

Manchester Street Angels reponse from Street Angels - Christian Nightlife Initiatives

Background:

Following the tragic death of a 17 year old in Manchester whilst on a night out over Christmas a message was left on a tribute web site calling for Street Angels in Manchester. Wesley Hall, who had set up social media to help find the 17 year old, set up Facebook / Twitter sites '[Manchester Angels](#)' / 'UKStreetAngels' and started to contact different agencies in the city and find potential volunteers. The Facebook page has attracted 13,000 likes. A meeting for those interested was set up on Wednesday 8th January 2014 - 3.30pm for public, 5.30pm for agencies.

Street Angels has run in Manchester 6/7 years ago but found that the city is far too big for one small team based at Piccadilly. Ideally there should be teams of trained volunteers (Street Angels, Street Pastors and others) in:

- Piccadilly
- China Town / Portland Street / Canal Street
- Oxford Street / University area
- Deansgate
- Victoria / Arena / Printworks
- Transport hubs (train / bus stations and trams)
- Isolated streets linking the areas

Talking to the Ascension Trust's Street Pastors they discovered the same when they set up in Manchester city centre and currently cover Piccadilly alternate weekends. A LGBT group patrol Canal Street with Village Angels.

Messages on social media have highlighted Wesley's criminal past and fifty convictions in the Burnley area – including recent serious violent crime for which he received a prison sentence.

The concept of Manchester Angels has received much local media coverage and acknowledgement from various agencies thanks to Wesley's drive and passion over the last 7 days.

The Meetings:

Wesley Hall presented the vision for Manchester Angels at both 3.30pm and 5.30pm and Paul Blakey, Steve Brock and Trevor Bendrien offered words from the national Street Angels - CNI Network perspective around: need to work fully in partnership with agencies especially police and council; need to commit to this long term and not for it to be a reaction to a tragic events; need for policies, insurance, accountability, leadership team, etc.

The 3.30pm meeting was open to the general public, and revealed some hurt over the blocking of questions and comments on Facebook by several people - a report was in the [Manchester Evening News](#). The police also spoke and said that they had not given support to this initiative as was claimed (police statement is below). Several people left the 3.30pm meeting and there was a lot of hurt and concern from some (generally around Wesley and the way he handled some questions and the blocking of people on social media) and support for Wesley from others. Wesley also claimed at the meeting to have the support of the council.

The 5.30pm meeting, to which public services had been invited, was better conducted and the agencies represented were very supportive and talked about initiatives already in place that have made Manchester at night the safest it has ever been. It was generally agreed that there is a need to 'join the dots' of existing initiatives and to look at how some of the easier developed ideas (such as a Manchester night-life web site, phone charging points, pre-paid taxi cards) can be set up. Local councillors at the meeting made it clear they had not been approached in respect of the initiative, but would consider it on a partnership basis.

What was clear from both meetings is the passion and drive from the wider Manchester community to see several schemes set up.

However, Wesley's claims to have police and council support have been refuted by both parties.

Police response:

Response from Inspector Phil Spurgeon

My position is this:

While we work hard with partners to assist in the rehabilitation of offenders, we understand concerns about this individual's offending history - it is long, with many, many crimes. Some of them are fairly recent and some of them are really nasty - this information is a matter of public record so I am not breaching any confidences or infringing on anyone's right to privacy.

When any individual or group comes forward with an idea to help us make Manchester safer, we will listen, offer advice and give appropriate support at relevant times. When the Manchester Angels initiative was put forward, I spoke to the individual who said he was the organiser, and I met him at the weekend.

My initial advice was to signpost him to the existing Angels project in the city (Village Angels), one in Bolton where I used to work (Bolton Street Angels), and outreach projects in the city such as The Men's Room and Survivors Project. All these initiatives have faced considerable challenges in getting off the ground and keep going. I suggested that without learning from that experience, Manchester Angels would struggle.

We also agreed to attend the partners conference yesterday.

Because of tensions and information in various social media forums, I took the decision to have staff at yesterdays event from start to finish. I gave the organiser clear advice following the suggestion that security staff would be used, and how that had been communicated.

I was unable to attend the event yesterday, but sent two of my Sergeants.

You may be aware that one of my Sergeants publicly corrected the organiser in the meeting when he said that the initiative had the 'full backing' of police - it doesn't. It is very early stages for the initiative and until we are clear about the management, structures and processes, we cannot give support. One of the Sergeants also spoke later in the meeting, when tempers rose between the organiser and a female who attended. The Sergeant tells me that he asked for the female to be allowed to make her point and that he refused to eject her, as requested by the organiser, as he felt that it was not appropriate for GMP staff to do so.

I have since the event offered further advice to the organiser about his role within the initiative, and the style of communication at the meetings yesterday and in social media forums.

If and when the organiser comes back with a clearer plan for the Manchester Angels initiative, I will offer further advice and decide what, if any further support it is appropriate for GMP to give.

The information provided above has been communicated to the press and in replies to enquiries via Facebook and Twitter, so again, I'm not sharing anything with you that isn't already in the public domain.

I hope that helps.

Inspector Phil Spurgeon 11131

Current situation (12th January):

There is a divide between those who are the side of Wesley and those others who are concerned about him taking the lead on this. Street Angels - CNI Network is in contact with both these groups and have spoken to Manchester's Ascension Trust Street Pastors who are keen to increase the numbers of volunteers (from the church community) to offer a weekly patrol in Piccadilly area.

The Manchester Angels facebook page (headed up by Wesley) has 10 unidentified administrators and it would be useful to know who these are as it would appear these people are forming a steering group for the project. They are currently taking time to look through the mass of communication. The Save Manchester Angels facebook group (mainly people banned from the Manchester Angels page owing, it would appear, to posting comments that

were not openly supporting of Wesley's initiative) are also keen to be involved but are waiting for things to develop.

From a Street Angels - CNI Network perspective we are keen that this enthusiasm leads to something positive happening on the streets of Manchester in terms of a caring presence for those who find themselves vulnerable. We stand by our comments in the meeting that there needs to be:

- A steering group (chosen from an open forum not hand picked);
- A qualified support for Wesley should he adopt a democratic approach to driving the project forward;
- Open accountability through a properly formulated partnership steering group for all that happens;
- Several groups taking responsibility for different areas with links

We admire the passion and drive that Wesley would appear to have, but think that rather than heading up Manchester Angels individually, he works with others on connecting and joining the dots and utilising his apparently excellent social media skills to this end; allowing the many others who are keen to see a functioning SA-CNI to utilise their own skills to develop a true partnership-based initiative reflecting the breadth of the city's communities.

As a network we are happy to offer our time, support and resources to both groups (and others as they develop) should they chose to follow the SA-CNI model, but ideally there should be one coordinated approach even if different teams take responsibility for the 6 geographical areas.

