

Safeguarding Blog No. 2

All are welcome?

On 28th September this year, if you had wanted to access the Lincoln Engine Shed music venue, and you were male, you might have found yourself being asked questions about the performers playing on stage that evening. This may of course not be a venue that readers have frequented very much. But the door policy, when customers had paid for their tickets, appeared quite odd. It seems that the venue security staff wanted to be assured that the male attendees had a good knowledge of the band in question and their music. It was not exactly clear what the consequence would be of, say, failure to give the name of the bass guitarist or the title of the last but one track on their only album. So why did this happen?

The all-female band due on stage that night are called The Last Dinner Party, and I would invite you to google them. They have a brash, arty and colourful style, and seem to appeal to a predominantly female audience, some of whom dress up at concerts to match the band's appearance. Their lyrics appear to chime with the life experiences of many young women, with the added aspect of appealing to a gay and non-binary audience as well. Was there, therefore, a concern that any single male who entered the mix in the venue that night, might have had some ulterior motive for attending? Was it, in fact, a pre-emptive safeguarding tactic? Was there some local intelligence that made the door teams wary? Had there been earlier concerns about inappropriate behaviour towards females? Whatever the reason, the actions caused a furore that you can read about in this linked local news article:

<https://www.lincolnshirelive.co.uk/news/local-news/lincoln-engine-shed-apologies-unacceptable-9591942>

At church we regularly sing 'All are welcome in this place'. Our training underlines the importance of welcoming all to our churches, but only in safety, and in some cases with contractual conditions. We may not ask questions about a prospective congregant's pre-knowledge of Charles Wesley hymns, and we certainly don't generally ask people as they walk through the door for the first time why they have come to our church. But when we have a legitimate concern about someone's behaviour, or where we have learnt about an issue from another source, it's absolutely right to ask questions, but not of the tick box variety that might just help you get past the door steward. Our questions should be focused on careful enquiry, nurturing a pastoral relationship and, yes, testing and challenging when appropriate. Listening with care to the answers is also vitally important.

I do have to declare an interest here. As a regular gig-goer, I attended a Last Dinner Party concert in London in mid-October. I went with a male friend, and we were probably in a gender minority of about 10%. Our senior railcards then put us in an even smaller demographic grouping. But it was a really good show, and we were not asked any questions by the door staff. We were made welcome and no-one asked why we were there.

Grahame Snelling

Independent Chair of the District Safeguarding Group

1st November 2024