

The Lighthouse Group

Social exclusion

Over the past few years there has been a significant and increasing national need for effective strategies to tackle poor attendance and low academic attainment in schools serving the most deprived areas of the UK.

Many young people are being denied months – sometimes years – of their education entitlement and are missing out on opportunities they will never have again. Short term school exclusion can lead to life-long social exclusion and alienation. More often than not, school exclusion adversely affects the young person excluded, both in the short-term and the long-term. It may also have a detrimental impact upon the excluded pupil's family as well as a profoundly negative influence on their local community and wider society.

One organisation which is striving to address the issue of exclusion and behavioural difficulties is The Lighthouse Group. The Lighthouse Group is a Christian educational charity which works with young people who are excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion from school.

A new kind of school

Six years ago, The Lighthouse Group received a grant from the BBC's *Children in Need* foundation to provide life skills education for disaffected young people in inner-city Bradford. Today, the project has culminated in the development of a DfES-registered independent school.



Personal Advisors offer valuable career advice



Vocational qualifications in music are on offer



Significant relationships are often developed through leisure activities

Paul Chenery has been the Marketing and Public Relations Co-ordinator at The Lighthouse Group since April 2005. His role is to communicate the vision of The Lighthouse Group so that others can contribute to the work and help to transform the lives of the young people that the charity exists to support. Paul previously spent a year studying theology and working for a well known pharmaceutical company.



Skills for independent living are taught

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Young people work towards nationally accredited qualifications



A team of 27 staff work with more than 200 young people each year to deliver unique educational programmes that are specifically designed to support those who have failed in (and been failed by) mainstream education. The Lighthouse Group focuses on transforming the lives of disaffected young people in crisis within education, with the goal of reviving their academic fortunes so they can attain GCSEs.

Working in small groups of no more than eight, young people are taught by a team of three adults: one teacher and two teaching assistants. The net result is that not only do many of the young people achieve at the highest standard whilst attending programmes at The Lighthouse Group, but more than ninety percent are successfully re-integrated back into a mainstream school or youth training programme.

Blessed are the peacemakers

Programmes achieve success by tackling the issues that underpin behavioural difficulties, whilst providing focused development in basic numeracy and literacy.

The Lighthouse Group realises that problems at school are often the outworking of problems at home, hence the significance of the organisation's Family Support Team, which aims to tackle the underlying issues that cause behavioural difficulties in the classroom. Families which find themselves in crisis are offered in-depth and compassionate support. The Family Support Team mediates relationships between family, school and the young person.

The Lighthouse Group's brand of alternative education support is now funded as a social enterprise, enabling it to work in partnership with 23 secondary schools and the local education authority. Clear strategic leadership and planning has enabled The Lighthouse Group and its partners to build a strong, practical commitment to providing excellent and sustainable educational provision to those who are excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion.

What the young people say

One youngster said: 'I started going to Church after being involved with The Lighthouse Group. While I was there I made some great friends and started attending more regularly. I believe that God has changed my life for the better and I want everyone to know about it. I want to thank all the people who have got me to this point, especially the guys at The Lighthouse Group. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be where I am today.'



Intensive classroom support helps teach basic key skills

Christian community

Because The Lighthouse Group is an independent, non-denominational Christian organisation it is also able to work in partnership with a number of local Churches. This, in turn, opens up opportunities for speaking to young people about difficult life issues and choices (eg drug and alcohol abuse, depression, relationships and unplanned pregnancy) from a Christian perspective.

A range of small group activities allow staff members to establish and build strong relationships with each young person. Positive relationships like this are a practical outworking of the Christian beliefs of staff members.

Many of the young people really value the significant relationships they have with staff and their peers, and respond positively to the mentoring and guidance they receive. Many also feel part of a wider Christian community and develop a sense of belonging with respect to the churches involved in the project.

Building on the vision that was developed to serve Bradford, The Lighthouse Group has begun the process of developing centres of excellence in other UK cities with the aim of transforming the lives and educational prospects of many of the hardest-to-reach young people and bringing hope to many of the nation's neediest families.

■ Paul Chenery

Another wrote: 'Thank you all 4 your help and support when I was going through a bad time, you are lifesavers. You saved me before it was too late, you should be given gold medals. You and all the hospital staff have been so supportive. I didn't know what the drugs were doing to me but now I know that my life is worth living and there is a chance 4 me to have a good life and be happy without drugs. Thank you all so much. I know writing a letter isn't much but I need you all to know I'm so thankful, I can trust people now as well and I'm a new person. Thank you so much and I'll never stop saying THANK YOU!!!'