

# Setting the scene for community engagement – context, meaning and action

Liz Richardson, University of Manchester  
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# Why community engagement in health and wellbeing?

“There was no real tradition on the estate of self help. Birmingham was very protective and did everything in-house. The nanny state idea is rife in Birmingham, people are reluctant to let go of the reins. People have grown up with health care and everything provided”

Resident, Birmingham, quoted in Richardson, L (2008) *DIY Community Action* Policy Press

# Renegotiating the relationship between state and citizen

- Many public bodies and local agencies want to give more responsibility to people for their own well being
- General feeling in society of need to re-balance relationships
- E.g. in 2000 half the population agreed with the statement 'the welfare state encourages people to stop looking after each other', up from a third of respondents in 1991

(John Hills, 2004, *Inequality and the State*, OUP)

# What are we trying to do?

- Fundamentally about:
  - personal and civic responsibility
  - supporting people to exercise their own agency positively
  - individual and collective efficacy
- Call it 'community engagement' for short

# But there are different ways of getting there: community engagement and self-help

- Community self-help = informal groups of people, acting on a voluntary basis, working together to solve common problems by taking action themselves, and with others

# Community engagement and agencies

- Citizen involvement in design and delivery of services (provided by others)
- Engaging with people as users of services e.g. to increase take-up of activities, facilities or services through outreach, publicity etc

# Community engagement and behaviour change

- It's about self-help
- Self-help happens, whether policy makers want it to or not, as part of everyday life
- Classic model is loyalty, voice, exit, neglect
- All involve use of agency and people making choices
- But not always in right direction – neglect and loyalty
- Engaging communities on health often involves changing attitudes and behaviours

# Government thinking is along same lines

‘[public policy to change behaviours] is not just about the government and its agencies learning a few extra techniques to “make people eat their greens”. Rather it is about helping individuals – and communities – to help themselves’

Halpern, D., Bates, C., Beales, G. and Heathfield, A. (2004)  
*Personal responsibility and changing behaviour: The state of knowledge and its implications for public policy*, London: Cabinet Office.



# But can you use the same models?

## Community development

- build on what's there, go with community preferences
- e.g. Open Space Technology: whoever comes is the right people, whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- Work with the willing to do what they want

## Behaviour change

- Predefined set of goals, change what happens
- e.g. target the not-currently - interested, need to achieve specific goals
- Work with the possibly unwilling to change what they want

# Great when it works: community self-help

- Already going that direction – keen and interested
- Trafford Hall training and small grants
- Only small groups, not necessarily the most in need
- Not clear how much will impact on wider behaviours
- Core organisers already engaged
- But not the point!
- Active volunteers created new activities for others
- Community-led and community-run











# Supporting community self-help

- Only a few chose to get actively involved
- Estimates between 1-21% of the national population
- Lower in poorer neighbourhoods
- Therefore, the usual suspects' = gold dust!
- Don't let it fall through your fingers
- Go with the willing
- As long as there are activities, facilities, services
- The minority provide benefits for the majority
- Support locally and networks – overcome isolation, inspire







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# But can be very hard for communities to do

## Example 1

- ‘chemical free’ and ‘home grown’ not ‘organic’.
- Health promotion worker lost support taking bacon butties off the menu in the community cafe
- “Healthy eating’s okay, but people must have a choice” (resident, Stockport)

## Example 2

- Failed food cooperative: “we were not only trying to change shopping habits, but people’s eating habits as well” (resident), and this was too much all at once. “People’s priorities are all wrong” (resident, Leyland)

# Hard cont.

## Example 3

- Group wanted to do more, like “sitting people down and saying why don’t you go on a college course”, but people in crisis did not respond to this well.
- “The hard part is to help people to change their own lives” (resident, Rhyl).

## Lessons for groups

- Win trust slowly
- Build up relationships

# Lessons for community engagement and agencies

## Reaching people

- Fun activities – school fates, street parties, multi-cultural festivals
- Euro Neighbours' Day has 7 million people but marginal in UK
- 75% do social events – not many do meetings
- ANYTHING with children and young people/intergenerational

## Empowering people to change

- More user-led approaches, more individualised and tailored services
- Communities could help design these services too

# More empowering health services



“NHS pays for season ticket” MEN Dec 2007

11 individual budget pilots –  
‘Putting People First’

Transformation and personalisation are a key part of community engagement on health and well-being

# And finally, lessons about large scale change



# Even in the Boro





# Yes, but too slow, too rigid

BUT

- Opening up access/thinking laterally about use of space
- Responsiveness – dance mats example!
- Creates cynicism - older brothers and sisters example

We need:

- Play areas in 5 minutes of every home
- Sitting places
- Community green fingers
- Different ways to deliver

# Changing delivery





# 5 days or 5 years....? £6,500 [www.make-good.com](http://www.make-good.com)

