

2022 - 2023

Impact Report





Vision

Our vision is a world where individuals and communities are empowered to live life to the full, supported by a network of collaborative Christian Churches, organisations, and other sectors. We aspire to create positive and lasting change by promoting faith, hope, and healing in all aspects of life.



Mission

Our mission is to bring faith, hope, and healing to individuals and communities by empowering them to live life to the full. By working collaboratively with the Christian community and other sectors, we create positive and lasting change.



Values

We value strong relationships and believe in the importance of enjoying the journey as we work towards our goals, with Christian values at the core of all we do.

Director's Introduction

I am thrilled to share with you the incredible strides that Connect Network has made over this last year. We have invested significant effort into laying down stronger foundations and gaining a deeper understanding of our role in empowering the Christian community to better serve the needs of their communities and the city.



We have been amazed by the abundant creativity and life that permeates the Christian community's responses to these needs, and we are passionate about sharing their invaluable contributions with the world. Our primary focus remains on supporting churches and charities to continue their incredible work in serving those around them.

Through our workshops and events, we have been able to equip church members to better understand the needs of the people they serve and to provide more effective support. We have also created safe spaces for leaders to receive the support they need to continue their vital work.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the individuals who have supported us this year. Your contributions, big or small, have enabled us to continue our work and make a positive impact.

I would also like to extend a special thanks to our small team of dedicated volunteers, who have generously given their time and expertise to support our cause. Your efforts have been invaluable and deeply appreciated.

DEB FOZZARD

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF CONNECT NETWORK

Our Projects:

Connecting Churches

Leaders Connect

This year, Connect Network focused on rekindling connections between Church leaders impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a series of prayer meetings, lunches, and events, we fostered unity and collaboration among leaders. The impact has been significant, with renewed energy and enthusiasm among leaders, a willingness to work together towards shared goals, and a more coordinated approach to work. Our efforts have enabled us to have a more significant impact on the communities we serve and build a stronger, more united Church in Sunderland. Connect Network facilitated 28 in-person prayer meetings for Christian Church and charity leaders from different denominations, which proved to be a vital source of support, encouragement, and prayer. We also facilitated four lunches with key speakers to bring encouragement to the group. These meetings have been impactful, with attendees reporting increased feelings of connectedness and a greater sense of purpose.



Goal: Facilitate churches in Sunderland that are well connected to each other and to Connect Network

Believe in Sunderland 2022

The city of Sunderland is well aware of its brokenness and recognises that the world is also facing its own challenges. Despite this, the Christian community has been a source of hope, demonstrating the positive impact that serving, giving, and reaching out can have. From running toddler groups to food banks, the church has been actively involved in making a difference. To highlight their efforts and raise awareness about their work, the Believe in Sunderland 2022 event was organised. This event provided an opportunity for over 30 Christian churches and charities to showcase the resource they offer to the community. Members of local authority, social prescribers and the Police were among many others who were eager to see what was on offer. Attendees left feeling empowered, supported, and motivated to assist others using the resources available.

Engaging with Sunderland Connect Network in the last couple of years has been such a joy for us!

To see what God is currently doing across the city, and to hear of all that's taken place up until now, is so inspiring and encouraging.

For us, the impact of Connect Network means that we get to see the value of what we're doing amongst a bigger and richer picture of the church at work across the city.

It's also given us the opportunity to forge and grow in some wonderful and life-giving relationships with people we wouldn't necessarily have had the chance to connect with.

Ian and Kat Harding, Pastors of C3 Church

Communication

At Connect Network, a key priority is delivering consistent and relevant communication to our community. To achieve this, we created monthly e-newsletters and daily social media posts which included important information about training, events, vacancies, and the support available within our network. Additionally, we leveraged our extensive database of connections to provide personalised assistance to those seeking support within the Christian community.

Connect Network holds a unique position in the city, acting as a network of churches and charities spanning across Sunderland, including Washington and the Coalfields. We actively cultivate positive relationships with key organisations and charities working towards healthier, stronger communities. Throughout the year, we met with members of the police, local authority, schools, and the voluntary sector to encourage collaboration and a more coordinated approach to supporting our communities.



Goal: To have churches that are well informed of the happenings in their communities and the city

Promoting the Gospel (Young People)

Reaching 33,000 young people in Sunderland with the gospel is a daunting task. To effectively engage with them, we collaborated with Wearside Youth for Christ this year to conduct a comprehensive youth work survey. The survey provided us with a clear understanding of how and where churches are currently engaging with young people, as well as identifying areas where more support is needed.

Our dedicated team produced a report based on the findings of the survey. Through our 'prayer with a purpose' event we were able to analyse the results and gain valuable insights into how we can improve our outreach efforts. We have already started taking the next steps to utilise the findings of the report to create a comprehensive action plan.



Goal: To support Churches to reach every young person with the gospel

Children and Family: Building Hope for Children in Sunderland

To work towards our objective, we have formed partnerships with Cornerstone (Northeast) and Home for Good. Together, we have developed a storyboard titled 'Building Hope for Children in Sunderland', which we aim to unveil in 2023.

Our storyboard showcases our commitment to providing a safe haven for children in crisis and our dedication to improving their well-being. Through this initiative, we hope to make a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable children in Sunderland by giving them access to the safety and security they deserve.



Goal: To have increased safer alternatives and options for children in crisis in Sunderland

Health and Wellbeing

First aid training

As part of our efforts to achieve our goal, we had the privilege of serving two local churches who sought to train their teams as first aiders. To support their efforts, we sourced and hosted the training at our centre, which has become a popular venue for such training. By providing access to training opportunities like this, we aim to empower individuals and organisations to better care for the health and safety of those around them. Through our efforts in promoting physical activity and training, we hope to contribute to the overall well-being of our local community.



Goal: To improve the health and well-being of the local community through training opportunities

Thanks for all your coordinating for this year and making it happen. I do find it so useful and supportive one of the best things I have engaged within ministry. I do hope it continues as there is nothing else like this in the diocese and it is good to hear others in the same boat.

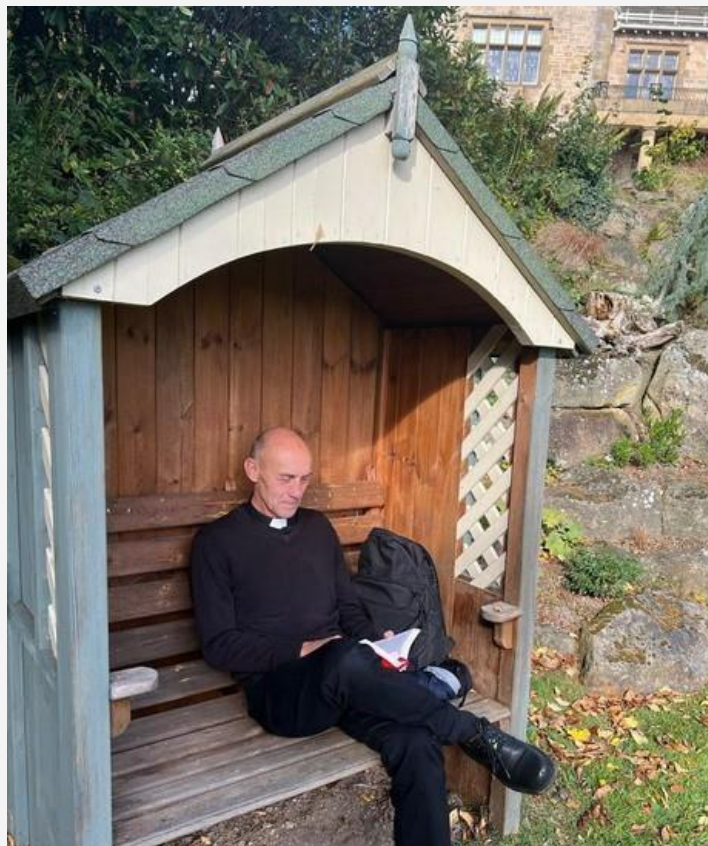
Elaine, Keeping it Together attendee

Keeping it Together

The demands of Christian ministry can be psychologically challenging, and the past two years of navigating the pandemic have taken a significant toll on those serving in this capacity.

While much attention has been given to supporting the vulnerable during this time, those working in supportive roles, including churches, have often been overlooked. In response, Connect Network partnered with Dave Burke, a pastor and mental health first aid trainer, to establish an online community of clergy. The goal was to provide a supportive space for pastors to meet monthly, receive professional input from someone actively involved in the field of mental health, and provide mutual support to one another.

The program, launched in January 2022, was designed not only to provide support for clergy to help others, but also to prioritise their own well-being. The response from the network has been overwhelmingly positive, with a growing number of clergy joining the community and reaping the benefits of this essential program.



Poverty

Gifts of Love

We are proud to report that for the eighth consecutive year, Connect Network successfully coordinated our Gifts of Love hamper project, providing much-needed support to families across Sunderland during the Christmas season. The project saw the active participation of numerous community members and organisations, including Churches, Schools, charities, and individuals.

The hampers, filled with carefully selected Christmas food items were beautifully wrapped, and brought joy and comfort to families in need, providing a tangible demonstration of our commitment to supporting our community. The impact of this project on the families it served cannot be overstated, and we are grateful for the continued support and engagement of our partners in making it possible year after year.



Goal: to see people
lifted out of poverty

The Gifts of Love is such a lovely and well needed project especially in a time where there is so much poverty. Families and individuals who are struggling with 'the cost of living' and who probably can't afford to buy Christmas presents, can experience a little light in the gloominess of their situation. Gifts of love will bring to the individual(s) caring thoughts, a joyful surprise, and a much-needed gift.

Donor, Gifts of Love

Equipping

Faith in Mind

Workshops and mentoring to support churches working with those affected by trauma or addiction.

As part of our efforts to achieve our objective, we launched the Faith in Mind project; workshops and mentoring to support churches working with those affected by trauma or addiction. Poor mental health is a prevalent issue in our city, and through the Faith in Mind project, we aim to educate, inspire, and equip the local churches to better support those in need in their communities. The workshops were held in partnership with a Christian psychotherapist who has a passion for building bridges between faith and spirituality and modern psychological perspectives.

We were pleased to have 25 attendees at our workshops and eight participants receiving one-on-one mentoring. Feedback from attendees has been positive, indicating that they are now more self-aware with an increased awareness of others' emotions and have a better understanding of mental health issues. They are now better informed, less judgmental, and more compassionate towards those in need.

Our efforts have also garnered the endorsement of Rt. Revd. Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham, who believes the project will be of great value.



Goal: To increase the effectiveness of the Churches' support systems and provide signposting for vulnerable individuals

The Centre

We are thrilled to see St. Andrew's Methodist Church building providing a welcoming and friendly space, serving as a hub for Connect Network and a base for other Christian charities and organisations to operate from. Additionally, we facilitate training, networking, and events that support and benefit churches and charities in their mission to serve their communities. Leaders Connect identified it as a neutral and accessible place and now meet here weekly for their prayer meetings. We look forward to continuing to serve our community through this space.



Case Study: Three 13 Training and Enterprise

Three13 is not just a training company, but a missionary organisation. With that in mind we are delighted to have seen 3 of our learners come to faith in Jesus Christ and start a lifelong walk with Him in the last 12 months. These three plus another former learner have attended an Alpha course we ran at the Centre and are now part of a growing house church run under the Sunderland Community Church banner.

The practical work we do has seen 29 learners qualify for a level 1 in either Carpentry, Painting & Decorating or Horticulture. Using the Centre as the place to teach learners, we have painted the entire building from top to bottom and, re-established the garden and allotment area. We are confident that these areas can become a vital part of the local community.

There have been challenges along the way but God has given us what we need at just the right time. Martin was registered blind. He has faint sight but needed simple tasks to complete. After an initial assessment it was decided that doing work in the garden would suit him best. He wanted to paint the garden fence, and this became his project whilst the course. The product was outstanding, and Martin was delighted with his work. In his words "this has given me my confidence back as I know I can do things despite my blindness". Melvin has not worked properly for most of his life, preferring to lead a life of crime. He came on our Painting and Decorating course and loved it. He then did Horticulture and Carpentry. Martin was with us for the best part of 4 months and in this time came to faith in Jesus. One of the best quotes we have had come from him, "if it was not for these courses I'd be back in jail, you've actually kept me out of jail"!

Colin Fozzard, T hree:1 3 Training and Enterprise Sunderland Hub Manager

“Sunderland Connect Network Centre is a Place of Fruitfulness”

In November 2022, the Lord laid it in our heart to commence a youth work in Sunderland. The vision and passion were geared towards gathering youths, young adults, and their families for worship, transformation, fellowship, and encounters with God. Also, to support youths to identify and fulfil their divine purpose. Similarly, to impact young people who are perceived as hard to reach due to difficult life challenges such as drug addiction, homelessness, abuse, poor mental health among others. We seek to use various activities to promote mental wellbeing such as sports and games events, counselling and personalised tailored support, provision of information and signposting of individuals to where they can get help for those in need of services we don't provide.

The Lord brought us to The Sunderland Connect Network Centre as a centre of fruitfulness to bring the vision to pass. We have experienced great testimonies and wonders of God from the events and activities carried out in the centre. We want to say a big thank to Sunderland Connect Network for partnering with us through the centre.

Redeemed Christian Church of God, The Fruitful Vine

A Note from the Chair

There is no organisation in the world like the church.

Our nation, city and communities do better when the church is fulfilling its mission. Connect Network has worked this year to support and equip churches (the people – not buildings) to impact their communities more effectively.

Connect Network exists to benefit the people of Sunderland through supporting and building capacity within churches and voluntary sector organisations so that they are better able to meet their charitable purposes and to promote the Christian faith.



We recognise that no one can meet the needs of our city alone and much time and effort has gone into developing relationships and partnerships with others: statutory partners, voluntary organisations, and key individuals.

One of our key initiatives has been to support church leaders in encouraging and strengthening them by offering ongoing training and support for their self-care, recognising the impact that the last few years have had on them. Poor mental health is so damaging for our communities and Connect Network has sought to serve and equip churches to understand and meet some of the vast needs in the city through training and workshops.

Jesus was often found interacting with the poorer people in society and once again we were able to express Christian love for the city by delivering hampers at Christmas to many who would otherwise have gone without.

Occupying the Centre, in Southwick, has enabled us to host events, training, gatherings and showcases, as well as offer kindness and care to individuals in need.

In terms of governance the trustees have met 5 times during the year, receiving monthly management accounts and reports from the Director on delivery and performance. We have been awarded grants of £43,120.00 during the year and donations of £13,176.76. In total, our income amounted to £90,210.52 and expenditure came to £68541.30. The trustees feel we are in a good position to further develop and grow our work in 2023-24 and further enable the churches to benefit the city.

PHIL DOBSON

CHAIR OF CONNECT NETWORK



Thank you

To everyone who has financially supported us this year.

Arnold Clark Community Fund

Benefact Trust, Brighter Lives Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Bethany City Church

Catalyst Church

Church of the Nazarene

Easington Lane Apostolic Church

Gentoo Aspire

Henry Smith Foundation

North Wearside Parish

Personal donors

RCCG Living Praise

Roker Methodist Church

Scientists in Congregations

Silksworth Independent Methodist Church

Sunderland Community Church

Sunderland Foodbank

Two Worlds Christian Centre URC Northern Synod

Wearside Youth For Christ

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