

day2day



Next page: Spring is here...honestly!

A Christian scheme that has kept the peace on the streets of a Preston neighbourhood, Meadow Street (pictured), is now being piloted in the city centre. Will it work? Crime Reporter STEF HALL reports



The peace patrol

TWO years ago the area of Meadow Street in Deepdale was a very different place.

On the fringe of Preston's red light district, it was riddled with crime problems connected to drug use, prostitution and anti-social behaviour.

Now residents are enjoying a big improvement in their neighbourhood with a huge reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime, especially at night.

They believe it is partly thanks to the Street Pastors scheme. The scheme was introduced to St George's and St Matthew's areas of Preston in 2009 because at the time the area was considered the neediest.

Now its volunteers are piloting an expansion of their work to a very different area of Preston – the city centre, which is visited by thousands of revellers over the weekend.

Police hope the volunteers, a group of Christians aged 30 to 70, from 20 churches in the city, will have a calming influence on a sometimes-volatile nightlife.



PASTOR: Chris Drury

But the pastors are also hoping to form relationships with homeless people, some of whom they aim to guide towards help. The pastors patrol the area around Church Street and the bus station from 11.30pm to 3am every Friday night and if deemed successful they could be a permanent fixture in the city centre at the weekend. Rev Chris Drury of Fulwood Free Methodist Church oversees the scheme locally. He explains: "The police ap-



DELIGHT: Insp Jill Halliwell

proached us before Christmas and asked whether we could support the work they are doing in the city centre, particularly their Night Safe Project, in the lead-up to Christmas. "We looked at this and felt it would be an appropriate expansion of the work we already do literally just across Ringway in St George's and Matthew's. "We were delighted to be involved but did not want to reduce our long term commitments to those areas. It was de-

ecided to stay in that area the first part of the evening then around 11.30pm, when we know things quieten down there, we go into the city centre until 3am. We know we are needed a lot more across Ringway by that time." Already the team has come into contact with different people they have been able to support, and Chris says they have seen positive effects.

Their previous work has been focused on Preston's red light zone and surrounding communities, where they have built up relationships with sex workers, residents and shop owners.

In Church Street the volunteers are dealing with far greater numbers of people.

They have focused their initial work around the bus station area, looking to help some of the homeless people around there.

They are beginning to build relationships with other agencies that work at night, such as door-men, pubs, clubs and taxi ranks. And, as Rev Drury points out, it can be the simplest things that

make a difference. He recalls: "There was one guy we found who was worse for wear through drink, and we helped him sober up and made sure he got home safely."

"There was an incident where a lady had her bag stolen and was confused and upset. Our team sat her down and calmed her down and they were able to escort her to a cash machine after helping her find some of her bank cards."

"We don't want to get in the way of people having a good time but we want to help them to be safe."

City centre Insp Jill Halliwell says: "I am delighted that the Street Pastors are now working in the city centre during the night."

"Although they work independently of the police, we have a common aim and that is securing the safety and well-being of people within the city."

"They are a hugely welcome addition to the partnership of agencies and organisations working within the city centre."

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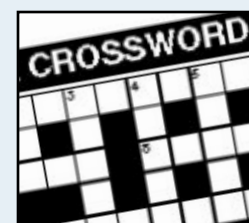
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PAGE 50



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PAGE 51



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