

Report to Ingol & Tanterton Neighbourhood Council: Warm Space Programme

At its meeting on 26th October, the Neighbourhood Council reviewed the ideas for a Warm Space programme, and resolved (102/22) to gift to the Christian Fellowship a hot water boiler and a toaster, to award a grant to Intact for a heating system, and to pay for posters and flyers to advertise the scheme. At its November meeting, it was reported that the Warm Spaces leaflets and flyers had been printed and distributed, and that the programme was under way. The flyers referred to some 80 events and activities taking place throughout each day, and throughout the week, involving Intact, Tanterton Village Centre, Tanterton Christian Fellowship, and other partners including Ingol Library, Ingol Methodist, Ashton Methodist, Cottam Community Centre, St Margaret's Parish Hall and Holy Family Church.

At its meeting on 23 February, the Unite Community Partnership discussed and shared experiences on the programme. The main conclusions were that the programme had been well promoted, but had been slow to take hold, especially as regards evening events. The feeling was that 'warmth' alone was not enough to bring people in – there had to be some activities, such as Friendship Groups, craft groups and games: in other words, it was clear that *social space* was just as important as warmth. Intact, TVC and Tanterton Christian Fellowship all reported that they saw relatively little extra usage by new faces, but more engagement from current users – although the Christian Centre reported their Tuesday Coffee Stop had brought in new non-church goers, people who now enjoy each other's company, even though most of them did not know each other a year ago. Intact's specific warm space (promoted) programme has attracted 72 people since it started. More importantly, the Warm Space provided a mechanism to build on what Intact was already doing, and add new types of activities to the sessions that were created through the UNITE Warm Space initiative. In practical terms, this means that people that initially came for the warm space, were also able to attend Intact's other social activities, such as craft sessions, bingo, Friendly Friday etc etc.

Opening additional hours, especially in the evenings, also brought its own problems, not least, in the case of Intact, a significant increase in the monthly fuel bill arising not because of increased unit costs (as they are fixed by contract), but from the extra usage. Arising in part from this programme, Intact had in addition secured a grant from Cadent to deliver a 'warmth project' over the next two years, using the Monday, Wednesday and Thursday warm space sessions to bolt on other activities such as carbon monoxide awareness workshops (44 attendees) and slow cooker classes (12 attendees).

The key learning for future years was that, after two to three years of COVID restrictions, tackling social isolation would seem to be more important than merely helping people keep warm. There is a clear and growing demand for social events and activities tackling loneliness and isolation – and that this is at least as big a problem as the Cost of Fuel Crisis. People will not come out of their homes just to seek warmth – but they WILL come out to socialise and/or learn - in a warm environment.

Bill Shannon
March 2023

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Alan