**Learning Site Programme**

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**Overview**

A Learning Site comprises of up to 3 Neighbourhoods across a given locality. The core aim is to nurture and create space for grassroots, citizen-led efforts towards change, to prevail. There are four main constituents that make up a learning site:

* **Sponsor** - an organisation able to the fund learning process, including the recruitment of a Community Animator. E.g. Local Authority or Health Board
* **Host** - an organisation rooted in the neighbourhood which understands the local context. Must have enough structure to recruit and support a Community Animator. E.g. Neighbourhood Association or Faith Organisation.
* **Community Animator -** employed by the host association/organisation to support local community and economic building; accountable to the local community whom they serve.
* **Community** - The process is initiative through the invitation of the local community themselves. Practically speaking this requires at least 8-15 residents who are passionate enough to form an initiating group and willing to host conversations with other residents that are inclusive and long term in commitment.

For accuracy throughout the remainder of this document we will use language specific to Asset Based Community Development. There is a glossary of terms available [here](http://www.nurturedevelopment.org/glossary/).

**What have we learnt so far?**

Experience has taught us that for community animation practice and asset-based community development more broadly to become deeply rooted, it must be nurtured in what some refer to as living laboratories; what we prefer to refer to as Learning Sites. The main advantages of a Learning Site are as follows;

● It creates time and a safe space for citizens, associations, local practitioners and helping organisations to learn together how to make to discover and connect disconnected assets in a citizen-led way.

● It creates an opportunity and context within which to break down traditional structures and work beyond silos towards the greater good of a given neighbourhood or number neighbourhoods or their equivalent (outer estate, town, village etc.)

● The learning process offers timely and proportionate training, mentoring and development input to advance your neighbourhood initiatives.

Nurture Development has supported the establishment and development of 15 Learning Sites across the UK, 35 in Australia and many more around the world, with the express intent of creating shared learning, relationships, and exemplary projects that promote rural and urban asset based community building practice and revitalisation efforts throughout the world. We also support collaboration across and between learning sites, at regional, national and international levels.

Over the course of two and three year development cycles we have supported Learning Sites to:

1. Convene an initiating group of residents who have connected and mobilised hundreds of local residents to share their gifts, skills and passions.

2. Facilitate Local residents to work out what a strong and vibrant community means to them, and then set in train a clear shared vision for the future. Within that vision they are clear about what they will be doing as citizens with no help from outside, what they will lead on with some outside help, and what they expect outside agencies to do for them.

3. We have supported the convening of a wider circle of practitioners, who are truly committed to deepen their individual and collective practice towards precipitating citizen-led action.

4. Curated a strong sense of stewardship amongst leaders to create the conditions that support the growth of community driven change, and to address the dilemmas that this way of working surfaces, especially when transitioning from more traditional approaches.

**2. Approach**

A Learning Site in essence is a supportive learning context for citizens, associations, practitioners and organisations to be in discovery mode, and get out of linear planning and delivery mode. It provides space to reflect on their own practice, whilst also benefiting from the experience of emergent lessons from other citizens and practitioners in other learning sites.

**2.1 What’s the optimum size?**

A Learning Site is typically made up of up to three neighbourhoods in a locality hosted to engage in a learning experience, sharing their practice, both locally and globally. Each neighbourhood will have a population of approximately 3,000 to 5,000 people. The Learning Site will also have a facilitated ABCD Community of Practice, and a Learning and Development programme.

As the existing network of Learning Sites has grown in the UK and Australia there have been some important learnings around what constitutes ‘favourable conditions’ at the beginning of the learning journey, we have included these in Appendix A of this report. These favourable conditions are not intended to be selection criteria or a prescription, they are offered as a self-appraisal tool to support understanding regarding optimal starting point.

**3. Objectives**

The overall recommendations as set out above are encased within a vision for the development of a Community Building Programme. The Community Building programme pursues the following objectives:

1. To use an ABCD approach to create stronger, safer, healthier, happier, more prosperous and more inclusive communities, driven from the inside out.
2. To use ABCD methods and tools, developed by Nurture Development and our partners, to enable local residents to map the commonwealth of individual, associational, institutional, environmental and cultural assets and resources and reveal the hidden treasures within people and their communities.
3. To build and strengthen connections between individuals and across associations and institutions thereby increasing community cohesion and reducing isolation.
4. To recruit and train Community Animators to ensure the longevity of Asset-Based Community Driven efforts and the sustainability of the change achieved.
5. To support the local community and host associations/organisations to create a lasting legacy and impact in their place, practice and culture.

Invariably no two learning sites are the same, however, our support remains consistently aligned to five guiding principles:

**Place based** - we recognise that it is in neighbourhoods that everything comes together. In order to connect people to the place where they live we need to ensure that we work at a neighbourhood level.

**Focus on strengths** - we start with 'what is strong?’ not ‘what is wrong?' This could be individual strengths, neighbourhood strengths, assets to be utilised etc, environmental, cultural and economic.

**Citizen-led** - we are committed to working in a way that puts communities in the driving seat. When it comes to building community, citizen action is more durable and sustainable than top-down professional intervention. Community is built by the people who live, sleep and work there.

**Relationship building** – our work is distinctive at a number of levels including the fact that we see the neighbourhood as the primary unit of change and not the individual or the institution, hence our main focus is on building on the strengths of the informal associations and networks that make up the fabric of community life. At the heart of this strength based approach is the idea of connecting assets that were not previously connected. Hence connection is even more important than the asset focus, in fact discovering assets is just the beginning. Bring them into productive relationship with each other is the ultimate goal.

**Inclusion** – we are committed to ensuring an inclusive approach is at the heart of community building. Social Justice is a foundational value on which all of our work at Nurture Development depends for its legitimacy. Learning Sites are also invited to commit to these principles.

**4. Our Team**

Nurture Development boasts a unique team with expertise spanning multiple sectors and disciplines. We have been at the forefront of advances in our respective areas of real world know how and craft in community building & development. What sets us apart from other support organisations is our capacity to work from the kitchen table to the boardroom table, which is to say we work at the philosophical, strategic and practical levels, but also from resident relationship building to organisational change. Working across all these levels we support radical cultural change and positive disruption.

**5. Method & Timetable**

The Community Building Programme will initially be a 24 month process with the support of Nurture Development. The support is offered in 3 key areas; field work and training, strategic support and project development. The emphasis is on genuine and deep community building, partnership development & sustainable change.

The learning relationship creates space for an emergent response to the training and support needs of a Learning Site. We acknowledge the importance of going at the ‘speed of trust’ and our supports reflects that. Below is a summary of the specific support roles that Nurture Development is offering for purpose of the contract / schedule:

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| Support Area | Key Trainer | Resource Requirement | Key Tasks |
| Field Work, Project Development and support.  Ongoing online support and curator of learning experiences. | Cormac Russell & Chris Chinnock | 25 days | Support to Initiating Groups to adopt practical community building tools and ABCD Methodology to have community conversations and vision for the future  Support to Community Animator providing ongoing mentoring, training and timely local input to support their practice.  Support to Host Organisation/Association to recruit Community Animator(s), providing input to their induction and initial training.  Support to develop tools and methodology which enhance whole community animation.  Support to ABCD Community of Practice.  Timely workshops which match the tempo of local practice.  Ad hoc mentoring as required (online) |
| Strategic Support | Cormac Russell & Chris Chinnock | 10 days | Engage hearts and minds and work with strategic leads across all organisations and elected members to embed at a philosophical and strategic levels.  Co-Facilitate with field work trainer a learning and development day; celebrating learning and visions for the future.  Support embedding ABCD into wider policy approach e.g. social value, commissioning, neighbourhood plans |
| Project Development | Chris Chinnock | 5 days | Access to an online community of practice with the ability to connect locally or to the wider learning site network  Access to the most current practice and thought leadership in community building practice  Access to the most current workbooks, handouts and tools to deepen your practice.  Support and advice around ABCD workshops and strategic conversations |