



“Bridge Church Lincoln has always believed that the fullest possible expression of growing and going in Lincoln is through place and presence—not just activities or action, but through communities of believers worshipping, serving, rooted in specific neighbourhoods. For nearly twenty years, Bridge Church has operated through community hubs in various forms across Lincoln. It has partnered with churches, the City of Lincoln Council, and other organisations to provide aid to the city through Food Banks, clothing fanks, summer food vouchers for families and a citywide Christmas Sacks Project.”

Mike Farley serves on the Senior Leadership of Bridge Church, having pastored another church for ten years. The two churches merged in January 2019 after years of strong friendship and shared vision, partnering in projects and mission in the city. Bridge Church is currently based in two parts of the city, Park Ward and Sincil Bank. Both neighbourhoods are marked by social and health inequalities.

Discernment:



In early 2019, Bridge Church operated across three sites in the two neighbourhoods.

Mike, newly appointed Community Pastor, was asked to prayerfully discern the future direction of the church's community presence. The question before the leadership was not simply *what* to run, but *who* they were called to be. Throughout the year, Mike and senior leader Sian sensed a strong pull toward creating “home-from-home spaces”—second front rooms where people could find welcome, hospitality, healing, and hope. Signs of this were possible with the charity shop, and café run in Park Ward.

The idea of *centres of shalom*, places of welcome whereby through the wholeness of God, a person could find wholeness themselves. This was not project design but spiritual discernment. As stated in the latest Theos Report: Making a Neighbourhood Health Service, these places would become “anchors” in and of the community.

During this season, God wove together a series of relational connections that would prove pivotal. One of those connections was a local member of a local NHS Neighbourhood Team who had been exploring her own faith during this period, connecting with both churches prior to merger, through Messy Church, local school connections, and mutual friendships.

She connected Sian and Mike to a recently appointed NHS Mental Health lead in the Neighbourhood Team, coming from Nottinghamshire, having been integral to founding their multi-faith chaplaincy programme. The national Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Transformation programme was launching, and Lincolnshire had been chosen as one of only twelve early implementer sites. She arrived with a clear awareness of the NHS's limitations and the Church's unique strengths. In one of their first conversations, she said:



“The NHS does the medical side of mental health well but does not really understand community. The church does community well. What if we worked together?”

This became a watershed moment. Values aligned, and relationships deepened over the course of some months and it became clear that connections within the neighbourhood with the City of Lincoln Council and now this with NHS Lincolnshire were sharing the same purpose: a commitment to dignity and worth; the need for a long-term presence; grassroots transformation; open-handed collaboration where agendas were left at the front door and a deep need for community listening.

It became increasingly clear to Bridge Church that God was weaving something larger than any single organisation could contain. Our shared vision and ‘calling’ was to see people as they truly are. The NHS aptly calls this person centred; and Bridge calls it ‘imago Dei’

Doing the Journey



The vision grew: **a community safe space every fifteen to twenty minutes from a person's home.** It was clear that the church enabled could provide such spaces.

Bridge Church offered space in its Sincil Bank site as a pilot Wellbeing Hub, a “centre of shalom” embedded in the NHS transformation programme. They entered openly, transparently, and without hiding their identity as a church.

This continued through the difficult Covid days, as everything went fallow, but preparations could take place. Bridge Church undertook aid projects for the city, and the site became a Covid Vaccination centre, as partnership continued and deepened further. In 2021, the Hub could open and from welcoming one gentleman for a month, word of mouth spread and soon the hub was a hive of activity, local support and a space whereby professionals, especially from the NHS could meet their ‘patients’ in a safe, warm, welcoming and non-clinical setting. To Bridge Church, they are always welcome guests. This forms the core of the idea that this work is about the formation of embassies of the God’s Kingdom. As people enter, they receive the grace-filled welcome of a Kingdom different to that from which people came. This is a home from home, and it is the home of God’s people, welcoming all and benefitting all.

Today, Bridge Church is recognised as the flagship Wellbeing Hub in Lincolnshire. A research-led NHS evaluation found that for every £1 invested, the Hub generates £5.21 (gross) in social value.

Bridge Central now hosts a weekly Wellbeing Space for sixteen hours, offering free refreshments and hospitality; craft, art, games, cooking; access to free washing and drying facilities; Citizen’s Advice and Salvation Army Employment Plus drop-ins; appointments with health professionals; Kintsugi Hope Wellbeing Groups, book clubs, and volunteering opportunities for people who may not be able to volunteer elsewhere.

The space is distinctively Christian, yet fully collaborative. It intentionally Christian with artwork on the walls, a prayer space, a daily rhythm of prayer open to all, and a gentle but unmistakable Christian presence. Christian identity is not diluted; it is lived.

Additional to this, Bridge Church have successfully built a team of Community Connectors who work within and alongside a series of Community Hubs developed in partnership with six other churches across the area, all of whom are embedded in the local neighbourhoods. Mike leads the team whose Christian faith shapes how they build trust, listen, foster community-led solutions, and hold together the partnership ecosystem.

The NHS recognises Connectors as “the glue” of the programme. Bridge Church has now partnered with at least six other churches to establish Hubs or satellite spaces that embody hospitality, listening, care, and community connection.

Alongside this, Lincoln’s Night Light Cafés—first birthed in the church and then scaled in partnership with the NHS, now offer nightly non-clinical mental health support across the county.

Partnership, participation, and perseverance are key, with prayer as the engine, not an afterthought. The work involves navigating misunderstandings, moments where the NHS pulls back, seasons of “desert” and discouragement. Yet consistent presence, listening, and steady Christian witness continues to build trust.

Bridge Church’s partnership with NHS Lincolnshire is not simply a model of cross-sector collaboration. It is a picture of the Church living its calling to be the body of Christ amid real human struggles.

Bridge Church has taken these words seriously — offering its presence, its space, its people, and its faith to the wellbeing of Lincoln and more widely across the county. In doing so, it has shown that collaboration with the NHS does not require abandoning Christian distinctiveness; rather, it allows that distinctiveness to shine.

A Prophetic Presence

The prayer of Teresa of Avila, ancient as it is, stands the test of time for this work and partnership, participation, and perseverance, forming Christian Community Hubs in both parts of the city and now in partnership much more widely.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*