

One of the things that I enjoy the most in my role as a CRCWM is watching how opportunities grow. Back in September 2014 at Roker URC we had a consultation event with local residents, and other organisations and projects already active in the local area. We shared what we were doing and found out what others were doing too. One of the



conversations we had was with the local council I.T team. They had computers available to community projects to develop what they called 'Electronic Village Halls' (EVH). They had redundant computers from the local council that they were hoping to distribute across Sunderland for those in the community to have access to. With the knowledge at the time of the introduction of Universal Credit, which among other things would mean people seeking work and benefits would need access to a computer to fulfil what was required of them, and the closure of job centres and libraries where people could

currently access IT, this presented us with an opportunity. So we took 5 of the computers and developed the church vestry into an EVH. In the first 2 years, this has been a great way of enabling a range of activities, including job search and employability for people, access to computers for the first time for a generation who never used computers before so they can skype, email, research family history and we have held workshops lead by local organisations including computer safety, identity fraud and kids coding skills. Open at least 2 mornings a week and with the added bonus of tea, coffee and homemade scones the EVH also offers an opportunity to socialise, build new relationships and volunteer.



But the growth continues, through prayer and through networking (meeting people and organisations) we spoke with FODI (Friends of the Drop In) a charity who work with refugees and asylum seekers across the city of Sunderland. Talking with them about issues and needs they were facing we recognised that as well as integration issues and a need for additional places of welcome across the city that many Asylum Seekers and Refugees were also very limited on where they could access IT. So

we are now on week 4 of extending our Thursday morning IT session and welcoming Asylum seekers and Refugees to join us. It is early days but we envisage a new opportunity for growth, relationship building and purpose in to areas we would not have been able to envisage 2 years ago when we were gifted the opportunity of our EVH.