

## John Hamilton introduces the work at Dawson Christian Centre, Dagenham

Dawson Christian Centre is one of two centres that LCM has in the borough of Barking and Dagenham, in north-east London. Over the years the borough has had much bad press over violence among young people, the BNP, crime and so on. There are these issues, but there is much to be thankful and grateful for as well – and nothing more so than the number of good churches right across the board that are active in reaching out to the community with God’s word and deed.

Daniel Martin, Victoria Adamkiewicz and myself are the full-time workers who are based here at the Dawson Christian Centre. Along with our team of volunteers – who do an outstanding work – our number one aim is to point and persuade people to trust in Jesus! Our mission statement is very simple: ‘We at Dawson Christian Centre exist to share with our community the love of God in Jesus Christ’.

Barking and Dagenham used to be a predominantly white working class borough, but this has really changed over the last few years. Recent figures stated that in a population of 167,000, the breakdown included 72% white

John (left) visiting a friend



British, 1.5% Irish, 3.9% ‘other white’, 2.8% Indian, 2.25% Pakistani, 1.1% Bengali, 2.4% Caribbean, 7.6% African, and 0.9% Chinese. In the last couple of years the Eastern European population has greatly increased.

We at Dawson serve our community in many different ways, and over a hundred adults and young people attend our events each week. Our regular events include youth clubs, a drop-in lunch club and a toddler group.

Our two weekly *youth clubs* are for school years 4-6 and 7-11; over twenty-five young people, mostly boys, come to each group. The young people are from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds, and we try and provide a safe, fun environment for them. They have football, pool, computer games, board games, crafts and pamper sessions for the girls. We also have a short ten-minute talk time sharing the Bible with the young

people in a relevant way. We are often amazed by the questions that they ask. One boy in particular, C, also comes along to the lunchtime club we run in a local secondary school. He is very inquisitive and was given a youth Bible to help him in his search to understand who God really is.

Kids & Co is our weekly *parent and toddler group* and we get over forty toddlers and thirty adults attending. The children enjoy playing with a variety of toys, games and crafts, and there is music, singing and stories from the Bible. We encourage the parents and carers to join in. It is a fantastic opportunity for us to get alongside children and adults alike, building friendships, offering support and sharing our faith. Some of the parents have come along to the Alpha sessions we run.

We run our *drop-in* every Friday between noon and 3pm. This has proven to be a fantastic means of making and building real friendships with our local community for Jesus’ sake and as a stepping stone into his church. Our centre is on a busy road right beside a bus stop, and in the warmer months we park our two huge, bright yellow parasols together with tables and chairs – and a ping-pong table – on the patio in front of our centre and meet people passing by. We offer cold drinks and Good News papers to those walking by and those waiting at the bus stop, as well as simply chatting and getting to know people.

In the colder months, all our drop-in activities are inside our hall. One end is carpeted, and we bring in settees, coffee tables, plants and so on to create a welcoming and comfortable environment

# A community centre

## our mission is to share with our community the love of God in Jesus Christ

where people can feel at ease and chat, play table or board games and use the internet. We have a light lunch available, including home-made soup during the cold winter months.

A wide range of people do drop in. A is 82; we met him on the doors about 18 months ago, built friendship, invited him along and he has been coming ever since. He now sees us as real friends; he’s completed an Alpha course, we’ve had serious conversations with him and have brought him along to church. Please pray that A will see his need to come to Jesus and know him personally. One of our families includes a toddler, his mum, his aunts and grandmum, they all have different needs, and we’ve been able to help in many practical ways; most of the family now attend a local church. Last autumn a cul-de-sac had to be evacuated, and as we were outside, the emergency services asked if the residents could use our hall; we welcomed them with open arms, and it was great to see these neighbours – some of whom didn’t know each other too well – talk to each other.

As well as these regular events, we have special events throughout the year, including Alpha courses, fun days and Scottish ceilidhs. We also allow a

number of groups to use our hall for social events that involve the local community.

We want to get ourselves known in the local community, and hopefully we can build good relationships that lead people into a personal, passionate and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. We go out as much as possible to our neighbourhood and community, visiting from door to door. All the team find this work rewarding, challenging and difficult at times, yet I believe this can be one of the most effective ways of showing our faith to our community. It is as we go to the lost that God opens up doors and hearts for us to share the good news.

Please pray for us as a team in this area of ministry as we reach out to our neighbours. At times it can seem to be difficult work, particularly as we come up against people who are involved in the occult and spiritualist churches: there almost seems to be at least one such person in every street, and at times there can be a manifestation of the battle between light and darkness. But we confidently believe that through the power of the gospel, Jesus working through us can win these people for his kingdom.

We also have good links with local ministers and pastors, and churches where we can invite people to come along to services

and, in particular, evangelistic events. One church gave us a lot of food to distribute to those in need in the community; some of the local people have been amazed that the church would do something like this.



At the drop-in

Every Wednesday we partner with one of the local vicars and a youth leader from another church and together we run a lunch club at a local secondary school. Please pray that God’s word would indeed be the power of salvation for the youth of Dagenham.

Every third Monday we take informal services at two local nursing homes and build friendships with staff and residents. This can be quite tough and demanding, as some of our older folk have various kinds of disabilities, but many enjoy singing the older hymns and listening to messages of Jesus. We spend a long time afterwards chatting to and befriending folk. Some who are unable to communicate *really* appreciate their hand being held and a warm smiling face – sometimes that’s all you can do. G regularly visits his wife in one of the homes we’ve been to, and he’s been strongly affected by a talk we gave on John 3:16 and God’s amazing grace; during a later visit he testified that he’d become a Christian and was finding it tough. He’s come to our ‘drop in’ and chatted; we were able to give him Bible notes for new Christians and to pray with him. Please pray that our Lord will support G as he cares for his wife and that he will soon be part of a local church fellowship.

Please pray that Christ will be seen in everything we say, do and think. We so need his presence with us, so that as we build friendships, folk will be drawn to Jesus as their Saviour.

Taking the air (Daniel centre)



Victoria