

A 'Week' in the Life of Oikos

Prepared for the AGM on 1st October 2024 and
the Annual Charity Commission Report.



OIKOS-BRIGG

The 16 Oikos activities presented below by various contributors are roughly in the sequence they occur during the week. This starts on a Monday morning with a team packing bags ready for delivery throughout the week....and ends with a 'Thought for the (following) Week' posted on a Sunday. Within the write-ups you'll see opportunities for prayer, bible study, various forms of fellowship and numerous opportunities for service in and with the community.

Food Bank: Monday morning & Every Day

Our food bank continues to grow in our area as we continue to engage and collaborate with third-party services in order to receive referrals and support as many people as possible who are struggling with food for many reasons.

One of our biggest achievements was receiving our 5-star food hygiene rating in April 2024. We have also implemented a number of new processes and procedures in to ensure we manage our food and premises at the highest level possible. Our next priority is enabling as many volunteers as possible to complete their Food Hygiene Level 2 certificate.

In 22/23 year, we averaged 31 parcels a month and in 23/24 there has been a small increase with us averaging 32 parcels a month. Altogether from April 2023 to March 2024, we provided 383 parcels. Our parcels are currently split by household as follows: 31% single, 20% couple, 26% small families, 22% large families and then a small amount to those with no fixed abode. The true increase of parcels isn't truly reflected as in 22/23, we provided 56 parcels to those in temporary accommodation, compared to just 4 in 23/24 due to the Council no longer using a premises in Brigg for housing homeless people. Therefore, without the no fixed abode parcels, the average in 22/23 was 26 parcels a month compared to the 32 this year which is a 22% increase. We are expecting an increase for 24/25, as 2024 YTD we have already provided 299 parcels, averaging 33 a month, however as we have not yet hit our busiest period (November-March) this isn't a true reflection.

Through our parcels in 23/24, we have supported approximately 690 individual people.

We also provided Christmas Hampers in December 2023. We provided 72 fresh hampers altogether, which included treats too. Our Christmas Hampers were supported through a grant provided from Singleton Birch and a donation from Brigg Lions and topped up with a grant from the National Lottery's Community Fund. As with our food bank items, our Hampers are supported heavily by item donations which are gratefully received.

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We continue to deliver a high proportion of our parcels but where possible have moved to a pickup system. This also allows for more time to talk and discuss with users, and signpost as required. We have identified more need to talk with our clients and our referrers, so we can be sure users are receiving the support they need. We are also identifying ways in which some of them can move in-house. This is an ongoing development of the food bank system and an element we are very keen to progress.

Hannah Dobson

Bible Course: Monday afternoon

The Bible study group was started up about a year ago. The Bible Course and a study on Romans were the first two study materials. The material for both of these came from the Bible Society in the form of DVD's with Dr Andrew Ollerton as presenter. This was followed by the Simply Jesus course; the format was again by video by with Tom Wright as presenter. The intention was to take us back to the first century and feel the impact of Jesus ministry as if it were today. Tom is an eminent theologian as well as historian and it was quite a challenge at times.

What was evident from the use of these three pre-prepared sets of material was that as the group got to know each other then the most valuable experience was that from sharing thoughts with each other. The format has changed since. We have used study guides on both Genesis, using the Bible Month material from the Methodist church, and are currently studying the book of James.

It's not this number every week but we have had up to 18 people at an individual study. It is very much an ecumenical gathering and one of the joys is the exchange between people of different traditions.

Malcolm Bailey

Brigg AA: Monday evening

The Brigg meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous continues to thrive. It meets at 7 pm on Monday evenings.

We are a very friendly bunch of people

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The room is often full to overflowing and those who come have varying lengths of sobriety, from days and weeks to many years.

On the first Monday of the month meetings are open to all comers who might, for example, be curious about what happens in a meeting of AA or have a relative with alcohol problems. All other meetings are restricted to those who have a desire to stop drinking.

Prayer Meeting: Tuesday morning

The prayer meeting has been the cornerstone of Oikos before we even became Oikos! The meeting is weekly at 9.15am each Tuesday and lasts for half an hour. Prayers are free form but two common themes have remained throughout: that of Christian unity and prayers for children and young people. It would be normal to pray for each activity of the week, the people involved and those that might come onto the premises.

The weekly pattern was replaced with daily prayers for the 11 days of Thy Kingdom Come between Ascension and Pentecost. As well as watching the videos, and usually including a Cheeky Pandas one too 😊, we each took up the invitation to pray for at least 5 people we know to come to faith and develop a relationship with Jesus. Those prayers continue.

Malcolm Bailey

Café Fellowship: Tuesday morning

I must confess to never being too sure as to whether I am attending a Café or Coffee Fellowship because both are intrinsically linked to what we are about. Allow me for a moment to reminisce; as a youngster all that was on offer was 'Camp Coffee', chicory essence as it said on the bottle, lovely to flavour cakes but a poor beverage!

Certainly our meetings began when 'Costa Coffee' made their premises available to Christian groups alongside their regular clientele – an opportunity for Christian witness! Numbers grew so that it became difficult to hear one another above the in house music, air conditioning and general conversation; so a move of venue was arranged to the Angel, where we met until Covid intervened.

Since the opening of these Oikos premises; we have met here in the main meeting room, initially on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday mornings and more recently the 2nd and 3rd at 10 – 11 am to avoid clashing with the Food Bank's Pantry.

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We now gather in the shop area, as attendance has dramatically declined to perhaps five or six, nevertheless representative of our Brigg Churches. Occasionally we are joined on Zoom with our friends Revd's Andrew Ballard, and Peter and Sylvia Thomas.

We do enjoy some interesting discussions; anyone caring to join us will be most welcome; we would certainly be open to any suggestions for topics. Of course, fellowship is a truly scriptural word occurring 19 times, so I read in the Greek New Testament. 'Koinonia' speaks of sharing, friendship, support, fellowship and our relationship with Christ – actually that might be a word to talk about! Come and share fellowship with us, some great coffee or even tea!

Bill Smith

Community Pantry: Tuesday

Our Community Pantry continues to be a resounding success. It is very popular and continues to attract a queue. We open at 10am, and have people queueing from 9am. As the months go on, the queue has started to even out over the day which shows our publicity and conversations reassuring people that we have sufficient items throughout the day has started to garner confidence which means people do not queue for as long now as they don't all rush for the opening time.

From April 2023 to March 2024, we have taken £4,530 in donations for our Community Pantry. Since our increase from £2 to £4 for a basket of food in September 2023, we average £480 a month in takings from Pantry. On average we have 115 households a month through our Pantry and have approximately a 25% new attendee rate. This equates to approximately 434 unique households a year supported via the Pantry, approximately 1,519 people.

We made the decision to increase the donation amount to allow for increased sustainability of our Pantry, whilst still providing a very cost-effective offering.

Our Pantry costs approximately £925 a month to run as we spend this amount on pallets from His Church which includes a fresh, frozen and ambient. Some ambient items may go into our food parcel supplies, rather than our Pantry if we are running low, but this gives an approximation. Given our average of donations, the net cost of running Pantry is approximately £445. On average, our users receive around £50 worth of items, which costs us less than £4 per household to provide (and £4 donation from our user too). We are very pleased and proud of our offerings and will continue to look for funding to keep this at the highest levels we can. We are grateful to have another year of funding through the National

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Lottery's Community Fund, which means we are currently funded until December 2025 at our current costings.

We are also grateful to our Neighbourly pickups at LIDL and ALDI as these make up a large amount of our Pantry items too. We have also received donations from Golden Wonder and Bakkavor for our Pantry. A further thank you to be extended to Broughton Allotments who provide us with freshly grown items each month to go into our Pantry.

We have a brilliantly dedicated Pantry day team, which we would also like to extend a thank you to the Nottingham Building Society for providing volunteers for both our day and evening Pantry every month.

As well as having third parties attending our Pantry to provide support to our users, we have also trialled other elements during Pantry. We have had the Wild Weed Kitchen earlier in the year who cooked plant-based burgers which was a great talking point. We will continue to look at our offerings during Pantry to provide entertainment and support, and not just a shop.

Hannah Dobson

Space 2 B: Tuesday afternoon

We began Space 2 B in April 2024 following discussions with the community in Q1 of the year where a need for a space for people to come, meet each other, tackle loneliness and offer a warm space. Space 2 B runs twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday for 2 hours. We average 10 attendees on each Space 2 B, with others popping their heads in, asking questions or viewing the shop. During the first 6 months of Space 2 B, we have welcomed approximately 30 unique people to Space 2 B, with us also bringing quite a few children in over the summer months on top of this.

We recognise there is more we can do with Space 2 B to impact more people and bring more people in, a main focus will be a warm space in the winter months and possibly also integrating cooking / eating into it a bit more; and not just bought-in cakes. However, this in no way is to take away the success of Space 2 B to date, and the key isn't the numbers impacted but the impact you have on individuals.

Hannah Dobson

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Pilgrim Group: Wednesday morning

The Pilgrims group (a follow on from the Alpha course) continues to meet on the first Wednesday of the month.

We discuss a variety of topics, often with people sharing what's happening in their lives, or of particular concern to them.

We have a Bible text and consider how it speaks to us at that particular time, and what we can take from it into the coming month.

We always have a time of prayer, and these are open for each of us to offer up our own prayers - and it's so encouraging that "pilgrims" are becoming more comfortable to voice their own prayers during this time.

Recently, some of our Pilgrims were invited to attend the "Air fryer" course, and not only was it great that they took up this offer, but also that others attended on an "informal basis" to share in the conversation and pick up recipe ideas!

We are delighted that 2 of our group, although having moved some little way away, are still coming back to join us each month.

Kate Marr

Death Café: Wednesday afternoon

The Death Cafe group continues to meet about every six weeks. All meetings are on a Wednesday at 12-30 pm. Meetings finish at 2-00 pm.

Topics are very varied but within the broad frame of gentle discussion about life and death with tea and cake. We always have a lot to say!

We had a prolonged break in 2023 when interest seemed to be waning, but the group has regained energy in 2024 with two new members and no loss of original attendees.

If you're interested our next meeting will be on Wednesday 30th October. If you can't make that particular date contact John Cottingham on 07850366315.

John Cottingham

Community Meal Nights: Wednesday evening

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We trialled the idea of running a community meal night in July 2024 just before the schools broke up. We are grateful to Sir John Nelthorpe for their support of trialling this at their school canteen and with their students. Altogether, we had 12 families join us for the event and including volunteers we cooked for 35 people. The adults all cooked the main course together and the young people did activities with Grace followed by making the dessert. We cooked Pasta Bolognese and Eton Mess.

We received really good feedback from the attendees and it was clear there was an appetite for this offering. Following a grant application to the National Lottery, we were successful in receiving £6000 to run a year's worth of community meal nights. We plan to run these on the second Wednesday of the month from October onwards and are grateful to St John's for allowing us to use their premises.

The idea of the community meal nights is to bring a variety of different people together to create a community feel and a collaboration where we cook and then eat together. There is no cost to the attendees, and we will also be able to share skills from both those running the event and from the attendees too.

Hannah Dobson/Grace Smith

The Shop: Thursday/Friday/Saturday

The shop continues to open from 10 till 2 every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Customer interest and sales vary from day to day, with most sales being on cards, bibles and books, and the busiest times of the year being Christmas and Easter. Though we were very grateful, at the time of opening the shop in these premises 3 years ago, to the Ice House in Grimsby for their generous donations of stock, most of this has now sold or has "passed its sell by date". A few months ago, I took the decision to go a bit more "upmarket" and so introduced more modern gifts and cards. The collection of Hannah Dunnett gifts, cards and posters has proved extremely popular with many customers, as have our range of cards, jewellery and candles. Of course, the initial purchase of this stock meant an initial outlay to Oikos, but I believe it has proved worthwhile.

The window display, the theme of which is changed regularly, attracts a lot of attention and often brings new customers in. We try to make the display topical. At the moment it is Bible Stories, to coincide with the Open the Book teams returning to the local schools and re-enacting bible stories.

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The 24 volunteers who work alongside me in, the shop, now have more than the cards, books and gifts to sell. They also have refills of Eco washing-up and laundry liquid to dispense, cups of coffee to make from our coffee machine in the Cameo Café, bags of food that are brought in for the Foodbank to be taken into the back, and enquiries to be answered about the Foodbank and Food Pantry. Not forgetting the School Uniform Exchange Scheme, jigsaw library and nearly new bookshelves. And, most importantly, being a listening ear for anyone who needs a chat or maybe advice. Not what they all initially signed up for but are happy to help in whatever way they can.

As ever, I am indebted to, and so grateful for, the time and work that the shop staff offer to the Oikos shop. We couldn't keep open without them.

And my very special thanks to Anne and Piero, my 2 assistant managers, and to Stephen, who often fills in for us.

More volunteers would be nice and, as my 80th birthday creeps ever nearer, thoughts about a new manager!

Mary Knaggs

Youth Work: Throughout the Week but especially Thursday evening, Friday afternoon and evening.

The youth work programme that has started this year, has involved the development of 3 groups, they are Brigg Youth Club, TBD group and the Adult Youth Group.

The Youth Club meets every Friday from 6:30-8pm at Brigg Methodist Church. Here young people aged 11-14 years old come to play games, make things, chill with friends and have a safe space to call theirs. We usually have about 12 young people who attend each week but can vary who we have as we do have 30 young people on our register. We have benefitted from Caistor Methodist Church as they have given us resources such as the table tennis equipment, table football, air hockey and bean bags.

TBD group was a group for 14-18 years old at the beginning, however, we have progressed to making it a group for anyone aged 11-18 years old, who wants to focus on awards and making a change to their society. At the moment, we have been focusing on leadership and participation. For the young people this has meant that they have planned and delivered sessions for the youth group, they have also investigated where the government gives money and whether they agree with it or not. We hope to look at ASDAN awards with them soon.

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The adult youth group runs before the youth group, allowing those over 18 to come and experience what the youth group get up too. The table tennis proves popular at the moment and different board games. We also try to have other options available such as origami, planting seeds and film afternoons. Here we have between 8-10 people turning up each week.

During the school holidays, we have tried to run activities for children and young people. In the Easter holidays we had a table outside the Oikos shop offering games, crafts and activities. With the number of families and children who participated in these events, we could see the need for future activities during the holidays. Therefore, in May Half Term, we ran a children's club for 3 days. We did games, crafts, cooking and had a drum workshop one day. With the number of children who came we realised this needed to be continued during the summer holidays. The youth group started in June and therefore allowed us to also run activities for the young people over the summer too. We had one day trip for the children to the Scout campsite, where they went on go karts, built fires, did archery and went on scavenger hunts. Then there were 3 afternoon activities which were based on 3 different themes: space, under the sea and camping. We did a day trip for the young people too, there's was to Hatfield Water Park, here they got to kayak and go on the Aqua Park. They also had 3 afternoon activity sessions. The themes for theirs was: Olympics, Ready Steady Cook and a film afternoon with a colour run.

Last school year, we worked in Sir John Nelthorpe in two different areas. The first being a Social Enterprise club. Here they managed a budget, bought the required resources, made the products and then they should have sold them, however due to an unseeable situation, this couldn't be achieved. The other area was a craft group at lunchtime focusing on different cultures and countries in line with the Olympics. For example, we did string art of the Eiffel tower and make scratch art Greek vases.

Grace Smith

Footnote: Grace is employed by the Barton, Brigg & Wolds Methodist Circuit. This is a full-time permanent employment with finances raised by the Circuit from a number of sources, including the Methodist Circuit and District and from Oikos itself. Grace is based at Oikos in an office that was refurbished in the main through a grant provided by the Bishop of Lincoln's Transformation Fund.

The desire within Oikos for the development of youth work can be traced back to at least as far back as a Doodle Vision circulated in July 2017 ☺

School Uniform Exchange

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The school uniform exchange nearly does what it says on the tin. The difference being that its not a requirement to bring a uniform before taking one...and its not a requirement to take one if you bring one. Apart from that it's an exchange!! 😊

Oikos became the permanent home of the school uniform exchange a couple of years ago and is available whenever the premises are open, so that's the Community Pantry day, Space 2 B sessions and the three days that the shop is open of course.

We stock whatever people donate but there is a good selection for Brigg primary school and SJN in particular and with some availability for St Marys Wrawby, Broughton and Barnetby.

Men's Breakfast: Saturday morning

The Men's breakfast is held every 3 weeks! (Long story). It starts at Wetherspoons and migrates to Oikos around 9.15am for prayer, fellowship and conversation. This is often the most theologically challenging experience of any other meeting! It benefits hugely that it is held in a truly ecumenical and friendly setting.

There is no set plan to the conversations but the topics spring up in the moment often sparked by a particular passage from scripture.

It has been the custom over a number of years to continue this experience over a full weekend during an annual retreat to Ampleforth Abbey in the autumn. This year it will be 11th-13th October. The setting is beautiful and the food and fellowship great. Attending the set services in the Abbey is optional, though it has been known for some to forego requirement for sleep and attend every available service betwixt taking part in the group's conversations. An impressive feat!

Grateful thanks to Vince Adams for organising both the breakfasts and the retreat over this and many years.

Malcolm Bailey

Facebook: Throughout the week

There are 3 facebook pages in operation: Oikos-Brigg, Brigg Food Bank run by Hannah and which is dedicated to 'what it says on the tin', and Brigg Youth Club page run by Grace and likewise.

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The Oikos page did have a pattern of posts on various themes throughout the week: Monday food bank matters, Tuesday prayer, Wednesday shop, Thursday schools, Friday eco matters, Saturday roundup and Sunday Thought for the Week. Some of that structure remains but is now more populated by news of the day! Followers have steadily increased to 538.

Through our Brigg Food Bank Facebook, we have a wonderful community and interaction levels. Our Brigg Food Bank page is now up to 1,215 followers. We continue to grow this and post a variety of posts. We recognise we need to use this more for thank you posts, as well as information of what is going on. From Harvest Festival 2024, we will make more of an effort to focus on this too.

Malcolm Bailey/Hannah Dobson

Thoughts for the Week: Sunday

'Thoughts for the Week' are posted each Sunday on the Oikos facebook page. With the exception of this September when it has been 'open house', contributors have mostly been either a minister or local preacher. There is no direction, or requirement to stick with a lectionary, other than to provide something of encouragement and/or challenge to folk on their Christian journey.

Hugely grateful to all contributors who contribute for a month of Sundays: again this is very much an ecumenical mix. They have included: Rev^d Peter Thomas, Ven Andrew Ballard, Mags Eames, Pastor Tom MacDonald, Fr Lim, Rev^d Enid Knowles, Rev^d David Eames, Nigel Pimlott, Keith Simpson, Anna George, Bishop David Tustin, Rev^d Heather Wilson, Rev^d Sally Long, Rev^d Julie Wearing, Bev Barker Lawrance, John Pullen, Rev^d Ian Wales, Revd John Boardman, Rev^d Joy Osbourne, Jonathan Oatridge.

Malcolm Bailey