

# An insight into the work of the volunteers who keep Glasgow city centre safe at night



Since 2009, the streets of Glasgow's City Centre have been blessed by the life-saving work of street pastors; volunteers that dedicate their time to go out between 10pm and 4am every Friday and Saturday night to listen, care and help anyone they can in order to strengthen the community and work towards providing Glasgow safer streets.

Set up by Les Isaac in 2003 as a response to gang's, crime and violence in South London, Street Pastors are a Christian charitable organisation that currently cover over 300 towns and cities around the UK. The Glasgow team consists of around 120 volunteers, split up into 8 separate teams with each team going out at least once a month whatever the weather.

Joining them as an observer on a Saturday night into the early hours of Sunday morning was extremely eye opening as I experienced what it is like to be sober amongst revellers enjoying the city's vibrant nightlife. More importantly, I witnessed a wide range of different ways street pastors help anyone they can and how important this is. Although the time I spent with the pastors

was actually very quiet compared to other nights, still, a significant amount of help was given. Support was provided to a badly bleeding girl while she waited on an ambulance after being assaulted. A man was taken home by a pastor because he was severely stranded. A girl standing herself, crying, was accompanied, comforted and given a jacket while waiting on a taxi to arrive and two girls were walked to the apartment they were staying in as they were lost and had been looking a while with no luck.

Stuart Crawford, Glasgow Street Pastors (GSP) Coordinator explains: "Street pastors are part of the Christian faith so it's taking the whole idea of Christianity outside of a church and into the city centre. I think for a lot of us that's the big motivation factor; we want to put our faith into action by doing something practical to help people."



Stuart Crawford

Assisting overly drunk people, providing flip flops, discarding glass bottles, helping the homeless, reuniting people with their friends, giving directions, providing first aid, providing a safe zone, calming fights, phoning ambulances and just simply listening and having conversations with people are some examples of duties carried out.

Last year, 2942 pair of flip-flops were given out. Doing this prevents women walking around the streets barefooted as a result of taking their heels off. This takes away the pain from wearing heels but also reduces the amount of casualties in A&E with foot injuries as a result of standing on broken glass or discarded needles. This ties in with the removal of glass bottles and as it is common for women to be barefooted, clearing abandoned bottles prevents them from being smashed on the streets and being stood on. And more importantly, every bottle off the street results in a weapon being off the street. Last year 3520 were picked up.

However, Stuart explains the biggest concern for street pastors: "The main thing we are trying to do when we are out is look out for people

who get a bit vulnerable and can't look after themselves. Either because they've got too drunk, lost contact with their friends or just got themselves into a bit of difficulty. What we will try to do is organise a taxi for them to get home, give them directions to get to the right place, or we will take some time and actually talk to them."



Monthly blog posts are uploaded to the GSP website by Stuart. Here, he summarises the work done each month, recruitment information, announcements, special thanks for donations etc. And here you can read just some of the stories that prove 'life changing' help is provided. If the street pastors were not here to assist in some of these cases then the outcomes could be very different. 'A team responded to a call to a venue where they found a man with serious suicidal intentions due to a personal tragedy. He was brought to the Safe Zone where he was cared for and counselled for a prolonged period. To

ensure his immediate safety, an ambulance was called and he was taken to hospital at 4am. Without the presence of a Street Pastor team and Safe Zone pastors, who knows what would have happened to this man?' This is an example of a story that highlights this.

In order to provide safer streets the charity works alongside Community Safety Glasgow (CSG), a partnership between Glasgow City Council and Police Scotland aiming to tackle antisocial behaviour. CSG help with funding. They provide digital radios in order for street pastors to contact the Public Space CCTV Control Centre. These also allow them to listen in to the Night Radio Network to be called for assistance by door staff in pubs and clubs. Steven McGeady, Area Service Manager for CSG said: "Street Pastors are important in that they fill a very important gap which uniformed services do not fill. They help the public enormously, though it's hard to estimate the true extent because sometimes it's just a kind word that's enough to prevent a situation developing further. They can be the difference between an otherwise law abiding person gaining a criminal record through stupidity caused





The Glasgow Street Pastor team

by over consumption. They keep people safe and get them home safely before they end up in a hospital, A&E or police custody. They also help calm situations, prevent fights, protect vulnerable individuals and identify and combat predatory behaviour."

As well as CSG, GSP work with Police Scotland who also help with funding. Andrew Small, Communities Inspector here said: "I cannot talk highly enough of the work Stuart and his team do. They do an excellent job of assisting the city. Incidents including thefts, sexual assault, unlicensed taxis and people taking advantage of vulnerable people would be more common if street pastors weren't there." When out on patrol, if police officers come across a situation in which street pastors are able to deal with, they pass it on. This means the situation can get dealt with in a better way. For example, if someone is overly drunk and it is not possible for them to get home the police will request this person gets taken to the Safe Zone instead of a cell.

The Safe Zone is located on Buchanan Street at St.

Georges Tron Church. Here, the Safe Zone team and first aiders look after and help anyone who comes through the doors but mostly highly intoxicated people who need somewhere to sober up while they wait for a family member to pick them up or are able to get home themselves. Throughout the month of April the Safe Zone had 37 visitors, 15 of these due to alcohol and two through drugs. Here, first aid is provided as well as food, water, counselling and ways to contact family and to get home.

Stuart wrote on the GSP blog that: 'the compassionate care being demonstrated on the streets and in the Safe Zone is having an impact on our city that cannot be measured by statistics alone and behind the statistics are the stories. These types of stories are not exceptional to us, but we should never minimise the difference it makes to the people concerned and to their families to know they were kept safe and cared for.'

When asked if there is any aspect of being a Street Pastor that Stuart doesn't like, he explained: "Seeing the state that some people

get themselves into; that can be really upsetting. One of the things that you have to be as a street pastor is non-judgemental. We never judge anybody and why they've got themselves into the state they're in but when you actually see some people end up being that way it kind of breaks your heart a wee bit."

After speaking to Amy Brown who experienced first-hand how much help street pastors are, she said:

*"The fact that people volunteer to walk the streets early hours in the morning at the weekend to make sure people are safe is incredible. They help so many people in so many different ways."*

Amy had been on a night out with her friend, who was unable to walk and hold herself up properly due to too much alcohol. Her friend was being unresponsive and sat down to be sick when street pastors approached. They comforted Amy's friend, gave her water, and provided a phone in order to get hold of

someone to come get them as theirs both had no battery. The street pastors then waited until their lift home arrived to ensure they would be safe.


However, people using the night time economy are not the only concern. Street pastors provide a vast amount of help to the homeless who spend their nights sleeping rough on the streets. They are provided with food, hats, gloves and even underwear. Stuart said: "I think there's a level of burying the head in Glasgow about the size of the problem and you only have to walk the streets at night to see it." The statistics recorded by GSP highlight this.


50 items of food were given out the night I observed and 54 conversations took place. For a homeless person it can mean a lot to have someone care, help or even just provide some company for a short while.


By conducting a survey and posting it on my personal social media pages I asked 'have you ever been helped by street pastors?' I added a comment box and feedback included: "I had lost my friends and my phone was dead so I approached a street

Some statistics on help given by street pastors in 2016

Directions given - 452  
→ times

Helped people to safety/friends - 352 times 

 Help to overly drunk - 282 times

First Aid given - 94 times 

 Items of food given to homeless - 2685

pastor to help me, they took me to the top of the taxi queue to get me home quick so I wasn't panicking about being myself." As well as: "I regularly come across street pastors when out in town and they've gave me flip flops when I've been carrying my heels, they are always so friendly." Stuart confirmed that 'really really positive' feedback is regularly given to GSP and to be specific, appreciation was shown to them 1880 times during 2016.

Being the only organisation that runs between 10pm and 4am, makes street pastors important. The number of lives they have positively affected on the streets is huge and they are continuing to make a difference to vulnerable people and their families every week. Donations made by the public are vital in order for the charity to operate. Around £2,000 a year is spent on flip flops alone.

For a number of ways in which you can donate to Glasgow Street Pastors go to the following link: <https://gsp.scot/donate> or if you are interested in becoming a street pastor go to the following link for more information and to enquire: <https://gsp.scot/volunteer>

