

Chance to Thrive

A Summary Report



The Church of Scotland
Ministries Council





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The Research Advisory Group (Martin Johnstone, Russell McLarty, Jennifer Wallace, Raymond Young and latterly Fred Vincent) have provided invaluable support to the process, making critical comments and suggestions.

We remain responsible for any errors or omissions in interpretation and reporting.

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FOREWORD

The Chance to Thrive Steering Group is delighted to receive this Summary Report and accompanying Recommendations from the research team who have worked diligently with Chance to Thrive during the last number of years.

It is important we take time to celebrate the completion of this report.

It is also very important we take time to celebrate the people whose stories of working to further encourage thriving in their communities and congregations are found here.

We would like to express a sincere thank you to

- The people in the Chance to Thrive congregations and communities
- The Chance to Thrive mentors for the 'supportive accompaniment' provided
- The research team from Animate & Blake Stevenson who undertook the task of trying to track the impact of an innovative and distinctive project
- The funders of the research: The Baird Trust, Carnegie UK Trust, The Bellahouston Bequest Fund and the Ministries' Council of the Church of Scotland
- The Priority Areas' staff team who were in post during the research: Martin Johnstone, Noel Mathias, Lynn MacLellan, Anne Jolly and Shirley Billes; and, particularly to Rev Russell McLarty, the initial Chance to Thrive co-ordinator.
- The more recent members of the Priority Areas' team: Shirley Grieve, John Finch, Naomi Dornan (for also designing the Report layout) and, the Chance to Thrive co-ordinator, Fred Vincent
- The General Trustees and the Ministries' Council for their ongoing commitment to, and support of, Chance to Thrive as a process focused on thriving communities and congregations.

The Chance to Thrive Steering Group commends this Report, and its Recommendations, to the Church, all local congregations (both Priority Area ones and others as well), our partners and local community stakeholders.

The journey continues...

Raymond Young
Chair,
Chance to Thrive Steering Group

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE CHANCE TO THRIVE PROGRAMME: SUMMARY REPORT

1. What did Chance to Thrive set out to do?

In 2011 the Church of Scotland set out to ‘*work alongside local people from eight of the poorest neighbourhoods in Scotland to develop new resources designed to help the local community to grow its own capacity to flourish and thrive.*’¹ It called this programme Chance to Thrive.

Chance to Thrive had an interest in how to turn a Church building into a community resource. However, more fundamentally it was seen as being about creating the spaces and opportunities which engender communities with the confidence to change – street by street, neighbourhood by neighbourhood.

The focus was firstly on the strengths of local people to create their own long-term vision for the community. Secondly, it was on the spaces between buildings. Lastly, it was on the buildings themselves, reflecting the values of safety, creativity, neighbourliness and hope.

2. Why is it relevant beyond the Church?

As it was getting underway, the Scottish Government published its Regeneration Strategy, *Achieving a Sustainable Future*². It defines regeneration as ‘*the holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces alone will not suffice*’.

The Scottish Government was becoming increasingly aware of the potential of faith-based organisations to take up a role as ‘community anchor organisations’³. Chance to Thrive is specifically mentioned as an example of support for local community led regeneration in the Scottish Government document⁴.

In its execution Chance to Thrive follows what is becoming known as the ‘Scottish Approach’ which encourages policy makers, agencies and practitioners to focus on ‘assets’ approaches, co-production and improvement. In establishing Chance to Thrive the Church recognised that it had assets in relation to volunteers, paid staff and buildings, which could support communities to thrive. The initiative started in communities, that were encouraged to engage with local agencies (co-production) and to plan for and monitor the changes they aspired to (improvement).

¹ Church of Scotland Priority Areas Committee (March 2011) *Chance to Thrive, Building the Future Background Document*

² Scottish Government (Dec 2011) *Achieving a Sustainable Future: Regeneration Strategy*

³ This term originated in Home Office (2005) *Firm Foundations: The Government’s Framework for Community Capacity Building* and was used ‘because of the solid foundation they give to a wide variety of self-help and capacity building activities in local communities and because of their roots within their communities.’

⁴ Paragraph 109

A number of funders partnered with the Church of Scotland on the evaluation of the programme.⁵ The Carnegie UK Trust provided additional support which allowed for the production of an information film about Chance to Thrive⁶ and hosted several research seminars. The experiences of Chance to Thrive were seen as particularly relevant to the Carnegie UK Trust's developing theory and practice on the Enabling State⁷. This envisions communities of place and interest taking a greater role in the provision of services to the public.

3. Who participated?

Nineteen congregations from Priority Areas applied and eight were selected: Cranhill, Castlemilk, St Mark's Drumchapel, Tron St Mary's and Maryhill (all in Glasgow), Chalmers Church in Larkhall (South Lanarkshire), St Mark's in Raploch (Stirling) and Lochee in Dundee.

At the outset of the process they were at different stages of development. For instance, one congregation, Cranhill, already had a fully operational Community Development Trust. Others were new to the concept of the Church as a vehicle for community regeneration.

4. What was the 'Theory of Change'⁸?

In brief, the theory of change was that putting a small amount of resource and support into local congregations and Church buildings would enable them to connect further with local people, and together achieve thriving communities.

The small amount of resource included: the Project Co-ordinator; eight volunteer mentors with skills in regeneration and community development; an 'enabling panel' which gave access to external advice, specialist support, funding and opportunities for mutual support; and the provision of learning exchange and celebration through regular programme events.

What would constitute 'thriving communities' was not clearly defined by the Church of Scotland. However, the key indicators of success included:

- increased individual and community confidence
- growing levels of social action and community engagement
- increased numbers of local artists
- reduced levels of poverty and increased population stability

⁵ The Baird Trust, Carnegie UK Trust, the Bellahouston Bequest Fund and the Church of Scotland Ministries Council

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCmcD56awLo>

⁷ www.enablingstate.co.uk

⁸ A Theory of Change is defined by the Center for Theory of Change as 'a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context'.

- vibrant new transformational spaces and resources

Each of the eight selected congregations was asked to establish a Chance to Thrive group. This would include people from within and outside the congregation, but the congregation was not given specific guidance or training on the approach they were to use. The expectation was that they would review their own ‘assets’, seek out the ‘assets’ in local communities and collaborate to make the difference needed. Mentors and ministers brought their own understanding of what this approach meant with them.

In practice, some groups turned out to be more adept than others at finding and building on their strengths, identifying the opportunities around them and collaborating. Some had the advantage of paid workers, in addition to a minister, to support them. But all have established their own understanding of an ‘asset based approach’ and made progress in their own ways.

5. WHAT DIFFERENCE DID CHANCE TO THRIVE MAKE?

Three years into the programme the volume of activity in seven out of the eight congregations has increased by about two-thirds.⁹

Numbers of regular groups and activities (excluding one off events in communities)	54
Number of regular volunteers, including at least 15 leading activities	238
Approximate value of the volunteer time generated through the programme per year. ¹⁰	£300,000
Number of beneficiaries of groups and activities	2260
Amount of inward investment (excluding in kind contributions/donations)	c.£992,000 ¹¹
Number of new church members (including several new elders)	60

⁹ The activities of Cranhill Community Development Trust have not been attributed to the programme

¹⁰ Calculated using a 2015 Scottish Living Wage figure of £8.25 per hour for 3 hours a week for 238 volunteers

¹¹ This includes money for buildings from the General Trustees and Church of Scotland funds such as Go For It.

Of the 122 people who filled an online survey sent out to the eight Chance to Thrive groups, 68% said their confidence had increased. 53% said that their skills had increased either to some extent or to a significant extent.

Chance to Thrive has had local impact at a time when public services, such as community halls and centres, are being withdrawn. It has enabled local churches to work with other partners in their efforts to ensure that each of these communities thrives despite the cuts in local authority budgets.

The asset that the church building and space bring to each community is considerable in each of the eight areas. Judging by the numbers involved in the various activities provided either directly or indirectly by Chance to Thrive, the impact on local people has been a significant growth in opportunities to participate in their local community.

There is little evidence to suggest an increase in the numbers of community artists. It is too early to say whether there are reduced levels of poverty and increased population stability.

All of the Chance to Thrive groups have succeeded in what they set out to achieve to some extent. The largest congregation, Maryhill, also managed to embed Chance to Thrive in the wider congregation from the outset, which has given it added strength and sustainability. Three others: Larkhall, Raploch and Tron St Mary's have used Chance to Thrive as a highly effective 'driver' or an 'engine room' for change, working well in partnership both with the congregation and the wider community.

Lochee has used Chance to Thrive to generate ideas, but has struggled to get the wider congregation behind them. In Cranhill, ideas were already being generated by their Community Development Trust, so Chance to Thrive has had a more limited impact. For different reasons, in Drumchapel and in Castlemilk the original focus of attention had to be on unifying the Church so Chance to Thrive took time to embed.

6. How much did it cost?

The Chance to Thrive programme had a budget of approximately £60,000 per year; which was met on 50%:50% basis between the Church of Scotland's Ministries Council and General Trustees. This paid for a Project Co-ordinator and included a minimal budget for mentor expenses, publicity, venue hire, and office accommodation. The programme has undoubtedly achieved a huge amount with very little direct financial investment.

7. How much income did it generate?

The General Trustees and the Ministries Council are the most significant supporters of Chance to Thrive, but it has also acted as a powerful driver to bring money into the local areas. Almost all of

the Chance to Thrive congregations have been successful in some of their funding applications, some highly so. They have been particularly successful in attracting money, and gifts in kind, from local businesses.

It could be said that the initiative has given local Churches the infrastructure and energy needed to attract investment from inside and outside the Church.

However, three years in, Chance to Thrive has only generated 5% of the five-year investment target of £20m estimated at the outset of the programme.

8. How does the Chance to Thrive model work as a way of enabling community based regeneration?

Chance to Thrive has adopted ‘the Scottish Approach’ of co-production, asset-based approaches and improvement, to some extent. All of the eight congregations have developed stronger partnerships with community organisations and local agencies, and are beginning to plan with partners and community members outside the church. They are engaged in co-production.

The Churches, and the people within them, are an asset in themselves. All of them are beginning to see the community as a resource rather than something that needs fixed, and several of them are quite far down this road.

The ministers and mentors have played leading roles in coaching Chance to Thrive groups to ‘*learn from*’, rather than ‘*do to*’, local people. They have also encouraged Chance to Thrive groups to try new ‘*small tests of change*’¹² and learn from them.

The evaluation process has helped to capture their learning on an ongoing basis. Regular ‘gatherings’ have enabled Chance to Thrive groups to learn from one another. However, a learning or ‘improvement culture’ is not yet embedded, and it could be strengthened.

9. What has made Chance to Thrive successful?

- **Faith**

Chance to Thrive has been a programme in which the Church of Scotland has demonstrated faith in action. It has not always been an easy journey. Chance to Thrive has captured both the hope for the future of the Church as it takes up its role as an enabler of truly integrated and connected communities, as well as the grief which comes with the experience of diminishment. All of the Chance to Thrive congregations are small; many of them have experienced further loss over the past three years.

¹² see <http://www.ihl.org>: The Science of Improvement

Faith has played a hugely important role as a driver in Chance to Thrive. 80% of those who filled in the online survey cited faith as a motivator for their involvement in the programme. Chance to Thrive groups have also learned about faith in action from their experience in communities. Ministers, in particular, have commented on how their congregations have been challenged to accept diversity and difference in new ways, through opening their doors and accepting people who have struggled in their lives. One minister referred to this process as “*churching the churched*”.

- **Volunteers**

Chance to Thrive has been particularly successful in attracting and using volunteers. The Chance to Thrive groups have all been run by volunteers. The commitment of the initial volunteers has been rewarded as their energy has attracted new volunteers from both within and outside the congregation.

80% of survey respondents thought that they had been highly successful at involving local people as volunteers. In addition, the mentors are highly skilled volunteers, who gave up several hours of their time every month.

At times however, the reliance on volunteers has left Chance to Thrive groups feeling fragile. Most Chance to Thrive groups have also benefited from the input of paid staff paid for by the Church of Scotland itself, Trust Funds or the NHS.

- **Assets**

Chance to Thrive has, from the outset, captured and ultimately harnessed the tension between a focus on buildings as an asset and a focus on the community as an asset. There is now an implicit assumption that the church buildings and land around them are for the use of the whole community and are one of the key assets the Church brings to an area.

As a result, much of the focus has been on ensuring that the buildings are fit for purpose. As Church buildings have been renovated, and Chance to Thrive groups have made real efforts to connect with the local community beyond their congregation, so the local community usage has increased. Church hall lets have increased in almost all Chance to Thrive congregations, bringing in both income and the strengths of a much wider user-group.

At the same time as Church buildings have been renovated, Chance to Thrive communities have experienced a loss of other facilities. Council buildings have closed and community centres have been forced to generate more of their own income by raising prices. As a result, Church resources have become more valuable. Although the situation is bleak in many ways, it is fortuitous in one, forcing communities to overcome any prejudices they might have, and enabling Churches to take up what was a traditional role at the heart of the local community.

- **Partnership working**

One of the areas where Chance to Thrive appears to have been particularly successful is in establishing new partnerships locally. Partners have included local businesses, voluntary sector agencies, the NHS and local authorities. One partner described how he understood the Chance to Thrive contribution to the local community in terms of:

“Their pastoral role, their forward thinking outlook (they know what’s happening and are in tune with the needs of the community), their adaptability (they fit around you) and their visibility.”

The fact that churches have a permanent local presence and are committed to supporting the vulnerable, often by giving freely of their time, has also been highlighted by partners as a real gift.

10. Are Churches Community Anchor Organisations?

Community Anchor Organisations are: *‘independent community led organisations with multi-purpose functions, which provide a focal point for local communities and community organisations, and for community services.’*¹³

98% of survey respondents said that the Church had an important role to play in community development. Chance to Thrive groups are clearly not, however, community owned organisations. At the same time many of them are working towards being led by the community and providing a focal point for activity within the community.

11. Conclusions

Chance to Thrive is an ambitious programme, which sets out to transform communities, in ways that will take a generation to achieve.

Judging by the amount of activity demonstrated and outcomes achieved in each Chance to Thrive area, and comparing these with cost of the programme, it is both highly effective and efficient.

At the same time, it is very difficult to attribute all of the local benefits to Chance to Thrive itself. This is partly because it is hard to define; areas have implemented it in different ways. It is also because there have been lots of other elements at play. These include dynamic ministers who may have generated a lot of the activity anyway and other staff, some of whom have been paid for through successful funding applications written by Chance to Thrive groups.

At this stage it is doubtful whether some of the targets will be achieved by the end of five years. It is unlikely that another £19m will be forthcoming. None of the Chance to Thrive groups appear to

¹³ UK Government Dept. of Communities & Local Government (2007) *Third Sector Strategy*

be developing local artists. If there is a substantial reduction in poverty and increased population stability in Chance to Thrive areas, it will be hard to attribute it to the programme.

There is a further question about how sustainable the Church of Scotland's involvement is in the long term, given the demographic of those most involved.

What is absolutely clear is that Chance to Thrive has brought a huge amount of hope, motivation and practical offers of support into congregations at local levels.

“Chance to Thrive has promoted resilience within the congregation.” (Minister)

In the eight areas it has put the Church building back in the heart of the community. It has also mobilised the asset that is the congregation to work alongside the local community and local agencies for the benefit of the local area. All of the eight congregations look set to build on the progress they have made so far over the next two years.

12. What could happen next?

Chance to Thrive demonstrates how much faith-based communities can, and do, contribute to the regeneration of Scotland's poorest areas with a minimal amount of investment. Their contribution is tangibly different to statutory agencies, and is recognised as such by local partners.

The Scottish Government continues to acknowledge the increasing expertise faith-based organisations have in community regeneration in a variety of ways. It could do more to encourage them to take up their role in local communities by:

- offering advice, funding and support
- ensuring that they are referenced in policy documents
- using its influence to put pressure on local statutory agencies to include and support faith-based organisations

The Scottish Government could also play an important role in exploring and endorsing the model, encouraging other national organisations, both faith-based and secular, to explore it for themselves.

There is a need to be cautious of too close a collaboration. The Church should not be seen as a replacement for community services generally.

Many local authorities have been slow to recognise and support the role of churches in community regeneration. The evidence in this evaluation shows that small amounts of investment, support and appreciation by local statutory partners can yield a huge amount. Local authorities should prioritise getting to know their local faith communities and finding out how they can work with them

in the best interests of local communities.

Chance to Thrive groups have learned a lot about partnership working over the past three years, both from their successes and their mistakes. In many ways they seem to be regarded by statutory, voluntary and community sector partners as being in an ideal place to bring people together to work on community regeneration. They are trusted as independent and transparent. Their role as 'an honest broker' in communities and partnerships should be supported and encouraged by local authorities.

13. Recommendations

For the Church

1. There is a lot of learning to be gained from the first three years of Chance to Thrive which can inform the expansion of the programme. In particular we would wish to highlight the importance of sensitivity and flexibility in introducing Chance to Thrive to congregations, the crucial role played by ministers, and the need to include their perspectives from the outset.
2. Those congregations which struggled most to embed Chance to Thrive, were, unsurprisingly, those where there were tensions either between different parts of the congregation, or between the minister and key members of the congregation.
3. The key and replicable elements of the model are: a minister, a mentor, an active group or section of the congregation which is well linked with other parts of the congregation, and a Project Co-ordinator who can bring the Chance to Thrive groups together and also access resources from other parts of the Church of Scotland.
4. Congregations need to demonstrate a willingness to work with partners, an openness to being community-led and a belief in the strengths of the local community as well as an awareness of what needs to change and how they can contribute to that change.
5. It is now important to define a clearer role for mentors and to draw up a role description for them, which includes the requirement to draw up an agreement between themselves, the ministers and the Chance to Thrive group.
6. It is also crucial to encourage and support congregations to work out the relationship between a Chance to Thrive group, the Kirk Session, and the presbytery. Both this and the intervention in would make the best use of resources.
7. The enabling panel has not played an essential role and could be discontinued, although it is important for the Church to use its networks to draw in expertise when needed.
8. Chance to Thrive has always been about liberating the expertise and energy within existing congregations and communities. The eight foundational Chance to Thrive groups have learned a huge amount from implementing the model in their communities and have now become experts in the process themselves.
9. At the 2014 Research Seminar, members of existing Chance to Thrive congregations

offered to support the new congregations. The Director of the Scottish Community Alliance also recommended a 'peer mentoring' approach. It is imperative that this offer is taken up so that the assets based, bottom up ethos of Chance to Thrive is continued.

10. Chance to Thrive is becoming more aware of the importance of taking an assets based approach. If it is looking for congregations to do the same, it needs to support them to understand what that is. This could be done through training on assets mapping and challenging assumptions and prejudices within congregations.
11. The Church of Scotland has not always been effective at transferring the learning from one regeneration programme to another, nor at building links between programmes. The lessons of Chance to Thrive need to be drawn on as new programmes such as The Path of Renewal develop. One way to start this could be to organise a learning session for key personnel at 121 George Street to examine the findings from this and other evaluations such as Go For It, where this is a cross-over of learning.
12. Those ministers who participated in Chance to Thrive contributed hugely to its success. Most were involved in their congregation's application process, but a couple were drawn to the congregation by their participation in Chance to Thrive. As noted earlier, most were women and all had participated in training or coaching programmes, which encouraged a collaborative leadership approach. This was evident throughout the programme and ministers were honest about the difficulties in adopting this approach on both sides.
13. We recommend that the Church of Scotland continues to encourage collaborative leadership training for ministers. Existing Chance to Thrive groups could provide good placement opportunities for new ministers.

For the Scottish Government

14. Chance to Thrive demonstrates how much faith-based communities can contribute to the regeneration of Scotland's poorest areas with the minimal amount of investment. Their contribution is tangibly different to statutory agencies, and is recognised as such by local partners. They are there for the long haul and whilst some are set on recruiting members, many are more interested in a growth in the spirit and life of the whole community.
15. The Scottish Government already recognises the huge strengths that faith-based organisations can bring to community regeneration activity. One steering group member noted increasing collaboration with civil servants:
"We are now being seen as less of a think-tank and more of a doer that talks from its own experience"
16. We recommend that the Scottish Government continues to acknowledge the increasing expertise faith-based organisations have in community regeneration in a variety of ways.
17. It could do more to encourage faith-based organisations to take up their role in local communities by:
 - offering advice, funding and support

- ensuring that they are referenced in policy documents
 - using its influence to put pressure on local statutory agencies to include and support faith-based organisations
18. Chance to Thrive groups show the potential for a national faith-based organisation to mobilise the assets within local community faith-based groups, which in their turn can provide both an inspiration and a resource for local communities. There are key components of the model which could be replicated elsewhere. These include the value of volunteer mentors and the huge potential of volunteers generally.
19. The Scottish Government could play an important role in exploring and endorsing the model, encouraging other national organisations, both faith-based and secular, to explore it for themselves.
20. There is a need to be cautious of too close a collaboration. The Church should not be seen as a replacement for community services generally. With the closure or pricing up of community centres this is already beginning to happen. Many of the volunteers were older, and this reflects not just our ageing population but in particular ageing congregations, and paid workers (including ministers) played a vital role in harnessing the energy of volunteers.
21. Much of the value of faith-based organisations comes from their independence. One straight talking mentor pointed out that there are different values at play:
- "CTT reflects the need to make partnerships with Government and current structures. There is a tension between this and remaining focused on values not derived from Government agendas. We need to be wary of Government partnerships. The church agenda for poor areas is to love them. The Government agenda is about shutting them up!"*

For local authorities

22. Many local authorities have been slow to recognise and support the role of churches in community regeneration. The evidence in this evaluation shows that small amounts of investment, support and appreciation, by local statutory partners, can yield a huge amount. Local authorities should prioritise getting to know their local faith communities and finding out how they can work with them in the best interests of local communities.
23. At the same time it is important to recognise that faith communities have a different outlook and different priorities to the statutory sector. Their strengths should be recognised rather than harnessed and they cannot be thought of as a replacement for other community facilities and support.
24. Chance to Thrive groups have learned a lot about partnership working over the past three years, both from their successes and their mistakes. In many ways they seem to be regarded by statutory, voluntary and community sector partners as being in an ideal place to bring people together to work on community regeneration. They are trusted as independent and transparent. Their role as 'an honest broker' in communities and

partnerships could be supported and encouraged by local authorities.

14. Final Word

“The genius of Chance to Thrive is that it unearths the treasure that is already there”

Asset based approaches are constantly being talked about and rarely effectively and systematically implemented. Chance to Thrive shows that it is possible to successfully implement this approach, by focusing very locally and allowing time, and providing a small amount of support, when necessary.

Minimal emphasis on goals, and no targets, has allowed Chance to Thrive to evolve slowly and flourish gradually, rather than be focused and driven. This has caused frustration at times. But generosity has become its hallmark; the generosity particularly of the volunteer mentors and the volunteers in congregations and communities.

That generosity has enabled local congregations to seek and include partners without having to be concerned about who gets credit for achievements. This has, in turn, generated trust.

Communities and local agencies have learned about the contribution an active energetic church can make to their ability to thrive; churches and congregations have learned that communities have much to teach them about living their faith in the world.

Notes





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