



drived areas during the pandemic has marked almost five decades of

Established in 1972, through the initiative of St John and St Stephen's Church, Grimsby, the Shalom Youth Project (known as Shal) has been providing a second home for the area's children and young people, welcoming more than 100 on an average evening. It has helped almost 5,000 to date.

"If the Church doesn't make a difference, what's it there for?" said founder Canon John Ellis.

During the pandemic, outreach work has continued to help prevent local children from being drawn into the county lines drug trade. The youth centre's ethos is focused on character building and developing young people within the community.

Shal, he says, has become "a place of belonging, a place of safety" for generations of children.

One of them is 48-year-old Kayla, now Shal's Operations Manager, who joined as a five-year-old child. "It has made a massive difference to my life," she said.

"They have supported me through a lot of things and a lot of traumas.

"Our dad was a drinker. It was awful."

Shal, Kayla said, "made me believe in myself."

Another is 44-year-old Sarah. She started attending Shal when she was six or seven, drifting away as a young adult. But during the pandemic, she said she "felt God tugging at me" and began attending the Cyber Church run by the Shal team.

Sarah is one of more than 200 people who attend the online services.

"When I started going back to church, I didn't have any faith", Sarah explained.

"But this has been drip-feeding my faith. It has given me hope.

"It's quite a deprived area. I know it sounds cheesy, but it's a bit of a light in the community."

#### **More information:**

- The Church of England's [Vision and Strategy for the 2020s](https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/stories-blogs-and-features/it-made-me-believe-myself-seed-hope-planted-five-decades) is helping us to be a Church which proclaims and lives out the Good News of Jesus Christ afresh in every generation.