

Freedom Community Alliance Supporters Newsletter – January 2024



Dear friend

Wow! Another year has flown by and we finished 2023 with a sense of gratitude for so many blessings, not least of which is the support that you continue to give to our work. As with life in general, the year has been full of successes and challenges, joy and sadness but our team of 26 staff, volunteers and partners are still standing and just as committed to the work they do for those in most need within our local community.



Earlier in the year, we said ‘goodbye’ to Crocombe Barton near Lynton which, for more than 13 years, has been a treatment centre for those wanting freedom from addiction. In May we held a celebration of all that had been achieved there and it was incredibly moving to hear story after story of men who shared how their lives had been transformed by the work of the team there. Indeed, many shared how they genuinely believed they would not be alive had it not been for Crocombe.



In November, one of those men, Chris, joined a team that went to Uganda with the local charity Amigos. There he was able to share so much of his life lessons with young men there who were themselves struggling. He said he kept having to pinch himself to think that 5 years ago, he was in prison, but now he was able to travel to Africa to help others. Chris says he is first in the queue to return next year. 😊

Leaving Crocombe generated many different emotions for everyone. Since then, two members of the staff team have found roles supporting others in recovery elsewhere. At FCA, we continue to provide Recovery Housing (currently 9 bed spaces) in Barnstaple for men who are ready to stop their substance misuse but recognise they need help by living in a supportive and accountable community to strengthen their recovery. We have a number of men doing fantastically well in their journeys of recovery with the help of their support worker Alice.

Our work at the Freedom Centre continues to grow with more than 10,000 visits made in 2023. This is an increase of more than a third on the number we had in 2022. The number of hot lunches served was up 22% on 2022. The below figures give an indication of the impact our team and our amazing partners have made working together:

Activity	Total 2023	Activity	Total 2023
Visits to the Freedom Centre	10807	Computer used	112
Different individuals supported	488	Food parcels given	1317
Lunches provided	7017	Loads of clothes laundered	195
Clothing donations given out	419	On site GP appointments	323
Showers provided	695	Nursing interventions	730
Foodbank vouchers given	104	Gym used	535
Phone used by clients	226	On site pods used	965
Phones charged	244	Breakfasts for pod users	497

We continue to provide a total of 51 beds of supported housing for individuals who either have been homeless or are at risk of being so. These include some properties that provide night by night provision and are the first step on the ladder for those struggling with chaos. We have 2 shared houses and 8 pods (4 internally on site at the Freedom

Centre and 4 externally) all of which is used for this temporary accommodation. In 2023, 103 different individuals used this temporary accommodation. The four pods on site here were used on 965 times over the year providing safe sleep, with our night welfare team providing a reassuring presence to users. This is an occupancy rate of 72% which, when you consider the levels of chaos of those involved, is really positive. We also have more established shared houses that individuals can call home. In 2023, these houses were used by 37 different individuals and a further 12 from our Recovery Housing.



It was fantastic that our wonderful Kitchen Team was awarded North Devon Voluntary Service Team of the Year for 2023 for their incredible work in providing more than 7000 hot nutritious meals to those in need. We are so appreciative for our amazing volunteers who give so much of their time and energy to help.

In the autumn, we welcomed a team of 5 Devon Mind support workers to the Freedom Centre where they will be based going forward. So many of our clients struggle with their mental health and we are excited about the opportunities that this alliance with Devon Mind might produce.



We have recently also secured some funding to enable more of our clients to access counselling services. We recognise that without being able to process painful life events and the resulting emotions, many individuals will remain stuck in behaviours that undermine their hopes for a positive and full life. The 6-month pilot using counsellors that Freedom are already working with, aims to build trust with individuals who use our Day Centre, to encourage them to engage with a counsellor and move forward in their lives. We will keep you posted on progress.

Once again at Christmas we have been blown away by the kindness of our supporters in the donations they have made. As well as food items, clothing and other gifts, we have received monetary donations in the lead up to Christmas of £5404 which is amazing and we are so grateful. In addition, two young men from year 6 at West



Buckland School – Josh & Charlie – have been dipping themselves in a cold pond every day since September and have raised an incredible **£1500** for Freedom. This



is a fantastic effort. We also were delighted to welcome 12 teams (63 runners) from Fremington Trailblazer Running Club (aka Wise Men/Women from the East) with bags of gifts that we were able to distribute.

We ended the year with a sense of sadness when one of our amazing maintenance team, Graham, had a serious heart episode whilst at work. He was rushed to Derriford Hospital and underwent lengthy surgery on 6th December and he remains in ICU after complications. Graham is a dearly loved member of our team who has been part of the journey of Freedom from the very beginning. He is such a gentle, humble man who loves to serve others and we miss him terribly. Please do pray with us for a full recovery for 'Gra' and for peace and comfort for his family including his dear partner Helen who remains with him for much of the time.



That said, we begin 2024 with a sense of hope about all that we can do to help those in need and respond to the needs of our local community in partnership with North Devon Council, Health Services and others. Our trustees will be meeting on 12th January to look again at our 'mission, vision and values' and how we need to organise ourselves for the challenges ahead. We are so grateful to them and to you all for your ongoing support for our work and hope you are encouraged by some of what you have read.

On behalf of all at Freedom we wish you a very happy, healthy and blessed 2024. **God bless you.**

The Freedom Team