

FIT Voices – Whole Community Works – North Kent

This story begins in 1993 with plans for regeneration in the north Kent area of Thames Gateway. Sir Peter Hall had remarked that the greatest challenge for those responsible in delivering the Thames Gateway would be to integrate existing communities with the new developments. The Revd Martin Henwood felt called to rise to that challenge.



In the first five years the parish church, Holy Trinity Dartford, was itself regenerated, reaching out in to the community to fund a £2million project that enabled Health and later Citizens Advice to deliver their services from the convenient location and hospitality of the church and ancillary buildings. Thus the Church became actively engaged with the wider community and prepared for the next period in its life.

The church was asked to spearhead community development in a nearby local area, specifically The Tree Estate. With DBC funding matched by the Diocese of Rochester, Sue Hutson, a Lay Reader within the Church of England, undertook an MA in Community Development and learnt how to connect these skills with what was required in this community. She discerned the greatest needs of the community by enabling their voices to be heard, and created real partnerships between faith, voluntary, public and private sectors and this led to the founding of the charity “Faith in their Voices”. The name encapsulated faith in the disadvantaged and marginalised voices. This was shortened to FIT Voices, which hinted at the purpose of the Charity’s work, which was the fitting together of the different voices and their desires that work for the mutual benefit of the whole community.

The desire to genuinely listen and include, led to the involvement of The Grubb Institute as consultants and the next stage in the Charity’s life. From 2008 they worked with FIT voices to manage and develop the regeneration of Gravesend Old Town Hall.

Gravesend has a history of ethnic diversity, migrant settlement and an established Sikh community dating back to the 1930’s. The Town Hall

Regeneration

Inclusion

Consultancy

Collaboration

building had previously been used as a Court and a Prison. Consulting by means of community workshops ensured community ownership of the project. The building is now able to engage with local citizens by providing a place to meet alongside other faith and community groups; offering a safe place for young people; a place of hospitality, especially to New Arrivals.



Other projects initiated and run by the Charity include a service that welcomes young people to Bluewater, and a high street shop turned into an Arts Gallery for local artists serving the wider community.

A pattern has emerged, which involves thorough research and consultation, engagement with community groups, voluntary, public and private sector agencies and a principle of collaboration between people of faith and goodwill.

Brokering partnerships and developing and managing projects that allow communities to work together follows this. In October 2009 the charity changed its name to Whole Community Works – a statement derived from the practical experience that encapsulated the philosophy of the Charity.

One of the most recent pieces of work has been to carry out, together with The Grubb Institute, a Feasibility Study about Faith Communities and regeneration in the Thames Gateway. Read the report [here](#).

Go to www.wholecommunityworks.org.uk to read more about the Old Town Hall and other projects or visit <http://dartfordparishchurch.org/> for more information about the Church community.

The Revd Martin Henwood DL is Vicar of Holy Trinity, Dartford, Chair of Whole Community Works and Advisor to The Bishop of Rochester on the Gateway.

Related Stories

For information on the churches' involvement in the regeneration of the Thames Gateway in East London see, [Inspiring Communities](#)