A CONCEPT FOR ENGAGEMENT

SOCIAL CAPITAL PRESS

COMMUNITY

NORTH EAST EDINBURGH

CONNECTIONS
All four communities have (or had) a community newspaper which was seen to be a very important local asset.

- Restalrig has ‘The Speaker’ which is produced by the Ripple Project: “We fought tooth and nail to keep it!”
- Craigmillar used to have their own local paper ‘The Chronicle’ which was very popular, but despite the best efforts of The White House community centre it was not possible to sustain it due to funding cuts, and funding applications were rejected.
- Portobello has ‘The Reporter’ a local community-run newspaper.
- Leith has ‘The Leither’, a community-run local magazine.

There is an opportunity to build a network of community newspapers across North East Edinburgh to provide a platform for engagement, whilst supporting highly valued existing community-led resources.

This approach celebrates and respects the differences in communities across North East Edinburgh, but offers the opportunity to create a sustainable funding model for community-led newspapers through partnership working and shared infrastructure.
The NHS Locality Team are seeking a way of engaging across and within the locality to work with existing communities to tackle social isolation and loneliness in line with their locality action plan.

They wish to engage communities across NE locality in the co-design of health and care services, in community planning and participatory budgeting, and to understand what matters to them in order to prioritise future work plans.

Through the network of community newspapers, the locality team can create ongoing engagement with citizens across the locality. By paying for regular space across each of the papers, the locality team can share news and information about health and care services and local events; and invite readers to get involved in co-design, service development and participatory budgeting: all while providing regular income to sustain these valuable local resources.

The local newspapers themselves provide a view into understanding the local context: the issues that matter to people locally; and the groups, events, organisations, and key individuals who are active in the community.
Participants highlighted the importance of celebrating diversity and pride in the distinct local identity of communities within NE locality. When asked how we can connect and support communities to work together to tackle social isolation and loneliness, participants pointed to the opportunity to provide shared and consistent infrastructure throughout the locality, i.e. making sure the basics were in place (e.g. core services, well connected public transport and public amenities) to allow the communities to focus on interacting and supporting each other.

**RATIONALE**

**CELEBRATE DIVERSITY AND LOCAL IDENTITY**

A locally written and produced community newspaper ensures community members can represent and celebrate their distinct local identity. By supporting the local newspapers to work together as a network, the NE Locality Team can work with them to secure a sustainable funding model, achieving economies of scale by sharing infrastructure, reducing administrative burdens and negotiating better deals from suppliers and advertisers due to their combined reach.

This includes sharing content that is relevant across the locality, using the same web infrastructure, collaborating on training for volunteers and sharing the print run to reduce cost per newspaper.

**OPPORTUNITY**

**ECONOMIES OF SCALE**
Participants from Craigmillar felt that the area has a negative reputation which is not based on the reality of life there. They voiced a need for “more good news stories about Craigmillar” to change the public perception of the area and give people a sense of pride in where they are from.

**RATIONALE**

AN UNDERSERVED BAD REPUTATION

**OPPORTUNITY**

POSITIVE NEWS STORIES

The community-led newspaper provides an outlet and opportunity to focus on good news stories about each area, presenting a positive image of the area and the community.

By providing funding to resurrect ‘The Chronicle’, and supporting the formation of a network of community newspapers, communities can be empowered to change the way their areas are represented in the media - both within the area and across the locality.
There was a clear message that digital services often exclude the most vulnerable people in the community, who are most likely to be at risk of social isolation and loneliness.

We learned about innovative community-led services that use the telephone, rather than the internet, recruiting local volunteers to make a regular phone call each day to someone who may be socially isolated or lonely.

Having said this, we also learned about popular community-led social media like the “I love Leith” Facebook, and The Ripple twitter feed and website.

This raises the importance of ensuring any engagement around social isolation and loneliness uses multiple different formats. By embracing different forms of communication we can ensure people aren’t excluded from the organisations and people who can help.

Print and digital versions give people the choice of how to access their local news. In addition, it is also important to give people multiple ways of getting in touch with the local paper i.e. by letter, email, phone, via social media or in person. As The Speaker in Restalrig is produced by The Ripple Project, there is also a physical place where the community can connect with the local paper.
We learned that leafleting door-to-door remains one of the most effective ways of engaging the community in a local issue or informing them about local events.

We also heard about the gap in face-to-face, door-to-door outreach and befriending services. Visiting people at home was seen to be very important to reach community members most vulnerable of being lonely or socially isolated.

**DOOR-TO-DOOR ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT**

**OPPORTUNITY**

**SOCIAL PAPER ROUND**

Door-to-door delivery of the local newspaper offers the opportunity to reach people who rarely engage with the community. It creates an opportunity for social interaction, and an excuse to knock on the door and check they are ok.

Through a ‘social’ paper round, groups of volunteers could deliver the newspaper to their neighbourhood. Volunteers could be trained to identify people who may be at risk of social isolation and loneliness, and know how to help. This would offer the volunteers a social form of physical activity, whilst giving something back to their community. It also extends the reach of the paper, spreading the word about local events and organisations.
Participants highlighted examples of where the community had successfully come together to respond to a local issue. Examples included saving a struggling high school threatened with closure, and fundraising for a statue to commemorate a local hero. In these instances the community achieved their desired goal, and it was highlighted that affecting change is very effective in building community.

This suggests that to engage the community we need to understand the local issues are important to them. This also highlights the importance of demonstrating how their opinions and ideas have been listened to and acted upon.

The local newspaper offers an opportunity to raise awareness and gather views about important local issues. It also offers a platform to support the community to organise and influence decision-makers to achieve their desired change.

Through a network of local newspapers, issues that cut across the locality can be identified, raising their priority and amplifying the voices of the communities.
Community events and activities were seen to be an important way of building community and tackling social isolation and loneliness. There was an appetite for more community events, but in some areas participants highlighted a lack of outdoor space and venues to host community gatherings.

We heard about the many different special interest groups and activities that bring people together. These included arts-based activities, community gardens, workshop facilities, physical activities and cinema clubs.

Despite this, we learned about the challenges experienced by some local organisations in raising awareness and attendance at their events and group activities.

The local newspaper provides a way of spreading the word about upcoming community events. They also allow the diverse range of activities and groups available in the local community to be profiled to boost participation.

The local newspaper could also promote local talent, showcasing some of the work of community members who attend these groups.
The mapping activity highlighted the importance of schools to the local communities. As mentioned previously, one community rallied around to save their local school at risk from closure due to poor inspection results. The lasting effect has been a massive turnaround in the school’s performance, and far greater involvement of the whole community in the activities of the school.

We learned that working to improve the local area for children or grandchildren is a key motivator for people who are active volunteers in their community. Schools are seen to be the heart of the community, and offer an opportunity to engage the whole community in positive change.

Through the mapping activity we also learned that people value intergenerational activities within their communities.

Offering local schools space in the paper to share their news, and engage the community in the successes and activities of young people builds the sense of community around the school, and offers ways for the wider community to get involved.

Through the network, the local newspapers could develop a variety of different volunteering roles that might appeal to different age groups, creating opportunities for intergenerational collaboration and learning to produce the paper.
The mapping and persona activities highlighted the importance of the Citizens Advice Bureau in supporting people vulnerable of social isolation and loneliness due to problems with housing, benefits and accessing vital support. This service is in high demand, and due to capacity issues people can often wait three weeks for an appointment.

In collaboration with the Citizens Advice Bureau, the network of local newspapers could share useful information about issues affecting citizens across the locality. By sharing information about issues frequently raised at the Citizens Advice Bureau, e.g. benefit changes, disability assessment, tenancy problems, the newspaper can provide advice about what people affected can try themselves. This has the added benefit of making the wider community aware of local issues and statutory rights.
The strong connection between mental health, and loneliness and social isolation was clearly evident in the personas created by the groups. Overcoming challenges in accessing support for mental health, such as long wait times and lack of capacity for specialist care were seen as major facilitators to tackling social isolation and loneliness.

While some excellent third sector services such as The Thistle Foundation were identified as key assets in the community to support mental health, they are not an alternative to clinical services for people who need medication or specialist support.

Participants highlighted the need to raise the priority of mental health in comparison to physical health, and allocate resources and support for communities.

The network of local newspapers should work together to raise the priority of mental health in their communities. This could include regular features and shared content that discusses mental health issues, and advice about where to go for help if you’re worried about yourself or a loved one.
During the mapping activity, participants told us about lots of great community resources that are run or accessed by different ethnic communities. There was a concern that some groups or activities were seen to be exclusively used by one ethnic group, and an appetite for more mixed activities. While there were some great examples of communities coming together in this way, they tended to be organised in response to a problem rather than for positive reasons. One group highlighted the opportunity of food-based events to bring different ethnic groups together.

The network of local newspapers should work together to celebrate the ethnic diversity within their communities. Through regular features and content, each local newspaper could increase awareness of the activities of different ethnic groups, highlight upcoming events or religious festivals, and share recipes from different cultures. This ensures the paper is inclusive and welcoming, and positively reframes the ethnic diversity and cultural differences within the community as a key asset.
James is 34 and lives on his own with his cat in a tenement flat. Originally from England, James moved to Scotland when he was a child and has lived all over Edinburgh before settling in Restalrig in his 20’s. James faced many challenges growing up and is now very detached from his family. He is a recovering alcoholic and went through periods of drug addiction. After having bad experiences with health and social care services, he has grown wary and now rarely engages with them. During his recovery, James did engage with a charity for help. This led him to become a volunteer himself, which has given him a sense of purpose. James has developed a real passion for helping people, prides himself on his dependability, and keeps a watchful eye over his elderly neighbours. His voluntary work has given James a sense of community, which he misses at the weekend when the services are closed.

James began volunteering at The Speaker at the weekends, assisting in getting the newspaper ready for print. Working alongside a graphic designer through the Social Capital Press, James received training in the basics and can now digitally lay out the articles received from the community reporters. This upskilling has encouraged James to look into enrolling on graphic design night classes at the local college. As the paper has grown, James now leads a small team of newsroom volunteers. This role has not only given him professional experience in terms of building his CV, but has also given him a social network at weekends. James feels a valued and respected contributor on the newspaper team.
Billy is 70 years old and is the 6th generation of his family to live in Craigmillar. Billy is well-known locally, where he has a reputation for always putting others first. He is motivated by improving the community for his children and grandchildren, who live locally. Following a long illness, Billy’s wife recently died. As her health declined, Billy’s caring responsibilities increased, leading him to become ever more detached from the community. After she passed away, not only was Billy dealing with grief, he had become so used to his caring responsibilities and routine, that he felt lost.

Billy joined The Chronicle as a columnist, where he now writes a weekly article focusing on the what’s going on in the Craigmillar community, reporting on key issues and celebrating achievements. Following some training in computer skills supported by the Social Capital Press, Billy can write his column from home and submit it digitally or go into the newsroom office and work alongside fellow community reporters. The newspaper has become a conduit for Billy in helping him return and embed himself back into the community. It has also given Billy back a sense of weekly routine and he is gradually returning to his passion for community activism, using his experience and voice to rally the community to influence change.
Pam is a semi-retired publisher and has recently moved to Leith from England. She has a back injury that can limit how long she can sit for so enjoys keeping active. Since moving to the area, she has been looking to meet like-minded people, interested in politics and craft-making. At an event at the local library, Pam discovered the Pilmeny Resource Centre where she has enrolled in the Leith Time Bank initiative. Living alone and with no children, or other family members living nearby, Pam does worry that there’s no one looking out for her.

Pam joined The Leither social paper round team to keep fit and meet new people. Once a week Pam meets up with her fellow Leith delivery team before setting off to deliver papers around the community. She received training through the Social Capital Press, which gave her confidence in how she can help people who might be lonely or socially isolated. Each team has their own specific residents to visit and catch up with. Pam visits 5 elderly ladies in her neighbourhood – one of whom is blind so Pam likes to spend time reading the newspaper to her. Through this role, Pam has built up a social circle, not only with her delivery team but also with the ladies she regularly visits. Pam has also felt the benefits of the extra weekly walks.
Jeannie was born in Portobello and has lived and worked there all her life. Now in her late 70’s, Jeannie lives alone with her pet budgie in the same top floor flat she has lived in for the past 30 years. She has long term health problems and is disabled, which prevents her from regularly leaving the house. She hasn’t been to her local GP in years and is at risk of falls. Jeannie has a very modest pension and often has to choose between buying food or putting the heating on. She relies on a carer who visits her once a day for 15 minutes to bring her shopping and to bath and dress her, but her carer finds it difficult to visit at consistent times and sometimes doesn’t make it at all. Over the years, Jeannie’s family have all moved away, with her children living abroad. Her typical daily routine is centred around her favourite TV programmes and waiting for her carer to pop in and see her.

Jeannie’s carer signed her up to be visited by the social paper round team from The Reporter, who deliver her paper once a week. This has become a real highlight of Jeannie’s week, where she hears about everything that’s been going on in Portobello over a cup of tea with her dedicated deliverer, who she has developed a great friendship with. Unlike her carer, who often doesn’t have the time to stay for a chat, Jeannie’s deliverer takes the time to catch up with her, share stories, and helps Jeannie with completing the newspaper crossword. While Jeannie is housebound, since being included in The Reporter social paper round, Jeannie has gained a new friend and feels more linked in and connected to her community.