

Loneliness: an urgent crisis

Many of us will have experienced feeling alone, even if for a limited time. For some, however, loneliness is severe and prolonged, and the number of people suffering is growing ever greater.

According to a report published before Christmas by Jo Cox's Commission for Loneliness, it is a 'chronic illness... causing widespread misery.' Rachel Reeves MP, co-chair of the commission, said that 'loneliness is no longer just a personal misfortune but has grown into a social epidemic.' The report calls for a government-led strategy to combat the crisis that does not discriminate between young and old and urges us all to get involved.

'Tackling loneliness is a challenge that can only be met by concerted action by everyone.'

According to the report:

- over 9 million people in the UK across all adult ages are often or always lonely
- loneliness is as harmful as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- loneliness increases the risk of premature death by about a third

Whilst Christmas for many means time spent with family and friends, this year one million people in the UK were expected to spend Christmas alone.

The BCM Care Centre is one of the projects supported by money raised at the Sponsored Sleepout. We asked our clients there about their experience of loneliness...

'I come to the Care Centre for help, food, nice staff and companionship. I see people I haven't seen in a while. Otherwise I'd be alone.' David

'If the Care Centre didn't exist we'd all be on our own. I come to socialise and meet new people. I'd get more depressed without it. I'd just be at home staring at four walls.' Richard

Please pray for those who are lonely and for action by government, families, communities and individuals to bring an end to loneliness.

Birmingham City Mission

The Clock Tower, 2 Langdon St,
Birmingham B9 4BP

Birmingham Churches Winter Night Shelter
at the BCM Care Centre on
Thursdays, 22nd Feb - 22nd March
WE NEED VOLUNTEERS
to befriend, serve, clean & stay over
If you can help, call 0121 766 6603

**SPEND A
FRIDAY NIGHT IN
(a cardboard box)**

Raise funds for Birmingham City Mission's work with homeless people and find out what it's really like to sleep rough.

**BCM'S
sponsored
SLEEPOUT**

Friday 16th February

Details & registration form at
birminghamcitymission.co.uk
0121 766 6603
office@birminghamcitymission.co.uk

REGISTER NOW

Those who come

The other project funded by the Sleepout is the Resource Centre. We asked BCM Support Worker, Steve, about the many different people who go there for help.

'Those who come may have recently come out of jail and have no benefits set up as yet. Or recently moved off the street and into a hostel or flat. Job Centre sanctioning (stopping benefits for a period of time) remains an issue, as does the switch to universal credit which means people can go a month without money. We have a lot of single mothers and women escaping abusive relationships. Life on benefits is tough and the reality is there is often a choice to be made between bills or food.'

Pray for those who come to the Resource Centre, for the provision of their needs, financial and emotional stability and God's presence in their lives.

birminghamcitymission.co.uk

Telephone: 0121 766 6603

Email: office@birminghamcitymission.co.uk

BCM MONTHLY



Compassion for the needy

Two weeks before Christmas I was in my office when my phone rang. It was from my daughter, Deborah. "Dad, mom is doing CPR on a man." For a split second I was speechless as I tried to process what she had said. My eventual response was to say, "I hope that you don't have to start doing CPR on your mom!"

They had just turned out of our estate onto the main Stourbridge Road and found it blocked by a police car. Jackie saw that there was a young police woman attending to a man on the floor. Even with her restricted mobility she immediately got out of the car, went over to the police officer, explained that she was a trained nurse and offered her assistance. This was gratefully received. Jackie continued to perform CPR until other emergency services arrived, at which point she got back into the car. We understand that the man was rushed to hospital but sadly passed away.

A couple of days later we were having a meal with six friends when two of us heard our phones ping. To our amazement we saw a post on Facebook about what Jackie had done. Someone had heard what had happened and described Jackie as a 'local hero'. She had chosen to 'get involved' rather than walk on the other side. Within 24 hours over 5,000 people had liked the post and hundreds had made comments. I have found it an emotional experience to read what people have said about Jackie.

In 2018 we will all be confronted with people in need. It may be a physical need or someone who requires emotional support. It might be a neighbour who is lonely, or a single parent struggling to cope. A homeless person desperate for food or an elderly person who needs someone to talk to. The great example of Jesus is that he had compassion for people. When his disciples returned to him after being on a 'mission' trip, he took them away for a retreat to a lonely place. As they arrived, crowds had followed, and the scripture says, 'When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.' He went on to teach them many things and to feed the 5,000.

Of course, we all should be assisting people in practical ways but the greatest thing that any one of us can do is to explain to people how much God loves them and how the Lord Jesus died upon a cross for them so that their sins could be forgiven. This is why BCM's mission statement is: 'Proclaiming the gospel; Helping the needy'. The Bible says that there is much joy in heaven over one sinner who comes to repentance than over ninety-nine righteous who do not need to repent.

In this coming year may we all be determined to be more like Jesus and to show compassion and care to whomever God brings along our path, and not to walk on the other side.

Wes Erpen

Wes Erpen, Chief Executive



Keith and Angela Webb have been long-time supporters and volunteers

of the Mission. In recent years Keith has been collecting items of value and selling them on ebay for BCM. During 2017 he sold around 1,300 items raising over £14,000 for the Mission.

Cash in the Attic

Some of the things Keith has sold during 2017:

- 1793 American Half Penny £199.99
- Caedmon Original 1978 LP and Single £855 (half to BCM/half to donor)
- Bakelite Valve Radio £49
- World War 1 Tin dated 1914, sent out by Queen Mary to the troops in the trenches, £31
- Snowboard £100
- Fake Lowry Painting, but still sold for £56
- Saxophone £224.99
- Mamod Steam-driven Car £89.43

Keith has a keen eye for items of value. If you have something that you would like to donate to BCM that could be sold on ebay please ring Keith on 07751 305702. All items would have to be delivered to The Clock Tower.

Finally, a very big thank you to Angela for allowing her house to be filled with goods. I'm sure she has stepped over one or two boxes through the years...

JANUARY 2018



"We are extremely proud to be associated with the Mission and the fantastic work you guys are doing there."
Stacey Tonge, PTV Group



After hearing about ToyLink at assemblies led by the Youth Team, secondary school students got stuck in by giving toys, wrapping or working in the food bank.

"The assembly was great, informative and well linked to concepts surrounding light and darkness that students of all beliefs can relate to. It was very helpful to explain to students how important it is to try and think about giving rather than just receiving."

Teacher at Birmingham Academy

The Children's Team were also busy taking their 'Christmas Special' assemblies into primary schools (below).



Christmas starts early at the Mission

At BCM Christmas began in September when the ToyLink team moved into the Clock Tower to organise the wrapping room and sort donated gifts. They needed to be ready for a mammoth operation that involved hundreds of volunteers collecting, selecting, wrapping and delivering presents to, this year, 1,138 Birmingham families with a total of 2,838 children.

Just before Christmas BBC Midlands Today reported on the project, interviewing Austin who has received gifts for his five children since his wife died ten years ago.

Austin talked about how he would feel he had let down his children.

"I couldn't afford many presents. Without those charities giving us presents, they would've only had a few little ones. You've got to get on with it at the end of the day. They're my children. I couldn't let them go anywhere else, so I'll do my best."

Thank you to everyone who has given toys, money, time and energy to help families like Austin's under strain this Christmas.



The wrapping room full of volunteers from DWP and Volunteering Matters (left); a team from Landrover criss-crossed Kings Norton in six of their vehicles to deliver gifts (below); Stacey and Stuart from PTV Group which, every year, donates the use of its Route Optimiser software, saving BCM countless man-hours in routing deliveries across the city (top right).



ToyLink isn't the end of the BCM Christmas story. In December staff and volunteers across all departments brought food, friendship and the great news of Jesus' birth to thousands.



Thank you to Waitrose in Harborne for yet another year running supporting BCM's Christmas meals for the homeless and elderly (above); there was a slap-up turkey dinner and hearty carol singing at the Care Centre's Christmas meal (below); clients at ElderLink got crafty with baubles, tinsel, holly and ivy to create glitzy table decorations (right).



PRAYER FOCUS

SUNDAY

Please remember Alan & Helen Cutler in your prayers. Helen's father and uncle passed away within three days last month; it has been a physically and emotionally exhausting time.

Thank the Lord for all the Christmas meals that took place at ElderLink and the Care Centre; and for the meals for staff and volunteers, which were full of fun and laughter.

MONDAY

Thank the Lord for Yvonne Iley and Bobbie Schipper, who organised the sorting and wrapping of toys before Christmas. Thank the Lord also for the 300 wonderful volunteers from companies and churches, and also individuals, who helped to make our 'ToyLink' project happen. Pray that the 1,200 families who received gifts will read the Christian literature enclosed in each bag.

TUESDAY

Continue to pray for Derek Cotterill, our Development Officer, that he will be able to generate contacts with new churches, that he will be well received and that he will be blessed as he encourages people with what God is doing through BCM.

Pray for our new City Missionary, Eric Bafende, who starts this month; having been a missionary doctor in Africa, he comes with a lot of experience. Pray with us that the Lord will send another Missionary and the relevant financial support.

WEDNESDAY

As we enter a new year, please pray for the Board of Directors by name.

Owen Nicholds (Chair), Tony Ball, Rev Stuart Carter, Roger Chapman, David Clark, Simon Loescher, Ruth Mountford and Andrew Noble. Ask God to give them wisdom and faith as they meet regularly and strategically direct the ministries and affairs of the Mission.

THURSDAY

Praise God that thousands of children heard about the real meaning of Christmas in recent weeks.

Please pray the Children's Team and the Youth Team as they prepare to recommence their schools work; pray especially that Sue Fearon & John Platt, the team managers, will know the Lord's wisdom.

FRIDAY

Most Fridays our staff have a devotional service when leaders from churches across the city minister God's Word. Pray that these services will be a real blessing to our staff who are giving of themselves to hurting people every day, which can be very challenging and emotionally draining. Especially pray that we will all be kept close to the Lord in our personal lives.

SATURDAY

Remember the Evangelism Team doing city centre outreach today. Pray that the Lord will protect them as they share the gospel and give them clarity as they engage people in debate. Pray for God's anointing on their words and that people will be drawn to God as they hear the message.

Pray that the Lord will meet our financial needs this month in whatever way He chooses. We thank the Lord for goodness and mercy, which follow us all the days of our life.



Open the Book equips church groups to lead bible story assemblies in primary schools.

If you would like to get involved...

Info sessions: Tues 16th Jan, Mon 29th Jan & Tues 6th March, 6.30pm - 7.45pm

Full training: Tues 16th Jan, Mon 29th Jan & Tues 6th March, 9.15am - 3.15pm

Reserve your place by contacting childrensteam@birminghamcitymission.co.uk

The training is free. Sessions may be cancelled depending on number of bookings.

INTERNSHIP

- A one-year hands-on training opportunity
- No fees; accommodation, food & bus pass provided
- Wide choice of modules, including:

City centre & estate evangelism

Youth & Children's work

Reaching the homeless

Supporting the elderly

Overseas mission experience

For more information call 0121 766 6603 or visit

birminghamcitymission.co.uk

