

## **The story of the Charlton Fund 2015-24**

On an allotment site a flag advertises that a group of people from a local baptist church is around. They are part of the allotment community. Towards the end of the afternoon chairs, a table and a parasol are set out, tea and coffee are made and some cake is offered. The people from the allotment are invited over. This is where the Church is.

A small group meets in a house. There were five, now there can be as many as 20. Among them are 3 families and one of the families has a baby and a 3 year old who have asked for a service of presentation. This is a fledging church. It may or may not establish itself into the dreams of its people but all that matters is, for now, it is serving them well.

At lunch-time in a city centre church people gather for a talk and a discussion on an area of restorative justice. The number these talks attract grow considerably during lockdown when the meetings happen on zoom.

There's a crowd of about 200 and during the course of the match the chaplain walks around the ground. She's become a familiar face for many people because she's always there, often on the turnstile as people enter and she is up for whatever conversation people want to have. At the end of the match she huddles with the team on the pitch who know her well.

A touring theatre company are performing a play about radicalisation to a group of secondary school students. Afterwards there's a series of workshops for the students to explore the issue more. A schools worker, supported by the church, will follow up the conversation at the weekly lunchtime club.

A child says that the art group he comes to is the highlight of his week. At school he's been bullied but the art group helps him to talk about it. He says; "it cheers me up and makes me feel better about myself".

A group of teenage women gather at the fourth of their weekly sessions. They're half way through a course that is helping them to manage what feels like a very challenging and frightening world..

Three trustees from the Charlton Fund make a visit to one of the projects. They sit in a light, clean and tastefully decorated room. Behind them large patio doors, paid for by the Trust, leads onto an area where children can play and people can meet. They are shown pictures of what the room was like and how much work has been done to make it a home, a church and place of belonging.

The next month the 3 trustees meet again to report back to the rest of the group. The group is a mix of people from the Southern Counties Baptist Association and New Road Baptist Church. In 2015 the church received £190,000, from the sale of Charlton on Otmoor Baptist Chapel, which it planted 200 years ago. Drawing on its history of supporting and planting churches over the centuries, the church decided to use this money to fund new work around the county.

The Charlton Fund has been available to Baptist Churches in Oxfordshire to 'engage in new and imaginative expressions of mission' with their local communities for 9 years.

All the money has now been spent and the Fund has been closed. These are just a few little snapshots of the projects supported, from Bloxham to Barton to Bicester, from Witney to Woodstock to Wolvercote, from Cowley to Kings Sutton to Kidlington, from Oxford to Henley to Didcot and Littlemore. Thirteen churches have been supported with grants from £800 to £24,000.

The Charlton Fund is a story of churches that have reached out in new and imaginative ways and, as they have done so, they have touched the lives of many people, including the bereaved, the homeless, the isolated, frightened and those living in poverty. This is the work of the kingdom, as Jesus describes it; "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these sisters and brothers of mine, you did for me".

Trustees of the Charlton-on-Otmoor Living Legacy Fund  
March 2024