

Street Pastors' night 'brilliant'

A GROUP of people was on duty on the streets of Tavistock for the first time last Saturday night, patrolling and visiting pubs as part of a national network set up following a number of fatal stabbings in Brixton in 2003.

Tavistock Street Pastors consists of church members with a concern for society, and in particular young people who **feel** themselves to be excluded and marginalized.

Local co-ordinator Roger Bird said the aim was to get to know people in the community and find out what their Deeds were and what

could be done to help.

'The presence of street pastors is for people to get to know that the church is there for them in a practical way. The role is not about preaching heaven and hell, but one of listening, caring and helping - working in an unconditional way,' Roger said.

Street Pastor Graham Boot-Handford said the first night had been 'absolutely brilliant': 'We had no idea what to expect. It was quite quiet at 10pm, but not for long!' It had got 'quite exciting' a couple of times. Graham said they had had 'loads of good conversations' and some girls who knew about the scheme came up and asked if they had flip-flops for them later on - one of the services the pastors provide for those who become rather wobbly on their high heels.

'The vast majority were really positive and shaking our hands,' Graham said. One landlord asked them for assistance when a situation developed outside his establishment, 'We are not there to separate fights, but we stood and prayed and the situation ended peacefully,' he said.

The street pastors were out until at least 2.30am, with one team of four patrolling the streets and another group of three or four praying in Abbey Chapel.

Each member has been through extensive training and links have been forged and help gained from both local councils, the police, and local agencies, including the youth service and social services. The street pastors will be on the streets of Tavistock every Saturday night and hope to build a relationship with everyone: shop keepers, local schools, businesses, families, local police, youth clubs and leaders, as well as the young people out for the night. There will be a Commissioning Service at St Eustachius Church on Monday, December 7, where the councils, police and other agencies will be represented.