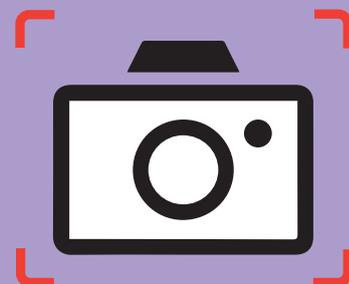


Towards a contemporary snapshot of Community Development Practice and Learning in England: December 2016



Preamble & Context

In 2010 a Government resourced consultation involving a range of key actors from the community development field published an important report entitled **The Community Development Challenge (Together We Can)**.

The consultation set out to discern and envisage the future of community development in the UK. It was noted that Society relies on community development yet the occupation is not well known. Government tends to invest in it unevenly through several funding streams but has no co-ordinated overview. Yet social policies and programmes repeatedly come back to community development as they grapple with the problems of overcoming disadvantage, engaging with residents and making public services work better.

The earlier report highlighted what it discerned was the **community development offer** "... community development combines various functions: helping people set up groups, supporting forums and networks, and organising events and activities that enable people to work together across organisational and community boundaries. It actively tackles the divisions, social exclusion and discrimination that deter some people in communities from participating in activities and decision-making. It also works with public authorities and agencies to help them understand and engage with the communities

they serve, and facilitates links upwards, downwards and 'horizontally' across communities and agencies."

A distinctive ethos and perspective "...at the heart of the practice is a set of values about collective working, equality and justice, learning and reflecting, participation, political awareness and sustainable change. It is this combination of roles, values, responsibilities and spheres of operation that give community development its distinctive character. But in many places only one or two of these aspects are present, which weakens the impact and contributes to the confusion about what community development is. The report recommends that practice should only be recognised fully as community development if it meets this comprehensive definition."

How are some of the earlier identified Challenges being addressed?

In 2016 the **Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development Learning (England)** commissioned an initial piece of research about Community Development activity in England and the opportunities that exist for developing and supporting people involved in their community. The findings and commentary are in the following summary report.

The Key purpose of Community Development

Community development enables people to work collectively to bring about positive social change.

This long term process starts from people's own experience and enables communities* to work together to:

- » Identify their own needs and actions
- » Take collective action using their strengths and resources
- » Develop their confidence, skills and knowledge
- » Challenge unequal power relationships
- » Promote social justice, equality and inclusion in order to improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live and societies of which they are a part.

*Communities refer to those that can be defined by geography, identity or interest.

Community development values

The community development process is underpinned by a set of values on which all practice is based. Community development practitioners need to relate these values to their roles and actions. There are five key values that underpin all community development practice:

- » Social justice and equality
- » Anti-discrimination
- » Community empowerment
- » Collective action
- » Working and learning together

Social justice and equality

Work for a more just and equal society which recognises environmental, political, cultural and economic issues by:

- » Celebrating the strengths, skills and assets in communities
- » Acknowledging and challenging inequalities, injustice and imbalances of power
- » Promoting human and civil rights and responsibilities

Anti-discrimination

Respect, value, support and promote difference and diversity whilst rejecting and challenging any form of oppression, discrimination and sectarianism.

- » Recognise that discrimination works at individual, community, organisational/institutional and societal levels
- » Explore and challenge all forms of discrimination
- » Develop anti-oppressive policies and practices which actively support and value diversity

Community empowerment

Enable communities to develop confidence, capacity, skills and relationships to shape collective action and challenge imbalances of power.

- » Enable communities to recognise and build on their existing skills, knowledge and expertise
- » Promote the rights of communities to define themselves, their priorities and agendas for action
- » Provide the space for communities to develop critical, creative, independent and active decision making and participation

Collective action

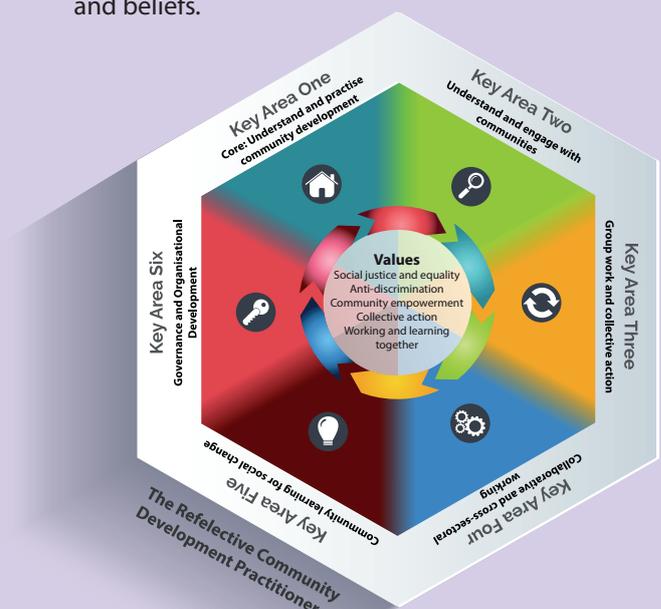
Promote the active participation of people within communities, using the power of a collective voice and goal.

- » Recognise the wealth of creative and positive resources within individuals and communities
- » Promote and support diverse communities to agree and take action on their common concerns and interests
- » Use the power of the collective voice to plan and take collective action while respecting the rights of others

Working and learning together

Create and encourage opportunities for collective learning through action and shared reflection.

- » Learn from shared experiences of working in collaboration
- » Understand experiences in the context of wider social, political and economic forces
- » Encourage critical reflection on own practice, values and beliefs.



ESB has created a full report and a graphical outline of the data we collected as well as this summary report. Find out more at: esbendorsement.org.uk

Summative Report and Overview

- » The survey findings reveal a highly skilled and resilient workforce which has developed new ways to fund the work through enterprise and effective deployment of resources. The wide range of job titles and the variety of groups and organisations they are working with and within reflect the many and diverse arenas for community development practice.
- » The survey shows that CD is a profession undertaken by a range of people in a variety of settings. CD works to a core set of values and processes to influence social change using established tools and methods. The survey report outlines the qualifications and training of survey respondents. It looks at the National Occupational Standards for community development (CD NOS) and the level to which respondents are undertaking the key standards, values and processes.
- » There have been significant changes in the sector in terms of the policy landscape since 2010 and despite the variation in scale it is important to note the significant similarities and differences expressed in the data collected in this snapshot survey.
- » The findings reveal most Community Development is based in geographical areas, often delivered through community centres, independent groups, who include communities of interest and identity. Practitioners see Community Development values as key and supporting their practice.

The key areas of community development practice are:

- » Generic Community Development Work – helping people define their concerns, interests and needs and giving communities a voice towards creating and improving community facilities and services
- » Promoting and supporting community health and well-being at very local levels – also, with local action group, being a resource in decision making at a strategic level.
- » Supporting groups, partnerships and campaigning – often involving organisational, governance and management input and capacity building
- » Local training and learning support to many different actors and players within communities, voluntary organisations and public services

Training and learning support to many different players within communities and public services

The survey revealed a wide range of training being delivered, often informal and non-accredited, and substantial offers to help deliver the lower levels of training sessions. The survey also reveals that there is a gap between the training that practitioners are seeking and the level of training being provided, specifically at an advanced level and highlights the changing demand for the topics needed to ensure community development practice responds to the changing social, economic and political landscape.

Policy and Practice Contexts and Emerging Trends

Findings illustrate that there are several Policy Developments to which community development is currently contributing. There continues to be great relevance for community development perspectives and practices across a wide range of social policy issues and there are some clear trends that could be investigated further and benefit from the rich potential of a community development approach.

The following have been noted:

- » Policies relating to the devolving of public services;
- » Local community economic development;
- » Health Inequalities: address challenges and improving wellbeing;
- » Social Justice Issues;

- » Community Cohesion and Integration;
- » Climate change and environmental issues;
- » Creating Resilient and Empowered Communities;
- » Housing and Homelessness;
- » Working with Young People;
- » Community Arts;
- » Migrant and Refugee Resettlement;
- » Rural Communities and access to public services.

Aspects for Ongoing Discernment

Devolving public Services - While devolution is providing opportunities in some parts of the country for greater partnership working for the delivery of services, local people are sceptical about the power that will be devolved in relation to the responsibilities. This raises issues and concerns about capacity building and skills development to challenge some of the assumptions being made by decision makers and procurement agencies

Health and Wellbeing - A whole raft of guidelines has come from Public Health England, NICE and NHS Alliance around addressing health inequalities relating to health and wellbeing, which provide a range of opportunities for community development approaches to be used. There seems to be a general trend within policy towards developing resilience among both individuals and communities. This is being identified up not only by health-related documents but also by policies on issues such as public safety and emergencies. There is likely to be a much greater demand for local communities to take responsibility for delivering health and wellbeing related services.

Local delivery of Services - Across the country, as local authority services are cut, more services are being delivered by either social enterprises, voluntary organisations or specially constituted community organisations. They are delivering library services, tourist information centres, youth services, adult social care among others often in imaginative and innovative ways. Concurrently there is a considerable process of asset transfer that has been supported by a number of DCLG funded programs. The outcome of this is that community organisations are increasingly going to be responsible for maintaining and developing some key local assets. This will obviously require and generate a need the capacity, skills and abilities to do so. Over the past year, the key national infrastructure organisations specialising in resourcing local groups to managing community buildings has closed resulting in a gap in support and training services for local groups.

Local Community Economic Development Initiatives are now widespread relating to the confidence of local community groups to engage in social enterprise projects. The developments are across a range of thematic areas: health, sport and leisure, culture, art and music. Such projects are generating employments as well as opportunities for local volunteering. Some projects are being generated in partnership with prison establishments and other institutions.

Diversity and Integration There are also a substantial and wide spectrum of developments outside of central government being instigated by trade unions, faith organisations and national bodies representing BME and disabled people's groups, all bringing people together to address major issues and requiring skills and knowledge.

Other policy areas Other policy issues which will require people to develop skills involve giving tenants the right to manage their housing accommodation through a tenant empowerment programme. The Big Local programme of devolving large sums of money to very local areas and the encouragement of community organising through both Citizens UK and Locality. Empowering legislation in the form of the Sustainable Communities Act was enacted in 2007 giving local people opportunities to bring about change.

Recommendations & Conclusions

The intention of ESB in commissioning this research was to generate a 'snapshot' of community development practice in England and Wales at this juncture. It was envisaged that this would indicate some actions, including further research, that might be/could be/should be pursued forthwith and looking further ahead. Against this backdrop, it is with some caution that ESB is offering the following recommendations in this report. The snapshot research process has been helpful and useful illustrating that community development has a very positive future role to play in the emerging policy contexts mentioned above.

Recommendations

- » Further consideration is needed to look at the way in which practitioners are defining their practice and ensuring that they are aware of the value base that underpins the occupation and understanding the true process of community development. A clear finding of the research is the fragmentation of job roles with workers stretched across a number of jobs.
- » Employment of community development workers is now by a diverse range of employers, many of them quite small. ESB and other quality assurance agencies need to be able to gain access to employers to encourage further continuing professional development and other support systems.
- » Employers and community project managers need to be alert to learning and training resources available and be willing, when appropriate, to release staff to take up training and learning opportunities.
- » People working in the field, in paid and unpaid posts, would benefit from better access to consistent and focused training, including knowledge and information about what is available and where.
- » The training and learning to be offered should be along a continuum of learning opportunities embracing formal structured institutional training, work based learning and recognition routes. Advances and developments by ESB and partner organisations regarding the latter was noted in responses from some thematic and geographic areas
- » Training and education providers need to be able to adapt the provision they offer, and publicise it more widely, ensuring that community development values, ethics and processes are covered as well as technical subjects.
- » Experienced practitioners need to have access to higher level learning. Innovative initiatives should explore the potential for existing practitioners to deliver introductory and lower level training. Such initiatives would enable practice experience and wisdom to be shared with less experienced workers and encourage new people into the field.
- » The research has evidenced the substantial return from relatively modest and limited resources enjoyed by both statutory and voluntary organisations to promote and support community development work.
- » In response to the research finding relating to the fragmentation of job roles with workers stretched across a number of posts/ jobs. More immediate amounts of even limited funding could contribute towards stable organisations and practitioners, releasing a massive amount of support for struggling communities.
- » The ESB Research planning group commends the above indications and findings to the **Looking to the Future** research commissioned by Big Local Trust. The ESB will look forward to offering support and partnership as considered appropriate.