

CONNECTED  
COMMUNITIES

# Mooreclose

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# Purpose of the report Audience

This report introduces the Connected Communities research that was conducted in Moorclose, detailing the background to our approach and its underpinning theoretical concepts. An overview of demographic data of the community of Moorclose is also provided to illustrate the socio-economic composition of the area.

The first stage of the Connected Communities theory of change is to ‘understand’ the community being researched. This is done by surveying residents in order to understand their social networks and identify their needs. Within this report, we have described the processes undertaken to do this, including the recruitment and training of community researchers, the data collection process, and the results yielded.

Following this ‘understand’ stage, the approach then seeks to ‘involve’ communities in the joint process of designing interventions to meet everyone’s needs. This report describes the three community feedback events that took place, along with the focused work carried out between key partners and the community researchers, identifying and developing solutions to strengthen the social networks within Moorclose.

This report is aimed at:

- The communities who took part in the research: We hope it will help you to understand your community better and inspire you to take action to build an even stronger Moorclose.
- Anyone interested in learning more about this take on community development: We hope it will increase your awareness of different ways to engage with communities.
- Those working in community development or public health: We hope it will inform community development initiatives that impact on Moorclose and inform ways of engaging with the community.
- Local authorities and policy makers: We hope it will influence policy that impacts on Moorclose, and also inform ways of engaging with the community.

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This Connected Communities project provides a case study example of collaborative research practice, which was supported in kind by Cumbria Constabulary. We would like to thank Sergeant Mitchell Franks for his energy in his role as strategic lead in the project within Moorclose. The local authorities also played a key role in the Stronger Together project, being based in the Allerdale Local Focus Hub (ALFH), where partners across sectors collaborated to share local knowledge and insight.

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# Executive summary

## Chapter One: An Introduction to Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a participatory action research approach. It seeks to work with communities to conduct their own community research, share the research results with key stakeholders and co-produce interventions to meet the needs of the community. The specific methods and outcomes of each Connected Communities project differ slightly, responding to unique features within each community. However, they all seek to promote community capital, which is measured through improvements in well-being, capacity, citizenship and social value.

## Chapter Two: Community Focus – An Overview of Moorclose

The area of Moorclose in Workington was selected for this study after consultation with local community stakeholders across West Cumbria. Moorclose households are home to predominantly white, working-class individuals or families, with almost half the population living in housing association accommodation. Moorclose experiences income and employment deprivation above national averages, with significantly larger proportions of working-age adults with no qualifications. The proportion of children living in low-income families is above the regional and national averages. But while statistical data can be useful in providing an overview, it can also miss a great deal of detail. The numbers paint a picture of a community experiencing hardship and with few prospects, but they fail to identify the individual and community assets already existing within Moorclose. This is exactly what Stronger Together sought to achieve by using a Connected Communities approach to develop the capacity and resilience of Moorclose.

## Chapter Three: Collaborative Community Research

Collaboration is key in carrying out effective community research. Taking time to create positive working relationships with partners across all sectors can ensure that appropriate resources and knowledge are shared with the right people. Existing groups that work with children and young people (formal and informal) can be an effective means of recruiting children in research and can also be helpful in gaining and maintaining contact with parents. The strong relationship between the researchers and these groups provided a solid foundation for the project, with the project staff contributing their knowledge, skills and resources – all of which were invaluable in developing a well-organised, engaging project.

## Chapter Four: Survey Results

Most people in Moorclose said that they were satisfied with the area as a place to live and agreed that people in Moorclose look out for each other. The quiet environment, community spirit and local amenities were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers identified as drugs and a lack of places for people to meet. Key areas for improvement were identified as better services for young people and better parking and traffic measures. Connections between family, friends and neighbours are strong in Moorclose, but connections with organisations are weaker. However, those who do have connections with local organisations and services really value these services. People who feel lonely have fewer social networks to draw support from, especially emotional support.

People's self-reported health is poorer than the national average, with older people, people with disabilities and people living alone reporting the poorest levels of health. The average mental well-being score in Moorclose is higher than the national average. Those with an impairment or health condition were significantly more likely to feel lonely and have lower levels of mental well-being. In general terms, people in Moorclose reported feeling less lonely than the general population. The loneliest group of people were young mothers. The least lonely people were 18 to 24-year-olds and those over 75 years old. There was a strong link between health and loneliness, and connections were associated significantly with better mental health.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations from the Research

The Connected Communities approach helped children to connect with their community while realising their role and capacity and developing their citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Moorclose, with weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Moorclose that were identified as being in the greatest need were young mothers and those with health issues. In light of these results, it is recommended that Moorclose:

1. Responds to physical and mental health needs through effective community models of social prescribing.
2. Develops projects that provide social action opportunities for children and young people.
3. Celebrates the strong bonds within Moorclose.
4. Connects vulnerable young mothers to reduce loneliness and social isolation.
5. Provides support for those in the community experiencing substance abuse.
6. Builds linking social capital through new and effective forms of connection and co-produced services between the community of Moorclose and the local authorities, and other public agencies that represent them.

## Chapter Six: Sharing Results and Working Together

The Community Shout Out event brought together community researchers and other key stakeholders to recognise and celebrate the achievements of the young community researchers, and also to invite people to join the Stronger Together Action Group (STAG) to put research into action. The dedicated STAG provided a structured, organised space for partners to share their working and identify ways to collaborate, all working towards the same goal based on shared values. One limitation of this project is the lack of representation of elected members for Moorclose (acknowledging representation was given by an elected member for another ward who was the Chair of West Cumbria Community Safety Partnership) and community residents on STAG.

The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly impacted the group's ability to make connections with the community and develop projects that sought to specifically respond to the research findings, but also showed how responsive and resilient such groups can be in times of crisis. A key learning from the project has been the importance of people and partnerships, which can lead to innovative and inclusive ways of working but can also be compounded by complex histories and power dynamics, different ways of working, and limited capacity to invest in developing relationships. Reflexive, adaptive approaches have shown to be effective in slowly starting to overcome these challenges.

## Chapter Seven: Co-produced Projects to Enhance Community Capital

A number of collaborative projects emerged from the STAG in response to the research findings, focused on increasing provision for children and young people, developing social networks for women experiencing loneliness, and developing capacity and resilience at Moorclose Community Centre. Increased provision for children and young people came through securing funding for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme, providing youth provision to deter antisocial behaviour, and offering funding from the Tackling Inequalities Fund.

A women's group provided a space for women to develop their social networks, meet new people and connect with local organisations. The capacity and resilience of Moorclose Community Centre was developed through mentoring, supporting funding bids and helping staff to build their skills and vision around funding, to think beyond current delivery, and to identify funding streams for the Community Centre. STAG members helped the Community Centre to develop networks with organisations that can offer support and that provided practical and financial support during lockdown.

PART 1: BACKGROUND - CHAPTER 1

# An introduction to Connected Communities

The University of Central Lancashire’s (UCLan) Centre for Citizenship and Community has developed a participatory action research approach called Connected Communities (Parsfield, et al., 2015).

Through working with community researchers to survey residents, the research seeks to understand communities and explore how different interventions build resilient, inclusive communities and empower individuals to take greater control of their lives through relationships based on shared concerns and mutual trust. This process can then serve to enhance community capital.

Connected Communities research has been carried out across the UK and internationally. In Broadgate, Preston, faith-based organisations were found to have a central role in the social networks of residents, but this afforded few opportunities to ‘bump into’ new people. A new community group was therefore created to provide opportunities to develop new social connections (Ridley & Morris, 2018). Similarly, research in central London found that young professionals who moved to the city were more likely to experience loneliness, so a mentoring programme between young professionals and older people (thecaresfamily.org.uk) was created to connect people and develop social networks. In a research project spanning the UK, France and China (uclan.ac.uk/research/activity/odessa), the Connected Communities approach was used to develop innovative ways to develop technology and interventions to support older people to age well in their own homes.

Connected Communities is not intended to be a fixed methodological framework. Instead, it is a set of research stages that can adapted within different contexts. These stages are summarised in the table opposite:



*Community capital refers to “the sum of assets including relationships in a community and the value that accrues from these”*

*(Parsfield, et al., 2015, p. 12).*



<b>Recruit and train community researchers</b>	Community researchers are recruited, usually through local voluntary sector partners. These individuals live in the communities being researched, and receive accredited training in research methods, data protection and health and safety, among other issues.
<b>Survey residents</b>	Community researchers survey residents using a questionnaire completed via a face-to-face interview during door-to-door enquiries. The questionnaire captures the personal and demographic characteristics of each respondent (age, gender, employment status etc), and data about their subjective well-being through nationally validated well-being research survey tools. It also seeks to understand residents’ perceptions of their community and their social networks.
<b>Social network analysis and well-being analysis</b>	All respondents’ surveys are analysed to understand the social relationships within each community. The resulting analysis enables researchers to understand patterns of connectivity and isolation specific to each area, and to identify key people, places and institutions that are (or have the potential to be) central assets within networks that bring people together.
<b>Community feedback and conversation</b>	The results are reported back to the community and key stakeholders at participatory events. This initiates conversations that act as a key catalyst for subsequent intervention projects seeking to use the community’s assets to tackle local issues relating to social isolation or low levels of well-being.
<b>Co-production of intervention project</b>	Having reflected on the research findings and utilising personal insights into local assets and problems, residents work with local partner organisations to design and deliver projects to address the issues that emerge.
<b>Evaluation report</b>	Throughout the course of the approach, data is gathered to provide an evaluation of the project’s impact upon participants’ social networks and well-being. This can then contribute to sustainably embedding the benefits and lessons of the process in the local area.

By following the steps outlined above, community capacity can be enhanced by the participating communities.

Table 1: Connected Communities key stages

## Defining Community Capital

Community Capital is measured through four social dividends: well-being, citizenship, capacity and social value. These are described in the table below:

<b>Well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling part of a community</li> <li>• Greater life satisfaction due to enhanced relationships</li> <li>• Social support protecting against harm to mental health and physical health.</li> </ul>
<b>Citizenship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater sense of empowerment</li> <li>• More skills to access work and education</li> <li>• Collective agency – cooperating to get things done in society.</li> </ul>
<b>Capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits spread through networks rather than helping only individuals</li> <li>• Influential change makers can be identified to efficiently target greater returns on investment</li> <li>• Connected individuals contribute to greater community capital – and benefit in turn from that increased capital.</li> </ul>
<b>Social value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased participation in work, training and volunteering</li> <li>• Increased resilience and viability of community services</li> <li>• Notional savings to public budgets through preventative demand management.</li> </ul>

By following the steps outlined above, community capacity can be enhanced by the participating communities.

The process of stimulating community capital through a Connected Communities approach has been translated into a three-stage theory of change: understanding the local situation, relationships and patterns of isolation; involving people in creating a solution; and connecting people to each another to reduce isolation. This is summarised below:



Figure One: Connected Communities Theory of Change

## Community capital and public policy

The benefits of involving communities in making positive changes in their communities has long been acknowledged in national public policy. The ‘Big Society’, introduced by David Cameron in 2010, sought to promote citizenship and therefore reduce pressures on public services. The Civil Society Strategy, published in 2018, sought to “build a country that works for everyone” (Cabinet Office, 2018a, p. 12). This strategy is based on the five foundations of social value: people; places; the social sector; the private sector (promoting business, finance, and technology); and the public sector.

Most recently, the Levelling Up White Paper proposes to provide communities with more power, stating that “power is also generated locally, by the voluntary contributions of citizens and public servants taking responsibility for realising the changes they want to see” (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022, p. 215). This development of local power is proposed to take the form of a review of neighbourhood governance, piloting new models for community partnership, piloting a Community Covenants model, and involving communities in decision making around assets, planning and social economy, and procurement. The focus here is on communities, local authorities and the private sector working collaboratively, with central government having minimal input.

The potentially preventative and restorative impact that social networks can have on individual and community well-being has also been a focus of UK policy development over the last decade. This has been seen through the introduction of a Minister for Loneliness and the publication of a national loneliness strategy (Cabinet Office, 2018b). Loneliness and social networks were brought to the forefront of social policy during the Covid-19 pandemic, with concerns that social distancing would have a pervasive impact beyond those already experiencing loneliness. Indeed, during this time the population reported worsening mental health, particularly young people (ONS, 2021).

Amid the challenges Covid-19 brought, the pandemic did bring some positivity, with mutual aid groups emerging across the country, seeing neighborhoods and communities coming together to support one another. It has been argued that the long-term sustainability of such groups will be largely dependent on the social networks and social capital within communities (Wilson, et al., in press). MP Danny Kruger was commissioned by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson to report on how these community-powered initiatives could be sustained to help the UK “build back better” after the pandemic, with recommendations outlined in the Levelling Up Our Communities report (Kruger, 2020). It is yet to be seen how many of these recommendations are enacted, but some have been included in the Levelling Up White Paper, suggesting an acknowledgment of the power of community capacity.

The past decade’s policy focus on promoting civic society and challenging loneliness speaks to the value that can be accrued by involving communities in the development of services that impact on them, particularly those that strengthen social networks. As discussed above, the Covid-19 pandemic provided overwhelming evidence of the human capacity to care for and connect with others, and the ability of communities to self-organise in times of crisis. However, the effectiveness of this policy in driving change will depend upon engaging the communities on whom it impacts; this is essential in ensuring that ‘levelling up’ and ‘building back better’ become more than mere slogans.

While a Connected Communities approach cannot be a silver bullet – whereby simply involving individuals in community development and strengthening community capital will overcome all social issues experienced in any given area – there is undoubtedly value in community-led action and targeted interventions. It is also not only the end product (i.e. the intervention) that is of value; the process of being involved in a co-productive exercise can benefit the individual and the community.

### Study purpose

The overall aim of the Stronger Together project was to improve community capital and thereby reduce the vulnerability of local places. It aims to help empower vulnerable communities to support themselves and to strengthen their sense of having a key stake in the affairs of their community.

Specifically, the Stronger Together Ormsgill project sought to:

1. Understand the existing barriers in Moorclose that prevent residents engaging with Focus Hub partners.
2. Produce specific outcomes that develop trust and confidence between Moorclose residents and Focus Hub partners (evidenced through increased reporting of problems at their infancy and more pro-social behaviour).
3. Support and empower the community to find their own solutions to the problems faced.
4. Reduce the community’s reliance on agencies.

### Summary

Connected Communities, a participatory action research approach, seeks to work with communities to conduct their own community research, share the research with key stakeholders and co-produce interventions to meet the needs of the community. The specific methods and outcomes of each Connected Communities project differ slightly, responding to unique features within each community. However, they all seek to promote community capital, which is measured through improvements in well-being, capacity, citizenship and social value.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 2

# Community focus – an overview of Moorclose

The Connected Communities project introduced in this report was based at the UCLan Westlakes Campus, in Whitehaven, Cumbria, as part of a wider project spanning communities along the Cumbrian coastline.

The area of Moorclose in Workington was selected for this study after consultation with local community stakeholders across West Cumbria, including the local safety partnership and representatives from schools and local authorities. The selection was also informed by local data that will be described below.

### LSOA data

The areas covered by the Connected Communities research included three Local Super Output Areas (LSOAs) of Moorclose (Allerdale 010A, Allerdale 010B and Allerdale 010C). This was because this area is generally viewed as one single community in which similar challenges are perceived. Data from all LSOAs will now be presented.

### Population

Combined, Moorclose has a population of 4,750 (1,428, 1,809 and 1,543 respectively). The community's proportions of children and young people (0-15 years), working-age adults (16-64) and older people (65 plus) are in line with regional and national averages. Almost half of the population lives in rental accommodation (with 43% being social housing), and the remaining housing stock comes largely from private ownership.

### Ethnicity

Moorclose is predominantly White British, making up 99.1% of the population. This is above the Cumbrian average (98.5%) and significantly above average for the UK (85.4%).

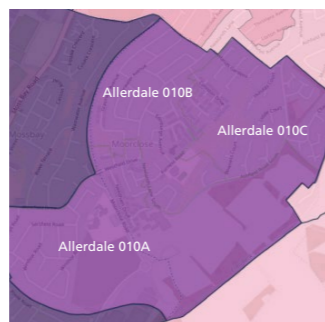


Figure 2: An overview of West Cumbria

### An overview of West Cumbria



- Geographically isolated
- Post industrial area with Sellafield being a major employer
- Polarised social demography
- Pockets of very high deprivation
- Limited services
- Below regional and national averages of education and employment.

Figure 1: An overview of West Cumbria

### Economic and employment profile

The economic and employment profiles of Moorclose differ slightly, so their respective profiles will now be presented separately:

	Economically active residents	Economically inactive	Long term unemployed	Never worked
010A	67%	33%	1.9%	0.9%
010B	65%	35%	1.5%	1.2%
010C	61%	39%	2.9%	1.7%
Cumbria	81%	19%	1.3%	0.4%
UK	75%	25%	1.7%	0.7%

Table 2: Economic and Employment Profile of Moorclose, Cumbria and the UK

All areas experience levels of income and employment deprivation above the national average. However, this is most marked in Allerdale 010C, which, when ranked nationally, is one of the top 10% most deprived LSOAs using this indicator (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019).

### Children and young people

The children and young people's profiles of Moorclose differ slightly, so their respective profiles will now be presented separately:

	Working-age adults with no qualifications	Children living in low-income families
010A	37%	23%
010B	34%	24%
010C	40%	19%
Cumbria	24.2%	12%
UK	22.5%	17%

Table 3: Children and Young People Profile of Ormsgill, Cumbria and the UK

As the table illustrates, Moorclose has a significantly larger proportion of working-age adults with no qualifications. The proportion of children living in low-income families in Allerdale 010A and 010B is significantly above the regional and national averages, with Allerdale 010C falling closer to the national average. Data provided by the then-named Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2019 indicates that Moorclose experiences above national levels of low educational attainment and child poverty. Indeed, when ranked nationally, Allerdale 010B is one of the top 20% most deprived LSOAs for child poverty, as is Allerdale 010A for educational attainment.

### Health and Social Care

When asked, 41% of residents in Moorclose report very good health, with 2.25% reporting very bad health. In Cumbria, 45% report very good health, with 1.3% reporting very bad health. Nationally, these figures sit at 47% and 1.2% respectively. In Moorclose, 12.25% report that their activity is limited a lot due to health issues. For Cumbria this figure is at 9.7%, while nationally it is at 8.3%. These data suggest that residents in Moorclose experience poorer health outcomes than the local and national averages.

Data provided by the MHCLG (2019) indicates that Moorclose experiences levels of older persons' deprivation that are slightly above the national average. Indeed, when ranked nationally, Moorclose is one of the top 30 to 50% most deprived LSOAs using this indicator.

### Local assets

These data make sobering reading but are not presented to highlight the deficiencies in the community – they simply reflect the challenges the community faces. The community of Moorclose possesses a number of physical assets, providing green space and affordable housing (MHCLG, 2019). It is also situated close to the Cumbrian Coast and is part of a National Cycle Network route. There are also number of facilities in the area, including a large community centre and a busy local shopping area.

### Summary

Moorclose households are home to predominantly white, working-class individuals or families, with almost half the population living in housing association accommodation. Moorclose experiences income and employment deprivation above national averages, with significantly larger proportions of working-age adults with no qualifications. The proportion of children living in low-income families is above the regional and national averages. Statistical data can be useful in providing an overview but can miss a deal of detail. The numbers paint a picture of a community experiencing hardship and with few prospects, but they fail to identify the individual and community assets already existing within Moorclose. This is exactly what Stronger Together sought to achieve by using a Connected Communities approach to develop the capacity and resilience within Moorclose.

**PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 3**

# Collaborative Community Research

**Partnerships with organisations and public services working in Moorclose were essential, both in terms of governing and managing the research project as a whole and also in recruiting young community researchers effectively.**

**Partnership working**

In order to encourage collaboration between key stakeholders and the community of Moorclose, a Stronger Together Development Group was established to lead this project. This was a collaboration between Cumbria Constabulary and Allerdale Borough Council. The group’s purpose and project plan were agreed, and the group served as a forum where local knowledge, skills and expertise could be shared. The project benefited from the full support of the established Allerdale Local Focus Hub Partnership (ALFH).

The ALFH is a problem-solving partnership based in Allerdale with priorities in relation to antisocial behaviour and supporting young people in our most deprived communities. The relationships between partners within the ALFH are positive and committed to supporting change – for the agencies to understand the day-to-day challenges of families and for our communities to thrive, a multi-agency approach must be the direction of travel for the provision of future delivery.

*The relationships between partners within the ALFH are positive and committed to supporting change...*



**Recruitment: Reaching and engaging young community researchers**

A core component of the Connected Communities approach is to involve communities in research in order to develop an understanding of everyone’s needs. This project successfully recruited, trained and deployed 74 community researchers. As you’re about to read, the Connected Communities methodologies adopted in Cumbria differed slightly from the traditional approach, which historically sees only adult members of the community conducting community research in pairs or alone in their own time. In addition to this traditional method, we recruited and trained children as community researchers, and supported them in enacting their citizenship to provide opportunities to be real agents of change. To do this in Moorclose, local children were invited to participate through South Workington Youth Partnership (SWYP), St Joseph’s Catholic High School, and the Fire and Police Cadets.

The children were recruited by utilising connections with organisations that work with children and young people, informed by the expertise and local knowledge of the Stronger Together Development Group. SWYP is a community youth group operating from Moorclose Community Centre that provides engagement opportunities for local children and young people, including those with learning difficulties. The Fire Cadets, based at Workington Community Fire Station in Moorclose, works with young people from throughout West Cumbria.

A number of cadets were from the immediate area. The Police Cadets, although not based in Moorclose and with no young people being from Moorclose, still felt a connection to the area and saw being involved in a project to promote community resilience as part of their civic duty. St Joseph’s Catholic High School is situated approximately half a mile from Moorclose and is the main Catholic secondary for children living in this area. It was felt that the ethos of the Connected Communities research strongly resonated with the school’s mission, which includes supporting the local community.

This project ran from February 2019 to February 2020, during which time 57 children and young people were successfully recruited, trained and acted as young community researchers, with 17 adults supporting this research. The ages of the children ranged from seven to 17, and slightly more boys took part than girls.

To introduce the project to young community researchers, recruitment workshops were held at times when the groups would normally meet (or within school time). This provided opportunities for young people to reflect on what they felt was important in their community and also get any questions about the project answered. A total of seven data collection sessions involving both adult and young community researchers took place. A breakdown of the community research groups can be seen below:

	No. of community researchers	Ages of community researchers	Data collection sessions
Fire cadets	9	14-16	3
Police cadets	7	14-16	2
SWYP	25	4-25	1
St Joseph’s Catholic High School	33	12-13	1

Table 5: Stronger Together Moorclose Community Research Groups

Meeting at Moorclose Community Centre, Workington Fire Station or Workington Children’s Centre (the Minto Centre), the young community researchers were trained in community research skills in a way that was appropriate for their age group, covering issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and personal safety. This also gave young people the chance to practice the surveys on one another and ask questions. The young community researchers assigned themselves into pairs and were then allocated to a youth worker or adult community researchers who chaperoned the young community researchers during their data collection.

## The Research process: Doorstep surveys

Local residents who had been informed about the project and had consented were surveyed through two doorstep data collection sessions. These generated both quantitative and qualitative data to help understand the social connectivity and capital of Moorclose. Completion of the questionnaire took between 15 and 45 minutes, depending upon the interviewer-respondent interaction. To ensure their safety, the doorstep survey method also required the young community researchers to always be accompanied by a trained adult.

Collaboration with partner organisations proved an invaluable contribution to the success of this research project. The different community venues provided a convenient and safe base for the research training and data collection sessions and gave young community researchers opportunities to learn more about what services were offered in their area. The support of the cadet leaders, youth workers and teachers provided an appropriate level of discipline during the sessions, and their expertise ensured that the sessions were delivered in a structured and professional manner.

## Data Analysis: Making sense of the data

The results from the paper surveys were inputted into a spreadsheet in which the identities of the residents were separated from the responses. Some of the data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and more complex analysis was conducted with SPSS, a program that is specifically used in quantitative social science research. Through using descriptive statistics, we could understand who completed the survey, giving us a general understanding of who lives in Moorclose.

Correlational analysis helps us understand which groups of people were more likely to do something or feel a certain way. For example, women with young children were more likely to report feeling lonely often. Social network analysis enabled us to understand the patterns of connectivity and isolation, and to identify the key types of support people turn to, along with the places and institutions that were (or had the potential to be) central assets within networks that bring people together.

The sample size was not large enough to conduct more complex statistical analysis that would give us significant data, but this was not the intention of the research. We were more interested in getting a broad understanding of the social networks and views of people in Moorclose, which would then act as a catalyst to drive the community and stakeholders to develop projects to strengthen community networks, well-being and resilience.

## Ethics: Protecting everyone's interests

As with all participatory action research, there were a number of measures that were taken to ensure that the research was being carried out ethically and protecting the interests of all who were involved. For this project, the focus was on the interests of the community researchers (who were in this case children and young people) and the residents who were surveyed. Steps that were taken with children and young people included obtaining both consent from parents and caregivers and assent from the children and young people and taking time to ensure that all children and young people understood concepts such as the right to withdraw and confidentiality.

Ethical considerations relating to the residents who the children and young people surveyed included ensuring that they felt they had enough information about the project to provide informed consent to take part, and that they understood what would happen with their responses. For a more detailed description of the ethical procedures taken in this and other Connected Communities research, please see Wilson and Morris (2020).

## Summary

Collaboration is key in ensuring effective community research. Taking time to create positive working relationships with partners across all sectors can ensure that appropriate resources and knowledge are shared with the right people. Existing groups that would work with children and young people (formally and informally) can be an effective means of recruiting children in research and can also be helpful in gaining and maintaining contact with parents.

The strong relationship between the researchers and these groups provided a solid foundation for the project, with the workers contributing their knowledge, skills and resources – all of which were invaluable in developing a well-organised and engaging project.





PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 4

# Survey results

## Overview of the sample

Our young community researchers approached over 800 properties. Of those who responded, 62% of residents agreed to participate in the survey. A total of 210 survey interviews were completed, of which 66% were with female respondents.

Two-thirds of respondents had lived in the area for 20 years or more (65%), while 5% had lived in Moorclose for less than a year. A majority of respondents who gave their ethnicity described themselves as being White British (96%), representative of the wider population of Moorclose.

A quarter were aged 65+, while 41% were under 35. The charts opposite compare the age profile of respondents with the wider population of Moorclose, demonstrating that the survey is representative of Moorclose in terms of age.



Figure 4: Public data for age distribution in Moorclose

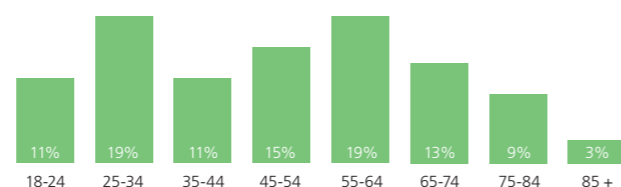


Figure 5: Public data for age distribution in Moorclose

Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) lived with other people, and 31% lived with children. A significant proportion (of residents (40%) were unemployed, with a large number of these people (81%) reporting that this was due to ill health. More than a third (37%) described their main role as being in paid work/self-employed/education, while 12% were retired. Only 9% reported being a regular volunteer, and the same number reported that they provided unpaid care for a family member.

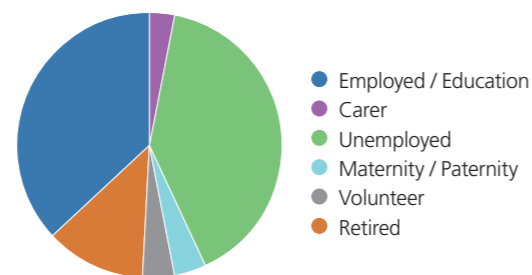


Figure 6: Economic activity of Moorclose respondents

## Perceptions of Moorclose

Most respondents (70%) were very or fairly satisfied with Moorclose as a place to live, with 13% fairly dissatisfied and 8% very dissatisfied. More than half (60%) agreed that people look out for each other, and almost three-quarters (70%) agreed that they can always find someone to help them. More than half of people in Moorclose (52%) reporting said they knew most of their neighbours and nearly everyone (96%) said they knew some of their neighbours. 78% of people said they felt they belonged in Moorclose, while 18% said they didn't feel they belonged (11% fairly; 7% strongly). 58% think that "people from different backgrounds get on around here" and 48% agree that "most people around here can be trusted", whereas 40% "feel you can't be too careful".

Residents felt that the best things about living in Moorclose included the quiet, community spirit, local amenities, deep roots, the outdoors and easy access to blue and green spaces. Comments such as "the community feel – people look out for each other", "we live amongst people we grew up with" and "it's not too built up; we are near the countryside" were frequently cited. The main barriers that prevent people from different backgrounds getting along were reported to be drugs, a lack of places for people to meet, ignorance and a lack of diversity. The main areas for improvement around Moorclose were seen as having more for children and young people to do, more traffic reduction measures, the removal of drug users from the area, better links with housing, tackling litter and tackling antisocial behaviour (linked to drug users). It was felt that having "a cafe in the Community Centre open for teenagers in the evening" would help with "getting young lads off the streets [away from] causing trouble".

## Health, social networks and loneliness

When compared with regional and national figures, fewer people from Moorclose report excellent health and more people report fair and poor health.

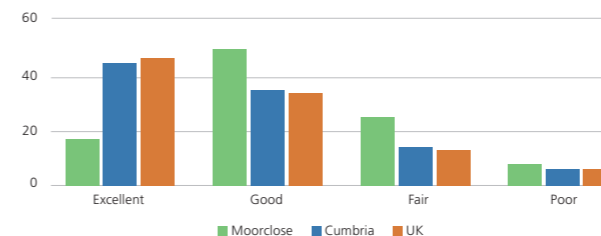


Figure 7: Self-reported health status in Moorclose compared with regional and national figures

People living alone were more likely to report having poor health, as were retired people. Over a quarter of people (25% of women and 28% of men) said they have a health issue that stopped them doing what they would like to do.

## Mental health, social networks and loneliness

Emotional well-being in Moorclose is slightly higher than the national average. There was little variation between the ages in terms of emotional well-being. 18 to 24-year-olds and those aged 85 and older reported the highest levels of emotional well-being, while those aged 55-65 reported the lowest. There was very little difference in terms of gender, with women reporting slightly higher levels of well-being than men. Similarly, there was also very little difference in terms of living with others, with people living with others scoring slightly higher than people living alone.

A fifth of Moorclose residents said they felt lonely often or always, while 80% of respondents described themselves as hardly ever or never lonely, which is in line with the general population of the UK (ONS, 2018). 43% of those aged between 25 and 35 reported feeling lonely sometimes or often, with 20% reporting they feel lonely often. Of those who said they felt lonely often, 75% were female, 67% had children living with them, and 42% described their main role as being on maternity or paternity leave. 38% of those who said they feel lonely often live with others. The least lonely people were 18 to 24-year-olds and those over 75.

A third of people with poor health (33%) reported feeling lonely often. People with fair or poor health accounted for more than half of the people who said they feel lonely often (55%), even though they are only a small part of the overall sample (n=11). Furthermore, 12% of people with disabilities and long-term health conditions reported feeling lonely often. People with disabilities and long-term health conditions accounted for more than half of the people who say they feel lonely often (60%), even though they are only a quarter the overall sample (n=49).

There was a notable difference between emotional well-being when viewed in relation to loneliness, with those who hardly ever or never feel lonely scoring much higher than those who say they feel lonely often. The more often people in Moorclose saw their family, the higher their levels of well-being. This pattern did not repeat when looking at friends. However, the more neighbours people knew, the higher their levels of well-being. People in Moorclose were more likely to have higher levels of well-being if they feel that most people can be trusted.

## Community skills and volunteering

Almost a quarter (24%) of people said they had volunteered with community groups or projects in the last year, including one-off volunteering and regular volunteering. People who were more likely to volunteer were women and people aged 25-34 years old, followed by those aged 35-44 and 55-64. Among those who said they felt lonely often, 42% had volunteered recently. Activities stated by residents included volunteering in Moorclose Community Centre and SWYP, sitting on a housing association committee, sports coaching and supporting charity shops. When asked what skills residents felt they possessed and would be interested in volunteering in the future, responses centred around five key areas:

1. Children and young people
2. Health and social care
3. Sports
4. People skills
5. Creativity

## Resources and mental well-being

Generally, those with access to resources reported higher mental well-being. The mental well-being gap was most pronounced between those with or without emotional support resources, and between those with or without information resources. Those without family or friend connections were much more likely to be lonely, but there was no significant difference in loneliness between those with resource connections to local organisations and those without. This underlines the importance of developing strong social ties in alleviating loneliness, rather than relying on institutional relationships.

## Depth of resource networks

The survey asked residents who they would go to for practical or emotional support (such as for information about what is going on locally, to make a positive change in their community or to do something social with). It was found that:

- 97% of residents said they have someone who could give them practical support.
- 84% of residents said they have someone who could help them find out what's on in the area.

- 89% of residents said they have someone who could give them emotional support.
- 64% of residents said they have someone who could give them support to make a positive change in their community.
- 84% of residents said they have someone with whom they could do something they enjoy socially.

## Breadth and importance of local resources

By combining all answers to the resource questions from all respondents, a picture of the local resource network can be constructed. Almost a third of connections (31%) were family connections, while just over a quarter (26%) were friendship connections and 15% were connections to neighbours. Together, these three types of resources account for 73% of all resource mentions.

Family, friend and neighbour ties dominate the different resource networks, although there is some variability between them. While 94% of residents said it was family they would turn to when they needed practical help, family was only mentioned in 61% of cases regarding change-making networks. For this network, local social resources (local organisations, councillors, community, church and neighbours) accounted for 24% of the change-making resources described by respondents.

We also asked how important these people were on a scale of one to five. Although friends, family and neighbours were the most often reported networks, they were not always cited as the most important. While family and friends were the most important social networks for emotional support, making a change in the community and social activity, they were not for practical support or for finding out what was going on in the area. For practical support, the family were actually rated as the least important, with neighbours, online resources, and local services and organisations being cited as the most important. Local organisations were felt to be the most important in helping people to find out what is going on in the area, followed by family and friends. Although family, friends and neighbours are important, the few people who use online groups, local services and organisations really rely on them.

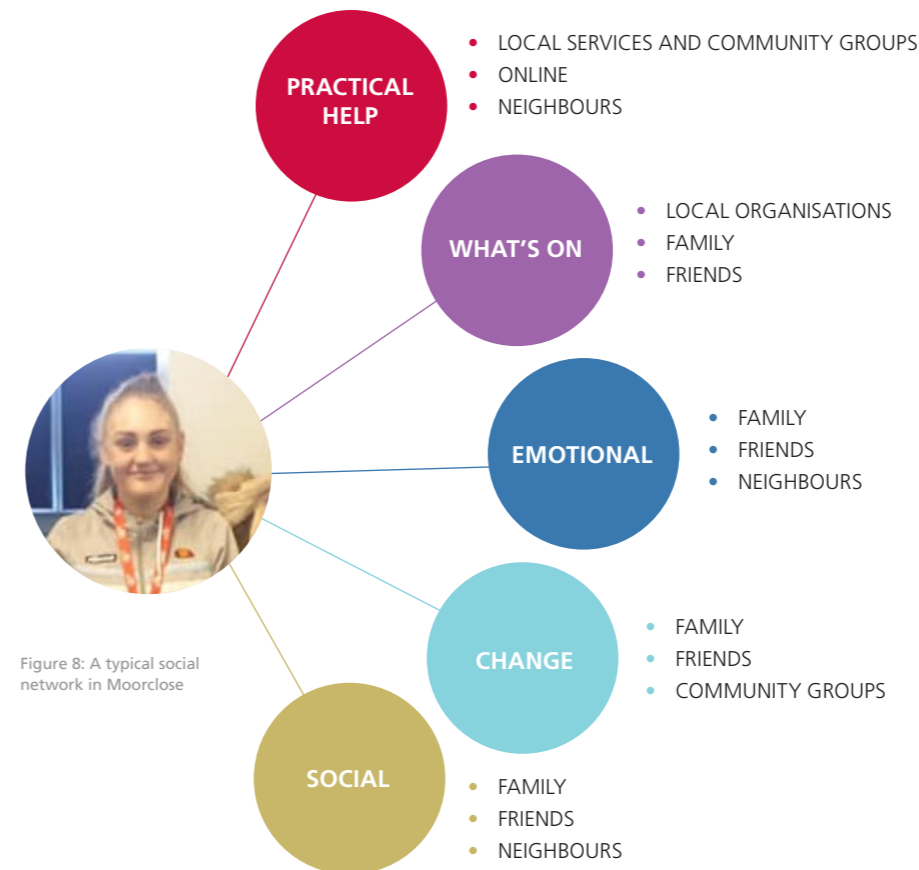


Figure 8: A typical social network in Moorclose

*On average, people who described themselves as being lonely often had fewer resources in their social network, which tended to be family, friends and neighbours. The difference between those who are lonely often and those who are hardly ever or never lonely was most clearly shown in emotional support resources.*

## Summary

**Perceptions of Moorclose:** Most people said that they were satisfied with the area as a place in which to live and agreed that people in Moorclose look out for each other. The quiet environment, community spirit and local amenities were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being drugs, a lack of places for people to meet and ignorance. Key areas for improvement were identified as having better services for young people and better parking and traffic measures.

**Health:** People's self-reported health is poorer than the national average, with older people, people with disabilities and people living alone reporting the poorest levels of health. The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was higher than the national average. Those with an impairment or health condition were significantly more likely to feel lonely and have lower levels of mental well-being.

**Loneliness:** In general terms, people in Moorclose reported feeling less lonely than the general population. The loneliest group of people was young mothers. The least lonely people were 18 to 24-year-olds and those over 75. There was a strong link between health and loneliness, and connections were associated significantly with better mental health.

**Community connections and social networks:** Connections between family, friends and neighbours are strong in Moorclose, but connections with organisations are weaker. However, those who do have connections with local organisations and services really value these services. People who feel lonely have fewer social networks to draw support from, especially emotional support.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 5

# Discussion and recommendations

The following discussion highlights the key findings of the community survey that inform the recommendations made at the end of the chapter.

## Discussion

### Families, friends and neighbours' matter in Moorclose

The survey results revealed that families, friends and neighbours made up the core support networks for residents in Moorclose. This indicates a strong degree of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), but weak bridging and linking social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Strong bonding capital – in which the connections within a group or community are characterised by high levels of similarity in areas such as demography, attitudes and available information resources – has its strengths. It can, for example, provide support to people with poor access to resources within a tight structural network.

This may be seen as being reflected in well-being measures for Moorclose that are above the national average. However, it can prevent communities from connecting with individuals or organisations that are outside of their network. Such a tight social network can alienate communities, leaving them reluctant to engage with external services. Social capital of this kind may be seen as being associated with the conditions of a number of 'left-behind' working-class coastal communities that have strong shared collective identities tightly bound in their industrial past (House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities, 2019).

*The survey results revealed that families, friends and neighbours made up the core support networks for residents in Moorclose.*

One group who were identified as having poorer social networks and were more likely to experience loneliness was young mothers. There is research showing that mothers of young children are vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation (Lee, Vasileiou & Barnett, 2019), and indeed, there is support available at the local nursery. We need to know more about the ages of these mothers' children and the social networks that are available. Contrary to national figures, younger people and older people were the least likely to report feeling lonely. This may be due to the deep-rooted nature of community in West Cumbria, where generations remain within the same communities which they grew up.

### Building back better through partnerships

'Bridging' social capital means creating connections that link people together where traditionally they may be divided by race, class or religion. These associations that 'bridge' between communities, groups or organisations look outwards, rather than 'inwards'. An extension of bridging social capital is 'linking' social capital. This describes the respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutional power structures in society. It differs from bridging social capital because the power differences between partners are a conscious part of the relationship. While bridging social capital develops horizontal trust between cultural groups, linking social capital involves conventional power hierarchies.

There is no one preferred form of social capital; rather, the strongest, most resilient communities possess all forms of social capital, utilising these different networks to meet their different needs. The recommendations provided below are framed with this in mind, with a view to bringing in local supportive organisations to help harness the strengths already existing in Moorclose and enhance the social networks and well-being of all within the community.

## Covid-19

It is important to note that this research was conducted just before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK, so issues facing Moorclose may have changed as a result of the secondary impacts of the outbreak. The subsequent cost of living crisis currently facing the UK at the time of writing will also be significantly impacting on residents of Moorclose.

## Recommendations

### Social prescribing

**Findings: People experiencing ill health had poorer social networks and were more likely to be lonely**

Survey data revealed that those with physical or emotional health needs reported poorer social networks, lower levels of emotional well-being and higher levels of loneliness. Inclusive social prescribing initiatives delivered through local GPs would give access to those with health barriers and provide opportunities to connect with others. These recommendations must be understood in the context of the community – Moorclose experiences poorer health on average than both Cumbria and the UK, and thus such interventions could be appropriate for a large number of residents.

### Increase targeted child and youth provision

**Findings: More than a third of people in Moorclose want more for children and young people to do.**

The Stronger Together research brought together young people from SWYP and Fire and Police Cadets, meaning we already have a group of engaged children and young people. Some girls involved in the research have expressed a desire to do further community research and social action projects in the local area. It was recommended that further social action projects are made available to young people in Moorclose.



## Recommendations (continued)

### Celebrate Moorclose

#### Findings: Moorclose is a supportive, close-knit community where most people feel they belong

The strong bonding social capital (close-knit community) that was evidenced in the surveys can be capitalised on to bring people together and create a sense of pride in Moorclose. Events like the Big Lunch can help with this and can also introduce services into the community in an informal way (surveys revealed poor bridging social capital, which suggests that residents do not effectively access services that would help them). Other activities to celebrate the existing assets within Moorclose include the formation of a street association and a 'best street' competition that would also challenge the litter issue arising from the survey.

### Activities for young mums

#### Findings: Young mothers are the loneliest group of people in Moorclose

This finding lends itself to the development of a dedicated community connectivity group for young mothers. Further research is needed to understand the specific issues faced by young mums and the kind of activities these women would like to support them.

### Develop joint working opportunities

#### Findings: Few residents have connections with those in positions of power, such as the local authorities

It is recommended that opportunities be created to connect residents – especially children and young people – with those with power and influence. Through developing linking social capital, trust between residents and statutory service organisations can be built and new means of co-production developed. Such linking capital will also encourage local government (and other governance and service organisations) to ground accountability for their policies and practices in authentic participation from the communities on which they impact.

### Limitations

We acknowledge that this study has a number of limitations, including that of adding little to the literature on the perspectives and social connections of children and young people (under 18s) – or those of particular BAME groups living in the area. Targeted work with local organisations would be a useful measure to include in future research to ensure that all groups, especially the 'hidden' groups whose voices may be less well heard, are better included in the research process.

Comparing the survey results with the local data discussed in Chapter Two reveals that the sample is not entirely representative of the community of Moorclose. However, the results do serve to illuminate some of the underlying social issues in the area and can be used as a catalyst to ignite conversations and activity on a local level.

Finally, the use of children as community researchers may have presented a number of challenges, potentially impacting on the quality of the data collected. During the doorstep surveys, some residents may not have felt comfortable disclosing sensitive information about themselves to children, and the children may not have been adequately mature to understand some more complex responses. However, we are confident that the role of the adult community researchers in supporting the children provided some quality assurance in relation to the process and outcomes of data collection.

## Summary

The Connected Communities approach helped children to connect with their community, realising their role, capacity and developing citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Moorclose, with weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Moorclose that were identified as being in the greatest need were those with young mothers and those with health issues. In light of these results, it is recommended that any interventions developed to build community capital in Moorclose:

1. Responds to physical and mental health needs through effective community models of social prescribing.
2. Develops projects that provide social action opportunities for children and young people.
3. Celebrates the strong bonds within Moorclose.
4. Connects vulnerable young mothers to reduce loneliness and social isolation.
5. Provides support for those in the community experiencing substance abuse.
6. Builds linking social capital through new and effective forms of connection and co-produced services between the community of Moorclose and the local authorities, and other public agencies that represent them.



## PART 3: INFORM - CHAPTER 6

**Inform:** Co-produce interventions that involve participants and service providers working together to develop shared solutions

# Sharing Results and Working Together

### Moorclose Community Shout Out: 12 February 2020

The community researchers shared the research results at a Community Shout Out event on 12 February 2020 at Moorclose Community Centre. The event was organised by the UCLan research team in partnership with Moorclose Community Centre, Allerdale Borough Council and Cumbria Constabulary. Posters giving notice of the event were placed in several locations around the area (for example, shops and community notice boards), adverts were posted on UCLan's and partners' social media pages, and personal invitations were issued to people on our networks.

Held in Moorclose Community Centre's large theatre, the Shout Out was attended by 96 people including, among others, community researchers and their families, representatives of local community groups and charities such as South Workington Youth Partnership and Affinity Credit Union (now Pennine Community Credit Union). Representatives from both Cumbria County Council and Allerdale Borough Council were in attendance, including a local elected member and the leader of Allerdale Borough Council. It was also attended by the Chair of UCLan.

Community researchers volunteered to present their research findings, professionally and enthusiastically describing the research they conducted and the results yielded. The question and answer session that followed gave the young people opportunities to share their experience of being a community researcher. This was a significant achievement for the community researchers, most of whom had never spoken publicly before. Professor David Morris presented all community researchers with certificates and acknowledged their civic contribution to the local community.

*The question and answer session that followed gave the young people opportunities to share their experience of being a community researcher.*



Discussions took place during the event about potential projects that could be developed to meet the needs of the community. This was further explored over 'food and feedback' following the official presentation, during which attendees could share ideas and register an interest to be involved in the next stage of the research. The event provided a forum to share the results and explore possibilities, but also a chance to celebrate the achievements of the young community researchers, many of whom had never attended such an event before. Recognising the contribution of community researchers is a fundamental feature of participatory action research, validating the critical role they play in the research and hopefully building the capacity of individuals and the communities.

Holding the event in a venue within the community not only brought people and services in the community together but also provided some financial income for the Community Centre and a local catering company.

### Stronger Together Action Group (STAG)

The Community Shout Out event generated excitement about the potential for transforming these results into projects that will make a real difference to the lives of Moorclose residents. At the event, eleven people registered to join the Stronger Together Action Group (STAG). This included one community member, along with third-sector organisations and elected members. Despite registrations of interest, no individual residents or elected members representing the Moorclose ward attended STAG, but it is felt that the community was represented by the Centre Manager, who is also a resident.



The core group consisted of at least one representative from the following organisations.

- Active Cumbria
- Allerdale Borough Council (including officers and Chair of West Cumbria Community Safety Partnership)
- Cumbria Constabulary
- Cumbria County Council (including public health and community development)
- Cumbria Fire Service
- Moorclose Community Centre
- University of Central Lancashire

STAG met monthly throughout the project, with its first task being to review the results from the community research, where three main workstreams were identified:

- 1. Increase provision for children and young people**
- 2. Develop social networks for women experiencing loneliness**
- 3. Develop capacity and resilience at Moorclose Community Centre**

These provided a framework for STAG meetings, where progress on each workstream was discussed, actions agreed and opportunities identified. A shared Microsoft Teams folder was created, giving all partners a space to upload and share documents relating to their work in Moorclose.

All members of STAG saw the group as one of the best elements of the project. This action group provided a space to enable interested partners to meet and develop their working relationships, identify areas for potential collaborative working and share information about each other's services.

*“The STAG meetings have drawn together the different strands of the service. When you’re trying to drive forward a service that will be of benefit to everyone, you’ve really got to have everybody aware of what’s going on.”*

Shared values within the different organisations were widely felt to have strengthened working relationships, which centred around a genuine desire to help Moorclose thrive.

*“All of the people were really positive and really wanting to do good and wanting to help that community and get things up and running... it was really clear that every partner that was getting around the table on a monthly basis really cared about Moorclose.”*

This commitment was characterised in the positive attitudes of all members, which was cited by many as being a strong defining feature of the group.

The STAG group was chaired by ALFH Manager Emma Thompson, who saw her role as “to ensure everyone sees value out of our partnership, both for themselves and the whole partnership”. Again, this highlights the importance of shared values in partnership working. Having strong leadership and someone to act as the organiser and connector is essential in ensuring partnership meetings and practices take place; very often people and organisations have the best intentions to work in partnership but get distracted by the day-to-day functions within their roles. Thanks to such strong leadership, this did not happen with Stronger Together.

## Covid-19

A month after the Community Shout Out event, the UK was put under the first national Covid-19 lockdown, meaning no in-person services could be delivered and no face-to-face meetings could take place.

The Community Centre quickly responded to the emerging food crisis facing many residents and began its own mutual aid group, providing a number of services for Moorclose and the wider community of West Cumbria:

- Responding to the food crisis: Daily food parcels were delivered to the doorsteps of residents in need, including families and older people. Physical food pantries (which were running before Covid) also took place and continue to be a very busy service for the Community Centre.
- Offering online support: A daily WhatsApp support was provided for disability and youth groups and an active online youth group. Activities offered during lockdown included a homework club, cooking lessons, quizzes, a VE Day celebration and participating in the national ‘Big Bird Watch’.
- Sharing information: Moorclose Community Centre was able to signpost vulnerable residents or residents in need to relevant organisations and provided a strong social media presence where they shared information about available support,

During this time, members of the STAG kept in touch with the Community Centre, offering support where possible. Members of ALFH visited the centre to offer practical and logistical support at what was an extremely busy time. STAG also continued to meet via Microsoft Teams, which enabled the group to identify the key workstreams and develop a strategy for when lockdown lifted. STAG members also organised a socially distanced litter pick, which was attended by most partner organisations.

Following the lifting of lockdown and the following the government’s recovery roadmap, some face-to-face services resumed at the Community Centre with strict safety measures in place. However, subsequent lockdowns and a cautious approach meant that the Community Centre was not fully open until Summer 2021.

## Led by the community?

Despite being an open group and inviting all members of the community to join, there was no representation of community residents on STAG other than from the Centre Manager. We have not spoken to any of the residents about this, so we can only speculate why this was. Although the Community Shout Out event was well attended, most attendees were however representatives of organisations; there were very few parents or community residents in attendance, so few community members would have been aware of STAG. Given the learning from previous projects (Wilson, Morris & Williamson, 2020), we know that involving parents of young community researchers can be a key catalyst in making sustainable change within the community, creating a grassroots, bottom-up structure for change. This did not happen in Moorclose and it is important that we consider why.

One possibility could be that the community researchers came from groups that were not particularly embedded in the community, such as the Police and Fire Cadets and St Joseph’s Catholic High School. Parents from these formal groups did not participate in the community research and are not actively involved in these groups. If this is the case, it would suggest that while recruiting community researchers from formal groups makes things easier from an operational perspective (i.e. easy access to a large number of young people), it is less effective in making sustainable gains in the community, particularly in light of citizenship.

This argument is supported by previous research conducted in disadvantaged communities in West Cumbria, which saw that recruitment of parents who did not engage actively in education was influenced significantly by the type of “gatekeeper” that was used to recruit them. For example, no parents were recruited when using formal gatekeepers, such as schools, but when informal gatekeepers were used, such as groups organised by community centres, recruitment and engagement with parents was much more successful (Wilson, 2019).

## Partnership working is key and relationships matter

Relationships played a key role in both the successes and challenges of this project. STAG enjoyed positive, trusting relationships based on shared values, and provided a regular forum for partners to meet and pool their knowledge and resources to best support the needs of the community. For example, Active Cumbria identified their Tackling Inequalities Fund to support community members with learning difficulties.

STAG meetings also provided opportunities to build networks and identify community needs that could be linked up with available funding. Furthermore, STAG enabled partners to offer mentoring and support to the Community Centre. Structured meetings and having an allocated person to engage and bring everyone together were considered critical to the group’s effectiveness.

As can be seen, partnership working can lead to powerful and significant changes in how services are developed and delivered. However, developing partnership working is not always a straightforward process. Bringing different people together can bring innovative and imaginative ideas to the table, but differences may also present some challenges.



### Complex histories and power dynamics

Communities are complex and often have deep, entrenched histories that can hold positive memories or may lead to mistrust of others within the community and organisations who seek to work with them. Trust is evidently crucial in partnership working, and so communities' histories must be given careful consideration by anyone seeking to work with them. In Moorclose, there seems to be a distrust of the local authorities and other formal organisations, with some having felt let down, not listened to or taken advantage of in the past, particularly by people in positions of trust. Understandably, these experiences can leave communities suspicious when engaging with local authorities and other organisations.

Formal organisations involved in STAG, such as Cumbria Constabulary and Allerdale Borough Council, tried to build relationships with the community in order to gain trust and create a more positive attitude to partnership working. For instance, Active Cumbria took the time to meet face to face with Moorclose Community Centre to explore the benefits of involving a partner in a specific project, both in terms of developing capacity and securing further funding. Furthermore, the ALFH took a more hands-on approach to building relationships with the community and Moorclose Community Centre in particular:

*"I just rocked up, had a chat and asked 'what's your problems? What do you need sorted? What do you need support with? How's it going? How are you?'. We had some open and frank discussions about what support would be available to her if she needs it. I also just volunteered, doing stuff on the site."*

These examples required the more formal organisations to actively reflect on the complex histories in Moorclose and how they may be viewed by the community. They had to adopt an approach to engaging with the community that was familiar, on the community's terms. In instances where this was done, more positive, trusting relationships were built. When this was not done, the barriers or mistrust remained.

### Different ways of working

Different types of organisations have different ways of working, particularly in relation to structures, policies and procedures. These differences can sometimes make working together challenging. For example, local authorities must comply with constituted statutory responsibilities and registered charities must adhere to Charity Commission Governance requirements. It is important to remember that when reviewing ways of working, time should be spent developing strategies that are workable for all parties involved, while maintaining high standards of quality. By ensuring that all parties are complying with their governance obligations, organisations are laying the foundations for sustainability and resilience.

Even the ways in which organisations meet can be different, and with Covid-19 forcing all meetings to be held virtually (rather than being held face to face in the community), a formal approach was necessitated by which some community groups were unfamiliar or less comfortable with. STAG partners acknowledged that online meetings were not the most effective way of building positive relationships and met the community face to face when possible.

### Stretched services with limited capacity

Most organisations are working under severe constraints, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, grassroots community organisations are often particularly limited in terms of their time and capacity. Their focus is on project delivery, and sometimes they don't have the resources to attend a large number of meetings; their priority is responding to the immediate needs of the community.

Lessons learned from the pandemic show that formal organisations can adapt and respond by understanding the priorities and passions of communities and working with them to develop relationships. For example, when Covid-19 hit, staff from the ALFH maintained contact with Moorclose Community Centre through regular phone calls and by offering support with the community response to the pandemic. As soon as face-to-face contact for work purposes resumed, the ALFH Manager visited Moorclose Community Centre and organised a local litter pick, providing an opportunity to reconnect and build relationships with the community.

To overcome barriers and engage with the community, more formal organisations with traditional positions of power have needed to reflect critically on how they are viewed and adapt accordingly. This may present conflicts internally, as some may be reluctant to embrace new approaches, but the success stories associated with Stronger Together have come from examples where people have taken the time to invest in building strong partnerships.

Strong leadership is needed to bring different people and organisations together to serve a shared purpose. Appreciative leadership approaches have been previously shown to be an effective organisational tool in promoting effective partnership working in mental health services (Fieldhouse & Onyett, 2012). This is an approach that involves a strengths-based perspective, emphasising the talents, experience and other positive qualities of partners, and it presents a positive vision for the future rather than a reflection on the past (Onyett, 2002). Given the enduring challenges concerning trust with local authorities in Moorclose, a leadership approach based on vision, ambition and commitment is likely to be required if these are to be addressed in a way that creates positive future outcomes (Onyett, 2006).

### Summary

The Community Shout Out event brought together community researchers and other key stakeholders to recognise and celebrate the achievements of the young people and to invite people to join STAG in order to put research into action. The dedicated STAG provided a structured and organised space for partners to share their working and identify ways to collaborate, all working towards the same goal based on shared values. One limitation of this project is the lack of representation of elected members for Moorclose (acknowledging representation was given by an elected member for another ward who was the Chair of West Cumbria Community Safety Partnership) and community residents on STAG.

The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly impacted on the ability of the group to make connections with the community and develop projects that sought to specifically respond to the research findings, but also showed how responsive and resilient such groups can be in times of crisis. A key learning from the project has been the importance of people and partnerships, and their scope for involved and inclusive ways of working but which can however be impacted on by complex histories and power dynamics, different ways of working, and stretched services. The evidence of experiences suggests that strong leadership, based on reflective and adaptive approaches can be effective in meeting those challenges.



## PART 4: CONNECT - CHAPTER 7

**Connect: Facilitate platforms that enable social connections; broker individuals to sources of support or weave networks among people and groups.**

# Co-produced projects to enhance community capital

In order to evaluate the projects developed from STAG, we drew on as many sources of information as possible. This included analysis of meeting minutes and interviews with members of the STAG, observations and participation in projects, and informal conversations with residents who used the services.

It also included analysis of project outcome data that, when available, was used to identify specific outcomes of the projects.

### Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns undoubtedly impacted on the project. Moorclose Community Centre provided a rapid response to meet the immediate needs of the community, principally by sourcing free food and delivering this to vulnerable residents, many of whom were young families, disabled people or older and were already experiencing financial hardship. The commitment, dedication and creativity of Angela Good, Centre Manager at Moorclose Community Centre, was noted by many STAG members. Below is one example of the inventive ways in which the manager responded to the Covid-19 restrictions:

*“During lockdown, Angela had a number of innovative ideas. She held an online youth camp, delivering a jar with a candle inside which was going to be the campfire that was left at their doors. And then they all met online later on and sang around the campfire... really good ideas that would have done a lot to alleviate loneliness that people might have felt, particularly younger people at the time.”*

The work undertaken by Moorclose Community Centre received significant publicity on social media and in the local media. This further developed the networks of the centre and enhanced its reputation among the general public.

Covid-19 has meant that fewer projects than anticipated have been developed, but it provides an example of how communities and partnerships can be responsive and flexible during times of crisis. It also showed how participatory action research can be unpredictable and subject to external events beyond the control of the researchers.

### Workstreams

This section will describe projects that have taken place as a direct and indirect result of the Stronger Together research, revolving around three key themes:

1. Increase provision for children and young people.
2. Develop social networks for women experiencing loneliness.
3. Develop capacity and resilience at Moorclose Community Centre.

The results of the Stronger Together research also found that people in Moorclose have strong connections between each other (strong bonding social capital) but have weaker ties with services outside the community (poorer bridging and linking). A number of these projects therefore sought to broker connections with local organisations that can support them. These projects will all be discussed using the community capital framework introduced at the start of the report.

#### Increase provision for children and young people

Moorclose Community Centre and Active Cumbria worked in partnership to develop a number of initiatives:

##### Securing funding for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme:

This national government initiative funds holiday provision for children receiving Free School Meals, providing food and four hours of activity a day for five days a week during school holidays. Moorclose Community Centre would have provided this service without the support of the STAG. However, by working with Active Cumbria, the Centre was encouraged to develop its thinking around how best to use the funds.

**Audience:** Children experiencing poverty.

**Impact:** Improved physical and emotional well-being of children experiencing poverty.

**Well-being:** Providing food and activities for children and young people supported their emotional as well as physical well-being, with observations of young people socialising and enjoying themselves:

*“There was one day I was actually down to the Centre. I was eating lunch and that provision was on and everyone was gathering outside, they were doing something crafty outside and having a really good time. There was a lot of playing in [the] back field as well. We had really positive engagement and I think that is probably one of the main things about that Community Centre; the positive work that they get with young people and their engagement.”*

The HAF programme seeks to provide not only food and physical activities, but also build emotional resilience and provide opportunities to get out and about. Moorclose Community Centre built its sessions around these four areas (food, physical activities, emotional resilience and getting out and about), with clear learning objectives for each session – an approach that has been recognised as best practice. Young people enjoyed the HAF so much they required further sessions be delivered during other school holidays, and now additional services are offered to local young people during half-term holidays.





**Youth provision to deter antisocial behaviour:**

‘Safe Space’ was funded by West Cumbria Safety Partnership, which aims to challenge antisocial behaviour in Moorclose by providing additional youth provision along with physical and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Every Friday night, Moorclose Community Centre holds the Youth Café for those who want a more informal, unstructured service and a youth group for those who want more structure. Sessions are also held on a Wednesday night.

**Audience:** Young people causing antisocial behaviour.

**Impact:** Opportunities to enact citizenship.

**Citizenship:** Safe Space offers young people ownership over the group, enabling them to set the agenda of the sessions. This in itself can build skills and confidence, and has also been shown to build trust between youth workers and the young people. Sessions organised by the young people include games nights, cooking sessions and stargazing. Among these youth-led sessions, education around drugs, alcohol, sex, and staying safe are delivered. The youth workers do not claim to guarantee the avoidance of unnecessary risks, but they arm them with information about the consequences and where to go to for support if something goes wrong.

One case study provides an encouraging example of how citizenship can be developed when young people are given opportunities to participate in meaningful activities:

**Case study**

*“We just did some gardening out the back because it all needed a bit of a tidy up and it turns out the kid loved it that much that he wanted his grandma to buy him more kit and to learn more from other people’s gardens. He said it was probably the first time he [had] felt positively.*

*He had positive feedback for something that he himself had achieved and it was only weeding and planting, but it was in a sensory garden for the disabled group that they’ve got there. I think he felt a real sense of purpose.*

*My idea was that if he connected with the Centre and [the Manager] gets to meet him then instead of going into county lines, which is where it was all coming from, he could get involved there. I saw that as an example of what we could achieve here on a bigger scale. Now that for me was proof of concept and has led to developments within the Youth Offending Teams beyond Moorclose.”*



**Offering funding from the Tackling Inequalities Fund:**

Active Cumbria provided funding for outdoor equipment to enable the young people’s disability group to be able to continue walking and engaging in outdoor activities during the winter months.

**Audience:** Young people with disabilities

**Impact:** Improved well-being in young people with disabilities and increased capacity of Moorclose Community Centre

**Citizenship:** The health and well-being of local disabled young people was improved through being able to access new recreational opportunities. For example, specialist disabled bikes were provided to the group as a result of this funding. One sibling of a young person who used the service described how she had never seen her sister so tired in the evening after a day using the bikes, yet the next morning she “bounced out the door, she was so happy to come”, and said she had “never seen her like this.” Walking boots and waterproof outdoor clothing ensured the group were able to complete Duke of Edinburgh activities and spend time outdoors during wet weather:

*“He got us a load of equipment for the Duke of Edinburgh [students], they’re all chuffed to bits with it. The disabled guys have been telling us, whenever they’ve been for a walk, they’ve already had their waterproofs on. So that’s working. And whenever we go, they’ve got their rucksacks and they’ve got the gear with them.”*

This anecdote also shows how this funding supported the young people in completing their Duke of Edinburgh awards, therefore building their own capacity through completing the course.

**Capacity:** This project provides an example of how capacity can be built when organisations work in partnership, with Active Cumbria supporting Moorclose Community Centre to consider the sustainability of the project when applying for funding:

*“We looked and there were bits of kit and I was trying to think wider than what they do already, so we looked at disability-specific care. We got waterproof trousers and jackets because they do a lot of walking in groups, but generally over the winter they don’t do that much so it’s thinking about how we could keep that going. But we also put in a bit for staffing to implement it over a six-month period. So again, not only support for [the Manager] and her ongoing sustainability of staffing costs, but also looking at the longer-term picture.”*



## Develop social networks for women experiencing loneliness

**Moorclose Community Centre Women’s Group:** The findings of the survey strongly resonated with staff at the Community Centre, who were already aware of ladies who were “desperately lonely”. An intergenerational Women’s Group was set up immediately following the Community Shout Out event, as it was known that a number of recently bereaved women were also experiencing loneliness. The group met several times in February and March 2020, when they did arts and crafts and enjoyed chatting and spending time together. When lockdown caused face-to-face meetings to be cancelled, the Community Centre tried to continue to run the group using Zoom, but there was little uptake. The face-to-face sessions resumed in August 2021, with a core group of six women attending. The group is mainly attended by mothers of young children, bereaved older women and young women with learning disabilities. Providing an inclusive environment for women from all backgrounds is the focus of this group.

**Audience:** Women experiencing loneliness

**Impact:** Improved well-being and social networks in women experiencing loneliness. New opportunities to enact citizenship and develop individual capacity.

**Wellbeing:** Accounts provided by the Community Centre and from attendees themselves suggest the group contributed to improvements in emotional well-being and reductions in loneliness. In some cases, this improvement was quite stark:

*“One of the ladies actually came up to one of my volunteers and said, ‘can you make sure Angela knows how thankful we are for getting this set up and going... I don’t think I’d be here if it wasn’t for it... I see no-one, go nowhere.’”*

The informal group intentionally has no specific focused activities, but did provide toys and on one occasion soft play for the young children who attended the group. The provision offers a safe space for the mothers to talk, share challenges and give advice. Older members of the group are also able to offer advice to the younger members and talk about their grandchildren. A new mother who had recently moved to the area attends the group and has made friends with others, helping her to establish new social networks in an unfamiliar community.

**Citizenship:** An additional impact has been the opportunities it has provided for the women to participate in activities that further help Moorclose Community Centre. For example, some women volunteer to help organise community events and knit gifts that can be sold to raise funds. This is a great example of the additionality that opportunities to connect in a mutual space bring, with both the individuals and community benefitting by the group.

**Capacity:** As stated in the introduction, the women’s group is intergenerational, with younger and older women attending. This provides an opportunity for skill sharing to take place, such as older women teaching younger members how to knit and younger members teaching older members how to work their new mobile phones. Furthermore, the group has given one young woman with learning disabilities the opportunity to open a small shop in the Community Centre selling donated baby and children’s clothes and toys. Through running her own small business, this young woman is able to learn new skills, build her confidence and add experience to her CV. She has also acted as a positive role model for her peers, with other young people with learning disabilities getting involved with other initiatives offered by the Community Centre, such as the ‘furniture room’ and the ‘prom room’, which offer goods to families experiencing hardship.

**Additional services to support women:** During lockdown, members of STAG convened a meeting between all organisations that provide support to women in Allerdale in order to identify services that could be offered to the group. Public health provision for women is developing beyond the community centre, with a number of professionals becoming established in the area:

*“We did move forward in that the health coach is getting quite a lot of referrals or is working with a few people from that area. And because of the social prescribers now being quite embedded in the Workington area, they are aware of the needs in Moorclose, so they are conscious that that’s one of the areas that they should be working with people as much as possible. The same with the breastfeeding, peer support groups.”*

## Develop capacity and resilience for Moorclose Community Centre

STAG identified as a key institution Moorclose Community Centre, offering an outstanding facility in the heart of the community. The Community Centre is an old school, providing a number of rooms, ample parking and a number of halls (including a sports hall and a fully functioning theatre). At the start of 2019, the Centre had recently been taken over by new management that was keen to get involved with STAG and build upon its already-expanding offer of services. The Centre Manager developed working relationships with members of the STAG, including Allerdale Borough Council, Cumbria County Council and Active Cumbria.

STAG was able to effectively support Moorclose Community Centre in the following ways:

- **Mentoring and supporting the Community Centre to develop its skills and vision around funding, thinking beyond current delivery.**
- **Identifying funding streams for the Community Centre and supporting with funding bids.**
- **Developing networks with organisations.**

The first two outcomes have been detailed within the other sections of this chapter. The final outcome, developing networks, has helped to provide new business opportunities and raise extra funds for the Community Centre. For example, the partnership approach STAG adopted led to a fruitful connection with the local NHS Trust:

*“We’ve got five NHS teams in now, spreading the word between themselves. A local NHS [building] is getting refurbished and it’s going to be out of action for about six months, so, a nurse practitioner comes and works in here too.”*

Providing facilities for hire to primary and tertiary services is an example of how community centres can become more self-reliant and less dependent on grant funding, strengthening an organisation’s resilience and thus being more sustainable. Furthermore, by bringing services directly into the community, residents face few barriers in access (for example, travel), thereby overcoming the weak bridging social capital that the community research revealed while also reducing health inequalities.

What drives the success of the Community Centre is the dedication and commitment of Angela, Centre Manager. All partners involved in STAG have a huge amount of respect for her, all praising her unwavering commitment to her community, as summarised here:

*“She was tending to a number of disabled children, they were attached to her as if she was a magnet, literally. She’s obviously a very determined person, a very active and a very caring person. I’ve always been very impressed by the amount of work Angela manages to do on behalf of others.”*

This closing passage speaks volumes about the human and emotional capital that is present in the Moorclose Community Centre. Angela has stressed that she alone cannot be credited for the achievements of the Community Centre; she is supported by Stephen Rumney and her team of staff and volunteers, all of whom work tirelessly behind the scenes. A strong board and a diverse team with different people active on an operational level is essential in building a resilient, sustainable charity and contributes to business continuity. Recognising and celebrating these assets is the cornerstone of participatory approaches like Connected Communities. Providing opportunities for community hubs such as Moorclose Community Centre to develop their bridging and linking social capital can further develop their capacities, which can then be transferred to the wider community, improving health and social outcomes.

## Summary

A number of collaborative projects emerged from the STAG in response to the research findings, which focused on increasing provision for children and young people, developing social networks for women experiencing loneliness, and developing capacity and resilience at Moorclose Community Centre. Additional funding was secured through working with partners which enabled activities to provide services to promote the physical and emotional well-being of children and young people. It also supported further youth provision to deter antisocial behaviour.

A women’s group provided a space for women to develop their social networks, meet new people and connect with local organisations. The capacity and resilience of Moorclose Community Centre was developed through mentoring and supporting the Centre to build its skills and vision around funding, think beyond current delivery and identify funding streams. STAG members helped the Centre to develop networks with organisations that can offer support and provided practical and financial support during lockdown.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Full list of community researchers

Fire Cadets	Police Cadets	SWYP	St Joseph's Catholic High School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jason Ferguson (Cadet Leader)</li> <li>• Cameron McGarel</li> <li>• Keegan Milligan</li> <li>• Liam Sharples</li> <li>• Jacob Hoggarth</li> <li>• Mitchell Park</li> <li>• Jackson Peckham</li> <li>• Harvey Wood</li> <li>• Jack Farrington</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• David Keevil (Cadet Leader)</li> <li>• Steven Bragg (Cadet Leader)</li> <li>• Finn Ireland</li> <li>• Lucy Stephenson</li> <li>• Alysha Dickinson</li> <li>• Kate Bailiff</li> <li>• Jack Heffernan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angela Good (Centre Manager)</li> <li>• Stephen Rumney (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Trish Heron (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Jonathan Cuthell (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Kirsty Caine (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Diana Harrison (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Sandra Cueto (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Chantelle Rumney (Volunteer)</li> <li>• Leighan Fulton</li> <li>• Sara Hughes</li> <li>• Natasha McArthur</li> <li>• Anya Studholme</li> <li>• Courtney Trainor</li> <li>• Daniel Knott</li> <li>• Sam Knott</li> <li>• Sarah Patterson</li> <li>• Millie Denver</li> <li>• Lacie Rayson</li> <li>• Lily Rogers</li> <li>• Aleesha Graham</li> <li>• Katherine Caine</li> <li>• Mark Caine</li> <li>• Dylan Cullen</li> <li>• Leo Cullen</li> <li>• Kate Tomlinson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jacky Kennedy (Head Teacher)</li> <li>• TBC (Teacher)</li> <li>• TBC (Teacher)</li> <li>• Teacher</li> <li>• Joshua Brownlee</li> <li>• Mason Burgess</li> <li>• Ciaran Campbell</li> <li>• Benjamin Carini</li> <li>• Ryan Crellin</li> <li>• Kayla Clark</li> <li>• Ellis Gibson</li> <li>• Jessica Gilmour</li> <li>• Declan Graham</li> <li>• Ryan Greggain</li> <li>• Lucy Haycock</li> <li>• Joshua Hefford</li> <li>• Brandon Hodgson</li> <li>• Kayla Hodgson</li> <li>• Kia-Mae Jackson</li> <li>• Charley Melton</li> <li>• Dylan Needham-Edgar</li> <li>• Lewis O'Leary</li> <li>• Kiara Routledge</li> <li>• Molly Rushforth</li> <li>• Scout Storey</li> <li>• Aidan Thompson</li> <li>• Terry Walsh</li> <li>• Caiden Winder</li> <li>• Lyra Wilson</li> <li>• Ruby Winthrop</li> <li>• Callum Black</li> <li>• Jessica Brogdon</li> <li>• Lucy Brown</li> </ul>

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES – *Moorclose*

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