Empowering Communities

Community skills development and neighbourhood workforce planning

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summary

A summary of the Early Adopter programme for Skills for Care

by Melanie Henwood Associates

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An innovative programme on community skills development and workforce planning was launched in 2011 by Skills for Care. The programme sought to promote the development of individual and community assets and social capital, and to explore the contribution of a skills-led approach building on some tools and templates designed for local application.[1]

Fifteen projects were supported to examine multiple contexts and to develop initiatives in diverse neighbourhoods and environments. An independent evaluation was commissioned from Melanie Henwood Associates to identify the learning from the programme and to explore the contribution that it could make to social care and support and to improving local health and wellbeing. A full report is available, but this summary identifies the major conclusions and findings.

The projects are all summarised briefly at the end of this document. The evaluation involved documentary analysis of project progress reports; telephone interviews with key project personnel in 11 sites and in-depth fieldwork visits to four of the projects (Timebank, Somersham; MacIntyre, Oxford; Gentoo Living, Sunderland; and Turning Point, Swindon).

The projects were diverse in scope, scale and experience. They were located across a wide area of England, from the North East to the South West, and included a range of types of locality including urban and rural. All projects defined themselves geographically (i.e. in terms of a 'community of place'), but many were also concerned with a particular group, or groups, within that area (i.e. a 'community of interest'). This included objectives around skills development and social inclusion for people with learning disabilities; for people with mental health needs; and for older and disabled people.

The majority of the projects identified some generic objectives around improving the sense of community and neighbourhood, and in developing people's skills. In addition, some 80 per cent were concerned with empowering people to live independently, and 60 per cent sought to improve citizens' health and wellbeing. More than half were hoping to achieve savings in mainstream services, and 40 per cent saw their role in terms of filling the gaps left by mainstream, support.

Neighbourhoods and Social Capital
There is increasing attention being paid to the quality and character of neighbourhoods, and the significance of social and community capital. Both the previous Labour administration and the present Coalition Government have also focused on such matters, and this interest is particularly evident in developments such as localism; the idea of the 'Big Society' and the role of volunteers; and in the new public health agenda that emphasises individual and community assets in supporting health and wellbeing.

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[1] Skills for Care (2011), *Making use of 'Only a footstep away?' Practical steps in neighbourhood workforce planning and community skills development and their role in supporting new and existing community assets.*

A White Paper on care and support[2] published in July 2012 emphasised the importance of preventing, postponing and minimising people's need for formal care and support by "promoting people's independence and wellbeing." A central element of the vision for achieving this objective is the role of active and inclusive communities:

"Support within communities can benefit everyone: volunteering can keep people active, promote physical and mental health and wellbeing, and strengthen local connections. Community support can also generate economic benefits; for example, by supporting people back into employment." (P.15)

The contribution of communities is to be encouraged to enable the sharing of experience, time, skills and talents:

"We will support the growth and development of time banking, time credit and other approaches that help people to give their time and skills (...). These initiatives create supportive and reciprocal networks and help build relations and connections between people in local communities." (P.25)

The White Paper builds on the work undertaken by the Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) partnership (and on the earlier Putting People First Consortium). The emphasis on building community capacity has focused particularly on:

➢ **Building social support networks** (associated with reduced illness and mortality and good mental health).

➢ **Encouraging membership of groups** (participation in groups can have a major

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impact in reducing the risk of dying in the next year).

➢ **Nurturing an inclusive community** (a whole community focus can improve things for everyone).

➢ **Enabling everyone to make a contribution** (giving is associated with positive health and wellbeing).

The programme supported by Skills for Care provides some rich experience to inform such an approach. In addition, the particular focus on skills, and the potential for developing skills for the mutual benefit of all citizens, offers some early insight on how to create and support inclusive communities. The programme does not offer any 'magic bullet' or single blueprint for action, but the range of experience of the projects, and the individual and community outcomes achieved, begin to highlight some of the ways forward and the potential gain.

Individual and Community Outcomes

We looked at the experience of the projects and the differences they made to the people involved along a number of dimensions.

Skills and Knowledge

Virtually all of the projects struggled at times with the concept of 'skills', and particularly with distinguishing it from ideas based around qualifications. Participants in the projects were often unable to identify their own experiences and attributes as 'skills', particularly if they had poor experience of formal education or training. Helping people to recognise and identify their own skills was a major transformation for many, as this comment highlights:

"The existing skills that we found – so, for example, a willingness to get things done, practical skills, communication, negotiating, knowledge of the local area, and I think they

found that quite powerful. Oh wow! Yeah! 'Knowledge of the local area' – of course I have that!"

For Time Banks and similar schemes, helping people to recognise that they have something to offer is crucial, as this person remarked:

"It was important to put skills into a practical context to show that whilst providing support to learn a new language is a useful skill, so is being able to take someone's dog for a walk!"

Helping people to develop and acquire new skills can be particularly important in facilitating social inclusion. The concept of 'The Experience Tree' developed by MacIntyre was concerned with supporting people with learning disabilities to have life-enhancing experiences that would enable them to develop new skills, build confidence and self-esteem, and greater independence by building sustainable links with their local community:

"Social skills (...) making friends, relationships, building networks that aren't paid support."

There was also a benefit to the companies and organisations that were providing such experiences, and greater awareness of people with learning disabilities.

Other projects found that developing people's skills was also a crucial stepping stone to wider opportunities, not least in equipping people to return to education or training or to move into paid employment with the benefit of new skills and confidence. This was a particular feature of the Connected Care project, and of the adaptive coaching developed by Gentoo Living. The following comments by participants highlight the personal transformation:

"I hadn't been to work for like three years (...) coming back was quite hard, but I've got the confidence now to go on to other jobs."

"I want to be in work by 2014 [when my youngest is in nursery]. I'm going to go back to college and see what I can achieve."

Another project (Future for Fleetwood)) focused on developing new practical skills for people who were receiving packages from a local Food Bank but had little knowledge of how to prepare the fresh vegetables provided. A 'Cook and Eat' group enabled people to have a healthier diet, as well as to develop their self-esteem and to reduce their social isolation. Some of the group members subsequently built on their experience by going on to develop their skills further through voluntary activity and through NVQ qualifications*.*

Quality of Life & Social Inclusion

Improving the quality of life both of people volunteering or working in the projects, and of people being supported by interventions, was another important dimension. For some projects, improving the life skills of people was seen as central to enabling better social inclusion and participation. Dimensions, for example, was working to enable people with learning disabilities to be "better connected and more independent" through making better use of the natural support within communities.

Improving general health and wellbeing was also seen as a quality of life issue, and for some (such as the Neighbourhood Scheme in Calderdale), getting people involved in community groups was the first step in creating a sense of belonging, and potentially delaying the onset of people needing home care or day care.

Building intergenerational links was a particular focus of SOS Global and of Ulnes

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Walton. SOS Global had a successful experience in promoting a 'Safer Internet Day' when younger people were able to provide considerable information and support to older internet users. Less success was achieved with plans to use volunteers to visit care homes and take the concept of Memory Cafés and music to improve the engagement and quality of life for residents with dementia. Access to the homes was problematic and attempts were regarded with suspicion and hostility by care providers.

Community capital might be thought easier to achieve in rural or village locations, but the projects found this was far from a given. In Ulnes Walton the absence of 'community spirit' had – historically – been striking. Subsequent efforts to establish regular gatherings offering social opportunities and afternoon tea or lunches had brought about a transformation in contact and friendliness:

"People talk to each other. We just had an over 65s meal last week (...) and there are people that come that never see each other from year to year (...) And they love it; the old folks absolutely adore it, they talk to people they haven't talked to for years."

Overcoming social isolation was also a central theme in other projects and reflects the wider recognition of these issues such as in The Campaign to End Loneliness[3] (not least because of the associations between loneliness and increased risks of poor health and mortality). Eston Residents Association described their focus on involving people in the community and trying to improve quality of life, including working with a residential home as part of their contribution to Britain in Bloom:

"They're growing their own plants and they're growing some of their own fruit,

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[3] http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/

which they're cooking in the kitchen at the home. And (...) an elderly lady there, she told us she was so pleased she'd got involved with us and it gives her a reason to get out of bed on a morning."

Facilitating social inclusion for everyone has implications for the skills and understanding of people who can make participation more or less difficult for others. People with learning disabilities for example face particular problems if they are unable to use routine services such as banks or shops. The Keyring project was trying to improve the experience of people using banks by raising awareness and skills of bank staff.

The Timebank project in Somersham initially set out to support older people and enable them to participate more fully in society but in practice it became apparent that "it has to be a whole community thing." Being able to 'make a contribution' was a recurrent theme across many of the projects.

Individual stories and experiences illustrated the difference that developing and sharing skills could make in people's lives. In addition to the improved quality of life that was achieved by people using (or at risk of using) care and support services, there were also intrinsic benefits and value for people engaging as volunteers or as part of the wider community.

Voluntary Activity

The distinction between volunteers and people being supported by projects was rarely black and white and there was considerable overlap between these groups. While several projects were explicitly concerned that improving the skills of volunteers could help them in finding paid employment, this could be a double edged sword and the success of getting volunteers into employment could mean community organisations struggled to continually

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support the recruitment and training of new volunteers.

Innovative approaches – such as timebanking – challenge traditional models of voluntary activity. In Somersham it was clear this could be both a strength and a weakness; while some voluntary bodies couldn't see how a timebank might fit with volunteering, others were attracted by the flexibility and mutualism of the model, and by the prospect of being able to benefit from as well as give to the time bank. This was especially clear when it became apparent that the time bank could be about whatever its members wanted and that it could provide not only practical support such as with odd jobs, but also enjoyable activities such as "cookery workshops and djembe African drumming, and singing lessons."

Sense of Community

Trying to build a 'sense of community' was a strong motivator across several projects. Although 'community' is a term that is often used freely and loosely, the experience of the projects was that clarity of terminology and definition can be very important. What people understand by 'community' can be quite narrow and very local, and without a full appreciation of this, and an understanding of the implications for practical initiatives, developments may not thrive. Service providers may have perceptions of the local community that differ considerably from those of people who live there. The Gentoo project, for example, realised that an area they had regarded as one community, was strongly seen as two separate entities by the residents. A failure to recognise this would have significantly limited the project in engaging with and getting the commitment of local people.

Recurrent messages across the projects emphasised that developments can only go

at the pace of the community, and change often takes considerable time to deliver.

Organisational and Strategic Outcomes

In different ways the projects all anticipated or hoped that there would be benefit to people who were using – or were likely to use – health and care support, and that reliance on formal services might be reduced through better use of social capital.

Reduced reliance on services

Many of the project participants who were interviewed for this study were sceptical of approaches to substitute volunteers for paid staff, or to place greater demands on voluntary services as a means of managing austerity measures in public services. This was especially clear where projects were based in organisations with a campaigning role. Although communities and the 'Big Society' were attracting greater attention, many people recognised that much of the activity associated with such initiatives had been underway for years and that people were quietly getting on with things without necessarily seeing it as part of any wider political initiative.

In several projects it was recognised that while they may not have been established to substitute for statutory services, nonetheless if they did not exist communities would be doing less well in addressing health and wellbeing matters.

A minority of the projects were beginning to address value for money or Social Return on Investment. Such methodologies were at an early stage of development, although it was recognised they could be particularly useful in enabling dialogue with local commissioners.

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Joint Working and Partnerships

The benefits of 'stronger partnerships' were frequently referenced, both between individual participants and at organisational level. Many organisations were small and relatively fragile; both personal and organisational survival were frequent preoccupations and could be significant distractions.

Opportunities for partnerships could arise in unexpected ways and could take projects into new territory and needing to engage with a wider constituency of interest.

The evolving policy agenda around public health was also recognised to create new opportunities for several of the projects to align their objectives and aspirations with wider local goals. Identifying individual and community assets fits particularly well with the new model of Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies, and there are opportunities for projects to work more closely with health commissioners. This was recognised explicitly by Turning Point, but was also becoming more evident in other projects.

Conclusions

It is important to understand the key findings and conclusions from the programme, particularly if the opportunities for the projects to offer more than the sum of the parts are to be maximised. There are various 'internal' messages for Skills for Care concerned with how best to manage, resource and support programmes, and these are not detailed here but are being addressed separately. However, there are also important messages for policy and practice.

As noted at the beginning of this overview, the relevance of the programme of work to wider care and health agendas has grown over its lifetime. The vision of the White

Paper for care and support recognises the vital contributions made by communities and the scope for drawing on skills and resources, but also for strengthening and developing them:

"Supporting active and inclusive communities and encouraging people to use their skills and talents to build new friendships and connections is central to our vision for care and support." (P.22)

The experience of the Skills for Care programme confirms that there is much that the community *can* contribute, and that an asset or skill-based approach has particular value. However, it is also clear that initiatives of this nature take considerable time to establish and grow, and the scale of development is often extremely modest. It is not possible to simply scale-up such initiatives without investment in support and infrastructure. The very nature of community-based social capital is that it cannot be created overnight or simply switched on.

Community capital can also be fragile and reliant on one or two charismatic individuals. A local organisational or personal crisis can therefore be disruptive.

The features of communities that may be integral to the successful development of social capital may also be the same ones that are most at risk from attempts to co-opt initiatives or formalise them through a government-led programme. This is not to argue against promoting social capital and supportive communities, but such developments cannot be seen as an optional add-on so much as an integral part of the strategic vision for whole communities and for the benefit of all citizens.

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Summary of the 15 projects

Access Dorset
Access Dorset is a charity and umbrella organisation of User Led Organisations. Working with Dorset County Council to develop user-led management of Centres for Independent Living, and developing the skills of local people to run the centres.

Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Located in the Neighbourhood Schemes Team the project is working to create self-sustaining community groups to help improve the health and wellbeing of people aged over 50, with a particular focus on people who are vulnerable and isolated.

Community Council, Shropshire
A registered charity which identifies and addresses rural issues. The project worked with local individuals and communities to understand skills and networks and to develop training materials.

Dimensions
Dimensions UK is a national specialist provider of support to people with a learning disability and to people on the autistic spectrum. Working in a small area of Newcastle community maps were used to identify community resources used by 12 people supported by Dimensions. This was to inform the development of training packages for paid and unpaid community members to better support the integration of people with a learning disability in using community resources.

Eston Residents Association
Eston Residents Association was established in 1997, covering some 3,200 homes and businesses. The Association is active on many fronts, all concerned with developing community spirit and pride.

Gentoo
The Gentoo Group is a not for profit housing organisation managing some 30,000 properties in the City of Sunderland. Profits are redirected into neighbourhoods and communities, delivering a range of projects to improve skills, enhance employment prospects, promote enterprise and raise aspirations. The project focused on two community groups and used an Adaptive Coaching model to support the development of a neighbourhood vision.

Herefordshire Public Services
Focusing on facilitating coordination of the community workforce in delivering health and social care support, and identifying the development and support needs of the community workforce.

Keyring
Keyring are a national charity working with more than 40 local authorities to provide supported living networks throughout England and Wales. Keyring builds links with the local community and believes these Community Connections can reduce dependence on support workers and develop members' confidence and self-reliance.

The project focused particularly on approaching local banks to explore their readiness to attend training events to enable people with learning disabilities to access services.

Luton Borough Council
Building on earlier work on workforce mapping, the Council aimed to produce a learning and development programme to assist front-line staff addressing prevention in the context of community empowerment and neighbourhood working.

MacIntyre

MacIntyre provides learning, support and care to more than 1000 children, young people and adults with learning disabilities across England. The project focused on developing the concept of The Experience Tree to offer people with a learning disability life enhancing experiences and opportunities to build on and develop skills.

N-Compass Northwest

N-Compass operates through Lancashire supporting children, young people and adults through a range of care, health and wellbeing services.

The 'Future for Fleetwood' project was located within a health and wellbeing service – Help Direct.

SOS Global

SOS Global is a social enterprise with experience of raising awareness of health and social issues for youth and communities. The project focused on identifying how self-reliance and mutual support can be established between older and younger people.

Timebank, Somersham

Somersham is a large village in Cambridgeshire. The establishment of a Timebank was seen as an opportunity to develop community skills. The timebank is open to all members of the community, but there was a particular focus on supporting vulnerable older people and carers.

Turning Point

Turning Point is a leading social care organisation providing services for people with complex needs in England and Wales. Connected Care has been developed as a model of community-led commissioning. Working in Swindon, a Connected Care project was established to support

community members to become Community Researchers (CRs) to research local needs and become more engaged in local commissioning decisions.

Ulnes Walton

The Community Group in Ulnes Walton brings together a range of groups and activities intended to combat social isolation, encourage participation and foster community spirit and pride in the local area.

> ## *What next*
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> The next phase of the work will build upon the learning from the community skills sites and will include the following work:
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> - Community Skills Development - a guide for commissioning
> - Value realisation and skills led communities
> - The role of skills as part of assessment and person centred approaches
> - Peer to Peer mentoring and community skills approaches.
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> ## *Further Information*
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> For further information on the community skills development work, please contact Jim Thomas, Workforce Innovation Programme, Programme Head – Skills for Care
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