

social action schemes within *Message 2000* were entitled *Ground Level Projects*. Pam White of Ground Level contacted Phil Gleave of the Police whose community affairs department had launched a *Make a Difference* campaign, asking Manchester young people to volunteer their time. She offered him between 800-1000 young people for two successive weeks; the normal number per existing project was 25! The Valley Estate in Swinton was chosen as the target area, via local consultation. Local residents already had ideas and plans but lacked manpower and funding. The logistical triumph, to find a project, to transport and resource the workers, all in a short 6 weeks, deserves applause.



### How green was the valley?

The Valley Estate is small - only about 500 homes. It began life as respectable 1930's Local Authority housing, but lack of upgrading over the years left some houses in 1980 with outside toilets and bare brick kitchens. Some newcomers had brought with them juvenile boredom, drug abuse, car theft, burglary, vandalism and graffiti. Many houses had become void and the record for the shortest stay of a new tenant was a torrid 28 minutes. By abandoning the points system for newcomers and creating a Community Lettings Project to monitor applications to the Housing Department, attempts were being made to turn round social



decline. However, physical regeneration was needed and **seven major projects were identified**. Hordes, mainly teenagers, cleared rubbish, refurbished 319 gardens and 31 neglected areas, helped redevelop a community centre, built a simple amphitheatre for local drama, created a linear park, and a dog walking area. Cuttings from the local papers were upbeat: "*Who needs Charlie? We've got our own ground force here*" and "*The feel-*



*good factor bursts into full bloom*". Local people came out with food, drink, gratitude and spiritual seeds were sown. The crime rate on the estate for the 10 days dropped to zero and was 45% down on the year. Jack Straw, as Home Secretary, even came to visit because the impact had been noted.



### What were the lasting gains?

When I saw the area in Spring 2002, the Resource and Community Centre still flourished, many gardens still showed pride or were being turned into carports. The memory of 2000 is still good but the park, walking area, amphitheatre and

planters were already regressing back into vandalised neglect, litter and decay. It was not all maintainable. The kids still kick their heels; the small minority remain criminal and destructive. **Sustainable change is still a difficult issue.**

## Eden after the garden blitz

New Frontiers International (NFI) were already in south Manchester and had recently become partners in *Eden Longsight*. NFI have a reputation as a swift acting, pioneering church planting movement. What could be done here to hold some ground gained? An NFI planter - Howard Kellett and his family, were brought in, not just for Valley Estate but wider Swinton. Starting as a Cell of 6, they have grown to a congregation of 40-50 meeting in Grosvenor Primary school on a Sunday, calling themselves North Manchester Family Church. NFI approached Hayden Brophy (right with Howard) to be team leader of the full time youth workers for Valley Estate and surrounding schools. In his late 30's, he was based in an NFI work in Norwich, with 16 years youth and schools work experience. He visited, sensed a call as well as an unprecedented level of challenge, knew Howard Kellett a little and decided to come. Hayden recruited two further full time colleagues, Stuart Gosling whom he knew and later in January 2002, Kaye Hieatt.

**Arriving was not so easy.** Hayden moved to Manchester in January 2001 but lived off the estate with NFI contacts. Some members of the *Valley Estate Community Lettings Project* who had previous bad experiences of church, feared church hit and run tactics and brainwashing of kids. The application for a rented house was turned down. Increased prayer followed and by the second bid, a month later, the two objectors had mysteriously stepped down, being replaced by people with positive experiences of *Message 2000*. Application was granted and an April move date followed.

Like a number of *Eden* workers and volunteers, Hayden and Stuart have faced the next challenge of walking into a literally empty council house, without gas and electricity connected. Most of the workers are single and in their early 20's. Many are recent graduates who have not acquired furniture, white goods, carpets, nor the savvy in dealing with service providers or installing burglar



alarms. Simple life stares you in the face. **This is not a tale of wealthy yuppies decamping with an existing life style into inner Manchester.**

There are heart warming stories of the local church members giving away fridges, cookers, sofas and beds, curtains and carpets, to give *Eden* workers something, but these gifts sometimes arrive weeks or months apart. I saw a sacrificial and demanding pattern, including house sharing which brings community life challenges.

## Opening the school door

The next stage was to build some schools work and recruit the volunteers. The reputation of *The Tribe* and the impact of *Message 2000* assisted with credibility in both domains.



**Schools are looking for those who can work with their pupils.** This team of 3 full timers came with a track record from elsewhere and proved themselves at Wentworth secondary school. They are now involved with 4 local schools in the Swinton/Salford area. One additional volunteer, Dave Atkinson (above with Hayden) is becoming paid as staff at Wentworth.

There are two tracks to their schools work:

**Track 1** is free support: RE lessons, assemblies and lunch time clubs, which could include sport skills and drama. This team also started a breakfast club, which helps disadvantaged kids start the day nutritionally and socially and a Tuesday lunch time youth club mixing support, Christian presentation, games, an agony aunt slot and fun.

**Track 2** are pieces of contracted out work, with the school paying *The Message*. It includes pupil support from the school's *Learning Zone* (right), work with the exclusion



issues, being learning mentors and teaching PHSE modules including varied aspects of sex education. The permanent presence of Track 2, creates a staff fringe who are asked to help in pastoral crisis like response to fights and unexplained absences, and builds contacts across the years of pupil's lives.

Not all *Eden* teams offer this range. It depends on the skills brought by the incoming team. Enabling the school to reduce exclusion and truancy maintains their roll figures, and so keeps their income and morale up.

## Strands Across Eden

### Staffing an Eden

The volunteers are recruited from a variety of sources. *The Tribe* are intentionally part of the advertising of *Eden* and the recruiting of voluntary missionaries at various national gatherings. Some like *Spring Harvest* or *New Wine/Soul Survivor* serve certain traditions. Some are gatherings such as *Stoneleigh* (before NFI closed it) and the Methodist *Easter People*. This high profile and opportunity is one of the least reproducible aspects of the *Eden* story, as is its fund-raising function, not that this invalidates such a process. The experience and reputation of *Message 2000* has similarly created a possibility in the minds of older teens and twenties. Others come because they are students in Manchester, with houses on or near some of the projects, while another source is people in churches around the country who have sister churches acting as partners with an *Eden* project. There is a process of application, a weekend visit, informal and formal interview.

**Full timers** are interviewed by senior *Message* figures such as Andy Hawthorne and Team Leaders. They are usually paid by the trust out of donation income. An exception is one denominationally paid team.



"Which Eden is that- Cornwall, Manchester or T.V. show"

Contracts are open but the expectation is a minimum of 3 years and five is preferred. **The culture shock involved and the demanding roles to be adopted are openly aired, but this can only be part of the orientation needed.** The oldest project, Wythenshawe, is coming to the five year point and the retention rate will be of interest.

**Volunteers** must be 18 and are usually single although one or two marriages have resulted. They go through a similar interview process. They are responsible for their own funding which in part may be from their sending church, but they are expected to find a job. Some elect for a "McJob", while others are teachers or in local industries. They can request joining a particular *Eden* but this is not guaranteed.

Their roles within *Eden* are twofold. They are a key part of discipling the young people won through the schools work and part of the assistant staffing of detached work, helping with the Bus, drama or sport clubs. As interest grows they may well lead youth cells for those who respond.

The other role is strengthening the new or existing local church and reducing the cultural gap between existing church life and non-churched young people showing spiritual interest. I will not be surprised to see varying responses across Manchester, with some churches linked to *Eden* being able to bridge the gap and in other cases, the necessity of forming youth congregations, working in relationship with existing local churches. In the Swinton story there is intentional commitment to all age congregational church, though embracing youth cells. It's too soon to tell whether their hope can be realised. This dual identity, with roles as *Eden* workers and local church members, creates some inherent tension simply because both are true and important.

Both *Eden* workers and volunteers are encouraged to think of 21 session weeks and to aim to work 14 of them. Monday to Friday whether working for *Eden* or another employer counts as 10 sessions. That leaves Sunday morning, a youth event and two evenings. It's a practical way to set yardsticks and head off burnout. The aim is also to have a monthly review of each voluntary worker by a full timer, the full timers by the team leader, and the latter by a *Message* worker.

## Living in a new Eden

I've highlighted the moving into an empty council house syndrome, but the challenges don't end there. There is noise at night, people having open domestic conflicts, the higher prospect of being a victim of crime and instantly being spotted as "one of those Christians - or Eden people". The latter seems less adversarial than I expected, and people always pick up sincerity, so the positive impact of the projects is already making some difference. Other obvious pressures come from less definable culture shock, the need to find work and the demands of the mission tasks. As one put it:

*"You really do have to go out on cold wintry nights, it's totally sacrificial and you will be out of your comfort zone. You will wear yourself out even if you are doing it in God's strength. It is hard work and I think we need to be honest about that sometimes."*

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The volunteers who move onto an estate may be as many as 30 or as few as 13. Working cross culturally, there has always been the danger of the mission compound mentality, with sorties out into the wicked or primitive world outside. Volunteers have to learn a lot: how to get on with - and even live with - others they did not choose, how to resist being in cliques with those they like, how to work within guidelines about houses that are used by them and for aspects of youth work. Acquiring child protection instincts and youth ministry standards of professionalism, as well as relating to new churches with unknown members are part of the steep learning curve.



## Learning as Eden develops

I was privileged to be given a copy of the private evaluation of the *Eden* projects as conducted by the *Shaftesbury Society* in 2001. I deliberately made my own assessment of what I had seen before sitting down to read it later shortly before writing. What I met was evidence of a normal process.

**Pioneering ventures take time to mature.** At the start, vision, passion and fire predominate. Attending one weekly meeting of the wider team showed me those realities are still hot and strong. Structures are minimal with the emphasis on the relational, functional and flexible. The pioneers are obviously gifted and have been in the culture sometime. The culture is "go for it" not "weigh it up". However, as the venture grows so it draws in others, may multiply venues or functions and so become more complex in organisation. The *Eden* idea now has 8 to 10 projects, several hundred volunteers and more than 40 staff. It is famous and has to handle people like me wanting to come and see. It bumps up against training needs, spots mistakes or misjudgements, experiences casualties, finds it was not in a sprint but a long distance race and that sustainability is a real issue. **If it is wise it asks for external assessment and advice.** *Eden* has done just that. I judge *Shaftesbury* have done them a service and the indicators are that the recommendations are being put in place.

The benefits that are coming on stream are various. There is the creation of more thorough resources to enable newcomers to be prepared for what they will face, balancing the call for sacrifice with the reality of moving and culture shock. Providing the support needed (including a buddy system) and resources to learn how to build team and creatively handle the dual identity of being *Eden* workers and local church members are issues being addressed. Better structures with public clarity of purpose are being evolved, enabling senior leaders to have clearer tasks and providing known ways into the decision making. I hope that these gains will not be at the cost of diminishing the faith, prayer and flexibility that have been hallmarks to date of a youthful venture. I neither saw nor read of factors that lead me to doubt the integrity of *Eden*, the necessity of the inner city task, or the inescapability of learning some things the hard way.

## Picking up the Questions

This issue's cover shows a jigsaw with a piece missing. So far I've highlighted the problematic mismatch of need and resources linked to mission with inner cities. (pages 4-6) It is as though that deadlock is a puzzle with pieces missing. I've tried to tell enough of the *Eden* story to pick up its vision, dynamics and pressures. Does it add jigsaw pieces as we try to find ways forward in our inner cities? First the question "has it worked?" needs putting.

## Has Eden Worked?

Some levels of answer are easier than others. The vision of bringing full time schools workers and volunteer teams is now reality in 6 locations. There are some settling and coping difficulties but they could be described as a normal learning curve in a young organisation. **Schools work is established and there is evidence of effective youth evangelism and some incorporation into local churches.** In the earliest story, a thriving local church has grown up and it is thinking through how to reproduce. Crime rates on some of these estates have fallen, in some cases dramatically, attracting police interest and even some national comment, both upon that and the unlikely move of middle class Christians onto the estates, such that housing prices have gone up. In those senses something has worked and gratitude is right.

There are still things we don't know. When the singles become married and have families will they stay? Is this permanent commitment or more like a tour of mission service? Will the post *Message 2000* physical degeneration, observable on the Valley estate, be typical or unusual? Will the focus on youth be the key way into wider community regeneration or only be a strand that leaves those issues untouched, making community transformation an unreachable goal? Will new Christians be able to resist the "redemption and lift" syndrome and will they form indigenous church, including leadership? Will the new and revitalised local churches engage with such wider issues or regress to a narrow evangelistic agenda or worse gradually acquire a fortress mentality unable to assimilate those becoming Christians out of the estate culture? To ask these questions is not to despise anything that has already been done. It indicates what a long road there is to travel.

## Is Eden a Church Planting movement?

When I put the question to Andy Hawthorne his instant response was, "No, it is an urban youth ministry." In terms of his own history, gifting and passion, that was true. In the sense of planting understood as the intentional creation of a new all age congregation centred around worship in a secular venue, the answer is also true.



"to plant or not to plant  
that is the question"

However, planting is a wider phenomenon than that. The table itself shows this is but one slant on the story. In half the cases an existing church is called a "partner Church". It is deemed strong enough for *Eden* to join forces with. **Yet adding more than 30 people to any of these is a significant injection of life that most planting theorists would see as a form of planting**, not least because

those who came did so with an explicit mission intention including the commitment to move house, area and culture. It is true that the focus of the 30 was youth work, but that work was intentionally to feed into churches from the outside in.

In the other half of the cases, there is the phrase "in partnership with". Hearing more of the dynamics this is code for "starting a new church with denominational partners who are explicitly planting". The denominational width of partners in this list is pleasing, though I do not know what the existing churches in the areas selected thought about their arrival. **The intentional focus on youth - one of the segments of society most distanced from church - also makes it very likely that what will emerge is the creation of fresh ways of being church** that go beyond usual congregational expression. Read Graham Cray's *Grove Evangelism* Booklet 57 *Youth Congregations and Emerging Church* or re-read *Encounters on the Edge No 4* for the validity of this trend of seeing youth a specific missionary culture that will lead to appropriate church.