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Strategic
Briefing

Growing community capacity

Dartington
Trust

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Introduction

This briefing explores how local authorities can work with children, families and communities to develop their collective capacity to address the challenges they face.

Increased demand for services, limited resources and recognition of the drawbacks of top-down public service models has led to some local authorities seeking new and innovative ways to support the needs of children and families (Gibson, 2020; Gupta, 2015). This includes moving towards being more of an action enabler 'precipitating collective citizenship and neighbour-to-neighbour interdependence' (Russell, 2020, p. 8). Participation and collaboration are key to this way of working (Cottam, 2018; Lowe, 2018). This means tapping into the latent potential of the community and stepping back from direct service delivery as a first resort and, instead, supporting the community to develop their capabilities and skills.

The potential of communities has been brought into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic, with local residents pulling together to provide support to each other through Mutual Aid groups.[1] In many cases this support has reached people more quickly, and helped with a wider variety of needs, than traditional services (Tiratelli and Kaye, 2020). There is an opportunity going forward to capitalise on this momentum and for councils, citizens and communities to develop different relationships with one another, working together in more facilitative and supportive ways.

This briefing uses a range of examples from across the sector and includes the following sections:

- What is community development?
- Why grow community capacity?
- The challenges of community development.
- Putting community development into practice.
- Key steps to consider when developing community capacity.

The briefing is relevant to senior managers with responsibilities for improving and promoting better outcomes for children, families and the wider community.

1 Mutual Aid groups are local support groups that have been established during the COVID-19 pandemic. For further information see **Communities vs. Coronavirus: The Rise of Mutual Aid - New Local**.

What is community development?

A community can be defined geographically in terms of place, or based on relationships, with people coming together voluntarily around an interest or common purpose. In the context of children and families, a community can be defined as a family's wider network of support, where there is a shared sense of connection and a commitment to making things better for themselves and the wider community (Lawrence, 2019).

Community development (including Asset Based Community Development - ABCD)[2] aims to empower communities to address social isolation and socio-economic inequality, and create stronger, more connected communities. Key components of the approach include building on the strengths of individuals and communities and mobilising them to come together to realise and develop their capacity, skills, knowledge and connections.

The approach is strengths-based and contrasts with a deficit-based approach, where disadvantaged communities are negatively perceived as a set of problems to be solved (Harrison et al., 2019; Russell, 2020). Asset-based work does not ignore needs or challenges; rather it 'refuses to define people or communities by them' (Sutton, 2018, p. 3).

Community development is distinct from community-based work or volunteering. It has the potential to be transformative and address inequality and disadvantage by enabling practitioners to redistribute power through changing their own behaviours (Child Family Community Australia, 2019). It moves away from a top-down, professionally-led delivery model to one that is led by the community, although professionals may be involved in the initial stages of contact-making and engagement. Early and continuous engagement and collaboration with communities and networking within and across agencies are integral to the process and are part of an iterative process of change that builds from the smaller to larger scale (Harrison et al., 2019; Forde and Lynch, 2014).

Identifying, connecting and mobilising community assets is not a linear process; however, there are a core set of principles and practices that enable community development, including being:

- citizen-led
- relationship-oriented
- asset-based
- place-based
- inclusion-focused.

(Russell, 2020, p.15).

2 For further information on Asset based Community Development see: www.bcruralcentre.org/2018/05/01/cormac-russell-explains-asset-based-community-development

A key feature of community development is recognising what is already in place locally and unlocking a community's ability to utilise their skills and assets (Russell, 2020). A first step in this is mobilisation of the community, through strategies that can be based around individuals, groups, places or services:

- Individual-based strategies consider the needs of individuals and set out how community assets can be developed and deployed to improve their lives.
- Group-based strategies tap into pre-existing groups within communities and build upon these.
- Place-based strategies focus on the geographical area and making this conducive to community mobilisation.
- Service-based strategies aim to empower people who interact with services and have ideas how to improve these.
  (Tiratelli, 2020)

Why grow community capacity?

A decade of austerity has required new ways of working to achieve sustainable solutions to local challenges. Demand pressures have also increased in both quantity and complexity (Holmes, 2021), most notably in relation to increasing levels of poverty and inequality, which have been compounded by the pandemic (Kaye and Morgan, 2021).

There is both an economic and moral case for addressing social inequalities and high cost child welfare interventions (Bywaters et al., 2020). There is also recognition that, for services to be sustainable, they need to move away from being reactive to being preventative and involving wider local support networks (Lent and Studdert, 2019).

A community approach, where social workers act as 'brokers' of resources and work with the community and voluntary organisations to support individuals, is not new; it was previously highlighted in a 1982 inquiry into the role of social workers (Barclay Report, 1982). However, over the years there has been a decrease in community-based social work practice (Tiratelli, 2020). In addition, social isolation within communities, entrenched poverty and intergenerational disadvantage, have created a vicious cycle from which many families find hard to break out (Featherstone et al., 2018; Tiratelli, 2020).

As part of the shift towards a more preventative approach in service design and delivery, local authorities are increasingly taking on the role of facilitator to foster a wider ecosystem of support and activity (Tjoa, 2018). In areas with high levels of deprivation, the approach has enabled families and their networks to identify their strengths, develop a stronger sense of ownership and make choices for themselves. As one practitioner reflected within the context of the current pandemic: "...there is now an opportunity for councils to act more like a safe umbrella for all families as they work out a solution to their problems." (Research interview, 2020).

The challenges of community development

Community development is complex and can be difficult to kick-start (International Association of Community Development, 2017). There are a number of challenges that senior managers need to consider when they begin to put community development into practice:

- Community development should not be seen as a way to plug the funding gap in children and family services. Community groups may be left to deliver services with little support and resources, leaving them without real provision to meet local needs (Research interview, 2020). This is neither sustainable nor desirable. Growing community capacity, especially in places where there are wide-ranging structural inequalities, requires investment in both resources and time, particularly at the outset (Featherstone et al., 2018).

- Culture shift in both the council and community can take a long time and requires buy-in from leaders, the wider workforce, communities and individuals within the community. It may take a long time for professionals to move away from the assumption that they know best, and become more willing to take the time to listen to the community, share power and design and deliver services alongside the community (Sutton, 2018).

- Innovative approaches carry with them certain risks that local authorities can sometimes feel reluctant to accept or be unequipped to manage. This can be a particular challenge in children and family social work, where professionals may be particularly risk averse because of the need to safeguard children from significant harm. Thus, a flexible approach to risk management is necessary when working with the community in order to strike a balance between supporting families and safeguarding children (Carr-West at al., 2011).

- Local authorities have accountability and responsibility for local outcomes (Harrison et al., 2019) and can be reluctant to hand over control because of concerns that things may go wrong (Selwyn, 2016). This may be compounded by a lack of trust; communities may not trust the local authority, especially where there have been negative experiences in the past or where they have been consulted many times and their suggestions have not been used, and their lives have not changed. Similarly, local authorities may not trust communities and be fearful of 'ceding power or nervous that people will ask for the wrong things' (Sutton, 2018, p. 16).

- A huge disparity in community participation and social capital between affluent and deprived areas is a difficult reality. In areas where there is such disparity, creating commonality between residents so that they can help each other can be challenging. This may be a particular barrier because co-production is disproportionately practiced by those who are 'better off', leaving those who are disadvantaged even further behind (Sutton, 2018). It is important that the 'loudest voices' do not remain dominant and that professionals are innovative and proactive in seeking out and engaging communities that have not been engaged in the past (Kaye and Morgan, 2021).

- The lack of evidence on the effectiveness of community-led models is often a barrier to implementing and sustaining a programme and may be used as a reason for funders to not support a certain programme that may take longer to demonstrate impact (Tjoa, 2019). Funding uncertainty, coupled with lack of resources, can limit the ability of councils and community groups to plan ahead and sustain existing community-led programmes.

Putting community development into practice

While putting community development into practice can be challenging, there are also opportunities for making it a positive experience. Establishing trust and a genuine partnership between the council and community is key. This requires a sharing of power and the removal of barriers to participation (Tjoa, 2019).

This section highlights some of the key steps for maximising success in community development. There are significant overlaps across the steps highlighted but they are each accompanied by one or two examples to illustrate the diverse range of approaches local authorities are using.

Adopt citizen-led approaches

Some councils have already adopted approaches that recognise children and families as active participants in service design and delivery (Lent and Studdert, 2019). By being citizen-led and building on what already exists, they are focusing on what people can achieve themselves and less on what services can do on their behalf. In practice, there is often a strong emphasis on building and sustaining meaningful relationships within communities and developing networks of reciprocal exchange and acceptable support, as illustrated at Camden Council.

Camden Council

Inspired by Camden's family fostering scheme from the 1960s, which supported the whole family, Camden Council is reimagining the local community as a 'village' that is friendly and inclusive, and where people feel cared for and cherished. The council's approach has been strengthened by the relational activism approach (**Becoming Unstuck With Relational Activism**), which makes change happen through personal and informal relationships and mutuality (for example, a butcher who donated school uniforms to struggling families).

The council is seeking to reflect the values of mutuality and activism by acting as enabler and facilitator, rather than as direct service deliverer or commissioner. This includes inviting residents with experience of services to share stories and lead training, circulating stories about relational work and good practice across the borough, and through participatory research, known as Camden Conversations.

For further information see:

Camden Conversations: Our family-led child protection enquiry
Community development work: The approach in Camden Council

Foster a culture of collaboration and partnership working

There is an imperative for leaders in councils, the third sector and the community to collaborate in order to respond to the needs of the community (Lowe, 2018). However, lack of a clear vision about collective outcomes often hampers progress in building community capacity. Identifying community leaders and activists who are passionate about their local area and supporting them to bring the community together is a key first step to successful collaboration. This collaboration is a key feature of Love Barrow Families.

Love Barrow Families

Love Barrow Families (LBF) was founded by two local public sector workers who sought to tackle some of the long-term challenges facing its residents. The team of health and social care workers are co-located in a (non-council) building in the centre of Barrow-in-Furness. The aim was to build on the existing knowledge and assets amongst the community in Barrow, and trust people to find answers to the difficulties they faced and to look after each other.

Using the principles of co-production, as defined by the New Economic Foundation (**Co-production: A manifesto for growing the core economy**), six families with different experiences of services were invited to several facilitated meetings to identify the top priorities for their local area. This shaped the underpinning principles of LBF, which include:

1) Have an open front door: no one should be turned away. Working with Barrow-in-Furness Borough Council, LBF has been able to spend small amounts of money to provide tailored support to families, which has made an important difference to the lives of many families.
2) Try to get things right first time: by using the **Dynamic-maturational model of attachment and adaptation (DMM)** to make sure they do what is needed to help families at the earliest opportunity. The team has also simplified the assessment process by bringing together multiple assessments into a single document so that families only need to tell their, often traumatic, story once.
3) Active citizenship: As well as the core team of professionals, there is a core group of local residents who help each other through informal mutual exchange. One example of this is the skills bank, where local residents become good neighbours by volunteering their time and skills to help other residents when a need arises.

For further information see:

Our films - Love Barrow Families
Working with the community: Love Barrow Families
Research in Practice podcast: Working with the community

Integrate community capacity building into the whole council vision

A strong local leadership that promotes the sharing of power and resources with the community is crucial to embedding partnership working within the culture of the organisation. Making community capacity building an integrated part of the whole council vision and strategy can help the workforce and community to work more collaboratively. In Leeds, following its successful Family Valued programme (Harris et al., 2020), the council has been engaging the wider community to make Leeds a more child friendly city.

Child Friendly Leeds

In setting out its new vision, Child Friendly Leeds, the council made a commitment to reposition children's services as part of all strategies within the council. Through this, the council has developed networks of partners and ambassadors who support the council's vision. This includes 'community teams' made up of elected members, community officers and people from the third sector.

Ten community teams, comprising people with local expertise and knowledge of the area, were set up to lead the process of determining the services that are most needed and suitable for the local area.

For more information, see:

Child Friendly Leeds

Leeds Partners in Practice: Reimagining child welfare services for the 21st century

Normalise co-production with the community

Co-production is at the core of community development. It can be defined as 'a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution' (Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), 2015: **Co-production in social care: what it is and how to do it**). It is a strengths-based approach which recognises that individuals have their own set of skills, knowledge and experiences which they can use to help them find solutions to their difficulties (Aked and Stephens, 2009; SCIE, 2015). It means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours.

Further reading

For further information on the value of co-production for people with lived experience of services you can listen to the following podcast:

Working together, learning together: A lived experience guide to co-production

It may be difficult to build a shared sense of ownership in areas where there are social inequalities because of the legacy of people being defined by their 'problems'. In these areas, it is important to develop a good understanding of both needs and assets in order to offer the right support. This means identifying and developing meaningful relationships within communities and developing networks of mutual exchange (Harrison et al, 2019).

Alongside this, there needs to be a good understanding of the lived experience of Black, Asian and ethnic minority children and families, who are 'disproportionately represented in the child welfare system' (Bernard, 2020, p2), as well as the impact of inequality and poverty on the lives and experiences of children and families (Morris et al., 2019).

The following example illustrates how Wigan's Children and Young People Deal is based on a two-way engagement process. 'Our part' describes the support children and young people feel they need from the council, and 'Your part' sets out all the things they are willing to do in their communities to help make Wigan a better place to live. The philosophy behind the 'deal' is one that encourages partnership and reciprocity, starting with the assets that both the council and community can draw on.

Wigan's Children and Young People Deal

The Deal

for children and young people

Our part

- **Help you to be healthier.**
- **Support you to learn and grow.**
- **Help to keep where you live clean and tidy.**
- **Help you to be safe.**
- **Make Wigan Borough a place where everyone is accepted and valued.**
- **Make sure we listen to you.**

Your part

- **Look after your own health.**
- **Be the best you can be.**
- **Help to keep where you live clean and tidy.**
- **Stay safe.**
- **Be kind and caring to yourself and to others.**
- **Share your views.**

Adapted from: www.wigan.gov.uk/Docs/PDF/Council/The-Deal/Poster-DealforChildrenYoungPeople.pdf

Further information can be found here:

A citizen-led approach to health and care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal

Learn from the lived experience of children and families

The views of children and families with experience of services are at the heart of effective social work and of evidence-informed practice. Valuing the contributions of the community can also help instil a sense of shared purpose and understanding. One way of doing this is through Appreciative Inquiry, which helps to identify and promote good practice and create a learning culture (for more information on Appreciative inquiry see ***Appreciative Inquiry in child protection - identifying and promoting good practice and creating a learning culture: Practice Tool***).

Appreciative Inquiry involves exploring people's experience of existing best practice; collectively developing a shared vision for future practice; and working together to develop, design and create this practice (Rose and Barnes, 2008; Martins, 2014). Rather than focusing on deficits, this approach actively involves people with lived experience of services in co-producing solutions (Tjoa, 2019; Aked and Stephens, 2009), as illustrated in the following examples.

Doncaster's Children's Trust

Doncaster's Children's Trust recognise that care leavers are valuable assets, and seeks to continuously learn from their lived experience by engaging them as Young Advisors. The Young Advisors not only act as a reference group, but also shape the Trust's strategy and influence decision-making.

They have helped improve the experience of care leavers, by redefining practice standards, redesigning children's homes and leading the staff recruitment process. They have also led on wider engagement with young people and delivered training to partners through the Hear Me programme.

For more information see:

www.doncasterchildrenstrust.co.uk/hear-me/chief-executives-young-advisors;
www.doncasterchildrenstrust.co.uk/hear-me/hear-me-training-professionals

Newham Social Welfare Alliance

The Newham Social Welfare Alliance supports the borough's most vulnerable residents to take actions focusing on the links between poor health and employment status. A cross-sector project design team meets weekly to develop the approach and works iteratively to fine-tune it.

This symbiotic working relationship enables better connectivity to Newham Council and Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Survey (VCFS) services, as well as allowing frontline workers to enhance their skills.

Utilise different methods of gathering evidence

Some councils have been exploring different methods of gathering data to shape and support their work. In addition to drawing on 'hard' data, councils are also recognising the value of gathering evidence through ethnographic research to better understand the complexity of people's lives and the complex systems within which they operate (Local Government Association, 2013).

Story-telling and other qualitative approaches can help develop a shared understanding of needs and aspirations. The following example shows how Copeland Council gathers data and intelligence by involving and training children as researchers.

Copeland Borough Council

Copeland Borough Council has been focusing on tackling key issues such as child poverty, intergenerational neglect and adverse childhood experiences. The council worked with other agencies, including the police and the local NHS trust, to establish its local children's partnership to drive change in their local area.

An example of the approach is the Connected Communities work - https://connected-communities.org - which aims to improve social capital and connect communities through co-production and deliberative engagement. As part of this initiative, children were trained and deployed as researchers to gather intelligence about their local areas (for example, identifying sites that feel unsafe). They used stickers and maps, and then interviewed people in the community, 'chaperoned' by local police community support officers.

Involving children has helped strengthen their understanding of public accountability and, for example, has led to the implementation of Public Space Protection Orders on vandalised playgrounds - demonstrating that everyone can make a difference. The children's mental health has also improved by virtue of having their voices heard and being taken seriously by people who make decisions in the community.

Copeland Council focuses on building strong relationships with children and families, which is facilitated by a community development worker recruited from within the community. The council has been instrumental in running workshops to support the development of a child-led children's charter and the work of community ambassadors. It has also supported several community-led initiatives (for example, children-run fundraising for local services, the volunteering and community-led response to COVID-19).

For further information see:

Child poverty is at a 20-year high – but in one English community, children themselves are intervening

Mainstream community commissioning

To help balance the power asymmetry between councils and communities, some responsibility for commissioning and budget-setting could be handed over to the community. Devolving more funds to community groups can encourage individuals to participate in improving their local area, create community cohesion and increase engagement and social capital (Coutts, 2020; MHCLG, 2011).

There are different methods to community commissioning, ranging from engagement at operational level only to one that hands over considerable legal governance power. Regardless of the methods adopted, for community commissioning to work there needs to be continued provision of reliable support to the community so they can acquire new skills and expand their capability (Lent et al., 2019).

Barrowcliff Big Local - SPARKS

The Barrowcliff Big Local area in North Yorkshire addressed the long history of mistrust between the community and the council's social care services by creating a partnership called SPARKS. The aim was to enable the community to participate in decision-making on an equal footing with the council.

The partnership provides coaching and support systems for families to develop parenting and life skills. This complements existing provision and is aimed at developing greater trust with families. As a result of the partnership, local children have become more engaged in their community and been involved in designing and building a local playpark.

For more information see:

http://ourbiggerstory.com/timeline.php?Area_ID=2

For more information on participatory commissioning and budgeting see:

Community Commissioning: Shaping public services through people power

Participatory Budgeting | Local Government Association

Devolved Budgets: An Evaluation of Pilots in Three Local Authorities in England - What Works for Children's Social Care

Give the community responsibility for local resources

Giving citizens access and responsibilities over local resources (for example, the running of children's centres and community hubs) can help them grow their collective capacity. The use of these spaces also provides a safety net for communities, especially at a time of financial insecurity. The approach can also instil a stronger sense of ownership, which can help to recalibrate the relationship between the council and community.

Telford and Wrekin Council

In the face of significant funding cuts, Telford and Wrekin Council decided to hand over most of their children's centres to schools, parish councils and Home Start to prevent any closures. To enable communities to get their services off the ground and strengthen their provision, the council provided financial support, covering the rental cost of the facilities in the first three years.

The council has continued to provide support through charity fundraising and sharing resources. This has enabled these community centres to thrive and build enough capacity to widen their provision to support other age groups.

Develop frontline skills and autonomy

Developing practitioners' skills and autonomy to help them work more responsively with the community is key. Skills such as building trust, respect and empathy, as well as the ability to signpost people to resources in the community, can help practitioners to better respond to the immediate and long-term needs of children and families (Unwin, 2018).

It also means working more iteratively and adapting services and support based on the experiences and feedback from the community (Research in Practice, 2019). This may include giving workers autonomy over spending decisions so that they can respond directly to the needs of the families they support, as with the devolved budgets' pilot (Westlake et al., 2020). The pilot is based on the idea that social workers are best placed to know what help the families they are supporting need to create sustainable change and keep children safely at home. An example from the pilot is provided below.

Devolved budgets in Darlington

Social workers were enabled to practice in a different way as part of the devolved budgets pilot in Darlington. They were able to access help for families that would not normally be available, including using the budget for practical, material or financial help – ranging from homewares and essentials to costlier items and to settle rent arrears. It also supported therapeutic and specialist interventions, often for children who had behavioural or mental health needs. In some cases this prevented children from entering care.

For more information see:

Devolved Budgets Pilot Report (Westlake et al., 2020, p.15)

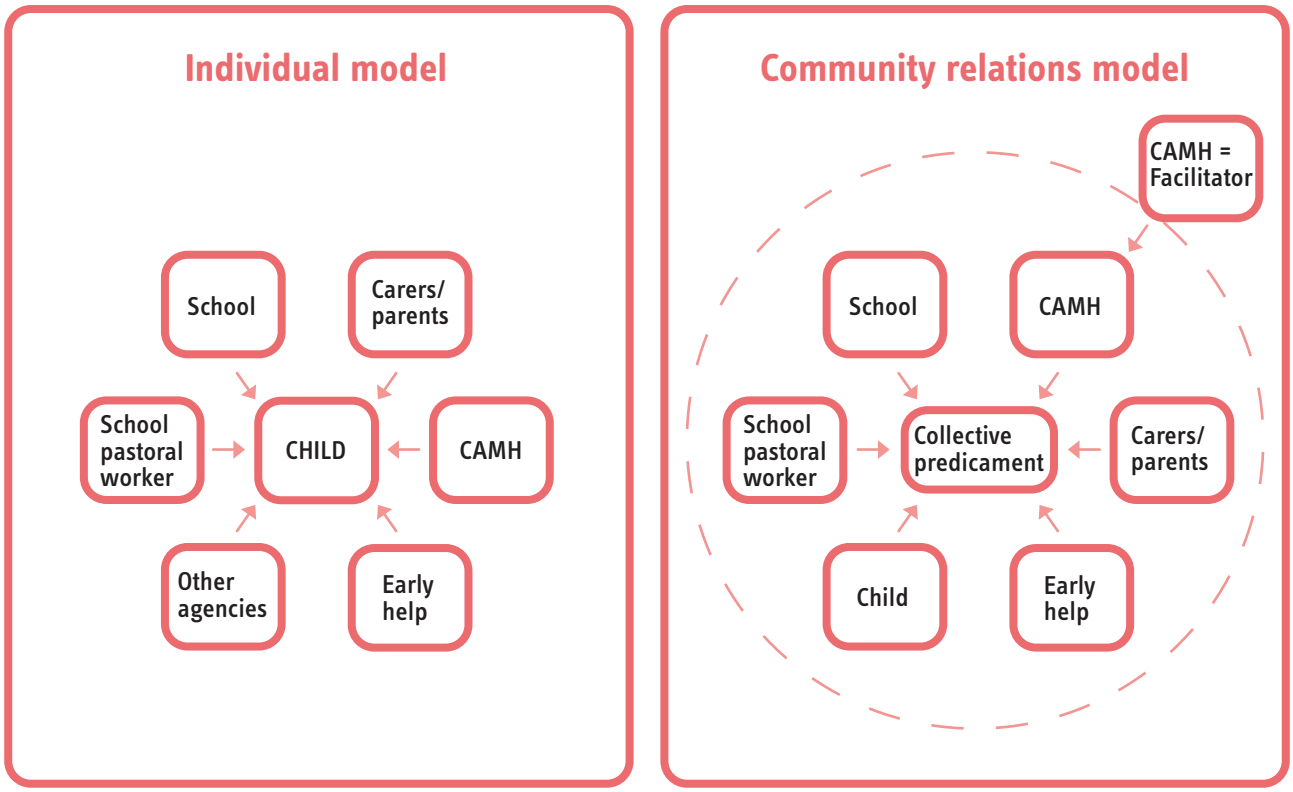
Frontline workers may also need to be supported to think differently about social problems and trusted to respond creatively to work alongside children and families (Tjoa, 2019). One way of doing this is through reflective supervision. Senior and middle leaders play a key role in establishing and modelling a culture of supervision and creating a space for critical reflection across the workforce (for further resources on supervision see: **Positive supervision culture - Practice Supervisor Development Programme Repository**).

Embed holistic working

Using funding from what central government called the 'Troubled Families Programme', some councils are working with the community to develop a whole-family approach. In many areas a first step has been to rename this programme of work; in Kirklees, for instance, it is called the Stronger Families Programme.

The diagrams below contrast an individualised model, in which issues and service responses focus solely on the child, with a community relations model, which aims to ensure that children and families' experiences are understood within a wider contextual framework. This model moves away from locating problems within children and families, where they have to get individualised help from different agencies, to a more holistic system, where the family is seen as an active partner alongside other agencies (for example, schools, Early Help, and Children and Adolescent Mental Health) (van Roosmalen et al., 2013).

The community relations approach enables support to be provided to children and families at the earliest opportunity, before the situation worsens. This can minimise the need for more expensive and coercive forms of interventions, which can ultimately be detrimental to the children and families involved (Bywaters et al., 2020).



Individual model versus community relations model, derived from van Roosmalen (2016)

Kirklees Council

Kirklees Council's whole-family approach is embedded across early support services and different age groups. It has enabled the provision of critical wrap-around support to individuals in a way that is more supportive and relational, and less prescriptive and top-down.

The council's three-step restorative practice model includes an intermediate 'formulation' stage, which considers a family's holistic needs alongside their assets. This approach has enabled families to access the right support at the right time. The model has also encouraged the development of voluntary capacity as families and the wider community are involved in story telling about their place and what outcomes they want to achieve together.

More recently, the contribution of Mutual Aid groups during the COVID-19 crisis has led to more joined-up services, which are stronger and more effective in supporting families during a time of crisis. The crisis has also accelerated the establishment of key partnerships and facilitated more place-based working with local residents and volunteers, with a focus on their lived experience of services and the integration of services around a person in a place.

This has led to the council working more flexibly and creatively with the community. For example, in response to a new spike in cases during the pandemic and local restrictions, council officers worked with the community to mobilise two community buses to provide early support drop-ins for families, replacing their visits to children's centres. These buses were used to distribute public health messages and provide services like school nursing to children.

Kirklees Council is developing this model further by working to create conditions that enable families to support each other during other times of difficulties and minor crises. For example, in the event of a family illness which could lead to a child not attending school, other families from within the existing community network might offer to take the child to school, thus averting school absences and visits by the council's welfare officer.

For more information see:

http://ourbiggerstory.com/timeline.php?Area_ID=2

Key steps to consider when developing community capacity

Local authorities are at different stages of their journey in building community capacity. While this journey can be rewarding, it can also be unpredictable and things can sometimes go wrong before positive outcomes are achieved.

Practitioners and strategic leads have identified a number of key steps to consider when developing community capacity:[3]

> **Work 'with' and not 'to':**

- Work alongside children and families to develop a children and families' charter, setting out the council's commitment to their community. Councils can be more supportive by appointing Children's Champions within the council's elected representatives.
- Embed a culture of working alongside the community, recognising the skills both inside and outside the organisation. Councils can invite 'experts by experience' from the community to share their stories and lead training through a rolling programme of community-led workshops.

> **Don't underestimate the importance of networks:**

- Leaders should get to know and work with the 'movers and shakers' in the community, and to broaden the base by identifying and working with new community leaders.
- Partnership between different sectors and agencies is fundamental; it is important to ensure that the workforce understands the concept of partnership working and are committed to the same goal.

> **Don't get in the way but be generous with time, support and resources:**

- The role of the local authority is an enabler, providing the opportunity and spaces for the wider community to come together and identify solutions to their collective problems.
- Not getting in the way sometimes means recognising that some communities are perfectly happy and do not need support. In other situations, it may mean professionals consciously stepping back to allow people to find their own solutions.

> **Have an open door:**

- This provides communities the assurance of help when they need it and gives people the confidence to do things as they know that they are not on their own. Be aware that community groups can sometime feel like a 'lone lighthouse', and councils should consider what more they can do to help (Research in Practice, 2020).

> **Be open about intended outcomes and the support available:**

- This knowledge can empower the community to work towards improving outcomes and achieving their shared objectives. It is also important to be clear and honest about the requirements of delivery and what support you would continue to offer.

3 These steps are mainly based on research interviews.

- **Do not go into a community acting as experts:**
  - Develop the skill of active listening and have conversations with people in the community to get to know what matters to them. Take off lanyards and embed yourself in the community.
  - It is also important to build in a route for families with direct lived experience of services to have influence at a strategic level.

- **Start somewhere, don't wait until it's perfect:**
  - Learn to recognise when you have made enough progress to really get going.
  - Meanwhile, grow and maximise the assets you have and be open minded about the kind of journey you will take with the community.

Conclusion

There has been a renewed interest in community development over the last decade. This has become particularly relevant during the COVID-19 crisis, where communities have worked alongside the public and voluntary sectors in response to increasing levels of vulnerability and inequality. There is now a growing appreciation of what communities can achieve if they are given the power and resources to act.

The following questions are designed to support you in reflecting on the approach to community development in your organisation.

Questions for reflection

- How does the culture and leadership of your organisation support ways of working that take account of the complexity of communities? How well do you know the communities you support? How might your understanding of these be developed further?
- How do people experience structural inequalities in your community? Do professionals understand how disadvantage and inequality can affect the communities they support? What further training might the workforce need in this area?
- How do you support practitioners to work in ways that empower communities and that facilitate collaboration, co-production and trust-building? Does the ethos and vision of the organisation reflect this? Do you lead and model this way of working?
- How do you ensure that children and families are central to the design and delivery of services? How do you reach people who may not proactively volunteer their time, knowledge and skills?
- What innovative methods of commissioning and evidence-gathering have you used to take account of a community development perspective? What changes could you make to develop this further?

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Research in Practice
The Granary Dartington Hall
Totnes Devon TQ9 6EE

tel 01803 867692
email ask@researchinpractice.org.uk

Author: Dr Pawda Tjoa, Senior Policy Researcher, New Local

Photographer: mattjeacock

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