

Community Franchising

Business Franchising is common place in our society for example as we walk along a High Street we see retail franchises such as Thortons chocolates, Subway, Boots Opticians, Rohan and Bang & Olufsen. It is simply about duplicating success by providing an established brand, product/service and training to budding business people.

Now the Church is taking hold of Community Franchising as local churches around the country are replicating successful social action projects rather than reinventing the wheel.

At times in history the Church has been pivotal in delivering our country's social welfare system and, contrastingly, there are other periods when the Church has been woefully disconnected from the needs of our society. Today the country's 30,000+ local churches are increasingly involved in social action and serving people through thousands of Community Franchise projects.




The Cinnamon Network, a group of 100 executives of Christian social action organisations, have recently completed research that has revealed that church volunteers are contributing 72 million hours every year to serving communities which, together with donations and gifts in kind, is valued at over £1 billion per annum.

Community Franchising is the new name for replicating successful church-led social action projects. Communities Secretary Eric Pickles at a recent event about Community Franchising commented, "In the eyes of some, being religious is seen as being "weird". They don't want public discussion about faith, and don't want faith to have a role in our communities. Everyone – whether religious or secular – loses out from that kind of attitude. We need to ensure that all our faith groups have every opportunity to make their mark."

Powerful examples of Community Franchising projects which have been growing rapidly over the last decade include: Street Pastors, which started in Brixton and Street Angels which started in Halifax, to address anti-social behaviour. Between them now mobilising teams of volunteers on Friday and Saturday nights to support people in vulnerable situations. These projects have now been replicated by churches in over 300 communities across the UK.

Another example is CAP, which started in Bradford to help people in debt to become debt free and which has now been replicated by over 160 churches around the country.

The Cinnamon Network has identified that the Community Franchising approach to building and strengthening the muscles of local churches to serve their communities has a number of key advantages:

-  An 'off the peg' social action project which can be adapted to fit the local context without having to 'reinvent the wheel'
-  A social action project that has an established track record of delivering success across multiple other communities
-  A cost effective social action project because research, identification of success factors and training are already developed



A way of working which honours and serves local churches without having to raise significant costs for a central charity.

Community Franchising to date has developed mostly by accident when a local church pioneers a social action project that delivers concrete outcomes. The project is visited by church leaders and activists from other communities who are interested in replicating its success. Soon there are 'how to' guides, franchise agreements, networks of practitioners to share best practice, and professional training and support.

More recent Community Franchise charities such as GB Job Clubs have intentionally developed a nationwide network of projects by following a Community Franchising strategy. GB Job Clubs was inspired by a man who was made redundant and started a small group for mutual support, to share skills and do some word of mouth job hunting. The first GB Job Club in Edenbridge has helped 89 people find work over the last 2 years. Each person now in work is saving the state £8,500 per annum in benefit claims or, in total, over £750,000 annually. There are now over 130 job clubs just like it which have been replicated across the country. This is a strong example of Community Franchising and its ability to deliver local change at national scale and to do so rapidly.

What has changed is that there are an increasing number of charities beginning to follow an intentional Community Franchise approach. There are a cluster of Community Franchise initiatives around the issue of homelessness. Curry Union helping local churches to invite rough sleepers to be guests at a regular curry club. Hope into Action helping local churches to buy a home to house people who are homeless and Winter Night Shelter helping local churches work together to provide accommodation in their buildings for the homeless during the harshest period of winter.

Across the country thousands of churches are addressing social breakdown including family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness, addiction, debt, anti-social behaviour, homelessness, ill health and other crisis issues through Community Franchising. An online marketplace for Community Franchising projects www.communityfranchising.net to help local churches address issues of social breakdown has recently been launched by The Cinnamon Network.

It is time for the Church to do for social action what Alpha has done for evangelism. Community Franchising is just that. Replicating the best the church has to offer in social action. Not reinventing the wheel but taking up off the peg community projects that have a track record for success, moving at speed to address the most pressing issues of social breakdown in their communities. 72 million hours a year is just the start!

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