



Good Society

An exploration of different people, places and projects across the UK, and the values and faith they share

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www.agoodsociety.org

The Good Society project is about listening to those who rarely have power

Revd. Bob Fyffe

Good relationships are built on listening as well as talking. We hope the Good Society project is the beginning of a much longer period of reflection and listening on behalf of Churches and the wider community.

We have heard much over the last few years about the Big Society, a concept which raises important questions about what we mean by society, and how we participate in making our local communities places where we are valued and can make a real contribution.

So we decided to give voice to different kinds of communities across the United Kingdom by asking the question, 'What does a good society mean for you?'

We engaged through a participatory research process that encouraged church-based and faith groups to tell their own story, in their own words.

What has emerged has been informative and enlightening. There are many great and often unheralded pieces of work going on that illustrate solid community building and a deep sense of care for the whole community.

What you will find within this report are common descriptions of a good society as a place that re-builds the spirit by nurturing individuals and offering hope; integrates different generations and faiths; models healthy ways of living and being and offers chances to learn; re-builds communities by solving conflicts creatively and sharing ambitions and goals; and provides practical resources to solve problems.

Faith groups and leaders are asked to challenge the status quo, by becoming mediators and community leaders rather than just faith leaders; standing for values rather than fundamentals; being seen as voices of truth, values and integrity, rather than holders of power; leading by creating possibilities; and seeing buildings as an opportunity for new thinking on the meaning of sanctuary and community.

What begins with the Good Society project is a process of listening to the voices of those who rarely, if ever, have the power, status, position or confidence to speak in the public square. It is important that we continue by listening closely, and allowing new voices and communities to tell their own story and reflect upon what a good society means for them.

We want to promote a year of conversation about the values that have emerged, what are the marks of a good society, and seek to involve other groups. You can view the research at agoodsociety.org, where you will also be able to download a toolkit to assist in undertaking your own research.

The outcomes can then be included on the site. More material will be added as time goes on. There are already a number of people and organisations reflecting on some of the outcomes of this first phase.

We look forward to hearing from you about what is happening where you live. We want to hear your communities views, and we hope to give them voice.

Revd. Bob Fyffe, General Secretary
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

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Belfast

All Souls' Church; the ex-paramilitaries writing group; the anti-austerity Coalition of Resistance

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Birmingham

Saltley Methodist Church; the Pensioner's Club; Remnants sewing group

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Thematic

Hope and Aspiration

How communities give power and voice to different individuals by nurturing them and offering opportunities to learn.

Community

How people are building a 'good society' by bringing different generations, ethnic and faith groups together, integrating the past with the present, and finding ways to share goals.

Health and Well-being

How communities can support healthy ways of being by sharing learning, skills and knowledge, helping people resolve conflicts, and modelling positive ways of living.

Spirit

The attitudes and behaviours that build creativity and a sense of being part of something bigger, helping people believe they can make a difference.

About

Never think a small band of committed people cannot change the world - it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead,
American anthropologist

"I think a good society is there; it's there at the grassroots, it's there in the caring and sharing and the working together."

Deanna, Newcastle

Churches, parishes and congregations are to be found in every community across the United Kingdom. The people who gather in these places are drawn from these communities.

As such the Church has played a pivotal role in our society; not existing as a closed religious gathering, but as a community of faith with a deep concern for everyone living in their neighbourhood.

This is evidenced in the countless ways in which churches serve the needs of their community, regardless of religious affiliation or belonging.

The 'Good Society' project is a description of how some of these acts of service are being undertaken. Different communities across the United Kingdom tell their story, and describe in their own words what a 'good society' would look like for them.

These are moving and inspirational stories which we hope will make a contribution to the wider debate concerning the role of the Church, and faith more generally, in seeking the common good for all.

The project does not intend to offer sociopolitical analysis, and does not offer any recommendations to the churches or to Government. The voices must speak for themselves.



How

This project, commissioned by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, set out in the summer of 2011 with two questions: "What do we mean by good society?" and "What can and do churches or faith groups contribute to the development of such a society?"

The research was conducted as conversations and group discussions. A combination of audio recording, still photographs and handwritten notes were used to capture the responses.

This approach reflected the unique perspectives of each of the communities and projects visited.

No community or project could be regarded as 'typical' or 'representative' of anything other than itself. Although researchers were open to finding common themes, there was no presumption that such themes would emerge.

In many ways the most challenging part of the process was trying to get the engagement of groups at a local level. In most cases this meant making initial approaches to people who were remote from the communities, but who could open access.

The original ambition was to try and include communities or projects from ten different areas of the UK. This ambition was eventually adapted, with the final focus on seven geographical areas, and several additional projects, giving 12 centres of enquiry.

In partnership with Church Action on Poverty, a range of questions were developed. It was agreed that each community and project would be enabled to describe itself with its own voice.

These voices are accompanied by the latest Church Urban Fund published data, other comparative statistics on poverty indicators and local authority documents.

The stories and insights have been heart-warming and challenging. In presenting the work the story has been told by location. There were also some common themes.

We have concentrated primarily on areas of major social challenge, areas where individuals and communities rely on the imagination, energy and engagement of small numbers of paid workers and larger numbers of volunteers and willing participants.

Through the toolkit (www.agoodsociety.org) others are encouraged to explore their own 'good society' perspectives and develop their own plans.

Belfast

Gerry, former paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force

I don't want my grandchildren to have to face the situation where I made the decisions that I made. I wouldn't want them to go through 40 years to realise it is wrong.

Paula Tabakim, All Souls' congregation member

Good Society



Rev Chris Hudson, minister, All Souls' Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church

"The sacrifices made for violence were not worth it: the sacrifices made for peace were. Undoubtedly."
Gerry

Rev Chris Hudson MBE is a Dublin-born peace activist turned Unitarian Minister in south Belfast's All Souls' Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church.

Although from a Republican family with links to the old IRA, he made it his mission to understand and explain the Ulster loyalist perspective while remaining opposed to its violent campaigns.

In 1993, he became an unofficial negotiator for Protestant paramilitaries. The talks eventually led to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) announcing a ceasefire in October 1994. Chris is also the unofficial Christian chaplain for Ulster's gay community.

A true non-conformist, Chris worked as a women's hairdresser, postman, actor and writer before becoming a minister.

He has applied his beliefs to his church, and revived the congregation of just 25 mostly elderly regulars by embracing the gay community and welcoming members of different faiths, nationalities and creeds, to create what he calls a non-doctrinal, non-conformist, "beloved community."

* names have been changed

"We should welcome people, not just tolerate them. We should believe in a concept of justice that in a good society would bring understanding, reconciliation and forgiveness, along with duties and responsibilities."
Paula, All Souls' congregation member

Belfast is a complex and complicated collection of communities.

The perspectives reflected here come from a very small selection of ex-paramilitaries from one part of the Protestant working class.

One of the paramilitaries, Gerry* had been in a position of significant power. The other, Peter* had been a "foot soldier", who had killed in accordance with the orders he received and who has subsequently spent 17 years in prison. He was released from prison as a result of the Good Friday Agreement.

In 2010 Peter wrote a play, the culmination of an interest in writing that was first sparked whilst he was in prison. Its performance attracted widespread media coverage and resulted in him entering into mediation with the family of the man he murdered.

"The night the play came out, the family of the person I murdered approached me and accused me of making a name for myself on the back of the relative who had

Belfast

Religion is about the pilgrimage, it is about making a better society. And we have an obligation to meet and join with all sorts of different people along the way

Peter, former paramilitary

died. It went to the press and the press exposed me for being this monster from the past from the past. Which led to this discussion – am I not allowed to move on now?”
Peter

The whole question of “peace and reconciliation” gave Peter the opportunity to go into a mediation process with the Victims Commission for Northern Ireland, as he “wanted it done properly”. That has enabled him and the victim’s family to move on. He now works with others to give people a voice through a creative writing group, supported by Rev Hudson, community theatre and conflict resolution specialists.

“I got together with a few other people who are all ex-life sentence prisoners, and have very similar backgrounds to me. We had this notion to say look, we need to create a platform here for people within working class areas give them training in creative writing, and drama, and give them opportunities.

“How do we get the Protestant community connected to the arts? I think it is very important in many ways. The most important thing is that it gives you a voice that previously hadn’t been heard.”
Peter

Peter is now writing a second play.

Gerry was a senior member of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and one of its leaders during the Troubles. He is now involved in moving towards peace, after 40 years of violence. The progress towards peace has been a long slow process.

“..even though we may well have been the majority, we were the people outside the law, we were beyond the pale.”
Gerry

18 years ago when the UVF started down the road to peace and sought help, they needed an individual to give voice to what they were saying. The fact that they chose to work with Rev Hudson happened by accident.

“.....we were genuine about what we were doing and Chris was genuine about what he was doing. It was a realisation that violence was going nowhere. That realisation must have hit everyone. You can go on forever doing this. But really it achieves nothing.

“Its a huge challenge to take your own people with you. And at times it’s a slow, tedious, and frustrating process. It’s one step forward, two steps back. And there’s no point in standing at the end of the pier and finding that there’s no-one there with you. It’s self-defeating. Some people don’t understand what you’re trying to do. But you have to find compromises and bring the people with you every inch of the way. If you don’t, you fail.”
Gerry

The whole move towards peace has been and continues to be complex and difficult. Different and competing voices need to be heard and their views on what will make a good society in Northern Ireland considered and valued.

Anti-Austerity

Chris is also working alongside Niall McNally, an organiser with Siptu (Services, Industry, Professional and Technical Union) Northern Ireland. Niall is working to create a ‘people’s movement’ to develop alternatives to austerity.

“I am looking to build a broad range of principles and support for civil society. Principles that will help people look at the moral issues and not just the economic ones. The church is part of civil society and should be part of the dialogue about moral values.”

Niall’s work is modelled on the UK ‘coalition of resistance’ idea that has been developed by Tony Benn to tackle the impact of austerity, and which involves people from across different communities.

“Religion is about the journey, the pilgrimage, and it is about making a better society. We have an obligation and a duty to do that and to meet and join with all sorts of people on the way.”
Rev Hudson



Rev Chris Hudson and union activist Niall McNally



Mural, Belfast



Belfast Peace Wall

“This is about moral issues and values which are shared. It is important that we recognise people have lost their centre of gravity, their moral sense. The church, politicians and trades unions need to act together, to listen and help people regain their values.

“You have to be informed by a set of values - whether it be socialist or religious values. Otherwise we just end up crucifying each other.”

Niall

“I would hope that there’s something better than this, better than humanity. From the crooked timbers of humanity nothing straight can ever be made. I suppose I would describe myself as humanist, and I think the church is moving in that direction, and that’s how it should be. Christianity should be about humanity, and less about dogma.”

Gerry

I feel within myself that I have a right to move on.

Peter, former paramilitary

We don’t want a sectarian approach. We need to look at things differently. We can’t agree on everything, but there’s a commonality and a broad range of principles that we can all buy into.

*Niall McNally,
Trade Union Activist*

Birmingham

**Nisreen Mubarak, Remnants sewing tutor,
Saltley Methodist Church**

We are working together, there's no boundaries. It's a place of sanctuary, where we leave our problems behind. There shouldn't be differences between us. This place is an example of how it should be.

Rev Andi Smith and members of the Remnants sewing group at Saltley Methodist Church

Good Society



Enid Linton, volunteer tutor, Remnants sewing group

Saltley is an inner-city area of Birmingham to the east of the city.

According to the Church Urban Fund, Saltley is now one of the most deprived areas in England, with its most significant poverty-related issues pensioner poverty and low qualification levels. It is also an area of high ethnic diversity, with 81 per cent of the population non-white British.

The main street in Saltley, Alum Rock Road, is colourful, noisy and busy, with a plethora of shops selling saris and Asian fabrics, grocers with open shop fronts selling a wide range of fruit and vegetables, Halal butchers, and bakeries, with colourful sweetmeats.

Saltley Methodist Church has seen waves of change, with the influx of a large Afro-Caribbean population after World War II, and then in more recent times the growth of the Asian community.

As Andi Smith, the Minister at Saltley Methodist Church, says: "It is easy to feel as though this is an increasingly mono-ethnic neighbourhood, with deep and sharp divisions. One of the real worries within this context is the diminishing number of safe places in which people can gather and mix, hear one another's stories and work on common projects together."

In response to all this change, the stated aim of the church

is, "to offer space for those who need space, teaching for those who seek wisdom and most importantly a body of people with whom we can learn what it means to be the people God made us to be."

The church is open and inclusive. For their presentation of the Christmas story in 2011, over the course of three days they involved 800 children and 300 adults from across the breadth of the community.

According to Rev Smith: "Central to the life of Saltley Methodist Church is a vision of lives changed and communities transformed."

Saltley Pensioner's Club

For those meeting at the Saltley Neighbourhood Pensioners Club in the church, these changes to the area present real problems of exclusion and distance.

Maureen comes to the centre two days a week. "I was very frightened coming here at first so came with a friend, but got to know people and made some nice friends. It helps you get out."

Violet also comes to the centre two days a week. "There have been a lot of changes in the area: in the sixties everyone used to mix together and chat; now Alum Rock Road is all Asian shops and houses, there is nothing for us

Birmingham



The Remnants workshop



A bag being made for a competition



Tutor Nisreen Mubarak with a student

now. If we could all just live together as a community, work together, and integrate more – that would be nice.”

Remnants

It was in response to these needs that Remnants started 15 years ago. A sewing group with a difference, Remnants is about “sewing the fabric of a healthy community”.

In a workshop space created within the fabric of the church, a group of women from across the community meet twice a week from 10am to 2pm.

They take in seconds of soft furnishings, ends of fabric rolls and other donations of fabric, thread, buttons, and beads, and from this make something new - the new being anything from clothes to household items, or pieces of decorative jewellery.

Because it’s a church people feel safe. They think there must be something good happening here.

Marge Jordan, Remnants volunteer tutor

“It is nice to have Muslims in the church; even though it is not their religion, they want to be here. It is good to know they are just ordinary people. They are just like you and I. That is the good thing about Remnants.

“We are a church and this is the community. We have to live together; to live separately is not the Christian way. What you say and how you live may not make a difference to the majority of people, but if it makes a difference to one person that is better than none.”

Marge Jordan, Remnants tutor

Nisreen Mubarak is employed by the church as the teacher, and works with volunteers drawn from across the community to teach dress-making, soft furnishing making and creative needlecraft. Nisreen was encouraged to apply for the job by her husband because the Methodist Church was seen as a safe place for her to work where her faith and values would be respected.

For her it has been a great opportunity to bring her skills and knowledge into her own community and to share with women of all ages, faiths and ethnic backgrounds.

“A place of being wanted, needed... it’s something I can give. I love working with the community. I believe we can make this place better. We are working together...there’s no boundaries. It’s a place of sanctuary. We leave our problems behind. There shouldn’t be differences between us. This place is an example of how it should be. Out there

it’s not. Everyone is in their own groups. They don’t want to mix. They’re too scared.

“I’d love to see more classes like this. One of the volunteers was telling someone about us and they said, ‘Oh is that the place where everybody is welcome?’ And that’s a lovely thing, for us to be known that way. That this church is a place where everybody is welcome. I wish that our mosques were the same. I wish that we were also known to bring communities in.

“This is the best place I have been. To see what you are offering to others – you didn’t have to do this for us. But you didn’t just do it for one group. You’ve done it for everybody. And look at how many people are benefiting.”

Nisreen Mubarak

“Togetherness is the name of the game. Unity is a deliberate act - you have to work at it. Remnants has given us a common focus and task.”

Marge Jordan

“To many, Remnants is a random assortment of women who like to sew, but if you look closely and listen hard you hear stories shared, hope restored and community transformed. It is the simple conviction of Remnants that we are ‘better together.’”

Rev Andi Smith

Attendees come from across the breadth of the community. These include young women from Somalia, Pakistan and Birmingham; older Afro-Caribbean women who moved to Salford 50 years ago, and who help with the teaching, passing on their expertise as machinists; and a number of Eastern European women.

The group meet and share, and through their work they learn about one another’s cultures, faith and traditions.

This is the best place I have been. And look at how many people are benefiting. Not just one colour, not just one group – but everybody.

Nisreen Mubarak, Remnants tutor

“You want to leave everything else and come here. It brings the whole community together. Different ages, different cultures; we are all so cool with each other.

“You wouldn’t believe it, but I was the sort of person who kept myself to myself. Since I had the children I hadn’t left the house and that was 12 years ago. So it’s brought that confidence back. It’s really opened me up again.

“My husband is happy for me to be here; he can see when I come home I’m much more fun to be around. My girls inspire me as well. They really want me to learn something here. In the future God knows what I’ll be doing! There’s so much to learn.

“I would respect a church as I would respect our mosques. We’re so lucky to have this opportunity to come here and chat and mix with everybody. There’s a beautiful ladies’ group here too. I respect it 100 per cent. It’s my top priority.

“Without Remnants, some of our women would be lost. We would be in the house all the time. We want it to broaden and get more ladies involved from different races and backgrounds. We would welcome them.”

Shaisha Parveen, Remnants member

The aim for the project is to sell the products and use the money as the first step towards establishing Remnants as a social enterprise. The future for the group includes plans to expand the workshop space, and so increase the numbers who can come. There is currently a waiting list for places, but no one leaves, so more space is essential.

If we can understand other cultures and religions, we can get along. My friends here are like family now. That’s how close we are with each other.

*Shaisha Parveen
Remnants member*

Cornwall

Adam Harris, St Austell
Community Kitchen volunteer

What we need is a little society, where you live, with interconnections that are local. Then you could get a lot of integration and cross-pollination. It boils down to charity beginning at home.



Kim Mathews, Manager of St Austell Community Kitchen (STAK), and a client

“STAK would not work in a city or a village, it needs to be in a town like St Austell.”

Adam Harris, STAK volunteer

Cornwall is a beautiful area and, a favourite holiday destination. However, there are wide geographical variations. Pengegon is within the two per cent most deprived areas in England, while Latchbrook South is at the other end of the spectrum, in the six per cent least deprived.

According to Cornwall's 2010 Homelessness review:

- Average annual earnings are 16.4 per cent lower in Cornwall than the rest of the UK.
- The low-wage economy in Cornwall, the seasonal nature of many dominant employment sectors and low savings levels place many people at increased risk of homelessness.
- The geographical remoteness, increasing and ageing population, and low wage economy in Cornwall, have led to an increase in demand for affordable accommodation, particularly in the social rented sector.
- The cost of buying or renting property in the private sector has remained consistently high across Cornwall.
- Social housing forms only 12 per cent of the housing stock, compared to 16 per cent regionally and 23 percent nationally.

- Significant numbers of rough sleepers are present in both urban and rural areas, but current outreach services are patchy. There is only one ten-bed direct access night shelter.
- Cornwall has higher numbers of homeless applications from people leaving care than nationally.
- Approximately 20 per cent of rough sleepers are women, but there are no specialist services for female rough sleepers.

“Mousehole lost 50 per cent of its population in 10 years. It is now a holiday let village.”

Julyan, Newlyn

Cornwall's population is weighted to the old and the young, which puts further pressure on services. Countering this is the fact that the county has a very high volunteering base and a huge amount of money is given as time - estimated to be worth around £250 - £300 million a year.

St Austell

St Austell is an old market town, once famous as the centre of the china clay industry. Despite the decline of the industry, it remains one of Cornwall's largest towns, with its two main attractions now being the St Austell brewery and the Eden project.



Computer class, STAK

On Cornwall online, St Austell is described in stark terms: "Although the town itself has little to offer the visitor (in fact some might even describe it as being pretty grim) it does provide an ideal centre for some of the loveliest beaches in Cornwall."

We are trying to get clients to regain their pride; to see that they can do something for others, that they can be part of what is happening in the town. We are not just giving them a meal.

Kim Mathews, Manager of St Austell Community Kitchen (STAK)

According to Church Urban Fund (CUF) statistics, St Austell is among the most deprived parishes in the country. CUF identifies the most significant poverty-related issues as the relatively high rate of working age poverty, and the relatively low qualification levels.

St Austell Community Kitchen (STAK)

St Austell Community Kitchen provides a safe and welcoming environment for the vulnerable, needy and homeless. The majority of the people who use STAK are single, physically distant from any known family and socially isolated. STAK's own publicity states:

"STAK is important for many reasons, the main reason is that society is generally geared towards excluding people who do not meet social norms. These could be people with mental health or disability issues, learning and integrating issues, a history of drug/alcohol dependency or crime, and some people who simply lose their way and do not know which way to turn. It is important because of



our key objectives: respecting the individuality and humanity of all who pass through our doors, helping those less fortunate than ourselves, or who ask for help."

STAK, which has been running for over 25 years, has had a number of different venues but now seems settled in its home at 8 High Cross Street, St Austell - although it does not own the premises and is continuously under threat. The organisation is currently placing bids for funding to buy the building and secure its future in the centre of the town, where it is both easily accessed and able to maintain good links with other agencies and support services.

STAK is largely dependent on voluntary effort. Both trustees and workers are volunteers giving their time and energy freely, and the meals provided are the result of high levels of voluntary contribution in the form of food donations from individuals, institutions, supermarkets and local shops. The majority of the trustees are also from church backgrounds, and a wide range of different denominations. The common theme for them all is the call to be active in their community and, specifically, to be working with those who are marginalised from the mainstream.

STAK is open from 10.30 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Saturday. It provides morning coffee, lunch and dinner. The main meal costs £1, but for those who have no money there is always a large bowl of hot soup, bread and tea/coffee, and guidance as to how to get vouchers for the local food bank, or other forms of help.

Kim Mathews, who has been both chairman of STAK and a key volunteer and is now paid as the project worker for the organisation, comes from a very strong faith background.

"Faith is huge for me in this work. I was part of an evangelical church, part of the leadership team. God wanted us to be far more involved in the community. We stopped being inward looking and started looking outward. We closed our doors on Sundays and 250 people moved out to work in our communities."



STAK volunteer chef with Adam, volunteer manager

STAK doesn't make judgements; it welcomes anyone who is isolated or vulnerable for whatever reason.

Alan, STAK volunteer

STAK has achieved a great deal. In 2012 it provided some 3,570 hot and nutritious three-course meals, and 690 free meals for those who cannot afford the £1 which the main meal costs. 3,435 cups of tea/coffee were consumed. STAK also provides courses such as Food Hygiene and First Aid and runs a computer club.

STAK is now established as a charitable company. Grants from the Church Urban Fund and the Rose Mullion Trust are enabling the organisation to pay Kim and a part-time accountant, and, with support from Church Urban Fund, STAK now has a business plan.

The demand for meals and other support is ever increasing. STAK, along with other community kitchens and food banks, is seeing a steadily increasing number of people who cannot afford to pay for their food.

STAK sees itself as helping people build tolerance and acceptance, giving people a chance to step back a little from the chaos they live in.

Part of the importance of STAK is the atmosphere it creates, so that it does welcome all and encourages people to talk, engage and get some positive social interaction.

"It's been about 16 years altogether since I first started volunteering. You help people and you get a little bit of satisfaction from knowing that you are making life somewhat easier for someone else. We're never going to get an ideal society. Never, ever. Sometimes people come in with huge problems and we can to some extent help



Lilian, STAK volunteer

sort them out. We're not social workers or councillors of any description, but sometimes it's nice when people just want to talk and unburden themselves."

Lilian, STAK volunteer

The regular clients of STAK tell of their experience with honesty and openness. Alan has COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and cannot work anymore. His only hobby is making model aircraft. He lives on his own and comes to STAK most days. Sometimes he volunteers by doing odd jobs and helping with the computer club.

"If you just stayed at home staring at walls you would go crazy. It is like a family, we all muck in with one another and look out for one another. If someone who is a regular doesn't turn up, we will try and find out what has happened."

Alan, STAK volunteer

Lee has been coming to STAK since 1986. He is there six days a week (STAK is closed on Sundays) and on the seventh day he sits in his room. Lee has some physical and learning disabilities and is not able to work. He lived at home with his mother until she died and is now on his own. He has nowhere else to go and would be too nervous to try going to a new centre. He is learning to use a computer and, with Kim, has been to use a computer in another building.

"It is like a family. I have not got a family, this is my family. They do a good job, it is like a family affair, a nice, warm, safe place to be. Something nice to eat and then the social. It is run by good people - if it closed it would be a great loss, some people would not know what to do at all."

Lee, STAK client

Graham classes himself as fairly lucky. He has mechanical health problems, but no mental health, drugs or alcohol issues. He describes himself as, 'middle-aged and middle class in trouble.' He can see himself volunteering almost full-time if they are successful in buying the building.

We try not to categorise each other, but then we are all human. We try to live by the statement on the wall - 'love, care and respect from all to all'

Graham, STAK volunteer

Adam, who was a full-time volunteer for a while, came to STAK originally when he was himself homeless. He is now back in work, but still comes and volunteers when he can.

"It is an extraordinary mix of people, but they all have problems engaging with society. They don't conform to social norms and they get negative affirmation from society. But here you break the circle. STAK doesn't make judgements, it welcomes anyone who is isolated or vulnerable, for whatever reason. It works because it is here and it has become a family, with everything that happens in a family, from fights and rows to laughter and joy." Adam, STAK volunteer

STAK recognises that the individual exists and matters. It notices their presence and their absence and helps them to engage in something bigger than themselves, in something called 'family', or community.

In June 2012, STAK received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

St Thomas's Church, Camelford

Camelford is not an area of deprivation in terms of statics; it is not classed as a problem area and appears to be relatively well-off.

Described as the gateway to Camelot Country, it is an attractive and ancient town with some 2,000 inhabitants lying on the edge of Bodmin Moor.

The average house price locally is £195k for a three-bedroomed house. There is no, or very little, public transport, and 20 per cent of the population do not have cars. There is a lack of work apart from seasonal minimum wage work. Many young people are leaving the area.

St Thomas's Church in the centre of Camelford is relatively modern (1938). It is not the parish church, which is 1.5 miles from the centre and which, whilst old and beautiful, is not part of the everyday life of the town in Camelford. There are two areas of social housing, with significant issues of fuel poverty and an underlying culture of drink

and drugs. There is no gas in the area, so heating is electricity or oil, both of which are very expensive. The new social housing, mainly flats, is on the outskirts of Camelford. Even if jobs were available, residents need their own transport to access them. The estate has no facilities for children and, until the church started the Tommies Toddlers playgroup, the young mothers had nowhere to go with the children when it rained. On dry days they meet together in the public park, but there is no shelter.

The church really helps, it helps the children socialise and has helped me to make friends and settle in.

Jenny, St Thomas's playgroup

The playgroup offers a place for young mothers to meet and connect socially, and also provides a basic breakfast for mothers and children to share together. They use Facebook to keep in touch.

Whilst Jenny's husband's family are from the area, she initially found it difficult to make friends.

"I look forward to the weekly play group, it is good for the kids and the mums. It is really busy, 15 mums at least. The church really helps, it helps the children socialise and has helped me to make friends and settle in. The children are so confident in this space."

Jenny

Maggie also moved to the area and did not know any of her neighbours. She works as a child minder and also has two children of her own. Her husband is often away as he is a yacht skipper.

"The toddler group is great. The attitude here is that the church is just a building, so get on with it. The kids can go anywhere. The church is for everybody, and everyone is invited in regardless, it is friendly and people speak to you, and you can call on people to help you out. There



STAK client

is a teenage group here on a Friday night, but they need something every night of the week." Maggie

The church is for everybody, and everyone is invited in regardless. It is friendly and people speak to you, and you can call on people to help you out.

Maggie, St Thomas's Church playgroup

Newlyn Trinity Church

"I have lived here for 26 years, people will always talk to you. It is wonderful here and Newlyn Trinity is the centre in terms of the heart."

Enid, Women's Network member

"I have lived in Newlyn all my life. It is small enough to know quite a lot of people. It has changed with new estates and new people. In the past everyone knew everyone but it was not insular, as people had to go away to earn their living – to Africa and America – in gold and tin mines. People said, 'Wherever there is a hole in the ground there is a Cornishman.' What is important are friends, and the activities of the church which make us friends and family."

Ruth, Women's Network member

Newlyn is a fishing port, but as with other fishing communities it is struggling to survive. It has a population of 4,000 and is a classic example of rural poverty or, as Julyan, the Methodist Minister, puts it, 'post-industrial by the sea – quarrying has gone, mining in the hinterland has gone and fishing has seriously declined.'

Newlyn, whilst still the biggest fishing port in the southwest, is now becoming more dependent on the tourist industry, and young people are leaving the area for lack of jobs. Penwith, the area in which Newlyn sits, is among the 20 per cent most deprived in England.

The Church Urban Fund identify that the most significant poverty issues for the parish are the high level of both child poverty and working age poverty. In addition, pensioner poverty and lone parenthood are higher than average. However, life expectancy for both men and women is high, sitting at 80 years for men and 83 years for women.

The housing estate where many of the most economically deprived members of the community live is separate from the rest of Newlyn, the hill between it and the town being seen as a barrier. Young people do not want to come down the hill.



Graham, STAK volunteer

Newlyn Trinity Church, which is part way up the hill, celebrated its fifth anniversary as a community centre in December 2011. The Church has been physically developed to become a resource for the whole community whilst retaining a sacred quiet space which anyone can use as a place of sanctuary. A wide range of groups use the space, from the children's centre and youth group, to women's craft and social groups, to a support group for young offenders and various therapeutic and counselling groups.

A lot is happening here. Service numbers are small, but a lot of people are touched by the church.

Christine, Newlyn Trinity Church

Trinity is also part of the wider Christian family of churches that provide the Christian Helpline, which has recruited drivers and befrienders, and which has for the past 25 years provided a hospital car service. The Women's Craft group meets each week, sharing skills, knowledge and friendship.

For all the women in the craft group, the issues of employment and a worthwhile future for young people were the highest priority and the basis for a good and sustainable society.

The Women's Network, which also meets weekly, attracts around 20 regular, mainly elderly ladies. For them employment was also the first priority, together with affordable homes, so that young people would stay in Newlyn and keep the town alive.

"Trinity is a very happy centre, serving the whole community. We think and work in fellowship to support changes, even though some difficult heart-searching may be involved."

Ruth

Jen, a youth worker, runs the youth group and through social networks has contact with around 300 young people every week, from young mothers to young people leaving school with no employment or training prospects.

"On the housing estate a lot of the young people are NEETS (not in education, training or employment). The older boys are on the boats which is fairly good money, but there are no other opportunities and what there are are voluntary or seasonal."

Jen

The youth project has a big presence in the community, but funding is a big issue. Funders want to develop new projects. But, as Jen says: "What kids want is to keep doing what they are doing. There was nothing for young people



Brenda, St Thomas's Church warden



St Thomas's Church, Camelford



to do, so when I started the community youth group here I had 80 young people coming. Our consultation showed that young people want somewhere warm and safe to hang out and meet friends, with someone to talk to. In the long run they want jobs that are paid well, not just voluntary or seasonal work. This work has made an impact.

"Nine years ago we saw more drugs and more crime and ASBOs. But now you cannot get money for preventative work."

I think the church needs to be seen to be out there in the community, meeting people where they are.

Amanda Evans, Church Urban Fund



Glasgow

Flo, parishioner and member
Tron St Mary's Discovery Group

I hope that the Church is a place where it is safe to come; for the young, for the old, for the elderly, and for the asylum seekers. I hope that they come here and everybody will be as one. And they'll have the love of God in this place. Because it's a lack of love, that is what is wrong with this community, I think.

Good Society



Derelict block of flats, Red Road

Red Road and Tron St Mary's Church

Tron St Mary's Church of Scotland is in North Glasgow and encompasses in the parish the notorious Red Road Flats, high-rise blocks that were models of their time but have since degenerated into 'slum' dwellings, and have now been listed for demolition.

"How can I speak about the needs of this parish if I don't live here, see it for myself, and become a part of it?"
Reverend Jill Clancy

The estate became populated with asylum seekers during the 'dispersal' programme of the 90s, which led to tensions between locals and newcomers. On 7 March 2010, a family of three asylum seekers jumped to their death from one of the towers.

The church has had to cope with an influx of asylum seekers with very immediate and basic needs, which they have tried to meet, while balancing the needs of their existing congregation - who live in an area with some of the highest levels of poverty in the UK.

Yet the church sees its diverse congregation as a great strength. It has established a number of community projects to support asylum seekers. It is one of eight parishes working with the Church of Scotland's four-year Chance to Thrive programme, which puts churches and their facilities at the heart of plans to regenerate some of the Scotland's poorest areas.

One key element of this work has been the creation of a very detailed community profile, using statistical information from a range of sources to gain a better understanding of the area.

The profile concludes that the area faces high levels of economic inactivity; deprivation; suicide and poor health (both physical and mental); overcrowding; and high crime rates. Almost half of children live in households where nobody works.

The work also referenced a Joseph Rowntree Foundation report exploring social ills, which identified that 'decline in community' was the issue that topped the list. This was a belief that a weakened sense of community and neighbourliness exists, that neighbours no longer look out for each other or even know each other. This leaves people feeling isolated, lonely and fearful, particularly the elderly or those on their own.

The conclusion of the profile states: "Overall, as with many communities, the Tron St Mary's parish community has a number of positive and negative aspects. However, the changes occurring within the local area relating to housing and a desire to continue a close engagement with the local people offers a number of positives for the area. The continuation and development of church-based projects can go a long way in providing a great deal of support."

The Discovery Group

Part of our love for people is about how we care. It is not about us, it is about them.

Flo

Jill Clancy, the Minister at Tron St Mary's, has been there for four years. She moved to live in the new council estate, near the blocks of flats which are being demolished. Until the flats are demolished they are an oppressive presence.

"We are survivors here, Whatever it is we will deal with it. But now we need to think ahead. There needs to be a new community life here, and not just houses."

Rev Jill Clancy

Jill works with the discovery group, challenging this small family to care for one another and take that care out to others. This core group are loyal members of the church, some having lived in the area and come to the church for 20 plus years. Others live away from the area but are committed to supporting the church, and others are recent members of the group.

As a result of their work, the church is now looking to employ a family support worker - someone who can work across the generations as well as with the different cultural groups.

"Looking at the children you can see real differences. The asylum seeker children may be poor but they are healthy and well, they are looked after and their families know how to cook. The Scottish kids are, thin, weedy and grey. Families have forgotten how to cook - if you want one thing that sums up this area, it is the empty blue plastic bags which come from the take-out."

Rev Jill Clancy

The church is supporting the nursery school, and with a family support worker will be able to reach out more effectively to the community. As Rev Clancy says: "The Scottish community think all the help is for the asylum seekers. It is changing, but we need to help them overcome their pride and accept the help - it is very hard to say that you do not know how to parent a child."

Jill is leading the church to be progressive and open, from the way worship is organised with its informal and welcoming approach, to the tea and coffee that follows. It has now become common practice for people to bring in food and share with everyone. This is building more friendliness, greater openness and greater generosity.

"The church must be seen to be going out to people,

not to be just concerned with itself. We go out to people and if they want to come to church it's OK - but it's also OK if they don't."

Rev Jill Clancy

When the flats are physically demolished, we need to mark that. We need to feel people's pain, as well as joy that something new will come from it. A bit like Easter actually, it will be a death and then a resurrection.

Rev Jill Clancy

Reaching out to asylum seekers has brought some into the church. Some came to make use of the charity shop that used to offer second-hand clothes and small pieces of furniture, others come to join the services and to stay to share food and drink afterwards.

The first steps to meeting with the community were these small ones, which grew into some asylum seekers becoming members of the craft group and seeing a, "Scottish lassie and a Nigerian lassie sharing child care." Small steps are starting to build a more coherent sense of community.

The craft group works well with people coming from across the whole community. They learn from one another about crafts from different places, sharing their gifts and abilities, cooking mince and tatties and good curries and sharing life stories.

"A good society accepts people as they are and not as we think they should be. It helps them to be more than they think they are, raises their self-esteem and helps them reach out. The lack of love is what is wrong. So we grow to know the love of God together and give back what we have to them."

Rev Jill Clancy

One major challenge is the resentment that has built up around the myth that what the asylum seekers were getting was better than what was on offer to those who had lived in the community for generations.

"This community has no voice and we need to learn how to not only be their voice, but a listening voice that walks beside them on their life journey."

Rev Jill Clancy



Young congregation member



Rev Jill Clancy



Congregation member

Jill sees that part of the role of the church is to encourage people to ask. What is this place and what is my place in it? How is my voice heard? What is this community? The church, for Jill, provides a safe and accepting place for people to ask these questions and find the answers together. It is safe for the elderly, the young, and asylum seekers to be together as one community.

In church, Jill asks people to introduce themselves to one another, so that you get to know the names of the people around you and the whole church family starts to mix.

Tron St Mary's does not attract much attention and struggles to get funding. The support of the Church of Scotland's Transformation team has made a big difference, but gaining grants is a continuous struggle. It has now managed to get a part-time Parish Assistant who runs some of the growing range of activities, which now includes a community cafe on a Tuesday morning; English classes on a Tuesday afternoon; a girl's club; and an after school drop-in.

A good society accepts people as they are and not as what we think they should be. It helps them to be more than they think they are, raises their self-esteem and helps them reach out.

Rev Jill Clancy

Liverpool

The Kingsley Kanga News

Toxteth is a pretty good place to be young.

Year 5 Kingsley Community School pupils at the Unity Youth Centre

Good Society



Kingsley Community School pupils at Growing Granby allotment

“A good community usually depends on the people who live there. If the other people come in and see how the other people act, that’s all that it is really; the people who already live here, and how they act to other people.”
Hassan

Toxteth, an inner city area in south Liverpool, has been associated with deprivation and social unrest since the 1981 and 2011 riots. It is primarily a residential area with a mixture of old terraced housing, post-World War II social housing and a legacy of large Victorian houses.

Immigration to Toxteth has taken place for over a century. In one of its seven parishes, 69 per cent of the population are non-white British. Common across all the parishes is that they are described by the Church Urban Fund as being amongst the most deprived in England.

The most significant poverty-related issues in the area are child poverty, working age poverty and relatively low life expectancy, most particularly among women. Unemployment rates are very high.

Yet community spirit is strong and social enterprises thrive; waves of immigrants from Ireland, the West Indies, Somalia and Yemen have created an historically multicultural community proud of its diversity and heritage.

Many people are working hard to change perceptions of Toxteth. Allotment and orchard project Growing Granby, the Unity Youth Centre and Granby Children’s Centre provide opportunities for young people, and a sense of pride.

The Good Society project teamed up with Year 5 pupils at Kingsley Community School to create a newspaper designed to document these projects, reflecting the good news coming out of the area.

Written entirely by the pupils themselves, the newspaper, dubbed ‘The Kingsley Kanga News’, also includes the views of the young journalists, who interviewed each other to find out what they love about their neighbourhood – and what could be better.

The journalists were not only given a chance to tell the story of where they live; they were also given a voice on the issues that matter to them, and learned about what makes a strong, healthy and happy community.

Kingsley Community School

The school is housed in a modern, purpose-built building which was opened in 2001. It is a truly multi-cultural school with children originating from over 25 different countries.

Liverpool

I love Toxteth. It is in my heart...forever

Hannan

Although predominantly Muslim, the school welcomes children of all faiths and none. The core values of the school are respect, equality, self-worth and co-operation.

Their code of conduct is:

We always try to treat each other with respect
 We always try to give everyone a fair chance
 We always try to be the best we can
 We always try to work together, helping each other

"Mrs Lee has experienced many generations growing up. Mrs Lee said: "All the children inspire me at Kingsley School." She has worked at Kingsley School for almost 12 years. Before that Mrs Lee was a dinner lady at the old Granby School. Mrs Lee loves gardening in her spare time. When Mrs Lee was asked would she retire if she won the Lottery, she said: 'No! I don't want to be rich or famous. I want to keep working.'" *Sian*

Next to the school is the Granby Children's Centre, opened in 2006, which is a focal point for local families with children up to the age of five. It runs a range of courses and drop-ins for parents, as well as a 50-place nursery for children aged three and under.

Granby Care Home

Jane, a family link worker at the Children's Centre, offered to take a group of learner reporters from Kingsley to meet some of the older people living in the nearby Granby Care Home.

She was also keen to introduce the children to the 'Reading Project', a national book club scheme based at the care home that aims to bring people together through a shared love of reading.

"The Reading Project started in the children's centre around three years ago, and tries to unite people with books. This project runs in schools, libraries, care homes etc. We met four people named Christine, Jean, Beverley and Jane, who were involved. They were four of 500 people. The project grew really quickly. The north and southwest of England are also involved. When you read, it refreshes your mind. Christine, Jean, Beverley and Jane said: 'Don't judge a book from its cover.'" *Hassan*

After participating in the Reading Club session, the journalists went on to meet retired nurse and grandmother Maria Obiamiwe, who first came to Liverpool from Nigeria to work as a nurse in 1961.

"Maria worked for thirty long years, but quit her job because she was ill and couldn't see much. She was in her twenties when she gave birth to her first child. Maria has six children and fifteen grandchildren. She said: 'If I went back in time I wouldn't change anything, for the world we are in tells us what to do. I have no right to change that.'

"Even though she has lots of loving children and grand children none of them has visited her since she'd been in the care home. A girl in my group was so affected by now and wanted to cry! 'If I retrieved my eyesight I would shout WOW is this what I've been missing?!' Maria said. Maria's youngest daughter at the age of five has the name Melody. 'I love children and I hope that you all have a very good life,' she said." *Suad*

Growing Granby

Growing Granby is a community growing project that aims to improve the quality of life for all those living in Toxteth. In July 2011, a group of volunteers got together and approached local housing association, Liverpool Mutual Homes (LMH), to ask if they could lease a derelict piece of land on Kingsley Road for three years.

LMH agreed, and Growing Granby was born. The patch of land now features an allotment and a seating area built from the bricks of demolished local homes, reflecting the project's commitment to recycling. There is also play area and a wildlife corner.

The project has also enlisted the help of local schoolchildren to plant apple trees throughout the neighbourhood. Growing Granby co-founder, Jean Grant, researched old maps of the area to try and understand how the land looked before it became part of the city. She then used this knowledge to plot where the trees should be planted.

Growing Granby continues to encourage planting in the area, and engage local people in community building.

"Anna had been growing vegetables, especially potatoes. Anna said that she loved potatoes and that was why she planted them. She planted them in drills. Anna and Jean



Paul and Mannsour



Hassan



Faiza and Suad



Meeting local police officer Jamal Al-Shabazz



Meeting local police

planted vegetable sections and fruit sections and also pretty flowers. They were wonderful. Jean Grant has also been growing sedum flowers that happen to grow on mountains. Anna grows garlic, cabbage, broccoli and strawberries.

“Jean Grant thinks planting makes her responsible. Anna said that the Growing Granby site used to have massive houses on it. Jean Grant said she had a really old, old map to show us, which showed the old times when Growing Granby was filled with fields. She told us that she had a little version of the map. She told us that the big map was made in 1678. It was quite old. We had so much fun and Jean really loved coming in to Kingsley Community School.”

Sameh

“Some of Year 5 went to Growing Granby, a place where houses had been demolished. There is now a patch of land. What happened there? Let’s find out. We went to interview Jean. On the site now are lots of plants growing, for example chicory and garlic. We met a 72-year-old woman called Jean growing plants, transforming the land into a garden. She recycled everything and made a bench out of bricks! Wow! Jean was 68 years old when she started this fantastic project. She said: ‘We took a patch of demolished houses and made plants, vegetables and fruit.’”

Daniel

The Unity Centre

The Unity Centre is a volunteer run youth-club, operating from premises in the heart of the community.

The building incorporates a community gym, open to members of the public, a suitably decorated ‘girl’s room’, a computer suite, sports hall, and social area with couches.

The Unity runs a number of sports teams; volunteers also work as mentors at local schools supporting young people to be open about the issues affecting their lives. The centre is open to all young people in the area.



Meeting Granby Care Home resident Maria Obiamiwe

It is well-known and greatly respected for the support it offers young people vulnerable to criminalisation and gang culture.

However, the Centre relies on Lottery funding, and struggles to keep going. The dilapidated building is in urgent need of repair.

“Some of Year 5 and I went to the Unity. When we first got there we saw a man called Ricky and he is 43 years old. He started to work at the Unity in 2001 and became a manager in 2006. There were lots of displays and on one it showed which days you can do boxing, swimming, pizza night and zumba. They even went to Blackpool.”

“The building was built in 1963 and when it’s raining the roof is always leaking, so Ricky sent an application for a £500,000 grant to build a new Unity with no leaking roof. Ricky showed us the computer room and said that there was an accident in the computer room and water was really pouring into the room. But luckily Ricky put big bags over all the computers and saved them. Then Ricky showed us a bullying display and said: ‘If someone gets bullied I will try to solve it and make them happy and comfortable.’ You can even take reading books home to read.”

The Unity project helps you if you’re lonely, you have no friends and you want to have friends.

Simona

“Ricky showed us the sports hall where you can play football, outdoor cricket and roller skating. Then Ricky showed us the gym and said that the gym is the worst because there’s lots of leaking there. I asked, “Was it expensive for all the workout stuff?” He replied that young people helped to get the £10,000 to buy the workout stuff.”



Ann and Hannan

Ricky likes to work with children and young people because he wants to help them with their college and homework.

“Ricky’s life inspiration is to be a physics teacher and Ricky’s wish is to get a new nice centre with no leaking roof. The sweetest thing he said was: ‘If I win the Lottery I would work for free.’”

Simona

Viewpoints

The pupils of Kingsley described in their own words the experience of living in the area.

Although many said they loved the parks, activities, sports facilities and shops of Toxteth - and some pupils had actually moved to Toxteth to escape areas of high crime and anti-social behaviour - most pupils said they worried about gangs, gun crime and bullying.

“Paul gave his thoughts about Toxteth, a place where he lives. Paul said he likes to go to the park because there is lots of things to do, like playing football, picnics and feeding the ducks. He especially likes bonfire night in the park, because there is a big firework display. Although he likes certain things in Toxteth, he doesn’t like guns, gun crimes and robbers.”

Paul, interviewed by Abdliahi



Interviewing Ricky, Manager of the Unity Centre

“I like Toxteth because I have a really nice neighbourhood. My neighbours are really helpful, like one day my new neighbours came to our house and gave us a delicious plate of blueberry muffins. I dislike Toxteth because there are always teenage gangs hanging around.”

“All the people who live on my street are very nice, especially Tommy. Tommy is very nice because when my Mum was having a baby, Tommy looked after me. Tommy has three dogs but one of his dogs died. I wouldn’t change anything about Toxteth because I like Toxteth the way it is! I like it the way it is because I do swimming, gymnastics, trampolining and also football. That is why I love Toxteth. It is in my heart...forever!”

Hannan

“Daniel said: ‘I like Toxteth because of all the activities that Toxteth has, for example, the Unity.’ Another thing that Daniel likes is that he meets lots of new people. But the thing that he does not like about Toxteth is all the gangs of teenagers.”

“He added: ‘I came to Liverpool in Toxteth because in my old home called Widnes there was even more gangs than Toxteth.’ Finally Daniel decided that he likes Toxteth more than Widnes.”

Daniel, interviewed by Ali



Sameh interviewing Anna, Growing Granby volunteer

To read the full version of the Kingsley Kanga News, go to www.agoodsociety.org/locations/liverpool

Newcastle

Anne Marron, Fieldwork Development Officer, University of Durham

Faith for me is not in a religious context; it's more to do with a faith in people's ability to change.



A 'Good Society' workshop, run by the North East Churches Regional Commission

The north-east of England is facing huge social and economic changes – the decline of heavy industry, shipbuilding and manufacture, and the corresponding inequalities in health, and rising unemployment.

The north-east's local communities and faith groups have a long tradition of active responses to issues faced by deprived communities, and in particular action around young people, who in this current recession have been the hardest hit.

Unemployment levels amongst the under 25s far outstrip general unemployment levels. By April 2011 the unemployment rate for young people in the north east had increased to 20 per cent.

The Regional Faiths Network

The Churches Regional Commission (CRC) in the North East has taken an active role in leading research, discussion and action in response to the rising needs of communities under stress. They have sought to actively engage with public authorities.

For example, they are working closely with Durham County Council, aligning the work of faith communities to the Council's priority themes for building sustainable communities; Altogether Wealthier, Altogether Healthier, Altogether Safer, Altogether Greener, and Altogether Better for Children and Young People.

Faith is the counter culture, the thing that says to be the best that you can be as a human being you need to care for the other.

Susan Johnson, Darlington Methodist Church

CRC is producing briefing reports for the council members and officers and the churches illustrating how a 'faith perspective' can inform public policies and practices. Across another four local authorities in the Durham Diocesan area, the 'Faith in Our Community' (FIC) report highlights the work of six neighbourhood projects in the most disadvantaged communities. FIC continues to build capacity and capability by:

- Developing skills and confidence
- Developing insight into how the community development approach could strengthen parish development and social action
- Providing access to professional support and consultancy
- Providing the opportunity to share learning through a structured programme
- Providing a community development worker as a resource
- Reflecting theologically with local groups how faith perspectives inform and shape local initiatives

In 2010 a critical reflection on the learning from this work was published. In our workshop with the Regional Faith Network and Churches Regional Commission in 2012, it was apparent that this learning had been taken seriously. A multi-faith group of leaders present at the network meeting were seeking to build on that foundation.

We asked the group what they meant by a “Good and Compassionate Society”:

- Justice for all
- Well-being for all
- A will to acknowledge and honour difference
- Recognition of the importance of relationships and a focus on goodness, and what that means for faith and non-faith organisations
- Choice as a recognised good which is not just a feature of having money, position or power, but engages the whole self
- Commitment to work together on projects and actions that enable and support the building of positive relationships
- A high quality of care for the old and vulnerable, as well as young people and children
- Willingness to change and to be changed, building on the stories of young and old about what goodness means to them
- In discussing what a good and compassionate society would be like, the groups reflected on the particular role that faiths and faith groups have to play in enabling and developing such a society

We need to move from being providers of last resort, such as the food bank, to being a critical friend and public voice.

Workshop Participant

“A good society is one where people accept others for their humanity and welcome the stranger. It is important for us to provide safe places for people to come together, places to build friendships and connections that cross boundaries. The implicit contribution of faith groups is an expectation that they do provide safety and compassion. Compassion and mindfulness are really important to help us keep building on what we know makes a good society.”

Workshop Participant

“We’re not as inclusive a society as we should be, and I think it’s partly lack of education. People don’t know about one another. Difference is a key to a good society - but so is acceptance alongside difference.”

Deanna Van der Velde, the North East Council of Christians and Jews

The group were not naive about the challenges faced by communities and the faith groups working with them. This is not about good words, but about understanding the real difficulties communities, individuals and families are experiencing, and finding the best ways to work with people to build resilience and sustainable change.

I think a good society is there; it’s there at the grassroots, it’s there in the caring and sharing and the working together.

Deanna Van der Velde, the North East Council of Christians and Jews

“It is important that we challenge landscapes of normality e.g. the fact that it is ‘normal’ for people in the north east to have a shorter life expectancy than those in the south east; or the fact that in deprived areas one in four households are having to access food banks on a regular basis. We need to identify and address the dilemmas that these and other landscapes of normality raise.”

Workshop Participant

“Indifference is the opposite to compassion – we need to look for the needy and ask about need and then that is where we can look for and find God.”

Workshop Participant

The Church, Faith Groups and Public Bodies - ‘How can we be the change we want to see?’

Given the background of the significant work that the Churches Regional Commission has been undertaking with Durham County Council to build resilient and sustainable communities, the group discussed particular role faith groups can play as a critical friend to public authorities.

They recognised that this may not be an easy step to take. Yet they are a public voice, and have a set of principles that can enable institutions such as the local authority or the university to reflect on their attitudes, policies and practices and help them face difficult questions about equity, fairness, value and aspiration.

“We have a unique voice and are uniquely placed to speak out, but we must have no vested interest and must focus on building relationships, gaining credibility and then using this platform to work for inclusivity.”

Workshop Participant

“Faith is incredibly relevant. Jesus showed us how to reach out to people in the community. He was the ultimate example, he was showing love, showing compassion. He did practical things, and he also challenged the status quo.”

Sarah Haswell, Church Warden



Jim Robertson of the North East Churches Regional Commission



Deanna Van der Velde, of the North East Council of Christians and Jews with Methodist preacher Margaret Harrison.



Workshop participants

We need to develop more opportunities for faith communities to raise issues through the telling of positive stories by using Twitter and YouTube, and engaging directly with MPs and other key authority figures.

Workshop Participant

Swansea

Kate,
Swansea

It's nice to meet people from older generations who live in the area. It's lovely. And if you give to them, you receive from them.

ARC Centre Craft tutor Sybil, 82, with learner Kate, 29, and her daughter

Good Society



Craft class at the ARC Blaenymaes Centre

"If you are lonely, you can come to groups like the ARC Centre and feel welcomed. And not be judged. That is important. In reality, the area we live in is brilliant. The support is out there, the groups are out there. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

Kate Williams, 29, mum-of-two

Kate lives in the Blaenymaes area of Swansea, which is in the hills four km from the city centre.

In common with other areas to the north and west of Swansea, Penderry was initially the result of late 19th and early 20th century expansion, with further development in the early post war years. Across the ward, only 33 per cent of housing is owner occupied (less than half the Swansea average), and almost 48 per cent of households rent their properties from the local authority, with the rest renting largely from Gwalia, the main housing association.

The numbers of unemployed people are above the average for Swansea, as are the numbers of DWP benefit claimants. The area has a high proportion of under 16s and lone parents, a high birth rate and also a high number of people living with limiting long-term illnesses.

"A good society is where people are engaged, and have hope."

Anthony, ARC Centre Manager

The area appears open and bright, with large areas of grassland on which large numbers of ponies live, either tethered or just roaming freely. The ponies are all owned locally and are a major feature of life in this area, many of them being brought from horse fairs.

Access to shops and other amenities is very limited, so that buying fresh food is both challenging and expensive, involving two bus journeys. Access to the city centre is also difficult, and for most of the community not something they would expect to do. This also applies to going to the beach - so the sea is just another aspect of the distant landscape.

St Teilo's Parish Church

"Faith is not what I say, but what I do."

Reverend Padraig Gallagher

St Teilo's Parish Church, part of the Church in Wales, serves the communities of Blaenymaes, Penplas, Portmead and Caereithin. It sees itself as a church whose purpose is to, "develop a community of faith who are empowered to draw alongside our neighbours so as to share God's love with them". For Padraig Gallagher, the vicar of St Teilo's, "it is all about hope".

The church strives to offer a range of services and activities that are important within the life of the community. Padraig has encouraged the church family to reconnect with the community.

Swansea

You matter, that is the message we are trying to bring

Rev Padraig Gallagher, St Teilo's Parish Church

"We are here to be part of the community, to make the people in this community know that they matter and that it is about being, not always about doing. As a church we are now a hub for the wider community and we are learning to give willingly and generously without expectations of getting back."

Rev Padraig Gallagher

The programme for the week includes a mother and toddler group which is not run by the church, though they pay for a play worker to provide two mornings of work in the parish, as well as Tai Chi classes. The mother and toddler group meets in the church, using the space to set up games, reading areas and offer support to young mothers. The group is supported by volunteers and some staff from Faith in Families, an initiative run by the Brecon diocese (see below).

A family lunch follows their morning of play, and parental support and learning. One of the Padraig's key actions was to replace the vestry with a working kitchen. This enables the church to host major events, from the family lunches held in the weeks before Christmas, with numbers of between 73 and 95 attending, to wedding teas and the regular weekly hot family lunch for the mother and toddler group.

I find the area gets slated quite a bit...because it is deprived. But if you take the time to come into the community, it's so close, anybody will help anybody.

Kat Williams, 29, mum-of-two, Clase Family Centre

The Church supports the local drop-in centre which has an outlet for a fruit and vegetables co-operative, making fresh produce available at a reasonable price. This has now been running for over three years. The drop-in centre also has a charity shop, with affordable second hand clothing and furniture, as well as a place for people to come and talk.

The church provides a monthly community lunch welcoming people from the drop-in centre, and they in turn provide help for church events. In addition, the church provides a food pantry for those in desperate need - "a gift which is given with no expectations."

The church also supports Groundforce, the local group of volunteers focused on improving the local environment. They organise litter picks in the area and look after the church gardens and grass. They use the money raised from this type of gardening work to take children away on trips.

One of the older members of the congregation is a skilled natural lantern maker using willow and paper. She has taught others in the community how to make these large lanterns which can come in any shape, from a shark to a dragon. Over a four-week period in Winter, lanterns are made, and on a cold dark night in December, the lantern parade walks through the community, gathering up people to join together at the church for a short carol service followed by tea.

"If you go around the community and ask people where the church is, a lot of them will point and say, 'That's our church.' If you ask them, 'Do you go there on a regular basis?', they say no. But nonetheless that's their church. People want to see increased numbers. But I think there has to be another way of looking at it."

Rev Padraig Gallagher, St Teilo's Parish Church

Family Centres

"A good society is about community spirit, that's probably one of the most important things. Love and friendship. For me family isn't about biological family, it's about the people you can rely on who can offer you love and support. And those are my friends and the friends my son has made. I feel proud of myself, of my son, and of the people around here too."

Kat Williams, 29, mum-of-two

There are three family centres in the area run by Faith In Families:

Bonymaen family centre and Eastside Support Project
Penplas Family Centre
Clase Caemawr Family Centre

They are a key element of the work of the Swansea and Brecon Diocesan Board for Social Responsibility, a registered charity which runs a number of projects on behalf of the Diocese. The Board's work is dedicated to fulfilling its mission:

- Enhancing People's Lives
- Realising people's potential
- People Matter, Whoever, Whatever and Wherever they are



Children at the ARC Centre



Emma Lewis, 29, mum-of-two, Clase Centre playgroup



Rev Padraig Gallagher

The family centres are based in Gwalia housing association estates and primary schools in the heart of the community. The Clase Centre is itself a conversion of two semi-detached houses which were given to Faith in Families by the housing association for this specific purpose. Bonymaen opened in 1999 and the Eastside Project (part of Sure Start) had been in existence for four years. Penplas opened in 2003 and Clase in 2008. A high proportion of the children and families that the centres work with experience poverty, domestic abuse, social isolation, neglect and low achievement. The work of the centres ranges from parent and toddler groups to healthy family lunch sessions, to learning and development opportunities for parents and carers.

"It's nice to come here and interact with the parents. The children get to work on their social skills because they're playing with different children all the time. And they really enjoy it."

Emma Lewis, 29, mum-of-two

It was the family centre that brought it together for me. I'll never forget them.

Kat Williams

At the Clase Centre, there were a number of parents and residents who were learning Welsh, a pre-school group meeting in a dedicated play room attached to the primary school, and a group involved in learning to cook simple meals - making pancakes with fresh fruit. The Centre actively engages with the community where it is based, inviting them to make suggestions about services that should be available and encouraging them to engage with activities such as jewellery making or digital photography, providing crèche facilities to make it easier for young parents to get involved. They also seek to employ as volunteers, and/or paid staff, young people from the area, offering training and support.

"It was the family centre that brought it together for me. I'll never forget them. I like my life, I like the mum who I am, and I like my friends."

Kat

Funding for the centres is a continuing problem. Much of the funding comes from the Welsh Assembly, but is subject to the austerity cuts which are impacting on all public services.

The ARC (Action Resource Centre)

"We are trying to build a good society here, getting local people engaged more. A lot of conditions affect them negatively - poor health, unemployment, and apathy. We are working at making them willing participants. People talk about the self-esteem of individuals, but we are raising the self esteem of the community."

Anthony, ARC Centre Manager



The church in Blaenymaes

The ARC is the Action Resource Centre run by the Blaenymaes, Portmead, Penplas Development Trust, which is community owned and devoted to the area. As a development trust it is free to generate its own income and earn money from other services. The trust is a Communities First Partnership, an initiative created by the Welsh Assembly to tackle poverty. It is trying to bring community development and regeneration work together with education and the development of volunteering, giving people skills and knowledge, and supporting them in getting meaningful work.

They were winners of the Lord Mayor's Community Regeneration Award in 2007 and 2009. The Board is chaired by Reverend Padraig Gallagher, the vicar of St Teilo's Parish Church.

Anthony, who runs the Centre, is a Communities First Co-ordinator and is employed by Swansea City Council.

People are unaware of how good things could be. The key for all agencies is to switch people on. It was so much worse ten years ago, people are now getting engaged and building hope.

Anthony, Centre Manager

Success comes in small ways, like the intergenerational craft group that runs at ARC, involving elderly members of the community who are skilled craftswomen working alongside mothers and children, sharing knowledge and skills.



Youth centre with pony mural, Blaenymaes

Daffodils were being made to decorate the wedding tea of one of the members of the group – a young woman who cannot afford to pay for her own flowers.

"It's the human need to be together, to get on together and grow together. And in the community like this which in the past has had such a bad name, I think these little shoots we're seeing they will mature. It's got to be awakened, and I think it is possible"

Sybil Coleman, volunteer arts & crafts tutor, the ARC Centre

Anthony sees the challenge of austerity and welfare reform is already having an impact. Service providers are under threat, such as the youth workers. He continues to work with partners to try and secure the future for the trust, so it can continue to get different community groups engaged in such projects as the renovated flat and shop they now let out. Through projects like this, the trust is able to employ young people and train them so that they can move on to other jobs.

"In this community more than the average have done badly at school and have no training, so cannot get well paid work – there have been generations of this, so it will take a long time to change. But people do get jobs, so the effort is really worthwhile. Gwalia took on young people for the estate maintenance scheme, trained them and supported them to get work."

Anthony

It's the human need to be together, to get on together and grow together. I think these little shoots we're seeing here will mature.

Sybil Coleman, volunteer arts & crafts tutor, the ARC Centre



Welsh class, the Clase Centre

The trust has established a learning centre so that local people can access opportunities which are relevant and local. Consultations take place every year before timetables and subjects are set, making the service responsive to community needs.

The trust works through partnerships, such as the one with the university, which provides IT and humanities classes, and which works with Anthony to encourage lifelong learning. Clubs such as the Crazy Computer Club, which is run with the youth worker, enable kids to play computer games, listen to music and also get help with their homework.

"To create the good society here you first need to get people engaged and then give them aspiration – so they believe it is possible to move on and change."
Anthony

The ARC café serves a range of meals and healthy options as well as providing a buffet service to businesses and local agencies. The cafe employs and trains volunteers so that they have the basis for applying for paid employment. They are given help to get NVQs in Food Hygiene and then are supported to apply for jobs.

Christchurch Church of Wales Primary School

Situated on a cramped site near the city centre, this is the only Church of Wales School in Swansea. It was originally built in 1864, and in 1992 the public house next door was incorporated into the building to provide extra classrooms. It is light and airy, and welcomes all with a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, smiles and laughter.

The vision of the school is: "To establish a centre of excellence by developing a Christian ethos which encourages self-evaluation and enables ALL individuals to develop fully their potential, intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.

Three quarters of the children come from areas that are in the 10 per cent most deprived in Swansea. One in four of the children receive free school meals. A breakfast club



Mosaic, the Class Centre

operates everyday to give children the chance for hot food at the beginning of the day.

The teachers respect us, they treat everyone fair and the children are really nice. We get along well and it's just a happy place. I come in in the morning I don't worry about anything

Jessica, 10

The children come from the local community and beyond - they also come from a number of different faiths and backgrounds. A fifth of children are from Muslim families and other faith traditions. They come to this school because of its value-based approach, its clear approach to equity and fairness, and the inclusive nature of the teaching. There is very high demand for places but the physical constraints of the site and school buildings limit the amount of growth possible.

Values are the essential drive that underpin all that the school does:

"Respect is the big one. Respect for yourself so that you look after yourself. Respect for others and other people's feelings. Respect for the environment, respect for the work that others do. If they have self-confidence and high self-esteem then they have love for themselves and are more likely to show love for others. The other values will come through that."

Helen-Marie Davies, headteacher

The values of Christchurch Primary School are: Courage, Trust, Creativity, Justice, Forgiveness, Peace, Humility, Truth, Thankfulness, Compassion, Hope and Friendship.

Every term there is a focus on two of the values through the curriculum, and through the exploration of different faiths in the daily collective worship.

“The morals that you want to celebrate run through every faith. And when we teach the values we also include stories from other cultures and faiths as well.”
Helen-Marie Davies

Helen-Marie Davies has built on this values-based approach by using the innovative methods of restorative justice to manage discipline and behaviour in the school.

Children are actively involved in understanding what was bad about their behaviour. They describe the situation and how they behaved and why, and then they decide what changes they are going to make. Two restorative justice sessions were witnessed, one with a whole class and one with just two children who had been fighting. In the circle with all the children from one class they said that what had been bad was, “fighting, not showing respect, not listening and chatting all the time”. The promises they had made were, “to behave, not to interrupt, to be good, to be a good friend and to help people”. The teacher was positive and encouraging about the progress that had been made, but gave the children a further challenge “to do things at the first time of asking, to listen more and be kind to one another and help each other out.”

The School Council has children from each year group. They are asked for their honest views about the school and what it is doing and they get involved in making decisions about school policies and events.

“The teachers listen to us and if we have a problem they’ll sort it out. Once the problem’s sorted I just feel really happy in myself and that makes me stronger.”
Jessica, 10, School Council member

Love runs through everything. If you have love for others, love for yourself, love for your environment, and you demonstrate that love, then you will in fact demonstrate all the other values as well.

Helen-Marie Davies, Headteacher, Christchurch primary

“Really, the teachers are like family to us. They care about you and they give you things and I want to give them things back to say thank you.”
Natalie, 9, School Council member

“It is important for children to have a view. It is their school, and teachers show respect for children by listening. Being on the school council makes the kids happier, and helps the other kids deal with problems.”
Teacher Assistant

“Being on the school council has given me courage and confidence. I felt excited and happy when all my friends voted for me – I was over the moon and that gave me courage. You need to believe in yourself, and don’t stop till you get what you want.”
School Council member

“The teachers respect us, they treat everyone fair and the children are really nice. I come in and I’m really happy. I don’t know why, it’s just the thought of coming here.”
Jessica

We see the children coming into the nursery and we see them growing, not just academically but also spiritually and emotionally. We give them the strategies to help them survive and the life skills that they’ll need later on in life.

Helen-Marie Davies, Headteacher, Christchurch primary



Restorative justice session, Christchurch School



Pupils after participating in restorative justice



Helen-Marie Davies, headteacher, Christchurch Primary



Youth worker, the ARC Centre



Teacher and pupil, Christchurch Primary



Natalie and Jessica, Christchurch School Council members

Hope and Aspiration

Anthony,
Swansea

To create the good society here you first need to get people engaged and then give them aspiration – to believe it is possible to move on and change.

Young boy at Clase Caemawr family centre pre-school group, Swansea

Good Society

A good society is a place of worthwhile work, a place where children grow up with a sense of community

Ruth, Cornwall

Hope and aspiration are the essential ingredients that give energy and purpose, both to the people engaged in the work and those who are beneficiaries.

All the programmes and projects had this as the essential building block, thereby enabling people to see a future and a good society for themselves that is positive and hopeful.

"It must be awful not to belong anywhere."
Anne, Cornwall

"There's a lot of guilt by association within the Protestant working class. A lot of problems have been brought by themselves, that can't be denied. But there's good people that don't deserve being told they're dinosaurs that don't want to move forward. We will show you we can move forward. The skills are there in abundance - either people are being suppressed or they are holding themselves back. But I think we'll get it done."
'Peter,' Belfast

Hope and aspiration can also be rebuilt through an improvement of the physical environment.

When the flats are physically demolished, we need to mark that. We need to feel people's pain, as well as joy that something new will come from it. A bit like Easter actually, it will be a death and then a resurrection.

Jill, Glasgow

Confidence also needs to be built, so that people can develop and find a voice for themselves, and make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

"It is all about empowering people to feel and know that they can make a difference."
Workshop participant, Newcastle

I think it's what Gandhi said that you can be the change you want to be. So that actually it's about how you live yourself. And in fact you can only change yourself. You can try as hard as you can to change others but you've got to change yourself and know yourself.

Workshop participant, Newcastle

Faith leaders should provide positive examples of growth and achievements – rather than holding power, they should hold and look after the space where projects happen.

"I think it's (the Remnants sewing group) so popular because people learn to do things for themselves."
Marge, Birmingham

I look forward to the weekly play group, it is good for the kids and the mums. It is really busy, 15 mums at least. The Church really helps, it helps the children socialise and has helped me to make friends and settle in. The children are so confident in this space.
Jenny, Cornwall

"A good society is a place of worthwhile work, a place where children grow up with a sense of community and other people value them and they value the support and guidance given. A place where the church still plays a part in the life of the community."
Ruth, Cornwall

Hope and Aspiration



Red Road flats, Glasgow



Remnants studio, Birmingham



St Austell Community Kitchen (STAK), Cornwall



Pupils at Kingsley Community School, Toxteth



Clase Centre pre-school group, Blaenymaes, Swansea

“On a personal level, it’s about personal betterment. For me to move on by being creative in some ways negates everything I have done in the past. It doesn’t take away anything I’ve done in the past, and I would never suggest that. I think I’ve got something to say and I think I’ve got a story to tell. If that can open up a discussion then great.”
Peter, Belfast

“I first moved to the area and I just had my son and he was my only friend. And I came to the family centre and they introduced me to groups around here, and I made so many friends. And they’re more like my family now. I’m learning Welsh, I’ve done a food hygiene and first aid course here, it’s been fantastic. And the people are brilliant. With childcare if there was a place I had to go and had nobody to look after the baby they’d say bring him over, it’s fine. I don’t think I’d be the person I am without them.”
Kat, Swansea

If there is a challenge out there, which we know there is, we hope that we will meet that challenge. And accept people as they are, not as what we think they should be. We think we can give them a quality of life that they don’t have.

George, Glasgow

Community

Hassan, age 10,
Liverpool

A good community usually depends on the people who live there. That's all that it is really...the people who already live here, and how they act to other people.

After service lunch, Tron St Mary's Glasgow



St Austell Community Kitchen, Cornwall

By using buildings as a central resource for the community, it is possible for different groups to build a good society by growing together, resolving issues, and building a wider sense of belonging.

Rethinking the way buildings are used is not just about regeneration – it's an opportunity for new thinking on the meaning of sanctuary and community.

"Because it's a church people feel safe. They think there must be something good happening here. It is nice to have Muslims in the church. Even though it is not their religion, they want to be here and they have no hang-ups about it. It is good to know they are just ordinary people. They are just like you and I."
Patricia, Birmingham

"I love working with the community. This place is an example of how it should be. Out there it's not. Everyone is in their own groups. They don't want to mix. They're too scared to mix. There's no boundaries here. It's like a sanctuary for all of us."
Nisreen, Birmingham

"The toddler group is great. The attitude here is that the church is just a building, so get on with it. The kids can go anywhere. The Church is for everybody and everyone is invited in regardless."
Maggie, Cornwall

"We have been able to bring people in from the cold and use church as a place where people can have dialogue - that's the way we see All Souls' functioning."
Rev Chris Hudson, Belfast

Re-building community is about groups coming together to create a shared enterprise, whether that was Remnants sewing group, the soup kitchen or the groups at Tron St Mary's in Glasgow.

"I'd love to see more classes like this. One of the volunteers was telling someone about us and they said 'Oh is that the place where everybody is welcome?' And that's a lovely thing, for us to be known that way. That this church is a place where everybody is welcome."
Nisreen, Birmingham

"We are trying to get clients to regain their pride, to see that they can do something for others, that they can be part of what is happening in the town. We are not just giving them a meal, we are helping them knit squares for the hospice, make flowers for the spring fair, learn new skills and volunteer to help others."
Kim, Cornwall

"The craft group works well with people from across the whole community. They learn from one another about crafts from different places, sharing their gifts and ability, cooking mince and tatties and good curries, sharing life stories – this is how we can build community."
Jill, Glasgow

These groups and individuals working collectively actively resolve conflicts and bring different communities together.

“A good society is one where you reach out and find out what other people’s needs might be and try and meet them without expecting anything back in return. From what we’ve learnt here, we know that people need more confidence to do things for themselves. And hopefully that would raise the whole level of quality of life for children here, and everybody in the community.”
Jean, Glasgow

“A good society is one where people accept others for their humanity and welcome the stranger. It is important for us to provide safe places for people to come together, places to build friendships and connections that cross boundaries. The implicit contribution of faith groups is an expectation that they do provide safety and compassion. Compassion and mindfulness are really important to help us keep building on what we know makes a good society.”
Workshop participant, Newcastle

We should welcome people, not just tolerate them; and we should believe in a concept of justice that in a good society would bring understanding, reconciliation and forgiveness, along with duties and responsibilities.

Paula, Belfast

The different groups were coming together from across different divides, ages, history, faith, ethnic groups and finding ways to build understanding and shared learning.

“It brings the whole community, different religions, different cultures, different ages. We get on well and really enjoy the time here. We are very serious about the work we do but then there’s an occasional joke time as well. We go for meals - at Christmas the class went out and we had a meal together. If it’s someone’s birthday we bring food in here as well and share that.”
Shaisha, Birmingham

“It’s nice to meet people from older generations who live in the area. It’s lovely. And if you give to them, you receive from them.”
Kate, Swansea

“We’ve just been on a trip to Auschwitz. I think a lot of people don’t have an awful lot of interaction with other faiths, and there we were mixing - Hindus, Muslims,

Jews and Christians together. We had a fantastic picture of the Imam and another Muslim praying in the snow at Auschwitz. We saw the young people playing snow balls together, turbaned Sikhs, the Imam, young Christians. We stopped thinking in terms of, oh that’s a Muslim, oh that’s a Sikh. We were thinking they’re just friends of ours now. We were all one.”
Deanna, Newcastle

“Maria said we should look up to our parents and learn from them and listen to them. It was interesting to talk to her, because I didn’t know how it felt to be old.”
Suad, Liverpool

“We don’t look at where they’re from, who they are. Enid, me, we’re from different backgrounds but we don’t see the colour boundaries, we just see the unity. We’re learning from each other.”
Nisreen, Birmingham

“I think sometimes we can listen to their needs because we could say we’ve been there, done that, but it was very different in our day and we can learn from them as well. We learn the difficulties of being a young mum today. They give so much time to their families. One thing we can give them is a little bit of time to say how is it going today or things like that. All the ages respect each other and work together. It’s like a family situation. I met Kate’s mother and father on Mothering Sunday in church. To me that’s a good mix because that’s what family life is, which is often missing now. Generations don’t always intertwine in family life, but in community they can.”
Sybil, Swansea

Key to making this work were leaders who saw themselves as community leaders, not just faith leaders.

“We stopped being inward looking and started acting outwards. We closed our church doors on Sundays and 250 people moved out to work in our communities.”
Kim, Cornwall

“I chose to live here. How can I speak about the needs of this parish if I don’t live here, see it for myself, and become a part of it? This community has no voice and we need to learn how to be their voice - a listening voice that walks beside them on their life journey.”
Jill, Glasgow

This community has no voice and we need to learn how to be their voice - a listening voice that walks beside them on their life journey.

Jill, Glasgow



Family Centre, Swansea



Map of Toxteth, Liverpool



Remnants group studio, Birmingham

“(Religious communities) do hold an incredible amount of influence within communities here. So is that not an asset with people struggling against austerity? It’s about building alliances there than can result in the betterment of people.”
Niall, Belfast

“We are here to be part of the community, to make the people in this community know that they matter and that it is about being, not always about doing. As a church we are now a hub for the wider community and we are learning to give willingly and generously without expectations of getting back.”
Padraig, Swansea

“The whole aim of the work is to make people feel included, make them feel that someone cares and that people will notice what is happening to them. We are uniquely placed to speak out; we must have no vested interests, and instead focus on building relationships, gaining credibility and then using this platform to work for inclusivity.”
Workshop participant, Newcastle

By allowing people to feel valued, faith and community leaders create places of sanctuary, where even the most marginalised groups feel safe and welcome. And by opening their doors, communities are made stronger.

“I haven’t got a family, this is my family. They do a good job. It is like a family affair, a nice warm, safe place to be. It is run by good people - if it closed it would be a great loss, some people would not know what to do at all.”
Lee, Cornwall

“It is an extraordinary mix of people but they all have problems engaging with society. But STAK doesn’t make judgements, it welcomes anyone who is isolated or vulnerable, for whatever reason. STAK has become a family, with everything that happens in a family happening here, from fights and rows to laughter and joy.”
Adam, Cornwall

“The Unity project helps you if you’re lonely, you have no friends and you want to have friends. You can go to the Unity for free and make friends. It’s a good thing to have that project because it’s really sad to not have friends and sit alone in a corner and do nothing.”
Simona, Liverpool

Health and Well-being

Kat,
Swansea

People are friendly, they are welcoming and you just have to get involved with the community. And since I have I've enjoyed living here and it has got better.

Food cupboard, St Austell Community Kitchen



Welsh class, Clase family centre, Swansea

A good society safeguards and promotes health and well-being, which goes beyond the physical health of individuals. So much of the work happening was concerned with the broader ambitions of improving the health and well-being of the whole person and the community.

"You wouldn't believe it but I was kind of a person who kept myself to myself. I always lacked confidence, but coming here I definitely feel I've opened up a lot more. Since I've had my children, I haven't worked, and that's 12 years ago now. So it's brought that confidence back in me."

Shaisha, Birmingham

"It is important that we address and challenge negative landscapes of normality – for example the fact that it is 'normal' for people in the north east to have a shorter life expectancy than those in the south east. Or the fact that in deprived areas, one in four households are having to access food banks on a regular basis."

Workshop participant, Newcastle

"Sometimes to be able to change you have to understand what's influencing your lives and the lives of people around you. And also that you need a new set of skills. I suppose I have a belief that through those mechanisms people can change because I've seen it. When you see potential in people, within a relationship which is based on trust, that allows for that to happen."

Anne, Newcastle

"Some of Year 5 went to Growing Granby, a place where houses had been demolished. On the site now are lots of plants growing, for example, chicory and garlic. We met a 72-year-old woman called Jean growing plants, transforming the land into a garden. She recycled everything there and made a bench out of bricks! Wow! She said, 'We took a patch of demolished houses and made plants, vegetables and fruit.'"

Daniel, 10, Liverpool

"The greatest killer amongst men in the Republic of Ireland at the moment is suicide. That can be directly related to the economic collapse. The church has a responsibility - we are part of civil society. And we should be there with our voices. So that's why I think it isn't wrong for us to take sides."

Rev Hudson, Belfast

It's a social thing for older people to be able to come out and meet younger people. When people do come they're always welcome and it fulfils a need. It's really taken off and we wouldn't miss it for the world now.

Sybil, Swansea



Remnants Studio, Birmingham



Badges created by Remnants Studio



Pony, Blaenymaes estate, Swansea



Growing Granby, Toxteth



Knitted flowers made by clients, St Austell Community Kitchen



Restorative justice circle, Christchurch primary, Swansea

It's a huge challenge to take your own people with you. And at time it's a slow, tedious and frustrating process. It's one step forward, two steps back.

Gerry, Belfast

"I think once you've retired, you're not working. Remnants (sewing group) gives you an incentive to get out of the house. If you don't have an incentive to get out of the house what are you going to do? You're going to sit down and watch television or do nothing."
Marge, Birmingham

"The reading project which started around three years ago tries to unite people with books. This project runs in schools, libraries, and care homes. We met four people named Christine, Jean, Beverley and Jane, who were involved. They were four of 500 people. The project grew really quickly. The north and southwest of England are also involved. When you read, it refreshes your mind. Christine, Jean, Beverley and Jane said, 'Don't judge a book from its cover.'
Hassan, 10, Liverpool

"Faith in Communities is about the transformation of individuals. Vitally important to the work is compassion, consultation and commitment supported by a 'can-do' attitude. The work is trying to help people change the way they measure value, so moving from basing their sense of self-worth on the external - 'what have I got' - to the internal - 'what are my relationships like with my neighbours and my community'.
Workshop participant, Newcastle

"Being on the school council has given me courage and confidence - I felt excited and happy when all my friends voted for me, I was over the moon. You need to believe in yourself, and don't stop till you get what you want."
School council member, 11, Swansea

A good society also offers people a 'second chance', enabling them to grow and change, to get work and find value in their lives.

"I feel within myself that I have a right to move on."
Peter, Belfast

"In this community more than the average have done badly at school and have no training, so cannot get well paid work. There have been generations of this so it will take a long time to change. But people do get jobs, so the effort is really worthwhile."
Anthony, Swansea

"It's a huge challenge to take your own people with you. And at the time it's a slow, tedious and frustrating process. It's one step forward, two steps back. And there's no point in standing at the end of the pier and finding that there's no-one there with you. It's self-defeating. Sometimes you have to step back and compromise when you don't want to. Some people don't understand what you're trying to do. But you have to find compromises and bring the people with you every inch of the way. If you don't you fail."
'Gerry', Belfast

"What kids want is to keep doing what they are doing. There was nothing for young people to do, so when I started the community youth group here I had 80 young people coming. Our consultation showed that young people want somewhere warm and safe to hang out and meet friends, with someone to talk to. In the long run they want jobs that are paid, not just voluntary or seasonal work. This work has made an impact. Nine years ago, we saw more drugs, crime and Asbos."
Jen, Cornwall

Spirit

Rev Jill Clancy,
Glasgow

Part of our love for people is what
we do and how we care.

Good Society

Because we have quite an eclectic mix here,
we use the term that we are a beloved community.
We disagree with each other with loving kindness.

Rev Chris Hudson, Belfast

In a good society, people are committed to working together to create possibilities, giving voice to their belief and living their faith, and being challenged in their turn to change.

People are committed to action based on faith, a belief that a good society is possible - and that at its root is based in values and spirituality.

"Faith is incredibly relevant. Jesus showed us how to reach out to people in the community. He was the ultimate example, he was showing love, showing compassion. He did practical things, and he also challenged the status quo. We as faith groups have a calling on us to show love in the community, and it's incredibly important that we start helping and befriending those in need; because that's another key element, that people feel valued. We're not just seeing people as a project. We're seeing them as individuals who are worth befriending."

Sarah, Newcastle

"I think as much as man evolves, religion evolves. Every time a new generation looks at scripture it should look at it with the eyes and knowledge that people have now. If we don't do that, we are changing the scripture into dogma. I think that's why Jesus was always questioning. He challenged the authority and thinking of the time. We have to continue to do that. Sometimes we learn new things in the most unlikely places."

Chris, Belfast

"Faith is not what I say, but we do."

Padraig, Swansea

"We think and work in fellowship to support changes even though some difficult heart searching may be involved."

Ruth, Cornwall

"Questioning and reform is the basis of religion. We are not doing something new."

Paula, Belfast

"It's about feeling like you're a valued member of a society and that you have the right to education, employment, safety, family, relationships, health, faith. They're all choices that people make and a well society, or a good society, would be encouraging that. And provide the resources to make that happen."

Anne, Newcastle

"I would hope that there's something better than this. From the crooked timbers of humanity nothing straight can ever be made. Christianity should be about humanity, and less about dogma."

Gerry, Belfast

"I think it [a good society] is there, I think it's there at the grassroots, it's there in the caring and sharing and the working together. But it's not publicised. The media don't like good stories, they only like 'bad stories'. I don't see the broken society, I see families together in the park, I see families out together shopping. They're not necessarily in the faith buildings but I also see a search for spirituality amongst people in the lighting of candles, in the outpouring of grief...and I see that as a need for spirituality which perhaps, maybe, the leaders of faith are not necessarily answering."

Deanna, Newcastle

"Faith at its best - and that's any faith, whether it's Muslim, Buddhist or whatever - has, I think, at its heart, a care for the other. So we've got this selfish gene that is part of our nature that says, 'Survival, that's what we're about.' But faith is the counter-culture, the thing that says to be the best that you can be as a human being you need to care for the other."

Susan, Newcastle

From the crooked timbers
of humanity nothing straight can
ever be made. Christianity should
be about humanity, and less
about dogma.

'Gerry', Belfast

Acknowledgements

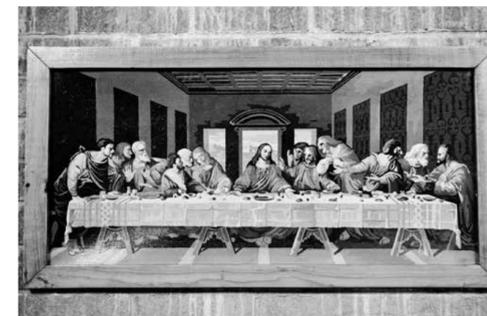
After-service lunch, Tron St Mary's, Glasgow

Good Society



Research Team

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What we have described here is a snapshot of what was happening in various parts of the country. It should be understood that many of the initiatives described may have changed, developed and even ceased as circumstances - social and financial - have changed.



Church Action on Poverty

Church Action on Poverty is a national ecumenical Christian social justice charity committed to tackling poverty in the UK. They work in partnership with churches and with people in poverty themselves to find solutions to poverty, locally, nationally and globally. www.church-poverty.org.uk



Churches Together in Britain & Ireland

Churches Together is an ecumenical organisation that works to strengthen networks, share collaborative opportunities, and create a collective voice across Britain and Ireland's many different Christian churches and denominations. www.ctbi.org.uk

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