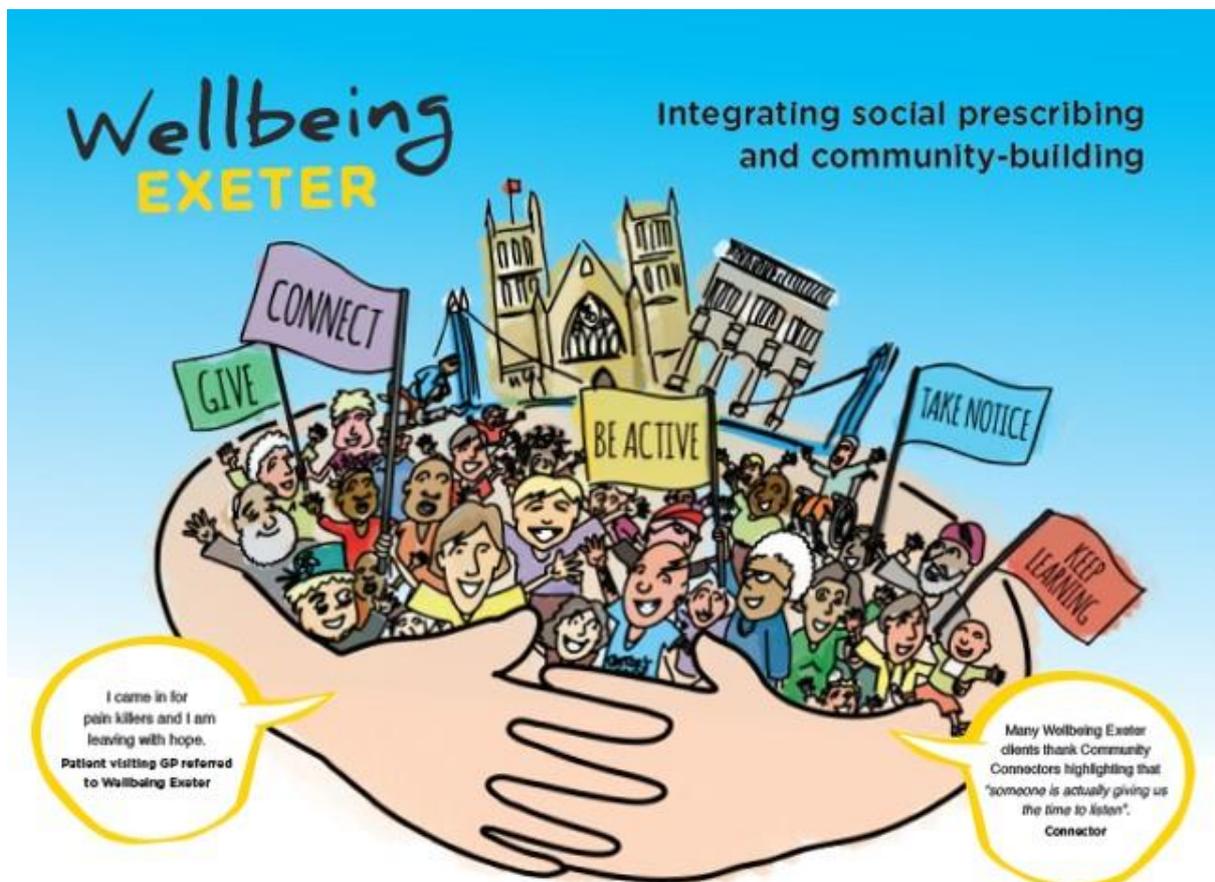


Community Engagement within Wellbeing Exeter

Early Evidence, Learning and Evaluation



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Scope of the Report

This report considers the community engagement elements within Wellbeing Exeter, until September 2017, including: community building, the community grants pot, and the Big Listen. It examines actions against milestones specified in the grant agreement with Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI), but also considers their work with relation to the Wellbeing Exeter Theory of Change. Given the pilot nature of the project, this report is very much less audit than a record of process and progress, a means of capturing learning and experience, and an opportunity to set out next steps going forward. It aims to collate and develop our understanding of community building within the context of social prescribing.

The report is based on community-based interviews with all seven original community builders, the WE coordinator, the community building mentor, and the builders' manager at ECI, along with ongoing conversations and email contact with all of these. The general observations also draw on discussions within the Action Learning Sets conducted with builders between March and July 2017, although in line with the protocol agreed during the sessions, no potentially attributable material from these conversations is included. It also considers written evidence of builders' work (see below), through informal means such as Facebook and printed promotional material, and in more structured form via progress reports, spreadsheets detailing listening conversations, and asset mapping.

Wellbeing Exeter and Community Building

Theory of Change: IF, as a partnership, we work together to introduce people to new opportunities and activities in their community, and grow capacity to increase interdependence in community life, THEN we reduce dependence on health and social care services.

Community building is the means through which Wellbeing Exeter 'grows capacity to increase interdependence in community life', supporting people within local neighbourhoods in the city to come together and to take action, creating an environment which is lively, inclusive, and able to receive and accommodate those people looking to become more connected with their community.

Exeter Community Initiatives have responsibility for this aspect of the programme. The milestones in the original grant agreement with DCF only extend to the end of March 2017, and mostly relate to setting up the project: recruitment, training, and initial mapping work. Almost all of these have been met. ECI also supplied a monitoring and evaluation framework outlining elements of builder activity to be documented, the outcomes of which have been used to help compile this report.

Recruitment and staffing

Seven community builders were originally recruited, over a period of some months, covering the following areas:

- Pinhoe and Clyst St Mary/George (VC, until May 2017)
- Exwick (RG - recruited in spring 2017)
- Topsham (MS)
- St Thomas (CP)
- Newtown and St Leonards (JL)
- Mount Pleasant and Polsloe community (EP - recruited in spring 2017)
- Countess Wear and Newcourt (SF)

All but one of these builders initially had casual contracts for 7.5 hours a week, though there was the opportunity to work additional hours for attending training sessions, action learning sets, etc. The builders have regular team meetings, and report at intervals on paper to Carole Pilley at ECI, who manages the team. When the Pinhoe builder resigned, the builder from Mount Pleasant/Polsloe, also took on Pinhoe.

Several of those recruited were known already in some way to ECI, either as employees, volunteers, or in another capacity. This is largely because the number of hours and length of contract (initially only 4 months) did not make this an appealing prospect to external applicants. It was a non-standard recruitment process in that personal qualities (and a general 'nosiness' about community life) were more important than particular skills or qualifications.

ECI say hours were restricted in the first instance so that a) builders did not feel overwhelmed by the lack of structure, and level of autonomy which the role requires – a gradual introduction to the nature of the role is often more productive, and b) in order to minimise potential problems through too much over-hasty intervention at the point when builders do not fully understand local dynamics.

Initially, several builders felt they did not have sufficient hours to do their job effectively. Successful community building, they say, relies on building a certain amount of momentum, to follow up on conversations within a reasonable timeframe, etc. Community activity does not lend itself to a standard working pattern, and builders will often need to be available at different times of day, and on different days of the week to engage with all sections of the population, and to be able to visit groups while they are meeting. Therefore, a degree of flexibility as to when the hours can be worked throughout the week is necessary. This has been difficult to reconcile with other commitments: owing to the limited hours offered, building is not for most people their main paid job. For the same reason, working additional hours for training etc has often not been possible.

Going forward, staffing and hours have been revised as follows:

EP 25hrs

RG 22 hrs

CP 16hrs

SF 10hrs

JL 10hrs

From November two new builders have been appointed, both at 16 hours:

Training and Development

Builder attendance at **WE learning and development events** has been good (other work commitments permitting – see above), and those builders who have attended have fully engaged with these opportunities, effectively linking with community connectors, and sharing ideas and understanding of roles (see separate report). In particular, the Asset-Based Community Development course facilitated by Cormac Russell in September 2017 was universally acclaimed, though it was also universally felt this should have come far earlier. There is considerable appetite for the level 2 of this course in future (a date has now been fixed for March 2018). There is a general sense, among builders and managers, that a more structured induction/training programme would have been useful, possibly one at least partly shared with connectors. There have been a number of constraints on this, not least the staggered recruitment, and the serious health problems of the community building mentor.

ECI's experienced community organiser, SB, has been a crucial mentoring support to builders throughout the spring and summer of 2017. She has been extremely influential: (one builder commented: 'I have her words in my head all the time'), although she herself has recommended a future training programme that brought in other voices and styles, so that builders understand 'they don't need to be me to do this job'. However, SB's ongoing health problems have meant she is unable to have an ongoing role within the Wellbeing Exeter project.

Monthly Action Learning sets, facilitated by an external professional, were held for all builders and the builders' mentor, from March to July 2017. Although the original scope of the action learning, as set out in the grant agreement with ECI was 'to analyse emerging data and interpret progress towards outcomes', in practice these sets have had a more reflective and pedagogical focus, more suited to the Action Learning approach. Participants felt this became a valuable forum for collective learning, support and challenge. These sessions had a double purpose: they provided a space for frank and detailed exploration of specific situations and problems builders face during the course of their work. This has contributed to a strong team spirit, and some very productive collective problem-solving or pooling of experience.

The practice of action learning, using an open and non-judgemental form of questioning, and enabling someone to find their own ways forward, is also extremely pertinent to the everyday work of a community builder. Feedback following a review of the set suggested participants valued the opportunity for team building, sharing experience, and mutual

learning and support. As far as practical elements were concerned, although the sets facilitated excellent development of listening skills, there was a sense that the action learning sets alone did not provide all the necessary tools for effective building work.

Mapping, Collaborating and Communicating

Builders conducted **baseline overviews** in their respective communities, mapping community assets, including physical amenities such as community centres, but with a greater focus on community organisations, smaller informal groups, and key individuals (One comment: 'people think mapping is all about buildings but that's the least of it'). One builder, who lives in her 'patch', explains that she has learned about so many more groups and individuals doing different things since she began this work. While others might know a great deal about assets of one kind or another, few others have the holistic overview that builders gain from this mapping exercise. As an example, as of September 2017, this builder has mapped in her area:

- **142** activities, classes and groups
- **12** regular events
- **20** buildings, amenities and infrastructure
- **5** adult learning opportunities
- **11** schools
- **4** political groups
- **13** places of worship
- **19** organisations or charities
- **13** means of communication

Using this list, she has been able to supply 'personalised' details of hand-picked activities and events to a group of people in a supported housing development, tailored to their interests and availability. She recognises also that this list is never really completed, as she gets to know about new things every week, and of course others stop, or change direction.

It would be very desirable to develop a system for community-owned asset-mapping, as a participatory process. ECI have details of an IT package to support this, and will investigate how it might work for us.

There is general recognition that it is important to find ways to share the results of this mapping more widely (see action points below). Some work needs to be done to develop uniform documenting mechanisms for asset mapping, to facilitate sharing. Builders' approaches to this and other aspects of documentation have not been consistent.

The wider ICE project includes an extensive piece of work undertaken by DCC's Simon Chant and his team on health-related risk stratification across Exeter, using a series of integrated data sets, including an electronic frailty index, to identify areas of particular need. Work has begun to combine this data-driven approach with the qualitative understanding of

community networks, connections and activity developed by the builders. It is hoped that this will continue.

Builders have been **working together** in several instances, sometimes where areas adjoin, and sometimes for shadowing purposes, to improve skills and to gain a better sense of how the areas differ from each other. Over the summer, several different pairs of builders have collaborated on a series of pop-up games in partnership with Active Devon in various parks. It is helpful to have an additional pair of hands on such occasions, particularly if it is intended to use the events as opportunities to conduct listenings with participants at the same time. Collaborating can also provide important new perspectives on the same situation, providing time is allowed to 'debrief' impressions and information afterwards.

Builders have considered the most **appropriate forms of communication** within the neighbourhoods in which they work. In some cases it has been useful to set up Facebook pages, and use these to promote events, and share relevant information. In others, printed material such as Parish magazines and noticeboards are more widely used.

Communication between WE community connectors and builders has been erratic. Some connectors and builders have good relationships, and readily pass information on community resources in one direction, and details of individuals looking for links into the community in the other. With others this has been less forthcoming: an idea suggested at a joint training session for mutual work shadowing to improve mutual understanding of roles and how each might contribute to the other has not happened systematically. A series of bimonthly meetings has now been established to attempt to rectify this.

Listening

Builders have spent a large proportion of their time conducting '**listenings**' within specific localities: speaking to as many people as possible within an area (a single street or housing estate, for example), to gain a rounded impression of local opportunities and concerns. To date, they have held well over 700 such conversations. This 'blanket' approach is considered important to avoid the potential for motivated individuals to monopolise builders' attention. This is not a doorstep survey: there is no fixed agenda as the idea is to discover what is important to residents, so a flexible format of open questions is used.

Listening in this way is time-consuming, and often requires builders to return to an area several times, at different times of day, to catch residents when they are at home. But the benefits of a very detailed, super-local knowledge of an area are significant. For example, one builder could tell me what rough proportion of single people, students and families lived in each street in a part of her area, and how this might affect the nature of neighbourly relationships. Having identified this dynamic, she has been able to support those planning initiatives designed to bring the different segments of the community together, on a street-by-street basis.

Other examples:

- One builder has spoken to the majority of people in an established neighbourhood in central Pinhoe, and is embarking on a similar comparative process in an area of new development in a more peripheral location, following the identification of concerns about the involvement of new residents in community life.
- In another area, a chance introduction has led to a series of listenings in a sheltered housing complex, gaining a picture of local concerns but also identifying individuals with skills and enthusiasm for community-building initiatives.

Very often, the process of being asked about one's concerns and passions, and experience of community life, is productive in its own right. Sometimes residents need to 'vent' about frustrating issues in order to move on into a more constructive phase. Similarly, being listened to (actively, but not judgementally) can provide an opportunity to talk things through, and identify ways forward. Having described all her responsibilities to a builder, one woman recognised that, despite being busy all day, she was quite lonely, as her commitments left her no time for her own social relationships, and resolved to do more for herself.

One builder has had some success with conducting joint listenings, on one occasion with a local resident who is a former mental health social worker wanting to get active in her area, and on another with a local GP with a strong interest in social prescribing. She describes how it can be helpful to have someone with you who is a familiar face, as it helps to gain people's trust, while someone else's perspective can also be useful. Listenings conducted as part of the Big Listen initiative (see below) were always conducted in pairs. Developing active relationships with residents who have an interest in linking with others and facilitating action locally (known in ABCD circles as 'resident connectors'), is an important step towards establishing sustainable mechanisms that will endure beyond the active involvement of a community builder in a neighbourhood.

In some cases, it is more appropriate to meet residents collectively, or in a neutral setting, to learn about their priorities. Two builders decided to try to talk to and engage teenagers through outside events, in spaces commonly used by young people – one through pop-up sports events on a recreation field, and the other through a series of early-evening activities in a park. The organiser of the latter says: 'I don't know if they will actually join in, but they might well come and hover on the edges, and I'll be able to speak to them.'

The Big Listen

This initiative took place during July and August 2017, partly in order to increase the reach of the mainstream community building work. Ten individual 'Listeners' were recruited, along with four groups, and three of the community builders also contributed. Well in excess of 900 people were listened to over the summer, at community events, shopping in town, at the Mosque, in the park, etc. People were asked a series of open questions about what they valued about their local area, what they saw as being important to their wellbeing, and what they would like to see change. Analysis of this data is ongoing.

The Big Listen has additionally been a useful means for potential builders to dip a toe in the water, and gain a sense of what community building (or at least community listening) is about, and whether they are suited to this very particular way of working. Two of the Big Listeners then came to the ABCD training in September to consolidate their understanding.

Moving into Action

Following (or rather, overlapping with) the mapping and listening process, builders have begun to support local people moving into action. This might be through enabling a resident to meet their neighbours, or to visit a local social group. Or it might be through connecting someone with a great idea for local action with someone who can help. Often it involves creating spaces to allow communities to come together and decide on future steps. The emphasis is firmly on facilitating, linking and encouraging, rather than on doing ‘for’ anyone.

Examples of the *kind of facilitation involved* include:

- **Bite-size engagement** – encouraging someone to deliver leaflets in their street, for example, is a good way of involving someone in a low-commitment activity which involves contact with neighbours, and may lead to more substantial engagement in future.
- **Priming the pump.** One builder has focused her efforts on a local green space that had been neglected. Once she had coordinated the removal of brambles, and the planting of trees, others have come forward with plans for building benches, constructing a noticeboard, and making bird boxes. All this attention has also stimulated the developer who owns the land to promise new play equipment and improved lighting.
- **Creating spaces.** One of the builders planning pop-up sports activities for teenagers has scheduled these sessions to coincide with the time when an ailing over-50s group meet in a neighbouring community centre. They will begin by asking if the young people can use the toilets in the centre, to initiate some interaction, then possibly encourage the older people to provide refreshments to the teenagers, with the aim of opening up an inter-generational space that is of mutual benefit.
- **Finding a niche.** A woman was introduced to a builder by a WE connector, and encouraged to come along to a craft group around the corner from where she has lived for several decades, but has become increasingly isolated recently. She enjoyed the atmosphere, though she isn’t much of a crafter, and has busied herself making the tea and coffee. She is planning to do some baking for the group’s stall at an upcoming community day, and the crafters will make and decorate cake boxes.
- **Stimulating discussion.** One builder was invited to run a session at a local community association which was struggling to recruit new volunteers. Through guiding an open conversation, the builder helped the group come up with a list of practical actions they can take to encourage new people to join them.
- **Just a little tweak.** One builder noticed that no one from a sheltered housing development attended a social group in a very nearby community centre. She

discovered that several residents visited the convenience store next to the centre earlier in the morning to buy their newspapers, but were concerned that if they arrived later, to coincide with the group, their papers would be sold out. She explained she would ask the shop owner to put back the right newspapers for these residents, to make it easier for them to join the group.

- **Community Grants.** Wellbeing Exeter included provision for a limited pot of funding ‘to support initiatives that enable all local people to participate fully in local life, and to engage in activities that promote social and physical wellbeing.’ This programme was administered through Devon Community Foundation’s usual grantmaking channels. Applications to the fund were very slow to begin coming in. Builders have observed that the applications process is not nimble enough for very small amounts of money and very informal groups.

Builders are learning **how to step back** from an activity or relationship which is becoming established, and no longer requires their intensive input. This might be a very gradual process, or it might begin to happen very quickly as others take the initiative and begin to move forwards independently. Here is the Mount Pleasant/Polsloe builder’s account of how this began to happen at a working party weekend she instigated at a neglected local park:

‘Day 1. Residents came from all over the neighbourhood, taking ownership of the park, bearing gifts of trees, plants and cake. Everyone pitched in: young, old, church members, police cadets, student volunteers, folk from shared households. Over 70 residents!... I asked what would make Mount Pleasant a better place to live. People popped ideas on a big sheet of paper, and later when others spotted the ideas, some folks volunteered skills to hopefully help make it happen in the future.

Day 2. There was a smaller turnout, a core working party that had bonded the day before. Folk found jobs to do that suited their skills and what they were passionate about. I stepped back and let people find solutions, and work it out amongst themselves, for example re: drug users and the syringes etc they leave behind. They worked out a plan and discussed how they will monitor the problem.’

Case Studies

These case studies have been chosen to illustrate various aspects of the community-building ‘craft’. They expand on the ‘moving into action’ examples above, and draw out particular learning points (names have been changed).

1. Creating in Exwick

Philip was referred to WE by his GP in January 2017. He met with a connector and mentioned his desire to do some gardening at the sheltered housing development Iveagh Court in Exwick in which he lived. The connector put Philip in touch with the Exwick community builder, and he invited her to meet with him and some other residents in the

Common Room at Iveagh Court. She listened to all the members of the group talk about their different interests and ambitions. A member of staff from the development owners (Guinness) was also included. Guinness managers had some concerns as Philip had some history with respect to gardening within the Scheme. The Community Builder's manager stepped in to clarify and allay the fears of the Guinness managers and get agreement to continue. The Community Builder went on to meet with the managers, and continued to listen to all the residents within the scheme. Over time, she developed a broader picture of residents wanting to get together more, and make more of their communal space. Having built the relationship with Guinness she was able to enable residents' greater involvement in the environment and activities, and new ways forward have been agreed.

Meanwhile, builders were strengthening connections with the Exwick Community Centre, just a few hundred yards from Iveagh Court. The Exwick Youth Council, a dormant organisation, had been supported to rejuvenate through some community building work that predated the WE project. The builder made a connection between the Iveagh Court residents and the Youth Council. The result is a series of creative workshops being held in Iveagh Court's community room in September, with an explicitly intergenerational focus – 'everyone from 9-99!' One of these, a drawing class, is being led by Philip. These events are being followed by a Community Celebration Day at Exwick Community Centre, which will include an exhibition of the work produced.

- **It took time:** eight months from the original WE referral to the workshops and community celebration. And it relied on relationships formed even earlier by the previous Exwick builder.
- **A stone in the pond:** what began as a link made because one person wanted to do some gardening, has resulted in something much more extensive, that could not have been predicted at the outset. This process is unpredictable (and may move some distance from an individual's initial stated needs or aims), and the effects are far-reaching. And it doesn't end here: relationships are being formed between the Youth Council, the Community Centre, and Iveagh Court residents and management which, it is hoped, will continue into the future.
- **The solution was collective:** while the original connection was with an individual, the builders have approached this as a collective concern, and seen it as a starting point for more general engagement. This was not a simple case of signposting an individual to a gardening club. It is the crucial difference between a standard social prescribing model, and WE's integrated approach.
- **Place is where it's at:** this example shows how a firmly place-based approach to community engagement, built on local knowledge and local relationships, can work. If the individual had lived in Mount Pleasant, or in Newcourt, things would have worked differently.

2. Alley Action

The Newtown builder met with a woman who said she was unhappy about the atmosphere in the alleyway behind her house. It was being used by drug-dealers and users, so families do not feel comfortable using the space. She said she knew she could report this to the council, who would come and clean up the drug detritus, or make a complaint to the landlord about local drug-dealing tenants, but she wanted to do something more positive in parallel, which would help revive the community spirit there used to be in the area. The resident suggested a litter pick, and is being supported by the builder to use Facebook to gather support from other residents, and to source equipment from the council. There is also a rather faded mural at one end of the alley, and there is some talk of working together to revive it, possibly with wider community help.

- **Act first:** The litter pick alone will not transform this area and its community spirit. But it's a simple, low-commitment way to encourage people to take action together, and see where it leads. Doing, rather than talking, is often the place to start, though it's also important to manage expectations, partly in order for people not to be disappointed, but partly also to make things less daunting. Encouraging someone to organise a litter-pick is of a different order to suggesting someone take on the revival of a neighbourhood.
- **Alternatives to confrontation:** asset-based community building starts from the understanding that aiming to work constructively, and collectively, is better than confronting (in this case) anti-social behaviour head-on.

3. Crafting and Evolving

A craft group meets weekly at a community centre in Exwick, at the same time as the Centre is open as a Community Café. The group is attended by a range of local people, some of whom have additional needs. It has developed from a short course funded by ECI into an ongoing concern, with a growing membership and plans for it to be independently managed by members. With builder help, a group-member has designed a poster to advertise the group locally, and another member has volunteered to be treasurer. It will require only a light touch from the local builder to ensure they have the resources they need, and all is running smoothly.

The support and development of this group has enabled it to become a welcoming environment for others in the community. Helen, a middle-aged woman who has lived around the corner for several decades, was introduced to the Exwick builder by a WE connector; the Builder invited her to come along and meet her at the Community Café. Helen had become increasingly isolated recently, especially after she stopped driving, which meant she couldn't continue her regular volunteering role helping an older woman with her weekly shop. Although she said initially she wasn't much of a crafter, the Builder invited Helen into the craft group. Helen really enjoyed the atmosphere at the group, and busied herself making the tea and coffee. She commented afterwards how good it was to hear people laughing. It emerged that she used to be a keen baker, but her oven at home was

now too unreliable for her to do much. The builders have encouraged her to use the oven at the community centre to get baking again. She continues to be a regular member of the group.

- **Moving forward, stepping back:** This is an example of a group that has been helped to evolve, develop, and become increasingly independent, as a result of community builder involvement.
- **Not a precise science:** Helen's story also shows how, even if perhaps not a perfect fit on paper, the fact that this group was extremely local, and friendly and accommodating, has enabled her to find a niche in a way that could not have been anticipated in advance. An approach which was limited to 'matching' a specified need with an advertised 'service' would have found this far more difficult to achieve.
- **Company trumps content:** This informal, inclusive group provides the opportunity for conversation and connecting with others in ways that more activity-focused organisations may not. Exactly what the group is doing is less important than whether it promotes and encourages connection.

4. Merrivale Park

The St Thomas builder has been conducting listenings among residents who live in the houses surrounding the neglected Merrivale Park. The community building fronting the road has been closed for several years, and is boarded up. The park behind is unloved and underused. The builder has been living in the area for ten years, and has always wanted to try to do something about this. When she became a builder, she began knocking on doors nearby and talking to people about what was important to them. Unprompted, family after family mentioned the park – she was clearly not alone.

In response, and as a way of getting to talk to even more local people about their thoughts on the park, the builder organised a community event in the park, with Exeter City FC running a ball skills session on the sports area, a parkour demonstration, and stalls with food, drinks and face painting. The event took place on a sunny Saturday morning. Over 80 people attended. Here are some of the comments left on the St Thomas community builder Facebook page following the first event:

'Wasn't it great?? Council members dropped in. Community dropped in. Lots of fun activities on such a hot afternoon. Of course also lots of ideas and plans for the future too. Well done and thanks!'

'Thanks for organising it! Lovely to meet local people all wanting to make the most of the space, exciting to think of the fun stuff that could be happening for our kids right on our doorstep in the future.'

'Fantastic event, thank you. Great to see everyone there, and talk about practical ways we can make the most of the space for everyone.'

Since then, building on the enthusiasm of that first event, the builder has helped organise a series of four pop-up games sessions (in collaboration with Active Devon) in the park over the summer, each time attracting new participants. A new community exercising initiative is also setting up a 'branch' in Merrivale, at the builder's instigation. Now the builder is working on ways to encourage participants to take over organising the events, so she can step back.

- **Listening** systematically to residents living around the park through open conversations enabled the builder to gain a detailed understanding of local concerns, and to plan activities accordingly.
- **Maintaining momentum:** timing is critical here. The builder has worked hard to establish a regular set of events within a reasonably limited time frame, to keep people interested, and to maintain the profile of the activities for those who have not yet joined in.
- **Linking** with other organisations is key to successful building. Here, Exeter City FC, Active Devon, and Free Movement (the community exercise organisation) all have a part to play, as do local councillors.

5. Priory Road Park

Priory Road Park, which is owned by the developer Persimmon, is a key place for local people to meet as there are no community buildings in the area. The Mount Pleasant Community Builder met Mark who had recently moved into social housing in the area from another city in the South West. Mark has had cancer and suffers from PTSD. He was very keen to get involved with the community and had been clearing brambles and pruning trees in the Park. Mark loves the area: he said it felt like home and settling there was the best move he had ever made. He said he was keen to do more locally. The Community Builder supported local action days and Mark came up with a vision for the community to make benches for the park. Persimmon agreed to give Mark the wood for the benches and these were built and sited in the Park by Mark and other members of the Community. Mark's feedback on the Bench Project was "My ideas became reality". Persimmon now liaise with Mark about the Park.

- **Go with the passion** – Mark had the ideas and passion and the Community Builder had the connections to enable Mark to make his vision a reality
- **Get out of the way** – It is all about residents stepping forward and working together. The Community Builder makes the links, helps dissolve barriers and then steps back, creating the space for residents to step forward.

What have we learned?

Natural communities beyond borders

The more we learn about the areas in which builders work, the clearer it becomes that administrative boundaries on a map do not necessarily correspond with local people's lived experience on the ground. In Exwick, for example, it is possible to identify three distinct 'natural communities' with which residents identify, and which shape local associational life. In other cases, such as Polsloe, topographical features such as railway lines or main roads effectively bisect neighbourhoods, meaning that community activity, albeit very nearby as the crow flies, may not straddle the divide. There is also a substantial amount of variation between and within areas.

This matters:

- It affects the extent to which builders can successfully fulfil their roles. Current patches, originally shaped around surgeries participating in WE, are generally too large, and too segmented, to operate as a single 'community'. Some tweaking of this has happened for the period from November 2017.
- Detailed on-the-ground knowledge of an area, and how it is lived in, such as that we are hoping will feed into the risk stratification crossover work, is essential to effective, targeted community building work. To understand that a park lying between a new housing development and an established series of terraced streets could be a useful space for community interaction, or that a small social housing block in an area of owner-occupied houses is often overlooked, makes all the difference.

Listen, then do, then worry about the details

The most effective way of developing community engagement is simply to do it. Simple, creative solutions, small-scale interventions, and providing suitable spaces for people to do things themselves, are all more effective than grand plans, lots of talk, and schemes that require external funding. But this approach only works if the builder has listened carefully to what people actually want and are willing to take action on, and is building on enthusiasm or motivation that already exists. So small changes can take place quite quickly, but speed is not a motivator here – longer term, more complex relationships, can take several months to build and come to fruition.

Planning for the unexpected: the power of serendipity

Uncomfortable though it may feel, some of the best examples of community engagement from the project so far have been unintended. A chance meeting at a bus stop opens up a whole new area of engagement with residents of a supported housing project. Spotting a poster outside a house inviting people to join a sewing group making sanitarywear for women in West Africa leads to an invitation to a church group meeting to find ways to help new residents feel welcome, and a meeting with the editor of the parish magazine. Many

more encounters will have yet to bear fruit. The outcomes of any particular intervention are not always clear from the outset – thank goodness! The key to success of this kind of community engagement is to balance a degree of focus and prioritising, with the flexibility to go where the community leads.

Many ways of doing this

It is fair to say that some builders have made a more successful and productive start than others. There are a variety of reasons why this is. Some have struggled to carve out useful chunks of time from the limited hours available, combined with other commitments. Others have enthusiasm, but have struggled with the high levels of autonomy and self-confidence required to do this work effectively. For a third group the challenge has been that of changing ways of working. As Amanda Kilroy from ECVS puts it, WE highlights the distinction between an organic vs a 'pathway' approach, requiring both connectors and builders in their own ways to be led by individuals and communities, and facilitate their own action, rather than following a pre-determined route, or stepping in and taking action themselves. For those used to working within a pathway system, this is a very difficult shift to make. One builder said: 'I'm constantly having to sit on my hands and bite my tongue, not to tell people what they ought to do, or to do it for them.' Previous experience in a more top-down or structured role within the sector can therefore be an active disadvantage.

That said, there are many ways to make an effective community builder. Ours are a varied bunch, each with their own strengths and their own style. One builder admitted to me that she was aware she was quite a different person to SB, the builders' mentor, younger, quieter, more earnest, and would therefore have to find her own way of being a builder. She's making a good job of it. As the project progresses, we'll learn more about these contrasting approaches.

Recommendations

The community engagement 'arm' of Wellbeing Exeter is a distinctive and integral element of its social prescribing model. It is important that we understand how it works *in combination with* the other parts of the programme, and how this part of Wellbeing Exeter impacts of the wider programme. It is also important that we develop our evaluation to effectively capture the impact of the community builders' work.

Before April 2018:

- We need to develop **systematic forms of recording for community asset mapping** exercises, to codify a baseline measure (current situation), and allow comparative analysis of progress going forward.
- We will investigate possible **digital portals** that will facilitate the sharing of asset mapping data with Community Connectors. This will give a far wider menu of more informal local options for Connectors to link participants into. In an accessible format

this material could also inform the activities of partner organisations more generally. It would also be helpful to a wider network of community-oriented professionals, and to individuals.

- We will move forward the work begun with Simon Chant on builders contributing a **qualitative layer of data to the risk stratification** maps. An initial workshop was held on 10 May 2017, with great potential for groundbreaking insights into local needs and resources, but this has not yet been developed. This is especially important at this point, while decisions about the placement of community builders for the period from April 2018 have yet to be finalised, as insights from this exercise could inform those decisions. As Simon Chant puts it, this detailed qualitative knowledge is the 'how' and the 'why' to his data's 'what'.
- Increasing the number of **larger community café/market place** type events held in builder neighbourhoods, both as networking opportunities for local groups and individuals, as showcases for eg local councillors, and as opportunities to have local people contribute directly and collectively to the asset appreciation process.
- In terms of **evaluation focus**, we will be designing a framework that has a greater emphasis on gathering evidence which helps us understand a) the effect for individuals of increased community connection, and b) the effect builders' activities are having on their communities *as a whole*.
- We will build on the case study approach begun here to develop a more generic typology of varieties of intervention, and an assessment of how effective they can be, under what circumstances. The aim of this exercise will be to develop some models of good practice, and to identify significant contributors to success. We will aim to look at the development of new initiatives, as well as evolving existing ones, and to consider initiatives from all spheres of activity.
- We also need to be able to **share these examples of good practice** more effectively, internally in order to develop a cycle of reflection and learning, and externally, to begin contributing to public conversations about this kind of work.

Thinking ahead to the post-March phase, we need to consider:

- How to organise the **distribution of builders** across the city, bearing in mind the input from the risk stratification work, alongside the Exeter Community Forum involvement.
- How the **Community Grants** scheme can be financed and reconfigured to provide swift, easy access to small amounts of money for supporting/kickstarting local activity. This is an important opportunity to trial new methods of distribution, devolving administration and decision making to neighbourhood level. NF has produced scoping paper on possible options, but there is currently no funding in place for this.
- How to **measure and document increasing interdependence**. Look into forms of participatory evaluation.

- Whether and in what ways we might be more pro-active about monitoring/encouraging interaction with BME communities through the work of community builders. This could be simply in the form of an explicit inclusion policy, but might in some areas need to be more substantial.
- What elements of the WE work will contribute towards a 'legacy' for the project, given the likelihood that community building will not be an indefinite resource in each of the areas in which it is currently focussed.