

Our Life Limehurst Village Wellbeing Project Report

October 2013

the
regenda
group



limehurstvillage I





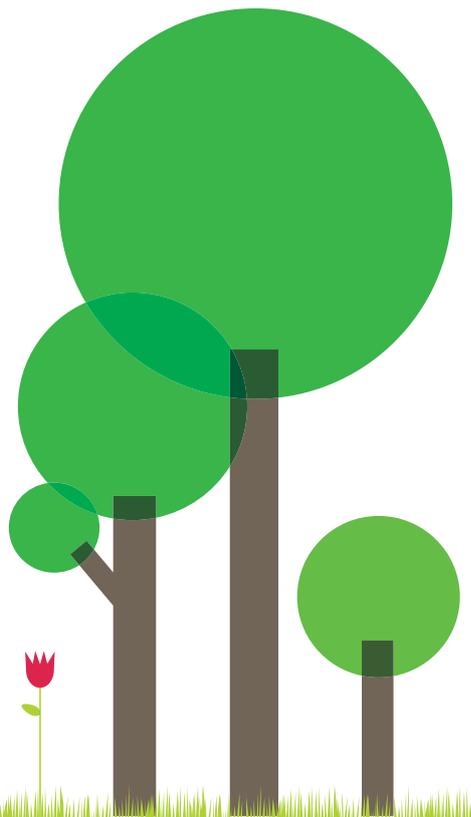
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1

Background

Our Life and Regenda Group

The Regenda Group is currently embarking on a 10 year Neighbourhood Development Plan to work with residents and partners of Limehurst Village, Oldham, that will transform the lives of residents.

In recognition of the significant health inequalities in the area which are likely to be adversely affected by current legislative and economic change, Regenda commissioned Our Life to undertake a wellbeing project to explore how to protect and enhance the wellbeing of present and future residents of Limehurst Village.

landlords and investors, can play in helping individuals and communities. Housing Associations have been extremely successful in building much needed affordable homes, meeting decent homes standards for existing homes, regenerating neighbourhoods and funding and delivering many services for their communities. Despite this and a sustained period of economic growth, people in social housing have continued to have lower wellbeing and health than the wider population.

In the current economic climate, housing associations will need to make difficult decisions on how to spend their limited resources in communities increasingly decimated by public spending cuts and rising unemployment. A focus on wellbeing provides a model for landlords to understand what issues are most important to their tenants and communities, and to make spending decisions based on building their resilience and wellbeing.

The Limehurst wellbeing project: Putting the ideas into practice

The aim of the Limehurst Wellbeing Project was to identify how to enhance the wellbeing of present and future residents, by exploring the current views of Limehurst residents. The project was an exciting departure from typical community engagement practice: instead of a professional-led audit, Our Life supported a new team of residents to lead the engagement process on their own estate, with payment provided by Regenda.

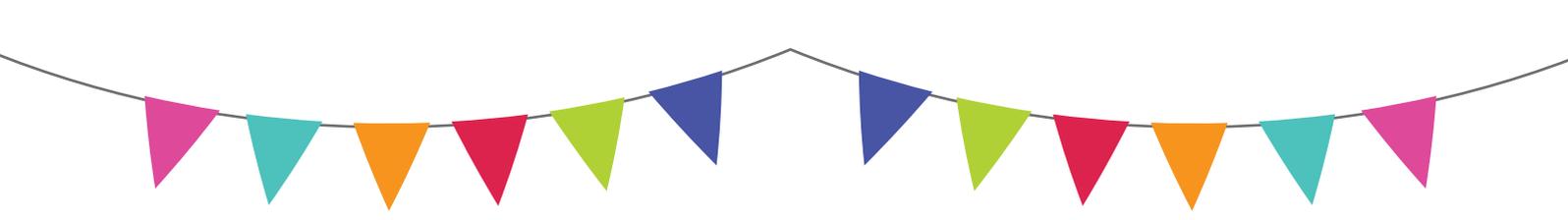
Evidence indicates that a change within a community can be achieved by a small group if the influence reaches a threshold whereby a new behaviour can be accepted as the norm and adapted by peers. The Limehurst Wellbeing “Explorers” would engage residents in deliberating on wellbeing in their own communities, and create a pool of ‘wellbeing champions’ who understand the factors which enhance wellbeing and can inspire other residents to take positive action. By building on the skills, knowledge, experience and commitment of local residents, the Limehurst Wellbeing project is seeking to lay down very firm foundations for sustainable development. The thinking is that local residents will also bring a higher degree of belief and trust to encounters with their own peers, opening-up more readily about the realities of life on their estate and identifying the pleasures which need to be protected and pains which need to be tackled. When local residents are the engagement workers it also provides an inspiring example of the ability of the community to lead itself through changes. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge gained by the researchers will stay within the neighbourhood along with the fees paid to them for their work.

Wellbeing and Health: The Concept

Health and wellbeing is a familiar phrase that has come to mean physical health and its impact on wellbeing. Our Life prefers the phrase wellbeing and health, because mental wellbeing is of crucial importance in determining both the existence of good health and how able a person is to overcome physical ill-health.

In 2009 a survey of mental wellbeing in the North West, the first of its kind in England, shed light on the relationship between mental wellbeing and other factors. The survey found those with good mental wellbeing have a higher satisfaction with life and are much more likely to be in employment, be educated, be healthy and have closer relationships with others. Evidence from the survey and from a wealth of other literature demonstrates that the determinants of good mental wellbeing are influenced by a wide range of social, environmental, economic, organisational and individual factors. Achieving mental wellbeing, therefore requires action across many different sectors and systems.

Social housing organisations and housing associations are acutely aware of the role housing plays in enhancing people’s quality of life, and the wider role they, as



This group of residents would be recruited from within the estate by Our Life, and trained to use community engagement techniques to:

- Map the physical and social assets in the area, and identify opportunities for improvement.
- Create a series of recommendations and actions that Regenda and the residents of Limehurst Village and other areas can take forward to protect and enhance wellbeing.
- Promote wellbeing in the community.
- Weave new networks within the communities, with increased awareness of the value of being connected to other people.

Outputs

The project sought to deliver the following outputs:

- 15 members of the community and local organisations trained in wellbeing and methods of engagement.
- A map of the assets of the area.
- Action plans to improve wellbeing.
- A feedback event and report.
- An evaluation report.

Evidencing the impact: An Evaluation framework for wellbeing.

As it has been notoriously difficult in the past to evidence the impact of wellbeing interventions, Our Life would also

be working with the Limehurst Partnership to create an evaluation framework, providing a set of agreed outcomes and tools that will help the partnership measure its impact. The aspirations for the Wellbeing Project were conceived in terms of outcomes for the Explorers and outcomes for Regenda:

Ideal Outcomes for Explorers:

- Increased enthusiasm and commitment to supporting action.
- Increased wellbeing - an increase in average wellbeing (Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing score) among participants.
- Increased understanding of issues relating to wellbeing, health and community assets.
- Behaviour change - participants indicate that they have changed their approach to wellbeing as a result of their engagement with the project.
- Wellbeing Explorers are empowered, more confident and their aspirations have been raised - participants are more able to work on the changes that need to be made in their local area at the end of the project.

Ideal Outcomes for Regenda Group:

- To assemble evidence of impact with a view to transferability to other portfolios (e.g. older people, younger people, employment and skills) and other neighbourhoods.
- To use the evidence of impact in Limehurst Village to provide learning and recommendations to other Registered Providers interested in improving wellbeing and health for communities.
- To enhance the relationship with residents, with a positive impact on the public's trust of both decisions being made by those in positions of power and authority, and also in the decision makers themselves.

This report will examine if these outcomes have been realised, and suggest how to focus empowerment work in the future to enhance the achievement of these outcomes over the longer-term.





2

The Practice

Recruitment and training of the 'wellbeing explorers'

Recruitment

Our Life began the recruitment phase in October 2012. The aim was to identify and train a team of 'wellbeing explorers' from amongst local residents (or 'advocates'), with Regenda providing the wages for up to ten posts for an initial 5 month contract up to the end of March 2012, offering 100 hours work for each Explorer at a rate of £7.50 an hour. The residents were recruited through leaflets delivered through every door on the estate by Regenda staff, asking for expressions of interest. Local community-based workers played a great role in encouraging residents to apply: the Children's Centre staff were particularly supportive of families, as they represented a large proportion of the estate. Raise The Youth Foundation promoted the opportunity to young people.

Pre-interview open sessions were held in the estate so that prospective applicants could find out more about the role and explore any impact on benefits. Benefits Advice sessions hosted by Regenda's Money Advice worker were invaluable, as people were able to know in advance if it was financially worthwhile pursuing interviews. In the event, benefit complications limited the field to ten applicants for the ten part-time jobs, so it was possible to take the angst out of interviewing by announcing that interviews would be very informal conversations, with willingness to get involved being the essential criterion.

Our Life wanted to avoid formal, traditional interviews so that residents could feel at ease in exploring the role thoroughly before committing themselves, so instead of questions a map of the estate was produced and some pins and post-its. Each interviewee found their home on the map, and were encouraged to start talking about the positive aspects of life on the estate (recorded on green post-it notes). Then they shared their observations on the challenging aspects of life on red post-it notes.

This adaptation of the 'Planning For Real' mapping method, creating a 'Planning For Wellbeing' tool, was their initial introduction to wellbeing concepts and Participatory Appraisal, without any fancy words changing hands. And it was such fun that before one interviewee had finished, another turned up for interview and spontaneously joined in with them. At one point there were four interviewees all comparing viewpoints on wellbeing on the estate, perched over a map awash in post-its and pins. And so an interview became a group session which developed team work and enhanced everyone's belief in the project, with lots of laughter and ideas.

Training

Training for local residents was bespoke, created from scratch to seek to provide 15-18 hours of adult education over five or six Monday mornings.

Our training brief was expressed in professional jargon: the resident explorers "will be trained in Participatory Appraisal (PA) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) techniques, and in running workshops. Participatory Appraisal (PA) can be defined as a set of approaches, behaviours and tools that allow local people themselves to identify key issues affecting them and to then plan and take action. Participatory research methods include 'opinion lines', 'mind maps', 'problem trees' and lots of deliberation."

The challenge was to find ways of exploring wellbeing through using community engagement and community development principles and methods, without preaching or jargon.

The training programme was drafted by Our Life, with an expectation that it would change to meet learners' emerging needs. There was a pattern underlying every plan, with reinforced key points in each session. The core content included:

- Welcomes
- Energiser/warm-up game
- Recap Exercises to explore approaches and use skills
- Feedback to reflect on lessons learnt, and how to apply them
- Evaluate training and identify future learning
- Homework/fieldwork to check-out authenticity of ideas/proposed methods
- Plan for next session
- Celebratory ending

In line with community development principles, the aim was to help the residents to feel confident in their own knowledge and skills, sharing insights and learning in a team development process. The training gurus rarely mention Fun or Friendship, but these are two essential ingredients in creating a lively team, so it was vital to allow lots of time for 'getting to know each other' exercises too.

Training session 1: What is wellbeing?

The group launched itself with a pairs exercise to find out more about each other, with each person to feedback on behalf of their partner. Limehurst residents threw themselves into the liveliest and most revealing set of disclosures ever procured through an innocent warm-up game.

The first challenge was to understand “the concept of wellbeing”, in the context of daily life on Limehurst Village. The group used Our Life’s ‘A Fair Deal For Wellbeing?’ discussion kit to explore the meaning of Wellbeing and how it can be improved: five profile cards (with made-up people described on them) are read out by the group. These profiles describe characters who are all facing challenges in life but all have some positive wellbeing factors in their lives too. The group then used twelve green ‘Wellbeing Influencer’ cards to discuss how each character enjoys or lacks each aspect of wellbeing. The first round of the game invites the group to decide which character is best endowed with each aspect of wellbeing:

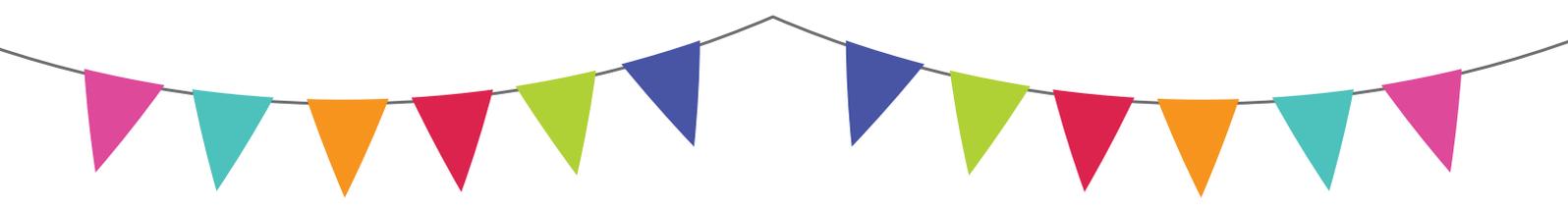
it’s a positive exercise in recognising people’s plusses as the starting-point, so participants don’t become demoralised by all of the negative stories and give up immediately in the face of a very steep hill. The group debated which character is best placed to benefit from each Influencer card, and these debates drew out a number of lessons: the most harassed people still have positives to build on – whether it is friendships, their own positive mind set, a determination to reach out, and more. As the round progressed, the group learnt about different dimensions of wellbeing: it isn’t just about physical health (activity) and diet but includes emotional wellbeing (feeling safe/time to enjoy ourselves/being aware of our environment/feeling useful/keep learning new things); economic wellbeing (having a good job/income/warm home); social wellbeing (living in a decent place; supportive relationships; community spirit; respect and equality.

To balance positivity with grounding in reality, the group now looked at which character has been allocated the most wellbeing cards, and discussed fairness and equalities. Why do some people get a better deal than others? How does this relate to life on Limehurst? The group placed the twelve green cards on the table again, and start talking about which aspects of wellbeing are generally in good shape on the estate: this positive start challenges them to recognise that there are good things to build on. Some aspects are very quickly agreed: “time to enjoy ourselves”, “giving to others”, “taking notice of our environment”. Despite original sceptical remarks, the realisation dawned that the housing estate is relatively in good order with “decent homes”, and some “good relationships”. The discussion about whether or not to see “relationships” as a positive led to the flip side, as the

group identified the need for more positive communication between elders and young people, especially when the Feeling Safe card was introduced. The group divided over whether to put the “Feeling equal and respected” card into the ‘Got or Not Got pile’ – some felt it was a strength but the experiences of mixed race/dual heritage families were discussed, along with the fears of some about the safety of the streets.

The discussion kit enabled the group to explore some tricky topics in a safe environment, moving from made-up stories to local reality in a shared exercise. Within an hour, the group had grasped wellbeing in several dimensions, and wanted to find better ways of translating wellbeing to local people (“what makes you feel good about yourself/ life/the estate”). The explorers had also collectively identified several challenges facing Limehurst residents, from their own experience (feeling safe; money worries/ heating bills and benefit changes/treatment of people by Job Centre staff; finding good jobs; relationships between age groups; being treated equally & respected).





The Explorers



Training session 4: Dipping the toe

“We experience moments absolutely free from worry. These brief respites are called panic” (Cullen Hightower)

Session four started with the group learning a new method (speed-dating) as a way of exploring how to introduce themselves to local residents. The group started with the question “*What are you hoping to gain yourself from being involved?*” Two members of Regenda staff joined-in the speed-date (two rows of seats facing each other; one side has questions, the other side offers suggestions, and then after 60 seconds the suggesters move down along one chair to meet a new person).

The following insights emerged from the explorers:

The visit of Raise The Youth Foundation electrified the group with a straight from-the-heart account of their own struggles when young, followed by acknowledgement of the positive potential of young people and their need to prove that negative perceptions weren't the whole story. Raise The Youth talked about their plans for youth work on the estate, and the group shared their ideas about a joint

meeting of the generations. Raise The Youth invited the group to join a youth activity event to engage the young people in a mapping game, and the group agreed to help think about wellbeing discussion techniques. At this point Regenda's photographer arrived to gather some visuals for Regenda's press releases, so Raise The Youth left with an offer to make some ID badges for the group.

“We're all interested in a better quality of life, and maybe the whole community can improve if we bring everyone together.”

(From one of the Limehurst explorers)





This was just a quick chat, but it felt more productive than many evaluation meetings because it wasn't labelled 'Evaluation'. The group members were able to ask the same question of Regenda staff, about what they hoped to get from the project. It was a good exchange rather than a dry process.

"I think this will be good for the children around here and will bring the community together. It might help me to find a new job".

"I've been here 27 years and this just seemed such an interesting thing to be doing. I've already started talking to people, asking for ideas about improving things round here"

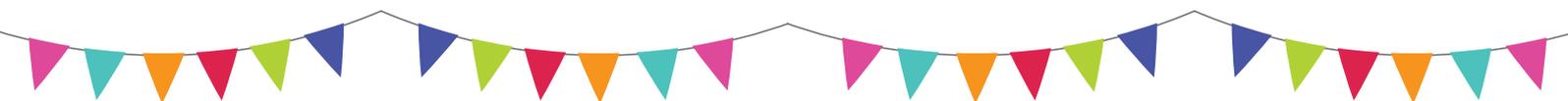
"I've been volunteering and training at the children's centre for a while now and want to make people here feel proud of the estate. It's not a bad place at all and I want to make it better for all the kids"

"I wouldn't speak out at first, but now I have more experience from meeting people in this group and my self-confidence has really increased"

"We want to get more people involved in getting things done on the estate and we hope there'll be something for everyone"

"We're working to be the voice of the community, bringing back views and ideas for improvement"





Now the group had found its first step to meeting local people to try out their engagement methods, and they are working alongside other services as they do it. The dilemma of how to ask children for their views about Limehurst was resolved, by using a Christmas tree as an 'Ideas tree', and giving the children paper baubles on which they could write things they like and dislike about life on the estate. Once the children had received their card

baubles from Santa, they would fill-in their views and take them to hang on the tree before receiving a Christmas gift. Adults would be given a leaflet about the Project, including a star-chart to fill in while they wait for their children, to assess the ease with which people can enjoy the five ways to Wellbeing on Limehurst: Making friends, Community spirit, Learning new things, Being Active, Enjoying Nature. Local traders would be asked to contribute prizes for a draw of all entries.

Training session 5: Action planning for a trial run

The group invited two more potential partners to help them plan the Santa's Grotto event. Urban Angels, a voluntary dance troupe for local children, and had developed an enthusiastic team of local helpers and a community action settlement called Impact, looking to inspire residents to meet their own needs in new voluntary projects. Both groups were keen to throw their support into the wellbeing project.

Action planning has never been easier, now that the group have a clear aim and the desire to act. Finally, they re-assessed the group-work methods they might want to use in future engagement with residents of all ages. No-one's called them Participatory Appraisal methods, but the group have decided that what makes them work is that they are fun, easy to use and quick.

Figure 1: Planning Grid

A Fair Deal for Wellbeing? **Planning grid** Our community is: _____

What needs to be done?	Who will do it?		
	What can I do myself?	What can we do together as a group?	What do others need to do?

Training session 6: An explorers map

The Raise The Youth Foundation and Santa's Grotto events in late December 2012 taught the group a number of important lessons about team work and leadership. In the two events, the explorers had gathered 108 responses from residents (41 adults, 24 youth, 43 children). Twenty four responses to a Wellbeing Dice Game at the Youth event had revealed some very positive attitudes to wellbeing levels on the estate (Positives which help Wellbeing: friends, family help and support, events like this bringing people together, community vibe, great schools. Improvements which would help: more activities and events like this; tackle drugs and alcohol abuse; better publicity on activities; less litter /rubbish; good use of empty buildings).

The Santa's Grotto event had also generated a high level of feedback: 41 adults responded to the Ways To Wellbeing Starchart, with generally high scores for Learning and New Activities; Getting to know people; making a difference; healthy lifestyles; and Feeling Safe. However, a BME resident indicated that feeling safe and getting to know people was a challenge, highlighting a need for the explorers to research social exclusion. 43 children wrote their feelings on cardboard baubles for the Wellbeing Christmas Tree: 32 positive factors were identified by the children, predominantly celebrating friendships, fun and play and supportive adults. Negative factors were lack of enough activities for over sixes', and litter.



The explorers felt positive enough about this success to air their differences openly. There had been some troubling disagreements amongst a few of the explorers at the beginning of the Grotto event. This experience was reflected on, and the key lesson about future teamwork was to nominate co-ordinators from within their own ranks for each event, so that differences could be swiftly settled.



They also agreed to work in smaller groups to maximise their reach into the community once the engagement work begins in earnest.

The final step in the training was to agree a plan for engaging all of the different communities on the estate. The explorers researched the existing meetings on the estate, and created a matrix to outline where each social group could be located, which explorers would team-up to specialise in each engagement, and what methods would be most appropriate in each situation. They decided to pursue the easiest to reach by approaching existing community groups first ("the lowest hanging fruit") and then extending their reach to isolated individuals through coffee mornings and street work. The final stage of engagement would be to organise focus groups of different social groups to deepen the discussion about wellbeing, based on the findings of the initial stages.



“People here today are being brilliant together by coming along to this community event and sharing their skills, connecting together, having fun and strengthening their community”

(female, aged 30-39 from Middleton)

3

The Engagement work: December 2012 to March 2013

Outputs

From December 15th 2012 to March 1st 2013, the Explorers used a very creative range of methods for meeting local residents to discuss and record their views.

- 615 residents were interviewed, from every part of the estate and across all age-groups (143 children, 70 teenagers, 118 people aged 18-29, 80 people aged 30-39, 63 people aged 40-49, 45 people aged 50-54, 96 people aged 55 and over).
- An even number of male and female residents were interviewed for children, teenagers, and 18-29;
- there were more female than male respondents for ages 30-39 (58 female/22 male), ages 40-49 (49 female/15 male), ages 50-54 (28 female/17 male) and over 55s (65 female, 31 male).

Settings

Interviews were held in a wide range of community settings:

- A table in the reception area in St Chads
- Schools and School Councils
- Home Visits accompanying Regenda staff
- Community group meetings in St Chads Childrens Centre, Blackthorn Road Community Hall, Farm Road Youth Centre
- Events organised by the Explorers (Santa's grotto in St Chads, in partnership with Action For Children; coffee mornings in St Chads and Blackthorn Road Community Hall, in partnership with Urban Angels)
- Job Club in St Chads Library
- Interviews with SPAR customers (with permission from the store manager)
- Regenda Partners events: (launch at Community Hall; Raise the Youth event)
- Street interviews



Questions

The Explorers opening questions focussed on the positive aspects of life on the estate, asking people what they liked about life in Limehurst Village. The asset-based approach promotes an initial focus on positive aspects so that people aren't immediately overwhelmed by negativity and a sense of living in deficit. This positivity is essential : once people go on to explore the negative aspects, they can draw on the existence of positive qualities to find the energy and capacity to pursue improvements.

Once the sense of Limehurst Village having assets was established by positive questions, the Explorers asked people what they disliked about Limehurst and what might improve matters.

Techniques

A range of methods were used, according to the context in which interviews were held. The main tool was a log sheet to record interviews, asking people to discuss Limehurst Village's positives aspects, drawbacks and their ideas for improving wellbeing on the estate. This log sheet also recorded the gender, age-group and ethnicity of residents. The explorers also used a range of community engagement tools where-ever people were able to sit for a while and explore issues:

- The map and stick-its, and Wellbeing Discussion Cards, were used at the Regenda Partnership launch and in coffee mornings
- Wellbeing Dice games were used at Raise The Youth activity day and the Santa's grotto
- Positive and Negative Christmas baubles were used at the Santa's Grotto event
- A Wellbeing star-chart was used at the Santa's Grotto and with the explorers
- The Wellbeing Discussion Kit was used with the Explorers themselves to understand wellbeing dimensions, and at agency training sessions

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted by the team of Explorers on 4 March 2013. The group started the session by identifying issues which were mentioned regularly during interviews, and evolved a list of 59 issues with their own respective numbers. They agreed a coding system to annotate the completed log-sheets, so that every comment was given numbers to match the issue raised , and a Plus sign for a Positive aspect or Minus Sign for a Negative aspect, an 'A' for any suggested idea for improving matters, and a '*' for a memorable quote.

Results - An overview

Generally the people that were independent were positive about life on Limehurst Village and found many aspects of wellbeing were being met:

- the mixture of houses was welcome
- people like living near the countryside
- Good transport links
- Good venues for community activities
- Good community spirit and voluntary action
- Supportive friends and neighbours
- Family support
- Feeling safe and secure
- St Chads hub
- Regenda's plans for improving the estate
- Quiet environment in some streets
- Good Schools
- Good medical services



The following negative aspects of life on Limehurst Village were identified as general concerns:

- Lack of activities for children aged 6 and over
- More community activities for adults
- The appearance of the estate's streets, gardens and fences
- Drainage
- Damp
- Anti-social behaviours
- Traffic at school-time
- More shops and a greater variety of services are needed
- More jobs and training
- Help with money worries
- More security – policing, night-time youth support, tackle racism
- Better communication about what's on, why buildings are unused, etc
- Better response to tenant's complaints would increase local trust and belief in Regenda's plans

While a very small minority of residents were extremely negative about life in Limehurst Village, the prevailing feeling is that Limehurst Village is a good place to live in general, but several issues need to be addressed to improve the wellbeing of all residents. The following sections will illustrate these findings in more detail.



4

Residents' views on the improvements needed to enhance wellbeing in Limehurst Village

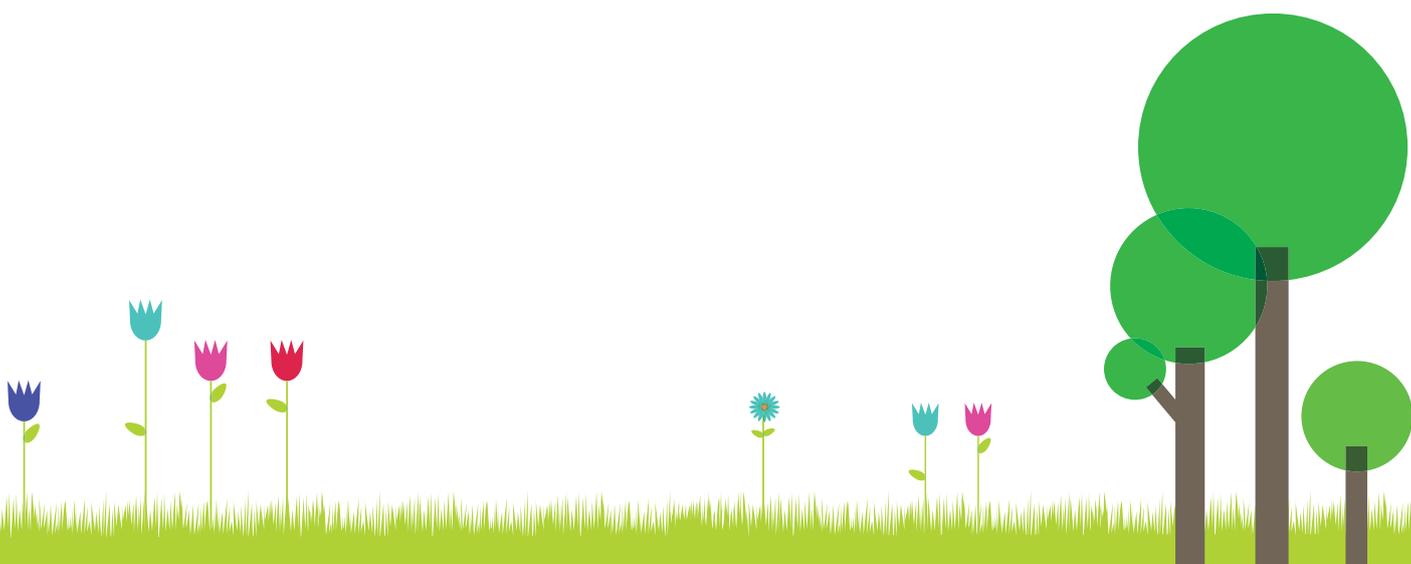
Table 1: Enhancing wellbeing in Limehurst village

Theme	Positives/Assets	Negatives/Challenges	Residents Ideas For Improvement
Activities For Children	Urban Angels Sure Start/Action for Children's activities	Anti social behaviour / playing on streets Fear of older teenagers on streets	A park for children and families for safe play More clubs for children aged 6+, especially in holidays and after school; arts Sports development Better publicity for existing activities
Activities For Youth	Raise The Youth's activities The local Youth Clubs	Not enough to do in evenings; hanging around streets; no jobs or training	Gym, sports, football pitch/ Astroturf, Cookery, knitting, photography, gardening, chess, bikes, nails & hair Involve young people in creating new facilities so they'll protect them
Activities For Adults	Activities at St Chads, Blackthorn Rd Community Hall	Very little for women-only, people with disabilities, or elders who don't like bingo Library opening hours	Crèches for classes Sports/ use of fields Better publicity for existing activities More staff/volunteers at library? Coffee mornings/chat Day-time activity for elders e.g. lunch club, walks

Theme	Positives/Assets	Negatives/Challenges	Residents Ideas For Improvement
Community Spirit	<p>Range of volunteer-led activities and groups</p> <p>Good venues with affordable hire rates</p>	Building cohesion between generations and top-and bottom of estate	<p>Inter-generational events</p> <p>Subsidised hire charges</p> <p>Need for External Lights at Community Hall</p>
Anti-Social Behaviour	<p>Less crime?</p> <p>PCSO's</p> <p>Youth work</p>	Street-drinking/noise; drug use; problem families; messy gardens	Better police presence (using the empty station?) ; notices; street-lighting
Feeling Safe And Secure	Adults generally feeling safe	<p>Racism</p> <p>Youth and children feel criticised and misunderstood by adults</p> <p>Children are afraid of some teenagers</p> <p>Night-time streets feel unsafe</p> <p>Cars speeding</p>	<p>Inter-generational activities</p> <p>CCTV</p> <p>Better lighting at night / policing</p> <p>Chicanes</p>
Service Delivery By Agencies	Regenda replacing boilers; good mix of houses; walkabouts; long-term plans to improve the estate	<p>Telephone system doesn't lead to response; loss of trust and belief in plans if no quick action</p> <p>Communications: not all areas receiving newsletters; lack of clarity on which agency responsible for which aspects e.g. roads, bins, street cleaning etc</p> <p>No showers</p> <p>Housing families with problems</p> <p>Scruffy gardens</p>	<p>Walkabouts; take action more quickly on replacement requests</p> <p>Communications plan to address concerns</p> <p>Job creation/ apprenticeships</p> <p>Showers</p> <p>More of a social mix in allocation of housing</p> <p>Enforcement of standards</p>

Theme	Positives/Assets	Negatives/Challenges	Residents Ideas For Improvement
	PCSO's visible and talking with residents	Closure of St Chads station with no news	Use the station for community activity
	Schools are an asset		
	Library	Opening hours too short	More staff/volunteers at library?
	Health Surgery		
	St Chads hub	More parking needed	Parking spaces at St Chads
Shops & Facilities	SPAR	High prices, lack of variety	Kid's allotments; using tenant's hall for a 'market' for green produce; need a butcher, baker, greengrocer A transport project for shopper's lifts
Environment		Dog mess; litter; glass; Unsightly empty buildings & Rowan Tree Road Run-down condition of gardens, fences and roads; Fly-tipping near Coal pit Lane; ginnels in a mess	Fines for litter & dog fouling Development soon Clarify who is responsible for upkeep of each aspect; Clean-up campaign by agencies and community More bins/ skips Ginnels clean-up TLC: a flower/garden competition More frequent grasscutting

Theme	Positives/Assets	Negatives/Challenges	Residents Ideas For Improvement
Jobs & Training	Job club	Lack of jobs and training opportunities/apprenticeships locally	Regenda and partners to create training/ apprenticeships/jobs A Handy-person to do jobs for people who can't garden, decorate etc (employed by Regenda?) Small business start-ups
Money		SPAR cash machine empties Heating costs Welfare reforms Loan sharks	Will new boilers reduce bills? Credit union
Community Cohesion	Parents and children, families, friends	Social tensions identified: Noisy neighbours, often drinkrelated or dogs; Adults/ Young people hanging around; employed people/people on benefits; racism; attitudes towards single parents	Community togetherness events/activities / trips More meeting places and activities for Top End
Physical Health			Gym, exercise classes,
Parenting	Action For Children	Dad's not catered for	Dad & Children sessions Childcare courses



5

Further Research

Throughout the process the Explorers have formed higher levels of trust and openness amongst the team about sensitive issues, so that they have been able to explore racism, money worries, conflicts and isolation. However, the group also recognised that these issues have not been aired consistently during the research, because they are highly sensitive issues requiring a high degree of trust or confidentiality. Accordingly, there will be a need for follow-up research to reach some under represented social groups and explore marginalised issues.

The additional research will require new methods. The explorers experienced the necessity for a higher degree of confidentiality when asking people about potentially sensitive issues and very personal experiences: racism, disabilities, and money worries could not be easily discussed in an on street encounter with a neighbour. The explorers are planning to address these gaps by:

- confidential home visits to BME contacts
- exploring support for people with disabilities via home visits to people met while accompanying Regenda's Housing Officers;
- organising a visit to Plus Dane's Congleton welfare reform resident champions project; asking Regenda's Money Advice Officer about the degree of residents' concerns about Welfare reform issues; working with Oldham Credit Union on 22 March 2013

Quotes: You say potato...

The research revealed that some issues generated significant heat from a minority of people, and the following quotes consequently reveal the spectrum of views and the varying intensity, from positive celebrations of Limehurst Village to severe alienation from anti-social behaviours.



Love it and hate it

“Lived on the estate many years. Greatly improved since Regenda took over. Most people are okay, just a few problem families who live on their reputation of being untouchable. Would like to see this change” (Female aged 55+)

“Limehurst is a good place to live now all the idiots have gone. My 21 year old grandson with special needs can now go to the shop and feel safer” (Female, aged 55+)

“I love it round here. The houses are very nice and the people are very friendly” (Female, aged 18-29)

“We like living on Limeside because everything is near like the schools and shops” (Female, aged 18-29)

“We love living on Limeside; have our own little community at the bottom of Pine Tree which is mainly retired people, working people and home owners.” (Female, aged 55+)

“Don't like living here: kids have no respect, too many unemployed” (Male, aged 55+)

“The positives are lovely neighbours, friendly people. The negatives are some anti-social behaviour, racism” (Female aged 40-49)

“Hate living here – it's scruffy and the neighbours are scum” (Female, aged under 18)

“Overall I like living here – it's a good community spirit” (Female aged 40-49)

“Overall I like living here – it's a good community spirit” (Female aged 40-49)

“Not a bad place to live: lived here donkey’s years! Lots better since the Housing Association took over. Think it’s great!” (Female aged 55+)

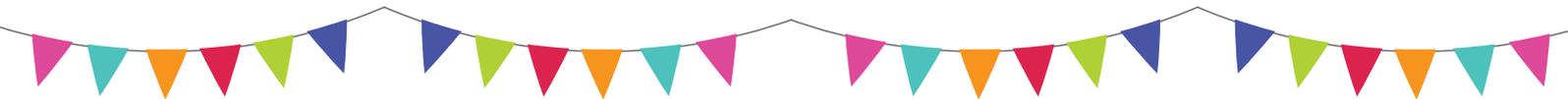
“I have seen great improvement on the estate since Regenda took over. It’s a good place to live with a good location for motorways, Manchester, etc. I would like to see more flats/houses built for couples/families who can’t get on the property ladder, to try to encourage more working people onto the estate” (Female, aged 50-54)

“Why should we believe any of the stuff they say they are going to do? Heard it all before” (Female, aged 55+)

“I can’t wait for them to start building the houses on the back because it’s currently a hazard to the kids” (Female, aged 30-39)

“Positive progression in the past few years” (Male, aged 50-54)

“Nice to see the area being updated and well looked-after” (Female aged 55+)



Kids stuff

“I love my home but wish I could put it on wheels and move it because the kids run wild” (Female, aged 55+)

“Would like a park or play area for kids to get them off the streets” (Female aged 18-29)

“Get the big kids to build a park for the smaller ones – then they might not wreck it” (Male aged 30-39)

“Can we have a park on Rowan Tree Road? Loads of space there” (Female, aged 18-29)

“Refurbish football pitches with astro turf and get rid of the glass” (Limehurst School Class 8)

“Would like the library to be open longer – my children don’t have access to a computer at home. Also somewhere safe to play as Limeside Park is so far away.”

(Female, aged 18-29)



Homes & gardens

“A lot of residents look after their homes but a small minority can't be bothered. Regenda need to do more about them” (Female, aged 50-54)

“Regenda need to be more strict on front gardens; some look like Steptoe's yard” (Male, aged 30-39)

Communcations / what's on?

“More communication about what's on; didn't even know about stuff in the tenant's hall” (female, aged 18-29)

“Needs to be more communication between Regenda, tenants etc so they can produce a newsletter of What's On” (Female, aged 55+)

“Elm Road people don't get invites to go to events but we get newsletters saying what people have done:” (Female, aged 18-29)

Job creation

“More needs to be done on the environmental side, creating at least one job” (Male aged 30-39)

“Would like to see a man and van employed by Regenda to do removals, decorating, gardening etc. At my age it's hard knowing who is reliable and trustworthy.. I like living on the estate – it's really friendly” (Female, aged 55+)

“Sports development would help physical and mental wellbeing: there's so much bad experience, depression and negativity on this estate” (Female, aged 40-49)

“Would like to see more done about young people with nothing to do and no job prospects: more employment and training of local people by Regenda” (Female aged 30-39)





“Me and my mates like it round here. We would like to see more clubs round here. Things like cookery, how to run a home, job club. Not all teenagers have no ambition!”
(Female, under 18)

The youth of today

“People here today at Raise the Youth are being brilliant together by coming along to this community event and sharing their skills, connecting together, having fun and strengthening their community”
(female, aged 30-39 from Middleton)

“Don’t like it anymore as too many youths drinking and causing trouble”
(Female, aged 50-54)

Clean-up

“The community needs to work together to clean up the area and give the young generation an example to follow” (Female aged 18-29)

“Litter’s a big problem; round by SPAR is always disgusting. Need more bins or clean ups” (Female aged 40-49)

Regenda systems

“Can’t understand why we need to talk to a receptionist who listens and then tells us to use the phone” (Male aged 55+)

“Likes living here – better than when the Council had the houses. Need to be more picky with who they put in their properties need better tenants” (Male aged 55+)

“Would like to see Regenda do more estate walkabouts, preferably once a month” (Female aged 30-39)

“When you need to complain they make you use the phone, which is not private” (Female aged 40-49)

What’s the point?

“Residents need to be responsible for their own futures and not rely on Regenda. ..Get off our backsides and do stuff” (Female aged 50-54)

“Don’t see any point in saying much because Regenda never do anything they say. But need street cleaners back as always lots of rubbish on the streets..and library needs to be open longer” (Female aged 50-54)

Top & botoom

“Lots going on at bottom end I believe but not much up here” (Female aged 50-54)

“Tenants Hall for this Elm Road end of the estate” (Female aged 40-49)

“The community needs to work together to clean up the area and give the young generation an example to follow.”
(Female aged 18-29)

Feeling safe

“There needs to be more police as I don't like walking about on my own at night”
(Female aged under 18)

“If Regenda has money to spend I would like to see two night patrollers going around the estate to problem hotspots because the police aren't interested.” (Female aged 55+)

Community togetherness

“Would love to see some events to bring the community together again” (Female aged 55+)

“Love living here. Would love to see more community activities though such as sports days, summer fairs, Easter parade”
(Female aged 30-39)

“We would like community litter-pickers as there is too much rubbish around” (Limehurst School Class 9)

“We would like benches dotted around the estate to sit on and chat with friends”
(Limehurst School Class 10)

A single voice

“Ice cream man to go on Lime Green Road please” (Limehurst School pupil, class 8)

6

Deepening the support

Training the agencies

The second element of Our Life's work involved training for Regenda's Partners to understand the value of supporting community wellbeing within the neighbourhoods in which they operate, and how to be most effective in deploying their resources to issues which matter to their residents. By meeting residents' declared priorities, agencies can reinforce a sense of ownership and influence amongst residents, which in itself helps to foster a sense of resilience and wellbeing. Our Life created a training programme for two afternoon sessions in early March 2013, focussing on:

- the rationale and methodology for resident-led community engagement
- how residents' can be instrumental in improving their own wellbeing
- how agencies can effectively support residents' wellbeing
- how to evaluate wellbeing outcomes
- how to respond appropriately when the residents feedback the results of their research in late March

Community Development

From December 2012 to March 2013, Our Life were also commissioned by Regenda to provide community development support for one day a week, to support the Explorer's engagement work; identify ways of strengthening existing community assets; and to support the wellbeing work of Regenda's Partners. Our Life has been working alongside the Explorers to offer one-to-one/sub-team mentoring and support, and been able to help individuals in the group to resolve differences with each other. Future support needs have been identified for existing community organisations on the estate, and will be supporting bids to external funders. Our Life has visited and liaised with other Regenda Partners to consolidate collaborative working, and to organise the focus groups to deepen some of the initial research into wellbeing issues.

Finally, Our Life has worked alongside Regenda Partner Raise the Youth to support one Explorer, in pursuing their vision of an Acting Agency on the estate. This Explorer is now being employed within Raise the Youth Foundation to develop his business idea, with financial support from Regenda.



7

The listening event

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” (Margaret Wheatley)

Introduction

On 25th March 2013, the project reached one of its key objectives: whole systems planning and shared deliberation. After two weeks of community-led planning and liaison with the Limehurst Village Project Manager, the Listening Event brought together forty people (comprising Regenda and their Partners, the Wellbeing Explorers and residents who have been actively involved in the engagement work). One particular desirable outcome had been expressed by Regenda in advance: a Community Action & Wellbeing Forum, which can function alongside other working groups in a partnership to transform Limehurst Village. Past experiences of Neighbourhood Forums within regeneration schemes will help to guide this potential community development project: many SRB Community Panels often foundered due to issues of ownership and community scepticism about change being possible. By developing an active conversation at the Listening Event about wellbeing assets, needs and quick win actions, it was hoped that an inspiring Neighbourhood Forum would be modelled at that session, and would organically continue to meet to pursue conversations, with the momentum generated by

the proposed actions and the desire to gain feedback on progress and generate new action ideas, with wider community input.

This Listening Event was therefore badged as the first meeting of the Community Action & Wellbeing Forum, led by the Explorers to initiate a ‘whole systems’ planning event to respond to the findings about wellbeing in Limehurst Village. This whole systems approach provided a fast and efficient way to produce a mutually-agreed action plan, by bringing together into one space the people and groups/ organisations that are needed to decide on and implement actions.

‘Whole systems’ workshops enable greater diversity and less hierarchy than is usual in a working meeting and provide a chance for each person and group to be heard. Importantly, they bring multiple perspectives to the planning process and this increases the chances of developing robust actions that have wide support and understanding because they have been identified from a common discussion. It also increases the chances of identifying crucial actions that might be missed if the workshop is attended only by professionals.

The Event

After introductions from Bill Lovatt (Regenda Regional Director) and Nick Beddow (Our Life), Sue Hubbard from the Explorers team took the lead as the Explorers shared their personal stories about their own experience and insight into wellbeing, before outlining how the engagement work was undertaken and the subsequent discoveries about wellbeing. Two children from Limehurst Schools Council shared their group’s research on children’s viewpoints, including the proposal for a children-led community clean-up day. The inputs from Sue and the two children inspired the participants, who raised the roof with enthusiasm and moved willingly into workshop groups to delve further into the issues and ideas for action.

The full meeting spent the rest of the day working on four tables, facilitated by Our Life’ and Regenda’s Project Manager. Each table had an equal mix of residents and agency workers. The first exercise was a Visioning exercise, to enable participants to identify and experience the “So What” of pursuing a wellbeing estate. The groups were asked to imagine themselves para-gliding over Limehurst Village in three year’s time, taking snapshots of what was happening below to illustrate wellbeing activities (What are people doing? How are they behaving to create their own wellbeing? How are they support each other’s wellbeing? What are agencies doing to make a positive difference to wellbeing? What has improved on the estate?)

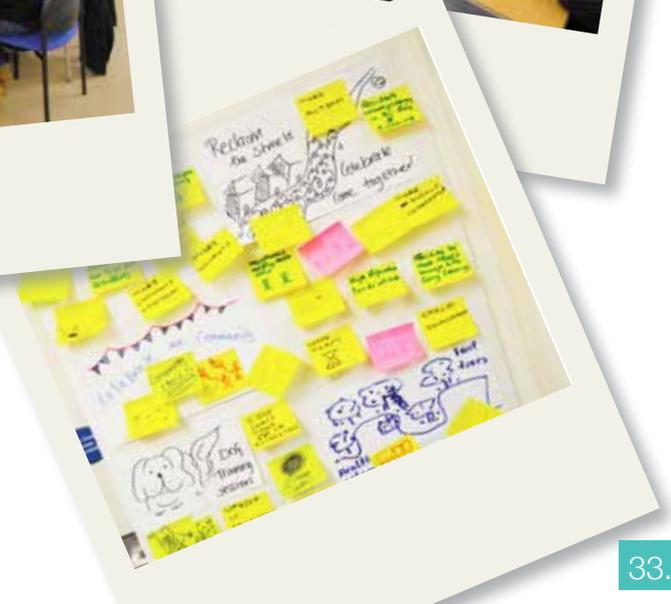
The feedback from this ‘visioning exercise’ was captured in Artwork by Regenda’s newly recruited Community Artist.

Figure 2. The Explorers Project



Figure 2. Community Vision Limehurst Village





Visions of Limehurst

The visions of Limehurst as a Wellbeing estate produced a wonderful list of feelings, relationships, activities, features, resources, qualities, behaviours, events, facilities and communication, here are just some of them:





Jobs & training facilities

We will be proud of Limehurst when others visit us

A bright future for everyone

Bee & butterfly friendly flowers & fruit

Good attitudes-respect both ways

Communication flow between all

Better use of existing venues eg schools opening in evenings, volunteer-led

Happy confident residents

Everyone working hard to make the dream come true

Happier, healthier families

Children playing together in nice, clean, safe parks

Local people with local jobs

Older people helping younger people

Sustaining action

High aspirations/ Can Do attitude

More Agency Collaboration

Linking in with other agencies to provide skills training & placements for communities

Cleaner streets & gardens

New committees for fundraising for future family events

Smiling faces

Young and old talking to each other and passing on experiences

Ownership

People with money problems get earlier help and advice

Active community members who sign-post for other residents

Neighbours helping each other

Higher feeling of control

Less crime

Green spaces developed - communal gardens, residents working together to maintain

Positive focus on why things work

Local people with local jobs

Older people helping younger people

More community cohesion

Linking in with other agencies to provide skills training & placements for communities

Cycle tracks

Craft evenings & events

Social Enterprise Bakery

People talking together

Youth centre for children within existing buildings

Allotments

More people in work

Funding for trips eg barges

Action planning

The afternoon session began with a 'Group Guidelines' card game, devised in the training sessions with communities. The groups proceeded to examine a single theme from the Explorer's research, with each table looking at a different issue. The facilitators supported the groups in identifying specific actions which could be taken by agencies and communities respectively, and then each group moved around the tables to look at each other's suggestions (employing a modified World Cafe method). The resulting flipcharts offered a wealth of insights:

a) Building community spirit

Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Affordable Community Venues /Subsidised hire charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask directly Find alternative venue if appropriate Fundraising Create a list of community spaces Table top sales in community hall Community decide how to spend community money Research the empty rooms Hold meetings with Agencies Hire rooms for free Fundraising events/learn to fundraise Dance groups put on shows to help fund Develop own events committee Identify groups Local co-op/ resource centre Look at match-funding Evidence-based: what works well? Room booking diary –a central resource Community run their own assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be transparent about costs so communities are able to make decisions Agency meeting to discuss common agendas/ face to face contact Trust the residents Formal business courses for funding Free rooms or actual cost Identify a Regenda funding officer Make the community spaces attractive to fee-paying agencies Training for community work/groupwork skills/conflict management/customer service training A Local Co-operation Charter Residents on steering group for venues Lifelong Learning More info on what's going on/events Research on best ways to share info eg Twitter, other social media, text, face-to-face Act as brokers for the community

Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Inter-generational: 'Limehurst In Bloom'	Community gardens to bring generations together IT skills taught by younger to older Knitting, sewing and cooking taught by elders to younger	Regenda Landscapes Partnership opportunity- hire of gardening equipment
New enterprises	'Evergreen' social enterprise Dog Walking social enterprise Handyman social enterprise Draughtproofing social enterprise	Business planning and start-up
Behaviours	Be the change you want to see	Remove troublemakers and welcome new families

b) Children's Activities

Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Better publicity needed for existing activities for children	Street reps to pass on word of mouth Social media networks, facebook page Promote through Explorers Peer pressure to get involved and attend Children design activities and publicity	Use School Council Promote via schools as parents trust them & read their letters Pay local people to get people to activities instead of paying for leaflets Use the QR code for what's on locally? Reduce hire rates so more people use the hall Use Hollingwood & Go Oldham websites to bring communities closer and break down separation Get advice on how social media is used locally Increase use of Twitter #Limehurst Open Days to share info Provide funding Pool their resources Agency Forum open to all people organising childrens activities



Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Co-ordinated Communication	Design the leaflets - Short eye catching leaflets Word of mouth via children Co-ordinated publicity: tell all what's happening, what works, how to get info Local radio- is it working? Is it interesting? Use youth clubs – encourage children to attend Local Youth Panel – fun, resourced, quick meetings, quick decisions, fun Encourage children and youth to set up Film Club on Saturday nights	Produce the leaflets Deliver activities Get together to share info & market research Work in partnership Low cost activities e.g. running, walking, nature trails Run a competition for children's engagement Help create Youth Panel Agencies need to get off their arses and find people
Volunteering	Volunteer	Provide info and training
Dads and Childrens sessions (overlap with Sports Provision)	Find out demand; devise options for age groups eg toddler, kids, teenagers	Provide venue Support activities eg sports library

c) Adult Activities

Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Gym	Identify existing facilities Identify skills & local leaders/Identify what they want/Research who would use/ Consultation Event/Let partners know /Approach agencies for support Organise & register Give time and commitment to organise and support Respect what's taking place Identify existing facilities e.g. photography Focus on mixed activities for men & women Identify motivated individuals	Promote opportunities & support attendance Support training/Develop agreed programme of activity/Funding & training on fundraising/CRBs /Venue? Land?/Advice/Linkages Provide a space/help with transport/help with finances & fundraising/outreach & community engagement/train people & pay for course fees/ Provide training/qualification support (e.g. CRB,academic) DIY/Gardening-Regenda's equipment

Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Gym continued...	<p>Identify skills & local leaders/Identify what they want/Research who would use/ Consultation Event/Let partners know</p> <p>/Approach agencies for support</p> <p>Support & engage</p> <p>Build Networks</p> <p>Ballroom dancing for all ages</p>	<p>Co-ordinate volunteers health & safety</p> <p>Support training/Develop agreed programme of activity/Funding & training on fundraising/CRBs</p> <p>/Venue? Land?/Advice/Linkages</p> <p>Audit of community skills and desire to be involved</p>
Sports	<p>Explore wider interests eg nature walks, running, cycling</p> <p>Identify skills & local leaders/Identify what they want/Research who would use/ Consultation Event/Let partners know</p> <p>/Approach agencies for support</p> <p>Yoga: ask community how many are interested; talk with Regenda and Rugby Club;</p>	<p>Support training/Develop agreed programme of activity/Funding & training on fundraising/CRBs</p> <p>Cheap venue, help with funds for advertising and mats</p>
Involve young people in creating & protecting new facilities	Engage with them – listen, and act on their ideas	<p>Identify ways of protecting facilities (e.g. structural)</p> <p>Promote & support better communication with young people e.g. Twitter, Facebook, young explorers</p>
Better publicity	<p>Social media, leaflet and word of mouth</p> <p>Help to distribute & design leaflets (Children's competition)</p> <p>Use local experts to develop social media</p>	Advertise it where can be seen by community e.g. GP, pharmacy, library, local press, school newsletter, lamppost posters, SPAR, rolling ads (Regenda)
Coffee morning	<p>Run it</p> <p>Use own homes to encourage relationship building</p> <p>Volunteer</p> <p>Take ownership</p> <p>Teenagers plan one & run for elders</p> <p>Charge nominal fee for fundraising</p>	<p>Use Council Development worker</p> <p>Provide building/space/food/transport</p> <p>Funding for children's breakfast club (tea and toast from 8am)</p> <p>Provide surgeries and advice</p> <p>Train community to give advice</p> <p>Health & Safety training/food hygiene</p>

Idea	What Communities Can Do	What Agencies Can Do
Daytime activities for everyone	Green spaces –planting Skill-swap events/showcases Lunch club-silver service Prize Bake-off Use leftovers to give out Get To Know Your Neighbour event Car boot/jumble sale Befrienders/ Buddy Bus-Stop	Wellness Club sessions Farms: to let people experience farming life/petting zoo/
Daytime activity for elders	Dance group Lunch club-silver service; encourage young people to help out while elders teach skills e.g. baking Use leftovers to give out Story-telling & photos of past Learn internet skills from young people Recycle cookers	Access to PCs
Crèches for classes	Social enterprise Form a committee?	Business start-up, referral Legal advice Funding advice CRBs

Quick Wins

The final act of the day was to generate ideas about quick wins under each theme:

Better publicity for children's activities:

Hollingwood website should have an app

New tenants should be given a welcome pack with What's On

Invite new tenants to a specific session

Affordable community venues:

Shared fund-raising plan

Community Spirit:

Christmas market
 Fun Day at rugby club
 Community clean-up
 Community Fun Day
 Limehurst's Got Talent

Activities for adults:

Tea, Coffee and Cake morning for all (chat, fun, skills, somewhere to go, something to do, someone to talk to)



The future

The ideas from the Listening Event are now being achieved by the Explorers, at a new Community Action and Wellbeing Forum, so that progress can be reported on and belief in the possibilities of improving life can be sustained.



“The essence of this philosophy has been called ‘handing over the stick’ – a symbolic transfer of power from the development worker to local partners. If we are serious about Participatory Appraisal and serious about helping local people to pursue their own development agenda, we must decide whether we are prepared to hand over power in this way.”

(VSO, Participatory Approaches)

8

Impact assessment

The Limehurst Village Wellbeing Project has been evaluated throughout and will be supported by a further assessment six months after the feedback event to capture ongoing and wider impacts.

Our Life has used the following methods and techniques to conduct its assessment:

- Participant observation;
- Face to Face interviews.
- Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS);

The findings from Our Life's assessment are presented in the themes below.

Explorers' motivations

The Explorers were asked about their motivations for applying for the role of 'Wellbeing Explorer'. The main driving force for applications across the group was a desire to 'make a difference to their neighbourhood'. For some of the Explorers it was about the need to do something positive for particular groups of people, in particular the younger and older generations:

"For me it was seeing the need, especially around the youth. You know, how lost they look and how they need some structure, you know, with it being what they did for a living or socially. Just something they've got an aim for."

Others gave their own personal perspective for wanting to help. For one Explorer it was about offering up their personal experiences:

"I was thinking that I could relate to people from the things that have happened in my life. There are things going on in the area which I felt like I could relate with. I can understand someone on a one-to-one because I know what it's like on here".

Others were motivated by a 'curiosity to understand' how others felt about living on the estate.

The Explorers were also motivated by what they thought the project could do for them. This included receiving a wage, having new experiences, getting to meet new people and the perceived benefits to their own wellbeing.

"I've always had jobs. Then through what I've been through I found myself unemployed and thought 'what am I going to do with myself? I need to get back into work but it's got to be something I want to do' and then this came up!"

Expectations

Expectations ahead of the project were mixed. Some of the Explorers expected the project to be exclusively about delivering the views and opinions of people living in Limehurst, whereas others were more ambitious in their expectations and saw the project as an 'activator' to help the community to 'bring to life' the things that it believed in. A few of the Explorers had less positive expectations and were more cynical in their expectations about the project at the beginning.

"I had this idea that we were going to be sat in the training room all the time, at first, and perhaps go to the tenants' hall or the school and that'd be it. Actually you know, getting out in the community and doing walkabouts and things like that, I didn't think we'd be doing things like that"

Others had fully embraced the opportunity as a force for change, as one Explorer indicated:

"From my point of view it is to bring people together and make things come true, not just to talk about it. I think it would bring a neighbourhood together, in a better way, really"

The Explorers were also concerned with 'expectations' of them. Many of the Explorers indicated that they had felt nervous about the practicalities of performing the role.

"The anxiety I had was about how we get speaking to people, and would people speak back. 'Can I carry it off', y'know, what's expected of me, that kind of thing".

Others however were far more resolute about the prospect of taking on the role.

"I was confident! I know a lot of people anyway. I'm always talking to everyone, so it's just the same, really, but y'know, it's about getting out there and actually seeing something done"

At the end of the project all of the Explorers remained optimistic about their work and their achievements. Expectations had shifted towards a desire to create action though most of the Explorers had developed a stronger sense of the reality of the task ahead.

Understanding the aims of the project

All Explorers indicated a strong understanding of the aims and purpose of the project. In particular, Explorers emphasised the functions of 'bringing people together' and 'creating action'. One explorer explained the aims as:





“To get out there, make people aware of what’s going on, and try and get activities and events going for the community to join together and get this whole thing done”

Others identified more with the research part of the role:

“It’s to get people together and for people to be comfortable and the give their views on what they think, good or bad. People really, they don’t think they’ve got a platform. They don’t think they can speak”

Collectively there was a strong sense from Explorers that the project was about ‘empowering’ people and ‘activating’ them in sharing a desire to make a difference to the estate. As one explorer suggested:

“Rather than just being in the street and y’know moaning about things, to say ‘Hey, actually, we can, you know, we can do this’. So yeah, I think it’s given them [the community] that.”

In all cases the Explorers saw the coming about of action and physical changes as the ultimate measure of success for the project. Over the course of the project, the Explorers’ sense of purpose increased. By the time of the listening event many of the Explorers were making personal commitments to back up their conviction for taking the project forward:

“We’ve gone out to these people, we’ve put ourselves on the line here because we’re the faces they see. So we are out there, y’know, it’s us they’re going to come back to and say, ‘hey you said this was going to happen....’ y’know”.

Training and baseline knowledge of ‘wellbeing’

The Explorers had little prior knowledge of ‘wellbeing’ or experience of working in a similar role. All of the Explorers had a positive view of the training and indicated that it was successful in preparing them for their work.

“We knew what kinds of things we needed to do for where we were, y’know the different methods for different places”

Despite their training, it was felt by the group, that nothing could really imitate the experience of conducting fieldwork for real. As one Explorer indicated:

“There was a bit of an excited apprehension; you know that, ‘Right now you’ve got to do it...’ It’s like passing your driving test: you pass and you’ve got to get in the car, you’re on your own, you know?”

A common misconception ahead of the training was that ‘wellbeing’ was about healthy eating, exercise, smoking and blood-pressure. The ‘openness’ of wellbeing as a framework for discussion was more appealing to the Explorers.

“I had [heard of ‘wellbeing’], but I hadn’t gone into depth with it, and it was something that came up in the first training session, which it was – we all thought it was ‘Have your five a day and your exercise’. And we said that’s what we didn’t want to do.”

Interviews with the Explorers provided evidence of a broader and more in depth understanding of ‘wellbeing’ at the end of the project.

“Things changed as the weeks went on, people did come in more confident. I assumed wellbeing was all to do with healthy eating and all that – but obviously it goes further than that. It’s so much bigger than that, than obviously just like ‘lose some weight’.”

All of the Explorers that were interviewed indicated that they had learnt a lot from their experience as an explorer. Key areas of learning included:

- ‘Wellbeing’ including contributory factors;
- Communication skills;
- Listening skills;
- Teamwork;
- Community engagement skills
- Community development skills

A significant positive outcome for the project has been that three of the ten Explorers have moved on to full time employment as a result of their involvement.

The best thing about being an Explorer

The Explorers were asked their view on the ‘best’ thing about their role. The most common response was about the ‘friendships’ that had resulted from the work and the feeling of being part of something that is going to make a difference. Second to this was the sense of being able to ‘see things through others eyes’.



For one explorer the best thing was providing people with an opportunity to say what they think:

“Some people, they’ve got so many problems, they close themselves inside and when they see somebody that is confident, that gives them time to talk, you know, to say it themselves without judging them. I think it is important”.

For another it was simply the chance to meet with other parents and to listen to their views.

There was a sense from all Explorers, that one of the best things about their role was that they felt part of the ‘bigger picture’. This was articulated in a number of ways; most notably about being able to say to people that they were ‘trying to make changes’ and that they were part of a team and had a goal. For others it was encapsulated as a feeling of being able to ‘represent the community’. Many of the Explorers reflected positively on being recognised on the estate by people they had interviewed or spoken with.

The best things about being an Explorer

The worst thing about being an Explorer

Some of the worst things about being an Explorer included the frustration of not being able to act immediately on findings, having to be careful about what they were saying to people when meeting them for the first time and being cold on evening fieldwork trips. Another negative was that the training element of the project was too long.

Generally, however, all of the Explorers had thoroughly enjoyed their experience of the project and wanted to continue to support it. When asked, all of the Explorers said that they would recommend becoming an ‘Explorer’ to other people.

For one Explorer the benefits to other people were clear:

“Because we hide – in all of us – we hide in a shell. Just to bring us out of ourselves. I think everybody has the bad and the good, but we got a lot of good to give out, a lot”



Figure 4 – The best things about being an Explorer





Views of Limehurst

One of the clearest outcomes for Explorers was the degree to which their views of Limehurst had changed over the course of the project. Many of the Explorers were surprised by the 'positivity' they had 'uncovered' in their exploration of wellbeing across the estate. This in turn had changed their attitudes towards the area.

"A lot more positives, and they weren't asking for stupid things, you know? Things that are totally out of reach like a trip to the moon! They were asking for sensible everyday things. I think it's them everyday things that make wellbeing. It's a lot of little things that make up the whole".

Many of the Explorers have built up considerable tacit knowledge of the ways in which people living on the estate view their wellbeing and health. They have also gained insight into the community's view of 'change' including; what it means to them, the degree of support for action and also what the community thinks of the key agents in that change (i.e. other people in the community, Regenda and other agencies). One of the key aims at the start of the project was that the Explorers would weave new networks within the community and develop increased awareness of the value of being connected to other people. This has been achieved and surpassed. The Explorers have become a community asset in themselves.

"People can be so negative about how they feel about themselves, so you've got to get them to a place – if you can get them to a place of self-belief, that actually we can change this and, y'know, to participate in it, that, I think that's it, but it's a hard one"

Success

All of the Explorers indicated that they were proud of the work that they had done, but to the Explorers, at the end of the project, 'success' means 'action'.

"It needs to carry on. Obviously you can't just leave it there now! You know what I mean? It's like dropping a stone in a pond, it's the ripples coming off it"

Furthermore, all of the Explorers that were interviewed at the end of the project were optimistic that their work would make a difference to others on the estate. There was also recognition that they themselves were fundamental in turning their findings into action. For a few of the Explorers the key to success was investment but for most it was about community empowerment and unlocking and activating people's passion for change. As one explorer indicated, it was about people's attitudes:

"People's attitudes. This sitting behind closed doors, y'know, keeping to themselves, that's definitely got to change"

Linked to this was the notion that people needed to communicate more effectively. This was seen as a major risk to the further success of the project. Explorers thought that communication was important to maintain momentum, grow support among the community and to ensure that all agencies had the same information.

Personal impacts

In addition to shared learning about wellbeing and the development of new skills in communication and engagement the Explorers also experienced a number of personal impacts. These included increased enthusiasm, commitment to supporting action and increased personal wellbeing.

All of the Explorers indicated that their confidence had increased as a result of their involvement. For one explorer this meant that they had become more confident in expressing themselves and in taking the lead when communicating with people:

"I think as time went on and I think I got more confident with things. I think I can talk now better than I could before, 'cos I didn't have the confidence to think that I could do it"

For another it was about meeting new people and feeling less isolated at home:

"It's made me feel positive and obviously I've met new people, I've been talking to a lot of people as well, so it's made me more positive about going out there and talking to people and getting to know people and basically just made me more confident about myself"

For other Explorers it was more about their self-esteem and how they feel about themselves.

"It's made me feel like, that I'm important in my community. Not important as in that I'm goody-goody but important that I can help to bring good into people's lives"

Many of the Explorers were also proud of the work that they had done and felt content with the notion that they had 'done their bit'.





"It's a good positivity thing for me and I feel proud when I walk on the street, you know, because I'm doing something for the community. It makes me proud and happy for myself"

Overall, all of the Explorers had enjoyed their experience and all felt that they had learnt something from the project. Additional, less expected, outcomes included the depth and strength of the personal relationships that have formed and the need to make 'things work' between themselves and with other agencies working on the estate. For one explorer their involvement had resulted in significant changes to their life and now meant that they felt 'accepted' into a community that they had first believed to be hostile to them. In their words it had become 'like a big family'.

"I feel more secure now and more comfortable. You know? I can allow my kids to play outside because I know they can play outside and nobody is going to come and harm them or do something. People know me and I know them and I know who they are and stuff like that. You don't think that a community... a group of people can change. So it brought more confidence to myself"

Wellbeing

Our Life has utilised the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) to measure the wellbeing of Explorers at the beginning of the project and at the end. The highest possible WEMWBS score is 35, and the lowest score is 7. The mean score across the North West in 2009 was 27.20. In total, 16.8% of people had a low level of mental wellbeing (7 – 22), 62.8% had a moderate level of mental wellbeing (22 – 33) and 20.4% had a high level of mental wellbeing (33+). For Oldham and Limehurst Village the best available estimate is a mean of 26.60 with 23.2% in the lower wellbeing group, 61.6% in the moderate group and 15.2% in the higher group.

- The average WEMWBS score for the group of Explorers at the start of the process was 31.1 (average across Oldham 26.6). Six months later, following the project, the average WEMWBS score had increased to 32.6, an increase of 1.5 on the scale.

- At the start of the project the lowest WEMWBS score within the group was 25, whilst the highest was 35. At the end of the project the lowest individual score was 29 and the highest 35. The Explorer with the lowest starting scores experienced the highest positive change.

- The lowest scoring elements of the scale at the beginning of the project were 'dealing with problems well' and 'feeling close to people' with a number of 'Explorers' indicating that they had positive experiences of these two elements only 'some of the time'.

- The highest scoring elements of the scale at the beginning of the project were 'feeling relaxed' and 'being able to make up my own mind about things'. All Explorers indicated that they felt positive about these elements 'most' or 'all of the time'.

- Our assessment at the end of the project (after 6 months) indicated that the increase in average wellbeing score across the group had been driven mostly by positive changes to the 'dealing with problems well' and 'feeling close to people' elements of the WEMWBS scale. Positive changes had also occurred in the elements of the scale relating to 'optimism', 'thinking clearly' and 'being able to make up my own mind about things'.

Wider outcomes

In addition to assessing whether the project outputs and planned outcomes were delivered, we will seek to assess whether the project has strengthened the wellbeing, sense of community and sense of control across Limehurst Village. We will do this utilising the Explorers for a follow-up exercise, where participants will be asked to complete a wellbeing survey and answer questions on what has improved in their neighbourhood.

"We've got to build on what we've done now. We've got to. This community is ripe. They're for things to be done, and to join in"



9

Guiding principles

The key lesson emerging from the work so far is the importance of building relationships and sharing information from multiple perspectives, so that Limehurst Village can work together to co-create wellbeing. Engagement is not a single process: it has to be continuous exploration and exchange as wellbeing is not fixed. A ten year development plan also depends on evolving ten year relationships to enhance the wellbeing of all.

“Do we really know what people want out there? A lot of people are happy and content with their lives but yeah, thinking about it people say ‘now I’ve thought about it, now you’ve asked the question and now I’ve explored it, this is what I’d like to see’. It’s just because no one’s ever there to ask them questions before, but somebody who is on a level footing with them, your neighbour, not a man in a suit!”

‘One Size Doesn’t Fit All’

The learning from this project suggests that a number of principles can guide intelligent, uniquely tailored approaches to supporting wellbeing in any particular community. Rather than seek to identify a single, one-size-fits-all model or toolkit, it is important to grasp the underlying principles which guide practitioners to use methods flexibly according to the needs of the situation.

These are as follows:

1. **Self-defined issues:** residents need to identify their own issues and concerns as the starting point. They do not respond positively to menus of issues and plans produced elsewhere.
2. **Ownership:** residents are more likely to respond actively to their own ideas and protect what they create.
3. **Listening is a mutual virtue:** agencies need to listen to residents and each other, and residents need opportunities to do likewise.
4. **Resident-led engagement promotes higher levels of trust in the authenticity of the process, builds trust amongst residents and agencies, and develops the skills for repeated engagement under local ownership.**
5. **Training for residents needs to be grounded in adult education principles, recognising their existing knowledge, skills and experience, and using active learning exercises as the basis for self-empowerment and team development.**
6. **Wellbeing concepts are sociological jargon and not readily understood by communities; the residents need support to identify wellbeing in their own terms, in the light of their own circumstances.**
7. **Asset-based Community Development:** it is essential to start from positive appreciation of existing strengths (assets are not just physical resources – they include people’s skills, activities and feelings). Otherwise, negativity can immediately undermine belief in the possibility of improving wellbeing.
8. **Existing community assets need to be mapped and appreciated: wellbeing already exists in many dimensions, but often goes unnoticed.**
9. **Blue-sky thinking isn’t enough, however: although positivity is vital from the start, people also need to examine their problems once they have identified assets. It is the combination of positive outlook and shared focus on real issues which provides the motor for community action.**





10. Evaluation doesn't have to feel like School Tests; people can enjoy scoring their own progress if the methods are fun, simple and quick. The same magic ingredients apply to engagement methods too.

11. Children can take the lead within communities, voicing their own concerns and ideas if they are given the opportunity. Child-led projects can inspire adults to act in solidarity, while challenging prejudices about young people. Ownership of resources by children helps to ensure that children protect these resources.

12. Us and Us, not Us and Them: agencies and residents are culturally different (hierarchies and peers, responsibilities and needs, providing and consuming, squares and blobs, etc), but share many aspects of 'community' (the need for shared vision, sense of belonging, recognition of contribution, acknowledgement of needs, territory etc). By communicating well, recognising the strengths and limitations of each other, these two communities can find shared causes and become assets for each other.

13. Teething problems: everyone learns from experience, given the space and support to reflect when things go wrong. Setbacks are readily seized on by sceptics as evidence of futility, but this dynamic should be resisted by applying a broader frame which recognises empowerment is a developing process.

14. Diversity means a multitude of methods and sites are essential.

15. Sensitivity: some personal issues and social issues do not lend themselves to probing questions on first encounters in public places. For example, experiences of racism, domestic violence, money worries and disabilities are better explored in confidential spaces by people with particular training in anti-discriminatory practice.

16. Better use of scarce resources: by valuing residents' priorities, agencies will receive greater levels of trust and belief in their authenticity. Small amounts of spending on residents' issues can be much more effective in generating community support than huge amounts spent on agency-led priorities.

17. Regeneration is not just about physical changes: it is regeneration of people from within themselves which makes life worth living. Empowerment cannot be given to people; they emancipate themselves through their own growth.

18. Multiple perspectives: 'Whole systems planning' which supports a peer-to-peer exchange between agencies and communities brings greater insight, relevance and shared ownership.

19. Momentum: scepticism about the possibility of change runs deep in people's experiences, due to past failures. Quick wins are essential to build momentum and wider support and belief in change.

20. It Ain't What You Do, It's The Way That You Do It: the best Plans in the world will be counter-productive if they aren't created in an engaged partnership with communities.



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