

## Melling Baptist Community Project

**Jo Hassoun, Leader of the Melling Baptist Community Project, located on the outskirts of Liverpool, has been awarded the 2015 Melling Council Civic Award.**



In a statement on their website, Melling District council announced 'The award was presented to Jo Hassoun for the difference she makes to the lives of the people who she comes into contact with through her work with the Melling Baptist Community Project. Described as being an inspirational pillar of the community, her caring demeanour and willingness to do anything for anyone, makes her a true part of the community'.

The Project which began about seven years ago can be described as 'church without walls', or '24/7 church'. Melling village has grown enormously in recent years as new estates have been formed, so the project began as a result of the increased need and opportunity. The purpose is to reach people where they are. Many in our nation have no experience of church culture. For Christians to connect with the individuals and families who surround them, we need to be prepared to go outside our comfort zone, and engage with people in ways that they are comfortable with.



At first, the Project ran a toddler group called POPS and a weekly assembly in the local school. Since then it has added a gospel choir which brings life and joy to a variety of events both formal and informal. 'Hub' is a weekly coffee morning, meeting in the local scout hall. With the help of a wonderful local gardener, 'Flower Power' provides beautiful planters twice a year to elderly and sick in the neighbourhood. 'Shoot' is a camera club run by a professional photographer. This is for people who don't want to spend a fortune on equipment but would like to improve their skills. Shoot's first exhibition was held recently and received many positive comments from the large number of people who attended. The club, appropriately, supports Mercy Vision, restoring eyesight to people around the world. 'In addition to these weekly or monthly activities, there are Easter and Christmas events, and most years there's a Holiday Bible Club in a local school.

These are the visible and obvious activities in Melling, but much of the work is unseen, private, and deeply personal. Jo Hassoun is constantly engaging with issues which are not for publication, and often result in totally un-churched people asking for prayer from Jo's extensive prayer support team.

Phil Jump, Regional Minister for the North Western Baptist Association who oversee the Melling Project commented "I'm delighted to see that Jo's work has been recognised by the wider community. This is a dynamic and creative project but it is also an exciting example of what can happen when local Christians start to take mission seriously. Many of the community links have been built up through the sheer vulnerability of this project – having to borrow halls, enlist help and draw in the skills and resources of others, has in turn opened up many spiritual conversations and journeys. I hope it will inspire others to take similar risks."

There are many activities that Jo dreams of starting, but additional committed Christian helpers are urgently needed to supplement the existing small band of overworked team members. We firmly believe that this work is of God, and we look forward to seeing it grow and leading to transformed lives, both young and old.

### For your thoughts and prayers:

- In what ways could you and your church engage with the mission of God locally, 'outside the building'?
- What is your church's relationship like with the local schools, and is there an opportunity to get involved in them?