

CONNECTED  
COMMUNITIES

# Ormsgill



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# Purpose of the report

# Audience

This report introduces the Connected Communities research that was conducted in Ormsgill, detailing the background to our approach and its underpinning theoretical concepts. An overview of demographic data of the community of Ormsgill 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 achieve 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 community need. 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 Ormsgill.

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 Ormsgill.
- Anyone interested in learning more about this approach to 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 Ormsgill and inform ways of engaging with the community.
- Local authorities and policy makers: we hope it will influence policy that impacts on Ormsgill, and also inform policy approaches to 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 Superintendent Jim Bailey for his energy in initially establishing the project within Ormsgill, and to PCSO Michelle Jones, who coordinated the Mini-Police. Michelle is a well-liked and respected officer in Ormsgill whose commitment to supporting young people in the estate is commendable.

The local authorities also played a key role in the Stronger Together project, being based in the Strengthening Ormsgill Community Group. This group is chaired by Councillor Bill McEwan and driven by Community Development Officer Simonetta Tiribocchi. This group provided an invaluable operational framework to identify key stakeholders and community researchers. Councillors Derek Brook and Beverly Morgan also gave their time to support the project, for which we are tremendously grateful. Simonetta has continued to offer significant support to the Ormsgill Stronger Together group, and her humour, warmth and positivity has resulted in a productive and impactful partnership.

The creation of the Ormsgill Stronger Together group was initially supported by Janine Adams from Furness Multi-Cultural Community Forum, whose passion for social justice, awareness of governance and approachability provided a solid foundation for the group to become sustainable. The fact that she was able to leave the group confidently speaks volumes for her mentorship.

And finally, we give a heartfelt thanks to the women behind Ormsgill Stronger Together (OST): Jade Duke, Terri Prophet, Ashleigh-Dee Ballantyne, Stacey Foreman and Khyla Mayor have all given up their time and made sacrifices to help make Ormsgill a great place to live. These residents continue to act as positive role models for girls and potential community leaders within Ormsgill and beyond, making tangible impacts on the lives of many in their community. They have been open and have fully engaged with the research process, providing an invaluable input to this report. The thriving group is providing a lasting legacy of the value of community-based research and the benefits of partnership working. We would like to congratulate OST for their achievements – they are true assets to Ormsgill.



# 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 Ormsgill

Ormsgill households are home to predominantly white, working-class individuals or families, with almost half the population living in housing association accommodation. Ormsgill 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 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 Ormsgill. This is exactly what Stronger Together sought to achieve by using a Connected Communities approach to develop the capacity and resilience within Ormsgill.

## Chapter Three: Community Researchers and the Research Process

Non-academic groups 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 researcher and these non-academic 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. The research process undertaken was broader than the traditional Connected Communities approach in that it included more focused work with the children aimed at developing their community consciousness through engaging with their local area by means of photography. Alongside the survey data, this provided a robust basis for the collection of data that was presented to the community, where feedback was given and ideas were generated for future co-produced interventions.

## Chapter Four: Survey Results

The key results from the community research are as follows:

- Perceptions of Ormsgill: Most people said they were satisfied with the area as a place to live and one in which it was felt that people look out for each other. The people and the community, the quiet environment and access to local amenities were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being identified as attitudes, stigma and stereotypes, cultural differences and drugs. Key areas for improvement were seen as having more for children and young people to do, cleaner streets and greater efforts to tackle drugs.
- Health: 25% of people said they have a health issue that stopped them from doing what they would like to do, this being equally so for men and women but more so for people aged 45-54 than other age groups. When compared with regional and national figures, fewer people from Ormsgill report excellent health with more reporting fair and poor health. Emotional well-being in Ormsgill is slightly higher than the average. 18 to 24-year-olds and 75 to 85-year-olds reported the lowest levels of emotional well-being, while those aged 35-44 reported the highest.

- Loneliness: One in 10 people in Ormsgill said they felt lonely often or always. This is lower than the general population of the UK. Women aged 45 or under (and particularly those aged below 25) living with children were the most likely to be lonely. Of people who were lonely often, 69% were female and 86% had children living with them. 93% of those who say they feel lonely often live with others. People with fair or poor health account for over half the people who say they feel lonely often.
- Community Connections and Social Networks: Family and friends made up most social connections. Those with poor health and those who say they feel lonely often were more likely to report having few or no connections. The primary schools, the local PCSO and the community centres were the institutions most frequently cited as being a resource for use as anchors to connect with the community. Social media plays a significant role in communicating what is happening in the community.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

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 Ormsgill, with somewhat weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Ormsgill that were identified as being in the greatest need were those with health issues, young mums and children and young people. In light of these results, it is recommended that Ormsgill:

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, including those based on the value and impact of intergenerational approaches;
3. builds on the evident pride and sense of belonging within Ormsgill through events like the Big Lunch, which can also provide opportunities to better integrate the Syrian refugees living in the area;
4. considers activities for young mums. Further research needs to take place to understand both the specific issues faced by this group of community members, and the sort of activities that these women would like to support them;
5. builds linking social capital through new and effective forms of connection and co-produced services between the community of Ormsgill, the local authorities, and the other public agencies that represent them.

## Chapter Six: Sharing Results and Working Together

Turning community research into action is dependent on bringing people together. This includes building on existing friendships and capacities within the community, along with forming new partnerships with individuals and services. What matters is the shared values around helping the community to meet its potential. The OST board provides a clear example of how grassroots community groups can benefit both the individuals involved and the wider community, and create a resilient environment to respond to any challenges they may face. In this case, strong relationships both within the group and between other partners enabled a culture of co-operation, characterised by respect, humour and a genuine passion for the community of Ormsgill.

## Chapter Seven: Co-produced projects to enhance community capital

The OST board have successfully developed and delivered a range of community projects that seek to meet their aim of making Ormsgill a thriving community. These projects or activities fall into four main categories:

- Making Ormsgill a Great Place to Grow Up
- Bringing People Together
- Bringing Services to the Community
- Civic Engagement

The board members of OST are committed to making Ormsgill a great place to live and will continue to work collaboratively with partners from all sections to ensure the estate has every opportunity to thrive.

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 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 meant 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. **Build community consciousness and cultivate citizenship in children living in Ormsgill through involvement in participatory action research.**
2. **Involve Ormsgill residents of all ages in the co-production of interventions to strengthen community capital.**
3. **Strengthen bridging social capital in Ormsgill by connecting key partners with the residents in most need.**

## 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: BACKGROUND - CHAPTER 2

# Community focus – an overview of Ormsgill

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 selection of the area of Ormsgill, Barrow for this study followed consultation with local community stakeholders including the police and local authorities, and was also informed by local data that will be described later in this report. The area is situated on the outskirts of Barrow, and consists mainly of terraced ex-council properties and flats.

### LSOA data

The area covered by the Connected Communities research is mainly the Lower Level Super Output Area (LSOA) of Ormsgill (Barrow-in-Furness 004C). This is only one-third of the electoral ward of Ormsgill, but is the area traditionally recognised as Ormsgill by the local community. This was because this area is viewed, in general, as one community where shared or similar challenges are perceived. LSOAs are geographic areas consisting of approximately 1,500 people and are used by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as a tool to collect demographic statistics on small areas. The data for Ormsgill will now be presented.

### Population

Ormsgill has a population of 1,528, having above regional and national proportions of children and young people (0-15 years), more working-aged adults (16-64), and fewer older people (65 plus).

### Ethnicity

Ormsgill is predominately White British, with this group comprising 98.9% of the population. This is in line with the Cumbrian average (98.5%) and is significantly above average for the UK (85.4%). The other 'white' categories make up most of the remaining population, including 'Other' White (0.9%), White – Irish (0.4%) and Gypsy/Travellers (0.1%).

### 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 2: An overview of West Cumbria

### Economic and employment profile

	Economically active residents	Economically inactive	Long term unemployed	Never worked
Ormsgill	57%	43%	5.2%	1.3%
Cumbria	81%	19%	1.3%	0.4%
UK	75%	25%	1.7%	0.7%

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

Most people who work in Ormsgill do so in jobs classed as belonging to 'elementary' occupations, followed by skilled trades, care, leisure and other service industries, and sales and customer services (ONS Census, 2011). Ormsgill experiences levels of income and employment deprivation that are significantly higher than the national average being, on this indicator (former Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015) being one of the top 10% most deprived LSOAs nationally. Levels of employment deprivation are also especially high in the Barrow in Furness area of Ormsgill.

### Children and young people

	Population aged 0-17	People with no qualifications as a percentage of working age adults	Long term unemployed
Ormsgill	31%	36%	36%
Cumbria	19%	24.2%	12%
UK	-	22.5%	17%

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

As the table illustrates, Ormsgill has a larger proportion of children and young people living in the area than the Cumbrian average. The area also has significantly larger proportions of working-age adults with no qualifications, while the proportion of children living in low-income families in Ormsgill is significantly above the regional and national averages. Data for 2015 provided by the (then) Department for Communities and Local Government (DfCLG) indicates that Ormsgill experiences levels of low educational attainment and child poverty that are above the national level. Indeed, when ranked nationally, on this indicator, Ormsgill is one of the top 10% most deprived LSOAs.

### Health

	Very Good health	Very Bad health	Limited Activity due to Health Issues
Ormsgill	38%	3%	16%
Cumbria	45%	1.3%	9.7%
UK	47%	1.2%	8.3%

Table 4: Health and Social Care Profile of Woodhouse, Kells, Cumbria and UK

As the table above illustrates, residents from Ormsgill report less good health and more bad health than regional and national averages, while a higher proportion of residents report that their daily activities are limited due to health issues. Data provided by the DfCLG (2019) indicate that Ormsgill also experiences significant levels of older person's deprivation. Indeed, when ranked nationally on this indicator, Ormsgill is one of the top 10% of most deprived LSOAs. Levels of health deprivation are also especially high in the Barrow in Furness area of Ormsgill.

### Street Safe surveys

Some Street Safe surveys have been conducted by the Strengthening Ormsgill multi-agency group in parts of Ormsgill. The purpose of those surveys is to understand and respond to the concerns of Ormsgill residents, primarily with regards to their safety. A recent Street Safe survey identified the key community concerns to be drugs and youth antisocial behaviour. The best thing about living in Ormsgill was identified to be its community spirit.

### 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 Ormsgill possesses a number of physical assets, providing green space and affordable housing (DfCLG, 2019). It is also situated close to the Cumbrian coast. There are also a number of facilities in the area, including a large community centre and a busy local shopping area.

### Summary

Ormsgill households are home to predominantly white, working-class individuals or families, with almost half the population living in housing association accommodation. Ormsgill 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 may 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 Ormsgill. Stronger Together sought to redress this gap by utilising a Connected Communities approach to understand assets and to support the development of capacity and resilience within the area.

**PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 3**

# Community Researchers and the Research Process

**A core component of the Connected Communities approach is to develop an understanding of everyone’s needs by involving communities in research.**

As you’re about to read, the Connected Communities methodologies adopted in Cumbria differed slightly from the traditional approach, which historically involves only adult members of the community who often conduct 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. In Ormsgill, local children were invited to participate through Dropzone Youth Projects and the Mini-Police.

**Research Process: Community survey**

**Young Community Researchers**

This project ran from February 2019 to February 2020 with 24 children being successfully recruited, trained and able to act as young community researchers. The ages of the children ranged from 10 to 14 and two-thirds were girls (67%). The children were recruited by utilising connections with two different non-academic groups: Dropzone Youth Projects, a community youth group operating in Ormsgill, and the Mini-Police, a community policing project that was delivered in partnership with Ormsgill Primary School. Dropzone is a charity offering youth provision throughout the Barrow area, which includes universal community-based youth work and alternative education. Mini-Police is delivered within school time to a small number of Year 5 pupils who apply to be Mini-Police.

Workshops were held within existing Dropzone groups at Ormsgill Youth Centre to introduce the project to young people. This provided opportunities for them to reflect on what they felt was important in their community and also to answer any questions about the project. Plans to do the same for the Mini-Police unfortunately had to be cancelled due to a severe storm that prevented travel. However, the strong relationship that Michelle (a local PCSO) had with the Mini-Police ensured that the majority of the young people did become community researchers.

*The support of the youth workers provided an appropriate level of discipline during the sessions, and their expertise ensured that the sessions were delivered in a structured and professional manner.*

Two data collection sessions involving both Dropzone and the Mini-Police took place, one in October half-term and another in February half-term. Meeting at Ormsgill Youth Centre, the young community researchers were trained in community research skills in a way that was appropriate for their age group. This covered issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and personal safety. The sessions also gave young people the chance to practice using the surveys with one another and to ask any questions that they had. The young community researchers assigned themselves to pairs and were then allocated to a youth worker or adult community researcher who chaperoned them during their data collection.

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

The relationship with these partners was a core element of the project, representing an invaluable contribution to its success. The Ormsgill Youth Centre provided a convenient and safe location in which to base the programme, providing easy access to children from Ormsgill. The support of the youth workers provided an appropriate level of structure during the sessions, and their expertise ensured that the sessions were delivered in a structured and professional manner.

**Adult Community Researchers**

The Strengthening Ormsgill Community Group recruited adult community researchers through the Love Ormsgill community group. These community researchers participated in a full day’s training in community research skills and practice, which included confidentiality, anonymity and safe working. Community researchers then undertook independent community research in the streets surrounding their home, returning the completed surveys to the lead researcher when complete.

Through the local expertise represented within it, the Strengthening Ormsgill Community Group identified that there were a number of Syrian refugee families living in Ormsgill at the time of the research. To ensure that all members of the community were invited to take part in the research, they involved the Refugee Support Group, which identified a translator to support data collection. They played a key role in identifying and accessing the area’s Syrian families being able to book home visits for herself and the lead researcher to interview these families within their own homes at a time that was convenient for them.

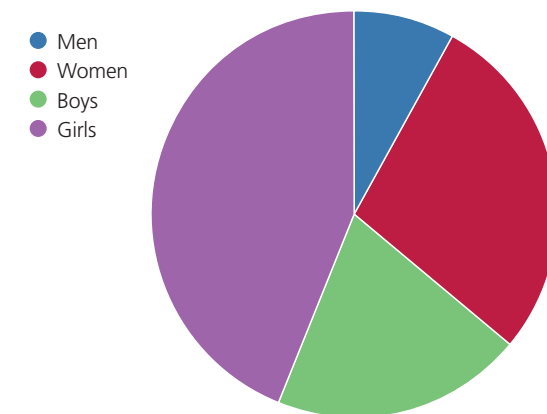


Figure 2: Gender breakdown of community researchers





## Community walks and photovoice

The young community researchers were also involved in community walks that included photography, as it was felt that this would help the children enact their citizenship and understand their community. Again, this differs from the Connected Communities approach, deployed elsewhere in which the predominant methodology is based on community surveys with little involvement of young researchers, and their families.

The approach used in Ormsgill had young people and their families at the heart of the data collection, who put themselves into groups and set about the streets of their local community. They used digital cameras or their own mobile phones to capture young people's perceptions of their community, expressing what they liked and disliked through this medium.

Adult community researchers engaged in conversations with the young community researchers during this time, gaining valuable insight into why certain areas were deemed good or bad. This was recorded using a clipboard while on the community walks. These photographs and the accompanying views were presented to the community through an art exhibition during the Ormsgill Community Shout Out.

## Data Analysis: Making sense of the data

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

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 that 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 sufficient to provide for the 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 Ormsgill, 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, a number of measures were taken to ensure that the research was being carried out ethically and in a way that protected 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 concepts such as the right to withdraw and confidentiality were understood by all the children and young people.

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

Non-academic groups can be an effective means of recruiting children into research, and can also be helpful in gaining and maintaining contact with parents. The strong relationship between the researcher and these non-academic 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.

The research process undertaken was broader than the traditional Connected Communities approach in that it included more focused work with the children to develop their community consciousness through engaging with their local area by way of photography. Alongside the survey data, it provided a robust basis for the collection of data that were presented to the community, where feedback was given and ideas generated for future co-produced interventions.





PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 4

# Survey results

## Overview of the sample

A total of 183 survey interviews were completed, of which 74% were with female respondents. Two-fifths of respondents had lived in the area for 20 years or more, while 6% had lived in Ormsgill for less than a year.

Most respondents described themselves as being White British (96%), representative of the wider population of Ormsgill. 10% were aged 65 or older, while 42% were under 35.

Younger people (especially those 25-35) were slightly overrepresented in our sample, and middle-aged (45-64 years) people were underrepresented.

Most respondents (80%) lived with other people. 60% lived with children, while 20% lived alone. 61% of residents said they were in paid work/self-employed/education, 20% reported being unemployed (more than half of these due to ill health), and 13% were retired.

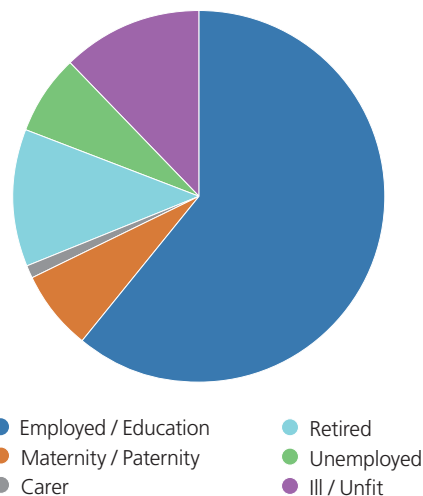


Figure 3: Economic Activity of Ormsgill Respondents

## Perceptions of Ormsgill

Most residents (83%) said they felt that they belonged in Ormsgill, whereas 9% people said they did not feel that they belonged. Three-quarters (75%) were very or fairly satisfied with Ormsgill as a place to live, while 11% reported being fairly dissatisfied and 4% as being very dissatisfied. Almost three-quarters of people (72%) agreed that people look out for each other and three-quarters (74%) agreed that they can always find someone to help them. 86% agreed that “most people around here can be trusted”, while 14% said, in this regard that they “feel you can’t be too careful”.

Residents felt that the best things about living in Ormsgill included the people and the community (62%), the quiet environment (10%) and the local amenities (7%). Comments such as “there’s some brilliant people around here” and “everyone is always looking out for each other and people come together for special events” were frequently cited. Residents identified the main barriers to doing what they wanted to do socially as attitudes, stigma and stereotypes (18%), cultural differences (8%) and drugs (4%). The main areas for in which there was felt to be scope for improvement in Ormsgill were that of having more for children and young people to do (29%); cleaner streets (16%) and tackling drugs issues (15%). It was widely felt that “more activities for teenagers [would] keep them out of trouble”, suggesting that residents would like to see more youth provision in the hope that it would deter antisocial behaviour in the area.

## Health

A quarter (25%) of all residents reported that they have a health issue that stopped them doing what they would like to do (affecting men and women equally). When compared with regional and national figures, fewer people from Ormsgill report excellent health and more people report fair or poor health. People aged 45-54 were more likely than those in other age groups to report poor health.

## Health, social networks and loneliness

Emotional well-being in Ormsgill is slightly higher than the average. 18 to 24-year-olds and 75 to 85-year-olds reported the lowest levels of emotional well-being, and those aged 35-44 reported the highest. There was very little difference in terms of gender, with women reporting having slightly higher levels of well-being than men. There was also very little difference in terms of living with others, with people living with others scoring slightly higher than people living alone.

There was a difference between emotional well-being in relation to loneliness, with those who reported hardly ever or never feeling lonely scoring much higher than those who say they feel lonely often. The more often people in Ormsgill saw their family and friends, the higher their levels of well-being. Half of people in Ormsgill (50%) said they knew all, and nearly everyone (91%) said they knew some of their neighbours. The more neighbours people knew, the higher their levels of well-being. People in Ormsgill were more likely to have higher levels of well-being if they feel that most people can be trusted.

One in 10 people said they felt lonely often or always. This is fewer than in the general population of the UK of which approximately one fifth report loneliness affecting them often or always (ONS, 2018). Women under 45 (and particularly those under 25) who live with children were the most likely to be lonely; among people who were lonely often, 69% were female and 86% had children living with them. 93% of those who say they feel lonely often live with others. People with fair or poor health account for more than half the people who say they feel lonely often (56%), even though they are only a small part of the overall sample (n=16). 7% of people with disabilities and long-term health conditions report feeling lonely often.

## Community skills and volunteering

Almost a quarter (23%) of people said they had volunteered with community groups/projects in the last year, including both those who volunteer on one-off events and those who volunteer regularly. Both men and women were equally likely to volunteer and there were no differences between age groups in numbers volunteering. Of all those who said they felt lonely often, 12.5% had volunteered recently. Activities reported by residents included volunteering in the school attended by their children (for example, as a school governor), helping out in the children’s centre or with child care, and volunteering at a local foodbank. When asked what skills residents felt they possessed and in what areas they felt they would be interested in volunteering in the future, responses concentrated in three key areas:

1. Children and young people
2. Information sharing (for example, a newsletter)
3. Community groups

## Resources and mental well-being

Generally, those with access to resources (people or organisations who could help them) reported higher levels of emotional well-being than those without. This well-being gap was most pronounced between those with/without people to support them emotionally or in getting access to information than? Connections with families and friends made a difference to people’s loneliness, but connections with local organisations did not. This underlines the importance of developing strong social ties in alleviating loneliness, rather than relying on institutional relationships.



### Breadth of local resources

By combining all answers to the resource questions from all respondents, a picture of local resource networks (i.e. individuals or groups of people that they turn to when in need of help) can be constructed. 44% of connections were family connections, while just over a quarter were friendship connections (27%). Together, these two types of resources account for 71% of all resource mentions.

Family and friend ties dominate the different resource networks, although there is some variability between them. While 53% of residents said they would turn to their family when they needed practical help, family was mentioned in only 23% of cases regarding individual change-making networks. For this network, friends and local organisations account for 48% of the change-making resources described by respondents. The table below shows the proportions of respondents that utilise each of a range of resource networks in respect of each of four types of need.

	Receiving practical help	Information on what is going on locally	Knowing how to be part of change in the community	Accessing social support
Family	53%	23%	23%	55%
Friends	26%	4%	32%	36%
Neighbours	14%	2%	5%	1%
Workmates	1%	2%	5%	1%
Social media	1%	40%	5%	-
Local organisations or community groups	0%	8%	16%	4%
Primary schools	0%	17%	7%	0%
Police Community Support Officer	0%	2%	7%	0%
NHS	6%	0%	0%	3%

Table 6: Supportive social networks in Ormsgill

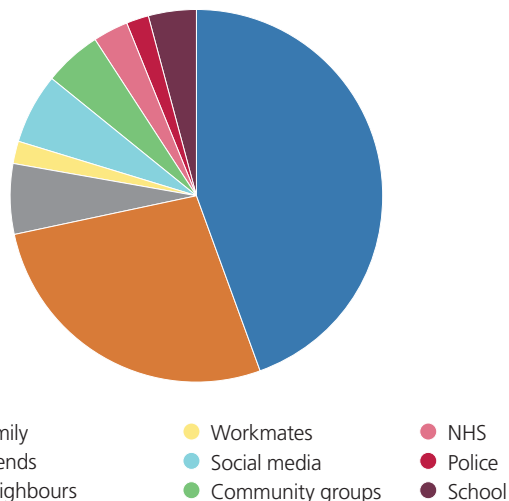


Figure 4: Total social network resource connections

Statutory organisations played a role in some of the supportive networks in Ormsgill. For example, the NHS was cited as offering practical and social support, and the local primary schools and the PCSO for Ormsgill were stated as being helpful for making a positive change in the community and for finding out what's going on in the area. Social media plays a small role in the social networks as a whole, but accounts for 40% of responses when finding out what is going on in the area.

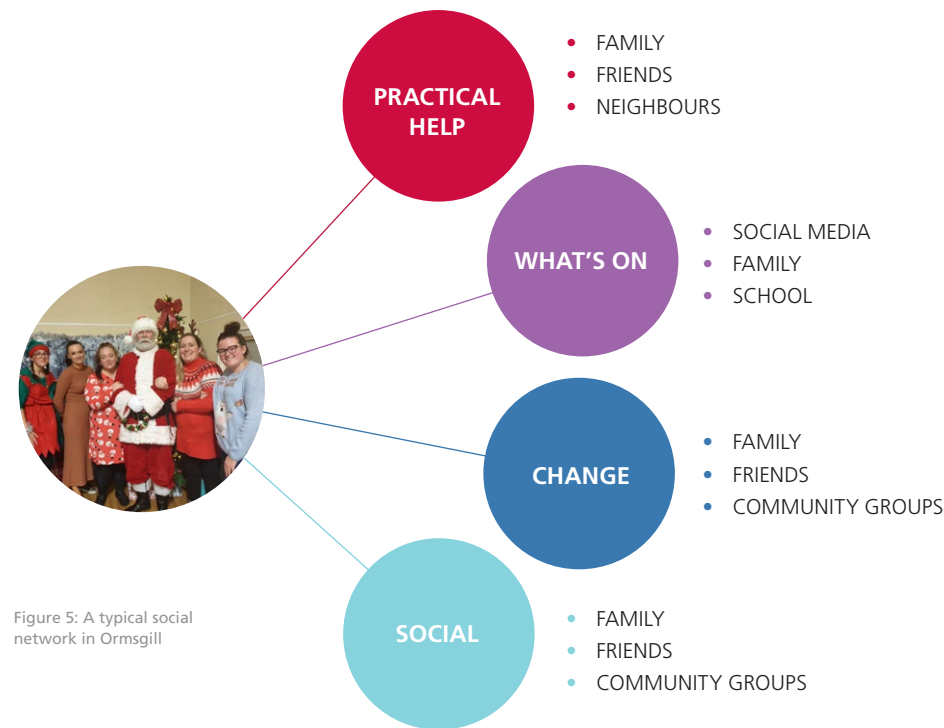


Figure 5: A typical social network in Ormsgill

93% of those who say they feel lonely often live with others.

### Summary

**Perceptions of Ormsgill:** Most people said they were satisfied with the area as a place to live and felt that people look out for each other. The people and the community, the quiet environment and access to local amenities were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being attitudes, stigma and stereotypes, cultural differences, and drugs. Key areas for improvement were identified as being those of having more for children and young people to do, cleaner streets and greater efforts to tackle drugs.

**Health:** 25% of people said they have a health issue that stops them from doing what they would like to do (affecting men and women equally). People aged 45-54 were more likely than other age groups to report poor health. When compared with regional and national figures, fewer people from Ormsgill report excellent health and more people report fair and poor health. Emotional well-being in Ormsgill is slightly higher than the national average. 18 to 24-year-olds and 75 to 85-year-olds reported the lowest levels of emotional well-being when compared with other age groups, and those aged 35-44 reported the highest.

**Loneliness:** One in 10 people said they felt lonely often or always. This is lower than the UK average. Women under 45 (and particularly under 25) who live with children were the age group most likely to be lonely. Of people who were lonely often, 69% were female and 86% had children living with them. 93% of those who say they feel lonely often live with others. People with fair or poor health account for over half the people who say they feel lonely often.

**Community connections and social networks:** Family and friends made up most social connections. Those with poor health and those who say they feel lonely often were more likely to report having few or no connections. The primary schools, the local PCSO and the community centres were the main institutions cited as being a resource and can be used as anchors to connect with the community. Social media plays a significant role in communicating what's on in the community.



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 Ormsgill

The survey results revealed that families, friends and neighbours made up the core support networks for residents in Ormsgill. 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 Ormsgill 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 main ambitions were to conduct community research and co-produce an intervention with local partners.*

One group who were identified as having poorer social networks than others and were more likely to experience loneliness than others was young mothers, and more research is needed on a local level to understand the experiences of this group. There is research showing that mothers of young children are vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation (Lee, Vasileiou & Barnett, 2019), and 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 South Cumbria, where generations remain within the same communities in 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 in that 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 Ormsgill and enhance the social networks and equalise well-being across the community population'.

## Recommendations

### Increase targeted child and youth provision

**Finding: Over a third of people in Ormsgill want more for children and young people to do**

The Stronger Together research brought together young people from Dropzone and Mini-Police, 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 is recommended that further social action projects are made available to young people in Ormsgill. It was also recommended that children and young people were included in the next stage of the research and the projects that emerge from this work.

### Intergenerational activities

**Finding: Young and older people in Ormsgill reported the lowest levels of emotional well-being**

The above finding lends itself to the development of an intergenerational connectivity and well-being project. Previous Connected Communities projects have developed an intergenerational connectivity programme for primary school children and older people. It was recommended that this programme could be adapted to suit young people, and further research is needed to understand the specific issues faced by younger and older people.





## Recommendations (continued)

### Celebrate Ormsgill

**Finding: Ormsgill is a supportive, close-knit community where most people feel they belong**

If it was felt that the strong bonding social capital (close-knit community) that was evidenced in the surveys could be capitalised on to bring people together and create a sense of pride in Ormsgill. It was recommended that public community events could facilitate this and can also introduce services into the community in an informal way (surveys revealed poor bridging social capital, which suggested that residents do not effectively access services that would help them). Cultural inclusion events could also be used to better integrate the Syrian refugees living in the area.

### Activities for young mums

**Finding: Young mothers are the loneliest group of people in Ormsgill**

The above finding lends itself to the development of a dedicated community connectivity group for young mothers. It was recommended that further research is needed to understand the specific issues faced by young mums and the sort of activities these women would like to support them.

### Cultural connectivity activities

**Finding: Refugee women have poor emotional well-being, high levels of loneliness and a desire to integrate**

The two Syrian refugee families interviewed as part of the survey showed a desire to integrate with the community but felt that there were few opportunities to do so. They were also fearful of discrimination and abuse, fuelled by social media content that they had seen. It was recommended that cultural connectivity activities could be developed and delivered in partnership with the refugee families.

### Community cafe

**Finding: Women under 45 (particularly under 25) living with children were the group most likely to be lonely in Ormsgill**

Volunteering can be a great way to overcome loneliness while also providing opportunities to build community capital. It was recommended that a community café managed by residents would not provide not only opportunities for residents to have somewhere to connect and socialise, but for volunteers to build their skills and qualifications.

### Develop joint working opportunities

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

It was recommended that opportunities be created to connect residents – especially children and young people – with those with power and influence by working with local institutions that already enjoy a degree of trust with those in the community (for example, local primary schools and the PCSO). Through developing linking social capital, it was hoped that trust between residents and statutory service organisations could be built and new means of co-production developed. It was also felt that such an approach would encourage local government (and other governance and service organisations) to be held accountable for their policies and practices that impact on communities.

## Structured governance

For any new community group to thrive, it was felt essential that capacity was built within the residents in the community. It was recommended that advice is sought by Cumbria CVS as it offers trustee and governance training, and that local businesses were approached to discuss ways in which they can support the group.

### 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 from particular Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups living in the area. Targeted working with local organisations would be a useful measure to include in future research as a way 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 Ormsgill. However, since the results serve to illuminate some of the underlying social issues in the area, they 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 the complexity of some responses. However, we are confident that the role of the local police officers 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 and capacity and developing citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Ormsgill, with somewhat weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Ormsgill that were identified as being in the greatest need were those with health issues, young mums, and children and young people. In light of these results, it is recommended that any interventions developed to build community capital in Ormsgill:

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, including those based on the value and impact of intergenerational approaches;
3. builds on the existing pride and sense of belonging through events like the Big Lunch, which can also provide opportunities to better integrate the Syrian refugees living in the area;
4. considers activities for young mums – further research needs to take place to understand the specific issues faced by young mums, and the sort of activities these women would like to support them;
5. builds linking social capital through new and effective forms of connection and co-produced services between the community of Ormsgill 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

### Ormsgill Community Shout Out: 12 March 2020

The community researchers shared the research results at a Community Shout Out event on 12 March 2020 at Ormsgill Family Centre. The event was organised by the UCLan research team in partnership with Dropzone and Cumbria County Council. Posters giving notice of the event were placed in several locations in the area (e.g. shops and community notice boards), adverts were posted through UCLan's and partners' social media pages, and personal invitations were issued to people on our mailing lists.

The Shout Out was attended by 54 people, including community researchers and their families, representatives of local community groups and charities such as The Well Communities and Furness Multi-Cultural Forum. Representatives from both Cumbria County Council and Barrow Borough Council were in attendance, including both elected members and staff. The headteacher from a local primary school and Barrow AFC also came to show their support for the young researchers.

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. Members from Barrow AFC presented all community researchers with certificates and local elected members acknowledged their civic contribution to the local community.

*The headteacher from a local primary school and Barrow AFC also came to show their support for the young researchers.*

Excited to learn more about nature, playing with friends planting 😊

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, where 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.

### The development of Ormsgill Stronger Together

**The story behind the development of Ormsgill Stronger Together community group is one of evolution.**

A UCLan research project called Stronger Together was working in collaboration with an existing community partnership group called Strengthening Ormsgill Community Group, which was facilitated by Cumbria County Council. This group was attended by a number of statutory and third-sector organisations, along with elected members, with the overarching aim of enabling and encouraging the community to shape and influence the health and wellbeing of Ormsgill residents.

As part of that group, a new community initiative called 'Love Ormsgill' was launched, which worked with active members of the community (principally from the Friends of Ormsgill School group), which sought to organise events and activities and help support the local community. At the same time, the Stronger Together research project (which used an approach called Connected Communities) was underway, with local children and young people working with police and young workers to survey residents to understand their views on their community, their well-being and their social networks. The children and young people also participated in a project that used a research method called photovoice, where they took photos of areas in Ormsgill that they liked and didn't like. Some parents took part in the research, volunteering their time to support the younger residents.

This group partnered up with another local community group, with the goal to work collaboratively to build a stronger neighbourhood. A number of community events were held that attracted many residents, including a number of women who would eventually become part of the Ormsgill Stronger Together board. The two community groups decided to work separately, and with the support of a Community Development Officer at Cumbria County Council, Ormsgill Stronger Together (OST) was formed. This new community group was set up to focus on making Ormsgill a better place to live, and specifically to:

- Provide services of local children and young people
- Make a difference to the lives of people in Ormsgill
- Build a sense of community spirit

OST could use the results from the UCLan research as a guide to inform what projects to develop. A former member of the Love Ormsgill group was instrumental in talking to members of her community and recruiting members for the new community group – resulting in a local, active board.

The partners who had been working with the new board saw the value and potential of the group. With UCLan's support, funding was granted by Cumbria Community Foundation to employ an experienced community development worker to mentor the new board in their first year, supporting them to ensure that all necessary governance structures and a sustainability plan was in place. After working with the group for a year (during the Covid pandemic), OST was a flourishing community group with all the structures, skills and capacities in place to function almost independently.

OST has gone from strength to strength, designing and delivering innovative and bespoke services to meet the needs of community members across the generations. It has been nominated for a local 'Love Barrow' award for its contribution to the community, and its work has received significant attention from the local press. With a growing team of volunteers, the board has plans to continue to work to support the community and is exploring options on how best to expand.

The tireless efforts of the women behind Ormsgill Stronger Together has been recognised in being awarded Project of the Year 2023 in the Love Barrow Awards.

## Ormsgill Stronger Together Board

OST is a constituted community group. Its board is made up of five local women who all volunteer their time be part of the group. Most are mums, and three of the five work at a local primary school. Below is a brief profile of the board members.

<p><b>Terri Prophet, Chair</b></p>	<p>Terri is a mum-of-three who moved from Manchester to Barrow-in-Furness to give her children a better life and better opportunities. Terri got involved because she wanted her children “to see how nice and rewarding it is to give back to the community and always try to help others when needed”. For Terri, the biggest achievement of being part of OST is seeing the impact it has on others and making people smile. Terri says the OST group “are not just friends, we are family”.</p>
<p><b>Kyhla Mayor, Vice-Chair</b></p>	<p>Kyhla is a mum-of-two who has always lived in Ormsgill and works at Ormsgill Primary School. Kyhla joined OST because she wanted to make a difference to the community and to provide fun things for children to do on the estate. Kyhla feels most proud when she sees the “smiles on the children and community’s faces when they’re enjoying the events that I have helped to organise”.</p>
<p><b>Jade Duke, Secretary</b></p>	<p>Jade is a mum-of-three who has lived on the estate from birth. She has volunteered for Friends of Ormsgill, Love Ormsgill and OST for more than four years. Jade got involved in OST after volunteering on a litter pick, where she talked about what she wanted to see happen in Ormsgill: “I’m very passionate about where I live and want to make it a better place to live”. Jade feels the biggest achievement of OST is in “all the improvements we have made and how we have managed to get a whole community back together again”.</p>
<p><b>Ashleigh-Dee Ballantyne</b></p>	<p>Ashleigh has always lived on the estate and works at Ormsgill Primary School. She got involved to help the people of the community and to give children things to do. For Ashleigh, her biggest achievement has been seeing the smiles of both adults and children after they have attended an event. She said “knowing that us as a group have contributed to that smile is just a great feeling”.</p>
<p><b>Stacey Foreman</b></p>	<p>Stacey is a mum-of-two who has always lived in Ormsgill and works at St Pius Primary School. Like many of the other board members, Stacey got involved in OST to provide opportunities for local children. She said “having two children of my own, I would sympathise with the limited opportunities on the estate for children. I remember a real buzz in the community when I was growing up and I wanted to help out and bring that back for my own children.” Stacey sees the biggest achievement of OST as seeing the differences start to take shape and helping to bring opportunities into the area that have been missing for some time.</p>



## Ingredients for a thriving community group

Two factors were identified as contributing to the success of OST: people and partnerships. One board member explained the success by saying “it’s the right people in the right places”. The role of people and partnerships will be discussed through describing the impact that existing friendships have had on the group and how they were able to successful build a strong network with local partners. The role of research-informed community development will then be considered in light of the UCLan research.

### Friendships

Members of the board were all friends before the creation of OST, with many having gone to school together and having a shared memory of growing up in Ormsgill. This means that there were already strong relationships in place, with board members knowing each other’s individual personalities and ways of working. Learning such things in new groups can be time consuming, but this was avoided here and meant “the girls could just crack on”, as one community partner said. For example, the board quickly created a group chat on WhatsApp that serves as its main communication method. The friendship is characterised not only by respect and support, but also humour, which represents a large part of the group’s atmosphere and environment.

All of the members are either mothers and/or work in a local primary school, and creating a great place to grow up is a significant driver for the group. The friends have a clear, shared vision of what they want to achieve through the group:

*“We all have the same ideas and the same thoughts about things and want to help. It’s something for our children to do as well.”*

OST board member

Getting together, the board feels empowered to step up and make a difference in its community. The group is passionate about the community, which is shown in its positive and proactive attitude in everything it does. As summarised by one member:

*“We can’t be one of them people: ‘Oh, there’s nothing for our kids to do around here’. There are things for our kids to do – because we do it.”*

OST board member

The drive is not to just help their own children; the board members care deeply about the wider community. Decisions are made through discussion, with all members having an equal say in the projects that the group undertake:

*“It’s good because I like that when we have the meetings, we all get to express what we want and what ideas we want to do – like what events we want to do. And there’s never like, ‘you’re not doing that’ – we all come to an agreement. So, say if one person wants to have a festival and you can’t do that, we always come to some sort of middle ground and just all agree on it.”*

OST board member

The board provides a forum for sharing creative ideas to improve the community based on its deep history and local knowledge, with the community bingo being a prime example of the value of these roots.

There is a shared understanding and respect around the commitments and availability of different members of the group, with some members being carers alongside being mums and others working full time. Related to this, there is an appreciation of the strengths of each member (“they bring something separate to the party”, said a community partner), and different roles and responsibilities are allocated according to these strengths. For example, some members meet with the local council and other community partners, others have strong connections with local schools, and others are strong in helping out at community events. All tasks are seen as being equally important and equally valuable.



### Strong partnerships

In addition to having strong relationship within the group, OST also have built strong relationships with a number of important community partners. These “good connections” mean that “they know who they can get hold up to try and get something done”, said one community partner. With the OST board having a strong sense of ownership of its work, it is open to seeking and accepting support, with an ethos around “sharing the responsibility” (community partner).

One significant factor behind the success of OST is the strong, positive partnership with the Community Development Team and elected members at Cumbria County Council (CCC). All were part of the initial Strengthening Ormsgill Community Group, and the Community Development Team offered substantial support during the development of OST and are committed to offer less intense ongoing support.

*“She’s like a mum to us!”*

OST board member

As OST was forming, the council-owned Ormsgill Community Centre that is now where OST is based was being regenerated. Within this partnership, there is a strong faith in the ability of OST to thrive and a commitment to support the group’s sustainability. Being based at Ormsgill Community Centre has also provided an opportunity to work with Family Action, and the two groups have successfully negotiated how they share the space and support one another’s events.

*“CCC and local councillors know that the OST group can really take a hold of [the community centre] space and they’re very supportive of that.”*

A community partner

CCC has also worked with OST on the planning of the community garden, which required various planning approvals, and supported community clean-ups. Central to the strong partnership between OST and CCC is the respectful and trusting relationships that have been built with council staff and elected members.

These relationships are based on shared values (commitment to making Ormsgill a great place to live), attitudes (respect and open-mindedness) and beliefs (that grassroots groups are a great asset to communities). Importantly, there is also a positive history of working together, and the relationships are very much characterised by fun, humour and warmth. CCC is committed to continuing to support OST as the group continues to grow, and OST is now part of the Barrow Town Deal’s Board, having a direct impact and influence on local regeneration investment.

As has been mentioned, OST has strong links with local primary schools. This has provided opportunities for community events to be promoted through school newsletters, reaching families who may otherwise have been unaware the of the group’s work. It has also created opportunities to share resources; for example, one of the primary schools will use the community garden once it is completed.

OST has also developed a professional network with breadth and depth. Other active community partners include the Housing Department at CCC, the local police and fire services, Dropzone Youth Projects, and Furness Multi-Cultural Forum.

These extensive partnerships have been cultivated through the support of mentoring and through a collaborative mindset, as the group “try and pull everybody in” (an OST board member). The group is “well thought of in that community... really well thought of – and that’s not just by members of the community” (a community partner), which enables it to act as a bridge between the wider community and the partners – something that was identified as a challenge in the community research.

### Research-informed community development

The UCLan research offered opportunities for younger local residents to participate in community research, and also generated data to inform the OST board about areas of the community to focus on in developing its plans.

Being a community researcher developed some young researchers’ confidence, pride and self-esteem, along with building individual capacity in learning new skills and developing networks with influential change makers (e.g. elected members). Most significantly, the research acted as a catalyst for social action by helping the young researchers realise the role they can play in their community and gain an awareness of their civic duty. Being part of the research helped to develop a community consciousness among some young researchers, as one mother described:

*“If somebody’s struggling, she can see that somebody’s struggling and if she can help, she’ll go and help now. Whereas before, she probably wouldn’t have looked at it... she’d have looked at it, but didn’t know what to do about it.”*

OST board member

Parents felt that this has a potentially long-term impact, not only on children but on other parents too:

*“It made a massive difference and it’s continued. It impacted the children and also impacted a lot of the parents as well, which helps the children. Their confidence grew as well because the children were raising issues, like the litter picking on the back [of the research].”*

OST board member



Examples of the continued community action include volunteering in school, litter picking and volunteering at OST community events. Partners reported that the research “created a buzz”, which then helped to provide a framework to start from:

*“This structure is really important because it was like having a car with no wheels and now we have the wheels. We’ve got the manual and we can actually get that car where it needed to be.”*

A community partner

As the above quote illustrated, the research unlocked the existing potential of the OST board, while also providing a mechanism to build on these capacities:

*“[The research] gave something tangible. It gave them the tools to set up the board and it gave us some very clear projects to start on, which helped them then start to get comfortable with the idea that they can make these changes and affect positive changes in the community.”*

A community partner

As can be seen, community research can help a neighbourhood to reap a number of benefits, from the community researchers conducting the research to the community groups using the results to inform projects or residents of the wider community enjoying these services, all contributing to greater community capital.



## Being part of a community group

The benefits of volunteering and being involved community action are well understood (Rider & Hall, 2002). Here, the benefits of being part of OST are presented using a community capital framework, which considers well-being, capacity and citizenship on both individual and community levels.

### Well-being

All members of the group say they enjoy being part of OST and that it makes them feel good, saying it has improved their mental health and confidence. This benefit is felt in different ways in different people; for example, it provides a break and change of focus for a member who is a carer for a family member, while another member gets a great sense of control knowing that she is doing something to actively make the community a better place for her children to live in. The experiences of being involved in an active community group have improved the confidence of most members:

*“It did build my confidence because I thought, ‘do you know what, we’re actually doing pretty well here, and people are enjoying it and kids are having fun and they’re actually out of the house.’”*

OST board member

Even group members who experience anxiety and have less confidence are still active and are supported by the rest of the group, taking part in community projects and running public family fun days. The gains in confidence have benefited the community too, with the group now feeling able to challenge situations they perceive as being unfair or wrong:

*“They’re not worried to safely challenge the community. They do a lot of keeping the area clean, tidy, safe, and there’s only a small group that don’t want to play along with that and they’re not worried about telling them that that’s not OK.”*

OST board member

These challenges, by an organised group of residents, help to build a sense of solidarity in the community and show the power of empowered citizens in enacting their collective agency.

### Capacity

The skills and capacity of the board have been developed significantly, which in turn has benefited the community. Being part of OST provided the group with opportunities to learn new skills, some of which they would otherwise have been unlikely to learn. For example, the group learned interviewer skills when they interviewed prospective artists for the community art project, which also saw them being trained in planning and surveying.

The group has significantly developed its capacity for running a community organisation, including sourcing funding and bid writing, clerking and administration, and banking. Initiatives such as the Community Fridge resulted in members gaining food hygiene certificates, which now can be used to help to develop the sustainability of the group through offering children’s parties.

As already noted, the group had many capacities and skills before forming OST. For example, members who work in school were already trained in first aid and safeguarding. Some had previously been involved in community development projects, which not only provided skills and experience, but also the confidence to get involved in OST.

Along with the continued support of the CCC Community Development Officer, key in developing the capacity of the OST board was the role of the mentor, whose vision was to “get the group to a place where they don’t need us” (a community partner). After one year of working together, it was felt that this vision was broadly achieved, so despite more funding potentially being available, the mentoring process was completed. Specific areas where the mentor helped to build the capacity of the board include strategic planning and governance, funding applications and safeguarding. The mentor also supported the group to develop its professional networks and learn how to communicate professionally with different partners.

*“I’ve managed to get them well networked. You’ll hear the name Stronger Together in meetings now. You’ll hear it when we read the news, you hear it on the radio. They’re out there... their professional network.”*

A community partner

These strong connections enhance the capacity of the board, demonstrating how benefits can be gained through networks. For instance, relationships with local supermarkets, who proactively approach the board to offer support, which in turn benefits the well-being of community members. Influential change makers have been identified through these networks, and the board members are now identified as influential change makers themselves.

As with the positive and proactive culture within the board and the collaborative and respectful ethos behind partnership working, the relationship between the OST members and the mentor was key in enabling everyone to work well together. The mentor knew some of the members previously and had the skills to nurture the board, supporting “them to seek out opportunities that they might not have thought possible before” (the mentor). The mentor offered advice on professional aspects of setting up a community organisation, and also offered practical support in helping out with community events.

### Citizenship

There is a strong sense of citizenship and collective agency among all group members, and a genuine desire to improve their community was summarised by one community partner:

*“The board are really keen to make the community better. Take it back to maybe what it used to be ‘once upon a time’. There are mums. They all live there, and they want to do something different. They were a group of friends already that had huge potential to move the community forward.”*

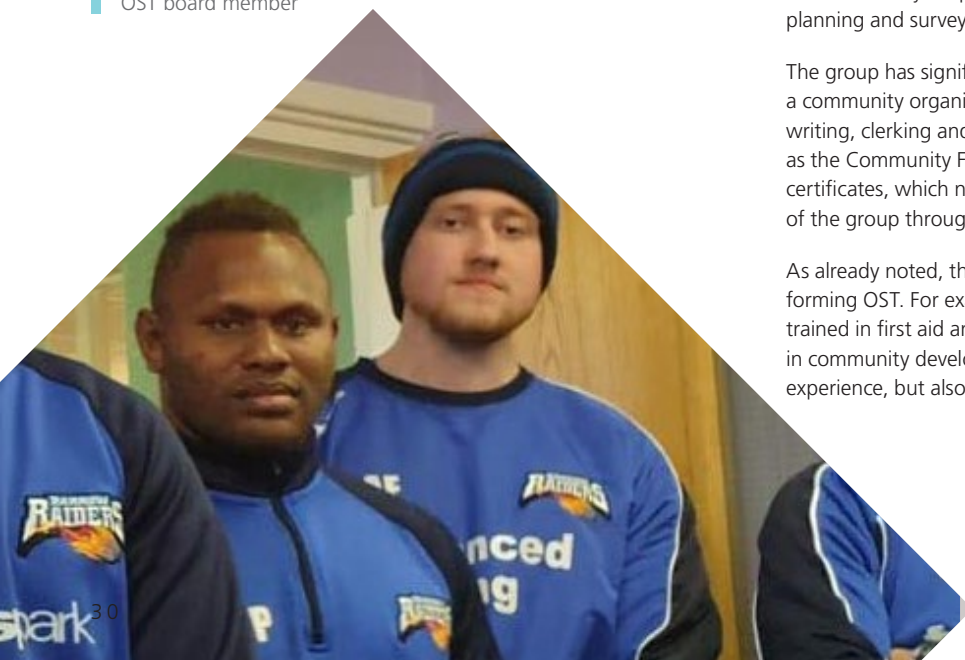
A community partner

The projects the group has delivered to strengthen the community speak volumes for the group’s sense of citizenship. However, one example is particularly worth noting:

*“[The community] have lots of people who just accept stuff because that’s how it is and what can you do. ‘You can’t challenge the system, it’s too difficult.’ For little things, like getting the lights turned on on a Thursday night for those kids who have been playing in the dark for God knows how long. But now you see the people who kicked the beehive. That’s the start of it, and that’s a really positive and empowering message.”*

A community partner

While group members felt a strong sense of citizenship before joining OST, many said that as much as they would have always wanted to get involved in projects to help their community, they “wouldn’t have done it off [their] own back” (OST board member). Through creating OST, the board members were given the tools and a platform to make a positive change in their community, “This is giving them the permission to go to the right channels with the confidence to say ‘why are we putting up with it?’” (a community partner). Many members said they previously felt confident within their personal lives but did not feel confident in standing to up authorities, which they do now they are part of the group.





**INSIGHT: Giving something back**

The OST board does not wish to be paid for its work, despite a number of partners offering support to generate funding. This speaks volumes for the sense of citizenship, values and drivers of the women behind OST.

*“I choose to do it because I like to do it and I like the outcome. If I was paid to do it, then I’m being paid to do something. Being a volunteer is more rewarding than getting a wage at the end of a day.”*

OST board member

The multiple roles that the women hold within the community was noted to be part of this decision.

*“I’m here not just through Ormsgill Stronger Together but I’m here as a parent, and being a parent, I think you look at things different. Whereas when you’re turning up to a job, you’re not being that parent, you’re being a paid worker.”*

OST board member

Working as a volunteer offers the members flexibility in the amount of time they can give to the project, depending on their own circumstances and capacity. Some were concerned that by being given a paid position their role may be professionalised, restricting the ways in which they could work, especially with children and young people.

*“I’d rather have that relationship with the children, being able to come here, having their tea, have a talk to us, and then go on with their day. It’s different when you’re paid. I don’t want the rules and regulations that other companies or organisations have.”*

OST board member

This case study provides a clear example of the power of grassroots organisations working with the community, for the community. Residents are driven by the intrinsic reward of serving their community rather than extrinsic rewards like money or recognition.

Here, we can see how the board acted as means to unlock latent citizenship, where residents feel empowered to develop and use their existing skills and enact their collaborative agency to make a positive change in their community.

**Highlights and challenges**

The group members overwhelmingly say that the best thing about being part of OST is making a difference to a community that they care so much about, and particularly its children:

*“Making a difference to children’s lives and giving them something to do.”*

OST board member

The group now has a growing track record of successfully delivering community projects for children, families and older people, which is making a demonstrable positive impact on Ormsgill residents.

*“That was the best thing about it – seeing that a group really wanted to make some changes and really getting to make a difference.”*

A community partner

As with most community development projects, the group encountered challenges. On a practical level, the community garden has presented many logistical challenges, which have been met with determination and resilience.

*“It will go ahead, but the actual garden’s not taken off as well as we wanted. But it’s only time, it’s in the background.”*

OST board member

Other challenges that the board have overcome include complications associated with setting up a bank account and managing expectations around the capacities of other partners. At times, these setbacks impacted negatively on some members’ mental health, especially when so much time, energy and passion had been invested in a project.

*“They are so keen on that being a success for everybody that when there’s a few young teenagers going in there and attempting to undo the hard work they’ve done, it sets them back.”*

A community partner

This has, at times, impacted on the confidence of some of the members, but with the support of the board, the mentor and wider partners, a strong resilience has been built among the group members individually and as a collective.

**Summary**

Turning community research into action is dependent on bringing people together. This includes building on existing friendships and capacities within the community as well as forming new partnerships with individuals and services. What matters is the shared values around helping the community to meet its potential.

The OST board provides a clear example of how grassroots community groups can benefit both the individuals involved and the wider community, and also create a resilient environment to respond to any challenges they may face. In this case, strong relationships both within the group and between other partners enabled a culture of co-operation characterised by respect, humour and a genuine passion for the community of Ormsgill.



## 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

The OST board has successfully developed and delivered a range of community projects that seek to meet the aim of making Ormsgill a thriving community. These projects or activities fall into four main categories:

1. Making Ormsgill a great place to grow up
2. Bringing people together
3. Bringing services to the community
4. Increasing civic engagement

These categories were loosely guided by the UCLan research results, which showed that older people were more likely to experience loneliness and that there was a strong desire for more activities for children and young people.

The results showed that residents hoped that increased youth provision would reduce antisocial behaviour, which had been identified as one of their main challenges. It was important to the board that projects were inclusive to all members, and consequently most projects have an intergenerational element to them.



*"We're not just aimed at young people or families, we're here for everybody and anybody."*

OST board member

The projects have had a significant impact on Ormsgill residents. Conversations with residents show how highly valued the OST board is by the community, especially because it is felt to go above and beyond to help people. For example, one resident spoke about how grateful she was for a member of the group regularly 'checking in' on her when she had Covid.

### The impact of Covid

The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly impacted on the group's plans for community projects, but rather than see it as an insurmountable challenge, the OST board responded to the adversities facing the community at the time and adapted its ways of working:

*"We still have their structure [from the research], so we all adapted, like the whole world, into this online presence, which is the main way we did it. But also, it was getting the girls to adapt to use Teams. But it's just something we do now."*

A community partner

During lockdown, the group delivered Christmas meals to people and food parcels to families experiencing hardship, and offered emotional and practical support to residents experiencing loneliness or mental ill health. The group also used this as an opportunity to focus on agreeing their aims and objectives, and prepared launch projects following the easing of lockdown.

*"We thought maybe Covid might have kept numbers down when we did get back to physical activity, but it didn't... we've held our events outdoors because that that was the safest thing to do and where you were allowed high capacity. And it worked."*

OST board member

This adaptability continued following the lifting of restrictions. For example, one board member became seriously ill with Covid and was unable to meet with the group face to face. In response, the group adopted a blended approach, where she could attend the face-to-face meetings virtually. What was important to the board was that this member continued to feel included in the group and was part of the planning and decision making taking place.





## Making Ormsgill a great place to grow up

### Activities for children and families

Providing more activities for children and families was a primary driver for the group – not only for their own children, but for the wider community:

*“Because of the limited opportunities in the area, we do find that children are turning towards electronics rather than going out. It’s nice for them to be able to have something to look forward to and something to do.”*

OST board member

Conversations with parents from Ormsgill showed that this was valued above any other project, particularly during the holidays. One mother described that her son struggles to take part in group activities due to his social anxiety, but he willingly comes to the community centre as he feels safe there.

### Summer programme

A range of activities have been made available to children and families over the summer holidays, including sport days, first aid training and bake offs. Children said these events made them feel happy and excited and that they had an “amazing” time. Parents appreciated the family-focused activities, with one mother saying she “liked spending time with family in the sun” and another saying “we felt like a community again”. This latter comment highlights the wider impact that family events can have on feelings of community belonging and solidarity.

### Holiday activities

In addition to activities for families during the summer holidays, special themed activities are offered at other times of the year, for example at Easter, Halloween and Christmas. Previous activities include baking and community egg hunts around Easter, spooky community walks at Halloween and Christmas parties.

### CASE STUDY: Spooky Walks

During Halloween, OST worked in partnership with Dropzone Youth Projects to deliver a Spooky Walks activity where children and young people built their own scarecrows, later displaying them in their garden. The group then collectively walked around the community judging the scarecrows and presenting prizes to the top scorers.

*“It was nice to see the children walking round and looking at different houses that they probably wouldn’t have gone to.”*

OST board member

This exercise gave the children and young people an opportunity to explore their community in a safe way – something that is not always possible.

*“It was nice to see houses actually taking part. Quite a lot joined in and made an effort.”*

OST board member

The project also gave the community a novel reason to get involved, and the fact that more houses participated than anticipated suggests a desire for further fun, community-focused activities.



### Litter picking

Community walks incorporating litter picking have proven to be very popular with children and young people in Ormsgill:

*“The kids, they love the litter pick and if you could see their faces and that when they’re doing it. They get dead competitive over how many bags they’ve got. If one child’s got four bags, the next one’s got five – ‘I’ve got more than you’, they make it into a proper competition. It’s lovely.”*

OST board member

When asked why they enjoyed litter picks, younger residents from Ormsgill said it was fun and “it was interesting to see how much people litter”. Many said it made them feel good to be helping their community.

### Sport and leisure activities

A number of sport and leisure activities are now available for children and young people in Ormsgill, including football and dancing. These are seen by the group as a good opportunity to engage with children and young people, and also to discreetly provide food to those from families that they know are experiencing severe financial hardship by laying on evening meals for all children. Ormsgill was also one of the first communities outside London to offer ParkPlay to residents, providing opportunities for families to have fun and get fit together.

### Arts and culture

Working in partnership with the local arts organisation BarrowFull, children and young people in Ormsgill were able to engage with a number of projects relating to arts and culture. For example, children have spent time on the local beach creating art and have worked with artists to produce an Ormsgill Stronger Together logo.

### CASE STUDY: Community garden

The most significant project involving Barrowfull is the community garden, which aims to create a sustainable garden for all residents to enjoy. This is an ongoing project, but so far children and young people have been involved in gardening and have made bird feeders and plant pots for Mother’s Day.

Younger residents who have been involved with the community garden said they learned about different birds and flowers, and enjoyed playing with their friends. The project will offer opportunities for intergenerational activities, bringing older and younger people together to create a community mural in the garden.



### Reducing antisocial behaviour

The UCLan research showed that many residents felt that more activities for children and young people in the estate could potentially reduce antisocial behaviour, and this was an area of interest shared by members of the board. OST has been engaging with children and young people who are known for antisocial behaviour in various ways, including offering them a friendly face, challenging their behaviour, negotiating future provision and asking for their views.

Although not specifically targeted, these young people have started attending the Community Centre and informally engaging with board members:

*“Some children have started to come here, knocking on the door, and they’ll say, ‘oh, can we have a hot chocolate?’ using their manners and they’ll come in and have a chat with us. And then we can talk to their parents and then that’s the ones that turn up. So, it’s just all rolling.”*

OST board member

It was felt that the informal, nurturing approach taken by the board was particularly effective in gaining the trust and respect of these young people, because “they want to think somebody bothers about them” (OST board member). Some members felt that they act as positive role models, based on developing relationships and offering informal, social support.

*“We’ve built some lovely relationships with individual children. It’s been nice for example, whilst making t-shirts recently, I spent some quality time with a young person and she expressed how much she had enjoyed that time.”*

OST board member

The board is also challenging the behaviour of young people who engage in antisocial behaviour by not just reprimanding them, but encouraging them to take positive action. For example, one board member offered to hold a young person’s bike while he picked up some litter he had thrown on the floor. In addition to challenging young people, the board has also opened up negotiations with young people:

*“They were all on about that they want a nice park and we said to them, ‘if you want a park all we ask is that you prove to us that you can look after it and take care of it’.”*

OST board member

Dialogue between the board and young people has also gone a step further in some cases, with young people who would not usually contribute to community meetings attending and speaking up:

*“One of them came to the community meeting that we had, and they were asking for suggestions. And one of them said that he likes gardening and he likes getting muddy and said, ‘what about if we could do a tractor race to raise money for cancer’, and I thought that was absolutely wonderful.”*

OST board member

These interactions may seem small, but they are significant. They provide examples of the group working to enhance relationships and develop opportunities for young people on the edges to feel part of their community and see the value they have through contributing to it rather than damaging, it.

### CASE STUDY: Cumbria Police

The positive partnership OST has with Cumbria Police is worth noting – in particular, the strong relationship the group has with Michelle Jones, the PCSO for the area. Michelle spends considerable time with young people on the estate, dropping into youth work sessions and playing football with young people. She also runs the Mini-Police project with a local primary school, where the Mini-Police officers engage in a range of activities to help their community. The PCSO and the Mini-Police officers also played a significant role in the Connected Communities research project, acting as community residents and surveying their community.

OST has involved the police in all public events, such as the summer programme for children and families, and the services day. This has been felt to overcome some engagement barriers between children and young people on the estate and the police:

*“It’s just nice that they can see a different side to the police and that they’re not just going to arrest people. Like they’re decent human beings like anyone.”*

OST board member

Furthermore, the conversations held with the children and young people have been said to be helpful in improving younger residents’ knowledge of who to go to if they need help. The importance of an approachable and engaged PCSO was also noted when talking to residents at the evaluation day, who valued the time that she spent on the estate.

### Impact

The impact of these activities on younger residents, families and the wider community will now be described considering three elements of community capital: well-being, capacity and citizenship.

#### Well-being

The physical and emotional well-being of some families in Ormsgill was enhanced due to the activities offered by OST. On an individual level, children and young people reported that the activities made them feel happy, and these benefits have been observed by board members:

*“The kids that do turn up to stuff, when you see them randomly on the street or something and it’s not an event day, they will question you, like ‘oh, when are we doing that again?’ or ‘when’s the next litter pick?’. And I think that’s nice because it obviously shows that they are enjoying it.”*

OST board member

The enhanced relationships with families that have been nurtured by the board have built a greater sense of community, contributing to the overall well-being of the community. Furthermore, the emotional and physical well-being of children and young people has also been promoted through offering regular outdoor physical activity.

The physical well-being of children from families experiencing hardship has been promoted due to food being offered at every activity. Here, the wider collective well-being impact can be seen through easing the stress and burden of families during the holidays by not only providing free activities to keep children entertained, but also providing free food – tackling challenges experienced particularly by families eligible for free school meals.

#### Capacity

Many of the projects aimed at children and families were delivered in partnership with other organisations, demonstrating how connected individuals and organisations can lead to better services for the community and greater community capital.





### Citizenship

The range of activities provided children with the opportunity to learn new skills, including first aid and gardening. This contributed not only to the individual attributes of the children but also to the collective skills within the community, which can be used to build greater community capital.

Some of the activities offered to the children resulted in an increase of awareness of community issues, igniting a sense of collective agency and empowerment. This was particularly the case with litter picks, with children saying "I like keeping the area clean and being outdoors", "we do it to make the world clean" and "I like doing it because it makes our world safe". A longer-term impact on attitudes and behaviours has also been seen in some of the children who took part:

*"I went to a skate park with my little girl, her and her two friends, there was rubbish in the bowl. And they were like, 'come on, let's get this rubbish out', and they just went and they took it to the bin and it was nice. Because they were like, 'well we can't play in there because it's disgusting.'"*

OST board member

Although not explicitly an increase in citizenship, the engagement the board has had with young people involved with antisocial behaviour will hopefully start to influence their behaviour and eventually result in a reduction of incidents on the estate, with improvements being felt across Ormsgill.

### Summary

OST provides a range of activities for children and families, including a summer programme, holiday activities, litter picking and a range of sport, leisure and cultural activities. The informal approach taken by the board members has helped to engage young people who have not previously engaged well with local projects, and it is hoped that this can be the catalyst for reducing antisocial behaviour in Ormsgill. The well-being, capacity and citizenship in the area has been enhanced as a result of these projects, resulting in greater community capital.



### Bringing people together

A focus of the Connected Communities research approach is on understanding social networks and using this information to reduce loneliness in a community. The research found that older people were the most likely to report feeling lonely often, and this was something that resonated with the board. A range of activities have been made available to help residents connect, including bingo, coffee mornings and intergenerational projects. Conversations with residents revealed how much this was appreciated; knowing there was a place to go where they would be welcomed and supported was felt to significantly help the mental health of some residents.

*"It's a trusted place. It's for local people. It's on our doorstep. It's certainly helped members of the community feel more confident and connected."*

A community partner

Being based at Ormsgill Community Centre provides a hub for the work of OST. Having a known, trusted place to meet is essential in engaging with communities, especially people who have not taken part in community activities before. An active Facebook page also helps to ensure that most residents are informed about what is going on in the estate.

### Reconnecting post-Covid

The board supported members who were isolating during lockdown by delivering food parcels and keeping in touch via WhatsApp. Following the lifting of restrictions, the group knew that it was important to offer safe face-to-face activities:

*"The confidence to come out from Covid, that's been a massive impact. I know that they ran events that got people out who would not have otherwise gone out. They've felt that this is a secure place to go."*

A community partner

Feeling physically safe following the global pandemic was important to residents in Ormsgill, and the Community Centre offered a nurturing, accessible and safe place to reconnect.

The regular weekly coffee morning held at Ormsgill Community Centre is a great example of how residents can now reconnect with one another, which offers low cost food to residents, along with tablets that can be used to access the internet.

*"Coffee morning has regular attendees that come every week and enjoy socialising with each other, some have been socially isolated for so long and really enjoy seeing friends old and new."*

OST Board Member





### CASE STUDY: Bingo

One advantage of community groups being developed and delivered by residents is their local knowledge and shared history. The group remembered how popular bingo was previously and launched a monthly bingo night with great success. A board member gave a moving example of the extent that a seemingly simple event can have:

*“A terminally ill lady from the estate had expressed how she wanted a night out with her friends. She was unable to physically get to her usual meeting places and they suggested going to bingo. It was an emotional day, but she really enjoyed spending time with other residents. Then she came back again. It’s nice to see that and give them those memories.”*

OST board member

Residents who attended bingo said things like “my mum really enjoyed it”, “it was fantastic, I loved it” and “it was a great night”, and with over 20 residents attending regularly, the sessions are providing opportunities to connect, laugh and play bingo.

*“Our monthly bingo is a big hit with our residences they love coming to join in with us we have also provide refreshments & a buffet style tea for them.”*

OST board member



### Then and now

Delivered by Barrowful, this intergenerational project brings the community together to share photos and memories of Ormsgill across the generations.

*“It got people talking about Ormsgill 60 years ago. And it really helped people to connect. It was so nice for the younger ones to hear the stories from the older ones.”*

A community partner

Residents who took part said they “loved sharing memories with others and hearing stories, particularly from the older generation” and that it made them feel “joyful”. Further intergenerational activities are planned to build on the positive connections made.

### Jubilee and Food Fest

The Queen’s Jubilee was celebrated in Ormsgill by incorporating it with a food festival. Here, traditional afternoon teas were serviced alongside food from other cultures.

*“We couldn’t let the queen’s jubilee pass without a special celebration, in the past residents had held street parties and other community events celebrating royal occasions.”*

OST board member

Funded by CCC and the Asda Foundation, and delivered with the support of Furness Multi-Cultural Forum, the event offered a chance for residents from different backgrounds to meet and connect over free food, live music, raffles and tombolas, craft activities, photo booths, cup cake decorating and face painting. OST also worked with Barrowful to create a jubilee banner which “took pride of place on the day of the event” and was contributed to by various residents and a range of community groups.

*“The day of the event could go down in history as one of the wettest days we have ever witnessed, however that did not dampen the spirits of our residents. By the end of the event we had children and adults dancing along to the music and generally having a good time. This was probably one of our most challenging events yet as we came across many obstacles, but enjoyed it nevertheless.”*

OST board member

The Jubilee and Food Fest provides an example of how a national celebration can bring people together on a very local level, to celebrate not only British traditions but also diversity within the area.



### Refugee support

Ormsgill is the main area where newly placed refugee families are housed, and special measures were taken to ensure that they were included in the Connected Communities research through working with partner organisations and providing an interpreter. The results showed that families, especially women, wanted opportunities to connect with the community. These opportunities were felt to be lacking, with the support that was offered to refugee families being based outside Ormsgill.

The OST board was aware of the challenges faced by the refugee community and were supported by its mentor, who also worked with refugees in a different role to create an environment where everyone felt welcome:

*“It’s been really lovely that OST have really connected and brought those people in, which hasn’t happened before. I’ve got absolute confidence in the girls that they’re going to make that as good as it can be. It’s all been really positive”.*

A community partner





Local refugees have volunteered in a number of OST community events and OST members and residents were taught to build a memorial bench. Some of the children now play football in the estate and one mother is now running Syrian cookery classes for other residents.

## Impact

### Well-being

The impact of social networks and opportunities to connect is well understood (Parsfield, et al., 2015), as is the importance of a central, trusted local meeting place (Ridley & Morris, 2018). The projects that the board has developed have provided both, resulting in reduced loneliness and improved emotional well-being in some residents.

*“We’ve touched on all age groups, so we’ve done stuff with all age groups. It’s becoming proven that our older generation are really quite still worried about coming out, but they have. They have come out and if we connected with people, they’ve had a go at new stuff. They’ve learned new skills.”*

A community partner

Residents have said that these projects have given them the chance to offer each other social support and to feel part of the community, and that reconnection was particularly important following the Covid pandemic. Through bringing residents together, both the well-being of individuals in Ormsgill and the collective sense of well-being in the community have been promoted.



### Citizenship

The creation of a community group based in the community and ran by the community has offered volunteering opportunities for local residents. The board are seen by residents as effective in communicating volunteering opportunities and active in promoting them. Examples of residents volunteering include taking part in local litter picks and helping on community fun days. These volunteering opportunities have had a significant impact on some residents:

*“There’s one lady and she’s got five children; some of them have additional needs. She never used to come out of the house and was always withdrawn because she rarely got a break. She never really had any friends either, but now she comes to every event. She comes everywhere and it’s nice to see the change in her and how confident she has become.”* OST board member

Community capital has been built not only by getting people together to connect and volunteer, but also by providing adult learning sessions, which residents say they really valued. These also build on the capacity of the board by having more skilled individuals active in their community.

*“She’s actually done some of the food hygiene course with us, just so we could try and bring her in and help. If she just wants to help out, come and help make something.”*

OST board member

The individual and collective benefits of volunteering are well understood (Rider & Hall, 2002), but the story outlined above provides a powerful example of how a real sense of collective agency and empowerment can be generated by working together towards a common goal – in this case, making Ormsgill a thriving place to live.

### Summary

OST provides a range of activities to bring the community together, including bingo, coffee mornings and an intergenerational project. These are seen as particularly important following Covid, during which many community members were initially fearful of socialising. The individual and community well-being and citizenship has been enhanced in Ormsgill as a result of these projects, resulting in greater community capital.

### Bringing services to the community

The community research revealed that residents in Ormsgill connected well with fellow residents, friends and family; they had what is known as strong bonding social capital. However, they had weaker bridging social capital, which meant that residents were less likely to use services available to them beyond the community. The board has developed a number of initiatives bringing organisations to the community, with the aim of raising awareness of services and overcoming perceived barriers like travel.

### Services day

As part of its summer programme, OST held a public event on a field outside Ormsgill Community Centre that sought to connect local residents with important services such as the NHS, CCC and BCC, and the police and fire services. As well as providing an opportunity to share important information, it was hoped that this would overcome some of the engagement barriers many of these organisations face.

*“It actually gave people the opportunity to go and speak to someone about their council tax bill or issues such as ‘why is the bin not being emptied?’. It just gave them time to be able to go and speak to them face to face and get an immediate reply.”*

OST board member

The services day provided information not only to adults but to children and young people, too. Statutory services such as fire and police offered fun activities to engage younger residents, such as going in the police van or using the fire hose. This sought to overcome barriers of perceiving police officers as people to avoid, but also to ensure that children and young people were informed about the support available to them.

*“It was good for the children to be able to come and see who was there and who they’ll be able to speak to if they need to.”*

OST board member

In addition to larger events such as services days, OST have also held ‘pop up’ information stalls by the main shopping area to promote the reporting of anti-social behaviour, ensuring that residents are aware of the ways in which they can do this.

By bringing services to Ormsgill in an informal and non-threatening environment, these organisations were able to build new relationships with residents, promote the support they offer and learn (and hopefully respond to) the challenges the community faces regarding access.



## CASE STUDY: Community Fridge

The board has worked with the local MP to secure funding for a Community Fridge. This is a place where all members of the community can access free food that would otherwise have gone to waste. The purpose of the fridge is to provide open access to food to the community, encourage social interactions over food and alleviate food waste.

Through creating strong partnerships with local supermarkets, surplus food is collected by board members or delivered to Ormsgill Community Centre several times a week, where residents can access food in a welcoming environment. The approach is very open, with no referrals needed and no details of those using the fridge being taken. This has been done deliberately, as the group acknowledges the fear and stigma associated with food poverty. The group tries to further challenge this stigma through regular posts on its Facebook page showing meals cooked by residents using food from the fridge, and also by providing a weekly summary of the amount of food waste the project has prevented.

The project is felt to be particularly impactful given that the local foodbank is not accessible to many local residents:

*“There’s no food shares around here. The closest one is towards the big park, where if you don’t drive, you’re not going to get anything from down there to bring it all the way up here.”*

OST board member

In a national and global context that is experiencing both economic and environmental crises, the Community Fridge is an example of a modest, place-based and low-cost way to alleviate these challenges. OST suggest how to use surplus food, health recipes i.e., freeze cheese Facebook page many people share images of meals prepared with food. The midwives who hold sessions are telling mums- to-be to access the fridge to encourage them to eat a healthier diet and reduce food waste.

The Community Fridge has 12 regular volunteers and is used by between 15 to 18 residents per day. It is estimated that 13,088.05 tons of food have been saved from landfill as a result. The project now works in partnership with Barrow Foodbank, and the Community Fridge can now offer emergency food parcels to those experiencing acute hardship. Working relationships have also been established with Barrow’s Community Kitchen, with both groups signposting to each other.

### Impact

#### Well-being

The individual well-being of residents is being promoted through access to free food from the Community Fridge, which will bring emotional and physical benefits. The well-being of the wider community is being promoted through services days, which provide the opportunity to build relationships with organisations that can offer support and help to build a wider sense of community in Barrow.

#### Capacity

The capacity of individuals in Ormsgill has been developed by gaining knowledge of what services are available to support them. Training opportunities such as first aid courses have also developed individual skills. Community capacity has been built through new partnerships to better support the community.

### Summary

Community events such as services days and projects like the Community Fridge have provided opportunities for residents to connect with services beyond their immediate neighbourhood. This has resulted in better-informed and connected individuals and improved networks within the community, positively impacting on the individual and community well-being and capacity of Ormsgill, strengthening community capital.



## Increasing civic engagement

In addition to encountering challenges with contacting organisations beyond the immediate community, the Connected Communities research revealed that few residents had any contacts with people in positions of power, and few said they would go to the council or councillors if they wanted to make a positive change in their community.

This can be understood as residents having poor linking social capital. The OST board members have developed opportunities to link themselves and community members with people who influence change in their community through organising community meetings and contacting their local MP.

### Community meetings

Residents now have the opportunity to speak with “lots of different agencies”, such as the CCC, the police and the fire service, in a familiar space that encourages a culture of respectful deliberation. This was triggered by a community member’s comment, and provides an example of how the board responds to the requests of the community:

*“Residents in the community expressed how community meetings were needed and so we made it happen. We arranged for local services to attend so that issues could be discussed.”*

OST board member

Examples of issues discussed at these meetings include litter, parking, library services and motorbikes being used on grassed areas. Young residents joined the meeting and asked the council about the park being updated, while another resident offered his services to transport people to hospital appointments – showing how community meetings can serve to offer opportunities to change and also to participate in local community support.

## Approaching people in power

Being part of a formal group created a space where residents felt more confident to speak out about issues that matter to them. For example, some board members challenged the local MP about the lack of street lighting on the local football ground. This built a relationship with the MP, which resulted in funding for the Community Fridge.

*“Keeping out of that comfort zone. The person I’m talking about now is the one who goes to an MP. The one who is furious that the lights aren’t on for their children on the Thursday night and she’s not accepting it anymore. ‘No, this is not good enough because it’s not good enough for my community’.”*

A community partner

OST has also voiced concerns about the ‘cost of living crisis’ and the impact it will have on residents. After raising this with CCC, £1,000 was awarded to the group to help supply the most vulnerable with resources to help them cope. Securing this funding is something that the OST board members, as individuals, would not have previously had the confidence to do, and shows the value of feeling part of a group.

Furthermore, OST contacted local councillors and the local MP for support in creating a weekly ‘Pop-Up Post Office’. Partly funded by CCC, this provides a much-needed service for elderly residents.



## Representing Ormsgill

In addition to sitting on the OST board, members now also represent the community in other organisations. For example, one member now sits on the board for Barrowfull, and the group is also on Barrow's Towns Fund Board. These positions provide the group with a space where they can influence policy and practice development on a broader scale, ensuring the best interests of the residents of Ormsgill are represented.

## Impact

### Well-being

Speaking out, either in community meetings or by directly contacting someone such as an MP, promotes a sense of community and builds relationships both within the community itself and beyond. These opportunities can build individual confidence through feeling empowered and heard.

### Citizenship

The experience of feeling heard and empowered has helped to build a sense of collective agency and resulted in greater citizenship in Ormsgill. The ways in which the community have acted collectively show the power of being part of a group.

## Capacity

Through engaging with those in authority, influential change makers were identified and networks developed beyond the community. The outcomes emerging from these networks and new relationships benefit the wider community, such as children and young people now being able to play football on dark nights.

## Summary

Opportunities for the community to challenge local decision makers were provided by OST through organising community meetings and contacting the local MP. This provided opportunities for residents to engage in debates with people in positions of power, heightening the civic engagement of the individuals and the community as a whole. This has benefited the individual and community well-being and capacity of Ormsgill, resulting in a more empowered estate with greater community capital.

## Plans for the future

The OST board is committed to continuing to design and deliver projects that make Ormsgill a great place to live. Maintaining and building OST's professional networks is seen as key to ensure the sustainability of the group. Although the mentor is now not officially providing support for the group, they continue to be in regular contact and have worked collaboratively on some projects.

OST is connected with key tertiary professional networks that will ensure the group is informed of relevant funding opportunities and that all governance standards are maintained. The strong partnerships with the local council and police service will continue to help OST build community capital and ensure residents are supported, informed and have opportunities to participate.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Full list of community researchers

Drop Zone	Mini-Police	Residents	Cumbria County Council	Furness Refugee Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lauren Dempster</li> <li>• Tyler Askew</li> <li>• Lewis Benzie</li> <li>• Amy Prophet</li> <li>• Leon Kay</li> <li>• Evie Graham</li> <li>• Niamh Horan</li> <li>• Fryer Duke</li> <li>• Teal Richards</li> <li>• Isabelle Tucker</li> <li>• Kiera Sharrott</li> <li>• Phoebe Faragher</li> <li>• Leah Miles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michelle Jones</li> <li>• Joseph Wallace</li> <li>• Macculy McGlaady</li> <li>• Lincoln Johnson</li> <li>• Harvey Newland</li> <li>• Gracie Helm</li> <li>• Reece Quinn</li> <li>• Lexi Gutkowaski</li> <li>• Cady McGlaady</li> <li>• Brooke Brown</li> <li>• Brooke Johnson</li> <li>• Lexi Platt</li> <li>• Milly Brown</li> <li>• Kieren Jones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jade Duke</li> <li>• Beverley Jayne Whitby</li> <li>• Rachel Moyse</li> <li>• Bekka Higgins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simonetta Tiribocchi</li> <li>• Bill McEwan</li> <li>• Michelle Rigg</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lina Harb Tyson</li> </ul>



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