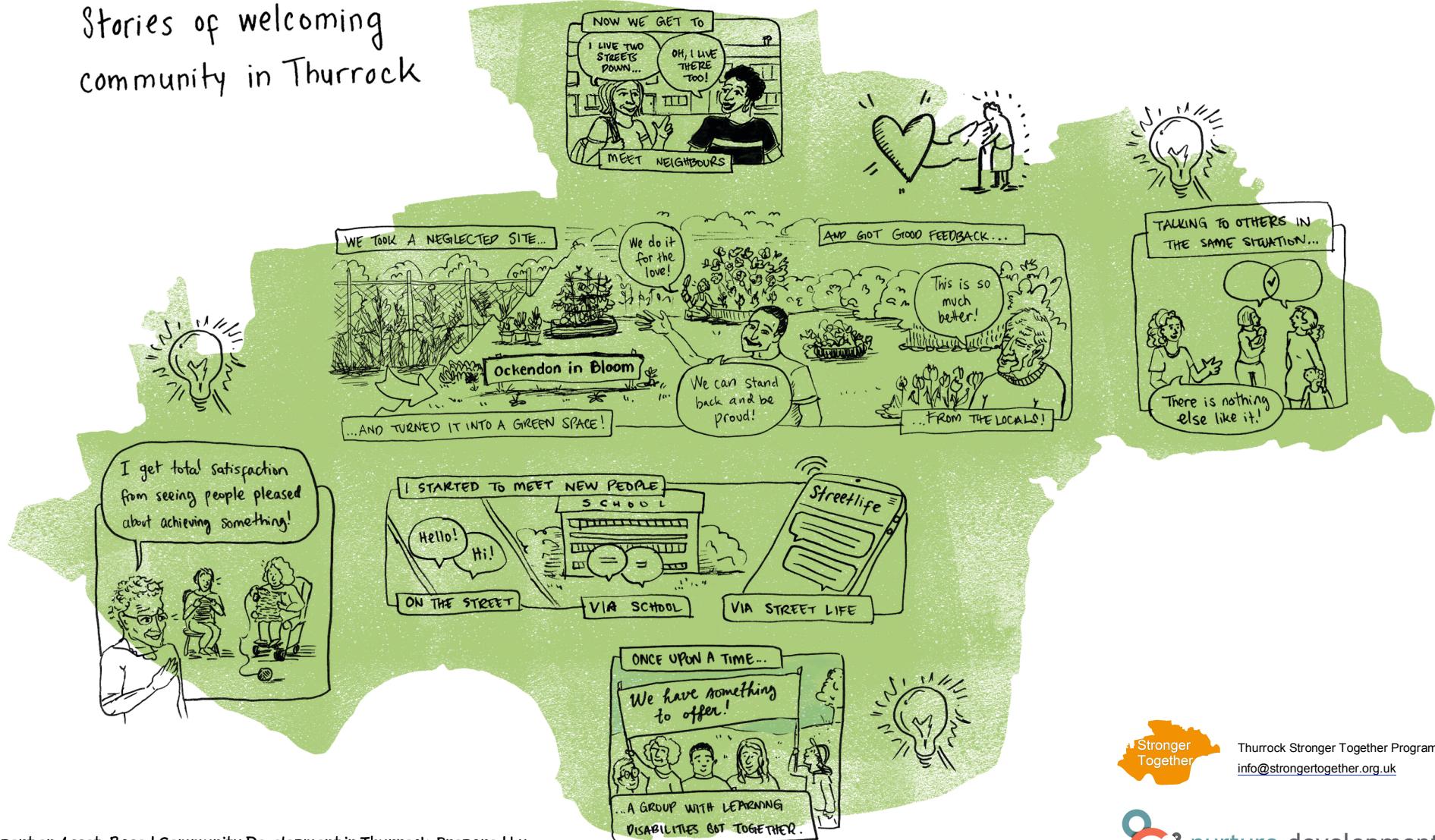


AT THE "HEART" of the MATTER

Stories of welcoming
community in Thurrock



A report on Asset-Based Community Development in Thurrock. Prepared by Nurture Development on behalf of Thurrock Stronger Together Programme, 2015.



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Heart of the matter – Contents

Preface	page 2
Introduction	page 3
Story sharing – how it works	page 4
Summary of the six stories	page 5

Stories of welcoming community - in people's own words

Gingerbread	page 6
Inside out	page 8
Friends	page 10
Green Fingered	page 12
Tea Club	page 14
Finding your passion	page 16
Key things the stories highlight about building a welcoming community	page 19

Preface

“Without community, there is no liberation.” – Audre Lorde

Stories have a profound impact on people’s lives. They inspire, console, and give meaning in difficult as well as joyful times. They also provide narratives which enable us to move from being atomized individuals to becoming networks of related people, with collective interests and shared dreams. Hence without stories, communities cannot prevail. The following document shares a small cross-section of the thousands of stories still to be told. These stories have been in part revealed by the effort of two local Asset-Based Community Builders working in Thurrock over the last year with the active support of the Thurrock Stronger Together Partnership.

What is Stronger Together?

The Thurrock Stronger Together Partnership promotes local, community activities that strengthen the connections between people. Stronger Together also encourages local people to have a greater say in what happens in their neighbourhood and to take control over where they live and the decisions that affect them.

To support all citizens across Thurrock in these civic actions, the Stronger Together Partnership has commissioned a range of catalytic supports including Local Area Coordination, Asset-Based Community Development, and Time-banking. This report focuses on some of the many citizen-led stories that have emerged specifically as a consequence of Asset-Based Community Development efforts over the last year (2014/15). The team that has supported this work was made up of two on the ground Community Builders, namely Teresa O’Keeffe and Christopher Pease, both funded by Thurrock Council and managed by Thurrock CVS. Nurture Development provided mentoring/training and technical support.

Why Thurrock Stronger Together adopted ABCD

The Partnership recognise the root causes of the vast majority of socio-economic and political issues are: disconnection and inequality. Research shows that one of the ways to address this disconnect is as close to people’s doorsteps as possible, since people will engage and connect around the things they care about, and most people will mobilise around the things that are close to home.

Building deeper social cohesion involves helping communities to discover, connect and mobilise the internal resources they have at grassroots level. Essentially it’s about making the invisible visible. Hence over the last year both Community Builders have supported local residents to join together to engage in a radical form of inclusion that has sought to surface energy among community members for growing interdependence in community life and reducing institutionalisation among those who have become most marginalised. They have started by shining a light on existing efforts, and sharing the stories of those local endeavours. They have also taken care to curate the new stories that are emerging as an increasing number of local residents become engaged in community building efforts.

The stories that have emerged are stories of citizen-led transformation, and are therefore best told by the citizens of Thurrock who have led them—hence the illustrations and the direct narratives that feature so prominently in this document. The pages to follow seek to provide a platform for those stories, to honour the people who told them and to curate their significance to a wider audience. We thank those who have shared their experiences, both for their inspiration and humility; they have done so in the hope that their stories will serve to inspire others in building their communities and sharing their experiences. After all a story shared is a community strengthened.



Cormac Russell, MD, Nurture Development

Stories of welcoming community in Thurrock

Introduction

In July 2015, Chris Pease and Teresa O'Keeffe, community builders in South Ockendon and Stifford Clays, invited residents to share and celebrate stories of building a welcoming community in Thurrock.

10 people came along to the Ockendon Centre and 9 people to Headon Hall in Stifford Clays, they shared their own personal stories of what they felt was important in building a welcoming community. With the support of Rob Vincent working for Nurture Development, stories were shared and discussed in small informal groups. Everyone then reflected together on a selection of stories which really got to the heart of what it means to build a welcoming community. Once the stories had been shared, we discussed what it was that makes a difference to people when it comes to building a supportive community

These were really enjoyable events and people spoke passionately about their experiences of connecting with other local people, and how they appreciated the support and generosity of other residents, and the importance of being accepted for who they are.

This report presents the stories that people shared, in their own words, with accompanying illustrations by illustrator Laura Sorvala. The illustrations help to bring the stories alive. The report also pulls out some of the key elements that people feel are important in building a welcoming community.

The method of sharing and analysing stories together was originally conceived to take place over time, leading to a body of stories that illustrate the importance of community building and help to gauge its impact over time. However, only one round of story sharing and analysis was conducted and so the collection of stories contained in the report can only provide a snapshot of the value of community building efforts, and begin to show the range of areas where it can impact on local lives.

If you are interested in getting involved in this kind of work in Thurrock, please do contact Nurture Development or Stronger Together (see details on back page).

Gathering stories of welcoming community over time

People from Thurrock aimed to come together regularly to share and reflect on stories of their community efforts. Over time, it was hoped that these stories could inspire others to become involved, to help everyone be clearer about what it is that matters in building a welcoming and inclusive community, and to get a sense of how community building efforts have helped make a positive difference to local lives. By sharing and comparing stories with community groups in other parts of the Borough there is also potential to take that inspiration and learning further and wider.

Many of the community groups are part of a Thurrock - wide initiative, 'Stronger Together' that seeks to build inclusive and welcoming communities across the borough. Gathering, sharing and reflecting on stories of community action is also a way to look at the contribution of this initiative over time, and the difference it is making to local lives. For more about this approach to learning from stories see: <http://emops.ning.com/page/most-significant-change-resources-and-links>

Story Catching - How it works



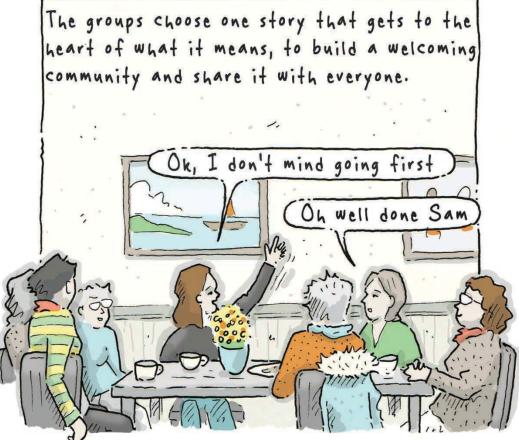
About what is important to them in building a welcoming community.



Everybody then discusses what these stories tell us about what really matters . . .



When building a welcoming community.



Our hope is to spread the word that these people have been positively affected . . .



And inspire others to get involved.

Summary of stories

The following stories were shared for the way they get to the heart of what it means to build a welcoming community. The full stories can be found on the following pages.

Gingerbread – supporting lone parents

A local mum is setting up a group for lone parents, since everything in the area seems to be for couples. It is important to be connected with and supported by others who understand and share your situation. Finding a venue that catered for kids was a challenge but they are moving forwards and have other ideas that they hope to follow up with, like a ‘Divorce Party’ for lone parents.

Inside out

Two young mothers started a free ‘fit club’ in the local area on Saturday mornings. They have a lot of connections with new mums in the area so are also setting up a ‘buggy fit’ club, so they can do some exercise with buggies without leaving their children. The clubs help people to get to know their neighbours – ‘the social connection part is as important as the exercise’.

Friends

A woman moved into the area from East London and found herself a bit lonely and wanting to connect with others, especially Asian mums, since she couldn’t find an Asian ‘community’. She set up a group for mums to get together at the Ockendon Centre and they subsequently met at each other’s houses or other local venues. She feels lucky to have very friendly neighbours, but also wants to help others who have not been able to make a connection. She has ideas for an event at the centre around Asian culture, around food or Asian cooking, since food is something everyone can relate to.

Green Fingered

Two residents spruced up a neglected plot of land, taking time to tidy it up and bring it back into shape. They have had good feedback from locals, especially the elderly, who enjoy looking at it. They enjoy stepping back and looking at what they have done, as well as the exercise they get from gardening. There is growing interest in the community from others who want to volunteer. There are likely to be more opportunities in future, for people who can make the regular commitment that plants and gardening needs.

Tea Club

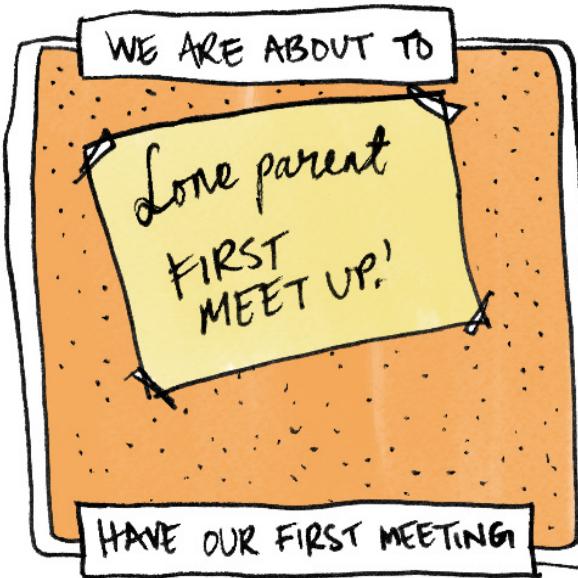
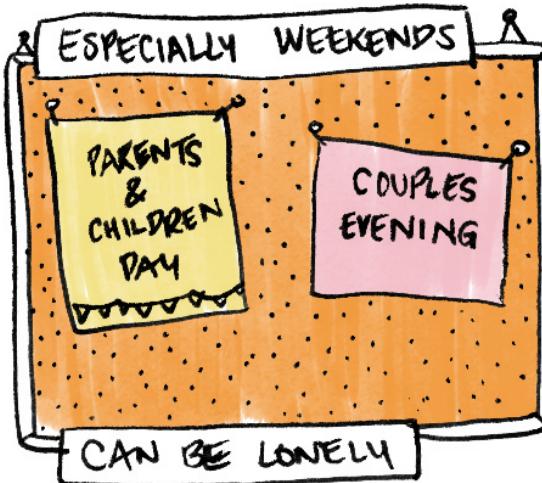
A group of people set up a ‘tea club’ for older people in the community who were on their own in the Chadwell area. They wanted to cook, share food and make it a real social event. The group faced some scepticism at first – since they are a group of people with learning disabilities – but the group has surprised a lot of people in a good way. They have had lots of people coming forward, to contribute equipment, and to offer fun activities. Building on the success of the tea club, they have continued to be inventive – organising shopping for those attending the club while they are there.

Finding your Passion

A local woman member of the Stifford Clays Community Forum Hub set up a knitting group, knitting for three neonatal units in London. She delivers wool and patterns and collects knitting from women who can’t get out for various reasons. Other groups of women are knitting in nursing homes, coming together and making friends in the process. Knitting brings the women a sense of achievement at being able to contribute, a connection with others in the community, and gives them an enjoyable hobby. It is also really personally rewarding to see what this activity brings to everyone involved.

Gingerbread

SUPPORTING LONE PARENTS



Gingerbread

Gingerbread is a lone parent charity and I wanted to start a group up in the area. Weekends can be lonely. You don't want to bother friends who are in couples and whose weekends are really family time. So I put something out on Aveley Parents about a group for lone parents, and Chris and another mum told me it was a great idea. Now we already have 22 members on a Facebook page and we are planning to have our first meet up in a week or so. We've got a venue lined up – the children's centre, but it is not easy to get to. We've thought about quite a few different venues, but they often don't have toys and stuff for kids.

We've had good feedback already. There is no group like it, and there is nothing for single parents. You need that connection with other people like you who understand. You can talk to others, but they don't know what it is like. You need support. Everything is for couples.

We also had the idea of a 'Divorce Party' for the parents.

What does this story show is important for building a welcoming community?

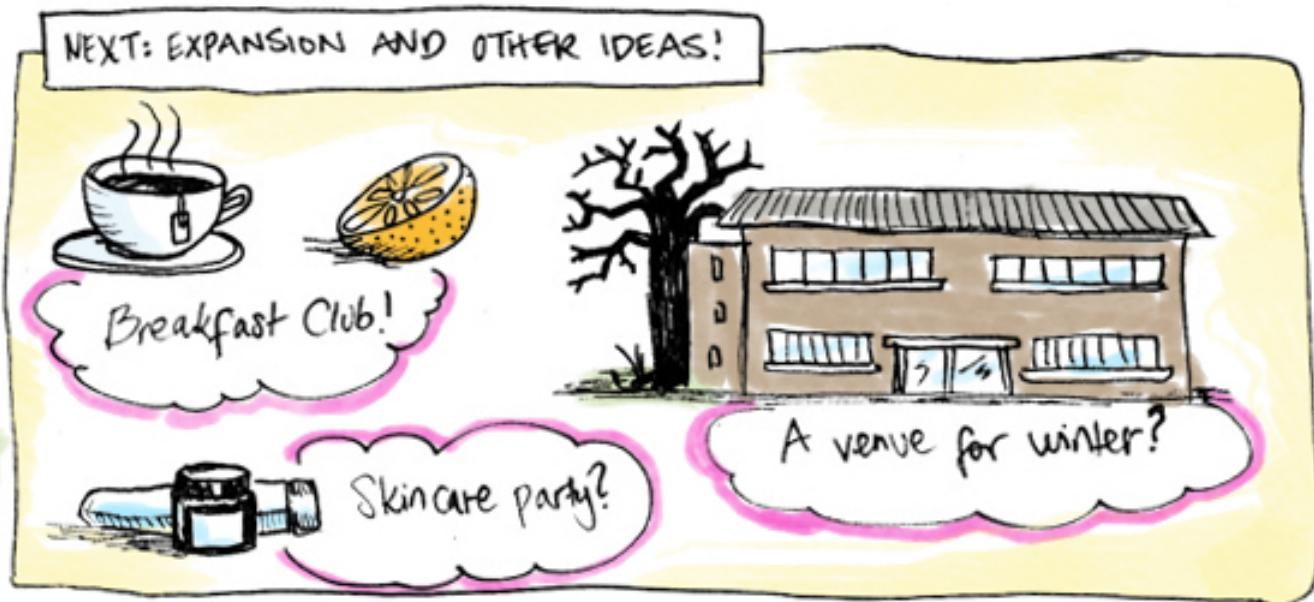
- **Catering for all different parts of the community:** 'There is no existing group that caters for lone parents – everything tends to be for couples'. It is important to have groups and activities for those who are not already catered for, but where there is a clear need.
- **Sharing experiences with others is an important way to get support:** 'You need that connection with others who have similar experience'
- **Connecting with others can help find the local resources to make things work.** In discussion, the residents identified a potential venue with soft play for children and recognised that finding venues that cater for children is a broader issue in the area.

Practical things coming out

- An offer of publicity from someone on a local forum, and another resident with a local website and Facebook page
- Recognition that the 'buggy fit' idea (see Inside out) could benefit single parents too
- A potential venue with a soft play area was highlighted by one resident.
- Need for more venues, and particularly those that cater for children was recognised as a general issue for the area.
- Advertising the group with 'venue to be confirmed' may find someone who has suggestions for this.

INSIDE OUT

Getting fit and healthy with a baby



Inside out

Shereen and I along with four others, we all 'work for 'Herbal life, a healthy nutrition company – who aim to promote good nutrition and exercise. We felt we wanted to get into the community to deal with the 20% exercise bit of it, as well as give people information. We started a fit club, it's completely free, every Saturday morning, people can come as and when they like, there are no restrictions to sign up. It is an hour of fun, exercise and team games, run by a fully qualified personal trainer. We don't have funding, we use our own money to get equipment and that. I work 2 days a week in a primary school. Shereen is at home.

The club has been running since May and we wanted to extend it. We felt there was another niche with a lot of new mums around - we wanted to start a 'buggy fit' club. We got to know quite a few mums from the classes we go to with our babies. So we are starting that in a couple of weeks, - the first one in Ockendon, and a second one in Aveley. Shereen and I have got a few routes marked out we are going to try - you do about half an hour speed walking and end up in one of the parks. We will do some exercise with the buggies, some without. It is just a way to get exercise into your life without leaving the children out as well. I know personally I started with the gym, but I do most of my exercise at home with baby.

We have a few other things in the pipeline as well. We are thinking of a 'healthy breakfast club' too, maybe we'll start by connecting to the fit club and buggy walk. Also we want to start something on skin care later in the year, using the Herbal Life range – maybe a skin-care party. It will be more of a girls night in, we'll try with our close friends and get their feedback. And maybe the ladies that come to fit club and then we can extend it. We do lots of leaflets and social media

publicity. The real test will be winter, we won't just be able to go out, but will need a venue.

What does the story show is important in building a welcoming community?

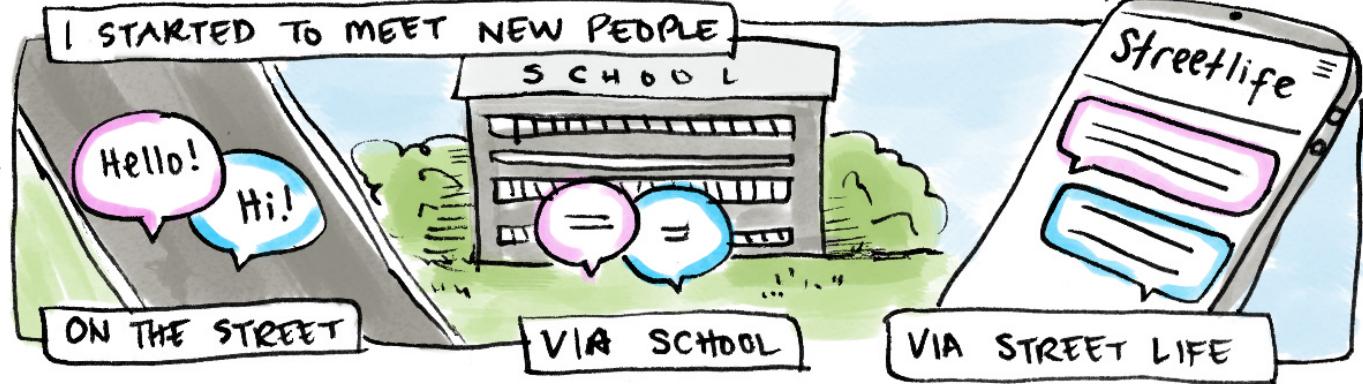
- **Existing opportunities can be built on:** the fit clubs built on experience of work with Herbal life but were independent and down to the initiative and fundraising of Shereen and Abigail. But they had an opportunity to do something practical around similar issues
- **The social dimension of the activities is as important as the fitness and health dimension:** "you get to know your neighbours, no reason to speak to them otherwise.... you are more likely to do it if you have fun with others....the social connection part is as important as the actual exercise"
- **Connecting with people is easier when it is an issue people care about:** "people are becoming more aware about being healthy and the issue of obesity.. so people are happy to come along"

Practical ideas

- Others mentioned interest in a Yoga class – and there was previously a session on Yoga at the centre, so there may be existing assets to draw on.
- The buggy-fit group may be of interest to the lone parents, there is an opportunity to link these two things up here.

Friends

- how to make them



Friends

I moved here 7 months ago from East London and found myself a bit lonely... I tried to make friends just going up to people saying hello. I talked to Chris on Street Life on the Internet and asked him if there were mums who wanted to get together. He said to come here to talk together and he said if I wanted to form a group he can provide a room here in the centre. So I met up with some of the mums in the school and just went up to strangers in the street and asked them if they want to come to the group. We did meet up, especially the Asian mums - because I didn't find any Asian community here. So I met up with a few of the Asian mums who got their friends to come to the group. We did meet on a Friday, once a week meeting her in the library. We became quite good friends so we ended up meeting in each others' houses, because the room here was sometimes not available, it was sometimes a problem. So, we meet up in gardens centres, Kids R us, or each others' houses.

In Ockendon people don't know much about Asian culture and stuff, and talking to Chrissie, during October we have a big festival – maybe we can do something in the centre: Asian food, dress, and maybe get people to know a bit more about Asian culture. We talked with Chris, planning to do Asian cooking class, and went to look for venue, but they hadn't finished the kitchen yet, we are waiting for that.

Now with the 'New Builds' I see quite a few faces so maybe there would be more interest to come around and meet up, since I sure they feel a bit lonely as I did when I started. I was lucky all my neighbours were very nice, asking me if I want to go out, but not everyone may be that lucky. I think people might be interested to meet up once a monthly. My kids have a few more friends to have around, they are more happy than when they started and I am a bit more happy with my circle of friends too.

What does this story show is important in building a welcoming community?

- **Connecting with other local residents and finding friends is vital for everyone's well-being:** "My kids have a few more friends to have around, they are more happy than when they started and I am a bit more happy with my circle of friends too"
- **Friendly neighbours make a difference, but it is also important to introduce yourself and reach out:** "when I moved in I introduced myself to them and took my kids, and when I knocked at the door – why are you here? but now they are nice to me and one of my neighbours invites me to everything. But you have to take the initiative to talk to people if you want them to be nice to you... it is also up to you too to go out and try... I have a neighbour who has been here 9 years and she doesn't know any of the neighbours. She says 'I wish I had done what you did... how could you manage to do that?' Maybe they would have been more friendly.. Maybe because they didn't think you are friendly".
- **Finding something everyone can relate to like food:** "food and cooking classes are a really good idea for learning about a culture... food is a good way to share and is the centre of everyone's life"

Practical ideas

- A re-vamp of the market with food stalls or a food festival. Build on the idea of different foods to re-vamp the local market rather than people going to Upminster, Dagenham and other places. Different communities could come to the street with street food or there could be a 'food festival' – not necessarily at the same time as the usual market.
- A 'say hello to each other' event that just allowed people to come and meet each other, using name badges and other things to make it work. This would get over the issue of there being so few public venues and spaces for people to come together and meet new people.
- **Giving children a chance and not writing them off:** You just need a bit of patience with these kids and they are quite happy... some have had older brother slightly naughty and they are labelled before they even walk through the door... Most of the kids around Matson have 'attitudes' apparently, but if you don't shout and talk down to them they are fine

Greenfingered



Green fingered

We both volunteer at Belhus' Park the small park behind Ockendon station, which was previously a landfill site. It has been going for a few years now. We also volunteer with 'Ockendon in bloom' which was started by another woman. They have a handful of plots across town - we do several of them. We found one directly half way between our houses. It was quite poorly managed. How did we get involved? It was word of mouth. Chris introduced me to Sonia. It was a domino effect of lots of connections... a friend went to one group and raved about it. I met Sonia who runs Ockendon in bloom. I said 'did you want more volunteers', because I work for the forum. I volunteered and knew Michael, and he liked it too. We have had nice feedback, especially from those who live opposite – it was knee high in weeds before, now we do pictures every week. Elderly people tend to comment more, young people don't. We put rubbish in bags at the side of the plot and some kids have set light to them, and some of the tyres used for plants got vandalised. We are trying to work around this – rather than leaving stuff out.

We have had a fair number of elderly people asking 'can you come and do our gardens?' So we have that in the back of our minds. We both ran out of space in our gardens. We do it for the love of it and the benefit of others to look at. We also do it to keep fit, and we feel proud of what we have done. We like to step back when we are done and say 'Cor, its great!' It is good work experience for some – one 15 year old boy was going to be a lawyer and now he wants to look at environmental science. I am thinking this could be a career avenue!

We are only managing one plot at the moment. When it is done we might look to others but we are keeping small at the moment. We can't open up just yet. I am putting things together to recruit, so we can talk to others, but we only have one plot at the moment. We have been talking to disabled groups, we have some funding, but involving others takes more organising. There is a lot of interest in volunteering

to do this sort of thing. Little Belhus' volunteer day on Friday is full but is expanding into Thursdays. There is a problem when plots don't get watered, like the council planters on Caffrey's parade shops. We need people to make a regular commitment so the plants don't die off.

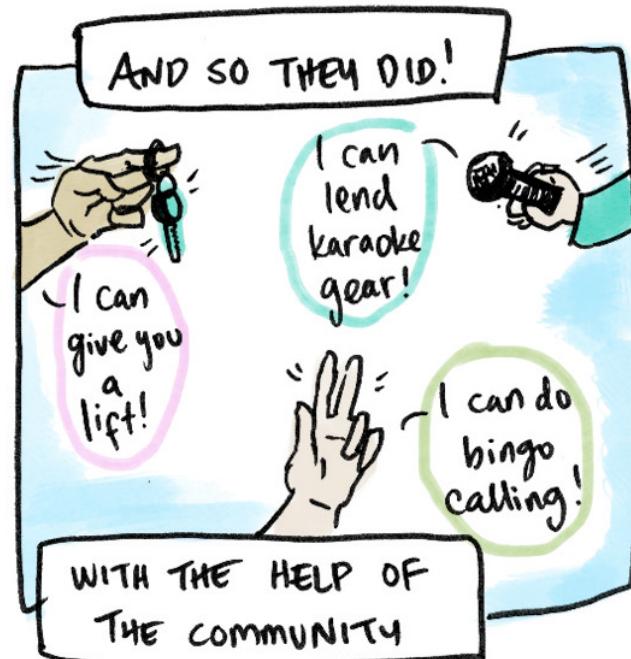
What does the story show is important in building a welcoming community?

- **Start with a passion:** Emma and Michael do the gardening 'for the love of it', and others get to enjoy the fruits of their endeavour
- **Finding connections through others – a 'Domino effect'** they got involved through different local people introducing them to others they were connected to.
- **One thing leads to another:** elderly people seeing the plot are requesting help with their own gardens, and more people are becoming interested in volunteering.
- **Building steadily:** they want to get it right with the existing plot and put in place the right support before moving too quickly to involve lots of other people "When it is done we might look to others but we are keeping small at moment."

Practical ideas

- One resident offered 20 tomato plants they have left over from a charity plant sale
- Chris reminded them of the 'Small Sparks' funding available for small amounts of money to help.
- Tapping into people using the garden centre was another idea – even if a small number of them could be reached.
- Finding people close to each of the plots that need tending would allow them to be looked after regularly more easily rather than relying on the same group of people to get to them all.
- There is space behind the old people's complex that might provide a future site

TEA CLUB ~ challenging stereotypes!



'Tea Club' – challenging stereotypes

The story I am sharing is about something Teresa taught me – you find strength in what often society says is the most unlikely of places. There are a group of people who are called 'customers' where they go, they are labelled as learning disabled. Their big passion was that they had something to offer to their community and they felt they were not going to be bound by the boundaries of people saying 'we are not going to go there because we are not like those people'. We had a conversation and one of the things they wanted to do was to start a 'tea club' for older people who were on their own in the Chadwell area. They had done some cooking lessons and they wanted to cook, bring people in and make it a real social event. They are making it happen.

There are barriers but the moment they started on this journey, the amount of people who came in with gifts - like someone said I am going to do bingo calling, or someone had a Karaoke machine, or we can get a bus to bring some of the people who are isolated. The beauty of it was... they had other ideas, there is a Tesco across the road, and one of the people really likes shopping for people, so he will go and do their shopping and they will get a lift home.

In a nutshell that is strong. You've got two groups, you've got learning disabled people who are out on the margins, you've got older people who are out on the margins actually no longer at the margins, and others, myself included, some are paid, some are in the community, saying we want to contribute to that too. And when I reflect with individuals, they've come across bullying discrimination and people looking at the chair not the human being - all that sort of stuff, but their passion is to say we have something to offer. And they don't want to control it, they are open to all sorts of ideas.

Some people's first reaction was 'really?' - as if they couldn't possibly do that. But the people there have got no challenge there at all, even within all the negative stuff. But the enthusiasm with which people have said – 'I can bring this to the table' and it is only going to get stronger. And they own it, it is not being done to people, it is actually 'we can do this'. Their overriding thing is we have a hall, we want to make people as welcome as possible. For people on the outside, it's 'we'll never go there, because

it is people with a disability'. They are prejudiced; they are nonsense. But the creativity of the club and openness of the people is really powerful.

I am happy to share this story – at its heart it is saying that once we start to have those conversations one to one, it doesn't matter if there are ten other people in the room who are negative, we'll be stronger, someone else will come later and say 'you know what, I heard you'. Even without the money and the resources, I've seen it, we can create wealth within ourselves and it makes the case stronger, to say well its working, how about you match us with what we have. Even when there are barriers like the person you talked about earlier – there will be others who have experienced the nonsense and they will come back and it will grow, the conversations will start it.

These people are not supposed to define things because they are seen as disabled but they have turned this on its head, they have got a response from others who are responding as human beings. It is up and running and the people who are needed for it to happen are all in place – coming together of various parts of the community. And everyone smiles when they talk about it – you realise that this is what it is all about.

What does this story show is important for building community?

- **Once you make a connection and start a conversation it is hard to stop:** "once we start to have those conversations one to one, it doesn't matter if there are ten other people in the room who are negative, we'll be stronger"
- **People doing things for themselves can get past the stereotypes about their ability or the 'type' of person they are:** "These people are not supposed to define things because they are seen as disabled but they have turned this on its head"
- **Many people in the community will share gifts and resources to support a good idea:** the tea club drew on transport, equipment and other support from residents. "Even without the money and the resources, I've seen it, we can create wealth within ourselves"
- **One good idea can lead to others:** the club were open to new ideas, like helping with shopping. The club was an inspiration to others locally.

FINDING YOUR passion

Before retiring, I worked with special needs children and in a nursing home



AND I HELPED MY MOTHER WITH ALZHEIMER'S.

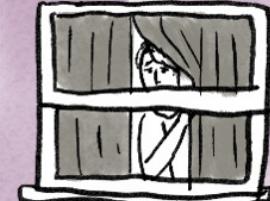


WHEN I RETIRED,
I DISCOVERED...



A PASSION TO HELP OLDER PEOPLE!

I THOUGHT ABOUT HOW CAN I RESPOND TO DIFFERENT NEEDS...



... NOT EVERYONE IS ABLE TO COME TO A GROUP!

SO I STARTED A MOBILE KNITTING GROUP



TAKING THE ACTIVITY TO THOSE PEOPLE.

I get total satisfaction from seeing people pleased about achieving something!



IF YOU HAVE PASSION...



Maybe I can try something I like...



... OTHERS GET INSPIRED TOO

Finding your passion

I retired when I was 62 years old and became a committee member of the Stifford Clays Community Forum and the Patient Participation Group (PPG) at the Stifford Clays Health Practice. You may ask why I decided to work as a volunteer for the community and the answer is simple. Although I worked in a special needs school in London full time, I also worked voluntarily at the weekends in a nursing home not far from my workplace. The nursing home had three floors – the ground floor was specifically for the elderly with Alzheimer's and dementia.

My Mum passed away shortly before I retired and I decided that following retirement, I would carry on with voluntary work but nearer to home in Grays. I joined the PPG at my surgery first and the committee soon realised that patients were unaware of the PPG, even though we had a notice board in the surgery's waiting room. We didn't know how to inform patients about the group, so a decision was made to try and 'visually' show patients our presence. We tried several things.

We set up a bookcase in the lobby of the surgery for adults. This was a 'read and return' library and we invited patients to run it themselves by borrowing books and returning them once read. Patients would also donate books for others to read. We also set up a children's bookcase in the waiting room for children to choose a book and take it home to read – encouraging literacy skills and interaction between parent and child.

I also sorted out a collection box for spectacles. Patients would donate glasses for 'Vision Overseas', a charity aiming to give sight to many underprivileged people. People love the idea that someone will use them and benefit from them.

The most successful thing is a knitting group – knitting for three neonatal units – (Basildon, Royal London and GOSH). I co-ordinate the group and I managed to get a grant for £250. We bought patterns and wool and Ikea donated a large bookcase. I offered the local community a collection service for knitting they had done at home. Many local ladies were given patterns and wool and they knitted for the premature babies at their own pace in their own home. I would call and collect bags of knitting and the club soon became successful. And a small group of ladies in nursing homes meet in their communal room to share their passion for knitting, share lunch and make friends. St. John's Church and Chestnut Craft Guild also had groups of ladies knitting for the babies.

These three initiatives have made patients aware of the PPG at their surgery and brought a community together through shared interests.

When I joined the Stifford Clays Community Forum, I quickly volunteered to join the Steering Group for the proposed Hub. The Chairman, Len Orpin had worked tirelessly with the local authority to provide a Hub for the community. I met Teresa (Community Builder) and we all worked towards making the Hub successful. Volunteers at the Hub get local people to talk to one another and to ensure that we look after one another. Sometimes just a cup of tea and a chat can help make someone's day a little brighter. The Hub offers a service to the community to resolve problems – it also offers information about clubs running in the area that might be of interest to them.

But once again we found that the community was not aware of the Hub. And some people are shy, on their own with no-one to come with them. Where do they get the confidence to walk

through the door? How could we let the local community know about the Hub and encourage them to come? Posters were put in local shops, library, surgery, school, community hall, residential homes etc informing the public about the Hub. We also go to already established meetings, such as clubs running in residential homes (Thai Chi), craft meetings, knitting clubs, school's parents evening etc and give short talks about how we could have a successful Hub in our local area.

What do I get out of it? I get total satisfaction. I get a buzz when I take knitting off people – the old ladies, they have achieved and their faces light up, they are so pleased with themselves. They have done good for the community, they have done something and it lifts their spirits. I strongly believe that volunteers ‘lead by example’ and can help make the local area a more friendly and pleasant place for our children to grow up in.

What does this story show about building a welcoming community?

- **Start with a passion:** the passion for knitting was matched by the passion to see people get satisfaction out of contributing and being part of something.
- **Activities like Knitting give people a great deal of satisfaction, as well as a hobby to occupy them:** “Teresa (Community Builder) has also set up a large knitting group.... Knitting is good for the ‘knitter’ as it keeps them occupied and gives them satisfaction that they are helping babies and their families. Knitting is therapeutic and can be very rewarding.”
- **Being involved in groups and activities helps people meet new friends, builds their confidence and gives them a growing sense of community** “Together the

community has grown in becoming a community that cares about one another”

“Teresa (Community Builder) has worked hard as a ‘connector’ within the local area. She has established new groups and has connected coordinators of groups with other group coordinators... Teresa has given local people the confidence to join clubs and make new friends.”

- **People feel good about contributing and being part of something:** even in small ways. Achieving something and contributing to the community ‘lifts people’s spirits’ and makes their life more enjoyable.
- **Meet people where they are – don’t always expect them to come to you:** lots of different ways were found to reach out to people where they already are or where they already meet.
- **Novel engaging communication works:** making things visual, and ensuring that big colourful posters and designs were used was an important part of getting people’s attention and getting them interested.
- **Giving and sharing is also personally rewarding:** “What do you get out of it? You get more out than you put in... I can see changes already and people are enjoying socialising and meeting one another”.
- **Lead by example:** “I strongly believe that volunteers ‘lead by example’ and can help make the local area a more friendly and pleasant place for our children to grow up in”.

Key things the stories highlight about building welcoming communities

A number of common things emerged in discussions around particular stories, which highlight important aspects of what it takes to build welcoming communities

- **Start with people's passions and people will make things happen:** people are motivated to do things for themselves when they are dealing with something that they care about. Connecting with others and getting them involved is easier if it is around an issue that matters to them or they can relate to. A part of this is also about responding to existing needs – in the case of the group for lone parents, there was nothing for them in the area, and so the new group quickly generated a lot of interest.
- **Connecting with other local residents helps to reduce feelings of isolation, and can build confidence and well-being:** people meet new friends and have a growing sense of community. In addition, connecting with others who share an experience and interests is an important way to build confidence and shared understanding, and can often be a springboard to action.
- **Opportunities for people to contribute their skills and gifts unlock the latent resourcefulness of many communities:** Many people in the community will share gifts and resources to support a good idea. Connecting with others can help to find the local resources to make things happen and help to build on existing opportunities and community assets. People feel good about contributing and being part of something, even in small ways.
- **When people doing things for themselves it is often a practical and powerful way to challenge stereotypes and expectations:** the 'tea club' challenged people's notions about people with learning disabilities, and the initiative of single mums, young mothers and elderly people in other stories challenges ideas of who is taking action and who needs help.
- **There is a 'domino effect' where one initiative can lead to others:** a good idea or event can lead to other people being inspired to do things themselves or other new ideas. Once people start making connections, they find they tend to make more and 'one thing leads to another'. In addition, when individuals connect and find a common interest, it can often flourish in the face of obstacles that might have put them off if they were facing them on their own.
- **Giving people something to do that is meaningful makes a difference:** activities like knitting or gardening as well as companionship, give people a great deal of satisfaction. They may be both a hobby to occupy their time and be rewarding for the sense of achievement they bring. They may also be therapeutic.

Learning about the process of building communities

Insights also emerged from the discussions about the process of community building itself:

- **Building steadily:** it is important to move at a pace that works for people and for the groups and activities that are happening. In the case of the volunteer gardening, there was an interest in volunteering from a growing number of people, but recognition of a need to match volunteers to appropriate

plots and activities and not rush into things in a way that may undermine the work already done by not doing it properly.

- **The social dimension of the activities is as important as the activities themselves:** in many initiatives, it is as much the connection with other residents that matters as the particular interest or activity in itself.
- **Meet people where they are – don't always expect them to come to you:** it may be important to reach out to people who may not be able to get out for various reasons and so they may not easily be able to attend events or centres. Finding ways to reach these people is important.
- **Novel engaging communication works:** making things visual, and ensuring that big colourful posters and designs were used was an important part of getting people's attention and getting them interested.
- **Giving and sharing is also personally rewarding for those who are community builders or community connectors:** it is an important motivation for many.
- **Lead by example:** community builders and connectors have an important role in modelling the process of recognising and celebrating people's skills and gifts - and ultimately showing that the local area can be made a more friendly and pleasant place “I strongly believe that volunteers ‘lead by example’ and can help make the local area a more friendly and pleasant place for our children to grow up in”.



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