

# It's great to work as Christians together

Many of our activities involve working alongside Christians of other denominations to share God's love with others

WHEN a teacher from an Isle of Wight secondary school died, staff phoned the co-ordinator of their local School Pastors.

They knew that these caring Christians could help students to articulate their feelings and deal with their sense of loss. It was a measure of how much these volunteers are appreciated and trusted.

The networks of School Pastors, Street Pastors and Prayer Pastors are just one way in which Christians of all denominations are working together across the **Isle of Wight**. Volunteers from Church of England, Baptist, URC, Pentecostal, Methodist, independent Evangelical churches and more set aside any minor differences they have in order to share God's love.

Street Pastors patrol the streets of Newport and Ryde regularly, into the early hours of the morning. They'll help late-night revellers who have drunk too much, been separated from their friends, lost their shoes, or who need help getting home. On many occasions, a listening ear is what's needed. This leads to a reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime, as it ensures vulnerable people are looked after.

Co-ordinator Susanne McCaffery said: "We don't tend to ask each other which churches we happen to go to, but we do know each individual who volunteers.



Above: School Pastors in the Bay C of E School with Archbishop Justin Welby; right: Street Pastors in action

Street Pastors on the island was actually started back in 2009 as an ecumenical initiative and it's continued ever since. We do one Saturday a month and one Friday a month in Newport, and one Saturday a month in Ryde. We also patrol in Cowes during Cowes Week, the Isle of Wight Festival and other major island events.

"The biggest incentive for us is doing God's work. We don't preach to people, but we listen to them and act like Jesus to them. We all wear a uniform, and people including the door staff and police know that uniform means we're here to help. We don't really talk about faith unless we are asked. And it does seem as though it reduces anti-social behaviour, especially later on at night."



Worshippers from various Isle of Wight churches started volunteering as School Pastors in 2012, supporting students at Medina College, Carisbrooke College and Ryde Academy. Lately they've also been invited into the Bay C of E School in Sandown.

## Holiday club is run in partnership

DOZENS of four to 11-year-olds from across West Wight have enjoyed fun, games, food and activities together for a week at the start of the summer holidays each year.

They've been part of the West Wight Holiday Bible Club, which is run as a partnership between all nine churches that are part of Churches Together in West Wight.

They all contribute towards funding youth worker Faye Smith, who runs a variety of groups for children and young people during the year – and heads up the team organising the Holiday Bible Club. This year, it may switch from being a week long to being specific days.

Hazel Britton, who chairs the ecumenical group, said: "It's one of the highlights of the year, and it's so good to see children from across the area engaged with Bible stories."

It's just one of many activities run by churches in Yarmouth, Totland and Freshwater, which have a great legacy of ecumenism. Their committee meets monthly, and



Faye Smith leads the Holiday Bible Club

there is a separate monthly prayer meeting, as well as ecumenical worship at significant times such as Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

They run Lent lunches that are also open to the community, plus Lent study groups that allow people to learn and pray together.

Churches Together in West Wight also organises 'Oasis', a weekly community drop-in for the

elderly in the Methodist Church, as well as Our Place West Wight, which includes a community cafe, and a reminisce and activity session for older people.

The ecumenical ministry to those in care homes is co-ordinated by their Anna Chaplain, and churches also act as collection points for the Freshwater Foodbank.

They're available in the playground for students to talk to, and also offer mentoring in school. Students are often referred to them via the school's own pastoral system.

Co-ordinator Sally Murphy said: "The first question we ask isn't what church our volunteers go to. It so happens that our 14 School Pastors are from nine different churches. We actually trailblazed on the island for our School Pastors to offer mentoring in school. It's very much at the point of need: perhaps a pupil has had a bereavement or their parents' marriage has broken up.

"It's about spending time showing that you care, giving them space to talk and really listening. We don't preach to people, but I think there is a difference compared with the secular mental health services that I was involved with for 22 years – and that's the prayer backing we have from Prayer Pastors.

"Because of our volunteers, students

develop a respect for the church and for prayer, and they might want to know why we offer our time. And the schools appreciate it too – they've seen the difference it makes and treat us as if we are part of the school community."

If you're part of an Isle of Wight church and would like to offer your time as a Street Pastor, School Pastor or Prayer Pastor, find out more details on [www.iowstreetpastors.org.uk](http://www.iowstreetpastors.org.uk). It's even possible to observe Pastors in action before deciding whether to commit yourself.

This ministry is just one of many across the island that benefits from being done ecumenically. Churchgoers meet regularly to worship and pray together, and the list of ecumenical projects includes Aspire in Ryde, Carisbrooke Priory, Home for Good, Messy Church, Anna Chaplaincy, hospital and hospice chaplaincy, Open the Book and the Lionheart Festival. Bishop Jonathan is patron of both Aspire

Ryde and Carisbrooke Priory.

Worshippers met for an all-island celebration in February to hear more about some of these ministries and another 'Pray the Wight' event is planned for March 15, when the focus will be on youth.

Meanwhile, **Churches Together in Fareham** are also very active, with churches meeting regularly for worship, prayer and community days.

Worshippers of all denominations get together for annual Lent study groups, and also for a joint service of witness in the town centre on Good Friday. And in the summer, they'll be running their joint holiday club for a week at the start of the school holidays.

The ecumenical Lent study groups have been running since at least 1986. Churchgoers register to take part and groups run in people's homes on different days of the week, and at different times of