

Evaluation Summary

March 2020 – August 2022



Cultivating Community in Springfield, Beech Hill & Gidlow

Curated by Northern Heart & Soul CiC



September 2022

Since just before the start of lockdown in March 2020 there has been intentional and thoughtful cultivating of community happening in

Springfield, Beech Hill and Gidlow CommUnity. A place labelled by those who plan from outside of the community, or organise for the political system, as the ward of Wigan West.

This evaluation summary does not intend to tell the story of events, as that story is lovingly and carefully documented elsewhere ([here](https://sbhcommunity.co.uk/category/community/)). <https://sbhcommunity.co.uk/category/community/>
It's not exhaustive either, there will be gaps. It's been completed in a timescale in order to get the inquiry started.

This evaluation summary:

1. Describes the behind the scenes story - the story of cultivation
2. Provides some noticings that may be useful to us when framing the enquiry and agreeing what it is that we might want to measure.

The Back Story

This story starts with a dream:

To become a self organising and self renovating neighbourhood.

The narrators of this story, Northern Heart and Soul CiC, found some investors, Lankelly Chase, who wanted to invest in the idea that the neighbourhood is the primary unit of change.

This didn't happen overnight, and it wont last forever. Lankelly Chase have committed to two years of support from 1st January 2022. We know that we will need much longer term investment than this and so this document is the beginning of an inquiry, using developmental evaluation approaches, to work out what matters enough to measure and how to we begin to generate the stories and the impact when we intentionally cultivate community. And, more importantly, how we centre the story tellers in the process in ways that are generative.

Our journey to NOW - The Enabling Resources

Between March 2020 and January 2022 the background animation work conducted by Gill and Angela was funded primarily through the training contracts of RIPEN, the training and development company belonging to Angela Fell (and now resting), along with a few small grants from the Local Connections Fund, Awards for All and GM Spaces. Training contracts enabled Angela to be able to show up in the community for a couple of days a week and the smaller successful funding applications enabled Gill to pay her bills whilst also showing up.

At the beginning of 2021 Gill and Angela applied to the GM System Changers Small Spaces Fund to create a womens spaces centred around changing the horrendous domestic abuse statistics locally. This was the start of a relationship with Lankelly Chase and an invitation to join in with the system change work across the Greater Manchester region followed.

Gill and Angela created a CiC as a temporary mechanism to hold the work. This would enable the newly formed community led associations to operate free from any unnecessary bureaucracy and enable the CiC to test out trading in order to build the case and community buy in for alternative and more collaborative structures such as community benefit societies, land trusts and / or



cooperatives in the future. Northern Heart and Soul was formed as a CiC in August 2021. If we are to become self organising and renovating, we are going to need the mechanisms to enable this.

Gill and Angela produced a small business plan proposal and by the end of 2021 had been offered a partnership with Lankelly Chase to the value of £140k over two years.

The business plan proposed that we (Northern Heart and Soul CiC) existed to take forward a ten year bold vision to become a self organising and self renovating neighbourhood.

This business plan covered the first two years of the ten year plan and the two strands of the business:

- Hyper local community building - rekindling the function of the neighbourhood in which we live
- Wider participatory & deliberative democracy and co-production across the borough

As a consequence of investment we intended to:

- Have a more cohesive and united neighbourhood that knows what it has and works together to tackle the big problems through a neighbourhood plan. (in a non traditional plan sense)
- Scoped out community alternatives to traditional social care service delivery, not to replace, but supplement.
- Created a structure / mechanism to enable the neighbourhood to take ownership of land, property and resource
- Established our reputation as mentors / trainers in community building and participative and deliberative approaches across the borough to support co-production.

It would be fair to say that the last strand of the business plan is no longer a key aim. Rather than seeking to change the system, through co-production (which is also required) Northern Heart and Soul have shifted to a hospicing modernity perspective, (see Vanessa Muchada de Oliveira) seeking to eclipse rather than fix the system, through collaborating and creating consensus based and women led networks. The reasoning behind this may or may not be worthy of an inquiry line within the evaluation, we will need to decide together where energy is best spent.

Back to evaluation - Lankelly Chase invited NH&S to join in with a larger evaluation programme with some of the larger grant holders and also encouraged NHS to find an evaluation partner. NHS CiC spent time looking for a good fit. An organisation that understood developmental evaluation and asset based community development. Whilst a preferred provider was found, they were unable to give this work the time it deserved. NH&S CiC decided to get going anyway and create a circle to act as critical friends. This document therefore exists to share some noticings and provide context for those who will be accompanying us as we develop and iterate the theory of change.

We believe that we need to rekindle community function; ensure that systems and services are in right relationship with communities; be courageous to midwife and cultivate alternatives and in doing so connect local with global.

Some clarity in the muddy water before we start



When we say that Angela and Gill set up a CiC to hold the community work, that was to enable Springfield, Beech Hill and Gidlow CommUnity mutual aid group to feel freer in all that it does. Springfield Beech Hill and Gidlow CommUnity is an unincorporated association with a committee, bank account and insurance. The committee grew considerably at the AGM in October 2021, and it is fair to say that participation has dropped considerably. Northern Heart and Soul wonder if the formalisation of it extinguished the fire from within and if its structure appeals to a particular kind of person - one that likes meetings, and one that either likes or doesn't like positional power. Northern Heart and Soul intend to explore this with members of the existing committee as a parallel process to the inquiry with a proposal to become a much more fluid association of associations. It is likely that the parallel process may impact on this inquiry.

Noticings

Community Function

In order to develop community function, the first steps require that we discover what we have, connect it together and then through that connection, mobilise. Once communities begin to see what they can achieve together then it's much more likely that they are able to see the possibility of taking back traditional community functions. Without this period of community building it is likely, due to our level of consumption, that communities will believe services from outside are the answer to all of our problems. The police keep us safe, GPs keeps us well and the teacher educates us. Once a community knows what it has, what it can do, it can articulate what it needs help with or wants others to do on its behalf.

Since just before the first lockdown in March 2020 Springfield, Beech Hill and Gidlow CommUnity have been intentionally building an online space that encompasses those principles. We now need to turn our attention to inquiring into and evaluating the work.

One thing that's really easy to measure is the growth in both membership and activity within the Facebook group. It would be even easier to measure if Facebook analytics enabled us to explore more than 90 days of activity.



On 3rd September 2022 there are 2,370 members of the online Facebook community, of which 2,239 are active. Group admins are pretty good at screening people to ensure that they live in the area, but obviously neighbours (Wigan Central) can get through. We have an estimated total population of 13,456 and an electorate of 9,049 according to the



Wigan West results in the May 2022 election. This election saw a 27.52% turn out with Phyll Cullen receiving 1,542 of the 2,490 votes cast or spoilt. It is clear to see the considerable level of potential community power that has been cultivated online over the last two years when we sit participative democracy alongside representative democracy. At a time when trust in the political systems are at an all time low, we are seeing steady growth with a 7% increase on the preceding 90 day period.

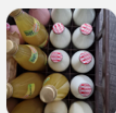
Women predominantly contribute (74%) and predominantly between the 25-54 age range. Men who are more likely to get involved online are between the ages of 25-24.



As numbers have grown, so has activity with the number of posts up 139% in the 5th September in comparison to the previous period.

Daily active members during this period peaked at 1,796 on the 10th July 2022 and were at it lowest at 1049 on the 28th July 2022.

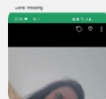
15/08/2022
2
12:10



Free Does anyone want any milk we've 6 pints left over from delivery this morning so its fresh Also there are... 1682
Posted by Joanne Marr

Highest reach for an individual post during this period was concerned with sharing milk and reached 1682.

27/08/2022
2
22:51



Please share https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1113705829532495&id=100026792648370 1562 675
Posted by Donna Gallagher

The post that had the greatest engagement, with 675, concerned a young person missing from the area. (and thank goodness was found.)



One of the main early goals of the community facebook page was to connect the community together so that we could begin to connect and then use, what we already have, more productively.

We cultivated that through encouraging gifting and sharing and creating funds like the solidarity fund. We have anecdotal evidence that that has increased, via the posts and we do know that the group has brought comfort and connection to many, through their comments on posts, their messages and in some cases direct action. However, those stories belong as yet to the group, rather than this evaluation, and therefore we may want to consider the line of enquiry that would enable us to gather stories and data to support this measure. We may also want to consider and so what?

If we take a snap shot of posts on the facebook group between 6th August and 5th September 2022 the following is revealed:

242 posts in total of which:

- 55 relate to sharing information about community events
- 50 are gifting and recycling items no longer needed by the owner
- 28 are asking people for local recommendations - usually a business service
- 17 are concerned with items, pets and people that are lost, found and in the main reunited
- 12 are sharing the joy - just seen this, been here, you should see it too - many from attendance at group events
- 10 are asking for items to be gifted
- 10 are sharing community news mainly related to traffic and travel
- 9 seek expertise (knowledge) from the community
- 7 relate to suggesting and growing support for new community ideas
- 5 share concerns or people or animals
- 4 share a big thank you; 4 promote small businesses ; 4 share community safety ideas / concern and a further 4 share concerns about services and / or residents
- 3 offer marketing opportunities for local businesses; 3 aim to get in touch with people in the group; 3 relate to information / awareness raising or education on an issue and 3 share job opportunities
- 2 create surveys to develop further some of the home grown ideas; and 2 provide information on surgeries offered by services
- 1 offers a course; 1 shares local history and 1 reminds the group of the agreed rules on selling to each other

One of the areas of growth that is less well documented is the story of community decision making and problem solving together. From community crowd funding, solidarity fund, safer in springfield problem solving, consensus decision making in the facebook group and the introduction of Vocal Eyes. This may be something to explore within this or a further inquiry.

Onland

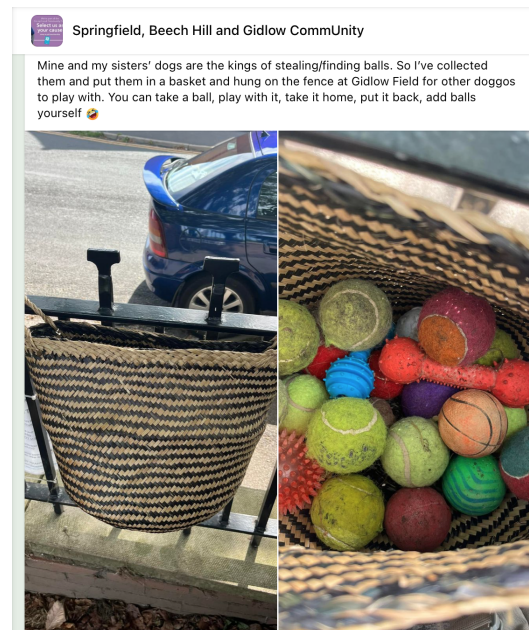
In the creation of onland spaces we have taken the same principles. Embedding asset based community development approaches and Camerado principles in anything that we host / convene.



1. Springfield Dog Show
2. Well Good Socials / Tea and Biscuit at the Hen Hole
3. Community Play
4. Community Awards
5. We Hear You

1. The Springfield Dog Show is becoming a tradition in the community, with people already beginning to talk about 2023. Whilst as animators, we are still taking more of an active role in the organisation of this than we would hope for, there was both a shift in terms of a step into an organiser role by a member of the group and also a widening of people involved. New judges emerged and new sponsors stepped forward, with offers in place to contribute funding. It was interesting to see the post following the most recent dog show where a neighbour decided that they didn't need permission to set this up.

Do we need to explore this in the inquiry? Are people feeling more ownership of / connection to and belonging to place? Why is that? Is it as a consequence of the neighbour response to the pandemic / because its been modelled or something else?



2. Well Good Socials are pretty new and model the bread and butter of the approach. Create an open space, invite people in to share gifts, skills, passion and tea. Have learning conversations, discover what people care about, connect them with others and see what grows. We have already seen community play emerge from this space, which has supported play in Beech Hill and around Diggle St over the month of August. We know anecdotally the impact this has had on individuals involved and we need to ensure the inquiry captures this, without turning peoples stories into case studies, or building in any measurement tools. We also need to explore how we draw out the barriers and inequalities to growing self organised communities, the restrictive funding regimes (HAF) and the inaccessibility of these programmes to low income neighbourhoods. The story of the socials will be captured and curated in parallel with the inquiry and featured as one of the stories on the new community website. Tea and Biscuit at the Hen Hole is a peer support / friendship group that emerged from the pantry. It still receives a little support from Northern Heart and Soul.

3. Community Play was new for summer 2022. It is likely that inquiry will surface within well good social discussions. NHS would love to see resource shift from activity providers to 'community as providers' in summer 2023.

4. Community Awards is new for Autumn 2022 and a format used by community builders in Birmingham was adopted. On the 8th September 2022 almost 80 local people will get to discover why their neighbours nominated them as a community superstar. This approach is important to community building in so far as the recognition comes from peers rather than a panel of perceived community leaders. The process of nominations also identifies the first circle of connectors in the community. People who are natural connectors tend to get multiple nominations, although that



can be skewed in the early years, when less people know about the awards. What that then means is that on the awards night, many of the community connectors get to meet each other, the people who believe in the importance of community are together in the same room. We might therefore want to consider this as a future inquiry in terms of following the nominees connections. It's also interesting to see that this has uncovered a whole new layer of people and it resonates with the next insight. The spectrum of nominations has been delightful from carers, community pubs, teachers, grandparents, street singers, gardeners and across the ages. The generative story about this event will be available when we gather.

As you'll see in the Community Story Book at the beginning of lockdown we created a network of street 'champions' via WhatsApp. One of the things that we've noticed is that many of the champions show up less in community now than during the pandemic. This may be because of furlough, it may be about intrinsic motivation. There may be a whole range of reasons. Since we've been taking more time to cultivate we seem to have revealed a new layer of community life. Given that much of the intentional work now is focussed on peer support rather than helper and helped and charitable models; and, that a self organised community has liberation and solidarity at its centre, is this maybe a line worthy of inquiry? Are we interested in what the new people were doing during lockdown? Were they already so connected that they didn't need to create or join new networks?

So some groups like the pantry, eventually closed. There were a number of reasons potentially for this. Do we want to explore that? Is there learning in there for us that will be useful for the future? What is notable is that few of the people who became involved in the pantry have shown up in other offerings that are more centred on peer support and Camerado principles. Is this a line worthy of further inquiry? When we think about the garden group offering, this hasn't seen a huge increase in membership growth, but it's still thriving and working together. Do we want to explore why that is?

5. We Hear You

An excellent piece of work, and an emotive, sensitive and thought provoking interactive audio experience. Where we go with it and what we do with it next feels uncertain. It's been difficult to get the people in the room around this. Any future growth would need some resource too. That could happen. Given that central to the work is the creation of women led safe spaces and that we want to see a neighbourhood that's safe for women and young people then a decision needs to be made as to whether this is a parallel piece of work, or part of this inquiry.

Right Relationship

It is fair to say that it's been a rocky ride in terms of building relationships and trust with local institutions and services.

At inception, when the mutual aid group started we had a phone call from a local Councillor asking us to keep off the patch. It's taken two years and the Councillor to taste the fruit of our offerings and build a relationship to learn that the Councillor had been warned off - we'd been labelled as trouble makers. We now have a honest friendship which creates the conditions for us to work out



together how best to sit in right relationship. How might representative and participative democracy work together and how do we enable all citizens to feel that sense of agency and satisfaction that is derived when you contribute to making the place you live in better. This story will grow and is intended to be included within the inquiry. We have a truly community rooted and minded local Councillor.

Not being in receipt of funding from the Local Authority puts us in quite a unique position locally, in so far as we can be honest and open about the patriarchy, paternalism, nepotism and the way the town centres the institution as the protagonist in the Wigan story. No doubt, one of the reasons we have been labelled as trouble makers. We have felt stage managed by the local authority, with some softening and opening recently. We could add detail to this story, but it feels the energy it uses will generate little. Up until recently we felt that the relationship was extractive, seeking to take with nothing to offer. That might be useful to explore as part of the inquiry. How much do we contribute to this problem? In refusing DEAL funding are we cutting our nose off to spite our face, or standing tall against what we feel is a passive aggressive and paternalistic approach?

In some respects this also applies to the relationship with the VCSE sector. In many respects community building threatens this sector the most in terms of its long term sustainability and its bread and butter funding. If communities rekindle their functions, then fewer people need paying to fix them, and that resource shifts. Our experience in the borough to date has been one of a luke warm reception. We see decisions being made and wonder who made them. We see people representing the sector without any feedback loops. We notice that men are over represented. Our experience in this space has led us to step back from the second strand of our business plan aims and instead seek out those who want to create something breaks away from the patriarchy.

Where are we travelling too?

Considering the landscape is important to the inquiry.

We are:

- Thinking about food sovereignty
- Considering accessing a loan to buy the first home for community rent
- Thinking about physical assets and spaces
- Living Wage pilot
- Upcycling / recycling/ make do and mend
- Thinking about the care system and community alternatives and noticing how many grandparents are formally and informally caring for their children
- Taking some women and children / young people away to begin community dreaming
- SOUP events / participatory budgeting- growing more women led community businesses
- Going away with some women as part of the collaborative network growth - strengthening the spine, along with the work with GM New Northern Weave.
- Exploring the use of generative journalism and peoples press
- Thinking about comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable - liberation during times of strife.
- Thinking about who is not here? Asset based community development works on the principles of creating circles and then widening circles, asking who is not here, searching the edges and



inviting in, and or creating new associations and spaces. Given the number of people of colour we see walking about in the neighbourhood and then comparing that to the number of people of colour in both online and inland communities then it's clear that there's more to do. There has been some invitations to work alongside organisations to develop this, but that has not yet bore fruit. Young people too, they need to be at the centre.

Final Thoughts

There are so many lines of inquiry to take and we can broaden this for 2023. We just need to decide what we want to learn, where we want to start.

