



**TOGETHER
LIVERPOOL** 

Network of *Kindness*

Progress
Report

April 2022 - April 2023



Introduction - Network of Kindness - Year 2 Overview

We are pleased to present the second-year Progress Report for the Network of Kindness project. This year has seen significant development of the project towards our objectives, and we are excited to share these accomplishments. Through the progress we've made we've become increasingly aware of the challenging conditions groups are facing in their communities and of the need for ongoing support.

Through the Network of Kindness, our vision is to help build a kinder, more equal, just, and generous society where people are empowered to live life to the full. Everything we do is directed towards achieving this goal, and we are committed to making a significant and meaningful impact in the communities we serve. With 7.2 million households going without essentials, according to the 'An Essentials Guarantee' report by Joseph Rowntree Foundation it's clear that the need for the Network of Kindness is only growing. As we work towards this end, local communities are the ones who are best placed to shape their own futures and engage with the challenges they are facing.

With the launch of our Network of Kindness membership model, our Learning Communities and Communities of Practice are now offering two distinct activity streams. These support people and projects to take the next step in social action in our communities to meet these emerging and deepening needs. By embedding our core principles of Listening, Connecting, Equipping and Amplifying we are facilitating local groups to deliver increasingly sustainable social action within those contexts. Learning Communities and Communities of Practice support the widest range of organisations to make best use of the strengths in local communities and empower them to address injustice.

The development of this model further builds on year one and enables us to look forward to accelerating our pace in year 3 and beyond. We are excited about the potential for even greater impact in the coming years as we seek to address poverty and injustice in some of the country's most deprived communities.

We also hosted events open to the public including two Cost of Living Assemblies and we launched a new termly Meet the Funders session for members.



Contents & Highlights

Led by our new Executive Director James Green, the team and trustees have advanced our social action initiatives, building on foundations laid in the previous year.

1 - Developing the Network of Kindness

1.1 - Launch of Network of Kindness membership model - The Network of Kindness now has 73 affiliated members including 38 Champions, 15 Projects and 20 Hubs. These individuals, churches, charities, faith and community groups are involved in a wide range of social action projects across our region, from food and financial insecurity to social isolation, housing, environmental issues and mental health.

1.2 - Social Action Plans and Learning Communities - We have now worked with 35% of churches in five Deaneries across the Diocese of Liverpool area to develop Social Action Plans. We have begun delivery of a structured Learning Community programme, connecting and equipping faith groups within a Deanery area to take their next step in their social action, facilitating an asset-based approach.

1.3 - Communities of Practice - We've hosted nine online Communities of Practice sessions across six social action themes in 2022/3. Open to all Network of Kindness members, these provide opportunities for participants to build relationships, share learning, collaborate and campaign for change together.

2 - Public Events and Member Training - We've hosted and co-hosted 27 events open to the public and member training, engaging 462 people in discussions around poverty, the environment, racial equality, leadership, accessing funding and community development in 2022/23.

3 - Microgrants/Direct funding activities - Four new food pantries opened in South Sefton and St Helens, as a result of our Food Insecurities project, funded by Feeding Britain and the Albert Gubay Foundation. In total the 14 pantries have over 5,000 members and have saved these members over £620,000 from their average food shop. Our Feast of Fun microgrants programme relaunched in January 2023 in partnership with food services business Meals & More, is enabling the delivery of 1,750 meals across 20 projects this Easter.

4 - Places of Welcome - We've now supported the opening of 18 Places of Welcome tackling social isolation across the Diocese of Liverpool area.

5 - Real Conversations - We hosted funded by the UK government's New Deal that gathered over 150 participants across 6 locations in 12 meetings to discuss their communities.

6 - Plans for the future - We are excited to be on target to deliver National Lottery objectives for Year 3. In addition to these objectives, we'll hold Communities of Practice to explore housing, displaced people and county lines concerns. We'll continue to facilitate Learning Communities to launch new projects. We'll grow membership to over 150.



1 - Developing the Network of Kindness

1.1 - Membership model

The project's membership model was launched at our Network of Kindness celebration in October 2022. This was an opportunity for us to gather social activists in person for the first time since launching during the pandemic, to celebrate the accomplishments of those connected to the Network of Kindness, connect groups, and listen to concerns about challenges being faced in our communities.

Attended by 60 people, the event was a great success and generated clear momentum around the Network of Kindness. Our membership has now grown to 73 individuals, churches, charities, faith and community groups involved in projects dealing with all areas of social action from food and financial insecurity, to social isolation, children, displaced people and mental health.

Among the 20 Network of Kindness Hubs delivering multiple projects in their area are: Imagine If Trust, St Andrews Community Network, Hope Centre-St Helens, Lifted Wigan, Liverpool Dementia Action Alliance, Youth With a Mission Liverpool, Compassion Acts, and Care Merseyside. Among 15 Projects signed up to our Network are: The Gateway Collective, Lauda Project, Hope Community Fridge, Toxteth Women's Centre, Pearls Project, and the Smile Collective.

All members gain access to the Network of Kindness Communities of Practice (see 1.3), plus opportunities to benefit from selected member-only funding and training opportunities such as applying for our Feast of Fun grants, or attending our new Meet the Funder workshop series.

The conversations around barriers to social action projects formed the basis for the themes we explored in our initial Communities of Practice. This type of conversation remains a core part of our work and ensures that we continue to work with groups in a way that is meaningful for them.

We're working to grow the Network of Kindness to bring people together from a wide range of projects and contexts to build relationships and share learning. In achieving this, we'll both increase capacity in local groups and find more efficient ways of working at scale.



CASE STUDY - NETWORK OF KINDNESS HUB: LIFTED WIGAN
[WATCH HERE](#)

1.2 - Learning Communities

We developed our Learning Community programme to ensure clear impact, following conversations with local groups. They told us they needed support to take Social Action Plans to the next step, to become projects that would impact their communities. Learning Communities are the way we support the development and implementation of these plans. This new piece of work is above and beyond the initial project scope and significantly strengthens the impact our work is having.

Learning Communities take faith groups in a Deanery area from mapping and surveying their local communities to launching new projects and developing existing work. They provide an excellent context for collaborative working, strategic planning and embedding good principles. Groups attend all four sessions which progress through:

Session 1 - Data and Decisions - Focus on engaging with mapping and surveying work already completed with the Deanery. We then consider the root causes of injustice and how groups might address them.

Session 2 - Vision and Counting - Explore the difference groups want to make in their communities and how they'll measure it. We provide simple tools and a guide on how to measure impact to support them.

Session 3 - Listening and Equipping - Ensuring that community voices are heard in all aspects of a project. We also support best practice by providing relevant template policies and practical project delivery advice.

Session 4 - Launching and Campaigning - We celebrate the achievements of groups and their work preparing to develop or launch projects. We also consider how to campaign for real change in future.

Each participant group receives a Network of Kindness Project Launch Guide which provides the central spine for planning during the Learning Community and keeps groups on track with an asset-based approach. We provide one-to-one sessions for each group to support project development.

During Learning Communities we invite key groups such as a CVS, infrastructure organisation or charity to connect participants with potential partners and support systems.

We are delighted by the development of this significant piece of work and the early indications are very positive. We are running Learning Communities in all areas of Liverpool Diocese over the next 4 years. We are projecting the launch or development of 125 new social action projects through this piece of work that are sustainable, hear local voices, networked together and are able to measure their impact.



LEARNING COMMUNITY - GROUP WORK



LEARNING COMMUNITY - NORTH SEFTON GROUP

"I really enjoyed our first Network of Kindness Learning Community. It was good to look at what's going on in the Deanery as a whole, and also look at the community feedback and statistics from our own parish. The session was fun and gave us lots of space to chat in smaller groups, which allowed us to start to think about developing what we are currently doing and think creatively about what we might be able to do in the future." - Rev Poppy Thorpe, Vicar of All Saints with Saint Frideswyde

TESTIMONIAL: SOUTH SEFTON LEARNING COMMUNITIES PARTICIPANT

1.3 - Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are the second major strand of activity launched in Year 2. These groups are open to all Network of Kindness members, drawn from a wide range of people, places and projects across the geographical area covered by the Diocese of Liverpool.

The Network of Kindness Celebration and first Communities of Practice were opportunities to co-produce the themes for our sessions. We heard from groups that they reliably face three main barriers; Lack of people, funds and space.

In the launch phase, we ran nine online Communities of Practice sessions online, engaging 23 participants in discussions around Social Isolation, Children & Youth, Food Insecurity, Environment, Financial Insecurity, and Mental Health. The sessions enabled members to build relationships, share learning and work towards campaigning for change together. We're excited by the experiences, insight and commitment of our growing Network and for Communities of Practice to facilitate their ongoing development.

After conversations with network members, from April 2023 these sessions will transition to in-person events with a clearer focus on practical equipping. This next step in the development of Communities of Practice will better facilitate the building of relationships and make collaborative working easier, in particular around supporting the development of social action work in underdeveloped themes such as displaced people, housing and modern slavery.

In addition to Communities of Practice we connect our member with potential partners including:

- Supporting children's charity Kids Matter to better understand our local context, hosted an online meeting attended by 8 groups leading to multiple further conversations and a local delivery partner to recruit a regional worker.
- We've supported Leeds based charity Zarach to develop a local partnership that will enable them to tackle 'bed poverty' in Liverpool.
- We've delivered our first joint event with a fellow networking organisation Catalyst to strengthen links between our members and other denominations and charities.
- We've formed a new Feast of Fun partnership with food charity Meals & More to facilitate the delivery of 1,750 healthy meals and activities during the upcoming Easter holidays to children and their families living in the Diocese to address holiday hunger.

"I love the idea of being part of the Network of Kindness! There are many small projects, like ours, which are making a big difference in various communities across Liverpool; think of the potential impact and difference we can make if we come together in a network where we share the same vision.

"The power in the room at the Network of Kindness celebration event was amazing.

I felt that God was certainly with us. The Network offers an opportunity to discover what other projects are doing, to connect us with others in our community, and potential to work collaboratively. By working in collaboration we can meet the needs of our community more effectively.

"Each of us can bring our strengths to the Network of Kindness. It doesn't matter if projects differ, we all have the same aim. The Network of Kindness is somewhere of mutual help, support and encouragement. I believe that we can achieve more and help more people in our communities in numerous ways, not just providing by the provision of activities but also through challenging injustices together."

- Alison Twist, Children and Family Worker, Liverpool North Central Methodist Circuit

NETWORK OF KINDNESS MEMBER TESTIMONIAL

2 - Public events and member training

As well as delivering clear pathways for support, we host public events and member training, to help build relationships, developing social action projects, grow the Network of Kindness and connect people to . With this in mind, we hosted a number of events open to the public.

We launched a series of online 'Cost of Living Assemblies', so far engaging over 40 participants across two events in September 2022 and January 2023. In the first, we discussed the likely impact of the crisis and how groups might respond. In the second, we heard from three key local groups about their responses to the crisis including Warm Spaces, co-production and community cohesion. We invited participants to discuss experiences and work in their communities.



MEET THE FUNDERS ONLINE EVENT

After the first assembly, participants' survey results following the assembly told us they particularly needed support on how to plan and deliver social projects, connect with others, measure the impact of their work and access funding. This feedback has shaped the next stage of the project.

In Year 2 we launched our termly Meet the Funders workshops. We connected 20 members with the Benefact Trust who delivered training on writing successful applications, their fund criteria and how to

apply. Afterwards members asked questions about prospective bids and how to develop them.

We also co-hosted a joint half-day 'Equipped to Serve' event with fellow Christian networking organisation Catalyst, gathering 40 Network of Kindness members, church and charity leaders. The event facilitated shared conversations around key strengths and challenges. The majority of attendees reported struggling with being overwhelmed or burnt out. There was a desire for a space where they can find support and better care for themselves. We'll address these concerns by holding termly events with Catalyst.

We delivered two sessions training 16 Church of England curates to develop their understanding of poverty in their community, the role of the church in responding and considering strategies for practical action.

We also partnered with Christian Aid to host 'After the Flood', gathering 30 climate activists to explore the intersection between racial justice and climate change. We were delighted to welcome All Black Lives UK to be part of the panel discussion with ourselves, Christian Aid and Movement for Justice & Reconciliation. We also hosted Christian Aid's Head of Middle East Policy and Advocacy William Bell, to present the charity's new report 'Where is Palestine? A story of loss, inequality and failure'. Both events engaged grassroots activists, and served to deepen our critical thinking and relationships as we explored complex issues together.

"The assembly created a space to share experience, knowledge and ideas for moving forward with hope, a necessary tool in this current unjust and complex situation created in part by the austerity policies of our government, which have over many years resulted in benefit cuts, caps and wage decline"

"Encouraging to hear from others working in similar circumstances with additional expertise and knowledge - especially around funding and support."

"I thought the evening was really helpful and such a breath of fresh air hearing creative and practical ways people are responding to the cost of living crisis. Thanks for all your hard work."

3 - Direct funding & Micro grants



CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY ST HELENS

[WATCH HERE](#)

Pantries" most visited pantries in the country, in March.

Additionally we have developed a new partnership with food services business Meals and More who will provide ongoing funding for our Feast of Fun Microgrants. We're delighted to have secured the future of this fund for future years.

Over the last 12 months we've supported 18 projects to provide over 3,000 meals, helping tackle holiday hunger by providing healthy food and activities for children across the Diocese of Liverpool area.



FEAST OF FUN ACTIVITIES 2023

"Our Feast of Fun Activity made a massive difference to the families in our community and parents were very grateful for the support that we offered them. The children enjoyed making new friends, learning new skills and playing with one another. A lot of families who are struggling financially shared openly how receiving a healthy lunch for both themselves and their children was a 'weight off my mind' and 'an answer to prayer because I don't get paid until the end of the week'. When the Easter Bunny turned up and gave each child an Easter Egg, one mum filled up with tears and whispered, 'Thank you for making such a magical memory for my son because I don't have the money right now to do that'.

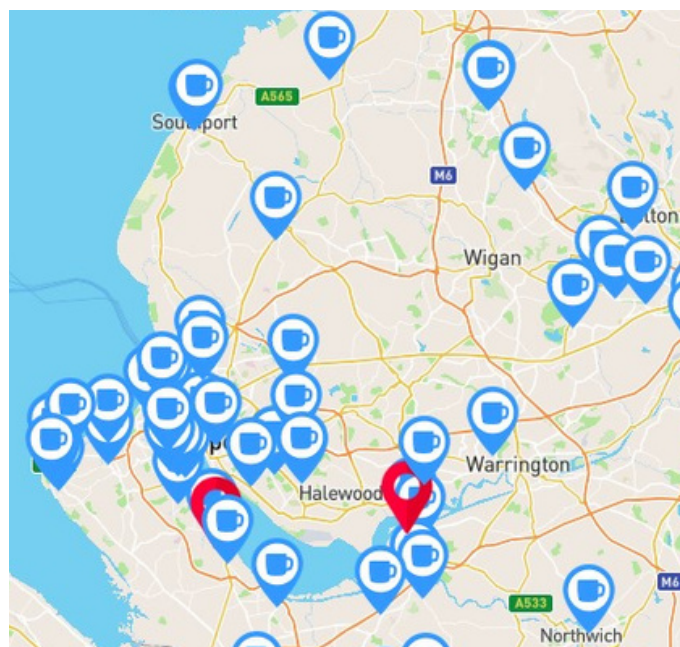
FEAST OF FUN PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIAL

"This grant made a huge difference in strengthening relationships with families in our community. It also provided an opportunity in strengthening our connections with a variety of local community partnerships here in Widnes - who after the success of this event now want to work on more projects together!"

FEAST OF FUN PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIAL

4 - Places of Welcome

The Network of Kindness has so far supported 18 Places of Welcome to open or re-open post-pandemic, providing places for people to connect with one another, find belonging and offer gifts and skills that interest them. These Places of Welcome reduce social isolation, providing everyone in their neighbourhood with a place to go for a friendly face, a cup of tea and a conversation when they need it. As we move forward, we are running sessions to support warm spaces to become Places of Welcome as part of our ongoing social isolation Community of Practice.



Among the Places of Welcome the Network of Kindness has supported to establish is the Friendship Cafe run by new charity Cherish, Reach and Connect in Southport, who shared their story for our Network of Kindness celebration event:



CASE STUDY - FRIENDSHIP CAFE PLACE OF WELCOME
[WATCH HERE](#)

5 - Real Conversations

As part of a national project, with funding from the UK Government's Faith New Deal. We held eight conversations in Parr, St Helens and four in Wigan with an average of 10-15 people at each conversation. These areas are some of the most deprived in the region. They were aimed at engaging the community and supporting them to reflect on their communities. We then creatively imagined what their communities could look like in the future together.

Four clear themes emerged around community space, community projects, community organisation and lack of provision for young people. The outcomes of those conversations will be presented to key local decision-makers in their area to seek real change.



REAL CONVERSATIONS - PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS IN ST HELENS AND WIGAN

6 - Plans for the future

Embedding the Network of Kindness across the faith sector within the geographical area of Liverpool Diocese is a significant undertaking. To deliver this objective this will take us beyond the end of the current National Lottery grant life-span. Over the next 12 months we will increase our current levels of output as ways of working become more established and also target underdeveloped areas of social action.

Our communities are facing increasing need with decreased resources. The cost of living crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have severely impacted deprived communities in the Liverpool City Region and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. The Foing under and Without report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) reveals that, among UK low-income households in the bottom 40% of incomes, 7.2 million households (62%) are going without essentials, with 4.7 million households (41%) in arrears with at least one household bill, and over 3 million households (28%) unable to afford keeping their home warm since June (JRF, 2022). Inflation reached a historic high at 11%, and the number of people living in very deep poverty increased from 4.7 million to 6.5 million in the two decades before the pandemic.

The JRF study emphasizes that despite government support measures, hardships have continued to rise, especially for those on the lowest incomes. These combined pressures have increased the risk of poverty for residents in the region and had cascading effects on health, education, and social cohesion.

The faith sector in the Liverpool City Region has played a critical role in supporting residents struggling with the consequences of deprivation stepping in to provide essential services, such as food banks, mental health support, and financial assistance, offering a vital lifeline for those in need. Local faith groups though are not immune from the struggles facing wider society. Soaring energy bills, a reduction in attendance of 20% at Anglican Churches. This leads to a reduction in volunteer capacity and income meaning groups who want to care for their communities are tasked with doing more with less.

This fragility underlines the importance of the Network of Kindness and its ability to bring groups together, support them to target their resources effectively and provide opportunities where greater collaboration can be achieved. It's in this context that we have shaped our plans for the next 12 months. As we do so, we are also conscious of the need to broaden our reach and support areas of social action that are underdeveloped within the diocese particularly housing and displaced people.

Our key objectives for this coming year (May 2023-April 2024) are:

- **Membership** Grow Network of Kindness membership to 150+
- **Learning Communities** Deliver a further 10 Learning Community sessions
- **Social Action Planning** Support a further 40% of churches with social action planning
- **Communities of Practice** Deliver sessions that will see new projects launched or partnerships developed, in particular in the areas of: Housing, Displaced People, Modern Slavery and Social Isolation
- **Places of Welcome** Support the opening of at least 12 more Places of Welcome.
- **Feast of Fun** Deliver an additional three rounds of microgrant funding to enable work tackling holiday hunger. We anticipate the provision of 6,500 meals in the next 12 months.
- **Partnerships** Strengthen partnerships with key groups and organisations including Liverpool Diocese and the Church Urban Fund, and forge connections with a wider range of denominations and faith groups
- **Meet the Funders** Deliver 3 sessions connecting Network of Kindness members with funders
- **Equality & Diversity** Provide workshops to strengthen EDI within members' projects



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