

Executive Summary

Go For It Fund Impact Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Scotland's *Go For It* Fund, launched in 2012, was designed to encourage creative ways of working which develop the life and mission of the local church and are transformative for both communities and congregations. It aimed to achieve this through community engagement and good partnership working. *Go For It* provided 'first funding' to help new ideas grow and bear fruit, supported by a relational approach to the role of funder. This report examines the impacts of that funding and of the approach taken by the Fund.



THE IMPACT OF FUNDING

Range and Depth

Go For It allocated just over £7million in the form of 377 grants to 237 organisations.

Funded projects have reported reaching 152,856 people, engaging 3,152 volunteers and employing 429 staff between 2012 and 2019.

The programme funded a ‘spectacularly diverse’ range of activities and supported some projects throughout their lifecycle from concept to maturity.

The projects were highly valued and relevant, with 92% of survey respondents indicating that their project did or was expected to continue after the end of the grant.

Lives Transformed

Projects addressed local community needs across Scotland and other places where there are Church of Scotland churches, delivering improvements in mental health, financial health, support for addiction, social isolation and many more areas. Lives were transformed through the projects and several had their work recognised through national and local awards.

Renewed Sense of Purpose

Congregations found a new sense of purpose describing themselves as ‘more active’, ‘outward-looking’ and ‘beginning to understand the importance of closer bonds with the community’. Often this stemmed from wider and more daily use of the church buildings which generated a ‘buzz’.

In many cases this contributed to increased acceptance and tolerance and a more compassionate parish church. The majority (89%) of grantholders responding to the survey believed that their church was more outward looking as a result of their Go For It-funded project.

Some grantholders believed the perception of their church in the local community had changed and that church was no longer seen as ‘just for Sunday’.

Engaging with Younger People

Go For It has funded many youth and ‘Messy Church’-type projects. Bringing more young people into the church congregation was cited by 40% of grantholders responding to the survey as a key achievement. There was some evidence that funded projects had helped to address apprehension about crossing the threshold of a church for some young families.

More People Engaged in the Life the Church has to Offer

‘Creating new ecclesial communities’ was selected by 31% of projects as a project aim on their funding application form. However, 45% of grantholder survey respondents agreed that they were developing a new ecclesial community and 74% that they were exploring a new or different model of mission (communicating the good news of the Gospel).



MAIN IMPACTS OF THE FUND FOR CHURCH AND COMMUNITY



Figure i: Key areas of impact for church and community

The process of better understanding the needs of local communities helped congregations discover ‘how needing God manifests itself in our locality’ bringing ‘life in all its fullness’ to people through focusing on their health and wellbeing.

Benefit of Partnerships

Partnerships between churches and local community groups or organisations were viewed as ‘win-win’, bringing benefits to both. Relationships with well-established Christian organisations such as Scripture Union were also strengthened.

Community partners reported that the support both local people and their own staff or volunteers had experienced through these faith-based projects was transformative.

Increased Recognition and Value

Churches were valued by other agencies working locally (including statutory, business and Third Sector) as respected providers of support within their communities, rather than solely as places for Sunday worship.

The Church more widely has achieved a higher profile nationally. MPs and MSPs have been encouraged to engage with projects in their constituencies, with 50–60 project visits by individual parliamentarians taking place across Scotland, often developing new relationships.

Tackling Poverty and Social Injustice

Through this funding programme the Church has demonstrated its connectedness and response to social injustice within communities, reaching some of the most vulnerable and isolated groups in society with support, practical help and connection. Of the 377 projects awarded *Go For It* grants, 56% included the criterion ‘Tackling poverty and social injustice’.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF GO FOR IT

Go For It funding was regarded by the organisations and congregations that benefited as having distinct characteristics. These are described in Figure ii.



Figure ii: Distinct characteristics of the Fund

THE IMPACT OF THE RELATIONAL APPROACH TAKEN BY THE FUND

Well over half (58%) of grantholders responding to the survey said that they would not have been likely to get their project off the ground without the support to develop their idea, to articulate their aims and to develop a strong funding proposal. Many would not have been able to attract funding from any other source to take their faith-based approaches.

The rigour of the application process and ongoing reporting, coupled with support through training courses and from the staff team, were acknowledged by most as helping projects to be in a better position to attract ongoing funding from other sources.

Grantholders responding to the survey indicated that the training and support offered by the *Go For It* team and partners helped them to achieve their goals more effectively (77%).

Projects that received *Go For It* grants grew in confidence, in their ability to develop and deliver impactful projects and to attract ongoing funding or to become sustainable.

Go For It successfully provided a relational approach to funding and provided valued opportunities to learn and to share learning with other projects.

WHAT THE CHURCH CAN LEARN FROM GO FOR IT

- Local churches can successfully create a balance between Word and social action to benefit their communities and congregations
- Through taking social action, local churches can come closer to the heart of their communities
- Churches can do more to learn from one another's experiences and problem-solving approaches
- The Church would benefit from more prominent national reporting on the achievements of local church projects
- Projects in their early stages tend to develop organically and may move away from initial outline budgets and indicators, requiring a flexible approach to funding to achieve maximum impact

"Resourcing local churches to share in Word and action the Gospel in their neighbourhoods".

Church of Scotland stakeholder describing the Fund's purpose

