



“Life Church, Bristol, is a community of people that stand together around the incredible love of God, shown to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are a church made up of people of all ages and backgrounds based in the Fishponds area of the city.”

Tara Macolm serves on the Senior Leadership team and is the Community Outreach Pastor. The church is based at the Vassall Centre, and they work in literally close partnership with Bristol Charities who have set up two Community Hubs to “empower local residents and groups to shape their neighbourhoods, by offering tailored activities, support services, and opportunities to connect, with the aim to create lasting positive change. The Vassall Centre is one of these Hubs.

Bristol Charities is a longstanding secular organisation in the city. Tara tells their story of partnership.

Discernment:



How did we get started? What was our vision as a church and how did that lead us to relate and then partner in the way we do?

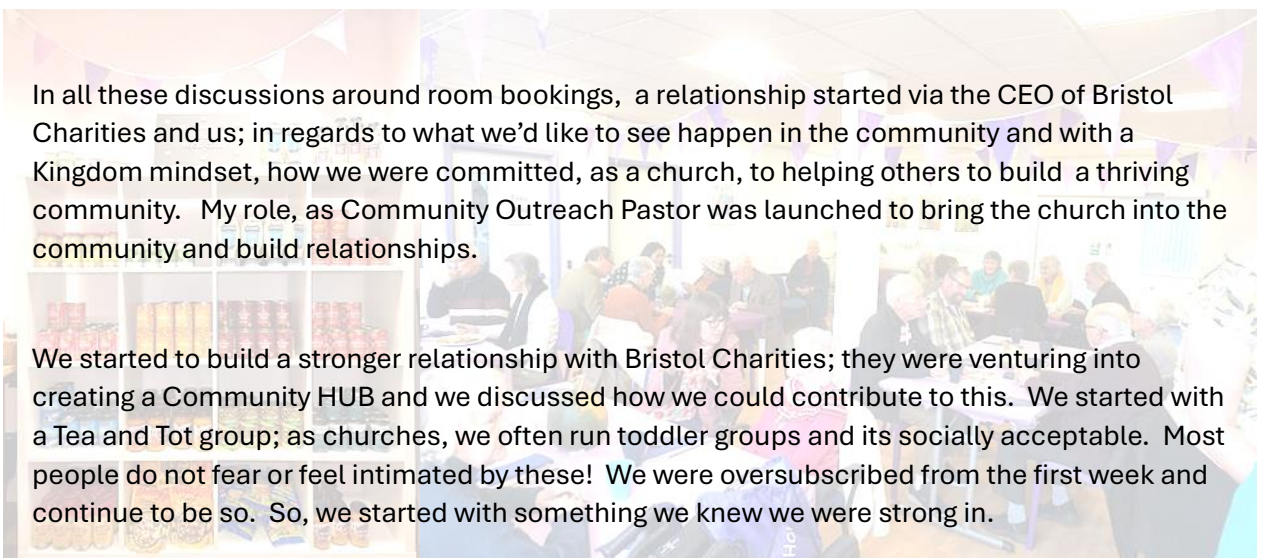
We got started when we first moved into the Vassall Centre as a church a couple of years ago. We had grown out of our existing building and needed more space. Initially, we rented the largest room at the centre.

At that time, the building was scheduled to be demolished and new housing to be built. After much discussion and the community backlash, this was squashed. The owners, Bristol Charities, decided to repurpose part of the centre as a Community HUB.

But, our church was outgrowing this new room. So, we had to move to a bigger space for Sunday services, only a few blocks away. However, we maintained our official office at the Vassall Centre. We as a church felt God wanted us in this community, so we started with our Kids and Youth programs to offer outreach to the local area via these. However, we still met at a local school for Sunday services.

In all these discussions around room bookings, a relationship started via the CEO of Bristol Charities and us; in regards to what we'd like to see happen in the community and with a Kingdom mindset, how we were committed, as a church, to helping others to build a thriving community. My role, as Community Outreach Pastor was launched to bring the church into the community and build relationships.

We started to build a stronger relationship with Bristol Charities; they were venturing into creating a Community HUB and we discussed how we could contribute to this. We started with a Tea and Tot group; as churches, we often run toddler groups and its socially acceptable. Most people do not fear or feel intimidated by these! We were oversubscribed from the first week and continue to be so. So, we started with something we knew we were strong in.



Once the charity saw how we worked, we had bigger questions around faith, how we related with the people coming in etc. We drafted up a 'Faith' charter agreement that didn't stop us from sharing the gospel; rather, it was by relationship where we also wouldn't force the gospel. If invited to pray, we did. However, we weren't teaching the bible at the tot group. We let our relationships build with these parents and families organically and let the Spirit work through us. What happened? Naturally, people asked about our church. And faith. And yes, we do pray with them when they ask!

Once this had started, we ventured into partnering with other sessions. Warm Spaces was launched; Hub Drop ins and Christmas carols; Family work and food clubs; recently launched a Fix it Forward (community DIY/garden clean up with volunteers)

Doing the Journey:



The relationship is constantly evolving and growing.

But what's amazing is that Bristol Charities also see the benefits of us working together in partnership. We have the same mindset to transform a community and help to relieve isolation, poverty and suffering. We share these mindsets. And through this relationship, I'm contracted from them to work extra hours in addition to my church hours. It really is a partnership.

There are some activities we run as a church; Sunday services, Kids Friday nights, Youth Friday nights are all Christian content. Christmas services and carols, again, all church content.

There are some activities we lead on, yet partner with Bristol Charities; Tea and Tots, Warm Spaces (Soup and Social), Fix it Forward, (DIY/Garden clean up)

And other activities we support but Bristol Charities leads: Family Engagement work (befriending/ pastoral), Food club, etc.

And other activities that Bristol Charities run solely, we don't actively plan in. Although, we often serve in these as volunteers to help run the sessions/events.

So we are often in the HUB, it becomes almost seamless.

We also have introduced other Christian charities to help us with Family engagement; CAP (Christians Against Poverty) The Noise (clean-up/community) SEN charities etc.

