

Soundbites

"We are embodying the Christian Faith in our community."
(Management Committee Member)

"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."
(Management Committee Member)

"Now the local community, or at least some of them, know that the church is open to them. They also know me, my face, what I do and have made links and offers of help with supporting the new drop-in we are hoping to start."
(Community Worker)

"A large part of the success of this project has been due to the trust people hold in the Church to deliver activities and support communities. The project has no other agenda than supporting the local community"

"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."
(Community Worker)

"An experienced community development worker described the discussion at one network event as: "The best discussion of community development values and their effects I have ever heard amongst non-professionals (and better than most among professionals)."

"It's been about starting activities and letting them grow and flourish."
(Community Worker)

"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."
(Community Worker)

Contact Details

For copies of either a Summary or a Full Report, or for further information about FIC, please contact: bernadette.askins@talktalk.net

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Stepping Out in Faith

The Faith in Our Communities (FIC) Initiative in the Durham Diocesan Area

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



Shildon Mustard Seed Community Allotment - local people had a great time planting and celebrating with a barbecue.

Church based projects in the Durham Diocesan area have been tackling community concerns and issues from the bottom up. The aim of the FIC project has been to address concerns such as social exclusion, inequalities and improving health and wellbeing.

The six local church based projects, funded by Church Urban Fund, through the FIC Project, appointed community development workers in the mainly former mining communities areas of: **Shildon, Sunderland Pallion, Hetton-le-Hole, Stockton Hardwick, Stockton Newtown and Houghton-le-Spring**. Each project formed a local management group which had the task of supporting the workers to plan, implement and evaluate their work.

People of all ages have been involved, from toddler groups to older people's groups and care homes, and the projects have developed a wide range of activities, from keep-fit classes to food growing schemes and developing allotments. Collectively they have supported vulnerable adults and engaged people 'missed' by mainstream services.

The six projects are rooted in the values that come from their faith. However they have not confined their initiatives to church buildings and community halls. Workers, management committee members and volunteers have been living out their faith in their local communities – they have been 'Stepping out in Faith' in new situations and contexts.

Partnerships - People - Purpose

FIC has worked through partnerships at all levels of its development. Their experience is that faith based organizations can work actively with other community groups and voluntary sector organisations as important allies. Together they can strengthen and widen the democratic process.

Empowerment and engagement has increased in the FIC Project areas and has enhanced both capability and capacity to confidently take part in decision making.

This collaboration has contributed to strengthening community cohesion, so not only individuals but also groups and communities feel included and part of a greater whole.

At a deeper level, people not involved in traditional church life have acknowledged the importance of faith in public life through their experiences of 'service' and 'involvement' and 'engagement' in project activities.



Representatives of St Luke's Neighbourhood Trust, Sunderland and Stockton HOPE working together at the 'Weaving Communities' event

Faith Inspired Community Development

Church Related Community Development builds directly upon the central themes and tenets of the Christian faith – fairness – social justice – love and concern for each other. Essentially, if someone suffers, it affects us all. The concept of 'mission' challenges people of faith to engage in the world around them so as to help create a fairer and less divisive society, starting with themselves in the communities in which they live and engage with day by day.

Confidence, Coherence and Change

- Achieving change through doing things with people and not for people. The rejecting of running services that have the tendency to relate to people as dependent consumers
- Challenging and enabling people to achieve their potential as active creators of change
- Ensuring that coherent community development values and principles permeate all activities e.g. through the workers learning programme; valuing the role of the volunteers: through promoting models of leadership and management that are transparent and distributive.



Community development workers, management committee members and volunteers met regularly to share ideas and take part in training events

Actions - Accomplishments - Achievements



Stockton PLANT worked with children and parents from local schools on a healthy eating project.

- Developing services promoting health and wellbeing
- Enabling partnerships and working in cooperation with other sectors
- Activities and projects responding to community needs
- Creating employment opportunities for residents in disadvantaged communities
- Recognition and community development qualifications for the project workers
- Providing and creating volunteering opportunities and inducting people as active citizens
- Developing and delivering learning programmes for local groups
- Promoting and contributing to community cohesion and connectedness
- Enhancing social and faithful capital in church and community networks
- Engaging with socially excluded groups and marginalised individuals
- Disseminating good practice through critical reflection and 'open learning' events



FACE Houghton held a family fun day, building bridges across the wider community



Parent and Toddler Group at planting sessions at Mustard Seed, Shildon



Hetton New Dawn organise events for older people in the community hall to combat isolation, increase wellbeing and improved mental health.



Sharing experiences at a FIC Learning Day



Reflecting together on the links between faith and community development 'Where is God in this?'