

A photograph of two women in a community setting. The woman on the left has short brown hair and is wearing a dark patterned top and a black jacket, holding a white mug. The woman on the right has long dark hair and is wearing a yellow patterned scarf and a white top, holding a blue mug. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background shows a room with wooden paneling and a television.

# Common Good Fund: An Evaluation

**This summary has been produced  
based on the evaluation conducted  
by Dr Sophie E. Bremner  
May 2017**

## About the Common Good Fund

The Common Good Fund (CGF) was a response to increased tensions between and within communities across England which were particularly evident following the EU referendum. Building on the Church Urban Fund's (CUF) experience in administering the Near Neighbours programme, the CGF provided small grants (£250 - £5000) to local groups and organisations who are working to build connections across communities in order to encourage people to live together well. The programme had four key objectives:

- a) **Creating a common agenda** – seeing local people reach a shared vision of how to work together to improve their areas.
- b) **Promoting a sense of personal responsibility** – recognising that everyone has something to contribute and should feel ownership over local initiatives.
- c) **Increasing levels of participation and social cohesion** – believing that the local community is strongest when everyone is involved in social action.
- d) **Promoting an alternative to hate, intolerance, and prejudice** – identifying that meaningful relationships can develop where there is shared understanding, as well as trust and respect for each other.

The CGF was administered through Near Neighbours, a programme which brings together people in communities that are religiously and ethnically diverse, so that they can get to know each other better, build relationships of trust and collaborate together on initiatives that improve the local community they live in. This is achieved through Near Neighbours' local presence in communities across England with hubs and co-ordinators; a small grants fund to provide support for local projects; and a network of national partners to provide training, expertise and resources.

## Evaluation Approach and Methodology

This evaluation was commissioned by CUF to assess the extent to which the funded projects met the objectives of the programme. The evaluation was carried out by Dr. Sophie E. Bremner in May 2017, based on five case studies of Common Good Fund projects in Boston, Peterborough, Stoke-on-Trent, Ipswich and London. The research methods included ethnographic observation, numerous informal conversations with participants and planners, six more structured interviews, and two focus groups.

The evaluation identified a number of trends which for the purposes of this executive summary can be categorised within the following three themes:

- 1) Breaking down Barriers: Connecting people and communities and developing trust and respect
- 2) Volunteering
- 3) Creating a Common Agenda and Enacting Change



## 1. Breaking down Barriers: Connecting people and communities and developing trust and respect

One of the key findings of this evaluation was that participation in CGF projects often enabled new people, from diverse ethnicities, nationalities and faiths, to talk to each other and make connections.

*'Participation in CGF projects often enabled new people, from diverse ethnicities, nationalities and faiths, to talk to each other and make connections'*

There was also evidence of more enduring relationships that had the potential to last beyond the scope of the CGF-funded projects.

For example, in Peterborough, PARCA (Promoting African Refugee Community Association) were funded to put on social events and community roundtables. Daniele, a Lithuanian woman and mother of a young daughter, who had recently relocated to Peterborough and visited PARCA for the first time on the Women's Day event and made new connections with other women, said this had helped her to feel a sense of belonging in Peterborough and reduced her feelings of isolation.

Through these connections, the CGF-funded projects created opportunities for inter-community understanding and dialogue, helping to break down barriers, increase trust and reduce prejudice.

### Case Study: London

**The Urban Partnership Group (UPG)** is a charity that serves a community in West London, where it runs services including a children's centre and programmes for older people, parents and those seeking employment. The community in which UPG works is made up of two major groups: Somalis and white British people.

UPG received funding from the CGF to run two film projects for young people in order to reduce tensions in the community following the murder of a local Nigerian boy by a local Somali boy. Community relations had deteriorated in the wake of the murder.

The workshops for the first film project took place during the trial and the participants were people aged between 10 and 35 and from white British and Black African (predominantly Somali and Nigerian) ethnic groups.

Although it has taken time to overcome feelings of distrust (which was acknowledged as being a particular problem in the area) the leaders of the project suggested that progress had been made as a result of the CGF-funded project and its ability to embrace different groups of people. Indeed, a relative of the young boy who was murdered, volunteered with the film project during the trial, which was seen by participants as a profound symbol of the community coming together peacefully in the face of adversity and community tension. The fact that bridges were being built was also exemplified by the experiences of one young Somali girl, who commented that "for me it was good - I'm usually used to only seeing Somalians."





## 2. Volunteering

The CGF-funded events offered scope for volunteers to be involved in the work of the host organisations, often increasing their sense of belonging and engagement. In addition, the CGF-funded events provided opportunities for service users of the organisations to become volunteers themselves, increasing skills and helping them feel valued by the community.

*'Common Good Fund Events offered opportunities for service users to become volunteers, increasing skills and helping them to feel valued by the community.'*

It was also observed through the case studies that volunteering could be an effective way of increasing connections between the white British community and migrants and engendering cross-cultural understanding. For example, PARCA's volunteering partnerships with Seetec (a 'welfare-to-work' company) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had, over the last few years, brought a large number of (usually white British) unemployed people to volunteer with the organisation. Within this group of British volunteers, there was evidence of changing perceptions about others. Joan, for example, acknowledged that before she volunteered with PARCA she had never really interacted with people from other places, but now her "eyes had been opened" to the humanity in others. She especially enjoyed meeting the Syrian refugee families and now called PARCA "my family." Though this partnership pre-dated the CGF-funded project, it demonstrates what could be possible through the further funding of organisations like PARCA.

### Case Study: Boston

St. Botolph's church, in the Lincolnshire market town of Boston, held a community lunch on each Tuesday in February 2017. The final of these four lunches, on Shrove Tuesday, was a special lunch serving pancakes and was planned to coincide with the opening and blessing of the church's new multilingual chapel (funded by the Diocese of Lincoln).<sup>1</sup> These events, supported by church staff and volunteers, were part of a wider vision of Reverend Alyson Buxton that St. Botolph's should be a community-facing church for all the residents of Boston, a "place of hospitality."

A diverse group of people attended the lunches, including students from Boston College, a large number of elderly white British people, a local walking group, a class of children with learning difficulties, some homeless people and included people from Dominica, India, Lithuania, Poland and Zambia. People were forced by necessity to sit (and then usually talk) with strangers at the large communal dining tables. The responses to the church's own one-page questionnaire revealed that nearly every visitor had met someone new. One person wrote: "it is a good way of bringing people together."

Lesley, a volunteer leader explained how her team had developed friendships because of their voluntary work cooking and serving the CGF-funded community lunches. There was also evidence of future arrangements to connect being made: for example, a Dominican musician, Mathieu not only offered to play keyboards and sing at the next community lunch but also connected with a volunteer from the local Royal Voluntary Service, agreeing to come and join their singing group for the elderly.



### 3. Creating a Common Agenda and Enacting Change

Whilst developing a shared agenda for the future was not an explicit aim of the projects, in some cases CGF projects created space to start these kinds of conversations and feed into a wider effort of building more connected communities.

For example, in Boston, the CGF-funded community lunches and multi-national cookbook, in addition to the opening of the multilingual chapel, fed into the local church's wider response to the outcome of the EU referendum in Boston (which had the highest 'leave' vote in the U.K.), a response in which they wanted to forge a vision of a united town.<sup>2</sup>

In Peterborough, round table talks were specifically aimed at bringing people together to consider the future of their local communities. One of these was called 'Improving Cohesion and Integration' and the other 'Improving Neighbourhoods'. As a result of these talks, concrete plans were made: Parochial Church Council (PCC) representatives offered to help disseminate information about community events, and resources about how to report hate crime, fly-tipping, and exploitative landlords were shared, in addition to news of future free ESOL lessons.

#### Looking to the Future

The evaluation found that CGF-funded projects created opportunities for participants to access other services offered by the funded organisations. For example at the CGF-funded events in Peterborough, participants were successfully connected to other ongoing projects such as ESOL classes, women's groups, sewing lessons, youth clubs, IT classes and translation services.

Furthermore, in some cases, there was evidence of the funded projects enabling ongoing collaboration between the host organisation and other groups, including sustaining some of the CGF-funded projects themselves. In Boston for example, a group of Lithuanians attending a community lunch explained that they had previously been hesitant to worship at St. Botolph's. Having attended the CGF-funded event, however, and having learnt more about the multilingual chapel, they were now intending to visit the church in the future. Leaders and volunteers at St. Botolph's expressed a desire to continue running a series of community lunches.



## Conclusion

The findings presented in this evaluation have demonstrated that participation in CGF funded projects had a range of positive impacts. These impacts include:

- breaking down barriers between people and communities, developing trust and respect and reducing prejudice;
- offering the opportunity for volunteers to be involved in the work of the host organisations, in turn increasing volunteers' sense of belonging and engagement;
- in many cases, creating the space to start conversations about creating a common agenda and creating change together in communities.

A limitation of the CGF-funded projects was their short-term nature. In light of significant divisions and tensions between communities, participants acknowledged that longer-term initiatives would be necessary to extend the positive impact of the CGF-funded projects.

In this context, the CGF grants served as a catalyst, enabling existing organisations to extend their reach to new individuals and communities. These new participants were able to connect to existing ongoing service provision, learn about each other's cultures, build a sense of trust, and in some cases establish longer-lasting connections. Successful projects built on the foundation of relationships that had been cultivated over many years by local organisations and the communities that they serve. Participants recognised the value of the CGF-funded projects and the importance of carrying forward the relationships and partnerships to improve cohesion in their communities.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> The multilingual chapel offered a peaceful corner of the church for people to pray. Signs and prayer cards had been written in four languages in addition to English (Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian and Russian), pillar candles created a focal point, and other resources for prayer were offered (including stones with uplifting messages such as 'peace' and 'love', and prayer bracelets to aid the reciting of Psalms 23).
- <sup>2</sup> On the Sunday immediately after the EU referendum, and in response to it, St. Botolph's held a 'Friendship Service' with a Lithuanian woman leading the prayers. They had a large turnout in comparison to their usual Sunday services.

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