

OFFERING HOPE & A NEW BEGINNING

The Future of Our Centre

In January 1986, the Prison Fellowship trustees petitioned God for the right environment to support released prisoners. After much prayer and generous donations, Number 39 University Street was purchased as a drop-in centre.

A Central Hope

'Prison Fellowship,' says *Jonny*, 'helped me through my first lockdown.

Long before COVID-19, I sat alone in a cell, contemplating an uncertain future. A PF volunteer offered to chat. Little did I realise how influential PFNI would become.

After serving my time, I was keen to reconnect. I telephoned the office and spoke with Neil, the Aftercare Worker. I took the train to Botanic station in Belfast and walked to University Street to a bright purple door.

The PF Centre is a three-storey, mid-terrace building. I buzzed the intercom and was met by Neil who gave me a guided tour. The ground floor consisted of a large meeting area with armchairs and a dining table. A small kitchen sat at the rear with an infinite supply of mugs for tea.

Neil led me upstairs to the staff offices. I said hello and glimpsed their immense workload. He brought me to the converted attic and poured coffees while we talked. I learned about the Centre's vision and how it catered to anyone connected to prison life. He told me about the Bible studies, the Voices of Hope choir, and the drop-in meals.

The Centre soon became the focal point of PFNI's mission. It has hosted countless events like Christmas dinners and children's parties. It's been used as a base to make hampers and toy parcels. Not to mention that it hosts weekly activities and monthly prayer meetings.

During the past 10 years alone, an average of 1,089 visitors per year benefited from the PFNI's Centre. We asked some of our service-users what No 39 means to them and how they ended up there.



I wondered how a small team could undertake so much. By the end, I was eager to join them and rebuild my life with the grace of God.

The Centre lived up to the hype.

I engaged with the men on Wednesday mornings. They welcomed me without prejudice and valued my input. The staff helped nurture me during those formative months and provided invaluable support.

Then the pandemic struck. The meetings stopped, the summer excursion was cancelled, as was everything I enjoyed.

I miss interacting with the men who I regard as brothers. I crave that weekly interaction with the volunteers and staff. The Centre was and is my church, my place to worship with like-minded people who understand me.

Only God knows the future. He's provided a vaccine that could bring us together again. The Centre might reopen soon and keep its doors unlocked. That's my prayer and my central hope.'