

Church for a Different World



A brief background:

25 years ago the church recognised the changes in the local community and accepted that it was not sustainable as a place of worship only, but that social need in the area, brought about by deep seated poverty, could and should not be ignored, in fact to ignore these issues was seen to be “unchristian”. The church then set out on a mission to:

“Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

The local community is 90% black and ethnic minority, poor within the top 10% in the country and transient. Until 2010, the area enjoyed regeneration funding to address deep-seated poverty and poor outcomes. There is now no regeneration funding. Benefit reform and cuts to local council services have made a deprived area worse off. The area is suffering more than before 2010. It has a population of 12,355 - 64.92% White British, 14.91% Pakistani, 5% Bangladeshi (Census 2011) and is a hate crime hotspot.

We organise events that bring the community together.

- Very low life expectancy, high levels of poor health/limiting long-term illness or disability. 24% of people have a long-term illness/disability. 10% are Disability Living Allowance claimants; 5% are Incapacity Benefit claimants. Around 15% have low mental well-being.

We provide healthy living events and promote good mental and physical health through self-help groups which provide support and enhance self-esteem.

- Very high proportion of young lone-parents in multi-ethnic communities living in social housing, dependent on benefits. 33.7% of all households are lone-parent homes with dependent children accounting for 31.7% of dependent children. 93.3% of these households are headed by a female lone-parent.

We support local women and work with them to enable children to be school ready.

- 23.1% Long-term Unemployment, 28.5% of dependent children live in households with no adult in employment. 20% of households are fuel poor. 52.7% of the population in the ‘At Risk’ group with multiple unhealthy lifestyle behaviours, compounded by unemployment and debt, which can lead to low mental well-being. 21% of the population have ‘Health Challenges’.

We provide a fully accessible Centre with placements for volunteers, entry level support and guidance, access to IT and computers and support to those isolated and unable to work. We provide physical activities and Luncheon clubs.

We aim: to sustain/develop a safe, welcoming Centre as a symbol of hope, cohesion and opportunity at the heart of the Community, offering 7 days a week activity where cost and culture is not a barrier to inclusion; to train local people to identify and build on assets/strengths already existing within the community; to provide a base for others who like us want to empower the local community and replace dependency with community resilience; to access grants and encourage self-sustainability from income from the services we provide.

We are working towards an asset transfer of the Centre to a local community trust with covenanted protection for Christian Worship. We seek, through education and support, to build the capacity of community members and empower them to have greater control and influence, to be a community that gets things done. Overall, this will have a longer-term impact on the poverty in the area

We have a Big Lottery funded project £366K over 3 years. The project outcomes are: the empowerment of local isolated women to become more active citizens with a focus on those most difficult to reach; improved skills, self-esteem and life chances for local people, with a focus on those who are most difficult to reach; sustaining an affordable, accessible, local asset to create a stronger, more cohesive community, connecting local people to tackle problems.

We host over 36 hours per week face to face provision, hosting a full range of groups from the local area including youth clubs, martial arts, luncheon clubs, neo-natal knitters, exercise classes, ESOL cafe's, coaching for women, weight-watchers, etc.

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life." **Nelson Mandela**