

GOSPEL STANDARD BETHESDA FUND

Registered Charity 209376

Closure of the Studley Bethesda Home

For some years the future of the Studley Bethesda Home (Studley Home) has been under prayerful consideration due to the low level of occupancy and, in turn, the viability of resourcing and sustaining the care provided. In April 2020, the Bethesda trustees had reached a stage where they had made preparations to hold a public meeting to discuss the various options identified for the Studley Home as part of a consultation process.

The planned meeting did not take place as it was overtaken by events with the country going into lockdown due to the spread of COVID-19.

The focus of the trustees, the General Manager and the Home Managers then became, with the Lord's help, to ensure the safety and well-being of the residents and staff within the three Bethesda Homes. Mercifully the Homes have been brought, thus far, safely through COVID-19. This, however, has not been without a 'human cost' and consequences, particularly in the staffing of the Homes due to the implementation of government guidelines restricting the movement and deployment of staff.

The staffing situation at the Studley Home was exacerbated by the heavy reliance on agency staff and having only a very limited local pool of bank staff that could be drawn on to cover shifts. Where cover was not available, the Studley Home was left to draw on the goodwill of staff and in particular, that of the Home Manager. Although this was a solution, it was one that was not sustainable and detracted from the management of the Home.

Although efforts have been made to recruit staff to the Studley Home, this has been against the backcloth of a national shortage of staff across the whole of the Care Sector. Rules, introduced during COVID-19, also discouraged part-time staff from working in more than one care home with the consequent impact on staff availability. More recently, the government's mandate requiring frontline care home staff to be double vaccinated by 11 November 2021, has meant that those staff who do not feel able to be vaccinated for conscience's sake, will then lose their jobs. Additionally, those who may well have the skills to be employed as care workers, in the future, will be prevented unless they are double vaccinated.

In July 2021, an appeal was made to Gospel Standard causes of truth, local to the Studley Home, in Wiltshire and the surrounding areas, together with appeals to individual churches with substantial congregations, to come and take up the vacancies at the Studley Home. An advertisement was also placed in the Gospel Standard Magazine in August 2021. Sadly, there was no local response to this request and only two individuals responded to the advertisement in the Gospel Standard.

The pressure on staffing raised issues for the management of the Studley Home in recruiting and retaining staff, together with maintaining staff morale. This, in turn, raised challenges as shifts were needed to be filled, often by the Home Manager, to ensure the care, safety and well-being of the residents.

The restrictions placed on us by the government guidelines during COVID-19 included constraints on entering the Bethesda Homes, which in turn limited the General Manager making regular physical visits to the Homes: management had to be by 'remote means' and the lack of face to face sharing of day to day issues and problems have impacted on interactions with individuals.

Trustees were made and kept aware of the developing situation at the Studley Home, the General Manager made every effort to find a solution and much prayer was put up to the Lord to reveal His Will in this matter.

On Monday, 23 August 2021 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook an unannounced Focused Inspection at the Studley Home. The inspection had been triggered

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by concerns raised with the CQC under a Protected Disclosure (Whistleblowing). The outcome of the Focused Inspection was the CQC raising a "Warning Notice" relating to the registration of the Studley Home due to the failure to comply with relevant requirements of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014. Although, concerns were expressed over the way the language in the Notice was nuanced, it was identified there was a basis for the judgement made and that the points raised were symptomatic of the management challenges faced in staffing the Studley Home.

When the trustees were made aware of the CQC intervention, prayer was made for the Lord to appear and grant the wisdom needed to deal with the intractable situation being faced at the Studley Home.

This intervention, coming on top of all the other underlying difficulties facing the Studley Home, was felt by the trustees to be a confirmation that we should be moving towards a home closure and on Monday, 20 September 2021 earnest prayer was made to the Lord by the trustees, at their weekly early morning prayer meeting, to show them what to do, and, if it were His will for the Studley Home to be closed, for Him to give us a further token of confirmation.

On Friday 24 September 2021, even whilst the trustees were meeting to consider how to respond to the CQC and how to move forward in dealing with the situation at the Studley Home, a message was received that the Home Manager felt unable to continue in their current role. This in turn, highlighted further the fragility of the situation regarding staffing the Studley Home and the need to take immediate action, as the management of the Home and importantly, the ability to ensure the continued safety, care and support of the residents, could not be sustained.

Although, the news regarding the management of the Studley Home was received with much sadness, there was a felt sense that the Lord had answered the prayers for a further 'token' as to the future of the Home at Studley. We prove that prayers are not always answered in the way that we might choose.

At a meeting attended by all the Trustees to review the continuing situation at the Studley Home and in view of the place where the Lord had brought the trustees and the General Manager; it was with great sadness that the proposal was made to close the Studley Bethesda Home with effect from Friday 29 October 2021. This decision was passed unanimously by the Trustees. We trust that you will appreciate that this decision was not made lightly.

There is still much to be done to help the residents and their loved ones/families find suitable accommodation to meet their care needs. We will be working closely with them, the staff and Home Manager throughout this period. Our desire is that we each might prove:

"He who has helped me hitherto
Will help me all my journey through,
And give me daily cause to raise
New Ebenezers to His praise."

On behalf of the Bethesda Trustees,



M Ridout
Chairman
01 October 2021