



A BRIEF HISTORY

ABOUT THE LISTENING PLACE IN SALISBURY

BEGINNING

In 2000, one of the Salisbury Methodist Church members had a vision of providing listening services for the people of Salisbury. This vision was sparked by a course on Christian Listening given by the Acorn Christian Healing Foundation, based at Bordon in Hampshire. The vision was that this listening service would be an ecumenical project, developed with Churches Together in Salisbury and using trained Listeners from as wide a group of churches as possible.

During the next three years a development group – members of Salisbury Methodist Church – tested the vision and then laid firm, responsible foundations.

Listeners, from different churches, were trained using the “Called to Listen” course prepared by Acorn for the training of Christian Listeners. Salisbury Listening Place opened in September 2003 as a project of Salisbury Methodist Church (SMC), managed by a management team appointed by the Church Council and chaired by the minister in pastoral charge.

The Listening Place was (and remains) a ministry of availability, free of charge, for three two-hour sessions each week, allowing anyone to come, with or without an appointment, to be heard by a trained Listener.

The money needed to set up this service was raised by concerts and other fund raising events. The Listening Place income and expenditure is part of the accounts of Salisbury Methodist Church. The Listening Place “treasurer” is the SMC finance steward.

GOVERNANCE

The Listening Place is a project of Salisbury Methodist Church and is accountable to the Church Council. The Church Council appoints a management team which includes:

- The minister (who is in the chair);
- The manager and the deputy manager of the Listening Place;
- One of the church stewards
- The finance steward (treasurer of the Listening Place)
- Minutes secretary
- Publicity officer

- Training officer
- Representative of the Listeners

The management team meets usually four times a year, receiving reports on all that is done by or on behalf of the Listening Place, planning work and events and dealing with issues that occur in the activity of the Listening Place.

MONEY

The Listening Place sessions are held on the premises of Salisbury Methodist Church. The costs of heating, lighting, telephone and computer links and printing are part of the SMC budget for all church activities. The particular extra expenses involved in the Listening Place are for publicity – designing and printing leaflets and posters; advertising in newspapers and church magazines – and for training – paying for the Listening courses delivered by Acorn Christian Healing Foundation. These particular costs have been met though funds raised by concerts and from personal donations.

VENUE

The venue for the three weekly sessions held by the Listening Place is Salisbury Methodist Church. There is a foyer where people enter the church building; it is there that a table and notice are placed, where there are three people: at least two of them are trained Listeners. Coffee, tea, squash, water are offered to anyone who comes to the Listening Place. For people who want a private one-to-one listening, one or more rooms are available. There is access for the disabled, and there are toilets for all.

SAFEGUARDING

Everyone who staffs the Listening Place has DBS clearance and the Safeguarding training required by the Methodist Church. This is necessary because the Listening Place is often used by vulnerable adults.

Rooms in the church building used for one-to-one listening sessions have a transparent section in their internal doors, so that the Listener seated outside the room can see the Listener listening in the room, while the person being listened to is hidden from outside view by a screen. The Listener in the room can thus easily ask for help or anything else needed.

PUBLICITY

It is essential that the availability of the Listening service is known to as many people as possible. Leaflets and/or posters are given to GPs' surgeries (the most frequent source of referrals), churches, pharmacists, schools, community centres and many other places where people are. The distribution is done annually and/or bi-annually. Advertisements, and sometimes articles, are placed in local papers and church magazines and The Salisbury Listening Place also has a website.

TRAINING

Listeners are trained in the particular method of reflective listening taught by the Acorn Christian Healing Foundation. No advice or comment or judgement is made by the Listener; users of the service are helped to reach their own decisions by the Listener, after a person has said all they want to say, asking three questions:

1. Out of all you have said, what is most important?
2. Is there anything you want to do about it?
3. Now that we are finishing, how are you feeling?

The training in this kind of listening is delivered by Acorn trainers in three modules:

Module 1: Effective Listening Practice – 2 two and a half hour sessions;

Module 2: Applied Listening Practice – 2 two and a half hour sessions;

Module 3: Professional Volunteer Listening – 4 two and a half hour sessions.

At the Listening Place all the Listeners are volunteers. Listeners who have done this Acorn training are given more practice in using the particular Listening technique before going onto the rota as Listeners at Salisbury Listening Place.