

Sharing Our Story...

Responding to the Coronavirus

Ebenezer's Darwen, Lancs



Joanne Brindle is a pioneer minister in the Ribble Valley in Lancashire, and here we catch a glimpse of the remarkable story of how an empty church building has, in the last 12 months, become a focal point for the local community, and even more so during the current climate. Joanne shares the story:

"The church closed a number of years ago and the building had been empty for a while. We asked if we could have the church building and turn it into a community hub. I was asked to project manage this. We've had a few setbacks along the way, but we've overcome these, and I felt God inspire me to make the building more than just a hub, but something that could be open to the community all the time, so I asked the NWBA if we could make it into a coffee shop too, and they agreed.

Ebenezer's runs four days a week as a coffee shop. We have all sorts of different community groups coming in and it really has become a hub for the community. In the coffee shop, we have a veterans' café, a carers and cared for café, and a dementia café. We have a free legal clinic once a week with a local solicitor who gives advice. Downstairs, in the basement, an organisation called 'Outdoors For All' are moving in, facilitating conversations around the campfire, community walks and all sorts. We're also in conversations about alternative education provision based here. On Sundays, we gather to worship.

The name Ebenezer means 'the rock' and we really think this is what the building has become—a rock for the community and a safe place for everyone and anyone.

At this time of Coronavirus restrictions, we are doing a competition for kids which is really engaging with the community: We've got a competition going for who can grow the biggest sunflower, and who can make us smile with their picture—we are promising a free party here for the winner so we've had lots of engagement!

Our Sunday night group (usually around 16 committed Christians) gathers to pray, and the virus has brought many more people into contact with us. We posted on Facebook about sharing the burden, being here for people and if people wanted prayer, to let us know. The number of responses stunned me. We've had so many people reaching out for prayer. They may not make it on a Sunday but people are still hungry, and are reaching out to God at this time as we give them opportunity to."

Check out Ebenezer's in Darwen, where your physical hunger can be filled with cakes, and your spiritual hunger will be met by God!

