

TOGETHER NETWORK⁺



Foreword



Through the Together Network, Church Urban Fund is making a unique and invaluable contribution to communities, supporting churches, community groups, and other partners to work together to advance the common good, often in the face of very challenging circumstances.

In communities that have not shared in the benefits of economic growth, initiatives such as job clubs, holiday schemes, debt advice, and community cafés can be the difference between hope and despair. Running them requires time, skills, resources, energy, and perseverance. It is so important then that there are encouragers, networkers, innovators, and those with knowledge and experience to pass on, working to connect, equip, and mobilise this vast team of committed people in towns, cities, and villages across the country. Through its 35 development workers and many more supporters, this is what the Together Network provides. The Together Network is not only becoming a vital infrastructure for the church, but also for communities, serving as a vehicle for engagement with statutory partners and as a channel through which communities and policy makers can interact.

I warmly commend this summary to you and hope that you too find it an uplifting account of the creative and effective ways in which churches, together with many other partners, are working together to tackle some of the major challenges facing our communities today.

The Most Rev. and Rt. Hon. Justin Welby
Archbishop of Canterbury

OUR VISION

Our vision is to see people and communities across England flourish and enjoy life in all its fullness.

We believe that communities flourish when people have:



AGENCY

the ability to make and follow through on choices about the direction of their own lives, and that of the communities and society in which they live.



RELATIONSHIPS OF EQUALITY

within households, communities and society more widely, in which they feel safe to belong, interdependence is acknowledged, and all have opportunities to give and receive.



JUST ACCESS TO RESOURCES

sufficient to provide for their wellbeing in a sustainable and dignified way and to participate fully socially, politically and economically.

Who We Are

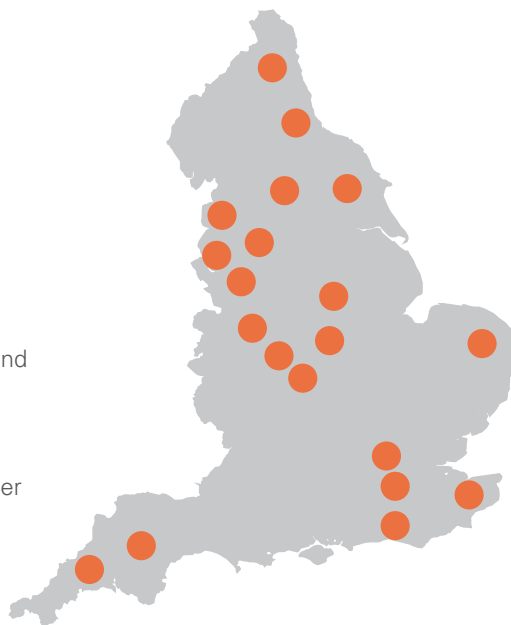
The Together Network is made up of 20 partnerships (Joint Ventures) between Church Urban Fund and Church of England dioceses and in some cases Methodist Districts. It works relationally to catalyse and resource local action, ensuring that:

- Social action by churches and community groups – and that delivered directly by the Together Network – grows in extent, effectiveness, and faithfulness.
- Collaboration for the common good grows, including across sectors (state, private, and voluntary), faiths, church denominations, and within neighbourhoods.
- Best practice is shared, resources are leveraged, and appropriate opportunities for engagement are identified.
- Social policy, public opinion, and public service design and resourcing are increasingly informed by real life experiences in local communities.

Together Network development workers work with churches of all sizes and denominations to support social action and community engagement, providing training, advice, contacts, resources, and encouragement.

Our Joint Ventures:

Capital Mass
Communities Together Durham
Greater Together Manchester
Imagine Norfolk Together
Thrive Together Birmingham
Together Canterbury
Together for Change
Together in Sussex
Together Lancashire
Together Leicester
Together Liverpool
Together Middlesbrough & Cleveland
Together Newcastle
Together Southwark
Transformation Cornwall
Transforming Communities Together
Transforming Lives Together
Transforming Notts Together
Transforming Plymouth Together
Wellsprings Together Bradford



35

development workers employed across the Together Network

687

social action and community projects supported by the Together Network in 2017



335

of these projects were partnerships, involving two or more churches or organisations

23%

increase in the number of social action and community projects supported by the Together Network compared to 2016



19,068

people took part in Together Network events, training, and workshops in 2017

+71%

increase in people taking part in Together Network events, training, and workshops compared to 2016

+51%

increase in partnership working between churches since 2014 according to the 2017 Church in Action Survey

The Together Network, and the projects it supports, tackle a wide spectrum of social issues. Emerging areas of focus are:

LONELINESS

HOMELESSNESS

MENTAL HEALTH

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

FOOD POVERTY

In 2017 the Together Network provided support to 687 social action and community projects, an increase of 23% on the previous year. It also supported churches and other organisations with 78 funding applications, helping secure more than £1.1 million for projects to benefit local communities. A new partnership, Together Leicester, was set up in 2017.

Growing Together

The Together Network has proved an effective vehicle for incubating and spreading ideas that work, when it comes to social action and community engagement. For example, there are now more than 200 Places of Welcome in locations from Birmingham and Bradford through to Widnes and Wolverhampton, each offering a safe space in which people from all walks of life can build the kinds of mutually supportive relationships that are foundational to personal resilience and wellbeing, and to thriving local communities.

As well as building the capacity of churches and other organisations to respond to social issues in their areas, the Together Network delivers projects directly, providing additional resources and expertise to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing our communities.

This year has seen deepening engagement with the problem of holiday hunger, with several Joint Ventures delivering innovative programmes that address this, and working closely with Feeding Britain and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. Our work amongst refugees and asylum seekers has also grown, and the Together Network is supporting and delivering a wide range of projects that respond to the needs both of newly arrived migrants, and of the communities receiving them.

In addition, Church Urban Fund's Together Grants supported 66 projects in 2017, awarding a total of £135,007 in small grants to local projects working with a range of groups including young people, those experiencing unemployment, homelessness, domestic abuse, and mental health issues.

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11



Learning Together

The Together Network delivered 510 training sessions, workshops, and events involving 19,068 people during 2017.

These events equip and encourage churches and other groups for community engagement, and raise awareness of the social issues we are responding to.

In the Black Country, for example, Transforming Communities Together partnered with Housing Justice to host a conference on homelessness, giving delegates the opportunity to hear from national and local experts about ways churches and faith and community groups can get involved in practical solutions.

Since the conference, attendees have run a successful night shelter in Walsall, in partnership with the council. Many of the volunteers came from local churches. Transforming Communities Together has also partnered with Homeless Link and YMCA Black Country to set up a 'Community of Practice', bringing together diverse groups from across Walsall and beyond who are committed to tackling homelessness together.

During 2017 we spent time exploring how to improve the way we evidence the impact of the Together Network. Through a consultative process, and building on the findings of an evaluation conducted by researchers from Coventry University during 2016, we have developed a set of tools with which to do this. Our aim is to capture more stories about the difference our work is making, as well as getting a clearer picture of our engagement in numbers.

We are very grateful to The Lempriere Pringle Trust for their ongoing financial support of the Together Network which has funded our infrastructure and, in 2017, stimulated over £1.8m of locally generated income across our 20 Joint Ventures.

We are delighted too to be partnering with Allchurches Trust who are generously supporting the Together Network.



ALLCHURCHES TRUST LIMITED
OWNERS OF ECCLESIASTICAL INSURANCE GROUP

Learning Together

CASE STUDY

Positive Pathways

Positive Pathways is working to break the cycle of homelessness in a distinctive way. By providing one-to-one relational support to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness at critical points on their pathway to securing and sustaining accommodation, the project offers a holistic response to this growing problem.

The process of moving into accommodation can be a difficult one for people who have not had their own place to live for a long time. The administrative aspects alone can be complex and stressful, making the support that Positive Pathways workers provide invaluable.

One client, James (not his real name), found himself having to register at the Jobcentre, at a new GP practice, and inform various

support agencies of a new address – all of which required ID and evidence of tenancy presented in person. Navigating the system can be confusing and stressful without support.

Some clients need to navigate a range of services, for example for support with budgeting, mental health problems, or drug and alcohol addictions. Many value help with finding new places to build supportive relationships, where family relationships have broken down, or individuals need to disconnect from social relationships that have been damaging in the past. Clients often need support in getting used to shopping or cooking for themselves, and the properties they end up in may be inadequately furnished: accessing cooking equipment, bedding, and cleaning

equipment is difficult if you do not know where to go and are on a tight budget. Positive Pathways workers provide tailored 'wrap-around' support that can respond to any or all of these challenges, depending on the priorities and needs of the individual.

So far, more than 365 people have been supported through Positive Pathways, and as a result of the project's success in Bradford and Middlesbrough, funding has been secured to continue this work over the next five years, extending its coverage across Yorkshire over this period. The project's Christian ethos has helped it maintain a flexible, holistic approach, complementing vital statutory provision and creating time for relationships that transform lives and support sustainable change.

CASE STUDY

Fresh Start – Coventry

In Coventry, Together for Change's Fresh Start initiative is providing valuable support to refugees and asylum seekers through friendship, football, and English conversation cafés.

Yonas (not his real name), a young asylum seeker from Eritrea, has been significantly impacted by Fresh Start. Formerly a mechanic in Eritrea, Yonas had to flee his country because of government repression and arrived in the UK in September 2017. Shortly after being resettled in Coventry by the Home Office, Yonas started attending the Fresh Start Conversation Café and enthusiastically joined the Saturday football club. He has received over 60 hours of free English support,

accelerating his progress and boosting his confidence. He has built meaningful friendships with Fresh Start's British volunteers as well as young men from different countries.

In March 2018, Yonas had an interview at a local college for a mechanics course. Very few recently-arrived refugees or asylum seekers are able to access these courses as they require a high level of English proficiency. Yonas, however, passed the English test with flying colours and was accepted onto the course. Through his determination and the ongoing support he has enjoyed through Fresh Start, Yonas has made extraordinary progress in starting his new life in the UK.



CASE STUDY

Faithfully Ageing Better

Faithfully Ageing Better is a partnership between Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland and Ageing Better Middlesbrough, a six-year Big Lottery funded programme that aims to reduce loneliness and isolation for people aged 50 and over in Middlesbrough.

The Faithfully Ageing Better project was created in recognition of the great work churches do in providing support and care to older people who are isolated, particularly in times of loss, bereavement, and ill-health. The project aims to identify, celebrate, and help to develop this work to continue to serve the spiritual and practical needs of the older community.

By raising awareness and providing encouragement and practical support to churches, Faithfully Ageing Better is helping connect more people with the companionship, community, and conversation that is so important for their wellbeing. Commenting on the impact of Welcome Break, a weekly drop-in for older people

hosted by St Barnabas Church, Linthorpe, for example, Development Worker Kate Wells said:

“What seems to make the real difference to people is the regularity and reliability of the group, and the strong friendships that have been formed. There is also a sense of having a ‘place’ – some of the people who have come for a long time have started to help out, either formally by serving refreshments, or informally by being there and talking to and welcoming newer attendees.”

A creative collaboration between Faithfully Ageing Better and Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland’s ‘Feast of Fun’ holiday programme for families has seen them support a series of events and trips that bring together different generations. This has been an exciting development, helping build meaningful and mutually supportive networks of relationships within local communities and talking to and welcoming newer attendees.”

TOGETHER NETWORK⁺

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Charity number: 297483



Whether it is across different generations, nationalities, beliefs, or levels of prosperity, learning to live together well has become a pressing challenge for our society. Responding to this challenge, in partnership with others, lies at the heart of our work across England.

Celebrating diversity is a vital part of this response, but this can only be done authentically when we engage honestly with some of the inequalities, disagreements, and struggles that are often woven into the differences and divisions between people.

Looking ahead, we know that living together well also means making room for one another's voices, insight, and experiences in the public sphere. As we continue to catalyse local responses to social issues through our work in communities and churches, we will be seeking too to build bridges, connecting communities with public and policy debates about wellbeing, justice, and equality.

Help us change lives and communities together.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Paul Hackwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Hackwood
Executive Director

www.togethernetnetwork.org.uk

Front cover image courtesy of The Gazette