

# The Village Centre



## The Story of the Village Centre

*...God's Vision the Church's Mission...*

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>page 3</b>
<i>“The God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start building.”</i>	
<b>1. God reveals His vision</b>	<b>page 4</b>
a. A Man of God	
b. A New Beginning	
c. God’s Time has Come	
<b>2. In the Beginning</b>	<b>page 5</b>
a. Godly people gathered in prayer	
b. The Church turned Inside-Out	
c. The Bridge	
d. Facts are the fingers of God	
e. The God of Heaven will give us success	
<b>3. The Village Centre is Born</b>	<b>page 11</b>
a. The Centre begins to operate	
b. Rapid Growth	
c. Nehemiah and a Charitable Company	
d. A Separate Charity	
e. Directors	
f. Staff	
g. The Church	
<b>4. Today and Tomorrow</b>	<b>page 20</b>
a. The Village Centre	
b. The Church	
c. The Mission in Practice	
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>page 23</b>
<i>God's mission, accomplished by God's methods, will not lack God's resources, and will fulfil God's purposes.</i>	
<b>6. Stories of Changed Lives</b>	<b>page 24</b>
a. Amy	
b. The Gas Explosion	
c. Tam	
d. Hugh	

# Introduction

*“The God of Heaven will give us success.  
We His servants will start building.”*



These words from **Nehemiah 2 verse 20** were a promise from God given to East Mains Baptist Church at the outset of Village Centre journey. They gave the church confidence to face the challenge of a million-pound project knowing that God would supply all the skills, wisdom, guidance and financial resources required for His work. God’s promise remains at the heart of the project, for as the building of bricks and mortar has given way to the building of hope, encouragement, friendship, and love into the lives of people who come through the doors of the Village Centre, the success of His work still depends on His Spirit at work through His servants.

This document is designed to give an overview of the life and history of the Village Centre from its beginnings 40 years ago up to today.

The Village Centre was born out of a passion for lost people, and a compassion for those in need, but its real genesis was in the heart of God. He began to reveal His vision of a Centre for the Community at East Mains Baptist Church, East Kilbride, in the 1980s and 90s, to a great man of God who served as a Deacon of the Church. However, it was not until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that God’s time came for the Vision to become a reality.

The story that follows is important because, inevitably as time passes the original Vision that God gives gets diluted, amended and forgotten. People's opinions and ideas start to erode God's revelation. That is why it is vital to regularly step back and remember, seek God, and hear again the voice of heaven.

Today there is a conviction that God has only just begun and that in Him, the best is yet to be.

# 1. God Reveals His Vision.



## **A Man of God.**

God began to reveal His Vision of a centre for the community based at East Mains Baptist Church, in the 1980s and 90s to a man of God called Ian Arton, who served on the Church Leadership, the Deacons Court as it was called then. Ian shared this vision with the Church's leaders, but they did not think that the time was right, and the ideas were left in abeyance.

Ten years passed. The Church became vacant when the Pastor left. As the Church prayed, asking God who He wanted to be their new pastor, they were led to call Jim McGillivray, who at the time was pastor in Leven Baptist Church in Fife. Jim discerned that it was God's will for him to accept the invitation to become pastor in East Mains and was duly inducted to the position in July 1998.

## **A New Beginning**

As Jim prepared for the new pastorate, while still in Leven, he spent extended times in prayer. During one of those times, in June 1998, God gave him the Vision of a centre for the community at East Mains, which the Lord said He would bring into existence during Jim's pastorate there. At this time Jim knew nothing of the Vision God had previously given to Ian Arton.

When Jim was Inducted to be pastor of East Mains Baptist Church in July 1998, he did not reveal to anyone the Vision that God had given him of a Centre. God had instructed him that he was not to speak of it but simply to commit the matter to the Lord in prayer. At the time of His choosing, God Himself would speak to the Church and Deacons and reveal His Vision.

## **God's Time has Come.**

God's time of revelation came early in 1999. One evening as the Deacons were in prayer, asking the Lord how the Church might reach out more effectively with His love, in both the message of the Gospel, and practical care to those in need, God spoke.

It is here that the story of the Village Centre begins.

## 2. In the Beginning.



### Godly People Gathered in Prayer

Over the years, East Mains Baptist Church has been blessed by having many spiritual giants serving as Deacons [Leaders] of the Church. In 1999 such a group of godly people were gathered together to pray and discuss the Lord's work.

Over the previous few months God had been laying on their hearts and minds a burden for the people of the town who were living and dying without Christ. Each time they met they would pray and talk together about this.

They were asking the Lord how the church could more effectively reach people in East Kilbride with the **Love of God in Word** (the Good News of Jesus - the Great Commission, Matt 28.18-20) and **Action** (Love - the Great Commandment, Matt 22.37-39).

As they prayed the Lord brought to their minds the Vision that He had given to Ian Arton more than a decade previously. Ian had died the year before, in 1998, but God had made sure the Vision had been preserved for just the right time. Ian, being an Architect, had been prompted by the Lord to record God's vision in many drawings of how the Church buildings could be adapted and developed to become a centre where people could encounter the love of God. A search was made, and drawings were found.

The Deacons continued to pray.

### “The Church turned Inside-Out!”

The Deacons began to explore what God's plans might be that would enable the Church to effectively share God's love.

They knew from the Vision given to Ian Arton that it would involve doing something to the buildings, but what did God want the Church to do with the buildings to reach out to people with His love in Word and Action.

As they prayed, God said,

“Use the buildings to, **‘turn the Church inside-out!’** To focus on mission and so move the Church from a ‘pastoral model’ to a ‘mission model’ of Church life.

With that word from the Lord they then asked,

“Lord, how do You want us to do that?”

He gave them the picture of a Bridge.

## **The Bridge**



God said that the Church was to build a “Bridge” to span between the Church and the Community.

As the Deacons and Church prayerfully explored this Word, they realised that a bridge is not a destination, its purpose is to span a gap and enable people to cross over.

A Bridge is also different from the two places it joins. It connects strongly to each side and links each to the other to provide a safe and secure crossing between them.

God revealed to the Deacons, and the Church, that they were to create His Bridge, which would not be the Church, and would not be the Community, but would be securely connected to each and would span between them.

This would mean that people in the Community, and people from the Church, would walk onto the Bridge, meet, make connections and build friendships.

On this “Bridge” the Church would build warm relationships with people and share the love of God in Word [Gospel] and in practical care [Action]. But even more, as people encountered God’s love through His people, God’s Bridge would provide a means by which those who wished to, could cross over into the fullness of His saving grace.

This was God’s strategy that He revealed to the Deacons and Church. The Centre, the Bridge, would enable the Church to engage in, not just evangelism, but the Mission of God as revealed in Jesus, of sharing the Good News of salvation, and of loving care and compassion to those in need.

The Church knew that extensive research had discovered that more than 90% of people who come to faith in Christ are in warm contact with Christians or with a Church. So, if the Church was going to be successful in reaching people for Christ it needed as many people as possible in warm contact with it.

The Centre would help create this large number of people whom the Church could reach out to with the Good News of Jesus, as they met on God's Bridge. People like Amy!

### **Amy's Story!** [Not her real name]

Amy came to the Village Centre as a young person with barriers to employment on a work experience programme from Skills Exchange, who have offices in our buildings. They asked if we would take on Amy as a placement for 6 months. She was terrible!

She could not turn up on time...when she turned up at all! She was obnoxious. She was rude. She was a terrible worker. You would not have hired this girl because she was an absolute disaster in every sense of the word.

But Joanne was Centre Manager and Myra was the Café Manager and both were full of God's love and wanted to share that love with Amy.

Two and a half years later Amy was transformed by the power of God's love through the Village Centre.

Today Amy has 2 children, a loving partner, a lovely home and a wonderful life. All because the Christians in the Village Centre took time to get alongside her, get to know her, hold her hand through difficult times, and share the love of God with her.

**You can read the full incredible story of Amy in the "Stories" Section at the end of this document.**

It was for people like Amy that God gave the Church the Vision and the passion to create the Village Centre.

## “Facts are the Fingers of God.” William Carey

William Carey, the great Baptist pioneer who founded the modern missionary movement in 1792, said, “Facts are the fingers of God.” He said that the Lord’s people should seek God in prayer, conduct research, gather facts, and through those facts, saturated in prayer, God would guide His people in the direction He wanted them to go.



The Deacons followed the example of their great Baptist predecessor, and prompted by the Spirit, in **May 1999**, appointed a small team to explore the needs of the Church and the Community. The Team was also to determine how adequate the buildings were to meet those needs. The Deacons called this team, “The Property Development Group” [P.D.G].

To fulfil their remit, the P.D.G. evaluated the suitability and condition of the Church’s buildings, as well as conducting anecdotal research into the needs of the Church and surrounding Community. Based on this research they produced a Report which was presented to the Leadership in the **late summer of 1999**.

As the Leaders prayed, seeking God’s will about how He wanted the Church to engage in Mission, they came to the settled conviction that the time had come for the Vision that He had given in embryo to Ian Arton, to become a reality. It was now God’s time for the Church to create a Centre for the Community where people would be able to encounter the love of God in Word and Action.

## “The God of Heaven will give us Success.”

In **September 1999** the Leaders presented what they believed God was saying to them, along with the Report of the PDG, for the



Church to consider and discern whether it was indeed God’s Will to create a Centre for the Community which would be God’s Bridge.

At the Meeting the Church made the following decision...



*“As a Church we believe that it is God’s will to develop a Church Centre with maximum flexibility which will serve the five main purposes of the Church: Worship, Evangelism, Fellowship, Discipleship and Service.”*

Extract from Minute of Church Meeting September 1999

The PDG was commissioned to continue their work and one of the members of the PDG, Lindsay Young, who is an architect, drew up some sketch ideas for the Church which were presented to a Church Meeting in the **spring of 2000**.

The Church decided that the sketches reflected their vision, so the PDG was instructed to contact the Baptist Union Property Group for guidance. The BUS Property Group gave excellent advice and suggested that the next step was for the Church to formally engage an architect.

The Church discussed the advice of the BUSPG then instructed the Deacons to appoint Davis Duncan Architects, Glasgow, to develop the Church’s ideas into proper plans.

In **May 2001** drawings, with costs, were presented to the Church for them to consider, discuss and pray through over the summer.

The Church met in **September 2001** to share the guidance God had given to them, to spend time together in prayer, and to discuss the ideas. During that evening several words from the Lord were given, along with convictions that had come out of people’s personal prayers.

The Church was encouraged to go away from this evening and continue to seek God’s will, with the objective of coming together at the AGM in October to make a formal decision about the Centre.

At the **Church AGM on 11<sup>th</sup> Oct 2001**, there was discussion and prayer, then the following decision was made...

*“As a Church we believe that it is God’s will that we develop a Church Centre based on the kind of facilities outlined in the proposed development plan of May 2001.”*

Extract from Minute of Church AGM Oct 2001

Two further evenings were planned:

**22<sup>nd</sup> November** when the Church would meet to decide what kind of buildings should be built.

**6<sup>th</sup> December** when the final decision would be made about the project and, if the Church believed that it was God's will to create a Centre, they would commit to the Vision.

On the **6<sup>th</sup> of December** the Church decided that it was indeed God's Will to create a Centre for the Community, and that evening God gave the Church Nehemiah 2:20 as a confirmation, and a promise...

**“The God of Heaven will give us success. We His servants will start building.”**

**Nehemiah 2 v 20**

### 3. The Village Centre is Born.

#### The Centre Begins to Operate

The Church discerned that the Centre should be developed in phases as the Lord prospered the work. It was therefore decided that the first phase would be to renovate and upgrade the existing buildings.



The Property Development Group was tasked by the Church to oversee the upgrade of the existing Church buildings to make them effective for the Church's twofold Mission of sharing God's Love in Word and Action.

The church decided that the **first steps** in establishing a Centre were:

- Install Toilets in the main Church Building
- Create a Vestry/Prayer Room
- Renovate the Upstairs Hall
- Upgrade Church House from the basement to the top floor.

The "Centre" began to operate with these buildings as the Church opened up their facilities for people and groups within the Community to use.

#### Rapid Growth

Soon need, and demand for space, exceeded what the Church's facilities could provide, so research was done to identify what the next stage of the Centre development should be.



The Deacons and Church realised that they were at a significant moment.

Up until now they had simply opened the Church buildings for Community use. The next step would launch them into the Centre Vision proper, of constructing new buildings and launching into a new mission. **They paused to pray.**

Out of prayer, God guided the Church to 3 crucial decisions:

- **A Community Audit.** The anecdotal research conducted by the PDG was a useful starting point to understanding the needs of the Church and Community. However it was realised that more in depth information would be required, and so the Baptist Union Lanarkshire Mission Networker, Bill Cairney, was engaged in 2005 to undertake an audit of the Community and produce a Report. Bill did an excellent piece of work, and his report became the foundation for the Village Centre Business Plan. This Plan was to be of crucial importance in the development of the Village Centre Project.
- **Construction of Buildings:** a builder was engaged to demolish the old wooden hall and construct a new hall in accordance with the Architect's Plans.
- **Creation of a Charitable Company:** a separate Charitable Company was set up with 3 Directors in April 2006.

## Nehemiah and a Charitable Company

Every step of the way the Deacons and Church were led by God through visions, prayer and His Word.



As noted above, God gave the Vision of creating a **Bridge** which spanned between the Church and the Community. It was to be neither the Church nor the Community, but an entity independent of both, though strongly connected to each, and spanning between them to enable people to meet and cross.

As the Deacons and Church continued to meet and pray about this Bridge God guided them to His Word to see how His Bridge was to be set up and operate.

It was to the **Book of Nehemiah** that God directed the Church to identify the Lord's template for His work. The Church embarked on a careful study of the example and principles laid down by God in Nehemiah.

As the Church studied Nehemiah and listened to God's guidance, they sought each step of the way to implement what God showed to them in His Word. The Lord revealed a number of key principles:

- The Centre was to be shaped by the needs of people (1:3)
- God would supply the resources for the Centre from the World (2:7-8) and His people (2.18)
- The Church was to ask the world for their resources (2:7-8)
- The Centre Team was to play a key role in the project (2:11-18)

And so on...

**It was God’s guidance in Nehemiah, combined with the Vision He had given of a Bridge, that led the Church to set up a separate Charitable Company in April 2006.**

## **A Separate Charity**

The decision by the Church to set up **a separate charitable company** was taken primarily because God instructed that it should be so through the Vision of a Bridge that He had given.



However, as the Church engaged in a prayerful study of the book of Nehemiah, the Lord confirmed that it was His will for His Centre to be a separate charity, as well as giving a number of **operational reasons** why this should be so.

- **Protection for the Church:** God spoke to the Church through Nehemiah warning that the road ahead would not be easy with much opposition from both the world and even some of God’s people (Neh 4, 5, 6, 7 etc). Operating in a separate company would help to protect the Church and enable the work to be accomplished.
- **Financial Security:** God spoke to the Church about another aspect of the “Protection” (Nehemiah 4, 5, 6, 7 etc): Financial Security.

Isolating the Church’s finances from the Centre meant that if at any time in the future things went badly, the Church would be safe-guarded.

In addition to which it was built into the Company that if it ceased trading/operating then the buildings would revert to the ownership of the Church.

- **Tough Decisions:** Nehemiah had to make difficult decisions quickly. God guided him to operate with a small team of two others with himself to manage matters (Neh 7:1-3)

God guided East Mains to appoint a small team with the authority to take tough decisions quickly: the Directors.

The team of 3 people that God guided the Church to appoint was comprised of the Pastor (Jim McGillivray), the Church Treasurer (Alex Marshall) and a Church member who was involved in the building trade (Paul Brightey). The Church set them apart to be Directors of the Village Centre Charitable Company to lead the project. The Church also appointed them to be the Members of the Company.

- **The World's Resources:** Finally, God guided the Church through Nehemiah to build using the world's resources (Neh 2:7-8). Setting up a separate charitable company had certain financial benefits to enable the Church to accomplish God's will of securing money from the world for His plans. A crucial one being financial traceability.

Just as Nehemiah had to report to Artaxerxes about the project (Neh 2:6 & 13:6), God revealed that The Village Centre would be following Nehemiah in this as well. Companies and Trusts who give finance require traceability of the money they give so that they can make sure that their gifts are being properly used. Being a separate Charitable Company enabled The Village Centre to isolate the project's finances from the Church's, and in this way outside funders could see that the money was being used for the purposes for which it had been given.

## **The Directors**

### **The Directors' Remit**

To make God's vision a reality He guided the Church in 2006 to appoint Directors and give them 3 tasks:

- To continue the work of upgrading the original buildings: toilets, upstairs hall, church house, etc.

- To construct new buildings to provide facilities to better further the mission of the church and meet the needs of people.
- To manage the campus buildings (Church and VC) to enable the church to fulfil its 2-fold mission of bringing God's Love to people in the message of the Gospel, and practical care.

The VC team completed the first two objectives of the renovation of the original buildings, including the demolition of an old hall which was not fit for the church's God given mission, as well as overseeing the construction of new buildings.

In both of these the VC team served the church in securing funding, renovating old buildings, and managing construction.

## **The Change of Directors**

In 2018 the original Directors believed it was God's time for them to step down and for a new team to be appointed. Jim McGillivray was to be retiring as Pastor of the Church, and it was felt this was a suitable moment for a new beginning.

Both Alex Marshall and Paul Brightey resigned. Jim McGillivray was to stay on for a short transitional period until the new Directors were appointed. He would step down when the new Pastor of the Church was appointed as a Director. For various reasons the new Pastor was unable to take up a position on the Board, so Jim continued and is only now, in 2024, able to step down, due to the fact that one of the Pastors, Ruari O'Brien, has been appointed as a Director.

The present Board of Directors continues the 3 tasks noted above for which the Church appointed them, especially the third one of the ongoing management of the facilities, as well as the coordination of the community and church use of the buildings.

## The Appointment of Staff

In 2007, when building work was being launched, the Directors decided that it would be important to appoint two paid staff members. The people who were appointed by the Directors in 2007 were **Ricky Gray**, to manage the construction project, and **Margaret Calder** to manage the facilities and interface with users. Both worked together on generating and securing funding for the project.

In 2008 at the conclusion of the building phase Ricky Gray's assignment was completed. He had done an excellent job, and the buildings had been completed.

Margaret Calder stayed on as the first Centre Manager for the next 6 years. Then in 2013 she resigned to return to nursing and Joanne Gray was appointed.



Joanne Gray, Village Centre Manager 2013-2024

During Joanne's 11 years as Manager, the Village Centre has grown dramatically and now has approximately 3,000 people each week through its doors, and approximately 150 community groups.

In addition the Centre has extended care, love, encouragement and help to hundreds of people.

People like those impacted by the **Gas Explosion in the Village.**

## 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 and they gave the 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.

**...But that was only the beginning! Read the whole story at the end in the “Stories” Section...**

## **The Church**

The stories of the Gas Explosion and Amy demonstrate that the Village Centre was not only a place for groups and people to meet; not only a Café with good food and great staff; it was a place where God's love could be expressed and experienced and where lives could be transformed.

So, while the VC Directors and Staff were appointed to manage the facilities and coordinate the use of the buildings, the Vision God gave was far more than facilities management.

God's calling was to create a Bridge between the Church and Community to enable the Church to engage with people on the Bridge and so reach out to the users of the Centre with His love in Word and Action, people like Amy and those affected by the Gas Explosion.

The fundamental concept God gave to the Church was of course for the people of the church to build warm relationships with non-church people who come through the doors of the Centre.

The Village Centre is the Mission field that God called the church to when He first gave the Vision. It will be exciting to see how God guides the church to take forward His vision.

The VC team that God guided the church to establish will continue to be of importance in managing the facilities and administering the community and church group use to create the best possible environment for the church to accomplish the Mission of God.

The VC team also continue their remit of securing funding to support the operation of the Centre so that the facilities continue to be available for the church to fulfil God's Vision.

## 4. Today and Tomorrow



The Vision of the Village Centre was revealed by God, discerned by the Church leadership, and by the Church.

It has been a remarkable journey with God, as He has enabled the Church to accomplish this amazing project to share His Love with the World.

As noted in the Introduction, as time passes the original Vision that God gives gets diluted, amended and forgotten. People's opinions and ideas start to erode God's revelation. That is why it is vital to regularly step back and remember, seek God, and hear again the voice of heaven.

In addition, it is a fact that organisations tend to move from simplicity to complexity and those involved in those organisations get so caught up in managing the day-to-day operation, that they easily forget the purpose.

The fundamental facts of the Village Centre/Church partnership under God are:

### **The Village Centre...**

- The VC was revealed by God as the means by which EMBC is to accomplish His Mission.
- The VC was established by the Church in obedience to God's revelation
- The VC exists to serve the church's mission.
- The VC team was appointed by the church to fulfil the purposes noted above
- The VC team continues to be a servant of the church in God's service, though the Church is not its “master”!
- The VC is God’s Bridge to connect the Church and Community and enable His people to share His love in Word and Care with others.

## The Church...

- God's call to the Church was and is to recognise the VC as its primary mission field.
- The Church is to continue to seek ways in which to share the **love of God in practical care** to the staff, users, community groups, and all whom God sends through the doors of the campus buildings.
- The church is to seek imaginative and effective ways as revealed by God **to share the Good News of Jesus** with staff, users, community groups, and all whom God sends through onto His Bridge
- His people are to walk onto His bridge, make connections, build friendships and share His love with the world, in Word and Action.

## The Mission in Practice

Read about the ways in which God has accomplished His work through the Village Centre in the stories section at the end of this document. Although all the names of people have been changed to protect their privacy, you will meet people like **Hugh**, whose life was devastated but was loved and given practical help by the Village Centre that took him into a more wonderful life than he dreamed possible.

People like **Tam**, a hardened criminal whose body was covered in scars from a violent life. Who had spent more time in jail in his 39 years than out of prison. A drug addict who was banned from homeless units. But whom God brought to the Village Centre where he and his life were transformed so that today he is a chef in a hotel in Scotland drug free.

And of course the marvellous full stories of **Amy** and the **victims of the Gas Explosion**.

These are just a few samples of the many lives blessed by the Village Centre over the last 18 years.

There are the families who have been blessed, the children cared for, the people with additional needs who have been loved and equipped for life. The people who needed practical help, love and encouragement, and found it at the VC.

There are so very many stories that could and should be told of how God has blessed people and transformed lives through the ministry of the Village Centre.

Each one is a tribute to the Centre Managers like Margaret Calder and Joanne Gray; the marvellous Staff of the V.C.; the Directors who have guided the Centre; and East Mains Baptist Church to whom God gave the Vision to create the Centre, and who made it possible by their prayers and sacrificial giving.

However, all the wonderful blessings that the Village Centre has brought into people's lives is most of all a tribute to the limitless love, mercy and grace of God. The Village Centre is His Vision, brought into existence by His power and blessed by His continuing presence at work in and through the VC Team.

The newest member of the Team is Nadina Brown who takes over as Centre Manager from Joanne. Nadina has come to head up the Team, manage the Centre, and lead the it forward into God's great future where the best is yet to be.

# Conclusion

God revealed to East Mains Baptist Church that a Centre for the Community should be established as His means for advancing the Gospel and sharing His love with the people of East Kilbride. The church "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision!"

God's mission, accomplished by God's methods, will not lack God's resources, and will fulfil God's purposes.

Together the Church and the Village Centre, which it created at God's direction, are His glorious strategy for His Mission in this time and place.



# Stories of Changed Lives.

## Amy's Story.

---

Amy came to the Village Centre as a young person with barriers to employment on a work experience programme from Skills Exchange, who have Officers in our buildings. They asked if we would take on Amy as a placement for 6 months. She was terrible!

She could not turn up on time...when she turned up at all! She was obnoxious. She was rude. She was a terrible worker. You would not have hired this girl because she was an absolute disaster in every sense of the word.

But Joanne was Centre Manager and Myra was the Café Manager, both of whom were full of God's love and wanted to share that love with Amy. So together they started giving Amy a mixture of tough love, straight talking and encouragement, and gradually she began to open up and talk about her background.

Amy was born in the greater Glasgow area but was sent into care by her mother when she was just a little girl. Her mother kept her older and younger siblings, but Amy was given away! Amy was taken to the other side of the country and put into a foster family in Fife. This little girl was distraught. She wanted her Mum and her brothers and sisters. For the next 15 years Amy grew up in Fife being moved from care home to care home, foster family to foster family, batted around the care system. Then at 18 she was considered an adult and given a flat, not in Fife where she knew people, but in East Kilbride. She was now in a town where she knew no one. She was in a flat on her own and had no idea how to look after herself, never mind her new home!

She didn't know how to work her washing machine. She didn't know how to cook for herself. She didn't know how to clean properly. Her life had been organised for her, but now there was no one to tell her when to get out of bed or have a shower. All the ordinary things of everyday.

And she was frightened living by herself because she had lived all her life in Group accommodation. She'd always lived with a number of people and was surrounded by people who always did things for her.



Myra and Joanne stepped in. They cleaned her flat and showed her how to keep it that way. They taught her how to use the washing machine. At the Café, the Chefs taught her how to cook, and each day would give her a meal away to heat up for dinner at home.

Amy began to change! She was now surrounded by people who loved her and cared about her. She was learning new skills. She became a star in the Café. People were amazed at the miraculous transformation in Amy. Staff and Customers really liked Amy. She was so good that Joanne secured government funding to keep her on the staff for 2 years.

Joanne thought, 'If Amy has changed so much in 6 months, if we can hire her on a funding scheme for two years, then think how much more of an improvement there will be and how massive that will be for her life.' And so it was. An amazing 2 years for Amy and for the VC!

Amy herself began to realise that she was someone of worth; that an employer would see her as a good candidate for a job. She realised that she was so good that the VC wanted to employ her because she was such a great employee.

She had come to us with no qualifications at all, not even a Standard Grade from school. Nothing. So during her 2 years with us we put her through an SVQ in Food and Beverage Service and we also sent her on a Barista Course to become a Certified Barista. So that when she left here and went on into her next job she had an SVQ and a Barista qualification.

That was not just for Amy. It is something that The VC does for all of the people who are employed in the Cafe. They go to Kirkcaldy for the Barista training, and the SVQ's are done in-house. We have a training company who come in and take the people through the SVQ, free of charge. It gives staff skills, knowledge and something to put on their CV. We put our more experienced members of staff through advanced SVQ's through this training scheme. So again, we're equipping people for life. We are not equipping people to keep a hold of them at the Village Centre. We are blessing them with free training courses that can take them on into the next chapter?

As it came towards the end of the two years for Amy the VC didn't have the finance to enable her to continue and the government scheme was not available. However, Joanne helped Amy think about what she wanted to do

with her life. She helped her identify vacancies and fill in applications. She prepared Amy for interviews. Amy got interviews and secured a position in a company. Now she was in a real job, not supported employment. However, she didn't leave the Village Centre behind, she continued to come back and see us and let us know how she was getting on. And we were still very much in contact with her.

She called Myra her mum because Myra was like a mother to her. She was the one who was there for Amy. The one who disciplined her and told her, 'You cannot behave like this'. Amy still needed that because in many ways she was still a child, because she had never had that adolescent phase where her behaviour was being corrected and she was being moulded into a mature responsible adult. Myra was taking on the role of a Mum.

Amy was settled in her home and doing well in her job. And now she met this lovely boy Stephen, and they started dating. They were going out for a while and were very much in love and so decided to move in together. Not long after, Amy fell pregnant. She told her Mum, Myra, of course, and all her friends at the VC. She brought in her baby scans. When the baby was born the first person she called was Myra, and said, "Mum, it's Amy, I've just had a baby." And Myra said "O, that's amazing. When was the baby born?" And she said, "10 minutes ago."

Myra had started off as her boss as Café Manager in the Village Centre Café, but she had become far more. God's love flowing through Myra had worked a miracle in this young woman's life. A young person who was terrible at a job. Who was difficult, argumentative, undisciplined, and thoroughly unpleasant. But Myra had taken the time to get to know that young person, get to understand her, why she was the way she was, and help her to become a wonderful person.

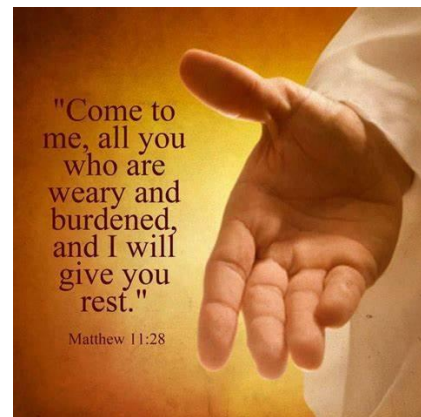
It is now a few years since Amy first came to the V.C. She now has a second child. When the baby was born, once again she phoned 'Mum', Myra, and said, "Mum I've just had another baby!"

Amy is thriving. She has her partner, Stephen. He works through the week and Amy works at the weekends, so that they've got enough money. They bought a little house together, so she is no longer in council accommodation. She keeps her home pristine, just as Mum Myra taught

her to do. She cooks the family dinners every day of the week, just as the VC Chefs taught her.

Amy keeps in touch with Myra and gives her all the news about what is going on in her life and family. She's now back in touch with her birth family as well. And things are going really well.

Amy's children are growing up in a wonderful loving home. One of them is at school, the other at the nursery. She's a great mum and her kids are always turned out beautifully and so is she. She is doing well in her job. All because the Christians in the Village Centre took time to get alongside her, get to know her and hold her hand through a difficult time.



## 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.





## Tam's Story

---

Tam lived in Lindsay House and would come to the VC for help. Before the official food bank started up the Church and VC together ran their own food bank system. We had carrier bags with a few essentials in them: a pack of pasta, pasta sauce, some tins, a few biscuits, sugar etc., a few things that they might need to keep them going for the next few days.

Tam would come down to the unofficial food bank. One week he stopped coming and we didn't see him for a while. Then a year or so later he turned up, ran into the Village Centre and said,

“Joanne, I need help”.

I said “Where have you been?”

“Gaol, I've just come out of gaol.”

“O when did you get out of gaol?”

“Today, I just came out today.”

So Tam had been in gaol, came out that day and had come round to the 1st place that he thought he could go to for help. It was a place that he knew that he had could come to and not be judged. He would not be made to feel any less of a person than any other person that walked in.

So he said,

“I need some help. I don't have anywhere to stay. I can't get into a homeless unit.”

He was barred from various ones. Partly his own doing. But the ones that he was allowed to be in didn't have any space for him for the next few days. And he said,

“I don't know what to do and I don't have anywhere to go.”

“OK, let's get you sorted with a bed for tonight.”

So I contacted all the homeless units that he had said he was allowed into. None of them had space. I contacted shelter. They said,

“Yes, we can get Tam space somewhere in a couple of days”.

I said, “What's he to do for a couple of days?”

“Well, we can give him a sleeping bag.”

People were not particularly interested in helping Tam. He had been in and out of gaol his whole life. He'd been in gaol more than he'd been out! He was not worth helping. A hopeless case. He was to get a sleeping bag and sleep on a bench, and nobody particularly cared that this was a human being and that was what his fate was to be.

But we cared! So the Village Centre paid for him to stay in a hotel for three nights. It gave us three days breathing space to find out how we could get him somewhere to stay.

During his 3 days in the hotel I went with him to the Housing Department in Hamilton, and they were able to get him into a Scatter Flat in Burnbank.

He was not welcome in the group accommodation homeless units because he had in the past shown that he was not able to be in a group setting. He took a lot of drugs, sold a lot of drugs, got up to mischief, got into fights, he was not welcome. But he said to me that he wanted to change his life. He said to me,

“When I was in gaol I picked up a Bible because I had nothing better to do, and I started reading it. And I thought, do you know, when I get out of here, I'm going to go and see Joanne at the Village Centre and I'm going to change my life.”

I decided to trust that Tam was telling the truth, that he really did want to change his life.

I drove Tam down to his flat and we met a social worker there. We got him settled in his flat. And then I said to him,

“OK, so you're not allowed to take any drugs.”

And he said, “Well, how am I going to do that?”

I said, “I don't actually care, but you're not taking any drugs. And we're going to change your life.”

So he said, “OK”

And he went to the doctor and said,

“Here's my situation. I am addicted to...” There was a long list!

The Doctor prescribed some kind of blockers that would help and enrolled him in a methadone programme. He went to the chemist every morning for methadone, and various other medication to ease the process of withdrawal from these drugs. So every morning I drove down to Burnbank and picked him up. I brought him up here to the village centre and every day, from 8:30 in the morning till 4:30 Monday to Saturday he worked in the cafe for free. He worked in the kitchen because he was not the type of character who was going to be a delight to serve our clientele out front. He had scars and various stab wounds on his body. He had bullet wounds. He looked like he was withdrawing from all sorts of drugs. He was not a front of house person. So we put him in the back washing dishes. Then the chef at the time said,

“Do you want to come and help me prepare some of the food, I need an extra hand?”

So he then was helping to cook. We then put them through an SVQ in Cooking. He was with us every day Monday to Saturday. And then on Sunday, he would sometimes appear at church.

It was not all plain sailing! He was not always completely with it, because sometimes he slipped up and took the drugs he was not supposed to take, and it played absolute havoc with the medication that he was taking to stop him doing that. So it was not always a bed of roses.

The police contacted me and said,

“Do you have this man, Tam on your property?”

“Yes.”

And they said, “Well, we want to come and speak to you about the danger this man is.”

I said “OK.”

So the police came and they said,

“Do you know he's an armed robber?”

I said, “Yes. He's been very open about his past.”

And he said “OK, do you know he has been stabbed this many times from all the people that are after him. Do you know that he has stabbed this many people. He's been involved in this, that and this.”

I said, “Yes, I know this.”

And they said, “Well, what are you doing?”

I said, “Tam has said he wants to change his life, and we are trusting that he does want to, and we want to help him do that.”

And they said, “Well, we will come twice a week to see you, to make sure that you and your staff are all OK and we will come once a week to see him, to make sure that he is staying on the straight and narrow and he's not up to anything that he shouldn't be.”

“That's great.”

So twice a week, I met with the police to let them know what was going on. And once a week Tam met with the police. And some of those times he met with the police because he had been involved in a fight the night before, and the police actually were saying that they needed to take Him into custody. And I was then advocating for him saying,

“No, we're trying to help him change his life. We need to keep him out of gaol, and we need to work together on this.”

And we managed to keep him out of gaol. So he was with us for a number of years. And he did a great job and gained experience in cooking and qualifications. His life changed!

We took time to build a relationship with Tam and find out why he was the way that he was. Nobody sits in primary school and when they are asked what they want to be when they leave school, puts up their hand and says, ‘I want to be a drug addict and in gaol.’ So what flipped Tam to make his life like this, because he never set out to be that.

When Tam was young, his dad was in and out of gaol, and one day Tam stole something from a shop and he went home and told his dad, and his dad said, ‘Well done, son. That's great.’

Tam was praised for committing crimes. As he got a bit older, his dad got him involved in the criminal lifestyle and he was praised when he committed crime and punished when he did not commit crime. He was in

that lifestyle and said to himself, 'This is what life is. It's what I'm good at. And this is what I'm praised for. This is what gets me affirmation and things.'

When he was 15, he stole his first car. And then he kept on stealing cars because it's an easy way to make money. His dad liked it. The cars got passed to his dad who sold them. This was a well-paid job that his Dad approved and encouraged him in.

He got caught and found himself in gaol at 16. It was the first time he was in gaol. From 16 onwards till he came to the Village Centre in his late 30s he spent more years in gaol than he spent out of gaol. When he came out of gaol at the end of five years for armed robbery he went to his mum's house and somebody else answered the door and said,

"We bought the house, the lady that used to live here died."

So while Tam had been in gaol, his mum had died. He hadn't been informed of this, and he was not able to go to her funeral. His dad had died previously so now he had nobody apart from the people he'd met in gaol and criminals in the gang lifestyle he had been in. Those people were his people. Those were his family. He had nobody else. So that's why he was in the situation that he was in, and coming into the Village Centre and being shown a bit of love and care, and being shown that here were people who really believed in him, made a huge impact on Tam and changed his life.

Today Tam is a Chef in a Hotel on a Scottish Island. He rents a flat on the Island. He is not involved in crime or drugs. He is an excellent Chef. He is doing really well.

If sometime, you happen to be visiting an Island and go into a hotel for lunch, maybe you will eat a meal made by Tam. You might even see him, with the scars of a past life left far behind, and the joy of a new life born out of the love of God poured into him through Joanne and the Staff of The Village Centre.



## Hugh's story.

---

Hugh came to the Village Centre in December 2022 when his flat was flooded by a burst water tank 2 flats above. Everybody in the block was evacuated. Hugh was put into the Holiday Inn by his insurance company. He was given breakfast in the Holiday Inn. The Insurance company provided an allowance for him to buy Lunch and Dinner. For dinner he would buy a Marks and Spencer's microwave meal, he gave this to the chefs at the Holiday Inn who would microwave it, put it on a fancy plate, add extra veg and deliver it to his room for him. For Lunch Hugh came to the Village Centre Café.

One day not long after his flat flood he was walking past the Village Centre and noticed the Café sign and walked in. He loved it. He enjoyed the food and everyone was warm and friendly and made him feel welcome. He came back the next day and the next. Every day, 6 days a week, the Café was his lunch venue. The staff in the cafe quickly noticed that this older gentleman was coming every day to the cafe. So they got chatting to him. He told them his story. They asked about what was happening in his life. They spent time with him and made him realise that they genuinely cared about him.

The Café can be very busy at lunchtime and some days when Hugh arrived there wasn't a free table. The Cafe staff would go to him and say,

“Oh, there's not a space free to sit at table by yourself, but there is Anne, who also comes in by herself, let me check if she would be happy for you to sit with her.

Anne, are you happy to have a guest at your table who has nowhere to sit?

Absolutely.”

The two of them got talking. They arranged to meet for lunch the next week and ended up meeting for lunch every week because they were both on their own and enjoyed the company. Hugh of course was still coming in every other day of the week.

Another day, Hugh was sitting at table by himself, reading his book, having his lunch, and a couple of younger ladies came in, maybe in their 40s or 50s, and the place was busy, no free tables, they went to turn around to

leave, but Joanne was walking into the cafe at that point, noticed Hugh and said to the ladies,

“Girls, if you don't mind sharing a table, I know that Hugh over there would love the company.”

They said, “We’d love that. That would be great.”

So they went over and sat beside him and had their lunch alongside Hugh. After lunch they arranged with Hugh to meet him once a week at the library and go for an afternoon coffee.

So now this gentleman who was out of his house and had been feeling a bit lonely and isolated because he lived alone and was staying in a hotel, now suddenly had friends: Anne for lunch once a week; two ladies whom he met for coffee each week. Through coming to the Village Centre he was building friendships.

Hugh was in the hotel for 11 months in total. He said that living in the hotel was like being Richard Gere in the film *Pretty Woman*. Like Gere, his hotel life meant he was constantly surrounded by interesting characters, a constant flow of the people who were around about there. In one of his many chats with Joanne, he asked her,

“Do you think I should sell my flat and live in a hotel full time?”

Joanne said, “Well Richard Gere did it. So I don't know. I don't see why not. Except, that was just a film!”

Eventually the insurance company were able to track Hugh down because he kept ignoring their calls because he didn't want to move out of the hotel and move back to his flat. But the Insurance Company explained that they could no longer pay for the hotel because his flat was now repaired. So he moved back into his flat.

He kept coming to the Cafe for lunch, but he was not happy. When he closed his door in the evening, he was alone and felt isolated after the hustle and bustle of the noise in the hotel. To make matters worse there was anti-social behaviour in his block of flats. One of the other tenants was causing him a bit of distress. This person would bang his door and shout “I'm going to kill you in your sleep, old man.” And lots of other horrible threats. So Hugh was very frightened in his own home now, as well as feeling isolated.

He spoke to his local authority councillor. He went to the Housing Department. He tried everywhere, but there was nothing anyone would do because they refused to move the man who was threatening Hugh out of his flat, because the man had mental health issues.

Hugh was still coming to the Café every day and chatting with Joanne and the Café Staff about his problems.

Hugh became so stressed about the whole situation that he suffered a stroke and was rushed to hospital. The authorities became aware that this situation was serious so when he had recovered, they moved him into a bungalow in a council amenity housing complex in White Hills because they realised that he could not go back to his flat and live in that stressful situation.

He loves his new home and really enjoys the company of the other older people who all go out and enjoy doing the garden and speaking to each other. They have a lovely community.

His stroke meant that was no longer able to drive but the Village Centre was so important to him that he wanted to continue coming to meet Joanne and the Staff whom he now looked on as his family! So he arranged with a friend to give him a lift one day. He spoke to Joanne and said how much he wanted to keep coming to the Café but couldn't manage now because he couldn't drive. While Hugh was in having lunch, Joanne checked out the bus timetable from his home in Whitehills. She downloaded the First Bus App onto Hughs phone and explained to him what buses he would be able to get, where the bus stop was in relation to his house, and how he'd be able to get to the Café to meet up with the friends that he had made. He is back to coming in a few times a week.

The week before Joanne left, he spoke to her and said,

“Joanne, I'm devastated that you're leaving because every day that I see you, you make my life better in some way. I just love my time here at the Village Centre.”

He spoke to Joanne's replacement, Nadina, and explained what a lifeline the Village Centre had been for him because he suddenly had these friendships.



At the Café he has recently made a new friend who invited him along to a fitness class at the John Wright Sport Centre. And so he now goes to that fitness Class a couple of times a week, and he's made some great friends there whom he meets for a coffee.

As a result of his stroke his eyesight is not so good, so he finds reading a bit difficult. So when he's in at the Café, if he's on his own, Bronagh will sit with him and read a few pages of his book to him and have a chat.

That is Hugh's Story. A man whose life was devastated by a flood, but through it found care, hope and friendship in the Village Centre where the staff have become a family, and the place a safe haven of love.

