

There are numerous ecumenical projects in England that have been set up to meet an identified need in the local community. Projects are very varied in their focus but they usually work with people who are under stress or needing support such as homeless people or asylum seekers. Some provide breakfast or lunch for lonely people; others visit housebound or run credit unions. They are highly likely to be working with statutory bodies and other voluntary and community groups in a complementary way. They have to be flexible and able to review their work continually and make changes in direction as the need arises: for instance meeting new needs that emerge or responding to changes in legislation or funding.

Often a few individuals from one or more churches, who have vision energy and commitment, initiate such projects. The projects can begin life as an ecumenical group or alternatively as a single denominational group which draws in people from other local churches at a later stage. The relationship of such projects with the local churches varies. Often it is strong, and local churches give both financial and other practical support such as the use of meeting rooms, halls, photocopiers, and appeals in newsletters etc. The wider church membership may give support through collecting items and attending fund-raising events.

Some of these projects are set up and ‘owned’ ecumenically by the local churches and become Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEPs). In these cases the local churches have a corporate responsibility and representatives of all the churches will serve on the management committee. As in all LEPs a Declaration of Intent and a Constitution needs to be agreed by the parent denominations and ratified by the Sponsoring Body.

If the project begins to raise funds from external sources and to appoint workers, it will be necessary to become much more formal. It is likely to become a charitable company with a memorandum and articles of association and acquire charitable status. The Charity Commission will require a constitution and this will have to be in line with its criteria and be approved by the Commission. The project will have to appoint trustees who have individual and corporate responsibility for the project. If the project is a Local Ecumenical Partnership, it is likely that the churches involved will appoint the majority of the trustees. If it is not an LEP trustees may be elected in other ways, according to the constitution.

Projects that develop in these ways are very demanding of those involved. Both individuals and churches have responsibilities in law for their employees and for the financial probity of the project. It requires a big commitment and a considerable amount of time because those involved will be called on to serve on the management committee, act as trustees or take on particular responsibilities

for the organisation. Both clergy and lay people may be involved. One of the advantages of being a Local Ecumenical Mission Partnership is that the local churches ‘own’ the project and give it stability.

Funders may look upon an LEP project more favourably, seeing it as a project backed by the local churches and therefore more stable and secure. On the other hand, many funding agencies are not permitted to support work that they perceive to be religious in character.

The ***Chat Shop*** in Newcastle is a Local Ecumenical Mission Partnership. The Partnership includes the Roman Catholic Cathedral Parish of St. Mary’s and the local Church of England, Methodist and Baptist churches and the name of the project derives from this Partnership – **Churches Acting Together**.

This LEP opened in 1992 in an area of high unemployment with a local ‘white’ population... Today Arthur’s Hill is a diverse and mixed area in the west of Newcastle, with the usual problems associated with inner cities. A large number of people are from ethnic minorities and of other faiths and there are many asylum seekers. The café is a friendly and supportive environment where meals are served at low cost. The work is in collaboration with a variety of agencies, which provide support sessions on the premises.

Industrial and Social Responsibility (ISR) in Bristol was set up to act as the churches response to the problems of a large city. It is a Local Ecumenical Mission Partnership sponsored by Churches Together in Greater Bristol, with its own premises leased from the RC Diocese of Clifton. The Director is appointed ecumenically and personnel are either seconded from denominations or appointed and funded ecumenically. *ISR Bristol* has found that it is essential in projects such as this that lines of communication and management must be clearly defined and that the people seconded should understand and be committed to them. As the funding denominations cover a wider area than Bristol, *ISR*’s expertise and experience is available to a much wider area than first envisaged and neighbouring County Bodies send representatives to serve on the Executive Committee.

Local Broadcasting is another area of work where a Mission Partnership might be formed especially to enable the churches to fund a full or part time producer/presenter of religious material.

Overseas Church Twinning – Many towns and villages in England are twinned with towns and villages of similar size in Europe or further afield. LEPs and Churches Together Groups within these areas should be encouraged to join these associations enabling such groups to fulfil their prophetic role.