

The Gas Explosion

In May 2021 there was a gas explosion on the Main St in East Kilbride.



It was a Bank Holiday, so the Village Centre was closed, and Joanne and the Staff were off. However, Joanne had decided to go into her office and run the payroll. While she was working the phone rang. It was the local police asking if the Centre would be able to take in some evacuees as there had been a gas explosion in the village. The police had had to evacuate a couple of blocks of flats. Could the residents come to the Centre? They didn't know how long it would be. Joanne said yes, send them round. She had no idea what she was going to do. She was in the buildings by herself. The whole centre was closed. There were no staff there.

Here's her account of what happened...

“I didn't know what to do, so in a crisis, what do you do? You call your mum. So I called my mum, and I explained what was happening.

“Can you come and help me. I don't know what I'm going to do.”

So, she came down and she said,

“I'm going to make a pot of soup”.

The Café chefs had some soup frozen in the freezer that was good to use. So we heated up some soup for the hordes of people who were coming round from the various flats that had been evacuated from the gas explosion.

The Crisis Centre manager for the council arrived with a team to help people get places to stay. She was dealing with all that side of things.

We were very much there to arrange for people to have a warm place, and something to eat.

Some of the people from that gas explosion turned up in their pyjamas. There was an older lady who arrived and had no teeth in. Others didn't have their medication. People were frightened for their pets which were still in the flats. People didn't know what had happened. It was all very frightening.

They arrived and we served them soup. We had soup and bread but that was all. Someone came round and asked,

“Can I get anything.”

I said, “Let’s get some sweet treats for people.”

So she ran around to the Co-op who gave sweet treats free of charge.

We were feeding people and comforting them. There were people who had no shoes, they had just run from their houses as they were. So we were trying to help people in that way.

We fed them and we gave them a comfortable place to be and chatted with them. Spent the day with them.

Domino's pizzas delivered down free-of-charge pizzas. I had phoned them, explained what had happened and said,

“Can you send us some food?”

And they said, “Yes, we'll send you pizzas. How many do you need?”

I said, “Lots!”

So they sent us lots of pizzas free-of-charge.

People were at the Village Centre for the day. Gradually throughout the day they would be going away to be housed or put into hotels. People’s pets arrived during the day, Cats and Budgies, as the Fire Service secured the building and got into the flats.

We were simply being the hands and feet of Jesus to them. We did not sort out their crisis situation in any way. But we were on the ground and with them for that day in their time of crisis. Lending a comforting ear, an arm around their shoulders. Whatever they needed to help them feel a little bit more at ease. Eventually they all got housed in some way or another into hotels or wherever they were going to be. We tidied up and went home.

The following day I started a kind of Facebook campaign. How can we help these people? I explained that they had been evacuated from their properties because there had been a gas explosion in one of the top flats, which had caused all the water pipes to burst. Everybody's houses were completely flooded.

Once it was safe to do so I went into the block of flats and there was water pouring down the walls. It was every flat right down to the bottom floor. Everyone's flats were completely saturated, their things were ruined.

Some of the residents asked me to go round to help them. They had each been given 30–45-minute slots to go into their flat and get essentials then leave. At that point the residents didn't know what was going to happen to their homes. Was the block falling down? Will it have to be demolished? One of the older ladies was frail and not physically able to go in and collect her stuff. She phoned me and asked if I could help. I went round and collected the stuff that I thought looked important to her and some things that she said that she needed and any clothing that wasn't saturated. Each resident was allowed to take one box full of stuff. I filled a box and dropped it off to where she was staying.

Through Facebook campaign I managed to get information about where the people were staying. Some people came to the Centre to give me their contact information. But I managed to find out where they were all staying. I got in contact with them and asked, “What do you need?” For some people it was, “I need a microwave.” Others it was, “I don't have any shoes for my children, I need shoes”. Another person said, “I've got a 5 year-old, and we have no clothes other than the clothes that we ran out the building in.” I was able to find out exactly what people needed. And then put on a Facebook post noting what people needed.

People in the community started coming in and dropping off these items to me at the Village Centre. I would then collate them into what people needed and then drive them and drop them off at the accommodation that they were in. So that was great. It was the Village Centre doing something for the community. So we dropped off what was to be delivered to the different people.

The Co-op had a campaign going on where people could donate money. They then just came round to me and handed in all this money to me and said can you do something with that?

I exchanged it into ALDI vouchers and Love to Shop vouchers. And everybody got a £50 ALDI voucher and a £50 Love to Shop voucher, so they were able to do a food shop, and they were able to go and buy clothes and replace anything that they needed to replace. It was fascinating to see the

needs of different demographics. There would be an older person who would say, "I don't need anything other than my teeth. I need to sort that out. So we would be able to help in that way getting them organised. There were people with teenage children and what they needed was their hair straighteners; that was the most important thing. So we'd post in Facebook a request for hair straighteners. And someone would hand in a pair of hair straighteners. People were donating goods that they had and were happy to give away, but others were coming down and they'd gone and bought somebody a 32-inch television. One of the residents needed an ironing board, so somebody went and bought one and gave it in. Somebody else needed a duvet. So somebody bought one and gave it. The whole community was getting behind this this project.

The person in whose house the gas explosion had happened was called Andy, he was in hospital being treated for his injuries. While he was there I contacted the housing department and said,

"Here's what we've been doing, is there any way that we could find out when this gentleman's getting out of hospital, where he's going to be housed, and we could go in advance and make his house more homely for him."

And they said, "Well, he's been put into a scatter flat. He's got a couch; he's got a bed."

I said, "Yes, but he's not got any glasses. He's not got any food in his cupboards. He's not got anything and his house exploded."

The roof had been blown off. The windows had exploded out. So he had nothing. Nothing was salvageable from his flat.

So again I said to the local community this person is getting out of hospital I'm able to go in to where he is going to be housed and make his house a home. Has anybody got these things?

A local restaurant had contacted me and said we'll give you £500. Or tell us what you need, and we'll go and buy whatever is needed. So I said to the owner of the local restaurant I said, "Here are the things he needs." The restaurant owner bought a 48-inch TV. He bought throws and cushions and bedding, pots and pans, food for the fridge and freezer. I got a few people

together and we went round and cleaned the flat. Got the TV working and got everything sorted for this gentleman coming out of hospital.

This was a massive moment for the Village Centre because we got to be what we were always established to be. We were established to be a place where people are valued, people are welcomed, people are part of a community, whoever they are. Whether they felt isolated or lonely, or if some trauma had happened to them. Like Andy whose life was suddenly turned upside down. But he experienced the love of Jesus through the Village Centre. The Village Centre was there for him in his time of need and there was no reason why they should help him. It was also able to co-ordinate the love and care of people in the Community and bring them together to help people in need. It was a pivotal moment for the Village Centre, for the board and the staff to be reminded that, we were created for something more than serving teas and coffees and hiring out meeting rooms. All the staff, and everybody else, saw the vision of the Village Centre come to life.

