



ABBKEYVIEW

Together we make a community

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH



He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

(Matthew 13.31-32, NIV)



Summary

In a short community research project in 2019 we found that people value the friendliness and community spirit in Abbeyview. The research has also identified some gaps, especially for young children and families. A minority feel that there are barriers to engagement and find it hard to break into existing groups. St Ninian’s Church and its Minister are well recognized as a presence that supports people to belong to the community. St Ninian’s is now recognized as a partner in the local action plan by the other community groups in Abbeyview.

Background

In early 2019 an application was successfully submitted to the Church of Scotland’s ‘Go For It’ fund for a grant to carry out pilot research to support St Ninian’s Parish Church in Dunfermline, Fife to deepen its engagement with the local community. Work started in March 2019, with support from the Craighead Institute of Life and Faith. The research has been a joint effort with local community partners.

The Church of Scotland is engaged in a journey of radical change. This project forms part of a bigger picture of the story of St Ninian’s as a church that seeks to serve its local community and to be open to doing so in new ways. Situated at the heart of Abbeyview, the church building is already well used by the community for activities and the church members serve the community in many ways.

Aim

The overall purpose of the research was to identify areas of community life that residents in Abbeyview considered to be in need of support and to scope opportunities for the church to become more engaged in social action. There was also a wish to build local partnerships to bring together skills and resources and to consider what such engagement might mean for the development of the church over the next 3 years.

Method

The approach was a participatory research design in which church members and their community partners would carry out the research and reflect on the findings to develop the action plan together.

A research group, formed of people from local groups, met 6 times between April and September 2019. The group comprised active members of Abbeyview Community Council, Lynburn Primary School Parents Teachers' Association, the Tryst Centre and Fife Council (Community Capacity Building) and three representatives from St Ninian's Church (the Minister, President of the Guild and President of the Circle of Friendship).

The group felt that not everyone was participating in the community activities being offered in Abbeyview. They therefore decided to find out whether people felt part of the community and what helped or hindered this. The original proposal had been to hold focus groups with three different sections of the community. However, the group opted to try and reach more community members through a survey administered by group members at specific events and venues. By the autumn of 2019 the group felt that it had served its purposes and agreed to feedback the result of its work to inform discussion about next steps for joint actions in the community.



Whose Views Did We Obtain?

230 enquiry forms were completed.

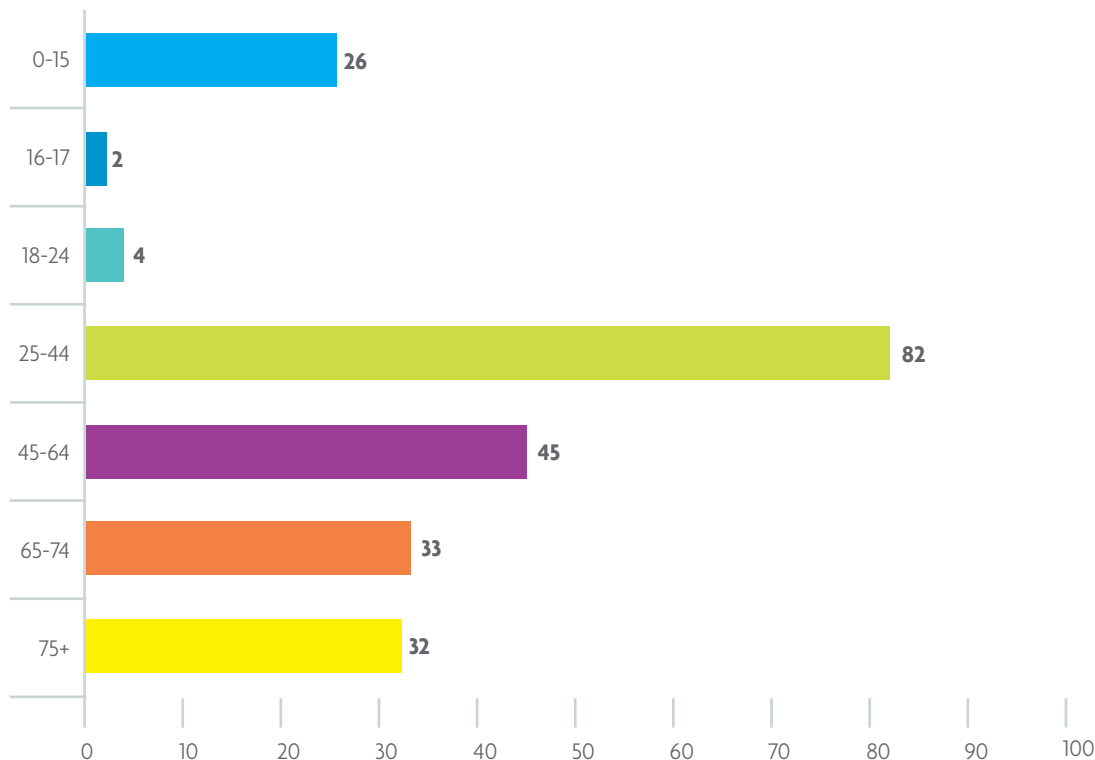
162 (73%) from women and 60 (27%) from men.

The ages of those responding ranged from under 15 to over 75 (see chart below).

Young adults were under-represented.

QUESTION 6: Which age group are you in?

Answered: 224 Skipped: 6



Over 100 people were reached through the Abbeyview Festival (46% of those responding), with Lynburn Primary School Fayre, Abbeyview Bowling Club and the Circle of Friendship at St Ninian's accounting for most of the remaining responses.

Of the 138 people who answered the question about living in Abbeyview, 100 (72%) said that they did so. Of those who said how long they had lived in Abbeyview, 5 were recent residents (under 1 year), 42 had been resident between 1 and 10 years, 34 for 11-50 years and 12 for over 50 years. Two people said they had lived in Abbeyview all their life.

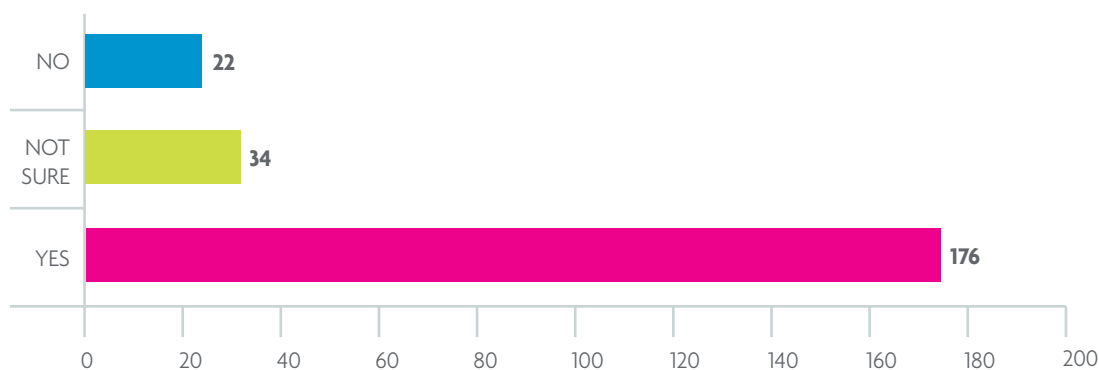


What Did We Find Out?

We found out that there was a strong sense of belonging in Abbeyview. 76% of those interviewed (176/230) said that they felt a part of the community of Abbeyview. Belonging was particularly high among those aged under 15 (88%, 23/26) and over 75s (84%, 27/32).

QUESTION 1: Do you feel part of the community of Abbeyview?

Answered: 230 Skipped: 0



Of the 144 usable responses as to who or what helped people to feel a part of the community in Abbeyview, people-related reasons topped the list.

QUESTION 2: If Yes, who or what helps you to feel like that?



The largest category of responses (31) mentioned the friendliness, community spirit or just 'the people'. The Church was mentioned as the next biggest reason for feeling a part of the community (25 people said this, though none was under the age of 24). School and the bowling club (both places where interviews were conducted) also figured large as reasons for feeling a sense of belonging. Knowing everyone through being resident for some time and the friendliness of the local shops were also important.

Those who had said that they were not sure they belonged or did not feel a part of the community were asked why this was or what might make a difference. There were 60 people responses to this (including 4 from people who did not live in Abbeyview). Suggestions included better ways of involving people and opportunities for families and children including non-means tested activities for toddlers and activities for teenagers.

What Might Make A Difference For Those Who Do Not Feel Part Of Abbeyview?

| | | |
|--------------------------------|----------|--|
| Better involvement | 8 | “Hard to work out how to get involved as a young person” “Too many community cliques, hard for in-comers” “Clubs that aren’t cliquey” “More social media opportunities to get involved in community activities” |
| Better/affordable bus service | 5 | “Lots can’t afford the bus - £2 to town” |
| More information | 5 | “Don’t know where to find information” |
| More activities generally | 4 | |
| More for children | 4 | “Youth club to be open to all ages. Not available for children younger than 9.” |
| More for toddlers | 4 | “Need a non means-tested nursery, kids club” |
| More for families | 3 | “More family events” |
| More for teenagers | 3 | |
| Improvements to park | 3 | |
| Library | 2 | |
| Adult facilities including gym | 2 | |
| Additional support needs | 2 | |
| Rent office open more days | 2 | |

81 of 120 people polled when attending the Abbeyview Festival thought that it was easy to find out about events and activities in Abbeyview. 73 out of 123 said Facebook was their preferred way to find out. The Community Council page was most mentioned and proved itself a key information hub about the school fire.

20 people completed postcards for St Ninian’s at the Festival to request more information. Requests received were for information about: opportunities for baptisms, weddings and funerals (11), requests for prayer (7), wish to speak to someone from the church (6), interested to try out a service (3).



Partnerships

In 2017 the Coalfields Regeneration Trust had supported local organisations in Abbeyview to develop a local community action plan, the Abbeyview Community Action Plan 2018-23 (Coalfields Regeneration Trust with Fife Council undated). Research was conducted in 2017 by Coalfields Community Futures. On the basis of a household survey of 300 residents and a family fun day, priorities were identified for community involvement, facilities and recreation, the environment and local services. The plan espouses a partnership approach and St Ninian's is listed as a potential partner.

Most of the partners in that work have taken part in the current project. The group has met in St Ninian's and has responded warmly to the welcome offered by the Minister. The group agrees that St Ninian's is indeed now a partner in the local action plan and at the conclusion of this research a meeting was held with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to pick up on progress with the action plan. Meanwhile the local partners have been involved (as 'Abbeyview Futures') in consulting the community about a new community hub in order to present a proposal to the Scottish Government to replace the current community centre with a base for a range of services and activities to support the local community, building on the activities established at The Tryst. Results will be shared between the projects.

The fire at Woodmill High School on the very evening of the Abbeyview Festival has imposed a huge strain on the community of Abbeyview. At the same time the community's capacity to meet need in its midst has been demonstrated by its response to the fire. St Ninian's has been a part of that response, not least through the Wednesday cosy café which is important to pupils of the displaced DAS Unit. The church may have a particular place in ensuring that there is support for those who are most impacted by changes, but least able to have their voices heard.

Some Conclusions

Even this small piece of research has demonstrated the strength of community in Abbeyview. Nonetheless there is a clear challenge to broaden the circle of involvement.

The research shows how much is happening and yet there is a wish for more opportunities, especially for those with young families. However, the group has reflected that perhaps what is needed is for community groups to work together to join the dots, rather than simply to start new provisions.

One learning from conducting this research has been that the Church's hospitality can extend to hosting and bringing together local groups and that this has been welcomed. The research has shown that the church and the other activities that take place on its premises is an important way in which people come to a sense of belonging. This suggests that there is the experience and capacity to extend this hospitality to different parts of the community, especially those who feel isolated or lacking in opportunities to take part in activities that would enable them to belong.

“The call of the Church is to encourage people to follow Jesus: to discover for themselves the life transforming power of the Gospel; to know what it is to be loved by and to love God; and to share that love with all those who we meet and with all of creation.”

(Church of Scotland, Radical Action Plan, 2019)

What Next?

There are two standout messages from this research. Firstly, that the community of Abbeyview has strong resources in its people to be welcoming and secondly, that St Ninian’s is positioned to be able to make a difference by the trust it has already built up.

An image for a vision of the Church’s future mission is that of an arbour, of a tree under whose spreading branches the newer and the more settled parts of the community can find shelter. A starting-point may be to build on the strengths identified in the community and to consider asking partners and local organisations to sign up to a community Charter of Kindness (as promoted by the Carnegie Trust) so that the values which will inform any future developments can be stated and communicated.

On this basis there could then be a plan to try one or more new activities of service with the community which might lead to new expression of church. Some of the possible areas for development suggested by the research and from recent developments in the community include:

- Access to pastoral support for the pupils and teachers from Woodmill, possibly leading to a youth group
- A response to the need for low-cost or free support for toddlers
- A men’s wellbeing group in partnership with neighbouring congregations
- Encouraging the congregation of St Ninian’s to become more inter-generational.

In order to take forward such outreach in partnership with others, additional capacity will be needed.

There is the opportunity now for St Ninian’s to reflect on how it wants to continue engagement with local partners to offer support to the community of Abbeyview, perhaps to serve those not currently engaged with church in new ways as a development of its mission to live out the Gospel. The next step is to hold an action planning meeting and thereafter funding will be sought to bring in extra capacity to carry out the identified work with the community.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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