

## MARK OF MISSION 4

Seeking to transform unjust structures of society...

by supporting the work of StopGap as it strives to provide temporary housing for the homeless in Hexham and Tynedale.



Many of the examples of the growing inequality in our world are as a result of the structures we have built that benefit the few at the expense of the many. There is a place in mission to question the status quo and become open to seeing the world through the eyes of the vulnerable and dispossessed. Jesus was clear by both his words and actions that his heart was close to those who many would overlook. Any small actions we take towards noticing those who are on the edges of society are noticed by God.

A project that is seeking to transform some local injustices by stepping into the nation's housing and homeless crisis, is the organisation called **StopGap Supported Housing** in Hexham.

StopGap's mission is to support vulnerable adults, both those who are homeless and those who may be threatened with homelessness. Many cases of homelessness in rural areas go undetected, with individuals more likely to bed down in outhouses, barns, tents and parked cars.

StopGap was initiated to help homeless people in Tynedale in 1997 as the Hexham Cold Weather Scheme. It was registered as a charity two years later. Since 2001, when the first accommodation service opened in Hexham, almost 900 adults have been supported. But this is just 40% of the referrals that have been received.

### Project description and development:

StopGap currently provides accommodation for 7 people in



its Dean Street project, where staff and volunteers work with these vulnerable people, helping them address their problems and develop simple skills, access training or deal with the complexities of the benefit and housing system. The aim is to enable them to move on.

In 2019 StopGap made a number of successful applications to develop and equip an additional facility in Haugh Lane (previously the Links building). This will provide eleven individual bed spaces with facilities and communal living rooms and kitchens. Access will be via a new reception area and staff offices and there will be a large training / IT suite area.



By utilising the accommodation and office / training space a thriving community-based homelessness accommodation and support service can be developed. StopGap will be able to provide support sooner, to prevent or reduce the nights rough sleeping and stop the insecurity and vulnerability of 'sofa-surfing'. Existing accommodation in Dean Street as a move-on facility will provide increased housing options.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

The new accommodation has had to be adapted to take account of COVID restrictions, and this has delayed the move – now expected to be by the end of January.

The introduction of people, particularly into shared accommodation, will now have to be phased to allow for a quarantine period before introducing a new person into an already occupied flat. The use and rental of the office and training space is no longer certain. There are huge challenges in getting the new building up and running safely and fully utilised.

In the meantime extra staffing, PPE and other measures have added to day-to-day costs not covered by most grant funders .

### **How might St Andrew's be involved?**

Grants are very useful for major projects or facilities, but rarely cover running costs. Donations from the church have previously gone to support these, and they could usefully do so in the future.

StopGap uses volunteers for some of its work - mentoring, passing on skills, collecting food donations, helping clients in moving on, setting up home and independent living.

The advantages of this project would be that it is addressing a current and growing problem in the immediate local area. Plus, there could be real opportunities for volunteer involvement from the church.

