CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Woodhouse

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Inclusion and Connected Communities in Policy and Practice

Girl's Gang

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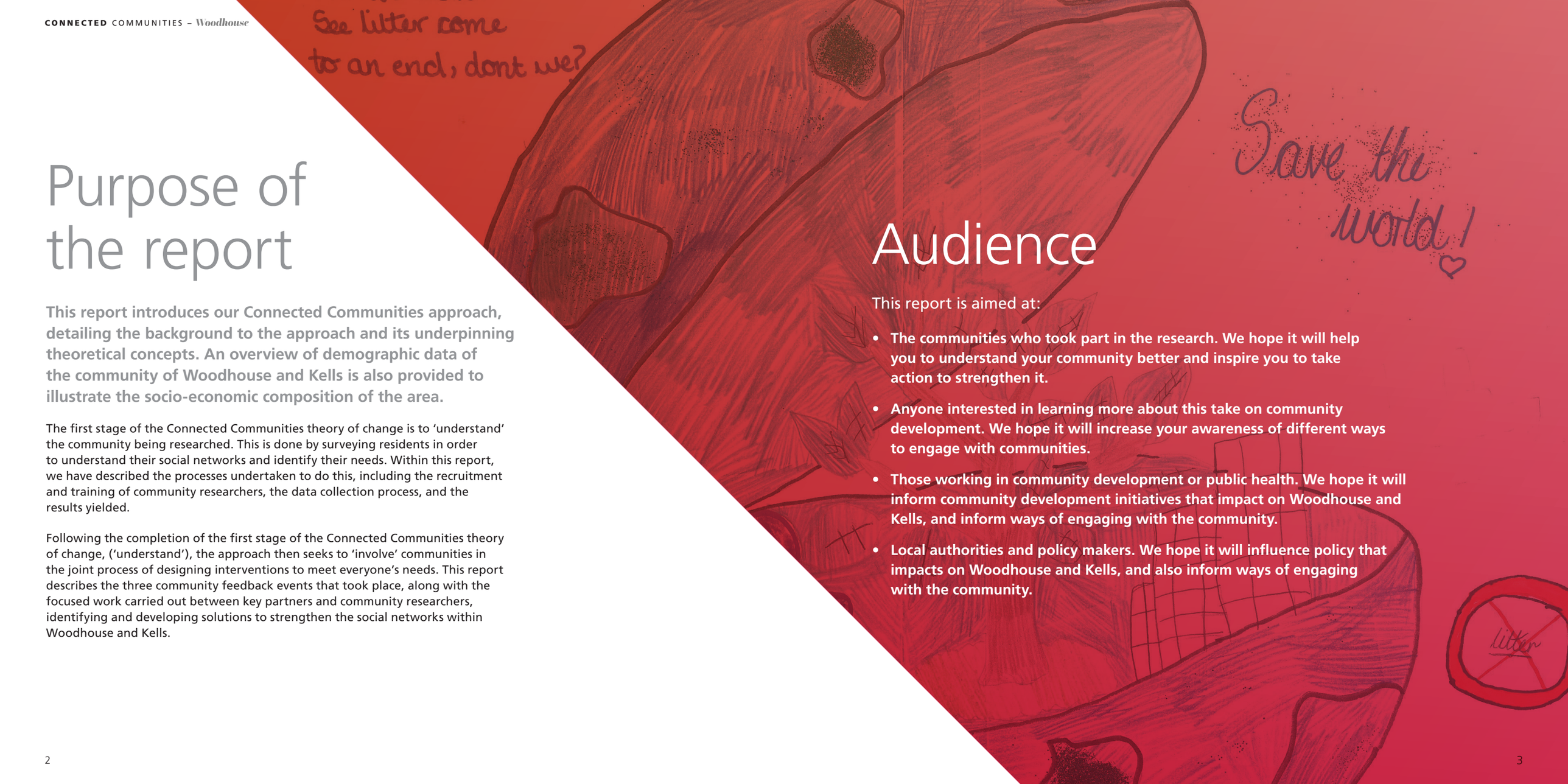
Purpose of the report

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

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

Following the completion of the first stage of the Connected Communities theory of change, ('understand'), the approach then seeks to 'involve' communities in the joint process of designing interventions to meet everyone's needs. This report describes the three community feedback events that took place, along with the focused work carried out between key partners and community researchers, identifying and developing solutions to strengthen the social networks within Woodhouse and Kells.



Audience

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 strengthen it.**
- **Anyone interested in learning more about this take on community development. We hope it will increase your awareness of different ways to engage with communities.**
- **Those working in community development or public health. We hope it will inform community development initiatives that impact on Woodhouse and Kells, and inform ways of engaging with the community.**
- **Local authorities and policy makers. We hope it will influence policy that impacts on Woodhouse and Kells, and also inform ways of engaging with the community.**

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Acknowledgements - There are a number of individuals and organisations without whom this work would not have been possible. Firstly, we would like to thank our young community researchers and their families for their relentless dedication, time, passion and commitment; Annalise Lewthwaite, Jaya Pilkington, Lacey Ritson, Lexie Nesbitt, Libby Smith, Madison Dixon, Olivia Graham, Rayna Morton and Shannon Telford. We would also like to thank Kiera Williamson, Brook Smith, Tilly Todd, Tia Smith and Kieta Hall.

The project was based at St Peter's Community Hall in Woodhouse, and we would like to thank the Parish Council for use of their building. We would also like to thank Carol Spence for always being available to help with issues we faced in the centre, often at short notice.

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 Inspector Mark Wear and Superintendent Gary Slater for their energy in establishing the project within West Cumbria, and to Louise Coid and her team at the Copeland Focus Hub. The skills, patience and expertise of the police officers involved were a major contributor to the childrens' enjoyment of the data collection activity.

The local authorities also supported the work undertaken by Girls Gang in a number of ways. Staff at Cumbria County Council, namely Sarah McNeil, Georgina Ternent and Maria Hewitt all gave up their time to raise awareness of issues such as recycling and healthy eating. Copeland Borough Council spent time with the group, educating them about the democratic process, and consulting with them on the development of the Children's Charter – which is now council policy. And we would particularly like to thank Scrutiny Officer James Young, who not only led this exercise, but also attended every community event we held.

A number of local third sector organisations offered their services to Girls Gang, without cost, and these activities have undoubtedly enhanced the experience of the girls taking part in the research. We would like to thank Dave Roberts and Emma Dockeray from Soundwave, Sandra Dempsey from Age UK West Cumbria, Matt LeBourne from The Colourful North, Jo Haigh from Always Another Way Ltd and Nic Lynch from QL North.

Finally, our colleagues at UCLan played an invaluable role in offering advice, guidance and support throughout the project. For this we would like to thank, Dr Julie Ridley, Dr Manjit Bola, Jez Buffin, Dr Steve Broome, Grete Smith, Ellen Dodson and Dr Cath Larkins.

The social value calculations featuring in this report were conducted by LynchPin Support. We thank Nicola Lynch for sharing her expertise with us.

PART 1: BACKGROUND - CHAPTER 1

An introduction to Connected Communities

The University of Central Lancashire's (UCLan) Centre for Citizenship and Community has developed the exciting Connected Communities approach (Parsfield, et al., 2015) as an action research strategy to explore how the community aspect of people's lives contributes to well-being.

The intention is to then analyse 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.

> *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).*

The Connected Communities approach is a purposefully fluid, bespoke approach, responding to the nuances of each community, rather than being a fixed one-size-fits-all framework. **The table opposite summarises the key features** that make up the approach.

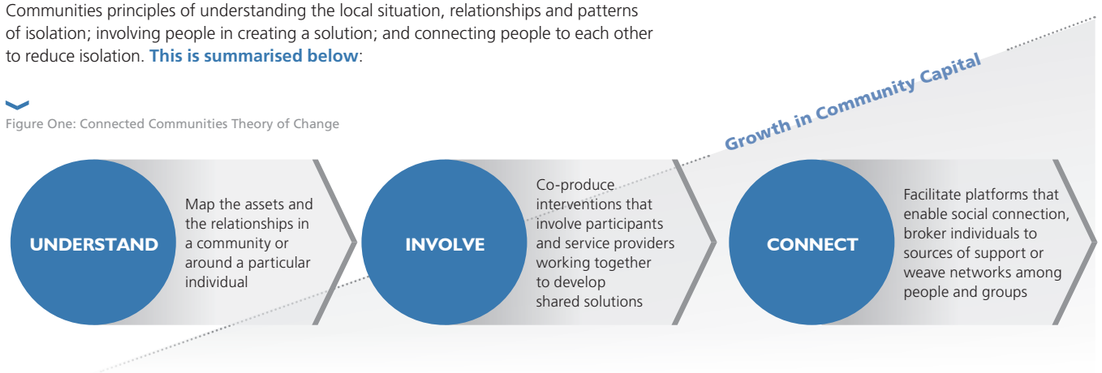
By following the steps outlined in the table, community capacity can be enhanced by the participating communities. And through the learning and reflection gained from seven Connected Communities projects that have taken place across the UK, it was concluded that four types of value, or 'dividends' could be accrued from the process: well-being, citizenship, capacity, and social value dividends.

Recruit and train community researchers	Community researchers are recruited, usually through local voluntary sector partners. These individuals are resident in the communities being researched, and receive accredited training in research methods, data protection and health and safety.
Survey residents	Community researchers survey residents using a questionnaire completed via a face-to-face interview through 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.
Social network analysis and well-being analysis	All respondents' surveys are aggregated using social network analysis computer software (UCINET and Gephi) in order to create a 'network map' of all the social relationships reported by the respondents in each locality. This provides a visual representation of who knows who in the study area. The resulting analysis enables researchers and partners 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.
Community playback	Data is played back through workshops in each locality to share the findings with residents and partners, including the volunteer community researchers where possible. Conversations initiated by playing back this data, including visualisations of social network maps for each area, are a key catalyst for intervention projects that seek to use the community's assets to tackle local issues relating to social isolation or low well-being.
Co-production of intervention project	Attendees at the playback workshop reflect upon the research findings, as well as their personal insights into local assets and problems, and work with local partner organisations to design and run projects that attempt to respond to the issues that emerge.
Evaluation report	Throughout the course of the approach, data is gathered to provide an evaluation of the projects' impact upon participants' social networks and well-being. This can then contribute to sustainability plans that embed the benefits of the process in the local area.

Table 1: Connected Communities key stages

We therefore suggest that community capital can be grown by following the Connected Communities principles of understanding the local situation, relationships and patterns of isolation; involving people in creating a solution; and connecting people to each other to reduce isolation. **This is summarised below**:

Figure One: Connected Communities Theory of Change



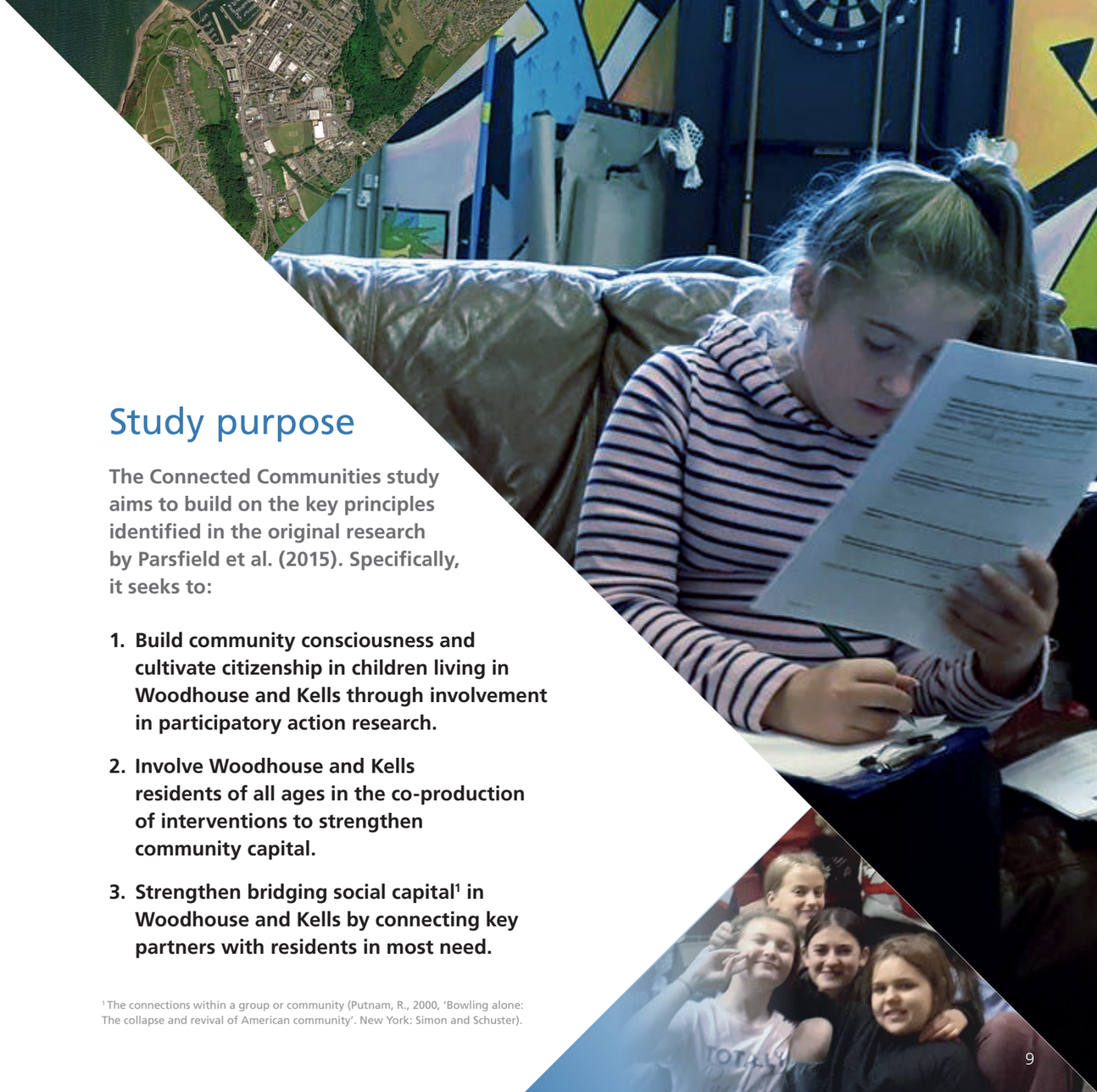
Since the introduction of the Big Society by David Cameron in 2010, the UK government has expressed a desire to see more residents that are better able to support themselves and therefore reduce pressures on public services. The Civil Society Strategy, published in 2018, outlines *"how government will work with and support civil society in the years to come, so that together we can build a country that works for everyone"* (Cabinet Office, 2018a, p.12).

This strategy is based on the five foundations of social value; people (enabling a lifetime of contribution), places (empowerment and investment for local communities); the social sector (supporting charities and social enterprises); the private sector (promoting business, finance, and tech for good); and the public sector (ensuring collaborative commissioning). Encouraging these foundations to work collaboratively and alongside the government *"can help to bring together the resources, policies and people"* (p.12). What's more, within this strategy, young people and their potential contribution to society are *"recognised as vital"*, with the *"ability to help the country tackle its most urgent challenges and deliver a better future for all of us"* (p.10).

The impact of loneliness and social isolation on individuals and communities is also recognised in contemporary social policy, evidenced through the introduction in the UK of a Minister for Loneliness, and publication of the national loneliness strategy (Cabinet Office, 2018b). Together, the focus on developing a civic society and challenging loneliness demonstrates the government's drive to encourage more independent, connected communities.

However, the effectiveness of this policy in driving change will depend upon engaging the communities on whom it impacts. While the 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 definitely value in community-led action and targeted interventions, and it is not only the end product that is of value (i.e. the intervention) but the process of being involved in a co- productive exercise that can benefit the individual and the community.

> *"... how government will work with and support civil society in the years to come, so that together we can build a country that works for everyone"*
>
> **(Cabinet Office, 2018a, p.12).**



Study purpose

The Connected Communities study aims to build on the key principles identified in the original research by Parsfield et al. (2015). Specifically, it seeks to:

1. **Build community consciousness and cultivate citizenship in children living in Woodhouse and Kells through involvement in participatory action research.**
2. **Involve Woodhouse and Kells residents of all ages in the co-production of interventions to strengthen community capital.**
3. **Strengthen bridging social capital[1] in Woodhouse and Kells by connecting key partners with residents in most need.**

[1] The connections within a group or community (Putnam, R., 2000, 'Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community'. New York: Simon and Schuster).

PART 1: BACKGROUND - CHAPTER 2

Community focus – an overview of Woodhouse and Kells

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. Figure 2 right summarises the key socio-economic features of West Cumbria.

The area of Woodhouse and Kells, Whitehaven, was selected for this study after consultation with local community stakeholders across West Cumbria – including local schools and local authorities – along with being informed by local data, which will be described later in this report. The area is situated between Whitehaven town centre and the Cumbrian coastline, and consists mainly of terraced and semi-detached ex-council properties. Like other areas in Whitehaven, there is a deep history in the mining industry, which at the time of the research, had ceased to operate for a number of decades. A large employer for Whitehaven, Marchon Chemical Plant, used to be based in Woodhouse, which saw an economic decline following its closure in 2004.

The areas covered by the Connected Communities research included the Lower Level Super Output Areas (LSOA) of Woodhouse and Kells because they are viewed, in general, as one community, where similar challenges are perceived. LSOAs are a geographic area consisting of approximately 1,500 people, and are used by the Department of Local Government and Communities (DfLGC) as a tool to collect demographic statistics on small areas. The data for Woodhouse and Kells is outlined on the opposite page.

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

LSOA and Ward data

Population

Collectively, Woodhouse and Kells has a population of 3,112 (1,695 and 1,417 respectively). Both communities have above regional and national proportions of children and young people (0-15 years), more working aged adults (16-64), and fewer older people (65 years plus).

Ethnicity

The ethnic makeup of Woodhouse and Kells is predominately White British, making up 98.5% of the population. This is in line with the Cumbrian average (98.5%) and significantly above average for the UK (85.4%). The other ethnicities include 'Other' Asian (0.5%), White Irish (0.4%) and 'Other' White (0.4%).

Economic and employment profile

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

	Economically active residents	Economically inactive	Long term unemployed	Never worked
Kells	69%	31%	1.7%	0.9%
Woodhouse	56%	44%	4.1%	3.1%
Cumbria	81%	19%	1.3%	0.4%
UK	75%	25%	1.7%	0.7%

Table 2: Economic and Employment Profile of Woodhouse, Kells, Cumbria and UK

Children and young people

The children and young people's profiles of Woodhouse and Kells differ slightly, so their respective profiles will now be presented below. As the table illustrates, both Woodhouse and Kells have a larger proportion of children and young people living in the area than the Cumbrian average. They also have significantly larger proportions of working age adults with no qualifications, especially Woodhouse. The proportion of children living in low-income families in Woodhouse is significantly above the regional and national averages, with Kells falling between the Cumbrian and national average. And data provided by the DfCLG (2015) indicates that Woodhouse and Kells experience above national levels of low educational attainment and child poverty. Indeed, when ranked nationally, Woodhouse is one of the top 10% most deprived LSOA using this indicator.

	Population aged 0-17	People with no qualifications as a percentage of working age adults	Long term unemployed
Kells	24%	35%	15%
Woodhouse	27%	45%	39%
Cumbria	19%	24.2%	12%
UK	-	22.5%	17%

Table 3: Children and Young People Profile of Woodhouse, Kells, Cumbria and UK

Health and social care

The health and social care profiles of Woodhouse and Kells differ slightly, so their respective profiles are presented below.

	Very Good health	Very Bad health	Limited Activity due to Health Issues
Kells	42%	2%	14%
Woodhouse	42%	3%	15%
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 Woodhouse and Kells report less good health and more bad health than regional and national averages, along with a higher proportion of residents reporting that their daily activities are limited due to health issues. Data provided by the DfCLG (2019) indicates that Woodhouse and Kells experience above national levels of older persons' deprivation. And when ranked nationally, Woodhouse is one of the top 10% most deprived LSOA using this indicator.

Local assets

These findings might well be sobering to read, but are not presented to highlight the deficiencies in the community – they are simply to highlight the challenges the community faces. Conversely, the community of Woodhouse and Kells possesses a number of physical assets, providing sea-views, green space, and affordable housing (DfCLG, 2016).

Summary

Figure presented here reveal a community that is experiencing a number of challenges, especially in terms of health and employment. Our Connected Communities approach aims to build on the existing capital within the community, with the view to promote well-being, capacity, citizenship and social value.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 3

Community researchers

A core component of the Connected Communities approach (Parsfield, et al., 2015) is to involve communities in research, to develop an understanding of everyone's needs.

Girls Gang: a community-based youth council

The research carried out in West Cumbria revolved around recruiting and training children[3] as community researchers, to support them in enacting their civic citizenship and providing opportunities to be real agents of change. In order to do this in Woodhouse and Kells, a community-based youth council was established with the County Councillor for the area. The aim of the group was not specially to recruit a group of girls; this was purely a result of the self-selection process, influenced by friendship groups in school.

The research location was based within a north western coastal ex-mining community, areas of which have been highlighted to marginalise working-class white girls (Richards, 2017). A longitudinal study in a similar community demonstrated that girls in these areas are often vulnerable to intergenerational poverty, where their initial career aspirations fail to be realised, due to modified decision-making, with girls often opting to remain close to their families.

The research demonstrated an endemic of low levels of self-confidence and a perception of not being 'good enough' to reach their academic potential. This, along with a perceived distance from teachers and the education system situated girls in coastal ex-mining communities in a particularly marginalised position (Richards, 2017).

A report by the Children's Commissioner for England, focusing on children in the north of England, reflected on the significant differences emerging between boys' and girls' career aspirations and what they believed their local area offered them. Despite girls outperforming boys academically, their aspirations were felt to be limited due to the male-dominated nature of both traditional industries and also regeneration (Children's Commissioner for England, 2018). It is within this context that Girls Gang is situated and as will be seen, provides an example of how Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) can help to overcome such aspirational barriers.

Despite girls outperforming boys academically, their aspirations were felt to be limited due to the male-dominated nature of both traditional industries and also regeneration.

[3] The young residents who acted as young community researchers will be referred to as 'children' throughout the report. According to the European Commission, children are individuals aged between 0-14 years old, and young people are those aged 15-24 years old (European Commission, 2011)

Participants

The initial recruitment strategy invited local children to become community researchers through presentations in assemblies at two primary schools in the Woodhouse and Kells area. Here, the lead researcher delivered a talk about community and citizenship (to 265 pupils in total) and from this, children and their families were invited to attend an information evening held at their local community centre, St Peter's Community Hall. This initial recruitment method using assembly talks in school was not successful in recruiting a cohort of children, with only one child attending the information evening. On reflection, the method allowed no opportunities for children to have their say about their community and was not delivered within a social space where they could work together easily.

After seeking advice from one of the engaging primary schools, an interactive strategy was adopted. Here, the lead researcher returned to the school and facilitated an interactive workshop with one class of year 6 pupils (32 in total). This provided children with an opportunity to get involved via practical activities in smaller groups, where they could express their views on community matters. The session ended by providing children with information about the youth council that was going to take place at St Peter's Community Hall, which they could take home to show their parents. Teachers gave feedback that the children engaged well and enjoyed this activity because it provided a different experience, and a welcome break from an intensive curriculum in preparation for SATs exams.

Following this recruitment method, 12 girls aged between 10 and 11 years old attended the first session, with another two girls joining the group at a later date. Data highlighting the impact of group involvement was captured throughout a period of seven months. The groups met weekly for one hour in St Peter's Community Hall and sessions were facilitated by the lead researcher and the County Councillor for the area. The group took part in a vote to self-name themselves, and as a result the group was called Girls Gang.

All sessions were child-led from the start, with a strong emphasis on creating a safe social space where the children could relate to one another. The first session identified that fun, spending time with friends and challenging litter were the priorities of the group. These priorities were balanced with the research agenda of the Connected Communities project, and this was carried out by the facilitators via a weekly reflection process – making certain that the aims of both the children and the researchers were being honoured. To ensure the group remained child-led, a periodical audit was conducted by the facilitators using a self-assessment toolkit provided by the British Youth Council (British Youth Council, 2012).

Ethics

Working with children requires certain ethical considerations and the recruitment of young researchers was guided by such considerations, particularly concerning the children's freedom to consent and confidentiality (Alderson, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Punch, 2002). All children who attended the interactive workshop were issued with a flyer providing information about a new weekly youth council that would provide a space to train the children in community research skills. Written informed consent was provided by parents and written informed assent was provided by the children. Fluid consent (the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time) was assured by making other activities available at the same time as the research sessions. Permission to use images of the group has been provided by both the parents and the children, however this report uses pseudonyms when providing personal accounts of the experience of participation.

Summary

The recruitment and retention of young community researchers requires an engaging, inclusive strategy. Expert partners, such as schools, can offer valuable insights into effective recruitment methods, along with acting as gatekeepers. Our interactive strategy successfully recruited fourteen community researchers.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 4

Research process

A number of methods were adopted to help the children enact their citizenship and understand their community. These included community surveying and community walks, along with visual and creative methods. The explorative and creative methods were also used to keep the children engaged and energised on a regular basis over the course of a year.

Community survey

A total of 19 data collection sessions took place over 8 days during the Easter and summer holidays in 2018, which surveyed local residents through doorstep interviews to generate both quantitative and qualitative data to help understand the social connectivity and capital in Woodhouse and Kells. This process provided information to participants, gained consent and provided time to complete the questionnaire. Community researchers leafleted the streets before approaching people on the doorstep to participate in the survey, providing information and inviting expressions of willingness to participate. At the subsequent door-knocking stage, residents were invited to participate either at that point in time, or at a mutually accepted agreed future date. Completion of the questionnaire took variable amounts of time (between 15 and 45 minutes) depending upon interviewer and respondent interaction.

Prior to collecting data from residents, children organised themselves into pairs and were allocated an appropriate adult who would be responsible for them, accompanying the girls in their research to ensure their safety.

These 'mini research teams' then chose collectively what streets to survey, and were provided with a community research pack, consisting of a map of the area, surveys, ethical consent forms and the lead researchers' details in case of an emergency. These 'mini research teams' also negotiated roles within their groups, for example, agreeing who would interview residents and who would record responses.
This was flexible and entirely led by the children.

Ethics

Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the University of Central Lancashire, PsySoc Ethics Committee. Information about the study was given to all potential residents outlining the aims of the study and purpose of the interview, consent and the right to refuse, confidentiality, and what was to happen to the information collected. Residents were asked if they had any questions about their involvement before the interview commenced and were also asked for their verbal and written consent. The importance of confidentiality was stressed to residents, both in the written information given at the start of the interview and during the introduction to the study at the doorstep. The residents' verbal consent was recorded by the community researchers. Respondents were also asked if they wanted to receive information about the findings and/or attend the community feedback event. All such identifying information was recorded at the end of the interview on the final page, which was separated from questionnaire responses prior to data inputting and analysis. Responses were treated as confidential, and the anonymity of all residents in the study was assured.

Data analysis

The analysis presented in Chapter 6 is based on the completed community questionnaires. Descriptive statistics and frequency data are presented in the results section and a social network map is included to illustrate key aspects of the findings regarding connectivity. The questionnaire data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using a combination of Excel, SPSS, UCINET and NetDraw.

Social network analysis and well-being analysis[4]

Information about individuals' social support and networks has been aggregated using social network analysis computer software (UCINET and Netdraw), to create a 'network map' of all the social relationships reported by all the respondents – providing visual representations of 'who knows who', and who is connected to who in the Woodhouse and Kells area. This analysis enables us to understand the patterns of connectivity and isolation, and to identify the key types of support people turn to, along with the places and institutions that were (or had the potential to be) central assets within networks that bring people together.

Child-led qualitative coding

To facilitate the groups' interaction and ownership of the research, qualitative data from the doorstep surveys was presented to the community researchers to code. In pairs, the children discussed and generated themes from the responses to questions like 'what is the best thing about living in this community?', 'what are the top two barriers you face in doing what you would like to do locally?' and 'what are the main things you would like to see to improve the area?' These themes were shared with the group and discussed to validate the results.

[4] Mental well-being was measured on the 7-item Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS). Scores given are adjusted to reflect use of the 7-item scale, and possible scores range from 7 (lowest MWB) to 35 (highest MWB).

To facilitate the groups' interaction and ownership of the research, qualitative data from the doorstep surveys was presented to the community researchers to code.

Community walks and litter picks

It was important that the girls had a sense of ownership and identity with their community, and to help facilitate this a number of community walks and litter picks were organised.

Community walks were held during the weekly sessions, where the girls agreed a route to walk around their local area. Parents were invited to attend these walks, with four parents participating in at least one walk. These activities provided opportunities for the girls to show the facilitators areas of the community that were important to them, along with taking photos as a method of data collection.

Litter picks took place during school holidays, and consisted of morning and afternoon sessions, including a shared lunch. The girls agreed what route to take on their litter picks, which provided an opportunity for the girls to take part in visible social action activity.

Visual and creative methods

Early in their community research skills training, the girls were presented with maps of their community and coloured stickers. This provided them with the opportunity to reflect upon their community, and indicate how they felt about different geographic areas. For example, they could use a red sticker to highlight areas that they did not like and explain the reasons in writing. This activity helped to develop the girl's community consciousness and their level of awareness of the specific current social, economic and environmental issues (Theodori, 2004).

Alongside the Connected Communities research project, the group also developed their own litter campaign where they wrote a song and play about litter, and designed a poster campaign to challenge littering locally. They took photos on community walks too. This material was presented to parents, residents and local stakeholders, including the Elected Mayor and chair of the County Council. It provided a focus for times when the community research was in a hiatus, for example, while the quantitative data was being analysed.

Summary

The research process undertaken was broader than the traditional Connected Communities approach. This included more focused work with the community researchers to support the girls to develop their community consciousness (mapping) and provide opportunities to take action on the social issues that mattered to them (litter campaign). Alongside the survey data, which the girls coded themselves, it provided a collection of data that was presented to the community, where feedback was given and ideas were generated for future co-produced interventions (see chapter 8).

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 5

The impact of being a community researcher

A core element of Connected Communities lies in its use of community researchers, which creates empowering experiences for those involved. In order to understand these experiences better, a number of methodologies were adopted, which will now be described – followed by a summary of the key impacts that research participation had on the children involved.

Methodologies

A qualitative approach was adopted to understand the experience and impact of being a community researcher through group discussion, a post-it note pedagogy, peer interviews and mini focus groups:

Group discussions

Throughout the research, the group participated in feedback sessions where the girls were invited to voice any concerns they had and suggest solutions for the way the group was being run. In addition to these timetabled feedback sessions, there were several occasions where members of the group challenged decisions made by the facilitators for not consulting with the group – for example, the date to hold an additional activity. Any issues voiced were listened to and responded to by the facilitators, usually through a group discussion, to ensure that all decisions were made collectively.

Post-it note pedagogy (Quigley, 2012)

The initial research design included a written feedback form, where the girls would periodically self-report their agreement with a number of statements relating to citizenship using a Likert scale. This was to measure any changes in attitudes relating to citizenship over time. However, it became apparent that the girls did not engage well with this form, and they were observed rushing through it – it was seen as a boring task. Also, it was observed that the responses given were focused on the immediate past and not necessarily reflective of the child's overall attitude. For example, when asked how connected they felt to their friends, responses were related to incidents that may have occurred that day within a friendship group, rather than an overall reflection on feelings of belonging.

> *To overcome this issue a post-it note pedagogy was adopted, offering a more creative and open method of generating regular feedback.*

Specific questions relating to an activity were presented on pieces of paper, scattered around the room. The group was then provided with post-it notes to give feedback on these questions and given a set time period to do it in. For example, following the data collection, these questions were asked:

1. **What did you like?**
2. **What didn't you like?**
3. **What would make this activity better?**
4. **What did you learn?**
5. **How has this changed the way you view your community?**

This method was much better received, as it was informal and involved physically moving around the room, rather than being similar to traditional paper exercises like those used in school.

Following the success of the post-it note pedagogy, an ideas and question tree (Quigley, 2012) was painted by the group and displayed on the wall of the room where the groups took place.

This tree offered a space for the girls to provide feedback about the group at any time and also suggest new activity ideas.

Peer interviews

Peer interviews, where research participants interview one another, were used to explore the children's experiences of participation in Connected Communities. This was done to overcome concerns about social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013), where the children may omit negative experiences to please the researcher (Lushy & Munro, 2015; Oerke & Bogner, 2013). Such methods also enable the children to actively lead in all aspects of the research process. Peer interviews have been shown to be an effective mediating tool in listening to pupils' perspectives on their education (Niemi, Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2018) and for understanding care leavers' experience of transition to adult services (Lushy & Munro, 2015).

Within Girls Gang, the group received a one-hour training session on interview techniques where they also co-designed the interview schedule, discussing and agreeing the key themes. Over the course of four sessions, the children organised themselves into pairs and were given an audio recorder to conduct the interviews with each other in a quiet room. A total of five peer interviews, with ten participants, were conducted, lasting between 20 and 50 minutes. The girls were reassured that their responses would remain anonymous and they were reminded to keep issues discussed confidential. The audio recordings were sent for external transcription, where codes were assigned to each recording and text transcripts of each peer interview were produced. The results were shared with the group in the form of bullet points, written by the lead researcher, and the group discussed and agreed the final results were an accurate representation of their experiences of Girls Gang.

Mini focus groups

Mini focus groups, containing between four and six participants (Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Kitzinger, 1995), were also used to explore and identify key elements of children's experiences. Focus groups have been suggested to be an effective method in eliciting children's voices (Gibson, 2007), with four or five participants being felt to be an ideal sample size (Morgan, et al., 2002).

Two focus groups took place, both consisting of five participants and the lead researcher. Participants in the focus group volunteered to read the questions, which helped to balance potential power inequalities in the research process. Just as with the peer interviews, audio recordings were sent for external transcription and the results were shared with the group in the form of bullet points.

Results

The data was triangulated to understand the process that helped to enhance citizenship and community capital. Details of the strategies that supported engagement will be described here, followed by the ways in which exploration was promoted both physically and intellectually. The resulting experiences of empathy and empowerment will then be reflected upon.

Engagement: developing relations

Peer interviews revealed the main reasons for attending the first group were because the taster session in school was fun, their friends were coming and that there was nothing else to do in the area. For example, Courtney told her friend in a peer interview:

> *"When Suzanne came into school I wasn't sure, but I was like, I'll come to it, have a go, see what it's like. I came, most of my friends were there and I barely played out anymore, so it was a chance to be with my friends."*

There is no denying that social snowballing influenced the relatively large sample size from the start, but the social space created in the taster session also ignited interest in coming to the first group session. The simple act of providing a space for these children to socialise, with a specific goal, was felt to create a feeling of community and connection, both between the group and with the wider community. This was summarised by Lucie in a peer interview: *"It's like we are our own little community… I know we're part of this big one, but we have our own little one together."* The feeling of connection was further explained when Lucie reflected on the most memorable elements of the group:

> *"I think just coming to the group and being in that room… sitting there talking around the sofas… that's when I feel most connected… We like really connect and we all show our feelings, and at school and other clubs we just don't".*

This experience of connectivity helped Lucie to reflect on the importance of friends and social relationships, and the impact this can have: *"you don't actually realise how, once you've got together round just a little table, how important that is to you. And you can feel all, like just, you just buzz all around."* Here, Lucie's reflection highlights the powerful impact that informal but purposeful social gatherings can have on children.

It was reported that the first session, where the children chose the focus of the group and wrote the ground rules, helped them feel that they had ownership over the group. This was highlighted by Eva, who said in a peer interview: *"no one really has control of the group, we all just share it, because we all share our opinions, like there's not one person that just goes 'right everybody, listen up, I'm talking now shhh'"*. Such a shared environment can be challenging for facilitators in ensuring that everyone, from the most outspoken to the quietest child, all have an equal say. But as Eva's comment (amongst others) shows, this is a valued feature of the group.

> *"I know we do like serious work and stuff, like organising events… but we do have fun… We have downtime and it literally is just that, even though we're doing serious stuff, it just makes it a whole lot more fun. And the thing is, when I think of the fun in Girls Gang, I don't think of downtime".*

Another key factor that contributed to the attrition of the group was that the schedule allowed time for fun and unstructured activities. This *"downtime"* in a safe space meant they could spend time with their friends socially, outside of school. During a peer interview, Katie offered some interesting insights into downtime and what was deemed as fun:

Katie's reflection shows that even though downtime is considered a fun and important element of Girls Gang, it is not necessarily the most fun and enjoyable part of the group. Rather, activities that have meaning are the most impactful and memorable.

These strategies highlight the importance of a positive relational space in the recruitment and formation of groups seeking to promote citizenship. The need for relational social spaces that provide children with the means to exercise agency can be balanced with other agendas, through reflection and discussion.

Exploration: expanding relations

The research group provided girls with opportunities to explore not only the physical community but also their ideas around what community meant to them, and how to take action to help those in need. Physical exploration took a number of forms, including the doorstep surveys, community walks and litter picks.

The community-based activities generated a strong collective identity in the group, and self-report measures demonstrated that many felt pride walking around the community as a group. This pride was enhanced in some of the girls by positive comments from residents about the great work they were doing. Belle told her friend about this experience in a peer interview: *"I loved how people were looking at us because they were looking at us with a big smile on their faces and people were saying 'you've brought humanity back', I just felt like I was a hero."* Within this group, these public community activities proved not only to enhance relations within the group through developing a collective identity, but provided opportunities to form new connections with community members.

Reflecting on the doorstep surveys, the girls reported they enjoyed having the opportunity to access areas of the community they would not be allowed to go on their own – and talk to people they would not otherwise have spoken to. A number of anonymous post-data collection responses elicited using the post-it note pedagogy cited *"meeting new people"* and *"speaking to new people"* as some of the things the girls liked the best in the experience. The freedom and control the girls could exercise throughout the data collection was also valued, as stated by Katie: *"I liked how we could go like anywhere on that street."* As can be seen by the feedback provided, participation in community research provided the girls with a unique opportunity to explore and understand their community.

Mini focus groups revealed that being accompanied by police officers added to their experience of safety, but that they appreciated being able to choose how much input they had into interviewing residents. Again, this method of community research allowed the girls to explore their community on their terms, exercising agency in the interview process, which provided the opportunity to develop relations not only with the community but also the local police.

The symbolic experience of safety was also valued in the sessions being held in the community centre, in providing a safe place for the girls to share their ideas without fear of criticism, and was one of the main reasons for the continued attendance to the group. During a peer interview Belle described how this space had helped her:

> *"Before, I was really in a down place, I would get bullied, but now I know I can stand up for myself, it's boosted my confidence a lot because [the group is] always there for you…making new friends isn't that scary, I wouldn't have learnt this otherwise because I really wasn't sociable but now I am because of [the group]".*

The freedom to have a voice and be heard was appreciated by the group, as summarised by Louisa when comparing this group to school:

> *"I definitely have a say, unlike school, everyone gets a chance to speak like in school only one or two people get chosen all the time and I feel like here everyone actually gets a chance to speak for themselves".*

This was supported by Charlie who commented she did not think anyone was in *"total control"* and that *"we all have an input into what goes on."*

Empathy: understanding relations

The exploration activities undertaken by the group developed an understanding of the needs of the local community.

The doorstep research highlighted the hidden social issues, such as the loneliness and bereavement experienced especially by older people. The girls reflected on how the experience developed their understanding of the community. For example, Eva said she learnt *"that you can have some really sad stories and still be a nice person."*

Moreover, Toni learnt that *"some people are lonely, she said she wouldn't have spoken to anyone all day if we hadn't called"* and Katie *"realised how many people couldn't get out."* This increased understanding and empathy towards people in their community can be illustrated through Charlie's account of interviewing an elderly lady who lived on her street, but whom she had never spoken to before:

> *"I think the main thing I remember is this lady, she was all lonely… so she let us into her house because I think her granddaughter just passed away and her husband has got something wrong with him, so we stayed with her longer. When we asked [certain questions], they were really bad questions if you had something wrong with you, so we were being nice to her about it. Then we were like, 'OK thank you for your time, we like you very much, hope well for the best'. She was really nice, she was smiling, well she was smiling at me down the road".*

Here, Charlie not only shows a great deal of empathy towards her neighbour, but also reflects on how the survey questions may impact on her, and adjusted her approach accordingly (in *"being nice"* when asking the questions about loneliness).

Through developing relations with those in their community, the group were able to realise the possible impact they could have, helping to develop agency. By learning and reflecting on results as a group, the girls were motivated to design interventions to cultivate community capital within their community – that is, bring the community together to support those most in need.

Empowerment: enhancing relations

The accumulation of engaging, exploring and empathising with the community resulted in a sense of empowerment in the group. This was summarised by Katie, who said, *"I have found that not everyone is proud to call this community their home, but as a group we know that we can change that."*

Charlie, when reflecting on the future of the group, said:

> *"I think about what it could be like once we've done all this and all the things we've planned, and we could just change the whole community."*

Courtney noted her own agency and social responsibility alongside that of the police when reflecting *"as much as they help us, if they're really busy, I also think of it as we're helping them, if we're changing the community, they're going to be more free."* Such examples demonstrate how the research process promoted a critical reflection on their role as active citizenships, where the girls felt empowered to take action within this role.

Summary

The Connected Communities research undertaken in Woodhouse and Kells had local girls at its centre. Through a battery of measures, it can be seen that the experience provided participatory power through creating a safe space for the girls to enact their citizenship. Working alongside local police officers, the girls revised their perceptions of the police, and reflected on the role they themselves play in civil society.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 6

Survey results

Overview of the sample

A total of 124 survey interviews were completed, of which 73% were with female respondents. Over half (57%) the respondents had lived in the area for 20 years or more, and almost three quarters (74%) had lived in Woodhouse for at least a decade. All respondents who gave their ethnicity described themselves as being White British. Roughly, a quarter were aged 18-34, a quarter were 35-54, a quarter 55-64, and a quarter were 65+. Just over a third were in paid work or self-employed (35%), 21% reported to be unemployed (42% of these due to ill health) and 35% were retired. Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) lived with other people, while 26% lived alone. Almost two-thirds (62%) described their main role as being a full-time home keeper. Just two percent reported being a volunteer. People who were more likely to volunteer were men, people aged 45-54 year olds and people living with others.

Residents felt that the best thing about living in Woodhouse and Kells was the close community

Perceptions of Woodhouse and Kells

Most people questioned were very or fairly satisfied living in Woodhouse and Kells (83%), with only 5% fairly dissatisfied and 2% very dissatisfied. Over two thirds agreed that people look out for each other (69%), with only 9% disagreeing. Over three quarters agreed that they can always find someone to help them (77%), with less than a quarter disagreeing (13%). Residents felt that the best things about living in Woodhouse and Kells were the close community (32%), friendly people (20%) and quiet environment (11%).

Comments such as *"everyone knows each other"* and *"it's home… my community and close to family"* were frequently cited. The main barriers faced by residents in doing what they wanted to do socially were reported to be time (19%), motivation (10%), health (10%) and work (10%). More specifically, frequent comments included *"family commitments"*, *"my own laziness"* and *"I don't know who to contact"*. The main areas for improvement around Woodhouse and Kells were felt to be less litter (15%), better roads (14%) and better provision for children and young people (13%). Residents wished for more *"attention to detail in general appearance"* to be given by fellow residents, and a number of residents were concerned about the location of one of the parks, with one resident suggesting the *"play park be moved away from the shop area"*.

Health

Almost two fifths (39%) had an 'impairment or health condition'. Almost a fifth (19%) had a physical disability, while 17% had a 'long-term health condition'. There were no significant differences between gender and health. People living alone were significantly more likely to report experiencing poor health (alone=28%, with others=9%). The main health-related problems reported by working aged adults and older people were the same. However, the proportion of those experiencing the top three issues differed, summarised in the table below:

Working aged adults	Older adults
Disability: 12%	Disability: 24%
Long term health conditions: 18%	Long term health conditions: 15%
Mental ill health: 9%	Mental ill health: 9%

Table 5: Health related problems

Health, social networks and loneliness

Two fifths (39%) of those with a physical disability were affected 'a lot' in how they interact socially with others because of their disability, while a third (35%) were not affected at all. Around a third (35%) of those with a long-term health condition were affected 'a lot' in how they interact socially with others because of their condition, while just 15% were not affected at all. While 11% reported having a mental health problem, 43% were affected a lot in how they interact socially with others because of their condition, with a further 57% affected 'a little' – no-one reported being unaffected. Those with an impairment or health condition were more likely to feel lonely, and had slightly lower mental well-being.

Three fifths (59%) reported their health as excellent or good, while 41% described their health as fair or poor. The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was 25.1, which is higher than the national average (23.6). Over two thirds (69%) described themselves as hardly ever or never lonely, while around a quarter (24%) described themselves as lonely some of the time, and 7% said they were often lonely.

Resources and mental well-being

Those with access to resources reported significantly higher mental well-being. In fact, the mental well-being gap was most pronounced between those with/without information resources (25.5 / 20.3), change-making resources (26.3 / 22.5), social activity connections (25.4 / 22.3), and connections that ask for help (25.4 / 22.7).

There was no difference in loneliness between those who had family connections and those who did not, and only small differences in loneliness between those who had friendships or connections to local organisations and those who did not (those without were slightly more likely to be lonely).

Depth of resource networks

The survey asked respondents for up to five answers for each of the six different resource questions (i.e. up to 30 resources each, with repetition of the same resource allowed across different resource questions). Across the whole sample, 18% of the total possible answers were recorded, giving an indication of the depth of resource networks. (It should be noted that answers such as 'family' and 'friends' can refer to multiple individuals, so resource networks are deeper than they appear based on these figures). While only around one in five possible answers were recorded, this is slightly higher than in other Connected Communities surveys (for example, in a similar survey carried out in Preston, 11% of all possible connections were reported).

The proportion of answers given varied across the different resource networks: 20% were given in social activity networks, 20% in local information networks, 20% in emotional support networks, 19% in helping networks, 18% on practical support networks, and 13% in change-making networks.

Breadth and importance of local resources

By combining all answers to the resource questions from all respondents, a picture of the local resource network can be constructed. The table overleaf shows that a total of 688 individual answers were given by the sample across the resource network questions (an average of 5.5 each). Of these, over half (59%) were family connections, while just over a fifth were friendship connections, and 5% were connections to local organisations. Together, family and friend connections make up 80% of all resource connections mentioned.

The table also shows the average importance of these connections. Family, friends, council, local doctors, and carers are among the most important connections in respondents' resource networks. Schools are among the least mentioned and least important resources in terms of accessing resources.

The proportion of people who were often lonely was higher when access to a particular type of resource was lacking. This was particularly the case for change-making resources: 16% of those without a change-making resource often felt lonely, compared to 1% of those with such a resource.

Resource	No.	% of all mentioned	Average importance
Family	408	59.3	4.5
Friends	142	20.6	4.6
Local organisations	36	5.2	4.5
Neighbours	27	3.9	4.0
Social media	20	2.9	4.1
Council	11	1.6	4.8
Local paper	9	1.3	4.2
Doctor	8	1.2	4.5
Carers	6	0.9	4.8

Table 6: Resources and their perceived importance[5]

Generally, family and friendship ties dominate the different resource networks, although there is some variability between them. While family accounts for around three quarters of connections for practical help and emotional support, it accounts for around half the connections in change-making, social activity, information, and asked-for-help networks. Local social resources (local organisations, council, councillors, MPs, and police) account for less than a third (30%) of change-making resources described by respondents.

16% of those without a change-making resource often felt lonely, compared to 1% of those with such a resource.

[5] Responses with frequencies below 5 included Colleagues, Church, Community, Councillor, Social networks, Anyone, Charities, MP, NHS, Police, School, Self, TV, Word of mouth

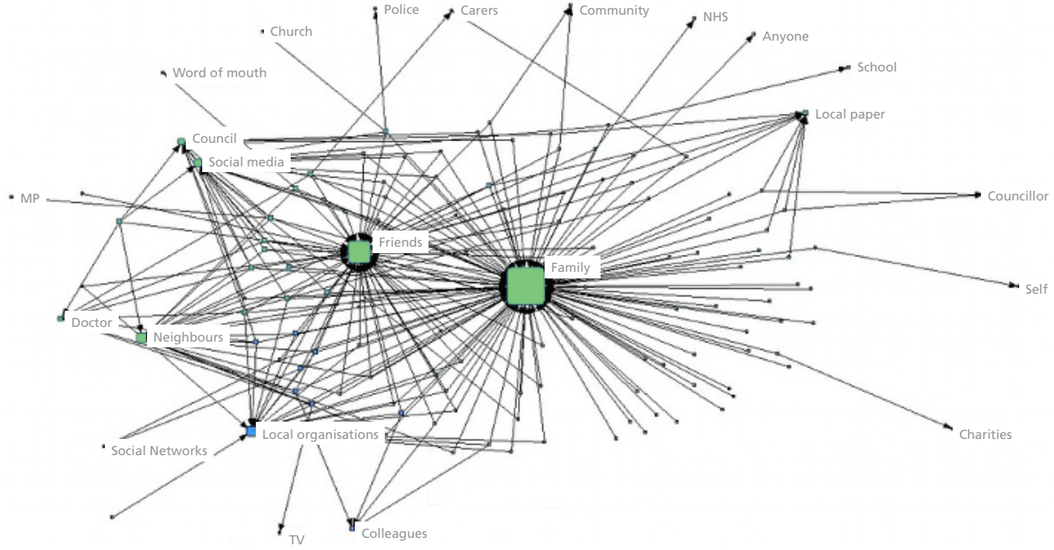


Figure 3: Sociogram illustrating social networks in Woodhouse and Kells

Across all resources, two-thirds (67%) are described as 'essential', a fifth (19%) as 'very important', 8% as 'quite important', 2% as 'a bit important', and 4% as 'not important at all'.

The diagram above shows the resource network in Woodhouse and Kells, illustrating where respondents are connected to a certain type of resource. The diagram emphasises the dominance of family structures – and to a lesser degree friendship networks – in obtaining resources. It shows that there are a significant number of individuals who are only connected to family-based resources, and shows that local institutional resources are very much on the periphery of local resource networks.

The significant correlation between access to resources and mental well-being might imply the importance of strategies to thicken and diversify resource networks for those who have limited connections. Connections to local groups and organisations appears under-developed and initiatives such as social prescribing, and/or community connectors may be helpful in establishing connections between local people in ways that are facilitated through local institutions. More broadly, mapping the landscape of local organisations and their fit to local interests, stimulating new group activity (informal and/or informal) and developing a local network weaving approach to community development may be beneficial to the area.

Other key findings include:

- Around one in eight people (13%) have no connection to family through which they can get access to any type of resource/support
- More than half (52%) did not report a connection to a friend through which they can get access to any type of resource/support. One third of respondents aged below 55 did not have access to resources through friends, compared to two-thirds of those aged 55 plus
- Less than a fifth (19%) report being able to access some kind of resource/ support from a neighbour – 81% do not have such a connection. People who have lived in the area for five years or less are less likely to have connections to neighbours through which they can access resources. However, older people are on the whole no more likely to report neighbour connections
- Only around one in 20 (6%) report using social media or online resources to access a specific resource – 94% do not. No person aged 65 or more reported using social media to access resources
- Two thirds (68%) do not have a resource-based connection to a local institution (a local organisation, council, councillor, MP, doctor, NHS, police or church). Women (30%) were slightly less likely to report connections to local institutions than men (38%). Respondents aged 55-74 were more likely to report ties to local institutions (an average of 42% had such connections, compared to 27% of the rest of the sample).

Summary

Perceptions of Woodhouse and Kells

- Most people said they were satisfied with the area to live, but only around two-thirds said that people look out for each other
- The close community, friendly people, and quiet environment were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being time, motivation, health and believing there was nothing to do. Key areas for improvement were identified as better roads, less litter, and better services for young people.

Health:

- Almost two fifths had an 'impairment or health condition'. Almost a fifth had a physical disability, while just over a quarter had a 'long-term health condition'
- The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was 25.1, which is higher than the national average (23.6)
- Those with an impairment or health condition were more likely to feel lonely and had slightly lower mental well-being.

Loneliness

- In general terms, people in Woodhouse and Kells reported feeling less lonely than the general population and reported higher levels of emotional well-being
- The loneliest groups were middle-aged unemployed people, those living alone, those with health problems and older people. The least lonely people were 18-24 year olds and those over 85 years old
- Connections were associated significantly with better mental health
- People living with others were more likely to report never, or hardly ever, feeling lonely
- People with health issues were more likely to report feeling lonely often.

Community connections and social networks

- Family alone made up over half the connections, and friends and family made up 80% of all connections
- Connections to local groups and organisations appears underdeveloped
- Those with poor health were more likely to report having no connections to family resources
- Friendship networks between young people (under 55 year olds) were weaker than those of older people
- Neighbourhood connections were weak, with 81% not reporting a connection with a neighbour. Older people were more likely to have stronger connections with their neighbours
- People in Woodhouse and Kells appear to have poor connections with local institutions.

> *Family alone made up over half the connections, and friends and family made up 80% of all connections.*

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 7

Discussion and recommendations

This chapter brings together both of the data sets reported in this paper – the experience of the young researchers and also the community survey data. The ways in which the participation impacted on the children will be reflected upon, followed by a discussion of key findings of the community survey. Recommendations will be presented in light of these results.

Discussion

Realising citizenship through community research and social action

This research reveals a framework of four ways in which children's agency can be seen as practices of citizenship. The mechanism in which Connected Communities acted to enable citizenship will be discussed, followed by a proposition that evidence -based social action is a means to bring the research to life. By being aware of the relations between themselves and between the local community (comprised of engagement, exploration, empathy and empowerment), the children were able to understand their collective agency in supporting the community (Larkin, 2014; Cockburn, 2005; Lister, 2007; Moosa-Mitha, 2005). This sense of agency and citizenship was realised through the creation of a social space that provided a place for the children to explore and understand the community, sharing their ideas in how to transform this into social action.

Social action, however, was not an anticipated outcome of the research; the main ambitions were to conduct community research and co-produce an intervention with local partners. This ambition was achieved, alongside a programme of social action. In the UK, social action is viewed as a means to develop citizenship in practice, with the Cabinet Office establishing a cross party 'Step Up To Serve #iwill campaign'. The campaign provides funding for social action projects and for the evaluation of

The main ambitions were to conduct community research and co-produce an intervention with local partners.

projects to inform effective practice. Recent research has indicated that social action can 'develop critical skills for employment and adulthood', such as empathy, problem solving, resilience, cooperation and a sense of community (Behavioural Insights Team, 2018, p.3).

Social action projects promote autonomy for children to choose the societal challenge to take action against, and the methods in which to do so. Current practices surrounding social action focus on taking action, with less emphasis on this action being informed by an evidence base. The research outlined in this report suggests that a Connected Communities approach provides a means to facilitate evidence-based social action through the engaging, explorative and empathic experiences gained through community research – where citizenship can be enacted by empowered and informed social action.

The Connected Communities approach also advocates the transformative power that social relations can have for communities. It demonstrates how the relational aspects of Connected Communities can interact with the relational aspects of youth citizenship, resulting in a group of reflective and empowered young citizens. By reflecting on their understanding of each other and their community, the children came to understand their collective role in supporting the community, providing an opportunity to exercise agency.

The act of group reflection motivated the group to design interventions to cultivate community capital, which included the 'relationships in a community and the value that accrues from these' (Parsfield et al., 2015, page 12). After applying the Connected Communities approach, the social value, or 'divided' that has accrued from this work is clearly embedded in the citizenship dividend. Through working together to understand social networks and relations, a strong sense of citizenship can be ignited, with a clear vision of what to change in the community and how.

Families matter in Woodhouse and Kells

Our survey results revealed that families made up the core support networks for residents in Woodhouse and Kells. This indicates a strong degree of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), but weak bridging and linking social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Strong bonding capital – the connections within a group or community – comprised of high levels of similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes and available information resources, has its strengths. For example, it can offer support for people with poor access to resources within a tight structural network. This is reflected in Woodhouse and Kells through well-being measures that are above the national average and self-reported loneliness being below the national average.

However, this can also prevent communities from connecting with individuals or organisations outside their network that might promote social change or identify other forms of association. Such a social network composition can alienate communities, leaving them reluctant to engage with external services. This social capital composition is symptomatic of a number of 'left behind' working class coastal communities, who have strong shared collective identities, tightly bound in their industrial past (House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities, 2019).

Furthermore, such an inward facing approach to their community, while having its advantages, can leave new residents vulnerable to social isolation, by not being accepted as belonging to the existing community. This also leaves current residents, especially older residents, vulnerable to social isolation, as friends and family may move into supported living, move away or pass away.

Contrary to national figures, younger people (aged between 18 and 25 years old) were the least likely to report feeling lonely. This may be due to the deep-rooted nature of community in West Cumbria, where generations remain within the same communities in which they grew up.

There appears to be some conflicting evidence surrounding neighbourhood connections and perceptions. Only 3.9% of residents cited neighbours as being a community resource, yet over two thirds of residents agreed that 'people around here look after one another' and over three quarters agreed that they 'can always find someone to help' them. This could mean a number of things. Perhaps the people do use neighbours as a support network, but for some reason did not report it? Alternatively, it could be that there is a nostalgic view of the concept of community, that 'everyone around here looks after each other', when, in reality, this is not the case.

Turning the gaze outwards

'Bridging social capital' means creating connections that link people where traditionally they may be divided by race, class, or religion. And 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 gradients – or authority gradients – in society. It differs from bridging social capital because the power differences between partners are a conscious part of the relationship. While bridging social capital develops horizontal trust amongst cultural groups, linking social capital involves classic 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.

Spreading the word around Woodhouse and Kells

A number of residents reported that they did not know what was going on in Woodhouse and Kells, and a minority reported using social media and other formal information networks to gain information about what was happening locally. While family and friends can be great sources of information, this may be limiting residents' opportunities to find out about new projects coming to the area, particularly if their family and friends' social networks are also narrow. The limited use of social media may be reflected in the sample, which disproportionally represented older people, who traditionally use social media less. Nonetheless, these results suggest that bridging social capital could be developed through developing an information system that can be shared by those with strong bonding capital – in other words, through a medium that is easy for family and friends to share.

Recommendations

In light of the findings on the previous pages, the following recommendations are made to promote community connectivity and capital in Woodhouse and Kells.

1. It is recommended that initiatives seeking to build bridging and linking social capital, through connecting with local institutions, would be particulary beneficial for Woodhouse and Kells.

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

3. Some older people, particularly those aged between 75-85 years old, and those who lived alone, reported higher levels of loneliness and poorer social networks, often citing age, health and transport as barriers to engaging socially. At a time when third sector organisations are experiencing significant financial difficulties, opportunities to help to connect those vulnerable older people would be advantageous. Any projects or interventions would benefit from working with local GPs to identify those who may be vulnerable, and ensure barriers such as travel are adequately accounted for when designing services.

4. Reflecting on the public data surrounding youth, educational attainment and employment– accompanied by the survey results that the community would like more youth provision in the area – it is recommended that focused youth provision would help to strengthen the community. Ideally, this would provide children and young people with educational and personal development opportunities, and connect with the other groups highlighted within the surveys. For example, intergenerational social action activities could help young people to gain voluntary experience, which would also provide opportunities for older people to develop their social networks. Likewise, projects could involve children and young people in the development of inclusive active living initiatives, providing opportunities for those with health difficulties to engage in light physical exercise.

5. Woodhouse and Kells would benefit from a central information system that periodically shared details of local projects, initiative and events. This would need to appeal to the strong existing community identity (published by someone identified as belonging to the community of Woodhouse and Kells), that introduces external organisations. The local primary schools, community centre or churches may be valuable assets in exploring this initiative. The tone of any information systems plays a crucial role in prompting engagement, and any initiative that seeks to do so would benefit from celebrating the strengths identified in this report (higher emotional well-being and lower levels of loneliness) in order to attract readership.

6. Survey results indicate that few residents have connections with those in positions of power, such as the local authorities. It is recommended that opportunities to connect residents with those with power and influence be created, especially for children and young people. Through developing linking social capital, residents and local authorities can build trust, developing new means of co-production. Such linking capital will also encourage the local government (and others in position of power) to be accountable for their policies and practices that impact on the community.

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 BAME groups living in the area. Targeted working with local organisations would be a useful tactic to adopt in future research to ensure that all groups, especially those who may be somewhat 'hidden', are included in the research.

Comparing the survey results with the ONS data discussed in chapter 2 reveals that the sample is not entirely representative of the community in Woodhouse and Kells. However, the survey results do serve to illuminate some of the underlying social issues in the area, and can be used as a catalyst to ignite conversations and activity on a local level.

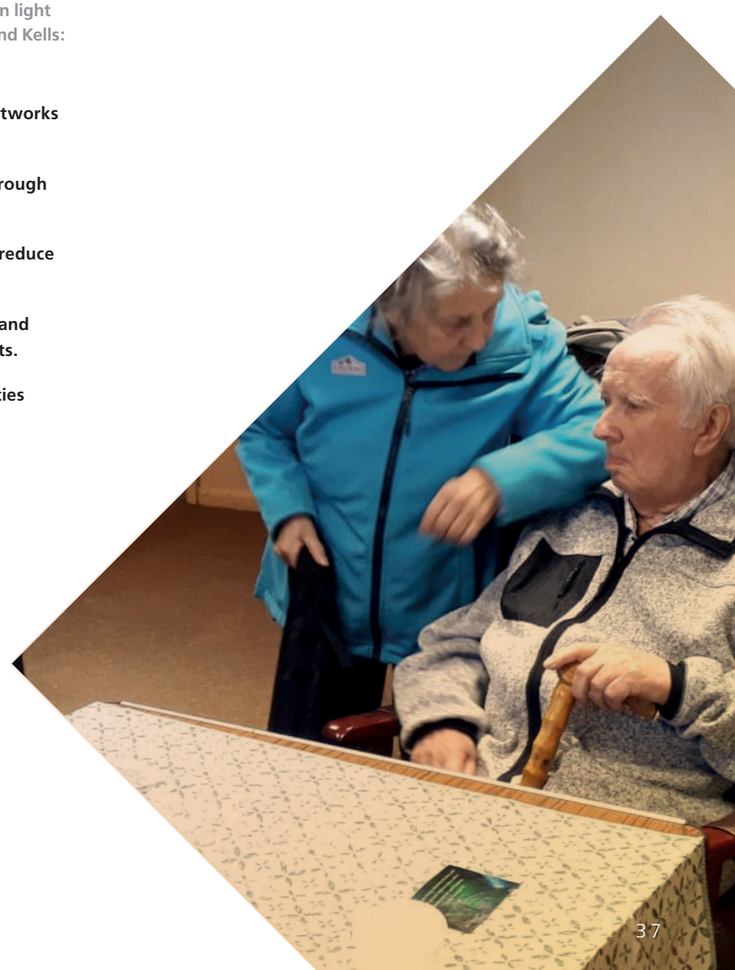
Finally, the use of children as community researchers may have presented a number of challenges, potentially impacting on the quality of the data collected. During the doorstep surveys, some residents may not have felt comfortable disclosing sensitive information about themselves to children, and the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

However, we are confident that the role of the local police offers in supporting the children provided some quality assurance to the data collected.

Summary

The Connected Communities approach helped local girls to connect with their community, realising their role, capacity and citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Woodhouse and Kells, with weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Woodhouse and Kells who were identified as having the most needs were those with health issues, older people, and children and young people. In light of these results, it's recommended that Woodhouse and Kells:

1. **Builds bridging social capital through stronger networks with external agencies and organisations.**
2. **Responds to physical and mental health needs through social prescribing.**
3. **Connects vulnerable older people living alone to reduce loneliness and social isolation.**
4. **Develops social action opportunities for children and young people, including intergenerational projects.**
5. **Builds linking social capital through local authorities connecting and co-producing with residents.**



PART 3: INFORM - CHAPTER 8

Community feedback events

A series of information sharing sessions took place at St Peter's Community Hall between July 2018 and February 2019, providing the community researchers with opportunities to share their research as it developed.

July 2018

After the quantitative data had been analysed by researchers at UCLan, a community 'playback workshop' was organised to share the findings with residents and local stakeholders, including survey respondents (where they had indicated they wanted to be involved), the community researchers and their families. Posters giving notice of the feedback event were placed in several locations in the area (shops, community notice boards), advertised through UCLan's and partners' social media pages, and personal invitations issued to people on our mailing lists.

The event was organised by the UCLan research team and attended by over 60 people, including amongst others, community researchers and their families, representatives of local community groups and charities such as Age UK, Soundwave and Inspira. Representatives from both Cumbria County Council and Copeland Borough Council were in attendance, which included the Leader of Cumbria County Council and the Elected Mayor of Copeland.

An overview of the research methodology was provided by UCLan, followed by an in-depth discussion with the girls about the experience of being a community researcher and the results generated by the activity. The County Councillor who co-facilitated Girls Gang with UCLan praised the girls passion and dedication to their community.

The Elected Mayor presented the community researchers with certificates and acknowledged their civic contribution to the local community. The event received coverage by the local media, resulting in a full-page feature.

> *"Girls' Gang lead by example for their whole community"*
>
> **The Whitehaven News**


COPELAND: PRIDE OF PLACE

Girls' Gang lead by example for their whole community

The Litter Song

Time nearly up for grant bids

Your recycling is on the up

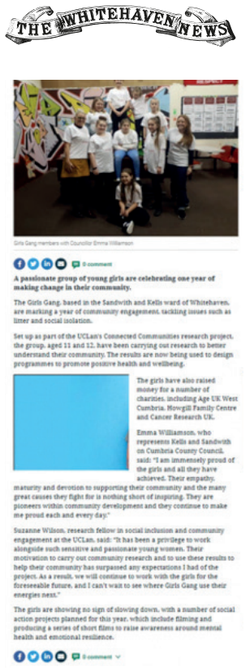
What does Tracey Taylor like? 'Our beautiful scenery and friendly people'

Media coverage of community event July 2018

October 2018

After the qualitative data had been analysed by the girls, under the supervision of the UCLan research team, the girls presented these findings to the Woodhouse Stakeholder Group (including local businesses, in particular social impact teams from the nuclear sector, Copeland Borough Council, Cumbria County Council and local charities such as The Colourful North). This provided a more detailed account of the research undertaken and results yielded.

The girls also discussed the coding process and the results they had yielded from this exercise. This smaller, more informal form of community feedback event also provided the girls with the opportunity to share their initial ideas to meet their community's needs, in response to the quantitative data.


THE WHITEHAVEN NEWS

A passionate group of young girls are celebrating one year of making change in their community.

Media coverage of community event February 2019

February 2019

To mark the first year of Girls Gang being operational, a community event was held to celebrate the achievements of the group. The event was organised by the UCLan research team and attended by over 30 people, including amongst others, community researchers and their families, representatives of local community groups and charities such as Age UK, The Colourful North and Inspira. Representatives from both Cumbria County Council and Copeland Borough Council were in attendances, including the Elected Mayor of Copeland.

> *"Girls' Gang celebrate a year of striving for change"*
>
> **The Whitehaven News**

This event purposefully allowed for the networking and informal conversations, centred around a buffet dinner. There was also a presentation given by UCLan, the local County Councillor and the community researchers. Considerable time was given to a questions and answers session, providing community stakeholders with the opportunity to ask the community researchers about their experiences and for the community researchers to ask the community stakeholders questions if they wished. Key findings were presented on the walls of the community centre, and all attendees were given post-it notes and invited to provide feedback on the findings – or make suggestions for potential interventions to meet these needs. The event received coverage by the local media.

The reflexive conversations initiated by playing back this data, including visualisations of social network maps to illustrate key findings, enabled wider involvement and engagement in the process of its analysis and in generating ideas for local interventions that could make a key difference in tackling identified local needs. In previous projects, this process has helped to shift understandings of community from place to relationships, and to spark an explicit understanding of outcomes being dependent on social relationships. More broadly, the process of change – relational and network building – is central and based on previous experience of this research approach and extensive local participation. Communities may develop social initiatives on which to base bids for funds to support further capacity building.

Furthermore, these events provided the girls with the opportunity not only to present information to the public, but to individuals with power locally, such as the Elected Mayor. Public recognition of the children's achievements from such individuals also formed a significant feature of these events, serving to develop children's confidence, capacity and citizenship.

Summary

Community feedback events provide an opportunity to disseminate information to the community and actively engage members in driving new interventions forward. Events that provide children with opportunities to share their experience and views can also serve to develop their confidence, their capacity and their citizenship.

PART 3: INFORM - CHAPTER 9

Co-productive workshops

The girls involved in the community research also participated in a number of co-productive workshops where they worked alongside local partners to explore possible interventions to meet the needs of the community identified in the research. This activity was partly in response to the recommendations made in chapter 7 surrounding building linking social capital:

Survey results indicate that few residents have connections with those in positions of power, such as the local authorities. It's recommended that opportunities to connect residents with those with power and influence be created, especially for children and young people. Through developing linking social capital (Woolcock, 2001; Szreter and Woolcock, 2004) residents and local authorities can build trust, developing new ways to co-produce. Such linking capital will also encourage the local government (and others in position of power) to be accountable for their policies and practices that impact on the community.

The ways in which children worked with local authorities and organisations to share and shape ideas in response to the survey findings are outlined on the opposite page.

Cumbria County Council

Cumbria County Council worked with the girls throughout the project, mainly through the elected member for the ward being a co-facilitator of Girls Gang. This provided the elected member with regular opportunities to talk to the girls about their ideas surrounding how to best meet their community's needs. In particular, the following results were discussed with the view of developing collaborative, co-produced interventions:

- **Barriers that older people and people with long-term health conditions may face in accessing physical activity opportunities**
- **Raising awareness surrounding emotional resilience in the community, particularly in women who were long-term unemployed**

These discussions used an asset-based perspective, acknowledging the strengths inherent within the communities and explored how to build upon these.

Copeland Borough Council

Copeland Borough Council's Child Poverty Task and Finish group approached UCLan to seek advice in the direction of their work. This provided an opportunity for the council to work alongside the girls to reflect upon the results of the survey and co-produce interventions to meet their needs.

Results revealed that there were limited connections between the local authorities and Woodhouse and Kells, and that the council were not seen as effective change-makers. In order to explore this in more detail with reference to child poverty, a workshop was held with the girls, a local elected member and a scrutiny officer. This experience provided the opportunity for the girls to work alongside real change-makers and influencers within their community, along with learning more about the democratic processes involved in local authorities.

This process explored the girls understanding of the causes, consequences and experiences of child poverty, and asked them to provide possible solutions. One of the reoccurring themes was ensuring children's voices were heard, and in response to this, Copeland Borough Council worked with children across Copeland in the development of a Children's Charter – the council's pledge to ensure that the interests of all children will be at the forefront of all policy development.

Age UK

Age UK West Cumbria, a charitable organisation, would not traditionally be understood as an organisation in a position of power. However, this is the case when working with children, who are traditionally perceived as holding little power or authority with any formal organisation (Larkins, 2014). In light of the survey findings identifying some older people as having poorer social networks and experiencing higher levels of loneliness, Age UK were invited to discuss this issue with the group. Through a workshop, which invited the children to decorate cakes to give to lonely people in their community, Age UK explored ways in which children can work with older people to enhance community connections, strongly suggesting the potential for intergenerational connectivity activities. The insights gained from these conversations demonstrated that the children had a wealth of ideas to connect the generations, and a strong drive to be part of this process. Consequently, an intergenerational connectivity programme was developed called Youth Connectors.

Summary

Targeted workshops connecting children and relevant parties can yield fruitful results when exploring interventions to meet the needs of communities. Furthermore, it is a means to an end in itself, building linking social capital between young people and those in positions of power.

PART 4: CONNECT - CHAPTER 10

Co-produced projects to enhance community capital

The results of the Connected Communities research found that people in Woodhouse and Kells have strong connections between each other (strong bonding social capital), but have weaker ties with services outside the community (poorer bridging and linking). Therefore, a number of projects have been co-produced with the community to strengthen community capital and broker connections with local organisations that can support them. This chapter will describe four successful projects that have taken place as a direct result of this research, which are:

- **Youth Connectors**
- **Just me and my thoughts mental health film**
- **West Cumbria Community Action Trust (WCCAT)**
- **Copeland Borough Council's Children's Charter**

These projects will all be discussed using the community capital framework introduced at the start of the report.

Youth Connectors: An intergenerational connectivity project

Project summary

Youth Connectors is an intergenerational connectivity programme that supports children and young people to design, develop and deliver a range of intergenerational projects in their communities. Run by the children and young people, under the supervision of Howgill Family Centre staff, these mini projects bring together younger and older community members to build strong intergenerational connections and overcome loneliness. This project has the duel impact of reducing social isolation in older people, while promoting citizenship in children and young people. Through their involvement in the co-production of interventions to support their community, young people also develop their confidence and their knowledge of issues facing older people.

Community needs being met:

- Focused Youth Provision
- Connectivity projects for older people

Funding awarded:
£5,000 (Cumbria Community Foundation)

Key Partners:
Howgill Family Centre, Alzheimer's Society, Cumbria County Council

Aim

To work with children to design, develop and deliver a range of intergenerational projects in their communities, providing social action opportunities for children, and reducing loneliness in older people.

Objectives

1. **Hold weekly sessions, where the Youth Connectors Project Workers support local children to design, develop and deliver community connectivity events**
2. **Deliver connectivity events run by the children, under the supervision of the Youth Connectors Project Workers, bringing together younger and older community members to build strong intergenerational connections and reduce loneliness**

Impact

The impact of Youth Connectors on different community members has been carried out using the following methods:

- **Survey of all adults involved in the connectivity events**
- **Feedback session with Youth Connectors**
- **Field notes from sessions**
- **Social Value Calculation**

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

Older people: Children involved with Youth Connectors felt that the events reduced loneliness in older people. For example, Caden reflected: *"I think they are less lonely because they have met people that care about them."*

Carers: The connectivity events also brought happiness to carers, as was summarised by Mary, a full-time carer for her husband who suffers with dementia:

> *"As a carer I enjoyed the relaxed, friendly atmosphere of the dementia café and it was good to be with young people. Being old can be very isolating and it's good that these young girls are doing something to help older people socialise."*

Carers also reported that they appreciated the opportunity to have a rest and to be able to connect with other carers and local services that were available.

Young people: The project also helped some children to feel less lonely, as stated by Tanya:

> *"I feel less lonely because I have made new friends!"*

Indeed, the project appeared to connect a number of young people who lived in the same neighbourhood, attended the same school, but had never spoken to one another. These connections extended beyond the Youth Connectors group, creating friendships and expanding these young people's social networks. Furthermore, all children who took part in the community connectivity events reported they had enjoyed the experience and felt happier for doing so.

Citizenship

Young people: The planning and delivery of community connectivity events encouraged the children to reflect on the experience of being older and lonely, developing their empathy, as summarised by Summer: *"I felt sad for them, it must be so difficult".* Youth Connected helped young people to realise the role they can have in making a better society, as was reflected by Leah:

> *"I did it because I believe in being a helpful person to the less fortunate. We ran a dementia friendly café for people who wanted to come by."*

This sense of citizenship was appreciated by the staff at a local care home: *"a fantastic group of young people. It's amazing to see them take an interest in older adults, especially those with dementia. This illness is rapidly taking over the community and some of these young people could potentially in the future be making a difference to their lives."*

Adults: A mother whose children attended Youth Connectors enjoyed helping out in the first community connectivity project so much that she is now volunteering with the group – providing her with new opportunities to develop her skills and experience, as well as giving her a sense of achievement in volunteering within her community. One parent volunteer commented:

> *"It was really nice to be able to help my children and other children, it made me feel good about myself. It was interesting working on projects to help people with dementia, I actually learned a lot of things about dementia myself".*

Capacity

Young people: The children developed their social skills in connecting with older people: "I learned how to help old people and interact with them. I learned to let people know they are not alone by showing like you really care about them and their life."*The dementia friends training and dementia friendly café helped to raise awareness of issues affecting people with dementia and their families: "I learnt that dementia can affect different things, like speech. I learned that everyone with dementia is different."*

Services: Through engaging with older people during the sessions, organisations such as Alzheimer's Society and West Cumbria Community Action Trust (WCCAT) received feedback about what other services were felt to be needed, which has informed the development of future projects.

Social Value

Social impact describes the changes made in people's lives by an activity or a group of activities when we also consider what would have happened anyway and the contribution of others to those changes. Impacts can be good or bad and most of us want to increase the positive impact we're creating and reduce the negative impact we're creating. **Social value** describes how important those different impacts are and is often expressed in monetary terms. Impacts that are not usually expressed with a financial value but can be done through social value calculations includes increases in confidence and reductions in loneliness.

For more information about social value visit the Social Value UK website **http://www.socialvalueuk.org/**.

The social value of Youth Connectors has been calculated at £78,648.14. This figure includes a 25% discount as we cannot guarantee that all the positive changes that took place were solely the result of the project.

Legacy

The Youth Connectors project ran for one year and delivered a number of community connectivity events. This framework has now been adopted within new youth provision via South Whitehaven Youth Partnership, which will continue to provide opportunities for youth-led inter-generational connectivity projects.

Furthermore, the community connectivity events inspired community members to start their own dementia café, operating under West Cumbria Community Action Trust, and funding has been secured from Whitehaven Town Council to support its delivery for one year. One of the dementia café founders described how seeing the work of Youth Connectors inspired him to continue and develop this work:

> *"The work that the children have done with the older generation is really inspiring. Having seen older people in my family become isolated, helping the older generation is very important to me. I hope to be able to help Youth Connectors continue to make a difference."*

Just me and my thoughts' mental health film

Project summary

Girls Gang, the group of girls who took part in the initial community research, wrote, starred in and helped to produce a film about bullying and the impact this can have on emotional wellbeing. The girls wrote the script for the film, which was based around one particular girl who was experiencing cyber bullying from another girl. The girls also chose what roles they wanted in the film.

During the summer holidays, the girls gave up a substantial amount of their time to record the film. This was carried out at the Cumbria Film Studios filming studio in Workington, at the UCLan West Lakes Campus, around the community of Woodhouse, and also in someone's home. The film premiered to a select audience at UCLan's West Lakes Campus in March 2020 and will be available to primary schools across Cumbria from September 2020.

Community needs being met:

- Youth focused provision

Key Partners: UCLan, WCCAT, Cumbria Film Studios

Funding awarded: £5,000 (Cumbria Community Foundation)

Aim

To produce a short film about bullying and the impact it can have on emotional wellbeing, written and starring local young people.

Objectives

- **Work with local young people to develop a theme for the film and write the script**
- **Provide learning opportunities for young people about film making**
- **Provide opportunities for young people to gain experience in acting**
- **Disseminate the film to local primary schools to raise awareness of issues around bullying and mental health**

Impact

The impact of involvement in the production of a mental health film on the girls was undertaken using the following methods:

- **Survey involving all members of Girls Gang and their parents**
- **Feedback session with Girls Gang**

The wider dissemination of the film has been delayed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, which caused all schools to close on 20th March 2020.

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

The experience of being involved in this creative project positively impacted on the emotional wellbeing of some of the girls, mainly in growing their confidence. This was particularly felt in those who had never taken part in such an activity before. The impact on one girl was summarised by her mother in the passage below:

> *"[My daughter] has and almost certainly always will suffer with lack of confidence. So, I was surprised when I watched her talking on camera. It was a pleasure to see how much she enjoyed herself and how everyone around her made her feel at ease. Never would I have expected her to do this. This has been a fantastic experience for [my daughter] as a little bit of confidence is definitely shining through now, and I'm sure if given the opportunity she would overcome her fears and do it all again as she knows now she could do it." (Mother)*

Citizenship

Although Girls Gang were already formed and actively engaged in social action, this project engaged the girls in an activity that they would have not otherwise been able to access. The girls had chosen the filmmaking project as something they would like to focus on in 2019. This provided them with yet another unique and innovative way to enact their citizenship.

Capacity

The girls spent over 100 hours writing and recording the short film. This provided the girls with an experience they would otherwise not have had around photography and filmmaking. This was the first time the girls had participated in such an activity, and the learning gained from it was significant. For example, they learned how hard filming can be, which caused some of the girls to reassess their career aspirations. Writing and developing this film encouraged the girls to reflect on issues that impact young people's mental health. The story created for the film was largely informed by the girls' personal experiences, and the reflection and consequent group conversations caused the girls to develop their awareness of issues around bullying and mental health.

Legacy

The film can be viewed on the UCLan's Centre for Citizenship and Community webpage and 100 DVDs have been produced for the girls' families and friends, and for wider distribution. However, the wider dissemination of the film has been delayed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, which caused all schools to close on 20th March 2020. Upon the schools' planned re-opening in September 2020, DVDs of the film will be sent to primary schools across Cumbria.

West Cumbria Community Action Trust (WCCAT)

Project summary

WCCAT is a new charity established as a result of previous partnership work between UCLan (Suzanne Wilson) and Cumbria County Council (Emma Williamson). Its mission is to become a vehicle for projects seeking to meet the needs of the community that emerged from the Connected Communities research – along with continuing to work with Girls Gang. WCCAT is based at St Peter's Community Hall, which WCCAT hopes to transform into an active community hub. This hub will add to existing provision, acting as a multipurpose facility, providing or hosting a range of activities and services used by different people. The idea is to bring local people together along with the organisations and businesses that will enable the community to form new relationships and support networks. WCCAT are developing strong working ties with the newly appointed Social Prescribing Link Workers at Copeland Borough Council, who are seen as being central in helping to develop this bridging social capital.

Community needs being met:

- Develop joint working opportunities
- Inclusive social prescribing initiatives

Key Partners: UCLan

Funding awarded: £2,000 (Cumbria Community Foundation), £600 (Whitehaven Town Council)

Aim

- **To be a successful community hub, delivering services to the local community, reflecting its needs and aspirations for the benefit of all**
- **To continue to support the local community by providing first class facilities for a range of activities**

Objectives

- **Recruit and train members of the local community to sit on the trustee board**
- **Develop a team of local volunteers**
- **Develop place-based interventions to strengthen the community and meet the needs that emerged from the research**

Impact

WCCAT is in its infancy as a charity and it is too early to assess the impact on community capital on a wider level. However, we have been able to understand how being part of WCCAT has benefitted individual members of the community through the application of the community capital framework using the following methods:

- **Focus groups/interviews with trustees**
- **Funding and project reports**
- **Social Value Calculation (Girls Gang)**

The qualitative impact of being part of Girls Gang has already been discussed in Chapter 5 so is not included in the wellbeing, citizenship or capacity section of the framework opposite. The social impact in monetary terms will, however, be discussed in this section.

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

Trustees and other volunteers involved in WCCAT have reported that these opportunities have increased their confidence. It has helped to develop feelings of belongingness to their community and connectivity with others:

> *"I lived here all my life and I love living here, but I've never done anything like this before, it makes you feel good about yourself to know your giving something back".*

As can also be seen the quote above, volunteers report that they enjoy volunteering in the community, bringing them happiness and satisfaction.

Citizenship

Many of the trustees and volunteers at WCCAT are local, and passionate that their children and wider community receive the opportunities they deserve. Being part of a local charity with the specific aim to do so has developed a sense of having a stake in their community .

> *"It's great to feel you are actually doing something to help the community.*

Furthermore, with the Girls Gang specifically, a number of parents have reported that their own awareness of civic duty and engagement was raised as a result of their daughter's actions, which in some case led them to enact citizenship themselves. This took many forms, from volunteering with Girls Gang events, to becoming a trustee of WCCAT, to getting involved in the community response to COVID-19.

Capacity

Being involved in a new community group, particularly on a trustee level, has helped to develop new skills that residents previously had no access to. It also provided opportunities for residents to develop their experience, for example, volunteering in one of the Cuppa to Connect coffee mornings, which sought to bring third sector and statutory services to the community. *"I didn't know so much went into organising coffee mornings, I learned a lot!"*

Social Value

The social value of Girls Gang, the project that inspired the community to set up West Cumbria Community Action Trust, has been calculated at £131,658.11. This figure includes a 25% discount as we cannot guarantee that all the positive changes that took place were solely the result of the project.

Legacy

A strong trustee board has been established to support the sustainability of WCCAT. Members include three members of the community, the County Councillor for the area, a member of the nuclear industry, and a community engagement researcher. This provides a combination of skills, experience and knowledge of charitable governance, local government and local industry, with an authentic understanding of the needs of the local communities. Future projects include social prescribing drop-ins and initiatives, along with specific small projects to support the community post COVID-19.

Children's Charter

Project summary

Copeland Borough Council (CBC) established a Task and Finish group focusing on child poverty involving elected members and Scrutiny. Here, it was identified that the Connected Communities West Cumbria project provided an opportunity for CBC to work with children from areas experiencing significant poverty, in the co-production of a Children's Charter. The Children's Charter is the Council's pledge to listen and respond to the needs and ideas expressed by local children. It has been written by local children from a variety of backgrounds, mainly from areas experiencing significant poverty.

The Council will be held accountable to children. Although they won't have any powers over the Council, children will be asked to provide feedback on the Council's fulfilment of their pledges. It was envisioned that this co-produced Children's Charter would provide children facing the greatest barriers to engagement and participation with local governance an opportunity to be heard – and to be involved in the creation of a validated local policy. The children's accounts of their experience of being involved in the co-production of this Charter demonstrate, in some children, increased confidence, citizenship and aspirations.

Community needs being met:

- Youth focused provision
- Develop joint working opportunities

Key Partners: UCLan, Copeland Borough Council, St Begh's Catholic Primary School

Aim

To work with local children and young people to co-produce a Children's Charter which will act as Copeland Borough Council's pledge to protect the best interests of children and young people experiencing hardship in Copeland.

Objectives

1. Develop a Task and Finish Group

2. Understand the views of local children and young people

3. Apply these views to a workable children's charter

4. Formally adopt the Charter

Impact

It is too early to assess the impact of the Children's Charter on community capital on a wider level. However, we have been able to understand how being part of its development has benefitted children and young people through the application of the community capital framework using the following methods.

1. Focus groups with young people and adults

2. Interview with policy officer

3. Policy papers, council reports

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

The process of being involved increased confidence, and children enjoyed being part of something that was going to make a real difference. They especially liked adults coming into their spaces and having the opportunity to share their ideas and views which were felt to be genuinely heard: *"it helped my confidence when the people came into school and we get to tell them about what we thought and they listened to us".*

Citizenship

Being involved in a piece of work proved to these children and young people that their voice can indeed be heard. When the concept of the charter was introduced, one girl responded, *"no one will listen to us"*. The process of involving the girl and her peers in the process of developing this piece of policy developed their sense of having a stake in her community and the desire to be heard. This was summarised succinctly in a focus group at the end of the project, where the same girl said "when they came back into school and showed us what they had done and that they had listened to what we all had to say, that was really good. I didn't think that we'd actually make a difference but we did".

Capacity

Involving the children in the development of a local policy offered the development of a number of new skills, including critical thinking and presentation skills (which included presenting at a conference organised by Barnardo's and The University of Cumbria). Furthermore, the children gained an understanding of civic society and developed their experience of communicating with authority figures, such as the police and councillors.

Legacy

The Children's Charter has been put through the council's Project Framework and officially adopted. There is now a Children's Charter Project Board which consists of a council scrutiny officer, Senior Directors, Heads of Service, Mayor's Political Assistant and members of the council. There will be an Annual Report produced on what actions the council have undertaken under the Children's Charter over the previous year, which local children and young people will be able to scrutinise and challenge.

> *"As a small local council, with no responsibility for children's services or health provision throughout the borough, the Children's Charter will be used to make real and tangible differences to child poverty within Copeland. The charter was not a document to be written and forgotten about; it is a living framework full of ambition to help children have agency within their communities. Through working with partner organisations, universities, emergency services and all levels of local government I hope that Copeland's Children Charter can make a real difference and serve as a template for other organisations".*

Chapter summary

It is important that community research isn't conducted for its own sake and that it is used to make a positive difference to the areas it has worked with. This chapter has provided four examples of how community research can be used to inform the development of co-produced interventions to help strengthen communities. It has also shown how members of all ages and backgrounds can work with local authorities and third sector organisations to make a meaningful difference in their communities.

PART 4: CONNECT - CHAPTER 11

Report summary

Chapter 1:

The University of Central Lancashire's (UCLan) Centre for Citizenship and Community has developed the Connected Communities approach (Parsfield, et al., 2015). This is an action research strategy to explore how the community dimension of people's lives contributes to well-being – and can be developed to analyse 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 serve to enhance community capital. The Connected Communities study aimed to build on the key principles identified in the original research by Parsfield et al. (2015). Specifically, it sought to:

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

Chapter 2:

The figures presented in the report reveal a community that is experiencing a number of challenges, especially in terms of health and employment. A Connected Communities approach aims to build on the existing capital within the community, with the view to promote well-being, capacity and citizenship, resulting in public service savings.

Chapter 3: Community researchers

The recruitment and retention of young community researchers requires an engaging, inclusive strategy. Expert partners, such as schools, can offer valuable insights into effective recruitment methods, along with acting as gatekeepers. This interactive strategy successfully recruited fourteen community researchers.

Chapter 4: Research process

The research process undertaken was broader than the traditional Connected Communities approach. This included more focused work with the community researchers to support the children to develop their community consciousness (mapping) and provide opportunities to take action on social issues that mattered to them (litter campaign). This, alongside the survey data – which the children coded themselves – provided a collection of data that was presented to the community, where feedback was given and ideas generated for future co-produced interventions.

Chapter 5: Research experience

The Connected Communities research undertaken in Woodhouse and Kells provides an original adaptation of the approach, with children being at its centre. Through a battery of measures, it can be seen that the experience provided participatory power through creating a safe space for children to enact their citizenship. Working alongside local police officers, the children revised their perceptions of the police, and reflected on the role they themselves play in civil society.

Chapter 6: Survey results

Perceptions of Woodhouse and Kells:

Most people said that they were satisfied with the area to live, but only around two-thirds said that people look out for each other. The close community, friendly people and quiet environment were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being time, motivation, health and believing there was nothing to do. Key areas for improvement were identified as better roads, less litter and better services for young people.

Health:

Almost two fifths had an 'impairment or health condition'. Almost a fifth had a physical disability, while just over a quarter had a 'long-term health condition'. The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was 25.1, which is higher than the national average (23.6). Those with an impairment or health condition were more likely to feel lonely, and had slightly lower mental well-being.

Loneliness:

In general terms, people in Woodhouse and Kells reported feeling less lonely than the general population, and reported higher levels of emotional well-being. The loneliest group of people were middle-aged unemployed people, those living alone, those with health problems and older people. The least lonely people were 18-24 year olds and those over 85 year old. Connections were associated significantly with better mental health. People living with others were more likely to report never or hardly ever feeling lonely. People with health issues were more likely to report feeling lonely often.

Community connections and social networks:

Family alone made up over half the connections, and friends and family made up 80% of all connections. Connections to local groups and organisations appears underdeveloped. Those with poor health were more likely to report having no connections to family resources. Friendship networks between young people (under 55 year olds) were weaker than that of older people. Neighbourhood connections were weak, with 81% not reporting a connection with a neighbour. Older people were more likely to have stronger connections with their neighbours. People in Woodhouse and Kells appear to have poor connections with local institutions.

Chapter 7: Discussion and recommendations

The Connect Communities approach helped children to connect with their community, realising their role, capacity and citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Woodhouse and Kells, with weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Woodhouse and Kells who were identified as having the most needs were those with health issues, older people, and children and young people. In light of these results, it is recommended that Woodhouse and Kells:

1. **Builds bridging social capital through stronger networks with external agencies and organisations**
2. **Responds to physical and mental health needs through social prescribing**
3. **Connects vulnerable older people to reduce loneliness and social isolation**
4. **Develops social action opportunities for children and young people, including intergenerational projects**
5. **Builds linking social capital through local authorities connecting and co-producing with residents.**

Chapter 8: Community feedback events

Community feedback events provide an opportunity to disseminate information to the community, and actively engage members in driving new interventions forward. Events that provide children with opportunities to share their experience and views can also serve to develop their confidence, their capacity and their citizenship.

Chapter 9: Co-productive workshops

Targeted workshops connecting children and relevant parties can yield fruitful results when exploring interventions to meet the needs of communities. Furthermore, it is a means to an end in itself, building linking social capital between young people and those in positions of power.

Chapter 10: Co-productive projects

It is important that community research isn't conducted for its own sake and that it is used to make a positive difference to the areas it has worked with. This chapter has provided four examples of how community research can be used to inform the development of co-produced interventions to help strengthen communities. It has also shown how members of all ages and backgrounds can work with local authorities and third sector organisations to make a meaningful difference in their communities.

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