

# LANDSCAPES OF HELPING: KINDLINESS IN NEIGHBOURHOODS AND COMMUNITIES

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**Kindliness** in communities is an increasingly important issue in the context of wider social changes such as the rise of individualism, geographical mobility and an 'ageing society'. The help that occurs between people in everyday settings is an aspect of human behaviour that is taken for granted, yet it is little researched or understood.

The report:

- identifies factors that may inhibit or encourage kindliness in communities;
- explores the impact of emotional, social, geographical and economic factors;
- discusses some ways that people navigate informal helping in their lives;
- explores how people negotiate conflicts around giving and receiving help in their lives;
- identifies ways that kindliness can be fostered in communities.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an exploration of the conditions for the development of kindness in modern communities. It is based on a case study of Hebden Bridge, a semi-rural location in West Yorkshire with a reputation for 'alternative' values and cultures.

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Increasing geographical mobility, economic change and the rise of an individualist culture in the UK have contributed to the loosening of close ties in communities. In this context, communities need to evolve, to reconnect, so that people cultivate the 'background hum' of sociability that has been associated with neighbourliness. This 'background hum' is characterised by people's awareness of each other, by a respect for each other's privacy and by a readiness to take action if help is needed. In this research we define kindness as 'neighbourliness enacted' and describe the process of reconnection within communities as the 'reinvention of sociality'. Hebden Bridge's relative success in melding traditional and more contemporary forms of sociality helps to identify some broader lessons about fostering kindness in neighbourhoods and communities.

## Mapping the landscape of helping

Hebden is made up of a mixture of settled working class communities, hill farmers and more cosmopolitan incomers, including people seeking alternative lifestyles and a population which has often worked in the public sector, holding pro-social and liberal values. This has created a relatively diverse population with a high level of social and cultural capital. To some extent, older forms of sociality have survived or been re-imagined to accommodate social changes. This reinvention has been supported by the presence of a high number of networks and interest groups. These networks and groups did not necessarily overlap, but there was enough 'permeability' between them to foster connections within and across communities.

These connections were supported by co-operative values which were shared by both established and new sections of the community. These values were expressed in public events that reflected an openness and general invitation to belong. Such activities provided a shared focus for discussion,

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gave a sense of cohesion and generated overlapping social networks. The architecture and geography of Hebden Bridge has also been key in creating such networks. Not only was the love of the landscape a unifying feature for both old and new communities, but long rows of terraces with shared access, and the town's location in a steep valley where people must descend to the centre to access services, facilitate regular social contact. There has also been a purposeful construction of public spaces such as the creation of a town square and the redevelopment of the town hall as a community facility. The melding of newer and older forms of co-operative business ethic also helped develop relationships of trust which fostered kindness.

## Navigating the landscape of helping

While Hebden Bridge and the surrounding parishes were largely perceived as supportive and helpful places to live, individual responses were more complex and sometimes appeared contradictory. While most people felt that giving help was a good thing, they simultaneously expressed a reluctance to ask for, or accept, help themselves. People often felt they had to present themselves as self-reliant, capable and independent in order to maintain their dignity, especially in a broader context that over-values independence. People negotiated these tensions in different ways and we constructed narratives to illustrate how people forged 'orientations' to kindness that made sense in the context of their lives. These tensions could be managed through orientations which focused on collective action, or through individual acts of helping, but they all reflected people's struggle to strike a balance between expressing vulnerability and maintaining their dignity. These orientations to kindness often worked in tandem to strengthen networks and foster kindness within and across communities, but sometimes at a cost to the individual adopting them.

## Cultivating the landscape of helping

We identified some conditions that may help kindness to flourish in communities. Social connection increases the likelihood that people will be known to one another, have their needs recognised, and have people to draw on for support. Therefore, in identifying mechanisms which foster kindness we also describe those which simultaneously build neighbourliness and sociality.

*Making kindness palatable* – it was important that kindness was facilitated in ways which were sensitive to language and presentation. If people retained a sense of personal independence and dignity they were more likely to ask for and accept help. Non-help-focused conversations and activities could help people express their needs indirectly, through something they feel more comfortable talking about, such as knitting, dog walking or football.

*Nurturing bonders and bridgers* – Hebden has many people who work to strengthen the bonds between individual members *within* communities ('bonders'), as well as people who work *across* different sections of the community ('bridgers'). These people are important in facilitating one-to-one kindness and also creating connections between different sections of the community, demonstrating the hybridisation of older and newer forms of sociality.

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*Creating a shared myth* – it seemed important that people feel a strong sense of attachment to the place where they live because if they value a place they are prepared to invest in it and in the people who live there. In Hebden this was built around its positive unifying features and expressed through community events, communicated in local media and through newsletters and joint ventures around common interests.

*Building common cause* – it was important that people had opportunities to come together to articulate common values and build ‘common cause’ because this offered a means to break down barriers and misperceptions, enabling people to appreciate that they have similar values and experiences. In Hebden, communities expressed these shared values when uniting to defend the landscape or by coming together through shared socio-economic interests.

*Hubs of helping* – a sense of community can be more easily developed when there is an identified focal point for people to share information and make contact with others. The erosion of such facilities as shops or Post Offices has been detrimental in many neighbourhoods and this research highlighted how important it is to develop ways of connecting communities. In Hebden this had taken the form of virtual hubs such as Google groups or Facebook pages and the creation of a wealth of formal, group associations. In addition, the idea of community-run shops, pubs and other local facilities offer promising new possibilities.

*Third spaces* – a conscious attempt to create public spaces where people could come into daily informal contact was key in promoting sociability and trust. Public space has long been an essential feature of urban housing design, yet it is not always ‘owned’ by people locally. It was important that the development of space tapped into the emotional connections people had with their neighbourhood.

*Creating kinder economies* – social enterprises whose business aims were about more than the ‘bottom-line’ worked to support local networks and facilitate helping. In Hebden this relied on people having the resources and time to develop alternative business models, as well as resist threats such as the encroachment of big corporations.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

People helping each other is an aspect of human behaviour that is taken for granted, yet there is little research which examines this aspect of our experience. In this study we explore informal helping – which we term ‘kindliness’ – in everyday settings in an attempt to understand how people engage with helping and how it is fostered in communities.

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Our research was carried out in Hebden Bridge and the surrounding area, which lies in the Metropolitan Borough of Calderdale, in West Yorkshire. Hebden Bridge nestles in a steep valley on the Yorkshire side of the Pennine Hills. It sits at the centre of the parishes of Hebden Royd, Heptonstall, Erringden, Wadsworth and Blackshaw, which are connected by the town’s main thoroughfare but which also possess their own distinct identities, stretching into the hills surrounding the town. For the sake of brevity we describe this area collectively as ‘Hebden’ and refer to the town as Hebden Bridge.

Hebden Bridge has a reputation as a place where mutual aid and community ties are strong and this made it a potentially rich context to begin to explore the possibilities of developing cultures or ‘ecologies’ of kindliness (Lindley, *et al.*, 2012). We use the metaphor of landscape throughout the report, a notion inspired in large part by the people of Calderdale, who inhabit their valley with a fierce care for its beauty, and a deep respect for the demands it places upon them. This metaphor is apposite because a landscape is about more than simple geography. It moulds how its people live and work within its folds; it both shapes and is shaped by how they come together and the means by which they negotiate their emotional, social and political worlds.

When we negotiate the world in this way we are shaped by it, but we are also active participants who use our understanding and emotional responses to make sense of the world and to act in it. In order to explore this process we use a psycho-social approach which places the interaction between our emotional life, and the contexts in which we are embedded, at the centre of our research.

Our research is informed by relevant literature, especially the reviews on informal help commissioned by JRF (Dalley, *et al.*, 2012; Lindley, *et al.*,

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2012) and literature on neighbourliness (e.g. Harris and Gale, 2004; Harris 2008; Pilch, 2006). This literature emphasises the need for ‘low level community kindness’ (Lindley, *et al.*, 2012) across society, but acknowledges that isolation can increase with age and, therefore, older people tend to be in greater need of this social resource (Dalley, *et al.*, 2012; Lindley, *et al.*, 2012). Our research did not specifically focus on older people, but we did include a greater proportion of middle to older aged people as participants.

In this report we refer to communities, networks and groups. By community we mean a collection of individuals who do not necessarily have a personal connection, but share an identification with a place or common identity. We use network to describe a number of loosely connected individuals who are potentially able to contact each other and draw on each other’s knowledge or expertise. Lastly we use group to describe a more organised setting where members share an interest or hobby.

We present our findings in three sections. *Mapping the landscape* gives a description of the area and highlights some salient features of the locality. *Navigating the landscape* uses vignettes to explore how people make sense of the context in which they find themselves and negotiate kindness in their everyday lives. In *Cultivating the landscape* we use this understanding to inform our suggestions about nurturing informal helping in communities.

This report is based on research undertaken in 2013–14 by a team from the University of Central Lancashire and red Consultancy. The research was commissioned alongside a sister project in Glasgow, *The Liveable Lives study*, and was funded under the JRF programme: *Risk, Trust and Relationships* in the context of an ageing society. This report complements our interim report: *Informal support in a Yorkshire town* which identified a broad range of factors which shaped informal helping (Spandler, *et al.*, 2014a). These included: the socio-political and economic context, including policy and discourses about dependency; the features of a locality, including geography and social networks; the interpersonal relationships developed between people, including perceptions of risk and trust; and our emotional responses to this context, such as fear and vulnerability. This report builds on these findings to tell a story of how a landscape of helping developed in a particular locality.

## Background: kindness and neighbourliness

There is no shared vocabulary to refer to the kind of helping we explored in this research and we struggled to find terms that precisely describe it. A wide range of terms are used to delineate its features, such as neighbourliness, mutual aid, everyday support or, more colloquially, that ‘little bit of help’. We initially used words like informal support but found this inadequate to the task and decided to reject terms connected with helping, support and care because of their association in people’s minds with more formalised types of care. Similarly, the notion of mutual aid brought with it connotations of organised helping, through societies and group association. Equally, many people use neighbourliness to describe everyday helping and support, yet this implies those showing kindness live in close geographical proximity to each other. In a context of wider geographical and social mobility, as well as technological change, like Harris (2003), we found that neighbourliness is not necessarily tied to place or proximity.

In response we chose the word kindness to reflect the wide range of informal helping we encountered in our study. There is, however, inevitably much overlap between kindness and the notion of neighbourliness. Harris and Gale (2004) identify key aspects of neighbourliness as: an awareness

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of the situation of other residents; respect for their privacy; and a readiness to take action if help is needed. Neighbourliness could in some ways be seen as latent (Mann, 1954), a 'background hum of sociability and support', respectful regard and a willingness to help (Forrest and Bridge, 2006, p. 18). It is only when people are aware of a need, or ask for help, that this latent potential moves into action. In this research we describe this moving into action as kindness. In other words, kindness can be seen as neighbourliness enacted.

Kindness also encompasses both practical help and emotional support, such as a sense of people being there for each other. Not surprisingly, we quickly recognised that there were gendered manifestations of kindness, as men seemed less willing to articulate their understandings about informal support and often focused more on practical helping. However, we were aware that, as a predominantly female research team, the way we talked about informal support may have excluded some ways men might talk about it and this may have influenced our analysis. These issues highlight the importance of avoiding a simplistic binary analysis of gender differences and the need for a more nuanced examination of the interaction between gender and kindness.

For the purposes of this research we define kindness as low level practical or emotional support, which is not provided through formalised groups or organisations, but between people who are not in a familial relationship. In other words, we do not include help provided by/within families, charity/aid or volunteering. Despite this definition, it was often difficult to identify boundaries between help within the family and outside; and low level help between neighbours could easily transform into longer-term more intensive support and care. We also found it difficult to distinguish between informal and more formalised (or semi-formal) help and our exploration of kindness involved going through, and observing, semi-formal organisations who often mediate more informal relationships.

Similarly, while we started this research trying to distinguish between giving and receiving help, we increasingly realised that this distinction was hard to sustain. In everyday life it is not always possible, or desirable, to separate out the needs of the self and the needs of others (Munn-Giddings, 2001). People practise kindness, not only to help others, but to help themselves, and to improve the communities in which they live.

Kindness is part of our lived and unquestioned experience, and some of the participants in the research struggled to understand why we would want to explore something so seemingly obvious. Yet the fact that we struggled to name it indicated that this was an area of human life which had not been subjected to conscious exploration or reflection. Perhaps we live with kindness, but we do not understand it.

## Methodology

It is precisely because practices of kindness were implicit that we required a methodology which attempted to understand motivations and assumptions that are naturalised and culturally embedded. Social research often identifies factors which inhibit or foster a particular behaviour or outcome. Yet these factors are entangled in rich social settings and interpreted through the complex understandings of real people in context. So although we still wanted to identify salient factors which support kindness, we also wanted to understand how they come together in particular settings, and how they are *experienced* by individuals with varying life stories, who may not necessarily consciously articulate their orientations to kindness. Therefore, we employed a psycho-social methodology which is underpinned by an

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assumption that kindness is influenced by a complex interplay of emotional and social factors (Lindley, *et al.*, 2012). We used a range of methods including the following:

*'Rapid capture' street survey* – in the first year we carried out a 'rapid capture' street survey to provide an overview of how people talked about informal support in their locality. We spoke to 151 local people and used this to identify a broad range of factors which seemed to shape kindness at the emotional, familial/relational, geographical and societal levels (see Spandler, *et al.*, 2014a). We drew on these findings to select sites and individuals to participate in the next stages of the research.

*Site observations* – we selected three sites where we identified informal networks of helping taking place. Taken together, these sites reflected a reasonable mix of the diversity of Hebden, including both rural and town settings; cosmopolitan and more traditional communities; as well as place-based and more virtual associations. We included one group-based site as it reflected the newer cosmopolitan population of Hebden Bridge. Our interest here was in exploring how the group provided opportunities for members to offer kindness individually, outside of the group setting, rather than examining the group itself, or group interactions.

We carried out observations to help identify contextual factors which supported kindness; to gain access to less visible forms of kindness; and to identify people to interview. We organised an additional event in each of the sites which served the dual function of feeding back our early findings to local residents and collecting additional data using a rapid capture method similar to our earlier street survey.

*Individual interviews* – we conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with individuals identified from our street survey and observation sites. We specifically selected people who were embedded in networks of informal support and those who seemed to represent different approaches to kindness. We aimed for a diverse sample, including those who lived in the town, 'hill dwellers', long-term residents and new arrivals, as well as approximately equal numbers of men and women.

*Data analysis* – data was initially analysed by individual team members and then subjected to discussions within the research team in order to refine our emergent understandings. We used narratives to present our findings because they illustrate that factors cannot be seen in isolation but need to be understood in relation to a whole ecology of helping. Since much of our understanding about kindness is implicit, narratives are a useful means of converting tacit into explicit knowledge (Lindley, *et al.*, 2002). By combining the words of several participants, we constructed vignettes to help us illustrate some common orientations to kindness. These vignettes do not represent particular individuals but illustrate the complex and often conflicting orientations people held towards kindness. We also used interpretation panels, involving people who were not part of the core research team to examine selected data in more detail. This helped us to check our emerging interpretations and see if our own tacit and unarticulated assumptions and dispositions to kindness were impacting on our analysis and ensure that our analysis was solidly grounded in the data.

In the next section we describe the 'landscape' of Hebden and identify key features which help generate and maintain the social 'glue' of kindness.

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## 2 MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE

This section describes the area in which we carried out our research. It highlights some salient features of the locality which helped to shape practices of kindness.

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Originally defined by hill farming, the development of the cotton trade in the nineteenth century transformed Hebden Bridge into a thriving mill town and dotted the landscape of the valley with cotton mills, drawing labour away from the land and from surrounding villages. By the 1960s, however, the decline of the industry meant a lack of local employment, few facilities and deteriorating housing stock in both Hebden Bridge and the surrounding villages (Spencer, 1999).

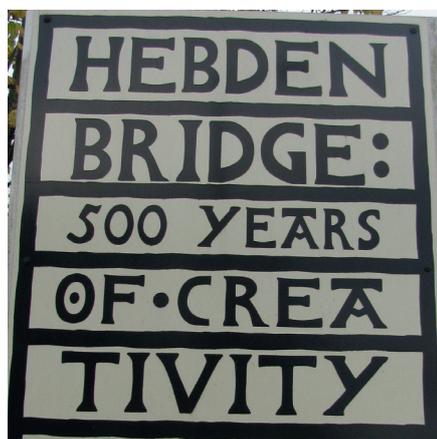


Hebden Bridge  
Simon Warner collection,  
Pennine Horizons Digital Archive

In the 1970s Hebden Bridge experienced a revival, with an influx of artists, writers, musicians and New Age activists seeking a place to settle. The town developed a reputation as an alternative rural refuge that had potential for a community-based way of life that was felt to be missing in more urban environments (Barker, 2012). This potential also attracted a new second wave of inward migration of well-educated professionals with a social conscience who often worked in the public sector with decent salaries and organisational capacity. In addition, Hebden Bridge has become increasingly well known for its lesbian, gay and bisexual population, many of whom have also migrated to the area (Smith and Holt, 2005). The pace of migration has steadily increased and, more recently, Hebden has also become a place for professionals seeking a second home. Migration on the part of educated professionals and early retirees has led to a bump in the 45–59 age group, and the younger 16–24 age group constitutes a lower proportion of the population than for England overall. This may have implications for the town, in terms of support, as its population ages.

It is clear that the history of Hebden is one of flux and change, reflecting the wider history of western industrialisation. However, Hebden has developed its own identity, with a unique population of native hill farming people, the children of mill workers, hippies and professionals creating a rich social mix with many interconnected networks. This is reflected in the number of well-established local organisations and groups in Hebden Bridge such as the independent cinema, the Little Theatre, the Artsmill, the Poetry Press and the Trades Club. There has also been an accompanying revival in some of the outlying villages. This thriving culture has been, at least in part, driven by the arrival of well-educated professionals whose desire to make change was demonstrated by the development of the Hebden Bridge Community Association (HBCA) which raised substantial funding to refurbish the town hall, after negotiating with the council to transfer this asset to HBCA. This activity reflects the combined social and cultural capital embedded in the town.

There has always been a shifting population within the town and the surrounding hills, but before the late 1960s migration was more piecemeal. For example, Barker (2012) describes earlier migration as coming in twos and threes. Many perceive migration in the last few decades as changing the nature of the area, occurring as it did in response to the successful marketing of the town. This sold Hebden as a place to experience a more natural way of life characterised by a sense of security and an alternative community, a process which Smith (2002) describes as ‘greentrification’. The incomers who came as a response to that marketing continued the process of reputation building, exemplified by the creation of a slogan ‘It’s so Hebden Bridge’ to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the town in 2010. The phrase is emblazoned on the sign at the entrance to the town, along with a picture of a bridge, the date of the inception of the town (1510) and the words ‘Hebden Bridge – 500 years of creativity’. When the town was actually established, and its historic artistic credentials, are almost irrelevant since the point of the exercise was to promote the reputation of the town today, as a desirable place to live or spend time.



Hebden Bridge town sign  
Authors' image

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There is a feeling locally that inward migration has resulted in the increasing gentrification of Hebden. More recent arrivals often have employment outside the area that takes them away for much of the week, making it difficult for them to contribute to the sense of community that may have initially attracted them to the area and helped build it into the place we see today. These newcomers have been described as ‘wealthier yuppie types’ on the local Hebweb site and there is a sense that some have yet to find a place in a town where hill farmers rub shoulders with crystal healers, lesbian mothers and city commuters. It is important not to over-stress the diversity of inward migration as Hebden has a largely white population (less than 5 per cent of the population are classified as black or minority ethnic).

Hebden Bridge is far from representative of most towns in England with its unique mix of more settled working class communities and the more cosmopolitan, socially and geographically mobile incomers. Hebden Bridge can be seen as a hybrid of older communities which are characterised by similarity, solidarity and a sense of duty, and newer communities which are characterised by more diversity and an emphasis on individual freedom and choice. Neither form of community is ideal; both have risks as well as benefits for their members. Traditional close-knit or ‘enfolding’ communities could be harsh or unforgiving (Bulmer, 1986) and often characterised by poverty, lack of privacy, community control over the individual, compulsory caring (especially for women), and intolerance of difference and diversity (Harris, 2006; 2007b). More cosmopolitan communities are characterised by increased mobility, transience and individualism, where people may have to look further afield for the help and support people previously relied on family or neighbours to provide.

In Hebden associations have developed which combine these older and newer types of communities and enable people to create and maintain connections which foster kindness. This hybridity might be called the ‘reinvention of sociality’, in other words, the development of new ways in which people create and maintain connections that foster kindness. This was reflected in residents’ perception of their area as most people we spoke to felt that Hebden was a relatively kind and welcoming place compared with other places they’d lived or visited.

The following comment was typical:

“There are all sorts of different dynamics, but there is a vibe about the town that does, I think, go across all the different communities.”

Not all were so positive about the area, and particularly the town of Hebden Bridge itself, which one interviewee referred to as ‘a drug town with a tourist problem’. Yet, despite these divisions, there was a general acceptance of the positive image of the town. Buying into its mythology and internalising it seemed to have helped to make Hebden Bridge a ‘good object’ in the hearts and minds of many local people. This often manifested itself through fond attachment to particular features of the social, cultural and geographical landscape of the town, such as the local cinema or the Little Theatre. There were similar attachments to place in the surrounding parishes and this sense of shared pride and attachment helped to fuel confidence, social connection and reciprocity:

“I never knew how a society like the one we have here could exist really. I'd always say 'hello' [in other areas] to people but people generally wouldn't stop and that was why it was a bit of a shock coming up here to suddenly people stopping and saying 'hello' and asking how you were. And that kind of thing engenders in you that type of response as well, you know.”

This kind of informal contact seemed very evident in Hebden and was also reflected in small acts such as holding keys for neighbours which Harris and Gale (2004) argue is a significant indicator of trust and well-being in communities. This perception of Hebden, as a place where kindness was facilitated through association, connection and trust, was identified during the early stages of the research, but we also recognised that there was diversity across the area. In order to flesh out our early findings we identified three different sites in which we carried out observation – two geographical sites and one organisation. These sites represented some of the different social and geographical groups which constituted the area.

## Observation sites

*Dodnaze* is an estate of mixed social and private housing on the outskirts of Hebden Bridge town. The estate has a long-established working class community with a small number of incomers. There are no longer any shops on the estate, but it is served by a small community centre which is open part-time and is largely used by local young mothers and children. Despite the lack of facilities on the estate, people were positive about their community; they shared with the rest of Hebden a love of the rural landscape, felt a pride in their environment and that people on the estate were prepared to help if they needed it. Kindliness was usually mediated by proximity and neighbourliness often happened on a one-to-one basis. There were fewer formal groups or associations than in the town and people were more likely to associate informally, through meeting others while walking dogs on local land or having informal contact in the local park.



View along Wadsworth Lane,  
Dodnaze  
David Martin collection,  
Pennine Horizons Digital Archive

*Blackshaw Head* is a rural hillside village, a mile or so out of Hebden. It is a disparate community spread along a winding road at the very top of the valley overlooking the town. Like many villages it experienced a loss of facilities and population in the 1950s and 60s with the decline of the mills and rural employment. By the 1970s few of the original families remained and the population was ageing; however, the village experienced a revival in the following decades with an influx of new residents mirroring, in microcosm, the town of Hebden Bridge. While not all take part in village activism, and there are distinct networks within the village, help is often given across the boundaries of these networks. For example, a group of residents came together to negotiate collectively to get cheaper fuel from their oil supplier. The relative isolation of the community and the challenges of harsh winters helped to bring together disparate elements of the community and several groups were instigated by residents such as BOGS (Blackshaw Head Optimistic Gardeners), an environmental group, an arts and crafts group, a food co-op, an active internet group, and a Methodist chapel which acts as a community centre and hosts the annual fete in a neighbouring field.



**Blackshaw Head**  
David Martin collection,  
Penine Horizons Digital Archive

*Hebden Bridge Women's Institute (WI)* has a younger and more alternative membership than is typically associated with the WI. It is a large WI with more than 80 members who are a mix of some long-established residents and newcomers seeking to establish connections in the town. The membership represents the social entrepreneurial side of the town as many run local businesses or are self-employed. The group meets once a month and, like all WIs, has an educational focus and hosts speakers on a variety of subjects. There is a Facebook page where members share information and organise activities outside of the main meeting, such as the walking group or trips to the theatre or cinema. Members forged new friendships in the group, joining other existing networks and constructing associations based on shared interests and values. The group mediated connections, facilitating the networks which enabled kindness to happen and in this way was typical of many such groups across the area.

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## Features of the landscape

In this section we describe in more detail how the landscape of informal helping was shaped. This includes an exploration of how elements such as public space were organised, how networks and communities were connected and how the local economy was structured. We return to this description later when we examine the elements that foster kindness.

## Negotiating difference

Any community has to find ways to negotiate differences between its members. A key feature of Hebden was the proactive efforts by residents to create local activities and events, which were widely advertised, communicating a sense of openness to different sections of the community – what we call ‘an invitation to belong’. The inclusive programming of films at the local cinema was an example of this, as it included old black and white films, independent cultural films and blockbusters, broadening its appeal. This openness is also expressed through annual events such as the Festival of Light, the handmade parade and an annual charity duck race where the local rotary club organises the release of thousands of yellow plastic ducks into the river. Such events attract tourists to the area but also bring together disparate sections of the community, lessening isolation, facilitating connections between people, and creating a positive vibe about the area.

Of course, the reality of ‘community’ was far more complex than the reputation of the area might imply. Communities were sometimes divided about how open to change and difference they should be. In Blackshaw Head, the development of wind turbines created some divisions, as did a proposal to set up a drug/alcohol treatment unit in a residential area. In addition, Hebden has a largely white population and the extent of its openness is perhaps questionable. We spoke to very few people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds but one person felt that they had not been readily accepted or included in the local community. Although it is hard to draw conclusions from this, it was reported that the networks involved in the WI were more inclusive of people from BME backgrounds, perhaps reflecting the younger, more cosmopolitan feel of the group. Again this group stressed an ‘openness’ which was exemplified in the informal atmosphere of the meetings and the style of the group which encouraged interaction between members. The WI might be seen as a community of interest as well as an organisational hub for the various networks or interest groups within it. It expresses the newly forged community of more professional and cosmopolitan incomers.

There were also examples of this openness among older, longer established residents in the community. For example, lesbians and bisexual women in the area reported feeling relatively comfortable and accepted in the area (see also Smith and Holt, 2005). In urban areas with high concentrations of LGBT people the gay community is often concentrated in particular areas with a defined identity. In Hebden many lesbians and bisexual women we spoke to suggested they lived more openly alongside their neighbours with less apparent need to specifically socialise, or organise their support networks around their sexuality. This openness does not suggest an absence of prejudice in the town, but that any prejudices have been largely managed by establishing a context which makes it more difficult for divisive or hostile attitudes to prevail.

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## Communities and networks

Communities were often marked by sub-divisions and smaller nodes of association based around neighbourhood and friendship or interest groups. Those who lived in the hilltop communities and the town's surrounding parishes often had an identity associated with their own neighbourhood and saw it as distinct, or even in opposition to, the cosmopolitan town of Hebden Bridge. Even within the town itself there were often distinct networks from which people derived support.

These smaller networks were often key in providing informal support, enabling like-minded people to come together to form affective ties. If these smaller networks were closed or isolated, they seemed to function well enough for their own members, but there could be suspicion and distrust which did not necessarily foster kindness towards people on the periphery or outside that network (especially newcomers who might not understand their implicit rules of engagement).

However, what was noticeable about Hebden was a permeability between these smaller networks. The area seemed to benefit from having people who were members of different networks, often facilitated by membership of organised interest groups. In other words, a hilltop farmer could be connected with a cosmopolitan professional through membership of the local history group or by a neighbourhood interest group. The high number of activities and groups facilitated the overlapping of these networks and increased permeability:

“Hebden Bridge has got an unusual degree of social engagement. I mean that there's lots of different social circles, places, and lots of different things going on as well. If you look at the Hebden diary, it's ridiculous. And so all those people have circles and within those circles there's the ability to get support at different levels.”

The interconnection of these networks was enhanced by people who acted as 'bridgers'. These people communicated across sectional divides and acted as mediators between different segments of the community. There were many incomers in Hebden who had previous experience of community development work and this informed the way in which they made friendships and connections in the town. It is important to stress that not all community bridgers are professionals; this bridging role could also be taken by local ministers or by longer established residents. For example, we noted that working class individuals and families could also operate as bridgers, often distinguished by having a trusted standing across the community. For example the following extract describes a 'crossover family':

“There's this kind of crossover family, whose families, you know, for generations have lived in the village. We went to X's birthday party and both the communities were there. And I was thinking I've never seen some of these people before. But you go to somebody else's birthday party, that's just one community, and you'll see all of the faces that you recognise and, you know, the lawyers and the media folk and the social workers, kind of like this

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particular gang, this vibe that Hebden has of having lots of people in it that are support orientated, quite a hippy vibe, and then you've got the hill farmers.”

In this case the marriage of a traditional hill farmer from a long-established family to an incomer had created a conduit for communication between the two communities. Bridgers could also be incomers who shared a working class culture or upbringing with local people but engaged with the more cosmopolitan aspects of the town.

One of the strengths of Hebden was also the continuation of older, traditional and strongly bonded communities. These communities were, in part, maintained by long-established people who acted as 'bonders' with communities and networks. They often worked through more traditional community hubs, such as pubs, shops and post offices, or sometimes just took on this role as an individual. These bonders offered personal support and practical help and put energy into developing and sustaining relationships within their community and networks. As such they became known in their communities and acted as points of contact and communication; they formed the glue which sustained thicker social ties within communities.

## Narratives of place

In Hebden Bridge and some of the surrounding parishes there has been a conscious attempt to create an overarching and shared narrative of the area. People who moved to Hebden in the past decades often held what might be called prefigurative political ideals, the belief in actively creating the kind of alternative society in which they would like to live. In this way, Hebden can be seen as an 'intentional community' created by both the people who live there and the people who have moved there, a community woven together by the conscious creation of shared values and principles:

“I think because a lot of us aren't born and bred here and we've come to live here, you know, that kind of gives a certain affinity ... wanting, really actively wanting, and consciously wanting, to create a community around me and around us, of positiveness and of kindness and looking and seeking to do those things, knowing that actually, that is a much better way to live your life and a better way for us to live our lives.”

This shared outlook became self-perpetuating, as more people were attracted to living in a place associated with particular values:

“You sort of start off with something then once it gets a reputation then more people who have those kind of ideas and values are attracted to it.”

The revival of the village community of Blackshaw Head was slightly different, but driven by a similar social mix as the town, generating a range of activities which encouraged connection between social groups and building a strong sense of place and belonging which people could identify with. For example, a small group including the local Methodist minister started a

local newsletter in order to bring the community together, even though at the start there was little news to report. This newsletter is now an online resource (although paper copies are circulated for older residents). The renewal of sociality in Blackshaw Head drew in residents from the newer, professional sections of the community, older residents and some of the farming community. Most residents of Blackshaw Head would see the village as having its own identity, distinct from Hebden Bridge and its 'bottom-dwellers' and there is at times an uneasy relationship with the town which is often perceived as resource rich and gentrified.

Not all sections of the community buy into the new artistic and alternative narrative of Hebden. For example the vision which resulted in the rebuilding of the town hall, with its modern annexe and business focus, was not shared by some older sections of the community. However, there are many elements of this narrative that more traditional community members can identify with, for example, values of collectivity and social obligation and a deep respect for the unique landscape and character of the area. Therefore, there were enough acceptable elements of the overall narrative to ensure people could relate to it, or at least not reject it outright.

In Dodnaze, despite the positive regard people felt for their neighbourhood, there were few proactive efforts to articulate and disseminate a positive story about it. Residents felt a tangential relationship to the wider story of Hebden Bridge and saw the estate as somehow connected to, yet apart from, the town. Their experience did not chime with that of the town, since much of the community was long established and known to them, there was no process of arriving in the area with intent to create and articulate their ideal community. Incomers choosing to move to the estate and create new forms of collective activity were involved in negotiation with longstanding members.

## Public space

The availability of public and shared spaces enables people who are not necessarily connected to come into contact with each other. The architecture and geography has facilitated this process in Hebden Bridge. Originally built to house the mill workforce, the long rows of terraces often share access at the back and people regularly use common space around their houses. Even the footpaths in the hills and valleys are interwoven and criss-crossed, enabling greater connections with the landscape and between people. Equally, the location of the town, in a steep valley, means that people must descend to the centre in order to access shops, services and buses.

Not all this common space is an accident of geography or merely a by-product of design. Some of



St Georges Square, Hebden Bridge  
Alan Greenwood collection,  
Pennine Horizons Digital Archive

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it has been purposefully created such as the pedestrianised town square in the centre of Hebden Bridge, which people inevitably cross to get through town. This ensures that there is incidental contact between members of the community who often use it as a place to meet and catch up with friends and neighbours.

In addition, there were many examples of people taking the initiative to develop shared green spaces in both the town and the surrounding parishes, for example, tidying up bits of unused land and turning them into useable green spaces for dog walking, shared gardening or play areas. In Dodnaze people talked about the way in which the surrounding fields created a neutral space and a relaxed atmosphere which facilitated connections between people.

“It’s a little community, only four streets. A confined community that’s contained in a small area. And in about 100 yards you’re in the fields. You meet people and you talk. Most are out with their dog. We’re very lucky to have the park and playing field – if there’s no open space how do people meet each other? People tend to walk their dogs at the same time each day, it’s just kind of evolved like that really ... if someone’s out with a dog, they’re friendly. In town people are hurrying and scurrying about. I never feel afraid here; I know most people.”

In Dodnaze, the local children’s play area provided a place where local mothers regularly met up and offered each other help (such as looking out for each other’s children). In the last two decades the public space of Hebden has taken a more contemporary form and some older residents bemoan the demise of the local pub culture and feel alienated or excluded from the rise of cafes and bistros often frequented by younger more cosmopolitan people who appear to have more disposable income. Yet, despite these changes, the town has managed to develop and sustain some of the older public spaces such as the Trades Club, the local cinema and the Little Theatre, as well as its public parks, walkways and square.

## Community facilities

The national decline of cohesive and geographically settled communities has been accompanied by the closure of the churches and chapels, shops and pubs that served them. These often operated as places where people could come together and news of any local issue or personal difficulty (such as loss or illness) could be shared within the community (Muir, 2012). This decline was also evident across Hebden, but some individual shops, post offices and pubs have survived and the town hall has been reinvented as a community facility. These places facilitated connections between people who may be isolated and/or not linked into more formal social groups and associations. For example, one of the local publicans in Hebden Bridge opened up the pub on Sunday mornings to provide an inexpensive monthly breakfast and get together for older men in the area.

In addition, many newer facilities have developed which serve both the older and newer sections of the community and illustrate new forms of association focused on cafes, the revival of old chapels and new co-operative ventures such as Great Rock Food Co-op. For example, many people in the

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area have dogs and Hebden has recently established a cafe specifically for dogs and their owners, providing another place where people connect with each other, often through conversations about their pets. Dogs are well-known for being excellent conversation starters and pet ownership has been positively associated with increased social engagement and neighbourhood friendliness (Harris, 2007a; Wood, *et al.*, 2005).

We also noted positive use of virtual spaces such as Facebook, Google groups or neighbourhood websites which facilitated connections between people and enabled information sharing. Newer arrivals often used internet communication to make connections with their neighbours and this has been particularly successful in Blackshaw Head where residents can be isolated, especially in winter. The residents there created a Google group which draws in more than two-thirds of the households in the village. It operates as a place where people can share news, discuss local issues and ask for help if they need it (for example if they are ill or unable to go out). This enables people to be connected with each other and to gain a sense of community which might otherwise be hard to attain.

“... the Google group, yeah, it’s used for things like, ‘Oh I’ve seen that there’s a big pile of wood at the pub’, ‘What time’s the bonfire, when is it on?’ Or things like, ‘Did you know that the bus isn’t running today?’ Or ‘I need to get to Halifax for a hospital appointment, can someone give me a lift?’, that kind of thing.”

Similarly, the WI Facebook page allowed women to communicate about social gatherings or individual issues and can lessen isolation for those new to the area. Given the issue we identified in our interim findings about people finding it difficult to ask for help, this type of communication allows people to put out general calls for help without the fear of rejection that may be attached to a request to a specific individual. This supports the idea that online connectivity can promote sociality and that in some cases this can develop into face-to-face support, but does not always have to (Flouch and Harris, 2010; Hampton, *et al.*, 2011). Virtual connectivity has been shown to facilitate support, even indirectly for those not online (Hampton, *et al.*, 2011).

## Local economies

Hebden Bridge is notable for its wealth of small businesses, social enterprises and practices of reciprocity between businesses, backed up by a long history of co-operativism. Many people we spoke to talked about a kind of helping which was embedded in the exchange of goods and services. This was kindness driven by an alternative business model and ethic which encompassed a desire to aid others in the course of doing business. A positive value was placed on trading in a way that supported people as more than just customers, going beyond mere economic exchange. This was another area where older and newer communities converged in their ethical vision. The values of mutual aid that infused the co-operative movement were shared by the ‘hippies’ that arrived in the 1970s and 80s and by the later wave of community activists and ethical entrepreneurs who arrived in Hebden Bridge with plans to run small ethical businesses. Some local businesses have explicitly social objectives such as employing local people, especially unemployed or young people.

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There was evidence of small businesses actually helping each other out, working together rather than being in direct competition with each other:

“I think people are supporting the co-operative because it’s a community co-operative. And it’s friends selling their goods and we’ve created it to enable those people to be more successful and to be more self-sufficient. It feels like a small tribe, it feels like a very positive reciprocal arrangement where we know one another, we’re supporting each other. We’re producing really great food, politically I love the fact that we’re screwing big supermarkets out of pennies.”

Great Rock Co-op in Blackshaw Head was another example of this, drawing producers from across the communities. There was an imperative for diverse local businesses to get involved in the co-op as it was a means of generating custom, yet that same need also drove social networking and a positive personal ethic. This echoed the older form of socially responsible economy expressed through some of the local pubs and local shops.

Some older residents who had memories of older-style independent shops and a different attitude to employment and trading felt the loss of the more personable service they provided. Indeed we suspect that one of the reasons why many Hebden residents have resisted plans for the big supermarkets and other chain stores is their more impersonal nature, even if people on low incomes might welcome the opportunity to buy cheaper food.

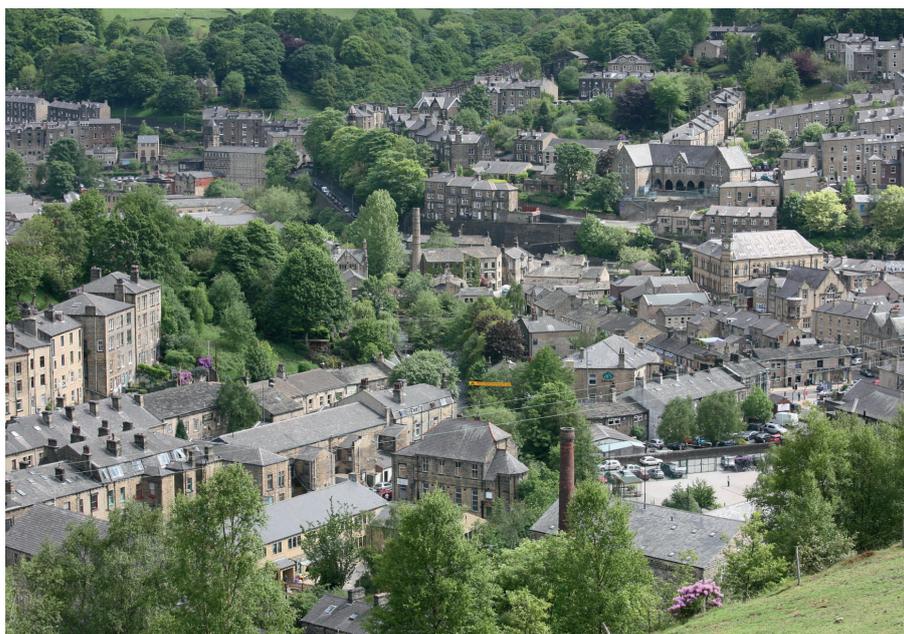
Some older manifestations of alternative business ethics had survived or been revived in some of the newer local enterprises. For example, some local businesses offered free delivery and post office staff were often a key point of social contact for older people in less populated areas. In one rural area an enterprising farmer had set up a shop in one of the farm outbuildings providing daily deliveries to many older people across the valley. These deliveries were about more than good customer relations; on visits the shop owner would spend time with customers and give help such as cleaning or bringing meals. While the shop had set opening hours, it would open if people ‘knocked on’ and needed something. The small shop is packed, not only with essentials, but also notices, leaflets and other ways people could share information with each other. Among all the goods was also a seat for customers where people could sit and share news and chat:

“[One day] she took it out and I went down and I said, ‘Where’s the seat gone?’ And she said, ‘Oh we’ve moved it out.’ I said, ‘Well that’s no good for somebody who’s walked down the valley like me,’ I said, at my age. So she put it back ... She brought it back in ... quite a lot of people do like to have a little sit down don’t they?”

Our mapping of Hebden reveals a complex picture of both change and continuity where divisions and conflict are not absent but managed and contained. Strong bonds within networks and communities are forged by regular contact, mediated through social spaces, community facilities and an alternative, more co-operative, local business ethic. Different sections of the community have contact with each other through collective events and are bound together by an overarching vision of the area and an openness to change. This kind of sociality seemed to encourage kindness by creating

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trust and security and by maximising the number of potential contacts a person may have with other community members, increasing the chance that their needs are known and responded to.



**View over Hebden Bridge**  
Alan Greenwood collection,  
Pennine Horizons Digital Archive

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## 3 NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE OF HELPING

Kindliness can only be understood in the context of affective human relationships, and this section outlines how individuals navigated kindness in their everyday lives, and how their approaches to kindness were constructed through their lived experience.

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In the initial phase of the research we noted that people often expressed a reluctance to ask for, or receive, help from others. This was a similar finding to other research which has referred to this reluctance to ask for help as the 'request scruple' (Linders, 2010). Linders' research was carried out in a low income, fairly cohesive, urban area in the Netherlands. She argues that even when people lived in difficult circumstances, they were prepared to help others, but there appeared to be a decline in people's readiness to *seek* support.

Such reluctance may be a feature of the times in which we live, exacerbated by prevailing discourses which valorise self-reliance and demonise welfare dependency (Hoggett, 2000; Froggett, 2002; Spandler, *et al.*, 2014a). At the same time, the rise of neo-liberal discourse and the development of an increasingly permeable and post-modern society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Bauman, 2001) has placed the individual, rather than the wider collective, at centre stage. This individual differs from those of previous generations in that they must grapple with a self-help therapeutic discourse which encourages them to recognise their personal needs at the same time as they are exhorted by wider society to embrace independence and individual success (Nicholson, 1999; Illouz, 2008). Yet those personal needs may well be expressed in a desire to be part of a stable community, where there is a sense of obligation to others and where individual gain should take into account the needs of the collective.

It is not surprising therefore that people often struggle to make sense of these conflicting messages. We heard this tension articulated in people's

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accounts, between their desire for independence and their need for help at times in their lives. What people told us often seemed contradictory, as they reported feeling that giving was a good and proper thing to do, yet they simultaneously expressed a reluctance to accept help themselves. It was also not always possible to predict a person's behaviour in relation to kindness from their espoused views in a straightforward or linear way. For example, someone who said they would not accept help from others, actually went on to reveal a day-to-day life full of instances of being helped by a neighbour. They appeared to minimise any uncomfortable feelings associated with accepting help by framing it as something other than helping (in this case as a friendship). This helped reduce any uncomfortable feelings associated with needing or asking for help.

Such contradictions are perhaps understandable when people negotiated such a tangled field of discourse. It is important to understand this negotiation if we are to create environments which help people reconcile these conflicting messages and be more likely to seek and accept help. In particular, any attempts to foster kindness must address the conflicting messages in society about giving and receiving help, but also appreciate that people's responses reflect an often delicate negotiation of emotional and social conflicts forged through their particular life experiences and the specific situations within which they find themselves.

When we looked at people's accounts more closely, we found some distinctive approaches to kindness that were common across our interviews. Using our landscape metaphor, we describe these as orientations to kindness. We constructed some narratives to illustrate these orientations, and to show how they were forged through particular life experiences and made sense in the context of those lives. The vignettes were constructed by weaving together the lifestory narratives of several participants. In this way, each vignette is a composite that represents a common orientation rather than any one individual. In addition, the vignettes we present are not comprehensive and there are likely to be many other orientations to kindness. However, they illustrate the most common orientations we identified during our research.

Each of these orientations can be seen as particular ways in which people attempt to negotiate wider discursive and emotional tensions around giving and receiving help. In other words, while the broader tensions may be common, the particular ways people negotiate and sometimes resolve them in their lives may differ. Given our early findings we specifically focused on the dynamics around receiving help. We noted that these orientations have both benefits and costs to the individual who adopts them and we explore this at the end of each vignette.

## **A 'traditional' orientation to kindness**

This orientation is profoundly shaped by moral beliefs which appear quite fixed and unchanging and provided both a source of comfort and a set of guidelines to live by. Kindness appears inherent in these beliefs which define helping others as the 'right thing to do'. This orientation is inherently collective as it insists that the individual is part of an interconnected whole, within which people are responsible for each other. People who adopted this orientation often used the life of Jesus as an example of model helping, or drew on institutional helping through the church or selfless helping by family members.

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This orientation seemed to be dependent on close connective ties within communities and is often held by older people, or those who have strong religious beliefs. People who held this orientation saw older communities as more closely knit, a place where daily contact made people's needs more visible meaning that people are aware of each other's needs and can provide help *without needing to ask*. Therefore, people expressing this type of orientation often experienced a profound sense of the loss of traditional values of connection in the increasing pace of modern life. The faster pace of society and the demands of work had reduced face-to-face contact, and the increasing focus on the individual was perceived as evidence of a generally less caring society.

The sense of loss expressed about the changes in their community echoed broader narratives of community decline which has been found in other research (Harris, 2007b). Despite this, many people who held this orientation continued to help in their communities into their 70s and 80s. This reflected the fact that a personal sense of dignity and identity could be closely related to being able to help others.

### **Florence**

In Old Town everybody was connected with the chapel, the school, the bowling club, you know, and it was a Christian upbringing that we had, although I can't remember going to church much. My dad worked seven days a week and he was very strict, we couldn't speak at the meal table, with the six of us you can imagine! But my parents, if they did argue it was when we weren't there, so I suppose we were taught good values. I think that's your basis when you get older, your background and your childhood is your rock. We did things together as a family, we shared everything and that's what I've done all my life, tried to share.

As a little girl I can remember my mother always helping out, there was always a knock at our door – 'Have you a cup of sugar, a bit of this to spare?' I never heard my mother say no and I suppose that's where it comes from. It's like in winter, at Chapel, I'll make soup for them and take it over. I've not been asked to do it but it's just something nice for somebody else. I mean I'm a Christian, not a very good one, I can shout and carry on at times, but I have that faith and I think it's that if you see somebody in need you spare that minute or time to talk.

If you give, it comes back a hundredfold, if you give to people it will rub off onto them. I could go out now in this village and say 'Can you do this for me?' and they're from all walks of life, but they would do that. It's like when I go into Hebden, even if I don't know them, I'll say, 'Good morning!' And some of them are astonished! See today it's all email, Google, that sort of thing; well I like to talk to a person face-to-face, eye contact is very important, and that's something people don't do today. Don't get me wrong, email is great in lots of respects, but you're losing the warmth and looking at someone. It's like, when the fete was on, I looked up and down the field and I thought, how wonderful, the contact with the people, the children running around freely, no fear, it was seeing and believing in the goodness of people. You can have the power to move mountains but if you haven't got love you've got nothing and you just hope you can show them that having all these materialistic things does nothing for you, does it?

These days nobody has any time, everybody wants it now, things have gone so quick the last 50 years young people don't know where they're going. I mean they do make friendships, but sometimes you need to be still and think, what am I doing, what can I do to make things better? They've been brought up to a telephone and a television and laptops, the wives or the partners have got to go out to work to make ends meet and I think it's a time thing, it's sad really. It's your progress I suppose, it goes faster and faster, but I think it's bad really.

In this village you get to know people, but I do feel there's a difference now with the newer ones, when they're here they keep themselves to themselves. We used to help one another out, what with getting the hay in and those sorts of things. Now that's all changed and you've got people who haven't got the same kind of outlook, they just drive to their house and drive out again and people don't walk about the same. I suppose it doesn't matter now though because I don't need to ask for help, do I? I would have to be really desperate to ask, if it's something serious, you know, I try and struggle on until I desperately need it.

This orientation was informed by a strong social code which had been externally reinforced over time. However, this position was compromised when confronted by rapid social change which threatened the security of older collective and traditional notions of bonded communities. With the breakdown of thick ties and supportive communities there is a risk that people who adopt this orientation can feel unsupported and isolated; they may experience disillusionment and feel less likely to trust community members who don't act upon similar values. It is an orientation which helps to build 'thick' ties within communities, as people who hold this position often make a strong commitment to place and neighbourhood. Yet this same commitment can result in feeling over-burdened when help does not seem to be reciprocated and feeling let down when their own needs are not anticipated by others.

Despite holding on to the importance of mutuality and community, people who held this orientation simultaneously portrayed themselves as strongly independent. It is an orientation where individual dignity and identity seemed closely related to giving help and demonstrating independence within a supportive community. Modern discourses where need is met through individual help-seeking is resisted since there is an expectation that need should be anticipated and help provided without having to ask.

### **An 'activist' orientation to kindness**

Like the traditional orientation, this orientation to kindness is embedded in a clear set of values, but here it tends to be framed more in social and political rather than religious terms. These values are often acquired in childhood, and could be informed by the experience of poverty and hardship, but they could also be adopted over time. Many who held this orientation were baby boomers, children of the 1960s, who benefitted from the expansion of the higher education system and lived through political upheaval and the development of the new social movements post 1968. Their values were strongly informed by older, collectivist notions of social justice but they also sought alternative lifestyles and communitarian relationships espoused by ideologies encountered in their youth.

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In this way, an activist orientation takes a less uniquely individual or personal approach to kindness. Shaped by a decade of possibility and change, empowered by educational opportunity, and influenced by the newer social movements and the re-emergence of co-operativism and eco-politics, this kind of orientation tends to look to the public sphere to create opportunities for connection and believes that civic activity can create change and foster a kinder world. Such an approach seeks to develop kindness through social action and shared endeavour, seeing kindness as rooted in collectivity and community. Here the notion of community is much more open than the traditional orientation, conceiving it as a diverse and shifting population, woven together through a shared sense of place and personal connection. This orientation tends to see community and kindness as something which is purposefully created and freely chosen, rather than based in a fixed moral code. That is not to say that there is no moral element to the orientation; an activist orientation holds deep convictions based on equity and the importance of social connection.

### **Justin**

I come from a working class background, my dad was a socialist, and I still call myself a socialist, but for me climate change is the big threat, it's going to affect our kids and grandchildren and particularly the poor countries around the world. I got involved in politics at a very young age and it gives you a confidence that it's possible to change things, you have to work hard but you can get results and there's a pleasure in it. There's this positive feedback, not everything succeeds but if you can get certain projects off the ground, which can inspire others to have a go.

We've lived in Hebden Bridge since 1972, we were both social workers looking for a way out, I was living in London and wanted somewhere a bit greener. The thing that hit me first was the hills and the architecture, I'd never seen anything like it, all the wonderful countryside, almost in every direction you walk. I had one or two friends here at the time and we ended up squatting on the hillside, we tried to set up an alternative community, but the council changed and we got evicted. I suppose there was a certain cache about living here then and people's friends started visiting and moving in.

It's the kind of place that if you're willing to do things for the community you'll get accepted, but I know about there being a 'No Hippies' sign on the pub doors in Mytholmroyd. Maybe I'm thick skinned, but I think it was just bemusement really because we were very different. We're just very rich in our culture and we've got this community who question things and there's a kind of radical tradition here, a pattern going right back to when the co-operative movement was very strong in Hebden and that attitude had an influence on the town. I think there is this willingness to do things for the community that you don't necessarily find in other places. I would call it social capital, these things are a lot harder sometimes on a housing estate with a lot of social problems, in that sense we're quite privileged, there is a core of a few people who start initiatives and can get other people involved. Like when there was the battle to keep the land at the back, they created a company to own the land so they could build houses on it and they'd started sending in

people with chainsaws. Every time they came, we went and stopped them, the police were called and it went on for hours, it definitely brought everybody together.

These days most of my work is trying to sort out environmental problems in the valley, but I also get involved in things outside the town, even at an international level, so I'm probably not the typical Hebden person. I suppose I see myself as compassionate to other people by thinking about bigger issues. It sometimes frustrates me that people tend to have narrow horizons and perhaps miss some of the bigger picture, but you have to work with what you have, you don't get anywhere with blaming people. I think people want to get involved in groups they like to socialise in, where their mates are, you can only tempt them and try and see if there was anything that could get them interested.

I feel that there would be support if I got ill; saying that, I sometimes think who's going to be there when I'm older, to kind of check that I was all right? I feel that a lot of people in the community expect stuff to happen but aren't prepared to get involved in it. Those of us that are involved, we're all getting on a bit and trying to get younger people through is just so hard.

This is an outwardly focused orientation to giving and receiving which directs its efforts towards the creation of an environment which fosters kindness. This approach to kindness understands it as a general social wealth and people who adopt this orientation often have a strong sense of civic or social duty. They often seek to realise their values through their work, whether paid or voluntary, and this helps them to develop and sustain communities.

However, even in Hebden, where there were many individuals who seemed to devote their time to social causes, the activists found themselves strained at times. Its outward focus tends to resist discussion of personal vulnerability and people who adopt this orientation tend to focus on wider need often at great personal expense and may experience burnout. Another risk for people who adopt this kind of orientation is that their public profile may inhibit them from feeling able to ask for help from others. Indeed some people who held this orientation felt that they would go outside their own community if they needed help. In addition, because their focus is on the public sphere it may mean people are less focused on one-to-one acts of kindness/neighbourliness and less embedded in the day-to-day workings of their neighbourhood.

## A 'rescuer' orientation to kindness

Unlike the previous two orientations, this orientation seemed less obviously informed by a particular set of external values. People who adopted this orientation tend to project a strong self-identity as one who protects those who are vulnerable or in need, while retaining a sense of invulnerability and strength themselves. This 'superman' orientation enables the person to avoid feelings of vulnerability or dependency as they are in a position of strength in relation to those around them. Not surprisingly, this orientation tended to be associated with masculinity and adopters were often, but not exclusively, male. People often felt it was weak to need help, unless it is help

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in dire circumstances, or unavoidable practical help. It can be a response to deprivation, or poor early experiences, where the person may have learnt that help was not available to them or they had to deal with seemingly insurmountable circumstances on their own. This orientation can, therefore, be seen as a way for the person to deal with difficulty by outwardly portraying strength and capability.

### **Billy**

I was 11-year-old when my mother just disappeared, nobody knew where she was and I didn't see her again until I was 18. My sister and my brother were younger than me so I was the breadwinner. I didn't have a lot of what you call prime time as a child. We were to be put in homes and I remember we could stay with our father but on condition my grandma would come and live with us because my father wouldn't have been sufficient, in them days, to look after us. I learnt the hard way, I can cook, I can bake, I can wash, I can do everything, I've always been self-sufficient.

My grandma as well, she were always looking after people. She were forever picking up old ladies who she thought were in distress and they ended up just coming to our house all the time and she's feeding them and all that. And then when they passed on I go an' have a breather and the next thing you know she's found somebody else to do the same for. One day we got a call at the school and my grandma were in hospital, she'd had an inflamed appendix, this had been going on for weeks, it like ruptured and she insisted on walking to the hospital. And my dad just went, 'oh yes she's gutsy, oh good for her' sort of thing. And then she broke her leg one time in two places and so everything just fell apart because all this stuff she does for people but she made sure she was out of that place in a fortnight. I think it's been ingrained into me that it's a weakness to look for help.

If you see someone who needs some help, you just help them. Now, next door, that side's got Alzheimer's, he's all twisted with his knuckles and arthritis and stuff, I'm there for him. He's only got to say something and I'm there straight away. On the other side, I mean I rushed her to hospital because she started having a baby and it was like snowing, 12 o'clock at night and I were in my pyjamas, all of my gear, but I've a 4-by-4 so I could use that.

Maybe it's a bloke thing, but I never cried or asked for things where I'm desolate or ought, I've always managed. I'm not one for sympathy from people, I'm a survivor. It tends to wind me up, you know, if it's a problem I'm talking about, it makes me feel down. Sometimes problems go away if you ignore them, maybe. I've always got at the back of my head that you don't want to offload too much anyway because you put people off. People just wouldn't want to talk to you, they'd think you weren't coping. There may even be an element of, there's certain people that you don't want to feel you owe one.

While those who adopt this position rarely volunteer formally, their individual efforts are often part of the glue that binds people to community. Therefore this orientation is often very beneficial to those around them. However, the risk is that it does not necessarily result in the person being helped or

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nurtured themselves. A resistance to vulnerability expressed through action and helping is often unsustainable in the long run as people may struggle to deal with their own need for others. It can be hard for others to know how to best offer help as people who adopt this orientation vigorously defend against any perception of their weakness or vulnerability. Presenting a capable front, even when in pain or difficulty, can compound health or emotional difficulties and cause unnecessary suffering. Although people certainly benefit from adopting this orientation in terms of the rewards they get from giving, and the status gained from being a strong member of the community, it does not necessarily help to forge sustained bonds of reciprocity or mutual aid in communities or to build alliances between different communities.

## An 'empathic' approach to kindness

People who adopted this orientation were acutely aware of wider social change, yet were more likely than the previous orientations we described to grapple with, or even positively embrace, the challenges such change represented. This orientation incorporated more of the therapeutic self-help and individualist teachings of modern society, embodied a sense of active individual choice and demonstrated considerable self-reflection. People adopting this orientation attempted to construct their own values and identities, and used this to try to create a kinder community, rather than drawing piecemeal on a more fixed set of values. While this orientation stressed collective responses and mutual aid, it also more explicitly recognised that individuals have a responsibility to themselves and others. In this way, if someone takes advantage of their goodwill, or does not reciprocate their kindness, the response is not necessarily bitterness or disappointment. The combination of both a collective and an individual responsibility for kindness meant that people who adopted this kind of orientation often made a more considered assessment of whether to give help to others.

### Alice

My mum and dad were sort of hippies, they moved here in the 60s; they are definitely from a generation who believed they could make a difference, I think we've lost that a bit now. I was brought up in an environment where people debated and disagreed but still remained friends and it was also very creative and happy. I remember weird family holidays where my mum and her friend took us off hitchhiking. We were just camping, they had no money, and my mum was working in crêperies and picking pears. People were just so kind to us, random strangers, and it really stuck in my mind. I suppose two women with three little kids, people want to help them don't they?

When I was 18 I went away for a while, travelling and working in all sorts of jobs. I craved the anonymity of a city, being around like-minded people and never having to explain yourself. So I've lived in cities and I've lived in villages, but growing up in a small community, I think I've always had that as a model for living. It's given me the sense that I want to find a group where it's OK to give and to be known, I suppose it is a sense of family, to have that sense of community.

For me, when you help someone you hope that you engender a sense of wanting to help in other people and even if some people do end up ripping you off, they probably didn't mean to at the time. I think the more you force kindness on people, it actually steamrollers in the end, it's like a charm offensive isn't it? It's like [philosopher] Paolo Freire, that it's not the banking concept of education, it's a give and take and the leader's learning as well. It's not like, 'I've given too much now', it's a flow, it's like the weather systems, it balances automatically. I don't think it's about doing it because it's 'morally right', notions of duty and care as a moral burden don't sit easy with me.

I'm a great believer in trying to accept people for what they are and what they give; one of the main reasons I would not help somebody, is if they don't operate from that kind of value set. There's so many things that have happened in my life that you could get bitter and twisted about and you have to let go because you can waste lots of energy on that. Sometimes I'm able to see that their behaviour is about something going on for them and I try and forgive them for it, because I'm very judgemental, that's one of the worst characteristics I have!

What people forget is that if someone asks, it's nice to be able to give them something, it makes you feel happy, doesn't it? I like the sense of being able to offer some advice or give them a bit of a support or kindness, so it's quite selfish really because I get a real kick out of it.

I think the old lot are like, 'Oh these bloody newcomers coming in.' They see them as different from themselves and that might be about what they've got or their posh car or whatever. People who've lived here a long time can be funny with new people, treat them as outsiders, and I always try and overturn that because it's the worst thing.

In terms of receiving help, I think I've become more comfortable with it as I've got older, I've become less prideful. I think I've got better humility now and understand that I'm not superwoman. Everybody needs help, I think there probably was a feeling of it being a weakness in some way. I weigh the pros and cons now and know this isn't a big thing to ask and the person I'm asking is able to give it. I wouldn't ask if I thought somebody couldn't give help, because I wouldn't want to put them in a situation.

This orientation seemed to enable people to hold the tensions between the needs of the self and the needs of others without feeling overwhelmed or disillusioned. This orientation could be seen as personally embodying the hybrid combination of older and newer forms of sociality we saw in Hebden. While this might seem like an ideal position in relation to kindliness, there were some risks. The centrality of individual choice meant people adopting this orientation often followed their own personal trajectories, and were perhaps less likely to develop long-term ties in neighbourhoods, potentially creating 'thinner' social ties within communities. Since this orientation also had no conception of giving as a moral duty, those holding it might also struggle to give help to people who do not share their own, more open, values and aspirations. In this sense giving was more contingent,

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dependent on context and relationship, rather than an external moral imperative.

Their greater ease in accepting help might reflect other research which suggests the babyboomer generation are more likely to ask for help than their parents' generation (Mental Health Foundation, 2012). Yet those who adopted this orientation, and spoke easily about accepting help from others, were largely physically capable and had not really needed others to meet their everyday needs. Despite the apparent absorption of a therapeutic culture which allows for self-examination and the expression of personal need, it remains to be seen how this generation will cope with the emotional challenges of ageing, diminished capacity and isolation.

## **Orientations to helping**

This section has explored how people's approaches to kindness are shaped by orientations constructed through their lived experience. These orientations emerge from the way people absorb and respond to the world in which they find themselves. They are implicit and taken for granted because they are lived and not necessarily consciously reflected upon or articulated.

They illustrate how people's experiences can generate a range of reactions to giving and receiving help. For example, if people have experience of not being supported or have negative experiences where giving is simply a one-way street then they can express feelings of bitterness or resentment and feel disillusioned about the capacity of human beings to give. Similarly, prevailing messages of self-reliance and independence can make it difficult for people to ask for help and they can feel shame at any expression of their own vulnerability. These kinds of emotional responses are key in understanding why people might not ask for help or deny help from others. People may defend themselves against feelings of humiliation, vulnerability or disappointment by suffering through difficulty and hiding their needs. Yet, living without help in this way can create a vicious cycle, where people refuse help in an attempt to avoid vulnerability, yet may become increasingly vulnerable, isolated and distressed as a result.

Particular orientations are often associated with specific localities, for example northern working class areas like Hebden can often foster 'traditional' and 'rescuer' orientations. In the case of these orientations the focus on helping others and collective responsibility, in turn, helps to perpetuate the thick social ties and neighbourliness which characterise the area. We can think of this as a virtuous cycle, where people grow up in a specific culture, absorb the values of a place, and then enact those values in the way in which they engage with helping in their locality. Yet such virtuous cycles can be created as we saw in the newer cosmopolitan Hebden Bridge. People who expressed orientations such as the activist or empathic were drawn to the area because they saw a fit with their value systems and then became engaged in a process of co-construction with likeminded others. These orientations seemed to generate more loose, dispersed social networks and produced much of the group based activity that characterised the town.

While we have constructed four orientations from our research, it is important to emphasise that these are not fixed or static in individuals or in any way definitive. We have merely used them as a way to highlight the various ways that people attempt to negotiate discursive and emotional

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conflicts in navigating kindness in their everyday lives. What is important is that, in shaping a landscape that fosters kindness, various emotional responses need to be considered alongside considerations of wider policy, discourse and the features of a locality. These arenas are not discrete, but interlinked and interdependent. In the next section we build on this to explore ways of nurturing kindness which address concerns at the policy, neighbourhood and interpersonal levels.

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## 4 CULTIVATING THE LANDSCAPE OF HELPING

This section identifies various conditions which enabled the fostering of kindness. We emphasise the need to address the social and physical environment, the content of messages about help and support, and to consider people's emotional responses to giving and receiving help.

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It seems clear that social connections increase the likelihood that people will be known to one another, have their needs identified and have people to draw on for support. Social connections increase interpersonal trust and means we are more likely to give and receive help (Lindley, *et al.*, 2012).

It is equally clear that when people have little connection with each other, they are more likely to develop ideas about other people based on stereotypes, misperceptions and projections. The vignettes illustrate how the newly arrived could feel that local people were unwelcoming and more established residents complained that newcomers 'kept themselves to themselves'. This lack of interpersonal knowledge, connection and trust meant that there was often little contact between these two sections of the community and help was sometimes only given within smaller known groups.

A mistrust generated by a lack of mutual exchange can set up a self-perpetuating cycle where individuals and communities become divided or even hostile to each other. This is not to say that communities or interest groups should always be integrated as there is a real need for people to have a sense of belonging to groups of like-minded people. However, it is important that there are interconnections between communities in order to create an environment which is tolerant, overlapping and open. This kind of culture helps people to feel that they can 'dare to be kind' (Dalley, *et al.*, 2012; Harris, 2004).

Earlier in the report we described kindness as 'neighbourliness enacted'. Therefore, in identifying mechanisms which foster kindness, we inevitably describe those which simultaneously build neighbourliness. What concerns

us here is cultivating the ‘background hum of sociability and support’ (Forrest and Bridge, 2006) which is more likely to result in actual acts of kindness, or the manifestation of ‘latent neighbourliness’ (Mann, 1954).

It is important to note that the mechanisms we identify do not exist in isolation – they are interrelated and interdependent. They came together in Hebden in a specific and unique way as part of a whole landscape. While we do not claim that this landscape is ideal or perfect, it does appear that the transition from a traditional cohesive mill town to a more diverse and cosmopolitan community has been managed relatively well and, as such, we think it offers broader lessons about cultivating kindness. In Chapter 2, we described a rich ecology of help, support, open-mindedness, organisational nodes, orientations, attachments and connectivities, with a unique social mix, culture and ecology. This rich ecology evolved organically and cannot simply be reproduced elsewhere. However, it has certain key features which, in principle, may be reproducible in other contexts, if they are understood holistically and contextually.



Looking down on Hebden Bridge  
Bill Marsden collection,  
Pennine Horizons Digital Archive

## Creating a shared myth

Our description of Hebden highlights how important it is that people feel a strong sense of the value of the place in which they live and the people who live there (Abrams, 2006). In our vignettes we saw that people placed value on their locality and, in doing so, they valued both themselves and their neighbours and felt a desire to invest energy in those around them. This sense of place can be built; a locality can develop a reputation, just as Hebden Bridge was transformed by people who built its reputation as a creative centre, culminating in the slogan ‘It’s so Hebden Bridge’. Blackshaw Head experienced a similar renewal as a rural village, instigated by a newsletter and expressed through an annual fete. These myths are constructed and maintained through discourse which is shared on social media, demonstrated in creative events, collectively defended when necessary, and sustained by the considerable material outcomes of this creative self-belief. In this sense Hebden’s reputation persists in the minds of the people who live there, making it a ‘real’, as well as an ‘imagined’, community (Anderson, 1991) with concrete economic and social relations, as well as an enhanced self-concept. Its ‘real’ effects in Hebden include the preservation of the independent cinema, a local theatre, the town hall development and the creation of a town square. This is important given the wider changes in society we have referred

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to earlier. Imagined communities do not need to rely on regular face-to-face interactions between members, but can be constructed in the imaginations of the people who perceive themselves as part of it (Harris, 2003).

Hebden can be seen as exceptional in having a concentration of people with orientations to kindness who possess the skills or time to devote to build this 'myth'. Social capital wasn't evenly distributed within the area and not all of Hebden benefitted from such reputational advantage. The Dodnaze estate was at some distance from the town centre, had less cultural and social capital to draw upon and residents struggled to create a narrative about the place which was broad enough to encompass both the older and newer sections of the community. Yet while many people who lived in Dodnaze estate felt little connection to the cosmopolitan and creative myth of Hebden, they could relate to messages about the landscape and their environment.

This highlights the importance of creating a narrative about a place which is broad and inclusive enough to encompass diverse connections to a place or neighbourhood. This is not just a question of better marketing. Most communities have positive unifying features around which a narrative can be built but the creation of an inclusive narrative requires forms of organisation, activity and overlapping networks where different sections of the community find common cause and come together. These can be built by, and expressed through, community-wide events, communicated in local media and through newsletters and joint ventures around shared values and interests. However it requires a conscious effort, and time and sensitivity to articulate this narrative about place, especially if diverse communities who may have alternative visions can come together.

## **Building common cause**

The importance of shared values was a recurring theme in people's discussion of kindness. When people felt they had values in common or were on the same wavelength with others they were more likely to give and receive help. These values often superseded any specific political or religious outlook and concerned having similar interpersonal values about the importance of mutual support, fairness and equity. These values were often articulated through shared needs and it was important that opportunities were developed for people to come together to articulate such values and build common cause.

In Hebden, communities expressed these shared values when uniting to defend the landscape, as they did in our activist vignette, or by coming together through shared socio-economic interests in Blackshaw Head when people worked together as a group to buy oil because it gave them greater bargaining power. These were all ways in which different segments of the community, with apparently little in common, were connected by a unifying cause. This offered a means to break down barriers and misperceptions, enabling people to appreciate that they may actually have similar values and experiences. If we develop common cause with others, we are more likely to develop relationships of trust and be willing to help each other.

## **Third spaces**

When we described the features of Hebden it was clear that there had been a conscious attempt to create public spaces, such as the town square, where people would come into daily informal contact or where public events could

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be staged. Oldenburg (1989) has referred to these as 'third spaces'. These are neutral public spaces, neither home nor work, that promote sociability and consolidate social norms and trust (see also Harris, 2008; Forrest and Bridge, 2006). Other research has specifically highlighted the importance of green spaces in strengthening social ties, developing social activities and creating a sense of belonging (Kuo, *et al.*, 1998). Indeed, as we saw in Dodnaze, creating pleasant environments for shared activities, such as children's play areas or dog walking, can stimulate informal human contact and connection (Harris, 2007a).

Public space has long been an essential feature of urban housing design, yet it is not always well used or 'owned' by people in the neighbourhood. We described earlier in the report examples of local people coming together for 'clean-up' days where they would pick up litter or clear common ground. Building connections in communities involves more than providing a physical space; it is about tapping into the emotional connections people have with their neighbourhood so people develop a sense of attachment to that space.

## Hubs of helping

When we looked at the features of Hebden we saw that developing a sense of community was easier when there was an identified focal point where people could come together to share information and make contact with others. Hebden is unusual in that it has managed to retain much of its local infrastructure and many of these focal points took more traditional forms such as the local shop, pub, Post Office, church or community centre. There were also many interest groups, such as the WI, which operated in a similar way, allowing contact with others and access to networks and information. What these had in common was that they were not ostensibly established in order to provide support, but they functioned as informal hubs of helping which mediated information and enabled people to identify whether others might need help and what help might be available.

Yet in many areas such local facilities have been eroded. Many residents in Dodnaze missed the local shop which had closed some years earlier. This loss was not ameliorated by a burgeoning of formal groups in the area, such as the Hebden Bridge Community Association, which tended to be more popular with the more cosmopolitan residents of the town. This seemed to reflect wider research which has noted that a culture of engagement in formal groups is relatively alien to most people in working class areas, unlike one-to-one aid or informal association which is used extensively (Williams, 2003). As Harris (2004, p. 4) notes, more traditional working class sociability tends to be based on ties to people *who know one another* (network density); rather than the more extensive forms of middle class networks (network diversity). Therefore in working class areas the loss of these facilities is likely to be more keenly felt as they provide a valuable social role in communities. This highlights the need to retain or develop existing facilities to ensure that hubs of helping continue to exist in communities.

Another way in which the loss of these hubs was addressed in Hebden was by the development of virtual hubs such as internet groups, which enabled helping. In Blackshaw Head the need for communication across the village had resulted in the development of an online Google group. This demonstrates that hubs can be virtual as well as concrete (Harris, 2003). Virtual hubs can also take away the embarrassment of asking for help by acting as a mediator, communicating needs and making them visible. It may also offer a more neutral and bounded environment for those keen

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to retain a sense of privacy. While playing an important function, virtual hubs cannot replace the need for face-to-face contact which may be required to develop affective ties and trust, especially in older or working class communities. Therefore investment in a variety of different hubs, and retaining more traditional forms, is important to mediate contact between people and enable helping.

## Creating kinder economies

While not all members of communities engage with social centres or virtual groups, most will use local services or shops at some point. In Hebden there is a wealth of small businesses and co-operative ventures and these often functioned as local hubs and helped foster kindliness. Having social enterprises whose business aims were about more than the bottom-line seemed to express positive values about care and human connection that were shared across the older and newer communities. Indeed a high level of mutual support was often necessary for the creation of small business ventures. Great Rock Co-op in Blackshaw Head was an example of this, drawing producers from across the communities. There was an imperative for diverse local businesses to get involved in the co-op as it was a means of generating custom, yet that same need also drove social networking and a positive personal ethic. This echoed the older form of kinder economies expressed through some of the local pubs and local shops. Therefore in some ways it can be seen as an emergent social economy (Bouchard, 2009) where local systems of employment and trade are intertwined with pro-social values and principles and businesses are not exclusively motivated by profit.

It is possible for planners to build social business collaboration into policy when developing strategic plans for areas or localities. Its success in Hebden relied on people having the skills, resources and time to devote to putting into practice alternative business models, as well as resisting threats to this ethos, such as the encroachment of big impersonal corporations. This illustrates the need to develop capacity across an area, addressing engagement, ownership and enriching networks in order to provide a basis for such collaboration and activism.

## Nurturing bonders and bridgers

Every community needs people who work to strengthen the bonds between individual members *within* communities ('bonders'), and people who can work *across* different sections of the community ('bridgers') (Putnam, 1995). Bonders were often evident in more traditional older communities which tended to produce denser social networks and 'thicker' ties within more bounded communities, as illustrated by the traditionalist and the rescuer orientations. Bridgers, on the other hand, were often evident in newer communities with higher levels of social and cultural capital which tended to produce looser, but more expansive and permeable, ties and networks, as illustrated by the activist and empathic orientations.

In the past few decades the notion of using community champions has become current in community development work and while community bridgers and bonders are undoubtedly champions of sorts within their communities, they play a particular role here in relation to cultivating kindness. When attempting to foster kindliness in communities these people

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are key and it may be important to identify, work with and foster such individuals in specific communities.

## Making kindness palatable

While we can nurture kindly environments by shaping the landscape in which people live, we also need to address the way in which help in general is presented. When we started this research we quickly realised that framing kindness in terms of help or support might be off-putting because of its connotations of neediness, vulnerability or dependency. Indeed, one of the most striking of our early findings was how people were often reluctant to ask for help and how, at times, they felt uncomfortable receiving help. Many of the people we spoke to were aware of this reluctance and had found ways to make help more palatable so that people could accept it. This was often about the way in which help was presented. Several people gave examples of how they had presented receiving help as giving. For example, one participant had encouraged a shy resident to attend an event by asking her to make a cake, which was a particular skill of hers, and personally accompanied her to the evening. Similarly, in another project, women were invited to knit jumpers for battery hens who had lost their feathers and had recently been rehomed. While the chickens were no doubt in need, the organiser's main focus was to enable women to come together, and form friendships and connections. People's desire to meet their own needs through giving to others cannot be underestimated.

Our orientations to kindness made clear that our life experiences and emotional responses can affect how people respond to well-meaning attempts to help or engage them. In other words, providing new social opportunities or interventions will not automatically result in kindness. For example, in one JRF initiative which was launched to tackle loneliness in communities in Yorkshire, the very use of the term loneliness made it difficult for people to engage and overcome the shame, embarrassment and denial that can accompany being identified as lonely (Allen, *et al.*, 2014). In a similar way, we noted that people were often more able to accept help when it was not explicitly framed as help or support. Such reluctance is not helped by wider social policy and discourses in society which position independence and self-reliance as privileged and admired qualities.

This approach highlights how important it is to tailor the way in which help is offered. Needing help from others need not inevitably result in feeling dependent or vulnerable as it often depends on the way help is offered (Clark, *et al.*, 1998). A few participants we spoke to were able to articulate how they tailored their approach to giving help according to their knowledge of different people, demonstrating they had thought about the issue. One person, for example, recalled how she was brusque with one neighbour who resisted help and would only accept it if she brooked no discussion, yet with another neighbour she was careful not to undermine him and to be sensitive in the way she offered help.

People also commonly presented the help they gave as 'no trouble' or part of something they were doing anyway. As individuals we constantly tailor our responses to others, yet when we work in organisations the demands of time and resource make this a more challenging task. However, we can be aware of issues such as language and presentation, thinking through the sensitivities that people have around helping, and design initiatives that address those in their tone, approach and delivery. Inspiration could be sought from projects which try to address men's reluctance to seek

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help. For example, a mental health project framed in football language was successful in engaging men in getting support (Spandler, *et al.*, 2014b). Non-help-focused conversations and settings can help people express their needs indirectly, through something else that they feel more comfortable talking about, such as knitting, dog walking or football. Equally, for communities where formal group activities are less familiar or comfortable, there might need to be more focus on facilitating one-to-one connections between people, using peer support or time banking schemes.

These examples demonstrate ways in which people are enabled to maintain their dignity and independence while receiving help from others. This illustrates Arthur Frank's suggestion that human life is characterised by the tension between vulnerability and dignity:

Humans are vulnerable, in our bodies, our psyches, and our souls.

Human life is a struggle between dignity and vulnerability. I understand dignity as an ideal of the self we would like to be – how we would like to conduct ourselves, complemented by how we would like others to treat us. Vulnerability is the constant threat of the self's dignity being undermined.

–Frank, 2012, p. 2

This approach is distinct from that of prevailing welfare policy which largely presents vulnerability in negative terms, things to be resisted, denied or denigrated. Those messages are reinforced by the media and compel people to present as capable and independent if they are to maintain their dignity. Therefore broader policy messages could be shaped so as to enable people to hold a balance between vulnerability and dignity. We saw clearly in the orientations that people navigated a rocky course between these two positions, echoing tensions in wider discourses around helping. While people understandably wish to maintain their independence, policy messages should not undermine people's willingness to ask for help because of rigid notions of self-reliance and polarised ideals of independence versus dependence.

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## 5 CONCLUSION

Whether it is possible, or even desirable, to intervene in communities to directly foster kindness, is a question beyond the scope of this research. If this was considered a laudable aim, then identifying who could or should take responsibility for developing such initiatives would need serious consideration. We have, however, identified some of the conditions that make it more likely for kindness to flourish.

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In particular, we have highlighted the importance of the reinvention of sociality – the development of ways in which people create and maintain trust and relationships which foster kindness. This research has several key messages.

### **Communities can be re-imagined**

This study illustrates the possibilities of making the transition from traditional to more contemporary forms of sociality. Hebden provided a good example of how older forms of sociality have been re-imagined to accommodate social change, using the energy of a new generation, drawing on new ideas, practices and technologies. To some degree, we witnessed a two-way readiness to support this hybridity, from both the older traditional communities and the newer more liberal incomers. The more settled and closely connected older Hebden community has co-existed relatively harmoniously with the more open and liberal cosmopolitanism of newcomers. Modern forms of sociality have reinvigorated older forms of neighbourhood-based community solidarity and provided a fertile ground for the development of new networks of interdependence and mutuality. This, on the whole, has avoided the pitfall of either idealising or denigrating the new, or romanticising or dismissing the old.

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## Kindliness can persist through social change

This study also counters a number of popular assumptions about kindliness and forms of sociality, namely that they are the sole preserve of organic, place-based communities with stable family structures and community ties – the very factors that are perceived to be threatened by modern forms of mobility, individualism and consumerism. Our study demonstrates that attachment to place can be an important emotional glue, but that this is as much to do with imaginative identification as geographical rootedness. In Hebden this identification was sustained by a love of the landscape as well as an attachment to an idea of community, to a way of life and to people they felt they could trust and relate to. Such an attachment can be as important in more virtual and networked forms of sociality which characterise modern communities of interest.

## The rise of individualism challenges kindliness

It was clear that, despite Hebden's reputation as embodying alternative values, people were still affected by discourses and practices which have been seen as antithetical to kindliness, such as competitive individualism (James, 2008; Gerhardt, 2010) and rigid notions of self-reliance and independence (Spandler, *et al.*, 2014a). This was not a process of people simply internalising wider discourses, as these public messages interacted with people's life stories and personal orientations to kindliness in complex ways. The wider tension between individualism and collectivism was illustrated most acutely in relation to ideals of independence and fear of dependency, where people expressed a fear of asking for help.

## Re-invigorating connections fosters kindliness

To some degree, these discursive and emotional tensions were mediated through the various mechanisms we have highlighted in generating opportunities for connections. For example the creation of interconnected networks, forging common cause, renewed use of public spaces as third spaces, and the development of community facilities as hubs of helping. These opportunities for connection enable people to forge new forms of care and concern, not necessarily based on older forms of obligation and self-sacrifice. Here it is possible to aspire to a sense of interdependency which avoids the dichotomy between self-reliance or dependency, enabling people to hold the balance between vulnerability and dignity.

## The economy can not be ignored

Finally, the study also highlights the importance of a local pro-social economy where the values of reciprocity among the small business community were sustained in day-to-day transactions. This underlines the importance attributed to face-to-face interaction, and the uniformity of chains and the anonymity of supermarkets are actively avoided. Hebden may prefigure what Jeremy Rifkin (2010) proposes as the emergence of a new economic order in which smaller, more laterally organised economies exist alongside larger, more vertically integrated corporations. These smaller, distributed economies are marked by localism, co-operation and a pro-social

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focus. The relationship in Hebden between such economic organisation and kindness highlights the need to think about how the economic as well as the social world is organised when we consider how to foster kindness. Similarly, the development of community-owned services such as shops and pubs would be another way of reinventing the social which may help replace the demise of older style 'hubs of helping'.<sup>1</sup>

The reinvention of sociality we describe is not unique to Hebden, but more research is required to see how kindness is fostered in different places, especially in more socially deprived areas and culturally and ethnically diverse communities. Kindness, especially because of its associations with support and care, is also a gendered phenomenon and it would be worth more explicitly exploring the gendered dynamics of informal support in further research.

In sum, achieving a culture of kindness is primarily a relational question where pro-social and altruistic behaviours cannot be considered apart from wider processes of individualisation which are often perceived as threatening social bonds. Hebden is by no means immune to these processes. However the study suggests that, given certain conditions, people can develop new settlements between traditional and modern cultures of kindness, in terms of shared attachments and values, actively sustained connections, and imagining how things can be different.

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# NOTES

- 1 The Plunkett Foundation was established to help predominantly rural communities set up and run a wide range of co-operatives and community-owned enterprises such as community-owned shops, co-operative pubs and community food enterprises ([www.plunkett.co.uk](http://www.plunkett.co.uk)).

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