

# The Effective Christian Presence and Enterprise Project

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



## Executive summary

The Effective Christian Presence and Enterprise (ECPE) project has aimed to identify, learn from, encourage and network sustainable and enterprising forms of Christian 'presence' across Yorkshire and the Humber. The term 'presence' was chosen by the 19 project participants to encompass the diversity of their community action - including local churches, social enterprises, Christian charities, community projects, arts-based initiatives and much more.

The contribution made by these 19 presences, when described in numbers, is remarkable:

- In 2007 almost 5000 people came into contact with the work of the presences. If occasional and repeated contacts such as attendees at events and visitors to church buildings are included to generate a 'footfall' figure, the estimate could go up to almost 280,000 each year.
- Of these, around 1400 were children or young people, but around 12000 more children and young people are in occasional contact with the presences, for example through schools work.
- More than 800 people were involved in delivering the work of the presences.
- The salary costs alone of this work totals around £1.2 million per year.
- Discounting the value of a major new development to the premises of Hull Community Church, the total financial value contributed by the presences to their local area in 2007 was almost £2.9 million. This includes the substantial contribution made by many volunteers to their local communities through the presences.

The nature of this work, however, doesn't lend itself to description in numbers. The presences described in this report are focussed on catalysing transformation in the lives of people across the region. Some of the many examples of change they describe are:

- "We see an increase in school attendance and punctuality for those who come to breakfast club as well as an improvement in reading skills. There is a sense of real encouragement in the churches whom we work closely with - this is immediate and tangible. There is also the knock-on effect of seeing Christians engaging in mission through volunteering. A visible presence is created in the community, getting people talking, bringing up conversations of faith which may have laid dormant for some time."
- "The effects are easiest to see with our volunteers. Many of the volunteers from the community have special needs of one kind or another. We have seen them grow in confidence and self-esteem. Some have gained work experience. They have found a support structure and a sense of belonging."
- "The Conversation Club also helps community cohesion. It allows women, many of whom have been through very difficult experiences, to socialise, support each other and explore the new community they now live in."
- "Some of our projects have been operating for many years, and we are already seeing long-term changes in people's lives such as ... Improved quality of life and well-being and fuller lives. ... For those suffering pain, abuse, hardships, distress, deprivation and unhappiness – the chance to help people become free from that pain and live happier and fuller lives is ultimately the reason for our work. In caring for individuals, we want to support people as they try to make the changes that so many of them long for."

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Through this report you will be able to explore how these presences understand effectiveness, and what factors help or hinder this sort of work. From this work, seven key findings emerged, which give rise to some suggested ways forward for the future that are applicable on a national basis:

### **1) Partnership or collaborative working is a key [or 'default' position] for effectiveness.**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- Churches/presences considering community engagement need to think first about partnerships
- Training on partnership development and negotiation is needed, including contract development; the risks and benefits of partnership; on expressing Christian organisational ethos and values and understanding 'secular' partners

### **2) Volunteers are crucial.**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- To borrow 'best practice' from the wider voluntary sector in volunteer recruitment, management, retention and care
- Training for ministers and key 'presence' personnel on volunteer management - Faithworks and CRC Yorkshire and the Humber are working on developing focussed training with the Livability community mission team (formerly Shaftesbury)

### **3) Effectiveness requires three distinct leadership styles working together [team building, entrepreneurial and project/strategic management].**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- Exploration of how to attract and enable the entrepreneurial leadership style to flourish within ordained ministry and lay leadership
- Training after theological training for ordained people, and lay leaders, on 'project development and management' including fundraising
- Denominations should commit to life-long learning which includes personal development and mentoring for leaders
- Church hierarchy need to be encouraging new 'projects' to be led by teams of people who have the range of leadership styles required
- A shared approach should be explored to community development and social entrepreneurship training

### **4) However, effectiveness is dependent on more than the church leader! Teams are crucial.**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- Training on effective team building is vital
- Local congregations need to 'come alive' to possibilities; perhaps this could be encouraged by further exploring new ways to organise ordained ministry to empower congregations to take the lead in initiatives
- There needs to be more ongoing communication through local and regional church networks about how different churches are serving their local communities
- Entrepreneurial leaders need to be encouraged to share their knowledge to ensure sustainability and succession

## **5) It's important to strive for quality.**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- More support from church networks, particularly for those presences that are delivering welfare services, to secure accredited quality assurance standards such as PQASSO or Investors in People. This support could take the form of 'organisational mentoring'
- There is a need to explore the nature and importance of quality assurance standards and their relevance to the diversity of Christian presences
- We must encourage the highest quality of service – too many churches settle for “this will do”

## **6) Flexible 'church structures' can actively encourage effective presences.**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- Explore more flexibility from 'church structures' which fosters a culture that encourages and supports new initiatives, social entrepreneurship and risk taking, to unlock resources in the form of buildings, people and energy

## **7) Sustainability is about more than long-term funding – it's about 'keeping the fire alive'.**

*Suggested ways forward:*

- Recognition of the centrality of prayer to sustainability for the individuals involved in the work and for the work itself - perhaps this could be supported through ongoing development of prayer resources
- More networking for a purpose between presences to facilitate encouragement, prayer support and sharing of ideas and best practice, especially where projects/presences are engaged in similar work, across denominational boundaries
- There is a need to explore how more effective different local structures can be developed for inter-denominational Christian presences such as an enterprising charity model rather than a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP).
- Develop a mentoring scheme for key presence leaders, which also could facilitate some of the Training outlined above.

We invite you to read and enjoy the learning we have gathered from the experiences of these 19 presences, and to join in the debate by visiting [www.faithworks.info/ecpe](http://www.faithworks.info/ecpe)

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Front page photos: (from left to right): St Michael's Youth Project, Grewelthorpe Project, Pointed Arrow, Halifax Street Angels -(C) Northern Exposure - Heather Magner.