

Supporting best practice in community development

Assets in Action

A case study of asset-based community development in North Glasgow



Family garden party on Hawthorn Housing Co-operative's Byshot Path

Introduction

The term ‘asset-based’ is increasingly being used by those working in community development to emphasise building on the positive social aspects of a community without overly focusing on negative aspects. Assets in this regard refer not only to physical assets such as land and buildings but to the wealth of knowledge, skills, experience and social networks that can help address the priorities and needs of the community. Indeed, these ‘social’ assets need to be in place before communities can make use of any physical assets at their disposal.

The SCDC is pleased to present the work of the Children’s Inclusion Partnership (CHIP) in North Glasgow as an example of how such an approach can be used in practice. CHIP is a partnership between Barnardo’s and Stepping Stones for Families. The case study was prepared with the help of Angus Wood from Barnardo’s who is the Children’s Service Manager.

The Children’s Inclusion Partnership (CHIP)

In North Glasgow a high proportion of families live on low incomes. Over the past 20 years large parts of North Glasgow have been subject to demolition and partial reconstruction with associated disruption to family and community life. CHIP has therefore been set up as a community development project linking families, children and communities in north Glasgow.



Tree planting: Byshot Path

Working with a wide range of local partners, CHIP enables children and families to think about what is going on in their communities, to speak out

about it and to achieve some positive change as a result. It aims to help people feel stronger and more optimistic through influencing the circumstances and decisions that affect them.

Current activities include:

- Environmental work with children and families with a focus on bringing vacant and derelict land back into community use. This work is carried out in partnership with local youth organisations, housing providers and community groups
- In pre-5s establishments, facilitating the participation of parents and children in improving their local 'micro environments'. This includes planning, fundraising and hands-on work
- A photography-based, intergenerational 'living history' project which brings together a diverse group of stakeholders from a neighbourhood that has been through a large amount of change in recent years

Combining assets

The above activities all involve identifying and building on community assets ranging from vacant land to local community groups.

Angus highlights the following community assets as being important in Possilpark (the community with which CHIP has been most intensively involved up till now):

- **A network of locally initiated community organisations** which have formed in response to locally defined need.
- **Long-standing older community activists** who are able to connect with younger generations.
- **Young adult activists** who have grown up with an awareness of the effectiveness of collective community action, or who have experienced good quality services in the past.
- **Housing organisations** with a strong commitment to the 'wider action' agenda and to local participation in their governance.
- **Partnership working** between community groups, organisations and individuals.
- **Trusting relationships** between the above.
- **External voluntary organisations** with a long-term commitment to supporting local initiatives.
- **Buildings and spaces available for community use.** This includes a community centre managed by the Glasgow Life, the community interest company that runs the cultural and sporting activities formerly the responsibility of Glasgow City Council.

Moreover, Angus feels that these community assets have complemented each other. For example, the locally initiated community organisations know and trust each other well enough to work together, such as on an annual Gala Day, a winter festival, and on smaller scale joint projects throughout the year; the older community activists have provided role models for the younger generation; and the housing organisations have supported community activity through funding as well as through adding their name and reputation to joint community ventures. In addition, social or person-centred assets make it possible for the community to take advantage of the buildings and spaces available in Possilpark. In other words, communities need to be cohesive and confident enough to make good use of their physical resources.

Throughout this process CHIP has played a role in helping the community to make the most of its assets. As an external voluntary organisation with a long-term commitment to the community, CHIP has acted at various times as host, networker, bridge, catalyst and partner in new developments. Over the years it has piloted ways of working which have been picked up and amplified by local groups and organisations.



Wildflower seeding with Friends of Possilpark Greenspace and Young People's Futures

What has been achieved?

In 2009/10 CHIP itself had direct contact with 28 adults and 92 children. However, the people affected by the work of locally based groups such as Young People's Futures, Friends of Possilpark Greenspace, the Disability Community and Depot Arts can be counted in hundreds.

CHIP and the network of community groups of which it is part has made steady progress towards environmental improvement that is sustainable, while involving local people and being appropriate to the needs of the community. It has helped to put in place a high level of sustained and varied activity for young people and children, and this 'mixed economy' of activity suits a wide range of children and young people's interests. The strong network of locally rooted community groups attracts external funding and, as Angus points out, success builds on success. As a result of the project, outside and statutory agencies view the existing local networks as potential partners on the basis of their reliable track record.

Keeping things going

The project has played a part in improving the lives of children and their families in Possilpark, but what lies ahead for them?

A central aim of community development is to help build strong, sustainable, communities. This can take a long time and requires significant investment. At the moment CHIP is funded by Barnardo's voluntary funding and Glasgow City Council Integrated Grants Fund (formerly Fairer Scotland Fund and Sure Start). While acknowledging the strength of local organisations, Angus also emphasises the vital support to community life provided by facilities such as Possilpoint, the local community centre which is managed by Glasgow Life. Angus notes that there have been closures of similar buildings in other parts of the city. Possilpoint is understood to be secure at the moment and it is difficult to see, he adds, how the people of Possilpark could finance the running of the centre as an affordable community facility without some continued investment from beyond the immediate locality.

Wider lessons

The success of the Children's Inclusion Partnership in North Glasgow highlights the value of asset-based community development. CHIP has contributed to the improvement of the local environment and community spirit by building on the strengths of the community. As a result, children and their families have been able to play an active part in enhancing their own communities, and this should make the community healthier and more confident in the long term.

Investment in communities requires both commitment and finance. Communities that are fragmented and low in social capital cannot be expected to achieve change on their own. Whilst resources may be limited in a period of recession, an opportunity exists to invest long term in communities

rather than having to deal with the consequences of not doing so further down the line. As such the Scottish Community Development Centre is working with the partners including the Scottish Government and those on the ground in community development to develop an asset-based strategy for Scotland. This will be informed by examples of asset-based work such as the Children's Inclusion Partnership in North Glasgow.

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