



# Community Capacity Building

Making positive community change possible



## Community Capacity Building Project

January 2015-December 2017

# Background

## Leicestershire County Council's Communities Strategy

**Leicestershire County Council's Communities Strategy sets out the Council's continuing commitment to work in partnership to support, strengthen and empower local communities.**

The Strategy includes aspirations to develop and utilise the assets of the people and places of Leicestershire. This will help to build confidence, identify early interventions to help people to remain independent and to provide information and advice to help people to access appropriate support services.

As resources have become increasingly stretched, the Council has strived to encourage partnership working in local communities. Local communities are often best placed to understand their own needs and to develop their own solutions using the assets available in their area. By working with residents, agencies and partners to combine resources, skills and knowledge, communities can develop new projects and initiatives for the benefit of local people. The term 'communities' can mean both people in different places (communities of place/geography) and different groups of people (communities of interest) and we recognise that people could belong to many different communities at any one time.

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# Introduction

## The Community Capacity Building (CCB) Project

**The Community Capacity Building (CCB) project is a community development project that has focused on creating new and exciting projects that are organised by people from the local community.**

The project was commissioned in light of the Council's Communities Strategy, and CCB has supported actions that are positive, creative and inclusive for the whole community. Instead of focusing on what is missing or causing problems, CCB concentrates on what is possible.

The project utilises the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) model of community development. We have worked with community members to support them to kick-start new projects and activities into long-term projects that can be sustainable beyond the life of the CCB project, utilising the assets available to them:

- Individuals – the time, skills and enthusiasm people can share with their community as volunteers
- Buildings and physical space
- Resources and equipment
- Small, informal groups in the community that could support new activities or projects
- Skills, experience and resources that partner organisations could share with the community
- Ways to connect different people within the community so they can work together

In particular, CCB has aimed to support the development of initiatives that will support the priorities of Public Health. These include improving people's health and wellbeing, promoting healthy lifestyle, striving to reduce social isolation and encouraging people to remain independent for as long as possible.

# Project Scope

The initial scope of the project was to work in agreed target areas of Leicestershire:

- Hastings ward (Loughborough, Charnwood Borough)
- Greenhill and Agar Nook (Coalville, North West Leicestershire)
- South Wigston (Oadby & Wigston Borough)
- Bagworth and Thornton (Hinckley and Bosworth)
- Supporting seven Leicestershire communities to explore taking on their local library as a community managed library

From 2016, the CCB target areas were amended to:

- Hasting and Lemyngton wards (Loughborough)
- Greenhill, Agar Nook and Coalville Town
- South Wigston and Wigston
- Measham

From 2016 it was agreed that CCB support in Bagworth and Thornton would cease and work would commence with the local community in Measham. The initiatives developed in Bagworth and Thornton continued to receive support from CCB and from Voluntary Action Leicestershire's (VAL) Group Support service.

## The Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Approach

CCB has focused on the ABCD approach, utilising the assets available to communities to help people develop new initiatives for the benefit of their local area. The project has encouraged greater agency in local people, helping them to develop new skills and build up connections with existing services and organisations to progress their ideas into fully-fledged and sustainable projects.

## Hastings and Lemyngton Wards in Loughborough

Work in Loughborough has focused on demonstrating the potential to bring about positive change through community action. The Stair Fairies project has brought local residents together to tackle the poor conditions in the public areas of blocks of flats. Likewise, the Good Gleaners project has focused on upcycling goods and redistributing them to residents with particular needs. The partnership work with the Bangladeshi Social Association has led to the development of IT and English sessions, as well as new sewing classes for

local residents to share their skills with one another in a friendly setting.

## Coalville – Greenhill, Agar Nook and Coalville Town

In Coalville, CCB initially focused on the Greenhill and Agar Nook estates, working in partnership with Greenhill Tenant and Resident Association, Agar Nook Community Association and local churches before expanding to the wider Coalville area. Work in this area has demonstrated the possibility of attaching new activities to existing projects, such as the Coalville Crafters group linking with a local coffee morning, new activities at Marlborough Square Methodist Church making use of community space and the Oasis café in Hugglescote running wellbeing sessions in the café space.

## Wigston & South Wigston

CCB's work in Wigston and South Wigston has covered a wide range of interests and led to the formation of several new community groups. This has included the new Step Out Youth Group in South Wigston providing activities for children and young people, the Incredible Edible Oadby & Wigston food-growing project encouraging community gardening, the peer support provided at the Dementia Carers Group and the community engagement and inclusion activities of the Neighbour Hub.

## Bagworth and Thornton

Bagworth and Thornton are particularly small, rural communities, which present different challenges and opportunities. CCB worked with local residents to develop the Thornton Stroke and Disability Club and the Olive Branch Club, both of which tackle social isolation to bring people together in local community venues.

## Measham

CCB benefited from previous work supporting volunteers to form a new group to take over Measham Library. Early work built on this relationship and established new partnerships with Measham Parish Council, Measham Medical Unit and Measham Leisure Centre to work cooperatively to build up new initiatives. As a result, several new activities have been developed including Measham Stroke and Disability Club, Walking Football Sessions, Art and Craft Therapy Sessions at Measham Library and Measham Patient Participation Group (PPG) becoming constituted to apply for funding.

# Project Statistics

Number of initiatives created and number of people involved



The CCB project has supported a number of different initiatives, but 44 initiatives continue to run or have achieved their objectives. 286 community members are currently involved in the various CCB initiatives. Over the course of the project, new volunteers have come on board, and some volunteers have moved on.



42

Kickstarters



286

Volunteers/  
people  
involved



44

Initiatives  
being  
created

Area	No of Initiatives	Kick-starters	Volunteers/ People Involved
Coalville	11	9	47
South Wigston & Wigston Magna	14	14	114
Bagworth & Thornton	2	2	11
Hastings & Lemyngton	9	9	47
Measham	7	7	17
Countywide Project	1	1	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>286</b>

Please note that the people who dropped out of projects, or were involved in projects that did not progress, are not included in this count.

# Supporting the development of community managed libraries

In April 2015, CCB started to provide support to seven Leicestershire communities to help them to take over their local library as a Community Managed Library.

The seven areas that received support were Measham, Sapcote, Narborough, Cosby, Kibworth, Ibstock, and Great Glen. The promotional work up to that point had been unable to generate enough local interest to form new community groups to put in a proposal to Leicestershire County Council to take over their local library.

CCB promoted workshops in each area, distributing marketing material in local supermarkets, leisure centres, schools, local businesses, schools and religious institutions. In partnership with VAL's Group Support Team, CCB designed and delivered workshops in all seven areas, with a total of 117 people attending the various events. The workshop used the ABCD approach and 'possibility thinking' tools from the Think Leicestershire project to generate interest from the local community and explore how they could take over these services. All seven areas went on to submit a Registration of Interest and have since gone on to take over their local library services

# Celebrate Events -

## Celebrate your community and bring people together

To celebrate the achievements of our target communities in the CCB project we put in a bid to the Celebrate England programme managed by the Big Lottery Fund.

Through this funding we aimed to bring people together at four community events in each of our target areas: Measham, Coalville (Greenhill and Agar Nook), Wigston and Loughborough (Hastings and Lemyngton wards).

During the CCB engagement work we identified a need to celebrate the assets and positive work in our target areas. It could be to celebrate something from a community's history or a local hero, or just a chance to bring people together to get to know their neighbours better. Our CCB areas are often the subject of negative publicity and perceptions due to economic deprivation, unemployment and crime. Through these events we aimed to encourage people to rethink their views of these areas, to encourage local community groups to bring their services to these areas and inspire a greater sense of pride and community spirit.



We brought together a diverse range of people at each of these events, including ‘harder to reach’ segments of the community, to educate, engage and connect people. A key step in building community capacity is helping people to become better acquainted with their neighbours, so we use these events to foster better communication within these communities and show people they can have fun together by sharing their skills and experience. Although these events were open to the general public we particularly aimed to encourage the marginalised and vulnerable sections of the community.

Working in partnership with other local groups and volunteers, the Celebrate events successfully brought different groups of people together to celebrate their local areas through shared activities. People commented on the need for similar events in the future and community groups were particularly pleased with the opportunity to promote their work and carry out fundraising activities. The Celebrate events also offered an opportunity to begin to close down the CCB project and support the people involved in the various initiatives to think about planning for long-term sustainability. People involved in different initiatives were able to network with one another and with representatives from other organisations to share their experiences and think about working together in the future.



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## Lessons Learnt –

### Things that Worked and Things that Did Not Work

#### Offering people specific volunteering roles and specific projects

At the start of the CCB project, the intention was to outline a series of set volunteer roles to involve members of the local community, including ‘Kickstarters’ and ‘Encouragers’ as specific roles for each area.

As CCB began engagement and discussions with local residents, it quickly became apparent

that these general roles did not engage people’s interests. Instead, people expressed an interest in developing specific roles within individual projects.

As a result, the idea behind Kickstarter volunteers shifted from offering advice and support to other members of the community to instead taking a lead on projects with support, advice and guidance from the CCB Officers. We found that people were more interested in having direct involvement in the initiatives and therefore focused on supporting people to take their ideas forward and building up project groups.

## Focus on communities of interest, rather than communities of place

Initially, the CCB networking and engagement events focused on communities of place and were open to everyone in the community with discussions around a range of different interests. What became apparent through conversations with kickstarter volunteers was that these meetings and events needed to be targeted at particular issues or interests to draw in people from the local community and to give these conversations a focus. As a result, all of the initiatives CCB has supported have focused on communities of interest, far more so than on communities of place.

One example of this has been the Mental Health Forum in Oadby & Wigston, which started meeting in September 2016. As these meetings have had a specific focus on supporting positive mental health, they have pulled in a range of VCS organisations and statutory sector partners with an interest in mental health and working together to support the local community.

Another example is the Walking Football project in Measham. This activity has engaged men from the local community, bringing them together for physical activity sessions and helping to tackle social isolation by bringing them together as a group. Engaging men in community activities can prove difficult, but these Walking Football sessions demonstrate that they can be brought together through a community of interest.

## Some groups do not want (or need) to become constituted, but they can still work effectively

Whilst CCB has advocated the benefits of becoming a constituted group, such as being able to apply for grant funding and formalise the work they are doing, some groups that we have worked with have found that they do not need to become constituted.

An instance of this has been the Coalville Crafters group, which, after exploring some different venues, agreed to meet fortnightly at the Greenhill Community Shop Coffee morning. As they work in partnership with Greenhill Tenants and Residents Association, they are able to use the space free of charge, members can buy refreshments

themselves, and the group has received several donations of craft materials to allow them to carry out craft sessions. The group has also begun to explore selling some of the craft items at local events to raise additional funds to pool for future activities.

Another example is 'Crafting for a Cause', a group that meets at the Salvation Army café in South Wigston. As this group meets in a public space, they do not incur room hire costs, and members are able to buy their own drinks and lunches if they wish. As the group makes craft items to support local causes, they have received vast donations of wool, card-making items, material and even a sewing machine.

## Life happens

In some cases, volunteers have had to withdraw their support due to personal circumstances changing. Some volunteers have found that their circumstances have changed and they have no longer had time to stay involved with projects, whilst some have found other interests. As with any kind of volunteering, people are giving their time, skills and experience free of charge and CCB recognises and appreciates that sometimes people cannot keep up their volunteering commitments.

## Voluntary and community sector groups can often progress initiatives more quickly than statutory services

It is often the case that Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups are able to progress new initiatives more quickly than partners working in the statutory sector. Statutory services typically need to follow specific processes and procedures to begin new projects, whilst VCS organisations have greater freedom to explore possibilities and to try new ways of working.

One instance of this is the Stair Fairies project, which is a good example of communities beginning to tackle a local issue, in this case cleaning up shared spaces in blocks of flats, and being able to access funding to deliver a project that would not be available to statutory sector organisations.

# Assets, Limitations and Opportunities

## Some strengths and assets in local communities:

- There are a number of strong and vibrant local assets such as community organisations, charities, sport clubs, schools, faith groups and other local authority services
- Diversity, offering a wealth of skills, experience and interests
- Strong community resilience
- CCB experience in volunteering and community building
- Strong sense of belonging and pride
- A number of community buildings
- Lots of potential support from local businesses – although most cannot offer funding, they can potentially offer volunteer time, provide meeting rooms for community groups
- A willingness in the local community to try new things
- Interest from local funders to support new projects in the area

## Some limitations and weaknesses:

- Lack of small pockets of funding to kick-start initiatives to help them start before becoming constituted
- For every one project that was set up successfully, another five or six potential projects did not go ahead for various reasons such as lack of human resources, personal issues, poor health, fear of duplication or lack of time
- Lots of time was used to reassure people of the benefits of our project and build trust
- Lack of communication and coordination between different organisations and service providers
- Lack of time
- A feeling in some local residents that their local area is lacking potential
- Lack of confidence in volunteers to lead new projects

- Reliance on paid staff to take projects forward
- Transport links limited

## Potential opportunities:

- Local residents and groups appreciate the fact that resources are being invested in their communities
- Areas of high population have a lot of potential volunteers in the community
- There are opportunities to further build community resources on the back of the projects set up by CCBs and to meet the demands of the local needs
- Recognition from statutory sector partners that these target areas have high levels of deprivation and identified need
- Interest in collaboration and partnership working
- Volunteers willing to try new ways of working and willing to develop new skills to take new projects forward
- New politicians who may be open to new ideas and ways of working
- Opportunities to build partnerships with local stakeholders to utilise existing community assets
- Growth in services
- Potential to expand social prescribing
- Support from district and borough council initiatives
- Existing organisations willing to support new initiatives
- Recognition that the positives in local communities need to be celebrated
- Recognition that people and services need to be better connected

## Potential threats:

- Potential duplication of services – different service providers are providing similar services in the same areas, which proves confusing for the local community
- Lack of coordination and a lack of clear role descriptions or responsibility
- Lack of human resources and lack of participation across different generations in the community
- Some volunteers may feel they aren't supported after the end of the CCB project
- Some projects currently lack clear leadership and direction for the future
- Lack of small pots of grant funding to kick-start and maintain projects
- Funding cuts to voluntary sector support services
- Lack of marketing and training resources
- Volunteers may lose confidence in their projects
- Political history in different areas could be a barrier to progress
- Local people may be concerned that things can never really change



# Recommendations

- Small pots of grant funding need to be identified and made readily available to kick-start new community initiatives
- It is important to invest in people in local communities through training, peer support, links to other local services and recognition of their achievements
- It is important to be aware of new housing developments bringing in more people to different areas, which will increase the demand on existing services
- Social prescribing offers new opportunities for the community and can help to reduce demand on existing services – these opportunities should be further encouraged
- Celebratory community events bring communities together under positive circumstances and promote community cohesion – these kind of events need to be encouraged and supported
- Communities require support to help them to connect to one another and to connect to local services
- Local communities can benefit from networking opportunities, but need support to develop networks and partnerships
- Building links with private sector organisations offers new opportunities
- Engagement from local organisations is key, e.g. district/ borough councils, churches, schools etc.



# Find out more

**We run a wide variety of services that help people change their lives for the better.**

**To find out more about our projects or services contact our helpline on:**

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