

# A History of SCDC, 1994 - 2009

**This paper puts on record some of the key formative events and explores primary elements of the activities of the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) to the point that its organisational base changed from a partnership between the Home Office funded Community Development Foundation (CDF) - a non-departmental public body - and the University of Glasgow, to become an independent Scottish voluntary organisation.**

SCDC has been variously described as a practice development agency, a policy think-tank and a research centre. Over its 25 years of operation to date it has been all of those things though emphasis has ebbed and flowed with changing issues and opportunities. However, the core purpose of SCDC has remained unchanged - to promote best practice in community development.

Though until 2009 a small part of its income came from CDF, the primary means of pursuing its mission was through income generation from contracts and grants. As SCDC grew, as much as 90% of its funding was generated in this way. The funded work primarily provided research, training and practice support. This not only offered immediate responses to the needs of the field, its workers, managers and policy makers, but was frequently designed to create tools and resources that would be available for use long-term and be free of charge.

It is important to appreciate however that there was also a range of activities from which no income was derived. These were enabled by cross subsidising from income generation. They include conferences, seminars, learning exchanges, publications, participation in professional networks and organisations and, indeed, time spent on advisory committees and working groups for government and other agencies.

A further significant feature of the role played by SCDC was its consistently collaborative approach. There are important examples of its paid work that were delivered in partnership with other agencies. Similarly, there are very important examples of its commitment to working with others to generate voices for community development that drew workers and agencies together that were not income generating. For example, it participated actively in the Scottish Community Development Network (SCDN), Community Development Alliance Scotland (CDAS) and the European Community Development Network (EuCDN).

The paper seeks to explain the rationale for the Centre by exploring the context of community development in the early 1990s before reviewing the work that was undertaken. As far as possible this is presented chronologically but it is important to appreciate that aspects of the work varied from relatively short term to more or less continuous. Throughout the paper we will make reference to significant illustrations of both income and non-income generating activities.

## The context

Like most initiatives, SCDC, formally launched in 1994, was a product of the confluence of particular conditions and people that enabled its emergence.

By the end of the 1980's public policy across local government in Scotland had increasingly emphasised community development as a method of tackling widespread and spatially concentrated multiple deprivation. In particular, the largest local authority covering half of Scotland, Strathclyde Regional Council, had a well-developed social strategy<sup>1</sup>. Lying behind its approach was a political debate about the potential for more participatory democracy that could be enabled by supporting communities to become more organised and skilled in both representing themselves and generating action for change on their own behalf. There was no romanticism about the potential for local community development in terms of altering macro level social structure - described in one report as, '*as likely as an ant pushing an elephant uphill*'<sup>2</sup> - however there

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<sup>1</sup> Strathclyde Regional Council '*Social Strategy for the 80's*' Glasgow 1985

<sup>2</sup> Strathclyde Regional Council '*Report of the Policy Review Group on Community Development Services*' (the Worthington Report) Glasgow 1978

was an ambition to reform local democracy. One of the architects of the strategy described the challenge in the following way:

*'Is the political system willing to try to develop political skills and administrative structures of the sort our society needs, to move from a "controlling" to an "enabling" view of its role?'*<sup>3</sup>

In Strathclyde this policy had led to the extensive employment of both neighbourhood based community development workers within its social work department and, in its education department, community education workers for whom community work roles ran alongside adult learning and literacy, and youth work. Combined these departments had approximately 600 dedicated staff, interestingly largely trained on the same community education courses in Scottish universities. But beyond this, with more than 100,000 staff, the Strathclyde strategy called for *'every employee to see themselves as a community development worker.'*<sup>4</sup> There was then both an extensive cadre of specialist workers but a philosophy that saw community development as an underpinning approach to public services as a whole. This was a source of some ambiguity and confusion.

Elsewhere in Scotland through the late 1970's and 1980's there had been a similar level of development of community education services, though rather less in social work departments. In the case of community education there was a non-departmental public body, the Scottish Community Education Council (SCEC later to be renamed Community Learning Scotland), charged with supporting the field.

By the end of the 1980s other public service areas were also increasingly embracing more participatory approaches. Monolithic public housing estates were being broken up, tenant participation was increasingly in vogue and the strength of the community based housing association movement was increasing. In formal education, parent participation in school boards; in social care, service user participation; and in health, an increased recognition of the patient voice and community led health prevention were emerging. Physical regeneration and planning were also recognising the importance of public

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<sup>3</sup> Young R *'Community development .... Its political and administrative challenge'* in Henderson P

and Thomas DN *'Readings in Community Work'* George Allen and Unwin London 1981

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

engagement. Meanwhile, community economic development through community led enterprises was being boosted.

Alongside this primarily public sector activity, the voluntary sector too had increasingly embraced community development. For example, the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and the Community Development Foundation (CDF) sponsored an annual community development summer school and local Councils of Voluntary Service, particularly in the cities, supported community development initiatives. Significantly there were also a few specialist, community managed, local community development projects which were influential, most notably the long-established Crossroads organisation in Glasgow that ran two fieldwork teaching units engaged heavily in supporting community development learning.

## **Towards the creation of the Centre**

So, with all of this going on why did proposals for a national community development centre emerge? Here various influences need to be appreciated. First there was a specialist UK national non-departmental government agency - the Community Development Foundation (CDF) - that had a small presence in Scotland whose focus on local project work was increasingly anomalous given the overall level of community development activity across the country. Its recently appointed Scottish regional manager (previously a field work trainer at the Crossroads organisation), and the wider organisation, were keen to review its function, and were acutely aware that a single officer would not have the capacity to establish and manage a Scotland-wide community development programme. In this they had the support of a Scottish Advisory Committee whose members included senior level advisors from Strathclyde Regional Council, SCEC, SCVO and, significantly, academia. The last, from the fields of social work and regeneration at Glasgow University were members who had been actively engaged in substantial research (some of which was published through CDF) and practise support in the community development field. Indeed, at the time, one of them was on secondment as Principal

Community Development Officer for Strathclyde Social Work Department and representing the Council on the advisory group<sup>5</sup>.

In the context of its task of reviewing the role of CDF in Scotland, in effect the advisory committee transformed itself from advising on local projects to developing a critical review of the state and needs of community development across Scotland. Given that this debate was informed by influential people with wide ranging networks in community development any emerging proposals had a degree of legitimacy that would be widely acknowledged and have the potential to be promoted with widespread support. It was out of this that the idea for a national community development centre emerged. But what were the issues that the advisory group felt were in need of attention and how feasible was it to seek to set up a national support body?

## Issues in Community Development

It might appear that the existing high level of investment in community development and the emergent trend towards more participatory and accountable public services would not be fertile ground for another new initiative. But in many ways it was the scale and pace of development that had precipitated concerns about the quality of practice and lack of mechanisms for improvement by learning from it. Research (Barr)<sup>6</sup> into practice in the social work department of Strathclyde had identified many examples of positive work but overall: a lack of clarity about the roles that community workers should be playing; lack of systematic evidence gathering about performance measured against clearly defined outcomes; lack of means by which to share learning and apply lessons. Whilst it might have been anticipated that there would be a growing literature offering critical analysis, this was largely absent.

Meanwhile in their evaluation of their own social strategy the Strathclyde Regional Council<sup>7</sup> had recognised that the underlying principles of more participatory public service delivery were not being realised not least because non-specialist staff and managers did not fully understand what the

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<sup>5</sup> Barr A *'Practising Community Development'* Community Development Foundation Publications, London 1991

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Strathclyde Regional Council *'Social Strategy for the 90's'* 1993

community development approach that they were being asked to adopt might mean. This general uncertainty about more accountable public service provision seemed to be echoed elsewhere both in other local authorities and in other public services, notably health.

Though it had been recognised as the third strand of community education since the 1975 Alexander report<sup>8</sup>, it was also becoming evident across Scotland that there was an increasing tension in community education around the relative emphasis being given to community work as against adult learning and youth work and widely varying interpretation of what the community work role should entail.

Further it was apparent that despite community development being increasingly adopted across a range of disciplines they seemed often to be operating in silos rather than recognising common ground. Ironically it was often communities themselves that were producing holistic critiques of their circumstances whilst professions remained locked in their defined roles. Yet an impending restructuring of local government across Scotland that would bring services into single tier councils from 1996 onwards was being planned with an emphasis on decentralisation and enhancement of 'local democracy and accountability'<sup>9</sup>. This impending reorganisation also had within it a significant threat to community development which to that point had primarily been promoted by the upper tier regional councils rather than the lower tier district councils which were set to become the foundations of the restructuring.

Though there were good examples of community development building on common interests or identities, the predominant model was neighbourhood work. In large part this reflected the association between community development employment and spatial analysis of poverty and deprivation. In Strathclyde Regional Council (substantially the largest single employer of community development workers) its Social Strategy, emerging in the late 1970's, focused attention of what were termed (perhaps rather unfortunately) 'Areas for Priority Treatment'. Within these areas there were teams of community development workers right through to the mid 1990's. It was also the case that, across Scotland, community work from a community education background tended to focus around neighbourhood community centres. Whilst practitioners worked with a range of types of groups often with specific

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander K.J.W. *Adult Education, the Challenge of Change* HMSO Edinburgh 1975

<sup>9</sup> See Scottish Office *Guidance on Decentralisation* Edinburgh 1995

interests (for example, housing, benefits, health and care needs) there were few examples of linkage between people with common needs or interests that transcended the neighbourhood focus of practice. It was apparent that there was much potential for development on other than spatial grounds.

It was with these kinds of concerns in mind that the CDF advisory group began to formulate the idea for a national community development centre that would seek to enhance the quality of practice on a cross disciplinary basis through promotion of research, analysis, publication, information exchange and dialogue, policy critique, and development support to practitioners.

## **A partnership model**

It was recognised that there was no national agency with a dedicated focus on community development in Scotland. Existing agencies like SCEC and SCVO were already contributing significantly and it would be essential to develop a collaborative relationship. The territory that was identified for the Centre clearly straddled practice and academic boundaries and the existing relationship between CDF and staff members at Glasgow University provided the potential basis for a partnership. However, institutional common interest needed to be supported by enthusiastic promotion of its potential. Thus, the personal commitment to the idea by the CDF officer and one of the Glasgow University staff (who ultimately became the co-directors) undoubtedly played a major role in sustaining the idea and engaging wider support for it in both institutions, which went on to form a joint steering committee. However, without the active and committed lobbying and support of the chair of the advisory group (who was the then Director of SCVO and also a trustee of CDF) it is doubtful that the venture would have got off the ground. The enthusiasm of the incoming director of CDF was also extremely valuable alongside support from the deputy director who was a member of the advisory group.

A partnership arrangement in which a joint committee of the University and CDF would collaborate but retain employment responsibility for their own staff was proposed. But as with many initiatives, the aspirations proved grander than the level of funding that seemed to be accessible. Despite submitting well developed proposals to Scottish government, grant funding was not initially forthcoming (though, once operational, a small grant to support a part time training post was provided). In addition to the funding already being

channelled into CDF in Scotland, eventually a small grant from a charitable trust was offered. This was barely enough to fund the expansion of activity for more than a few months but with a potential research contract in the offing the Centre was tentatively launched with the existing CDF manager and administrator and a half time university secondment. Success in tendering for a substantial Scottish Office Education Department contract to conduct research into the contribution of community education to community development enabled the take-off of the Centre. But it would be some time before the wider aspirations for its role would be realised.

## **Emerging character of SCDC**

The character of an organisation is forged in a complex interaction between the motivations of its workers, management board and sponsors; the capacity that it has to promote its mission in terms of both scale and flexibility of its resources and the competences and reputation of its staff; and the opportunities that are available to it.

In terms of motivation the lead players in the promotion of the Centre, who later became its directors, were deeply committed to community development principles and had each worked in the field for two decades. As we have indicated the CDF policy committee too was made up of people who shared this commitment. But to realise the opportunity to promote those principles they all had to recognise the interests of the potential sponsors, in this case a UK national non departmental public body, CDF, ultimately accountable to the Home Office, and a leading Scottish University.

Given that the mission of CDF was to promote community development and that it saw the idea of the Centre as a means to fulfil this there was a high level of congruence, however, there was a wider motivation to engage with the proposal. A recognised issue for CDF was not simply that its operation in Scotland was small scale but being project focused it had a very low profile in terms of influence on policy. Further, as a result of the predominance of its activities, it was often perceived as an English organisation and was accountable to a Conservative Home Secretary at a time when Scottish politics was dominated at both parliamentary and local government level by Labour. Though devolution was still some way off, Scottish identity was already a significant issue and CDF needed a profile that was clearly Scottish. Partnership

with an established Scottish institution and a new identity was attractive – some might say essential.

Motivations of a university were inevitably more complex. At one level the key departments supporting the initiative - Social Policy and Social Work, Urban Studies and Adult and Continuing Education - had an established, though in each case partial, locus in community development. Their interest was both academic and practical particularly given that their teaching was applied and much of their research was designed to inform and analyse both the context and issues of practice itself. But more widely the proposal for the Centre was emerging at a time when universities were becoming increasingly both more business oriented and being scrutinised more closely in terms of research output as well as teaching competence. At the same time Glasgow University had a more general aspiration to demonstrate links with the community. To engage with an initiative like the proposed centre the university had to be convinced that doing so would add value to its own mission to deliver excellence in research and teaching. Ceding responsibility to a partnership with an external agency carried potential to further its goals but also risk of loss of control and reputational damage. Understandably therefore, whilst there was sympathy for the ideas there was also wariness that was reflected in the nature of the partnership agreement that emerged. Though there would be no direct financial cost to the university as any staff involvement would be on a buy-out basis, there was a potential loss of more experienced staff who would need to be replaced on a short term basis until the Centre had demonstrated its capacity to be sustainable.

The partnership agreement between the university and CDF led to the establishment of an advisory management board for the incipient centre that would be made up equally of members off each agency, with the responsibility for chairing it rotating between a trustee of CDF and the Dean of the Social Science Faculty. The Centre was not being established as an independent organisation, rather two agencies were agreeing to collaborate whilst retaining complete responsibility for their own staff. The co-directors of the Centre would each ultimately be accountable to their own institutions but would jointly report to the advisory board. Continued engagement would depend on both partners being satisfied that the programme of activities satisfied its requirements. A partnership agreement between the two organisations was signed in 1993, although crucially for them it ensured that either partner could walk away from the arrangement at any time without sanction.

In terms of resources the university was not directly contributing financially whereas CDF was dedicating its existing, albeit relatively limited, budget for its work in Scotland to the initiative. From the start, therefore, there was a financial imbalance in the partnership. But potential access to the knowledge and skills available from the university was a basis from which it might be possible to lever in grants and contracts that would substantially alter the scale of CDF's profile in Scotland. Thus the core funding from CDF provided a degree of security to the venture but was insufficient to enable initiatives to be taken without further resources being acquired. To prosper the Centre would need to trade on the reputations of its staff and potential collaborators in the university. A key factor would be what opportunities would be available to do so.

Proposals to the Scottish Office of the UK government were received politely but without commitment to core grant funding. Partly it seemed that this was simply because it was felt that CDF was already a government funded body but perhaps more significantly the commitment to community development in public policy was emanating primarily from Labour Councils not the Conservative government. Opportunity had therefore to be sought in commissioned contracts for specific pieces of work including from government departments and local authorities. It was fortunate that at the time the Scottish Office Education Department was tendering for a major two-year research contract on community development in community education, that the Centre was able to win. Once operational, with a flow of income, it was better placed to identify further opportunities. It was a conscious strategy on the part of the Centre to generate through its work a dialogue about issues that required attention, for example through policy for practice seminars, conferences and publications, and in that sense, it was seeding the ground for further potential work.

## **Key early projects and programmes**

Perhaps in recognition of the precarious level of funding that was initially available, and although a half time Glasgow University buy out became operational in September 1993, the formal launch of the Centre did not take place until it was apparent that its capacity to secure work and income enabled it to move forward with confidence. The formal launch was also delayed to

coincide with a high profile European conference that was hosted by SCDC in conjunction with the Combined European Bureau for Social Development in Glasgow in September 1994. The keynote speaker at the conference was Bruce Millan, the former Secretary of State for Scotland who was then European Commissioner for Regional Policy and Cohesion.

The conference addressed regional policy across Europe, with a particular emphasis on urban regeneration and community enterprise. SCDC itself was formally launched at a reception held at the Burrell Gallery, with contributions from the vice-principal of Glasgow University, the Chair of CDF Trustees, and the Chair of the Scottish Policy Committee of CDF.

Once established there were two primary strands to the work of SCDC. One was a continuation of a programme already established by CDF promoting community development in health contexts, with funding for a worker having been secured by the then director of CDF. This including working as a partner in Sonas, an early community health project on South Uist, other partners being the Western Isles Health Board and the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS). The worker also organised seminars and a conference on the emerging field of community involvement in health. The other strand grew from the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) research contract. It was the latter that enabled the Centre to establish its new identity.

The case study research was conducted collaboratively between 1993-95 by university staff with backgrounds in community development and community education working to an advisory committee set up by SOED. The evidence challenged understanding of the role of community development in community education and caused a degree of controversy in the field. In particular it became clear that systematic evaluation of practice against measurable outcomes was widely lacking and claims about its impact frequently rested on assertion rather than evidence. Tackling this issue became a central theme in the subsequent work of SCDC.

The publication of the research<sup>10</sup> also coincided with a decision by the Secretary of State for Scotland to commission a review of community education in Scotland. The Director of SCDC who led the research was appointed as a member of the review group and as such was able to extend

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<sup>10</sup> Barr A. Hamilton R, Purcell R *'Learning for Change – community educations and community development'* Community Development Foundation 1996

the aspiration of the Centre to influence policy. The review published in 1998<sup>11</sup> made very significant changes in community education, not least retitling the activity community learning and development and enhancing the profile of community development alongside youth work and adult learning and literacy. At this point the Scottish Community Education Council was renamed Community Learning Scotland.

In parallel with the SOED research, in 1994-5 SCDC was also commissioned by the Strathclyde Regional Council to review practice in community development in its Social Work Department<sup>12</sup> in order to provide examples of best practice that could be transferred to the unitary councils that were about to take direct responsibility for social work services following local government reorganisation. Alongside a further smaller project focussing on needs of community organisations themselves<sup>13</sup>, the importance of improved planning and evaluation again emerged.

It was fortuitous therefore for SCDC that in 1995 the Voluntary Activity Unit of the Department for Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland was tendering for work to develop a framework for monitoring and evaluating community development, an activity that had received a substantial funding boost as a result of the peace dividend associated with the talks that would lead to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Though the Centre had some reservations about working outside Scotland it seemed too good an opportunity to miss given, first, that it would enable development work on better monitoring and evaluation and, second, that an external agency without specific connections to practice in Northern Ireland was seen as a potential benefit for the project. The commission was also particularly attractive because it would involve developing the framework collaboratively with community development practitioners across Northern Ireland and would feed perspectives from another part of the UK into the debate already underway in Scotland.

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<sup>11</sup> *Communities: Change through Learning – report of a working group on the future of community education* Scottish Office 1998

<sup>12</sup> SCDC *Strong Communities Effective Government* 1995

<sup>13</sup> SCDC *New Directions* 1995

The project in Northern Ireland led to two publications in 1996<sup>14</sup> setting out principles and indicators that could be applied to community development evaluation. Throughout the project the Voluntary Activity Unit kept other relevant civil service departments in the UK and the Irish Republic informed of the work that it was doing and they were invited to the launch conference in 1996. In sharing the material developed for Northern Ireland, which had built on the Learning for Change study in Scotland, it was felt that a cross national programme would be relevant to provide training and support to help organisations develop and implement the evaluation system. With joint funding from the Home Office for England, the SOED for Scotland, the VAU for Northern Ireland and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in the Irish Republic, the Achieving Better Community Development project was established that ran until 2000. It provided 26 five-day courses backed up by consultancy and networking support and an internet-based practice exchange for participants who were applying the model. At the end of the programme a new handbook<sup>15</sup> was prepared based on experience of users and was accompanied by a trainers' resource pack and case examples<sup>16</sup>.

It was also in this early period that SCDC ran a series of seminars under the title Policy for Practice and collaborated with others to establish a journal of community work and development initially for Scotland and later on a UK basis.

The Policy for Practice seminars invited prominent academics and practitioners to present papers that would encourage debate about both theory of community development and policy options that could inform practice. The seminars were written up and made available through the Centre. In this they were a forerunner to the much more significant establishment of a journal.

SCDC shared a common concern to enhance the quality of practice through access to theory, research and reflective writing about practice. Its working relationship with the Scottish Community Education Council led to a shared initiative in 1996 to co-publish a Scottish Journal of Community Work and Development. The journal set out to focus on articles exploring research,

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<sup>14</sup>Barr A, Hashagen S, Purcell R 'Monitoring and evaluating community development in Northern Ireland' and 'Measuring community development in Northern Ireland' Voluntary Activities Unit, Department for Health and Social Services, Belfast 1996

<sup>15</sup> Barr A, Hashagen S 'Achieving Better Community Development Handbook' Community Development Foundation, London 2000

<sup>16</sup> Taylor P, 'Working with ABCD' Community Development Foundation, London 2000

theory, policy, and practice across a range of disciplines, including education, social work, housing, health, regeneration and equalities, within which community work and development featured. The audience included academics, policy makers and practitioners across Scotland.

To widen the ownership of the journal and establish effective peer review of material, a 10-member editorial board was established chaired by an eminent professor of urban studies at Glasgow University. The board had academic members from 5 other Scottish Universities as well as members from the field of practice and the sponsoring agencies. Overall editorial responsibility was taken by the SCDC Director from Glasgow University though guest editors also took responsibility for some editions. Contributors to the journal like its board included academics, policy makers and practitioners.

The journal contained not only articles and book reviews in each edition but also a briefing on pertinent policy developments. For the first six editions the journal was solely Scottish in orientation. However, interest from other parts of the UK and the opportunity for SCDC to draw on its CDF roots enabled the scope of the publication to be broadened. From 2001 CDF became joint publisher (and after the closure of SCEC/CLS sole publisher) with an enhanced editorial board including representatives from elsewhere in the UK.

In all 16 editions were produced, the last in 2007, at which point the editorial board concluded that sustaining submissions and subscriptions in the context of a growing range of accessible information sources and media was not cost or outcome effective.

## **Wider development and changes from the late 1990s**

Running in parallel with the ABCD programme SCDC continued to engage with the health agenda through funding from the Health Education Board for Scotland which would develop into a major programme through the establishment of the Community Health Exchange (CHEX). At this time a director of SCDC also joined a Scottish Ministerial Advisory Group on Mental Health and Well-being further cementing health as a focus of the work of the

Centre. Policy influence was also enabled by membership of a Scottish Office Working Group on active citizenship.

Alongside the ABCD programme there were also a number of other smaller projects among which were two action research projects undertaken in collaboration with staff of CDF in England focussing on the potential role of community development in community care. These projects were funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and led to two publications.<sup>17 18</sup> Though not a consistent theme of the work of SCDC community care as an issue emerged again later in connection with work focused on community engagement and led to joint training work with the Scottish Care Commission for its staff on service user participation as an element of service inspections.

Work relating to care services has a close connection to health, but it was to be CHEX that would become the major programme in this area. CHEX was wholly funded by Health Education Board for Scotland and later by NHS Health Scotland as a distinctly identified programme within SCDC to support emerging community health initiatives. To some extent the emergence of a more directly practice support programme for community initiatives differed from other areas of SCDC work that had primarily focused on action research and development of tools to support community development practitioners.

Up to the point that ABCD was established, the delivery of SCDC projects had been primarily by the co-directors and two part time colleagues who also worked part-time in the university. That arrangement became problematic in terms of the insecurity of employment of the part time staff and by the time ABCD was operational there was a need to widen the number of contributors to the delivery of the programme. It was at this point that, in its action research and support for practitioners, SCDC moved to a development model that was based largely on engaging consultants for specific tasks rather than in-house appointments. However, in parallel was CHEX directly engaging 4 SCDC staff in a project to support local initiatives. Organisationally this had its tensions but given the relevance of both strands to the mission of SCDC to 'support best practice in community development' the models coexisted and to some extent overlapped. CHEX itself sometimes commissioned consultancy reports, for example, a digest of key policy relevant to community

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<sup>17</sup> Barr A, Drysdale J, Henderson P *'Towards Caring Communities'* Pavilion Publishing, Brighton 1997

<sup>18</sup> Barr A, Stenhouse C, Henderson P *'Caring Communities a Challenge for Social Inclusion'* Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York 2001

development and health that was widely used by practitioners in other fields too.<sup>19</sup> Similarly work conducted to develop an evaluation framework for community learning and development was later adapted to the needs of community health<sup>20</sup> with funding from NHS Health Scotland

It was the case however that there were two distinct strands to the work of SCDC from the time of the establishment of CHEX. At this point therefore it may be helpful to explore each in turn.

## **CHEX and community-led health**

CHEX emerged as an initiative generated in a dialogue between SCDC and HEBS but was essentially commissioned by the latter. Traditional models of health education were being questioned – telling people what was good for them was being replaced by a recognition that people need to be motivated by their own analysis of their needs before they will act. Hence improvement in health needed to start by working with communities from their experience and perspectives. This approach was leading to the emergence of community led health projects<sup>21</sup> and HEBS was seeking both to support their work and to assist them to engage with and learn from one another.

As in other areas then, the origins of the initiative reflected a shift in government thinking in Scotland towards more community-oriented practice. There had been a development agency in NHS England for some time and HEBS recruited a community manager from that network to establish a stronger profile for community approaches in public health and health education. There was also a similar project in Northern Ireland.

In 1995 SCDC was commissioned by HEBS to identify community health initiatives in operation throughout Scotland, and a national conference was called during which these projects were invited to propose how they would best wish to be supported. Their key recommendation was that priority should

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<sup>19</sup> Taylor P *'The Policy Maze'* SCDC/CHEX 2000

<sup>20</sup> SCDC *'Leap for Health'* Health Scotland, Edinburgh, 2003

<sup>21</sup> For a fuller exploration of community led health work see: Dailly J and Barr A *'Understanding a Community Led Approach to Health Improvement'* SCDC 2008

be given to encouraging learning and exchange between the various initiatives, and through this to advocate more strongly for community-led initiatives in the health services.

As a result of the conference, HEBS decided not to run such a networking initiative directly, as it could have done, but to fund an arms-length pilot project based at SCDC which would be more independent and distinct from NHS structures. This was named the Community Health Network Project, which ran between 1996 and 1998. The pilot was evaluated and, based on the conclusions, a more permanent project - the Community Health Exchange (CHEX) - was established and based at SCDC as before. CHEX was launched in 1999 and designed to have a strong emphasis on information and communication as well as networking. It attracted a highly regarded community worker with previous experience with both Crossroads and the Poverty Alliance to the post of manager.

There was an emphasis in CHEX on networking between projects and on training for local people engaged in their communities around health improvement. In relation to the former CHEX staff supported conferences, exchanges and events and provided an information resource to support local projects, including regular editions of CHEXpoints newsletter.

In relation to training a successful programme called 'Health Issues in the Community' had been developed and piloted by staff from Edinburgh University. Wider roll out of this training programme was to become a major strand of the work of CHEX and in turn it came to underpin the quality of the work of community led health projects by enhancement of local skills and knowledge.

Interestingly there has been a continuity to the work of CHEX that involved sustained relationships to the projects that they supported that was not possible in the more short-term contract work that characterised the work of other parts of SCDC.

Although HEBS preferred to see CHEX as a distinct project embedded in SCDC, there were concerns that this meant that other SCDC staff were unable to participate in CHEX work, and *vice versa*. This issue was partially resolved when HEBS, and its successor Health Scotland was able to engage SCDC personnel in separately funded health initiatives through its relationship with CHEX. Three major initiatives emerged through this relationship.

First, in 2002 SCDC was commissioned to prepare a version of LEAP (a framework for Learning Evaluation and Planning that had already been produced for the SOED for the field of community learning and development) for community-led health. This drew strongly on the ideas of Ron Labonte<sup>22</sup> that good health and wellbeing was dependent on personal, social, and environmental factors. The resultant publication, LEAP for Health was circulated widely across health promotion agencies, and led to a number of calls from the field for further support and advice on how best to use the resource. This led to the second initiative, the establishment of the LEAP Support Unit. Again, funded by Health Scotland, three staff were appointed to the project with two main functions, first to provide further training and support to LEAP users including the preparation of further materials and resources, and second to work with the network of Healthy Living Centres that were at that time coming towards the end of their funding, and were seeking ways to ensure longer term sustainability. This work led to the emergence of Scottish Communities for Health and Wellbeing, now the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland.

From the perspective of the organisational model of SCDC, this marked the transition between the dependence on a number of associates, to the expansion of the core staff team. In turn, this permitted the physical expansion of the organisation into a larger suite of rooms in its office building.

The third major initiative was Meeting the Shared Challenge. The CHEX manager had been a member of the “Healthy Communities: A shared challenge” task group, which in 2006 made 12 recommendations that provided a framework to take forward the government's commitment to a community-led approach to health improvement. In response to the recommendations the Scottish Government Health Improvement Strategy Division commissioned SCDC to deliver a national capacity building programme. The key aims were to improve understanding, enhance commitment and collaboration and improve practice amongst all partners involved in community led health and, in so doing, build community capacity to shape the health agenda and its priorities.

From 2007 for two years, delivery involved both SCDC and CHEX staff, and

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*Health Promotion and Empowerment: Reflections on Professional Practice'*

Journal of Health and Education Behaviour, Sage 1994

associates and the programme was co-ordinated by a SCDC co-director, reporting to an Advisory Board. Further staff were recruited to SCDC to lead on the information and communications element of the programme. It resulted in collaborations between NHS structures and community / voluntary organisations throughout Scotland, and the publication of several resources in the field, notably *Understanding a community-led approach to health improvement*<sup>23</sup>

Though this paper only covers the period to 2009, CHEX itself is now 20 years in operation and as well as continuing to provide its core functions has been closely involved in commissioning and delivering further programmes to encourage a greater emphasis on what has become defined as ‘community-led health’.

## **Beyond ABCD**

In reviewing CHEX across the whole period covered by this paper and exploring the development of the Journal, the narrative has rather overtaken the stages of development of other main programmes of SCDC. In exploring these we need to return to the millennium and trace the impact of the ABCD programme.

The ABCD programme was a launchpad for SCDC to grow its programme. This developed in relation to planning and evaluation, social inclusion training, and community engagement in particular. An important initiative directly connected to the ABCD programme was the development for Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education of a planning and evaluation framework for community learning and development. Whilst HMIE had been involved in and supported the ABCD programme, the outcomes of the Community Education review of 1998 included a recognition of the need to improve planning and evaluation of practice and develop materials that were specifically located in policy for community learning and development (as the field had now been redefined).

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<sup>23</sup> Dailly J and Barr A ‘*Understanding a Community Led Approach to Health Improvement*’ SCDC 2008

Working in consultation with practitioners and with an advisory group SCDC produced LEAP – Learning Evaluation and Planning<sup>24</sup>. The manual contained a foreword from the Ministers of education and communities and was established as the template for project, programme and policy evaluation within the field. Like ABCD, its approach was based on outcome focussed participatory approaches to evaluation, in which definition of the purposes, methods and results of activity were determined and judged by all the stakeholders. In terms of influence on practice it had the benefit of both official endorsement but, as importantly, a process for its development in which those who would be using it had been active participants in testing and amending it. Nonetheless, making effective use of the framework required the field to address a skills deficit and SCDC, working with colleagues in Community Learning Scotland, was commissioned to run a national training programme for community learning and development staff in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

It should be noted that there was a close working relationship between SCDC and CLS with mutual representation on each others boards and this was beneficial when the Scottish government invited tenders to conduct a major training programme to support the work of the 48 Social Inclusion Partnerships and 12 Working with Communities Partnerships that had been established across Scotland.<sup>25</sup> The scale of this programme would have been beyond the scope of SCDC alone but working in partnership with others there was potential to offer an exciting and ambitious programme. What emerged was a complex partnership led by SCDC drawing on its now established network of consultant associates, that would involve Community Learning Scotland, the Scottish Poverty Alliance, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, three departments from Glasgow University (Urban Studies, Social Policy and Social Work, and Adult and Continuing Education) and the Community Learning and Development Department at Dundee University. The bid for the programme, to be called Working Together – Learning Together (WTLT), set out to engage all the stakeholders in the partnerships in the training

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<sup>24</sup> SCDC '*LEAP – Learning Evaluation and Planning*' SCDC for the Scottish Office Education Department, Edinburgh, 2000

<sup>25</sup> Social inclusion partnerships (SIPs) were a key part of the Scottish Executive's Social Justice policy agenda in the late 1990s. The SIP approach saw the introduction of a few new thematic partnerships which focused on the social exclusion of particular social groups, as well as an expansion in the much larger number of area-based partnerships which targeted the most deprived communities in Scotland.

simultaneously. That would mean developing a programme that would work for community activists involved at local level, the staff directly employed in the partnerships and senior staff of the local authorities and other agencies that were hosting them.

It was here that the strength of a consortium approach was demonstrated. Whilst the Poverty Alliance could bring local people who had been supported to develop peer training skills, the universities could bring high level academic input and the practice agencies a wealth of applied knowledge and experience. With a budget over £1m this was the largest and most complex project SCDC had run. Over two years events were held approximately every second week for up to 100 participants. The partnerships were clustered into regional groups that were each engaged in three multi-day events focusing on core themes of poverty and exclusion, partnership and participation. Between events the partnerships worked with a support trainer to prepare for them and apply lessons. Specific thematic events were also organised to address emerging issues of common concern.

The one stakeholder group that was absent from the WTLT programme was civil servants. This was a perceived weakness of the programme given that funding for SIPs came from Scottish government. In recognition of the concern funding was made available to support a parallel programme of training events for senior civil servants across departments to explore the same core issues – poverty/exclusion, partnership and participation. Though conducted separately from the core WTLT programme, the events highlighted some common concerns, for example, in relation to the quality of community engagement.

## **Community led research**

Though WTLT was a dominant activity of SCDC between 2000 and 2003, as noted CHEX was developing its programme from 1999 onwards, and other new developments were emerging. Of particular significance was the Scottish Community Action Research Fund (SCARF). SCDC had long contended that enabling community organisations to properly analyse the issues they face and identify ways of tackling them is a fundamental aspect of community empowerment. When the Scottish Government agency Communities Scotland invited tenders to manage a grant fund, SCDC jumped at the opportunity.

SCARF ran for four years from 2002. It aimed to help communities to carry out their own research, develop their knowledge about their community, and improve skills and their ability to learn. It did so by funding community-led groups to carry out small-scale, practical research projects that met the needs of specific groups of people. SCARF funding was available to eligible groups in two stages: Stage-one grants of up to £1,650 help groups to work with a research mentor, selected from a pool of qualified people across all regions of Scotland, to develop a research plan and identify training and support needs. Stage-two, again supported by a mentor, provided grants of up to £10,000 to help groups to develop and implement a research plan and share findings. Over 80 groups completed part 1 and 57 went on to complete a project.

## Further developments in planning and evaluation

Throughout the decade there was continuous work using and developing the LEAP framework. Much of this focussed on the field of community learning and development and also including the establishment of the LEAP Support Unit with two staff funded by Health Scotland in 2005 (referred to in the earlier discussion of CHEX). The relevance of the LEAP framework to other fields had been recognised and commissions were made to develop versions for not only for health but also greenspace and volunteering<sup>26 27 28</sup>. Further, as policy for Community Learning and Development progressed particularly with the publication of new guidance on practice from Communities Scotland<sup>29</sup> to which SCDC had contributed through participation in a Scottish Executive/Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) working group, a revised edition of LEAP was commissioned<sup>30</sup>. The value of the LEAP framework was also recognised elsewhere in the UK and a version suitable for use anywhere and focussed specifically on community development was published by the Community Development Foundation<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> SCDC 'LEAP for Health' Health Scotland, Edinburgh 2003

<sup>27</sup> SCDC 'LEAP for Greenspace' Greenspace Scotland, Stirling 2003

<sup>28</sup> SCDC 'LEAP for Volunteering' Volunteer Development Scotland, Stirling 2005

<sup>29</sup> 'Working and Learning Together to build stronger communities – Scottish Executive Guidance for Community Learning and Development' Scottish Executive, 2004

<sup>30</sup> SCDC 'LEAP' revised edition' Communities Scotland, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2007

<sup>31</sup> SCDC 'LEAP' (UK version) Community Development Foundation, London 2008

Several of these adaptations opened up relationships between SCDC and other organisations that were adopting a community development perspective to their work. The LEAP for Greenspace resource in particular was important in cementing a relationship with the community environmental field. Borrowing from both LEAP for Greenspace and the thinking behind SCARF, two further programmes were commissioned through Scottish Natural Heritage to work with local projects developing community greenspaces and wishing to understand their impact.

Between 2004 and 2006, SCDC also became closely involved in the Carnegie UK Trust Commission on Rural Community Development<sup>32</sup> and its associated Rural Action Research Project, with one co-director acting as evaluator to the work of the Commission and the other leading the action research element concerned with developing a skills framework for rural community development practice.

## **A focus on community participation and engagement**

A consistent theme of much of the work the Centre focussed on supporting community participation in relation to the role of public bodies whose activities impact on their particular shared interests or geographical location. As noted, this was no more central than in the WTLT training programme for the SIPs. The close relationship established with the partnerships over the period of the programme and the shared experience explored in training events revealed much disquiet about the quality of engagement of communities by public bodies. This was a concern that was shared by members of the Community Development Alliance Scotland<sup>33</sup> - a collaboration, funded at that time by Communities Scotland, of national agencies that were involved in community development to share experience and influence policy.

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<sup>32</sup> Commission for Rural Community Development 'Progress Report' Carnegie UK Trust, 2006

<sup>33</sup> The Alliance had originally been set up by Community Learning Scotland in the mid 1990's to enable dialogue between national agencies that were involved in community development to share experience and influence policy. SCDC was a founding partner and in the mid 2000's the SCDC Board chair was its chair and an SCDC Director the Vice-chair. Members include: Association of Directors of Social Work, Association of *Scottish Community Councils*, *Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure Scotland*, Care Commission, Chartered Institute of Housing in *Scotland*, *Community Health Exchange*, *Community Learning & Development Managers Scotland*, Health Scotland, Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities.

Thus when the Minister for Communities convened a working group in 2003 to advise her on community empowerment, the SCDC director who was a member of the group took the opportunity to highlight the widespread concern about poor quality public engagement and to promote an idea that had been discussed by the Alliance.

The proposal was for the setting of national standards to guide the way in which community engagement should be conducted. The Minister responded to the proposal by inviting tenders to Communities Scotland to develop these standards. SCDC submitted a successful tender that stressed the importance of standards being developed in a way that modelled good practice in public engagement. Working closely with civil servants from Communities Scotland regional focus groups and conferences were conducted to identify what participants from all stakeholder groups – community representatives and operational staff and managers from the gamut of public agencies - saw as the ingredients of best practice. An advisory group, also comprising a mix of stakeholders, offered critical advice throughout and the draft standards were debated in a national conference. The standards were endorsed both by the Ministers for Communities and Finance and Public Service reform and COSLA and by a dozen other national agencies. There were just 10 Standards focussing on: who to involve, how to support their involvement, how to plan engagement purposefully, selection of best methods and clear procedures, communicating information, providing feedback, monitoring and evaluation. Support materials were prepared to assist the application of the Standards that were published in 2005<sup>34</sup>.

Also in 2005 a research<sup>35</sup> study conducted by SCDC for Communities Scotland about training needs of a range of professions involved in community regeneration had highlight skills for community engagement as an area of weakness. Thus, whilst standards had been produced and endorsed by all stakeholders, applying them effectively was not a given. In the light of this further work was commissioned from SCDC to develop a curriculum framework identifying core competences that were needed for the conduct of effective engagement<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup>SCDC *'National Standards for Community Engagement'* Communities Scotland, Scottish Executive, Edinburgh 2005

<sup>35</sup> Barr A, Kirkpatrick D, Lindsay M, Taylor P *'Community Learning and Development Training needs of other professions involved in regeneration'* Working Paper, Communities Scotland, Scottish Executive, 2005

<sup>36</sup> Barr A, Taylor P *'Better Community Engagement – a framework for learning'* Communities Scotland, Scottish Executive, 2007

## On-line support tools

SCDC itself was concerned to develop further means to support good engagement and was aware from its extensive work with LEAP that a structure for planning and evaluating engagement might be helpful. In a programme promoting the standards with public agencies SCDC began to consider whether there could be on-line support tools that would assist agencies. From this insight emerged ideas about a prototype tool for which development funding was obtained. This led to VOiCE which stands for visioning outcomes in community engagement. It is an online tool hosted by SCDC, with a technical partner, on behalf of Scottish Government, that enables agencies to conduct, record and evaluate engagement in a structured manner that involves analysis of the need for engagement, planning of how best to conduct it, guidance on doing it and on reviewing its results. The core database records all engagements by an agency and can be interrogated to evaluate overall practice.<sup>37</sup> Support materials were also prepared<sup>38</sup>

The successful development of VOiCE led on to a parallel development of an on-line version of LEAP<sup>39</sup>

## Community Capacity Building

It can be seen that with the exception of CHEX and SCARF and to a limited degree WTLT the primary focus of most SCDC work to this point related to the support of practitioners and agencies involved in community development and community engagement, rather than with communities or community organisations. The model of community development established during ABCD essentially understood the field as having the 'twin pillars' of community capacity building and community engagement. Yet by far the larger part of the work SCDC had been commissioned to do had been in the fields of community engagement and with the role of community development practitioners in local government and other public bodies. It was recognised that, despite arguing consistently that community engagement could not succeed unless grounded in community capacity building, SCDC had been unable to do much work on that pillar. It was a concern that direct work on community capacity

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<sup>37</sup> [www.voicescotland.org.uk](http://www.voicescotland.org.uk)

<sup>38</sup> e.g. SCDC *'Finding your VOiCE'* SCDC for the Scottish Government, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> [www.scdc.org.uk/what/leap](http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/leap)

building was not more prominent. The opportunity to bid to deliver a programme focussed on strengthening communities was therefore very attractive.

Communities Scotland had produced a review of the field of Community Learning and Development and this had noted that the community capacity building element of it had received fewer resources and was seen as less important. In early 2008 the Scottish Government and COSLA established a Concordat between each Council and the Scottish Government, based on 15 national outcomes. One of the 15 national outcomes was: *'We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others'*. A publication from Learning Connections, *Delivering Change*, developed a series of outcomes for the field. So community capacity building was emerging on the agenda, and SCDC welcomed this as a counterbalance to the previous (and continuing) work on engagement.

The first step was a commission from Learning Connections to compile a directory of the key resources that were then available to support community capacity building, published in late 2007<sup>40</sup> in two versions, both entitled *Building Community Capacity*. One of the resources recommended in this directory was *Assessing Community Strengths*<sup>41</sup>, which had been published by CDF. But this had been written primarily in an English context and did not correctly reflect the Scottish situation.

SCDC was then commissioned to provide a support programme named *Achieving Community Change*, and this formed the basis of what was to become the *Building Stronger Communities* framework which underpinned the subsequent ACE (*Achieving Community Empowerment*) programme with BIG lottery funding, and the later *Supporting Communities* programmes.

## **Towards Independence**

As the first decade of the 21st century drew to a close it was becoming more apparent that there was a need to review the organisational base of SCDC. Over time the partnership with the university had become less significant as only one member of staff was on its payroll whilst 18 were employed through

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<sup>40</sup> SCDC *'Building Community Capacity – resources for community learning and development practice'* Learning Connections, Scottish Government 2007

<sup>41</sup> Skinner S *'A new approach to assessing community strengths'* Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2002

CDF which was also the agency that managed all the financial affairs of the Centre.

It is worth noting that the origins of the Centre as a partnership between Glasgow University and the Community Development Foundation reflected a route to achieving the goals that its designers sought. It enabled a programme bringing together practice and policy development informed by theory and research. This was a rare combination but one that was felt at the time to have the potential to challenge the field and support its development.

In retrospect, in the light of the work actually undertaken by the Centre, that thinking looks sound. It was, however, quite a complex governance arrangement that emerged. Indeed, it never was a formal legal partnership. Rather there was an agreement to collaborate that depended on goodwill and pragmatism.

As noted in the opening to this paper, there was direct accountability for staff to their own employers but in practice it was the combined management board to which the directors primarily reported. The pragmatism of both agencies allowed it to work. But as the organisation grew over time, it was probably inevitable that CDF as the partner that provided administrative supports, including accounting and human relations, would become dominant. However, in terms of perception of what the Centre was there to do, for the field it was its programme of activity that defined its identity. Thus, as the direct role of the university diminished, the character of the Centre in terms of its practice, policy and theory functions was established.

Having established its own identity, the scope for SCDC to collaborate with a much wider potential range of agencies was apparent. The foregoing description of the programme illustrates that this gradually became the case. Moving to being an independent charitable organisation, with capacity to work with different partners was therefore a perceived opportunity. But there were wider environmental factors at play that had a significant bearing on the way that SCDC would develop.

It was particularly noteworthy that the Scottish National Party had taken control of the Scottish government in 2007 and there was increasingly strong expression of Scottish cultural identity. There was a perceived disadvantage for SCDC to be seen as a branch of an English based organisation. Furthermore, with an incoming new Chief Executive, CDF was embarking on a change process, and had engaged an organisational consultant to assist.

With this in mind the staff and board of SCDC recognised the need to review how SCDC should operate and plans were put in place to establish the Centre as an independent Scottish charity directly responsible to its own management board. With the change of focus of CDF this change became essential and inevitable. At this time, and significantly, the (UK) Department of Communities and Local Government which funded CDF realised belatedly that some of its grant to CDF had been going into Scotland for almost ten years, although the terms of the devolution settlement in 1999 were that community development was not 'retained'. So CDF could no longer fund work in Scotland through SCDC. This became a 'push' factor from the CDF point of view. Ironically, CDF itself was to close in 2016 as the UK government had decided to withdraw its funding support.

Whilst the new circumstances would be challenging, they also represented a huge opportunity that was facilitated by return of assets built up through the work of SCDC that were held by CDF.

By the time SCDC became independent the context of its work had shifted substantially as a result of gradual trends almost from its inception. Local government reorganisation and then austerity policy had had a major impact on the scale of direct employment of community development workers. Yet the principles of community development were being endorsed at the core of public policy and particularly public service reform. This was community development as approach across a range of host disciplines rather than community development as a discrete occupation. These shifts were already reflected in the work that SCDC had been doing and would influence the future trajectory of SCDC.

Thus in 2009 a new chapter in the history of SCDC began. We are delighted to be writing this account of the first chapter at the time SCDC celebrates the second chapter with its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an independent Scottish charity. We are also delighted to look at the strength with which SCDC has continued to promote the core mission established 25 years ago - to promote best practice in community development.

**Alan Barr and Stuart Hashagen**

**November 2019**