CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Mirehouse

Suzanne Wilson and
Professor David Morris
University of Central Lancashire

The Centre for Citizenship and Community
Inclusion and Connected Communities in Policy and Practice

University of Central Lancashire
UCLan

SAMUEL LINDOW FOUNDATION

Purpose of the report

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

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

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

Audience

This report is aimed at:

- **The communities who took part in the research. We hope it will help you to understand your community better and inspire you to take action to strengthen it.**
- **Anyone interested in learning more about this take on community development. We hope it will increase your awareness of different ways to engage with communities.**
- **Those working in community development or public health. We hope it will inform community development initiatives that impact on Mirehouse, and inform ways of engaging with the community.**
- **Local authorities and policy makers. We hope it will influence policy that impacts on Mirehouse, and also inform ways of engaging with the community.**

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PART 1: BACKGROUND - CHAPTER 1

An introduction to Connected Communities

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

The intention is to then analyse how different interventions build resilient, inclusive communities and empower individuals to take greater control of their lives through relationships based on shared concerns and mutual trust. This process can then serve to enhance community capital:

> *Community capital refers to "the sum of assets including relationships in a community and the value that accrues from these"*
>
> *(Parsfield, et al., 2015, p. 12).*

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

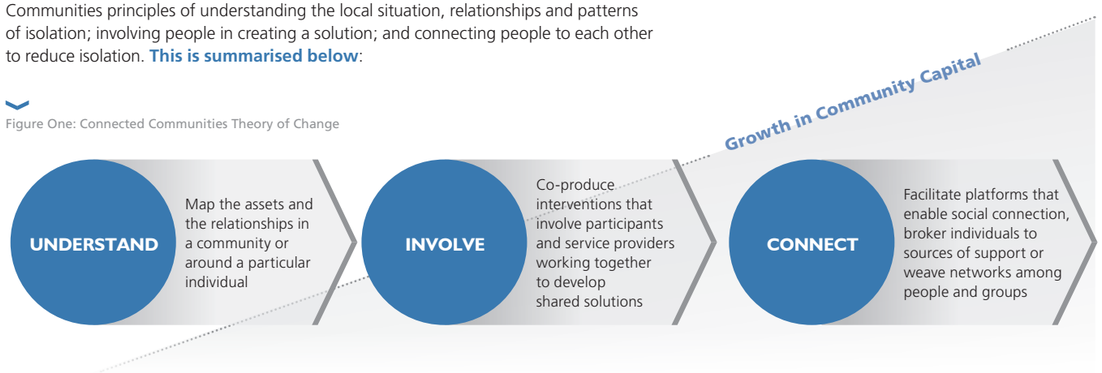
By following the steps outlined in the table, community capacity can be enhanced by the participating communities. And through the learning and reflection gained from seven Connected Communities projects that have taken place across the UK, it was concluded that four types of value, or 'dividends' could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

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

Table 1: Connected Communities key stages

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

Figure One: Connected Communities Theory of Change



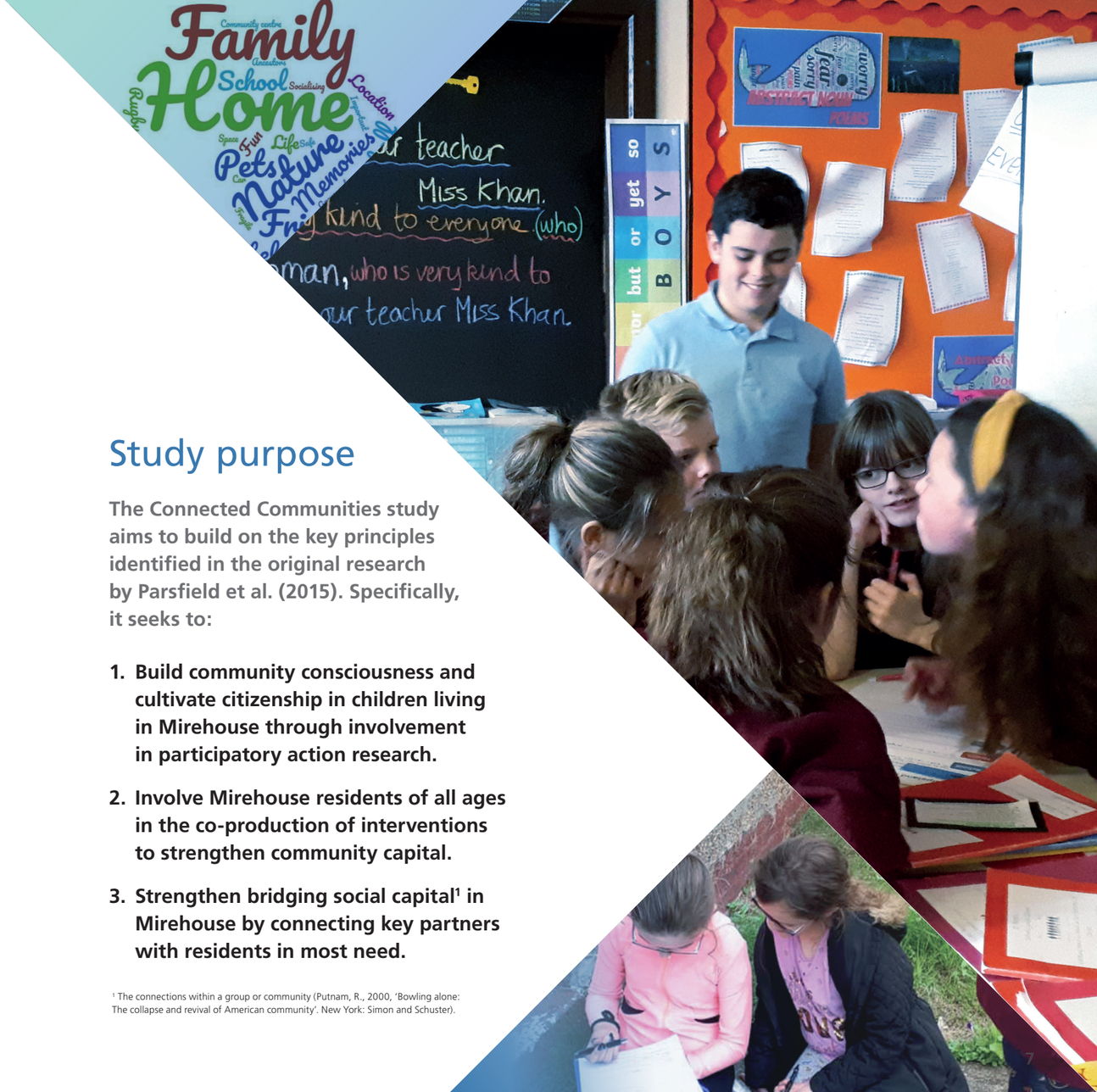
Since the introduction of the Big Society by David Cameron in 2010, the UK government has expressed a desire to see more residents that are better able to support themselves and therefore reduce pressures on public services. The Civil Society Strategy, published in 2018, outlines *"how government will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

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

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

The effectiveness of this policy in driving change will depend upon engaging the communities on whom it impacts. While the Connected Communities approach cannot be a silver bullet – whereby simply involving individuals in community development and strengthening community capital will overcome all social issues experienced in any given area – there is definitely value in community-led action and targeted interventions, and it is not only the end product that is of value (i.e. the intervention) but the process of being involved in a co- productive exercise that can benefit the individual and the community.

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



Study purpose

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

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

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

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 2

Community focus – an overview of Mirehouse

The Connected Communities project introduced in this report was based at the UCLan Westlakes Campus, in Whitehaven, Cumbria, as part of a wider project spanning communities along the Cumbrian coastline. Figure 2 right summarises the key socio-economic features of West Cumbria.

The area of Mirehouse, Whitehaven, was selected for this study after consultation with local community stakeholders across West Cumbria – including elected members, schools and local authorities. It was also informed by local data, which will be referenced later in this report. The area is situated near to Whitehaven town centre and the Cumbrian coastline, and consists mainly of terraced and semi-detached ex-council properties. Like other areas of Whitehaven, there is a strong mining heritage, the demise of which had taken place over earlier decades. A large employer for Whitehaven, Marchon Chemical Plant, had been based close to Mirehouse, which saw an economic decline following its closure in 2004.

The area covered by this Connected Communities research included three Lower Level Super Output Areas (LSOA) covering Mirehouse. LSOAs are a geographic area consisting of approximately 1,500 people, and are used by the Department of Local Government and Communities (DfLGC) as a tool to collect demographic statistics on small areas. The data for Mirehouse is outlined on the opposite page.

All data in this chapter is provided by Cumbria Observatory, unless stated otherwise.

An overview of West Cumbria

- Geographically isolated
- Post industrial area with Sellafield being a major employer
- Polarised social demography
- Pockets of very high deprivation
- Limited services
- Below regional and national averages of education and employment.

Figure 2: An overview of West Cumbria

LSOA and Ward Data

Population

Mirehouse has a population of 4,517, and has above regional and national proportions of children and young people (0-15 years), and fewer working aged adults (16-64 years). The proportion of older people (65 years plus) living in the area is in line with national and regional averages.

Ethnicity

The ethnic makeup of Mirehouse is predominantly White British, making up 98.7% of the population. This is in line with the Cumbrian average (98.5%) and significantly above average for the UK (85.4%). The other ethnicities include Asian (0.8%) and mixed ethnicities (0.6%).

Economic and employment profile

	Economically active residents	Economically inactive	Long term unemployed	Never worked
Mirehouse	66.2%	33.8%	2.5%	4.9%
Cumbria	81%	19%	1.3%	2.4%
UK	75%	25%	1.7%	3.9%

Table 2: Economic and Employment Profile of Mirehouse, Cumbria and UK

As can be seen, Mirehouse experiences above national levels of income and employment deprivation, which, when ranked nationally, makes Mirehouse one of the top 10% most deprived LSOA using this indicator (DfCLG, 2015).

Children and young people

	Population aged 0-17	People with no qualifications as a percentage of working age adults	Children living in low income families
Mirehouse	25%	39%	22%
Cumbria	19%	24.2%	12%
UK	-	22.5%	17%

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

As the table above illustrates, Mirehouse has a larger proportion of children and young people living in the area than the Cumbrian average. It also has significantly larger proportions of working age adults with no qualifications. The proportion of children living in low-income families in Mirehouse is significantly above the regional and national averages. And data provided by the DfCLG (2015) indicates that Mirehouse experiences above national levels of low educational attainment and child poverty. Indeed, when ranked nationally, Mirehouse is one of the top 10% most deprived LSOA using this indicator.

Health and social care

	Very Good Health	Very Bad Health	Limited Activity due to Health Issues
Mirehouse	44%	2.1%	13.7%
Cumbria	45%	1.3%	9.7%
UK	47%	1.2%	8.3%

Table 4: Health and Social Care Profile of Mirehouse, Cumbria and UK

As the table above illustrates, residents from Mirehouse report less good health and more bad health than regional and national averages, along with a higher proportion of residents reporting their daily activities are limited due to health issues. When ranked nationally, Mirehouse is one of the top 10% most deprived LSOA in terms of health deprivation.

Local assets

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

Summary

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

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 3

Community researchers

A core component of the Connected Communities approach is to involve communities in research, to develop an understanding of everyone's needs.

We recruited and trained children as community researchers, and supported them in enacting their citizenship to provide opportunities to be real agents of change. In order to do this in Mirehouse, a specific community research group was formed in a local primary school – and local children were invited to participate as part of their personal, social, health and economic programme (PSHE). The selected pupils could choose to attend the group as an alternative to the timetabled PSHE activity for their year.

Mirehouse community superheroes: A school based community group

Participants

This project was run from February 2018 to February 2019. 23 children who were initially in Year 5 (45.8% male; 54.2% female) were involved and school data informed us that 37.5% of these children were defined as disadvantaged – slightly above the average level for the ward (33%). Children were selected to participate in the project based either on their current residence in Mirehouse (83.3%), or on having recently lived there or in a neighbouring community (16.6%). The group called themselves Mirehouse Community Superheroes but this was often shortened to 'community group'.

A further four children – recruited by the children already involved in the project (this is called Participant Driven Snowball Sampling) – participated in data collection. Three of these children were girls (age 8-13), two of whom were siblings of the children in the school sample. These children were paired with children who had already completed the research skills training, with the latter group acting as mentors for those new to community research.

All children chose to attend the community group, and although they were made aware of their right to withdraw from the group at any time, no children chose to do so.

Programme

The main site for delivery was within a school classroom, where 45-minute weekly sessions took place during the school day, in term time, for one year. Sessions were led by two facilitators, the lead researcher and a school teaching assistant. The table below provides an overview of the topics covered during the sessions and the key partners involved:

Time frame	Activity	Partner Agencies
February to March 2018	Community consciousness, research methods training	
Easter Holidays 2018	Data collection	Cumbria Constabulary
April to June 2018	Social action (litter pick, cake decorating, poster campaigns)	Mayor Mike Starkie, Age UK West Cumbria
Summer holidays 2018	Data collection	Cumbria Constabulary
September to December 2018	Information dissemination • Gathering other forms of data (i.e. photos and testimonials) • Presenting this data, along with survey data, to key stakeholders in the community, which included: - Partners visiting the children in school - The children presenting to their community - The children pitching a funding bid idea to their community	Well Whitehaven, Cumbria Constabulary, Copeland Borough Council, Home Group
January to February 2019	Assessing impact, sustainability (promoting the Youth Connectors programme)	

Table 5: Connected Communities Mirehouse Programme

The partnership with the local primary school was a core element of the project, representing an invaluable contribution to its success. The school provided a convenient and safe location in which to base the programme, providing easy access to children from Mirehouse along with their parents. The support of teaching staff provided an appropriate level of discipline during the sessions, and their expertise ensured that the sessions were delivered in a structured and professional manner.

Ethics

Working with children requires certain ethical considerations to be taken into account and the recruitment of young researchers was guided by these principles, particularly those concerning the children's freedom to consent and confidentiality (Alderson, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Punch, 2002). The school wrote to all parents and guardians prior to the start of the project, providing information about the research and stressing that participation was optional. For the four children who were recruited through Respondent Driven Sampling methods, parental consent forms were taken home for parents to sign before they could embark on data collection.

Written informed consent was provided by parents and written informed assent was provided by the children. Fluid consent (the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time) was assured by making other activities available at the same time as the research sessions. Permission to use images of the group has been provided by both the parents and the children, however this report uses pseudonyms when providing personal accounts of the experience of participation.

Summary

Schools can be an effective means of recruiting children in research, and can also be helpful in gaining and maintaining contact with parents. Allowing children to recruit through their own social networks can be a useful tool for recruiting community researchers too. The strong relationship between the researcher and the school provided a solid foundation for the project, with the school contributing their knowledge, skills and resources – all of which were invaluable in developing a well-organised and engaging project.

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 4

Research process

A number of methods were adopted to help the children enact their citizenship and understand their community. These included community surveying and community walks, along with visual and creative methods. This again is different from the traditional Connected Communities approach, where community surveys are the predominant methodology with intermittent contact between the research lead and community researchers. Explorative and creative methods were also used to keep the children engaged and energised on a regular basis over the course of the project's life.

Community survey

During the 2018 Easter and summer holidays, local residents who had been provided with information on the project and whose consent had been secured, were surveyed through 16 doorstep data collection sessions over 8 days. These generated both quantitative and qualitative data to help to understand the social connectivity and capital of Mirehouse.

Community researchers leafleted the streets before approaching people on the doorstep to participate in the survey, providing information and inviting expressions of willingness to participate. At the subsequent door-knocking stage, residents were invited to participate either at that point in time, or at a mutually agreed future date.

Completion of the questionnaire took between 15 minutes and 45 minutes, depending upon the interviewer and respondent interaction.

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

Ethics

Ethical approval was sought from and granted by the University of Central Lancashire's, PsySoc Ethics Committee. Information about the study was provided to all potential residents. This outlined its aims, the purpose of the interviews, consent, confidentiality and the right to refuse, and information on what was to happen to the information collected. Residents were asked if they had any questions about their involvement before the interview commenced and were also asked for their verbal and written consent.

The importance of confidentiality was stressed to residents, both in the written information given at the start of the interview and during the introduction to the study at the doorstep. The residents' verbal consent was recorded by the community researchers. Respondents were also asked if they wanted to receive information about the findings and/or attend the community feedback event.

All such identifying information was recorded at the end of the interview on the final page, which was separated from questionnaire responses prior to data inputting and analysis. Responses were treated as confidential and the anonymity of all participants in the study was assured.

Data analysis

The analysis presented in Chapter 5 is based on the completed community questionnaires. Descriptive statistics and frequency data are presented in the results section and a social network map is included to illustrate key aspects of the findings regarding connectivity. The questionnaire data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using a combination of Excel, SPSS, UCINET and NetDraw.

Social network analysis and well-being analysis[2]

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

Child-led qualitative coding

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

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

Community walks and litter picks

It was important that children had a sense of ownership and identified with their community and to help facilitate this, a number of community walks and litter picks were organised. Community walks were held during a weekly session where the children agreed a route to walk around their local area. Families were invited to attend these walks, with one parent and one grandparent participating in at least one walk. These activities provided opportunities for the children to show the facilitators areas of the community that were important to them, and to take photos as a method of data collection.

Visual and creative methods

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

To help the children express their concerns and aspirations for Mirehouse, the group also took part in a poster competition to raise awareness of issues that concerned them locally. This was judged by the Elected Mayor of Copeland who attended a special session, speaking to every child about the motivations and messages behind their work.

Summary

The research process included surveys along with more focused work with the children to develop their community consciousness and provide opportunities to take action on the social issues that mattered to them. Alongside the survey data (which a number of the children coded themselves), it provided a robust basis for the collection of data that was presented to the community, where feedback was given and ideas were generated for future co-produced interventions.

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

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 5

Survey results

Overview of the sample

A total of 117 survey interviews were completed, of which 69% were with female respondents. Two thirds of respondents had lived in the area for 20 years or more, and more than three quarters had lived in Mirehouse for at least a decade. All respondents who gave their ethnicity described themselves as being White British. A third were aged 65+, while over a quarter (28%) were under 35.

Over three quarters of respondents (78%) lived with other people, while 22% lived alone. Almost two-thirds (62%) described their main role as being a full-time homekeeper. Just six percent reported being a volunteer.

Residents felt that the best things about living in Mirehouse included the community spirit (41%)

Perceptions of Mirehouse

Most respondents (82%) were very or fairly satisfied with Mirehouse as a place to live, with only 9% being fairly dissatisfied and no respondents being very dissatisfied. Almost three quarters of people agreed that people look out for each other (74%) and more than three quarters agreed that they can always find someone to help them (76%). Residents felt that the best things about living in Mirehouse included the community spirit (41%), friendly people (30%) and quiet environment (10%).

Comments such as *"everyone knows each other…It's home"*, "*we have good neighbours, there's always someone to help"* and *"come together as a community"* were frequently cited. The main barriers identified by residents in doing what they wanted to do socially were reported to be health (21%) and work (14%). The main areas for improvement around Mirehouse were felt to be better provision for children and young people (31%), and less litter (21%). It was felt that *"there's not much for kids to do, we need stuff for kids to look after"* and that *"better things for kids to do would stop bad behaviour".*

Health

Almost half (49%) of respondents had an 'impairment or health condition'. Almost a fifth (18%) had a physical disability, while 28% had a 'long-term health condition'. Two fifths (41%) of those with a physical disability reported they were affected 'a lot' in how they can interact socially with others because of their disability, while a fifth (18%) reported they were not affected at all. Similarly, two-fifths (40%) of those with a long-term health condition reported they were affected 'a lot' in how they can interact socially with others because of their condition, while a quarter (26%) reported not being affected at all. While only 8% reported having a mental health problem, half of those were affected a lot in how they can interact socially with others because of their condition, with a further 38% affected 'a little'.

Health, social networks and loneliness

Just over half (53%) of respondents reported their health as being excellent or good, while 47% described their health as fair or poor. The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was 24.3, which is slightly higher than the national average (23.6).

Over three fifths of respondents described themselves as hardly ever or never lonely, while around a fifth (22%) described themselves as lonely some of the time, and 17% said they were often lonely. This is above the national average (5%) of the general population who report feeling lonely often (ONS, 2018). In general, men are more likely than women to report feeling lonely often and 25-34 year olds are more likely than other age groups to report never or hardly ever feeling lonely (78%), while only 39% of people aged 55-64 years reported this. These figures go against the national trend of young people having the highest levels of self-reported loneliness. A third of those aged 75-84 years old reported feeling lonely often, making older people the most vulnerable group to experience loneliness.

People living alone were more likely to report feeling lonely often, and less likely to report never or hardly ever feeling lonely. Homemakers were significantly more likely to report feeling lonely often than those in education, training or employment. Retired people were significantly more likely to report feeling lonely often – they were also less likely to report never or hardly ever feeling lonely. These are in line with the national data concerning loneliness (ONS, 2018).

When analysing health-related and loneliness-related data, all health indicators demonstrated that those with health conditions were significantly more likely to report feeling lonely. The table below provides a breakdown of the different health conditions and the experience of loneliness.

	Feeling lonely often	Never or hardly ever feeling lonely
Mental health issues	44% (15%)	12% (65%)
Physical disabilities	38% (13%)	38% (67%)
Health impairments	30% (5%)	41% (80%)
Long term health conditions	24% (15%)	46% (68%)

Table 6: Loneliness and health

Resources and mental well-being

Generally, those with access to resources reported higher mental wellbeing. The mental well-being gap was most pronounced between those with/without emotional support resources, and between those with/without information resources.

Those without family or friend connections were much more likely to be lonely, but there was no significant difference in loneliness between those with resource connections to local organisations and those without. This underlines the importance of developing strong social ties in alleviating loneliness, rather than relying on institutional relationships.

Depth of resource networks

The survey asked respondents for up to five answers to each of the six different resource questions (i.e. up to 30 resources each, with repetition of the same resource allowed across different resource questions). Across the whole sample, 19% of the total possible answers were recorded, giving an indication of the depth of resource networks. It should be noted that answers such as 'family' and 'friends' can refer to multiple individuals, so resource networks are deeper than they appear based on these figures. While only around one in five possible answers were recorded, this is slightly higher than in other Connected Communities surveys (for example, in a similar survey carried out in Preston, 11% of all possible connections were reported).

The proportion of answers given varied across the different resource networks: 21% were given in social activity networks, 20% in local information networks, 20% in helping networks, 19% in emotional support networks, 17% on practical support networks, and 15% in change-making networks.

Breadth and importance of local resources

By combining all answers to the resource questions from all respondents, a picture of the local resource network can be constructed. Over half of all network connections (57%) were family connections, while just over a fifth were friendship connections, and one in ten were connections to local organisations. Together, these three types of resources account for 88% of all resource mentions.

Family, friends, neighbours, church and local doctors are among the most important connections in respondents' resource networks. Social media and online resources are reported as being relatively less important, as are carers (perhaps reflecting the transactional, functional nature of care provided).

The proportion of people who were often lonely was higher when access to a particular type of resource was lacking. This was particularly the case with social activity resources (46% without social connections were often lonely, compared to 12% of those with them), being asked for help (38% without were compared to 11% with), information resources (30% compared to 15%), and change-making resources (26% compared to 12%).

Family, friends, neighbours, church and local doctors are among the most important connections in respondents' resource networks.

Family, friends and local organisation ties dominate the different resource networks, although there is some variability between them. While family accounts for almost three quarters of connections for practical help, it accounts for just over two-fifths of connections in individual change-making networks. Local social resources (local organisations, councillors, community, church and neighbours) account for two-fifths of the change-making resources described by respondents.

Across all resources, almost two-thirds (64%) are described as 'essential', a fifth (21%) as 'very important', 9% as 'quite important', 3% as 'a bit important', and 2% as 'not important at all'.

The diagram opposite shows the resource network in Mirehouse, illustrating where respondents are connected to a certain type of resource, rather than counting the multiple, different types of connection to the same resource (e.g. multiple connections to family if practical support, emotional support, and change-making help are obtained from family).

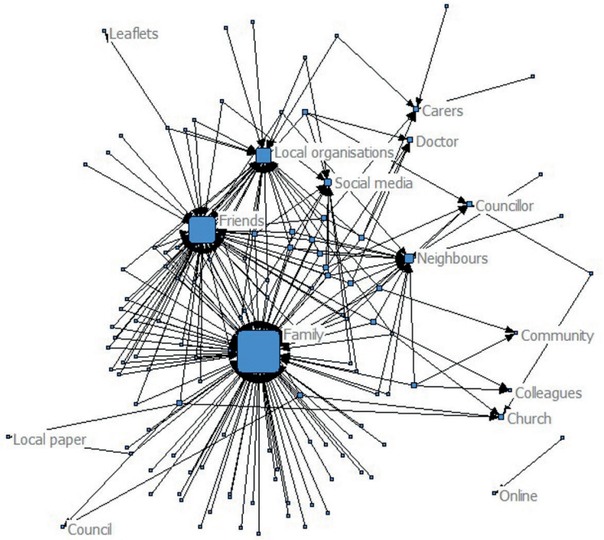


Figure 3: Spaciogram of social networks in Mirehouse

The diagram highlights the dominance of family structures in obtaining resources. It shows that there are a small number of very isolated people who are only connected to a single resource (e.g. to carers, online sources, or friends). It also shows that there are relatively few individuals (respondents) who are connected to multiple resources and who can currently act as a bridge between different sources of help, information and support.

Around one in eight people (13%) have no connection to family through which they can get access to any type of resource/support. Men (19%) were almost twice as likely to have no resource connection to family as women (10%), and the proportion of respondents with no connection to family increased with age.

More than half (52%) did not report a connection to a friend through which they can get access to any type of resource/support. There is a negative correlation between age and friendship resource connections (i.e. older people have fewer links to friends from whom they can access resources). And those with poorer health were also less likely to report friendship connections to resources.

Just one in seven (14%) report being able to access some kind of resource/support from a neighbour – 86% do not have such a connection. People who have lived in the area for five years or fewer are less likely to have connections to neighbours through which they can access resources. Relatedly, respondents aged 18-24 did not report any ties to neighbours, while older people are more likely to report neighbour connections.

Less than one in ten report using social media or online resources to access a specific resource (91% do not do so). Generally, older residents were less likely to have connections to resources through online or social media networks – only one person aged 55 or more had such a connection. And curiously, none of the nine people aged 18-24 reported a connection through social media, with respondents aged 18-24 only reporting connections to friends and family.

Two thirds (68%) do not have a resource-based connection to a local institution (a local organisation, council, councillor, doctor or church). Women (27%) were less likely to report connections to local institutions than men (44%). And generally, older residents were somewhat more likely to report ties to local institutions.

Summary

Perceptions of Mirehouse

Most people said that they were satisfied with the area as a place in which to live and agreed that people in Mirehouse look out for each other. The close community, friendly people and quiet environment were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being health and work. Key areas for improvement were identified as better services for young people and less litter.

Health

Almost half of residents had an 'impairment or health condition', almost a fifth had a physical disability, while a little under a third had a 'long-term health condition'. The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was 24.3, which is higher than the national average (23.6). Those with an impairment or health condition were significantly more likely to feel lonely, and have lower levels of mental well-being.

Loneliness

In general terms, people in Mirehouse reported feeling more lonely than the general population. The loneliest group of people were those living alone, those with health problems and older people. The least lonely people were 18-24 year olds. Connections were associated significantly with better mental health. People living with others were more likely to report never or hardly ever feeling lonely.

Community connections and social networks

Family alone made up over half the connections, and family, friends and local organisations made up 88% of all connections. Those with poor health were more likely to report having no connections to family resources. Friendship networks between young people (under 55 year olds) were weaker than those of older people.

Neighbourhood connections were weak, with 86% not reporting a connection with a neighbour – however, older people were more likely to have stronger connections with their neighbours. People in Mirehouse appear to have poor connections with local institutions, with these connections being still poorer in older people.

> *Family alone made up over half the connections, and family, friends and local organisations made up 88% of all connections.*

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 6

Discussion and recommendations

This following discussion highlights the key findings of the community survey that inform the recommendations made at the end of the chapter.

Discussion

Families matter in Mirehouse

The survey results revealed that families made up the core support networks for residents in Mirehouse. This indicates a strong degree of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), but weak bridging and linking social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Strong bonding capital – in which the connections within a group or community are characterised by high levels of similarity in dimensions such as demography, attitudes and available information resources – has its strengths. It can, for example, provide support to people with poor access to resources within a tight structural network.

This may be seen as being reflected in well-being measures for Mirehouse that are above the national average. However, it can prevent communities from connecting with individuals or organisations that are outside of their network, but might promote social change or enable other forms of association to be identified or utilised.

Such a social network composition can alienate communities, leaving them reluctant to engage with external services. Social capital of this kind may be seen as being associated with the conditions of a number of 'left behind' working class coastal communities, which have strong shared collective identities, tightly bound in their industrial past (House of Lords Select Committee on Regenerating Seaside Towns and Communities, 2019).

There is no one preferred form of social capital; rather, the strongest, most resilient communities possess all forms of social capital...

Furthermore, such an inward facing approach to the community, while having its advantages, can leave new residents vulnerable to social isolation through exclusion. Equally, this may leave established community members (particularly older residents) vulnerable to social isolation as new forms of social connectivity fail to fill the space vacated by friends and family who may have moved into supported living, moved away, or died.

This perhaps explains why people with health conditions are more vulnerable to feeling lonely, because the level of bonding capital that characterises their community prevents them access to the social networks that enable them to learn about supportive services available through local institutions.

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

Turning the gaze outwards

'Bridging social capital' means creating connections that link people together where traditionally they may be divided by race, class or religion. And these associations that 'bridge' between communities, groups or organisations look 'outwards', rather than 'inwards'.

An extension of bridging social capital, is 'linking social capital'. This describes the respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutional power gradients – or authority gradients – in society. It differs from bridging social capital because the power differences between partners are a conscious part of the relationship. While bridging social capital develops horizontal trust between cultural groups, linking social capital involves classic power hierarchies.

There is no one preferred form of social capital; rather, the strongest, most resilient communities possess all forms of social capital, utilising these different networks to meet their different needs.

Recommendations

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

1. Overall, initiatives seeking to build bridging and linking social capital, through connecting with local institutions, would be particularly beneficial for Mirehouse.

2. Survey data revealed that those with physical or emotional health needs reported poorer social networks, lower levels of emotional well-being and higher levels of loneliness. Inclusive social prescribing initiatives, delivered through the local GP and in conjunction with neighbourhood networks, would serve to increase opportunities for people with these health barriers to access and connect with others – and are therefore recommended.

Building on the emerging social prescribing evidence base, an approach of this kind could have a positive impact on health at community levels – as well as at individual levels – which is important in the context of the Mirehouse community's experience of poorer health outcomes than Cumbria and the UK generally.

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

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

5. Survey results indicate that few residents have connections with those in positions of power, such as the local authorities. It is recommended that opportunities to connect residents with those with power and influence be created, especially for children and young people. Through developing linking social capital, trust between residents and statutory service organisations can be built and new means of co-production developed. Such linking capital will also encourage local government (and other governance and service organisations) to ground accountability for their policies and practices in authentic participation from the communities on which they impact.

Through developing linking social capital, trust between residents and statutory service organisations can be built and new means of co-production developed.

Limitations

We acknowledge that this study has a number of limitations including that of adding little to the literature on the perspectives and social connections of children and young people (under 18s) – or those from particular BAME groups living in the area. Targeted working with local organisations would be a useful measure to include in future research to ensure that all groups, especially the 'hidden' groups whose voices may be less well heard to be better included in the research process.

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

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

Summary

The Connected Communities approach helped children to connect with their community, realising their role, capacity and developing citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Mirehouse, with weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Mirehouse that were identified as being in the greatest need were those with health issues, older people and children and young people. In light of these results, it is recommended that Mirehouse:

1. **Builds bridging social capital through stronger networks with external agencies and organisations.**
2. **Responds to physical and mental health needs through effective community models of social prescribing.**
3. **Connects vulnerable older people living alone to reduce loneliness and social isolation.**
4. **Develops projects that provide social action opportunities for children and young people, including those based on the value and impact of intergenerational approaches.**
5. **Builds linking social capital through new and effective forms of connection and co-produced services between the community of Mirehouse and the local authorities, and other public agencies that represent them.**

PART 3: INVOLVE - CHAPTER 7

Community Feedback Event November 2018

After the data had been analysed by the community researchers and researchers at UCLan, a community 'playback workshop' was organised to share the findings with residents and local stakeholders, including survey respondents (where they had indicated they wanted to be involved), the community researchers and their families.

Posters giving notice of the feedback event were placed in several locations in the area (shops, community notice boards), advertised through UCLan's and partners' social media pages, and personal invitations issued to people on our mailing lists.

In November 2018, all the children involved in the community research were invited to attend a special evening community event where they could share the results of their research. Many children chose to attend, bringing parents and family members. The event was also attended by local stakeholders including elected members, local authorities, West Cumbria Child Poverty Forum and Well Whitehaven.

This community event exhibited the photography produced by the children, and the children were all given the opportunity to share their stories behind the photographs.

> *A central aim of this event was to celebrate the hard work and the achievements of the young community researchers.*

An overview of the research methodology was provided by UCLan, followed by an in-depth discussion with the children about the experience of being a community researcher and the results generated by the activity. The County Councillor for Mirehouse presented the community researchers with certificates and acknowledged their civic contribution to the local community. The event received local media coverage, resulting in a full-page feature.

A central aim of this event was to celebrate the hard work and the achievements of the young community researchers, and there was a strong sense of pride amongst those who attended. Indeed, the feedback activities revealed this to be one of the aspects of the entire project with the greatest impact. It also provided an opportunity to bring the school and the community together. The local community Centre was chosen as a geographically central venue for the event to allow for as many local people as possible to attend, and to enable participation from those, including parents, who may have been more reluctant to participate in an event of this kind in a school setting.

Playing back the data enabled reflexive conversations to take place; these being further stimulated through the use of social network maps to illustrate key findings and help people to visualise these networks. This allowed for the widest possible engagement in the process of data analysis, and in generating ideas for local interventions that could make a key difference in tackling identified local needs based on the understanding the connections (and disconnections) that the data revealed.

In previous projects, this process has helped to shift understandings of community from one based solely on place, to one based on relationships, and to spark an explicit understanding of the outcomes arising from such social relationships. More broadly, the process of change – relational and network building – is central and based on previous experience of this research approach and extensive local participation. Communities may develop social initiatives on which to base bids for funds to support further capacity building.

Futhermore, these events provided children with the opportunity to present information to specific individuals with public responsibility, such as the elected member of the County Council, as well as members of the public locally. This was a significant feature of the events - public recognition of the children's achievements from such individuals, serving to enhance the children's sense of their own confidence, capacity and citizenship.

Summary

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

PART 3: INFORM - CHAPTER 8

Co-productive workshops

The children involved in the community research also participated in a number of co-productive workshops where they worked alongside local partners to explore possible interventions to meet the needs of the community identified in the research. This activity was partly in response to the recommendations made in Chapter 6 concerning the building of linking social capital:

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

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

Copeland Borough Council

Copeland Borough Council was involved in two main ways. Firstly, through the Child Poverty Task and Finish Group, and secondly through Well Whitehaven.

Child Poverty Task and Finish Group: Copeland Borough Council's Child Poverty Task and Finish group approached UCLan to seek advice in the direction of their work. This provided an opportunity for the council to work alongside the children in reflecting upon the results of the survey, and to co-produce interventions to meet their needs. Results revealed that there were limited connections between the local authorities and Mirehouse, and that the council was not seen as an effective change maker. In order to explore this in more detail with reference to child poverty, a workshop was held with the children, two local elected members and a scrutiny officer.

This experience provided the opportunity for the children to work alongside real change makers and influencers within their community, and to learn more about the democratic processes of the Local Authorities. Through this process, the children's understanding of the causes, consequences and experiences of child poverty were explored, and they were invited to suggest possible solutions. One of the reoccurring themes was that of ensuring that children's voices were heard and in response to this, Copeland Borough Council worked with children in the development of a Children's Charter – the council's pledge to ensure that the interests of all children will be at the forefront of all policy development.

Well Whitehaven: Well Whitehaven is a community-based health initiative in the Mirehouse area, led by Copeland Borough Council. The two community development officers held a number of sessions in which the children were invited to share their views on what they would like to see the initiaitive achieve in their area. Through this process, two children wrote and submitted successful funding bids to Well Whitehaven. One project focused on family and community–based litter picks, and the other was a project called 'Youth Connectors' – an intergenerational connectivity project where children design and deliver community connectivity events (which includes managing a budget of £200 per event). Funding for this project required two of the children involved to pitch the idea during a community bidding event, which they did successfully.

Cumbria Constabulary

PCSO Mark Fishpool attended a number of sessions within the school to listen to children's concerns about anti-social behaviour in Mirehouse, based on their sharing of evidence gained from the community walks. PCSO Fishpool responded by explaining the role of the police service and the ways in which residents can report crime in their area. The children were also able to ask PCSO Fishpool about his experiences of being a PCSO, and he was able to offer some general pointers as to how people join the service. The presence of a uniformed officer visiting the school also caused a great deal of excitement within the group.

Age UK

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

Home Group

Home Group, the local social Housing Association attended a session where the children shared their evidence from the community walks – highlighting their concerns regarding the lack of safe spaces to play, partially due to play parks being closed by Home Group. The Housing Officers listened attentively and have committed to respond to these concerns.

Summary

Workshops that are established to connect children with a range of other people and relevant organisations can yield fruitful results when exploring interventions to meet the needs of communities. Furthermore, the process of participation can be considered to be beneficial in itself, since it generates linking social capital (social capital then arises from the relationship between young people and those in positions of power). As external partners are invited to share experiences with children in their own classroom setting, these workshops can also add a great deal of diversity and excitement to the projects in which the children are involved!

PART 2: UNDERSTAND - CHAPTER 9

The impact of being a Community Researcher

A core element of Connected Communities lies in its use of community researchers, and the empowering experiences that can be created for those involved. In order to understand these participative representations of citizenship, a number of methodologies were adopted. These will be described and followed by a summary of the key impacts that research participation had on the children involved.

Methodologies

A qualitative research approach was adopted to understand the experience and impact of being a community researcher, deploying a pedagogic approach based on the use of post-it notes, mini focus groups with children, and interviews and focus groups with teachers.

Post-it note pedagogy (Quigley, 2012)

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

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

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

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

> *As this less traditional process – rather than being based principally on a paper exercise – involved moving around the classroom, it was much better received.*

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

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

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

Mini focus groups with children

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

Six focus groups took place, comprising between three and five participants together with the lead researcher. Audio recordings were sent for external transcription and code was written – with codes assigned to each recording. Text transcripts of each focus group were also produced.

Focus groups and interviews with teaching staff

Focus groups were also held with teachers of the children involved to identify the impact that it had on the children, and to explore the practical implications of such a project for the school. The teaching assistant who supported the project and the Headteacher were interviewed to explore in more detail the emerging themes from the focus groups, and to develop an understanding of the project from the teaching staff perspective.

School performance data

School data for students who had been involved with the project was also examined to identify any academic outcomes that could be considered to be a result of this involvement.

Results

The data was triangulated to understand the processes through which citizenship had been enhanced and community capital developed.

The value of community-based learning

When asked to describe the community group, a number of children said it was "*fun*", "*awesome*" and "*amazing*". Taking part in activities beyond the school gates caused much excitement, as evidenced by Katie: *"we went out places; we enjoyed it, like missing school!"* However, the benefits experienced by the children went beyond the exuberance of missing school, with a number of teachers reflecting on the impact it had back in the classroom:

> *"This is more, obviously, we do quite a lot in theory, and to me this was actually putting it into practice. So, there was a purpose for what they were doing and why they were doing it, so they could see the end results as well. Whereas we can say, well we'll do this and we'll do that, they can actually say, well we did this and we did that".*

More traditional, paper-based classroom activities were also cited as being fun as they gave the children opportunities to voice their views about their community: *"sometimes even the writing down could be fun because you've got to find other people's opinions on different stuff"* (Kevin). The value in combining fun activities with serious learning and outcomes was commented on by a number of children, with reflections including: *"we were sensible but had fun"* and *"I really liked it because as well as being very helpful to the community we could have some fun as well."*

The impact of this learning has been evidenced in a number of ways. When compared with their peers, a higher proportion of pupils involved in Mirehouse Community Superheroes achieved their end of year targets across all subjects. The Mirehouse Community Superheroes group also comprised pupils who achieved a higher end of year standard across all subjects. These results must be viewed with caution, however, as the sample size of this study is too small to infer statistically significant outcomes and the results may have been skewed by the presence of three high achievers. Nonetheless, it provides an encouraging pointer to the possible impact of participation in Mirehouse Community Superheroes on academic outcomes – highlighting the case for more research in the area.

Teachers reflected on how the community-based curriculum covered within Connected Communities complemented the Catholic concept of 'stewardship', a required aspect of the curriculum for Catholic schools. This was summarised by Mr. Brown: *"I think it's really empowering actually. Because I've also noticed it when we're talking about religion… being a good steward... about looking after the earth, and looking after each other".* In addition to complementing the PSHE curriculum, teachers noted that the community group may have impacted on *"speaking and listening"* in a range of subject areas: "in geography, in RE" and *"in terms of English, if the children were doing anything, written reports, letters"*. These teacher accounts suggest that the value of a community-based curriculum could possibly transcend personal development and support academic learning across a range of subjects.

Cultivating confident citizens of the future

All of the children expressed an increased awareness of their community, and their role within it. For example, Lorna reflected: *"I really do feel empowered because we know that this can make a change, so we know that our work will make a change to Mirehouse"*. Indeed, this was supported by teachers who reported observing increased community consciousness and an awareness of their own capacity. This suggests that a Connected Communities approach delivered within school can contribute to the social dividends of citizenship and capacity.

> *"And it was obvious that they were lacking that understanding of what community is, they see it more as a base rather than lots of things that contribute to what a community is. Whereas they always felt part of the school community, part of the church community, but it's taken it out of that and sort of encompassing it all, if that makes sense. So those two little bits are just aspects of this whole community, which is what we're aiming for isn't it?"*

There was a clear enjoyment to be gained through the activities, as reported by Charlotte: *"doing all this work gives me a more positive feeling about it, about Mirehouse because I've learnt more about it and I know that we have made a change to it"*, while Trinity added:

> *"It's given me a boost really because... now I know about the community, not just Mirehouse, other communities too, because they're all the same really... so it's given me the impact like I know how I can help the community now, so maybe I should go and do some of it."*

This enjoyment was observed by the teachers, as noted by Ms. Cross: *"the children, they just love, love what they're doing, and they can see the difference they're making"*.

Children were able to provide examples of how they had acted in more civically minded ways since being part of the community group, particularly surrounding litter. For example, John said: *"if I'm walking about and I see rubbish, I find a bin to put it in, so it doesn't affect anybody"* and Ellie described how she challenged her friends who dropped litter: *"I was telling them they shouldn't do it and they need to put it in the bin, and they did."*

However, some of the children expressed concerns that their newfound capacity would not be sustained following the completion of the Connected Communities research and sessions within their school. Mason, for example, observed: *"now that it's finished I don't think we'd be able to do as much"*. This highlights the need for structure and organisational responsibility to provide sustainability for these community-based interventions.

A core personal outcome of the Connected Communities project for many of the children involved was a marked increase in confidence. Tia said for example, being part of the group was *"good and made you feel happy about yourself"*, while Rosie reflected on how being part of the group built her confidence – something that was especially important to her because she had been bullied in the past: *"before I didn't really like to talk to people, but now I feel I can talk to people and they won't be mean to me"*. When asked what helped to develop this confidence, a number of children cited having the opportunity to talk to "new people", particularly those in positions of power, as being a significant factor.

Teachers reported that they observed an increased confidence in the children involved in the project, particularly those who had previously struggled. For example, teachers said that they observed quieter children raising their hands more in class, which they felt was a result of being involved in a project that encourages active participation in all children, where all views were given equal weighting:

> *"The ones that have the answers… and keep it in, in case it's wrong… they're the ones that have low self-esteem, hardly no confidence. [In this project] they work together with the other children, and they actually speak, they have a voice, and you can see them flourish, because they're into something and they can see that it's making a difference."*

"They're getting their confidence, their self-esteem's grown, and… they're working together and no one's telling tales on one another, they're just one big group and they know that all of them is making a difference."

These accounts highlight the personal value that can be gained from a community-based curriculum being delivered within a school-based setting; value that is not confined to development of community consciousness levels and examples of civic behaviour, but which also includes growth in confidence and self-esteem.

Strong Group Identity and Pride

A strong group identity, characterised by teamwork and social action, was formed within the group: *"it's a group that we all work together to make a better community"* (Jackson). This group identity transcended classroom-based activities, with some of the less social children being invited to join existing groups: "*they're actually playing outside of school together as well. I heard a couple of boys saying to Mitchell 'oh are you playing out tonight? We're going to go and play football'... it was just nice"* (Mrs White). Other teachers noted that the children were seen to be very proud of belonging to the group:

> *"They told me some of the things they'd done so far, the people they'd met. They talked about the mayor and they talked about where they were going, there was a walk planned, and they said they were hoping it would lead up to about making it a better place for them to live in."*

The identity of the group was further underpinned by a local printing firm that donated free 'Mirehouse Community Superheroes' t-shirts, thereby providing an example of how businesses can contribute to a local community development initiative.

Litter picking, a very public community activity, was most frequently cited as effectively building pride in the children. Mason said: *"I'm quite proud of the litter pick because like now, you see it now because it's still a little dirty but normally there's loads because loads of people go"*.

The Ofsted Inspection that took place during the course of the project also noted the role of the Connected Communities project in relation to the environmental improvements in which the children were involved:

> *"Pupils are extremely proud of their community. As part of the University of Central Lancashire's 'Connecting Communities' project, pupils take responsibility for their local environment. For example, pupils take part in litter picking, which demonstrates their active role in the town"* **(Ofsted, 2018, p. 6)**.

The strong pride and identity that the group demonstrated did have a negative consequence, however. A number of children experienced negative reactions from their friends, who said that they were "showing off" as being part of this special group:

> *"She was saying, well most of us don't like you when you used to come out of community group because you'd brag about all the things you'd done, and we went, 'well, we're helping the community, you wouldn't do that if it were you doing it to help your community'."*

Indeed, it could be that the group was seen as excluding all other pupils in the year group, and this issue needs to be considered in the future development of any school-based community projects.

Creating a culture of reciprocity between authority figures and children

Evaluation activities revealed that the visits from external partners positively impacted on the children's experience of the project. Justin reflected on his learning gained through working with these different partners: *"I didn't realise that you can do things and if you work with the right people you can do anything"*.

An important component of this relationship was that of allowing the children the opportunity to express their views honestly – and have these treated with respect. This was felt by the children to be of great value, with Madison adding:

> *"We can actually discuss our thoughts about Mirehouse, instead of just lying about it... because someone will like it, and you'll want to be friends with them, so you'll say the same thing... but in the community group, where we talk, you can actually say what you think."*

The process whereby people perceived to be in a position of power (such as the police or those from Local Authorities) worked with the children was helpful in enabling them to feel valued and validated. The power of these visits was embedded in the fact that the adults did not just listen, but they also returned to the school and responded through both words and actions. For example, Mitchell describes how the police responded to the children's concerns surrounding off-road motorbikes: "when the police came, when we told them about the motorbikes and stuff, like I haven't heard them much since". Carl added to this, reflecting:

> *"It was cool to talk to the police... I could see their point of view and how they were going to help as well... like how they were going to help us to help... we could tell what we would like to work on and they could help us do it and get it achieved."*

The implementation of the Children's Charter by Copeland Borough Council was also cited as being of significant impact for the children. Christian described how he felt this gave the group a voice:

> *"When we started, we were saying about children don't have as much say, and now it's like children do... it like the Children's Charter coming out and we started that, like no one really knew about it but now loads of people know about it."*

When the Children were first told that their data was being used to inform the Charter, Elise, who was seen to be visibly moved said: *"we've actually made a difference? My mum's on holiday, can I call her tonight to tell her?" She later proclaimed the Charter as "child power!"*

The excitement of meeting the Mayor and the voice that this gave the participants was captured in comments from pupils and teachers alike:

> *"I was excited because I'd never met him before and I thought it was cool saying that I met the mayor and talked to him."* **(Taylor)**

> *"You tell everyone, it's like 'oh, I met the mayor today!'"* **(Madison)**

> *"Yes I did! I got really excited!"* **(Shelby)**

> *"It is making a difference. I think it is having the mayor in, and having outside people coming in and just saying to the children, right, go for it. And they just say to them, right this needs done, this needs done, right, this is what we're going to do… they've got a voice!"* **(Mr Shaw)**

It is evident that the culture of reciprocity that developed between authority figures and the children was one of the most impactful elements of the Connected Communities project. Providing children with the opportunity to meet and speak to local representatives of these agencies generated feelings of empowerment, validation and agency in the children themselves. Seeing their ideas being brought to life by, for example, crime reduction or the development of the Children's Charter, further demonstrated to them vividly that their voices were being heard.

Discussion: Developing citizenship of the future through a community-based curriculum

Schools offer access to a large cohort of children from a range of backgrounds and a safe place for project delivery, with well skilled support staff. It was widely felt by school staff that involvement in the Mirehouse Community Superheroes project promoted the skills and values promoted within the PSHE aspect of the curriculum.

While primary school children predominantly attend a school within the geographic community in which they live, this changes when they progress to secondary school – often involving travel to schools sited in communities which can often be geographically, and perhaps symbolically distant. Therefore, accessing children at primary school age is both logistically practicable and developmentally appropriate, since children of primary school age typically have ideal aspirations and are starting to critically reflect on their social identity and position in society (Piaget, 1936; Erikson, 1950; Kohlberg, 1984).

Years five and six are seen as the most appropriate years in which to deliver such community-based participatory research action projects, as children in those years tend to possess the level of maturity and ability that is required to critically reflect on the concept of community and to conduct community interviews. More specifically, year five has been identified as the appropriate year from which to engage children in community interventions, as school requires year six pupils to focus their energies on their SATS exams.

A community-based curriculum is relevant to a number of recent policies, which will now be described.

> *'Civil Society Strategy: Building a Future that Works for Everyone', Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DfDCMS), August 2018*

The Civil Society Strategy explicitly states that young people have a central role to play. Within this, there are two main areas of focus:

Habits of social responsibility: The strategy states that *"the government wants to empower young people to shape the future of the country. This means helping them to develop the skills and habits of social responsibility during their childhood and youth"* (DfDCMS, 2018, p. 42). A community-based curriculum could develop those very skills.

Social responsibility in and out of school: The strategy states that:

> *Schools also play an important role. The government believes that social action, volunteering, and active citizenship opportunities are most effective when they are reinforced by knowledge of the rationale for being a good citizen. Citizenship teaching in schools, both as a discrete curriculum subject and as part of a whole-school approach, has been shown to enhance and reinforce participation individually and at school level.*
>
> *Citizenship, for example, is a mandatory part of the national curriculum in maintained secondary schools. At Key Stage 3 pupils are taught about the roles played by public institutions and voluntary groups in society, and the ways in which citizens work together to improve their communities, including opportunities to participate in school-based activities. (DfDCMS, 2018, p. 44).*

The community-based curriculum would complement and unlock aspects of the role of schools in this regard, providing children with the opportunity to develop their understanding of citizenship, along with actualising this through a community development mini-project.

> *'Loneliness Strategy: A Connected society: A Strategy for Tackling Loneliness' Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DfDCMS), October 2018.*

The Loneliness Strategy states that *"together as individuals, communities and government, we need to challenge this stigma by helping people to feel resilient and encouraging them to invest in and care for their own social well-being ahead of more vulnerable points in their lives."* The school-oriented grassroots project associated with a community-based curriculum represents a key element in this challenge to stigma:

"Loneliness will also be embedded into the relationships education curriculum in schools" (DfDCMS, 2018, p.47). This objective is currently being developed as has been stated in the recent report on loneliness in children and young people by the Office for National Statistics, making loneliness a standard feature of the school curriculum (now being taken forward as part of the loneliness strategy)" (ONS, 2018, p.40). A community-based curriculum clearly supports the fulfilment of this objective.

Supporting grass root opportunities: Developing opportunities for local organisations *"to strengthen local social relationships and community ties through funding for the sport and volunteering sectors and threading awareness of social connections through existing programmes"* was seen as vital (DfDCMS, 2018, p. 47). A community-based curriculum could connect schools and children with partner organisations to develop evidence-based interventions to enhance social connections in communities.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education: There is no recent information regarding PSHE available on government websites, the most recent being from 2013. There, it is stated that:

> *Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a non-statutory curriculum subject which develops the knowledge, skills and attributes all pupils need in order to keep healthy and safe and to prepare them for life and work... PSHE can encompass many areas of study (Department of Education, 2013).*

A community-based curriculum could provide schools with a broad approach that allows them to develop a project responding to the specific needs facing their immediate communities. Evidence from the Mirehouse Community Superheroes project suggests that the Connected Communities approach had a significant impact on pupils' personal and social development, specifically in relation to increased confidence, participation and community consciousness.

Summary

The accounts provided by children and teachers illustrate that the value of a community-based curriculum potentially transcends personal development (through community consciousness, civic behaviour, confidence and self-esteem), supporting academic learning across a range of subjects.

A strong group identity was formed, which developed friendship groups and created a great sense of pride. The culture of reciprocity that was developed between authority figures and children was one of the most impactful elements of the Connected Communities project. And providing children with the opportunity to meet and speak to people with local positions of power, such as the police and mayor, generated feelings of empowerment and validation.

Seeing their ideas being brought to life, for example, through crime reduction or the development of the Children's Charter, further demonstrated to them that their voices were being heard. These results can be seen as representing a powerful case for the development of further community-based activities within a school setting which, in reflecting a range of recent policy recommendations, would contribute significantly to their implementation.

PART 4: CONNECT - CHAPTER 10

Co-produced projects to enhance community capital

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

- **Youth Connectors**
- **Copeland Borough Council's Children's Charter**
- **Celebrating Connected Communities**

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

Youth Connectors: An intergenerational connectivity project

Project summary

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

Community needs being met:

- Focused Youth Provision
- Connectivity projects for older people

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

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

Aim

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

Objectives

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

Impact

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

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

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Citizenship

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

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

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

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

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

Capacity

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

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

Social Value

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

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

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

Legacy

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

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

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

Children's Charter

Project summary

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

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

Community needs being met:

- Youth focused provision
- Develop joint working opportunities

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

Aim

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

Objectives

1. **Develop a Task and Finish Group**
2. **Understand the views of local children and young people**
3. **Apply these views to a workable Children's Charter**
4. **Formally adopt the Charter**

Impact

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

1. **Focus groups with young people and adults**
2. **Interview with policy officer**
3. **Policy papers, council reports**

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

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

Citizenship

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

Capacity

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

Legacy

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

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

Celebrating Connected Communities

Project summary

Celebrating Connected Communities brought together primary school children and community researchers to explore different methods used in social science research in a fun and exciting way. Through workshops and art, the day raised awareness of the role and impact of social sciences in the UK today, and provided opportunities for the children to engage in research themselves.

The event drew upon expertise from a number of applied research centres in the University of Central Lancashire's School of Social Work, Care and Community, providing access to a range of methodological approaches, including surveys, community mapping, photo-voice and art. Primary schools in the Whitehaven area were specifically invited to participate, building on local community engagement research and public engagement work already done, using local knowledge to recruit those less likely to be able to access science events. The central theme was 'community' and how we can better understand and strengthen our communities. We hoped that this would ignite the imagination of local children to embark on their own community development projects, as we have been doing locally for two years. The event launched the West Cumbria Schools and Social Science Network, providing opportunities for follow-up activities with the children involved in the festival, and adding to the limited evidence evaluating the impact of such events.

Community needs being met:

- Youth focused provision
- Develop joint working opportunities

Funding awarded:
£1,000 (Economic and Social Research Council)

Key Partners:
UCLan, Copeland Borough Council, St Begh's Catholic Primary School, Monkwray Primary School, The Beacon Museum

Aim

1. **To raise awareness and improve primary school pupil's understanding of social science**
2. **To raise aspirations of primary school pupils, particularly around going to university and engaging with the social sciences**

Objectives

1. **Engage a cohort of primary school pupils in a social science event**
2. **Launch West Cumbria Schools and Social Science Network**

Impact

The impact assessment of Celebrating Connected Communities pupil has been carried out using the following methods:

- **Pupil pre and post event survey**
- **Pupil post session survey**
- **Field notes from sessions**
- **Focus group with teachers**

Community Capital Framework

Well-being

Almost all pupils reported enjoying the event, with a common phrase in the feedback being *"it was fun"*. All sessions were assessed in terms of children's enjoyment, and positive feedback for these sessions ranged from 76%-99%. Elements that teachers felt contributed to the enjoyment of the day included being able to learn outside of school and being able to use equipment, such as cameras. The interactive nature of the sessions was also felt to significantly contribute to the pupils' enjoyment.

Citizenship

Teachers reported they felt the event provided pupils with the opportunity to critically reflect on the role they can play in helping their community. At the end of the day all pupils were asked to think about ways in which they can use social sciences to help the community. Responses included *"to stop pollution and deforestation"*, *"stop people bullying people from other countries"* and *"helping make homes for animals in the wilderness"*.

Capacity

The event introduced the pupils to a new form of science which they had not previously studied. After taking part in the event, 92% of pupils said they understood what social science is, 94% said that social science is interesting and 90% of pupils said they were interested in being involved in social science projects in the future. The pupils were all asked what they learned from the day and responses tended to focus on practical issues around data collection in research, such as *"taking pictures of landscapes"* and *"expressing feelings in photos and art"*. Critical thinking skills relating to communities were also felt to be developed, with a number of pupils reporting that their main learning was gained from *"looking at and thinking about the good places and the bad places in my community"*. Furthermore, teachers felt that the event provided the pupils with skills that can be applied across the school curricular, including geography, science and maths.

Legacy

The Celebrating Connected Communities event provided a space for young people to become inspired by social sciences, and the projects worked with the schools to ensure that they had the resources to feel confident in continuing this work. One school ran a weekly social science club, where they reflected on the main societal challenges affecting their community and planned social action activities to overcome these challenges and make the world a better place.

Chapter Summary

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

PART 4: CONNECT - CHAPTER 11

Report summary

Chapter 1: An introduction to Connected Communities

The University of Central Lancashire's (UCLan) Centre for Citizenship and Community developed the Connected Communities approach (Parsfield, et al., 2015). It is an action research strategy to explore how the community dimension of people's lives contributes to well-being – and can be developed to analyse how different interventions build resilient, inclusive communities and empower individuals to take greater control of their lives through relationships based on shared concerns and mutual trust. This process can serve to enhance community capital. The Connected Communities study aimed to build on the key principles identified in the original research undertaken collaboratively by the RSA and UCLan [Parsfield et al. (2015)].

Specifically, it sought to:

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

Chapter 2: Community focus – an overview of Mirehouse

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

Chapter 3: Community researchers

Schools can be an effective means of recruiting children in research, and can also be helpful in gaining and maintaining contact with parents. Allowing children to recruit through their own social networks can be a useful tool for recruiting community researchers. The strong relationship between the researcher and the school provided a solid foundation for the project, with the school contributing their knowledge, skills and resources, all of which were invaluable in developing a well-organised and engaging project.

Chapter 4: Research process

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

Chapter 5: Survey results

Perceptions of Mirehouse: Most people said that they were satisfied with the area as a place to live and agreed that people look out for each other. The close community, friendly people and quiet environment were identified as being the best features of the area, with the main social barriers being poor health and lack of work. Key areas for improvement were identified as better services for young people and less litter.

Health: Almost half of residents had an 'impairment or health condition'. Almost a fifth had a physical disability, while almost a third had a 'long-term health condition'. The average mental well-being score reported by the sample was 24.3, which is higher than the national average (23.6). Those with an impairment or health condition were more significantly more likely to feel lonely, and had lower levels of mental well-being.

Loneliness: In general terms, people in Mirehouse reported feeling more lonely than the general population. The loneliest group of people were those living alone, those with health problems and older people. The least lonely people were 18-24 year olds. Connections were associated significantly with better mental health. People living with others were more likely to report never or hardly ever feeling lonely.

Community Connections and Social Networks: Family alone made up over half the connections, and family, friends and local organisations made up 88% of all connections. Those with poor health were more likely to report having no connections to family resources. Friendship networks between young people (under 55 year olds) were weaker than those of older people. Neighbourhood connections were weak, with 86% not reporting a connection with a neighbour. Older people were more likely to have stronger connections with their neighbours. People in Mirehouse appear to have poor connections with local institutions, with this being stronger in older people.

Chapter 6: Discussion and recommendations

The Connected Communities approach helped children to connect with their community, and to realise their role, capacity and citizenship within it. Survey results found strong bonding social capital in Mirehouse, with weak bridging and linking social capital. Groups within Mirehouse that were identified as being in the greatest need were those with health issues, older people and children and young people. In light of these results, it is recommended that Mirehouse:

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

Chapter 7: Community feedback event

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

Chapter 8: Co-productive workshops

Targeted workshops that connect children with relevant parties can yield fruitful results when exploring interventions to meet the needs of communities. Furthermore, it is a means to an end in itself, building linking social capital between young people and those in positions of power. These workshops can also add a great deal of diversity and excitement to projects when children are visited by external partners, inviting them into their classroom to share experiences.

Chapter 9: The impact of being a Community Researcher

The accounts provided by children and teachers illustrate that the value of a community-based curriculum potentially transcends personal development (through community consciousness, civic behaviour, confidence and self-esteem) – supporting academic learning across a range of subjects. A strong group identity was formed, which developed friendship groups and created a great sense of pride.

The culture of reciprocity that was developed between authority figures and children was one of the most impactful elements of the Connected Communities project. Providing children with the opportunity to meet and speak to people with local positions of power, such as the police and Mayor, generated feelings of empowerment and validation. Seeing their ideas being brought to life, for example, through crime reduction or the development of the Children's Charter further demonstrated to them that their voices were being heard. These results argue a strong case for the development of further community-based activities within a school setting, which would also respond to recommendations made in recent government policy.

Chapter 10: Co-productive projects

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

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Suzanne Wilson and Professor David Morris
University of Central Lancashire

The Centre for Citizenship and Community
Inclusion and Connected Communities in Policy and Practice

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