

Prayer for Children and Children's Workers in Derby: 1995 to the present.

Prayer for children and children's workers has been a central feature of prayer in Derby since the mid 90's. Two movements started in about 1995, without being aware of each other. But then, God knew!

The newly formed "City Vision", a relational network of the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches across the city, began a number of prayer initiatives, of which one was prayer for the City Council and another, Pray for Schools. The latter was one of the most exciting prayer groups that any who took part could ever remember! It was up to a dozen people, but what it lacked in numbers, it made up for in anointing and excitement! There was normally a map on the floor, showing the schools, and everything happened to that map: It was swept, it had water sprinkled on it, it was stamped on ... whatever enthusiastic intercessors do! During that time, we were led to pray for funding, which came in almost immediately from the Government in terms of multi-millions. The other group which prayed for the city council saw a great reward when a new mayor was appointed who, being a Christian, was determined to visit every primary school in the city, dressed in his robes, to do a Christian assembly. He had a small child-sized mayor's set of robes which travelled into school with him, so that at least one lucky child could dress up and dream of one day being mayor!

Without either group knowing about the other, a children's city-wide event in 1995 was called to bring together children's workers from across the city. It was decided that this would be a great thing to continue and so the charity Derby Kids for Christ (DKFC) was formed. As the years went by, there was a regular prayer meeting not only for children's workers, but to pray for the children in the schools. Prayer meetings continue monthly, one is on-line, with a similar one in a House of Prayer in the city, and one hosted by the diocese. Meetings to encourage and support the workers have been a prominent feature. Along the way, family prayer days called "Prayer Warriors" were also called, getting children and parents together to worship and pray, incorporating creative prayer stations. Also, DKFC brought together two school assembly teams, who went into schools every week. One of those continues today.

For the last 5 years or so (and over this last year, working with the diocese), DKFC has produced a 'Map of the City' which lists all 75 primary schools in the city, plus now the 19 secondary schools, with a carefully researched list of the various Christian inputs to each of the schools, in terms of assemblies and clubs, via the various projects ranging from local church links to 'Open the Book', the 'Experience' series, 'Prayer Spaces', 'Walk through the Bible' etc. 58 of the 75 have an 'outside' input at least termly, with 34 of these being monthly or even more frequently. The number of churches and teams involved is high, for which we praise God. Currently only 8 primaries have no identifiable outside input. This document is published across all interested groups, so that we can try to 'close the gap'. It is important to work whilst it is still light because darkness may come ... 'Experience Christmas' and 'Easter' have been offered to 8 primary schools across the most ethnically diverse area of Derby for the last 14 years. 'Prayer Spaces' has run in majority Muslim schools. God is so good! When done sensitively with good relationship and respect these things can be done.

In one estate in Derby a group of mums met to pray for their local primary schools. One school had a poor reputation and they heard from a member of staff that whatever they poured into the children, it felt like nothing changed. The school later had a serious fire and after nervously contacting the head, the mums were given free rein to pray around the premises. In league tables the following year they heard that it had achieved 14th place as the most improved school in the country.

The Cathedral is regularly engaging with 800 school children a week through their church music in schools project, and their Sunday ministries, including monthly 'Messy Cathedrals' are growing steadily. The cathedral school is now well established and there is joined up ecumenical support from a range of churches for Christian young people. A group of churches who would relate to HTB, provide evidence that young people and families are open to the gospel, with one increasing its numbers of children and young people attending by 1,500% between 2020 and 2022.

Other churches have taken time to recover since covid, but now are emerging with a real focus and dedication towards children's and youth ministry. For example, churches in a couple of areas have developed a team of 20 church members around their missional priority of children and young people. Several churches, alongside YWAM derby, are working together to support young people at one of the secondary schools with regularly 50+ teenagers attending an after-school drop in for hot chocolate.

A common trend across the city has been churches providing safe spaces for those who find society otherwise unsafe. For example, young people on the autistic and ADHD spectrum are incredibly welcomed by some churches specialising in this, and in the contexts of these safe spaces they are exploring and discovering faith. Mental health remains an ever-worsening crisis amongst younger generations, and churches that bring a lasting offer of hope are often well received, for example recent Message Trust events were well received by schools and led to links being formed with local churches that previously felt impossible.

There is a lot happening and it is encouraging for us to write this, and to see the results of the prayer that has been going on since 1995. Sometimes it is good to 'step back' and ask if there are any answers to prayer? It is not always obvious until you look!