards, is that some of the structural issues that are making so many people’s lives intolerable will be addressed. I long for a time when charities such as Christian CARE don’t need to exist. But, assuming that such a time is some way off, in the coming years I hope that, as a church we can continue to work in partnership with Christian CARE, and, in the short term, that we can find a way to ensure that our *Community Garden Project* and our food surplus café, *The Open Table* (which each Wednesday offers a

nutritious hot meal on a pay as you feel basis) can further support those people in Christian CARE's care. ”

## **GILLIAN**

Thank you.

In 2016 our AGM speaker was Dr Mohan Sekeram who explained the introduction of Social Prescribing to GP practices. It is only recently that Christian CARE has had significant contact with Social Prescribers and in particular Karen who works out of Wideway Medical Centre and Grand Drive Surgery. Karen, I would like to ask you.

**How did you hear about Christian CARE and decide that the charity might be able to help your clients? What support have you since requested from us and what difference has this made in the lives of your clients?**

## **KAREN**

“First I will explain what Social Prescribing is: it is an attempt to combat the social factors that impact the health of individuals. The Social Prescribing network is a result of the 2016 NHS plan which said physical and mental wellbeing needed to be improved. The key word is empowerment; individuals should be encouraged and supported to take steps to improve their own lives.

It was in December 2021 that I first contacted Christian CARE. One of the people I was working with needed some furniture and I was finding it difficult to solve the problem. Then Christian CARE was recommended to me as a possible source. Your timely response was so important as the swift provision really made that family's Christmas. Since then I have asked for help with bedding, a sofa, nappies and baby milk for a newborn, and a high chair and clothes for a mother who was simply unable to afford them for her growing infant. My experience has been that help from Christian CARE is always timely and speedy, with minimal time between my request and action being taken.

In Christian CARE you take a real interest in the clients I refer and will be proactive in enquiring if there are additional needs. You 'go the extra mile'. The result is that clients feel cared for and confident to ask for more help for themselves. They respond to suggestions about opportunities in the community to make progress in their lives.

So, as I finish, I just want to say thank you Gillian and the Christian CARE Association for all your support.”

## **GILLIAN**

Thank you.

Vanessa, as I was completing a Wimbledon Guild Small Grant form recently I was reminded that you name Christian CARE along with the Foodbank and Citizens Advice – as one of your partner organisations. We really appreciate our long-term close relationship with you and your colleagues in the Welfare Department and we appreciate your advice and the help you give is with training. So I wanted to ask you this:

**As you have shared in partnership with CCA over the past 10 years, what have you observed about the ways the charity interacts in the community. Can collaboration with CCA allow you to make a more effective contribution to the wellbeing of families in need?**

## **VANESSA**

“I have been working with Gillian and her team to support families in Merton for more than a decade. I really value the way Christian Care is sufficiently flexible to adapt quickly to meet clients’ changing needs, both in terms of the wider needs of the client base in general, with things like the response to Covid and the cost of living ‘crisis’, but also I refer to the very specific individual needs of the clients we both work with, all of whom have different, and often desperate, situations that need our support.

When a client case is referred to Wimbledon Guild and we have assessed the various ways in which we can give our support, Christian Care is always a consideration, particularly where their expertise will add the greatest value – families with NRPF, refugees, babies, children; families with nothing but the clothes on their backs. We trust that Christian Care will offer speedy, heartfelt and appropriate help. I have appreciated Gillian’s compassionate, yet practical, insight into client situations and that has helped greatly in the way we have been able to maximise our joint resources – including financial, practical and emotional.

Like Wimbledon Guild, Christian Care has a client-centred approach to meeting need. This shared aim has meant that whenever we are jointly supporting a client, we have the same goals in mind – and is one of the reasons Wimbledon Guild has repeatedly called upon Christian Care for help for clients whose needs are more than we can deal with on our own. We know that when we call on the support of Christian Care, our request will be met with open ears and open hearts. The support offered will be non-judgmental; it will be as abundant as resources allow and it will be kindly delivered. The type of help offered by Christian Care is simply not available elsewhere in Merton.

On behalf of all of us at Wimbledon Guild, I would like to take this opportunity to wish Gillian well in her retirement from Christian Care and to thank her for her immeasurable contribution to the support of our clients over the years. We are looking forward to our continued relationship with Christian Care in this new chapter of its work.”

## **GILLIAN**

Thank you.

Siobhain, we are so pleased and honoured that you can join us tonight. You had been a supporter of Christian CARE from the outset. So it is appropriate that we ask you to draw together our reflections:

**How do you see the place and impact of Christian CARE in the community today?**

## **SIOBHAIN**

“Ahead of today’s AGM, I was asked to speak for a few minutes about the place and impact of Christian CARE in the community. But to understand the role of Christian CARE in our communities today, we need to understand its history. The story has to start in 1966, when Cathy Come Home was first broadcast on our television screens. For everyone in the room who isn’t old enough to remember, Cathy Come Home was a play on the BBC’s Wednesday slot, and it told the story of Cathy who hitchhikes to the city where she meets her husband Reg. But when Cathy falls pregnant and Reg is injured at work, they are left unemployed, without a flat, and they are forced to into illegal squatting in a wrecked, abandoned building. The local council couldn’t help them because of the long list of other people also on the waiting list. That is why Christian CARE was founded in 1967. When the state and the council can’t help, Christian CARE is there to step into the breach with furniture and food and holidays and friendship. They are there to help when no-one else is. It is the most extraordinary voluntary group, who do so much with so little. And whilst times

have changed since Cathy Come Home was on our TV screens, the services they provide haven't.

Whereas the support that Christian CARE used to provide tended to be for local longstanding families, in later years, Christian CARE has come to support families, from all over the world, that are new to Britain, that may not have the necessary immigration status, but are looking for support. Where the Council might not be able to help them, because they might not have recourse to public funds, they are there to lend a helping hand. Christian CARE is an open door when people are faced with a sea of closed doors in front of them. They are always there to fill the gaps when people are in need, whatever the time, whatever the crisis.

The whole organisation is an embodiment of living the Gospel, living the Christian faith, being there when people are in need, and without judgment. I suspect that we are now in a situation where once again Christian CARE will be supporting young families in need, whether it is homeless families in Hall Place, or refugees in the Holiday Inn Express who are waiting for decisions on their asylum claims, or families affected by bereavement or illness. We will need Christian CARE more than ever.

I will just finish by saying that when Bert passed away, I wondered whether the organisation would survive. He devoted his life to Christian CARE, and to whole generations of people who relied on Christian Care, he was known 'Mr Bert'. I can remember so many occasions when Bert would come along with a hopeless immigration case, where we thought, what are we going to do to help this person? But he never gave up on anyone, resolute that something could be done. When Gillian stepped into the breach, she showed that same level of devotion. And I know that Gillian's time has come for her to move on. I wanted to thank you for all that you have done. We will now look for a new Mr Bert or a new Gillian or a new team of Gillians or a team of Berts to take us forward. You have given us a great service and we are very grateful to you."

## **GILLIAN**

Thank you all for making time to be part of the panel for this presentation. And giving us a different perspective on the work of the charity. It has been a real encouragement to us – supporters and volunteers – to hear what you have to say.