

For More Information and Contact

To read the full report or obtain the Directory of Faith Based Organisations in Reading either contact the secretary through the website or find further information online there.

www.readingfaithforum.com

Or via 14 Erleigh Rd Reading RG1 5LH

We also recommend the work of another independent organisation: **Reading Interfaith Group** aims to enable members of different faiths to learn about each other's beliefs, practices and traditions to create greater friendship, harmony and understanding. This group organise the well-established Friendship Walk between different places of Worship. www.readinginterfaith.co.uk



FAITH FORUM

READING

Summary of Research Report

The Faith Communities of Reading and how they can increase their capacity to serve Reading



The Faith Communities of Reading

Reading has a thriving faith community. We have identified:

- 109 worshipping faith communities
- An estimated attendance of around 20,000 people. About 3,900 are from world faiths other than Christianity. The responding 55 faith communities in the survey have 11,905 people attending.
- The majority are churches, there are also 5 mosques, a Hindu Temple, a Sikh Gurdwara, two synagogues, a Buddhist priory, a Buddhist community and various smaller groups

A full list will be found in the Faith Forum's Directory.

Faith Communities do a lot for Reading

The faith communities provide Reading with:

- At least 80 community halls and rooms
- The equivalent of between 250 and 400 full time staff in the form of staff and volunteers, whose value to the community is over £5 million a year
- This benefits between 5,000 and 15,000 people

Community Halls

The research has identified at least 45 premises with 80 rooms and halls available to the public, which are run by faith communities. These are a major resource. The nature of the buildings and the lack of more space are also a major limitation on capacity.

Greatly used by the wider community

These meeting places are used by over 100 organisations and groups from outside the faith communities. For example, the 28 churches that responded to the initial survey listed 101 community groups who used them. There is a complete list in the full research report, available online.

Over 100 small groups meet in these community halls

The survey showed that the 55 faith organisations responding to the survey organise/lead 183 groups for their faith communities. These groups offer a huge variety to the community; support to adults, some offer advice or lunches, for parents, the elderly, and for women. Among those responding to the survey there are 9 lunch clubs, 49 groups for adults and 16 women's groups across Reading and faiths. A list of these groups will be found at

www.readingfaithforum.com

Faith-based service delivery organisations

The researcher identified 34 faith-based organisations that serve Reading (32 Christian & 2 Muslim organisations). This list may not be complete. A full list of Service Delivery Organisations will be found in the Faith Forum's Directory.

26 of the Christian and Muslim organisations responded to our survey.

These:

- Employed 114 paid FTE staff, costing £2,565,783 a year
- Manage 532 volunteers working nearly 2500 volunteer hours per week the equivalent of 67 FTE workers
- Deliver services to 2810 clients per week
- Total turn over for these 26 organisations is over £4 million in the last year

These organisations include Churches Together in Reading Drop In Centre, helping & feeding the homeless and needy; Philippi Trust Counselling and training agency; CommuniCare, an information, advice and support centre; FAITH, that fights poverty among the homeless, addicted and marginalised; Reading Frontline, offering free benefit and debt management advice and support.

Youth work in Reading run by faith-based organisations

The 55 worshipping centres that responded to the survey run over 100 groups for the under 18s. (e.g. 44 for youth, 18 for boys, 14 for girls, 19 for toddlers) In addition there are larger projects like the YMCA, PACT, REinspired and others.



1 Bollywood Dancers – youth group of Reading Hindu Temple, performing at the East Reading Community Concert / 2&3 Christian Community Action delivering recycled furniture etc to those in need / 4 Christians from “RE- Inspire” helping deliver the national RE curriculum in schools / 5 The Salvation Army Hostel / 6 Churches In Reading Drop in Centre for the homeless serving lunch / 7 Mustard Tree community shop Dee Rd estate / 8 Churches in Reading Women’s Centre / 9 One of the many groups for carers and Children run by faith organisations

Recommendations for Consideration

Faith communities are “bottom up” organisations and this is both their strength and their weakness. Being “bottom up” means we are really in touch with the reality on the ground and the people who might tackle it. It also means it can be difficult to be strategic.

The report gives us the best strategic view yet in this area.

The full report needs careful consideration but the following areas seem well worth considering further:

The top issues noted by faith organisation include a need for money, better premises and more volunteers. In practice faith organisations are probably motivating a high percentage of volunteers with vision and need always greater than the resources.

Volunteers are required in various communities of need across Reading. A consideration is to raise awareness of this and make the most use of volunteers with particular skills in the areas they are most needed.

Community halls are a major resource that enables the work of faith organisations and others. They also place a limitation on capacity in so far as they are limited in number, space and facilities. Strategic improvement and maintenance is worth considering.

Some new or improved networks would be useful and appropriate for faith communities.

- Youth workers and Children’s Workers
- Those interested in existing Partnerships, LSP and LAA
- Better contact with small black led churches
- Better contact for some faith organisations who do not know of existing resources from RVA and Council etc. such as help with fund raising. In the full report our research makes some useful comments on this.

Parking and changes of parking restrictions were also mentioned as common problems.

The Research

Reading Faith Forum, has received a grant from Change Up to research what the faith communities in Reading already do in Reading, what problems they face and how their capacity can be increased. Jan Hearn was the main researcher in charge of the research. Mohammed Shabir and Nusrat Majeed helped to research some of the faith communities.

What this research does NOT cover

This research focuses on the faith communities as providers of community resources for Reading. Naturally faith communities consider that their main benefit to Reading is religious both in personal spiritual development and in prayer for the town. The research does not take into account the number of people from faith communities who volunteer to serve community through secular organisations or direct to their neighbours. Faith Community groups are also cultural entities which promote mutual understanding, They foster music from Bollywood dancing to Classical anthems. They also maintain many of Reading’s historic buildings.