

Urban Expression Victoria Park, Manchester



Urban Expression Victoria Park (UEVP) began four years ago in Longsight, a diverse and multi ethnic community in the south east side of inner city Manchester. Baptist Minister Gary Serra di Migni lived in the community for 18 months before pioneering this ministry, getting to know the area, the context and the people around him. Jayne Irlam joined Gary in leadership two years after UEVP's inception. Now, largely through Jayne's work with the police, God has extended UEVP's influence throughout Greater Manchester, and beyond. Jayne, a forensic nurse and minister in training through the Northern Baptist Learning Community, reflects on the work and role of this unique church plant....



My placement church, UEVP, is a 'fresh expression' church operating under the banner of Urban Expression. It is also recognised by the Baptist Union of Great Britain as a Baptist church plant. It specialises in being church for those who 'don't do church', and has three interwoven strands of ministry – workplace ministry, bereavement care and the pursuit of justice. Urban Expression exists to train, equip and encourage this type of creative missional activity within the contemporary urban world. The church is distinctly urban and therefore works with the predominantly poor and marginalised groups which are often found here; those on lower incomes or benefits, or otherwise existing on the economic edges of society. Socially, many are marginalised not just by economics but by physical, emotional and mental disorders which make it difficult for them to connect

with mainstream churches, particularly its culture of regular attendance and behavioural expectations.

UEVP's leadership searches for contextually relevant forms of evangelism and discipleship for this group in a northern British city with its own unique culture. For example, the lack of a church building helps those for whom the building, with its concomitant middle-class culture, represents a stumbling block to faith. It helps them see that church, as reflected in scripture, is in fact the congregation who have faith in Christ and receive the Spirit (as in Acts chapter 15). It strips church bare of the social 'add-ons' so that those who have little stake in society can see that they too can belong here. As a church plant, evangelism and sharing our faith is central to what we do.



As Baptist minister Dr. Martin Luther King fought for civil rights in the US, so in its own small way UEVP fights for religious freedom and social justice for marginalised groups such as Muslims and drug users. It thus enshrines the principle of religious freedom which was the very lifeblood of the Baptist denomination's genesis, and for which it paid with the blood of its members. UEVP may be small but it beats with the same radical heart as its forebears.. As a church modelled in many respects on that of the early church, it carries at its heart the ancient and unchanging message of salvation, it seeks to take a timeless message to those in a highly specific context – those thrashing around on the edge and underbelly of our post-modern, increasingly globalised capitalist society. Its activities may be highly contextualised but the spiritual resources upon which it draws to deliver them are timeless.

"To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some " 1 Cor 9: 22

For your thoughts and prayers:

- How could your church respond to those in your community who 'don't do church' ?
- What does 'pursuit of justice' look like within your church Context?