

# AN INTRODUCTION TO....



## 1. Background

Places of Welcome is one of several projects which is run by the charity Transforming Communities Together (TCT). TCT is a joint venture between the Church Urban Fund and the Diocese of Lichfield. We are part of the Together Network linking with 19 other independent joint ventures across England.

We were established in 2014 to build capacity and resilience in communities to tackle poverty in and around Staffordshire, northern Shropshire and the Black Country. We deliver several initiatives including Near Neighbours, Dementia-Friendly Churches, Just Finance Black Country, Wolverhampton Poverty Truth Commission, as well as work on the themes of homelessness, asylum-seekers, human trafficking, and families' champions. We currently employ two full-time and five part-time staff. The Chair of the Trustees is the Director of Transforming Communities for the Diocese of Lichfield.

TCT is seeking to extend Places of Welcome across Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and the Black County. The promotion of Places of Welcome is an integral part of Walsall's Integration Plan, and TCT has been funded by Walsall for All for this work.

## 2. Places of Welcome

The Places of Welcome movement is a growing network of hospitality run entirely by volunteers from local community groups, who want to make sure that everyone in their area has a place to go for a friendly face, a cup of tea and a conversation if and when they need it. The primary aim of the Places of Welcome network is that **every neighbourhood has places where all people feel safe to belong, connect with others and contribute to their local community**. Places of Welcome developed out of the Birmingham Social Inclusion process 'Giving Hope Changing Lives', as a response to the question – "Is Birmingham a welcoming city?" It quickly spread to the Black Country, more recently into the south of Staffordshire and in several other locations around England. There are now over 350 Places of Welcome nationally, with 19 in Walsall. We are now ready to reinvigorate our work in Walsall in order to support and strengthen the local Places of Welcome network and connect with other groups and organisations who are involved in building sustainable communities.

Places of Welcome bring people together, building a sense of community, reducing social exclusion and overcoming loneliness. They are local venues where, on a regular basis, people can find company, and be valued for who they are. The guiding principles of all Places of Welcome are expressed in 5 Ps. These are:

- **Place:** An accessible and hospitable building, open at the same time every week.
- **People:** Open to everyone regardless of their circumstances or situation, and staffed by volunteers.
- **Presence:** A place where people actively listen to one another.
- **Provision:** Offering free refreshments (at least a cup of tea and a biscuit) and basic local information.
- **Participation:** Recognises that every person coming to a Place of Welcome will bring talents, experiences and skills that they might be willing to share locally.

These principles build up an ethos where everyone is encouraged to participate. Places of Welcome develop according to the skills and resources that volunteers and visitors contribute. Some engage in craft activities, share practical skills, cook together, arrange for trips out, and run computer classes. Some have close links with job clubs and foodbanks running from the same venues.

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Such real examples of shared activities have a direct impact on reducing social exclusion and ensure that every person is valued. At the same time, Places of Welcome provide natural opportunities for sign-posting on to local services supporting carers, those with health problems, and people in debt. This information can be shared in a sensitive manner, with both leaflets and flyers available, as well as responding to issues that arise in the course of conversations. Many, though not all, Places of Welcome are based at churches which, in several neighbourhoods, can provide an initial point of engagement with local communities. Places of Welcome are run entirely by volunteers, using the community resources which churches and other local groups can freely provide.

#### **Case study 1**

*“At our Places of Welcome, we now have a regular group who come along and bring their knitting with them. As a church, we are currently knitting for Knit for Peace and some of our regulars at Places of Welcome have started to knit for this charity too. This week, one of the ladies brought a jumper with her to ask advice as she couldn’t figure out from the pattern how it should be sewn together. One of the other knitters sat down with her and they figured out between them how to do it and started to sew it together between them for the rest of the session. It was lovely to watch them work together to create this beautiful jumper 😊”*

#### **Case study 2**

*Tom (not his real name) was suffering from cancer and moved to Stoke from down south to be with his Mum. However quite soon after his move, his Mum sadly died. Tom felt lost and alone. Whilst popping to the local shops he saw the poster outside of the local Church advertising the Place of Welcome. A few days later he came into the church for prayers. Gradually he started to become more involved with the life of the church, attending the Place of Welcome a few times and also going along to church services. He helped with the summer holiday club and now feels a contentment with life that previously was missing. He feels that he can cope with life’s ups and downs much better; he no longer feels angry but is able to laugh when things go wrong. He feels increasingly part of the church community – and it was the sign to this Place of Welcome that helped to bring him in...*

**For more information about Places of Welcome, please visit the website at**

**[www.placesofwelcome.org.uk](http://www.placesofwelcome.org.uk)**