

Communities at the Centre

Evidencing Community-led Health



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Introduction

The case for community-led health has been accepted and now reflected in many policy and practice arenas.¹ Four years ago many community-led health organisations participated in the Scottish Government's national programme Healthy Communities: Meeting the Shared Challenge. While the programme focussed primarily on capacity building of public sector agencies and community and voluntary sector organisations, it also produced case studies demonstrating the impact of community-led health approaches.

With the following five case studies, we return to the themes of those original case studies – poverty and inequality, community leadership and inclusive practice. In keeping with the current context, new themes emerge such as asset transfer and co-production. The case studies capture the story, analysis and findings that demonstrate that the community-led health approach is particularly effective in sustaining the motivation and energy of local people in affecting positive health outcomes. Significantly, it is an approach that leads to development of positive change in the lives of individuals and within the lives of their communities.

The five case studies have different starting points and are located in different settings - some with community members coming together around a need or issue and others through the intervention of a community health project or NHS and Local Authority intervention. They all reflect the enthusiasm, stamina and skills of communities to get involved and work to build neighbourhoods of social networks, positive opportunities and good health.

Acknowledgements

Community-led health organisations

We thank and very much appreciate the time and commitment of the five organisations that shared their learning in these case studies.

Funders

We thank NHS Health Scotland for the funding to research and publish these case studies.

1 Healthy Communities: Meeting the Shared Challenge <http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/mtsc/Continuing%20to%20Meet%20the%20Challenge.pdf>. (2008)

Burnfoot Community Hub

– Borders

The transfer of community assets is central to the current proposal for the Community Empowerment Bill. However, several years ago the Burnfoot Community in Hawick envisaged the take-over of a vacant pub to regenerate community spirit and wellbeing. The lessons along the way are vital to share from securing dedicated support to on-going accountability to the wider community. At many times, the process has felt like a roller coaster to community members and agencies alike, but with the recent news of the BIG Lottery award for a centre that will provide health improving activities and a shared meeting place for everyone – there is much to celebrate.

Health All Round

- Lothian

Invaluable in this case study are the lessons shared from Health All Round's move from a locality where they had strong routes and positive relationships to a new community. The lessons further highlight how a community-led health organisation applies its proven experience and expertise in community development to support a community in coming together around expressed concerns around social cohesion.

PAGES (Parents A-dvisory Group for Education and Socialisation)

– Aberdeenshire

Parent power shines through in developing services in Aberdeenshire for children with additional needs. More responsive services were required for children, together with mutual support for parents. This case study highlights the collective action that was taken by parents to turn a former school building into a thriving resource for early years, older children and teenagers. It documents how parents worked together and also demonstrates the support role provided by public and third sector agencies and organisations in assisting PAGES. The community development process

transformed the quality of life for children and parents alike and this study shows the impact a small community group can make over a sustained period of time.

North Coast Connection

– Highland

When Tongue's local day care centre, the Kyle Centre, was threatened with closure in 2011, a group of local residents decided to take on the running of the centre themselves under the name of North Coast Connection. With the assistance of a local Community Development Officer and a partnership with Tongue's community-led transport providers, the group secured a three-year Service Level Agreement with Highland Health and Social Care Partnership. Since then, numbers using the centre have more than doubled, something North Coast Connection puts down to the open, flexible and needs-sensitive nature of their community-led health approach.

Stepping Stones

– West Dunbartonshire

This case study is evidence of community development processes and approaches that lead to major changes in people's mental health and wellbeing. Back in the 90's, it was a mammoth task for a small community group prioritising positive mental health to gain recognition and resources. Stepping Stones in Clydebank persisted with an approach that built on the expertise and experience of people they worked with. The challenges and changes are documented through lively first-hand accounts from people who initially used the service and then went on to influence and develop its future.

Building the evidence for community-led health - the back story

CHEX is consistently approached by policy makers for evidence to show the impact community-led health approaches have on health outcomes together with their interest in 'scaling up' good practice across the country. The focus is on approaches practiced both by third sector organisations and public sector agencies. But, as CHEX is primarily concerned with community-led health organisations, we create opportunities for these organisations to inform our future direction.

In seeking to build the evidence base, a process was introduced to generate ideas and responses which clearly underlined the challenges in compiling, analysing and using data. While organisations were in no doubt that the approach can and indeed is replicated in different areas, there was concern about capacity to engage, systems to integrate different types of evidence, possible lack of new insights and the risk that research findings would do little to increase understanding and convince policy makers to 'scale-up' the approach. Consequently, CHEX decided to continue to spotlight good practice through the production of case studies, highlighting the learning and core elements that are transferable to other organisations. However, we do fully recognise that there is a profound need for further research into the effects of community-led health approaches. And along with others such as NHS Health Scotland and Evaluation Support Scotland we continue to investigate the most effective method to compile, analyse and present findings to those who make and influence policy.

Community Health Exchange (CHEX)

CHEX supports community-led organisations and networks in low income areas that promote a wide range of activities and campaigns designed to tackle Scotland's health inequalities. Community-led health organisations are supporting local people to develop solutions that address health and wider inequalities. Through activities - such as walking groups, cookery classes, support groups, complementary therapy sessions and training in 'Health Issues in the Community' - they create a range of opportunities to promote change towards positive health outcomes. Including;

- Health & Wellbeing: supporting mental health improvement, promotion of affordable and quality food, social interaction and the promotion of more active lifestyles
- Community Development: empowering individuals and supporting collective community action
- Co-production: placing the skills and knowledge of local people on the same footing as professional 'experts' in the joint design of health, and other, public services
- Social Networks: individuals and community groups coming together to support each other and build social cohesion
- Social Capital: increased as people develop new skills, make new connections and establish new networks of support in their community

www.chex.org.uk

Burnfoot Community Hub

From conversion to transformation



The transfer of community assets is central to the current proposal for the Community Empowerment Bill. However, several years ago the Burnfoot Community in Hawick envisaged the take-over of a vacant pub to regenerate community spirit and wellbeing. The lessons along the way are vital to share from securing dedicated support to on-going accountability to the wider community. At many times, the process has felt like a roller coaster to community members and agencies alike, but with the recent news of the BIG Lottery award for a centre that will provide health improving activities and a shared meeting place for everyone – there is much to celebrate.

Setting

At first glance, Burnfoot seems like a self-contained community on the periphery of Hawick in the Scottish Borders. The boundary lines of open countryside to the north, A7 trunk road the west, disused railway line, industrial estate and the River Teviot to the south accentuate its physical distance from the rest of Hawick. This area of family houses, low rise flats, community primary school, community health flat, two churches and a small row of shops look like an attractive place to live. Dig deeper, however, and you find a large housing

estate (population of 3,594) consisting of predominantly young families on low income with few local services.

Since its development in the 1950s, when homes were built for the once flourishing textile industry, the Burnfoot community has both thrived and then struggled. The diminishing textile industry resulted in significant levels of deprivation; a high proportion of young families and fewer older people. This has resulted in isolation for some older people

and poor health outcomes for many - both in terms of physical health and social/economic circumstances. There are higher than average rates of respiratory diseases linked to smoking and environmental/occupational hazards associated with the traditional manufacturing

facilities for young people; enhanced local environment; and improved community safety. These priorities were translated into action through four working groups. Many local agencies indicated a commitment to supporting and working with community members to get



things done and the resulting 'Community Action Plan 2007-2010' shows an extensive list of agencies willing to offer information, advice, training and resources. Community members responded positively by participating in a range of activities including organising litter picks, family nights, lobbying for a local ATM/cash machine and better transport links.

However, the idea of a community cafe predominated. It was seen as a place that could meet many of the community's identified needs – bringing people together, provision of quality and healthy food, opportunities for training and local employment, the potential to provide child care facilities – a real hub for the local community to meet up, get involved and foster the much sought after community spirit. Initially, investigations for potential premises leaned towards fairly modest premises, but all this changed when the one and only pub in the area became vacant.

industries. There is a higher than average number of recipients of welfare benefits across the whole adult age range.¹ Consequently, over the last 20 years, the community has faced major challenges in re-kindling a once strong community spirit, and specifically confronting the stigma of disadvantage.

Background

The group driving the Burnfoot Community Hub evolved from a community development process started in 2007 when various agencies such as the Healthy Living Network and Community Learning and Development undertook community consultations and engagement to find out local people's needs and priorities. 40 meetings and a number of interviews were held, and over 200 community surveys were returned. Approximately 100 people of all ages attended a community workshop and prioritised improvements to social and community services; increased

of a community cafe predominated. It was seen as a place that could meet many of the community's identified needs – bringing people together, provision of quality and healthy food, opportunities for training and local employment, the potential to provide child care facilities – a real hub for the local community to meet up, get involved and foster the much sought after community spirit. Initially, investigations for potential premises leaned towards fairly modest premises, but all this changed when the one and only pub in the area became vacant.

Organisational Development

The strategic and operational development of the Community Action Plan² introduced the need for community members and others to come from a recognised organisation. Initially a steering group was formed and from that Burnfoot Community Future (BCF) was born. It was established as a company limited

1 Burnfoot Community Hub Project Business Plan

2 Burnfoot – Our local community action plan 2007-2010

by guarantee and is a recognised charity. It currently has 11 directors, approximately 103 members and recognised support from local public and voluntary sector agencies and organisations such as: Scottish Borders Council (SBC), NHS Borders, the Council of Voluntary Service 'The Bridge', Scottish Borders Housing Association and Police Scotland.

The whole group was involved in the first stage application and after approval a Hub Sub Group was set up and tasked to take forward the Hub proposal. During phase two, the Sub Group employed two part-time workers to assist with the development of the business plan.

The Sub Group comprised five directors and three ex-officio advisers. The directors were community members and co-opted members. Taking over the old Roadhouse Pub and surrounding area was a hugely ambitious project which resulted in increased aspirations together with the need for new skills, expertise and knowledge.



The decision to rejuvenate the old Roadhouse Pub brought the group into the new and challenging territory of planning applications, feasibility studies and sourcing funding. It brought new demands on the time of people working in a voluntary capacity and of additional input from agencies that hadn't envisaged the nature and extent of the project. It also introduced possibilities that people had never considered before – a nursery, a community garden, and a centre to accommodate diverse need and intergenerational opportunities.

Partnership Working

Strong partnership working between community members and some of the local agencies has

been fundamental to the development of this project.

"Support has been essential. Without support from the services, we wouldn't have got over the hurdles and struggles."

A Sub Group Member

"They helped to keep us on track and where we're heading next and to believe in ourselves."

A Sub Group Member

Strong relationships have been nurtured through joint problem solving and a respect for each other other's roles and responsibilities.

The facilitation role provided by some agencies created a range of opportunities for community members to realise and build on the skills they needed to achieve the milestones along the way e.g. formally consulting with other members of the community, negotiating for particular priorities and specific approaches. The emotional support when things became tricky was invaluable along with the knowledge base and differing perspectives which different agencies could bring.

Some agencies were more hands on than others and willing to contribute consistently to the process. But, from time to time, the lack of interest and involvement from others

created a degree of frustration amongst group members. When expectations were not fulfilled, community members were left feeling let down. There could be a sense that a disproportionate amount of work and unrealistic levels of responsibilities rested on their shoulders.

Once it was decided to apply for Lottery funding, the guidance and expertise from Scottish Borders Council Lottery officer was invaluable. The Hub's Business Plan had to be

"I've a huge emotional investment in Burnfoot, I've spent nearly all of my life here and I want to be part of improving the area."

Community Member

To get to this stage of major investment in the community has taken a long time and group members were ambivalent about the time commitment it required. On the one hand, there is frustration because of the many meetings resulting in an apparent lack of progress,

but on the other hand there is an acknowledgement that learning about technical information and consulting meaningfully with new and different people does take a long time. In order to fully realise a sense of ownership of the processes involved, people need to be able to work at their own pace and to develop the required confidence and skills. As a result, they will be able to take on the leadership



extremely comprehensive, well thought out and highly crafted document which demanded the expertise and collaborative effort from all Sub Group members.

Community Development and Community Leadership

The commitment from the Sub Group and their advisers to improve the Burnfoot area has shone through at different stages of the project development.

"I was inspired and motivated to be part of the Group because I wanted to improve the area, especially to enhance the wellbeing of every one in Burnfoot – not just physical improvements."

Community Member

of an ambitious initiative such as Burnfoot Community Hub. Furthermore, the Group and the processes they have undertaken have had to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the changing circumstance of group members. One member left due to changing circumstances, but importantly was welcomed back in another role.

"My circumstances changed and I have been encouraged to move in and out the Group. My role has changed, but I realise I can contribute to the process in the different ways."

Community Member

Community development approaches from support agencies have positively impacted on progress in a range of different ways. Capacity building has been key to these approaches.

For example: training from the 'Achieving Community Empowerment' programme¹ and inputs from national organisations like Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS)² have helped group members to assess their strengths and develop their skills.

Contribution to health improvement and tackling health inequalities

Throughout the last 4 years, community directors and local agencies have focussed on securing a community facility aimed at enhancing the health and wellbeing of the local community. Exerting community influence for positive change has been a key part of that.

In responding to their original community consultation of 2006 where people spoke of building community spirit there is now an established round of social events across the calendar at Easter, Halloween and Christmas time. Christmas 2013 brought not only Santa in his horse drawn carriage, but the tremendous news that BIG Lottery had awarded funding for the Community Hub. Success of the application

is testament to the stamina and resilience of local people and agencies that have persisted through thick and thin to achieve this substantial health improving investment into the area.

Other priorities also raised in the original consultation have been addressed. Environmental improvements have been carried out by members of the group around the local shops and play park, such as the painting of the railings and the addition of flower boxes that members of the local community maintain. These improvements are of benefit to the whole community.

Participation in the Burnfoot Hub project has led to health improvement for individuals and the wider community. Taking advantage of the opportunity to contribute to new and challenging experiences has offered those involved access to new information about health, especially about healthy and affordable food and how to use this to raise awareness with other members of the community. It has created opportunities to develop their potential in terms of education and employment and members of the group have gone on to further education with the prospect of worthwhile jobs.



- 1 <http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/achieving-community-empowerment/>
- 2 <http://www.dtascot.org.uk/>

“My life has taken a complete new direction, since I got involved.”

Community Member

Community members report an increase in confidence and skills, derived from engaging in processes that previously would have daunted them, such as lobbying for and securing new services e.g. funding awarded for games areas and installation of ATM/cash machine.

Progress of the Group is clearly documented in a range of reports, funding applications, photographs and minutes of meetings and demonstrates the power of participation by local groups which leads to health improvement.

The Group’s personal testimony and documented evidence of health improvement and ability to tackle inequalities shows the impact of this work both on individuals and the wider community.

Sustainability

The Group developed its potential to secure funding for the Hub and it became more evident that new skills and expertise would be required to manage the Hub in the future. These would include strategic development, continuing generation of revenue and capital funds and demonstrating their positive impact to funders and the wider community. As part of this process, people who had invested a huge part of their life to the Group were required to step down, a sensitive situation for any group. Importantly, Group members wanted to ensure that any member leaving the Group would be valued in other roles and supported in different ways to contribute to the Hub’s life. This challenging process for the Group was helped by both guidance and overall support from local agencies.

Learning from the preparatory processes has been invaluable. For example, the Group realised at different stages that there were no clearly identified roles or jobs for enthusiastic volunteers. Community members would respond to ‘calling notices’ for meetings, only to find that once information was conveyed to them there was little else for them to do. So

they agreed that recognition of this learning should be built into the running of the Hub.

The experience gained from being a volunteer in the Sub Group will help greatly in the running of the Hub. The Hub’s range of activities and what it can offer the community will be dependent on volunteers. The Community Directors are able to pass on and share their extensive knowledge with new volunteers – managing expectations, building social networks, managing demands on time, exploring new ideas, using new opportunities and influencing decisions. The directors are well aware that people need to be matched with and supported in various roles, ensuring that they play to their strengths and that it is an enjoyable and positive process for all concerned.

The Group is now in a strong position to ensure that the Community Hub transforms aspirations into day-to-day community health activities that bring enjoyment, new opportunities and good health for all in the Burnfoot community. However, no one is under any illusion that the hard work is just starting! There is a need for public sector agencies to: continue to build a shared understanding of community’s needs, ambitions and capacities; stimulate new ideas and effective ways to operate; build the commitment to community empowerment and implement a strategy for income generation. This will ensure the Hub is about economic development as well as good health and wellbeing. These are just some of the challenges!

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Health All Round

A Good Move



Invaluable in this case study are the lessons shared from Health All Round's move from a locality where they had strong routes and positive relationships to a new community. The lessons further highlight how a community-led health organisation applies its proven experience and expertise in community development to support a community in coming together around expressed concerns related to social cohesion.

Setting

In September 2012, Health All Round relocated within South West Edinburgh to its new home in Westfield Avenue, having been established in the area for many years.

The organisation therefore brings its wealth of experience and knowledge of what works to its new premises. It continues to serve the diverse communities of Gorgie/Dalry, Saughton/Stenhouse and also the surrounding communities of Saughtonhall, Hutchison and Shandon. The catchment area faces

considerable health, social and economic challenges - a higher than average rate of single adult dwellings, people on welfare benefit, low birth weight, people receiving psychiatric support, premature death through Coronary Heart Disease, cancer and alcohol problems¹. The work of Health All Round brings added value in the delivery of strategic priorities and makes a considerable contribution to tackling health inequalities at local level².

1 Ref: ScotPHO 2010

2 Ref: CHP presentation/CHEX Event 2013

Background

Health All Round is a well-established Edinburgh community-led health organisation, having existed in the Gorgie/Dalry area of the city since 1996¹. The move in 2012 was significant in the life of the organisation. Moving from an established base in the inner city to a new housing complex in a different neighbourhood brought new and distinct challenges to the organisation – building new relationships, reviewing needs and assets, re-visiting proven community development approaches and profiling its expertise and services. Simultaneously, Health All Round had to maintain a clear vision of its main purpose to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.

The organisation had many things going for it – an experienced co-ordinator, a committed and experienced staff team of six part-time workers, a large and enthusiastic group of 40 volunteers and strong governance by four Directors of a Company Limited by Guarantee. Its cocktail of funding from City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Community Health Partnership, Health Inequalities Fund and small grants from Scottish Community Fund, Neighbourhood Partnership, BIG Lottery Fund and Robertson Trust provide the basis for operation, but income generation is constantly at the forefront of ensuring a sustainable and thriving organisation.

Organisational Development

Health All Round's Business Plan (2012-2015) sets out the intended organisational development for the organisation along with identified outcomes, strategic aims and outputs. Crucially, it highlights the philosophy and values underpinning the organisation's work programmes:

1 In 2004 the organisation changed its name from Gorgie Dalry Community Health Project to Health All Round

"People within our community who experience inequalities should be supported and enabled to participate in community life and influence planning and development of local resources."
Health All Round

It is an ambitious plan seeking to: improve physical wellbeing, mental health, social interactions, strong and supportive friendships and opportunities for local volunteers in training and employment. The plan also works



A grand announcement

to increase the participation of local people previously not involved in a community activity and support for local people to shape and influence Health All Round's service provision. Importantly, the Plan also focuses on the training needs of the Board of Directors, staff and volunteers together with providing a safe and supportive working environment for all, including students on placement.

Partnership Working

In moving to its new location, Board members and staff set about developing strong working relationships with other community organisations and local services. Surveys of local needs and assets highlighted new opportunities and two priorities emerged: building social cohesion in the immediate neighbourhood and participation in a district-wide infrastructure to promote and sustain walking.

Activities

Building social cohesion

In working with the local Tenant's Association and Housing Association (Dunedin Canmore), a new initiative 'Welcome to Westfield' was created. It was well known that certain barriers existed between the blocks of flats. The three organisations wanted to create conditions that would help foster a greater community spirit and promote a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Joint working with the Tenants Association and Housing Association offered a real opportunity for Health All Round to build relationships with community members and become a trusted and reliable resource in the area. There was a common goal, but each partner gave their own particular prominence to specific outcomes



"We want to foster real community spirit and a sense of belonging."

Tenants Association

"Apart from local links that can be developed with Health All Round as a whole, the potential for linking housing issues to health greatly appeals to me and my colleagues."

Housing Association

"We want to promote Health All Round as a valuable resource and service in the area."

Health All Round

A positive environment was created to share ideas, introduce new ways of working and put people in touch with each other. A Fun Day was the vehicle and catalyst for all tenants to come together, get to know each other, enjoy themselves and participate in future activities. The Tenant's Association knew who to approach for support, advice, contributions and donations. Experience from previous community events brought informed judgements about who to approach for what. Lessons from previous community activities shaped the planning and marketing of the day.

The Programme was designed to break down real and perceived barriers between the different blocks of flats. It was also an opportunity to try out affordable healthy food, share information on health facilities, and provide cross-generational activities in sport and walking. The

cost of the day was kept to a minimum with outlays and expenditure primarily met through volunteering together with donations of goods and supplies.

The event was held on August 27th, in the flat's back green (garden). The disappointingly poor weather on the day, impacted on numbers and the partners would have welcomed many more people, but were delighted with the response from those who did turn up (approx. 50 people) who cited sports, city farm

and complementary therapies as just a few of the popular activities.

Reflection and analysis of the day were openly and honestly discussed between partners. There was agreement that certain things could have been done differently, but the main emphasis was on future development. Despite the challenges of the day, close co-operation between the partners had launched an enthusiastic and optimistic community event. It provided community members with experience of new health related activities and laid the foundations for more community involvement.

Building an infrastructure to promote and support physical and mental wellbeing

Building on previous links with other community and voluntary organisations and local services in South West Edinburgh, Health All Round and Wester Hailes Health Agency have set up a South West Walking Network (Stepping Out) and developed a local area plan.

Stepping Out aims to develop and coordinate local organisations to encourage, promote and sustain walking in South West Edinburgh. Community organisations and public sector agencies have come together to offer an infrastructure of support that encourages new walking groups, reduces duplication and promotes opportunities for partnership activities. Health All Round and Wester Hailes Health Agency are working with Paths for All to increase the uptake of Walk Leader training for local people and local agencies/health professionals.

The bringing together of different ideas and perspectives is intended to reach out to a diverse range of community members and consolidate a strategic approach to improve health on a number of levels.

"I and a colleague have gained a new 'transferable skill', in leading walking groups, that benefit me as an individual, but also helped my organisation (we're 'going for gold' with the Scottish Health at Work Scheme) and our tenants in our communities. I can help develop our networks and enable people to get more involved with Health All Round and other health related projects."

Dunedin Canmore Housing Association

Community Development & Community Leadership

The work of Health All Round illustrates clearly the different stages that community members are building towards a healthy community. Through capacity building, learning and engagement conditions have been created whereby community members are being assisted to build bridges that improve and strengthen community life and ultimately develop a healthy community.

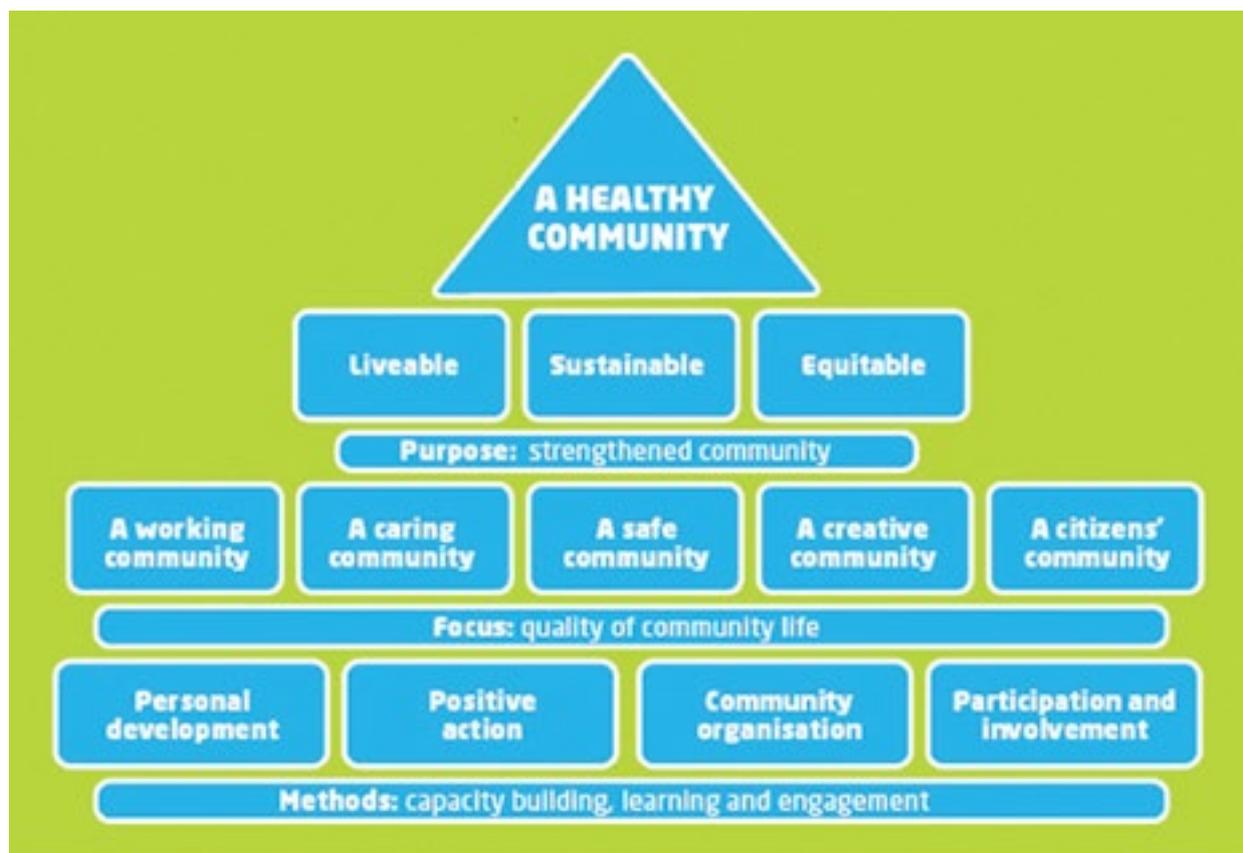


Warm and caring

Positive Action

Through community development approaches, Health All Round has facilitated a process for positive change towards health and wellbeing. In bringing local people and local services together in the organisation of 'Welcome to Westfield' new ways of working were introduced to encourage isolated residents to get more involved in community activity.

As key partners in the Walking Network, the project has drawn on its expertise to offer options that respond to the different needs and time-availability of people in the community. This offers opportunities not only to access the walks, but also to link up with community members from other neighbourhoods to become involved in joint activities towards physical and mental health and wellbeing.



Achieving Better Community Development (ABCD)¹ is a general framework for planning, evaluating and learning from community development approaches and interventions. It supports those in community development – community members, practitioners, policy makers, funders, to be clear about what they are aiming to achieve and how they should go about it. It helps them to develop a theory of what happens in community development and how to measure the changes. It does not prescribe measures or processes for organisations to use; rather it sets out a broad framework. Although a general framework for all community development, the ultimate outcome is a healthy community.

The principles underpinning the framework are:

- All stakeholders should participate
- Evaluation criteria and methods should reflect the motivations and objectives of all the participants
- Evaluation should be an integral element of community development, which continuously informs planning and action
- Attention should be given to evaluating the empowerment of communities and the changes in the quality of community life that result

Community life should become more satisfying, sustainable and equitable

¹ <http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/services/community-development/>

Participation & Involvement

Health All Round and partners apply methods that enable community members not only to easily access a community activity, but also to become involved in its further development. Steps are being taken to both build ownership of the community activity and address the barriers which would prevent involvement. For instance, resources are being committed to supporting community members to drive the initiatives in collaboration with public and third sector agencies/organisations.

Health All Round, in collaboration with other agencies and organisations, has strengthened the participation and involvement of community members in bringing about more positive social and health conditions. Welcome to Westfield seeks to use community involvement to break down barriers and bring diverse sections of the community together. The Walking Network aims to offer healthy opportunities whereby people will not only have enhanced physical and mental wellbeing, but will also have opportunities to join people from different neighbourhoods and to shape future services.

Contribution to health improvement and tackling health inequalities – building the evidence base

Health All Round and partners are in the process of compiling baseline evidence for each of the initiatives, which will be measured at regular intervals. There are signs that community participation is growing, with people from surrounding neighbourhoods showing an interest in Welcome to Westfield. The new opportunities offered through the Health Network create the potential for increased physical, mental and emotional wellbeing,¹ and the outcomes will be clearly documented and analysed over the next year.

Sustainability

At the same time as Health All Round is embarking on a new and exciting stage in its life, it is using its extensive experience, gathered over its previous 17 years, of what works well to ensure the success and sustainability of these newer initiatives. The South West Walking Network was initially funded through Paths for All and is now a firmly established initiative. It will require minimum material/financial resources and will build on the commitment of all voluntary and statutory partners to maintain and develop the resource. In particular, to encourage and support participation of local people as walkers, walk leaders and /or partners in planning.

Welcome to Westfield is planned to be an annual event and now has its own budget and a small amount of funds. All partners continue to work together to develop this event alongside local residents and are once again seeking support from surrounding businesses (several of whom showed support in 2013 through funding or presence on the day). The Westfield development continues to grow with 200 new flats currently being built so the potential for community involvement is significant. The development includes housing for a range of tenants including middle income (part buy housing), social and supported housing. This housing model is particularly helpful to the organisation's aim to reduce health inequalities by increasing community connections, promoting inclusion and increasing opportunities for participation and planning.

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1 Ref: Paths for All – SOA Supporting Evidence, (2010)

PAGES (Parent's Advisory Group for Education and Socialisation)

A Real Page Turner!



Parent power shines through in developing services in Aberdeenshire for children with additional needs. More responsive services were required for children, together with mutual support for parents. This case study highlights the collective action that was taken by parents to turn a former school building into a thriving resource for early years, older children and teenagers. It documents how parents worked together and also demonstrates the support role provided by public and third sector agencies and organisations in assisting PAGES. The community development process transformed the quality of life for children and parents and this study shows the impact a small community group can make over a sustained period of time.

Setting

Aberdeenshire in the north east of Scotland is an area that has seen many changes since the oil boom of the 1970s. Economic activity in this largely rural area had traditionally focused on agriculture, fishing and forestry while a doubling in population since 1975 saw the attendant broadening of the economic base for the area with oil and gas activities and associated service industries.

Aberdeenshire has higher home ownership, 71%, than for Scotland as a whole, 63%.¹

1 Aberdeenshire Profile, Aberdeenshire Council July 2013
<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/statistics/area/AberdeenshireProfile201320813.pdf>



PAGES is based close to the Aberdeenshire town of Ellon, one of the smaller major towns in the area with a population of nearly 10,000 people. Health statistics for Grampian compare favourably to Scottish averages, however health inequalities still exist, as do health issues such as obesity, substance abuse and increasing numbers of older people with care needs.¹ In terms of young people with additional support needs a recent report to the Scottish Government² identified 10,000 children in Aberdeenshire as being in need of additional learning support.

- 1 Director of Public Health Annual Report NHS Grampian 2011
http://www.nhsgrampian.org/grampianfoi/files/DPHsummaryreport2011_FINAL.pdf
- 2 Additional Support for Learning and Young Carers in Scotland (Pages 20-27) Report to Scottish Parliament. February 2013
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/02/7808/5>

Background

PAGES is a group of parents whose children have additional support needs. It resulted from the recognition that both parents and children were in need of additional support services.

“Statutory services take so long to respond. You get a diagnosis when your child is 8 and the service is still not there when your child leaves secondary education!”

Parent and Member of PAGES Board of Trustees

Sally Sheehan, a local community worker, recalls the commitment of one particularly active parent who, having found no other available services, travelled Aberdeenshire looking for a site from which to provide services for her child. She discovered a former school hosting an indoor bowling group and Woman’s Rural Institute group. The building itself had become “dark, dank, dull and dismal” but today is bursting with life and colour and is the much used resource that Esslemont

School has become. Set against the beauty of the rolling Aberdeenshire hills, this facility has flourished under the influence of PAGES and other user groups, namely: The Rainbow Rogues, Esslemont WRI, Esslemont Bowlers, Aberdeenshire Disability Sport, National Autistic Society Ellon Branch, Ellon Resource Centre and Childcare@home.

Esslemont now houses a fully equipped under 5s children's play room, a craft room, a young persons' room with broadband access, a substantial hall with newly curtained stage, refurbished kitchen space, a flourishing garden and many plans for the future.

Activities

PAGES runs a wide range of activities for children and their parents, at dates and times appropriate to as many people as possible. The Monday Nighters social group includes craft activities, outings to local places of interest and cooking and baking activities. Six week block 'taster sessions' have included climbing, drama, football, archery, swimming, camera club and Ti Kwan Do. During the summer holidays, PAGES has organised swimming sessions, climbing and 'tubing', where parents and children slide down a dry ski slope in rubber rings. There are also monthly coffee morning drop in sessions to meet the support needs of parents, enabling people to 'download', relax and enjoy each other's company whilst also swapping practical tips and ideas.

Much thought has been put into the design of the above activities to ensure they meet the needs of young people and their parents. For instance, taster sessions were developed to maintain children's interest, something that had not always been easy with longer-term activities. In addition, evening sessions

are organised for parents who are working during the day, and a recent archery session for dads has seen more men taking part in group activities – helping to address the sense of isolation that can follow the discovery of a child's 'special needs' diagnosis.

The most recent specially tailored activity is the Galaxy Group, developed in response to the needs of older teenagers in transition between childhood and adulthood, finding that no services were available locally to meet those needs. This group was initially called the Black Hole Group since people felt a familiar sense of frustration with lack of support. However as is



Esslemont Entertainers

typical for PAGES, they turned a negative into a positive and the group was renamed to reflect the bright possibilities that the name Galaxy brings to mind for their future. This newest venture will provide information sharing via events and online services. PAGES also plans to develop local groups in different areas where parents/carers can pool their SDS (Self-directed Support) funding to provide a variety of activities for their young people. A successful funding bid through the Carers Strategy has meant that the group will employ a Project Development Worker for two years to help carry out the group's aims.

PAGES recent 10th anniversary celebration culminated in a show put on by the young

people that have benefited from all this activity and every member of Esslemont Entertainers received a certificate of participation in recognition of their many talents, including singing and playing musical instruments for the delight and entertainment of their audience.

Partnership working

PAGES has strong working relationships across different sectors, and members of PAGES describe local networks as “Active and supportive”. Partnerships include those with Aberdeenshire Council, and with Sally Sheehan, Community Learning and Development worker, in particular. Social Work staff have also supported funding bids to help develop the programme of summer activities. The professional input of trained coaches has been invaluable with regard to the provision of activities such as football and archery. Collaborations within the community and voluntary sectors include those with Esslemont Users’ Group (consisting of groups based in Esslemont School), Childcare@home Aberdeenshire (part of One Parent Families Scotland and who provide the crèche and children focused activities for young children) and Esslemont Bowlers.

The benefits of partnership work are felt by everyone. Through the process of sharing the premises with previously existing groups,

PAGES has brought benefits to the premises used by all through its leadership role in upgrading the building. Partnership also means that organisations can help each other in areas where they may be stronger. As a larger organisation, Childcare@home Aberdeenshire is contracted to provide employment services for the Galaxy Group’s Project Development Worker. A benefit of partnership between the Bowlers Group and the young people engaged in PAGES activities is that some of the older children involved in PAGES activities have now been welcomed into the Bowlers’ Group.

Community Development, Community Leadership

PAGES grew from a group of parents who faced common challenges in finding appropriate services for their children and also in accessing appropriate support for themselves. The group have gone on to create both of those things by coming together to identify their own needs and developing the services that ensure that the needs of both children and parents can be met.

They have led the way in developing an enhanced community resource which others have benefited from. The group have engaged positively with a range of partner organisations locally including the Local Authority and other community and voluntary sector groups.



An important element of the organisation's approach has been that they continue to be responsive to the changing needs of existing members of the group - both children and parents. Members have put in place structured processes that help them to reflect on how they engage with new families, ensuring the appropriateness of what they have to offer. They also reflect on their learning and explore new ways of sharing that within the group and with partner organisations.

PAGES maintain healthy partnership working processes and have recently gained recognition from the leader of their Council, in the shape of a substantial donation from the Leader's Charitable Trust, acknowledging the role that they play locally in enhancing community services and facilities.

Health Improvement and Tackling Health Inequalities

The impact of the work that PAGES has undertaken in its ten years has had real health improvement impact. Parents are provided with support from those who fully understand their plight when a child is newly 'diagnosed'. That support continues as their child grows and their needs change. The latest development of the Galaxy Group to meet the needs of teenagers in transition is testimony to the positive way that PAGES has risen to each new challenge.

PAGES members have shown what their children can achieve and have helped to promote the inclusion of their children within non-specialist groups. The whole process has challenged the inequality in services which were found lacking in the first instance. The health and wellbeing of both children and parents has benefited from the work of this group.

"Being accepted into a group is massive for some of our young people. You can see the change from the first time they come and don't take part very much but we just work at their pace and later they are joining in and helping others. They build strong friendships and bond with the others in the group."

"Giving somebody something that we know they can do saying "we are relying on you" helps them realise they have something to offer. They rise to the challenge and get the satisfaction of hearing they've done a good job."

A Parent

In terms of long term impact, one young person from PAGES previously volunteered to help with childcare activities and is now employed as a trainee child care worker on the summer programme.

Sustainability

Given all that this organisation undertakes and achieves in a year, PAGES operate on a relatively small budget of £6000 per annum, illustrating the significant in-kind contributions made by parents and other volunteers.

PAGES is well respected for the work it does and the services it delivers, reflected in its relationships with other organisations sharing the premises and partnership relationships with the local authority, as well as the above mentioned in-kind contributions. Continual attention to truly reflective practice – reviewing the organisation's work and its usefulness – means PAGES can adjust its programmes to meet current needs, keeping things useful and relevant.

PAGES has built up a meaningful and reliable community resource, responsive to the particular needs of the young people and parents using their services. It invests in providing opportunities for young people to help build their capacity to be as independent as possible and fulfil their full potential encouraging them in a truly person-centred, asset-based approach. All of this ensures the sustainability of PAGES' activities.

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North Coast Connection

Opening doors, building a healthy community



North Coast Connection board and staff

When Tongue's local day care centre, the Kyle Centre, was threatened with closure in 2011, a group of local residents decided to take on the running of the centre themselves under the name of North Coast Connection. With the assistance of a local Community Development Officer and a partnership with Tongue's community-led transport providers, the group secured a three-year Service Level Agreement with Highland Health and Social Care Partnership. Since then, numbers using the centre have more than doubled, something North Coast Connection puts down to the open, flexible and needs-sensitive nature of their community-led health approach.

Setting

Tongue is a small village of about 500 people on the North coast of Sutherland in the Scottish Highlands. As with many rural communities, people live scattered across great distances from each other and from essential services. This can be a particular issue for older people, who may have gone to school, worked and socialised with people in neighbouring communities all of their lives and now find it difficult to 'keep up' with each other. The concern to maintain people's connections with each other is what gives rise to North Coast Connection's name.

Background

North Coast Connection grew out of the remnants of a statutory social work day care service which ran from the same building until 2011. When Highland Council, as part of their review of day care, decided that the centre wasn't sustainable, members of the community formed a working group and began proceedings to take community control of the building and its services.

An Action Group had been set up in 2006 to campaign to retain the local care home Caladh Sona, and to press for a new build with day care services on the same site. Consequently,

the Group had a major interest in trying to protect the day care service when closure threatened. A public meeting was organised by the Action Group, to consult on the future of the centre, and Andrea Madden, Community Development Officer for the Health and Social Care Partnership (NHS and Council) in the North West region agreed to be involved.

At the meeting, people were ready to sign up to campaign against the closure of the centre. But it was acknowledged that the centre was being underused, thus undermining the case for saving the council run service. However, the Action Group contended that despite the low number of 'registered' users of the building, it was well used by the community and that

older people relied on the centre for small, yet essential, things such as getting batteries for their hearing aids or finding an engineer to fix their washing machines. The Group also raised concerns about it taking as long as six months for people being assessed for day care services to hear of a decision, and that the cost of attending a day care centre was significant for those with little income. Finally, constraints on the wider use of the centre were created by the fact that, as a registered care facility, use of the building had to conform to health and safety procedures, policies protecting vulnerable adults and appropriate insurance requirements.

The people at the meeting came up with the idea that something different could be done by the community themselves, which would keep the lunch club while allowing other people to use the building. There was a consensus that it would be good to extend the scope of the centre to promote 'wellbeing' as well as health. Treasurer, Liz Goudie explains: *"It wouldn't just be like a village hall where people can hire it to use it, but there would actually be some sort of encouragement to put things on that would benefit the community"*.

Liz, who was part of this original group, recalls that they distilled the idea into a diagram showing the links between the centre as a community hub, the different activities that could be provided and groups in the community. This showed both anticipated and unexpected relationships (e.g. intergenerational support) which illustrated the richness that a properly running community facility could



provide. A series of further meetings took place in a local church, to hammer out the details of this plan.

A meeting was then arranged with the heads of social work at Highland Council. Instead of being confrontational, the group took the approach of presenting its solution at the start of the meeting. Andrea testifies that the Council were suitably impressed by this refreshing approach, and agreed in principle to the idea. There were, of course, lots of contractual agreements to work through, and the group successfully negotiated a three year Service Level Agreement until 2015.

Activities

The Kyle Centre is now being run three days a week as a health and wellbeing centre. Activities include lunch clubs, parents and toddlers groups, exercise sessions, youth group, local history, healthy eating, gardening group and health awareness-raising sessions. Other community groups and activities are held in the centre when it is not being used for these activities, including an art club and singing group.

Several of the North Coast Connection lunch club members are simply happy to be able to keep coming to the centre and, for them, community ownership has brought much needed continuity. In other ways, things now work quite differently. In the past, an older person's case would have been discussed by social work over a period of months to assess whether or not they should be referred for day care. The assessment process was very involved and included detailed financial assessments which were off putting for many people. This often resulted in unnecessary delays and risk of admissions to residential/ acute care – frustrating for those trying to support older people to remain independent and at home.

Now that the centre is a community facility, people can attend as many sessions as they wish, depending on the capacity of the sessions, without having to go through a lengthy assessment; importantly those with additional care needs can attend with extra support from national care provider Crossroads Care. In North Coast Connection's view, all people have to do is phone up and take the bus. As a result of this increased convenience and flexibility, use of the centre has increased by more than 100%.

Community volunteers bring added value in terms of the time they dedicate and the range of experience they bring. Members know them within the community, so there is a strong degree of trust and friendship. Volunteers receive training to ensure a high quality of

service and also to give individuals ongoing skills development and increase their likelihood of future employment. For example, one of the first volunteers at North Coast Connection was a support worker who has received training in 'moving and handling' and food hygiene, and is now also being trained in working with older adults. She has now been employed by North Coast Connection as a Centre Support Worker.

Partnership Working

Initially, the Action Group and other community members thought that NHS/Council involvement was simply to facilitate the closure of day care centres. However, it has turned out that partnership has been key to the development of the centre into a community-run facility. North Coast Connection now has a Service Level Agreement with Highland Health and Social Care Partnership. Support from public sector staff has been integral to equipping community members to take on running of the centre.

The collaboration with Transport For Tongue (T4T) is itself an example of the benefits of partnership work. It was felt that there was no point in taking over the building in an area with such a scattered population of people without having an adequate transport service in place. The council run bus service, which was withdrawn at the same time as the day care service, was regularly out of operation and was inadequate in terms of suitability for the road network in the area. T4T had been operating locally since 2009 as a door-to-door car service



Arriving at the Kyle Centre

helping people access local services e.g. GP appointments. It was ideally placed to form a community-based partnership with North Coast Connection, bringing knowledge of local needs and a more suitable bus, equipped with a lift.

The partnership was determined to preserve the existing service to give those already attending some continuity, so the T4T service was organised around the timings of the existing Kyle Centre (*day care*) service. For North Coast Connection it was a blessing not to have to worry about transport themselves, and the group believes this has eased the process of taking over the Kyle Centre as they were working with an already established community organisation. T4T benefited in turn by gaining a contract for the service and there are now improved bus routes in the local area. The partnership is evident on the ground, with volunteers from North Coast Connection escorting service users on and off the bus, which is driven by paid T4T staff. The services are now so well integrated that people coming into the centre often see T4T and North Coast Connection as one and the same service.

Andrea feels that the partnership is a positive example of how integrated transport should operate, with health, social care, transport and leisure services all running with and for each other. *“It’s an integrated transport model run by a community organisation; this should be more widely recognised.”*

Community Development and Community Leadership

Between them, the group members have an impressive set of skills, including administration, people and project management and financial management. They also have experience of working in the third sector. At the same time, community development support has been crucial. One of the key functions of this role was to act as an intermediary between the community group and the NHS/Council. On the one hand, the statutory processes may frustrate the group, but shared understanding explains why things operate in the way they do. This then becomes a two way process with the group able to articulate ideas in a language

familiar to the Council/NHS, showing how the group’s ambitions align with local and national priorities, such as The Joint Community Care Plan. For Community Worker Andrea, it is important to highlight to both the group and external partners how well it has engaged with local people and developed their skills, as well as how they have improved services through partnership working.

“Sometimes it is thought that community development is a quick fix, that you can go in and do community development in a few weeks. You can’t, because of the skills that the group and its volunteers need to develop. And it’s a long term ongoing process, and it’s staying with the community through their challenges. You can’t drop it after the initial excitement, because that’s when the work starts.”

Community Development Officer

One area where the group benefited from support is when it came to negotiating a contract or Service Level Agreement, SLA, with the Council. In terms of sustainability it was important that the contract was based on the strategies that underpinned the reshaping of care in Highland, such as the national Reshaping Care for Older People programme¹. This would ensure that the true value of the work of North Coast Connection is recognised as a service provider contributing to supporting community health and social care.

Community development support also helps maintain the morale of the group. Someone supporting the group, but not a member of it, is in a unique position of being able to objectively see the longer term progress (and potential) and remind the group of what they have achieved when they are struggling with matters at hand. *“When you’re caught up in it, all you tend to see is all the stresses and all the pressures and all the things you feel aren’t working well, because the good stuff is just normal to you. But I go out and see other organisations, which gives me a more realistic view of just what the group is achieving.”*

Community Development Officer

1 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/Support-Social-Care/Support/Older-People/ReshapingCare>

A factor of great importance to the group is their strong engagement with the community – evidenced by the fact that feedback from previous consultation with the community is displayed around the walls of the centre. Many activities come about as the direct result of people’s requests, such as the healthy eating initiative. The development of the centre was aided by public meetings right from the start. The partner organisations have conducted doorstep consultations and have continually collated evidence of need while delivering the services. In addition, North Coast Connection acknowledges that once everything people asked for is in place, they will need to consult with the community again over the actual delivery of the full service. This will maintain that strong connection with the community and ensure that they continue to meet their community’s changing needs.

Challenges

One of the biggest early challenges for North Coast Connection was dealing with the loss of the centre’s three full-time posts. This was a big issue for a small community in Sutherland whose unemployment rate is higher than average for the Highlands. Therefore, the loss of jobs became the main concern amongst the wider community, and the issue became so prominent that it led to a misleading story in the paper about the community group putting people out of work.

The group feels that these job losses were going to happen whether or not they took over the running of the centre. It was a case of “do it or lose it” as group member Marion recalls. Moreover, by taking ownership of the service, the group was able to provide some employment at the centre for local people. North Coast Connection now implements the principle of not having volunteers doing jobs that should be done by those in paid positions.

Future Sustainability

North Coast Connection is actively looking for new sources of money to run further activities. As a sign of the group’s growing ambition they intend to increase the size of the building, and have been successful at stage one of a Community Spaces¹ application, which would allow them to branch into mental health improvement work and wider social inclusion more generally. There are also plans to hold reminiscence classes for people with dementia and to set up a carers’ support group.



Despite some initial scepticism within the community about whether the community had the capacity to run such a facility, the Kyle Centre is now a hub of community activity for people of different generations. Importantly, community ownership means that the centre is now open to all and is more responsive to local need. Strong partnership is at the heart of the group’s success to date, and the pooling of skills and resources that this entails should sustain North Coast Connection for the foreseeable future.

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¹ <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/communityspaces>

Stepping Stones

One step at a time



This case study is evidence of community development processes and approaches that lead to major changes in people's lives. Back in the 90s, it was a mammoth task for a small community group prioritising positive mental health to gain recognition and resources. Stepping Stones in Clydebank persisted with an approach that built on the expertise and experience of people they worked with. The challenges and changes are documented through lively first-hand accounts from people who initially used the service and then went on to influence and develop its future.

Setting

West Dunbartonshire encompasses within its boundaries the main towns of Clydebank and Dumbarton; an area of proud industrial heritage. However, post-industrial decline and associated unemployment has brought particular challenges for people in the local area in terms of their sense of their own and their community's identity. Compared to the Scottish average, the area has high rates of suicide, substance abuse, depression and other mental health issues¹. It also has rates of smoking, alcohol-related hospital admissions and long term limiting illness that are higher than the national average².

1 Shipton D and Whyte B. Mental Health in Focus: a profile of mental health and wellbeing in Greater Glasgow & Clyde. Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2011. <http://www.GCPH.co.uk/mentalhealthprofiles>

2 Glasgow Centre for Population Health A Community Health and Wellbeing Profile for West Dunbartonshire 2008, <http://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/0629/WestDunbartonshire.pdf>

Background

Stepping Stones is an organisation whose origins in the 1990s saw a group of concerned people come together in a local manse in Clydebank to discuss the mental health support needs of people in the town. The organisation's approach to their mission is described by their Service Manager, John White, as *"focusing on recovery, resilience and peer support with an approach that utilises both personal and community assets"*.

Stepping Stones employs seven members of staff, has 15 volunteers and supports more than 650 people per annum. Referrals in the last year rose by 22% to 780. Its Board of five volunteer Directors are all former members who have used Stepping Stones support services themselves. They direct the work of the organisation that now covers the whole of West Dunbartonshire from the Glasgow boundary to the shores of Loch Lomond.

"Through helping people to help themselves and others, we will work together to ensure that people with a mental health issue are accepting and accepted, so that positive mental health and wellbeing becomes a way of life in West Dunbartonshire."

Extract from Stepping Stones Mission Statement

Activities

The organisation provides a range of individual and group work activities tailored to the needs of those who are struggling to maintain good mental health. Former members of Stepping Stones are encouraged to build on their improving mental health and wellbeing by supporting others. This promotes a sense of community and responsibility. They are supported to take on new roles as 'peer supporters' or volunteer in complementary therapies or group work support. This allows members to 'give back' to benefit future members.

"People who have been through it before you help you to see that anything is possible when you thought that nothing was possible – it's

the light at the end of the tunnel, a hope for the future when you didn't even know you had a future."

Stepping Stones Member

One member of staff reflects on newer ways of working:

"We've learned over the years. In the past people could come to groups, maybe even for years. Now we try to help people move on. It's a more constructive process."

Member of Staff

Therapeutic interventions include working with individuals to develop their own WRAP-Wellness Recovery Action Plan and referring people into their array of valuable social activities such as the cinema group, sewing and jewellery groups and a peer-led Lifelong Learning Group.

Community Development and Community Leadership

Stepping Stones has always drawn on the experience and expertise of people who have overcome mental health challenges in their own lives and understand the serious nature of what mental ill-health can mean for an individual, their family and friends. In the current organisation this expertise is harnessed in the shape of those on the Board of Directors who are all people who have previously been supported by the organisation on the road back to mental wellbeing. Volunteer 'peer supporters' are also a crucial part of ensuring the community-led ethos of the organisation and contribute to its high success rate. One member who previously described himself *"as the person your neighbours hate 'cause you were shouting in the street again in the wee small hours"* went on to describe how he now supports others back to health:

"It's amazing to think that now you can help others who are not well get their life back and do something meaningful – that's what Stepping Stones has done for me and that's how I know what others need cause I've been there and I've come out of it and I know they can too."

Volunteer peer supporter and Board Member

Much of the group work is supported by 'peer support' processes where new members are accompanied into group settings with somebody who has formerly been in comparable circumstances.

"You realise when you come to Stepping Stones that we are all the same really. Other people have overcome the same kind of problems that you have and they are there to help you do the same."

Stepping Stones Member

"Knowing that they really understand is crucial to giving you the confidence to move forward."

Stepping Stones Member

The most recently formed Linnvale Lifelong Learning Group arose from the necessity of developing a volunteer-led group. This was brought about when members asked Stepping Stones to provide a wider range of social activities for members. After discussion with staff it was agreed that some of the activities asked for could be facilitated by peers or volunteers without the direct active presence of a paid worker at their activities. It was agreed that support would be offered to peers when required. Over time, and with support from local agencies, the group became constituted. It continues to be provided with 'arm's length support' from the main organisation, and is now a flourishing resource into which other members of Stepping Stones and members of the wider community can now be referred.

This process typifies the work of Stepping Stones, with its focus on empowerment and self-efficacy being fundamental to the Learning Group's success. The personal development of individuals within the group is phenomenal and the new capacity that the group has to successfully take on the challenge illustrates the power of this way of working.

"The most important thing I have learned from Stepping Stones is that I am my own greatest asset – I didn't know that before – I learned it here and I tell others the same. That's how we can do what we do."

Volunteer Peer Supporter, Linnvale Lifelong Learning Group



Building self-belief

Many of those who come into contact with Stepping Stones struggle to maintain control over their lives. The opportunity to "put something back" and benefit others who find themselves in the same situation is a major source of motivation to them.

"There is no doubt that Stepping Stones was a lifeline for me and I only want to make sure that it's there for other folk when they might need it too."

Member of the Board

Partnership working

A former Community Psychiatric Nurse speaks highly of how statutory sector services have been realigned in recognition of Stepping Stones group work. The local mental health resource centre no longer offers group work since this was seen as "needless duplication...since it was being done at Stepping Stones in a more appropriate and effective way".



Always something to celebrate

Another NHS employee speaks of the strength that a community-led health organisation has in responding to need:

“Stepping Stones is so flexible and creative in ways that our systems and processes could never allow. They do use evidence based work but they don’t allow themselves to be ‘hobbled’ by that, some methodologies don’t lend themselves easily to providing a robust evidence base e.g. some creative arts work. Stepping Stones opens people’s minds to new ideas. I see that as their greatest strength.”

Ensuring inclusive practice

The staff team look at referrals and who is using their services on a regular basis. Analysis of the gender distribution revealed that low numbers of men were using their services. They have since developed activities with a focus around physical activity which has increased male membership at Stepping Stones from around 20% to 36%.

Based on an equalities impact assessment process by Stepping Stones’ Communications Group, the organisation has changed its way of engaging with the public. As a result, coffee mornings now encourage people to

bring families and friends instead of being just for members – Stepping Stones feels this is increasing general understanding of the organisation and the challenges that people with mental health problems face and how Stepping Stones can help. Consequently people are more likely to encourage others to use their services.

Contribution to health improvement and tackling health inequalities

People who suffer poor mental health are among those most disadvantaged in terms of health outcomes. The work of Stepping Stones in supporting people into recovery and improved mental wellbeing and in overcoming stigma and injustice is crucial in tackling health inequalities in West Dunbartonshire.

When asking members of Stepping Stones what impact their work has had on individuals and their community they have no difficulty in describing it:

“Even as a West of Scotland Man – you are supposed to be macho and all that – even me I found real peace through Stepping Stones.”

Member of Linnvale Life Long Learning Group

"It's hard work to give up what's in yer heed sometimes – especially when it's been there for years but that's what you need help with to get out of the fog and into the sunlight – that's what Stepping Stones can do."

Volunteer Peer Supporter

"Communities are made up of families. We help whole families and so the community is in a better place as a result. When we help somebody with their mental health issues we don't just help them. We take the pressure off their family and friends. We take the pressure off other services who struggle to support them. When people are very unwell it impacts on everybody that knows them. When we help them back to being well all those people benefit too. People who wouldn't have the time or energy to get involved in other things get their lives back – they are better able to contribute to their community too as well as the people who are members with us."

Volunteer Peer Supporter

Sustaining the organisation and its activities

In the past statutory sector partners had restrictive referral requirements and the organisation found it difficult to get its message across to health professionals. However over the 20 years Stepping Stones has existed those barriers have subsided in the light of clear evidence of Stepping Stones' effectiveness. The organisation is now contracted to provide mental health support services across West Dunbartonshire and people are provided with information from their GPs and other health and social care professionals. Self-referral is also an option. Stepping Stones is well known in the community as a place of safety and assistance, and this trust enables people to feel confident enough to approach the organisation for help.

"Word of mouth is one of our most effective ways of having people referred to us."

Board Member

"Nowadays when I say I'm involved with Stepping Stones people say, 'oh aye I've heard of them – they'll help you out if you're depressed or anxious'."

Volunteer Peer Supporter



Having initially been dependant on grant income, Stepping Stones has over the years built up local recognition of the value of the services it provides and now has a recurring contract with the local Community Health and Care Partnership.

Manager John White describes the difference this makes:

"Being contracted by local statutory sector organisations to provide these services provides us with a stable base from which to operate – we report quarterly on what we are doing and that regular reporting keeps us on our toes and helps us to reflect regularly on the effectiveness of what we do."

Manager Stepping Stones

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