

Stepping Out in Faith



A report on the Faith in Our Communities
Initiative in the Durham Diocesan Area

By Robert Errington, with Bernadette Askins, Paul Southgate and Jim Robertson

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1. STEPPING OUT IN FAITH

“The issue is not to talk more about God in a culture that has become irreligious, but how to express ethically the coming of God’s reign, how to help people respond to the real questions of their context, how to break with the paradigm according to which religion has only to do with the private sphere.” [David J Bosch (Believing in the Future) – quoted on the front page of ‘The Diocese of Durham Annual Delivery Plan to become a Grant-Making Diocese of the Church Urban Fund 2006-7’]

Introduction

Duncan B. Forrester, former Professor of Theology and Public Issues at Edinburgh, writes in his perceptive and sensitive book ‘On Human Worth’ that the human reality of poverty and inequality today is best expressed, not in statistics, but in people’s accounts of their own lives and experiences and in their own words. Their stories of hardship and courage, of disasters and triumphs, generosity and destructive behaviour, and friendship and exploitation, make no claim to objectivity or comprehensiveness. But they add a vital and often otherwise absent dimension to the discussion. These stories are more than anecdotes or hearsay evidence; they give access to dimensions of reality that must be heard if the description of communities and inequality is to be authentic (Forrester 2001).

Over the past two years, six projects in the Durham Diocesan area have tried to tackle social exclusion and inequality from the bottom up. By appointing local community workers in each area: Shildon, Sunderland Pallion, Hetton-le-Hole, Stockton Hardwick, Stockton Newtown and Houghton-le-Spring, they have developed a range of projects to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups in their communities.

All six projects have involved church members and built links with non-church going residents. They have worked with people of all ages, from toddler groups to older people’s homes, and developed a wide range of activities, from keep-fit classes to food growing schemes and developing allotments. They have supported vulnerable adults and engaged people ‘missed’ by mainstream services.

And they have shown that church-based community development provides unique opportunities to address issues of social justice for both individuals and communities. All six projects have been rooted in the values that come from their Christian faith, but they have not been confined to church buildings and community halls. Workers, management committee members and volunteers have been living out their faith beyond the walls of their own churches; they have been ‘Stepping out in Faith.’

These six projects also suggest ideas for how this approach can be strengthened further. Their development points to a vibrant environment in which churches are involved in responding to social needs. Perhaps it is fair to say that this type of church related community development approach has not always been understood or appreciated by people outside of the faith organisations.

Faith in our Community (FIC) marks an important development in North East church dialogue about the role of community development from a faith-based perspective in the regeneration of our neighbourhoods and communities. This evaluation report offers practical examples of the value churches and faith based organisations add to tackling social exclusion and disadvantage in the North East.

About this report

The stories in this report are brought together and extrapolated from a structured evaluation and review of the FIC project. The range of source materials includes personal interviews with FIC Steering Group members, community development workers, management committee members and volunteers, Diocesan plans, Church Urban Fund reports, notes from workshops, minutes from meetings, attendance at meetings and access to training materials and reflection documents. The views expressed are indicative of the thinking and considerations of the team of people who support and are engaged in the work of FIC. These views are not necessarily the stated policies or theological views of the Durham Diocese and its partners.

This report will present a number of challenges. For some, it will affirm and consolidate their commitment to work for change; for others, the stories and challenges may be less comfortable but, hopefully, thought-provoking. If this proves to be the outcome, the work of the projects and this evaluation report will have achieved their purpose.

Communities in Transition

The North East of England has a long history of poverty and deprivation. The decline of major employers in coal mining, ship building and other heavy industries and the legacy of their resultant health problems, has given rise to some of the most acute and entrenched deprivation in England. Regeneration initiatives over the years show only very limited impact on these concerns.

The changes impacting on communities, like those in the North East, can be broken down into different elements illustrating these transitions [adapted from Cable Project model 'Communities Experiencing Dynamic Transitions' Jim Robertson 2007 CCWA/DIAK Durham]

- Demographic Transition: an increasing ageing population, gender restructuring and intergenerational divisions
- Economic Transition: the poor getting relatively poorer, changing labour market systems and structures, fluctuating unemployment, the impact of globalisation, punitive income support systems and tentative support for social enterprise systems.

- Social Transition: marginalisation and social exclusion, discrimination, worklessness, changing role of the family, identity and formation, self-interest and social responsibility, faces and facets of oppression, social cohesion and expressions of fear and suspicion.
- Political Transition: formal status and support for extremist parties, restructuring of models of welfare, welfare to workfare, strategic partnerships, networking, ambivalence about political structures and evidence of political disengagement

The six FIC projects are located in areas of transition; predominantly localities that were formerly lively mining communities or based upon manufacturing industries. They are areas with a history of closeness, solidarity and commonality. As these industries have declined, community network support systems have changed and new support systems have been required. Faith organisations have responded to the need for the renewal and reshaping of these support systems. All six of the FIC projects has contributed to this process in a variety of different ways

The Diocese of Durham

In 2006 the Annual Delivery Plan for the Diocese of Durham reported a,

“persistent under-spend of Church Urban Fund money within the Diocese ... in spite of the fact that we are the 5th largest recipient of Church Urban Fund (CUF) money with 207 deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) identified in the 2004 Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD2004].”

CUF money had supported a number of local, award-winning church based community projects, but increasingly grants were being awarded in a reactive “first-come-first-served” way.” After discussions involving the Canon Caroline Dick, the former Social Responsibility Officer, the Churches’ Community Work Alliance, the Churches’ Regional Commission in North East, Archdeacons, CUF Officers and others, the Durham Diocese Annual Delivery Plan for 2006/7 addressed this issue by successfully becoming a grant-making diocese.

This decision enabled the Diocese to develop a project which would respond to perceived and researched needs. It would aim to increase the capacity within church congregations by giving

them the confidence and skills to plan new projects and employ workers with the support of an overall steering group. The project was called Faith in our Communities (FIC).

Influences on FIC

Churches and other faith communities have a long and rich tradition of involvement in addressing social issues. From the campaign to abolish slavery to the creation of model communities, Faith has provided the impetus and moral framework to tackle injustice and social transformation.

The nature of this involvement has changed over many years. In recent decades there has been an increasing focus on community development approaches to outreach work, mission and regenerating communities. 'Faith in the City', the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas report, was an important milestone publication, illustrating the potential of community development work and social action projects [ACUPA 1985]. At a later date, the Faithful Cities Report [2006] also alluded to the development challenges in city urban areas, though perhaps not as perceptively as the earlier report. But it did argue that the Church is a resource of sustained commitment, or 'Faithful Capital,' which can address the complex issues of regeneration and development.

Church Related Community Development is a term used to describe a specific way of working for change in communities. It usually, but not exclusively, focuses on communities and groups experiencing disadvantage and forms of exclusion and springs from a holistic, faith based view of communities.

"The Church Related Community Development approach is built directly upon the central themes of the Christian faith and Christian teaching. Essentially, if any suffer, it affects us all." [Bacon 2004 p.6]

Church Related Community Development

(CRCD) is rooted in the lives of everyday people. It seeks to strengthen the capacity of church members to be active in their parishes and local communities, to work with neighbourhood groups, organisations and networks to shape change and build social justice. It aims to do this through the process of

empowerment and participation; not by doing things for people, or running services that people engage with as consumers, but by supporting people to achieve their potential as equal partners and creators of change.

"Through CRCD people can develop skills and confidence and actively participate in bringing about change ... in the context of disadvantaged and excluded communities CRCD works with those, who at first sight, appear to have little or no power to make real changes in their community. It encourages people and groups to work with others and act collectively on common concerns," [Bacon 2004 p.10]

The concern in the Gospels for the powerless and the excluded teaches us to respect, value and care for the marginalised and poor in our society. Those groups pushed to the fringes of our society are often adversely affected by decisions made by people or institutions with little awareness of how their attitudes or policies impact on the lives of others. In CRCD church members are called to apply their faith in the world around them and help create a fairer and less divisive society, starting with the communities in which they live and pray. As we shall see in later sections, this enables the growth of Social Capital, but also Faithful Capital.

FIC at its inception was informed and shaped by a number of key conceptual influences. As well as the ideas about the nature of CRCD, the National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work has underpinned the development of the project and the education and training programme for the community workers. Furthermore, ideas that churches have an important role to play in enhancing Social Capital, developed by commentators such as Richard Putnam, have also been powerful forces.

Other community development approaches, international and local, influenced the development of FIC. From a European perspective CABLE (Community Action Based Learning for Empowerment) is an eight nations training and development project for community-based workers launched in October 2005. Aimed particularly at Central and Eastern Europe, one of its main objectives has been to develop a model of training for local community development workers employed by faith communities and civil society. It has held workshops looking at the training needed to enable community development workers to address poverty and social

exclusion in their own communities (Robertson 2006). Organisations from eight countries, including the Churches' Community Work Alliance from the United Kingdom, are partners of CABLE. Jim Robertson is actively involved in the CABLE Project and is a founding member of the FIC Partnership Steering Group.

There were also precedents for community development training posts within the North East. In Hendon, Sunderland, 'Back on the Map' had used New Deal for Communities funding to employ and train a team of local residents as Link Workers. They had supported people to access existing services, while simultaneously developing new groups and activities where they were needed.

Meanwhile from 2002-2005 HealthWORKS Newcastle had trained eighteen residents of East and West Newcastle as Community Health Link Workers. Taking the same community development approach as the workers in Hendon, the Newcastle workers were trainees, achieving NVQs in Community Work while supporting disadvantaged groups and marginalised individuals to access services and activities that improved their health (Green 2005).

The introduction to community development learning programmes for these earlier initiatives was developed by Community Work Assessment Consortium for North East England who have also offered support to the FIC Project through the Partnership Steering Group.

Using these experiences as inspiration, FIC set out the following objectives:

1. Develop six sustainable community development projects in disadvantaged communities within the area of Durham Diocese.
2. Appoint six local Christian activists as church-related community development workers
3. Increase awareness of the link between faith and community development and the involvement of church members in these six communities
4. Share the experience with parishes from the Durham Diocese and the regional churches
5. Recruit new parishes/Churches Together groups to participate in FIC Phase 2

Development of Faith in Community Partnership

In the year the Durham Diocese achieved

grant-making status, FIC brought together five organisations from the North East and beyond to form a partnership. The partners comprised Durham Diocese, The Churches Community Work Alliance [CCWA is the national network organisation which enables and supports churches and faith based community development, the Community Work Assessment Consortium for North East England [CWACNEE] and the Churches' Regional Commission in the North East (CRC) which is committed to promoting social action in the north east churches. The representatives from the selected partners had the necessary experience and expertise to develop a wide-ranging and complex community based project. The FIC Partnership Steering Group has continued to meet approximately every six weeks.

In 2006 and 2007 expressions of interest were invited from Anglican parishes and Churches Together groups that fell within the 10% most deprived in the Durham Diocese. From these discussions six groups expressed firm interest and were in a position to move ahead with a local FIC project.

Initially, the Partnership Steering Group planned to employ two FIC project managers on a part-time basis, one to focus on project development, the other on training the church related community development workers and management committee members. However funding bids to Northern Rock Foundation and Esmee Fairburn were unsuccessful and as the local projects gained momentum it became a matter of urgency to secure the funding.

The Diocesan Mission Fund agreed to fund the part-time post of Project Development Officer. This post, in collaboration with the Partnership Steering Group, would be responsible for supporting the local management committees to recruit, appoint and manage trainee community development workers in the six local projects; a vast amount of work for one part-time post. Bernadette Askins, a former Diocesan Ecumenical Officer for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, was appointed to this role, line managed by Canon Caroline Dick.

The role has been broad, supporting the six FIC local projects through various stages of development. This included the establishment of management committees, writing budgets, drawing up job descriptions, training members of interview panels, developing policies and procedures and guidance on line management. Bernadette also helped projects to seek match funding, as well as fundraising for the training of workers and committees.

2. SIX STORIES

The lack of funding for the Training Officer post meant that Bernadette and Jim Robertson (from CCWA and CWACNEE) were drawn into this area of work. They designed and delivered the learning and training programme described in section 3 and arranged the NVQ Level 3 Professional Accreditation for the community development workers. The training team also organise a regular series of learning events for management committees and church members.

“He also said, ‘What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds of the earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.’” (Mark 4: 30-32)

Shildon Mustard Seed Project Shildon

Like all of the areas covered by FIC, contains some of the most deprived communities in England. 18% of the working population receives invalidity benefit, half of the town’s adults have no qualifications and 40 % of children in Thickley North-East ward, where the project has been focused, grow up in workless households. The town’s major employer, previously employing 75% of the working population, closed in 1983. The town has not recovered economically, nor have its communities recovered their confidence.

The Church Urban Fund began discussing the opportunity to develop local FIC projects with Durham parishes in the summer of 2006. At the same time in Shildon a large scale public consultation was taking place around the closure of the Shildon Centre. This consultation identified a number of gaps in provision, including the need for environmental action and improvement. In September 2006 this information was used by the parish priest to prepare an application for funding that was approved 2 months later. By December a local committee had been formed and begun working with local agencies to develop the project. This committee included key partners from the area and representatives from local churches from more than one denomination, but particularly St John’s Church, Shildon. In September 2007 Helen, a woman already living and working in the Shildon area, was appointed as the FIC community development worker.

Consultations had identified the need for local environmental improvements and the Shildon Mustard Seed Project has worked closely with many of the community organisations in the area to develop new activities. In just over two years it has achieved a great deal: bulb planting and a logo competition in local schools, flower planting sessions, a sunflower competition, a giant thirty piece community jigsaw (each piece representing each group’s concerns and

the jigsaw assembled to represent the community coming together to tackle these issues), a yearlong series of tub planting sessions, development of a community allotment (with a poly tunnel) and a tool library. The Shildon Mustard Seed Project has developed partnership work wherever possible. There are around thirty other community organisations active in the local area.

The project has been very careful not to duplicate the work of other groups. Instead it has tried to work closely with other local projects to identify opportunities to involve all members of the local community in environmental change. A list of some of the agencies and groups they have worked shows the extent and range of their partnership approach: Shildon Town Council, the Jubilee Estate Community Centre, three local schools, The Locomotion Museum, Sure Start, Groundworks, S & D Training, the Safety Group, the Allotment Group, Nifty Fifties, the Dad's Group, CAVOS, Sedgfield Borough Council, the Brownies, Scouts and Guides, Residents' Associations, Durham Police and local churches including St John's, the Salvation Army, local Methodist and Catholic Churches and congregations.

Partnership work has not only increased the project's capacity to develop its activities, but has also attracted additional funding. £2778 was secured from Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) to work with S & D Training to enable local families to grow their own food. £4000 was received from Shildon Town Council who along with Groundwork has also donated considerable time, effort and additional resources to develop the community allotment.

The Mustard Seed Project has also been adaptable to local needs. It was expected that the worker would develop projects primarily with adults. However, much of the work has developed more naturally through local schools and with young people. The project found this to be a much more successful way of reaching the local community.

And it has learned from its experiences. In the early months of 2008 the project struggled to find volunteers to work with and to shape its direction. After a period of reflection it was recognised that they may have initially been overambitious. After a decision to focus on smaller cultural and leisure groups it proved to be much easier to involve members of the local community. Many of its successful events came about as a result of this shift in strategy.

The mustard seed starts as the smallest seed before it eventually grows into the biggest shrub of them all. Measuring the impact of a project rooted in partnership work and developed in such a short timescale is difficult. There is no doubt that the project has raised awareness of environmental issues in the area. But it has also improved the self-confidence and self-esteem of the people taking part. One older, isolated resident who took part in a planting session said:

"I have had a lovely time. You have no idea what this means to me."

The increase in self-confidence has been both individual and a collective experience. One management committee member felt that the project was about,

*"Enabling the community to have faith in itself."
(Management Committee Member – MC)*

And the project has had an impact on the relationship between the church and the local community. The project had:

"Raised awareness of the role of the Church Family and its responsibility to the wider community." (MC)

It was felt that the Mustard Seed Project was not an addition to the work of the church, but a central part of its mission. The project had provided the local church with the opportunity to:

"Give something back to the community, to share what we have been given with other people." "We are embodying the Christian Faith in our community." (MC)

St Luke's Pallion

A FIC project was launched in Pallion, Sunderland in September 2007. The FIC Partnership Steering Group had been clear from the outset that they wanted the individual projects to be shaped by, and reflect the needs of, local communities and their structures. In the case of the project in Pallion, we can clearly see how local conditions have impacted on its development.

All FIC projects have a strong ecumenical dimension. Often participation is through

membership of the local management committee, but in the case of St Luke's the worker appointed, Marie, is a member of the nearby St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. This has opened up a number of opportunities for developing new partnerships.

"The worker's Commissioning Service took place in the context of a service with healing for anointing. It was the first time that the Roman Catholic priest and the Anglican priest had shared in a joint service of this kind. The worker brought about 50 members from her church with her, and it means that she will be able to recruit volunteers from both congregations." (Durham Diocese 2008 Annual Delivery Plan p.2)

The FIC project was housed in St Luke's Neighbourhood Trust. The Neighbourhood Trust aims to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents and has given the FIC project a particular, holistic, health focus.

"The aim? It's the wholeness, wellbeing and involvement of the local community, as reached by the trainee community development worker. To make life better for everyone, both physically and emotionally." (MC).

St Luke's set out to achieve this aim by firstly identifying community needs. At an open day the FIC worker asked the local community what activities or classes they wanted. This has led to 3 weekly classes: 'Sit and B Fit', 'Sugarcraft' and 'Textiles'.

As well as developing the above activities and groups, St Luke's have also increased awareness and guidance of statutory bodies such as the Primary Care Trusts and neighbouring community projects.

Undoubtedly this has been helped by basing the community development worker in the Pallion Community Shop. The Community Shop is the 'hub' of the Ford, Pallion and Millfield Community.

Development Project and houses the 'Walking with Wheels' community development worker and staff from the Four Seasons Activity Group as well as the FIC worker. This proximity to other community projects has enabled the worker to develop useful partnerships with a range of statutory and voluntary services: e.g. Impact Family Services now work at St Luke's, providing a steady income but has also strengthened the project links with local families and their needs. Pennywell Neighbourhood Area Forum also contributed sewing machines textiles and tutors

for the Sugarcraft and Exercise classes.

As well as the development of new activities, the personal and professional development of the worker has been one of the project's most notable achievements.

"The biggest achievement of the project? Firstly Marie's development as a community development worker." (MC)

The worker has been supported by a large management committee, with a wide range of skills and experience. A particular strength has been the presence on the committee of an experienced Community Work NVQ Assessor who was able to provide on-site assessment. And there has been stability that has undoubtedly allowed the project to have solid foundations. The worker is supervised by a member of the management committee who, until October 2008, had been the project's secretary since its inception.

This stability has been accompanied by an awareness of personal and group evolution. Broadening the vision of the St Luke's Neighbourhood Trust management committee and raising the skills of the support group has been a major part of the project.

"I believe some of the management have changed considerably over the lifespan of the project." (MC)

It took some time for St Luke's Neighbourhood Trust to work out what their precise relationship with the worker was. Questions like the extent to which the worker is part of the trust or a separate project had to be struggled with and answered. Both Vision Days within the project and the Training Days that are part of the overall FIC programme have helped the committee explore and clarify their level of involvement. This process of reflection and learning together has made an impact on both committee members and project users.

"I feel that our aim of wholeness and wellbeing is ongoing and developmental. It has touched a lot of people's lives and continues to make a difference, by the local community linking up in small and large groups ... people I know are more enthusiastic and confident in themselves and willing to go out and relate to other people and enjoy the here and now." (MC)

For most participants the project has raised important questions of how their faith relates to their community life.

“Some deeper exploration of ‘who is my neighbour?’ and will I like them when I know?” (MC) For some it has even provided answers. “I believe in my community.” (MC) “It has challenged my perceptions and faith, helping me to grow and develop.” (Community Development Worker - W)

And their experience of the past year and a half has provided clear lessons for future development of this and other projects.

“Don’t give up. Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.” (MC)

Houghton-le-Spring (FACE)

The FIC project in Houghton-le-Spring also started in September 2007. Growing under the umbrella of St Michael’s Parochial Church Council, a voluntary sector organisation and registered charity, the project began with the broadest of remits. Over the next year the worker and the committee began to narrow their focus to ‘engage with families and children and to encourage family development and play.’

Their first step was to find out what children in the area wanted. As a result of their research they found that many of the activities that children wanted were, in fact, already available. But many of the services were not being accessed by local families. Rather than trying to duplicate existing activities Houghton-le-Spring FACE decided to produce a booklet outlining what was already happening in the community. This booklet was well received and a number of the groups listed in the directory reported they had received enquiries as a result of their inclusion. In common with a number of FIC projects, Houghton-le-Spring tried to build links with local partners.

“For me the project has been about building bridges between the church and local community.” (W)

Links have been established with a few other organisations, such as Connexions, the Coalfields Forum and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. Representatives from the local Bethany and Roman

Catholic Churches have become involved in the project and a reflection workshop was well attended. And FACE has organised some events themselves.

“A major event was held with a steel band, face painters and hair braiders from Bethany Christian Centre, a Henna tattooist from the local Bengali Women’s Project and the police all present.” (MC)

A regular newsletter has been published and they have built up a team of volunteers who have interest in, or have contributed to, FACE and are developing their skills. However, the worker and the management committee members feel that the project has developed slowly. 18 months into its development and some members felt that it was difficult to assess the impact of what they had done as the vision was still ‘hazy.’ This haziness has been compounded by the lack of any formal impact assessment or quality framework for this project.

In Houghton, a number of additional factors may also have contributed to this slow development. In the first year of the project the Rector who was originally involved in developing the idea for FIC in Houghton-le-Spring left the parish, leading to a temporary loss of leadership, some original partnership agencies and the absence of a clear action plan.

Other local churches, including Churches Together were not directly involved in the initial consultation and, as often is the case, it can be difficult to develop a sense of ownership when you have not been involved from the start. Important lessons have been learned about needing to take the time to lay solid foundations for any community project.

“You need to have a clear, worked out vision with wide discussion about how it was set up.” (MC)

A dedicated but inexperienced worker and management committee members initially struggled to clarify their roles and their working relationships. The worker has moved from a church office to a local community centre and finally has been working from home. Though this has allowed better access to the I.T. it may have made engagement with the local community more difficult. But In spite of all these difficulties and setbacks, the project has shown much durability.

“I think the biggest achievement for our project has simply been that after three years we’re still here!” (W)

The reflection of the worker and the management committee shows a willingness to learn from success and failure. They are open to developing the vision and to still making a difference to their local community.

“The management committee is much stronger because of the issues it has faced.” (MC)

“Now the local community (or at least some of them) know that the church is open to them. They also know me, my face and what I do, and have made links and offers of help with supporting the new drop-in we are hoping to start. It has also shown that a church-based project can be trusted; it’s not about evangelizing.” (W)

Stockton PLANT

The Newtown ward in Stockton is in the top 3% of deprivation scores in England (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2004). In 2007 the Local Strategic Partnership for the area, Stockton Renaissance, identified Children and Young People as a major theme in its community strategy designed to address the social issues resulting from such high levels of deprivation. In response to this the Local Ecumenical Partnership churches of St Paul (Anglican) and Newtown (Methodist) successfully applied to C.U.F. for a Church-Related Community Development Worker. On 1st January 2008 Stockton Parents Linking at Newtown Together (PLANT) officially started.

PLANT was established with the following objectives:

- To work with families in Stockton and particularly in the Newtown ward to develop parenting skills
- To work with local people to identify their issues and concerns and enable them to make appropriate responses
- To strengthen the links between the Local Ecumenical Partnership churches of St Paul and Newtown Methodists, the local community and other local churches and organisations.

A local resident, Sharon was recruited for the community development worker post through church networks. She had been a church volunteer and community activist for twenty years and part of the working party for Churches Working Together. The Chair, Revd Derek Rosamond, originally involved in identifying local needs and developing the bid for a FIC project in the local area, took over the responsibility as line-manager. One of his first tasks was to arrange some training for the management committee which resulted in some members of the management team completing an NVQ in managing a project.

The work of PLANT, though continuing to be based on children and families, has changed over time. The initial project plan had been to deliver parenting skills training. However, by taking time to learn from local people and work on relationships it became clear that taking a wider, supportive role, would be more appropriate. This would further enable PLANT to reach people who were not engaging with current initiatives.

The change signified an important shift towards a more community development approach; moving away from doing things for people, to supporting people to achieve for themselves and for their communities. For many of the FIC projects a greater understanding of a community development principles and approaches has been gained through experience and reflection.

“We had a lot to learn. The church had not been involved in the local community and this has been our chance to do this you must listen to learn.” (W)

In only two years PLANT has achieved much. Because of the methods used by the FIC worker, meeting parents at school gates, building relationships and passing on received wisdom, PLANT has developed activities in partnership with other local agencies. The projects it has been involved with include: organising a Logo competition with over three hundred primary school children, working with Home Start to train ten volunteers to work with families in need in their own households and supporting families through crisis situations, working with NCT to run a weekly Bumps and Babies Group, working with a Community Health Trainer to run a weekly Healthy Eating and Weight Management Course for adults and children, working with a local youth project to run a baking skills course for lads

with learning disabilities, co-ordinating a Gardening and Healthy Eating Project at a local Catholic primary school and arranging an intergenerational picnic with a local primary school.

PLANT seeks to serve all people irrespective of their religion. However there have been specific faith, rather than community development, outcomes from its work. The community development worker is now meeting with all the families who apply to have their children baptised (over fifty families last year). She leads a preparation class before each baptism and passes on information about PLANT. She then follows up contact with families after baptism. This helps to build an ongoing relationship with local families and enables PLANT to engage with a wider range of parents and children.

In addition a local primary school has held three services for the whole school at St Paul's Newtown and two visits have been made to the church by school classes for curricular activities. A minister of the church now leads assemblies at the school on a fortnightly basis and teaches some class sessions on Christian Faith and Community Leadership. While only the last of these examples relates to community development it shows the range of outcomes that have emerged from FIC activities.

Throughout its work, PLANT has enabled people to share faith, if that is what they choose, without forcing religion onto people. It has also developed the faith of the congregation and given them opportunities to work out their faith.

“Faith is about serving your community - this is the church in action.” (MC) “Faith is the why in what we do community development is the how.” (MC)

Stockton PLANT has grown from solid roots. The worker was already well grounded in the local community. Using existing networks, contacts and local network has been vital to avoid duplication and to gain the trust of the local community. But the worker also stressed that the back-up of church members has been essential to the success of the project. The management committee has been very involved in activities and fundraising and has had a stable membership; all of the original members are still involved apart from one minister who moved area.

There is a great deal of support for PLANT in both the church and the local community and there are many willing volunteers who provide regular,

practical help. The oldest church member is one hundred and four years old and she still attends church twice a week. She is really supportive of the project. And because PLANT has responded to identified local needs, it has worked.

“Things have not happened as we expected, but it has been proved that it has happened in the right way.” (W)

“The Church Hall is now a busy place, full of activities. It's a tangible sign that we are engaging with the community and they are engaging with us.” (W)

Stockton HOPE

Stockton HOPE began on 1st January 2008 and is based on the Hardwick Estate, one of the biggest housing estates in Europe. Unsurprisingly the area faces specific problems around exclusion and social isolation with older people and single parents being particularly affected.

The local management committee initially identified a need to base the project's work around a main theme of 'Intergenerational Work.' This is still an important aspect of the project, but new areas of work have developed naturally.

It was expected that Glynnis, the worker, would work with both older people and young people and then bring them together. However, Glynnis has found that by working through schools with young people, she has enabled them to develop links with older people in ways they feel appropriate and are therefore more sustainable.

In common with other FIC projects, initial perceptions of what local communities needed and how these needs could be met, have been gradually modified over time as the actual needs of communities have become clear. Instead, the main focus of the Stockton HOPE has been the;

“Recruiting and retaining volunteers to work on the estate, from Church members to users of the project.” (W)

By late 2008 the project had two regular volunteers involved in delivery and around twelve other volunteers who respond to requests for support on an ad hoc basis, equating to thirty volunteer hours per month. These people have been recruited in

two ways. Initially volunteers came through church networks such as North Stockton Churches Together. However, as the project has developed, people have been recruited through the regular groups and activities. One of the main initiatives developed by Stockton HOPE is a Toddler Group. The worker has given time and investment in building the confidence of participants and now several members of the Toddler Group help out as volunteers.

How has the project achieved this? One reason is that it has taken a partnership approach. It links with an older people's home, a local care home and schools (two primary and one secondary). This has led to a number of joint initiatives including a Christmas Lunch for older people prepared by young people and placements in elderly care for Year 10 and 11 pupils doing vocational courses. It has also worked closely with the 'Hype' project and had developed good links with the Food Project and Clothing Bank.

All this has taken good communication skills and patience. Taking a community development approach has also been vital. Throughout its work Stockton HOPE offers people choices and allows people to explore solutions for themselves, rather than prescribes answers. At the Kids Club, for example, the children are involved in the planning of the sessions, deciding what each person's contribution will be. At the end of the session everyone sits down to reflect on what worked well and what they would do differently next time.

From its inception the project was rooted in local church networks, rather than being imposed on them. Prior to her appointment Glynnis had been a long standing volunteer and church member, with a wide range of experience as a Guide Leader, running youth clubs and numerous other activities. She has brought her knowledge of local needs and networks to her current role and this has been a significant strength.

Not everything has gone smoothly. The Stockton HOPE had been envisaged as a new, independent structure, rather than coming under the ownership of one particular church. Developing this structure has created a great deal of work (and paperwork) in the first two years, though it has now achieved the status of a Registered Charity. In addition only three of the original eight management committee remain.

This is partly due to clergy moving parishes, but also some members felt that their involvement

was more appropriate in the developmental stage, rather than in the day-to-day management of the project. The project is now seeking to recruit more committee members and the Chair is now a layperson. But despite these structural changes Glynnis feels that she has been well supported from her line manager, an independent advisor and Church members and committee members.

Both the worker and management committee members are clear that the project is not about the advancement of religion, but an opportunity for those with faith to practice this within their community. The project has provided a practical role for faith and one of the results of this is a growing respect from local people for the work of Church communities and their work. A large part of the success of this project has been due to the trust that people, whatever they have a personal faith or not, have in the Church to deliver activities and support communities. Stockton HOPE has no other agenda than supporting the local community. For this reason it has been better placed to engage with people who may be more suspicious of other agencies.

Two stories illustrate this. Two men, with no money or food, were given supplies through the Food Project. When they had been paid the men returned to the project with bags of shopping to help restock supplies. Meanwhile the story of a single mother demonstrates the importance of volunteering. Neither the mother nor her child had any social contact; she was not claiming any benefits and both were extremely isolated and struggling with the challenges of the world.

The worker approached the mother on the street and asked if she would like to come to a toddler group and bring some of her friends. The mother replied she had no friends, but was eventually encouraged to go along. She now attends the group and is of great support to other mothers and is making an extremely valuable contribution to the project.

Hetton-le-Hole (Hetton New Dawn Group)

Hetton New Dawn Group was also launched in the second wave of projects in January 2008, but key members of the project had already been involved in the project development well before this time. The worker, Margaret, had been involved

in initial discussions as a church member when the idea of FIC was first mooted in 2006. The volunteer Chair, the Rev Ann Anderson has been involved since 2007. From the very beginning the project had strong relationships with existing church structures.

“As an initial person to be involved in the concept of the project I was interested in the work from the beginning. (I had been involved) as a member of the Church and Community Hall manager. I am also involved with many other churches in the Deanery and Deanery Secretary, also attend the Fellowship of Churches meetings. I am also a Fair Trade supporter involving most churches in the area.” (W)

The worker has an office based in Church Community Hall, supported by a grant from the Coalfield Regeneration Trust, though like some of the other workers, she often works from home. And indeed, one of the major successes of the Hetton-le-Hole project has been to refurbish the hall and to base new activities there.

The project is centred on the church building, but both the management committee and the worker have become aware of the danger of New Dawn being seen as ‘another church thing’. The project is something that should be rooted in the church, but not limited by it.

“This project is an inter-denominational church related project, part of the Churches’ outreach mission and development in this community – to link the church to interact more with community people who don’t regularly attend church services.” (MC)

One way this is shown is through the governance of New Dawn. When it first started it was under the umbrella of the Hetton Hall Management Trust. Eighteen months down the line it now has its own constitution, making some people feel it is more independent and therefore more inclusive to people who are not part of the Church of England membership. Hetton-le-Hole chose to focus its work around the establishment of ‘new activities for the Older Person’; to reduce social isolation and to provide access to services connecting elderly people to services. They began by researching what people want and setting up activities to meet those needs. As a result of this research, new groups such as a weekly Sit N’ B Fit class, and monthly History Group and Dance session are well attended.

“It’s been about starting activities and letting them grow and flourish.” (W) “Bringing like minded people together to allow people to participate and feel needed and wanted.” (W)

Although key members of New Dawn have been involved since inception, there has been a turnover of other committee members. But the project has successfully recruited new volunteers, including two new members for the New Dawn Steering Group. There have been changes in the project’s structure and decision making; sub-groups have been set up to take responsibility and ownership over some developments so the project is not just driven by the worker. In common with other FIC projects, as it is developing Hetton New Dawn is shifting its emphasis from service provision towards community empowerment. Plans for the future include a Lunch Club (Summer 2010), a Befriending Scheme and Indoor Bowls.

It has also built relationships with a number of partnership organisations including the local Catholic and Methodist churches, Sunderland Volunteer Centre, Sunderland CVS, the Coalfield Forum, Age Concern and Gentoo. And it is planning for the future.

“It’s been a wonderful experience to be part of this project – to see relationships grow and friendships formed. The future however will be most exciting when we get to the point of introducing a Luncheon Club and a Befriending scheme for elderly people, especially those who live on their own.” (W)

3. GATHERING STORIES: LEARNING AND REFLECTING TOGETHER

“Keep loving one another as Christian brothers and sisters. Remember to welcome strangers into your homes. There were some who did and welcomed angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:1-2)

FIC has been a learning process for everyone involved: steering group members, church members, community development workers, management committee members and volunteers. No one had been involved in a project quite like this before. From the start it was recognised that a range of training and learning was necessary to develop the skills of participants, share good practice and allow a space for structured reflection.

Management Committee Events

Three quarters of the management committee and church members of FIC projects are of retirement age. While many of the management committee members were already active in their local churches, very few of them had experience of running community projects. The Steering Group recognised that to achieve their vision of local FIC projects, management committee members needed a programme of support and training. By July 2009 they had organised and run six learning events to build the capacity of management committees and volunteers of the FIC projects.

The learning events allowed the projects to share experiences and reflect theologically on them. They also focused on the development of key skills to effectively manage and develop local initiatives. Topics included: ‘Developing a Christian Ethos’, ‘Funding Applications’, ‘Monitoring and Evaluation’, ‘Strategic Funding’ two sessions on ‘Supervision’ and issues and concerns in ‘Partnership Working.’

“Bringing management committee members from various projects together has let us share advice/discussion of problems. There was a feeling of camaraderie, most of us struggling with the same problems. It gave us encouragement.” (MC) “We have learned the value of collaborating with various partners.” (MC)

These events re-enforced the importance of local ownership, from a value-based community development perspective, but also from a practical, ‘what-works’ point of view.

“We need to talk to church members. We have to find ways of engaging the church community more fully. The congregations need to own the projects.” (W)

Visits and Exposure to Other Projects

Management committee members and workers visited different community development projects in the North East: the Cedarwood Centre on the Meadowell Estate in North Shields, the URC Church Grindon Community Project in Grindon, Sunderland, the Pendower Good Neighbour Project in Benwell, Newcastle upon Tyne, a particularly distinctive project at Port Clarence, near Middlesbrough and the Thrive Project in Thornaby to observe the community organising model of practice. Structured tasks were set and agreed before the visits to encourage reflection on key issues e.g.: roles played by workers at these projects, community development approaches used and the involvement of local people in the governance of projects. These visits provided much useful information to take back to the FIC projects.

“Invaluable – they move us forward – very useful.” (W) Pointed us in possible new directions and gave useful warnings on goals and loss of focus on community development principles.” (W)

In particular the visits re-enforced the need to build slowly, rather than try to achieve everything at once.

“(They) demonstrate how long it takes to build relationships.” (W) “Helped me to have more realistic expectations – to slow down and focus on ‘small steps’ approach.” (W)

NVQ Community Work Sessions

The community development worker posts were designed as training posts. Although many of the workers had experience as community activists, they had not previously undertaken any community development training or qualifications. So while they were developing FIC projects in their local areas, all the workers embarked on a NVQ Level 3 Community Development Work Accreditation Process with ETEC, a Sunderland based training organisation.

Through this process they reflected on the theory of community development work, its key purpose, principles and values, while simultaneously applying this to practice situations.

“Training has been very useful, especially open learning, supervisor training, risk assessment, completing funding applications, project visits and of course NVQ sessions. NVQ is invaluable and a way of making sure the project is managed and progressing to meet the requirements of Community Development, A check list really.” (W)

The practicalities of building the time necessary to complete an NVQ qualification into a busy, part-time, job has proved to be difficult.

“The NVQ has proved to be difficult to complete in the timescale due to the pressure of other work. Dates for training have sometimes presented a problem.” (W)

The NVQ itself was described as “endless,” and “time-consuming.” While these may not be unfamiliar sentiments to anyone familiar with building an NVQ portfolio and deciphering the terms used in the log-books, specific circumstances added to these difficulties.

In particular the lack of work-based assessors within FIC (with the exception of St Luke’s Pallion) meant that an assessor from ETEC, based in Sunderland, was used for all the workers. This meant that workers often found that completing the NVQ was a lonely process. One worker said that while the content of the NVQ was really useful to her work, and she had changed her practice in line with what she has learnt through the NVQ process, completing it has been very difficult. In particular she felt that she needed more, “one-to-one discussions with an assessor and more time for observation.” The geography of the six FIC projects made access to regular assessment opportunities more difficult when using a peripatetic assessor. While all six projects are within the Durham Diocese, they are up to thirty miles apart.

“The physical distance from the Training Agency office, combined with a part-time post with regular session delivery, make attendance at office-based sessions unfeasible.” (W)

While community development qualifications are essential to the success of this and future projects, it would be useful to explore alternative methods of assessment and practice recognition. In the future is hoped to introduce some forms of peer assessment e.g. by other FIC workers.

Monthly Learning/Training Days for the Workers

All six community development workers have attended monthly learning/training days. These have been organised and facilitated by Bernadette Askins and Jim Robertson, The days have provided an opportunity for the workers to meet together and to share and reflect on their experiences. The workers commented on the importance of peer support in what they sometimes felt to be an isolated role.

“From a personal view I find that the help, support and fellowship offered to me by my counterparts in the other projects has been invaluable. I would have most certainly given up on the job long ago if it hadn’t been for their love and support.” (W)

Beginning with opening prayer and reflection these training days have enabled workers to look at community development principles and values and to critically assess different community development approaches. In particular, Action Learning Sets have explored individual issues through a structured and safe learning environment. Again, the wide geographical spread of the FIC projects meant that once travel time was included, some workers felt that the regular training days significantly ate into their part-time hours.

“Travelling so far for training, on such a regular basis, is not practical.” (W)

It was suggested that given the difficulties they were facing with their NVQs, the Learning/Training Days could have included time to work together on particular NVQ learning outcomes and issues.

“In my opinion the training sessions would be better served if they were scheduled so that the mornings were spent having support discussions among the six workers, perhaps taking it in turns to facilitate and the afternoons spent working on the NVQ requirements.” (W)

These sessions have produced conflicting emotions from participants. On the one hand the process of reflection has been very much appreciated.

“Valuable for introducing and reflecting on the principles of community development.” (W)

“Valuable for helping us to define our individual roles.” (W)

The academic language of community development theory has proved challenging. For some of the participants, exploring the theoretical implications of the work has proved enlightening: for others, less so.

“Reflecting on the work (is) interesting ... helped me to make the link between community development and faith.” (W)

“The amount of theological reflection has been too much. Time would have been more productive considering the practical implications of running a project.” (W)

Whether there has been too much reflection or not, one thing that distinguishes FIC from other, non-faith based community development initiatives in the North East, has been the extent and depth of reflective practice in a range of situations. Through prayer, Christianity encourages regular, individual and collective reflection, to an extent seldom equalled in the secular world. Reflective Practice is one of the key principles of community development and while many community projects recognise its importance, they often find it difficult identify mechanisms to ensure it is built into practice.

While some workers struggled with the practice/reflection balance (as almost all community development projects do), FIC made sure that structures that prioritised reflection were built into all meetings, whether for workers, management committees or both. This is a striking example of how a faith-based approach can strengthen community development principles.

Open Learning Events

A further example of the added value of a faith based approach can be seen in the Open Learning Events. The aim of these events was to;

“Develop the theological understanding of church members of the link between church and community development and enthuse and encourage them to get involved.” (CUF Impact Report, July 2009)

By the end of 2009, four learning events had brought together over one hundred and fifty church members, management committee members, community development workers and community workers for shared reflection and learning. The events covered the themes of Partnership Working, The Faith Factor, Building Hope and Weaving Communities. Evaluations from these events have been overwhelmingly positive and numbers have been growing at each event. Anonymous participant comments included,

“I feel energised.”

“I now understand what we mean by mission.”

“It has changed my view of church.”

The last of these events, Weaving Communities, is worth looking at in some detail, not only for what it achieved on the day, but how the ideas of Social Capital that formed the thread for the event's discussion and can shed light on the significance and value of the overall FIC project.

4. 'WEAVING COMMUNITIES' A STORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

“Do to others as you would have others do to you. If you love only those who love you, what kind of graciousness is yours? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do favours to only those who are good to you, what kind of graciousness is yours? Even sinners do the same.” (Luke 6: 31-33) Quoted at the Weaving Communities Event, 20th October 2009

On a cold and wet day in October 2009, forty five people gathered at Grindon United Reformed Church, Sunderland. Attendees included representatives from all six FIC projects and the event was attended by community development workers, management committee members, volunteers and FIC Partnership Steering Group members.

Canon Stephen Cherry, Diocesan Director of Ministry opened the event, talking to participants about the concept of Social Capital. In 'Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,' Robert Putnam has described how Social Capital is a social glue that helps people, organisations and communities to work together towards shared goals. For Putnam, Social Capital,

“comes from everyday contact between people, as a result of their forming social connections and networks based on trust, shared values and reciprocity (or ‘give and take’)” (Putnam 2000 p.3)

Research suggests that high levels of social capital can have a number of benefits: high social capital can be good for children's behaviour, development and educational success; areas with high social capital are cleaner, safer and friendlier; people who are active in their community or belong to groups and clubs tend to have better health; and high levels of trust and strong social networks can help to ease the effects of financial disadvantage and may even help to make us richer. (NECSC 2007)

In his presentation Canon Stephen Cherry took the concept of Social Capital and explained it in everyday language. He related the 3 main types of Social Capital ('Bonding', 'Bridging' and 'Linking') and related them to faith.

- Bonding Social Capital could be connecting people who are part of the same church, or fellow Christians, or live in the same neighbourhood.

- Bridging Social Capital can tie together people who may have different interests or views, like people of different faiths.
- Linking Social Capital can connect people who have differing levels of power or social status and can be a way to get support from formal institutions or power structures.

The Weaving Communities event itself, helped to build social capital. The room was set up with five or six chairs around each table. As people arrived they tended to sit with people they already knew, mainly people from the same FIC project as themselves. During the group discussions people were moved about the room so they were sitting with people who were not from their area, thus encouraging people to bond, to bridge and to create networks. Networks are,

‘The building blocks of Social Capital. They bring people together with a sense of common purpose based on shared values and identity. They also enable us to exchange information, debate and discuss matters, and to give and receive support.’ (NECSC p. 11)

The next presentation at the event was from the hosts, Grindon URC. Although this project was not part of FIC, it had developed a similar neighbourhood community development approach. Helen Stephenson and Kay Dixon gave an honest and insightful practical and theological account of the past seven years of their faith based community work in the Grindon area of Sunderland, from its work with volunteers, to toddler groups and 'messy church.' Talking to people from FIC projects afterwards they felt equally inspired and respectful by the presentation; aware of how much FIC had achieved and how far they still had to travel.

Once people had moved to different tables they were asked to identify examples of building, bridging and linking social capital in Grindon and then to share similar stories from their own projects. Feedback was followed by questions and answers, a liturgy led by Canon Caroline Dick, and then lunch.

A number of aspects of the event stand out as being important. Firstly there was representation from volunteers and management committee members from all six FIC projects. This highlights the value people placed on this event and others like it. They weren't being paid to attend, but thought it

was worth spending a morning (and perhaps a long journey there and back) to discuss issues of faith, social capital and community development. Secondly the warmth and informality of the atmosphere contributed hugely to the high level of participation in the discussion. One story in particular illustrates this. When the different groups came back together their discussions individuals from each table gave brief feedback on the key points from their discussion.

Over lunch one of the workers revealed that one of the women who had spoken to the whole group was a volunteer from her project who had never, to her knowledge, spoken in front of such a large group of people before.

Thirdly there was a surprising lack of hierarchy in discussions. Though the church has a strong agenda of Social Justice and speaks the rhetoric of equality, it is still a hierarchical institution. As a management committee member of one FIC project put it, you should:

“Expect having to fight ‘institutional inertia’ in faith communities.”

But in both the discussions and feedback at this event everyone appeared to contribute equally. This indicates that issues of power and hierarchy are being addressed with some success by FIC, not just through its work in local communities but in how it runs its own events.

FIC and Social Capital

All six FIC projects have helped build social capital. ‘Building’ social capital can be found in all the projects, where the church members have volunteered or been involved in the management committees. ‘Bridging’ social capital has been built in the bonds that have been created between the different churches in Stockton Hope and in St Luke’s Pallion and between the linking of older people and children in Stockton HOPE and Shildon.

It has also been built in the development of links between the projects and other community and voluntary sector organisations e.g. with Age Concern (Hetton), the Community Shop (Pallion), Homestart (PLANT), Groundwork (Shildon) and local schools (HOPE and FACE). ‘Linking’ social capital, connecting people with decision making bodies and is found in Stockton PLANT, which has been asked by other organisations to facilitate a local network.

PLANT has been asked to do this because, as a faith based community organisation, it is trusted. It already has the trust of other voluntary and statutory providers in the area. It is seen as independent and without other ‘agendas.’

At a time where many statutory and regeneration bodies are required to engage with their communities, but sometimes only consult rather than empower, the independence and lack of any ‘political’ agenda of the church, other than the values of equality, empowerment and social justice that underpin faith based community development, is worth acknowledging and protecting. Trust is needed to build social capital, but is also an outcome of it. Social capital focuses on the potential of people and their assets rather than their problems. The assumption is held, backed by some researched evidence, that faith communities have sustained a long term investment and interest in social action in deprived communities: thus enhancing social capital.

Robert Putnam, Social Capital’s major living theorist, has written that, “Faith communities are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.” (Putnam p.66)

In particular they are a highly significant for volunteering and leadership skills;

“civic skills, civic norms, community interests and civic recruitment.”(Putnam p.65)

People befriend each other in churches but also learn how to facilitate meetings, administer organisations, make presentations and tackle social issues. Putnam is relating social capital to American churches, but it is important to stress that Faith, in Britain, is not a minority interest. Faith communities and religious organisations still form part of the bedrock of life in the UK. In the 2001 Census 77% of people identified themselves as having a religious faith. Here in the North East it is over 80%.

The North East is, nominally at least, the Faith Capital of the UK. However, that is a statistic and a contestable one, particularly since there is such a wide gap between the numbers of people identifying themselves as having a religious faith and those people actually attending church. Perhaps it is wisest to merely say that faith is important in today’s society because it is central to the lives of many people and helps shape their outlook and actions. People of faith

have much to offer to their communities through working for social wellbeing and social change in their neighbourhoods. In the discourse about how organisations, in both the public and Community and Voluntary Sector, help develop neighbourhoods and communities, the Churches' Regional Commission is exploring the notion of 'community resilience'.

In particular they are tackling the challenging question about identifying the 'important building blocks' that will contribute to community resilience. CRC obviously see a key contribution to be made by the churches and faith communities in partnership with their allies in the VCS. It is significant to note that the CRC has just been awarded a Joseph Rowntree Foundation grant to extend its research and practice relating to community resilience in the areas of both Durham Diocese and Newcastle Diocese. Those involved in this work acknowledge the insights acquired through their FIC project engagement and experiences.

What is being conveyed here is another distinctive part of the Church's theology and philosophical perspective: its holistic commitment to communities. Churches are not single issue groups but are concerned with human living in all its facets. Neither are churches concerned with just a single segment of the population. This stems from belief in sharing God's love with the community through service, and that leads to volunteering and social action. In this sense then church communities can be a source of Faithful Capital as well as Social Capital.

Faith based organizations and their partners in community groups and voluntary sector organisations are often rich in social capital [mutual aid networks, trust, norms of reciprocity and engagement]. Whilst aspects of their culture can be problematic [e.g. tendency towards charity rather than justice] they offer substantial strengths as partners for community building and civic renewal. In short, there is support for the view that faith based organizations and other community groups and voluntary sector organisations are potentially important allies for goals that aim to strengthen and widen the democratic process, increase empowerment and engagement and build community capacity in taking part in decision making. This collaboration is an important contribution to strengthening community cohesion, making not only individuals but also groups and communities feel included and part of a greater whole.

5. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND INGREDIENTS

“The mutual trust at the heart of community is born of each day’s forgiveness and acceptance of the frailty and poverty of ourselves and of others. But this trust is not developed overnight. That is why it takes time to form a real community.” (Vanier p.41)

Key Achievements

In the early days of its development FIC set itself the following objectives:

1. To develop six sustainable, community development projects in disadvantaged communities within Durham Diocese.
2. To appoint six local Christian activists as church-related community development workers
3. To increase awareness of the link between faith and community development and the involvement of church members in these six communities
4. To share the experience with parishes from the Durham Diocese and the regional churches
5. To recruit new parishes/Churches Together groups to participate in FIC Phase 2

Other objectives were also objectives about capacity building and developing partnerships. Three years later and six community development projects have indeed been developed in disadvantaged communities. Not only are all the projects still going, but all six of the original workers are still in post.

In a context where church structures and personnel can shift quickly, where funding for the voluntary sector is getting tighter by the year and people will naturally experience times of uncertainty, ill health and unexpected life events, the durability of the six FIC projects and workers suggests that something must be going right!

The long-term sustainability of the projects appears positive. Four of the six projects intend to continue after their original funding runs out, either with additional funding from CUF or from other sources, while the other two hope to continue the work they have started without the support of a paid worker.

Several projects have made important shifts during their lifespan from service provision to community empowerment, having the bravery to change their original plans from education and

service delivery to concentrate on building from the bottom up. And the experiences of the past three years have started to be shared with other parishes and communities, in the learning events, by participants and steering group members ‘spreading the word’ and through reports such as this.

Stories from the six projects and from the different learning events reveal participant’s increasing awareness of the link between faith and community development.

“Faith is about serving your community – this is faith in action.” (MC)

Not only have the links been made, but the level of understanding is sophisticated. Another story illustrates this. An experienced community development worker was present at the ‘Building Hope Network Event in Houghton-le-Spring. Afterwards they commented that they had taken part in,

“The best discussion of community development values and their effects I have ever heard amongst non-professionals (and better than most among professionals).” (MC)

But meeting these five, original, objectives is only part of FIC’s success. Other key achievements include:

- Contribution to creating employment opportunities for residents in disadvantaged communities
- Six workers achieving Level 3 NVQs in Community Development Work by July 2010
- Numerous activities and projects responding to community needs
- Enabling partnerships and working in cooperation with other sectors
- Developing services promoting health and wellbeing
- Providing and delivering volunteering opportunities
- Running a range of capacity building activities including ‘open learning opportunities’
- Developing and delivering learning programmes
- Building social capital
- Building faithful capital
- Promoting and contributing to community cohesion
- Engaging with socially excluded groups and marginalised individuals
- Disseminating good practice

For some of the individuals involved through its planning, birth and delivery, FIC has been a hugely significant project.

“FIC remains the single best thing I did in my eleven years as a Social Responsibility Officer.” (Partnership Steering Group member)

FIC has achieved what it set out to, though not always by the straightest path, and has acquired many other successes along the way.

Key Ingredients

How has FIC been able to do this? What has enabled these six projects to develop such powerful stories in such a short time? Numerous elements have played a part; each of the six stories includes tells of the local factors that have shaped their development. But there are also some wider, structural components that are worth considering.

The FIC Partnership Steering Group has included people with a range of experience: the Durham Diocese Board of Finance, the Churches Community Work Alliance, Churches Regional Commission and the Community Work Assessment Consortium for North East England are all represented.

But many of the people on this group are all in key positions to turn rhetoric into reality. The Archdeacon of Sunderland, the Diocesan Social Responsibility Officer and the Diocesan Director of Ministry not only give the decisions hierarchical ‘clout’, they are also well placed to try and embed FIC into new parishes and to share future developments with other Christian communities. Bernadette Askins, as Deputy Moderator of North East Christian Churches Together and Deputy Chair of the Churches’ Regional Commission Council shares her knowledge and learning from FIC with other Christian Communities.

Jim Robertson has managerial and practitioner roles in both local and national faith based community development networks [CCWA] and in secular professional community development practice networks such as the CWACNEE, Community Development North East [CDNE] and the England Standards Board for Community Development Work.

Paul Southgate, CRC Chief Officer has considerable experience on regional voluntary sector organisations and leads the faith strand which forms one of the key elements of the NE Equality

and Diversity Coalition. He also chairs the North East Regional Faiths Network thus bring important connections to non Christian faith groups active in the Region.

As the Project Development Officer, Bernadette attends the Partnership Steering Group meetings, acting as one of the links to the practicalities of the work on the ground. Her role throughout FIC has been crucial. As mentioned in the introduction she has supported, advised, trained, prompted, questioned and consoled the six projects at different times. She has not line managed the workers but has used her experience learnt as a Diocesan Officer to nurture and develop their work. She has attended the overwhelming majority of all management committee meetings, events, workshops and training.

If communication has been one key ingredient in the success of FIC, Bernadette has largely contributed to this. And as an outside, objective presence at management committee meetings, she ask questions that other people don’t feel able to ask, or wouldn’t think of. The commitment of the Partnership Steering Group, the workers, the management committee members and volunteers has to be highlighted.

When interviewing participants for this report, the two words that came up most frequently were ‘communication’ and ‘persistence’. Throughout FIC people have come together, talked, shared, planned, reflected and planned again. While people might have changed approaches, like the Mustard Seed Project shifting from work with adults to young people and children, they have not changed their values.

People have been prepared to learn from their experiences and to try again. Perhaps more controversially it could also be argued that one of the reasons why FIC has succeeded because there was a need for it. Britain is a more unequal society than at any time since the 1930’s and gap between the rich and the poor, at a local, national and international level increases daily.

As stated in the introduction, communities are undergoing much transition and instability. Taking a neighbourhood community development approach enables projects to build what is needed, rather than what people ‘should’ have. If people are part of developing activities in their community that they actually want and have a stake in, then research does indicate these activities have a greater chance of success.

6. LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE

Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities and their perspectives, in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. Church related community development engages with its partners to seek the empowerment of local communities. Communities are taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives such as health and wellbeing, homelessness or work with refugees. Faith based community development, at best, seeks to strengthen the capacity of people as active citizens through their parish or neighbourhood groups, organisations and networks.

And, to repeat what is said above Faith organisations do build capacity to shape and determine change in their communities. As we have seen, the church can be an organisation that is trusted, without a political agenda that means it only listens to the voices it wants to hear.

This change will not happen overnight, nor even in the three year lifespan of these projects. One of the key learning points for project members and workers, from their own experience and from the experience of similar projects like the one in Grindon is to set realistic targets and not expect too much too soon.

“Community development is hard to achieve when so much of community life is dependent on political decisions and economic circumstances. We have achieved a ripple that we hope will become a wave.”

(MC)

Learning for Faith in our Community Project Stage 2.

As already mentioned, no one in FIC had been involved in anything quite like this before. This lack of experience led, in some cases, to unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved and at what speed. It was not only the community workers and management committee members who were inexperienced; while the Partnership Steering Group and the project development worker came from a rich and diverse background, they were similarly innocent in the development of such a complex project.

Everyone learned together, sometimes in very steep curves, with energy and enthusiasm, but seldom with anyone to rein them back towards smaller, more achievable steps. Lessons were learned, often quickly, sometimes painfully. In particular some projects began with vague ideas of how to set up activities to meet perceived community needs; over time some projects changed their focus and their practice to identify what local communities actually wanted and how to take a more community development approach.

With the prospect of more FIC projects being developed it would be useful if the now, highly experienced practitioners had a structure to pass their hard gained knowledge on to others. Workers and management members could act as mentors towards newer recruits, playing an objective and supportive role through discussions and visits.

But even so, FIC will still necessarily remain a learning process, for those who have been involved for three years as well as three weeks. For the community development workers in particular it must remain an important recognition that praxis forms the basis of community development. Transformation is not merely achieved by rolling your sleeves up and doing things.

Structured reflection is of equal value with activity and is necessary to avoid that activity charging down blind alleys. Participants in the next stage of FIC must be rooted in this understanding and the importance of the training days and the community development work qualification.

Meanwhile the lessons of the Stage One and the difficulties of the assessment and training must be acknowledged. The FIC projects generally followed

sound community development practice. Initially some may have engaged with communities with a pre-set agenda, but this would shift as they began to listen to what people living in the area wanted.

But when they had decided on a focus and a strategy they rarely set out specific targets and monitored their progress towards achieving them. The work was often developed organically but while some projects produced regular reports and business plans, others did so sporadically.

Good monitoring does not just help projects to structure their work and measure their success, but also to attract support and resources from other quarters. FIC Management Committees and CDWs were action orientated and were not used to the demands of grant funders for regular monitoring and evaluating; churches (whether that be clergy or volunteers) do not have a history of working in this way .

There was some impatience with what was seen as 'bureaucracy' and unnecessary paperwork. The FIC Projects are not alone in this – Northern Rock Foundation's recent research has shown monitoring and communicating performance effectively was identified as a significant challenge to the community/voluntary sector.

And potential funders do expect evidence of clearly defined outcomes and outputs. The community development workers have used a variety of bases for their work. In St Luke's Pallion, having a desk in the local community shop has helped the worker to engage with the local community and forge links with other partners.

But this has not placed the church itself at the heart of the project. Other workers have used the church premises, which may have provided a focus for people who already used the church, but not for the wider community.

In many cases workers said that they often worked at home, where they had easier access to telephone and internet connections. This isolation makes networking and partnership building a more difficult process. Any future development of FIC should try to ensure that each worker can be based in an accessible venue with a telephone and computer they can use.

Whether this venue is within a church building or a community venue needs to be the subject of careful decision decided in each area. In the first stage of FIC the Community Development Workers who were based in church premises had

more opportunities to inform and involve church members.

Having the project located on the church premises was one of the ways to demonstrate to grant funders how the church building was being used to benefit the wider community, resulting in funding granted to improve the building. Also, church offices were given free of charge – important when funding was very tight – and showed commitment by the church and was important as 'matched funding'. Where the project is located in the church premises, there is a significant increase in the footfall of local people and other workers visiting/using the premises.

In one place (other than St Luke's) where working from the community centre was attempted, it was found to be too noisy. Nor could the centre give the worker a designated office space. Currently there is a discussion in another project about setting up an office in the church premises because of interruptions/noise in the community shop. However, being placed in a community venue could have advantages in engaging with people who would not usually enter a church building.

It could mean that the church was stepping out even further into the local community. However, additional funding may be necessary to pay for room hire etc. The most sensible approach would be for each FIC project to weigh up the pros and cons of where the CDW is based according to local needs and priorities. In the main the workers have been line managed by the vicar/priest.

This arrangement roots the worker directly into a local church structure. In some cases the worker who has been appointed has already been active in the parish before their appointment. In cases such as this there is the potential for this line management structure to present difficulties.

A disagreement between line manager and worker would also be a disagreement between vicar and parishioner. For both worker and manager, important issues could be left unsaid for fear of the implications of their other roles.

And while clergy may have much experience of pastoral issues, they do not always have a background in supervision, employment practices and legislation. The Partnership Steering Group wisely said from the start that the chair and the line manager should not be the same person.

But a structure that allowed the work of the community development workers to be steered by local committees while leaving line management

responsibilities to an experienced support worker might circumvent any future conflict. This person might also offer the community development worker independent, objective supervision, avoiding the possibility of a close friend on the management committee taking this role and struggling with the same conflict. The role of the clergy in relation to FIC projects is an interesting one.

At present all clergy support the projects and their workers though this is not written into their job description. Within the parish they play a pivotal role and they have the potential to help or hinder (or even sink or swim) a FIC project. In an attempt to ensure that their influence is more positive than negative it would be worth discussing if providing support to a FIC project could be written into their job description. How this additional responsibility could be 'sold' to clergy, rather than 'imposed' on them, would need further discussion within the Diocese.

More independent line management, community based and resourced workplaces, a greater, shared and agreed understanding of the training programme and a more rigorous process of identifying community needs, setting targets and implementing monitoring processes and impact assessments; all these suggestions could help facilitate the development of a second stage of FIC. A programme of peer support and mentoring, from existing workers and committees to new projects, could help to provide a practical learning structure. More experienced and qualified workers could even be trained as practice assessors. To put any of these ideas into practice additional funding would be required; existing resources would not be sufficient to ensure effective development, particularly of the formal and informal support infrastructure of training, management and co-ordination.

Finally, the stories of the six projects highlight a need to involve and engage ecumenically with other local churches and with local people from the outset. It is not enough for a local church to begin a FIC project because one or two key people think it is a good idea; if either or both of these individuals move on, as sometimes they do, it can take considerable time and effort to regain lost ground and momentum.

Ownership is something that needs to be created right from the start. The development of a committee, an understanding of the key purpose of community development and the foundations of a project vision could and should all begin before a

worker is appointed. Including church members, ecumenical and perhaps other faith partners and voluntary sector organisations at the earliest possible stage is essential to build ownership and effective partnership working.

The tight timescale that funding imposed on the first stage of FIC projects led, in some cases, to a lack of ownership by church and ecumenical members, a lack of clear focus on what the project wanted to achieve and how to achieve it and an insufficient initial exploration of the links between faith and community development. Over time the projects have achieved a lot. They have gradually engaged partners both within and outside faith communities and gained the trust of local communities. But inviting different organisations and individuals to help build a vision facilitates greater ownership, commitment and potential resources.

How to maintain this involvement is more difficult. All the projects made a big effort from the start to develop partnership working and representatives of partner organisations generously supported and advised the FIC projects in the early stages. As time passed, and the projects became more established, partners were unable to continue to attend meetings regularly. This has been disappointing but understandable, although they continue to respond positively when contacted. Recently, Hetton New Dawn has begun to work in partnership with Age Concern to develop a lunch club for older people. But again, a structured reflection from the participants (both FIC and outside agencies) in Stage One, looking at what worked well and what didn't work well, could guide future development.

FIC set out to identify and appoint as CDWs, local activists with a track record of community involvement. They were people with enthusiasm and ideas who wanted to put these into action. And some of the management committees wanted to see speedy results. It took time for everyone to understand what community development work was about and what the role of the CDW entailed and that it was going to take time to build relationships and support local people to identify their own priorities – they had to learn NOT to do things themselves.

The monthly training days provided opportunities to share good experiences and learn from them and the action learning set process was a useful structured way to encourage reflection. Any future development should consider appointing

mentors to support each individual CDW.

Stage Two of FIC should also make clear that the FIC community development work appointments are training posts. Initially there was not a shared level of understanding of the overall aim of the project and both the community development and faith development process.

Some of the expressions of frustration by the CDWs about the time spent on training might indicate that it was not recognised and understood that these were training posts. The concern of the FIC Project was to produce 'critical independently minded practitioners' not 'project operatives.' Certainly for some there was a perceived conflict between time spent 'doing the job' and the learning/training programme, though the fact they were part-time post will have accentuated their frustration.

Another key aspect of FIC is the significant emphasis given to theological reflection throughout the project.

It raises the question of the CDW personnel specification and whether it is important to recruit active members of faith organisations. At the beginning of FIC, when the management committees were planning recruitment and drawing up their job descriptions and personnel specifications, there were long discussions about equal opportunities and how important was faith; was it an essential/desirable/not necessary?

Some management committee members could not see why it was relevant. However if a CDW worker is recruited who does not share the values or the faith of the project as a whole, could they work effectively within as well as outside the church? This is another question for the second stage of FIC to wrestle with.

7. SUMMARY

Less than three years is not a long time to embed this work. The most striking outcomes can be found in the personal development of the many people involved in local projects. Many people have 'stepped out in faith' and there is much to be applauded and celebrated. The wider impact of FIC on the parishes and communities involved is only starting to be assessed and is not consistent across all six areas. However, the level of attendance and quality of engagement in these projects indicates enthusiasm, eagerness to learn and commitment and suggests that some progress is starting to be made. It is too early to say if or how FIC has made a difference to local communities themselves; this requires a much longer timescale and a deeper analysis. One of more obvious next steps is the ongoing development of links with other faith-based community development projects and mission development initiatives such as has begun with the United Reformed Church. One of the challenges for the Partnership Steering Group is to explore how the FIC initiative, piloted by the Durham Diocese, can engage with and influence other Diocese and denominations (and perhaps other faiths) regarding regional strategic planning as well as through partnerships at a local level.

One idea currently informing these discussions is the notion of Building Blocks for Parish and Mission Developments. This framework looks at some of the lessons learnt from this first stage of FIC that can be shared with faith organisations thinking about parish and mission development work generally and church based community development work and social action in particular.[Appendix 1] Utilising these building blocks will not prevent mistakes, mishaps and human error from occurring. But they will provide a valuable framework to ground the enthusiasm, the frustration, the surprises and the complexity of the development process. For those concerned about the distinctive presence of faith in public life and society overall the varied lessons from the FIC Project offer a coherent set of signposts and some useful guidelines for those stepping out in faith in the future. The FIC Partnership Process and the achievements of the respective Projects illustrate the perceptive notion that informs many theories and ideas about much community development work

*"It is remarkable what you can achieve if you don't care too much **who** gets the credit"*

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APPENDIX 1

Building Blocks for Parish Development: Lessons from the FIC Project

INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT OF LOCAL PEOPLE

APPROPRIATE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP

AFFIRMATION OF LOCAL SOCIAL ACTION INITIATIVES
BY GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT
AND CONSULTANCY

A CLEAR VISION INFORMED BY TRANSFORMATIVE
NARRATIVES

COMMITMENT TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND
CRITICAL REFLECTION

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Errington is a consultant with a long track record of working in Community Development and Health in the North East of England. His interests include community development approaches to health improvement and the participation of parents and carers in decision making structures.

Paul Southgate is the Chief Executive Officer for the Churches Regional Commission in the North East. He is a member of the North East Regional Faiths Network and serves on the Board of Voluntary Organisations Network North East and the management of the NE Equalities Coalition .

Bernadette Askins was RC diocesan ecumenical officer of Hexham and Newcastle for nine years. She currently chairs Churches Together in South Tyneside and is involved in the governance of both North East Christian Churches Together Group [NECCT] and Churches' Regional Commission Council [CRC]. For the past four years she has been project officer for Faith In Our Community.

Jim Robertson is an honorary project consultant with the Churches Regional Commission in the North East. He is a member of the Iona Community and a Trustee of the Churches Community Work Alliance. He is currently involved in various projects embracing community development and organisational change and has a special interest in concerns relating to faith in the public realm.

Contact details and Further information

For further information about FIC please contact:
bernadette.askins@talktalk.net

jimwrobertson@yahoo.com

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<http://www.northeastchurches.org.uk> and
<http://www.durham.anglican.org>.

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