

Nurture Development – Review of Community Building in Freshwater

August 2017

Background

With two months until the end of the first year of the Freshwater (IoW) Community Building Programme this paper looks back on the achievements thus far, outlines actions for the final stage of Year 1 and sets out thoughts for work going forward. It is a prelude to the final report to be submitted in November.

The Freshwater (IoW) Community Building Programme was initially designed to be a 12-month process with the support of Nurture Development. The emphasis has been on widespread capacity building, partnership development & sustainable change in the area.

The approach adopted has been based on the premise that there is a clear and logical link between actions that develop citizen-led approaches to community building and outcomes that deliver on safety, community cohesion and health and well-being. Working on the premise that results are *determined by how well strengths are expressed and not by how well needs are addressed*, the project builds on the strengths and community connections in Freshwater.

The project activities followed the methodology of ABCD, working on the premise that local communities have unique competencies that cannot be replaced by professional intervention or service and programme based responses.

The role of Nurture Development was to:

- Take part in recruitment panel and facilitate a briefing session with all key stakeholders involved. Undertake a walkabout with Community Builder and plan the December Ideas Fair.
- Support to Stewards Groups and Community Builder
- Support to develop asset mapping methodology and sharing of intelligence as deemed appropriate locally
- Support to Community of Practice
- Programme management support
- Ad hoc mentoring as required (off site)
- Support embedding ABCD into wider policy approach e.g. social value, commissioning, neighbourhood plans
- Support managing contract with sponsor group
- Inform support to guides, templates etc. as required including development of tools if not available ND will write up notes and send over.

The Story so far...

From November 2016 to August 2017, the Community Builder in Freshwater has skilfully woven together different people, associations and ideas knowing when to 'nudge things forward' and when to step back. They have faced the challenges of competing calls on time and of carving out a distinct identity for ABCD and Community Building in the area amidst a range of exciting initiatives based in the community.

Their work has focused on the following key areas:

Identifying resident's passions and gifts through walkabouts and being present at 'bumping' spaces

Through this approach, they have developed a range of connections – some building on personal relationships already had - and as such gathered stories of community inspired activity in the area and supported the deepening of connections and relationships. This has included:

- Ladies who coffee;
- From market to social space to market;
- Sugarloaf connectors – intentional conversations;
- CeeAnns education for all;
- Perry's lifeboat and Mental Health Advisors initiative;
- Shaun and art;
- Men in Sheds

Not all connections have led to community led initiatives but as Cormac Russell notes '*Asset Based Community Development leads to proliferation*' and as such they have helped paint a picture of the area being one in which relationships have been established, talents and gifts shared with a strong base for future community led activity.

Animating community led activity

The Community Builder has listened closely to the passions, vision, and gifts of many residents and from these has animated several initiatives. These have included the community garden project – presentation available – and the creation of an opportunity via a planned community of practice meeting with the IoW's business development lead and young people to identify an empty shop space in the High Street that can be a meeting space for young people and an opportunity to create and develop business ideas.

They have also identified the need for traditional skills on the island, those that are held by several tradespeople who are in the best position to pass on and share with young people. This has kick-started discussions with businesses and educational bodies on the island and local people to look at how this can be developed further.

Supporting the creation of a safe space at the leisure centre through the development of an advice and support drop in

This is the jewel in the crown of the Community Building work and a powerful example of how the community will create opportunities that allow it to strengthen itself, moving from a deficit model to one that sees the glass half full. Over time the space has seen over those attending encouraged to move from 'clients' to citizens offering their gifts to community and others.

In this space people, relationships have been created with others who share their passions and talent for the benefit of the wider community. The Community Builder has worked with colleagues from projects such as LAC and Southern housing who as well as offering their expertise are adept at stepping back and playing a key role in deepening relationships.

A visit to the space brings home how through nurturing and positivity a safe space can be created that allows residents to see themselves not solely as recipients but as invaluable contributions to the community.

Person A came to the drop in to seek support as he is homeless. He received support and advice that was of help to him and over time offered his gift as a photographer to both Community Builder and others ...

Person B is an invaluable connector and builder in the local area with a passion for supporting young people to achieve their ambition and potential as well as lending support and encouragement to those who attend the Tuesday sessions...

Person C is new to the area and has gained confidence and help through attending the space on Tuesdays and is now seeking to offer her skills and support to the wider community...

Creating an asset map of local activity

The Community Builder has worked hard throughout the project to develop a database of knowledge and information that offers the opportunity to connect people to their community and as importantly an opportunity to offer gifts to others.

Alongside this the deepening relationships and connections through conversations creates an *'informal or mental' mapping of the assets which exist within Freshwater* has led to informing/generating themed areas of activity and/or gaps and spaces to bring people together to build from.

An example of this are the activities that have emanated from a local café which is a powerful bumping space. The Community Builder's presence and that of other 'connected' people has inspired a greater knowledge of local assets and seen residents to come together create activity and support for each other.

Being present in this space one can see and experience how a Community Builder identifying and understanding assets, wider community conversations and bringing people together based on shared passions interests and spaces can generate new assets and support existing ones which further strengthens the community.

Preventative role of a community builder

The 'hub' is an example of where people who are defined as 'isolated' are supported to 'avoid' service intervention and because of the relationship and trust they have built with the Community Builder and other connected residents. This safe space allows individuals to develop relationships and receive support, information, and advice. This support is at times from agencies such as the Housing Association and Local Area Coordination, however it is more likely to be from other citizens who offer their gifts and invite them to share theirs moving them from client/service user to gift giver.

Challenge and response

Role of Steering group

The ongoing support and encouragement of key stakeholders, a presentation of work done so far and the promotion of the project by colleagues in Public Health has seen greater awareness and understanding of the role. It would be important to build on this further by inviting a wider membership onto the stewards group particularly residents.

It is proposed that the Sponsorship group is set up as a specific entity, feeding back to the Steering group, but involving new members from within the community. This could be supported by an ABCD workshop that also looks closely at the role of a group underpinned by the approach. Further details outlined later in the paper.

Additional observations

For many, their motivation to get involved in the community is not driven by the need to join an organisation rather based on personal connections they have and not based on their own needs. For example, there is a strong desire to make Freshwater a place that young people can stay, socialise, and gain sustainable employment often in the shape of entrepreneurship. Through ABCD conversations the assets and hunger for this exists within the community and that there can be no doubt that these connections between building good relationships locally, finding things for young people to do and the communities future relationships and wellbeing.

Freshwater has a strong community feel and track record of achievement the leisure centre being a perfect example. Whilst there is much on offer an Asset Based approach can connect more people to what exists already and what can be built and animated in the future. The approach will refocus citizens from being recipients to gift givers at the heart of future development. The work so far highlights this.

The success of the Tuesday hub shows what we have found in other learning sites, namely that 'meeting people locally and sharing experience can reduce feelings of isolation and be a source of friendship and mutual support. Even when people are quite self-sufficient, getting to know people locally can be rewarding for companionship, support and well-being'. The hub has also shown the importance of dismissing the term 'hard to reach' and ensuring that all know they are welcome for who they are and what they offer,

Through the opportunity to meet others we have also found that people have:

- Increased connections and opportunities and grown in growing confidence;
- Linked to groups and activities;
- Gained support and then begun to pass their experience on to others and find ways to help others to get involved

In other learning sites, we found that the initial step to get involved in community is often very hard. Ironically despite the Community Builder's extensive local connections it was also initially hard for the Community Builder to define the Community Building role. However; time, being present and engaging people where they feel most comfortable has opened meaningful dialogue and built relationships.

Confidence gained from recognising local assets and skills plus the desire to share gifts and working together with neighbours can lead to more confident conversations with agencies such as the council and Public Health, and an ability to express local concerns and priorities.

Proposed activity in September and October 2017

Celebration and Stories of welcoming community in Freshwater event

The event will invite residents and agencies to learn about and celebrate the Community Building work developed thus far and invite residents to share and celebrate stories of building a welcoming community.

This model was used in Nurture Developments Fife learning site where Community Builders and residents came together to share their own personal stories of what they felt was important in building a welcoming community.

With the support of Nurture Development, stories will be shared and discussed in small informal groups. Everyone will then reflect together on what the stories showed about building communities and what it is that makes a difference to local people.

These are enjoyable events and people spoke passionately about their experiences of connecting with other local people, and how they appreciated the support and generosity of other residents, and the importance of being accepted for who they are.

The stories will include those gathered over a period of the project and new ones gathered at the event and will illustrate the importance of community building and help to give a sense of its potential impact over time. The stories provide a snapshot of the value of community building efforts, and begin to show the range of areas where it can impact on local lives.

At this event, we could use remaining monies for the eLearning to set up a dedicated and interactive website based on the eLearning commons model initiated by Nurture Development. ND would support this development and create a learning and story sharing platform via social media which will promote the work and deepen learning and practice. It will be linked to the ABCD in England Facebook site and incite learning from other areas.hn

Reconvening and reconfiguring the support to the Community Builder

Propose that following the October event a Sponsorship group for the ABCD work is set up meeting monthly to discuss and guide the work. The first meeting after the event will focus on capturing the stories and learning and form a basis for future work.

There is no doubt that the effectiveness of Community Building work has laid the platform for the development of sustainable community activities aiming to play a key part in the well-being, safety, education, and entrepreneurship of the local communities in the Freshwater area. The strong connections made by with residents mean that a number would be interested in playing a part in this group.

Going forward this Group could also play a part in identifying ways in which the Community Building work could continue beyond Year 2 without the restrictive ties inevitably attached by statutory sector funders.

The approach could look at raising finance and resource that moves Freshwater's ABCD programme to a more sustainable and community led footing rather than applying for increasingly short term funded projects that set top-down targets and do not allow for truly community led activity. The approach would allow agencies such as the Council and Public Health to support communities without the restrictions of funder led targets and agendas that do not work at the pace of communities or tally with their vision.

The aim could be to invite contributors who wish to support the building of stronger, safer, more economically engaged citizens and neighbourhoods to put into a 'community pot'. Taking an aspect of the Theory of Change principles – *Supporting communities to building successful communities* - the approach will see initial funding through donations or gift based giving from individuals and organisations within a local community such as businesses, educational establishments, places of worship, schools, and philanthropists. This gift giving will not solely be restricted to monies but also offers of space, employees expertise and facilities.

The Sponsorship Group will play an important part of any community building programme, providing support for both the Community Builder, and championing the development of projects across their community.

Each group typically includes:

- 'Conductors': local people who support the ABCD (asset based community development) programme and are able to help positively promote the approach across the community.
- The Community Connectors who have been identified by the Community Builder

It would:

- Meet as a group approx. 3 times a year (or as agreed);
- Act as a Community-facing body representing the Community Building Programme;
- Help to promote Community-based projects in response to local need;
- Ensure that the principles of ABCD are maintained across projects;
- Act as a 'sounding board' and community viewpoint for Community Builder;
- Keep the Community Builder informed and updated regarding local community activities, organisations, and events;
- Promote Community Building programme positively whenever opportunity arises;
- Identify potential Community Connectors and pass information to Community Builder;
- The Sponsorship group would also take a lead in embedding evaluation within its responsibilities and with the support of Public Health and ND review the practice of the past year and map out the interrogation going forward.
- This work would also seek to evidence the connection that activity generated by ABCD based on the interests and assets which people possess and share, *'leads to the wider aim of market shaping, this diversifies 'assets' which people can connect to, and be a part of, which results in many benefits to the whole-system'*

Going forward in year 2 with Nurture Development

- Continue above support;
- Embed the eLearning component;
- Work with the Community Builder and Sponsorship group to host a two-day island wide event to share ABCD practice and identify two more learning sites;
- Support development of two further development sites through work with local communities who offer invitation