



**Communities
Together
Durham**

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

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"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

Isaiah 58:6-8

2022 has been a challenging year for the projects and people we work with in Durham Diocese. It was the year that research from Loughborough University found that North East now has the highest child poverty rates in the country, with over 50% of children growing up in poverty in some communities. Child Poverty rates in the region have risen by almost half, from 26% to 38%, in the space of six years compared to a drop by two percentage points across the country, with in-work poverty in the North East rising sharply from 2018/19.

The impacts of the COVID pandemic were still being felt across the charitable sector with staff and volunteers exhausted and still responding to the challenges in their communities. The cost of living crisis and crisis within the health services added further pressure to those working in communities.

Communities Together Durham are a team of people passionate about the dignity and worth of each individual, because every person is made in the image of God. We believe that local churches are uniquely placed to respond to local issues and we work with them and other partners to challenge poverty by: 1. Working together to address Child & Youth poverty; 2. Responding to isolation, particularly among the Elderly; 3. Reaching out and responding to the needs and gifts of Asylum Seekers & Refugees. Working together we can all contribute to and participate in God's transforming work of bringing hope, healing and justice. By doing so we are responding to Jesus's call to be with the last, the least and the lost.

Communities Together Durham have supported the amazing work congregations and projects have been engaging in to make their communities places where all can flourish and this is reflected in this report.

SMALL, FAITHFUL, RURAL

Our work with rural parishes has continued to grow this year. In June, after two years of covid-related delays, a group of seventy-five clergy and lay people from across the north were able to gather at The Sill to share the joys and burdens of the rural church context, and re-energise one another for ministry and social action in their communities. We were lucky enough to be involved in the planning and shaping of the event from the beginning, and it was a wonderful opportunity to lead discussions on tackling isolation and hearing all the innovative ways people are working to do this in their rural communities.



FOOD & FUN



Food and fun activities during school holidays have become part of the DNA of our churches, and we feel incredibly privileged to be able to support this work, financially and with advice and training opportunities. Over thirty people joined us at event in the spring and we were able to bring together people from churches with lots of experience of holiday activities, and those who were just starting out – ideas, energy and practical support were shared, and we were very happy to be working alongside diocesan youth and children's workers, as well as other organisations offering training and activities. CTD supported 14 holiday clubs this year providing fun food and friendship for many children and families. We had the joy of visiting many of them and it was great to see the diversity of what was offered, and how much families appreciated it and joined in – we noticed how well churches had observed, listened and responded to the gifts and challenges, to create spaces and activities that were specific and relevant in their communities.

PARISH NURSING MINISTRIES



We have also moved forward with plans to appoint parish nurses, focusing on mental health, in Teesdale and Weardale with prayerful and practical support from churches in Barnard Castle, Middleton in Teesdale, and Upper Weardale. Nurses will be recruited at the start of 2023, to embed themselves in these small and often isolated communities, link up existing work like the lunch clubs and holiday activities, and support the mental health of those living and working in the Dales by building relationships and focusing on whole-person care. We are very pleased to be working in partnership with Parish Nursing Ministries UK on this project, and it has also been very exciting to see interest from other churches in potentially bringing health ministry into other areas of the diocese.

KNOW YOUR CHURCH, KNOW YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

In 2022, a number of churches have emerged from the experiences of the lockdowns with a new sense of curiosity about their place in the community and their connections to their neighbours. The Know Your Church Know Your Neighbourhood process (KYCKYN) is an ideal tool for helping churches get a sense of where they are at in terms of their identity and community connections. We consciously try to keep the process prayerful, contemplative, and open to God's prompting so that we can respond to the question: "Who is God calling our church to be in our community?". We have done this through the use of prayerful walks, silence and poetry and reflecting together on some bible passages as part of the sessions we have had together. Three churches began the process in the autumn: St Andrew's Blackhall, St Cuthbert's Shotley Bridge and St Cuthbert's Blaydon, and they have all now got to the halfway stage of the process. All of them have carried out their congregation surveys, and in the new year they will all be contacting neighbours for community conversations. Once these conversations have happened, they will be in a position to attempt a response to the question of who God is calling them to be in 2023.

CASE STUDY

The parish of Great Aycliffe completed the process this year, after finding themselves with increased use of their church hall after several years of it being hired out regularly. The process of prayerful reflection led them to take a closer look at their community, and the significant amount of existing provision, both within and outside the church. As a result of this, instead of moving into a big project, requiring people-power they didn't really have, they looked closely at the work that was bearing fruit and have invested time and energy into their ministry with young people transitioning to secondary school, and their Place of Welcome. This has led to strong, meaningful relationships being built on, and both of these things doing sustainable work which is held in great value in the town.

POVERTY PROOFING

This year, we have had a series of meetings with the charity Children North East, with the aim of supporting the children in our diocese, especially those facing poverty. After a few meetings, trying to work out what the best direction would be, we focused on the work around schools. The Poverty Proofing the School Day process designed and run by Children North East will be offered to schools across the diocese in 2023. The work will begin in January 2023, approaching schools and beginning the process. At the end of the summer term, there will be a review to see how the project is progressing. This piece of work could be incredibly supportive to help schools think through how to make the school day accessible for all children regardless of financial means and could help to make schools a more inclusive place especially for the least well off in our communities.

LIVING WAGE

Providing charity, as important as it is in the moment will never challenge the high levels of poverty we have in the North East. However, ensuring people get paid decent wages will.

The Living Wage action team have been very busy this year with accreditations from Sunderland Uni and Newcastle Council. We have also worked with Sunderland Council to make the city a real living wage city—our first in the North East. We have also been actively involved in the national campaign to push for a Living Wage for Social Care, believing that our care workers deserve decent pay – not just clapping. We took part in a national action and assembly in Westminster. We also joined with colleagues from Leeds to ask one of the five big care providers to accredit. This national action has resulted in 164 newly accredited care providers, 12 newly accredited large NHS trusts and 23,096 workers have received a pay rise!

We respond to poverty through all the charitable support we provide in our communities but through the living wage campaign CTD has challenged the injustice of low pay with significant effect.



TRAINING & MUTUAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

Through conversation and listening, we discovered that a number of churches were keen to learn more about specific subjects, and share experiences with one another. We collaborated with Communities of Hope in offering fundraising training, and have recently begun a series of sessions on matters around Human Resources, to help churches and projects put robust policies and procedures together, and clergy and managers in church projects to feel more confident about their roles and responsibilities with regard to employees.

We have also hosted events for people to talk about community sponsorship, growing food and holiday clubs, offering mutual support and sharing ideas, and a conversation about responding to the cost of living crisis in the autumn saw 30 people from churches across the diocese come together via Zoom, to share their plans for supporting their community as finances are squeezed even further.



FOOD INSECURITY - RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Since joining the team in September, Anne has been exploring the various responses to tackling food insecurity across the Diocese. While food banks are still very much needed for people in food crisis, there is a visible move by churches towards wanting to empower people and challenge the issues leading to food insecurity. More church led pantries and community markets are emerging and Community Cafes are also on the increase offering a variety of models such as 'Pay as You Feel'.



CASE STUDY

Over the last year Space 4 community project in Houghton-le-Spring has been on a bit of a journey and one that we have seen in other projects that we support across the diocese.

The project was established in 2014 to support people through provision of food, advice and social opportunities. Like many of our church based organisations drop-ins and foodbanks are on offer.

The first big change came as staff and volunteers shifted from responding to food poverty through a parcel-based system to opening a food store that allowed people to choose their own food. In an interview with Spark Sunderland the manager Daniel Alcock explained 'we want to give people agency - it's a pay as you can, pay what you feel service'.

However, this wasn't enough. Jade, who ran the food store, and was angry that their actions were not tackling the causes. 'I feel that we are being a sticking plaster, and not making a long term difference for people, its just giving quick relief for the issue but doesn't make long term change'.

The staff and volunteers wanted to move beyond charity to justice as Jade explained, 'By challenging injustice within our community we are giving people the voice to make the change needed to tackle the root causes'.

In October Space 4 joined Tyne and Wear Citizens which includes institutions such as a schools, mosques, universities, mental health charities and other churches; all of whom want to challenge injustice. The project staff, volunteers and community members all took part in 2-day community organising training in the hub. The training taught them how to build power to take action on the issues that mattered to their community.

Kim, a local mum and volunteer said that the training made her reflect upon her role within Space 4 and within the community and 'was excited about new doors opening, meeting new people and building knowledge and power between us'.

The shift from charity to justice is one we at Communities Together Durham are witnessing as we come to terms with the fact that much of our charitable giving, while important in the moment, does not create long term change.

REFUGEE & ASYLUM SEEKER SUPPORT

The project got underway in September, with two members of staff being appointed to oversee the work. The first few months have been mainly spent observing and reflecting on some of the existing work with refugees and asylum seekers across the Diocese and visiting existing projects and drop-ins. We have spent time making connections and building relationships with people and groups providing voluntary support or statutory support to Asylum Seekers and Refugees and begun a mapping exercise to establish where the gaps in provision are

We are part of the regional multiagency networks established in South Tyneside, Co Durham and Sunderland and these have put us in a good strategic vantage point for collaborative work with sector partners. We have also started laying the groundwork for future engagement with statutory services such as the Home Office, Mears, North East Migration Partnership, British Red Cross and building on existing relationship with Durham County Council Humanitarian Support Partnership as we look to support the sector when wider dispersal is rolled out in County Durham. We are aiming to deliver training for local church drop-ins who might need to expand their service to meet the needs of asylum seekers.

We have also continued with the work already started supporting those arriving here from Ukraine under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The Diocese is linked to the Citizens Uk scheme as a strategic partner and made contact with other regional and national groups which has enabled us to find some hosts and accommodation for guests. We have also supported hosts with advice and information and run a weekly host drop-in.



PLACES OF WELCOME

Ray Leonard was supporting the Place of Welcome (PoW) network until he retired in July. Since then team members have visited Framwellgate Moor, Marske, Wingate, and St John's Gateshead. It was good to see the places in operation, and in particular it was good to see St John's Gateshead as this had started only in September and they were wondering about how to make better connections in the community. In October we visited Jarrow's Place of Welcome, and our new team member Jessie Luvai helped us to think about how our PoWs can be especially useful for refugees and asylum seekers.

We went from Jarrow to Hebburn where the church is in contact with a refugee family and were able to make those connections for future support. We also contacted the Place of Welcome network to ask about the possibility of training/resources on how to make a PoW suitably welcoming for refugees and asylum seekers. They liked the idea and are hoping to get some training out early next year.



PARISH OF JARROW & SIMONSIDE

2022 saw the foundations laid for a partnership in South Tyneside which brings together CTD, Durham Diocese, South Tyneside Churches Together and the parish of Jarrow and Simonside. Volunteers offer spaces where people can meet, make friends, access pastoral care and holiday activities for all ages.

The idea is simple, through four weekly Places of Welcome+ sessions, the team extend the hand of friendship. Refreshments are free, there are often things to do and by October the sessions also became part of a network of Warm Spaces

With volunteers from within the church and beyond, and options to train as Mental Health First Aiders or Money Mentors, they support staff leading a CMA Connect centre offering budget planning, tackling debt, checking benefits people may be entitled to and signposting to local organisations for more support.

This project was made possible because of the commitment of volunteers and partner organisations and a generous grant from Lord Crewe's Charity.



WARM SPACES

The country has seen a significant increase in energy costs this year and there has been a lot of conversation about how projects can best support people. The Warm Welcome Campaign was a national campaign asking community buildings and churches to offer free, warm spaces. Members of the team attended the national webinar and disseminated the relevant information to churches across the Diocese. We also held a lunchtime webinar, attended by 85 people, on how the local church can respond to the current crisis, including setting up Warm Hubs.

Members of the team have also contacted our Local Authorities and other agencies and sent information out to churches about possible grants, training and support being offered. This has been shared through the Diocesan Round up, at Diocesan Synod and support offered to clergy and churches. That support is ongoing.



INDIVIDUAL CHURCH SUPPORT

Throughout the year we have continued to walk alongside churches in their journeys of tackling poverty in their own communities. As a 'critical friend' we aim to encourage and celebrate the amazing work they are doing, and provide practical support in developing new and existing activities. We also look to be a support to clergy and lay leaders, and sometimes ask those challenging questions that will help churches move past immediate charitable responses to reflect on how they can help towards creating lasting changes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to all our partners and the churches and projects we work with for their support in challenging poverty in Durham Diocese, including:

The Bridge Project, to encourage and support churches to tackle poverty in their local communities. The Bridge Project is an initiative of the Diocese of Durham, wholly funded by a generous grant from Lord Crewe's Charity and delivered for the Diocese by CTD.

Faith in Community (FIC), an ecumenical partnership working with local groups to develop and support a network of community projects in areas of social and economic disadvantage. There are currently 10 projects in the FIC network.

Tyne and Wear Citizens, as one of over 20 diverse member organisations, including schools and other faith communities. We act together with power, for social justice and the common good.

During the year we have also worked with Parish Nursing Ministries UK, the North East Religious Learning Resources Centre, Community Money Advice and others.

CTD also supports parishes to identify gifts and develop responses to local need. We deliver training, facilitate networks including Places of Welcome, participate in research and advocate on a wide variety of issues.

Thank you to all our partners and funders for your generous support during 2022.

Keep up to date with all our work, and contact us via www.communitiestogetherdurham.org.uk