



# FAITH IN NORTH EAST REGENERATION PROJECT

## REPORT

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a report on the work undertaken on the 'Faith in North East Regeneration Project' (FiNER) an initiative of the Churches Regional Commission in the North East, which has been funded by the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund. The application for funding to the FCCBF was for development work in four domains: Local Authorities and Public Services; Faith Communities and Social Enterprise; Education and Training; Partnership Networking and Interfaith Structures. CRC was successful in receiving funding for two of the four domains; Local Authorities and Public services, and Education and Training. In May 2006 a project worker, Fiona Damm was appointed to work on the project. The background and context within which the project has been developed is given below.

### Background to the Churches Regional Commission in the North East (CRC)

The main objective of the Churches' Regional Commission is to work in partnership with North East Christian Churches Together (NECCT) to promote social action by churches and faith communities in the North East of England, encouraging faith communities to extend their contribution to the social and economic development of the region. CRC has engaged regionally with projects concerned with employment, industry and social enterprise, and in the last four years CRC has increasingly worked across the faith groups. The Faith in North East Regeneration (FiNER) project therefore can be seen to give added value to the work in which CRC is currently engaged.

### CRC Faith in the North East survey

In April 2004 the CRC was commissioned by the Home Office, to conduct a survey to identify and map the Faith Communities in the North East, in order to gather data for a regional strategic response to the Home Office's Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Review. One of the significant outcomes of the survey was that for the first time there was a single database comprising 1448 individual listed faith communities in the North East Region. The report, demonstrated the enormous core contribution that Faith communities contribute at community level to the creation of social capital. The findings from the survey have been published by the CRC in a report entitled 'Faith in the North East' which can be accessed through [www.northeastchurches.org.uk](http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk)

The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund (FCCB) money came at an opportune time for CRC, in that while the report highlighted the excellent work being done in the North East, it also became apparent that further work could be done to take this forward.

The key recommendations and findings from the Faith in the North East report have informed some of the priorities for the FINER project i.e.

- The report found that more understanding was needed by those involved in governance and policy making as to the distinctive contribution of faith communities; particularly in relation to Local Strategic Partnerships, Networking Groups etc.<sup>1</sup>
- There was also scope for substantial development of the capacities of faith communities which would be facilitated by the existence of an effective infrastructure. Such an infrastructure would provide the nexus between the two very different worlds of faith-based and secular interventions and would generate increased activity and more effective communication of good practice and support.<sup>2</sup>
- The survey also found that accurate knowledge of the role of faith communities in Local Strategic Partnerships was limited. Significantly, faith communities with the least awareness of the potential for working with LSPs, also have little knowledge about accessing new funding streams that might benefit their activities.<sup>3</sup>
- The report suggested that there was a need to support those involved in volunteering, in particular through the provision of a coherent strategy for training and learning.<sup>4</sup>
- New partnerships and ways of working needed to be generated between and across faith groups to maximise their potential for community involvement. More opportunities were needed for networking and sharing information.<sup>4</sup>

### The Government Agenda in relationship to the project

#### **Why engage with faith communities?**

In the past few years the Government has sought increasingly to engage with Faith communities. Reports such as the 2006 'Faithful Cities' highlight the unique perspective that Faith communities have brought to regeneration in our cities.<sup>5</sup> Faith community organisations can act as a gateway to access the tremendous reserves of energy and commitment of their members, which can be of great importance to the development of civil society. Many new arrivals to the UK frequently relate to the wider community mostly through trusted organisations serving their religious and or ethnic group.<sup>6</sup>

Faith also gives people a sense of identity. Developing our knowledge and understanding of faith is important not only because of its role in civic life, but because a growing number of younger people from ethnic minorities see this as a key aspect of their identity. Many think of themselves first in terms of their religion, and only after that in terms of their citizenship, as British, or their ethnic heritage, such as Pakistani or Punjabi.<sup>7</sup>

Engaging with Faith Communities can also encourage social inclusion. (In the North East, it is interesting to note that while there is at present no Regional Interfaith Network, there is a 'Community Cohesion Network' which is facilitated by the Government Office North East.) The concern of the faith groups is not just about economic poverty. It is about exclusion from opportunities, employment, social care etc. The interest of Government in the range of issues labelled as 'social inclusion' is indicative of a potential convergence of interest as the church and state agendas come together<sup>8</sup>

This increased awareness of the contribution which faith communities make to society has been reflected in recent government legislation at strategic level. The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations in 2006 made it unlawful to discriminate against workers because of religion or similar belief.

The Guidance on Local Area Agreements (June 2005) states that there is an expectation that successful Local Area Agreements (LAAs) will ensure the inclusiveness of relevant stakeholders including the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and local people themselves, in helping to identify shape and deliver appropriate local services. Faith communities have traditionally been regarded as part of the voluntary and community sector and so are consulted as service users in this context.

Faith communities have also been recognised as potential partners in service delivery. They are involved in social care, neighbourhood regeneration, and work across the equality and diversity boundaries of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age. Faith communities work with refugees, migrant workers, and homeless people, in education and in training. They possess valuable assets in terms of buildings, skills, networks and local knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

### Changing Demographic Characteristics of the North East

The demographic profile of the region shows that only 3.34% of people in the region are members of a minority faith (extracted from Census 2001).<sup>9</sup> Middlesbrough has the highest proportion of Muslims in the region (4.2%) followed by Newcastle upon Tyne (3.6%). The census indicates that excluding Middlesbrough and Newcastle upon Tyne, the level of Muslims in the North East falls from 1.1% to just 0.4%.<sup>10</sup> These two authorities are the only ones in the North East to have a higher proportion of Muslims than the national average.

These statistics explain in part why the interfaith infrastructures in the North East are less well developed compared to the better established interfaith infrastructures found in some other areas of Britain where there is a higher concentration of minority ethnic populations and different religions<sup>10</sup>.

The census also reveals that 80.1% of people in the North East claim to be Christian compared to the national average of 71.7%. This makes the North East the region with the highest proportion of Christians in England.<sup>9</sup> The latter may explain why the

response rates for the non-Christian faiths for the Faith in the North East Survey were between 16%-20% lower than for the larger faith groups.

### Interfaith Structures

The lack of interfaith structures has had implications for the work carried out for this project. It has not always been easy to identify the appropriate person who knows what other faiths are doing regarding community development work or the nature of involvement with Local Strategic Partnerships.

CRC, with the help of funding from the North East VCS Equalities Coalition's CADE project (Coalition for Action on Diversity and Equality) has been working towards establishing a regional interfaith network. Funding has also recently been agreed with the FCCBF to support work to facilitate an interfaith network and to develop a website for the region. In addition to the better established local interfaith bodies in Newcastle, Gateshead and Middlesbrough, there are emerging networks being formed in Sunderland and South Tyneside. In Durham work is going forward to develop a County Durham Faiths Network. Interfaith working is new to much of the region, and it will take time to establish such bodies.

### What the project hoped to achieve

This report provides a summary of some of the key issues and findings which have emerged over the year. As there was a degree of overlap between the two domains, they have been treated as being part of one overall project for the purposes of this report. The overall objectives for the project were:

#### **The Local Authorities and Public Services:**

'To enable faith communities in the North East to have a better understanding of how they can engage effectively with local authorities and other public services to contribute to local strategic agenda and to increase the 'religious literacy' in civic structures'

#### **Education and Training:**

'To develop a coherent policy and action plan for community development learning, in faith communities, across the North East'

## **SECTION 1: Local authority and public sector engagement with faith communities**

One of the objectives of the project was to (a) help faith communities in the North East to have a better understanding of how they can engage effectively with local authorities and other public services in order to contribute to local strategic agenda and (b) to help increase the 'religious literacy' in civic structures.

As stated above, local authorities and public bodies are increasingly working with faith groups to ensure that the services they provide and their accessibility take into account the religious beliefs and needs of the local faith communities. In order to do this it is important that the local authority and public service staff have a knowledge and understanding of faith communities. Religious literacy is not just about acquiring knowledge of the major feasts and festivals and dietary requirements of the different faiths. In its wider context religious literacy is also about understanding the internal ethos and structures of faith groups and of how they see faith as central to what they do in their civic life and social action.<sup>14</sup>

In order to achieve the project objectives, it was decided to identify local authority personnel in the region who might have a remit for faith in their work, with a view to bringing them together to explore and discuss issues relating to faith engagement.

### **I Regional local authority workshop 'Engaging with Faith Communities'**

The 25 authorities in the North East region were contacted with a view to finding out who had a remit for faith in their work. Each authority was able to identify a named person who had a remit for working with faith groups. In some areas there was a specially designated person to deal with faith matters and in others the role was 'tagged on' to their existing work. The role was fulfilled by a variety of people from Policy Advisers; Equality and Diversity Officers; Human Resources; to a Director of Environment. Identifying who had a remit for Faith in the Primary Care Trust. The Police and Fire Brigade proved more challenging and those who were identified came from personal contacts from a Community Development Officer from Durham County Council, who has a specific remit for engagement with faith communities. This was the first time that a comprehensive database of public sector workers with a remit for faith had been compiled on a region wide basis. The identified 'faith' officers were invited to attend a workshop with the aim of: (a) identifying and finding ways to address, the key issues for statutory agencies engaging with faith communities in the North East and (b) to look at the importance of raising awareness of 'religious literacy' in local authorities.

The workshop was held in September 2007 and the report can be accessed on the CRC website: [www.northeastchurches.org.uk](http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk).

For some participants this was the first time that they had reflected on how 'faith' fitted into local government thinking and how this might relate to their work. The first workshop focused on:

### **Why engage with Faith communities and what are the issues/barriers to engagement?**

The reasons put forward for the statutory sector engaging with faith communities and the barriers to effective engagement can be summarised as follows:

- Meeting government agendas such as equality and diversity, community cohesion; impact assessments and to inform service delivery.

It was not always easy to balance government agendas balanced against the needs and the capacity of faith groups. The same people who are who are known to be involved with faith groups in the region are repeatedly contacted for help or advice. This can be an issue for the volunteers who are working with church or interfaith networks and who do not have the capacity to become involved in consultation processes with different organisations and project work.

Conversely statutory sector staff did not always have the time to establish effective relationships and to build up a relationship of trust with faith communities, especially where engaging with faith communities was a relatively small part of their job.

Group discussions at the workshops showed that many people would contact their local Black Minority Ethnic (BME) group if they wanted to contact people from different faith traditions. The ethnicity of a person however, does not necessarily define their faith and people from minority ethnic groups may not see faith as primary to their identity.<sup>12,13</sup> It is important therefore not to make assumptions on a person's faith based on their ethnicity.

- Faith communities brought a 'spiritual, moral and philosophical perspective' to partnership work and added an extra dimension to other engagement. For example, in Middlesbrough the Council of Faiths were actively involved in campaigning against the proposal of a super Casino in their area.
- Faith communities also provided many resources, such as the use of their buildings as community venues, and the expertise and knowledge of volunteers who are involved with developing their community on many socio-economic and cultural issues
- Faith communities were also valued for the work they did at 'grassroots' level, bringing with them knowledge of local networks and communities.

It was difficult to identify people from these communities however, especially in relation to identifying appropriate faith representation on Local Strategic Partnerships. The main dilemma raised was: What happens if the LSP requires a faith representative to represent all faiths yet the majority of worshippers in an area are from the Christian faith? Does this preclude a faith representative being appointed from the Christian churches?

Although the value of engaging with faith groups was acknowledged, the actual process of engaging with people from different faith traditions was considered to be a difficult and complex process. The second part of the workshop focused on:

### **How to work with Faith communities - issues and good practice**

It was sometimes difficult for statutory sector staff who did not have a personal faith themselves to know where to begin in contacting people from different faiths. One participant at the workshop explained: 'I do not have a faith myself and would not know where to go to consult with faith groups; I thought I would simply knock on church doors'.

Possible suggestions for contacting faith communities came from working with BME networks, Churches Together networks, and to contact existing groups who were already engaged in consultation with community groups such as Local Strategic Partnerships. Another suggestion was to find a 'champion' in the community or a key contact who could be the 'gatekeeper' who had contacts with the wider faith community.

Knowing the right person to contact from different faith traditions was not always easy to define. The religious leader of a faith group may not always be the best person to talk to, but rather the Secretary of a mosque, or a member of a Church congregation. While other regions in the country with a high minority ethnic population and diversity of faith groups have well developed infrastructures available for consultation purposes, the interfaith structures in the North East are only just emerging. Many people would contact the BME group to find out about issues affecting different religions

Some good suggestions were given of how to contact faith communities such as contacting large interface organisations such as universities which could be a source of contacting 'new' faith groups. It was also important to meet people on their own territory, and to spend time getting to know communities in order to gain a better understanding of their culture and faith.

A fear of unintentionally 'offending' people from different faiths, often due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of different faiths was also a barrier to engagement. Not all staff appeared to be aware of the different religious festivals and dietary requirements of people from different faith traditions. Religious literacy in its wider context however, is also about understanding the internal ethos and structures of faith groups and of how they see faith as central to what they do in their civic life and social action.<sup>14</sup>

It was agreed by participants that training in religious literacy is essential in order to help them engage more effectively with faith communities. The Churches Regional Commission are currently working with their northern CRC partners from the North West and Yorkshire and Humber, to produce a free booklet for the three regions about religious literacy, called 'Understanding Faiths'.

### **Findings from the workshop and the way forward**

The workshop provided an opportunity for the first time for public sector workers who have a designated role for faith engagement to meet with colleagues from across the North East region. As one delegate said 'It's good to know we're all in the same boat'.

The extent of public sector engagement with faith communities varied enormously from area to area often dependent on whether there were well established interfaith bodies in place which could help in consultation processes. In some parts of the region there appeared to be very little engagement with faith communities.

One of the major barriers to engaging with faith communities was the lack of understanding and knowledge of different faiths. Training in religious literacy is a priority for statutory sector staff wishing to work with faith communities.

The development of the emerging interfaith bodies across the region will help to stimulate dialogue between faith communities, and with the statutory sector. A regional database or website for the region to share good practice and as an effective, systematic way of sharing information would also facilitate communication processes.

A 'faith' officers network in which statutory sector staff could learn from each other and share areas of good practice concerning faith issues was proposed at the workshop. However, any such network would have to compliment rather than duplicate the work that is currently being done by the North East Regional Equality Officers' network.

## **II 'A Faith community working in partnership with a local authority': A case study of good practice**

One of the key objectives of the project is to disseminate good practice on faith related matters across the region. While there may be many examples of good practice in faith communities engaging with the statutory sector across the region, these are not always easily identifiable. A Christian House Church was identified which has built up a good relationship over many years with both the local Council, establishing partnership working on several projects, and the local Churches Together which has led to many joint ecumenical initiatives in the area.

This church has over 20 years experience of working in the community on projects such as 'Beez Neez' a community care project which provides meals, transport and home visits for the elderly, and a 'Happy to help' service. This Churches' community work is based on the philosophical and theological belief that the church should be helping vulnerable people in the community. 'We take our responsibility to the community very seriously and many of our members are involved in social, community, economic and political arenas'.<sup>4</sup>

The background to the Churches' community work in partnership with the local Council started in 1986, when a Teams Support Group in an inner city area of the region was set up by a group of like minded people for the support and development of local people. The group originally consisted of; Church Ministers, police, health visitors, the local GP, a local head teacher, Community Education Officers, social workers, Council officers, and other members of the local community. A member of the House Church, a local doctor, wanted to provide more facilities for single parents in the area. The church paid for a nursery nurse and borrowed a room to use as a clinic to set up an embryonic Family Centre. Three to four years later community funding was obtained to 'do up' the clinic and to employ full time staff. Social Services then took the funding into mainstream. Now it is a partnership between the local Council, the local PCT and the House Church providing support, training and child protection to over 30 families.

The Council works closely with the local Borough Churches Together on a 'Foundations Furniture and Gardening Project'. The latter has core funded the project which operates from a shop provided by the Council. The project offers a service where eligible clients can be referred for furniture, household equipment or a gardening service. Most of the referrals come from housing offices and social services, whilst health visitors, community workers, church minister and others are regular referrers.

The Minister of the House Church believes that the relationship between the local authority and the Church projects has been enormously useful and supportive. In particularly the Council business initiatives team have helped with finance and advice over many years. Through working in true partnership with the Council the Church has had access to many resources and has been able to gain respect and trust.

### **III 'Community Bridge Building' - organisation links between a local authority and faith communities: A case example**

One of the objectives of the project was to explore critically how faith groups interact with local authorities and the statutory sector. The project wanted to explore whether faith groups have a distinctive contribution to offer public sector policy development and service delivery. What training support or resources would faith groups need in order to engage in this way?

A Council was identified who was willing to contribute to this piece of work. The Council's Services for Disabilities has a 'Community Bridge Building' department. Within this department there is a full time Manager for a 'Faith, Spirituality and Culture' Domain whose work focuses on the needs of service users with mental health issues and who works with the support, time and recovery workers.

The Faith, Spirituality and Culture domain in this Council believes that people with enduring mental ill-health can be helped by spirituality and faith which contribute to healing, and promote well being. Research evidence shows that people who have a spiritual dimension in their lives, and are in touch with it, have a better chance of staying mentally healthy, or recovering, if they become unwell. There is also a growing interest in, and demand for, health care that treats the whole person and acknowledges the many factors that influence both physical and mental well being.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Exploring the possibility of working together as part of the FiNER Project**

Agreement was reached with the Faith, Spirituality and Culture Domain Manager to try to identify and work with faith groups who were interested in supporting people with enduring mental ill health in this Council area and to examine ways in which the faith communities might be supported in this type of engagement. An exploratory meeting was held with the Manager, the Liaison Officer Minority Ethnic Communities, and the FiNER project worker and project advisers to take this work forward.

The initial meeting focused on why faith communities, and especially Christian churches, should become involved in the area of mental health. The National Institute for Mental Health in England set up a spirituality and mental health project in 2001<sup>2</sup>, partly in response to the 9/11 disaster. The project focused on the spiritual dimension in people's lives to try and enable them to have positive relations with faith communities and faith-based organisations.

The Church of England Archbishops' Council also produced a report called *Promoting mental health: A resource for spiritual and pastoral care*. The report had three main aims: to raise awareness about the importance of faith and spirituality in relation to mental well being; to identify ways in which health services can support the spiritual needs of their service users; and to build links between the churches and local health care practitioners.<sup>3</sup> Faith communities may be a first point of contact and can act as a

link and referral system to statutory mental health services and other sources of support in the community.

Many faith communities accept the important role they play in enabling people with mental health problems to be part of the life of the church and wider community and provide a range of support for people with mental health problems and their carers. However, the Archbishops' report also states that rejection and fear of people with mental health problems has been commonplace in many different religions and cultures. Explanations for mental health problems proposed by some faiths, such as blaming individuals or looking for sins in their lives to account for their problems have caused great suffering. In some cases people with mental health problems may be discouraged by their faith groups from receiving professional help<sup>4</sup>.

According to the Practice Manager, the aim of the Faith, Spirituality and Culture domain is to develop a dynamic relationship with members of local faith and black minority ethnic communities in order to develop culturally sensitive services and to identify the strengths and resources within the community and work with them to encourage those in need of their service to access it.

The domain had been focussing on addressing the spiritual and faith needs of service users, in particular the BME groups, gay and lesbian groups. It has been recognised through a report '*Count Me In*' by the Care Services Improvement Partnership, that people from black and minority ethnic groups were not receiving the culturally sensitive and relevant care that they needed.<sup>1</sup> The experience of the Manager in the Faith, Spirituality and Culture domain at the Council has been that people from a black minority ethnic background are unlikely to be identified as having mental health problems and are not part of the system and referral processes. This perhaps explains why the statutory sector has funding for several posts which target the BME community explicitly in relation to mental health.

Another area of concern for the domain was how to move from a 'delivery system' towards an 'enabling' system; i.e. by encouraging service users to help in their own recovery rather than relying on direct help. The domain wanted to explore whether faith groups could be instrumental in mental health recovery, and to let people know that their services were available.

### **Engaging with faith communities**

Engagement by the Faith Spirituality and Cultural Domain with the BME community was proving to be a slow and fragmented process. It was acknowledged that there was a feeling of 'consultation fatigue' on behalf of the BME community who had previously attended many workshops and events run in conjunction with the Council, but which had not resulted in any practical outcomes. It was suggested at the meeting that perhaps the statutory services needed to find a different approach to consulting with faith groups and others, such as meeting in the communities themselves and not on Council premises. Again, the issue of culture and faith was raised. The BME community is not a

homogenous religious group. Members of the BME community do not necessarily identify themselves by their faith, and people from different ethnic backgrounds may have many different faiths. Contacting the BME community on issues of faith therefore was a complex and time consuming task.

It had proved equally challenging for the domain manager to identify Churches to work with. This is due in part to the fact that even within the structured hierarchy of the Christian Church it can be difficult to identify who is the right person to contact. For example, the Methodist church in the North East has two 'Mission Enablers' who cover an area from Newcastle to the Scottish border and from Newcastle to Teesside respectively. There are 16 Methodist circuits in the Darlington District alone, most of which have outreach work and some employ lay workers for general pastoral work.

It was not easy to identify the appropriate people to speak to from different faiths. In the case of the Islamic faith it is widely accepted that the person to speak to on matters of faith would be the Imam of a Mosque, when perhaps the Chair or Secretary of the Mosque would be more appropriate.

The FiNER Project Worker undertook the task of identifying and contacting local churches in the Borough Council area to find out if they would be interested in meeting with the local authority workers to discuss how faith communities identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable people in their community, especially in relation to those with enduring mental health needs.

Many churches indicated that they did not have the capacity or time to engage with this work and in some cases it proved impossible to get in touch with the minister at all. It was therefore only possible to identify a small group of Churches who were willing to meet with the project worker to discuss the churches' role in relation to mental health with the possibility of subsequent engagement with the Local Authority officers. Some of the issues that they raised are as follows:

- What exactly was meant by 'mental ill health'? If it is taken in its widest sense, then there were members of the congregation and local community who could be said to have enduring mental health problems such as a sense of rejection and of alienation and 'not belonging' to the community. This could be due to bad parenting, the lack of access to good housing and high unemployment in the locality, which contributes to low self esteem and depression.
- This raised the question as to whether enduring mental ill health can be affected by the wider economic and social problems that existed within an area. Regeneration of an area and the provision of local jobs were likely to have a much bigger and lasting impact on helping people with long term depression or illness within the community as a whole, rather than servicing the needs of individual service users.

- If anyone was identified as having mental health issues, they were usually supported by the wider church community. However, it was found that there was no established mechanism for Churches to refer people directly to the Community Bridge Building service.
- The response to mental ill health was seen to be reactive and responsive but not systematic.
- One of the church groups gave an interesting example of how they had had a community project worker who had spent a lot of time counselling and listening to people who 'dropped in' to the Church Community Centre, sometimes just to talk. When the time limited project ended, due to lack of resources, the project worker left and the Vicar felt that this was a loss of a valuable service to the Community. He questioned whether it would have been possible for this service to have been paid for by the Council for the benefit of the community. This proved the point that if there was more contact between the faith communities and the statutory agencies, this could facilitate not just access to funding but a sharing of the local knowledge and resources that faith communities provide.

Although the contact group from the faith communities was small in number there was strong support for the possibility of an informal meeting with mental health service providers from the statutory sector to discuss the issue of how the church identifies and addresses the needs of vulnerable people and those with enduring mental ill health in their community. Learning how the local authority could assist in this process, would be an excellent idea. These church groups also expressed their willingness to ask other colleagues if they would like to share and engage in such a process.

Despite the interest shown by the churches and others it was proving too time consuming to take this work further at this particular stage. The time limited nature of the FiNER Project was also determining how further initiatives could be pursued. There was also the factor that the Domain Manager was leaving the area for another post, and it was agreed therefore that no further work would be undertaken on this specific piece of work at present.

### **What has been learnt from this piece of work?**

Engaging with faith communities is a time consuming process. One of the key risks identified for the project was that a lack of infrastructure may make it difficult identifying appropriate faith and community leaders. This was to prove true of this Borough area where the lack of interfaith structures and networks made it hard to identify faith communities who would be interested in jointly working with the local authority. A further risk that was realised was that gaining the confidence and building relationships with faith communities can be a slow process and this could make what could be achieved within the timescale of the project unrealistic.

However, there were many positive outcomes which arose from the work which are summarised below

- In this Borough area, there is evidence that work is being done, by the BME statutory sector in particular, to raise awareness of the importance of faith and spirituality in relation to mental well being. This was learned from a Community Development Worker for BME and mental health who was interested to hear about the FINER project initiative and able to join the group for the final stage. This worker's post is funded by a Primary Care Trust but seated within the Borough Voluntary Sector. The aim is to deliver racial equality in mental health. The main target is to encourage the Statutory Service Sector and public sector to engage with the BME community. The worker had only been in post a short time, but believed that there was a gap in meeting the needs of the BME community and mental health, related to religion and how this can help with people's health and well being.
- The Churches' role in helping vulnerable people in the community to explore their faith and spirituality which can contribute to their healing and wellbeing was seen by the small sample of Churches identified by the project, to be important.
- There is no systematic or established mechanism for the churches, or other faith communities to refer people to the appropriate statutory service provider.
- It was important to have some form of awareness raising training for statutory service staff so that they take into account the faith of people when they deliver services.
- Work also needs to be undertaken to inform officers in public sector organisations about the potential of the faith communities in promoting social wellbeing and health improvement.
- The BME Community Development worker felt that it was important for faith communities to receive training in order to help them understand how the statutory services such as the Council and Primary Care Trust, work and for faith communities to consider and explore how they want to work with the statutory service providers. Faith communities could be better represented if people were selected and trained in their community, to represent their own community, rather than being represented by an outside officer. Any meetings between the statutory sector and faith communities should be held in the community rather than in council offices.

The FINER project has illustrated the complexity of the task of supporting and equipping faith communities to develop their role in identifying and responding to the needs of their communities in relation to mental health provision in partnership with the public sector organisations.

## **SECTION 2: Local Strategic Partnerships and faith representation**

Section 1 of the report highlighted and discussed specific case examples from the project activity. In Section 2 the report deals with relationships between Faith Communities and Public Bodies through systems of governance. One of the main ways in which this engagement and interaction can take place is through the local strategic partnerships. Each local strategic partnership is run in a different way, and this has had a major impact on whether there is a designated place for a 'faith' representative or not.

The initial part of the project was spent in identifying the extent of engagement by faith communities with the Local Strategic Partnerships in the North East. A starting point was to examine which of the Local Strategic Partnerships might have a Faith representative on their LSP Board or on the sub groups of the LSP.

This proved challenging as there was some confusion over the whole issue of what was meant by the term 'a Faith rep' on the LSP. Can you have someone from a particular faith representing other faiths? How do they feed back to other faith groups? From discussions with the existing LSP faith reps in the region, the chairs of LSPs and other interested faith leaders, it emerged that faith representation was seen from two very different perspectives.

The issue of where a faith adviser/representative should be placed within the LSP structure was frequently raised by faith leaders and LSP co-ordinators. As one public service sector person put it 'LSPs are not legal entities in themselves and are moving away from representation toward a process of ensuring that partners are delivering on their action plans to support the key community aspirations. Faith reps or advisers are better situated therefore, in the theme groups of the LSP i.e. transport, environment, neighbourhood renewal, where they are at the table as key delivery partners'.

In the North East there are only a small number of faith representatives who actually sit as 'faith reps' on the main LSP board. When questioned as to who was the faith rep/adviser for the Local Strategic Partnerships in the region, most partnerships identified someone from the Church or non Christian community who sat on a themed group of the LSP. Although not representing faith communities, the latter were seen to bring a 'moral and spiritual perspective' to their work on the LSP.

The very term 'faith rep' was sometimes keenly disputed, with some people preferring to use the term 'faith adviser', the argument being that one person could not represent all faiths. One of the people interviewed for the project was a member of the clergy, who had in the past been a faith rep on an LSP board. At a later date, his place was rescinded as it was considered that he was not representing all the different faiths in the area. The predominant faith in the area in question was mainly Christian. Different faiths such as the Muslims and Sikhs worshipped at the larger Mosques and Gurdwaras in the nearby city and not in the local area. The clergyman felt that as Christianity was the main religion in the area there was no reason why he could not represent faith at the LSP

board. He also believed that faith communities have a unique contribution to make as advisers: they are a voice for the people and are actively involved in regeneration. They aim for the long term sustainability of areas and reach people whose voice is not always heard.

The past two years have seen several evaluations of the way that LSPs operate but none have looked specifically at the sensitive and sometimes controversial issue of the involvement of faith communities. To address this concern a survey '*Faith in LSP's?*'<sup>1</sup> by the Churches Regional Network was undertaken in 2006 to look into the experiences of faith community representatives on LSPs. An important aspect of the survey was that although it was undertaken by a church body it sought the views of faith representatives across all faiths. The survey drew on responses from four English regions including the North East of England. The aim of the survey was to capture and report on people's actual experiences of involvement on LSPs. It was hoped that the findings from the survey would lead to greater clarity about the role faith community representatives might be expected to play on LSPs.

In September 2006 the Church Urban Fund also produced a report '*Faithful Representation: Faith Representatives on Local Public Partnerships*'<sup>2</sup> which focuses on the resources needed by faith community representatives on partnerships and other public bodies. The report highlights both the advantages and disadvantages to working in partnership with the public sector.

In February 2007 CRC in partnership with Durham County Council and the Regeneration Exchange, hosted a workshop to discuss the findings from the above reports and how they might relate to work undertaken by faith leaders on LSPs in the region.

#### Workshop – Local Strategic Partnerships and Faith communities

The aim of the event was to use the reports to stimulate debate on how faith communities in the North East could become better equipped to take an active part in public partnerships and to look at how public partnerships could have a greater understanding of what faith communities have to offer.

The workshop was held in February 2007 and the report can be accessed on the CRC website: [www.northeastchurches.org.uk](http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk).

Two presentations given by the CRC Chief Officer, and the Durham County Council Community Development Officer, highlighted the importance of religious literacy. Faith representatives need support to perform effectively but what do Faith communities need if they are to support their representatives? If partners are to carry on a useful dialogue, is there a need for greater literacy in Faith matters? Without that 'religious literacy' there is confusion between faith, race and ethnicity which is not only unhelpful but can lead potentially to prejudice.

One of the key speakers at the event was the Chair of an LSP in the region. In the context of the issues raised in the reports, the speaker talked about her own experiences with the LSP.

As a community network representative with her own faith perspective, she became for years the unofficial LSP 'faith adviser'. In response to questions relating to her accountability in relation to this role, the speaker had set up a Faith Forum as part of the LSP to act as a consultative mechanism on matters of faith. However, one of the issues which the speaker had had to address was that of authority. As a lay person faith rep/adviser do you have authority?

'We're sitting with people who wear *uniforms* – suits, that is. And they expect Faith representatives to do the same: for example a dog collar ...' she suggested that in fact Faith representatives needed to wear *authority* in this kind of setting.

The speaker also felt that it was important to think about what Faith communities can bring to the table. Other partners can contribute money to the LSP. However, Faith groups are a resource in themselves. They can bring local knowledge and contacts to the table and can act as an independent voice to say what will or will not work in an area.

Participants at the workshop also believed that the contribution which faith communities could make to LSP and the statutory sector was often underestimated. It was important to understand how faith communities see their role in the community and wider society in order to understand what role Faith communities can play in LSPs.

The speaker emphasised that there were benefits resulting from faith community involvements in LSPs, such as receiving information regarding access to resources and the chance to channel information into the broader community. There was also the opportunity to influence and shape community plans and strategic decision.

The role of the faith rep was also about the broader issues that faiths share in common, in terms of spiritual values. The role brought the opportunity to shape values and vision. Faith representatives address a facet of people's lives that is not otherwise represented.

The workshops that followed the presentation picked up many of the issues raised by the speaker.

The workshops focussed on four areas:

1. Policy and strategy development
2. Roles representations and accountability
3. Practical Involvement
4. Resources.

A full report of the event can be found on the CRC website so what follows is a brief summary of the conclusions from the above topic discussions.

## Summary and action points to take forward

1. **Encourage more faith representation on LSPs.** There was some consideration of the question as to why there are so few Faith representatives in LSPs in the North East. It was suggested that perhaps more members of Faith communities with skills and talent would become involved in LSPs if they were aware of what they do. The work of LSPs needed to be publicised to faith communities and their leaders.

By raising awareness in ecumenical and interfaith groups about the significance and role of LSPs it was anticipated that more members of Faith communities with skills and talent would become involved in LSPs.

**Action:** Raise awareness in ecumenical and interfaith groups about the significance and role of LSPs and the important role that the faith communities can play.

Continue the dialogue and partnership working with high level bodies, such as GONE (Government Office North East) to emphasise the contribution of faith community in relation to community policy development and regeneration.

2. **Raise awareness of the contribution of faith communities to LSPs**

There was agreement by participants that often the contribution which faith communities could make to LSP and the statutory sector was underestimated. The discussions concluded that faith representatives address a facet of people's lives that is not otherwise represented. They often live in the locality and can provide a reality check. Their role brings opportunities to think differently: to bring into proceedings discussion on values.

**Action:** It was important to understand how faith communities see their role in the community and wider society in order to understand what role Faith communities can play in an LSP

3. **Resources for volunteers.** Discussion at the workshops concluded that faith representatives who are there in a voluntary capacity are not as well resourced as paid/statutory participants. Faith representatives needed to be more pro-active and to *ask* for resources (paper, printer, telephone etc) if they are to be effective.

**Action:** Explore and develop resources to equip Faith representatives for effective involvement on LSPs

It was noted that since Government Office North East (GONE) gather together LSP representatives it was important for Faith groups to lobby at these higher levels in order to secure the resources to support Faith representatives.

4. **The need for supporting structures for Faith representatives** was noted. There was definitely a need for faith alliances both inside and outside LSPs. The regional interfaith and local faith bodies could help in the process of communication between faith groups. There was also a need for a national faith network where faith representatives could go to for help and advice on their role.

**Action:** Create a regional network bringing Faith representatives together for information sharing relating to their involvement on LSPs and other partnerships

The Churches' Regional Commission plans to use the ideas and specific concerns generated in the workshop to design and inform a feasibility study it is commissioning relating to Local Strategic Partnerships and Faith Communities.

## **SECTION 3: Working with different faith traditions - training and support issues**

An intention of the project was to explore ways of addressing the education and training concerns in faith communities across the North East. The starting point for finding out what faith based social action and community development work was being done in the area, was to:

- access information given in the 2004 Faith in the North East Survey
- gather information from different community development networks about any engagement or involvement they had with the faith communities
- use a VCS communication network to invite practitioners and activists with interest in faith issues and concerns to make contact with the project
- make direct contact with community projects known to CRC and its network links

However, as the project progressed, it became apparent that proposed work was going to be far more complex and time consuming than originally anticipated. It was found that:

- since the 2004 survey some faith community projects had ended due to lack of funding
- faith initiatives in Christian and non-Christian communities lacked the support structures provided at earlier times by, for example, Barnardos Spectrum Project which, for a long number of years had focused specifically on work with Faith groups
- secular regional and sub-regional community development network organisations offered community development training opportunities but had only tentatively targeted and offered this to Faith Groups. They were, however willing to work in partnership with CRC to extend this focus in order to progress an ambition of the project which was to develop an accredited Faith and Community Module
- Interestingly, it was found that many of the faith groups contacted found it difficult to express what they considered to be distinctive about faith based community development and were consequently less than clear about their specific training needs. Indeed, many were directly asking the question - what exactly is meant by the term 'faith based community development work?'

### Faith Based Community Development – a contested concept

CRC has a working group which meets a few times a year to share ideas and thinking about the distinctive contribution of Faith based community development. For some people in society Faith based community development work is a contested concept. In the literature and guidebooks both The Churches Community Work Alliance<sup>1</sup> (CCWA) and the Faith Based Regeneration Network (FbRN) define faith based community development work as a way of working for change in communities. It springs from a holistic faith based view of communities, which values and dignifies all persons. It is particularly focussed on communities and groups experiencing disadvantage and

exclusion. In the North East context experiences daily are reminders that some people are forced to the margins by increasing change and decisions taken by others with no regard for the possible impact of these decisions on the lives of people. A distinctive role for faith related community development is to strive for a more appropriate balance and less divisive society. This faith presence in the community is based on a theology and vision which has a focus on those who are disadvantaged and marginalised and an analysis of the often repressive structures which underlie their condition, preventing the restoration of justice and wholeness. Faith communities seek to work with all others who wish to contribute to this creativity in the renewal of civil and economic society

### Tackling some of the Challenges

Looking back over the year and reflecting on tasks and work undertaken the project was able to:

- provide information about literature and good practice guidebooks that define and describe faith based community development work and how these could be accessed locally
- signpost and invite involvement and participation in regional events being organised by CRC and its regional partnership organisations: the aims of most of the events directly focusing on the issues and concerns identified above
- exploring the possibility of involvement and sharing in initiatives with other FCCB Fund projects in the region
- organising local workshops addressing knowledge and skill development for working with different faith traditions
- produce reports from the findings from workshops providing guidelines of acknowledged good practice
- work in partnership with a regional community development organisation, through CRC, to take forward the development of an accredited Faith and Community Development module.

### Community Development and Regeneration - Tools for Analysis

The FbRN Publication Tools for Regeneration – Practical advice for Faith Communities (2006)<sup>2</sup> provides useful materials and analytical tools for reviewing and evaluating community practice. For example, frameworks are offered for identifying and different types of community development and the characteristics of alternative approaches. The frameworks are obviously useful for analysing how well initiatives are working for change or advocating the concerns of power imbalances.

The following case-studies provide descriptive accounts of project work going on in the region by other projects. As will be noted opportunities were taken for engagement and involvement with these project.

# **I Middlesbrough – Community development and youth work training from a faith perspective**

## Middlesbrough Council of Faiths

The Middlesbrough Council of Faiths was established in Feb 2006. Interestingly it was brought into being at the request of the local Community Network and not at the request of the Faith communities in order to provide a means of electing representatives from the faith communities to serve on Middlesbrough Partnership Board and other bodies dealing with the regeneration of the town. The network consists of representatives from the Muslims; Christians; Sikh, Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu Faiths. There are two places on the LSP Board for Faith members. The LSP Board Faith representatives report back to the Council of Faith members, who in turn report to their respective communities. The website is also used to disseminate information.

The Council of Faiths acquired funding from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund to provide a series of introductory training sessions ('tasters') on aspects of youth and community development work from a faith perspective. The aim of the training was to use key occupational standards which expose people to learning and give structure to their work. It was anticipated that the project would address the issue of diversity with people being employed not just within the project but in the wider community.

## The Course 'Youth and Community Work' from a Faith Perspective

In order to be inclusive there were initially two training sessions; one open access and the other women only. The course was designed so that both the individual sessions and the complete series of lessons would stand on their own as a complete learning experience and that they would also act as work preparation for later learning opportunities leading to formal accreditation.

The taster courses were initially run separately for both women and young people. However, due to some recruitment difficulties with the women's group, the two groups were amalgamated into one. Each session was based on a topic from the taster sessions available from the FCDL<sup>3</sup> Learners were asked to consider a shared experience from several points of view i.e.:

- Community or youth work practice and principles
- Personal belief
- Faith tradition
- Surrounding culture

The pattern itself models a basic approach of community and youth work: that the community or youth workers have skills to offer, but deep relevant knowledge is held by those amongst whom they work.

The tutor developed the terminology 'faith viewpoint' to include participants who would not describe themselves any longer as members of a faith community but who had a history and interest in faith standpoints.

Although the course is still being run at the present time, recruitment remains a challenge which is currently being addressed by the MCF. There was an intense and eager response from a small number of participants initially but there has not been sufficient response to run accredited training sessions as was originally hoped. The training has been the first of its kind in the North East Region. The community development taster sessions have enabled people from different faith traditions and beliefs to use their experiences to reflect upon community development principles and practices from their own faith perspective. It is intended that a report on the training will be published in May/June 2007 by Learners All.<sup>4</sup>

## **II 'Working with people from different Faith traditions' – Workshops reports**

It was proving difficult and time consuming to identify and bring together community practitioners to explore ways of addressing the education and training concerns in faith communities across the North East. It became clear that what was needed was a 'gatekeeper' someone who was already involved in engaging with local faith communities. A local 'Churches Acting Together' organisation (The CHAT shop), employ a part time Development worker in the west end of Newcastle who has been working on an FCCB interfaith women's project 'Friends Together'. The interfaith women's project aims to encourage women to participate and get involved within their local community and to encourage women to work across different faiths/cultures. This was an opportunity for CRC to work in partnership with the CHAT Shop to develop two workshops to look at the needs and concerns of all faith-based communities and organisations with a view to identifying their training and support requirements.

### The 'Working with different Faith traditions' Workshops

The workshops had intended to focus on the locality of the west end of Newcastle. However, so much interest was shown in the workshops that people from outside the area were also invited to attend. This was the first opportunity that many people had had to explore the issues of faith in relation to their work.

In the planning stages of the workshops it had been anticipated that the women from the Chat Shops' interfaith project 'Friends Together' and workers from other local groups would attend the participants' workshop. However, this was to prove difficult for several reasons:

- Several different interpreters would have been required to capture the views of the service users/participants. It would have been extremely time consuming and

costly to co-ordinate the attendance of both interpreters and the participants at a workshop at a set time and place

- Even with the provision of childcare, women may find it hard to engage as they would like to while the children are nearby.
- People from different cultures and faith backgrounds may not feel confident in expressing, what are sometimes very personal views in a group situation.
- Some women would prefer not to attend an event where men were present.

It was decided that the best way forward was to hold two workshops, to seek the views of the project/community workers from both their own perspective, and from the point of view of the people they worked with. Many of the volunteers and workers at the workshops also had their own faith perspective to bring to the discussions and with experience of working on a one to one basis felt that they could respond to issues from both a participants and workers perspective.

The aim of the workshops was to:

- Identify key barriers/issues when working across different faiths and cultures
- Find ways to address and overcome these barriers
- Identify any support training requirements

The workshop report can be found on the CRC website: [www.northeastchurches.org.uk](http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk)  
A summary of the main points which arose from the workshop is given below:

### Language

Multiple languages were seen as a key barrier to effective communication between workers and service users/participants. Language was also a barrier to people building relationships with others in a group. Even with the presence of an interpreter, it was difficult for workers to capture the essence of what is going on in a group discussion. The continuing funding of ESOL was essential to help overcome language barriers. The suggestion was put forward that a free interpreting telephone service would also help families to access information.

### A lack of knowledge of other cultures

A lack of shared understanding and knowledge of cultural practices can lead to misunderstandings and assumptions, often rooted in media stereotypes. Several personal examples were given as to how assumptions based on people's ethnicity/culture can lead to prejudice. One dilemma discussed was how to deal with one venue's unwelcoming reaction to an Iraqi men's group who attended a community centre. The worker was unsure whether she should challenge her work colleague about this attitude; get the group to complain; or just go to another more welcoming venue, or

some other response. In practice, it was often easier to just go elsewhere. The group consensus was that people needed to be challenged about their attitudes to people from other cultures but it was the way in which this was carried out that was important if attitudes were to be changed.

A lack of knowledge or having a limited experience of using public services in their own country could be a barrier for people accessing statutory services such as the NHS, or housing, in this country. The issue was much wider than this however. A lack of confidence and understanding of what is expected of them also had implications for people from different faith traditions and cultures accessing cultural facilities such as museums or art galleries or being comfortable enough to attend a social event such as attending Sunday lunch as a guest in someone's home.

Workers also experienced difficulties in getting people from different backgrounds to mix and feel comfortable in new situations and to be open enough to share their emotions and experiences, especially where they were not encouraged to do this in their own culture.

A flexible approach to working with people from different faith traditions was essential to overcome this barrier and to encourage participatory engagement. Actually getting people to attend a taster course, or a group meeting was in itself a challenge because people often thought it was 'not for them'. One worker had tried unsuccessfully to get some older women to attend a free trial session for an aerobics class without success. The worker, decided to meet with the women in person at a class they already attended on a Sunday. The women agreed that if they could meet at the same time on a Sunday, at the same venue, they would be willing to try something new.

## Faith

Some people felt that while celebrating the diversity of different faiths, it was equally important not to focus on 'faith' itself. Others felt that it was hard to separate their faith from themselves as it was part of their identity.

The very use of the word 'faith' can be seen as divisive. The CHAT Shop initially had difficulty in recruiting women to attend their sessions because of the reference to 'faith' in the original title of the group, which the women were unhappy about. People may not always be comfortable with sharing their own personal faith in a group situation, especially if it differs from the 'official' religious beliefs of that faith. The group was renamed 'Friends Together' and subsequently attracted more participants.

Where meetings were held was also important. It was better if people could meet in a neutral venue and not say a church hall, although this was not always feasible due to costs, and locality etc.

Who we are and what we believe was an issue for many people at the workshops. Workers felt that out of respect for equal opportunities, they could not promote one religion over another. One volunteer with the refugee service queried whether as a volunteer she should share her own faith with others and how vocal should she be?

This led onto discussion as to whether people should leave their faith behind when they went to work, or could you share your faith with other people if for example, you had built up a relationship and trust over time? It was felt that this was an issue which was frequently not talked about in training. The suggestion was made that there should be guidance written into the person specification for volunteers on how to address the issue of sharing a person's own belief with those they were working for.

### Conclusion and summary

A lack of knowledge of people's faith and culture was identified by participants at the workshop as constituting a barrier for worker's engaging with people from faith traditions. This could be addressed by training, by networking and support from other colleagues working in the same area. It was also important not to be afraid to ask questions about people's faith and culture and to challenge where appropriate the misconceptions and attitudes towards people of different cultures in a sensitive manner.

A lack of knowledge of the social and cultural customs in this country could be a barrier for people from different faiths and cultures accessing statutory services, and participating in social and cultural events in this country. One to one mentoring was considered to be valuable in this context.

The issue of faith was important to both service users and providers. For workers, it was important that they felt able to share their faith with colleagues and those with whom they were working, providing this was done in a sensitive manner. Guidance relating to the sharing of a person's own faith should be written into contracts for volunteers who are working with people from different faith traditions and cultures.

Celebrating the different diversity of cultures and creating an atmosphere of respect were also important to ensure that everyone was treated equally, with no one faith or culture being promoted over another. The workshops highlighted the need for training in diversity and communication skills to ensure everyone is treated equally.

### **III 'The Church and community development work': A case study**

The community centre is located on an estate in one of the most deprived wards in County Durham. The centre which has been running for 28 years is owned by the Church. The estate, which is isolated from the rest of the town both geographically and socially, suffers from high unemployment, poverty, drug/alcohol abuse, housing problems, debt, vandalism, property crimes, dysfunctional families and people with poor health. It also has the highest percentage population of elderly people in County Durham many of whom are isolated.

The community work is part of the mission of the Church. The Church section of the Methodist Church Circuit Policy states: 'The local community recognises the church as a refuge place, oasis, meeting place, advice centre and a place of peace and trust – God's House'. The value that the community places on the churches' work is shown by the lack of vandalism to the community centre and Church. As the centre's secretary said 'We could not exist without the co-operation and the backing of the local community who regard the centre as a place of refuge in times of trouble and distress'.

The mission statement of the Church Community Centre is: 'To promote the benefit of the local community; to provide appropriate services and facilities in partnerships; to make all feel valued and to treat people equally, promoting a sense of purpose and self-esteem'. The work carried out by volunteers at the Church Community centre is based upon this mission to meet the needs of local residents and demonstrates how a local church can work not just with the local community but in partnership with the statutory sector to better serve the needs of the local community.

The centre offers a wide range of community activities for the whole population of the estate with church activities running alongside community activities. The majority of the work is done by volunteers. Their total weekly hours equal the work of nearly 5 full time staff. The Furniture Scheme has been particularly successful, providing household goods and furnishing for people on the estate particularly in response to crisis situations such as a fire, or flood. The luncheon club which runs twice a week provides an excellent lunch for the elderly, as well as acting as a venue where people can meet together socially.

The church has also built up a working relationship with the numerous statutory agencies working on the estate: Sure Start; community projects; the County and District Councils; the LSP; the PCT; and the police. However, there are challenges to this type of engagement. Chasing funding has been the most gruelling part of sustaining projects. New funding has recently been obtained from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to sustain the Playgroup and buy a new van for the Furniture Scheme. The systems in place for obtaining and justifying this funding are slow and overly bureaucratic, leading both to volunteer fatigue and reduced access to government funding streams. These issues, the centre staff feel, need to be raised at a more strategic level if the church is to work in an effective partnership with the statutory sector to benefit of the local community.

# CONCLUSION

## Achievements

The local authority and public services workshop event provided an opportunity for the first time for public sector workers who have a designated role for faith engagement to meet with colleagues from across the North East region. The workshop indicated the prospect of a future public sector 'faith' officer's network for the region to offer support and to disseminate good practice.

The Local Strategic Partnership workshop has been used to inform a feasibility study by CRC to explore the issues relating to: recruiting faith advisers/ reps for LSPs; supporting and training faith advisers/ reps; partnership and networking; enhancing the understanding of LSPs and public bodies as they relate to the contribution of the faith communities. The feasibility study will highlight the way forward for faith communities to be better represented at strategic level by engaging with Local Strategic Partnerships in the North East.

The FiNER project worked in partnership with other FCCBF fund projects to achieve project outcomes. The work undertaken with the CHAT Shop which looked at the training and support needs for people working with people from different faiths and cultures was particularly successful. This was due to the fact that the CHAT Shop had already established relationships with other community development workers locally who were already working with people from different faith traditions. This overcame one of the identified barriers to the project in that there would have been insufficient time to allow for relationships to be built with faith communities within the duration of the project.

The following is a summary of the issues which have arisen from the work undertaken by the Development Officer on the project, and where appropriate suggestions have been made to address these issues. They have been divided into the three sections of the project.

### SECTION 1: Local Authority and public sector engagement with faith communities

- **Lack of knowledge (religious literacy) of different faiths can be a barrier to engagement with faith communities.**

Training in religious literacy is a priority for statutory sector staff wishing to work with faith communities.

- **Identifying who to contact in relation to faith matters was a difficult and sometimes complex process.**

The development of the emerging interfaith bodies across the region will help to stimulate dialogue between faith communities, and with the statutory sector. A regional database or website for the region to share good practice and as an

effective, systematic way of sharing information would also facilitate communication processes.

- **There is no systematic or established mechanism for the churches, or other faith communities to refer people in the community to the appropriate statutory service provider**

Faith communities may be a first point of contact and can act as a link and referral system to statutory services and other sources of support in the community.

Faith communities need to receive training in order to help them understand how the statutory services such as the Council and Primary Care Trust, work. This could help in the referral process. Faith communities also need to consider and explore how they want to work with the statutory service providers.

- **Awareness raising training for statutory sector staff is essential so that they consider or take into account the faith of people when they deliver services.**

This is important as Faith communities are potential partners in service delivery and can help the public sector to meet government agendas such as social cohesion.

- **Raise awareness with the public sector of the contribution which faith communities make to the local community**

Faith communities provide many resources such as the use of their buildings as community venues, and the expertise and knowledge of volunteers who are involved with developing their community on many socio-economic and cultural issues.

## SECTION 2: LSP and Faith representation in the North East region

- **Difficulty in identifying appropriate faith representation.**

It was difficult to get faith advisers/representatives for LSPs that had an established mechanism for feeding back to the different faith communities. The emerging interfaith bodies will help to address this issue.

- **The contribution which faith communities could make to LSPs and the statutory sector was often underestimated**

It was important to understand how faith communities see their role in the community and wider society in order to understand what role Faith communities can play on a LSP.

A greater understanding was needed by those involved in governance and policy making as to the distinctive contribution of faith communities; particularly in relation to Local Strategic Partnerships, and Networking Groups.

- **Raise awareness of function of LSP with ecumenical and interfaith bodies**

Disseminate information about LSPs in the faith communities to raise their awareness about systems of community governance and the important role that the faith communities can play

Raise awareness of the benefits resulting from faith community involvements in LSPs such as receiving information regarding access to resources and the chance to channel information into the broader community. There is also the opportunity to influence and shape community plans and strategic decisions.

- **LSPs need to be more accessible to Faith representatives/advisers**

Training and induction, the provision of appropriate resources are needed for faith reps in order for them to become more effective in their role.

As GONE gather together LSP representatives it is important for faith groups to lobby at these higher levels in order to secure the resources to support faith representatives.

- **The need for supporting structures for Faith representatives**

The regional interfaith and local faith bodies could help in the process of communication between faith groups. There is also a need for a national faith network where faith representatives could go to for help and advice on their role.

### SECTION 3: Working with people from different faith traditions – training and support

- **Engaging with faith communities is a time consuming process**

This was an identified risk for the project i.e. that the time taken to develop relationships with faith communities affected the amount of work which could be achieved within the time frame of the project. This barrier was partly overcome by working in partnership with other FCCB funded projects who had already established contacts with different faith communities.

- **Difficult to identify faith community development work in the region**

A network and a directory of different organisations and faith communities who are working with people from different faith traditions and cultures would facilitate the process.

- **Training in religious literacy is necessary for staff working with people from different faith traditions and cultures**

This is important in order to provide inclusive services to people from different faiths and traditions; to help people to access social and cultural services; to enhance communication and mixing within different faith groups.

- **The workshops highlighted the need for training in diversity and communication skills to ensure everyone is treated equally**

It is important to link in to the wide range of diversity training available and being promoted regionally by both the statutory and voluntary sectors.

- **Protocols and/or guidance on how to deal with your own faith when working with people from other faith traditions was important.**

This could be written into a volunteer or new staff's job description or form part of the induction training process.

- **Raise awareness of the contribution that faith communities make to the social and economic regeneration of communities**

Faith communities have valuable assets in terms of buildings, skills, networks and local knowledge and volunteers. They are potential partners in service delivery and are involved in all aspects of neighbourhood.

- **There is scope for training in community development practices and principles for people working with faith communities.**

It is important that learning opportunities are developed that focus specifically on community development in a faith context.

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- <sup>1</sup> Faith in the North East– Social Action by faith communities in the region - a report by Kath Smith p6
- <sup>2</sup> Faith in the North East– Social Action by faith communities in the region - a report by Kath Smith p6
- <sup>3</sup> Faith in the North East – Social Action by faith communities in the region – a report by Kath Smith P5
- <sup>4</sup> Faith in the North East – Social Action by faith communities in the region – a report by Kath Smith P6
- <sup>5</sup> 'Faithful Cities' The Report from the Commission on Urban Life and Faith 2006
- <sup>6</sup> Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities (Home Office Faith communities Unit February 2004) p7
- <sup>7</sup> Religious literacy – The Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and Humber P7
- <sup>8</sup> Acting in Good Faith – Churches Change and Regeneration churches Community Work Alliance Northern Ireland 2004 P1
- <sup>9</sup> Ethnicity in the North East (figures taken from the 2001 census) p51
- <sup>10</sup> Ethnicity in the North East (figures taken from the 2001 census) p52
- <sup>11</sup> Robert Furbey, Adam Dinham, Richard Farnell, Doreen Finneron and Guy Wilkinson March 2006 Faith and Social Capital: Connecting or dividing, Bristol: Policy Press for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- <sup>12</sup> Faith in LSPs A report from the Churches Regional Network by Phillip Escott and Pat Logan December 2006
- <sup>13</sup> Religious Literacy 'A practical guide to the region's faith communities' the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and Humber .
- <sup>14</sup> The Churches Regional Network 'Faith in LSPs' Phil Escott & Pat Logan Dec 2006 p6

### A Borough Council Community Bridge Building initiative

- <sup>1</sup> Count Me In' a census report 'Care Services Improvement Partnership' National Institute for mental health in England. Published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

<sup>2</sup> ‘Breathing space’ article, Jan 2006 Community Care Journal p36-37

<sup>3</sup> The Church of England Archbishops’ Council ‘Promoting mental health: A resource for spiritual and pastoral care’ P19

<sup>4</sup> The Church of England Archbishops’ Council ‘Promoting mental health: A resource for spiritual and pastoral care’ p34

### Local Strategic partnerships

<sup>1</sup> Faith in LSPs - A report from the Churches Regional Network by Phillip Escott and Pat Logan December 2006

<sup>2</sup> Faithful Representation: Faith Representatives on Local Public Partnerships commissioned by the Church Urban Fund Sept 2006

### Working with Different Faith Traditions – Training and support issues

<sup>1</sup> Acting in Good Faith – p3 Churches Change and Regeneration - Churches Community Work Alliance Northern Ireland 2004

<sup>2</sup> Tools for Regeneration – Faith Based Regeneration Network, Rhumman Ahmed, Doreen Finneron, Harmander Singh 2006

<sup>3</sup> Taster sessions in Community Development Learning - Federation for Community Development Learning website: [www.fcdl.org.uk](http://www.fcdl.org.uk)

<sup>4</sup> Learners All: e-mail: [learners.all@ntlworld.com](mailto:learners.all@ntlworld.com)

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BME	Black Minority Ethnic
CHAT SHOP	Churches Acting Together in Arthur’s Hill
CRC	Churches Regional Commission
CRCD	Church related community development
FbRN	Faith Based Regeneration Network
FCCBF	Faith communities Capacity Building Fund
FCDL	Federation for Community Development Learning
FiNER	Faith in North East Regeneration Project’
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MCF	Middlesbrough Council of Faiths
NECCT	North East Christian Churches Together
VCS	Voluntary Community Service

# APPENDIX A

## GLOSSARY – AN EXPLANATION OF TERMS

While often taken as synonymous, “culture”, “ethnicity” and “religion” express different concepts. It is helpful to define such terms, and the following is adapted from advice given in the Cabinet Office publication *Outreach – Building Links with Ethnic Minority Communities*.

### **Culture**

An evolving mix of values, lifestyles and customs derived from social heritage. The culture of ethnic minority groups will be affected by the social, economic and political situation in the part of the country in which they live – it is not just about ethnic origin and religious beliefs. Day to day social, economic and political life will have a greater impact on some ethnic groups than on others for whom religion may be almost an all-embracing influence. Culture often includes language or dialect.

### **Ethnicity**

Members of the same ethnic group have a sense of shared past and origins; they perceive themselves as distinct from others; and these complementary aspects of common origin and distinctness are enhanced when different groups come into contact with each other. Members of the same ethnic group may often be followers of different religions.

### **Religion or belief**

A religion or belief is a world-view or ‘life stance’ - a set of answers to so-called ‘ultimate questions’ involving values - spiritual and moral – and beliefs about the nature of life and the world. Religions usually but not always involve belief in a god (or gods). People of many different cultures and ethnic groups may adhere to the same religion or belief. We need only consider how Christianity and Islam in particular have spread throughout the world to realise that culture and religion are far from synonymous.

### Some useful definitions

<b>Faith</b>	A person’s beliefs and values
<b>Religion</b>	A set of observances connected to faith
<b>Spirituality</b>	Transforming oneself and one’s relations with other people, the whole of creation, and the divine
<b>Race</b>	Social divisions based on skin colour and physical features
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Membership of a social group, often related to a geographical region or place of origin, with a distinctive language, customs, attitudes, and values
<b>Cultural traditions</b>	Norms about how and what to do often passed down through families and communities.

## APPENDIX B

### Engaging With Faith Communities: How to make sense of it all

25<sup>th</sup> September 2006

#### Government Guidance and related documents:

**Faith & Community:** A good practice guide for Local Authorities (LGA 2002)

[www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

**Partnership for the Common Good:** interfaith structures and local government good practice guidelines (Interfaith Network for the UK 2003) [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

**Working Together:** Cooperation between Government and Faith Communities (Home Office Faith Communities Unit February 2004)

Recommendations of the steering group reviewing patterns of engagement between Government and Faith Communities in England [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk)

**Working Together:** Cooperation between Government and Faith Communities Progress report August 2005 [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

**Community Cohesion** – an action guide Ch 8 Working with Faith Communities (LGA 2004) [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

**Faith, hope and clarity:** Developing a model of faith group involvement in civil renewal (De Montfort University Summary of research findings November 2005) [www.dmu.ac.uk](http://www.dmu.ac.uk)

**Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities** (OPDM April 2006) (Ch 5 Regional & Local Governance and Public services) [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

**Faith-based voluntary action** Economic & Social research Council Seminar Series Mapping the public policy landscape (ESRC 2006) [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)

#### **Developing Religious Literacy:**

**Religious Literacy:** A practical guide to the region's faith communities (CRC in Yorkshire & Humberside [www.yhassembly.gov.uk](http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk))

**The Needs of Faith Communities in Major Emergencies:** Some Guidelines (Home Office & cabinet Office July 2005) [www.ukresilience.info/publications/faith-communities.pdf](http://www.ukresilience.info/publications/faith-communities.pdf)

**Huntingdonshire District Council Faith Guide** [www.huntsdc.gov.uk](http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk)

**Faith in Partnership Series** (produced by Partnership for Theological Education, Manchester)

[www.manchester.anglican.org](http://www.manchester.anglican.org)

#### **Local Resources:**

**Ethnicity in the North East (2003)**

[www.gos.gov.uk/gone](http://www.gos.gov.uk/gone)

**Faith in the North East (2004)**

[www.northeastchurches.org.uk](http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk)

**Churches Regional Commission (CRC) and North East Christian Churches Together (NECCT)** Links to all member Christian denominations in the region.

[www.northeastchurches.org.uk](http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk)

**North East Religious Learning Resources Centre**

[www.resourcescentreonline.co.uk](http://www.resourcescentreonline.co.uk)

**Middlesbrough Council of Faiths**

[www.middlesbroughfaiths.org.uk](http://www.middlesbroughfaiths.org.uk)

#### **Other useful websites:**

**Interfaith Network for the UK**

[www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

**Faith Based Regeneration Network (FBRN)**

[www.fbrn.org.uk](http://www.fbrn.org.uk)