

# TOGETHER FOR A CHANGE

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July 2004

## Moments of Change

*Martin Johnstone, Project Coordinator*

It was one of those moments that changed people. At this year's General Assembly, there was a special evening session which took the form of a poverty hearing – a chance for those present at the Assembly to hear about what life is like for some of the many thousands of people living in poverty in Scotland today.

The evening focused around three interviews, involving David, Jean and Gordon, in which they shared with enormous honesty and frankness; some of the struggles which had scarred, continue to damage their lives.

There was one particular moment that will live with me - when Gordon spoke of a particular episode in his life. A gasp of horror went round the hall. People hung on his every word. And tears flowed freely in the hall. At that moment, I firmly believe that Jesus was among us, and that we were filled with passion and compassion, determined to help to shape a better world in which poverty no longer destroys and kills people before their time.

This is what Together for a Change is really all about. It is about confronting the people in the Guild, and through you the wider church and society, with the awful reality of poverty – a poverty that kills. One frightening statistic we heard at the Poverty Hearing was that a man in Shettleston lives, on average, 18 years less than a man in north-east Fife.

People sometimes say that when people are poor, it is their own fault. That has not been my experience. I have met too many wonderful people – people like David, Jean and Gordon – who have struggled against all the odds to do the very best they can.

In this Update, we share with you a little of how the work is going in Together for a Change and of the challenges we are facing in Easterhouse and along the Royston Road, as well as in Jamaica and the Gambia. But the greatest challenge exists not there but where you are –

that you might lift people out of their apathy and enable them to get passionate and yes, even angry, that in a world of plenty those in poverty are still dying before their time. Let's together do something about it.

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## Easterhouse – Jamaica

*Stuart Duff, minister of Lochwood Church of Scotland*

In the film Chariots of Fire there was a scene where Eric Liddell was running in the 440 yards race. He got off to a bad start, tangled feet with J. J. Gillies of England and tumbled to the track. He sat there dazed for a moment, not knowing whether he could get up, when an official screamed, "Get up and run!" Liddell jumped to his feet and in his unorthodox style of running took off after the pack, which was now a full twenty yards ahead of him. With forty yards to go, Liddell pulled into third place, then second and then right at the tape he passed Gillies, winning the race, and immediately collapsed in total exhaustion.

Despite the odds against him Liddell got up and ran, winning the race and the admiration of the crowds. It's very easy to give up especially when things go wrong or go against you. We wonder what's the point, how can we ever succeed? Yet there is something glorious about getting up and keeping on going.

Operation Easterhouse - Jamaica got off to a good start with a number of community groups involved. Yet unfortunately despite the good start the community groups that had expressed an interest pulled out. This reflects something of the fragility of life in a Priority Area, as people's lives and situations can so easily and quickly be knocked sideways.

Although it has been disappointing we aren't out of the race but still very much in it. Along with the youth group (TYO), Girls and Boys Brigade companies in Lochwood Church we have also links with the Music and Religious

and Moral Education (RME) Departments at Lochend Community High School, which will help us take the project forward with our partners in Kingston, Jamaica.

Through the internet and musical links with the Mel Nathan Institute in Kingston (elementary to secondary school) we hope that those in S3 will from the autumn of 2004 be able to build up a better understanding of the issues affecting them as young people and learn of the issues affecting their counterparts in Jamaica.

The other strand of Operation Easterhouse - Jamaica is to link the Boy's and Girl's Brigade companies in Lochwood with companies in Jamaica so that they can share about the issues and challenges that face them. The climax of all the work that will be done will be exchange visits taking place sometime in 2006.

Groups of teenagers from each location will be able to get a first hand insight of the issues that they have been finding out about as a result of their conversations. These exchange visits will be an important part of the process of understanding and exploring the issues of poverty. We trust also that the experiences gained from these visits will not only broaden the horizons of young people in Easterhouse but also enrich their lives as they learn about the hopes and fears of other young people in another culture.

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## Royston – Gambia

*Russell McLarty, minister of St Paul's Church of Scotland*

Firstly **we made a DVD** which helped us explain the project locally and get support from 4 local community groups in different parts of this large community of 10,000 people in Glasgow's East End.

We now have the wonderful answer to our prayers in a **World Exchange Placement**, Alzira de Costa, from Goa, India. Alzira, as an outsider, will be asking local people a key question; **'How has life changed for better and for worse over the past 15-20 years?'**

By asking individuals and then sharing thoughts on this matter in groups we hope to be able to come to a better understanding of how poverty has changed over this time. We are quite clear that people in our community still suffer disadvantage in so many ways and most



*Alzira de Costa who arrived in Glasgow as a World Exchange Placement from Goa in India*

certainly suffer a 'poverty of spirit' which means that they do not live their lives to the potential and do not contribute to wider society as they might. Alzira comes to Glasgow with experience in teaching and in community and group working. She is a most charming and engaging personality and we believe that she will work well with local people.

We plan to have **an artist residency** to follow up on the work Alzira has been doing. This residency will work with local people to help us understand the real issues in some form using people's creative talents.

We continue to look for **the best ways to set up the exchange visits** for 2005 linking with people who have made successful exchanges and trying to learn from success and mistakes!

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## Still need a speaker?

Do you still need a speaker for next session?

Martin Johnstone (Coordinator) is going to be available for four weeks for those who may be planning Presbyterian Council meetings and rallies. These dates are:

**13–17 September 2004, 25–29 October 2004**

**8–12 November 2004, 18–22 April 2005, 16–20 May 2005**

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