

## **Joe's Place Information for the Diocesan Newsletter July 2022**

Joe's Place is a project supported by the parishes of the John Ingram Partnership. It is highly regarded by those who use it, those who volunteer there and those who have kindly supported it through the years.

Joe's Place supports some of the many vulnerable people in the local area. These include those who are homeless, have little or no money or who face struggles with addiction or with issues related to mental & physical health or loneliness.

It was founded in 2014 as a PACE (Parish and Community Enablement) project and takes place every Wednesday in the Parish Centre of St Joseph's RC Church in the centre of Gateshead. The location is excellent with good transport links

Joe's Place is essentially a drop-in centre, where all are welcome. The warmth of the welcome given is recognised by all, and everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Guests are served freshly prepared hot or cold food at their tables. There is a wide menu which offers lighter meals such as scrambled egg on toast, or omelette and salad, or jacket potatoes with different fillings. More substantial meals include mince & dumplings, or sausage dinner with Yorkshires or Corned Beef Hash. There are also a wide range of desserts including cake & custard, or rice pudding or fresh fruit and ice cream. Our cooks receive many compliments!

Food is prepared in the kitchen using donated tinned and dried foods, together with fresh and frozen food purchased using generous donations from local schools, businesses, parishes, and individuals. We often offer sandwiches to take away or give fresh fruit as snacks.

We regularly distribute donated toiletries, clothing, or other items. We keep a stock of sleeping bags and rucksacks which can be distributed to individuals as needed. We also provide 'seasonal' treats at Easter and Christmas. Joe's Place has given many people an opportunity to take actions to show their concern for others by donating food, or other items.

When it opened in 2014 there were approximately 35 regular volunteers. Many of these original volunteers are still regularly attending. The Pandemic caused the project to close from March 2020 until we were able to reopen safely by offering a Takeaway service from October 2021. We are now fully open, and have been so for a while, though we continue to ensure good ventilation and spacing and provide hand sanitiser etc.

During the time we were closed the kitchen and dining area were fully refurbished. This was funded by Joe's Place itself and by generous donations from some of the local parishes in the Partnership. The existing furniture was reupholstered by a local firm and costs met by individual supporters. This was a wonderful example of the generosity of our supporters who responded so generously to our appeal by offering to fund the upholstery project. It was also a good example of using resources well by not sending the 'shabby' chairs to be scrapped.

We are reduced to only 20 regular volunteers now. These include several new volunteers who are contributing with great enthusiasm and dedication and are valued members of the team. We expect new volunteers to join in the coming months once the necessary safeguarding checks are completed. We regularly have 80 guests and are open from 10am till 1pm, though guests often arrive earlier and are never turned away or kept outside.

We have all learned a great deal since this project began, and the Pandemic has opened the eyes, as well as the hearts and minds of many to the needs of those around them. We have all come to realise that we are all dependent on others, and all of us have in different ways shared the anxiety, loneliness, and lack of human contact during the times of lockdown.

Those who come to Joe's Place as guests, volunteers or visitors become a community where we all recognise our vulnerabilities and our dependence on each other, and where we strive to treat each other with mutual kindness and respect. Sharing time together gives us opportunities to know each other by name and to share conversations and to help each other.

While the provision of meals is an important part of what we do, it is the warm welcome and friendliness and supportive, non-judgemental atmosphere that is at the heart of Joe's Place.

Joe's Place is a very visible sign of Christ's love in action in the centre of Gateshead. As people enter, they are greeted by a sign made by some of our guests. It reads 'WELCOME' and is a sincere message for all who come here.

It is interesting that the National Synthesis of the Synodal Responses by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales echoes many of the themes which projects like Joe's Place are promoting. We, who are part of the project, are thankful for the opportunity it gives us to put our Faith into Action and to live out our mission to serve our brothers and sisters and to bring Christ's love to others.

We recognise that we are all part of something much bigger and that what we do each Wednesday at Joe's Place is only possible because of the huge commitment of parishioners throughout the Partnership, and the Diocese together with many supporters who enable the work at Joe's Place to continue.

In January 2020 we became part of the Caritas Network, and we are regularly represented at the monthly meetings led by the Episcopal Vicar of Caritas Fr Adrian Tuckwell. His support, together with the shared experience of other members has been a great benefit to our work. 'The Caritas Network brings together many groups throughout the Diocese to reach out the hand of friendship and walk with one another in mutual support.' [Vicariate for Caritas]

'If only we might rediscover once for all that we need one another, and that in this way our human family can experience a rebirth, with all its faces, all its hands and all its voices, beyond the walls that we have erected.' [Fratelli Tutti 35]