



A THOUSAND VOICES

The story and History of Community House





The Vision

Cyril Summers conducting worship in the new main hall.

Corporation Road Forward Movement Hall dated from 1900 and was one of many churches built during a period of revival in the Welsh Church. It could seat 1,200 people, and could be full on Sundays. It was locally known for its famous leaning tower.

“There had been so much glory in those early years since 1900 when the Church was built to serve the local people.”

– Cyril Summers

The old church provided cultural, educational and social activities as well as worship and spiritual guidance. At Whitsun hundreds of people lined the streets to see the children walking out, families there to see which Sunday School had the best ‘turn out.’

By the 1950s the Church was showing fatal signs of decay; there was no choice but demolition.

“It was impossible to believe that it was God’s will that His Church should turn her back on her past and abandon all these people.”

“We began in House Groups studying the hundred or more ideas in the New Testament concerning the nature of the Church.” – Cyril Summers

Eventually guided by Cyril, the congregation reached their Vision of what the new Church should be:

All communities need a centre,

A place of meeting,

And supposing it were a centre of compassion,

A centre of understanding,

A refuge of comfort,

A centre of happiness.

A place where people are always treated as people.

Supposing it were in fact,

A centre of Christian life and witness.



Cyril & Dorothy Summers

Cyril, Dorothy and family at the manse

Cyril Summers was born in 1920 in a deprived area of Liverpool called Bootle. He felt the call to ordination in to the Presbyterian Church at the age of 18.

“The church in Bootle where I had been nurtured, was set between mean, dark and ugly streets... the twenties and thirties were times of great hardship for many families struggling constantly against bad housing, unemployment, poor health and forced to live on an inadequate and unhealthy diet.

My call to the ministry in 1938 had less to do with preaching than with new and radical ways of service to the underprivileged, whose lack of political power was of growing concern to me.”

– Cyril Summers

He attributed early influences in his life for his commitment to pacifism and socialism.

Cyril was not imprisoned as other conscientious objectors were during the Second World War but worked rescuing bombed out families in his home city, an experience that would prove transformative.

Cyril and Dorothy married in 1942. By this time they were running a community farm in Lincolnshire for young evacuees from all over Europe. They were a formidable partnership throughout their lives and in their marriage service they omitted the words, ‘Till death do us part’ as they believed their union would not be ended by death.

Cyril combined his pastorship of Community House with becoming a Labour Ward

Councillor and was elected Mayor in 1984.

His Vision for Community House was based on his beliefs and the Bible text, ‘For God so loved the World.’ For him this meant the church was for the world, not just for the Christians who attended weekly. He led the church people as they decided to embark on a new Christian venture at Community House, of service to the whole local community.



[Above] Cyril in his mayoral robes with Dorothy and Margery Martin, 1984.



[Left] Cyril was an industrial Chaplain at the steel works.

A Church without a Church

The international work camp of volunteers, 1963.

The dangerous state of the old church meant it had to be demolished. The members had many questions to answer;

How should we go about the demolition of the building? Where will worship and meetings for prayer and Bible study be held? Where will the resources and money come from? – Cyril Summers

They faced a bill for over £2,000 to demolish the building with only a few hundred pounds in the bank... An international group of young people came to an ecumenical work camp. It was to take 10,000 hours of volunteer work to complete the demolition.

The work camp had a considerable impact on the church, and through the press and television, on the town.
– Cyril Summers

While exiled from their Church, the membership worshipped at London Street Church. When they left, Cyril wrote a pageant that summed up their journey

This is the story of an ordinary people,

Who belonged to an ordinary church...

It is the story of God,

Calling this ordinary people,

To seek his way,

In a new and different situation.

It is the story of a people without a house of God,

A people without a home,

Who, being homeless,

Began to build a home,

Not for themselves,

But for all who are homeless.

During this House Group period, the church met in each others homes and discussed and prayed about what to rebuild. Members joined one of twelve teams to research different aspects of the Vision. After years of wrangling with the Presbyterian Church Community House opened in 1969.



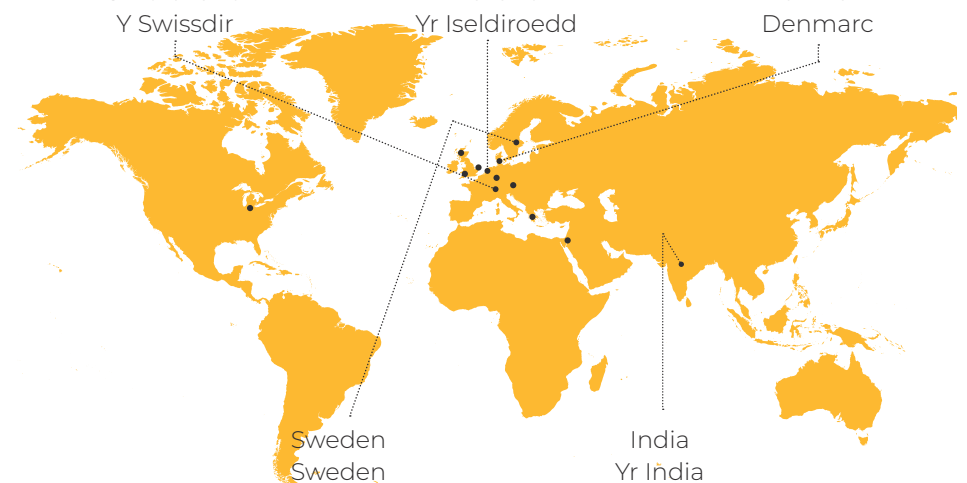
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Faith, peace & politics

Ingrid Wilson and the International Club visit the Mayor's Parlour.

So much of the life and work of Community House is woven together of strands that are almost impossible to unravel. However, community, faith, politics and peace would seem to be the main threads.

“Politics is the way we order the life of our community both local and international. Not to be in politics is to be political.

Community, for me, has always been quite simply what happens to society when people really care. It is what happens when people cease to live for themselves and live for one another.” – Cyril Summers

When Cyril decided to go into politics in his search for social justice, he became a Labour councillor. Elected Mayor, he

attended and addressed a world conference at Hiroshima and Nagasaki to commemorate 40 years since the dropping of the atomic bombs.

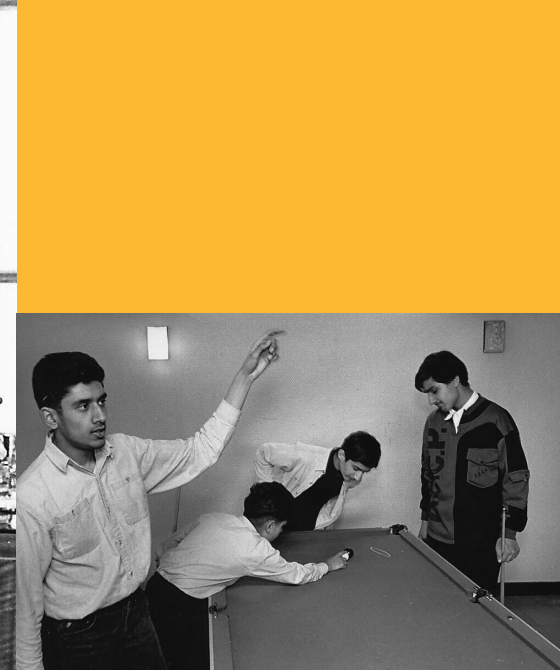
In 1981 the women, and some men, marching to Greenham Common to demonstrate against Cruise missiles stopped at Community House. On a hot summer day they rested in the garden and Dorothy Summers brought out the playgroup padding pool so they could cool their feet. A plaque in the coffee lounge records this.

Refugees of war, famine, political action or natural disaster have always been welcomed and helped. One such group were the Vietnamese ‘boat people’.

Community House holds a ‘Gold Peace Mala’ for its work in promoting peace, and is active in Interfaith work.

There was an original plan to make a church part of the building but funds ran out. On that site is the Peace Garden: a place that can be enjoyed by all and the focus of annual Peace Days.

The church membership is now very small but they continue to have a huge impact on the life in the building. They meet each Sunday in the little chapel and welcome anyone who wishes to join them.



[Top] The first Asian boys’ club.

[Above] Refugees and asylum seekers find a home at Community House, 2008.

JUBILEE GARDEN COMMUNITY PARK

RE OPENED ON APRIL 25th 1979 BY HER WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF NEWPORT
CLLR. MRS E. M. BOSLEY IN THE PRESENCE OF CLLR. L. J. TWIGG
(CHAIRMAN OF LEISURE SERVICES)

THIS PARK WAS DESIGNED AND IMPLEMENTED BY NEWPORT LEISURE
DEPARTMENT WITH THE HELP OF COMMUNITY INDUSTRY AND IN CO-OPERATION
WITH THE JUBILEE GARDENS RESIDENTS COMMITTEE
IT IS YOUR PARK

Building caring community

Opening Jubilee Gardens, 1970 – an important community initiative.

“Community work is essentially about achieving change through collective action and enabling people to increase their control over the decision making process that affects their lives.” – Cyril Summers

The understanding at Community House of the need to co-ordinate services to the community, was light years ahead of its time and began in the early 1970s after,

“Early one Christmas Eve fifty chickens and fifty bags of potatoes and peas were delivered, without previous notice, to be distributed among families in need. How many families who received them would otherwise have gone without and how many already had two chickens and a turkey we shall never know.”

– Cyril Summers

The creation of Jubilee Gardens following neighbours' concerns about anti-social behaviour on the site was one of Cyril's actions in the area. This community project won an award under the Prince of Wales Environmental Improvements scheme in 1970.

Active in community development since the 1970s, the Church has been involved in several job creation schemes. Task Force Maindee, created over 300 jobs.

One of the results of an Urban Aid project was the Maindee Books. The idea of a history of Maindee in words and pictures came from an exhibition of photographs organised by Community Development Officers Lisa Smith and Hilary Sloan in July 1984.

Another Community Development Officer called Sue Bidmead started a Festival for Maindee. The Festival is now an annual event with year-round preparation including workshops for making costumes.

Community House has never deviated from its aim of 'building caring community', Coffee 'n' Laughs and Dostana are some of the groups doing that today.



[Left] Hugh Clark signs copies of the 'Maindee Book'.



[Above] Maindee Festival, 2010 - now an annual event.



Sharing a space

English classes have been provided from the start.

“We were committed to people, all kinds of people, just people, all people.” – Cyril Summers

Many requests to hire the space came in soon after opening Community House. The first groups allowed were the Social Club for the Blind and Newport MIND because;

“...both groups place supreme importance on valuing people.”
– Cyril Summers

Many groups have used the space over the last 60 years. Making rooms available for hire allows many local needs to be met and brings in revenue. Trustees rather than the church now ensure that activities meet the criteria of ‘building caring community’.

The recognition that speaking English was at the heart of the improvement of the lives of immigrants came early. Many groups over the years have provided English lessons.

An early group for black and Asian minority women called Ashiana was ground breaking. At first, women were hesitant and men were wary of their wives and daughters attending, but they persevered and the increase in confidence of the women was huge.

The Coffee ‘n’ Laughs group won the Voluntary Arts Epic Award 2018 for Wales for their textile artwork ‘Maindee Stories’ led by artist Marion Cheung. The group itself were runners up nationally in the Diversity Award category, for what the group represents – a model for tackling isolation and depression with positive, creative action.

Groups as varied as Bundles (supporting women and young children in need) and Slimming World find a space. Many happy occasions like birthday parties, wedding receptions and Eid parties happen here.

[Top] A recent wedding celebration mendhi party, 2014.

[Bottom] Artist Marion Cheung shows embroidery skills of Coffee ‘n’ Laughs, 2016.





Working with young people

Margery Martin and child.

Community House has always worked with young families, Cyril writes over 20 years ago how the new idea of a mother and toddler group was helping children and their mothers.

Over the years there have been many play-based groups for children. All groups have always been encouraged to be part of the whole life of the building and to share their celebrations with their elders.

Today, provision is made at 'Stay and Play' and in the crèche associated with Coffee 'n' Laughs.

Early youth clubs must have been very different from today's:

"The Club exists to give people a place where they can come and enjoy themselves, meet

new people, sit, talk and have a cup of coffee and listen to some records." – Unknown youth club member, '70s

Brian Selby has been key to youth work here. In the early days, church members could be shocked at the antics of teenagers who had never come into a church building before;

"We have to allow the young people to remain free to choose for themselves. This means we have to accept bad language, unruly behaviour, strange appearance, a lot of noise, joylessness, the sulks and such, as signs of a growing understanding of the many ways in which we are free to choose." – Brian Selby



Many of its youth workers have gone on into professional youth work and the centre has strong links with the allied University department.

Many youngsters in Maindee and beyond would not have had their lives turned around and the community at large would not have benefited if it were not for the input of caring adults at Community House.

The Maindee Youth Project, a BBC Children in Need initiative is currently running its second highly rated project. Its aims include working with eastern European youngsters, increasing engagement with girls, building confidence and anti-racist work.

[Above] BBC Children in Need support the work with young people, 2017.

[Right] Play group share their celebrations with seniors, 2014





Every effort is made to bring young and old together;

“The Tuesday Lunch Club encourages an understanding of pensioners as people; so the children are able to recognise them in the street and say hello to them. But an exercise like this is also valuable as living history and finally, many pensioners do not have direct experience of ethnic minorities and the club helps draw people together.”

– Brian Selby

Caring for the elderly

Music & Memories – a lifeline for dementia sufferers and their carers.

From the beginning, supporting elderly people has been a corner stone of the work at Community House.

“The needs of the community were quickly identified by the community

itself. Maindee was one of the areas of the Borough where the number of old people living alone was far above the average.” – Cyril Summers

The result was Senior Friends which became a thriving group that met for many years.



“Senior Friends, who met alternate Saturdays, quickly formed into a caring community with a responsible, sensitive and systematic visiting of the sick and other absent members. Everything flourished: music, entertainment, outings, visits, summer excursions and annual holidays.” – Cyril Summers



[Main image]
© Copyright
Jo Haycock.

[Left page] Lunch clubs have always been important for seniors.

[Above] The Senior Friends old tyme concert party.

Today the needs of the elderly are mainly focussed on TLC – Tuesday Lunch Club or Tender Loving Care. However, so many day centres have been closed that Community House is now one of very few places where the elderly can go for a meal and company and it is dealing with much frailer people than it has in the past.



Community House, present and future



Many occasional bookings include meetings and conferences, family parties and religious festival celebrations for the local community. Maindee Festival, Sight Cymru, local political parties, local councillors' surgeries, Quakers, Iona Community, Gwent Local Health Board and Community House Presbyterian Church Christian Prayer Group, amongst others, are part of this network.

consider Community House their regular home for special events. Newport City Council even uses our hall at elections as a polling station.

2019 sees the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the building. Everyone in the neighbourhood seems to know someone who has been touched by the activities at Community House. This is your opportunity to help continue this vital work in a fitting setting for the next half-century.

Several diaspora communities, including Sudanese, Tigrayan, Hungarian and Indian Hindus,

Becoming a Friend of Community House

Community House is now known as a multi-cultural, multi-faith community centre in Newport, serving the neighbourhood of Maindee and beyond. Its mission is to build stronger, caring community together.

The building is still owned by the Presbyterian Church of Wales and leased to a charity, Community House (Eton Road), which relies on income from its room hire to run the building, supported by a pool of volunteers.

Regular groups of all ages benefitting from the homely and welcoming environment in 2019 include toddler and youth

projects, Tuesday lunch club (TLC), the Presbyterian Church of Wales and various Christian worshipping groups from Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and Eritrea, several Islamic classes, students of English from across the world, an interfaith inter-generational women's friendship group, slimming groups, Sufi meditation, an Alzheimer's music and memories group, a homework club for asylum-seekers and mother-tongue language classes.

Community House brings all these groups together at our Peace Day, held annually every September since the opening of the Peace Garden in 2005.

"Building strong and caring communities together"

You can do this through:

- Receiving regular news
- Being part of a Praying Network
- Sharing your ideas and inspiration
- Exploring regular groups and special events
- Enjoying friendship
- Volunteering to help
- Making a contribution in whatever way you can...

Ask, or get in touch with the Co-ordinator – details on the back cover.





Community House

***“It is the story of a people
Who are learning to become a community
Who in worship
Find Life,
And whose life is to share life.”***

– Cyril Summers, A People’s Pilgrimage, 1992



It is the story of a love that is all-inclusive
In a building that is vibrant and welcoming.
It is, in fact, the story of God’s people in God’s place,
Both constantly on the move
As our needs change.
It is an on-going process of
Altering and adapting,
Developing and evolving,
Protecting and caring,
Strengthening and empowering,
Sharing the joys and tears
Of one generation to the next.



Community House’s story
***“WILL ONLY FINISH WHEN GOD HAS NO FURTHER USE FOR IT
OR WHEN HIS PEOPLE HAVE NO FURTHER TIME FOR HIM.”***

– Cyril Summers, A People’s Pilgrimage, 1992