



Steps to Togetherness

Building connections within and between communities



32 Steps to Togetherness – a collaborative initiative to build connections within and between communities, social solidarity and a sense of togetherness

The challenge of growing social fragmentation across Europe

Modern life raises plenty of challenges that seriously affect our life and mental health. The pandemic has highlighted a persisting issue: loneliness is on the rise, as people are increasingly isolated within their communities. As a result, society is fragmented and people are less tolerant of others.

The bleakly challenging future ahead can feel extremely discouraging: climate change, global conflicts, the complex economic consequences of the pandemic, rising racism and the spreading of false narratives are just a few examples.



An initiative of:



Key Partners:



Finding solutions

A host of civil society and faith organisations across the UK and Europe have come together wanting to encourage and support people and communities to take steps to repair our fragmented society. We believe tackling loneliness, isolation and social fragmentation can start with individuals at a community level.

32 Steps to Togetherness is a **manual providing a comprehensive list of practical actions individuals can take to build connections in and between communities**, by: changing how we think about interactions; developing social relationships in our own local neighbourhoods and our workplaces; and through small but significant changes to our habits and hobbies. When we experience **society as a shared space**, we can develop a shared vision for tackling other issues.

Here is the summary of the 32 steps we can take towards togetherness across eight areas of our lives, to see the full document please go to the website: www.civilsocietyconsulting.co.uk

– Think Well

About cultivating a sense of openness to others and to yourself

1. Assume the best:

If you and the person you're speaking to clash, try focusing on understanding the source of the disagreement, rather than on the point that you disagree with.

2. Accept other points of view:

Try to imagine why someone might think a certain way, using empathy, and, if you don't succeed, remember it's not your responsibility to convince everyone to come to the same conclusion.

3. Be honest with yourself:

When you really think about it, when was the last time you connected with someone who has a really different perspective or life experience from you?

4. Make peace with awkward moments:

Awkward moments happen to all of us. If you're assuming the best in others, then, when an awkward moment happens, try to have faith that others are assuming the best in you too.



– Change Your Habits

Because we default to our habits all the time, making small changes to those habits can have a big effect

5. Say hello:

If you come from a country where it's already normal to say hello, try warming up the interaction by adding a smile or generally some warmth to the interaction. Use it as an opportunity to connect!

6. Use TV and screens as an opportunity to connect:

Talk to others about the TV you watch, it's an easy, guaranteed conversation starter.

7. Be aware of how you influence yourself by choosing who to follow on social media:

Social media can be a tool for connecting with your local area and activities happening in your community.

8. Go somewhere you wouldn't normally go, or encourage others to:

We can act as a bridge for other people: invite people along to places they haven't been to before.

– Help Out

Helping other people releases endorphins (the happy hormones), just like exercise, and strengthens our ties to them. It's contagious! People who receive help are more likely to give help

9. Volunteer for a cause that you care about:

Volunteering can be a win-win – you learn, feel connected and empowered, and valuable organisations get your help.

10. Get involved with youth initiatives:

Connecting with other like-minded young people will make the world feel safer, friendlier and more stable in what can be an overwhelming time in history.

11. Socialise with older people:

With difference comes complementary strengths, so young and old have much to learn and gain from one another.

12. Help out at a food bank or food poverty project:

If you're short on ideas for how and where to volunteer, foodbanks are always in need of an extra pair of hands no matter what your skill set.

– Join Something

Shared activities can build a sense of trust, belonging and common ground between people from very different backgrounds

13. Join a club:

If you're hesitant about making a commitment, explore a club that doesn't require weekly commitments. Try joining a community, cultural or civic centre.

14. Join a class:

Learning side-by-side allows us to build connections organically by uniting us on a common task!

15. Start a book group or film club:

If you're not into books or films, consider what other activity you could use to bring people together. Watching football? Playing cards?

16. Visit a place of worship:

Look into joining the social activities or volunteering at your place of worship, if you aren't already involved, and contribute ideas about how to make activities more appealing to a wider range of people.

– Be A Great Neighbour

We often don't make the most of the fact that we are connected to others simply by living on the same street or in the same building, but why miss out on the potential social connections that can be found right next door?

17. Lower your boundaries with your neighbours:

Whilst being aware of differences between city and small village dynamics, stop for a chat to find out a bit about your neighbours' life.

18. Share food with your neighbours:

If you're cooking for a special occasion, offer any extras (leftovers) to your neighbours as a starting point for conversation (you don't have to leave it to chance either, you could add a little more ingredients especially!)

19. Ask for and give help to your neighbours:

Ask your neighbours when you need some advice with home improvements or to borrow something; and reciprocate it when they are in need.

20. Use seasonal holidays as an opportunity to connect:

Get informed about what holidays your neighbours might be celebrating using the multi-faith calendar or a quick online search.

– Open Up Your Workplace

Work is an opportunity to bring together people who might not normally come together, together. Many of us are working five days a week, so even small changes to the work environment have a big impact on our lives

21. Make sure your team is diverse:

Review your job adverts: replace jargon with more accessible language, e.g. asking for a 'digital native' can put off people of different ages

22. Encourage connections between your team:

Block out time for the team to celebrate birthdays or organise social activities or lunches together.

23. Broaden your reach:

We tend to separate our professional and non-professional worlds, but, if appropriate, softening the line between our two worlds can foster a friendlier atmosphere in both.

24. Unionise or join a professional body:

Unions are important places where peers from the same sector can convene to achieve common aims and to uphold your rights and dignity at work.

– Support Your Local State School

Schools have a role to play in encouraging an inclusive social culture and institutionalising positive social practices amongst students, parents and teachers alike!

25. Help out at your local school:

Schools are always looking for ways to enrich their students' overall learning experiences. Because schools are on tight budgets, volunteering your time can have a real impact.

26. Involve school children in community action:

Engaging children at a young age in different social activities teaches them how to help others. Organisations are often open to receiving the help of schools and their pupils, whose energy and new perspectives can be a refreshing force for good.

27. Ask about school linking:

Connections can enrich the experiences of students by bringing different traditions, skills and perspectives to the table. If you're a student, teacher or parent, investigate whether your school is or could be linked with another school in the country or on the continent!

28. Encourage your local school to teach civic participation:

We need to foster a sense of civic participation in new generations. Encourage your local school to set up a student committee or to elect student representatives on specific issues so that children can have a say in school matters.

– Get Political

29. Write to your local politicians:

Community responses are critical in tackling big issues like social divisions and climate change. Local politicians' duty is to represent the needs of your local area and speak up on the decisions that affect your community.

30. Write to your representatives in Parliament:

Sometimes speaking to your local politicians is not enough when it comes to issues of national concern – social policy such as immigration or education policy. In that case, contact the member of parliament for your area.

31. Use your vote, and vote with your wallet:

Make sure you are informed about your political decisions – if you're not much of a reader, talk to someone who you trust to get their opinion. Whatever you do, use more than one source!

32. Understand the politics of all your social interactions and share these ideas:

Everytime we interact with someone, inadvertently or not, we exchange the values, issues and ideals that are important to us. Therefore, having a friendly chat with someone that is different to you and trying to understand their perspective (and share yours) is political!



32 Steps To Togetherness



Think well:

- Assume the best
- Accept other points of view
- Be honest with yourself
- Make peace with awkward moments

Change your habits:

- Say hello
- See TV and screens as an opportunity to connect
- Consider who you follow on social media
- Take a different path, act as a bridge

Help out:

- Volunteer for a cause that you care about
- Help with young people
- Socialise with older people
- Help out at a food bank or food poverty project

Join Something:

- Join a club
- Join a class
- Start a book group or film club
- Visit a place of worship

Be a great neighbour:

- Invite your neighbours round
- Cook or bake for your neighbours
- Ask for and give help to your neighbours
- Do seasonal cards

Open up your workplace:

- Make sure your team is diverse
- Encourage connections between your team
- Broaden your reach
- Join a trade union

Support your local state school:

- Help out at your local school
- Support community activity
- Ask about school linking
- Support young people to be heard

Get political:

- Write to your councillor
- Write to your MP
- Use your vote, and vote with your wallet
- Share these ideas

FUNDING FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY'S 'BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER' FUND

The National Lottery is now funding a two-year project called **32 Steps to Togetherness – Scotland & England**. The project aims to mobilise the civil society and faith sector by connecting and strengthening mutual understanding, learning and networks between social action leaders, civil society organisations and communities in Scotland and England.

Civil Society Consulting CIC and key partners will use the funding to deliver an innovative programme providing social action, faith and community leaders with the encouragement, improved skills, connections and resources to **improve community cohesion and reinforce the message of cultural and religious tolerance**.

National Lottery funding will enable the partners to reach **civil society and faith & belief-inspired social action leaders and the communities they serve**. The project will focus on 'grassroots' civil society and faith organisations led by diverse communities, especially looking to engage **younger leaders** seen as key agents of change with the motivation to take the lead in shaping their futures. Already other supporting partners engaged in promoting mutual understanding, collaboration and anti-racism networks have become involved as part of #MakeRacismHistory: the European Network on Religion & Belief (ENORB) and the European Network Against Racism (ENAR).

The three key objectives of the Steps to Togetherness – Scotland & England project are:

- To raise awareness of, and counter the threat of intolerance and racism, including faith-hate through the expertise and commitment of a diverse group of community, faith organisations and their leaders
- To encourage pro-social behaviours and initiatives on the ground to empower communities with the confidence to challenge divisive attitudes/behaviours and foster a positive sense of belonging
- To create/build a long-term infrastructure network to promote, showcase and replicate the 'Steps' and associated initiatives actioned by leaders.

Steps to Togetherness will be delivered through a wide range of activities: bi-monthly workshops, discussion sessions, inter-regional project exchanges and visits, capacity building and training of civil society and faith leaders (e.g. our Campaign to End Loneliness training), an interactive project website and 25 project/leader showcasing videos, quarterly engagement – awareness and critical thinking sessions led by inspirational speakers or writers from a host of civil society/faith backgrounds, and the establishment of a strengthened Lived Experience Reference Panel and much more besides based on ongoing consultations.

Come and get involved, first point of contact: Mark Ereira-Guyer
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