

The Cornerstone is part of Lancaster Methodist Church and is a community of people working together to create a safe place in the city. Before the pandemic, the Cornerstone Café was serving at least 100 people a week and between 50 and 100 people were using the building.



### Why was your organisation founded?

We are part of Lancaster Methodist Church which was formed in 2001. The Cornerstone became an outreach centre for the church. It was refurbished and a cafe opened in 2013.

### What services does your organisation offer?

Currently, we offer one-to-one bereavement support by phone or zoom. We are also beginning an online Zoom course called 'Getting Through the Grief' that begins this Friday at 11am. We have a fortnightly bereavement support group on Zoom for people with learning disabilities. We have just begun a lockdown support group called 'Moving to Freedom' which meets each Thursday at 7pm. We are currently offering worship, reflection and scripture study and a fortnightly men's group on Zoom. When our building is open we partner with various organisations which include Lancashire Youth Challenge, Lancaster District Community and Voluntary Solutions, 'Canchat', 'Christians Against Poverty', 'City of Sanctuary', the 'Refugee Advice and Information Service'. We offer meeting rooms for hire and counselling spaces. We are developing a range of activities and services across South Lancaster and the city centre including a Digital Champions network to support people with Computers; a Social Action Hub in South Lancaster, working in a community organising way to listen to and support residents; two Emergency Response Centres (city centre and South Lancaster); a community Coffee Space and community social media and a newsletter.

### How have your services changed during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?

All our regular groups and activities have moved to Zoom. Our chaplain continues to offer a lot of pastoral support by phone. Much of our community development work is currently done through virtual meetings, virtual coffee mornings and social media. Many of our support groups continued in person until the third lockdown, we are beginning to support them back safely.

### Have you seen an increase in people using your services?

We have had an increase in referrals for bereavement support. We have also seen an increase in need for specific groups including lockdown babies and refugees.

### Feedback from people using the service:

"I was referred to Simon Stewart, the chaplain at The Cornerstone by a mental health nurse, initially to help with repressed grief over the death of loved ones, and to address other losses in my life. However, the work that transpired was significantly broader than this, covering long-standing mental health issues including anxiety and anorexia, and obsessive exercising. I have worked with therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists over the last 10 years, yet the support and guidance I received from Simon have been in many ways more helpful. I believe that the progress I have made with my mental health would not have been possible without this type of support, and it is comforting to know that this is offered unconditionally and that the door is always open."

### How can people get involved?

We are increasing our community development and engagement work, particularly based on Scotforth Road. This work is in its infancy but has already grown to include digital engagement, social action and the creation of community activity. We plan to develop a community coffee shop and a social meeting space within our building. For more information please contact Phil McGrath, our centre manager, who is doing our outreach and community development work at philcornerstonecafe@gmail.com