

THE CHURCH IN OXFORD

MAPPING SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES & ACTIONS
2025 KEY INSIGHTS

KEY INSIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Viva and Renew Oxford partnered together to begin mapping Oxford's churches – not just their locations, but their current activities and their insight into the needs of the city. We have heard from over 50 churches and Christian organisations, and now offer some key insights from that research, as both a snapshot and a call to action.

Many churches are ready to work together with others to meet those needs. Our research highlights the following four themes for future work, to be taken forward by Oxford churches working collaboratively, with facilitation from Renew Oxford.

**HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES
HOMES FOR PEOPLE
MENTAL HEALTH
ENABLE COLLABORATION**

OUR PURPOSES

Celebrate and foster confidence in the growing contribution being made by Oxford's Christian community

Inspire churches to work together when it is the most effective way to tackle some of the key issues that we face

Facilitate a stronger connection between churches and the public sector to contribute to citywide change for the benefit of all

OUR DISCOVERIES

Over the last 9 months, our team has discovered that churches in the city are:

Growing in number

Rapidly becoming more diverse

Able to articulate the needs of the city

Engaged in wide range of social action

Providing friendship, community and belonging

Generating fresh hope.



Vicki Price
Viva



Steve Jones
Renew Oxford

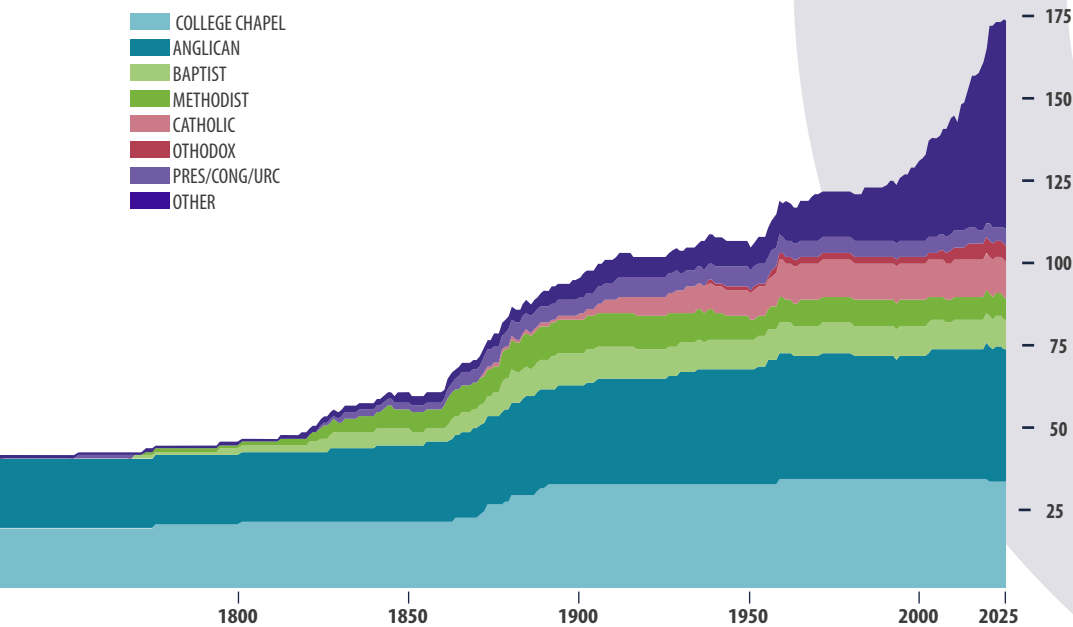
THE CHURCH IN OXFORD

THE CHURCH IN OXFORD IS GROWING AND ACTIVE

The last 25 years have seen a marked increase in churches meeting in repurposed spaces - schools, community centres, cinemas. Many of these churches gather people from across the county, making the city of Oxford a centre of religious life for the region.

TOTAL OXFORD CHURCHES BY TYPE

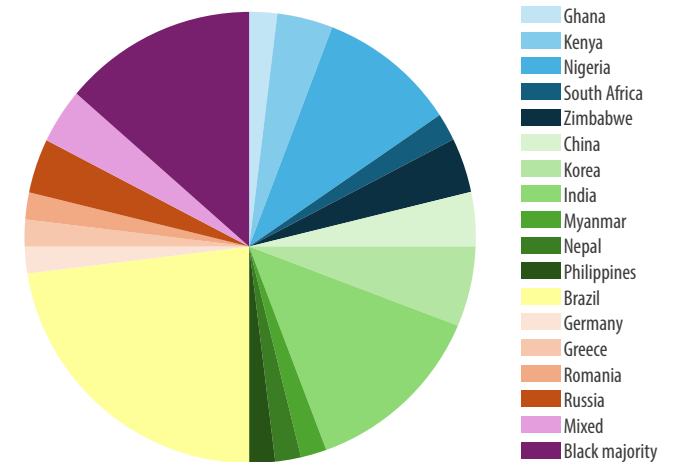
COLLEGE CHAPEL
 ANGLICAN
 BAPTIST
 METHODIST
 CATHOLIC
 OTTODOX
 PRES/CONG/URC
 OTHER



THE CHURCH IN OXFORD IS DIVERSE

Oxford has developed into a thriving multi-ethnic city over the last 50 years, and there has also been a major change in the city's churches. Amongst the 173 churches identified in Oxford today, more than 50 gather an ethnic minority group.

At the same time, other congregations have become very ethnically diverse, especially Catholic parishes and some Pentecostal churches.



Oxford pastors meeting, 2024

THE CHURCH IN OXFORD SEES OUR CITY'S NEEDS

Responses from churches to our survey highlighted six areas of need:

1. Children, youth and families
2. Mental Health and addiction
3. Housing and Homelessness
4. Poverty and the Cost of Living
5. Inclusion and Belonging
6. Creation care

Our team also conducted a review of over 40 publications from the public sector and VCS groups in the last five years, either reporting research on local needs or setting strategic priorities for action. This literature review highlighted the same needs and priorities as our church survey responses. We are therefore confident that churches have a clear view of the city's needs, and share priorities for action in common with public sector strategies and with many other voluntary organisations.



A copy of this literature review, containing many relevant statistics, can be found – together with a detailed report of our survey findings – at: www.renewoxford.org/mapping.

THE CHURCH IN OXFORD IS READY TO ACT

The work, ministry, service, and progress across Oxfordshire is phenomenal. Through churches and charities, individuals have experienced healing, exited trafficking and homelessness, and become debt free – while many parents and youth have experienced relational care and are beginning to break generational cycles.

Analysis of the mapping data showed where the Christian community has capacity to make a greater difference, which identified two main areas for initial focus:

**1. CHILDREN, YOUTH
AND FAMILIES**

2. PEOPLE IN CRISIS

**WE ARE SO ENCOURAGED BY HOW MUCH
PEOPLE WANT TO GET INVOLVED. THE
COMMON RESPONSE IS, 'WHAT CAN I DO?'
THE NUMBER OF CHARITIES IN OXFORD
AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO
VOLUNTEER IS EXTRAORDINARY**

Anti-Slavery Initiative Oxford

CHILDREN YOUTH & FAMILIES

Churches and Christian charities are working to meet the needs of Oxford families. At least twelve local churches mapped run toddler groups, whilst others run parenting courses and a wide range of informal support groups. There is a range of relevant Christian charities operating in the city. These groups identified three themes to consider in developing future work.



**WE HAVE AN
IMPORTANT ROLE IN
TEACHING THE CHURCH
HOW TO CARE FOR
ISOLATED FAMILIES**

Safe Families

1. HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Support for parents and children that is beyond the support given by schools and addresses the different complexities of family life.

School staff can see the need for support in different areas of children's and their parents' lives, including generational cycles of abuse and teenage pregnancy, but do not have the resources to address these crucial gaps.

Particular challenges highlighted were: language barriers; truancy; being unhoused; SEND provision; and supporting young people into employment. There is a need for support that addresses the complexities of family life.

For this theme, solutions included:

- *Sending workers to high-risk areas to build protective relationships with youth*
- *Finding and signposting parenting resources to strengthen and equip parents*
- *Providing spaces for activities*
- *Training in specialised areas such as trauma-informed care and parenting programs*
- *Volunteers for toddler groups*
- *Toddler groups in the afternoon (a current gap in services)*

**OXFORD IS QUITE
TRANSIENT. PEOPLE
DON'T LIVE NEAR
PARENTS OFTEN, AND LACK
GRANDPARENT SUPPORT**

Tiny Tots +

2. MENTAL HEALTH

A key challenge in Oxford is poor mental health amongst children and young people, which can be detrimental to other areas of their lives.

There is a need for anxiety and trauma support, and isolation was identified as a key challenge for both parents and young people, which leads to other difficulties such as low academic engagement and unreached potential.

The primary practical solution suggested here is:

- *to continue and to strengthen support for relevant support services*

3. COLLABORATION: UNITY OF SERVICES

The children, young people and families sector in Oxford is disparate, with lots of charitable work taking place, but difficulties in coordinating delivery with one another, with schools and with local authorities.

The proposed solution is:

- *for each service to become more informed about what others offer, so that they can signpost people to suitable help, and together achieve greater holistic support*

**THERE IS A RISE IN EMOTIONALLY BASED
SCHOOL AVOIDANCE – MAKING YOUNG
PEOPLE AT RISK OF EXPLOITATION,
ISOLATION, LONELINESS, NOT ATTAINING
THEIR POTENTIAL”**

Journey Together

GX



**PART OF THE RETREAT
WORK WE DO SPEAKS INTO
THE IDEA OF THE ANXIOUS
GENERATION ... YOU HAVE TO
OFFER THEM A GREATER LOVE**

Spacemakers

PEOPLE IN CRISIS

When people are in crisis, it is rarely due to a single issue, but because of multiple challenges affecting health, cost of living, housing, etc.

We interviewed organisations focused on supporting anti-slavery, vulnerably housed people, those needing debt advice, asylum seekers and local community outreach. These groups identified three themes to consider in developing future work.

1. HOMES FOR PEOPLE

Space for people to call home is vital for wellbeing.

There is an overall lack of affordable housing in Oxford, which contributes to risk of homelessness. Our research also highlighted a lack of capacity to host individuals in crisis by providing housing and care as they rebuild their lives, including people seeking asylum, survivors of domestic violence and/or labour trafficking, youth aging out of systems, and people exiting homelessness.

Practical solutions suggested:

- *Hosting: Mobilising the church to host individuals exiting crisis for a set time could be transformative for helping people to rebuild their lives*
- *Housing: informing churches about the existing provision for people that are vulnerably housed and how they can support this work*

2. MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Poor mental health is a root cause of wider social issues in Oxford. Trauma, addiction, and isolation were identified as key challenges needing urgent attention for people to heal, rebuild, and thrive.

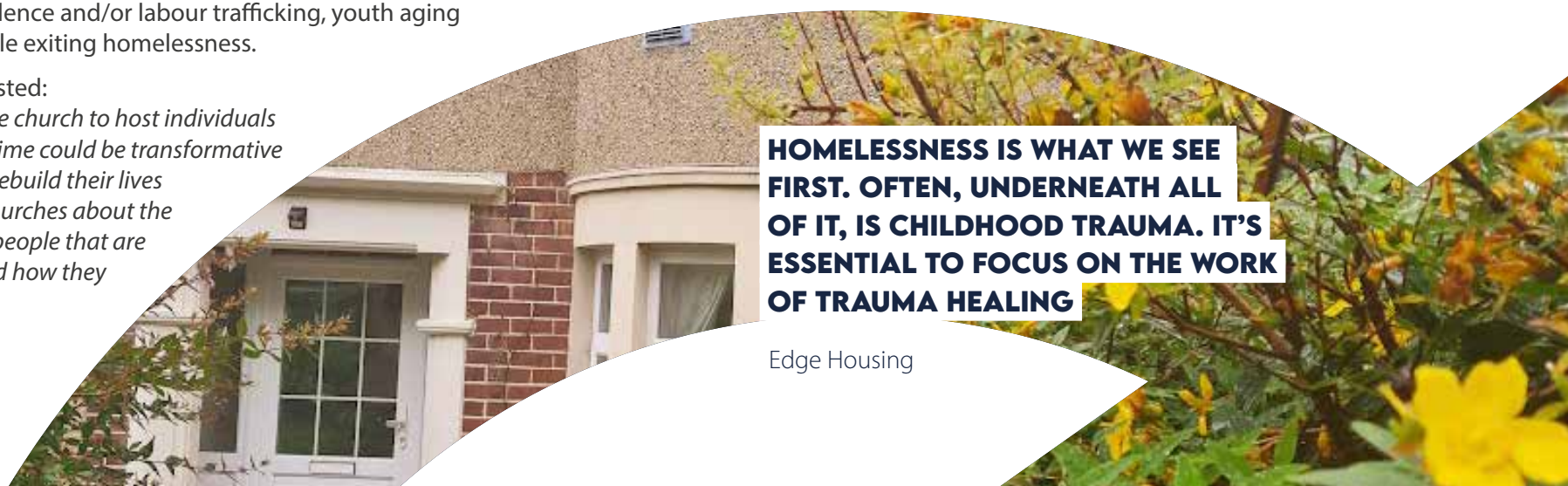
Interviews highlighted that trauma often underpins homelessness, substance use, or debt. Addressing trauma is essential for people to flourish.

Practical solutions suggested:

- *Peer-led group-based mental health models to facilitate healing from trauma. These could be implemented through churches and charities*
- *Drug use and addiction programming*
- *Mobilising the church to increase volunteers, including giving material support (toiletries, clothes, supplies) and facilitating ESL*
- *Mobilising the church to increase skilled volunteers for people in crisis, including legal experts, counsellors, and government, council, and policy specialists*

HOMELESSNESS IS WHAT WE SEE FIRST. OFTEN, UNDERNEATH ALL OF IT, IS CHILDHOOD TRAUMA. IT'S ESSENTIAL TO FOCUS ON THE WORK OF TRAUMA HEALING

Edge Housing



3. COLLABORATION

The church needs unity and collaboration across denominations to ensure the best support is provided for people in crisis.

Interviews highlighted the need for churches to unite in addressing community needs. Interviewees expressed a desire for shared information about programming in Oxfordshire, as increased signposting would widen access to support.

There is transformational potential in mobilising the church to unite to identify signs of people in distress and to link them with available services. This would require raising awareness, educating the church, and having a centralised list of available resources for effective referrals.

Collaboration is also needed with local authorities, as they often hold key to funding, access to specialised support, and structural change to enable all people to thrive.

Practical solutions suggested:

- *Communication channels with information about available services, plus people mobilised to share resources with those in need*
- *Training the church to identify signs of people in need of linkage to services*



FUTURE FOCUS

This research project has revealed how the Christian community in Oxford is growing, increasingly diverse, and already addressing the real needs of the city.

It has also provided some clear focus. As the following diagram shows, the repeated identification of mental health and of the need for collaboration leads to four key themes for future consideration.

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES	PEOPLE IN CRISIS
1. HOLISTIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES	2. HOMES FOR PEOPLE
3. MENTAL HEALTH	
4. ENABLE COLLABORATION	

KEY RECOMMENDATION

Based on our research, we recommend that churches together create a working group for each of these four key themes. Each group should be commissioned to prayer, to learn further about existing activities, to develop citywide networks, and to explore opportunities for more coordinated action.

We ask that these groups aim to bring proposals back to the churches for consideration by Autumn 2026.



Stay in touch with
Renew Oxford!



More detailed data and
reports, including links to
public sector research



Viva Network
homepage



Gather Movement: UK-wide
stories and resources

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