

Sharing Our Story...

Farnworth Baptist Church, Bolton



Bolton: The UK's biggest town, a historic football club and a former hub for textile production. Bolton was recently ranked in the top 15 per cent of deprived areas in the 2019 indices of deprivation. Over a third of children across Bolton are living in poverty, rising to more than half in some areas of the town. Six years ago, a church decided it wanted to be part of the answer to the children struggling on the fringes of education. It decided to open an alternative provision with a difference.

The TLG Bolton Education Centre is run in partnership with Farnworth Baptist Church and national children's charity Transforming Lives for Good (TLG). TLG Education Centres help local churches across the country to work with disadvantaged and excluded young people who are at crisis point. The centres work with the school, family and social services (where necessary) to provide the best care for each individual. They support between six and twelve young people who would otherwise miss out on their education and have a high staff to pupil ratio, enabling the young people to receive the crucial one-to-one support they need. John Bradbury, minister at Farnworth was keen to establish a centre because he saw a lack of aspiration from young people in the Farnworth area.

Susie McGibbon was the Head Teacher from 2017-2019, recently moving into a new role with TLG. In her two years at the Education Centre, Susie has already seen many children's lives transformed. She says, 'Working in an education centre is an honour and privilege. Although some days can be challenging, seeing the steps of progress, however big or small over weeks and months, is always a great celebration. When we give the centre to God each day, we watch His hand guide, protect and give strength.' One particular student arrived at the Education Centre for Key Stage Four. This student had really struggled with mainstream school and lacked a lot of confidence. Through the centre's holistic approach, she was able to thrive in the Centre's environment and left the Centre complete with qualifications and headed for college.

The key to the success of TLG's Education Centre programme is going beyond simply education and supporting the wider needs of the young person, including the skills they need to navigate through life, such as conflict resolution and how to make positive choices. The team in Bolton have had a great deal of success, especially in relation to the Centre's work with children and their educational and pastoral outcomes. Both Susie and John have noticed the impact on the church too. At one point, the centre was struggling for referrals and urgently needed new students. In response, the church gathered together in one of the biggest prayer meetings to happen at that church. The outpouring of support from the church soon led to a breakthrough of referrals, which the whole church was able to celebrate together.

Gareth Crossley recently started as TLG Bolton's new Head Teacher, and has a real heart to see children's lives transformed and is already excited to get into his new role: 'It has been exciting to see Farnworth Baptist Church demonstrate effective, long-standing commitment to families and young people in their local area. By partnering with TLG they really are transforming young people's lives for good and in turn impacting whole families.'

How could your church seek the peace and prosperity of the place (and people) you work with?