

AT THE TABLE

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Melanie McNatty, 2017



With Jim Diers in Seattle visiting the Bradner Community Garden

Executive Summary

Albert Einstein said:

“Everything should be as simple as it can be, but not simpler”¹.

This quote really sums up the key learnings and applications from my Winston Churchill Fellowship travel. As I journeyed through Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom my focus was on looking at community development practices in populations facing complex needs, and poverty, and how unrepresented groups could be involved in solving community problems.

My findings are simple, but not simplistic. They are not new by any means in the community development world but they clarified for me some key conditions for engagement, using both asset based community development and community-led development approaches. What I have come away with, is an understanding that creating the right culture and conditions is vitally important for successful community engagement when facing multi-complex issues.

The key conditions that emerged were:

1. *Long term involvement in communities* produces long term results when resourced effectively.
2. *Two-way engagement with communities* through the building of strong partnerships with public services and organisations, alongside the empowerment of communities in decision making processes.
3. *Not all groups of people are the same* - what works for one group may not work for another.
4. *Build community by linking people together* - use community connectors to ensure that conversations and dialogue take place.
5. *Provide space for conversations, but not being the voice for the community.* Hold multiple conversations, both in smaller and larger groups, rather than at large events.

¹ https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/albert_einstein.html

6. *Embrace diversity* by having the ability to see everybody who is present in a community.
7. *A flexible and focussed approach to working at a local level, with local needs.* Issues are often complicated/complex and solutions need to be more flexible and focussed.
8. *Grow leadership* from within communities and from outside communities – both are required.
9. *City-wide strategies to address community needs and aspirations* produce citywide results when the whole of community is involved.
10. *Who sits at the shared table* usually depends on whether you are asking the question about who is not present, and leaving space for those that are not yet at the table.
11. *When we face multi-complex issues*, there is often a fight between living in the “here and now” and having “hopes for the future”.

The key conditions for engagement with people facing multi-complex issues are wide and varied in nature. They highlight that what are often seen as simple solutions for engagement are actually grounded in complexity.



In the Boardroom at Leeds City Council - a Duplo construction that shares their simple vision for a Child Friendly city

Introduction

I am an experienced Community Development practitioner living and working in Dunedin where I have been involved in community and youth development work in a variety of settings for over twenty years. I am currently the Practice Manager for Family Works, Presbyterian Support Otago – we are a large social service organisation offering support to our region’s most vulnerable. Part of my role involves leading our organisation’s community development team and youth development/social enterprise work, as well as managing a vast range of social services, crisis intervention and advocacy in our local community. I am really passionate about ensuring that those whose voices are often silent in communities are able to have a voice in matters that affect them.

I have also been fortunate to be part of a group of experienced community development practitioners in Dunedin for a number of years now called “Community Builders”. Community Builders supports peer led learning, offering training and networking opportunities to support locally led community development initiatives in both communities of place and communities of interest.

Thanks to a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship, I travelled to Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom in August and September of 2016. This allowed me to look at development practices in communities facing complex needs and poverty, exploring ideas for the inclusion of unrepresented groups in community problem solving and decision making.

The learnings I highlight in this report are based on a wide range of conversations and visits to many projects, organisations and individuals who kindly shared their valuable time and allowed me to see first-hand some of their exciting community-led and asset-based community development efforts. The full list of groups visited is provided in Appendix One.

Purpose and Significance of My Study

In 2015, one of our poorest and most vulnerable communities was flooded – South Dunedin. It had (and still has) sea level rise issues making it one of the most susceptible communities in New Zealand to the effects of climate change. Geographically South Dunedin is a major piece of flat and reclaimed land – its dense population and old, cold housing stock cause some of the residents living there to face multi-complex issues. Major concerns include long term residents in poor grade housing, cheap and poorly insulated rentals, low levels of home ownership, a high proportion of unsupported elderly, and limited social housing.

My organisation worked alongside the local Council, other social service providers and community groups in the post-flood recovery effort. I was involved early on with the local Council, looking at how to approach the widespread flooding of approximately 1,500 houses, using some of the lessons learned from the Christchurch Earthquakes. However, through discussions with the Waimakariri District Council’s recovery managers it became apparent that the resilience levels of some of the residents and their ability to connect with their neighbours and greater community was vastly different from that experienced in Christchurch. Post 2011 Earthquake, whole streets of neighbours rallied around each other, even to the point of setting up local “schools” in their neighbourhood while actual schools were out of action. There seemed to be a resilience in Christchurch that I found lacking in South Dunedin, where there appeared to be a large number of residents who weren’t sure either what help they needed or didn’t know their neighbours to ask for help.

This led me to consider from a community development perspective - How could I engage this group of residents to ensure that they had a greater sense of resiliency in future events? How could I ensure that they were “at the table”, having input into issues affecting them and their community?

This is a community where I have worked and lived for many years and from my perspective, the residents have had much done “to them”, rather than “with them”. My application to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust was borne out of this sense of wondering ***“How do we really engage with and include unrepresented groups in solving community problems?”***

I therefore chose to explore innovative practices for engagement in communities facing multiple complex needs and poverty around the world, in order to gain insights into how best we can support the South Dunedin area. I was particularly interested in how to build meaningful relationships with those who do not normally sit “around the table” or are unable to “have their voices heard” easily, or at all.

I have used snapshots from a grassroots community organisation, a non-profit organisation, and a local Government to highlight the breadth and depth of the engagement required to ensure that community members who are not normally “at the table”, or whose voices are silent and/or missing, are engaged in strengths-based community development approaches. I identified practices that encourage participation from all members of communities, based on the belief that each individual has the ability to contribute to making their communities stronger. I have also added South Dunedin as a fourth snapshot to highlight why I have chosen the topic of engagement, the themes at work across each of the international snapshots and to offer insight into future positive engagement in the South Dunedin community.

This topic of engagement in hard to reach contexts is important to communities both in New Zealand and around the world as poverty in our communities is increasing at a rapid rate. Those facing multi-complex needs are becoming more and more marginalised, either “silent” or offering a “whisper” rather than a “loud voice” while the world discusses what their futures look like. Better outcomes are more likely when these voices are actively engaged in both in the informing of Governmental policy and locally-led actions.

Key Questions

The key questions I broadly set out to answer were:

1. How do we really engage with and include unrepresented groups in solving community problems?
2. How do we create a community culture that is inclusive of those who are often marginalised and facing issues of poverty and isolation, which result in them feeling disenfranchised and unable to participate?
3. What community development approaches challenge and remove the barriers that disempower individuals, young people and families?
4. How do you assist and partner with hard to reach communities and young people so that they are at the shared table, and participating in activities that impact their lives?



Asset map created in Motherwell, Scotland

Method

I was keen to look at projects that involved citizen-led participation and asset-based community development approaches, and at work happening at macro, micro and meso, levels. I used the wide range of contacts and networks I had through my work as a community development practitioner, enlisting Dunedin Community Builders and Inspiring Communities to help narrow down suitable places to explore and people to connect with. We were fortunate to have two community development veterans Jim Diers and Peter Kenyon visiting Dunedin in 2015 and 2016. Their guidance and expertise led me to many of the places, people and networks I would visit.

In the end I met with 26 organisations (outlined in Appendix One) over a period of four weeks. On each visit, I was able to interview key people involved and in many instances, I observed their work first-hand.

Community development is essentially a way of working that intrinsically believes that communities are best placed to identify their own issues and problems, and as such have the ability to seek their own solutions and opportunities (Walker & Aimers, 2013). In this report, I have focussed on two contemporary strengths-based community development theories; asset-based community development and community-led development. I have done this because these theories underpin the community development work my organisation does in Dunedin, it is my belief that they are the most appropriate for working with complex communities.

Asset-based community development (ABCD) focusses on discovering and mobilising resources that are already present in a community. ABCD encourages people to recognise that their community is more like a glass “half full” with assets, than a glass “half empty” with needs, focusing on strengths and not deficits. Community assets are resources that become valuable when they are brought together and made productive, or used differently. People, physical places like parks or groups in a community can be considered a local asset (Green et al, 2009).

The ABCD approach provides a way for community members to identify, locate and mobilise what they already have, so that they can build a stronger community. Effective ABCD has three essential qualities.

- It is asset-based and focused on what the community is already doing that will allow them a better outcome.
- It is internally focused and searches for what can already be found within a community.
- It is relationship driven, where a community's greatest strengths are the connections that allow its members to share their gifts (Green et al, 2009).

In summary, the strength of ABCD comes from discovering local assets, connecting those assets so that they work together and then creating conditions and opportunities for those assets to work together and be productive. This quote really sums ABCD up for me *“When a group of people discover what they have, they find power. When people join together in new connections and relationships they build power. When people become more productive together, they exercise their power to address problems and realise dreams”* (Green et al, 2009,15). This is the essence of ABCD.

Community-led development (CLD) focuses on working together in place to develop local resources and strengths (Inspiring Communities in Walker & Aimers, 2013). It is a “learning by doing” approach and has five core principles at its heart, these are:

- Shared local visions for ‘place’ driving action and change.
- Local people actively involved in planning, decision making and doing.
- Working across many sectors to unlock and harness creativity, ensuring the best use of resources.
- Proactively growing local leadership and ownership of change.
- Learning from doing; planning, action and reflection on outcomes (Inspiring Communities, 2013).

Critical to these five principles and foundational to CLD are relationships that are respectful and trusting, a common focus, cohesion, proactive and effective

engagement strategies, and working and learning together (Inspiring Communities, 2013).

CLD also hinges on the notion that some communities have the experience and capacity to lead themselves, while others require support and help to strengthen connections, engage locally and ensure action happens locally. Often events such as floods and times of crisis tend to build community engagement and resilience.

My Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship observations are largely from place-based communities; however, they also include some communities of interest such as drug and alcohol users, mental health users, faith-based communities and housing initiatives.

I have picked a cross-section of the organisations and groups I visited as Snapshots in the next section to assist me in communicating my findings. These are also used as examples in the Key Learnings section.

I then have brought together my notes from visits, interviews with people, resource material and observations and collated them under the broad four key questions to come up with 11 key learnings for engagement with communities facing multi-complex issues.

A visit to Streatham Youth & Community Trust where they are working with young people in an Irish travelling community



Snapshots of Visits

Here are snapshots from my visits, providing a cross section of the organisations I visited and the wider themes at work:

Snapshot 1 is grassroots community development project - Phinney Neighbourhood Association in Greenwood, Seattle. It has a 40-year track record of experience and with capacity to lead themselves. A gas explosion in 2016 destroyed businesses and damaged houses in this area, however the community was well able and resourced to seek their own solutions to the damage caused and the Association supported the local community from within.

Snapshot 2 is a local non-profit organisation called Solid Ground in Fremont, Seattle, which works with those on the margins of society in a highly diverse community. The housing in this neighbourhood used to be affordable and is slowly being gentrified. Those who are silent and without a voice are being pushed out, and community life is seen as less cohesive.

Snapshot 3 portrays the innovative approaches by local Government in the city of Portland. They work to ensure that all community members (including ethnic minority groups) are consulted on matters that are important to them. Their goal is that culture is improved and to ensure good community engagement across the whole of local Government.

Snapshot 4 provides insight on the community of South Dunedin, New Zealand, which faces multi-complex issues and is the basis on which I applied for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship.

Snapshot 1

Neighbourhood Association: Phinney Neighbourhood Association

“Building community takes time” says Lee Harper from the Phinney Neighbourhood Association. “Taking the time to build community, to get to know your people will have long lasting benefits” (Tauber, C. in Phinney Neighbourhood Association, 2016, 1).

Phinney Neighbourhood Association (PNA) started in 1980 with a Government grant to serve residents in the Phinney area and quickly expanded into the Greenhill area as community members brought their ideas and energy to the grassroots project. In 1981, it leased a disused elementary school and, in 2009 with the generosity of the local community was able to buy the property. The space for a community centre saw the creation of many programmes including a preschool co-op, childcare services, tool lending library and art gallery.

The PNA seeks to build, engage with, and support their diverse community through programmes, services and activities that connect neighbours and foster and supporting a culture of innovation and civic engagement (Phinney Neighbourhood Association, 2016). They believe that being strategic in where you go and being flexible is their “secret sauce”. They attend senior groups and consult there by sitting and listening, rather than holding another event for an older person to go out to. They create spaces for diverse groups to meet among these is an Alzheimer’s Café called “Dementia” where caregivers are able to take family members living with Alzheimer’s to a safe space that is free of judgment. These gathering spaces are used to catalyse conversation, previous catalysts have included pre-school events, local farmers market, the “Fixers Collective”, The Review community newspaper, Phinney Center Gallery, a seed library and a hot meal programme.

Community members say:

“I feel like I am part of the community and there is somebody who will be there when I need someone to be there. I have a second family – my real family is not available” (PNA Village Member in Phinney Neighbourhood Association, 2015, 3).

“Went to the Fixers Collective last night with a broken air filter, rice cooker and microwave. We got all three fixed and my daughter got to be part of it. She wants to go back. I just don’t want her to break anything just to go” (George, Fixers Collective Participant in Phinney Neighbourhood Association, 2016, 3).

The power of local community was seen when a gas explosion in Greenwood Avenue (the major business area) in March 2016 destroyed three buildings and damaged over 50 other buildings. Immediately the Greenwood Relief Fund was set up and 1,500 volunteers were mobilised. Crisis brought this neighbourhood

together, increasing their resilience as the community began to seek their own innovative solutions for fixing their damaged business area.

“This type of effort by the PNA makes me proud to be a member of this community” (Phinney Neighbourhood Association, 2016a, 16).

“We have the opportunity to make something great out of something awful” (Phinney Neighbourhood Association, 2016a, 17).

The PNA currently has 2,589 members representing 2,364 households and 225 businesses while their geographic reach is much wider. This is a long established, grassroots community development project.



Phinney Neighbourhood Development Association



Lee Harper, Phinney Neighbourhood Development Association

Snapshot 2

Non-Profit Organisation: Solid Ground

Fremont is a suburban community in Seattle that is incredibly diverse with a high proportion of people living in poverty. Once an inexpensive place to live, the area is slowly being gentrified which has forced rents to increase and many long-term residents to leave. Fremont is home to the Fremont Troll (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fremont_Troll), an exciting example of how the community has united to solve the longstanding issues at work in their neighbourhood. The Troll was birthed out of a competition, where young locals were asked to come up with a solution for the prevalence of tagging, vagrancy and unsavoury activities occurring beneath the Fremont Bridge. The winning idea from this resulted in the building of an enormous troll which now attracts tourists

from around the world. The community have taken real ownership of this solution and hold all kinds of festivals and events in an area which once they avoided.

Solid Ground is a non-profit organisation working to end poverty and fight against the inequality at work in their neighbourhood. They want to see Fremont become a strong community that is living beyond poverty and oppression, and where all people have the same opportunities to thrive. Solid Ground use an approach that allows for equitable voice and access to the necessary building blocks of a resilient community.

“When communities are denied the resources, they need to build wellbeing ... they are unable to realise their full potential” (McHenry, G. in Solid Ground (2015), 3).

With over 40 years of listening to people living on lower incomes, developing effective partnerships and running programmes in response to the needs identified, Solid Ground has been part of the Fremont community’s successful anti-poverty efforts in Seattle (Solid Ground, 2014).

Solid Ground use a framework of effecting systemic change through social justice, they believe that response must be led by those who are most impacted by the issues and inequities in their community. They focus on how to engage community members to get involved, have their voices heard, challenge systems, and influence policy makers. To do this they have formal structures such as a Community Accountability Council where the Council invites different service user groups or people affected by issues to a meeting to allow their contribution to the discourse.

They also hold listening sessions, taking care about where, when and with whom they hold these sessions. They use spaces where service users or people affected are familiar and comfortable. They describe their engagement as old school organising – when you have individual conversations with people, you will start to see threads of similarities.



The Fremont Troll in Seattle, a community solution and a tourist attraction

Snapshot 3

Local Government: The City of Portland

One in five neighbours in Portland speak a language other than English and nearly half of their school children go home to ethnic minority families. In the East and North of Portland, this percentage doubles (Immigrant and Refugee Task Force, 2008).

The City of Portland Office of Neighbourhood Involvement co-ordinates Portland's current neighbourhood-based community involvement system, which is made up of 95 recognised neighbourhood associations. Thirty years ago, the City of Portland embarked on its first community involvement system and Portland has changed dramatically since then. It has more recently embarked on a five-year plan to increase community involvement in Portland called "Community Connect" with two of its goals being to increase the number and diversity of people involved in their communities, and to strengthen community capacity (Community Connect, 2009).

One aspect of this project was community consultation, Community Connect saw hundreds of conversations and hosting consultations in natural gathering spaces. They have also sought out groups who are often under-represented, holding sessions that accommodate the diverse needs, backgrounds and challenges of the Portland population. Conscious of these struggles, the Council actively follows up on under-engaged groups to learn more about their experience.

Portland's neighbourhood system is recognised as a national model for how cities can foster strong partnerships with their neighbourhoods (Community Connect, 2009).

Their office has also focused on changing and improving local Government culture in terms of improving the quality and consistency of community engagement across the Council. They now have a City of Portland Public Involvement Advisory Council which is made up equally. This Council works on creating new community engagement policies, best practice, training, evaluation, and consultation support.



The Better Together Garden at the City of Portland

Snapshot 4

Local New Zealand Community: South Dunedin

South Dunedin is a major suburb in Dunedin that was built on low lying, flat land that was reclaimed from the coast in the early 1800's to be drained and developed. In 1876 this area became a borough but amalgamated with Dunedin City in 1905. South Dunedin was once home to Dunedin's premier sporting ground and has hosted major local industries and businesses in the area (such as the Railways Hillside workshop)².

South Dunedin is densely populated and one of New Zealand's oldest and poorest areas, low income individuals and families often living in old, cold housing. Because the area is flat and the housing is often affordable, South Dunedin's population hosts a disproportionate representation of elderly and people living with disabilities and mental health issues.

Geographically, the area has a very high water table, making it extremely susceptible to the effects of global warming. Both our Dunedin City and Otago Regional Councils have a lot of work to do with regards to these sea level rise challenges, beginning with long-term community consultation and the exploration of workable solutions.

In early June 2015, a major flood caused considerable damage to low-lying parts of South Dunedin. It was estimated that approximately 1,250 households were affected by the floods, across 29 streets - homes, businesses and schools all felt the effects.

The issues that surfaced as a result were far broader than just contaminated water damage: tenancy and substandard housing issues, complex mental health and disability issues, lack of community cohesion, limited resilience and ability to cope in adverse events, and inability to support neighbours during a crisis all became apparent.

While time has passed and there have been lessons learnt with regards to physical place and infrastructure, the need for the strengthening of the local

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Dunedin

community remains an issue. Greater needs identified as part of the flood recovery include sub-standard housing, increased resiliency of the local community to withstand future events, and a more cohesive and co-ordinated inter-agency response. There are many agencies working in the area but there is a real need to work together collaboratively. The South Dunedin community feels that it is often “done to” rather than “done with”, therefore a strengths-based community development approach is needed to build capability within the local community.



Widespread flooding in South Dunedin in 2015³

Key Learnings

I have gained a number of key insights about the factors and conditions necessary for engaging with and including unrepresented groups in solving community problems. These may seem quite simple to those working every day in place-

³ Photo credit: Paul Allen

based communities or communities of interest with marginalised people. However, I have found it useful to elaborate these with practical examples from my visits, as the ideas are far from simple to implement. I have linked my key learnings to the initial questions I sought to ask.

Engaging with and including unrepresented groups in solving community problems

Long term involvement in communities is key

Being involved in communities for the long haul is important for achieving transformational change, particularly in communities facing complex needs. These communities need people, organisations, and partners who are committed to the long term, rather than a vast array of organisations that go in and out of the community, without really getting involved, and spend a lot of money doing so.

The Glasgow Community Planning Partnership of Glasgow City Council has taken the “Thriving Places” – a ten-year investment into nine high deprivation communities in Glasgow with a rollout to the whole city in the future. The approach seeks to address inequalities that exist in the communities and to achieve better outcomes for residents based on the premise of “doing with” rather than “doing to” (Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, 2013). I visited three quite different projects across Glasgow - Priesthill, the Gorbals and Possilpark. Each of these focus on different areas of need, including social housing standards, empty sections on a main street, littering and homelessness. What was clearly evident with these projects was the Council’s commitment to moving at the community’s pace. For each of these projects this looks different 2-4 years on, but there is a guarantee by the Council to maintain a long-term approach.

In Seattle, another long-term investment is “Making Connections”, a project funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. One project that has arisen from this is the development of the White Center Community Development Association.

White Center is a community with a high proportion of migrants and former refugees and a high unemployment rate for residents for whom English is a second language. With support from “Making Connections”, and what are called “Trusted Advocates” a successful Airport Jobs programme works alongside local

organisations to recruit, screen and refer people looking for jobs to a training programme which helps prepare them for the nearby airport's application process. Because of long-term involvement, recruiters now understand White Center residents' aspirations, strengths and barriers. They then hold a job fair for White Center residents and almost everyone gets a job because they are very well prepared. They have also set up an airport-based case manager to follow up with residents for the first year of employment and this helps them stay in the jobs. This didn't happen quickly. It came through trial and error, long term investment and with the assistance of "Trusted Advocates" working with the airport employer to look at barriers residents faced (for example lack of English, form completion difficult) ⁴.



Community solutions currently being sought for the issue of littering and dumping in Possilpark in Glasgow

Two way engagement with communities

Building trust and confidence between communities and public services/organisations is vital. Effective partnerships grow when communities are empowered to be more involved in what happens in, and what is delivered in their community.

⁴ <http://www.aecf.org/resources/trusted-advocates/>

The team at Nurture Development⁵ (a United Kingdom and Ireland based organisation) provides thought leadership and practical support in promoting more place-based, citizen-centred approaches. They believe that supporting place-based and citizen-led work requires some risk taking on the part of agencies and groups who would partner with a community. It is important for partners to see that two-way engagement requires them to leave their own agency's agenda at the door, and place the power for defining the outcomes with the local community. If partners have already determined what success looks like, they have missed the opportunity to truly partner. I saw a tension here and with other community builders I met, regarding being able to stand in the gap between the community's goals and meeting the needs of the agencies goals. The community builder exists in a grey area between the needs and wants of both the community and organisation, negotiating at a higher level with managers and community leaders to ensure that each gets their desired outcome.

Community building at a grassroots level isn't when the outcomes are already predefined by another party. One community builder had been given a map from the local Council and told what he should be focusing on first, he decided to put that aside and take a blank piece of paper around his community to build an asset map. He started attending groups, social events, did walk arounds, and met local community members. What transpired was not only an asset map created by the community, but he began to hear the aspirations of the community and started to prioritise what was most important to them. What started to develop was community ownership. Looking for willing partners without hidden agendas is crucial so that communities have more influence over what happens.

Real partnerships could also mean changing the way in which resources are allocated. I saw a couple of good examples of this in local Council areas where instead of paying for a new seat or piece of public art in a community, they set up community matching funds where community members could apply for funds to do something in their community, by matching their contribution in hours. The community defined how the money would be spent and who did it.

At Bridging the Gap, in the Gorbals, Glasgow, a BIG Thursday drop in day each week is organised and run by local people. Serving in the kitchen (kicking up a

⁵ <http://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/who-we-are/>

Kiwi storm!) on a Thursday, I got to hear first-hand stories of the change this regular event was providing for former refugees and ethnic minority groups in the Gorbals area. What I was impressed with was not only how this community was working with the people around them, but that when we sat down to dinner one of the major funders of the drop-in, Foundation Scotland, was also there. On talking to the funder, they weren't there to tell the group what outcomes they were looking for, but were there seeking to understand the impact this group had on their local community. All too often the funder invites the community to the table to see how the community project or idea fits into the funder's outcomes. If we are looking for sustainable community change, then funders may have to flip their outcomes and behaviours upside down to allow communities' aspirations to influence the outcomes funders want to achieve and the services delivered in their communities.



Community-led playgroup at Bridging the Gap, The Gorbals, Scotland

Not all groups of people are the same

Not all groups of people are homogenous. What works for one group of people may not work for another, and in consultation with the community, you may need to try different methods of engagement. It is important not to assume that because you have done something that way before it is going to work the same way again in this community, or with this group of people.

Trust the people you are trying to engage with. Their ideas for engagement and finding solutions may be totally outside of what you have imagined and this is fine. In all conversations, always begin with listening to the most vulnerable, their experiences and their voice. Be trusting and defer to those people when seeking different ways to engage, and always ensure that the voices of the powerful as not heard the loudest.

Creating an inclusive community culture

Building community by linking people together

Building social capital in any community is important, and vital for building resilient communities. It is for this reason that having community connectors is imperative. The role of the community connector is to ensure that conversations and ongoing dialogue take place between community members and with relevant organisations. These connectors are often leaders or people who introduce people already in the community to others.

Cowdenbeath is a small ex-mining and engineering community in Fife, near Edinburgh. A community builder is funded by the Fife Council and is working for a local social enterprise, her role is linking people together, and she has found that connections have been very quick to make and multiply within her community. Taking the first step to get connected or involved however, is often very hard in making an initial connection with someone, being encouraged or accompanied by another community member to an event or social gathering is vital. This is an important aspect of community building, particularly in communities facing complex needs where often their focus is on immediate survival, rather than sustainability or change.

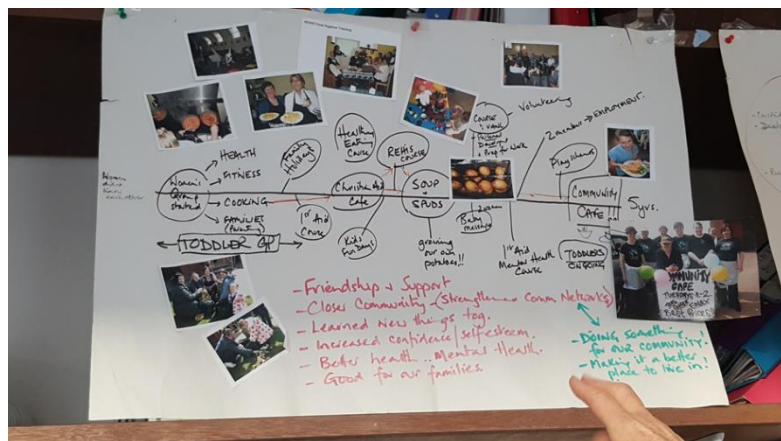
The key aim in the Cowdenbeath project has been to tackle loneliness and to connect people who aren't recognised by other community members. There are 22 connector groups; most of the building of community happens within the small group (12-14 people), however they meet occasionally as a larger group (depending on what they are wanting to achieve). This group functions within the understanding that you need to know the people you are working with in order to work productively. There when mapping community assets, it must be considered

that assets are found and known by the community in which they exist. These groups are well on the way to seeing their community as the agent of change.

Provide space for conversations, but not being the voice for the community

Once linked, conversations are fundamental in building community. The Cowdenbeath connector groups above are a great way to hold multiple conversations in smaller groups, enabling individual voices to be heard. They have used the connector groups to engage with residents, build connections, define what’s working and what is not working so well, and to facilitate and build community participation. This is more effective than holding large community events to encourage people to engage with one another. Both have their place in community building, but there appears more “voice” in the smaller connector group model, through natural conversations. Providing space for conversations is essential.

In the small community of Motherwell, I met an amazing couple where the husband is the local minister and the wife a paid community builder. Recognising that the best stories come from living in the midst of their community, this couple have chosen to rent from the government, surrounded by social housing in a densely populated and widely deprived area of Motherwell. From this simple act, they are asking the questions about: how best a community like this can be strengthened. How can community assets be built upon? Alongside the community, they are developing natural networks, hearing stories and holding listening events – where stories are told through song, film and dance. This has been community-led and, by being fully present in the community they are building trust.



Community engagement with connector group at Motherwell, Scotland

It's hard not to be the voice for a community, but it is imperative - this is what Solid Ground in Seattle believes is essential in their diverse community. Not only do they train low income community members to be part of their board, but they believe that fundamentally everyone has a voice whether we like it or not ... We just struggle with hearing each other. They are consistently challenging themselves about how to listen to the most vulnerable in their community essentially by learned experience and trial and error. Sometimes their efforts are sabotaged by poor timing, deciding what success looks like, and outcomes driven by funding (rather than the other way around).

In Priesthill, Glasgow there is a set of 197 flats which share equally in the common land called "The Barratt Flats". These were originally owned by the local Council and then sold to the Barratt Group in the 1980's who renovated and sold them off as affordable homes. Many of the flats were bought by landlords who have done very little to the flats over the years, they are known to have serious issues with dampness, rubbish dumping, vandalism, infestations and poor lighting. Rents in these properties are often more than in newer social housing properties in the area, but due to lack of social housing, tenants are often stuck and unable to move⁶.

Two years ago, the residents along with social housing provider, Sanctuary Housing set up an action group to support each other to find solutions to their problems. Supporting this group to have their voice heard and make changes was essential to the Sanctuary Housing staff who have come alongside these residents. The residents now meet regularly with Glasgow's Poverty Leadership panel about their preferred outcome to ensure that their homes are upgraded or rebuilt. Their resident group seeks to keep the Glasgow City Council accountable.

⁶ www.ghn.org.uk



Entrance to the 197 Barratt Flats

Embracing diversity

Embracing diversity means having the ability to see everybody who is present in a community as important. It means not excluding a certain group or groups of people, either because they are minority, or unable to speak up.

For this very reason, Solid Ground in Fremont, complete a community needs assessment every five year to ensure that they are capturing the voices of diversity. They have also sought to amplify these voices by ensuring that one-third of their board is made up of those with low incomes from their community where previously there were only professionals heard.

Over the past 15 years they have worked hard as an organisation to break down social and racial barriers to work with their community through a very different lens – a more inclusive one that embraces diversity. For instance, they have committed to the citywide Race and Social Justice Initiative which acknowledges barriers that people of colour, immigrants and former refugees. The fruit of this initiative include the creation of interest groups like Cooking Matters which is a Spanish English group (using Spanish and English languages) to teach skills on food in the States, as well as passing skills on to community members who want to learn to cook Spanish food. This has a double effect of building connections in the community as well as fostering diversity, it recognises diversity as both a strength and an opportunity through engagement that considers their

community's racial, cultural and socio-economic complexities. (Seattle Office for Civil Rights, 2012).



Visiting Gerald and the team at Solid Ground

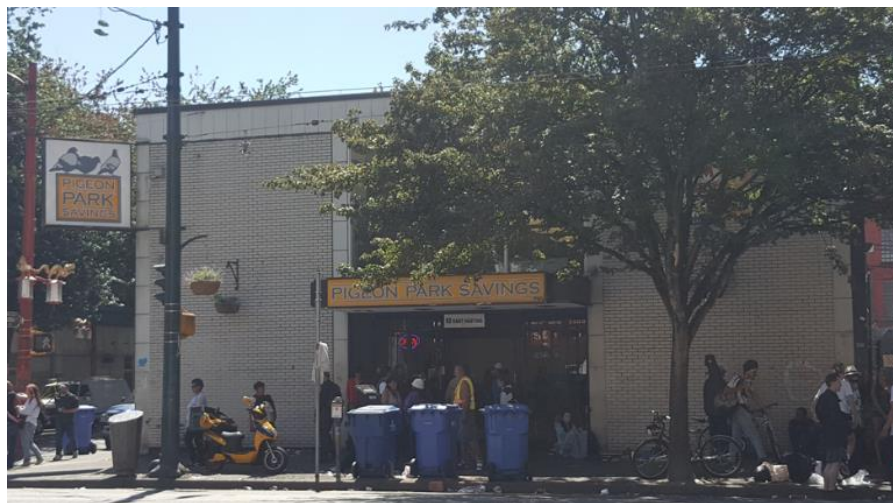
Approaches that challenge the removal of barriers

A flexible and focused approach to working at a local level, with local needs

Of course, conversations create the need to act on the outcomes of conversations to build social capital and empower communities. These approaches need to be flexible yet focused. From Nurture Development's perspective, the neighbourhood is an agent of its own change. They support solutions for problems that are flexible, focused and locally-led but the focus is on what is important to people rather than the issues or the specific challenges they face. It is important to start with where people are at, and what they can do, if you want to get them engaged.

I saw a great example at a Drug Users Centre in Downtown Eastside, Vancouver. This place was at risk of being closed due to funding difficulties, but a unique community-led centre, essentially led by drug users for drug users, has emerged to support safe usage of drugs. Ironic as it might sound, it was one of the best examples of community-led development and engagement that I saw. United Gospel Mission (UGM) (who currently fund-hold for the Drug Users Centre) led a

co-design process with consumers that went through a process of defining the issues and thinking about smart ways to make drug using safer. A “bong vending machine” was the outcome and this was designed and built. Their rationale was that if people were using drugs then they needed to do it safely using a clean bong. The cost was minimal for the purchase of the bong and was set by the users to ensure that they could afford to purchase one. This project was flexible and yet focused, working at a local level, with local needs. It may not have solved the drug using problem, but it ensures that the drug users are using equipment safely, and it was their idea!



Another community-led solution for drug users in Seattle – Pigeon Park Savings

Growing leadership from within communities and from outside communities

Growing leadership from within (the insider) is important to ensure that the voices of those who do not normally have a voice are able to be heard.

I realised very quickly from my travels that there is no one size that fits all, and that there is a right time to be an insider or outsider. I had answered that question for myself in New Zealand in having been in both roles in communities, but wanted to see what conditions were important in either situation.

The question that emerged for me was “how do you create a culture of inclusion, where local people value inclusion and have the competency to include others?” The answer emerged by asking a different question: “*Who are the connectors who are keeping this community together?*”

In my experience, there are two kinds of community builders. One goes to the usual places, arrives on time, and leaves on time (usually an outsider that goes in and out). Then there are those who go to the quiet places, those who arrive early, leave late and hang on the edge (usually an insider, but can be an outsider). A community needs both, but the second kind is usually doing the best work in terms of including those who are often marginalised and feel they have no voice.

In Fremont, Solid Ground have sought in their work to find a way to train low income community members to be on the board so they could be insiders, but a major challenge has also been for the board to realise how important this is.

At Phinney Neighbourhood Association, they found growing paid leadership from within to be a challenging area for them. They used to hire staff because they lived in the community, but they didn't always have the skill set needed - this became quite problematic for when they needed a particular skill set which they didn't find in the neighbourhood. Now they look for the right skill set rather than only looking for people living in the area, but also emphasise that cultural fit is equally important in selecting the right person. They believe that if you don't get the right culture fit, it just ends up being a job for someone, but it can be so much more than that, because of this they intentionally work on growing leadership from within. They currently have a mix of growing and hiring internally/externally so that there is the right mix.

Citywide strategies

While two-way strategies to build engagement and partnership are essential, citywide strategies to address community needs and aspirations are equally so. It is not an "either or" but an "and". Two successful Councils that stood out for me in this area were City of Portland in the United States and Leeds City Council in the United Kingdom.

Portland, in my opinion lead the charge in terms of engagement and neighbourhood involvement. They believe that consultation in communities of place is not enough and have sought to look at how civic engagement can be addressed for ethnically diverse communities, youth, those living with disabilities and other marginalised groups. Fundamental to this is that all communities (whether geographic or other) should have a voice in decision making.

They have developed not only a shared mission, goals and values for community engagement but have also formalised Public Involvement Principles.⁷ Through their Mission Goals and Values⁸ the Council is seeking to promote a culture of civic engagement by connecting and supporting all Portlanders to work together and with Government to build inclusive, safe and liveable neighbourhoods and communities.

There are seven key Public Involvement Principles that the Council have adopted to shape their perspective in civic engagement. These are:

1. Partnership – all community members have a right to be involved in decisions affecting themselves.
2. Early Involvement – engaging the public at the earliest possible time in development, design and implementation.
3. Building relationships and community capacity – investing in and developing long term, collaborative relationships and learning opportunities with key partners and stakeholders.
4. Inclusiveness and equity – dialogue and decision making that reaches out to and encourages participation.
5. Excellent quality process design and implementation – well-designed processes and techniques are fit for purpose and adapted to changing needs.
6. Transparency – accessible, open, honest and understandable processes.
7. Accountability – city leaders and staff are accountable for meaningful public involvement⁹.

During my day at the City of Portland, the Neighbourhood Engagement team had thoughtfully included a visit from a service user with a disability to talk to me about how his view of city life from a wheelchair has been listened to, and as a result improvement to access has been made for people in wheelchairs. He now leads the way on advocacy in his community around disability access. While these seven Public Involvement Principles are designed for and have been adopted by

⁷ City of Portland Public Involvement Principles, adopted on 4 August 2010

⁸ City of Portland Mission, Goals and Values, adopted on 12 April 2010

⁹ City of Portland Public Involvement Principles adopted on 4 August 2010

the City of Portland, the principles are key to good engagement in all community development projects and are transferrable.

Leeds City Council in the United Kingdom has a city-wide strategy called “Child Friendly Leeds”¹⁰. Their aspiration is to make Leeds a truly “Child Friendly” city and the best city for children to grow up in. They wanted to put children at the heart of their strategy for both social and physical regeneration and growth in their city, deciding to focus this work around the question “What do we want for our children in this area?” They previously had a failed child protection inspection and high child mortality in the community. Child Friendly Leeds is a collaborative approach to a citywide problem and the Council is working with the city - individuals, group, local schools, community, businesses and organisations - to make Leeds a child friendly city. They have sought collective responsibility and buy in to answer their central question and have three identified behaviours in their approach, aside from outcomes based accountability; they seek to listen to the voice of the child, work restoratively with families and do things with them rather than for them.

How have they done this? They have made sure the voice and influence of children is used in service design and response. They have a Children’s Mayor of Leeds as well as a Youth Parliament, both are active and work alongside their elected members. They have also sought innovative ways to involve children in the process of employment for their Children’s Service and children have influence over staff appointment decisions.

They have sought to adopt Einstein’s theory of making it simple enough for everyone to understand, rather than being simplistic. Children in Leeds understand what the wider community and the Council’s vision is for Leeds. This is evident in quite simple things such as valuing children and what they are going through. For example, at exam time they acknowledge the stress at work and put up signs around Leeds that wish the children well in their exams and then when their results come out they congratulate them. They have adopted a citywide “thumbs up” symbol which child friendly locations or supporters of Child Friendly Leeds can display to show they have had the input of Leeds children and young

¹⁰ <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/childfriendlyleeds/Pages/default.aspx>

people. It's a citywide strategy to improve outcomes for children in Leeds, which engages with and takes seriously the very group it seeks to support.



Child Friendly Leeds sign congratulating young people on their exams

Assisting and partnering to participate at the shared table

Who sits at the shared table?

I've asked this question often at home in New Zealand. Do we have a choice whether we sit at the table, or not? I have concluded (backed up by many conversations on my trip) that if I find myself at the shared table, I should feel privileged - but I should also be asking "*who is not at the table?*" - Can I give that seat to a person who struggles to be heard and how should I action this? **There should always be an empty chair for the person who is not at the table yet.**

Where do you find the voiceless? Well, the simple answer to that is: not usually at the table! In a community, the quietest voice is usually the most disconnected.

I would encourage you to go to places in the community where there is no noise. There you will find the voiceless - everyone has a voice, we just struggle with hearing each other. The challenge is to support the silent to have their voice heard. And we may need to look at innovative ways to ensure that people are at the table, which may include climbing through the window if we have continually tried banging on the front door.

When we face multi-complex issues

For the people living with the day-to-day reality of multi-complex issues, the “here and now” is incredibly important. There is quite often a fight between current decision making versus future decision making i.e. living in the “here and now” and “hopes for the future”. People with multi-complex issues often make decisions focused on coping with their current circumstances, rather than what they would like for their future¹¹. I don’t want to make assumptions, but merely make the observation from my experience that there is less likely to be risk taking, the trust of others is lower, and the sense of belonging to a community is therefore reduced. Skills can also present differently in lower income communities, and may sound and look different to those of higher income people. These are all useful factors to consider and assumptions to challenge when seeking to engage in communities facing multi-complex issues. There is strong need in all of this to have identity.

¹¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/>



Barratt Action Group formed to tackle sub-standard housing at The Barratt Flats, Glasgow

Turning Insights into Action

While this work seems simple and the ideas are basic, the complexity lies with the engagement of people facing multi-complex issues, using strengths-based community development approaches. This is where the real fun begins.

The following eleven key learnings around engagement are vital to consider when seeking to ensure that the voices of those in hard-to-reach communities are firstly heard, and secondly, heard effectively.

I have not written specifically about techniques for engagement, because these are diverse and generally come out of effective engagement with people. If one is using a community-led or asset-based approach, engagement is individually tailored to the particular community, using strengths and community driven resources.

The key conditions to consider in engagement are:

1. *Long term involvement in communities* produces long term results when resourced effectively. Of importance is the need to go at the community's own pace and allow each project to look different. It is also important to

understand residents' aspirations, strengths and barriers, and these are only understood by engaging long-term.

2. *Two-way engagement with communities* through the building of strong partnerships with public services and organisations, alongside effective partnerships with communities empowered in decision making processes. Building trust and confidence between communities and public services/organisations is essential, as is having more effective partnerships where communities are empowered to be more involved in what happens in their community and by/with whom. Strong partnerships also require there to be equal and inclusive engagement that is community responsive. If we are looking for sustainable community change, then funders may have to flip their outcomes upside down to allow communities to have more aspirations and influence over the outcomes they want to achieve and over services delivered in their communities.
3. *Not all groups of people are the same* and what works for one group may not work for another. You may need to use different methods and strategies for engaging diverse groups of people. It is important to trust the group you are trying to engage with as their ideas for engagement and finding solutions may be not the same as what you would imagine. Always begin with listening to the most vulnerable, trust and defer to them, because they will have the answers.
4. *Build community by linking people together* and the use of community connectors to ensure that conversations and dialogue take place. Hold multiple conversations in smaller groups, enabling more individual voices to be heard. At the very least, people will get to know others in their community and know who to turn to when they need support. You need to know who you are talking with when you are seeking to map assets in a community.
5. *Provide space for conversation, but not being the voice for the community.* Hold multiple conversations, both in smaller and larger groups. Small connector groups can join to form a larger group for facilitating further discussion rather than holding large events to encourage people to engage. Social action can also emerge where people join together with similar issues. Everyone has voice whether we like it or not, we just struggle to hear it. The

quietest voice is often the most disconnected voice so it is essential to go to the places where there is no noise in the community and provide space for conversations to happen naturally.

6. *Embrace diversity* by having the ability to see everybody who is present in a community and looking for groups that are often excluded because of who they are. Essential to this is working to break down social and racial barriers and looking through a more inclusive lens that embraces diversity.
7. *A flexible and focused approach to working at a local level, with local needs.* Issues are often complicated/complex and solutions need to be flexible, focused and locally-led. We need to act on the outcomes of conversations to build social capital and empower communities. There is a need to focus on what is important to people rather than the issues or the specific challenges they are facing. It is important to start with where the people are and what they can do, if you want to engage them.
8. *Grow leadership* from within communities and from outside communities – both are required from time to time, depending on the skill mix needed. There is no one size fits all. What it does need are people that are able to go to the quiet places, those who are able to arrive early at gatherings and leave late, and gathering at the edge.
9. *City-wide strategies* to address community needs and aspirations produce citywide results when the whole of community is involved. It is not an “either or” but an “and”. Key principles for civic engagement include partnership, early involvement, building relationships and community capacity, inclusiveness and equity, good quality process design and implementation, transparency and accountability. Of added importance is engagement of the group of citizens on which the city-wide strategies are focused.
10. *Who sits at the shared table* usually depends on whether you are asking the question about who is not present, and leaving space for those that are not yet at the table. If you find yourself at the shared table, you should feel privileged - but you should also be asking who is not at the table, and can you/how do you give that seat to a person who struggles to be heard (including the voice of children)? The voiceless are usually not at the table

and the quietest voice is usually the most disconnected. The challenge is to go to the places in the community where there is no noise.

11. *When we face multi-complex issues*, there is often a fight between living in the “here and now” and having “hopes for the future”. People with multi-complex issues often make decisions focused on coping with their current circumstances, rather than what they would like for their future. There is less likely to be risk taking, the trust of others is lower, and the sense of belonging to a community is therefore lower.

I went with four main questions to seek answers to regarding engagement, and a whole host of others that I was interested in as well. I came back with a clear question that should be asked each time we want to engage with any community of place, community of interest, easy-to-reach or hard-to-reach community. It’s a question but it is also a vision. We need to ask this question regularly if we are to be accountable and effective, bearing in mind the complexities of engagement.

It’s simple, and yet it’s complex. The question goes like this:

“If we were successful, and the community was really engaged, what would it look like?”

In summary, successful engagement in communities facing multi-complex needs takes a long time and needs willing partners who can work with others and commit to being there for the long haul, to build a depth of understanding of community needs and aspirations.



Intersection in Fremont designed to encourage engagement by community and place for connection

Where to From Here?

The insights, the knowledge, the experiences and learnings I have gained from this Fellowship are invaluable to my current community development work and are already being shared with my team. The team can consider some of the learnings in their work, both in the communities of place and interest they are currently supporting and walking alongside. The knowledge passes on.

I have presented a snapshot of my learnings to the wider Presbyterian Support Otago Board which supports community development work in the Otago region. Some of the work I viewed in Leeds has direct implications for community involvement and engagement from a national Presbyterian Support perspective. My learnings will be shared with this national body as we seek local solutions to local issues facing our diverse range of communities across New Zealand.

I plan to share my Fellowship experience with the non-Government sector in Dunedin through our Community Builders network and hui. I have already spoken to a few groups in Dunedin on the implication of my learning in areas such as housing and engagement with people in poverty.

I have also shared insight and knowledge with our local council around civic engagement with hard to reach communities and discussed adoption of

engagement strategies more effectively. I hope to be able to share these learnings more widely.

Because I visited a considerable number and broad range of organisations and people, I have realised that there are learnings and insights that I have not been able to include in this report, but I hope to be able to develop these further in the future throughout both my professional and informal spheres of influence.

Future study areas are:

- Effective housing models for the hard to house and models specific to vulnerable women and youth.
- Social enterprise in communities facing multi-complex needs.
- How to best evaluate and capture learning outcomes in community-led development.

To conclude, and on a more personal level, I have made national and international connections to people and places that I had never encountered before and have gained knowledge and insights that are valuable and are being shared. These are important steps as I seek to engage with those who are often not seen or heard, both in my own practice, that of my community development team and our wider organisation.

Appendix 1

Groups visited during the Fellowship trip August/September 2016

Organisation/Network	Location	Focus	Contact
	Canada		
Youth Unlimited - East Van Youth	Downtown Eastside, Vancouver	Street Youth, First Nations Aboriginal Youth, Prevention – working with youth in school, Youth Housing, sex trafficking, aftercare and employment opportunities	Jason Hradoway
The Salvation Army 614	Downtown Eastside, Vancouver	Re:cre8 Café, Community Housing for Women, Apartment Homes, Training and poverty alleviation	Stephen Bell
The Salvation Army Grace Mansion	Downtown Eastside, Vancouver	Supportive transitional housing	Vienne Chan
Servants to Asia's Urban Poor	Downtown Eastside, Vancouver	Community development initiatives with urban poor including Briarpatch Community Gardens	Rebecca Dahl
Just Work	Grandview, Vancouver	Economic initiative with three social enterprises – Just Renos, Just Potters, Just Catering	Zoie Ozirney
UGM	Vancouver	Poverty, homelessness, shelters, meals, education and job preparedness, affordable housing, preventative programmes	Derek Weiss
PHS Community Services	Vancouver	Housing, service and advocacy	Russell Maynard
Jacobs Well	Downtown Eastside, Vancouver	Transformative friendship groups	Jacqueline Dewar
	United States		
Jim Diers	Seattle	Seattle Community Builder and former Seattle City Councillor, various community projects, and neighbourhood matching grant projects, White Center	Jim Diers
Phinney Neighbourhood Association	Seattle	Neighbourhood Association, programmes and services that connect neighbours and fosters civic engagement	Lee Harper
Solid Ground	Wallingford, Seattle	Housing and resources to help people keep their home, healthy food and nutrition education, legal advocacy to access state benefits, skill building opportunities, connections to community resources, use of professional translation services	Mike Buchman and Gerald Wright

Delridge Neighbourhood Development Association	Seattle	Community connector, Croft Townhouses social housing, Youngstown Cultural Arts Center	Nick Poccia
City Repair	Portland/Seattle	Community Development, Permaculture, Urban Design	Cheryl Klok
Aranya Solutions	Portland	Change Agent, Organisational Development, Strategic Planning, Community Development	Katrina Zavalney
City of Portland	Portland	Office of Neighbourhood Involvement, New Portlander Programme	Paul Leistner, Kyle and Nina
	United Kingdom		
Christine Dale ex CAFCASS	Colchester, Essex	CAFCASS – Voice of Children in the Family Court	Christine Dale
Essex County Council	Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire	Family Solutions Programme	Annelise Bird
Leeds City Council	Leeds	Child Friendly Leeds Initiative, Workforce Development, Evaluation	Nigel Richardson, Andy Lloyd, Peter Storrie, Martyn Stenton and team
Croydon Voluntary Action	Croydon	Community organisation providing leadership and support to groups, residents and communities in Croydon	Paul Macey
Streatham Youth & Community Trust	Streatham	Youth and community work, play work, working alongside Irish Travellers	John Crawford and Alison
BRAG Enterprises	Cowdenbeath	Community Builder, Social Enterprise, community regeneration	Kayle Turner
Nurture Development	Glasgow/Ireland	Managing Director and Community Building Programme Manager, Asset Based Community Development Training and Resources	Cormac Russell and Shaun Burnett
Motherwell Church of Scotland	Motherwell	Making Connections Community Builder in Motherwell/Church of Scotland Minister	Helen and Derek Pope
Bridging the Gap	Gorbals, Glasgow	Thriving Places Initiative, not for profit organisation, working with young people, families and community inclusion	Trisha McConalogue
Thriving Places Possilpark	Possilpark, Glasgow	Community Connector, Thriving Places initiative	Alistair Mitchell
Sanctuary Housing	Priesthill, Glasgow	Thriving Places Initiative, affordable housing, social housing, development and care	Anthony Morrow

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AT THE TABLE

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT