



The highs and lows of starting chaplaincy work at a local FE College

Andrew Dye



I am the Youth Worker with Truro Methodist Circuit.

When I started in the post over two years ago one of the things that occurred to me was that Truro and Penwith College had a lot of students but no chaplaincy at all. As a new youth worker, I was challenged with the prompting to go where the young people are. I spoke to my steering group about my passion to try to start some work there and they encouraged me to pursue it.

I began by talking to the local ministers and with their support I wrote a proposal for the Truro Churches Together leaders group, who gave it full support, but left me to follow it up. For a while the proposals seemed to stall with questions: How best to make contact? Who else to include? What should it look like? Who needs to give the authority?

After some months of prayer and frustration at a seeming lack of progress, I was put in contact with a similarly inspired person in the form of Elly Sheard, an Anglican Vicar with a passion to see chaplaincy work in the college. This gave fresh impetus to the project. We met with the Cornwall Faith Forum to provide multi-faith support and eventually, we set up a meeting with the college. We approached the meeting with some trepidation but with some simple safeguards in place of a 'line manager', under the wing of the student services and a talk through of expectations, they were very happy for us to begin in September 2017.

We started with the tentative hope that we might establish trust between ourselves and the college, about having a chaplaincy established there. The upshot is that it has been a brilliant year! We go in for 3 hours (12-3pm) a day. The staff and student and college set up have all been really welcoming, to the extent that we are now seen as part of the team. We have been able to hold college carols, take part in the equality and diversity fair and wellbeing fair. We have also engaged students and staff on peace day, fairtrade week, interfaith week, holocaust week and refugee week. Much of our time is spent walking the college, chatting, saying some prayers and occasionally having people referred to us from others.

The doors have opened, and we hope to see the work grow with colleagues of other denominations and faiths. Our vision is the chaplaincy work would extend to cover other further education sites in Cornwall. God is good!

If you want to see further education chaplaincy work in a college near you, my advice would be: don't give up, keep praying, talk to lots of people, find similarly motivated workers and approach the college with respect and a heart to serve that community.

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