

Taking it to the streets

Street Pastors are celebrating their third birthday helping late-night revellers in Leicester. **Eva Nyandoro** joins in the fun

Stopping students having wheelie bin races, giving first aid and acting as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour are just a few of the things that the Christian volunteers of Westcotes have been undertaking for the past three years.

Last month marked the third anniversary of Westcotes Street Pastors and NiteLite a late night drop in coffee bar in Leicester. Ann Murphy co-ordinator for the Westcotes, Shaylesh Raja street team member and Jenny Few a member of the NiteLite team talk to Eva Nyandoro about their experiences over a cup of tea in NiteLite.

The volunteers patrol the busy streets every Friday evening throughout Westcotes and West End area providing support for the vulnerable and young.

The Pastors work alongside NiteLite, a late night coffee bar open till 2am every Friday situated in Robert Memorial Hall.

NiteLite provides a safe and secure place for somebody to get a cup of tea and engage in a chat.

Ann Murphy co-ordinator for Westcotes street pastors and volunteer described the Street Pastor role as offering a helping hand or listening ear.

She said: "We help vulnerable people in need and direct people who are drunk to NiteLite to sober them up before they go home."

"I have had dozen of conversation with people about money, life and

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relationship issues.

"There was an incident where a girl was walking by herself when a car with two lads drove slowly past trying to get her attention. We walked behind her until the drivers got annoyed and drove off.

"Sometime we hover around cash points acting as a deterrent with our visible blue uniforms."

At this point, I asked Ann if she ever worried about the dangers she faced, she smiles and says: "When good people do nothing evil flourish."

Ann enthusiastically remarks on the success the scheme has had on reducing litter.

She said: "While patrolling we monitored the litter behaviour and suggested to the bin warden that wider bins in specific places around Bede Park might reduce litter."

"The council added wider bins and as a result there been a significant drop in litter."

Patrolling in group of 3 or 4 people, Shaylesh Raja who works in a computer shop describes the work involved in being a Pastor.

He said: "We give girls flip flops who have taken off their shoes to prevent them cutting themselves on broken glass."

"We may talk to young people and ask them to keep the noise down in particular residential areas."

"The question we are often asked is 'what is a street pastor'?"

"We don't get physically involved in incidents, we act as a deterrent to ease the situation."

Selfless members such as 73-year-old Dorothy spend many Friday nights picking up numerous bottles to prevent accidents happening as she walks the street.

The NiteLite coffee bar working alongside the Street Pastors has become a regular late night spot for the locals to have a coffee and chat.

Jenny Few, a member of NiteLite team is proud of the role the coffee bar plays in the area.

She said: "NiteLite is a place where people can sober up, have a conversation and flapjacks."

"The job allows us the freedom to talk to people"

"We are known throughout the community, through the word of mouth and through passing trade."

"A lot of local businesses are very supportive of the work we do."





Meet the team



Views from the beat

Police think the work of the Street Pastors is fantastic. Sgt Dave Shields, Neighbourhood Policing for Westcotes, has been working alongside Ann Murphy and her team of Street Pastors since August 2008.

He said: "I have always been impressed by their commitment and dedication, often finding them throughout Westcotes and the West End, in the worst kind of weather.

"The team are found wherever they are needed, looking for those who need them most.

"I am confident in saying that when the Street Pastors identify the vulnerable and engage with them, they have prevented that person being a potential victim of



crime.

"Leicestershire Constabulary are committed to partnership based Policing. This requires groups of people who are willing and able to step forward and work towards effecting change. Anne and her team show this every weekend, and they are a very important presence within our Community."

I'm a survivor

Survival items that are handed out by the street pastors:

- Bottle of water
- Flip flops
- Safety alarm
- Lollies
- Personal rape alarm
- Silver Blanket
- A first Aid Kit

