

**TOGETHER
NETWORK** 

Together in Prayer

Advocacy and Empowerment

Lent and Easter 2020



Advocacy and Empowerment

Advocacy and empowerment are at the heart of what we do and how we do it.

The Together Network advocates and empowers through its work with churches, other faith groups and local and national organisations, encouraging partnership working and collaboration. Where projects are only the seed of an idea, we catalyse them to become an actuality, by coming alongside people and supporting them with scoping out their idea, identifying opportunities, training, linking up with others and accessing funding.

Empowerment and advocacy are intrinsic to the way we work within our community projects themselves. We adopt the concept of Asset-based community development (ABCD) in all that we do. ABCD is a sustainable approach to community development that recognises the inherent skills, gifts and talents that people and organisations have. It focuses on capabilities instead of deprivation; empowering people to build on what they have. Our approach listens to what people really want and need.

In this prayer diary we take a look at how advocacy and empowerment are weaved throughout our work over England, and offer some guidance for how you can pray for particular projects and people.

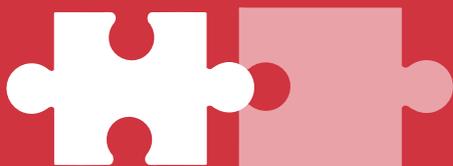
Thank you for supporting our work with your prayers.





900+

Last year we supported 900+ churches with their social action activities, empowering them to engage with their local communities.



9,000+

In 2019 we worked with 9,000+ volunteers, who have been empowered through their experiences giving to local projects.

300+



Over 350 of the projects we supported in 2019 worked to increase people's agency and confidence.



£250k

Last year we supported local organisations to secure over £250,000 for their community and social action projects.

Saints

In Coventry, Jet Jones, CEO at Together for Change, has been transforming a community building, with the community...



Together For Change identified Nuneaton as a town with areas of intense deprivation, and whilst churches were holding weekly prayer meetings to seek a way forward, they lacked the resources and capacity to make a significant difference. Together for Change felt drawn to a near empty building, sensing that this could become a hub for church-led social action. They went on to form a steering group of nine ecumenical churches and presented the concept to church leaders, who saw this as the answer to their prayers!

✓ *The cafe bar on the transformed ground floor of Saints*



TOGETHER IN PRAYER

Together for Change was asked to manage the development of the project. They met with the owner of the building, who bought into the vision and offered a lease on very favourable terms. Together with local churches and businesses, they have now transformed the ground floor of the previously derelict building into a useable and beautiful space!

Now known as 'Saints', the first phase of the project has just been launched last month: 'Enterprise and Equip' which seeks to tackle issues of unemployment and lack of education. The stunning space has stalls for local businesses, a play area for toddlers, a café and a fully equipped meeting room which local businesses and colleges can use.

Later phases will address physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and will bring people together through the creative arts.



Please pray that people's lives begin to be transformed as they join in with the work of this project and for all involved as they set about renovating the first floor of the building.

The Power of 'Being With'



A reflection from Andrew Frere-Smith, our Development Worker in Kings Lynn, Great Yarmouth.

A few years ago, my wife decided we should buy a red car. I had never had a red car before. Suddenly, I was seeing red cars everywhere. The same thing is happening to me at the moment with DIY. I'm re-tiling the bathroom and, wherever I go, I see tiles. It also happens with words. Currently I can't but notice the word with.

It all started last autumn when I read A Nazareth Manifesto by Samuel Wells. It had a significant impact on me. Sam begins by pointing out that many of us love to do things for people. We want to improve their circumstances, or bless them in some way, so we do something for them.



However, this can sometimes become a source of frustration as what we do is misunderstood or devalued. Sam Wells argues that a better way to bless people is not by doing things for them but rather do things with them or even simply be with them.

When I was a teacher, I found that the best way to help children learn was to encourage them to ask their own questions and then work with them to find the answers. In this way, they took ownership of the problems and were self-motivated. It was far more effective than simply giving them the answers.

It's very much the same in my role as a Development Worker. When people identify a problem and come together to address it, I can work with them to try and create something. But trying to set up a project on my own, no matter how noble, is futile. We have to do it together, as a team, with each other.

There is a new Churches Together project starting this month called Trees of Hope. The plan is to plant hundreds of trees to help fight climate change. To be a success, the project needs a huge group of volunteers; everyone working together, with one another.

Doing things with others is, of course, a great antidote to loneliness and it can be great fun - just ask people at Men's Shed. But recently I've been discovering the importance of a different kind of communion, not doing with but being with.

My parents are in their nineties. They don't need me to do anything for them or with them. What they want is for their family to be with them. Anyone who has nursed a sick friend or cared for an elderly relative will know that 'being with' can be costly. One's own agenda must be set aside and full attention given to the other person. We enter the realm of love expressed in service and sacrifice. It can be painful, especially on our emotions, but in these intimate moments, we can find treasure that lasts forever.

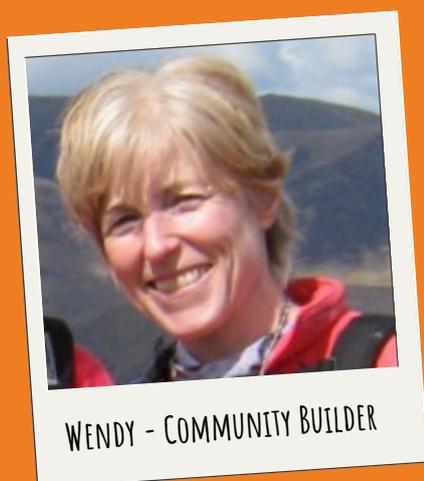
The Gospel of Matthew reminds us that Mary gave birth to a son and they called him Immanuel, which meant 'God with us' (1:23). When Jesus concluded his ministry, his final words were, "Behold, I am with you always" (28:20). Jesus spent his whole earthly life showing us how to be with people.

I hope that in the future, I'll more quickly recognise those opportunities to be with people. Like red cars, they're everywhere.

Transforming Notts Together

Transforming Notts Together offer a series of two workshops for churches called 'Getting Started in Your Community'. These have had really positive feedback from the churches that have participated in them but Transforming Notts Together are looking at how they can develop these further. This workshop helps churches to prayerfully consider their role in the wider context of the strengths and needs of their local area, looking at their gifts and skills, how they connect with their neighbours and where opportunities might be.

Transforming Notts are currently running this with two Nottingham churches together, so please pray that the individuals included will be inspired and challenged about what God might be calling them to in their local area. Please also pray for unity and the strengthening of relationships between local churches.



The Ripple Effect of Encouragement

Eve*, a community worker based at a church in Runcorn was new in post and wanted to set up a holiday food and activities programme, having seen the need in her town and how well the programmes have worked in other places. She was struggling to get support or information from anywhere and at the time the church was in vacancy.

Transforming Lives Together took Eve to visit one of their own 'Filling the Gap' holiday projects, where they were able to talk Eve through the steps she needed to take to get started, and the possible challenges to look out for. Eve also attended a Filling the Gap networking event Transforming Lives Together put on, and spent time with Wendy, our community worker there, to talk about evaluation and get general moral support. Eve was able to begin and run a very successful Filling the Gap programme with the help of volunteers which was so appreciated by the community.

Eve said, "Thank you for fuelling us into action with your keenness and enthusiasm! From the very first time we met, to the inspiring project visit and your continued support throughout the holiday project."

*name changed

Together Leicester

Together Leicester are working on four local celebration projects which help churches to identify the strengths, gifts and assets in their local community, thank God for and celebrate them, and then discern how they are called to serve in and with that local community. Please pray that these four projects, which are all about half-way through the process, allow people to come alongside their community and transform it together.

Please also pray for Together Leicester's work in partnership with the Soil Association, as they start to develop volunteer run 'Cook & Eat Hubs' in local communities to provide culturally appropriate opportunities for everyone to develop the skills they need to cook healthy and affordable food. Pray that the right partners are found to work together on this project.



Transforming Communities Together

Transforming Communities Together has worked with the Diocese of Lichfield and the Just Finance Foundation to develop 'Jesus Money', a new resource to encourage people to talk about the still taboo subject of money, which can often be the first way to start building financial resilience.



It's a simple pack of cards with an effective set of thought-provoking questions across four topic areas: spend, give, save, and borrow. Please pray that more and more churches and other faith groups use the cards and people are prompted to engage with support which empowers them to better manage their finances.

New Confidence

Together for Change have been supporting an Iranian couple, Ahmed and Rosa*, who were seeking asylum.

Together for Change's Fresh Start Project Coordinator met them at an event organised by the Coventry Refugee & Migrant Centre, and they subsequently started attending Together for Change's English Conversation Cafes twice a week. They said that they were incredibly lonely and isolated, and since arriving in the UK had spent most of their time alone in their home - this was having a very detrimental impact on their mental health and wellbeing. They have made some good friends through the café and Ahmed has regularly gone along to Together for Change's weekly football sessions.

Ahmed and Rosa were also invited to come to church by a volunteer after they expressed an interest in learning more about Christianity. They absolutely loved the experience, and have been regulars in the congregation since then!

Ahmed and Rosa are so much more confident. They've gone from having nothing to do but stay at home all day, to having a packed weekly schedule: English classes, volunteering, arts and crafts, home group and playing sport! They've recently been granted asylum, and the first thing that Ahmed said was "Thank you Jesus Christ: we have prayed so much for our decision to be a positive one, and now He has answered our prayers. We are so happy!"

*names changed



Please pray for Together for Changes work through Fresh Start, that every person who comes to them experiences the love of God and is able to regain their confidence.

Transforming Plymouth Together

Transforming Plymouth Together are running Community Hubs with a number of churches and non-faith venues, who open up their spaces as places where people can experience friendship and hospitality, and find somewhere they can contribute. So far they've typically seen a large number of older people joining initially as part of the group and then moving onto volunteering themselves to being part of the teams that are offering support, friendship, a listening ear, help and advice.

Please pray that this work can grow and spread as a model to other venues around the city, especially in areas of deprivation and places where there is a large number of older population living in isolation, which is often hidden. Pray also that churches will be inspired to get involved and for additional funding for this work.

Transforming Lives Together - Chester

Transforming Lives Together have supported a church in Weaverham, who wanted to make better use of their new premises, to creatively explore their community and how they will engage with social action. TLT altered the 'Know Your Church, Know Your Neighbourhood' programme to suit the context, reducing the number of sessions and giving it a more asset-based focus. This included church members collecting feedback from the community about the area and how the church could be more involved.

As a result of these conversations, a congregational survey, prayer walks and much discussion over five sessions, the church came up with firm ideas of what social action they wanted to focus on and what the next steps would be. A presentation of the outcomes of the process was made to the full congregation, and three sub-groups will form to take forward the main topic they decided on: communications, loneliness and young families.

Please pray for continued excitement for what's going to happen in the community and for great ideas as they explore the practical outworkings of the conversations.

What is the Together Network?

The Together Network is a key and distinctive aspect of CUF's work. It is currently comprised of 20 partnerships with Church of England dioceses working to support social action in specific areas of the country, and continues to grow.

Together Network member organisations employ dedicated Development Workers who support churches and other groups that are seeking to bring about positive change in their communities. This includes offering encouragement and guidance, delivering training, helping to identify resources, and building connections between groups.

Being part of an established national network enables members to share best practice and promote strategic working. At the same time, members can respond innovatively and creatively to specific opportunities and challenges in their areas.



**TOGETHER
NETWORK** ⊕

**National movement,
Local action**

The Together Network is a subsidiary charity of the Church Urban Fund

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