

Bristol Ageing Better Community Development for Older People (CDOP)

Summary of evaluation findings from UWE Bristol and Community Researchers

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This document provides a **summary of the evaluation findings relating to BAB Community Development for Older People** projects. Links to the full reports can be found on the last page.

Background

BAB funded a series of 10 projects focused on Community Development for Older People (CDOP). Each of these projects received funding for between 2 - 3 years.

UWE Bristol and a team of Community Researchers evaluated 7 of these projects: Greater Brislington, Horfield & Lockleaze, Greater Fishponds, Old Market, St Pauls, Stockwood and a city-wide 'strategic coordination' form of community development.

Impact on participants

Between June 2017 and January 2020, the 10 CDOP projects worked with **7,894 people**. Of these, 760 provided their demographic details.

At their start of their involvement with a CDOP project: the mean age of participants was **70.8** years old, **71%** lived in areas of higher multiple deprivation, **42%** were living alone, **44%** had a long-standing illness or disability, **22%** had carer responsibilities and **31%** scored as 'intensely lonely' (De Jong Gierveld scale n=166).

Following involvement in the project, evaluation questionnaires showed a statistically significant impact on:

- ▶ **Social and emotional loneliness**
- ▶ **Social contact with children, family and friends**
- ▶ **Wellbeing**
- ▶ **Health**
- ▶ **Social contact with non-family members**
- ▶ **Social participation in clubs, groups and societies**
- ▶ **Involvement in co-design**
- ▶ **Ability to influence local decisions**



10 Key Evaluation Findings



1. Scoping the area

The use of the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach helped practitioners **map existing connections, organisations, venues and volunteers at the start of their project**, laying significant groundwork for the future.

This was largely achieved by **developing contacts** with local groups and organisations, **connecting** with other community development workers and finding out the **historical context** (for example previous workers or agencies operating in that area).

When scoping an area, time should be managed wisely. Whilst it is necessary work, in some cases it left little time for the more tangible community development outputs to be established. If project aims are to be realistic, the **size and make-up of the area** also need to be carefully considered in conjunction with the numbers and hours of proposed project staff, **not stretching staff too thinly**.



2. Reaching and engaging people

After an initial phase of asset mapping and scoping the area, the CDOP projects used a variety of tools to reach and engage with local residents, exploring their interests and what they could offer.

Many projects initially **intended to set up steering groups** in order to involve local people from the beginning. These had **mixed levels of success**; some had little continuity of attendance and were not supported by project management, which limited their ability to carry out their intended function. The steering groups that were successful worked best as **part of a more general community consultation group** rather than one specifically aimed at the over 50s.

Alternative approaches to engaging people included **door knocking, one-off events, taster days and 'pop-ups'** (for example on key walking routes through the area, near shops and schools, and outside blocks of flats). However door knocking can be time-consuming and in some cases was only used at particular points in time, such as before major events. People were found to be more receptive if the door knocking was **undertaken by fellow residents themselves** rather than community development workers who can be seen as 'external'.

One-off events and taster days proved to be very popular and gave some of the more cautious older residents the opportunity to try something new in a safe and fun environment, while allowing the CDOP workers to hear their ideas for the project.

It can work well for these activities to **be informed by those who have a detailed knowledge of the local community**, for example local postal workers, community police officers or local residents who have lived in the area for many years.



3. Raising awareness of groups and activities

Publicity and marketing were an important part of almost every CDOP project and many of the projects **produced and distributed paper booklets** to provide information about new and existing activities. As a printed resource, these booklets **addressed digital exclusion** as individuals did not need to access the internet.

These were often most successful if **combined with information for all ages** in the community, with a section specifically for people aged 50+. This also made the **printing costs more sustainable** as local companies were more keen to pay for advertising in a publication with a wider reach. Similarly, it didn't appear to matter that a booklet covered a reasonably wide geographical area, as people tended to pick activities that were closest to them. For this reason, it may make sense to **combine forces with other agencies** in order to produce such booklets.

Booklets are not the only ways workers disseminated information. For example two CDOP projects made use of the **rolling information screens inside GP surgeries** and at least one project arranged for a **new notice board** to be built in a locality further away from the existing sources of information.



4. Connecting groups and organisations

Rather than focusing on community development within a specific neighbourhood, one project had a strategic approach and focused on **coordinating activities between agencies and groups** operating across sections of the city. This illustrates the potential for community development work at a **large population scale** where, in many cases, local agencies appreciate support to build partnerships and act more strategically.

This approach enabled the project to act as facilitators, **making introductions** between organisations and building connections. It also **helped to avoid duplication** across the city and provided an oversight of relevant training and funding opportunities.



5. Activities targeted at the 'over 50s'

The term the 'over 50s' encompasses such a **broad age range** that it is impossible to cater for all interests, cultural needs, skills and preferences under one umbrella approach. Similarly, many people, particularly amongst the 'younger old' population, **did not want to socialise and make connections solely within their age group.**

The most successful CDOP projects used a combination of approaches, with some activities targeted directly at the over 50s and others taking a more **community-wide, intergenerational** approach. This also often meant activities were more sustainable long-term.

Community development for older people might be best addressed through **building inclusive and age-friendly communities** where older people are included as part of a collaborative endeavour rather than as a separate, targeted population.



6. Loneliness, isolation and mental health

Good community development work is increasingly recognised as a **foundation for building the health and wellbeing of communities**. Community development can act as a route to better link people with public and voluntary sector services, to make sure their voice is heard, and to find creative solutions to local issues.

A number of the CDOP projects found that those who are **lonely or socially isolated often have low confidence and complex issues affecting their lives** (for example housing difficulties or poor mental health) and may need **one-to-one support before they are able to participate** in community activities. In some cases, this involved a referral to social prescribing services. Other people may only be comfortable attending an activity **when accompanied by someone else** and would not come to activities on their own.



7. Geographical boundaries and perceptions of 'community'

Many of the CDOP projects found that, within their geographical area of work, **residents often attended activities in other parts of the city**. Similarly, activities within that area were attended by residents of other neighbourhoods. **Some residents do not consider they have any connection, or want any connection, to their geographical neighbourhood**, while others identify as being a resident of an adjoining neighbourhood regardless of the political ward boundary. Sometimes these identities were influenced by geographical layouts, economic wealth and community assets.

'Communities' and geography are not mutually exclusive; people may belong to several different communities of interest or geography at once, travelling to places where they feel comfortable. This **affects how and where people look to find out about activities** on offer. It also has implications for the future funding of specific areas, as **not all individuals use services that are on their doorstep** and care should be taken when **imposing a definition of the 'community'** for workers to focus on. There is a need for flexibility and nuance in this definition to allow some measure of self-identification and this needs reflecting in the indicators used to measure the success of a project.



8. Transport and community venues

Mobility and transport are major barriers to people being able to attend activities. When **venues are unevenly dispersed** throughout a neighbourhood it can result in an activity being inaccessible for those without a car or who do not live nearby, with others required to take multiple buses in order to attend. This is not always possible for those with mobility difficulties.

Some CDOP projects found temporary solutions to the problem of transport, although these were not sustainable in the long-term. **Transport remains a barrier which extends beyond the control of individual projects** and significantly affects group participation.

Similarly, in some neighbourhoods the only local venue options were religious venues, which deterred some people from taking part. There is a **need for publicly supported secular venues** and for funding to **improve the condition of existing public venues** in some parts of the city.



9. Governance and staff turnover

Some of the CDOP projects had **high levels of staff turnover**, which caused problems in carrying out the project and continuing the momentum, relationships and practical arrangements established by previous workers.

In a few cases staff who left projects were not immediately replaced, often causing a hiatus in delivery. When they were replaced there was sometimes no handover and **new workers faced the challenge of starting again from scratch or guessing at what had been achieved so far**. Some had insufficient time remaining at the start of their employment to make any significant changes and some project work had to be abandoned as a result.

Similarly, in some cases there was confusion surrounding the management and governance of the project, with management unfamiliar with the project aims and objectives. In these cases this **lack of governance resulted in workers being left to 'go it alone'** with very little support or management.

These difficulties highlight the importance of ensuring that smaller providers have **contingency plans** in place to cover staff sickness and absence, that **governance is clear** and that **management have buy-in and hands-on** project involvement.



10. Sustainability and short-term funding contracts

Sustainability needs to be embedded in community activities from the start. CDOP workers supported groups with this in a variety of ways, including identifying relevant training courses, promoting the activity to new participants and preventing overreliance on one volunteer. Some projects found it **challenging to find volunteers willing to take on regular responsibilities with longer-term commitment** or who were interested in more strategic planning.

One aspect of sustainability is ensuring activities have enough attendees. Participation was encouraged when activities were free or low cost for participants, which was particularly valuable for those on low incomes. However **groups needed to find alternative ways to cover their ongoing costs** in order to remain viable in the longer-term. In many cases **intergenerational activities proved to be both the most popular and the most sustainable** given that offering activities to all ages generally increases attendance.

Connected to sustainability is the challenge of short-term funding contracts for community development work. **Funding for two or three years is not sufficient to achieve the full potential** of community development; it **takes time to find people** within the target group, to **build up trust** in the local community and to **enable vulnerable people to participate**, particularly those who face multiple complex issues in their lives. Short-term funding contracts also has implications for staffing, making it **difficult for projects to retain staff** to the end of a funding cycle. It can be argued that community development is an ongoing cycle of activity without a beginning or an end, and short-term contracts are unhelpful if this is the overall aim.

Implications of Covid-19

Covid-19 has a number of potential implications for community development work, including:

- ▶ **Logistical challenges** arising from communities being unable to meet in person or with limited face-to-face contact.
- ▶ **Older people's confidence, sense of value and self-worth may diminish** as a result of having reduced social contact, being viewed by society as 'vulnerable' and an increase in ageism during the pandemic.
- ▶ **Those who were already isolated may withdraw even further**, undoing the progress already made through CDOP work.
- ▶ **Increased mental health needs** resulting from fear, anxiety, loss of confidence and bereavement, as well as an **increase in physical health needs** resulting from 'long Covid'.
- ▶ Some activities for older people have been able to transition to online or telephone formats, making them accessible remotely. Covid-19 has therefore **generated new ways to bring activities directly into people's homes virtually**, something which may have previously been overlooked. This **has the potential to make activities more accessible to all**, including those who previously faced mobility or transport barriers.
- ▶ However **digital poverty and digital exclusion** may prevent some people from connecting with their communities, increasing loneliness and social isolation.

Further resources and information

[Click here](#) to view UWE's full evaluation report of the BAB Community Development for Older People projects.

There will soon be individual evaluation reports available for each CDOP area:

- ▶ Greater Brislington
- ▶ Greater Fishponds
- ▶ Horfield & Lockleaze
- ▶ St Pauls & Old Market
- ▶ Stockwood
- ▶ Citywide Coordination

Further BAB learning resources can be found at:
<http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/learning-and-evaluation-hub/>

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