

## This place helps us so much

Renew Wellbeing has provided a valuable framework for Hong Kongers to settle and integrate here in England. Sharon Shek explains more.



Last July we opened our Renew Wellbeing Café in Derby, and it's really helped Hong Kongers have a safe place and know the love of God.

It takes place each Thursday from 12 – 4pm at YADA, a non-alcoholic bar that wants to connect with the local community. Seven hosts – all Hong Kongers – were trained by Sarah Fegredo, a Baptist minister and the Renew Wellbeing area co-ordinator here. We wanted to provide a safe space for Hong Kongers to meet each other and get to know the community.

Each time there are jigsaws, paintings and board games. We also teach zentangle (art created by a collection of patterns) for focus and relaxation. There is a space for prayer, and we follow the same prayer format each week so people are used to it. We eat together.

In this way it is more than just a café – it is underpinned by mental health concerns, and the five concepts of wellbeing. All the hosts have had good training – it's not just chit chat.

It provides a place to speak Cantonese with each other, share information and experiences, share emotions and find solutions. It's a very good opportunity to talk. Many Hong Kongers don't know anyone when they arrive in the UK.

It's a huge upheaval for us all, and this is a treasured time to talk in our own language and increase our network. Some of our regulars even travel from Nottingham.

But there's English too – some locals from Trinity Baptist Church come each week. (To begin with we were supported by Trinity Baptist Church, and now we have a fund from the Council to help buy the drinks.) This all helps the process of integration – the Hong Kongers can see people are interested in them and want to support them. It's very special that they come and want to connect and communicate - it shows us England is a welcoming place. Ellen Price, the minister at Trinity, drops in regularly, and talks and listens to the Hong Kongers. It all helps.

We've found the people who come, come regularly, and these are all ages – from University students to elderly people. This place helps us so much – there is a very supportive atmosphere. Many who come are not

Christians, but it is interesting that they appreciate the prayer space.

Our aim is not to solve all problems, but to help those who come to have the strength to face their difficulties in daily life. Hong Kongers are generally very busy, looking after families and working, and this has provided a time to relax and de-stress. It's a release of pressure.

I think it's a good example of showing the love of Jesus, of the church moving out of the building and into the community. Hong Kongers don't like a 'hard sell' of the gospel. Here they are experiencing the love of Jesus.



# Renew Wellbeing



Renew Wellbeing is the name of the overarching organisation that is helping churches around the country to replicate the Renew Wellbeing café concept.

Founded by Baptist pastor Ruth Rice, its vision is to encourage as many churches as possible to open up a space in which to be present, be prayerful and be in partnership with their local council for as little as two hours a week to improve the wellbeing of those living around them.

The charity is now in partnership with around 240 Renew spaces, including Children, Youth and Family (CYF) spaces. Another Cantonese-speaking Renew Wellbeing café is due to open in Birmingham.

The charity's growth was supported by Baptists Together Mission Forum funding in 2020.

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