

Sunday 25th August 2024 - Pathway Project & Foodbank

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Preacher: Kathy Coe, Katy, & Linda Hood

[0 : 00] Thank you, everyone. It's lovely to have the opportunity to talk to you. I'm Cathy Coe, for those who don't know me, and I was the founder of Pathway, which is something I'm so very proud of, not for what I've done, but for what a whole team of people have done and built.

And this is Katie, who's manager of the refuges. So I've got my bit written down because, you know, memory goes as you get older. But for me, the start of Pathway was in the late 1980s, when I was struggling in an abusive marriage.

And, you know, each day was a trial, and I didn't know how it would end. I didn't let myself think about the worst way it could end, because that was too scary.

But I lived every day just in fear, and it was a nightmare. So you would think that there would have been people out there who could help.

Unfortunately, the first sort of services for domestic abuse were set up in the 1970s. And they were not funded.

[1 : 18] They struggled to sort of keep going. And there wasn't anything locally that would have helped me. So I was stuck on my own.

And I hadn't told people about what was happening, because I was ashamed, and I thought it was my fault. So I lived with that secret. And each day, I had to carry that and put on a brave face.

And I've always worn a lot of makeup, but it's not a mask anymore, and it used to be a mask. I needed someone who could support me, who could stand in my corner with me.

And I was fortunate that I was part of St Anne's Church at that time. And they really looked after me and cared for me and loved me. But they didn't know about domestic abuse, so they were as much in the dark as I was.

And when I first tried to set up Pathway, I went round and visited other refugees. And it was really challenging to see how they'd set up.

[2 : 32] I remember going to one, and they'd had all these women who needed help and needed somewhere to go. And there wasn't anywhere. So what they did was probably illegal and quite brave.

But they squatted in a council building that wasn't being used any longer. And they became such a pain to the local council, who tried to move them out but couldn't manage it, that the council in the end bought an old pub and gave them that building so that they could reclaim theirs.

And that was how a lot of people started. They just had to do whatever it took to move people in. The first refuge that opened was absolutely overwhelmed with a deluge of people wanting help.

And that, to a large extent, hasn't stopped. But at least we've got more support out there now. I needed someone who could listen and who could understand what I was going through.

But very few people did. And if they did, it was often because they'd struggled with the same thing. And so they didn't talk about it either.

[3 : 54] So having someone who could have listened to me would have made a world of difference. And I needed a refuge.

I needed a safe place to stay. Somewhere where I knew I wouldn't be found. And there wasn't much in the way of refuge spaces.

And when you speak to a social worker and they say, well, we could put you into this refuge, but it's not very nice. It doesn't make it inviting for you to take your children to.

I needed for someone to look at what was happening to me and identify it as a crime. Because it was a crime.

I was being beaten. You know, the coercive control, which wasn't even identified at that time, was horrendous. It was something that is a very specialist area.

[4 : 55] And often the police didn't really know what to do about it. I needed legal advice. I needed to find someone who would understand what I was going through and help me to get divorced.

I was really lucky that I found a really good lawyer who has got me divorced twice. So, you know, I've brought a lot of business his way.

And bless him, he made the mistake of saying when I told him what I wanted to do, if there's anything I can do to help. And so he still goes into the help centre now after all these years and does legal clinics.

And he's been, you know, I go out for lunch with him every now and again. And we have a catch-up. And it's so lovely that he's stuck with Pathway for all of these years.

I really needed a helpline. I needed somebody I could speak to whatever time of the day or night. And there weren't any 24-hour helplines at that point in time.

[6 : 05] And actually, when we set up the Pathway helpline, we were the first 24-hour helpline. I needed counselling afterwards, which the church paid for me to have.

They were really supportive. So I did get help in that way. And I needed justice. I needed to see that something was going to be done. And actually, it wasn't.

So there was nothing available. And I started thinking, somebody should do something about this. You know, and I would sit in church on Sunday and think, you know, why isn't anybody doing anything?

And God said to me, why aren't you doing anything? And so when God puts something like that on your heart, you don't argue with him. Well, I did for a while, but it didn't work.

You know, he's better than our arguments. So it took seven years. But I finally got a helpline running. And it was 24 hours a day.

[7 : 10] And everything else followed. We started to look towards getting a refuge. And that happened fairly quickly afterwards, thanks to the health services, who let us use the building that was the gatehouse of St. Matthew's Hospital.

Probably not the best place to be, but it was safe. And we could house three families and look after them. And that was a really good start.

We have grown a bit since then. And it's been quite a journey. And I remember when we were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Services.

And that was brilliant. We had a wonderful event to mark that. And the Queen's Lord Lieutenant came and presented us with it. And it was amazing.

And afterwards, Bishop Keith, who was there at the time, and had come along to our event, said, you must be really proud of what you've done.

[8 : 17] And I said, all I've done really is listen to God. And I've done what he's told me. And he said, I wish everybody would do that. And, you know, that would change the world, wouldn't it?

So it's been quite a journey. But, you know, I'm still part of Pathway as a volunteer. But Kate is more a part of Pathway because she's our refuge manager.

And if I had to pick one person who had the most challenging and emotional job in Pathway, it would be Katie.

So I'm going to hand over to her and she can tell you about what she does. Thank you. She's a star. She really is. As Kathy said, we've now got two refuges.

We are able, fortunate enough, to have 20 families. Unfortunately, we are always full. I wish it was different. But I'm proud that we can offer a safe space.

[9 : 20] We do our best to make the rooms as welcoming as possible. We've had one lady who very recently came to our services. She slept on her mother's grave to be very safe.

She had nothing. The clothes were wet that she was wearing. They were damp. They were soiled. She'd not eaten a meal. Thanks to the food bank donations you give us, we have a supply of food.

We have toiletries. Not only do we offer compassion and warmth, we still have the legal clinic, which is amazing. Jonathan is an amazing man with his time and his knowledge.

We have counselling services. Counsellors actually come into our refuge and offer a quiet space. It's not just about wanting somewhere safe. It's about finding you again.

Because for years, you have been doing your best to keep that other person happy so you're safe. And finding yourself is a massive journey. And that's what we try to do at Pathway.

[10 : 15] And Cathy said she was proud of me. I am incredibly proud that we're able to offer this service. And that is thanks to you, Cathy. But thank you to you for continuing with your support, with your donations, with the food, with the money that's gifted to us.

Because if you've got no clothes, for us to say, come on, we can get you a new pair of shoes, some clean underwear and something clean, it goes a long way in finding yourself again. So thank you.

And I want to thank you all as well, the people who give individually, for the church as a whole, which gives to us as part of its tithing. It makes so much difference.

And we couldn't do what we do without people who care about others and want to make a difference to them. And I just want to tell you a quick little story before we finish about the first woman we ever took into a refuge.

We hadn't got one at that time. She'd wronged the helpline. She'd got two boys. She couldn't send them to school because they were so bruised. And so she desperately needed somewhere to stay.

[11 : 30] And we found her a refuge space. And the chair at the time went with me and we picked her up and drove her to this refuge.

And it was a Christian one, which she was really pleased about. And we dropped her off. Some years later, I was standing at the cash point outside Morrisons.

It was safe by then, waiting to draw some money out. And a woman came up to me and said, you're from the refuge, aren't you? And you're always a bit worried about how they know that you're from the refuge.

And I didn't recognise her. So I said, yes, I am. And she said, you saved my life. She said, I want to tell you what's happened to me.

She said, I stayed at that refuge for a while. And then I moved to a refuge in Wales. And they really looked after me. And she said, I'm now back here.

[12 : 29] And I'm working with children who've been abused. And training as an educational psychologist. And she said, none of that would have happened if you hadn't stepped in and helped us.

And that's the sort of difference that we make. And people like Katie and the refuge staff and the team who do outreach work, they do that every day.

And they can only do that because you all support us. So thank you so very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. For those who don't know me, my name is Linda.

And for the last 12 years, I've been helping with the local food bank. I wonder how much your family's food shopping bill has gone up in the last year or two.

Lots. Yeah. Everything costs more, doesn't it? Whether it's a tin of soup, toilet rolls, pasta sauce, a loaf of bread. Everything seems to keep going up and up.

[13 : 45] So just imagine if you had to feed 40 people. What do you think that would cost? Well, let me give you a clue.

Every week, the food bank in Burntwood feeds around 40 people. My big reveal. On the table there is the contents of a one-person food pack.

And my friend Dorothy is going to come and pack it up so that you can see what we give out every week. We calculate that if we had to buy all the food that we give out, i.e. for 40 people, it's not for a whole week.

It's a three-day emergency pack to keep people going. So if we had to buy all the food that we give out, and the extras, the toilet rolls, the shampoo, the cat and dog food, the bleach, it would cost us about £600 for three days' worth of food for 40 people.

£600 a week, work it out for a year, that would cost us about £30,000. It makes my food bill seem very small.

[15 : 18] But when you put it that way, that awful lot of money, fortunately we don't need to find it. Because people, like you and me, give food and money to enable us to keep meeting that need.

Most of you will have seen the collection points in supermarkets. A lot of local churches have a box for people to put contributions in. Somehow, enough comes in to keep us going.

And as you see, Dot is packing up, testing to see if it's too heavy for the bag. What we give to one person.

You might ask, in this day and age, should we need food banks? After all, people can claim benefits if they can't work.

So surely nobody needs to go without food. But sadly, that isn't true. For a start, we used to get a lot of referral slips from the local job centres.

[16 : 38] They couldn't actually give people a food bank voucher, because that would be admitting that the benefits aren't enough for people to live on.

But we know that that is actually the truth. And even when people are just about managing, all it takes is something to go wrong.

Maybe the washing machine to break down. And they have to choose between paying for that and buying food. In August, as many of you will know, there's extra expenses because you have to buy new uniform, new school shoes for the children.

They reckon, on average, school uniform costs something like £230 per child to buy everything they need. So we find at Food Bank that August is usually a very busy month.

So let me tell you about some of the sort of people who come to Food Bank in Burntwood. Obviously, I can't tell you specific examples.

[17 : 53] What I can do is give you an idea of their sort of situation. So I've given them names, but these aren't specific people.

John. Thank you very much, Dot. There's another parcel ready to go out. John had a car accident. He was very badly injured.

He'll never be able to work again in a normal job. Because of his injuries, he needs to keep his house warm. And sometimes there's just not enough money for food as well.

Some months, the cupboards are empty. It's not helped by the fact that once, because he wasn't very well, he missed his appointment at the job centre.

So they sanctioned his benefits and he had nothing to live on for a month. So he needed to come to Food Bank. Take the case of Mary.

[19 : 00] She, as we've heard, was in an abusive relationship. She finally plucked up the courage to leave, but arrived in a strange place where she didn't know people.

Two children. It's August. They need school shoes. Her universal credit payment hasn't come through yet.

It often takes five or six weeks. So she came to the Food Bank. Susan had never asked for help from anyone in her life.

But when she was made redundant, she had nowhere to go. And one of her neighbours said, go to the Food Bank, they'll help. So she came and was overwhelmed by the fact that people cared enough to donate food to help people like her.

She gave all the volunteers a big hug and said, when I'm sorted out, I'll come back and bring food for other people.

[20 : 13] So those are the sorts of situations that we come across. We get all sorts of people, young and old.

A chap came only a week or so back who was in his 70s. We get young, single parents, all sorts of people find themselves in need and that's why it's great that food banks exist.

In an average week, we probably get about 15 vouchers presented to us. People are supposed to have a voucher to access the Food Bank.

Get vouchers from Housing Association, GP Surgeries, Litchfield District Council, all sorts of places. The CAB will issue Food Bank vouchers.

That voucher tells us how many people are in the family because obviously, if there's a big family, they need more food. I think the largest family we've ever had to feed was two adults and eight children.

[21 : 29] Fortunately, that doesn't happen very often because our shelves would be empty. Fortunately, as part of Canuck and District Food Bank, since we opened in the end of 2012, we have access to the warehouse, which is where all the donated food that goes into the supermarkets and so on is taken to the warehouse in Chadsmore.

I know some people here help with transporting that food. The staff, the volunteers at the warehouse date stamp everything so that we don't have to check it before we can give it out.

That means in a good week, if we say we've run out of tins of meat, tins of carrots, bottles of squash, whatever it is, they will be able to supply us.

Sometimes, they haven't got it either. In which case, we're reliant on the financial donations that people have made. There are some people who support us by giving me money in my hand.

I know that sounds a bit, but it's all accounted for, honest. But, you know, sometimes during a session I'll have to send one of the volunteers over to Heron Stores to get some toilet rolls because we've run out or whatever it might be.

[22 : 53] Occasionally, we get some really obscure things donated. I said, that jar of pickled eggs is never going to go.

We do have, as well as the bags that we make up ready, Trussell Trust give us a list of what is a nutritionally balanced diet for three days.

But people donate all sorts of obscure things. So our help yourself box that is there for anyone to take what they want, the jar of pickled eggs went to the very next person who came.

I haven't had these for years. So, even the obscure things still go because people have different tastes.

What we give them is a standard list, but, you know, they can choose a little bit by accessing that help yourself box.

[24 : 01] Things like toiletries as well. We try and provide if we've got them in stock. Yesterday, I actually went out and bought shampoo, deodorants, toilet rolls because we've almost run out of those.

Ready for us to open on Tuesday. The one thing that people don't think about, perhaps, that we need is carrier bags.

The ones that Dorothy actually ended up using are strong enough to hold all those tins and packets. Sometimes, somebody will come and say, oh, I've got a bag full of bags for you.

And we say, oh, thank you very much. And inside, there's bags from the shoe shop the chemists. All sorts of carrier bags, but they're not much used for carrying heavy food.

If anybody wants to come and feel the weight of those afterwards, you're very welcome to do so. So, we probably give out about 40 carrier bags a week.

[25 : 08] And, again, we rely on people bringing us those. So, if you've got a kitchen drawer or cupboard full of solid carrier bags, we'd love to see them.

It really helps. We couldn't run the food bank without volunteers. I have some wonderful people who help me.

Dorothy's joined us this year and she's very willing to come either a Tuesday or a Thursday. We're open two days a week. It's two hours each time.

one of our volunteers, Graham, just turned up one day and said, my wife has sent me.

And I said, oh. Well, she was talking to her hairdresser and said, I don't know what I'm going to do with our Graham. Now he's retiring.

[26 : 09] And the hairdresser said, tell him to volunteer at Food Bank. So he came and he did. And he again, he's absolutely wonderful.

He does every session, he does all the heavy lifting. He's really great. We've got a lot of different volunteers, some from churches, some not.

people who have a heart that nobody who is hungry should go without. A few weeks back, one chap said to me, why do you do this?

Is it because you're Christians or because you're nice people? And I said, well, I'll take the nice people, thank you. I explained that yes, some of the people who help are Christians.

We're based behind what used to be called Emmanuel Church. They've changed their name lately. But yes, we are connected to the local churches. It was churches together who agreed to set up the Food Bank when we first started.

[27 : 28] But I said, well, yes, a lot of us are Christians Christians. And we believe what Jesus said when he told his followers, I was hungry and you fed me.

And they said, when did we ever see you hungry? And he said, in as much as you did it for the least of these, you did it for me. So we're following Jesus' heart in helping those in need.

there's a word that you may have come across, a Hebrew word, shalom, which is often translated peace.

But it means so much more than what we often mean by peace. Shalom means, are you complete? Have you got everything you need?

how can you be at peace if you don't know where your family's next meal is coming from? So at Food Bank, we try to bring something of God's shalom to people.

[28 : 41] We try to share with them the peace, the fullness, the completeness that we have found. And we want them to be able to be touched by that as well.

one last thing. Sometimes people say, well, what do you need at Food Bank? So out in the foyer, we've got some little lists.

You're very welcome to take one of these that tells you the sort of things that we need, that we run out of most often. But we're just very grateful that because you as individuals and St.

John's as a church, because of the support that you give to Food Bank, we're able to bring something of God's shalom to people. Thank you.