



FIC works in North East England, in the area between the Tyne and the Tees.

EXTRACT FROM 2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT

‘FAITH IN OUR COMMUNITY PROJECT’

Introduction

Faith in Our Community (FIC) works with amazing, committed church members who share a vision to make life better for people in their communities. Nearly all these communities are situated in places where residents experience multi-deprivation in health, education, income, employment. 60% places where we work are within the 10% most deprived in the UK. Austerity measures continue to impact significantly in these deprived neighbourhoods and residents tell us about the stress they are experiencing, resulting in poor physical and mental health, with anxiety and depression very prevalent. Some of our FIC projects are welcoming and supporting significant numbers of distressed vulnerable people who have been moved from the South East into very poor-quality accommodation, resulting in loss their support networks. Other projects are offering asylum seekers hospitality and a safe place, while trying to deal with high community tensions stirred up by extremist organisations.

Appendix 1; a brief description of current work carried out by our eleven projects.

1. DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES

FIC knows the trustees and the work of local projects very well. We keep in touch by phone calls, texts and emails and by attending committee meetings and AGMs.

Currently, we are supporting 11 local projects. Over 250 volunteers from the churches and wider community are involved on a regular basis, local people who are keen to use their time and skills to improve their communities.

Sadly, one FIC project, which had been struggling to overcome challenging personnel and financial issues, finally had to close in February 2018. The closure was carried out in an orderly way and the remaining funds were given to a local church to continue to support similar work.

FIC was delighted to welcome Billingham URC as our newest project and look forward to supporting the church and their new Church-related Community Development Worker.

In 2017-18 the FIC Officer advised and supported local projects in the following ways (the number in brackets relates to how many were advised and supported):

- a) **Governance:** support when the chair moved away (3) and chair retired (1); applications to the Charity Commission to register projects as Charitable Incorporated Organisations (2); recruiting new trustees / committee members (6); employing new staff (1); conflicts of interest (1); closing a project (1)
- b) **Human Resources:** breakdown of relationship between worker and trustees (1); induction of new trustees (5); long term sickness (1); reduction of hours / possible redundancies when funding was running out (2); redundancy due to lack of funding (1); recruitment, appointment and induction of new community development worker (1)
- c) **Finance:** inadequate book-keeping / reporting to the trustees (2)
- d) **Financial sustainability** has become an increasing challenge as grants become more difficult to obtain. We circulate regular information about current grants and advise community workers / treasurers on grant applications. We also advise about diversifying their funding streams, to reduce dependency on grants.
- e) **Community Development Workers;** FIC's 10 community development workers have been supported to carry out their work more effectively, receiving individual mentoring, taking part in training workshops and benefitting from peer support via the Network.

2. LEARNING AND TRAINING PROGRAMME

FIC supports local projects with a learning and training programme for trustees, management committees, workers and volunteers.

- a) **Impact Workshops:** The FIC Officer has facilitated eight Impact Workshops when everyone involved reviewed the difference their work had made, how it could be improved and made suggestions for future developments.
- b) **Big Event:** To raise awareness of the wider context in which we work, we organised *Discovering Our Community Treasures* (photo) in November 2017, attended by 45 people. Everyone had supper together, followed by our speaker, Revd. Al Barrett, who shared his approach to community development in his parish at Hodge Hill, Birmingham, where the church supports local residents who have a passion to improve life for local people. Al recently completed a PhD at Durham University.
- c) **Learning About Community Development – An Introduction.** In 2018 we organised a programme of four sessions, attended by 25 people (21 volunteers and 4 employed workers). It was delivered by Ann Hindley, from Sostenga training organisation. Sessions included: May 22; What is community development? June 19th: Getting to know your community - the basics of finding out who is there and their interests; July 10th: Working with groups and the roles that people play in groups; July 17th: Dealing with tensions and conflicts in a community.
- d) **Nationally Accredited Training Programme for Community Development Workers:** Four people who participated in the 'Learning About Community Development' programme decided to continue their training and in September 2018 they began working towards national accredited qualifications.
- e) **Project Visits:** FIC workers decided they wanted to visit our projects and learn about them in more depth. Visits have been made to Grindon Church Community Project (Sunderland), Hetton New Dawn, Roker Life (Sunderland) and Shildon Alive.



3. FAITH IN OUR COMMUNITY NETWORK

The Network has met on six occasions including a visit to *Refuse Project, Chester le Street* (photo) to learn about how they used food which would otherwise go to landfill, to make delicious meals in their café.



Network meetings are occasions when our community development workers get together to share liturgy, successes and challenges, and to reflect on and learn from their experiences.

At each meeting, there is also learning about making grant applications, looking in detail at current opportunities.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANK YOU

A big 'thank-you' to our funders, because with their grants we have been able to significantly improve the lives of more than 3,000 people in the eleven communities where we work. Thanks also to: 250 committed church members and community volunteers who give their time very generously in a variety of ways; 60 trustees/directors who have undertaken the responsibilities of serving on management committees; 10 community development workers who work tirelessly to inspire and manage their projects. Well done everyone!

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FAITH IN OUR COMMUNITY - LOCAL PROJECTS

<p>Billingham United Reformed Church is a new FIC project. Church members have been working with children and families for some time and are hoping to appoint a community development worker very soon.</p>
<p>Easington Colliery Café Together organises weekly low cost/ healthy lunches for lonely and isolated people of all ages. A credit union pay point, signposting to help with budgeting / utilities and housing problems. During school holidays they provide activities for children and families. The community garden won a Britain in Bloom prize for their kitchen garden.</p>
<p>Hetton le Hole, New Dawn runs a community lunch for isolated elderly people and other group activities. There are two Welcome Cafes where people can use the computers and get help with benefit applications. They have a food bank and offer lunch and personal support. Recently they have started a community allotment to provide fresh veg for the foodbank.</p>
<p>Houghton, Space4 for 1:1 and groups where community volunteers listen, offer personal support and signposting to specialist agencies, bereavement support, men's shed, women's group and food parcels.</p>
<p>Shildon Alive is based in a shop on High Street with benefits advice, food parcels and advocacy. The volunteers run two community gardens which provide fresh fruit and veg for food parcels and a fridge and shelves of food for people to help themselves. They work with schools to involve pupils in community action, a junior credit union and dangers of loan sharks.</p>
<p>Stockton, HOPE is an ecumenical partnership which runs children's activities/food in term time and holidays. There is also a foodbank where people can get personal support. There is a weekly friendship group for people with mental health whose members have become involved in volunteering.</p>
<p>Stockton, People Linking At New Town (PLANT) organise Tuesday Tea Group and trips and Golden Zumba for older people. They also work closely with local children and families. Volunteers worked with school pupils on Christian Aid's Big Brekkie project and in Shaw Trust's garden growing pumpkins for the Harvest Festival (then donated to a local hostel).</p>
<p>Sunderland, Grindon Church Community Project is home to a steel band for people of all abilities. They have an IT room where local people can access computers. Children and young people's activities here include Sea Scouts, dancing, Northern Youth Choir. The community garden is a big feature and recently won a Britain in Bloom prize. Christmas activities often include a pantomime.</p>
<p>Sunderland, Roker Church Life's community action team run vintage tea parties and regular craft activities for older people. There are weekly creativity and dance sessions and food and activities in school holidays. Local asylum seekers volunteer in the garden growing veg and fruit which are used in the kitchen. There is also a digital project for teaching IT skills to older people and where residents can make applications for Universal Credit.</p>

Sunderland, St Luke's Neighbourhood Trust serve lunches for lonely and elderly people. There are children's after school and holiday activities and a friendship/ craft group. They provide a venue for a range of community activities e.g. Baby Massage, Argentinian Tango.

Witton Gilbert, Breathing Space focuses on improving mental health by organising creativity sessions, environment activities and Wellness Walks in the local dene, and running relaxation / mindfulness programmes. They work with people with addictions, poor mental health, learning difficulties and local children in school holidays.