

## A Community Life

### Eden West Bowling

Luke Owens, Eden West Bowling Team Leader

Eden is a national network of people that believe in long-term incarnational living in the poorest areas of the country. The Eden West Bowling team comprises of myself and nine volunteers. I am the only paid member of the team, all the others work part time or full time and give about 6-8 hours a week to support the community and share the gospel. Our team has three core principles:

1. To raise aspirations and increase the number of opportunities to live a positive, healthy life
2. To build community
3. And to introduce that community to the good news of God.

West Bowling is just over a mile from Bradford city centre and like many of the areas that surround Bradford it is a former industrial area that is densely populated. The area is incredibly diverse with the majority being from a Pakistani background, then white British, then Eastern European and Russian. But the reality is that there are people here from all over the world with significant groups from the Middle East, South America and many more regions. West Bowling has consistently been in the lowest 2% of most deprived wards according to the Index of Multiple Deprivations, with very poor health, income and educational attainment levels.

Eden West Bowling is part of St. Stephen's Church, and focuses on the Parkside estate that sits in one corner of the parish – an area with no church presence. The majority of team members have moved to the 1960s estate, as living incarnationally is a key aspect of Eden. The rest of the team members are spread across West Bowling and surrounding areas. This allows team members to truly live as part of the community and not just be another organisation providing services and disappearing off at the end the working day. Eden West Bowling has a core team but our ethos is shared with all in St Stephen's Church – simply put, 'to love your neighbour'.

A large part of Eden is living alongside people – being a port of call for those going through life's storms – but the team also delivers a range of activities.

### **Building a stronger Christian youth community:**

- Insync is a Sunday night church youth group with a very diverse make up, including those from traditional white working class backgrounds as well as asylum seekers from Africa.
- Prime Time – a community leadership course similar to the Duke of Edinburgh award, it has Bronze, Silver and Gold levels and is a recognised ASDAN qualification. Those who have attended the course so far have included asylum seekers, young people who have gone through adoption or fostering and those with severe learning difficulties. All aspire to better lives and to be leaders in their community.
- We work with 29 teenagers on a regular basis, all of whom are from financially-challenged households, so every year we run a Holiday at Home programme – a week of fun games, trips, visits from bands and Bible teaching.
- We want our young people to be truly active members of the church so we give them high-quality activities, as well as opportunities to be involved and volunteer at church. We spend a lot of time building relationships – this helps us to understand them, their lives, and what they are wanting to learn, do and experience.

- We also think it is important for them to experience the wider Christian world, so we take them to conferences, worship nights and festivals. Many of the young people we support have rarely travelled further than their journey to school and back so it is incredibly valuable when we can encourage them to go further and experience more.

**As well as building up and strengthening what happen in church the team is constantly reaching out, being active in the community and taking church to where people are.**

- We have an after-school club programme called ROCK. Pre-Covid we were active in three schools but currently we are just in one. This is an overtly gospel-sharing club, with prayers, singing and Bible stories, and the session is open to all.
- We have hosted weekly Friday afternoon prayer time in another primary school.
- We hold play sessions in different parks and green spaces. Members of the team set up games, craft activities and encourage young people to play. Our aim is to get to know children and families, share that we're from St Stephen's and be positive role models. When we turn up to the parks we see other adults dumping litter, drinking, smoking and riding motorbikes around inside the park so it's important for children to see more positive role models.
- A few weeks a year we are able to hire the Message Bus – this is a bus with a climbing wall, computer games, music and a space to share the Bible. This summer we gave out 100 St Mark's gospels over a five week period.
- We are actively trying to reclaim areas that are regularly vandalised, by helping the young people that are seen as the vandals/trouble-causers to reclaim their lives. County lines drugs is a major problem in the area – I've known children from as young as year 7 (age 11) getting recruited. Simply by being present in the spaces where anti-social behaviour and crime happens, we help to break the link and offer a new hope.
- During October half term 2022 we are partnering with Playful Anywhere to bring a play container to one of the local green spaces. With this resource we will run activities, offer training to parents and engage with the local community.
- We are launching another after-school ROCK club on a neighbouring estate in response to many requests from local children.
- Towards the end of 2022 we aim to launch TLG's Early Intervention programme to help those who struggle to settle in school, and the Wild Passport course for those who struggle to stay in secondary education. We are also partnering on the redevelopment of local sports facilities so that there will be spaces to engage young people.

Our aim through all of this is to build relationship and let people know that Christ changes lives – and that this is a gift open to all.

We always have an emphasis on quality and consistency – too often the services that people receive in West Bowling are of a lower quality, and come and go with funding, so we want to offer something better and longer-lasting.

To do all of this we partner with Shine and other organisations in the area, including local charities, sports clubs and companies such as Yorkshire Building Society. And we bring in mission apprentices and interns. One of the advantages of Eden is that we can be flexible and do some of the linking and connecting work that organisations with specific targets may otherwise struggle to do.

There are struggles to running an Eden team: it's not cheap, the team leader's role is  $\frac{2}{3}$  self-funded and  $\frac{1}{3}$  funded by the church, and all activities are funded through donations or grants. We are often at the whim of parents and turbulent home lives and we don't have an

indoor space on the Parkside estate where we can meet children and young people so we're dependent on the weather.

We are often asked why we do this – it is as simple as following Jesus' commandment to love your neighbour.

We'd love you to be involved in all that God's doing in West Bowling, so if you'd like to find out ways that you can support us, do visit [www.ststephensbd5.org.uk/eden](http://www.ststephensbd5.org.uk/eden)