

The Honorary Graduand: Jenny Foster

Honorary Doctor of Education

Jenny was born in Hemel Hempstead and grew up in Southend-on-sea with her Mum and Dad and big sister Evelyn. At Thorpe Primary and Southend High School for Girls she loved English and History, performing in school plays and playing netball. Her sister struggled with mental health issues in her teens and this, along with her Christian faith, inspired Jenny's career choices.

She and her sister were the first generation of their family to go to University. Jenny gained a 2:1 in History and Sociology from the University of York after a year working in a youth team for the United Reformed Church. Her career path was far from linear! In York she co-founded Theatre-in-Education group Sparks, performing work in schools on social and environmental issues. At 23 she moved to London to work in a mental health hostel before training to be a social worker, earning an MSc in Social Policy and Administration from London School of Economics.

Jenny worked with homeless people with support needs as Resettlement Manager at London Borough of Richmond, soon expanding the team to support more people to live independently, including the growing number of asylum seekers. Her first daughter, Megan, was born in 1996.

Moving to Bristol in 1998 she worked as Housing and Community Care Manager at South Gloucestershire Council and had her second daughter, Alina in 2000. Her girls are the joy of her life.

She set up Cafe Unlimited, a Fairtrade child-friendly cafe on Gloucester Road while the girls were small, and was part of the team who achieved Fairtrade City status for Bristol in 2005. She then worked as Bristol's Fairtrade Co-ordinator for 10 years. In this time she organised the world's largest Fair Trade Fashion shows, in Bristol Cathedral and the Galleries, and founded the Fairtrade Business Awards, encouraging over 500 businesses to improve their supply chains. She was honoured to be invited to 10 Downing Street to mark 15 years of the Fairtrade Mark in 2010 and was voted by local people to be included in the 'You Make Bristol' exhibition in the M Shed, photographed holding an inflatable Fairtrade banana!

One of her career highlights was hosting the International Fair Trade Towns Conference as part of Bristol's European Green Capital celebrations, championing the sustainability benefits of Fairtrade farming methods.

In her 2 years working as Regional Manager at the Leprosy Mission she visited leprosy patients in Niger and raised hundreds of thousands of pounds to fund treatment and anti-stigma work.

In 2018 she co-founded the education charity Global Goals Centre to inspire action on the Sustainable Development Goals. This small GGC team created impactful projects such as Threads, unravelling fast fashion, and Voices, sharing refugee stories through their art. Her biggest adventure was setting up Sparks Bristol in 2023, the sustainability, art and education hub in the ex-M&S store in Broadmead - bringing together all her passions in one place and encouraging local people to be part of a fairer, greener world. To date the project has had over 1.2 million visitors.