

Aileen Innes, Places of Welcome Co-ordinator, Heaton Baptist Church:

'I would say we have an average of 20 people each week - 6-7 helpers and the rest people accessing the cafe. Although we do try not to make it an 'us' and 'them'. On the odd week numbers will be less than that, and other weeks we've had up to 30 people.

POW has been a really successful ministry at HBC. In August we had a man turn up on a Wednesday looking for some assistance/money/food - he was clearly drunk and had just come out of prison that morning. As he had no documents, we couldn't issue him with a food bank voucher but we gave him a voucher for Sainsbury's (which is our practice) and invited him back to the cafe the following day. If I'm honest I didn't expect to see him again. But he did return to the cafe, where we had time to sit and talk to him. And he came again the following week. Then he started to come to church on a Sunday, and regularly pop into the church building during the week. This went on for a few months and in early December we worked with other professionals supporting him to take him through a detox off alcohol which he has done successfully. Throughout all of this the cafe was key as somewhere he knew he could come and receive some food, a warm welcome and company. In fact, I think if we didn't initially have the cafe to invite him to, I don't think he would have returned. He now helps at the cafe every week, comes in early to set up, stays for the duration and clears away. He also regularly brings friends along!

It (Places of Welcome) really is a fantastic thing and something I am so enjoying being part of. One of the main reasons I love it is that there is no agenda for those 2 hours other than to sit and talk with people - and rarely anywhere else in my life do I find I have that freedom just to have companionship with people like that.'