

Background

Described as the glue that holds society together, faith groups have proven track records of long term commitment to their communities as well as responding to times of crisis and change. They

- are shown to be strongest where social need is highest,
- offer social support and care to vulnerable members of society,
- stimulate unrivalled levels of volunteering
- maintain and make their buildings available for community use and often
- provide the only publicly available facility in rural areas.

Research published by the North West Regional Development Agency in 2005, demonstrated that they were present and active in areas both of affluence and of deprivation in urban and rural settings. With over 45,000 faith volunteers, faith communities made a net £90-95 million annual contribution to civil society in the North West in 2005.

Faith based groups already have a great deal of which to be proud and much to offer.

In 2010 as we face both the challenges and opportunities of the economic and social uncertainty of the years ahead, the need for these groups to be able to work, alone and together, with statutory and other bodies can only increase.

As one way to support current initiatives and to prepare for future ones it is proposed to carry out a detailed survey of the activities and resources contributed by faith groups in our area.

A similar piece of work has been carried out in Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire and more recently in Cheshire West.

The need

As the public sector comes under increasing pressure, with services reduced or curtailed, faith based initiatives will become ever more important to maintain community and family stability and cohesion.

Yet the true scope, range and value of their contributions are often not well understood by local authorities, agencies and other members of the community. There may be a lack of knowledge, coordination and recognition such that individuals or groups can feel isolated and undervalued and their potential overlooked.

There is a need to:

- have a more comprehensive picture of all the caring activities and projects run by faith groups,
- bring greater understanding of their work and value,
- create stronger networks and partnerships and
- develop practical ways to work more effectively and efficiently to respond to the needs of our area.

Aim

To provide an audit of the caring and community work undertaken by faith communities in Cheshire East demonstrating their role and value to the life of our area and in support of the new Sustainable Communities Strategy, *Ambition for All*



Outcomes

- An evidence-based assessment of faith groups contribution to the wellbeing and civil life of our area
- A comprehensive report identifying the scale, scope and range of faith-based projects
- Analysis of activities and recommendations for future development
- Stories and case studies for inspiration and as a basis for learning
- A series of relationships and networks built or strengthened through the process
- The ability to relate these resources and activities to the local and area-wide needs and priorities to nurture strong communities in Cheshire East.

Key Benefits

- Ultimately a web based resource or directory of initiatives based around locality and themes
- Identifying where Faith Communities and groups can work to impact further their neighbourhoods and area.
- Identifying and sharing good practice
- Promoting joined-up thinking and action
- Making further links into and across our communities and generations
- Identifying opportunities for partnership working and training.
- Signposting
- Making more effective use of available funds
- Building or sustaining social cohesion
- Increasing local ownership and participation
- Creating more volunteering opportunities and more volunteers
- Supporting independent living for older age
- Creating a register of available community facilities, spare capacity and future plans
- Enhancing rural inclusion through increased awareness and networks

An opportunity to work together

In this time of change and transition there are both challenges and opportunities. We have the prospect to do things differently and to create new and dynamic working partnerships which are responsive to local needs and priorities whilst contributing to the overall wellbeing of our society.

We know resources are limited but by each contributing what they are able much can be achieved. The whole is much greater than the sum of the parts.

There are three main constituent groups to this project.

- The faith sector – an opportunity to come together and work more effectively to serve our communities
- Public sector, national and local government, and local services or and agencies
- The private and business sector to play their part in supporting healthy and thriving communities and potential workforce.

How you can get involved

Contributions in cash or kind are sought to complete the project.

- *Financial* contributions to the direct cost of the project.
- *Hosting* meetings of support group and presentation events.
- *Promotion and endorsement* of project through networks and organisations known to you who should support the initiative
- *Promotion and endorsement* of project to networks and organisations known to you who should complete the survey.
- *Printing and mailing* of questionnaire
- *Printing* of final report

For more information contact:

Carolyn McQuaker

Tel: +44 (0) 1625 858210

carolyn.mcquaker@btconnect.com

Current partners and sponsors

Churches Together in Cheshire

Hope in North East Cheshire

Cheshire East Council

Macclesfield Interfaith group

Crewe Interfaith group

David Rutley MP

Cheshire Agricultural Chaplaincy Team

Go Project

Cheshire Children, Young People's and

Families VCFS Hub (The Hub)

Cheshire East CVS

Poynton Christian Fellowship

New Life Church Congleton

St Chad's Church, Handforth

Christian Concern Crewe

Knutsford Methodist Church

St Mary's Church, Middlewich

St Alban's RC Church, Macclesfield

Church of England, Chester Diocese

"I am delighted in my capacity as Member of Parliament for Macclesfield to offer my support and endorsement for taking forward the Faith Action Audit in Cheshire East. Strong communities are vital and the work of the faith sector is critical in building and sustaining that strength in our area.

I commend this initiative to you and would encourage you to support it in any way possible."

David Rutley, MP.

Hidden Treasure in Cheshire East

A survey of how faith-based caring and community initiatives contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of our area.



Bringing practical and creative solutions to local problems, faith groups are significant contributors to the life and well being of Cheshire East. They contribute to:

- Community cohesion
- Crime reduction
- Every Child Matters
- Care for the elderly
- Regeneration
- Debt management
- Arts & culture
- Rural inclusion & care
- Rehabilitation of offenders
- Drug & alcohol dependency reduction
- Unemployment & redundancy support
- Environmental awareness & improvement
- Employment
- Mental health
- Health care
- Family life
- Parenting
- Bereavement
- Young people
- Housing
- Advocacy