

# All equal but different

**Ian Hu** writes about Somewhere Else, Liverpool City Centre, a place where community formation is not just talked about – it evolves daily. Telling and sharing stories allows for a wide network of caring and support and a recognition that we are all equal but different. Here are four:

**Rob** is a 43-year old native of Aintree, Liverpool. He came to Somewhere Else approximately ten years ago when Storm, a support group for gay and lesbian Christians, relocated to the premises. Rob discovered that the ethos at Somewhere Else – the belief that “we can do things slightly differently here” – appealed to him. Rob has remained faithful to his Roman Catholic tradition which has been strengthened by a new understanding of a loving, affirming and accepting Christ through the community at Somewhere Else. He feels that through the community’s openness, acceptance and emphasis on hospitality, he has been able to develop a stronger ongoing relationship with God through Jesus Christ. He feels that the community at Somewhere Else is different because “labelling is not accepted here. The community emphasizes observing Christ in every person, and accepts people for who they are and for their God-given dignity.”

**Jan** is a 45-year old, married mother of three and a native of Liverpool. She is presently a candidate for presbyteral ministry in

the Methodist Church, and came to Somewhere Else while searching for a Foundation Training placement. Her college wanted her to serve in a placement that was outside of a middle class, suburban setting to which she was accustomed. Jan smiles, “College definitely wanted me to leave my comfort zone!” Over the years, Jan has accompanied her family through bouts of illness or crises, and feels that she is truly a “survivor of motherhood.”

Jan has identified several areas which differentiate Somewhere Else from her experiences with traditional churches. She cites an “amazing sense of community,” which is encouraged by storytelling. “People share their stories with you, and empower you

to feel comfortable in sharing your own story.” She also enjoys the level of acceptance that everyone encounters when visiting Somewhere Else, and says that “no one is judged or ‘put in a box’ – you are accepted for who you are.”

**Alex** is a 25-year old native of Bootle, Liverpool. Alex comments that the first time he visited Somewhere Else in August 2009, he did not have a chance to bake bread. This made him determined to return and to try his hand at breadmaking. Since then, Alex has undergone the in-house training sessions offered at Somewhere Else and likes how “the breadmaking process helps everyone feel at ease with one another, especially newcomers.” Beneath a cool, tough exterior at first glance, when you speak with Alex you quickly discover he possesses a deep empathy and understanding of people and relationships.

Alex feels that over the past ten months or so, he has developed increased patience. He also enjoys the sense of satisfaction in teaching the breadmaking process to inexperienced participants. Alex likes the physical set-up of the breadmaking room which allows people to gather around one large table and to engage with one another. He reflects, “Everyone feels accepted and can talk with each other.” ➔

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IAN HU



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Steve eventually was able to obtain a pitch selling the Big Issue outside of 'News from Nowhere' on Bold Street in Liverpool City Centre. By this time, he had lost all self esteem and would find food by searching through rubbish bins. One day he was invited upstairs to Somewhere Else for a bowl of soup and remembers feeling incredibly vulnerable. He also remembers how he was warmly welcomed, and how people seemed genuinely interested in his story. He realizes that at any time he could have simply walked away, but he didn't. Steve recalls how members of Somewhere Else looked after him, helped him to get off the streets and obtain a place at the local YMCA.

Eventually, Steve obtained his own flat and over the years became a member of the Somewhere Else Church Council and a keyholder. He says, "I found my way with my faith in Christ through Somewhere Else." One of the recent highlights of his experience was participating in a trip to South America with a team from Somewhere Else. He is enjoying a positive relationship with his father, and is a recognized leader within the community.

Stories of survival abound at Somewhere Else and are shared, affirmed and respected. On bread-making days, new communities can be observed in creation as people share, talk and help one another. Somewhere Else is a place where you can be yourself and rest assured that you will be affirmed for your own individual gifts.

### I was living under a bush near the Metropolitan Cathedral, and I honestly didn't know what I was going to do.

➔ **Steve** is a 52-year old native of Coventry who came to Somewhere Else about eight years ago. Through a breakdown in relationships, Steve suddenly found himself homeless on the streets of Liverpool. Steve remarks, "I was living under a bush near the Metropolitan Cathedral, and I



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### Holy Week 2010

During Holy Week 2010, a storytelling event was held at Somewhere Else, incorporating an arts and crafts project creating shoes. These shoes symbolized each participant's ongoing journey through life, recognizing the uniqueness of each individual's story. Each participant was encouraged to individualize their shoes to reflect their personalities and their stories.

### What is Somewhere Else?

- Somewhere Else is approximately ten years old, and was inspired by Rev Dr Barbara Glasson through the support of the Liverpool Methodist District. The intent was to create an organic Christian presence in Liverpool City Centre.
- The cornerstone of Somewhere Else is storytelling. Participants attending on Tuesdays and Thursdays spend the initial hour getting to know each other round the bread making table. A new community is created.
- Shared experiences include: homelessness and rough sleeping, drug or alcohol abuse, grief or loss, family estrangement, career achievements, military service, a holiday or an interesting encounter on the morning train.
- Over time, several people who were once homeless or sold the Big Issue have since become members of the Methodist Church at Somewhere Else.
- CASAI, the Church's Action on Sexual Abuse Issues, regularly holds sessions at Somewhere Else and also cares for survivors, some of whom have been hurt by the institutional Church.
- Somewhere Else provides ministry to the local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community. Storm was founded approximately ten years ago at Liverpool University and has transformed in its membership over the years. Liverpool Quest, a support group for LGBT Roman Catholics, formerly housed in Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral is now based at Somewhere Else. Both groups provide worship, fellowship and storytelling opportunities.
- Somewhere Else receives placement students from the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Church of England.