

More churches than ever before are working with Church Urban Fund to develop or launch social action projects from cookery courses for people at risk of food poverty to running networks of winter night shelters, a new report has found.

The Together Network, made up of 18 joint ventures set up in partnership with CUF and Church of England dioceses, helped more than 500 churches with projects to serve the community in 2015, up more than 40% from 350 in 2014.

Development workers from the network supported churches with planning a range of activities including a cooking course for people at risk of food poverty in Newcastle, a community cinema project in Lancashire and a weekly lunch club for elderly people in Coventry.

The network promoted local partnerships to run projects such as winter night shelters bringing together churches, local authorities, businesses, charitable organisations and others.

The details of the work of the Together Network are contained in [Changing Lives and Communities Together](#), assessing the impact of CUF over 2015.

The report includes the work of Near Neighbours, the CUF-administered programme to build relationships of trust across different faith and ethnic groups. The programme which works in eight locations across England invested £1.1 million in grassroots activities last year, giving grants to 330 community projects.

More than 2,000 people a week benefited from projects funded by grants of up to £5,000 awarded by CUF to communities across England in 2015.

CUF is now managing the work of the Church Credit Champions Network, the project helping congregations to take action on money and debt issues in their communities and set up by the Church of England's task group on responsible credit and savings.

The report detailing the impact of CUF, along with a new look and [website](#) for the charity, marks its transition from primarily a grant giving organisation to a development agency helping to ensure that church based social action is effective and sustainable.

A project run by Together Lancashire, a joint venture between CUF, Blackburn Diocese and the Methodists in Lancashire, which started with helping food banks to work together more closely, has grown to leading a network of more than 70 organisations tackling food poverty in areas from cookery courses to distributing funds for equipment and training.

Rev Canon Ed Saville, social responsibility officer for Blackburn Diocese, and a director of Together Lancashire, said: "Working in partnership with the dioceses and other groups including Lancashire County Council, this project has grown from helping around 25 food banks to work in closer co-operation to supporting a range of different programmes on tackling food poverty from gifts of low cost slow cookers to work on growing fruit and vegetables and setting up job clubs.

"This has been about identifying the strengths of local communities and encouraging groups to work together to come up with solutions."

Canon Paul Hackwood, executive chair of CUF, said: "Recent research showed that 10 million adults in England rely on social action projects provided from churches - a staggering figure.

"Changing Lives and Communities Together shows that social action is part of the fabric of the Church of England, with CUF working with more churches than ever before through 18 partnerships with the Church of England dioceses.

"This report details moving and inspiring stories of people whose lives have been transformed through the work of the Together Network, the Near Neighbours programme and the Together grants."

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