

Craigmillar Learning for Community Participation and Action report: Chapter 6b – Community initiatives.

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A 'research group' of local people - to locate key issues and concerns

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A full list of those who wished to be acknowledged is found in the separate Chapter 12: 'Background information (appendices)'.

Thanks also to the following for allowing the use of text from one of their publications:

Craigmillar Communiversality (see chapters 7 and 9)
The Estate of Bill Douglas (see chapter 7)

Chapter 6b: Community initiatives

Introduction

A significant number of local initiatives 'arise' from within the community, from local residents rather than through existing community organisations or community services. Groups, usually small groups, of local people develop these initiatives without paid staff taking lead roles. This is not to say that these organisations don't work with community organisations or use resources that these organisations can provide, but that residents working as unpaid volunteers and activists take the initiative and take the lead in building the project themselves.

Sometimes these initiatives run for a substantial period of time before members move onto other things and the project finishes, for example:

The Multi-media group - about a dozen folk, half Craigmillar, half incomers, set up the Craigmillar Multi-media group. It had charitable status, support from local business ... and ran for 3 years with no professional involvement – including organising funding, premise, membership. It was an incredible experience, 'just doing it ourselves'.

Sometimes they develop into community organisations with local paid staff, for example:

- The Craigmillar Festival Society itself which began as an initiative led by local mothers concerned about opportunities for their children and the wider community¹
- Craigmillar Ability Network was started by a core group of disabled people who formed a Board and worked with others to find funding for their project.

This chapter explores:

- examples of present community initiatives (pages 4-5)
- how they can develop (pages 6-7)
- finding funding (pages 8-9)
- self-management (pages 10-11)
- support from organisations and services (pages 12-13)
- final comment on a learning programme for local active people (page 14).

Note: Before reading this chapter it would be useful to look at Chapter 1a. This will give you some background information on lifelong learning, community learning and development, and participatory research.

¹ See Helen Crummy's book first published in 1992 'Let the people sing! A story of Craigmillar' for a detailed account of how the Craigmillar Festival Society developed. For a copy contact Craigmillar Communiiversity at: www.communiversity.org.uk/

Examples of present community initiatives

Craigmillar Self-builders² - A group of approximately 20 local families and individuals are working towards designing 21 houses and then owning and managing them together as a 'Friendly Society'³. They have:

- researched into house design and the use of environmentally sound (sustainable) approaches and materials
- worked with an architect on house design
- set up their own friendly society
- identified a site in Niddrie Mill.

The approach would allow them to build the 'healthy' houses they want and own them together without taking out a large mortgage or continuing to rent. Once the Draft Urban Development Framework⁴ for the area is agreed they can take their work forward.

Lismore Parents Action Group – Having completed their campaign to save Lismore Primary School, the group is now seeking to develop projects in Bingham. They have carried out a local survey to establish projects that local people think would be valuable. These include starting a food coop, and considering services and activities such as childcare, a breakfast club, job club, addictions, workshops for adults, bingo, swimming, pamper nights. The group has established funding through the Craigmillar Social Inclusion Partnership, found other sources of funding and set up an office - see details of their campaigning work in Chapter 3.

Niddrie Marischal Kids Club – Two local residents who were already active in their Neighbourhood Group were concerned about the lack of activities for young people. They are now running a club for 5-10 year olds and for 10-14 year olds. They have taken the young people on trips and organised fundraising events. The community police recognise that there has been a drop in difficulties with young people in the area.

Sadly the club is not presently running due to intimidation within the area, but may restart shortly with support from a City Council Community Education support worker.

² For more information on Craigmillar Self-builders contact them by email at: csbha2005@yahoo.co.uk

³ A Friendly Society is a cooperative form of ownership – for more information go on the internet to: <http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/fsrg/>

⁴ Copies of the Draft Urban Development Framework are available from PARC and the EDI Group Ltd – their contact details can be found on the internet at: www.edigroupscotland.co.uk. The Final Report on the Community Consultation commissioned by Craigmillar Community Council and led by Scottish Participatory Initiatives on the Draft Urban Development Framework is available from the Community Council via the Craigmillar Capacity Building Project website at: <http://www.craigmillarcommunitycouncil.org/UDFConsultationReport.doc>

The Wicked World Tour - Two local residents spoke of their work with others to actively supporting 'The Wicked World Tour'. The group, that included two young men with a degenerative condition, raised £110,000 so that the two young men could travel around the world in a disabled accessible bus. In the process the two men recorded their experiences and what they learnt across the world about accessibility for disabled people - a form of action research. They've set up a website⁵ to tell others what they did and what they learnt. The group continues to work to tell other about their experiences and learning through doing presentations and developing resources such as a toolkit for people to undertaken similar sorts of research.

Some other examples in the area: include local health groups, sports clubs, and pensioners:

- Several local health groups exist that provide mutual support between people for example the Heart to Heart group and the Men's Health Group. Both of these groups have developed with the support of Be Well, a local community health organisation.⁶
- Edina-Hibs football club provides training and support to a range of children's and youth football teams – a team of trained volunteer coaches runs the organisations and raises its funds.
- There are pensioners social and lunch clubs that run themselves without staff and provide mutual support⁷.

Comment on learning: This is not a comprehensive summary of all local initiatives. However, the diverse nature of the work these groups are doing means that together they form a strong resource for others in the community to learn from about the development of grassroots initiatives - and for a learning programme to draw upon.

⁵ For more information and contact details for the Wicked World Tour go on the internet to: www.wickedworldtour.com

⁶ For contact details for the Heart to Heart group and the Men's Health group go on the internet to the Be Well website: www.be-well.org.uk/

⁷ For example pensioner's groups at the Hays Business Centre, the Jack Kane Community Centre and Magdalene Community Centre

Developing a community initiative – finding the commitment

Crucial to the success of this type of community development is a core, committed group of people:

It's about people working together but it's a huge effort ... it needs a core group for whatever it takes to move things along.

Although this may be frustrating, because others outside the core group don't have the same type of commitment:

We're looking for other people to take over key roles after 14 months, as 'I can't do this for 5 years'. We're shouting for help, we've 4 core members ... people said they'd volunteer but didn't and for this project to progress they have to be committed.

So the motivation has to be very strong:

I was born in Craigmillar but was away for 15 years. Scotland has big health problems and 50% of health problems are caused by housing – damp, heating systems, doors are not healthy. I wanted a healthy home, healthy high-quality housing, for my family, and myself so I put my name down for the trip to see Benarty self-builders.

At a Niddrie Marischal Neighbourhood Association meeting people raised concerns about young people, and about drugs ... there were new houses but nothing for the young people to do.

Comment on learning: The sense of the commitment from a relatively small group of motivated and concerned people in driving this sort of community initiative forward feels crucial to this sort of activeness in the community. The experience of how to fashion and work with a core group in doing this work would be very valuable for the wider community, community organisations and the proposed learning programme to draw upon.

Developing community initiatives – sustaining your vision:

People have to be willing to learn and adapt in order to work towards their sense of what they want to achieve. This means researching issues:

We did a survey of everyone in Bingham – 550 people.

We visited a site in Morpeth. Here a charity is regenerating a whole area, which is bigger than Craigmillar. This includes houses in different styles; we went past a square-cut log house, and saw a curved window. Quality housing – this is the future.

And it means learning to work with professionals

We had to develop contacts, work with accountants. We needed belief and commitment but had no formal training ... but we're achieving more than any other funded group. 'You can do it.'

The Council gave us money to find an architect. We interviewed 3 architects, supported by Craigmillar Housing Development Project⁸ and found John Gilbert in Glasgow who has interest in social and eco-housing.

This could also have its tensions:

We had 4 different development (Council) workers, who got better and better. They thought we were very annoying and there was pressure to work with a Registered Social Landlord⁹.

But they also needed a strong vision or sense of their aspiration so that they can persist through difficulties:

We didn't want to go with a housing association, we wanted to remain independent so we wouldn't have our expectations changed, have them watered down. We're not expansionist, it's houses for active members only; and promoting self-build with local people.

Comment on learning: Not surprisingly it takes commitment to persist and make this sort of work happen, and these would be important qualities that these community initiatives could share with others who are active in the community – definitely a resource that a learning programme should draw upon.

⁸ Craigmillar Housing Development Project now the Craigmillar Neighbourhood Alliance. Contact details are on the Craigmillar Directory at:
www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf

⁹ A Housing Association would be an example of a Registered Social Landlord – an organisation that provides social housing but is not part of central or local government nor fully owned by the tenants themselves such as a Housing Coop.

Finding the right funding:

Community initiatives have had mixed experiences in working to get the funding they need to take their work forward.

One group raised over £100,000 of funding through their own enterprise rather than by applying to mainstream funders and grant-makers.

Another group has had significant success with such funders:

We've had Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) funding of £2500 in Nov and £2500 in Jan, to last until end of March. We're using it to rent an office and get equipment like a computer. We've used a book of grant-making to apply and got £500 from Getty Trust and £800 from Coop Grants. SIP funding for the next financial year includes £25,000 direct to the group and £25,000 to a separate pot for all organisations in the area. They can apply to a local funding panel.

Another has put a lot of hard work into applications and building local contacts to support their applications and has still been frustrated.

If I was working with one (my) group only I'd get nothing. You need to know every aspect of the Community. Organisations don't give funding to people they don't know ... I spent hours writing out a form to a Foundation, sent (it) in Monday and by Friday had a reply 'NO'. I was asking only for £450.

Another group has a particular need for Information Technology (computers) that is home and neighbourhood based but is struggling to find it:

The biggest problem the group faces is lack of funding for IT stuff. We've had £500 in total from the Social Inclusion Partnership for one computer and applied for our own decentralised IT kit. We hit 93% of Social Inclusion Partnership targets but have constantly been knocked back.

Comment on learning:

This is not a review of the Craigmillar Social Inclusion Partnership's funding decisions and criteria, so the positive and negative comments on this page should not be taken as a judgement on its work. What the comments illustrate is the range of experiences and approaches. It would be a valuable area for further local research that can support Craigmillar as a Community in developing and sharing its expertise in this area.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Neighbourhood Programme¹⁰ which is working in 20 different deprived neighbourhoods in England, Scotland and

¹⁰ Quote is on page 11 of the report; the report (July 2005) can be found on the Joseph Rowntree Foundation website at: www.jrf.org.uk. The JRF Neighbourhood programme is working with 20 groups across England, Scotland and Wales from Jan 2003 to June 2006.

Wales has found that giving community groups access to small amounts of credit that can support training, travel, events, technology, consultancy and advice, and information, was effective in their work. But is this the Craigmillar experience too? It would be valuable to find out more.

For a learning programme, this is an important area to support local active people in thinking through and learning more about.

However it does demonstrate that getting the right sort of funding for community initiatives is not always easy, as groups aren't necessarily looking to work in the same ways as more orthodox community organisations and community services. Nor do they have the same contacts and relationships within existing networks that can back up their funding applications.

Clearly those working within community initiatives have had success in getting funding or raising funds and they can be a source of knowledge for others about how to do this. There may also be more that both they and existing funders, such as the SIP, can learn from each other. Equally, community initiatives and funders could work together to produce advice for others to learn from, about how best to raise funds.

Self- management as a group of unpaid workers or volunteers

The 'research group'¹¹ discussed the complexities of organising themselves to work with young people. So, for instance, community initiatives need structures but not necessarily the same ones as community organisations and/or services.

Being a volunteer within a community initiative is not the same as getting a job:

I don't want people to have to sign a contract when they've been doing the job for 2.5 years ... they are highly trained volunteers already

'I only offered to help you'. I've given up a lot of things but don't want to take a job.

It needs structures in place and policies but not a 'job' and an interview

As a volunteer I wouldn't want to be told to sign a contract.

Community initiatives can be flexible in the ways they work, in ways that more structured organisations can't be:

One volunteer may be an hour-late but I would rather keep them ... I needed volunteers to say they were staying till 10pm so I could let more kids in.

A new policy about time-keeping in an organisation was knocking me for six - so I needed flexibility on the part of the organisation.

There was awareness, though, that policies were necessary when working with vulnerable people

Work with children or vulnerable people– needs policies and procedures

There was also frustration that Disclosure Scotland's¹² criminal records checking system took so long.

It's taking so long. 2 people have been waiting for 7 months.

Disclosure Scotland losing papers and people have to pay again.

¹¹ 'The research group' was a mix of local active people from different parts of the community. It involved 7 different local active people; 4 people who were volunteers or activists; 3 people who were both staff with local organisations, lived locally and were active in the community and 2 people who were staff in local organisations but did not live locally also attended 1 meeting. There were 3 meetings in all – some people attended once, some twice.

¹² Disclosure Scotland manages the checking of criminal records for volunteers and voluntary organisations in Scotland

This frustration was echoed by several staff working within local community organisations too.

Comment on learning: In one sense this is a very different situation to more formal volunteer working within larger voluntary sector organisations, where volunteers may have a job description, supervision from staff, policies to learn about and an induction and training programme. People who are active within the community through community initiatives are managing complex situations, bringing in relevant bits of policy such as child protection, but aiming to keep the informality and flexibility that they and the people they work with value.

This gives a real taste of the difference that being part of the community, living next door to the people you are working with, brings. The skills for working with people discussed in Chapter 4 - skills such as confidentiality, boundaries, trust and listening, are being used by people in their community participation in their *own* neighbourhood. This feels different to the experiences of staff who are working in other people's neighbourhoods. As one person pointed out, it's the same young people who attend the youth club who will pop into their house at other times of the week.

So, this is very skilled work which others in the community can learn from, and which needs strong support from other people and organisations, and this is looked at in the next section.

Support that helps community initiatives

One group valued practical support of community organisations and community services and felt able to access support when they needed it:

We use the Council and Capacity Building Project for photocopying, mailings. Visits, phone costs and web are mostly funded by ourselves. Most of us are on low incomes and are single parents but people have put their own money in. We access support when we need it and do our own admin ... the Capacity Building Project did a lot: helped with 2 public meetings, advertised, and supported two community visits.

However they also emphasised the need to challenge organisations and services. They were looking for:

- finance
- wider flexible access to the resources that services and community organisations get
- flexible support and hours from development workers
- decentralised technology that was going out to local active people, outside of offices – computer networks, palm pilots and phones.

Another person valued advice on working effectively within the community through the Capacity Building Project and the Craigmillar Neighbourhood Alliance¹³:

I could have made lots of enemies but the worker got me to concentrate on what you can achieve and made a huge difference

They have helped with building a plan for Niddrie Marischal. Also forming a constitution.

Others received support through Be Well, one of the local community health projects:

Be Well provide training for all their groups through a day conference. Social Work feed into this.

Comment on learning: Some community initiatives such as the Wicked World Tour do not seek significant amounts of support and training from organisations and services.

However, many people involved in community initiatives valued getting support from community organisations and community services in the area and this support was varied, for example:

- setting-up a constitution

¹³ For contact details for Craigmillar Neighbourhood Alliance go on the internet to: www.craigmillarcapacitybuilding.org/pdf/directory%202004.pdf

- filling in funding applications
- advice on policies and skills
- training
- ongoing encouragement and support
- advice on working within a 'local political environment'.

One group expressed frustration above, and this was clearly echoed in conversations from of all the community initiatives the researcher met with. All were looking for flexible support that understood both their strengths and their needs to develop and learn. There was a sense that they felt undervalued *not just* within their own communities but within the larger policy frameworks being developed by the Scottish Executive for community learning and development.

A learning programme needs to support those active in the community, both within community initiatives and within community organisations and services. It must grapple with this issue, so that stronger partnerships can develop. Perhaps then, people active in the community can then challenge policymakers and decision-makers, City-wide and nationally, to direct resources that can better support and strengthen the development of community initiatives.

Final comment on learning for people who are active in the community

People involved in community initiatives are digging deep and challenging themselves to develop their skills and knowledge in order to work towards their aspirations. Their degree of experience and motivation means that they have very significant contributions to make towards a learning programme for community participation.

Two people emphasised how important their independence within community initiatives was to them, that they weren't immediately reliant on funding organisations, and the position it gave them in arguing for change and challenging assumptions. This, too, is a valuable capacity for a community to have - people who don't feel immediately obligated to bigger funders. It is important for any community both to listen to, and value the power of, such 'independent voices'.

There is a very strong link here with the key idea from Chapter 1b, raised by Jane Thompson, of a '*committed dialogue*'¹⁴ both within local communities and between local communities and decision-makers. Community initiatives, alongside community organisations and community services, can provide fresh, creative and distinctive input into this dialogue. A learning programme has the potential to demonstrate and support the creative and assertive role that community initiatives play in the life of any community.

¹⁴ See Chapter 1b pages 12-13 and 17, and also Jane Thompson's (2001) report, 'Rerooting lifelong learning: resourcing neighbourhood renewal.' Details from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education on the Internet at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/>.