

**Community Missioner working
in deprived communities**

Statement of need

Government statistics show that there are pockets of deprivation within the Parish of Ipsley. Areas in the Woodrow ward are ranked in the bottom 10% most deprived and parts of Matchborough and Winyates fall into the bottom 20%. Government statistics highlighted the difficulty of people being able to access public services and a high proportion of people falling into the 'caution' category for wellbeing.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

In June 2014 the Christ Church Community Project obtained a grant from the Changing Futures Fund to assess the needs of the local community through consultation with various community groups and individuals. Their report was presented at a multi agency meeting with local partners, individuals and organisations to ascertain their reflection and insight. The report stated that Christ Church is able to offer access to, and use of, a tremendous community building. This can be their 'offer' in terms of part funding initiatives, which could be matched by resources from elsewhere. Christ Church also offer a non-judgemental safe space, which is attested by current users from the community.

The conclusion of this consultation highlighted that the activities already offered by the local church were valued and seen to be making a difference in peoples' lives, but they could be built upon with new initiatives to bring about further change in the local community, addressing the following emerging themes (it was recognised that the church may have to work in partnership with other organisations).

- A need to focus on people to bring about lasting change
- Health (emotional, physical and mental health needs)
- Wealth (debt and low self esteem)

To combat an ongoing problem with young people in Matchborough, in 2016 Redditch Council set up a task force (consisting of representatives from Christ Church, the police, social services, the council and the local school) to assess and set up strategies to address the problem. Preliminary conclusions have focused on the need to provide good youth engagement activities and to work with parents on taking responsibility for their children.

Christ Church offers a number of community based activities e.g. weekly lunch club, Foodbank, painting class, mums and tots and youth clubs. Presently these activities are run and supported by volunteers. The church buildings are also used during the week by Noah's Ark Nursery and various community groups.

Taking all of the above into account and also conversations with various people within the local community, it is believed that a full-time worker could develop relationships through new and existing contacts to assess the needs of the community and provide solutions by working in partnership with other organisations. This would bring lasting change to peoples' lives and the community.

Conclusions from the Changing Futures Fund Report by Revd Chris Allen

All the activities within the Christ Church community are highly valued. These provide the success to build upon. The comments and suggestions given seem to be highlighting three emerging themes that could provide a focus for future activity. These themes are recommended as a focus for prioritising. Considering activity in line with questions such as below will enable the development of a strategy that builds on current strengths and success. There are clear overlaps between these themes and some activities will impact across all three.

- How does this activity impact on people, and who are they?
- How will this activity help people make ends meet?
- How will this activity positively impact on people's health in the broadest sense?

People:

Ensuring that all projects seek to have a people focus is central to future development. Although this seems obvious, it would be easy to become distracted by targets, cuts and the specifics of activities. Activity type is a means to engagement and opportunity. A focus on people will demand:

- Mapping opportunities to identify gaps
- Effective communication about opportunities
- Ongoing engagement of user groups to design and support the delivery of activities
- Partnership working with other delivery agencies to enable a 'joined up' approach that maximises resources and reduces duplication.

Health:

A clear value of current activity is the value to interact and build up support groups. A health focus would enable health development across three areas.

- *Physical health:* Many of the embedded health problems in communities do not have clinical solutions. They have community solutions because the change that is needed is about lifestyle. Diet, smoking cessation, reduction of drug and alcohol abuse, increased exercise, etc is best encouraged by peers and not professionals.
- *Emotional health:* The current range of activity is clearly having an impact in this area as testified by current users. Reducing loneliness and isolation is positively impacting on the lives of those involved. How can this be extended? How can access be increased to current activities?
- *Mental health:* Anecdotal evidence is that this is high especially amongst men. Examination of data relating to anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide might also indicate a trend. What activities can be appropriately developed that increase access to support? There is an emerging movement around Mental Health First Aid which it may be appropriate to explore.

Wealth:

A number of the activities suggested above are centred on how personal finances can be stretched to their limit. This might be enabled through:

- Money advice relating to financial literacy, welfare, budgeting, access to credit (ie protection from loan sharks and payday lenders, etc).
- Job clubs to develop work acquisition skills and personal support. This could be linked to volunteering opportunities to enhance experience).
- Mechanisms for reducing household costs (skills sharing, recycling, second hand clothes, etc).
- Healthy eating on a budget skills development. This could be all age (there are successful examples of young people being engaged in such projects). No stereotyping about who does the cooking!

*Changing Futures Fund Chris Allen www.compass.uk.net
(2014)*