

The Heart of the Estate



An illustration of the ways in which
‘Unlocking’ the Bible has brought life and
hope to an urban estate in the North East



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'Unlocking' Town End Farm

When I arrived in Town End Farm as Unlock Discipleship Development worker I really did not know what to expect. The brief was to engage with the community, listening to the stories of the people who live there, encourage and enable them to release life changing skills, while giving a helping hand to the church to relate the gospel in the community.

Now, that sounds quite straight forward. However, most of the residents didn't have any 'church' background; most would say they had no faith; some didn't know what the Bible was; and in a children's after school club I asked if anyone knew about a man called Jesus, and two put their hands up! This was beginning to sound a bit more challenging than I first thought!

At first, I couldn't understand how and why they had limited experience of faith and church, but as I got to know them and as I listened to them I realised they had no one to walk alongside them to show them.

Yes, they are part of a parish, with a team ministry of three, but the parish is quite wide spread with over 30,000 people, and Town End Farm is at the very end of the parish and maybe a little bit hard to reach. In fact, I would go so far to say that it had got a bit lost. Parish staff were aware of that and had brought Unlock in to change it. But definitely more of a challenge than I thought!

In the heart of the Town End Farm Estate was a decommissioned, relatively modern, church building. The Church had given responsibility for its use and maintenance over to a Local Residents Association and they were running a few community activities in the building. This is where we started.

Over the next year or so, I spent time with local people, listened to their concerns and what they wanted; I talked about faith, church, God - where was He?! And you know what, light started to break through, dim at first but there was light.

In year two, along came suggestions from the people of Town End Farm.

Can we reclaim the chapel in the old church?.....YES!
Can we have a service of reflection in the chapel?.....YES!
Can we have a craft group?.....YES!
Can we have a holiday Club?.....The Ark was born!
What is Good Friday?
Can we flower bomb the cross for Easter day?.....YES!
Can we light candles for our loved ones in the chapel? (we did All Souls)
What is Christingle? Can we do it?....YES!



And now it's FAB!

Towards the end of year two local leaders began to emerge and so I worked to nurture, encourage and enable Kayleigh, Bab's & Sue.

- ♦ 'Can we learn more about faith and the Bible', they said? (so we now have a faith/bible group)
- ♦ 'Can we do a messy church thing', they said? (so we now have 'Little Lambs')
- ♦ 'Can we do something for 5-11year olds', they said (so we now have JAM (Jesus and Me) Club

All of us working together developed the idea of F.A.B.Faith at Bede's, Food at Bede's, Fellowship at Bede's, Fun at Bede's, Friday at Bede's.

Year three, we now have F.A.B Friday, starting at 10am with Bible/Faith group, then we do Little lambs followed by messy church and then JAM Club finishing at 5.00pm. **A full day** every Friday, **talking about Jesus!**, of faith, food, fellowship and fun.

By the end of year three the local leaders are confident and capable enough to stand on their own *six* feet and they no longer need an Unlock worker to walk with them. Two of them have been confirmed. The local clergy are supporting them to continue their personal growth in faith and to develop the work they are doing at St Bede's and in Town End Farm.

I've been walking alongside these wonderful folk of Town End Farm for 3 years now, listening to them, encouraging them, enabling them. When I drive to the estate every Friday I pray in the car on the way; I ask Jesus that all who I meet that day will see something or hear something of Him in me. Yet every week I see something and hear something of Him in them. The local people have been a blessing to me. After a lot of work, and a few challenges, there is a bright light shining on that estate.

And I think its because they needed to see Jesus's light reflected. They needed to have someone to tell them and to show how Jesus's light can shine in their lives, in their homes and on their estate. Many local people had never encountered this before. None of this could have happened without God, the wonderful team at UNLOCK, the North Wearside Parish clergy team, who have all been a fantastic support.

I know that's God light will continue to shine on TEF and on Kayleigh, Babs & Sue as they take over the leadership of F.A.B. Friday, with the help and support of the clergy team.

What next..... where will God shine His light? a church plant? F.A.B. Church? Watch this space!



*Lord Jesus,
Shine your light into the
shadows of our communities,
our homes and our lives and
help us to reflect that light so
that all we meet might glimpse
your grace. Amen*

30 minute makeover (of a spiritual kind)

Plan:

Reflection and meditation; have pictures, pebbles, shells etc. Ask people to choose something that 'speaks' to them or a memory they may have. Gentle music and readings, poems or scripture, with quiet times in between. Another one I have done was a reflection on a well known or favourite hymn; sing a verse then say a few words about what that verse is saying, until you've sung the whole hymn; it can be very moving.

Outcome:

Gently introduce people to 'being still' in our busy world, listening and connecting with words spoken and music playing.

One lady chose a shell and it brought back memories of her late husband being in the Navy and he would bring her a shell back from wherever he had been. She said it brought wonderful memories flooding back and she felt some sort of healing from being bereaved.

Some of the things we have done



Reclaiming the Chapel

Some of the things we have done

Plan:

A disused side chapel was part of the former church building. When Unlock first came to TEF it was simply being used as a store room.

After some conversations the local residents decided that they would like to reclaim it and turn it into a special quiet space for prayer and reflection. A whole group of people turned up to clear it out, clean it up and make it nice. Then together they chose beautiful things to put into it to help make it a special space. After a few weeks the Slimming world leader stored some of her kit in there and everyone was most offended that she was disrespecting what they now called their '***** sacred space'!

Outcome:

Creating a reflective space in the chapel allowed for monthly reflections to take place, usually after the Wednesday group but also at other times especially on Good Friday and other festivals. A series of Lent reflections was used and there is always an opportunity to light candles and read prayers. People have often asked for prayer and placed written prayers or photos of the ill or dead relatives.



Faith and Fairy Cakes

Some of the things we have done

Plan:

A small talk for example, on prayer; how and why do we pray? Then an activity to go along with it. I talked about praying for others and had a piece of flower arrangers oasis or a vase; I had a bucket filled with flowers and foliage and asked everyone to take a couple of flowers/ foliage and as they placed them in the oasis/vase think of a person or a place which they felt needed help or healing.

Outcomes:

When they had a finished there was the most beautiful floral arrangement, a bouquet of prayer. Then a cup of tea and a fairy cake!

One young Mum said she would never be able to place flowers in a vase again without thinking or praying for someone.



Craft and Chat

Some of the things we have done

Plan:

This came about as part of me asking what the residents would like in TEF and they said somewhere to go and to learn craft things and chat and that's exactly what this is. However don't be misled by the chat bit !!

Outcome:

We talk about faith, life, death, relationships, life events.

I really value this session, as it's a place where people feel 'safe' enough to open up, and all the while they're learning new skills; we've just done a ceramics course which was fantastic. They have learned to knit, crochet, glass paint, make cushion covers without a needle and thread!! I think this is the group where we can lay the foundations to build something on.

Faith and Fairy cakes, (page 6) and Craft and Chat ran on Wednesdays with the intention of including social activities with opportunity for some gentle Christian reflections to take place. The conversation during the sessions was invariably faith focussed as it was an opportunity for people to ask questions and fly ideas in a non-threatening environment. This group eventually led to the planning group and FAB Fridays outlined on page 4.



Storytelling Cafe

Some of the things we have done

Plan:

Cafe style coffee morning/afternoon, sharing our stories.

Outcome:

Each week I would set the tables up for about 6 people and on the tables would put a story from the Bible or if it was a saints day a story about that saint.

It was amazing what conversations came from that time together and how it led to listening to each other's stories and how our stories reflect with those in the Bible.

It was wonderful hearing people who had known each other for years finding out something different about each other.



The Ark

Some of the things we have done

Plan:

All-age activity Holiday Club, run once a week in the school holidays. Bible story, activity reflecting the story, songs, games, prayers and lunch. Parents stay with their children. The object was primarily to reach the parents and carers who came and stayed with the children.

The stories we have done so far:

- Noah
- In the beginning
- Daniel & The Lion's Den
- David & Goliath
- Jesus 12 special Friends
- Zaccheaus
- The wise man and the foolish man
- Pentecost
- Lent/Shrove Tuesday
- Story of the Mustard Seed
- Jonah & The Whale
- Olympics being in a Team best Team of all Team JC (Jesus Christ)
- Christingle & Nativity
- Epiphany : The Wise Men
- The Saddest Day & The Happiest Day (Easter)
- Passover
- The lost sheep
- The Calling of Samuel
- Loaves and Fishes
- Rainbow a sign of Gods Promise
- The Blind Man (Bartemeous)
- The calming of the storm.
- Follow Me & I will make you fishers of many.

Outcome:

This is part of life on TEF now; families will ask if The Ark is on and it has been great watching how the parents get involved and chat about the stories from the Bible. It is still growing in numbers and this is where we can reach out and connect with young families. There have already been some people led to baptism by coming along to The Ark.



JAM Club (Jesus and Me)

Some of the things we have done

Plan:

This has grown from The Ark, it is for 5 to 11 year olds and is a more structured session.

After school 3.30-5pm and parents leave their children.

Bible Story, activity, games, prayers, food.

Stories so far have included: -

- Ascension,
- Pentecost,
- Palm Sunday,
- Good Friday,
- Easter Day,
- Christmas.
- Stories about using our ears, eyes, heart, one body many parts; we did this over about 5 weeks adding body parts to a large body.
- Raising of Lazarus, where we wrapped someone in toilet roll and laid them in a tent; we all shouted 'Lazarus in the name of Jesus come out!' It was hilarious!
- David & Goliath, where we had a 9ft drawing of a Giant then we made slingshots and fired them at it.
- Joseph and his brothers; we did this over 3 weeks.
- Pentecost we talked about how God's Holy Spirit changes us, so I took a popcorn machine and showed the children the kernels of corn which they hadn't seen before! Then I put them in the machine and said it's a bit like God's Holy Spirit our invisible friend if we allow him into our lives we can change. I said this as the machine was whizzing around and then as the kernels popped the children's eyes just about popped too; popcorn came spilling out of the machine; they were running around all excited and I said so boys and girls what happens if we let God's Holy Spirit into our lives, and one little boy shouted, we'll turn into popcorn !! Yeah !!!
- We've talked about prayer and they do the Lord's Prayer with actions.

Outcome:

We look at the Bible story a little more 'in-depth' and relate it to their lives. One little boy said he wished it could be on every day!



One off Specials

Some of the things we have done

I've also done one off sessions:

Harvest Service

All Souls, a short service in the Chapel for all those who are bereaved.

Christingle Service.

Good Friday reflection.

I've also produced a simple lent resource, with a bible verse, then an action to do that week.

These went down well and were given out alongside the bingo books!

The chapel has been re ordered and is open each time the church hall is open so anyone can come in for peace and quiet and to light a candle.



Sunderland Stories

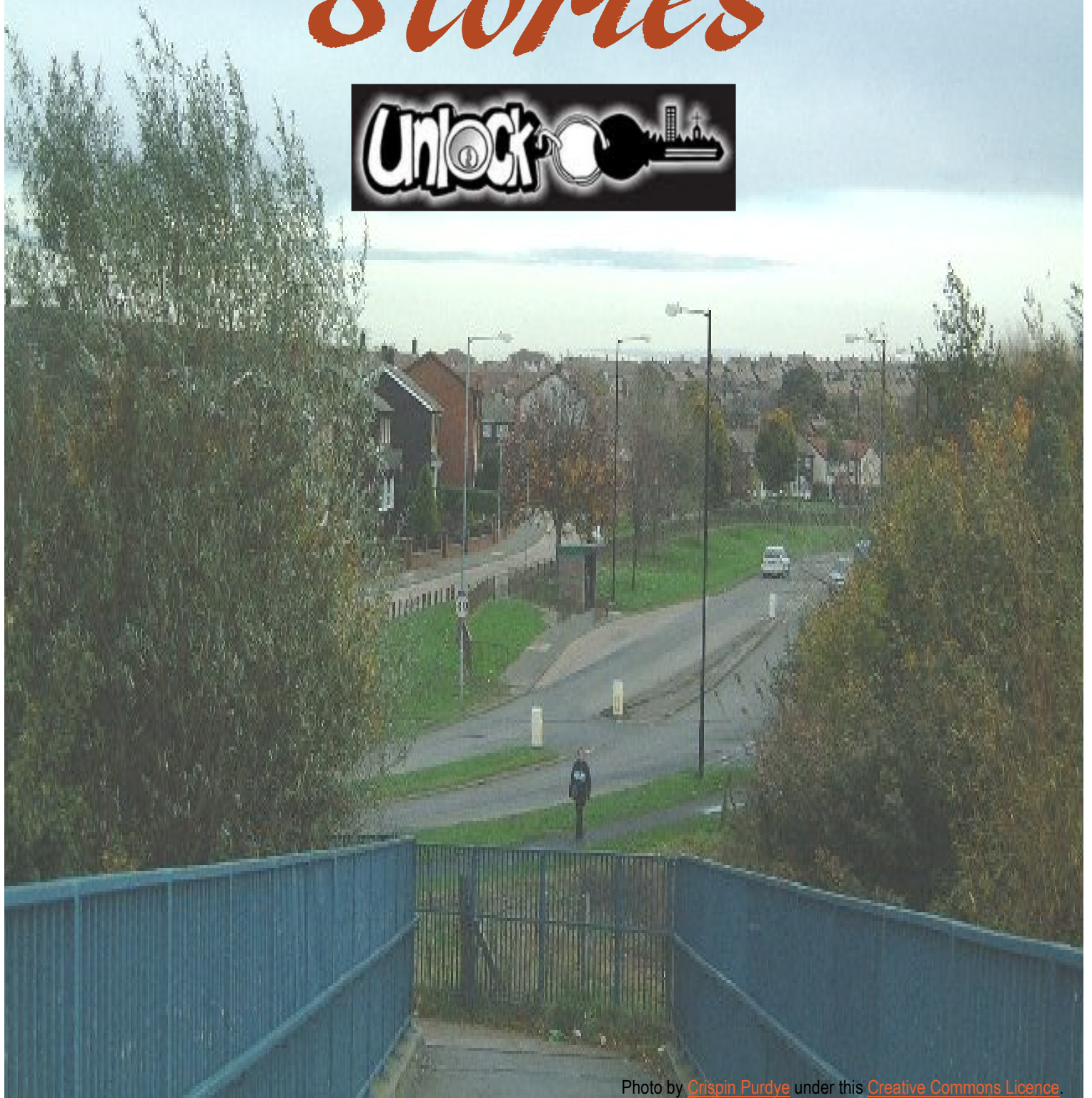


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Count Your Blessings

The first session I ran with 'The Buzz' was called 'Count Your Blessings' and I provided the group with treasure chests for them to decorate that they could keep their 'blessings' in and use as a reminder if they were feeling like everything was a bit grim. At the end of the session, it was great to hear one of the ladies really reflecting positively on her children and all the joy they bring to her life and their uniqueness and gifts.



An Extra Audience

Unlock works primarily with adults, but sometimes children really help us to do that - 'During the Bible story telling the children were great, they sat and listened so well. When I came to the end of the story I looked out and the parents/carers were sat just the same, listening, but the best thing was all the helpers doing the lunch in the kitchen, standing buttering bread, knives aloft, listening so intently!'



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Changes

There has been a noticeable change in the relationships of some the Estate Residents Association.

They will think more about what

they are doing and why they are doing it. They are more open to suggestions and definitely more willing to listen to others. The vicar said that members of the residents association are much more open to conversations with her and there has been a positive change in the relationships within the community.



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Hearing about Jesus



I wasn't going to do The Ark Holiday club this past half term as there was a lot going on at the local Bunny Hill Centre for families. However one of the residents asked if we would do it. I explained there was other stuff going on and maybe no one would turn up. She said she would tell people The Ark was on and we should do it anyway.

25 children came with parents/carers/grandparents; we had a total of about 40 people!

I was overwhelmed, why?

Because one of the young Mums asked for The Ark to be on and then she asked others to come.

The Children and the families chose to come knowing there was other more 'secular' stuff going on. They came knowing they would hear about Jesus!



I am learning:-

that how I think things can be done is not always how others think it can be done, but can work out just as well if not better!! An example of this was the craft &



chat. I thought it would be good if it was a little structured, e.g.: a theme for the afternoon, chat about it then do some crafting. However the ladies suggested we just put everything out, chose something to do and chatted while we did it.

It has been amazing the conversations we have had about faith, life, the universe!! and when the Vicar popped in she said it had the most lovely warm atmosphere.



Unlock Estate Journey

I have been reflecting on where my Unlock journey on the estate began and where we are now.

It's just so great to hear things like.....'I wish Jam Club could be on every day!' from Harry.....

People stopping me on the way to get milk from the shops, to pray for someone saying 'oh you're the lady from church you'll be able to help,'.....

To Jason age 5 asking 'why did Jesus die and the nails in his hands must have really, really hurt!'



It is a wonderful road to travel; it's got a few twists and turns and a couple of steep hills, the odd blind bend. It can be challenging, but it is exciting and a privilege to journey along it with all the amazing people I have met on the way.

Christingle on an un-churched Estate

The Christingle service was all set up in the Community Chapel, the 'Community Choir' had been practising and sounded like angels!! The candles were lit, there was a true sense of God in and at the Centre. The 30 Christingles were ready (a group of us had put them together on the afternoon), the chapel could seat 30 so I thought we would have more than enough room.....well that star must have been shining over our estate; people started coming in; we led them to the chapel, then one of the residents came running in saying, 'you'll never fit them all in the chapel, there are lots of people coming.' Sure enough everything had to be moved into the community hall; there were over 60 Adults and Children who came, Amazing!!

The choir led the carols, one of the residents read prayers (she had never done anything like that before) one of the residents children sang the first verse of Away in a Manger, and when we dimmed the lights and everyone joined in with the singing, it was beautiful!

I am sure the Angels were singing with us.



But what about the faith bit?

I feel really encouraged by the meetings with the local residents and how they are engaging with what my work with Unlock is about.



That was evident when in one of the meetings someone was getting quite enthusiastic about what we could do in the Craft & Chat group and someone else said, 'yes, that all sounds great, but what about the faith bit'!

Appreciated

The work we do with Unlock can be a little isolated and you can sometimes feel you're 'out there on your own' and I have to say I was feeling a little bit 'am I doing this right?'

Then I got a text message from one of the locals asking if I would be at Craft and chat on Wednesday; then I got another asking what time, then another asking was I there yet! I didn't think anything of this.

I was with the Craft & Chat ladies having a lovely conversation about babies names and how it's the first gift you give your child, when a couple of the community came in with a beautiful bouquet of flowers (I thought it was someone's birthday!)

So what a huge surprise when they gave them to me...'they are beautiful' I said, 'but what are they for?' 'Read the card', they said...

This is what it said.....

To a special lady who we are glad to have in our lives, this is just to say thank you for being there for us all.

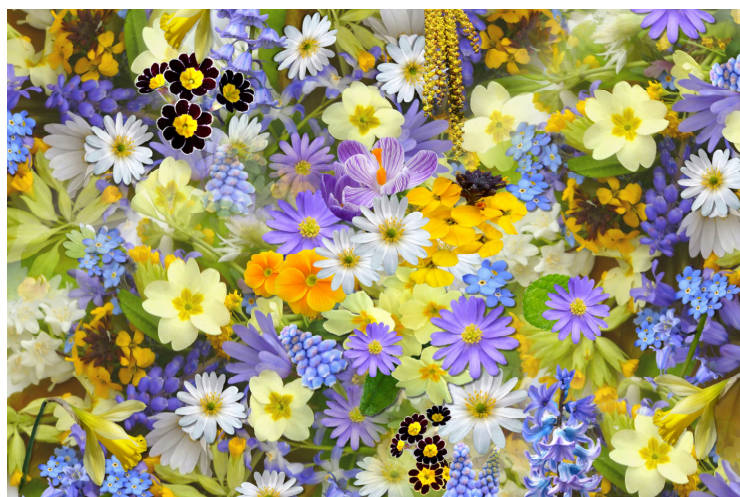


Bouquet of prayer

Some of the locals are 'into' spiritualist mediums and have on occasions invited people to come to 'sessions' in each other's homes.

At the Friday Drop In one of the young Mums mentioned this (she had hosted one of the medium sessions) to me, she asked my opinion about it; which led to an interesting conversation. I was about to go into the Chapel to do the reflection and I asked her if she would like to come.

She came along and joined in with all the responses; the reflection was a bouquet of prayer. Each person was asked to take a flower, think of a person,



place, situation that may need prayer, then as you name them, place the flower in the oasis. A beautiful bouquet of prayer was created. The young Mum was so moved by this and said she would never be able to put flowers in a vase again without thinking/praying for someone. There was such a blanket of peace came over us.

Easter Drawings

The Easter Ark was really encouraging; we showed a 20 min film of the Easter story and I did a very simple talk about going from the darkness of Good Friday to the amazing light of Easter day.

The craft we did was: - I gave them a black piece of card (to represent darkness) that if you scraped it with a pencil it had bright colours underneath (representing light).

I asked them to think about what they saw and heard on the film and draw something. It was amazing ! Some drew a cross, some did hearts and messages of love, some did family names.



Lent & Easter

It has been great doing the lent reflections; it has raised some interesting questions, for example what is Lent? What is Palm Sunday? The hope was to lead people on a journey.

We had a gentle Good Friday meditation in the Chapel that went well. But I was concerned that I was 'leaving them' on Good Friday at the cross, and not taking them to the Resurrection, (we did hand out personal invitations to everyone to join the churches in the Parish) so on Saturday night one of the residents, myself and a friend 'flower-bombed' the cross outside the community centre so on Easter Sunday morning the estate woke up to a beautiful cross covered in flowers and ribbon and a sign on it saying 'Jesus is Alive'



Unlocking the Prodigal

If there is one thing I take from my Unlock role at TEF is that I never fail to be surprised. Rarely in a disappointing way, most times in a way that really takes my breath away.

This has been evident in our weekly Faith/Bible group. We did Unlocking the Prodigal and this was an amazing start to 'unlocking' their understanding of faith and the bible.

This has opened up so many questions about, God, Jesus, and themselves, so much so they just want to continue to know and learn more. We are exploring love and prayer and talking about Lent, leading up to a Good Friday Service and a Fish Supper together.

Chantal is a great support in this group and the ladies have been very open and honest, their relationships with each other are growing and strengthening each week and again I feel that they will have good spiritual support when the time comes for me to move on.



Photo by Chaojoker, Creative Commons



Seeing Jesus - from an Unlock worker

When I drive to the estate every Friday I pray in the car on



the way; I ask Jesus that all who I meet that day will see something or hear something of Him in me. Yet every week I see something and hear something of Him in them. Thank you Jesus.

For Group Leaders

Resource name: *The Heart of the Estate*

Authors / Facilitator: Jacqueline Atkinson (Unlock Sunderland 2015 to 2018)

Unlike most Unlock Bible study packs, this resource is not designed as a series of sessions to work through with a small group. Rather it is a set of inspirational ideas with some indications of the impact they have had in a real life unchurched urban estate community.

All of the work undertaken was developed as result of compassionate listening and prolonged engagement with local people: their expressed needs, their stories, their concerns. Much of it was in response to their direct requests. Nevertheless, the overall aims and underlying approach are exactly the same as in all Unlock work. In this context Unlock's approach was applied to the whole structure of the work, rather than just to individual sessions and activities.

Aims: To enable participants to engage with their own stories in relation to their own local community and personal issues. To create opportunities to explore how their own story connects with the bigger story within scripture. To be able to reflect on the impacts, both positive and negative, of our attitudes and actions. To enable participants to reflect theologically on situations in their lives and in society, and to make reflective and informed choices about how they respond to challenging experiences and circumstances.

Outcomes: The groups will be more able to engage with each other, using a reflective theological cycle, starting from their own story or the stories of others in the group, or things that have affected them on a daily basis, without necessarily having to have to understand at an academic level. The group will be more able to refer to the connections made with Scripture, and intended changed approaches in similar situations in the future. The group will be able to reflect on their own experiences, and topical issues which affect them, and to do this in relation to scripture. The group will be better able to manage the points of crisis and tension in their lives with reference to scripture.



Unlock, by various names, has been around since 1972, trying to help (mainly) urban Christians to understand and share their faith appropriately. Our life experience matters; our stories; our joys and sorrows. The Bible has plenty to say, more than we'll ever know, about our lives, if we know how to read it and apply it - if we know how to **UNLOCK** it!

The work outlined in this pack applies the learning cycle on page 24, **starting by using a 'prompt'** or ice breaker to draw out group member's stories. Allow plenty of time for people to respond to the prompts and share their own experiences and listen carefully as they do. What are the themes and issues arising in the stories? Try to remember so that you can remind people later if necessary.

The next stage is to **find part of the Bible** that comes to mind having listened to the stories. If you are using these sessions with a non-church group you will need to be ready to provide some Bible links, but only if they are unable to do so. It is always worth giving them a chance to come up with a Bible link for themselves first; they may surprise you! Then ask the group to explore **connections**, similarities or differences.

Finally there is a **reflective activity**, giving people an opportunity to reflect on the session and any action they might want to take as a result. The reflective activity creates space in which discussion and reflection can continue in an unforced way.

How well the group know and trust one another will affect the type of story that they share, often the newer the group, the more light hearted the stories are likely to be.



Unlock uses an approach to engaging with the Bible that is different to traditional Bible studies (see page 24). Unlock's approach starts from the stories and experiences of group members, whereas a more traditional approach starts from the Biblical text. Unlock's approach has been found to work well with small groups of urban, oral learners from outside of the church. There are many free resources on the Unlock website designed for use with such groups. However, because each of these resources was designed for a particular group in a particular time and place they are unlikely be a perfect fit for your group as they stand. They are offered more as inspiration to you to design your own materials along the same lines, rather than as ready to use packages.

Unlock usually works with people outside of church who may be interested in finding out a bit more about faith but perhaps are not attracted to the formal methods of learning often associated with church. Our work is based on a reflective learning cycle and is a tried and tested way of introducing people to the Bible in a non-threatening way. Many churches have activities that draw in members of their surrounding community but then struggle with how to move on from those relationships into exploring faith, especially in urban environments where anything formal might be treated with suspicion.

This resource has been developed by an Unlock worker in Sunderland. The activities were developed to meet the needs of specific groups of local people.

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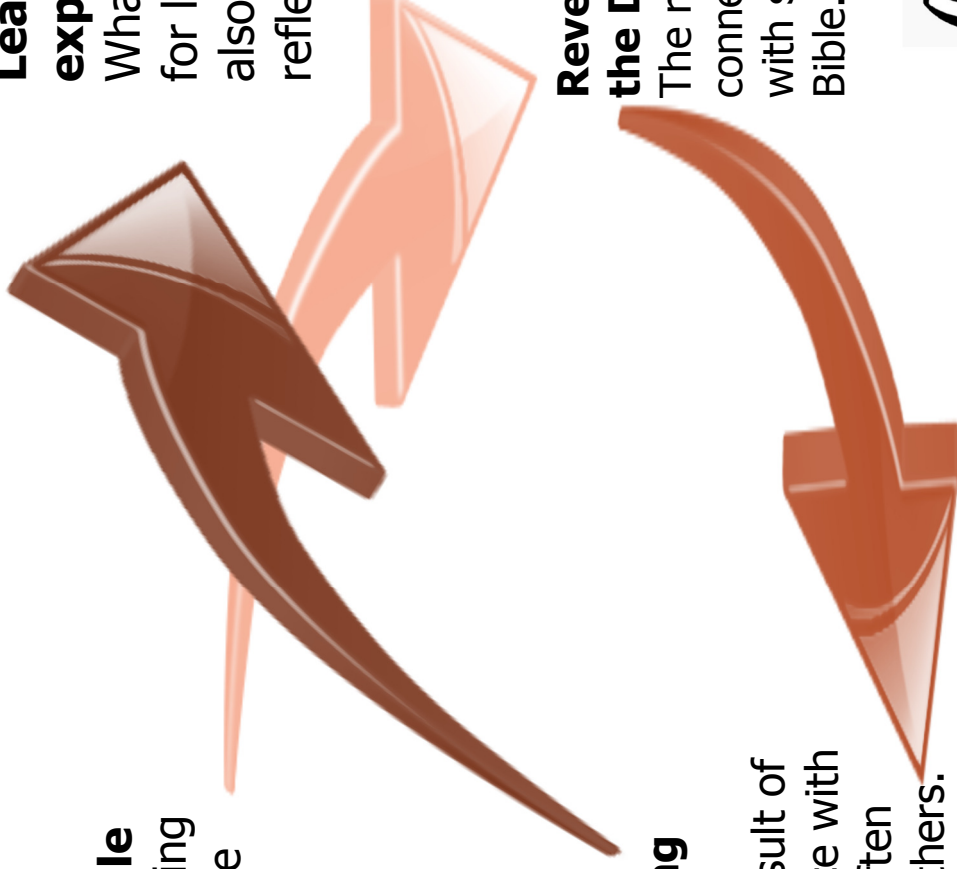
The Unlock Learning Cycle

Unlocking real life stories of urban people
Start with the group telling stories from their real life experience.

Leading to more experience
What we learn now is learnt for life and changes us. We also learn to keep reflecting!

Releasing life changing skills and confidence
Change happens as a result of linking real life experience with the Bible. This change often leads to action among others.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ
The real life stories are connected to and compared with similar situations in the Bible.



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