

My Neighbourhood' Woodfield Ward – a community model for a “Big Society”

Barnardo's (Dr B's) Harrogate



Project Synopsis

A project team of Barnardo's, Harrogate College, North Yorkshire Learning Consortium and Harrogate District Strategic Partnership aimed to create a team of qualified Neighbourhood patrons delivering community projects within the Woodfield area of Harrogate to increase take up of qualifications, increase social mobility and raise aspirations. 9 community projects are underway involving approximately 70 local residents. These successes can be seen at www.myneighbourhood.me.uk, and impact will be shared with other areas of the Harrogate District.

Project aims

The aim of the project was to empower individuals within the Woodfield area of Harrogate to manage and improve their community.

Key objectives and outcomes which were set were:-

- A Team of 20 Neighbourhood Patrons trained to deliver community improvement projects
- A series of (minimum 10) sustainable neighbourhood improvement projects developed and initiated
- 10 % Increase in the take up of skills based qualifications by residents
- Increased social mobility for residents
- Raised aspirations of residents

These changes were proposed to be will be measured through reduction in NEET, increased qualifications profile for the area, greater social mobility, increased employment and reduction in anti social behaviour. It was proposed that the impact on partners would increase recruitment, increase community engagement and establish network relationships with other public, voluntary and private sector organisations.

It was anticipated the changes would be sustained through the positioning of the patrons as mentors for other areas and through yearly recruitment activities following the same adapted models.

The Project was considered to be innovative because it would utilise the skills and funding available within the learning sector to empower a community to shape its own improvement. The project also aimed to engage a range of organisations to provide targeted support for new learners which would enable those individuals to plan, produce and develop social enterprising projects that will enhance their communities.

These “patrons” would then be seen as change role models and their experiences and projects would develop the community and its links with providers. Providers would then develop a social

focus in the community and develop case studies to encourage other individuals to access and participate in learning for the good of themselves and their communities.

Project Delivery

Upon the successful bid outcome we formed a steering group consisting of the key partners, (Barnardo's, Harrogate College, North Yorkshire Learning Consortium and Harrogate and District Strategic Partnership). The bid outcome was communicated to the community and key stakeholders through a series of launch events, widely publicised throughout the Woodfield Area. The Steering Group initially met exceptionally frequently to ensure momentum was maintained in getting the local community engaged, interested and involved in the project. Following the launch events, and due to a paucity of viable ideas from within the community the project group ran 3 workshops within the community to support and shape viable proposals being led by members of the community. At this stage the ideas consisted of:-

- Growing together (community Gardening venture)
- Family Film night at the Methodist church
- Community music initiative
- Soft Play social enterprise
- Two youth club based activities, 5 aside football league and music/dance production.

Utilising qualification framework which had been devised as part of the funding, project leads were identified for each of the groups and met frequently with Harrogate College Lead representative. The framework enabled a project plan and costings to be drawn together to ensure full and successful implementation of the proposals.

In April 2011 all project leads then pitched their ideas and costings to the project group for approval. Feedback was provided to each group in terms of value for money, viability, sustainability and chance of success.

Following this 2 viable projects emerged from the process

- Growing Together
- Family Film Night

Detailed feedback, guidance and continued support was provided to the other groups by the college representative. Unfortunately at this stage the 2 individually led social enterprises fell by the wayside, which were:-

- Community music initiative
- Soft Play social enterprise

The 2 viable projects and their lead representative continued to shape and develop their projects and carry out the necessary work involved.

The steering group continued to monitor interest and became very proactive in seeking out and supporting community groups to take advantage of the funding which was available. Extra intervention was provided for the Youth Club to support them in developing their ideas into a viable project proposal which would be successful, sustainable and raise valuable funds for the clubs development, which would benefit the Woodfield area and its residents.

Additional work was also undertaken by members of the steering group to bring other interested parties on board. This has resulted in the following viable projects moving forwards:-

- Growing Together
- Family Film Night
- Youth Club My Neighbourhood family fun day
- Harrogate Town “Our Team your Goal” initiative
- Credit Union project and support for Woodfield residents
- Fuel and energy education initiative
- Children’s Centre outreach summer park play initiative
- Community Sports Leadership Initiative
- Thirst Community History Project.

Learning Points and unforeseen issues

Low level of proactive community engagement. The community are willing to come forwards to forum type events where ideas can be openly discussed but they have limited commitment to engaging in or even leading such activity. There was an expectation from the majority of the groups that the steering group would manage, lead and direct all the projects. This has been evidenced by the fact that until the steering group did actively become involved in pulling some ideas together we only had 2 groups, Growing Together and Family Film Night, interested in leading their own groups to success. As other interested parties realized the time commitment it may involve in making something a success their interest waned, for example the Community music initiative, Soft Play Social Enterprise.

The harder to reach are harder to reach than anticipated.

We are aware that this area has a high proportion of NEET and unemployed yet very few of these groups have engaged with the events or the projects. However, we also believe that there are other barriers to this as we engaged key agencies to raise the profile of the project and the events as well as door knocking with the community to engage directly with such groups.

Suspicion

The community was suspicious of ulterior motives of the project and the monies. An approach of “where is the catch, this is too good to be true” was very apparent in the initial stages and continued throughout. This possibly led to some of the low uptake. We are hoping that the project will be a legacy to ensure future projects are a success

Impact of boundary and local politics

The events which were held to generate project ideas and those interested in committing to either leading or volunteering in the projects were encompassed with political undertones and a chance to voice deep rooted discontent about a variety of issues affecting the community.

Labeling of communities

Communities don’t like to be labeled as disadvantaged and requiring help and support by others, as many who live there like their local community and enjoy living there. This is evidenced through the Thirst Project who will be producing memoir based DVD and case studies to celebrate their local area and the positives of living there.

Communication

We relied heavily on printed and written communication and soon learnt this maybe wasn’t the best approach. However, we anticipated some degree of local word of mouth from those residents who had attended the events, and clearly discussed this with them. However, it soon became apparent that the community expected us to be carrying out the profile raising of the opportunity which existed for the community. It became apparent there was a big disconnect between educational

and community language and there was indeed a big objection to the use of educational language being used

How would we do things differently next time

We would set aside some of the monies for a dedicated project manager for the lifetime of the project in the form of a worker to facilitate the proposals made and work with individual leads of these groups to help bring the projects to fruition.

We would also consider more alternative ways of engaging with the local community. Being more proactive in attending community groups which were already in existence, and more proactive in suggesting solutions and project ideas. However we don't feel this would have changed the feel of the overall project and there was a general apathy of voluntary time commitment by the residents to make this a success. A feel of "do this for us" or "pay me to do this".

Project Outcomes

Successful initial stakeholder event to raise awareness of the funds available

Successful community events to engage with the local community and generate interest and excitement

- 9 community projects identified and in receipt of funds
- 4 of the 9 projects are sustainable as ongoing activities and can and will inform other communities
- Successful development of website www.myneighbourhood.me.uk
- Identification and involvement of in excess of 70 Neighbourhood patrons involved in delivering and making the 9 projects a success.
- Successful development of curriculum resources for project planning and allocation of monies to each project, used by project leads. However, it soon became clear that project leads were not from categories that would have provided fee remission for the qualification. Therefore a decision was made that monies would be of more benefit to the community being spent on the projects rather than funding qualifications that were at a lower level than qualifications projects leads already had achieved.
- A number of the projects should result in increased social mobility for residents of the Woodfield area. However due to the late implementation of the projects, for reasons highlighted above, these are unable to be captured at this point.
- The impact of the project is to be celebrated at an event in September where all project leads will be delivering a short presentation on the aims, achievements and outcomes and legacy of their projects.
- 4 of the 9 projects will be sharing practice with other Harrogate wards to ensure the impact of their projects is not lost and is sustained.

Sharing of project findings

The www.myneighbourhood.me.uk website will be maintained through the Harrogate District Strategic Partnerships My Neighbourhood strategy group. This website will contain key project contact details and success stories.

We are happy to share our experience with any other interested parties within the sector.