

Forge Podcast with Tim Morfin.mp3

Peter Wooding: [00:00:08] Welcome to the Forge Leadership podcast. Today we're joined by Tim Morfin the founder and leader of Transforming Lives for Food an innovative charity that partners with local churches to provide support for children who otherwise would be excluded from the educational system.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:25] Welcome to the Forge Leadership podcast. This week I'm joined by Tim Morfin. Tim is the founder and chief executive of Transforming Lives for Good, a Christian charity that exists because they believe that every child deserves to be loved, feel safe and have an education. Tim welcome to the podcast.

Tim Morfin: [00:00:41] Hi Simon thank you.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:43] Yeah. Cool where are you today.

Tim Morfin: [00:00:44] I am in a very misty, dreary Bradford West Yorkshire. It's not always like that but in January this is where we are.

Simon Barrington: [00:00:54] That's where your office is.

Tim Morfin: [00:00:55] Yes we are. Yeah very proud to be a Yorkshire based organisation but with a ministry to the whole of the UK. fantastic. And

[00:01:05] Tim you started Transforming Lives for good. Tell us about how TLG started and how you got involved.

Tim Morfin: [00:01:13] Yeah well I came to university here in Bradford in Yorkshire never imagined that I would stay but I got connected into a local church that was just really beginning to reach out to its local community. We opened a youth club which is something that so many churches have done over the years and ours was like any other. We opened the doors and a crowd of local kids came. But as we got to know them we just realized that for so many of them school was a huge challenge. And for many of them life was was pretty chaotic. So yeah just without any kind of big plan or vision for a national children's ministry we just began to help one boy called Lewis. I met him when he was 12 and by the time he was 15 he was completely disengaged from school but we helped him. His mom was really grateful he was grateful and the school said we've got loads more kids like him. How many how many would you like and one led to another and here we are with almost Well it is just 19 years later so it's been a remarkable journey.

Simon Barrington: [00:02:35] And what was the transformation you saw in Lewis and how did you help him how many and how many years ago was that.

Tim Morfin: [00:02:41] Yeah. So that was just before the charity was formed so we talking now sort of 25 years ago and yeah it's it's remarkable really to think back to a boy who lived in a pretty kind of chaotic family context and really struggled with with the expectations of school but would connect with us. So local church volunteers giving time and attention on a Friday and Saturday night and he would always be there. It was really out of that relationship of trust where he would open up to us and I think then we were able to use that relationship to connect with him and connect him back into into education so yeah it was it was remarkable to see him sit his GCSE exams to see him get a job but but also to stay connected into the local church and become part of that kind of wider community at the church. So yeah that was that was remarkable.

Simon Barrington: [00:03:55] That's amazing and how has that kind of shaped and impacted the way that TLG has grown over the last 20 odd years and bring us up to date with what you do now.

Tim Morfin: [00:04:07] So what began very much as that sort of youth center for Lewis and a small group of other young people we registered that as an independent school so this just kind of single classroom space for 10 young people in a local church and that became school for a group of young people that were on the edges of education in Yorkshire. but very quickly we worked out that you know all over the country there are young people for a whole variety of reasons who find school a difficult place to engage. Some of them don't have support at home. Some of them have additional educational needs. Some of them just find that they don't maybe have support within the system that they need and so realizing that that need is everywhere we founded TLG the charity Transforming Lives for Good and then in 2007 began to replicate those small education centres so we now have 13 of those across the UK. Each one is hosted by a local church. It's a local church based team supporting those children but volunteers alongside supporting young people and supporting families and then just six years ago we pioneered early intervention so that's a program for church volunteers to each spend an hour a week with a child in school so this is our kind of prevention if you like. It's how we avoid many many more kids like Lewis disconnecting from schools as teenagers and the way we've done that is to equip local churches of all different shapes and sizes to support local children through a partnership with their local school. And we now have a hundred churches across the UK from Inverness in the north all the way down to Newquay in the south west, Wales, Northern Ireland all across England. It's a remarkable thing just to see the local church very much being the hope for these children and families.

[00:06:35] And what is it that captivated your heart Tim to try and tackle this problem. The problem is huge isn't it. I mean I don't know what the stats are in terms of children being excluded from school but you guys must know that the the size of the challenge that you're up against. Tell me about that.

[00:06:55] Yeah absolutely right. The Need is huge and sadly it's a problem that continues to grow. And so if we look just solely at the issue of school exclusion which I think in some ways is a symptom of deeper issues but certainly there are a third of a million exclusions happening every single year in the UK and they affect two hundred and ten thousand different children and their families. And so that's a huge number of children and I think particularly for younger kids, there are 47,000 kids affected by exclusion who are 11 years old and younger and so primary kids including those I think that the stat that I find the hardest to really come to terms with is if you think about kids who are just 6 years old and younger there are over 6000 exclusions for six year olds and younger and that's the number that you know really in some ways is out of control so that is growing 30 percent year on year at the minute. So it's a huge need, families in every community are affected by this exclusion from school. And really you know that's despite the great efforts of some fantastic teachers in our schools, doing a great job, day in day out up and down the country. There are kids with just huge levels of need. But I think what really gives me passion is realising that this point of exclusion is is a huge opportunity because again statistically kids that are excluded and stay outside of education we know that huge numbers of them will disengage from from productive life. You know it will impact their future. One stat that I read recently is that 88 percent of young offenders were excluded from school. So these are young people who are involved in the criminal justice system and locked in a secure estate. Actually can trace back their story to the point of exclusion. And I think you know even for children who for whom school's been a happy place when life happens maybe there's a breakdown at home in some way maybe Mum and Dad are no longer living in the same house and for a child in that just really kind of can can rock a world. What I love about our early intervention is that been able to bring a volunteer from the local church into the life of that child for an hour a week for a whole year can really be the difference between a child adjusting to changes and the challenges of life and being able to thrive again in school. Or take a

downward path that can lead to a really bad and difficult future. And I think you know our passion always has been the local church. So going back 20 years we were local church volunteers this was how we you know really kind of express God's love for us through the way that we cared for these children. And I'm so passionate about just yeah everything that the local church can be for communities. God's people who know his love and His grace and are able to bring that to children and families and to do that to connect with them and journey with them and see those children and families drawn into the wider support of the local church so. That is my passion.

Simon Barrington: [00:11:04] Yes that's incredible and it comes across you know in your voice and you know when tell us that 88 percent of young offenders were excluded from school it shows the importance of early intervention and the massive difference that can be made in a child's life by intervening in the early stages as young as six, even children getting excluded from school. So a wonderful work that you are doing Tim. I had the privilege recently of attending one of your events and hearing the stories of some of the children's lives who'd be impacted and it was deeply moving is there a story you have more recently the Lewis of of a child that's maybe been impacted through your um early intervention program. Help our listeners get an idea of the kind of transformation that takes place by this coaching once a week for an hour through local church volunteers.

Tim Morfin: [00:12:01] Yes I think of a boy called Luke who who was just six years old and was actually in his second primary school because he'd already been excluded and moved from one school. And the point at which the it was a Salvation Army church and a volunteer called called James and the point at which that coach was introduced to the school to say hey we've got this programme from TLG can we serve you as a school. Are any children that we could get alongside and help. You know this boy Luke his Mom had already being told that if things don't change or improve the school will have no option but to exclude him again from from this new school. Things had got so bad that the school had marked an area in the playground with some cones and that was the area for Luke to play in on his own. Things were so desperate there for him and for the school teachers not really knowing how to help him. But yeah we're so grateful for the simple act of serving with one hour a week and it just gave the opportunity for James to build relationship with Luke to help him think you know first see that he's not on his own. That there are people that really care for him . Helping him think about those that are with him and for him but also helping him to to handle the stress that he had in his life and just learn how to regulate that how to express some of his anger in in a constructive way. And what was fantastic was just to see the way in which just small changes for Luke really I think made a huge difference as as teachers could see actually he was he was making some good choices and they were able to support him but it really was over the course of a year. And the great thing about early intervention is that it's not just about the child so so it's possible to see Luke adapting and feeling happier about school but also the connection to his mum and his mum being connected in to that local Salvation Army church meant that she was able to be supported and be part of community and again not feel isolated and like she was kind of facing this stuff on her own so yeah it's remarkable just to see the difference that one volunteer just giving an hour a week for a whole year can can make.

Simon Barrington: [00:14:47] Wow, I'm just so inspired by that story and what kind of support and training do you give to the volunteers to enable them to make those kinds of interventions with the children.

Tim Morfin: [00:14:58] Yes so it's simply a team from a local church who will volunteer to be trained and we're looking for a typically five volunteer coaches and for one of those to be that connection person the kind of co-ordinator for that team and we'll give some additional training to the co-ordinator. But for coaches it's a one day training and we bring that training all over the country. For seven years now we've been training teams and so we have hundreds well over a thousand coaches trained and helping children and families across the UK. And yeah we've been

able to make something I think really that is very doable just you know for every one of us. Most of us can find an hour an hour in a week and if we can then we just want to make it as easy as possible for the difference to be brought to a child.

Simon Barrington: [00:15:57] Right now if people want to get involved in serving alongside you and volunteers or churches that are listening - where do they go to look for help.

Tim Morfin: [00:16:07] Yeah. So very simply it's tlg.org.uk that's our website tlg.org.uk information there about all of our programs and contact information so yeah we are ready and waiting to receive any enquiries.

Simon Barrington: [00:16:24] Now I am fascinated because you've obviously grown up with this organization over 25 years from you know the start of yourself in a youth group in Yorkshire with a few other volunteers to the size of organisation that it is now and maybe you can tell us how many staff and volunteers you have but I'm really interested about, you know when did you first become aware that you were a leader and what was that leadership journey been like for you growing with your organisation over that time period.

Tim Morfin: [00:16:59] Yeah it's a great question. I think I probably realised that I was the leader as a teenager and so you know I think back to that church youth group that I had the privilege of being part of. And I guess you know the frustration that I was feeling around the way that that group was working and areas where it wasn't working. So you know I think it's been said many times that this sort of fine line that exists between sort of frustration and vision for leaders and I definitely look back through my life back to being a teenager and onwards and I can identify points of frustration with you know thinking back then it was about the way that as a group we were not really very cohesive. We had some teenagers from different backgrounds and we were not really connecting together and what was being provided. I think you know I was probably a typical grumpy teenager you know suggesting that everything could be better and everything was rubbish, whereas in actual fact a lot of it was great but there was opportunity for it to be better. And what was so good was that the leaders of that group were well patient enough to listen to my grumble but but also courageous enough to say to a sort of 14/15 year old well why don't you have a go. You know why don't you get a group of your friends together to see if you can you know make some plans of what we might do and that's what we did. And that was really the first time I can look back and see that I led something. And I guess yeah as I came to university got involved in local church in Bradford I similarly yeah had some had some frustrations but again had empowering leaders around me who were willing to say no have a go and and you know faith spelt R I S K saying yeah okay you know we'll let the young upstart have a crack at this and I made some massive massive mistakes and continue to make mistakes but I'm so grateful for those around me who have just created that space for leadership to grow.

Simon Barrington: [00:19:25] Fantastic. Who's had the greatest impact on your leadership and the way that you lead.

Tim Morfin: [00:19:34] Well again I guess I would look back to the growing up in local church and my dad was a sort of pioneer of a new church congregation to a housing estate on the fringes of Hull over in East Yorkshire which is my kind of home city and I remember from just being a young child just being alongside seeing my dad serving often serving in obscurity with really mundane things and serving with people just getting alongside encouraging others, releasing others. And he yeah I guess just brought that very much to me. Brought encouragement to me but brought opportunity. And then as I came to Bradford I guess I guess what really I would now look back and see a sort of fathers in the faith in in many ways in terms of just those who similarly saw leadership saw something in me and were willing to be so patient in listening to me often grumbling but but

theres a theme here isnt there of an angsty teenager then a young leader in their 20s. So so I think an amazing guy called Philip Haig who when I met him was sort of in his early 50s and he was a leader in this church but he was so passionate that the church would change that it would be outward looking that it would serve the community and then the church leader called Peter Vincent. We called him PV for short so Pastor PV. And you know he again was just, he would have been in his forties when I met him but he yeah he he mentored me, believed in me and very much kind of showed me what it was to have faith and to really believe God but also to have a heart to serve and to yeah have a have that I guess that outward look to others to see the impact that God can have.

Simon Barrington: [00:22:00] There is a fascinating theme coming through from what you're saying isn't it in terms of the sense of that grumbling and resentment and seeing the problems which could so easily be turned to angst from you or disconnection. Actually with people around you who gave you the opportunity to lead became massive opportunities for you to step up and lead. What would your advice be for teenagers and students and millennials who are setting out on their leadership journey and are maybe frustrated by the situations they find themselves in, the whole resentment to the churches that they're in or the organisations that they're in and what would your advice be to them from what you've learnt.

Tim Morfin: [00:22:47] It's a really it's a really key question isn't it. And certainly in my in my role now leading TLG a big part of what I'm doing is really raising up the next generation of leaders. I think you know in these situations and it's true still now where I feel that frustration but I think first and foremost it's about keeping the heart right and and recognise particularly where it's between generations it's it's really not personal and it's where even where it is personal, it's having a heart that is for God and a heart that's full of grace and love and understanding for one another. And so I think it's having a heart to forgive and to be gracious. I think I would also say it's a kind of lifetime of impact as a leader. I know that I was in such a hurry to see things happening right away and in reality things do take time. So having a willingness to do to run the course to kind of get up and go again to keep pressing on and pressing through and particularly as younger leaders our timeline can be very very short. So one of the brilliant quotes that I love is that we generally as people as leaders we will overestimate what we can achieve within a year or underestimate what we can achieve in 10 years. I smiled when I heard that one of our sort of intern graduates someone who had just been given a permanent role in TLG he was effectively you know a couple of months in and he said to his manager that he was going to commit to the TLG vision for the long term. And so he wouldn't be looking for any other opportunities anywhere else for for at least a year and that was just it was a beautiful beautiful insight into what the long term it when you you're 22. And I'm not critical of that at all. You know I think when everything is possible then it is just a wonderful place to be. When I think your realisation of it is actually where we spend 10 years that is going to be where the impact is and so you know I'm grateful for that year for the long term kind of sense that I think God has put in.

Simon Barrington: [00:25:18] That's brilliant. Now there will be many people out there listening who have an idea about starting up a charity or making a difference and turning around the situation that they they see or they feel is unjust. What do you wish that people had told you 25 years ago that you now know and would be advice to give someone who would be thinking of starting up their own charity.

Tim Morfin: [00:25:47] The reality is it's things that maybe I had an inkling of a but with that 20 years experience just are so so powerful in terms of life lessons and leadership lessons. So I probably have to begin with the cliché that it is all about the people and that is so well-worn and over-said but you know 20 years in I still utterly utterly believe that success in leadership in whatever sphere we are in in business in church in our friendship groups you know it's all about the people. And in an organisation it's about how we attract, how we draw in the right people. Those

that have the heart that really fits with the vision and I think in the early days you know it is very much as I've described finding people who will be the champions of the cause. So I had the fortunate position of being able to recruit to the team relatively quickly. So you know three years in we had a staff team of three people and then five years in we had a staff team of 16 and so you know by then we had some momentum we were able to write job descriptions and start to look for people that fitted the roles but many many leaders are often pioneering something solo. In the beginning but it's still all about the people. So it's the people outside of the organisation will champion and support and encourage. I think we found the growing leaders really investing in leadership development. It just happens that this morning before our conversation I've had an hour of mentoring one of our emerging leaders someone who is four years in to his TLG career. He's just about to relocate from Yorkshire to London and I am so excited that he's taking up a new role for us in the south but just the privilege of investing in him. I guess the other thing is in our context in terms of faith just how kind of central faith is and needs to be if we going to be building organizations that are missional and fulfilling the purpose God has. I think you know I would always have said I understand that, but I think I've just seen how central these things need to be.

Simon Barrington: [00:28:39] And it's incredible how those central things that sound like cliches are things which leaders just had to keep repeating, repeating and repeating because they are so important aren't they. Finding people who have a heart for the vision who understand the faith motivations of what we're about and investing in people are just so core and central to everything we do. Hey Tim as we come to an end now what are you most excited about in terms of the future for TLG. I hate him as we come to it there. Now what are you most excited about in terms of the future for TLG.

Tim Morfin: [00:29:11] Well it is an incredibly exciting year as in 2018. I think you know significantly we're excited about getting the word out on on who TLG are and the opportunity that the TLG programs offer the local church. I think you know we continue to be a name that not everyone has heard of. But I think in that respect there's a huge opportunity there and the great thing is as churches hear about who we are and how they get involved, then we've just seen incredible growth. So we've just kind of closed off our numbers for 2017. You know we had almost a church a week signing up to become early intervention partners for the whole of 2017 it's incredible. 49 brand new churches joining the vision to be trained and are now being sort of equipped for helping kids in in 2018. So that's incredibly exciting as people hear about who we are and the words spread. And then pretty significant we've not yet gone large on all of our comms with this. That's going to happen in the spring, but we're so excited to be able to add a brand new program to TLG. So a program called Make Lunch - this is a fantastic small charity that enables churches to respond to the real tragedy of holiday hunger for kids who are on free school meals in term time but don't have access to a hot meal in the holidays and make lunch is a small charity that's enabled churches to be equipped to provide that food. And so as of the beginning of January Make Lunch is fully part of TLG and so we now have three programs for churches to reach and to serve struggling children or families in their community so an incredibly exciting year ahead and one that we're so looking forward to.

Simon Barrington: [00:31:16] We really appreciate you taking the time Tim, to join us on the podcast today. Fascinating to hear about your journey and I'm sure many people have just been inspired by the kind of transformation that you're seeing in the lives of children like Lewis and Luke and many many more up and down the UK in partnership with local churches. So we wish you all the best in what you're doing and I'm sure many people will want to pray for you in what you're doing. How can people pray specifically for TLG this year.

Tim Morfin: [00:31:44] Well I think in addition to the things that I've shared I would say that because we are really keen to see this vision grow we've got big plans. And so the challenge of

funding the vision is really really huge. We've got to the biggest funding gap we've ever had for 2018. That's not that we're reckless in our planning it's just that we're ambitious because the need that we're meeting for those third of a million children experiencing exclusion the need is huge. And so yeah it's really yeah we're believing that God's going to work miraculously in providing. So join us please in praying to that end. That would be fantastic.

Simon Barrington: [00:32:28] Brilliant. Tim Morfin, Founder and Director of Transforming Lives for Good. Thanks for joining us today.

Tim Morfin: [00:32:35] Thank you so much.

Peter Wooding: [00:32:37] Thanks for listening to the Forge Leadership podcast. If you enjoyed today's episode don't forget to subscribe on iTunes, Stitcher, TuneIn or SoundCloud and whilst you're there please rate and comment on the podcast. Have a great week.