

## **July-August 2017 Mission Connect Report**

**David Farrow, Director of Thompson House, Belfast**

### **A privilege to share the gospel**

Thompson House is a hostel for men caught up in the criminal justice system, which is managed by PCI. At full capacity it accommodates 19 men, the majority are released prisoners on licence, supervised by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland.

The present hostel on the Antrim Road, Belfast has been open since 1984. It has recently been refurbished in partnership with Helm Housing with four new one-bedroom apartments added to the building.

The main aims of the hostel are to provide suitable accommodation for male offenders; to help residents find and retain employment; to encourage and assist residents to establish their own homes; and to commend the Christian faith and way of life in an open and accepting manner.

Thompson House has a joint management agreement with Radius Housing Association. They provide and maintain the physical accommodation, we provide the necessary supervision and support to the resident group. The accommodation comprises of 15 en-suite bedrooms and four apartments. The apartments allow the residents to experience living in their own one-bedroom flat, where they have to cook all their own meals, pay their own bills and budget on a daily basis.

Each resident is allocated a key worker from the staff team, whose role is to assist the resident to identify any problem areas and help them find ways of addressing any of these.

Since the ceasefire we have noticed an increase in drug problems among the younger residents. In a recent survey of our resident group we discovered that over 80% had problems with drugs and/or alcohol.

We encourage residents to attend Alcohol Anonymous and, when appropriate, Carlisle House – the residential unit also managed by PCI. In Carlisle House the residents are able to participate in a programme of individual and group work where they explore the reasons behind their addictive behaviour; all in a supportive Christian environment.

Many residents also have problems with anger management. This leads them into difficult situations in which they feel the only way out is violence or to offend to prevent loss of face in front of their friends.

When exploring the reasons for anger amongst residents, low self-esteem and abuse by parents can be uncovered. The residents' file indicate that a large proportion have suffered neglect, physical and sexual abuse as children, leaving them angry and confused – hardly surprising they become involved in illegal activities and open to taking addictive substances.

It is quite often against this background that we try to share the love of Christ. The vast majority of residents do not have any church connections at all, though they may nominally subscribe to a church.

It's a great privilege, therefore, to be able to work with residents and have the opportunity to share the gospel with them. On a voluntary basis we offer Christianity and Life Explored courses for residents to attend. Normally we find that five or six residents attend each group session and participate fully in the full group programme. Gideons Bibles are provided in each bedroom, along with UCB Bible notes. We find that these bring about conversations with residents who want to understand what they are reading.