



Never stop believing

21 stories from Peckham



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If belief can change a life, imagine what faith and action can do when they're added to the mix.

The 21 stories which follow – each short, gripping and to the point – reveal the impact faith and action are having on people in Peckham.

They explain why over the last 21 years, we've never stopped believing. They reveal how a seed as small as a grain of mustard can change the landscape when it's planted in the right place. They stir faith in the power of the church when it operates at a raw and needy community level.

As Jesus said, a city on a hill cannot be hidden. This book is one way we're shining our light and inviting you to see what we do, to meet some of the people we work with, and to consider your own part in making this light even brighter.

Don't ever stop believing.

21 years and 27,000 clients

The Pecan timeline



1989

- Unemployment in North Peckham over 20%
- First *Employment Preparation Course* (EPC)

1990

- First Pecan newsletter printed
- Laundrette opens



1991

- First successful bid to *European Social Fund* (ESF)
- Start of *Jobclub*
- 224 individuals on EPCs, 55 found work

1992

- Laundrette closes
- 30,000 homes visited
- 10% of unemployed in North Peckham trained

1993

- First company in South Thames area to win *Investors in People* award
- Launch of *English for Speakers of Other Language* courses
- Launch of *One to One* literacy project

1994

- Launch of *Brandon* mental health courses
- Pecan help to set up *Jobcare* in Dublin

1995

- Graham Kendrick fundraising gig raises £17,000 for Pecan
- Launch of *WECAN* - replication of Pecan in Woolwich

1996

- 1000th client gets job through Pecan
- Founder Simon Pellew wins *Londoner of the Year* award
- North Peckham estates demolished

1997

- Purchase of new office building
- Launch of *CLAIT* computer training course

1998

- All staff take pay cut to help Pecan



1999

- Pecan launches *Web Presence* project to help clients learn web skills



2000

- 80 staff train over 1800 clients

2001

- Big government contract awarded for *ESOL* and *Literacy* programmes
- Refugee and asylum seeker programme launches

2002

- Move to 121a Peckham High Street
- 10,000th individual trained by Pecan
- Winner of *Inner City 100* award for fastest growing inner city organisations

2003

- End of equal pay policy
- Launch of *Employment Preparation Course* for over-50s
- Simon Pellew leaves
- Kevin Belcher starts as CEO
- Simon awarded OBE for services to the community

2004

- Over 100 staff help nearly 3000 individuals

2005

- Launch of *Morph* furniture project
- Launch of *Workout* ex-offender programme

2006

- Launch of *PEEP* youth programme



2007

- Launch of *Create* carpentry training course

2008

- Launch of *Step Up* youth programme
- Ben Stansfield starts as CEO

2009

- Launch of Peckham Foodbank



2010

- **Total of 27,000 individuals trained since 1989**



Anthony

'I tell people, "if you want a job, if you want your life to come back, go to Pecan." '

For so many of the people who come through our doors, we provide a glimmer of hope that life *can* be different.

As this book went to press, Anthony had only been with us for a few weeks. 'I will do anything for Pecan,' he explains in his thick Caribbean accent, as he leans back in his chair. 'If I'd known about this place before, I would have been here long a time ago.'

Anthony had been out of work for four months. A problem with his documents forced him to resign from his job with Southwark Council – and his visit to the job centre threw up difficulties. 'I found some cleaning jobs,' he says, 'but some of them needed a CV. I didn't have a CV, I only had the experience.'

The job centre sent Anthony to Pecan where, after an initial chat with Teresa, one of our advisers, it became clear that as well as writing a CV, he'd

further increase his opportunities by going to college to improve his literacy. 'I respect Theresa for that,' he says. 'I know that I need it to get an even better job.'

A week later he'd been accepted onto a course.

Teresa is impressed with his progress. She says, 'His self esteem is improving and new horizons are opening up for him. He's an inspiration!'

Says Anthony, 'I tell people, "if you want a job, if you want your life to come back, go to Pecan." My friends say, "Did you pay for it?" and I tell them, "No" and they say, "Where is it again?"'



Ben

'Our programme managers actually embody the hope they talk about offering.'

'We were started by a group of churches,' Ben explains, 'driven by a passion to bring hope to local people in seemingly hopeless situations.' As Pecan's Chief Executive, Ben believes it's 'this same passion which sustains us today.'

For many of our staff, it was a journey that began on the other side of the table, as Pecan clients. This is unusual for an organisation like us and Ben believes it's key.

'They understand the obstacles and complex needs that our clients face,' he says, 'and they actually embody the hope they talk about offering.'

This authenticity means we are trusted within the community, and has led to regular interactions with local and central government. 'By sharing real life stories with those who shape policy,' Ben explains, 'we can give a voice to those who are often excluded. It is increasingly allowing us to become a connection point between the community, the church and local and central government.'

'But it isn't just the integrity of our staff that sets them apart,' says Ben. 'It's their empathy and compassion, as they continually go the extra mile to build relationships.' David is the perfect example.

'Peter manages our mental health project,' Ben explains. 'David is one of his clients. Peter has arranged for David to go on a public speaking course. He's been to speaker's corner with David and to classes with him in the evenings. David is loving it. It is having a massive impact on his life.'

It's this refusal to ever give up believing which gets Ben excited. That and, in his own words, 'our staff enabling people to reach their God-given potential.'



Christina

'Because I've been out of work I know what it is like.'

In Nigeria, Christina was a teacher. Upon returning to London, her birthplace, she found that having young children made working difficult. This experience prepared her well for working with us, initially as a volunteer and now as manager of our *Information, Advice and Guidance* projects.

'When I talked to my clients, it was drawn from my own experience,' she explains. 'I would call them in the evenings or they could text my phone and I'd have a chat with them.'

It's this belief in clients' potential – expressed through a warm and supportive approach – which helped Daisy to realise her own potential.

'Daisy came to us,' recalls Christina, 'with a CV that wouldn't have got her a job. She sat down with me and I gave her my lunch, she needed it more than I did. We worked on her CV and application form. She *wanted* to work and went for an interview,

but she didn't get it and was downhearted. But she said, "Christina, I am going to go and study." And she did.'

We supported Daisy as she began a course in Human Resources and Law at Southbank University and, says Christina, 'has graduated and has a fantastic job. She is now doing her Masters and she came back to say thank you.'

For us, this refusal to give up believing is at the heart of success stories like Daisy's.

'Daisy had no experience at the start, but we provided childcare for her in the school holidays so she could get work experience,' explains Christina. 'Although we hit most of our targets at Pecan,' she adds, 'the most important thing is that we always go the extra mile.'



Create

'When I started I didn't even know how to write my name. Now I'm even reading the newspaper'

Mark left school at 16. He spent years working on building sites, but without qualifications he began finding it difficult to get jobs.

'I was in a rut,' he explains, 'not really going anywhere. And I didn't know what I wanted.'

With more employers requiring qualifications, Pecan responded to the fact that sometimes it isn't enough to help an individual with their CV or interview skills.

We set up Create to provide further help for the long term unemployed – equipping them with skills and recognised qualifications in areas such as carpentry, literacy and numeracy.

At 46 Mark felt he was too old to go to college. But he did. And, after obtaining Maths and English qualifications, some hands on carpentry training and a little encouragement, he made it.

Ibrahim's story is very different. He arrived in the UK as an asylum seeker. His lack of English meant he couldn't even fill in a form, let alone find a job.

He enrolled in the Create Literacy and Numeracy programme, and on the third attempt passed his Entry Level 1 Numeracy – the first qualification he's ever received.

'I feel so proud,' he says. 'Knowing English feels so good. I can even confidently use the cash point.'

For Ibrahim it's the tutors that make the difference: 'It's the courage and patience of tutors to teach a grown man like me,' he says. 'It was so difficult but they really gave me courage. When I started I didn't even know how to write my name. Now I'm even reading the newspaper.'



Deborah & Peaches

'You always receive so much more than you give.'

They're a perfect team. Deborah is organised and holds the place together. Peaches is tough and straight talking, but has a warm heart. Twice a week they spend an afternoon volunteering at the Foodbank.

Deborah saw the volunteering opportunity in our newsletter. She got involved, only planning to help pack bags over Christmas. But something significant happened. 'What has taken place for me in these nine months has been truly life changing,' she says.

Peaches was adamant that she *didn't* want to volunteer. But, she explains, 'I fell in love with the heart of the people, the community spirit!'

Deborah links her involvement to her faith. 'It's about the command that we feed the poor and look after the downtrodden,' she explains. 'And you always receive so much more than you give out. It isn't just

the food bags, it's often the love of the Foodbank staff that touches clients deeply. Hearing people say, "this is a place where we find kindness," is very rewarding.'

The team always offer prayer to their clients. Deborah tells the moving story of Jack. 'He came to us very angry,' she recalls. 'But one day I felt God say, "Pop a Snickers in his bag," so I did. He turned to me and said, "My absolute favourite. How did you know?" Well I didn't. This led to an amazing conversation and something broke that afternoon. His anger was gone.'

From painting the walls of the Laundrette in 1989 to running the Foodbank in 2010, we would not exist without our volunteers.



Ellen

'We are here to show Jesus' love.'

For the last seven years Ellen has managed our work with young people, offering personal development and qualifications to those who've been expelled, in prison or are not in education.

Ellen has been offered other jobs and faced redundancy, due to funding shortages, during her time with us. But she's chosen to stay.

Her commitment is driven by her love for those she encounters. 'It's because we see each individual as being made in the image of God,' she says. 'We value each person. We really take the time to hear their story, to understand why they are in a certain situation.'

This attitude isn't lost on the young people. 'They say, "There is something different about Pecan that I can't pin-point." And afterwards they talk about how much they miss us,' says Ellen.

For a young person who has left school because of bullying, as many have, this approach

can work wonders. 'Through being in one-to-one sessions with the staff, or just being in an environment where someone cares for them, lives are really transformed,' says Ellen.

'Many of them end up back in college or re-engaged in school with their confidence built up. It's really exciting to see.'

Working with young people in gangs is a slower process, but is no less rewarding. 'We've seen them slowly make that intentional choice to give up that lifestyle completely,' Ellen says. 'Many are in college making something of themselves now. They are really proud about it, and rightly so.'

The difference, explains Ellen, is simple. 'We give our clients hope through time, compassion, care, and the showing of God's love. That's what sets Pecan apart.'



Employment Preparation

'When 23 of us started the course only three of us knew what a CV was!'

James, Employment Preparation Course participant, 1992.

Our aim has always been to reach those that no one else is reaching, and to believe in those that few others are investing in. In 1990 alone we knocked on doors on the North Peckham estates a staggering 30,000 times.

At each door we invited any unemployed residents to attend our Employment Preparation Course (EPC).

Attendees ranged from university lecturers to people who'd never worked. Most suffered from a common problem: lack of confidence. Our solution was to help people see their worth.

Our approach then, of encouraging people to talk about their achievements, continues to define us today. It provides the platform for developing powerful CVs, finding the right jobs, and learning interview skills.

Michael was made redundant by Dresdner Bank in 1996. He struggled to find another job and says, 'I hit rock bottom and had no-one to turn to.'

After moving between part-time jobs, he met someone from Pecan at the job centre. He attended a computer literacy course and an EPC. We then arranged a work experience placement for him at Citibank which, he says, 'boosted my confidence even further.'

Michael went on to full-time employment in an accounts role for a fashion company.

In the first ten years of our work on the North Peckham estates, unemployment fell from 26% to 10%. Very few agencies were addressing this issue during that period.

Thousands of people have found work through Pecan. And most would agree with Michael's comment that one ingredient in particular has made all the difference: 'At last I had met someone who genuinely cared.'



Foodbank

'Because of Foodbank I now have hope.'

In the Pecan offices there's a room which is a lifeline for some of Peckham's poorest residents. And it's stacked floor to ceiling with packets, cans and boxes of food.

When you're living below the poverty line, it can take just one missed paycheque, a delayed benefit payment or an unexpected bill and you struggle to put food on the table.

In December 2009, with the help of local churches, Pecan launched the Peckham Foodbank. Its aim: to provide people with emergency food for three days, the time it takes for statutory services to kick in.

Many individuals are referred by other agencies. All the food is donated by the public – churches, supermarkets, local groups, and schools. And, in the eight months following its launch, the Foodbank distributed over 3.5 tonnes of food to some 839 individuals.

Melissa had bailiffs knocking at her door and couldn't afford to buy food or clothes, or to go out. She and her two-year-old daughter came to Foodbank for help.

Foodbank manager Lurliene was on hand to help, providing her with food and introducing her to Christians Against Poverty, a charity that helps people who are in serious debt.

'Within a week my world had turned around,' explains Melissa. 'Me and my daughter were eating three meals a day and I was able to get a debt relief order.'

Foodbank goes far beyond the simple provision of food by offering support, counselling and prayer. For Melissa it has made all the difference. 'With the weekly support and prayers, I have gone on to secure a job with Southwark Council,' she says. 'Because of Foodbank I now have hope.'



Fran

'Pecan is a real gift to the local church.'

Fran Beckett knows a thing or two about church and community, having spent time as the CEO of the Shaftesbury Society (now Livability) and the Church Urban Fund. She's also advised the government on community and voluntary sector issues.

Today Fran is the leader of Restore (Peckham), a church focused on sharing the love of God in practical ways, particularly with those on the margins.

Her role as a church leader brings her into regular contact with Pecan and she now chairs our local church advisory group. 'We're very spoilt to have something like Pecan in our area,' she says. 'They are a real gift to the local church.'

Fran believes strongly in the two-way partnership between organisations like Pecan and local churches. 'Because Pecan works with individuals, they need to have links to local churches which they can refer people on to,' she explains.

Fran also gets excited by the massive opportunity to resource individual churches. This is starting to happen through the *Urban Mission Toolkit*, a new 21 week course equipping and inspiring people for urban mission. Fran was involved in the Peckham launch, and was enthusiastic about seeing Christians of all ages and backgrounds, 'wanting to see Peckham reached and lives touched.'

Fran is clear, Pecan has a key role to play in continuing to envision people about what can be achieved for God in Peckham.

Her own vision is to see a breaking down of barriers between communities. 'It is quite fragmented,' she says. 'There isn't 'the community', it is lots of different communities. Community is at the heart of the Godhead. I love to see people finding hope.'



Irene

'The first time I was asked to lead a group I nearly had a heart attack.'

Irene was one of our first trainers. A daughter of Dublin, she moved to London in the late 1980s, feeling God's call to work with people on the margins.

She met our founder Simon Pellew, and was soon on staff – being asked to lead training courses.

'I'd never stood up in front of people before,' she recalls. 'I was scared stiff. But, within weeks of getting to know the people, I loved it.'

Irene and the team filled the courses by door knocking on the North Peckham estates. One client they met this way was Ron.

Ron had been drinking heavily, sliding into depression after his wife and kids left him. He'd barely left the house in a year.

'He came in looking wasted and down,' Irene recalls. 'But as he started to socialise, he came to life. We used to have coffee together before we started. One day he arrived with a big grin on his face and said, "For the first time in nine months, I ran up my stairs at home." 'Around twenty years later he reappeared in the Pecan offices clutching a £10 note. Seeing Irene he said, 'I thought it was you,' and handed her the money. 'When I was on the course and my kids were visiting,' he explained, 'I had no money for food. You gave me £10. I've been waiting all these years to pay you back!'

Irene still works for Pecan, and she is still as enthusiastic as ever. 'This is not just a job,' she says, 'this is about serving.'



John

'We must be open minded, working hard to see where there might be gaps that we, the church, can fill.'

If Pecan was an individual it might be a lot like John Willis. A straight talking south Londoner, with a deep passion about people's right to work and a deep love for God, John came to faith in his 40s.

Moving from an engineering firm to manage the Peckham Trader's Association, John was Chair of Pecan's founding group.

'It was a wonderful opportunity for the church to do something about a specific issue, in this case unemployment' he says.

And, as the team knocked on doors on the North Peckham estates, it was the church which made all the difference. 'Because we were the church, we didn't tell people to come to an office. We said, "We're part of the church. See that church hall over there? Go there." That was the difference; the church was *part* of the community.'

John has been involved with Pecan ever since, clocking up seven years as a member of staff and another 14 years on the board. He's now in his 70s, but his commitment and passion show no sign of dimming.

Being on the board of Pecan in the early days was an eventful ride, with the charity nearly closing several times. 'We've always had to rely totally on the Lord,' explains John. 'We started off in faith and we've remained in faith.'

Looking ahead, John is clear. 'We must be open-minded about where we are going, seeing what the Lord wants us to do and working hard to see where there might be gaps that we, the church, can fill.'



Keith

'My life before was shady. But Pecan believed in me, I believed in them and God worked it from there.'

'I work for Lambeth Black Forum which I started just a couple of weeks ago. I'm a mentor to young gangs with the Metropolitan Police Service and I'm working for the council and for the church.'

We've not yet sat down and Keith is already reeling off the exciting projects he's involved with. His enthusiasm is infectious.

Keith came to us in 2005 after finishing a prison sentence. 'It's difficult to get a job once you've been inside,' he explains. 'I was offered a job as a hotel manager, but after doing background checks the offer was withdrawn. I felt I was wasting my time. I wasn't thinking of going back to crime but it was off-putting being turned down.'

Keith believes it was the intensity of our help which rewrote his future. 'Pecan brought companies in to meet me, and when you have a one-to-one with a Managing Director, you can see they really want to give you a chance.'

When Keith managed to secure a job with Mercedes Benz in Surrey, Zach, a Pecan staff member, travelled down with him to meet the staff at Mercedes.

'It was so nice of him,' says Keith. 'He booked my travel card and introduced me to the managers. The love that they showed me was more like a family thing. That's what really made the difference. I felt wanted, I felt loved!'

'My life before was shady. But Pecan believed in me, I believed in them and God worked it from there. Pecan is number one in my life,' he says, 'after God.'



Lisa Jane

'In my old school they didn't pay much attention to me, I was just a weirdo.'

Struggling at school with bullying and mental health issues, Lisa dropped out. 'I was just sitting at home all day,' she says, 'with nothing to do.'

Then the school called to ask if she'd visit Pecan. She was sceptical but decided to pay them a visit. 'I went there, had a meeting and just clicked straight away,' she says.

Today Lisa is on a Music Industry course in east London. And she's in a very different place than she was ten months ago.

She enrolled into Pecan's *Step Up* programme, which provides individualised support for 14-19 year-olds who are not in education, employment or training, or are at risk of exclusion from school. The programme has been so successful that Southwark Council is seeking extra funding to keep it going.

Step Up was a turning point for Lisa. 'I did literacy, numeracy and touch typing,' she says. 'And because it was just two hours a day it helped me to cope with my mental health issues. Where my confidence was low because I got bullied over the years, it picked me up and made me into a more bubbly person. I made lots more friends.'

'The staff at Pecan always made me feel special in my own way,' she continues. 'They were really supportive. I wanted to drop out again. I got to that stage where I couldn't cope, but Pecan called me up and invited me to events.'

'It really did help me. It boosted my confidence and made my character into something that I wanted it to be.'



Mental health

'Just having a good CV isn't much help'

For several years Matthew was unwell, unable to work. Meeting anyone, getting on a bus, even getting up in the morning were things he tried to avoid. They simply felt too difficult.

In the early 90s we were meeting many people in Matthew's situation – and it was becoming clear that we needed a different approach for people living with mental health problems. .

At the same time, a local hospital was experiencing a similar frustration: their mental health patients were struggling to get into work, leading to a cycle of disappointment that often triggered another breakdown.

A partnership was formed, and Pecan's first mental health course was born. It was tailored to help clients' regain their confidence, but was far more holistic, covering communication, finance, nutrition, stress management – and more.

We've been running the courses ever since. Peter Aleksin, Pecan's manager of mental health work since 1997 believes that, 'by accepting people where they are at, it helps them face up to the truth that if they haven't worked in 20 years, they aren't likely to – unless they change something.'

Close to a thousand individuals have attended the course, and the results have been incredible with clients often talking about being given the confidence they need to enter the workforce.

For Matthew, who has been in work for three years, the course made all the difference. 'Just having a good CV isn't much help – it makes no difference to the other areas of your life that may contribute to delaying your full recovery,' he explains. 'I have more confidence now and feel healthier in lots of areas of my life.'



Simon

'I wanted to do something that was helpful, that was different.'

'When I was about 18, I was travelling by train up to London and out of the window I could see all the tower blocks. I felt God was angry about what these places were doing to people.'

It was the late 80s, and the country had just been through a deep recession. There was talk in the church of helping people adjust to being unemployed.

'I couldn't stand that,' Simon recalls. 'It seemed wrong. I wanted to do something that was helpful, that was different.'

He started by bringing together a group of churches from across Peckham. Together they prayed for the area, and decided that unemployment was the key issue they needed to address.

After securing some funding from the council, they employed Ian and Irene. 'The early days were pretty wild,' recalls Simon. 'Someone put a scythe to the

throat of one of our recruiters and another pulled a gun on Irene.'

But it didn't deter them. As numbers on the courses grew they were embarking on another major project; the establishment of a laundrette on the estate. Pecan was born.

The organisation kept growing and, in 2003, Simon was awarded an OBE for his work. He considers equal pay his proudest achievement. He stuck to the principle of paying every staff member the same wage, which was initially £5,000.

'It was a real privilege to run an organisation that was so radical,' says Simon. 'I loved what it did in terms of relationships and what it said about how management should operate in terms of power.'

With nearly 30,000 clients having attended a Pecan course, the driving idea remains the same today as it was in 1989. We never stop believing.



Stephen Timms MP

'It was pretty clear that the estate was dramatically changed by the work of Pecan.'

Stephen Timms first came into contact with Pecan in 1994, his first year as an MP. And what he saw impressed him.

'I don't think any other kind of organisation would have been able to undertake the long-term, wide-scale volunteering effort that Pecan did on the North Peckham estates,' he says.

As Vice-Chair of the Labour Party, Mr Timms has a particular responsibility for faith groups, an area he's clearly passionate about.

'Church communities bring in the kind of values that can make a project like Pecan succeed,' he explains, 'those of responsibility, compassion and patience. Both local councils and central government need to be working with initiatives like Pecan if we are going to bring about the changes in our communities that we wish to see.'

Mr Timms's views epitomise the high regard that politicians have for Pecan. In 2008, while serving as Minister for Employment and Welfare Reform, he spoke at an event celebrating *Workout*, Pecan's ex-offender programme. He emphasises how impressed he was with the work he saw.

When we present ourselves to government, we never hide our strong and underpinning basis of faith. And this basis of faith, believes Mr Timms, has made a big difference.

'Pecan continues to be a very powerful model for how caring church members can contribute to a really big change in the economic well-being of their local area,' he says. 'At the heart of Pecan is the regular prayer meeting. And the churches who support the work in prayer reflect a very important source of the essence of the project.'



Steve

'People wondered if it was really possible to make something like this work, employing ex-offenders.'

The year is 1996 and Steve has just been handed a 13-year sentence for drug trafficking.

Zip forward a decade and a half and Steve's life is on a very different course. With a wide grin on his face, he explains he's now Pecan's Deputy Director.

Steve became a Christian at the start of his sentence and was released after seven years. Two years later we asked him to join Pecan and set up *Workout*, a new project for ex-offenders.

'When I first looked at the job I wondered if I was ready for it,' Steve explains. 'People wondered if it was really possible to make something like this work, employing ex-offenders. But we all had real faith that it could, with God at the head of it.'

The programme is now one of Pecan's most successful. And Steve's passion is unchanged. As he tells the story of Jason, it is easy to see why.

Jason had just been released from prison. While he'd been inside, his brother had been killed, allegedly by a rival gang. Jason's gang had come to him, promising to help him take revenge.

'Thankfully,' explains Steve, 'Jason felt he could trust Pecan and he talked to us. He didn't want to go through with it, but didn't know what to do.'

We asked Jason if he'd be prepared to disappear for a while. He agreed. We arranged for him to stay with a church in Nottingham. Three months later, after things had died down, he returned to London and through Pecan was able to find a job.

Jason's story captures why we never stop believing and why, in partnership with local churches, we are seeing people's lives *fully* transformed.



Teaching English

Gonzalo was a graduate and a manager in his native Colombia. Then everything changed. He was forced to flee as a political refugee.

'I say to young people, "Look at me. I couldn't speak English and all my qualifications made no difference here." But I knew that with Pecan's help, victory was in my own hands.'

Gonzalo was a graduate and a manager in his native Colombia before being forced to flee as a political refugee.

On arriving in the UK, his lack of English prevented him from finding work.

As our staff and volunteers knocked on doors in the North Peckham estate, a host of similar cases began to emerge - talented and motivated people who were desperate to work, but were confronted by a language barrier which seemed impossible to overcome.

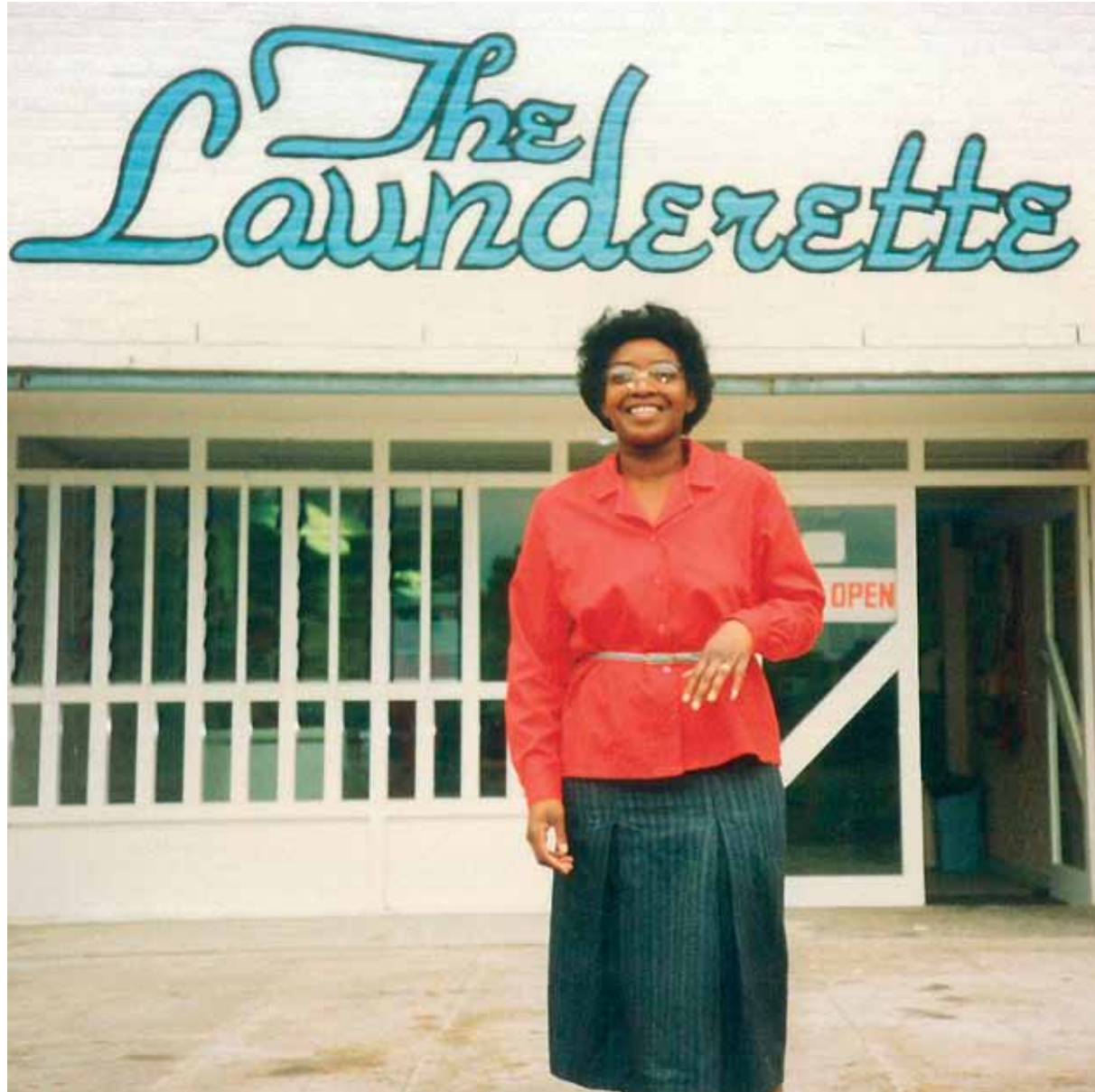
At Pecan we saw the need and, in May 1993, responded with our first English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course.

It was an overnight success and within a year it was supporting over a hundred individuals, including a Bangladeshi chef, a Ukrainian nuclear engineer and a Brazilian hairdresser.

From humble beginnings as a simple language course, ESOL went on to become one of our most successful endeavours. It has run for over 17 years, providing vital language, social, and employment support to thousands of people. These people would otherwise have been excluded.

Gonzalo managed to secure funding to run the Colombian Football Club, a project aimed at getting young people off the street and into football.

His story and the issues he faced recur throughout our history. Time and time again, as we refuse to stop believing, as we work to remove simple barriers, many individuals are released to reach their God given potential.



The Laundrette

'A glorious failure.'

Every shop was burnt out. Fire bombed in the south London riots of 1986. This was the scene at the Gloucester Grove Estate, north Peckham as the 80s ended.

One solitary shop space was resurrected. It was Pecan's first major project, a laundrette.

Based in a rented garage and furnished with the support of local churches, it became an opportunity to serve the community. By employing local people and selling coffee and sweets, it began to establish itself as a social centre for the estate.

According to one resident it was, 'the best thing the church has ever done for us.'

But it wasn't without its problems. Many school children would play truant and spend their days at the centre. Burglaries were frequent. One day a girl was spotted wheeling a trolley full of stolen sweets into her house!

Pecan founder Simon Pellew was at the laundrette every day for its first six months. 'I did the evening shift,' he recalls. 'I'd mop the floor and vacuum out the dryers. Then this gang of huge guys would come in, surround me and suggest I give them all free Mars bars.'

Despite the struggles there was a real determination to succeed. The staff built good relationships with many of the 350 weekly visitors and began to sense a change in the atmosphere of the estate.

This continued until 1992 when increased break-ins, violence and high running costs finally forced the laundrette to close.

'A glorious failure,' is how Simon describes it, believing this description will encourage staff not to be afraid of failure or risk-taking.

And he was right. It set a course we still follow today.



Tunde

'When I came in and saw the trainers and the way that they treated me, I fell in love, and I wanted to work for Pecan.'

Tunde's journey with us began on a training course in 1993. From there she took her first job with us and now, twenty years on, she runs our Jobsearch programme.

'I'm sure God ordered my steps into Pecan,' believes Tunde. 'Otherwise I wouldn't have stayed this long. People say to me, "Why are you still there?" And I say, it's a calling, not just a job. That's why I put my heart and soul into it.'

Pecan has always tried to help people to see their value. And Tunde knows this has lifelong consequences.

'What I do opens a huge door to so many things people never could have dreamt they could do. That's what gets me up in the morning, knowing I've put a smile on people's faces, knowing that they can stand on their own two feet and make it.'

Tunde regularly bumps into grateful former clients: the nurse in hospital who gives her special treatment, the man on the meat stall who tries to give her double portions, the fruit seller who forces free fruit into her hands.

'When people on the streets of Peckham shout, "Hey Tunde! You know what, I got a job, and I'm doing very well, my family are doing well," it brings me so much joy.'

It's this that makes it all worthwhile for Tunde. 'Once you've got them up and running it is amazing,' she says. 'You see this new person that you've never seen before. Someone who was dead on the inside, now come alive.'



Workout

'I'm doing a placement in a coffee shop now. I really believe Pecan helped a lot'

Christopher, Workout client

'If someone was into robbery they have skills around time management and attention to detail. If someone was into selling drugs they have quality assurance and customer service skills' says Ben Taiwo, *Workout* programme manager.

As a means of helping ex-offenders to transfer their skills from crime to career, there's no denying the brilliance of this logic.

Ex-offenders are one of society's most excluded groups. They often have few qualifications, limited work experience and drug or alcohol dependency problems. Added to which they have to cope with the stigma of a criminal record.

Yet research reveals that finding them gainful employment can help reduce the risk of re-offending by half.

Our belief in the potential of *every* ex-offender led us, in 2004, to launch *Workout*.

The journey begins long before an individual is released. A staff member meets with the prisoner

and together they draw up an action plan. Soon after release they begin a training course, a voluntary placement and an extensive job search.

The goal is to support all participants into full-time, sustainable employment within eight weeks.

In the five years *Workout* has been running, there have been over 750 clients on the programme, with an incredible 70% getting a job.

We're also mentoring local churches as they set up prison ministries, gaining entry to more London prisons, and working with the families of those in prison.

Ben tells a story that sums it all up. 'We had someone in here who had never worked. He was 47 years old, with 82 criminal convictions. He got his first job through us, and within a month he was promoted to be a supervisor.'

We never stop believing, and our experience is that belief is contagious.

An invitation

Please don't see this as the end. It isn't. If these incredible stories of transformation are to continue, we need you. That's why we're inviting you to join us, to stand alongside those who have lost hope and to never stop believing.

Here's some of the ways you can get involved and be part of bringing light and hope to people who most need it in Peckham:

Make a gift

We're able to be part of transforming thousands of lives each year – because of the regular gifts we receive. Your financial support *is* vital. Please consider making a monthly investment in this work.

A gift of £15 every month will pay for another person to receive three days of food from Pecan's Foodbank.

A gift of £30 every month will enable someone else to benefit from a one-to-one session in our mental health project.

Pray for us

Prayer is at the heart of what we do. We'd love you to support us in prayer and will provide you with monthly emails, church resources and more.

Volunteer at Pecan

A few hours given to help pack food bags will be an investment you won't regret. Or maybe you'd like to meet clients, or provide support in the office? Whatever your skills and interests, we've got rewarding opportunities for you.

Become a church partner

Would your church be interested in partnering with Pecan? Maybe you'd like a member of staff to visit and talk about our work? If you'd like to know more about opportunities for churches please do get in touch.

Visit www.pecan.org.uk and get involved today!

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