

FITC – Footprints in the Community

Charity of Sir Richard Whittington
Church & Communities Programme

Stepping out into the community with compassion, to meet local need.

Footprints in the Community (FITC) began as a small community cafe in 2012. It has since grown into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation offering wide-ranging support for local people. The aim is to reduce poverty and hardship, improve employability, decrease isolation, and enhance health and wellbeing outcomes. Funding from the Charity of Sir Richard Whittington has supported core costs, helping sustain existing services and develop new ways of working.



Why the work is needed

Redcar and Cleveland have high levels of deprivation and inequality. Health outcomes are below the national average, and almost 40% of children live in poverty. Nearly a quarter of local neighbourhoods rank among the most deprived in England, with low employment rates and high economic inactivity. Free school meal eligibility is high (28.6% in 2022).

Approach

FITC delivers a range of community-based activities to meet immediate needs, such as provision of food. They also address longer-term challenges like skills development, mental health, and social connection.

Key approaches include:

- The Shed – a community woodworking shop and creative space for members to work on their own projects.
- Reflections Dementia Support Group – reducing isolation for people living with dementia and their carers.
- Foodbank and Next Step Shop – providing emergency and subsidised food.
- Community café – a space for social connection.
- Advice and Support – providing financial advice, benefit checks, and debt management support.

FITC brings together people from diverse backgrounds and encourages user-led initiatives. Over 180 volunteers have been trained and supported, many gaining new skills, confidence, and career opportunities.

Partnerships are central to the model. It collaborates with the local council, charities, schools, faith groups, and the NHS. For example, a joint mental health project links statutory and voluntary organisations so people can access joined-up support more easily.

Impact



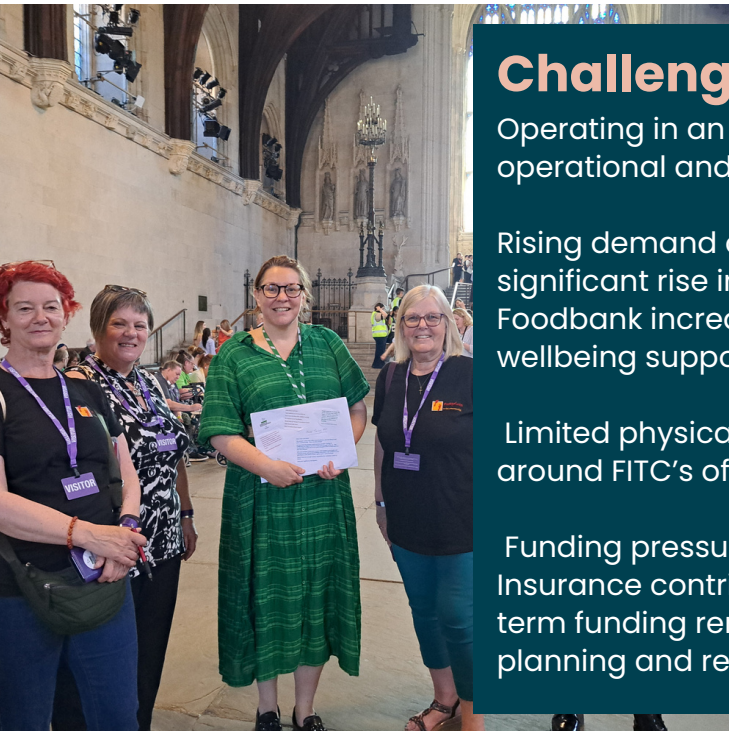
Growing Reach: Over the past year, FITC has supported more than 9,000 individuals. Participants report a wide range of outcomes, including reduced loneliness, improved mental health, greater confidence, new friendships, and access to employment or volunteering.

"I think it's like a family. We all work off each other and work together." Volunteer

"I came here for [social connection]— it's helped me a lot. I don't know what I'd do without this place." Participant

"It's made a huge difference in my life. I've made friends here and it gives me a sense of community and belonging that I'd miss otherwise." Participant

"We've started a community kitchen bringing people of different faiths and backgrounds together to cook and share meals. That's community." Project lead



Challenges

Operating in an area of high need brings ongoing challenges –both operational and financial.

Rising demand and complexity: The cost-of-living crisis has led to a significant rise in requests for help. The number of people using the Foodbank increased by 54% in 2023, while demand for advice and wellbeing support continues to grow.

Limited physical space: Existing facilities are stretched, and uncertainty around FITC's office lease makes long-term planning difficult.

Funding pressures: External costs, such as warehouse rent and National Insurance contributions, have risen sharply. Securing sustainable, long-term funding remains challenging. Short-term grants impact on planning and retaining staff.

Learnings

- Staff have learned to avoid making any assumptions about what people want, and they focus on listening to people's preferences (e.g. the dementia group's preferences for activities).
- They have also learnt the importance of capturing participant stories systematically to evidence impact and inspire others.

"We're much better now at supporting staff—encouraging them to turn their phones off at the end of the day and prioritise work-life balance. You've got to look after your mental wellbeing too." Project lead

Organisational Resilience

Core funding, adaptability, collaboration, and care for staff and volunteers underpin FITC's resilience.

The Future

FITC plans to continue and expand its work to meet growing local need. It intends to reapply for Mercers' support and hopes to move to larger, town-centre premises with more space for services, training, and community gatherings.

FITC values the positive, relationship-based experience of working with Mercers' and appreciates its flexible, proportionate approach: ***"It's more of a relationship, and I hope it's a long-term one. I hope Mercers' see the good we're doing through their funding and want to continue." Project lead***