

May 2025

Thank you for your continued interest in SWCC. Here is our latest news..

Chaplain's chat

No two days are the same!

In January 2023, one of the women at HMP Eastwood Park heard she had been offered a place on the Mother and Baby wing (MBU), which was great news. Let's call her Mel, for the purpose of the story. Mel arrived on the MBU full of attitude and larger than life! It didn't take her long to settle in. Her baby was born in the March and was gorgeous, with big brown eyes and a mop of dark curls. Over the past two years, Mel has faced many challenges but throughout all of that time, she has hugely valued the support of Community Chaplain, Avril, whom she has come to trust. Mel regularly attended the weekly Let's Cook sessions and fortnightly Messy Church sessions, which Baby Mel has thoroughly enjoyed, especially Avril's storytelling bag! As well as that, Mel has been able to talk through many of her difficulties and feels very differently about the future.

When an infant reaches the age of 2yrs old, they must leave the MBU and move permanently into the community; the aim being for the infant to return and live with their family. Thankfully, Mel has a wonderful dad, who had maintained regular visits with the family on the MBU. More recently, Baby Mel had begun having overnight visits with Dad in preparation for leaving the MBU. Initially it was thought Mel wouldn't be able to leave with her child and would have to transfer back to the main prison to finish her sentence. With the support of her Offender Manager and the nursery nurses, an appeal was presented before the Parole panel, who offered Mel 'Home Detention Curfew (HDC)'. Everyone was very excited with the news of Mel being able to leave prison and return home with her child.

One of the great privileges that Community Chaplaincy has is to be able to work with people both inside and outside the prison gate, and Avril arranged to give Mel a lift home on the day of her release, which was going to be an early 7:00am start! It happened to be the same day as Little Mel's 2nd Birthday. The car was full; there were balloons, birthday cake and lots of shopping! A few days earlier, someone from the local community had messaged Avril, explaining they had bags of shopping and wondered if she knew any families that could make use of them; this is something Avril describes as a divine coincidence! As they were driving to Mel's home, there were such mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety, so much to process. Avril and Mel stopped at Tesco's for Mel to quickly pick up some last-minute birthday gifts for Little Mel, and a Costa coffee. As Avril went to collect the coffees, Mel turned to Avril: "No, this is my treat to you, it's my way of saying thank you".



News in brief...



Meet Merrill our newest Chaplain...



*providing
support
beyond
mentoring...*

Greetings,

I have only met a few of you therefore, now is an ideal opportunity to tell you a little about myself and how I became involved with SWCC. Have you ever noticed how God sometimes uses lots of different threads when leading you to where he wants you to be? The beginnings of my interest in working with people who had experience of the criminal justice system began with an ex-prison officer telling me how he had met someone who he had helped to get his life back on track years after leaving the prison service. Soon after that I began training for Christian ministry and thoughts of the CJS were put into one of those, to be looked at later, files in my mind.

For a module on my training course, we had to explore different voluntary rolls. Chaplaincy was on my mind and during my search into the various forms I came across the SWCC. I was shocked by the number of people who had a very negative attitude to the idea, telling me that "I would not like it," or that it would be very "dangerous." Or, with a look of concern on their faces said "How can you deal with those sorts of people?" Two quotes came to my mind; "There but for the grace of God go I," and "Let he who has no sin cast the first stone!"

It is incredibly satisfying to show people a way forward from a shattered life to hope for a brighter future. We are privileged to walk beside them as they face the problems and uncertainties of a future this side of the gate.

SWCC is in it for the long haul and my new position as SALT project lead, promoting our listening ear programme, will enable us to stay alongside as they encounter new challenges in their lives.

We need more SALT volunteers. For information, drop me an email or ring me for a chat. My contact details are email: merril@southwestcc.org.uk Mobile phone: 07930 409802.

Merril

Spring Harvest



The Community Chaplaincy Association was represented at Spring Harvest in Minehead this year by two of our SWCC team: Cathy Jerrard and Jackie Oglethorpe, along with Mark Mansell from Futures Unlocked in Warwickshire. As well as sharing about the national picture of Community Chaplaincy, they all had some great conversations about the work we do in the South West with those who stopped at the stand.



We are looking for a new Chaplain in Cornwall. For more details or to apply, visit our website or www.charityjob.co.uk

Training

Our next Induction Training for new mentors begins Tuesday 13th May. If you or anyone you know might be interested in learning more about being a volunteer mentor with SWCC, please get in touch!

