

# Section 1 - Community Development Work

## Introduction

### A very brief history...

Community Development Work has a long history in the UK, dating back to the social campaigners in the Victorian era and since then has evolved and adapted as it sought to survive whilst retaining its principles and values. Governments have seen it as having different uses in implementing their policies, whether as part of withdrawing from colonies, tackling poverty, through to engaging its citizens in the workings of government.

### What it is

It has been recognised as an occupation, or as some would maintain, a profession, at least since the mid 1990's when we set down our purpose, values, principles and key areas of our work in the national occupational standards. Before then there were many attempts to try and explain what we did and why we were different from other approaches to engaging with, and supporting, communities. The word community has been much debated but in this manual we use it to cover communities based on location, of common interests, and of shared identity.

Every 5 years or so, we revise our national occupational standards to update them to the current political context and the arenas where community development takes place. Although the words may change the focus of community development is about changing the situation of those who have least power and resources, through enabling them to analyse what their problems are and how they want to collectively tackle them.

Community development principles and values are based around:

- Making changes
- Social / environmental justice
- Communities deciding on the issues
- People working together
- People having a greater say in decisions that affect their communities
- People learning from each other and from reflecting on previous attempts

Community development work is primarily a process, a way of working that produces results. To undertake community development work requires an understanding of the process and vast amounts of skills and knowledge; it is something that not everyone can undertake successfully. Like many professions there are some practitioners who seem to have a natural aptitude to working in their chosen field and so it's easy to underestimate the sheer amount of skill and expertise they bring to their work.

The main areas of work and roles undertaken by community development practitioners reflect the circular process of community development:

- Getting to know a community – of interest, identity, location
- Finding out what they see as their needs and issues that concern them

- Bringing people together to agree their aims and make plans to realise them
- Encouraging people to work together effectively in a group and with other groups and communities
- Assisting groups to decide how best to organise themselves – formal or informal systems and structures
- Supporting groups to get the necessary resources
- Bringing people together to learn from each other and to evaluate their activities
- Learning from their own practice through critical reflection as part of their continuous professional development

Community Development is essentially a bottom up approach of supporting and empowering people to take action with others in their community. It is based on the belief that people can develop their skills and knowledge to make a difference, which will benefit others in their community.

A community development practitioner is seen as an informal educator, a background supporter, helping with practical tasks when needed, making the links with others, providing information and contacts, and all the time encouraging people to develop their own ideas and expertise. Because of its educational role community development as an occupation is located in the life long learning sector, hence LLUK are the custodians of our national occupational standards (NOS).

These standards set out what a community development worker (whether they are paid or an activist) should know and be able to do. The full set of standards can be found at [www.lifelonglearninguk.org](http://www.lifelonglearninguk.org) and FCDL produce a summary sheet (see resources section). FCDL also have a CD rom aimed at employers which shows how the CDW NOS are used to improve the practice of community workers.

### **Who does community development work**

Community Development Workers come with a wide range of job titles and job descriptions, they can be called community mobilizers, engagement officers, community centre workers, community health workers, regeneration partnership workers, community liaison officers, community arts workers ... They can be working in urban or rural communities, but primarily in areas described as disadvantaged. They can be employed by local authorities, PCTs, local or regional voluntary organisations and local community groups and centres themselves. They may well be local activists who do not get paid and are involved in a variety of community groups campaigning or providing services to local people.

If they are working to the values and principles of community development and adopting the bottom up approach to empowering communities to bring about change, then we would recognise their community development work regardless of their title. Even if they were called community development workers but they did not work in the way outlined in the occupational standards we would not recognise them as such. Because there continues to be misunderstanding about what community development work is, posts are sometimes created without an appreciation of the skills needed to work in communities with all their tensions and challenges, and without appreciating the bottom up agenda setting of community development. There are many ways to work in communities but they are not all based on community development.

### **The current situation**

The divides between the rich and poor have continued to widen within our society, and the lives of poor communities are often made worse by the actions of the rich. Our communities are becoming more and more fragmented, and individuals may not see themselves as part of a local community. Community groups may be competing with other local groups for the basic resources to continue.

Our current government is interested in:

- Creating safe communities
- Cohesive communities
- Improving disadvantaged communities
- Reducing disparities between neighbourhoods
- Sustainable communities and sustainable communities strategies in rural and urban areas
- Strengthening citizens and communities voice; through participation, involvement in planning and local decision-making
- Community empowerment and local leadership
- Tackling the democratic deficit, creating active citizens
- Public service reform by involving local communities in LAA and LSPs in setting local priorities
- Sustainable development and climate change

and many more issues and topics relating to communities.

There is a growing focus on neighbourhoods, the concept of place shaping, of tackling areas of growth and managing areas of decline. There is a constant theme about the need to involve people as citizens and residents in a vast array of public policy areas, from community justice to the disposal of low-level radioactive waste. There is an increasing focus on regional or sub-national working to implement national policies, for instance in community empowerment. The voluntary and community sectors are being asked to play an increasing role in the design and delivery of public services, with schemes to improve and build their capacity to undertake this new role.

To all these agendas community development work has much to offer. It is certainly an interesting and challenging time to be undertaking community development work.

## **Introduction to community development work and social and environmental justice**

This skills manual is part of a series of resource packs and materials produced to support the FCDL's contribution to the DEFRA Every Action Counts programme, which aims to raise awareness of environmental issues amongst voluntary and community groups and the wider community. DEFRA has been charged by our current government with taking action to tackle the bigger environmental issues of climate change and natural resource depletion. For more information, and details of the whole programme, see the four page leaflet on the FCDL website and the Every Action Counts website ([www.everyactioncounts.org.uk](http://www.everyactioncounts.org.uk)). The EAC programme for meeting the environmental challenges facing us today is based on the idea that every community group, whether big or small, rural or urban focused, has a critical role in environmental sustainability.

FCDL has become involved with this programme because it recognises that environmental justice is a key part of social justice – one of the core values of community development work. Poor and marginalised communities are on the receiving end of many social injustices, and likewise they are more likely to live in degraded environments and be adversely affected by current environmental changes.

Community development workers aim is social justice and the FCDL's approach to working on sustainable development issues is based on recognizing the clear link between environmental problems and social injustices – the poorest communities usually have the smallest footprints but suffer from the excessive footprints of the more affluent. In the UK for example, the worst factory pollution is found in

the most deprived local authorities, and air pollution from traffic is also worst in these areas. FCDL views Environmental Justice as a crucial part of social justice and sees that environmental justice means that there should be:

- A quality of life for all - everyone should have a safe and healthy place to live, work and play
- Enough resources for all of us now and for future generations

All the material designed by the FCDL within the Every Action Counts programme are informed by the values of community development work, and aim to support communities and those who work with them, by promoting an environmental justice approach.

This manual is a contribution to the work of this programme.

The first contribution in this section seeks to demonstrate the role of community development work in creating happiness as well as sustainability.

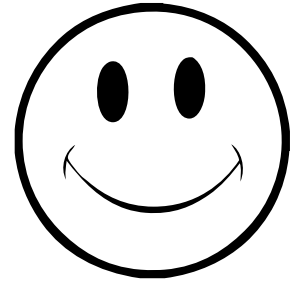
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## HAPPINESS, GREEN SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK - A STARTER

The aim of this overview is to add to the debates around green issues, community development work and human need. In so doing, this paper gives further weight to community development work practice by encouraging processes and outcomes used in community development to be used to increase people's happiness. This we would argue, is already the case, but further attention is drawn to the role of happiness in sustainable community development.



### Human Need

Let us begin by looking at a Theory of Human Need (Doyal and Gough 1991)

According to Doyal and Gough there are two basic human needs that apply to all human beings wherever they live, good health (Physical health) and the ability to make plans for their future lives (autonomy).

In order to meet these human needs several things must be satisfied, which are called universal need satisfiers:

- Adequate nutritional food and clean water
- Adequate protective housing
- A non-hazardous work environment
- A non-hazardous physical environment
- Appropriate health care
- Security in childhood
- Significant primary relationships
- Physical security
- Economic security
- Appropriate education
- Need for safe birth control and safe child bearing

The way our societies are organised have an important impact on meeting these needs. Every individual should have their needs satisfied, and so should be able to participate in production, exchange, distribution and consumption.

The important point here is that these universal need satisfiers must be in place to meet human need. One need satisfier cannot be omitted for another and they cannot be bargained or traded away. Think about the non-hazardous physical environment and examine pollution and its effects. Pollution adversely affects (directly or indirectly) these need satisfiers. A green sustainability is implicit throughout this theory of universal human need, as are notions of social justice and care.

The theory acknowledges that the meeting of human needs is complicated given that knowledge can be factual and socially constructed etc. However, they take a holistic approach to the development of an objective approach to meeting need i.e. they combine experienced understandings with the technical, rational and scientific. The theory suggests that the satisfaction of human needs allows true human emancipation.

## Linking Human Need, Community Development and the Environment

Meeting these human needs is a social activity, which requires participation and co-operation between individuals. It would seem that the key purpose of community development work (FCDL 2004) sits neatly within this conception of need, and vice versa.

An important point in both community development work and in meeting human needs is the idea of autonomy and self-determination. For Doyal and Gough (1991), issues of mental health prevent individuals being able to exercise autonomy effectively. This is particularly worrying when in our lifetimes up to 25% of people will experience a mental health problem. Furthermore, living near industrial activity or the consequences of its demise, can lead to feelings of disorder within the community. These feelings impact onto individual feelings of powerlessness and ultimately depression. (Downey and Van Willigenn 2005).

In short, increasing wealth does not necessarily mean improvements in our happiness. The Happy Planet Index (Marks N et al 2007) shows that Britain is the 108<sup>th</sup> happiest place in the world. At the same time the UK hovers around 4<sup>th</sup> place in terms of GDP. The Happy Planet Index measures the levels of consumption, self rated life satisfaction and life expectancy. The index demonstrates that the richest countries in the world use up most of the world's resources but are no happier than much poorer countries. Wealth does not equate to happiness. (Marks *ibid*)

It seems that beyond a certain level of wealth increased material consumption does very little for developing our happiness. For example, Germany and the USA have similar levels of life expectancy and life satisfaction, but the Germans consume half the natural resources that the Americans do.

The economic growth model we are caught up in does not generate improved quality of lives once we have reached a certain point. There is little wonder then, that as GDP has more than doubled in the past 30 years in the UK, feelings of happiness or well being have remained the same. (Marks 2007) (The Happy Planet survey does acknowledge that extreme poverty does not lead to a happy long life.)

The Happy Planet Index goes on to suggest that the moderately wealthy countries of Central America are amongst the happiest countries in the world because of their strong communities and individual interconnectivity. Community development work practice could be congruent with generating happy individuals and communities.

We have suggested that happiness is connected to good environmental practices, community development work practice and the meeting of human need. We can specifically see the cross-over between community development and happiness in Kasser's (2002) suggestion that happiness has 4 components:

- Security
- Relatedness
- Competence
- Autonomy

The key purpose of community development work and its principles and values clearly can be used to strengthen each of the individual components of happiness (FCDL 2004). Community development workers have been contributing to the creation of happiness.

At the same time we need to think about how the environment relates to the creation of happiness. There is a suggestion in the work of Carrus et al (2002) that the happiest people, in terms of environmental issues, are the ones who support practical local activities around improving the environment, rather than more ethereal, political or conceptual problems e.g. the effects

of carbon footprints on the ozone layer and world climatic change. (We know the effect of supporting local practical initiatives will have an effect on the grander debates, but the essential ingredient in linking happiness and environmental behaviour change is its tangibility and locality.)

For example, talking to a local authority community development worker in one of the most disadvantaged districts of West Yorkshire, she noted that the top priority for one run down council estate was not jobs, not improved housing, not increased skills but and improved physical environment. Several projects in the Wakefield District from Cutsyke, Castleford to Ossett, have developed to improve the environment, improving and greening eyesores from the industrial past and declining recreational facilities. Sourcing sustainable resources for these projects, bringing local people of all ages on board with the projects and getting local and national recognition for such work has increased the sense of worth of individuals who are facing extreme social exclusion or isolation.

Sustainable environments and communities, community development work and the meeting of human need is interlinked. In working to meet human need, we need to look after the environment and link people together in collective action. A benefit of working in this way is the potential for the generation of happier lives.

Community development work is as much about processes as outcomes. Green sustainability is about inputs, processes and outcomes; and so is meeting human need. In the Happiness Index, use of environmental resources to meet human goals is analysed. Resources are those things we have and can use whether human or natural; means refers to the way we use resources in different areas of social life; and the outcome is the result of our craft and endeavours: long happy lives.

### Taking environmental resource to fashion long happy lives

Resources	Means	Outcomes
Environmental Resources	Community Technological Healthcare Economic Values Family Education Governance Employment Consumption	Long happy lives

The table shows that our environmental resources can be used for creating long happy lives. However, the means by which we fashion resources to meet our needs are varied and often highly contested.

Community development work could be used as a vehicle to promote happiness in many different types of community and in the various forms community work takes. We need to be clear that our activities involve environmental resources ie the use of resources is "green proofed". We need to "green proof" resource decisions in all arenas of social life in which so we can mould resources for the creation of long happy lives.

This model obviously needs further refinement to be of use to practice and also to be theoretically sound. It is also open to claims of naivety given the nature of an increasingly materially unequal society and the effects of the perceptual nature of relative poverty.



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## References/ Further Reading

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