

Supporting Communities

Learning event summary report

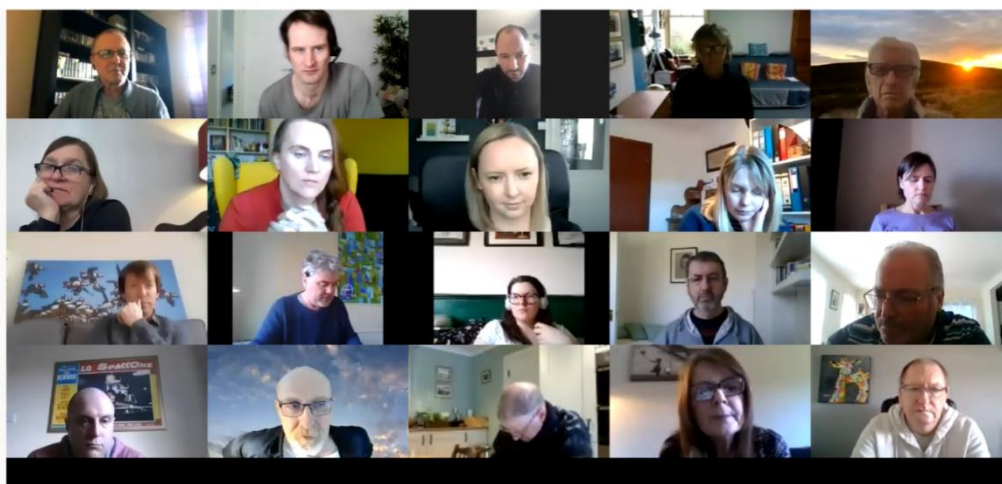
Thursday 18th March 2021

Introduction/Background

SCDC's Supporting Communities programme has sought to assist a wide range of community organisations and networks to address the wider social, economic and environmental opportunities in their area. Often these organisations and networks find it harder to secure community development support which is generally in very short supply, or even non-existent in many local areas. SCDC's role has been to work with these organisations (operating at a range of levels) to assist them to become better organised, inclusive and influential thereby increasing their effectiveness, impact and sustainability. This is particularly important given the need to develop strong community infrastructure as the Community Empowerment Act is implemented and the participation environment is characterised by both increased opportunities and a resulting complexity.

Purpose and Outline of the Session

This shared learning session has come at the end of a long and difficult year for the groups and projects involved in the Supporting Communities programme. Because of this we felt it was important to explore the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic from the perspective of the participants. The session was held online and we were pleased that 17 people from 7 sites across the country were able to join us for the discussion. These sites range from rural to urban and cover a wide geographical range including Kyle and Lochalsh, Langholm, Colmonnell, Polbeth, Kirkintilloch and Glasgow. The session was designed to allow participants to share their experiences of the pandemic and how they have responded. We also heard directly from a local community worker in Govanhill about how COVID 19 had affected that particular community and how they have responded.



Discussion Session 1 – What has been the impact of Covid 19 on our communities?

Small groups shared their experiences of the impact of Covid 19 on their communities.

The main themes/issues are outlined here.

- The nature of the pandemic helped to bring people together – there was less tension or competition within communities, but will this continue after the immediate crisis is past?
- The pandemic has shown up both strengths and vulnerabilities.
- The pandemic has highlighted existing poverty and has made it worse – poverty on top of poverty.
- There has been a real challenge in engaging around sensitive issues such as mental health problems.
- The pandemic has uncovered a huge amount of community need but it has also revealed a well of community talent and volunteering.
- The pandemic has meant an enforced change for how projects work, staff working from home, being furloughed, or changing roles. It will be difficult to get back to where we were before (if that is even desirable or possible).

The Govanhill Experience – Marzanna’s Story

In the session we heard from Marzanna Antoniak a Community Connector working in Govanhill on Glasgow. She spoke about the experience of Covid 19 and how the Govanhill community responded to it.

Marzanna’s Story: Learning from the pandemic

Marzanna is a Community Connector, employed by Govanhill Community Development Trust in a post funded by Glasgow City Council and the NHS. Govanhill is Scotland’s most diverse neighbourhood, and she speaks a number of community languages, which is vital for her to understand what is happening on the ground.

Marzanna told us how the pandemic has actually broken down barriers, with people and organisations coming together like never before. Staff who do on-the-ground work were also able to have their say, collaborate, and get inspired by each other’s ideas.

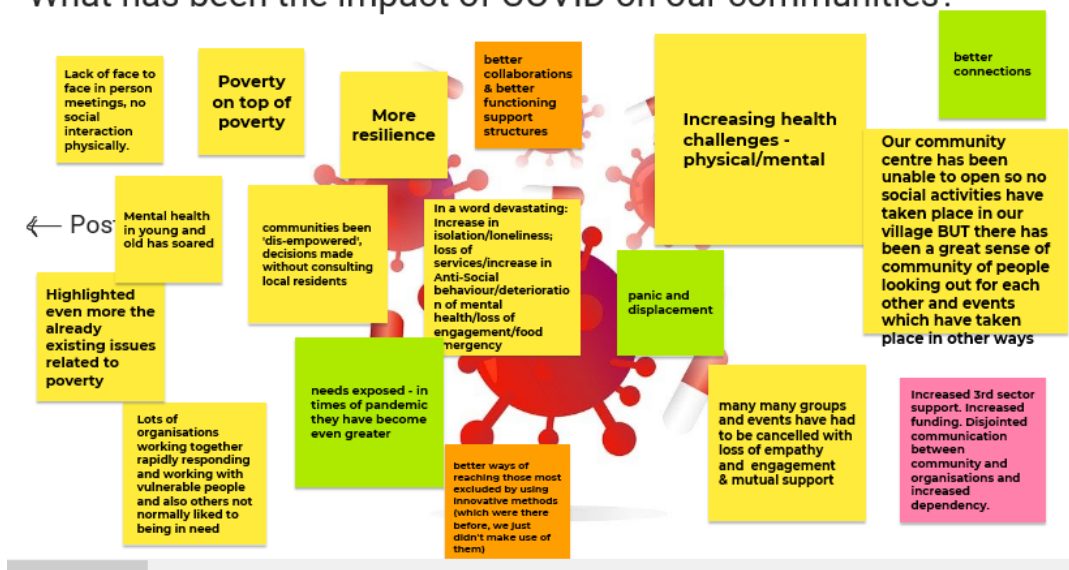
Because of lockdown, it's crucial that people know where to find help. Key things that Marzanna and her colleagues were able to do included:

- The creation of a printed and fully accessible directory of Govanhill services. This was delivered to over 8,000 households in Govanhill.
- The development of an online approach that actually works in Govanhill, even for the people who are normally perceived as facing huge barriers to participation because of their limited language or literacy skills. You need to engage differently and rely on videos, voice messages, and visuals as the principal communication methods.
- Digital inclusion was a key focus - not just a case of giving people devices and data but providing training and making sure people committed to it.

Lockdown was a period of real learning for Marzanna and her colleagues. There was greater demand on their time but also the need for greater collaboration to ensure there was no duplication and to ensure no-one was missed. The local workers have started using Google Docs to share documents with the data protection agreement covering what they can and can't share. This is now a tool for every single support worker in the area, with meeting minutes and action points. Staff have been able to share their insights and people can contact each other for advice across different organisations.

COVID made them focus on true inclusion on every level although they're still learning to be truly inclusive, for example, by incorporating sign-language interpreting or captioning at events. Part of Marzanna's role is to write a Locality Plan for Govanhill, based on residents' needs and wishes. The experience of COVID has focused her on making the plan as inclusive as possible in its development and its [dissemination](#).

What has been the impact of COVID on our communities?



Discussion Session 2 – how have we responded to Covid 19?

Small groups then reflected on their own responses to the pandemic. Here are some of the main points raised and covered in the discussions:

- The positive community response to the pandemic was highlighted by everyone taking part. Particular mention was made of the speed, effectiveness and flexibility of the community response. There was also, in many cases, an expansion of activities during the pandemic.
- We have been starting to hear from the less-heard voices during the pandemic and hopefully this will continue in the future.
- The response was helped by sensible and mature approaches to funding by the main grant funders and Scottish Government. The speed of funding to aid recovery was particularly appreciated.
- Relating to this there was a healthy, mature and collaborative approach to funding applications with community organisations coming together rather than competing for funding.
- There looks like there will be much more of a joined-up approach post-Covid and a clear co-ordinating role for community anchor organisations is emerging.
- There were some key differences noted between rural and urban communities, but also common themes identified.
- The accessibility of SCDC's Supporting Communities Safely (SCS) Guidance was noted
- In the light of the pandemic, we need to improve our communication methods so that we are genuinely inclusive.

Summary and Next Steps

Our thanks go to everyone who participated in the session and shared their experiences and ideas with us. We will continue to support those groups that are continuing to develop their work as we emerge out of the pandemic and begin to 'build forward better'. We also hope to deliver another shared learning session within the next 2 or 3 months. This will pick up on the key themes of the programme and will focus on the recovery from Covid and how best the local organisations can respond and develop their activity in the light of what we've learned during the past 12 months.

Mick, Paul, Dave and Robin

The SCDC Supporting Communities Team

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