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## **Shining a light on hand car washes**

### **An app that puts the spotlight on hand car washes gives the public a new tool to combat modern slavery**

Hand car washes have sprung up across the country in their thousands, and while many are legitimate businesses, some are not. Police raids in hand car washes in towns and cities up and down the country have unearthed victims living in horrendous conditions.

The Safe Car Wash app has been developed to allow the general public to engage with the problem.

The app asks a series of questions related to the indicators of modern slavery and if there is a high likelihood that modern slavery is occurring in the hand car wash, users will be asked to report their concerns to the Modern Slavery Helpline.

The app has been developed by the Clewer Initiative, the Church of England's response to modern slavery, and the Santa Marta Group, the Catholic Church's anti-slavery project.

They have spoken to the police, the National Crime Agency and the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority about how the church can help – and the Safe Car Wash app, released on Monday (4 June), is one response.

Baptist church members have been invited to download the new app and take part in the first comprehensive intelligence gathering on car washes.

The National Crime Agency thinks there are tens of thousands of people being exploited in the UK, but there is no reliable data on just how widespread it is. This lack of information means victims could be falling through the net.

The Clewer Initiative, which has worked alongside Baptist churches to raise the awareness of modern slavery, stated, 'It's tempting to ignore this problem, leave it to the police to deal with. But the reality is we are talking about real people who are trapped in exploitation, perhaps living under the threat of violence, with nowhere to turn.'

'We cannot be indifferent to the suffering around us, in our own communities, and as the Church we cannot turn away from our neighbour who may be in need.'

'Instead we must turn to them and say 'we see you'. That's why we need you to help make sure hand car washes in England are safe for everyone.'

Steve Tinning, associate minister of Leigh Road Baptist Church, used the app this week amid concern at the many hand car washes that have sprung up in Southend. He wrote this review.

Visit [www.theclewerinitiative.org/safecarwash](http://www.theclewerinitiative.org/safecarwash) for more details, including a range of promotional materials, graphics and prayers

## **Baptisms in a JCB in Canada**

### **How do you respond when someone wants to be baptised, but there's no baptistery in sight? Army chaplain and Baptist minister Gary Birch takes up the story**

'I'm chaplain to The King's Royal Hussars and while on exercise in Canada, three lads came to our communion services and expressed an interest in baptism,' writes Gary. 'I talked it all through with them, and as already committed but not yet baptised Christians, what better place!'

Gary and fellow chaplain Padre Luiz Marques were able to create a makeshift baptistery using tarpaulin and a JCB.

'We had a decent size group of their mates watching, and they all took videos to show families back home,' continues Gary. 'Within a week of posting the video online, there had been more than one million views!'

'Both Padre Luiz Marques, who is also here with 4 Battallion REME, and I are Baptist ministers and fairly new to army chaplaincy, but marvel at the opportunities it brings to share our faith and the love of God to so many young men and women.'

## **Mission through (rap) music**

## **A new ministry in north London is connecting with gang members through rap music. Interview with pastor and rapper Denzil Larbi**

'There have been times when I have had to stop some of them from going out to hurt their enemies,' explains Denzil Larbi. 'The reality is they're on the verge of being stabbed or going to prison.'

'God has been amazing by bringing these young people to us – and we're building relationships with them.'

Denzil is the associate pastor at Willesden Green Baptist Church and is spearheading an exciting new ministry. Since he joined the church last year he has helped to develop a music studio there. Denzil is a rapper himself and knows that music connects well with young people.

In recent months interest in the studio has grown. Initially only young people from the church were using it. But during a prayer walk Denzil spoke to a young guy with an interest in music and invited him to the studio. He came – and brought others too. In the space of a few weeks the number of non-churched youth using the studio had grown to around 25.

'It's just exploded,' says Denzil. 'We have never publicised it. And now we've had to open at different times.'

Around half of those using the studio, who are part of a local gang, are into making the music. The rest are content to have soft drinks and play pool in another room. Over time relationships have begun to develop and good conversations shared. Each week, Denzil says, he communicates the gospel. There's disbelief that he's a pastor, which has led to opportunities for him to share his testimony. He asks them questions about their lifestyle and values to make them think.

It's a relaxed set-up and they've responded. He's found among them an openness to Christianity: many might have been taken to church when they were younger, but have had misconceptions about the Christian faith. There is a willingness to ask questions and find out more.

'One told me he believes Christianity is for the white man,' says Denzil. 'So I've been able to give them a bit of context, a basic background.'

'They are definitely open. For most, it's the first time they've been able to ask these questions.'

'I throw in questions to make them think. I talk about dangers. We've spoken about drugs. A lot of them smoke weed. I ask them why – what do they feel.'

'It's made many realise they do it because they're bored.'

Rap music is a common denominator, and is another way Denzil can help impart a different message about life. Denzil says they're all into rap music, as it's a music they've grown up with that taps into and connects with their emotions. More recently drill music, a lyrically more violent sub-set of British rap, has hit the spotlight over questions about its potential relationship with crime. Denzil raps, and says his music has the same beats, but a completely different message. 'The message is my lifestyle.'

He's seen lots of talent. 'There's one guy who's just amazing at rapping.'

'But he's money driven. He doesn't see this as making enough money, so he's not putting that much into it.'

'There's another who wants to produce. He's very screwed on. He's studying at college. We've invested in business cards.'

So this is not a ministry in isolation. Not only is Denzil making connections with agencies working gangs, he's also introducing workshops and courses, such as how to produce and sell, to help give the young people tools about how to make a living from the music they love.

Above all, he'd love to see lives transformed – many live in precarious situations in keeping with the worrying picture of growing knife crime in the capital. One has committed his life to Christ and Denzil prays for more. As such, he has prayer requests:

Prayer for the young people themselves. For their protection (the reality is these guys are on the verge of being stabbed or going to prison) - and that they know Christ and begin to turn their life around.

Prayer for the wider church family at Willesden Green, as it embraces these new ways of engaging with at times challenging people

Prayer for more volunteers who have a heart for these young people.

'God placed me in the right church for this to happen,' says Denzil.

'Each week we communicate the gospel. We've had some powerful conversations. We're more connected in the community, as they're often on the street.'

It's allowed me to connect with them in the community. They're often on the street.

'We value all your prayers.'

**'Trusted, committed and invested'**

## **The response of faith groups during and after the Grenfell fire, how they did it and lessons others can learn, has been examined in a new report**

Many commentators remarked on the level and effectiveness of the faith groups' practical aid to those in need, particularly in the absence of a more co-ordinated official effort.

At least 15 separate centres run by faith communities responded. Aid included acting as evacuation areas, receiving, sorting and distributing donations, offering accommodation, drawing up lists of the missing, supporting emergency services, patrolling the cordon, providing counselling and supporting survivors seeking housing.

In the first three days alone at least 6000 people were fed by a range of faith communities. This is alongside the more expected provision of space for prayer and reflection and hosting interfaith services of memorial and lament.

Members of Westbourne Park Baptist Church were among the local faith groups who responded.

After Grenfell, a new report from think tank Theos, is a detailed study of that response.

Based on interviews with representatives of churches, synagogues, mosques, and gurdwaras in the vicinity, as well as from statutory bodies and emergency services, the report charts the faith groups' response in the immediate hours, days and weeks after the tragedy.

The report shows how faith groups were able to respond in the way they did for a number of key reasons.

First, they were trusted. By being embedded in the community – indeed, by being made up of people from the local community itself – the faith groups had the networks, knowledge and relationships that enabled them to mobilise volunteers to reach people quickly and confidently.

Second, they were committed. The faith groups had history and roots in the area that went back decades, and were known to be there for the long haul. This enabled them to respond in the medium and longer term, just as much as the short term.

Third, they were invested. Most faith groups in the area had not only been around for a long time but had invested in and run buildings and facilities that they could make available quickly and flexibly.

In addition to this, the distinctive faith ethos of these groups enabled and encouraged them to respond with openness, hospitality and religious sensitivity to those in need.

The report outlines this activity, and while acknowledging that no response to a tragedy of this nature is foolproof, offers a number of lessons for faith groups and any others wanting to serve their community in the case of a tragedy. These include: be visible, be flexible, and intentionally build networks within the community and with statutory bodies and emergency services.

Yvette Williams, Justice4Grenfell said,

‘This is a welcome report and I hope it will stand as a timely insight for the future. The community has leant on many local faith leaders for strength and support following the disaster. All faith leaders should recognise the fantastic response they gave to the fire.’

Elizabeth Oldfield, Director of Theos said,

‘Grenfell was a horrendous tragedy, which ended over 70 lives, damaged hundreds more, and shocked millions. Yet, while it revealed signs of vulnerability, inequality and even indifference, it also showed a community, including diverse people of faith, that could respond with real courage and commitment. We hope this report will help us learn the lessons of this tragedy, and equip faith communities elsewhere to best serve those around in times of crisis as well as day-to-day.’

Meanwhile, as the fact-finding stage of the public inquiry into Grenfell began, the Bishop of Kensington strongly stated that it’ll take more than apportion of blame and punishment of the guilty to bring about deeper change following the Grenfell fire.

The Rt Rev Dr Graham Tomlin, who has been working closely with community groups in the aftermath of the Grenfell fire and been a strong advocate for victims, said at a special Grenfell event last week (6 June), ‘If the Inquiry produces its results, culprits are identified and perhaps given prison sentences, that would satisfy a certain need for justice, or even revenge, but it still would not resolve anything fundamental.

‘If we allocate blame, punish the guilty, and then carry on as before, then there is no guarantee that something like this will not happen again, or even more, we will perpetuate the deeper conditions and attitudes that led us to this point.

‘We might even issue new types of building regulations, or safety measures in construction, but even that I suggest would not be enough.

'The kind of repentance that Jesus calls for, and indeed the Grenfell Tower fire calls for is deeper - a radical look at the way we live together in our society.'

Dr Tomlin also talked about the need for society to move away from self-interest and suggested this starts with the issue of housing which he said had now become too linked to profit making.

The local community in Kensington was praised at the time of the fire for how it rallied together. Bishop Graham said we need to see that sort of togetherness throughout the year not just at the time of tragedy.

'We need to make mutual care our regular way of life, rather than a brief response to an emergency...we choose our friends, we do not choose our neighbours. We need a new story, a new vision of life that sees us as those not made to pursue self-interest but as those who are fundamentally connected to one another.'