Community Stories
Extracts of Conversations

Community Stories is not a plan, nor does it provide any ready solutions; it does in some parts identify processes and shows how local groups have naturally come together and developed out of sometimes difficult situations. All the following experiences show how people have come to understand where they are and through that understanding identify where they want to be, how to move towards their goals and develop a focus.

Behind the facts and figures that the Government want to see, there are real people not just with houses, but with homes, who not only live in neighbourhoods but are part of a community. Places they have invested time in and hold a sense of protection for. People’s feelings or other soft outcomes in some cases could expand further afield into the wider environment. This can be shown when people raise issues over, for instance, bins not being emptied, but does this show pride over one house or a pride for the whole street? How often do people go into the community to achieve good for others? How empowered do people feel they are in the first place? Does this stop them from taking action that would directly make them feel better about what they have achieved and who they have helped. Would this not raise enjoyment or appreciation of an area outside of their own homes?

The aim of Community Stories is to provide examples of the experience of real people working within the communities of Tamworth. A wide variety of people are engaged in local activities within communities and through the work of the Community Development Team, we have provided the opportunity to allow people to reflect on their own experience of participation.

A community development approach starts with people in communities coming together to address diverse themes. It supports the connections that exist between them and the fact that individuals, groups and organisations need to learn from each other and co-operate if consistent and sustainable change is to be achieved. Community development spans the traditional boundaries of organisations in a way which is flexible and responsive to the priorities and concerns of communities.

The following show a small example of people in Tamworth working to make positive change. In some cases, these stories provide illustrations of the frustrating and challenging learning process that is inevitable in community participation, (which can include a lack of a defined end point to their contribution).

There are many people with skills who are not yet involved with their community, but may be encouraged to take part in community activities. You may find these stories inspiring and possibly a challenge to the way that you work within communities but mostly, we hope that you find them interesting and that you may use them to reflect on your own role within both the communities that you work and live.

... This is why the whole community is important, as a collective there is immense power and knowledge.’”

Practice Principles of Community Development

- Develop working relationships with communities and organisations
- Encourage people to work and learn from each other
- Work with communities to plan for change and take collective action
- Work with people in communities to develop and use methods to reflect on and evaluate their actions
- To develop community organisations
- To reflect on and develop one’s own practice and role
Background

Fiona first got involved in community groups seven years ago by dragging her friend along to the local youth centre for an open meeting aimed at talking about what the youth service and community can and want to do in the area. One thousand leaflets were dropped at homes yet staggeringly Fiona and her friend were two of only six locals that turned up!

Ordinarily (like most people) Fiona would have ignored the leaflet and carried on in her normal daily routine of a day on the computer, which apart from looking after her children was all she was interested in. Recently though her middle daughter aged fourteen was taken to hospital after being found unconscious in the street after drinking with friends. This gave Fiona the kick-start to go to the meeting and eventually become involved in community activities.

What did you expect from the meeting?

“Well the leaflet came directly from the local youth service aimed specifically at parents. It asked if they wanted to know what their children get up to when they’re not at home. The meeting agenda included plans for a youth club, missing facilities and a multi use games area that had been removed a few years previously to make way for new housing and not replaced.” Fiona wasn’t expecting much, but had some interest because her own children were in the age group that youth service engaged with. At this point Fiona felt the community spirit was none existent … “but looking back you just need the right opportunity and the right reason and angle to engage.”

What projects did you start off with?

“I helped organise the Amington Spring Fair. We did everything ourselves for just over twelve pounds’. Yet we made over one hundred and fifty, which went to Amington Heath primary school for the purchase of library books.” Fiona still keeps the newspaper cutting from that event. “I was quite pleased and rather impressed with myself, even though I am a person who doesn’t show excitement very often”. Having said that, although Fiona knew the donation had probably come at a good time for the school she didn’t necessarily realise the impact of the donation to the school and the potential benefit to the children, but her mind was now set on the fact that she knew she could bring money in and have funds to work with.

So with the potential to get resources, what next?

“The next stage was to speak to the Council for Voluntary Service and go about collating the evidence they would gain from a community survey to find out what residents in Amington felt they needed along with trying to find a building that could house the group we had started (Amington Community Enterprise – ACE). It took so long the group nearly folded.”

Fiona then found out that Pete, a Community Development Officer (CDO) was working in the area with the intention of helping and supporting groups like ACE. The realisation of the level of help that could be received from the CDO was welcomed. After several meetings with Pete a building was found and Fiona soon became a signatory on a lease (held by Council for Voluntary Service) on a building, now known as ‘The ARCH’ that would soon become well used by it’s community members. Looking back today, Fiona knows that the building the group occupies and the work that they do would be completely different without the support of the Council and the CDO. “In the first instance I felt that the Council were only ‘doing’ to be seen to be ‘doing’ but with the close bonding, more knowledge of how a council has to work and with successful and heartfelt projects under the groups belt, attitudes have changed and the community now feels that they have somewhere that’s theirs.”

How has your attitude or the community changed in between these projects?

“I know more about the community and the issues and challenges facing them. For personal reasons it gets me out of the house and stops me sitting in front of my computer all day. This is actually a serious point, as it’s all too common for people these days to hear and see problems through the media from the comfort of their settee. I realise this can heighten fear in people to engage with their community when the majority of what they are told through the news is horror stories on areas where they live. No-one really seems to want to engage and it can be difficult to see community spirit, but it’s there somewhere, hidden behind fear.”

“... you just need the right opportunity and the right reason and angle to engage”
What is your role?
“Police Officer within the Neighbourhood Police Team (NPT) at Tamworth (Staffordshire Police). I work as a Police officer on the beat but focusing on a particular area within the town. I currently cover two areas which are Kettlebrook and Belgrave and focus my attention on issues that affect the people within this community, whether it be anti-social behaviour, nuisance youths, neighbour disputes or a spate of incidents i.e. burglaries, criminal damage, drug related crime etc. Staffordshire Police’s aim is to instil trust and confidence within the community and my role is a key part of this aim by offering reassurance by means of home visits, high visibility patrol (by foot or on bikes) and demonstrating that the police are concentrating on the issues that matter most to the community.”

What is your background?
“I grew up in Tamworth and have lived here all of my life, I studied business management to degree level and have previously worked in customer service and finance. My dad was in the police and I wanted to be in the police too so I guess I did the degree as a back up plan in case I didn’t get in.”

How did you get involved in your current work in the community?
“My position within the NPT at Tamworth has enabled me to have more direct involvement with the community, prior to this I was an Immediate Response Officer which didn’t allow me to make any connections with local people, due to time constraints. My current role lets me work closely with the community in order to achieve common goals.”

What do you do now to effect change?
“By listening to local residents, I will often arrange special operations which target specific areas of crime; by tackling local criminals it gives out a positive message to the community that we as a police force will not tolerate crime at any level.”

What has changed for you and your local community in which you work?
“The general feedback from the residents is that there has been a decline in Anti-Social Behaviour in the area, this is probably a result of the increase in officers and Police Community Support Officer’s. Last year the area had one PC and one PCSO, this number has doubled and there are currently four of us focusing on Belgrave and Kettlebrook”

What have you learnt?
“I have learnt how to work alongside partner agencies, how to establish long term relationships with both victims and offenders and the importance of gaining the trust of local residents in order to tackle the problems that matter the most to them”

How do you see the future within your role and the community in which you work?
“I see Neighbourhood Policing to be ‘the way forward’. Staffordshire Police strive to establish trust and confidence within the community and Neighbourhood Policing is seen as a key role in achieving this aim. I think the role of the Neighbourhood officer will grow, hopefully leading to bigger teams giving more capability to deal with the issues that matter most. The fact that there will be a base for this to happen alongside other partner organisations almost feels essential for us to be a part of the community rather than people feeling we’re just dropped in.”

Personal aims/ambitions for the community
“I intend to build a career within the Police Force and would like to work within a diverse range of roles as a Police Constable. I have interest in areas of child protection and intelligence. All roles within the police force have the same end result, which is to make the community a better place to live. Whichever path my career takes me, I will gain valuable experience which will, in turn benefit local communities, partner agencies and the police force.”

What did you hope to get out of the role you are currently doing?
“I wanted a different policing experience. The NPT works at a slower pace than the Immediate Response Department, we look at things on an ongoing basis and look to tackle problems by working on long term solutions rather than simply arresting people, we look at how we can work together with other agencies to tackle to problem, help the victims and re-educate the offender. I think from a personal level, I have become more confident and am now able to suggest longer term solutions to ongoing problems”

What do you do now to effect change?
“I’ve gained an insight into how useful working alongside partner agencies to achieve a common goal is. Soon there will be a central base in a few areas of Tamworth, which are essentially community hubs with a large amount of direction coming from the community themselves. Different services will be in place as part of the community to allow a natural approach. People can just walk in and discuss anything they want or need to and bounce ideas off each other. It’s really important for all agencies to work together. Community Development involvement within this structure is fundamental for a coordinated organic approach. This setting gives opportunity for everyone to share information and build a bigger, better picture, which in turn can make the community safer. It will help prevent crime, predict crime patterns and generally get people talking to each other.”

What do you feel are the benefits of community partnership working?
“Eventually being based at an ARCH as a Neighbourhood Officer we are offering the community a point of contact within Staffs Police. The concept of this is that when people have ongoing problems, they can speak to the same officer, rather than dealing with ten different officers who do not know the background of the situation, this is important because it helps the community to have confidence in the Police. When the public’s confidence in us grows, the more they are likely to talk to us about crime and how it is affecting them we can focus on those issues making it a better, safer community in which to live. Once people start talking they find they have things in common with each other’s lives, ideas and aspirations. This helps to break down all sorts of social barriers.”
**Nikki Padmore**

ACE volunteer – Amington – Summer 2008

**Background**

Nikki was working from home in London, after giving up a good job in advertising to bring up her daughter, but ended up moving to Tamworth five years ago. Her daughter always hated London and felt there was always a need to live up to an attitude of being rough and tough. Nikki wasn’t ready for what would be ‘country life’ here, but thought it might be better for her daughter. She was attending Preston school in Wembley, which was supposedly one of the best in the area. If that was the case then the area wasn’t a good one.

The idea to move seemed good. Nikki could move here mortgage free and have some spare cash to enable her to enrol on a teacher training course at Tamworth College as she’d decided setting up a new business probably wasn’t the best approach in a new town she didn’t really know.

**What then?**

Six months after moving to Tamworth the most useful bus routes to Birmingham were cancelled. “I could not believe that I was now in a situation where the main work I could find was warehouse although I was lucky enough though to find a job at a local school for six months. Being there highlighted something to me – even though the kids at the school weren’t politically minded or necessarily understood the significance of what they were saying, I got a clear impression from the majority of them that an education to them felt almost worthless because all they could see themselves doing is getting a job in a warehouse or something along those lines.”

After six months at the school, work for Nikki wasn’t forthcoming and any money she had saved was virtually gone, so about three years ago Nikki came to the ARCH in Amington for debt advice; “It was completely on an off chance wondering if I could get help with my financial situation. A welfare officer from Homestart helped me out and at that point, even just talking to someone helped me and took a massive weight off my shoulders. I’d been having fears for looking after my daughter as any money coming in was falling short. I’ve even thought about moving back to London, but I really don’t want to, I like Tamworth and I can see the potential. For some reason though it doesn’t seem right in its dynamic set up, I realise that a lot of people were shoved here from Birmingham in the overspill, but where is the infrastructure to cope with it? I think we desperately need a new transport system here. I could go across London all day for about £5 if I wanted to, but here it’s about £2 return into town from Amington! That doesn’t make sense and doesn’t make it any easier to find or get jobs, certainly outside of the Borough. It either needs to be easier for people to get out of town for work or more importantly bring business into the town.”

**How did your first interaction with ARCH develop?**

“My first engagement at the ARCH was with the Independent Welfare Officer from Homestart, who helped immensely, but through other interaction with staff and volunteers there I began to see the ARCH as a way to voice my opinion. When I first moved here, I felt a bit like an outsider and wasn’t welcomed into the community straight away, which I look at in two ways. It’s either strange considering how the town was built up of ‘outsiders’ or it makes sense if the previous influx from the Birmingham overspill has left a bad taste in peoples’ mouths.”

“Tamworth people don’t seem to get too close to new people for a while so I’d seen the ARCH as somewhere to meet other people and get talking. It gave a great realisation that everyone has pretty much the same opinions. I began to realise that lots can be done here, I love Amington, I don’t care what anyone from outside the area says. I think it’s a great place, but it does feel a bit like it’s been put on the back burner. I feel like the powers that be assumed a few people here and left them to it. I would like to think that Amington doesn’t have to feel the way it feels and that myself and others can bring back some community spirit through the ARCH and the activities that develop from there. The reputation of Amington seems to outweigh the reality of it all and from the first time I walked through the door at the ARCH was clear that at least some people wanted to get things done here, to make improvements. It was all very open for all to join in and add comment or ideas. Things have developed quite a long way over the last couple of years and I’m even on a Community Development course now, which will bring me a qualification. The Community Development going on here is my cup of tea, I love being involved with the activities and through that I get to talk to people who understand where I’m coming from in life and my situations.”
Sam Dodds

Bancroft Community Centre - Glascote Heath - Winter 2008

How has your role changed?
I have gained a lot of experience with administration. Now community work, there seems as a whole a bit more administration than before. I had to teach the school leavers course called 7202. Preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector and am about to start a course called 7201. Teaching in the lifelong learning sector and am about to start a course called 7201. I have gained more experience with administration, how communities work, their aims as a whole.

What have you gained?
My job has grown to include more administration and fundraising as my knowledge of those areas of work has developed. Bit by bit I've become more familiar with the day-to-day running of Bancroft and become more involved so it's been a natural progression. It was just all about opening up and a massive appreciation of what's involved. I've actually gained qualifications whilst here such as -.

I now have a big appreciation of how difficult it is to run something like this. Even being involved with Bancroft, even the most involved with Bancroft centres, I wasn't aware of the complexity of it all.

What is your background?
I saw an advert for Bancroft in the local job centre, the job description virtually matched my job at the primary school in Plymouth, but this job was for older clients. It was initially a temporary contract for three months, but the position started in October 2007 and I'm still here fourteen months later. 

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How did you get involved with Bancroft?
I didn't realise that side of community work existed; I thought it was just all about opening up and talking in between from a friendly human viewpoint. Speak to people as a friend, not as someone who needs to be 'sorted' on a tick list. It's so important and keeps up morale. It's so motivated as they know they are not on their own. If we can know people at a personal level we get to know the challenges they face as a community. It really is important and keeps up morale. It's so important and keeps up morale. It's so important and keeps up morale.

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Katrina Dipple

Background
From Burton originally, Katrina has been in post for two years after moving on from her previous role as Deputy in the same area of four years. Previous work to both these roles was as Programme Manager for ‘Common Purpose’. This was paper-work based, which was fine in identifying issues but Katrina felt frustrated she wasn’t directly able to solve problems, so with a huge knowledge base built up in most highlighted issue areas she came to work in Tamworth.

What expectations did you have?
“I wanted to make a difference to peoples lives. The impact you can have no matter how big or small is always immensely satisfying.”

How does your role work?
“SureStart is about family support utilising multi agency partnership working frameworks. Staff are trained with this mind set so that all can understand new best practices that develop from reflective work. This lets everyone get to know each other, who can do what and why we’re doing what we’re doing. Multi-agency working is the key. The cross networking enables excellent support for community members as all partners have specific expertise, which in turn is supported by their own organisations. In other words, more can be achieved by bringing together two officers from two different community support groups rather than two officers from one. We run several different support groups, which can contain ten to fifteen family units in each. Creches are really popular and contain adult learning classes on the side such as I.T. craft workshops, beauty sessions and direct family learning opportunities such as early development techniques and a year long Level Three in Child Care. All of these structured activities are genuine learning opportunities which on their own merit through achievements are fantastic but what really makes these programmes work is the ability to gain a close-knit circle of friends. This for us and for our families is incredibly important. Meeting someone else with similar issues and experiences can take away the loneliness of a situation. This builds great bonds which builds self esteem and stops some people from becoming house bound and insular, which in turn will help develop their children’s social skills including speech and language.”

Have You Achieved What You Wanted To?
“Yes, there is a long way to go, but I’ve seen many changes in people’s lives. Commitment from the team has been fantastic and families are evidently finding the support useful. None of the work or success will come quickly as a lot of problems people and families find themselves in are deep rooted, but changes are happening, we have over one thousand families registered.”

What Have You Learnt?
“I’ve learnt a lot. I feel like I’ve become a part of the community, that’s quite humbling and makes me proud to have been accepted. Family members now pop in just to talk from time to time, this is so important for me and the work I do, I will always continue with the face to face ground level work.”

The future?
“Government is committed to Children’s Centres. Consultation is going out at present to make Children’s Centres become part of legislation. If this goes ahead then getting this work done at a child’s early development will reduce future problems.

All preventative work will become mainstream and all organisations sitting on Staffs Children’s Trust need to coordinate aims and monies.”
Faith Shell

How did your community work start?

“At the age of twelve, I was involved with the church youth club in Sheldon, Birmingham and through this I got a position on the Regional Youth Club Council in Birmingham, which we were affiliated with at the time. After a few years I climbed up the ranks and started with others to represent Birmingham at a national level. Quite often we would meet up in London to talk about fundraising ideas and development. This level of involvement enabled myself and other young people to springboard ideas. We looked at what we were doing, who for and why. We all realised nothing catered for people of our age (now 16) with disabilities. As a group we knew it had to be addressed. We were always making money through fundraising and giving it to different worthwhile groups, but we’d now asked the question “Why shouldn’t everyone get the same access to services and a relatively normal style of life?”

20 physically handicapped teenagers along with 20 able bodied people spent a week living and working together as a community in Hampshire in one of the three big houses owned by the National Association of Youth Clubs (N.A.Y.C.). The able-bodied youngsters, both male and female became the arms and legs of their counterparts. We had to take care of washing and dressing them, feeding and toileting, in fact all of the things we would normally take for granted. One special visitor we had was Margaret, a student at the London School of Economics at the time. She had heard about our scheme from the N.A.Y.C. headquarters in London and was keen to see us in action and how the system worked. It was a real eye opener for her and lead to peaks of laughter from one thing or another from all of us.”

“It was not long before the group started globe trotting and our first holiday was at Le Jarde just outside Paris. Our vehicles were a converted van and a bus, none of the sophisticated vehicles that we have travelled on since. Never the less we have some lasting happy memories. As time went on many of us moved onto other areas throughout the country all looking forward to the annual reunion in London. Sadly many of our friends who were disabled have since died, but they will never be forgotten. Several of the able bodied went on to establish P.H.A.B. (physically handicapped and able bodied) clubs in their own areas. Before long many of us married and raised our own families. I had started a family of my own and when my youngest child started school I looked for and gained work as a helper at the then Tamworth Nursery for Handicapped Children in Masefield Drive. It was quite a culture shock and made me realise how much courage the young parents had, coping with their children seven days a week. I am full of admiration for all of them, I get a lovely warm feeling when I see any of them who are now grown up and working themselves.”

“After a few years I moved on yet again and with a group of friends locally we started the Tamworth and District Jumbo club. ‘Jumbo’ came from the large purpose built ambulances that were owned by the ‘Across Club’. Between us we raised funds to take disabled adults and children on holidays abroad. We visited places such as Rome, France, Germany, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and eventually Jerusalem.”

“A few of us were lucky enough to be invited to meet the Pope at Coventry airport during his visit to Britain. An awe inspiring event if ever there was one. Many of the patients are no longer with us, but we are left with numerous happy memories. Regrettably the Across Trust eventually and unexpectedly ceased trading. We attempted to carry on using a local coach company, but the physical strain was taking its toll on the helpers. The Jumbulance was purpose built with a hydraulic lift, kitchen, toilet and stretcher beds. We just could not get the same service on an ordinary coach although we had brilliant help from one company in particular. With much regret we called it a day, but carried on in a different way.”

What then?

One day, in order to help a friend, Faith joined the New Tamworth Stroke Club at Sunset Close.

“At that time I’d recently had an operation on my shoulder so had occasionally needed something to offset the boredom even though I was limited in what I could do. There was a fear that the club would have to shut down through lack of volunteers, but as the work was so valuable and 12 people we were caring for at the time needed us. We knew we couldn’t let it happen. On occasions we are the only people who have a detailed knowledge of the individuals needs and hold their confidential files, but the intimate knowledge of the person as a friend is so important too. For example, we once had a man who to me was looking not his normal self, no one else had noticed and it could easily have been explained as an off day, but I wasn’t comfortable with it so I arranged a doctors appointment for him and arranged for his son to go with him too just to ask for advice and give him a check up. After a short while his son called me back to say thank you! It transpired that the gentleman had somehow fallen and suffered an unstable fracture of the spine. This shows the importance of being involved at a personal local level.”

It isn’t an easy role as you get so close to members, you know they’re ill, but that doesn’t prepare you for what you know is eventually coming. Members come and go and unfortunately due to the loss of some members we are now looking for people to fill the vacancies, but people can feel self conscious about themselves and it can be difficult to get new people to come along. To encourage people we even try to arrange transport where necessary.”

What else do you do?

“Away from the Stroke Club I occupy my time with several other community commitments. I am currently the vice president of the Tamworth branch of the Royal National Lifeboat Association having been a member for 33 years.”

“I sit on the Joint Tenants Management board of Tamworth Borough Council and am a tenant representative on the Strategic Partnership Board? I’m a member of the Tenants Federation, Staffordshire Tenants Forum and the Communication Team Tenants Voice who are involved in the production of the Open House Magazine. Any Tenant in Tamworth can get involved in as little or as much as they would like. There is nothing more annoying to me than when people say I hate Tamworth, there’s nothing to do. Well there is always something to do, just get up off your backside. In August this year I will have completed 50 years of voluntary service. People should get into the community spirit so they can eventually say that they like me have had 50 years of FUN!”
At the moment we’re thinking about getting some community cohesion such as simple fun days for residents or away days for young people.

Danny Murphy
Abelia Action Group – 130 homes – Amington – Autumn 2008

Background
Danny was born in Holliwell, North Wales and first came to Tamworth in 1985 when he was stationed at Whittington Barracks. Whilst here he met his wife and they moved back to Wales until 1992 to continue his service with the army. Once back in Tamworth they moved into a house in Abelia, Amington where they’ve lived since.

Five years ago Danny decided to become involved with the Abelia Action Group and since joining, Danny thinks the group has gone from strength to strength and the overall interaction of the group with its residents has shifted up a gear.

“Eighteen months ago, Midlands Heart took over looking after the estate and this seems to have created a bigger turn around of enthusiasm from the whole estate as some rise in community interest has shown through. Gareth Hopkins, Resident Involvement Officer from Midland Heart, came along with a real zest for interaction with the community members, he provided £100 for the group to develop and within ten months in March 2008 a constituted residents group was fully realized. Being constituted would mean that the group would have a better chance of gaining external funding to improve the area through local projects, give them more respect and put in place processes that would keep the workings of the group uniformed.”

“Our main aims are to bring an overall improvement to Abelia, partly through new environmental works, making it a place for young and old generations and to bring back a proper sense of community spirit. The first twelve months will let the Committee get established and start to build up a reserve of funds. So far we’ve raised money through holding events like raffles and as a group we’re going to decide how best to spend that money. At the moment we’re thinking about getting some community cohesion such as simple fun days for residents or away days for young people.”

“We’ve managed to save a small amount of money in the bank which is earmarked for bigger projects in the future. Ideas for improvements to date are things such as particular areas in Abelia that as far as we’re concerned might as well be waste land. The group is considering these being turned into sensory gardens to provide a space for people to relax, reflect and enjoy what is around them. There is no children’s play areas in Abelia either, so we would love to rectify that situation. At all stages we would want the whole communities input for designs and decisions of the overall purpose. All this means that we can get back a sense of ownership and to encourage this style of engagement we’d probably offer initial incentives such as vouchers to give people a reward for taking part. Once the works are complete though, we’re sure that what’s been achieved will be reward enough and spur on further enthusiasm for more improvements. Realistically a play area is too big for us to handle right now, both physically and financially, but we’ll do it if that’s what we decide to do.”
Mary Wilson
St Peters Church and Community Centre Administrator – Glascote Heath

Background
Mary moved to Tamworth 6 years ago and she used to work in catering which she was enjoying. A couple of years after moving to Tamworth Mary sadly lost her husband. “This was a massively tragic period in my life, I wasn’t too sure what direction my life would take at that point and the sense of loss was immense. I was invited to a community memorial service at St Peters Church and through this I found much needed warmth and an invitation to come back for whatever reason. This offered a great sense of belonging which I felt had gone off track. Whether I realised the amount of support I needed at the time or not, they had offered it. Being widowed at forty one I found getting through each day was a milestone.” Mary just couldn’t think about more than a week at a time but with the existing and newer supportive network around her life gradually became easier and had more direction. Through this support Mary naturally got involved with voluntary work at the centre and this became something to concentrate on. “Bit by bit I decided to do more voluntary work including youth work.”

In April 2007, Mary decided to take time out from her catering work with a mind to see what developed through aiming at doing more volunteer work. Mary felt a need to help a community that had helped her out so much and gave her an amazing amount of support “I needed to put back whatever I could wherever I could”. This built confidence back and a want to learn attitude. Mary insisted on being shown more to do with the running of the centre and in turn was able to develop different talents.

What did you hope to get out of it?
“With my new outlook I wanted to learn new things, try something different, for me the service industry just didn’t offer face to face interaction or a feeling of any true value at work. Working in the community is so diverse everyone wants different things, everyone has different needs”. Mary wanted to give back the enthusiasm that had been given to her, be a part of the community, and help everyone to help each other she wanted nothing directly to do with money or costs. “The thing is we should all be like that and we can all help each other out in some way at some point.”

Who do you work with now?
“SureStart, Jumping Beans, Social Services, Post Natal Depression Groups, Dispraxia Support Groups, Changes – empowering people to get back to work, Yoga, Weightwatchers & Tai Chi and we attend PACT meetings. I enjoy seeing the kids having time to run around in a safe environment, seeing mothers get together, they are all in the same boat and have similar situations and common problems. Allowing the community to get together means everyone can share best practice to make life easier.”

Have you seen that success?
“Yes, all the groups feel they are part of a bigger group and always leave the centre with a big smile on their faces. It can even be that just access to a drink and warm environment is enough. Sometimes this leads to something that no one was expecting, such as that visitor happening upon a group they’d like to join or finding that visitor can offer something to the community which in turn makes that person feel better about themselves and their neighbourhood.

What have you learnt / what has changed?
“My whole life has changed, essentially my whole outlook in life has changed and I’m now actually employed at the community centre which originally gave me so much support, just think what could be done if the whole chain carries on so someone we help does the same for someone else. That’s what communities should be. I look forward to going to work every day, I’m employed to manage the day-to-day running of the centre, but it’s the connection to the community that I love and feel so vitally important. I do everything but I love it and still give extra volunteer hours, it feels like home.”

Future
“I am contracted for two years and want to learn as much as possible with the hope that I could continue well into the future. I don’t want a top paid job, I love the community. I wouldn’t do anything else …. I’ll stay here, its too fulfilling.”
**Background**

Moved to Tamworth from a small village near Weston Super Mare. Had previously lived in Tamworth five and a half years ago.

**What did you think of Tamworth?**

"Before we moved we were in a protective atmosphere, no graffiti etc, it was a traditional English village where everyone knew each other. Teenagers in the area actually had something to do, they could get up to mischief, learn things and find boundaries and not bother anyone. Moving here was a big shock, we first noticed that horror and fear seemed to have set in amongst the residents. We moved into semi-sheltered housing at Silver Court, but something didn't feel right. Neighbours wouldn't come out to talk and our immediate impression was that elderly people were bullied by teenagers using our car park (which we pay for) to drink, take drugs, have sex and generally being loud & abusive. A neighbour once tried to talk to the young people and ‘coincidently’ her car then got smashed up and broken into. The residents at this point were too scared to do anything or engage. Police & Wardens were contacted a lot, but by the time they were able to attend trouble had usually cleared off. We can’t say it was just young people, grown ups were also using the car park for the same reason as the youngsters."

**What did you do about it?**

"We were making constant calls to Police and talking to Street Wardens but after a while we realised we also had to do something for ourselves and take a different approach. Midland Heart, who looked after the Silver Court residents realised that their customers must be at the heart of business. With all the frustration surrounding the events that were regularly taking place Tom decided to hold a meeting with residents and George Jones the Resident Involvement Officer from what was at the time Focus Housing (now Midland Heart). He advised it would be worthwhile forming a residents association as more usable notes and different ways of thinking would come from a group. It was a simple idea that greater numbers equals greater power. Through the group Tom was sent on courses to learn about Chairmanship, the role of a Secretary and Treasurer and how to become and work as a trust fund. Eventually a constitution was set up and Tom had started to use the Face Centre at Glascote to brush up on I.T. skills. The ball got rolling and protective measures have been put in place, fences put in and there's now no access to car park other than through a locked gate so now residents feel like it's theirs again. All the neighbours now know each other and now other people see it as a good place to live. Fund raising days such as car boot sales are held to help create a community and funds raised help towards putting on a Christmas meal/event. No one is on their own; everyone knows everyone and feels safe."

**What did you expect and what do you think is the problem?**

"Started as my own needs. I wanted to have a safe place to live, nothing else, but I've come to realise that kids really have nothing to do and are shown little or no respect, so why would they give respect back. Also the community doesn't seem 'together'. We need more inter-community events to happen. We need platforms for this to happen. People need to join residents groups and take back ownership along with an automatic respect for the people they live with in their community."

"I often wonder are people more defensive now as they have more to protect? Big TV's, nice cars, which can make people more defensive of their possessions. We've all got similarities we just need to fill in the gaps. We've all got problems. Kids can't play games or be slightly naughty playing knock and run, scrumping or kerby. One 14-year-old lad who used to have an ASBO is now a part of a church group just through engaging and being able to find something constructive to do. The community needs to understand that they have to work together. Older generations won't admit they've ever done wrong and so aren't willing to give kids a chance to make mistakes and grow up. Children nowadays know too much of the truth too, we believe that the 60's generation were too honest or 'Adult' with kids leaving no room for innocence anymore. Kids are put in the middle of a battlefield of opinions with barely any form and so see and hear things they shouldn't, information they know is not managed or given structure. It seems to me that there is too much on their shoulders."

"Children should be allowed to be children and enjoy it."

"We all need residents associations and young people can be involved if they want to, we need integration. Associations and partnerships are the best way to do this, greater numbers, greater knowledge. People pride – ownership.”

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**Tom Carol**

Silver Court Residents Association – Glascote Heath – Spring 2008
Jack and Ben
ARCH – Amington – Summer 2008

How did you get involved with the ARCH?

“We started by doing a project called Breathing Places. It was mostly based on environmental issues and improvements for us and all the animals that live here. We cut away brambles, planted trees and plants, put benches in and even a display board telling everyone what we’ve done.”

“We’ve tried to do other things too like getting a local post box reopened so that the communities, our families and especially older people don’t have so far to walk. We wrote a letter to the Royal Mail and the Tamworth Herald, but unfortunately due to Royal Mail issues that have nothing to do with our area this hasn’t happened and probably never will.”

What else would you like to do?

“At the moment we think our local area is really messy so we need to clean it up some more, make a show of it so it looks really good.”

“But because we did the Breathing Places project we were inspired to do more environmental work. Benefits are that the area would be safer for us to play and all the animals around would be better off too. Also people that come and visit would find it a nicer place to be and go away with a better impression of Amington.”

“The ARCH is really important to us for loads of reasons, but mainly because we can get stuck into our area and feel proud about it. It doesn’t just do us good, it does everyone some good!”
I learned an amazing and simple lesson I probably should have already known - ‘I could and can do what I want with my life’.
Barbara Bowker
Library Assistant - Glascote - Autumn 2008

What is your background to your involvement with the community?
Barbara first worked at the Doctors in Glascote and then came to the library ten years ago, “I’d always wanted to work at the library. In the first instance I wasn’t aware of how much of a community hub it was and neither therefore of its potential uses.”

“When I first arrived the library there seemed to be a minority of people who were very quick to cause confrontation with not only the library staff but to the community in general. There was little communication with the local Police at this time, but looking back I’m sure if the Police had been informed a lot of these problems would not have arisen. There were several instances of stones thrown and library staff being spat at.”

What did you think you would get out of it?
“It was a career move and I knew I’d get massive job satisfaction; I’d wanted to work in a library for quite some time. Like others I thought libraries should be quiet but this wasn’t the case here……quite the opposite.”

How do you think this came about?
“Glascote Heath was fast growing. Everyone was new to each other, with none of the close family knits you get in older established communities. (No relatives around the corner to give advise or help out), which put a lot of pressure on all local facilities including Schools, Doctors and of course the library, as we were the local information centre and meeting place, especially for local children.”

What has changed at Glascote Library
“With slowly introducing behaviour guidelines to some of the more unruly children and with the regular presence of the local Community Police Officers the library has become a peaceful, interesting centre for all ages. Everyone needs guidelines just to get a benchmark idea of how to behave in certain situations”

What have you learned?
“Having now grown up with the children I met ten years ago and seeing them maturing into young adults, enjoying the library facilities I feel the library has also grown with them learning what the community wants and needs.”

Future?
“I would like to work here until seventy, would like more children in. More projects like team read, bringing schools in, bring in poets, artists and create a real community environment for all people, children and adults.”

Summary

If development workers or other experienced professionals are placed directly in a locality alongside a community, successful engagement can be achieved without “doing unto” people. It is preferable that the community takes ownership, which develops pride and responsibility rather than telling community members what to do, which won’t achieve long-term, useful, meaningful goals and almost always leads to communities feeling like they are being pushed around. This can create an illusion that things are being done solely to appease ‘outsiders’, rather than the community deciding what is best needed, based on informed local knowledge. The outcome of effective community involvement can be to create a personal and passionate drive from the community, which in turn leads to more sustainable stronger communities.

Working within the community helps raise peoples’ awareness of their choices and gives a much wider scope for effective change. This has to take into account a respect for a communities’ diversity, addressing power imbalances and helping to address civil and human rights for all. This assists in taking away oppressive and discriminatory behaviour in favour of understanding and a desire for respect and harmony.

Community Development is about utilising certain principles and values together. It is about working with communities first and recognising their interests, expertise and experience as the basis for development. It is this approach that will result in equitable, relevant and sustainable change.

There are a range of key elements and practice principles for effective community development contained through the stories in this document. Readers will have seen that these elements are often identified by the storytellers. Sometimes the TBC Community Development Team have been actively involved with the storyteller but some of the stories highlight the fact that most elements of Community Development can be utilised, knowingly or not, by others to achieve positive impact. It is through Community Development that all elements are brought together and utilised.

For further information or to get involved in the four locality areas please contact the Community Development Team at Marmion House

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