

# The History of The Vine (Leeds Community Development)

In 2010 the Vineyard in Leeds saw great need around them. Inspired by the biblical command to "do justice and love kindness" (Micah 6:8) and by Jesus' manifesto to "preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of God's favour" (Luke 4:18, 19), they dug deep and gave generously to set up a new charity called Leeds Community Development (but popularly known as "the Vine").

Tom Riordan, The Chief Executive of Leeds City Council has said, *"We are setting ourselves a challenge to be the best city in the country. Not the richest, or the biggest, but the best for all who live and work in Leeds - our children, our communities and our business. A place where everyone can enjoy a good quality of life."*

Leeds Vineyard is 100% behind this vision; we have adopted it as part of our vision (even if we think there is more to life than "good quality"). God has called us to Build Bridges into our community to share our vision, especially into the poorer and needier parts, and the Vine is one of the ways in which we do this.

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The first project the Vine set up was a Debt Advice Centre. After researching different Debt Advice providers we decided to partner with the world class system run by CAP out of Bradford. Gwen Procter was appointed as our Debt Advice Centre Manager and after a period of training and building name awareness in the community, Gwen began seeing clients in May 2011. Since then 106 households have had contact with our centre and booked a first appointment (although, for various reasons, not all proceed). In the last 12 months 73% of clients have progressed onto the Debt Management Plan and are working their way to becoming debt free. Gwen takes on one new client per week (but is closed to new clients in December). The Debt Advice Centre covers inner and outer East Leeds as well as Holt Park and Headingley.

By the time Gwen gets to meet with a client they have generally been through some very difficult times. They will usually be in debt to level which is unsustainable and which is causing significant grief. Often people have got into difficulty because of a change in circumstances such as losing their job, suffering serious illness or through relationship breakdown. People are often on the edge of desperation, withdrawn from society and relationships.

With the help of the excellent system CAP run, Gwen seeks to walk the clients through a process of getting financially straight, negotiating with creditors, setting up a manageable budget and planning for the future. At the same time, befrienders from the Vineyard come alongside the client and help them with practical needs out of friendship. This might mean

taking them shopping, providing a listening ear over a cup of tea, accompanying them to court or bringing them along to a client social event.

People from all sorts of backgrounds get into financial trouble and it is a spectacularly wonderful thing to see someone given freedom from that "prison". The clients are given the opportunity to discover the good news of the gospel and we are delighted when they come along to weekly worship or join a housegroup as we know that is crucial for their long-term needs. Not only do they get set free from debt they are redeemed by their loving Saviour.

If you would like to get involved in this life-saving ministry please talk to Gwen on 07425 622086, or [send an email](#). Tell her about your availability and what you can and can't do and she may be able to find you a role working alongside her.



The second project the Vine set up was the Child Contact Centre. The main provider of services in this area is NACCC (National Association of Child Contact Centres). Child contact centres are neutral places where children of separated families can enjoy contact with their non-resident parents and sometimes other family members in a comfortable and safe environment.

In the first year or so Cyndy Dowling and Fi Brazill established the CCC (both working voluntarily) and the CCC developed a first class reputation across the city. In June 2013 Elaine Sadler was appointed as the Centre Manager. Each month she receives about half a dozen enquiries (some are direct, some through solicitors or other agencies). Typically it takes around 4 months for an enquiry to successfully lead to first use of the CCC. From January 2014 we will be able to accommodate up to 18 families. But we can only do this if we grow a larger team of volunteers.

Elaine and her team celebrate when family relationships are restored so that their services are no longer needed. Whilst we have opportunity to interact with client families it is not appropriate to share the gospel so the team are there to demonstrate kindness and to pray.

The centre operates fortnightly on Saturdays at the Vineyard Centre. If you would like to get involved in this heart-warming ministry please talk to Elaine. You can call her on 07435 788837. She will explain the different roles you may be able to help with.



The next project in the pipeline may be a Family Support Unit. This will provide a Lead Professional to work with social services, police, education and health to provide support to children who are falling through gaps in the system. The well-respected Common

Assessment Framework (CAF) will be the underpinning process for this.

CAF has been developed nationally as a mechanism to identify the needs of a child or young person at an early stage and then identify solutions and actions across a range of providers working with the young person and their family to prevent needs becoming more severe. CAFs cover the personal, social and educational needs of the child/young person and also consider how wider family circumstances may be impacting on the young person.

The number of CAFs undertaken is increasing year on year, but it is still relatively small compared to the total number of referrals to Children and Young People's social care. In 2011, a total of 1,115 CAFs were produced across Leeds, with 46 in the Inner North West Hub<sup>[1]</sup>. It has been suggested that, across Leeds as a whole, there is the potential for at least 60 additional CAFs per month. These are needed in order to identify and meet children's needs at an early stage, reducing the need for more specialist intervention at a later stage. Schools currently generate 42% of CAFs in Leeds and Early Years settings generate 20%.

CAF's identify a range of needs that reflect issues faced by the children and young people themselves and by their families. These include the:

- need to achieve personal and social development (46%);
- need for security and stability at home (33%);
- ability to deal with life changes and challenges (30%);
- physical health needs (28%);
- need to attend and enjoy school (27%).

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<sup>[1]</sup> Source: <http://www.leedsinitiative.org/ClusterDataProfile.aspx>

[Matt Button](#) has taken the lead in research and planning for this. As he and the team have talked with the local schools and community leaders it is clear that this would be a very popular move. Particularly because the church can provide a "wraparound" support to the Lead Professional - building bridges for the children so that they can connect with a safe community and other resources. The FST is waiting for sufficient funding before it can start.

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## What Can You Do?

1. Please pray for the Vine - for the trustees, the staff and the team of volunteers (not all from the Vineyard and not all followers of Jesus). Pray for safety and increased resources - people and money. Pray for the ongoing funding applications - seeking to create a regular and reliable source of income to the Vine.
2. Consider volunteering for one or more of the projects. Whether you can just give a few hours once a month or regular time each week there will be something you can do to help. We are building a large team from Leeds Vineyard and other churches around

Leeds in order to maintain the our Christian ethos within these projects. Please consider giving some of your time to join one of these volunteer teams.

3. Consider giving to the Vine. What is most helpful is a monthly standing order - even if it is only for £10! Predictable regular income allows us to take on a salaried staff to ensure that we do a really good job in serving our community.

You can visit the Vine website here: <http://www.thevineleeds.org/>