Evaluating Community-led Change

March 2016

Contents

1. Introduction

The Barrow Cadbury Trust has a long history of supporting grassroots community activity in Birmingham and the Black Country. Its recent Resources and Resilience programme aimed to address economic and social injustice and build resilience in communities by funding a number of organisations which support communities to tackle and find solutions to their own problems and have an active role and voice in the structures and services that affect them. The Trust calls this 'Community-Led Change' and believes that such approaches ensure a more sustainable and effective way to address local challenges and influence systems.

The Trust commissioned this research to evaluate evidence across 9 of the projects funded to support 'Community-led Change' with a view to deepening its understanding of the challenges to, and opportunities for, community engagement and exploring how different people engage with and respond to different methods of engagement. The Trust has supported some of the projects over several years, in neighbourhoods where people are the furthest from power, in recognition of the fact that community engagement and development take time to achieve meaningful change.

This report presents a brief overview of the approaches to community engagement used by the funded projects and an analysis of research findings focusing on enabling factors and barriers to effective community engagement. It includes examples where change and empowerment have been achieved, provides conclusions and makes suggestions to inform the Trust's future work.

1.1   Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation was commissioned in September 2015 and at that time the 9 projects were at different stages of development, 2 had started within the previous 6 months, 2 were about to end after 2 years and 4 were moving towards completion in 2016, with one project in mid-delivery. There were 8 in Birmingham, 1 in Sandwell; 7 were located in neighbourhoods, 2 were city-wide; they all had a different focus of activity and were working with communities of place, identity and interest[1].

The approach to the evaluation has been to engage in conversations with project leads and participants to facilitate and listen to their reflections on the projects they have been involved with and to capture their insights into what works, successes and barriers. The methods used were:

- A review of the background information provided by the Programme Manager to formulate the evaluation questions for the qualitative research

- Project visits to observe engagement activity (x 4)

- One-to-one interviews with project leads (x 9)

- Group discussions (x 2) and one-to-one / telephone interviews with project participants (x 12)

- Interviews with project stakeholders (x 3)

- Community-led Change: Making it Happen learning sharing event (11 people)

---

[1] See Appendix 1 for an overview of projects involved in the research

The findings have been analysed to draw out commonalities and differences in experience and general outcomes across the 9 projects and to highlight examples of community empowerment and Community-led Change in action[2].

1.2   Community-led Change in context

The Community-led Change programme emerged at a time of complex, some might say conflicted, policy context; one that has been described as *'policy rich and resource poor'* (McCabe 2011).

The core resource of community development workers has been largely stripped out of Local Authorities across Birmingham and the Black Country in the wake of austerity measures resulting in funding cuts. Similarly, community work capacity within the voluntary sector has been severely reduced, particularly with the ending of regeneration initiatives such as New Deal for Communities. Funding for community-based activity now comes mainly from grants from organisations like the Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Big Lottery, or charities like Comic Relief.

At the same time, there has been a growing interest in Community-led Change at a policy level. This has been driven, in part, by funders and practitioners as a reaction to the previous 'top down' approaches to neighbourhood regeneration and community change. More 'light touch' programmes have developed, such as the Joseph Rowntree Neighbourhoods Programme (Taylor et al 2007), which are less target-driven and less bounded by the need to achieve annual spend. This approach has been adopted more recently by Local Trust and the Big Local programme which requires a majority of residents on local planning partnerships, to play a strategic role in identifying and planning responses to needs within their own communities; and in which funding is 'drawn down' flexibly over at least a 10 year period[3].

At a national Government level there has been a sustained interest, under successive administrations, in devolving power to communities. The Localism Act (2011), for example, grants community rights to purchase and manage local assets, often community centres or sports and leisure facilities, and community asset transfer has been promoted across Local Authorities within the West Midlands. Similarly, the Department of Health has embedded community engagement in the structures of the reformed NHS and there is a strong movement towards co-production in service re-design processes in Health. Public Health departments nationally are also exploring approaches to community engagement that can help build resilience (Norman 2012), with a view to developing community support networks that will increase wellbeing and reduce the dependence on statutory services[4].

Philosophically, in some quarters at least, there has been a fundamental shift in attitudes to engaging with communities; to paraphrase the International Association for Community Development (2014) communities are no longer seen as the problem – they are the answer. In a climate of austerity and reducing resources for service delivery, local and national governments are looking to people to do more for themselves. Critics argue (BATC 2015) that this interest in Community-led Change by policy makers is little more than a 'smokescreen' for the real impact of

---

[2] See Appendix 2 for list of research participants
[3] see for example the Institute for Voluntary Action Research report on funding for resident control (2015)
[4] Coventry Community Wellbeing Development Project evaluation report, Merida Associates (July 2015)

the funding cuts and that there is an expectation that community groups will do more, whilst saying less in terms of advocacy and campaigning (Aiken 2014).

Birmingham context

The Kerslake Review of Birmingham City Council (2014)[5] found a number of issues relating to the council's engagement with residents that have been reflected in the experiences of projects in this research:

- many communities felt unable to raise issues, nor had a route to engage or have their voices heard

- the council tends to engage with people and groups it knows and is comfortable with, key consultation events were by invitation only

- there was the perception that community engagement meetings are 'talking shops'

- outside of formal events, the council's communications are based on a 'broadcast' model ie. information rather than engagement

- the council does not have a community engagement strategy or toolkit, so where engagement happens it is ad-hoc instead of being strategic and interactive

- the council's communication with communities is driven by their own planning processes and what the council wants to say rather than what people want to hear about

The review found 5 factors why connecting with communities is particularly challenging in Birmingham:

- Birmingham's population is much more diverse than most of the other major cities in England

- Birmingham has a relatively young population - 22% of Birmingham's residents are aged under 15 years old and 46% are aged under 30 years old compared to 18% and 37% respectively across the UK

- Birmingham's population is growing fast - between 2001 and 2012 Birmingham's population increased by 11% compared to 9% for Great Britain

- the city's population is becoming increasingly diverse with migrants from new countries joining established local communities

- in total, the city's population turns over by a third every ten years and that the rate of churn is highest in the more deprived areas of the city

The review recognised that a young, diverse population that benefits from an influx of new ideas is potentially a significant strength for the city, but also that the council and councillors need to work harder to engage with residents and to draw on the expertise of all communities. It noted the need to ensure communities understand the future role of the council as an enabler and commissioner of services, rather than a provider of services, and to ensure that communities know what the council can do for them; and the council knows what communities are able to do for themselves. This will be a significant shift for the historically paternalistic council in

---

[5] A BCC and DCLG appointed review in the wake of the 'Trojan Horse' incidents in some Birmingham schools. This section is drawn from the review report.

Birmingham, and similarly for councils elsewhere in the Black Country, and as the research for this report found, communities are slow to give up their expectation that the council will sort everything out.

The Kerslake review found little evidence that an understanding and knowledge of the diverse communities in Birmingham is being used to drive decision making in the council and it also recommended that the council move away from the invitation-only gatekeeper model of engagement with communities.

2. Approaches to Community-led Change

There are several approaches to engaging people in Community-led Change exemplified by the projects in this research; they can be broadly categorised as asset-based community development (ABCD); issue-based (deficit) models; and empowerment.

Asset-based models	Deficit models	Empowerment
• Starts from identifying existing strengths (assets) in a community – skills, knowledge, abilities, things people are able and willing to share with others • positive premise: there are things we can do, however small • Build on those strengths • Listen to people's ideas and support them to develop them into action	• Starting point is bringing people together to identify issues to be resolved • negative premise: there is something wrong here that needs to be fixed eg. poverty, poor services, community integration • Useful for helping people unite around a theme (issue) • Can reinforce the traditional community consultation position: we'll tell you what is wrong so that you can fix it	• Working with groups who feel disempowered eg. women, LGBT • Aim to build individual confidence and skills and collective voice • Personal development element

2.1 Asset-based community development

While within the UK and wider European context ABCD has tended to focus on 'soft' assets, namely building on the skills, knowledge and confidence of individuals and their capacity to create change at an individual / behavioural level (CLES and NEF; 2013), it also fits well within the prevailing policy environment which is moving the emphasis in the planning and delivery of services towards a more collaborative model, one that sees people as part of the solution, citizens and co-producers with something to offer[67].

> "[ABCD] *is founded upon the belief that everybody has something to give, and proposes that sustainable change only occurs when community members are committed to achieving it.*"[8]

The ABCD approach draws on earlier academic theories of social capital and recognises the role that social networks play in both enhancing the quality of people's lives and building more cohesive

---

[6] A Glass Half Full - IdEA/LGA March 2010
[7] See http://abcdeurope.ning.com for examples
[8] Tackling poverty in England: an asset-based approach; Bethany Eckley; Posted on http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/ 16/04/2014

and sustainable communities (Putnam: 2000). This is a key element of most of the funded projects in the research[9]. Where 'before and after' wellbeing measures have been used elsewhere to measure change effected using ABCD, there is a growing body of evidence that this approach promotes wellbeing by building stronger social networks, reducing isolation and mitigating the impact of poverty (Church Urban Fund: 2013, Cheung and Phillimore; 2013), both individually and at a community level (Rowson 2010). The Karis Neighbour Scheme's work with residents to introduce the Real Junk Food Café into the local community centre provides a useful example of how this approach achieves these outcomes, described by the project lead as:

1. *Connecting people – improving co-ordination and communication between groups and building on what is already there*

2. *Where people have ideas, offering support or linking them in to support from other organisations*

3. *Reflection of learning - encouraging groups to reflect on what has worked and learning after activities*

Open Door Community Forum takes an asset-based approach to engaging people by seeking to identify the 'gifts' that people can contribute to the community, such as listening to others, sharing skills or baking cakes for the community lunch.

ABCD has been criticised by some for lacking an underlying analysis of power relationships and structural inequalities (Friedl 2009), by starting from individual narratives rather than a position of collective action to tackle oppression and poverty (Craig et al 2011).

2.2 Deficit models

Citizens UK Birmingham is a project with a strategic purpose around effecting social change on a bigger scale and it has a different approach to engaging groups that is more aligned to 'deficit' models of engagement. Citizen, or community, organising draws on the work of Alinsky (1971) which presents a very clear power analysis and a systematic approach to effecting change. This, in its purest form, involves:

- Holding those in power to account for their actions
- Building broad-based movements with a focus on collective above individual need
- Organising mass actions to lobby for change
- Not taking money from the state, which would compromise independence and integrity.

The national body of Citizens UK provides a structured process for engagement for all affiliated groups. To join Citizens UK Birmingham groups and individuals must have a demonstrable network of people behind them whom they can consult.

"(we are) looking for those people (…) who have lots of stories from and about local people and their experiences. So they're not going to talk about an article they've read about foodbanks - they know about the people using foodbanks and what they mean."   Project lead
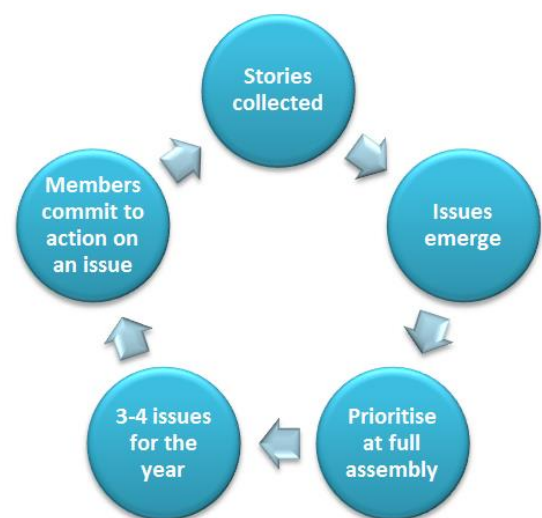

Stories collected

Issues emerge

Prioritise at full assembly

3-4 issues for the year

Members commit to action on an issue

Illustration of Citizens UK process of engagement

---

[9] See Appendix 3 for commonalities across projects

The WeCanB7 approach encompasses asset-based thinking within a deficit model. The project aims to harness the strengths of groups and agencies that already work in Nechells, a 'tri-sector' partnership of voluntary sector organisations, statutory agencies and local businesses to share resources and work together for change. They are engaging with local people about issues in themed groups and want to empower people to have a voice on decisions that affect them.

2.3 Empowerment

Empowerment approaches to engagement seek to change mind-sets, either of participants or of institutions, employers, decision makers or wider society. The EDAS Foundation, for instance, works mainly with women who would not usually get involved with community activism or know about opportunities to engage with decision makers. The project aims to empower women with knowledge of their rights and decision making structures and to challenge traditional views that it is not women's role to be involved in community issues.

The LGBT Leadership Academy is working to empower LGBT leaders and potential leaders and to support them to bring about change in attitudes and/or practice their own organisations, such as extending opportunities for LGBT employees. Once empowered, people can use the leadership skills they have gained more widely than the workplace and more LGBT leaders could become involved in their community, as school governors for example.

Financial inclusion

Projects that address financial inclusion empower people in a different way, by giving them information and tools so that they can make informed choices about accessing financial products and services. In Langley, for instance, the project linked people to the local credit union and provided information about more affordable alternatives to doorstep and payday loans. The approach had to be subtle as people were reluctant to engage, so the project offered general information in informal settings and at events so that people's interest could be de-personalised. The Digbeth Trust provided training to older people on how to access online shopping and comparison sites to get the best deals; this was of more interest to participants than how to access Pension Credit benefits. Older people had reported feeling excluded from being able to access the benefits of online shopping independently.

There is evidence across most the projects of a willingness to be flexible, to adapt the delivery of funded activity in response to the needs of the communities they are working with; projects have listened to people and changed direction, when needed. While most engage people on specific issues or to address gaps in knowledge or skills (the deficit model), often as a way of establishing common ground on which people can work together, several also look to identify the strengths in the community and build on those. Most of the projects demonstrated a strong commitment to improving connections with the communities they support, linking them to each other and to other groups and organisations to extend social networks and increase their power. Where the funded organisation is well established, has a history of social action and / or has wide-ranging local connections, such as Karis Neighbour Scheme, Langley PCC, CRIS and the Digbeth Trust, the relationships that have been developed with local people over a number of years have provided intelligence and insight into problems local people are experiencing and also some local confidence that something can be done about them.

3. Factors for successful engagement

This section explores what works in engaging people to bring about Community-led Change.

3.1 Leadership and vision

Having someone to drive the work forward, to hold and share the vision and ignite the community action flame that attracts others would seem to be an essential factor for successful engagement. There are different approaches to leadership across the funded projects; some project leads focus on transferring power to people who engage and others act as the conduit through which people connect with each other and with other communities, groups or decision makers.

CRIS, the EDAS Foundation and WeCanB7, for example, are organisations led by individuals who have a passionate belief in the work they are doing and who tend to 'lead from the front'. They are seen as knowledgeable by the people they work with and support, they may have valuable knowledge and experience of how the 'system' works for instance, and in some cases there is a risk that people may come to depend on their leadership and be unable to think about how power, skills and knowledge could be transferred from them to the community.

Other project leads, such as at Langley PCC, Karis Neighbour Scheme and Open Door Community Forum, take a gradually less directive leadership approach to facilitate and actively enable others to take on a range of roles and responsibilities. These leaders are more active in the initial stages of a project; they are critical in establishing the ways of working, getting the initial cohort of people involved, supporting them and getting things going; then they gradually withdraw and there is some evidence to suggest that this is an approach that encourages people to 'do it for themselves.'

It is interesting that several (5) of the funded projects have a faith-based element to their leadership and, for some, their organisational culture. Recent research for the Methodist Church showed that in many of the communities furthest from power, churches and other faith organisations can be the 'last ones standing' who are offering support to local communities in the face of austerity measures.[10]

Citizens UK Birmingham has a leadership approach that is embedded in their engagement model, which has moved away from individuals who might fit the traditional 'engaged local activist' stereotype, where influence is based on voice and an ability to attend meetings, to one in which people with leadership responsibility come from organisations committed to the underpinning philosophy of Citizens UK and who have

> "We see someone as a leader if they are known within their community or organisations and they have a network of people they know, people can be a dinner lady or the head teacher..."
>
> Project lead

an established network of engaged residents behind them. They have a clear leadership structure and members have access to leadership training, provided by the national organisation - everyone in a leadership role has undertaken the training and everyone who undertakes the training is called a leader.

---

[10] See *We Are Family* CGMC/Merida Associates 2015 http://www.cgmcontheweb.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Family-Ministries-Booklet.pdf

3.2 Making connections and identifying common ground

The majority of the funded projects are using established community engagement techniques to find out what changes people want to see, including one-to-one and small group conversations. Project leads and participants agreed it was important to find common ground, an idea, theme or issue that could inspire or galvanise people into action. Creating a sense of coming together to make a difference is important, providing a focal point around which people can build connections and relationships.

In some areas, such as Langley, Nechells and Ladywood, there are existing groups including resident members who are very experienced in community activity and who can encourage and support newer participants. At a meeting of the Rood End Community Champions (Langley) observed for the research, 3 new residents attended for the first time because they were concerned about speeding traffic on their street. It was this element of self-interest that created the energy to come along to the meeting but by the end of it they were offering to help with a litter pick in their area, to act as a link to the primary school (one was a parent governor) and to support a fund-raising activity. They also found out about a coffee morning where they could talk to a local authority officer about the traffic issue. It is these kinds of connections that make engagement successful.

At a strategic level, WeCanB7 has a vision to eradicate poverty in Nechells and has made connections with strategic policy makers from the private and public sectors in the city to engage them in the vision. For instance, having identified that the HS2 rail line will run through the area, the project has initiated conversations to talk about how to change the physical look of Nechells, to make the area a better Gateway to Birmingham. This has resonated with influencers and decision makers and created common ground with them. Similarly, the project is building connections with local businesses through the tri-sector partnership approach to create routes to local employment for residents.

3.3 Equipping people with skills and knowledge

To effect Community-led Change, all the project leads talked about the need to build confidence and support people to articulate ideas or concerns effectively with decision makers. Projects identified the importance of communities having a voice and being heard. The EDAS Foundation, for example, supports women to take collective action on common issues by training them in the skills they need to ask open questions that help them engage in a constructive dialogue with local councillors, MPs and officials.

> *"If I send one person to the local councillor then he may ignore them, if I send 3 or 4 people together, all with the same issue, then he has to do something in a constructive way."*
>
> Project lead

Some projects provide direct access to councillors or officials by inviting them to regular activities, such as coffee mornings, where people can speak with them on their own ground. Others are able through networks and connections to bring local people's issues in front of decision makers to get things done at the individual, neighbourhood or community level. While the project leads facilitate the connection and know who should be contacted, it is local people who do the talking. For some people these connections to and networking with senior-level influencers and decision makers, accessed through project leads, can see solutions to individual issues happen more speedily than is generally

the case, because they are able to circumvent the established systems and communication routes to achieve a more timely response and resolution.

The LGBT Leadership Academy anticipate that equipping more effective and successful LGBT leaders will effect organisational change around perceptions of LGBT employees and enable organisations to become more diverse, with better policies for LGBT community members. For example, one organisation which had supported a staff member to attend the leadership training asked the LGBT Centre to deliver a training day for all staff and senior managers and as a result the organisation has revised some of its policies, put in place a policy for transitioning in the workplace and set up a group to review inclusivity, diversity and hate crime definitions in relation to LGBT.

Some projects described their roles in supporting newly arrived communities to understand the cultural 'norms' of life in the UK, to prevent misunderstandings with their neighbours or the law. This includes, for instance, 2 projects that inform new arrivals about dustbin collections and fly tipping rules and another that helps parents to understand that physical punishment of children is against the law in the UK. This work to support integration is generally couched in terms of welcoming people and making them feel a part of the community.

> "The main thing is to help people who move into the area to live peacefully with those who are already there."
>
> Project lead

3.4 Social interaction

Project participants reported that they enjoyed the social aspects of coming together to act collectively and that this was part of the reason they engaged in community activities.

The need to create safe, comfortable spaces for people to meet and connect to make change was emphasised. Accessible, affordable venues are important but outdoor spaces, like an allotment or community garden, can also become a focal point for activity.

Several projects included food-related activities to bring people together, such as the community lunch at the Open Door Community Foundation, where the concept of hospitality is to the fore. Participants told us they came back to community groups where they felt welcomed the first time they attended.

The concept of a social hub where people can hear about things that might interest them is a strong one across several funded projects. In Ladywood there is a vibrant community café where a wide cross-section of the community congregate for food, news is exchanged and community business gets done. Similarly, Langley community centre and the Summerfield Residents Association (Ladywood) have coffee mornings where community information is exchanged and external agencies can pop in to meet residents. CRIS aims to create relationships between newly arrived and more settled communities using social activities, combined with childcare and opportunities for sharing food, to get people talking and from these conversations to identify issues and solutions.

3.5 Group values and attributes

Research participants felt the following values and attributes help to support successful community engagement:
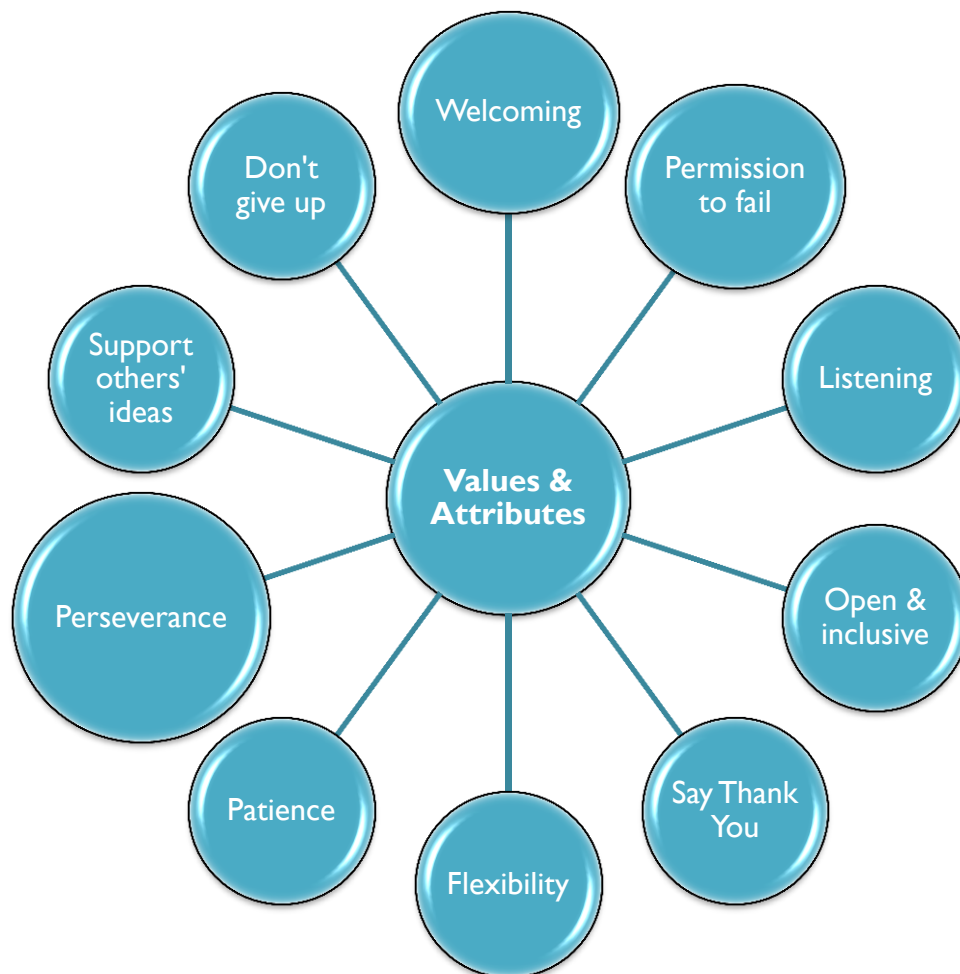
3.6 Effective promotion

Research participants reflected that they are not always good a promoting what they do. The Rood End Community Champions identified a number of things that had changed as a direct result of their local action but where other residents did not know they were the driving force behind making them happen, such as the creation of a shoppers' car park for which the local authority was given credit.

Many of the funded groups appear to operate in a fairly informal way, with limited budgets and little internal or external evaluation capacity so capturing and evidencing the difference they make on a day to day basis is not necessarily a high priority.

> *"If more people knew there are people out there doing things to get Rood End up & running they might be more prepared to turn out and help"*
>
> Participant

Celebrations were identified as a useful way to engage new people and hear their ideas, such as at the Unsung Heroes Awards evening held in Hodge Hill (Open Door / Neighbours Together).

4. Barriers to engagement

This section presents the major barriers to engagement and participation identified through the research.

4.1 Hierarchy of needs

At a time of austerity, housing shortages and welfare reform, projects funded to engage people in Community-led Change have often found that people have more pressing, and often complex, needs to be met before they are in a position to think about engaging in community action. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs helps to explain how basic needs can be a barrier to engagement. Only when the lower order needs of physical and emotional wellbeing are satisfied are people ready to engage with the higher order needs of influence and personal development.

Hierarchy of Needs
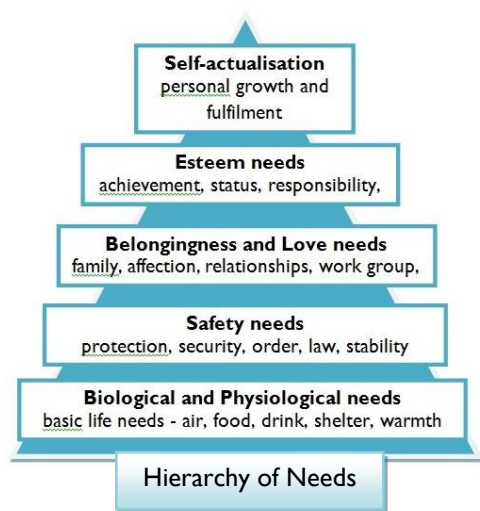
You cannot motivate someone to represent their community (level 4) when they are having family problems (level 3); and you cannot expect someone to help with a community event (level 3) when they are being evicted (level 2)[11].

Addressing immediate and urgent needs for people is deeply challenging, even for projects with a strong ethos of asset-based working, a dilemma Open Door Community Foundation identified. They have been working hard to unearth gifts and talents in the community and want to facilitate people to do things for themselves but find themselves sorting out people's pressing issues during their twice weekly Open Door drop-in sessions rather than developing and sharing strengths.

Birmingham LGBT highlighted at the Making it Happen event that the potentially dangerous consequences of speaking up or out for LGBT and other minority communities (level 2) can act as a significant barrier to engagement.

In contrast, the EDAS Foundation has found that empowered individuals tend to move away from groups they were involved with, taking their newly found skills and knowledge into other arenas, maybe to work on issues that have more personal importance to them such as FGM, or into volunteering or work with other projects (level 5). Whilst this is a powerful outcome for these individuals, it does have a potentially adverse impact on the long-term sustainability of the EDAS project.

4.2 Self-limiting beliefs and perceptions

At the Making it Happen event, research participants talked about the dangers of getting locked into using a deficit approach as too much of a focus on 'issues' and 'problems' can ultimately disempower people and prevent them from seeing themselves part of the solution. Project leads felt that they often had to work to overcome entrenched community and personal narratives that

---

[11] © Alan Chapman 1995-2005, with acknowledgements to Maslow

included *"we/they tried that before and it didn't work so why should we try it again?"* and people not believing that change is possible and therefore feeling that it is not worth doing anything because *"nothing ever happens here anyway".* Where people live in communities that have had little or no investment over time, their life experiences can create a 'small horizons' mentality that cannot envisage significant change or improvement because they have no concept of how good it could be.

A WeCanB7 stakeholder talked about the challenges of getting people to see the benefits to them and the wider community of picking up someone else's litter or fly-tipped rubbish, particularly when a new pile of rubbish would be back in a few days. It is hard for people to understand that they are creating a culture of cleaner streets by picking it up that takes time but will eventually be self-perpetuating. WeCanB7 also found that they needed to work in partnership with the local authority's street cleaning team to co-ordinate efforts.

In old-style community development, people would express their views and then become frustrated that change took too long to happen, when somebody else (usually the local authority) was responsible for making it happen. They had no need to know about the processes required to effect change because they were not leading it. Many people still have an increasingly unrealistic expectation that the local authority should do everything and there is general agreement amongst project leads that *"the worst thing you can do is raise expectations and not deliver"*. However, asset-based community development is designed to overcome this self-limiting mind-set and to empower people to set their own expectations and then do it for themselves.

> *"(They) knocked down flats and built houses - so changed the way it looks but didn't educate the people about the impacts of those changes - they still think that someone will come and mow my lawn, someone will fix my fence, someone will cut my hedges - no pride in ownership of houses - when things go wrong people don't fix it."*
>
> Project lead

4.3 Funding and resources

WeCanB7 highlighted a significant factor relating to statutory and voluntary sector funding that has had a sustained impact on people's willingness to engage in activity to change things in Nechells (and in deprived communities across Birmingham). Over many years, successive initiatives have 'parachuted' outside agencies into the area, bringing in key players who are successful but who then disappear when the funding runs out. People feel that none of the funding streams to date have made a significant and lasting difference to the area, nor have they addressed the issue of how to continue with successful initiatives once the funding has gone.

WeCanB7 also provided an example of how successful initiatives can inadvertently disadvantage an area by achieving their outcomes. Family Support Team funding for intensive work with parents of children at local schools (both secondary and primary) to embed the importance of regular school attendance enabled 6 primaries and 1 secondary school to move out of special measures because of increased attendance. The Family Support funding has now been replaced by Troubled Families money and one of the criteria to access this support is poor school attendance. So, somewhat ironically, while many families are indeed troubled and the area has the highest level of child

poverty in the city, none of the schools and families could access this support and the community was effectively being penalised for increasing pupil attendance.

Open Door Community Foundation found that their work become more challenging once the Lottery-funded Big Local initiative came into the area as many of the residents who were working with them to start the asset-based change process became actively involved in managing the Big Local funding and struggled to find time to do both.

Others are finding that the austerity measures in Birmingham mean that there are fewer agencies around in both the local authority and voluntary and community sectors to support people and this is placing additional pressures on those organisations that are providing advice, information and day-to-day support in addition to their social action work. A shrinking pool of other service providers also means there are fewer organisations to refer people onto and to connect with for collaboration, networking and campaigning.

Some of the projects are concerned that some funding streams are disproportionally bureaucratic and that this can create a barrier for community-led projects where people may lack the skills or knowledge to complete application forms appropriately.

4.4 Politics; politics and gatekeepers

Evidence from the research echoed the findings of the Kerslake Report in relation to self-appointed 'community leaders' who have achieved a high profile by attending public meetings and are embraced by the local authority as representing community views when they have little connection back into communities and are neither representative nor accountable. The engagement of what are colloquially known as the 'usual suspects' in consultation processes means there is less opportunity for other, often hidden, voices of communities to be heard. Some high profile 'leaders' can act as gatekeepers to communities, giving the false impression that the only way to engage some groups is through them.

Even at a local level there will be people with strong personalities who can stifle the quieter voices within the community and project leads need good facilitation skills to ensure everyone is able to contribute. Sometimes there can be contrasting but equally valid positions expressed that can lead to tension within groups. For example, some people might see the role of the group to influence decision makers and to lobby for the best outcome for the local area; while other people might want to focus on what the group can do for the community itself by working together and this kind of difference of opinion can create tension and distract people from finding a way to do both.

Political (with a small p) infighting between community groups or initiatives can get in the way of social action and community activists can find it disheartening, time consuming and disempowering to navigate these local politics.

Without community development support, it can be difficult for community organisations to adapt to the change in the nature of engagement that is currently taking place, particularly with statutory bodies. Many groups are still expecting to engage with decision makers in an adversarial manner, demanding change, rather than in a spirit of collaboration to co-produce change. Without support to adapt, people might feel that their voice is no longer being heard in a way they recognise and disengage from opportunities to influence.

For example, Citizens UK Birmingham arranged a meeting between the editor of the Evening Mail and Refugee Community Organisations: *"some smaller groups came along and they wasted a 4 minute opportunity to tell him what needed to change by telling him how angry they were with the newspapers - he wanted to help and they just did same old, same old."*

Building relationships with councillors and MPs is seen as a way of getting things done, however some projects voiced concerns about local councillors being politically motivated, particularly around election time and unwilling to share power or engage in equitable relationships with community organisations, only wanting to offer help and support when it was politically expedient for them to do so. In some areas, rivalry between councillors can get in the way and even prevent access to some resources if a project gets caught in the middle, or is felt to take sides. Managing relationships with local politicians can be a delicate and time-consuming operation.

4.5 Length of community development support

Where there has been long-term continuous funding of community engagement in an area, or with a specific community, the conditions are more likely to be created for Community-led Change. Where a funded and time-limited project is working with a community for the first time and breaking new ground in terms of engagement, it is difficult to quickly build the trust and relationships necessary to empower people to initiate or deliver change for themselves.

In Ladywood and Langley, for example, where the Trust has provided long-term support, several approaches and projects have been delivered over the years that have prepared the community for an asset-based facilitative approach where they begin to take the lead, they have seen how it can be done and know success is possible.

For the Digbeth Trust, on the other hand, aiming to build peer-to-peer networks to support financial inclusion with groups of older people where a prior relationship did not exist, there was not time in the funded project to do the development work necessary to enable that to happen. In one instance, 'parachuting' cold into a group of Asian elders who had assembled for the first time was very unsuccessful. It was possible to do training with small groups of older people in response to their expressed wish for skills in online shopping. This kind of intervention can help to create the conditions for Community-led Change in the future.

Similarly for Open Door Community Forum, the project has adjusted the pace of its work and focused on building connections and relationships as the community, which does not have a history of sustained community engagement, needed time to engage fully in asset-based working to achieve Community-led Change.

It is not just length of community development support that creates the conditions for change, however, but also the willingness and ability of projects to allow the engagement approach to move from the direct interventions, so often needed to get something going, to a facilitative co-production approach that enables the community to take the lead.

5. Evidence of change and empowerment

It is difficult to evidence change in individuals if it is not being captured with, for instance, start and finish outcomes measurement tools. There is anecdotal evidence from interviews of participants who have grown in confidence, who have taken on new roles and tackled issues they would not have believed possible before their engagement in funded projects. Particularly convincing is where other members of a group comment on the growth of a colleague, recognising how they have developed through the engagement process.

This section presents examples of change that has been evidenced by some of the funded projects.

Citizens UK Birmingham: Access to Mental Health services for 16-17 year olds

Citizens UK holds annual agenda setting sessions for its full membership to identify priorities for the year ahead, issues can only be taken forward if a minimum number of people sign up to act on them. In October 2013, the lack of access to Mental Health services for 16-17 year olds, who were falling between children's and adult services, was one of the main issues to emerge.

- The identified action was to achieve better Mental Health access for 16-17 year olds with relevant Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

- 51 members of Citizens UK Birmingham attended the next Board meeting of the CCG (Dec)

- Engaged the local authority to support the request for Mental Health services and achieved official full council backing (Jan 2014)

- Meeting the CCG Board with group of members who agreed to look at request for services (Feb)

- The CCG Mental Health commissioning team supported request as they had already cautioned a provider for failing to provide Mental Health services for 16-17 year olds

- It was recognised that it would take time to get a new service into commissioning cycles and they agreed to an interim service

- Chair of CCG agreed to meet wider Citizens UK Birmingham membership to give a progress update

- 500 people attended a week before local elections and the Chair publicly confirmed to the membership there would be an interim service while commissioning cycles moved to make the service changes (May)

- Forward Thinking Birmingham, a new Mental Health partnership for 0-25s was selected as a new provider in Feb 2015, the service to go live in April 2016 and 400-500 young people who would not have received a Mental Health service will now have it.

Rood End Community Champions: Environmental improvements

The Rood End Community Champions, supported by the Langley PCC project lead, have achieved real, visible changes in their neighbourhood in recent years. The Champions set out to invigorate a sense of civic pride in their area and achieved the following through a mixture of lobbying, research and rolling their sleeves up.

- A rolling programme of litter picks / rubbish clearance – streets are prioritised by need each year, volunteers recruited including scouts and parents
- Speedwatch research on streets used as 'rat runs' led to speed bumps being installed
- Lobbying local politicians resulted in a new car park for shoppers at the local shops, to support local economy
- Lobbying railway authorities to change the timing of a level crossing barrier to ease traffic congestion
- Working with local retailers to set up Christmas lights in the shopping area
- Lobbying banks and local retailers to encourage free cash machine facilities to be provided in the shopping area, to support local economy (now 2 machines)

Langley Community Allotment Scheme (Champions)

The Langley PCC project lead supported local people to take over 2 disused allotments as a focal point for local activity. It is growing slowly as a project but is established in the community now.

- Volunteers are keyholders for the allotment scheme
- The agreed principle is to run it on a subsistence budget
- Sales of produce covers the rent for the plots and cost of seeds
- People donate tools, jars and make chutney
- Site for community events

The Langley PCC funded project finished in November 2015. However the Rood End Community Champions are continuing to meet and have set themselves an agenda for the year *"let's stick to what we know we're good at and what we can realistically do"*. They have a structure and regular meetings and are well organised. If residents contact the church community centre now, volunteers can help with practical queries, for instance about public services, but cannot refer people for financial advice because the link made by the project lead with the Sandwell Financial Services Hub has not been maintained.

Development of Ladywood Community Development Trust

The aim of the Karis Neighbour Scheme funded project was to develop community leadership to create more sustainable activity, there is a history in the area of successive initiatives 're-inventing the wheel' and activity not being sustained. A community conference several years ago initiated a cross-ward community partnership which over the years has evolved into a Community Development Trust (CDT) which has been supported by the project lead and aims to hold and drive a community vision for Ladywood. The evolution of the CDT demonstrates that it takes time for people to develop the skills and knowledge to take on leadership roles in communities effectively.

- The original community partnership merged into the Ladywood Community First Panel which supported existing and new groups in the area. Panel members learned how to set criteria and make decisions about funding local projects and evaluating progress.

- Community First acted as a catalyst to groups to do something for themselves *"Community First really helped to change attitudes to doing things themselves"*.

- Community First finished March 2014 and the group continued and formed a Community Development Trust (CDT)

- The project lead has been supporting capacity building of the CDT members. They are looking at possible acquisition of an 'asset' (building) in the future and want to ensure they can manage it effectively.

- The project lead has helped to get the CDT up and running eg. by applying for charitable status.

Changes seen/emerging

The project lead and CDT Board members report:

- A greater sense of connectedness between projects and resident involvement

- A network of third sector groups communicating better

- A sense of more positivity and that a lot of good things are happening in Ladywood

- A sense from residents of a growing belief they can do things for themselves, less looking to the council to sort things out

- Approaching the end of the funded project, looking to hand on project lead role and functions, this is being discussed at CDT – they are looking to take on/host a worker under management of the community-led Board (step in the right direction) but still feel they 'need a paid worker'

- A CDT action plan is being put in place

The Real Junk Food Café in Ladywood community centre

Due to a reduction in statutory services, the local community centre was becoming under-used and the Ladywood Community Development Trust heard from local people that there was a desire to see more activity for the whole community in the centre and a general need for cooking classes.

After trying 1 or 2 other ideas, the project lead and an active resident made contact with the Real Junk Food Project in Birmingham to see if they would be interested in a joint project. The aim of the Real Junk Food Project is to create food sustainable communities; the starting point is to make use of waste food from supermarkets by cooking it and giving it away in pop-up cafes, on a 'pay as you feel' basis. People can give money or another gift, such as singing a song, telling a story or doing the washing up - this is an asset-based approach. It is all run by volunteers, the project leaders are currently paid in food.

The Real Junk Food Project leader reported that when they arrived in the Ladywood community centre kitchen it was crucial that they had help from the community leaders to set up the café and bring in local volunteers, it was important to have friendly faces around when people came into the café for the first time.

The café has created a real buzz in the community and has quickly grown into a social hub of activity where people meet and make connections.

The next step towards sustainability is to develop local 'grow sites' for produce to use in the café. There is one being set up in the community centre garden and on a community allotment. After that, the project aims to introduce community supported agriculture by linking the community to local food producers (farmers). In this model there are no middlemen (supermarkets), there is a guaranteed market for the farmer and a guaranteed food source for community.

An unintended outcome was that a local person who keeps bees on an allotment got in touch to say he would like to involve more local people in beekeeping so the project lead was able to put him in touch with the people who are developing the 'grow sites'.

6. Key Learning Points

Asset-based working supports Community-led Change

To enable sustainable change, the evidence suggests that the community engagement approach needs to shift from a deficit model, *"What are the problems here? How can we fix them?"* to a more optimistic strengths-based model that enables communities to ask *"What are the opportunities here? What have we already got that we can build on?"*. The role of the community worker is vital in enabling communities to make this shift. There is a parallel with professional coaching (see diagram) and where project leads are able to tailor their approach to the support needs of the community, progress towards Community-led Change is more likely.

From www.renshicon.com/how-to-shift-from-problem-solver-to-coach/

It takes times for a project worker to establish trust within communities, so it is also important to recognise that workers need to take time to withdraw, a gradual move across the scale from directive intervention to non-directive facilitation and then to a handover of power (which can be a challenge for those who are loathe to give it up). There is a risk that communities become dependent on key individuals if power is not gradually devolved and this can result in stagnation rather than progress towards Community-led Change. It has become clear that project leads require a sophisticated range of skills and attributes to effectively facilitate communities along a change pathway.

Community connections create short cuts to decision makers

It is a truism, but 'who you know' is a powerful way to find solutions, particularly to individual issues. Some of the funded projects have strong networks and connections and are able to get people in front of decision-makers by making a phone call, by-passing formal routes and systems. Participants are delighted when they use this shorter chain of command to get direct access to, for instance, political representatives. They see it as a core benefit of being engaged in a project. However the wider consequences of by-passing systems for individuals might be that the system is not changed for all. These informal processes also reinforce the power of the gatekeepers who hold the connections.

Community development can help people see the bigger picture

A desire to improve the local environment is a common driver for people to become engaged in community activity. A successful outcome, like securing traffic calming measures through a link to a local councillor, can be harnessed by a skilful facilitator to support the growth of participants by helping them to see the bigger picture. Traffic may be reduced on one street, but an unintended consequence can be that the problems get pushed along to the next street. There is an

opportunity for the community to get involved in influencing at a strategic level, for instance by informing a local traffic plan.

There are risks for local people in leading change

Community engagement to effect lasting change requires local people to commit themselves to the process, often for years. Generally, people like to 'pick & mix' the bits they do, there will always be more volunteers to do activities than to write funding applications. Some people consider the flexibility to drop-in and out of engaging as a positive, however real change needs people need to commit to see things through and this can be a big ask. Particularly as community-led engagement creates a different context from old-school community engagement, where residents shout at officers or members and demand action. Once a process is community-led and local people are taking responsibility for doing things, they can become perceived by other people as 'like the council' and there is a risk of disputes with near neighbours, a qualitatively different experience that could impact on people's quality of life (as has happened in some Big Local areas). People need to be supported to think through the wider implications before taking on a community leadership role, especially when there are significant funds available, and have access to appropriate training to lead effectively.

The social aspect of engagement is important

Social interaction with neighbours and other members of the community is a key motivator for people engaging in community activity. Being involved in something like litter picking can help people to bond as a group, it creates a visible presence on the street and may even confer status for some people. The effectiveness of social hubs for information sharing and making connections is another element that emerged from the research.

Celebrations are important for recognising the contributions people make as volunteers and for collective recognition of achievements. Where goals and milestones have been agreed at the beginning of a project they can be used both for reflection on achievements and to trigger celebration activities. It is important to share success stories locally, to help build momentum and engagement, as well as with funders.

Converting individual growth into Community-led Change can be a challenge

The funded projects offer lots of opportunities for individuals to gain knowledge, skills, connections and experience. It is not unusual for people empowered by community development activity to take what they have learnt into another avenue in life, perhaps a new job, rather than committing to the long haul of leading a community change process. Good projects know this and build in succession strategies to enable new leaders to come through.

External factors can have a big impact on engagement

Project leads reflected that there are cycles of community engagement, the ups and downs of life, political and economic realities impact on people's ability to engage and a project's ability to achieve empowerment goals. Where people are dealing with crises in meeting their basic needs, they need practical help and support first and empowerment later.

7. Conclusions

There is good qualitative evidence across the 9 projects that individual empowerment is being achieved for participants; people are growing in confidence, gaining skills, knowledge and experience and the groundwork for Community-led Change is being laid. For some projects, empowering individuals to know their rights and have the tools to engage in meaningful dialogue with decision makers marks a successful outcome. For project participants it was evident that on a personal level people have built social capital[12] through the connections they have made as a result of taking part. These connections and relationships have been described as the "*glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human wellbeing.*"[13]

Where projects have embraced an asset-based approach to engaging people, there are good indications in 1 or 2 that some changes are being led by local people, albeit with project support (paid or voluntary). A number of projects are working within a more traditional model of community development, identifying issues and making plans to tackle them. This can lead to change being achieved however it can also have a negative impact on the perceptions of local people who may feel that the issues never seem to go away. 2 or 3 projects have endeavoured to engage local people in more of a co-design or co-production process but this takes time to embed and become effective.

Across all projects, although they are at different stages of delivery, there is a dependency on the project leads to keep things going, maintain communications and connections and be the fount of all knowledge. 2 or 3 project leads have consciously considered how to move from a directive stance to a more facilitative role, and have empowered local people to take on more responsibility for aspects of delivery, but this is limited across the cohort. Where participants are taking on responsibility, they still generally feel the need for additional support and reassurance from a paid worker.

Sometimes projects are closely bound up with the identity of the project lead and it can be difficult to see how a movement towards a sharing of power within the project could happen. Where there is dependence on the knowledge and expertise of the project lead, it could be that local people are inadvertently inhibited from taking on a leadership role themselves. Some models, such as the one used by Citizens UK Birmingham, will continue to require paid staff to take on the 'organising' role in order to service[14] the participation and decision making structures that are central to the approach; advocates of this approach feel that the organising role is core to this model of participative (rather than representative) democracy and is a unique feature of the approach.

Citizens UK Birmingham and Birmingham LGBT see their work as influencing the wider agenda both in Birmingham and beyond, however several of the projects while networked at a local level, tend not to extend their activity outside their local spheres of influence. In the current economic climate, projects and organisations that network widely and embrace partnership working, adding value to the activities of other groups and organisations rather than competing for limited funds,

---

[12] Social capital represents social connections and the benefits these connections generate.
[13] Grootaert (1998), 'Social Capital: 'the Missing Link', Social Capital Initiative Working Paper Number 3, Social Development Department Publications
[14] Rather than to be the driver of decision making

are more likely to survive and be sustainable. WeCanB7's tri-sector approach and Ladywood's partnering with the Real Junk food Café are good examples here.

Projects are not really capturing the evidence of the difference they are making. Most of them do not have clear objectives or milestones and have no way of knowing the impact of the really good work they are doing. This puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to applying for funding from other sources and also means they do not have the tools to manage their projects effectively or measure the progress they have achieved.

Projects could benefit from a wider understanding of the policy environment in terms of community engagement, service re-design and commissioning. The asset-based approaches some projects are using fit very well against the agendas of statutory agencies and there are opportunities for communities to influence system change, if they know about them, such as Citizens UK Birmingham and Mental Health services for young people. Similarly, Open Door Community Foundation is helping to deliver against Public Health's wellbeing agenda by offering a social prescribing project to link people into community activities.

In conclusion, where the Barrow Cadbury Trust has invested in community development in an area over a longer period of time, the conditions are better for an asset-based facilitated community development approach to flourish and enable Community-led Change.

7.   Recommendations

1.   Future investment in community development projects should look for strong asset-based approaches to community engagement that include a recognition of the skills and attributes empowering community workers need to facilitate a process towards Community-led Change. The Trust should expect projects to be actively moving along the continuum from directive intervention to non-directive facilitation, depending on the starting point of the community concerned and the pace at which the skills and confidence of local people grow. In this way a risk of dependency on the worker can be mitigated.

2.   The Trust has a reputation as a community-friendly funder, easy to work with, offering great freedoms and flexibilities for projects to respond to the vagaries of changing realities in communities. The 'light touch' management of projects enables communities to try out new activities and ways of working; however it does not appear to require them to gather evidence of the difference they are making in a measurable way. As a consequence, groups are not gathering evidence and are missing out on opportunities for reflection that might help to steer their projects forward based on learning. It also means they are under-selling themselves because they are not allocating time to reflect on what they have achieved and how they did it. The Trust could consider how it could support groups to build the capacity to record the progress they make and to gather evidence to demonstrate their successes. Could the Trust, as a funder, helps communities to understand the use, relevance and language of measuring impact and outcomes? In the current climate the question of value for money is important to all funders and community groups need to know how to show their worth.

3.   It would be useful for the Trust to maintain a watching brief on approaches and tools for community engagement that are being produced in response to increasing policy requirements that communities be engaged in co-design and co-production processes for public services. Asset-based approaches are currently high on policy agendas but they require a lot more time and investment than is generally being recognised within engagement strategies. What role might the Trust play in enabling communities to take a more effective role in these important service re-design processes?

Merida
associates

March 2016

Useful references

Aiken, M. (2014) *Voluntary Services and Campaigning in Austerity UK: Saying Less and Doing* More National Coalition for Independent Action, London

Alinsky, S. (1971) *Rules for Radicals* Random House, New York

Arts and Humanities Research Council (2013) *Health and Wellbeing: the contribution of the arts and humanities.* AHRC, Swindon

Birmingham Against the Cuts (2015) *A response by BACT to the Kerslake Review* BACT, Birmingham

Cheung, S. and Phillimore, J. (2013) *Social networks, social capital and refugee integration.* Nuffield Foundation, London

Church Urban Fund (2013) *Tackling Poverty in England: An Asset Based Approach.* CUF, London

CLES and New Economics Foundation (2013) *Big Lottery Fund National Wellbeing Evaluation.* BIG Lottery, London

Craig, G., Mayo, M., Popple, K., Shaw, M. and Taylor, M. (2011) *The community development reader: History, themes and issues.* Policy Press, Bristol.

Friedl, L. (2009) *Mental health, resilience and inequalities* World Health Organisation, Geneva

Gilchrist, A. and Taylor, M. (2011) *The Short Guide to Community Development Policy* Press, Bristol

Institute for Voluntary Action Research (2015*) Funding for resident control; the Big Local experience so far* Local Trust, London

International Association for Community Development (2014) *Practice Insights: Community is the Answer* IACD, Falkland, Fife

Kerslake, B. (2014) *The way forward: an independent review of the governance and organisational capabilities of Birmingham City Council* Communities and Local Government, London

McCabe, A. (2011) *Below the radar in a Big Society? Reflections on community engagement, empowerment and social action in a changing policy context* Third Sector Research Centre, Birmingham

Norman, W. (2012) *Adapting to change: the role of community resilience* Young Foundation, London

Popple K (2015) *Analysing Community Work.* Policy Press, Bristol

Rowson, M (2010) *Connected communities: how social networks power and sustain the big society* RSA, London

Taylor, M., Wilson, M., Purdue, D. and Wilde, P. (2007) *Changing neighbourhoods Lessons from the JRF Neighbourhood Programme* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York

Twelvetrees, A. (2002) *Community Work Palgrave Macmillan*, Basingstoke