

**National Community Safety Conference
Portsmouth, June 15th 2006**

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- Introduce myself: co-CEO CDF, background of working in the community sector and in government
- Amanda's presentation has accurately described community principles and practice. I would like to describe outcomes of these approaches and why they are needed. This presentation aims to set the context for how we, at CDF, believe that CD is a fundamental component of safer communities. I will make three points in this talk:
 1. That stronger communities are also safer communities. I will briefly describe the broadly accepted components of stronger communities and what can happen when these component don't exist
 2. I will briefly describe the role and functions that community development workers can undertake when these components are not visible, or need support and development
 3. I will also describe how CDF helps to ensure that stronger communities, as an essential factor in safer communities, is recognised and embedded in Govt policy

1. So, what happens when a community, as geographically defined by housing, shops, schools, community facilities and services, fails to engender a *sense* of community? The end result is often one of physical decline and social disorder.

Poor physical design, spatial planning, lack of amenities, connection to broader social structures and services (beyond that of the defined community) means that there are few opportunities for individuals to develop the social bonds which create stronger, and therefore safer communities.

By this I mean the occasion to undertake one's day to day business in an environment which encourages social interaction with those people around you who should be, or feel, your community. To create opportunities to enable individuals to begin to recognise those around them and place them within this or that community context, because recognising and being recognised by others engenders a sense of belonging and community. Or the availability of an environment which encourages community interaction - such as a community centre, or well maintained play area. These provide the spaces in which formal and informal activities can take place, which in turn enable formal and informal social networks to develop and become stronger.

These networks then enable informal and formal local knowledge to be shared which can strengthen these community bonds.

So, in short, the poorly designed community, where there is no community facility – and that can mean no, too few, or poorly maintained community spaces, library, pub, shops, places of worship, play areas – will mean that the community exists on an inwardly focused routine that provides no opportunity for strengthening these social bonds. Members of that community consider their problems to be individual – there is no identification that these may be shared problems. Problems that relate to the living environment, such as housing repairs, poor street lighting, uncollected refuse or tipping, graffiti, broken play equipment and the lack of ability to be taken seriously in addressing these problems, by the landlord or local authority, bring with it a sense of powerlessness. And as people want to have power, then in these communities it often manifests itself in unsociable or criminal activities, community tensions and conflicts.

The community moves further down the list of those who have the authority and resources to improve this lot, because it becomes too much of a challenge to tackle. Without the social networks and knowledge-sharing there is no call for action to address these individual and collective problems and to help conditions, and community safety, improve.

For example, an elderly lady in her 80's, living by herself on an urban Birmingham estate, needs to draw her pension every week. Her only son lives a couple of hundred miles away in Wales. The neighbours that she still knows and recognises are elderly, too. And being elderly and having dementia she is unable to form any social bonds or networks with the new people arriving on the estate.

Her dementia means that she can only function in the same way that her long-term memory allows – how she has functioned for the last 20 or so years. She is used to taking her pension book, which has a date on it that she can check against the TV or radio, and walking to the local post office to draw her pension. However, the Government has decided that it is more cost effective to withdraw the pension book option and replace it with direct payment into the bank, or a cash card and PIN number that she can use at any cashpoint. But there isn't a post office or bank anywhere nearby – they closed down a long while ago – but there is a cashpoint. However, her dementia means that she has no way of remembering her PIN number unless it is written down in some obvious place.

She is quite fortunate. Her son, nearly 60, makes a weekly round trip from Wales to make sure she has enough food, throw the food away that is out of date, open and respond to mail, keep the house and garden tidy – she has always been house-proud and becomes upset if standards slip. He walks her to the cashpoint one particular week and she manages to dig out the PIN number. He finds £900 accumulated in her account. At home he finds a further £600 stashed in her blanket box, because there is nowhere else to put it.

He is pretty angry and very worried. The systems and facilities have failed his mother and he knows she is easy prey for a mugger, or burglar. He has written to the authorities, but the response clearly shows that the matter is out of their hands. Surely there must be other elderly people on the estate in the same predicament?

This story is meant to illustrate the situation faced in a particular part of society and the difficulties, when there is no, or little social glue, in collectively addressing a common problem. It is the story that my uncle told me about his mother two nights ago.

2. So how can community development help strengthen communities and who would you look to, to help do this?

Community development approaches may be formal – with qualified and experienced community development workers, who have been assigned to a community to help to strengthen it. It is worth noting that CDF undertook some research in 2004 and, based on a sample of 6 geographical areas, estimated that there are 20,000 community development workers across the UK, 45% of whom work for the public sector.

Community development approaches can also be informal where community leaders exist, such as within faith-based organisations, or where they emerge driven by a desire to improve the local lot, such as tenants' associations, or community groups, or where they are democratically elected to work for their community, such as local councillors.

These people formally and informally undertake the approaches described by Amanda. These people can help to:

- Build bridges where there is distrust – that can be between residents in the community, or between agencies and residents.
- Resolve conflicts and dissipate tensions, and allow a move towards identifying collective problems and potential solutions, rather than polarised problems
- Act as a catalyst for local action and interaction

3. So how does CDF help ensure that the importance of community development is reflected in government policy?

A particularly good example is the design of the indicators within the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund. At CDF we were concerned that local authorities administering this fund would concentrate on the Safer element, quite simply because reduction in crime is relatively easy to measure. It isn't as easy to measure a stronger community, but we argued that you can't have one without the other.

We have developed a set of indicators – or measures – which will help local authorities and other public agencies, to identify baselines and progress towards a stronger community.

Overall aim: Increased capacity of local communities to participate in local decision making and influence and contribute to service delivery.

As I have mentioned, strong communities display a wide variety of positive characteristics. All of these contribute to communities being both safer and stronger, but here we are concentrating on the **overall strength** of the community, which also has outcomes of value in themselves and for all other social policy areas as well as for safety.

Indicators however need to be highly selective if they are to be practicable. **Five required core outcome indicators** are set out here, each corresponding to a main component of community strength. A further **ten optional indicators** are recommended where further depth of investigation is required under the same headings. These expand to 60 - bespoke packages can be designed to meet a local community's or service providers particular needs.

The first three core indicators, on one aspect each of **governance, cohesion and volunteering**, capture community strength as evidenced in the perceptions and behaviour of individuals. These are already in wide use and have been accepted by government programmes as being meaningful, relevant and practicable.

The last two core indicators capture community strength as evidenced in **the condition of the voluntary and community sector (VCS)**. The fourth, on the growth of the local VCS, registers the perceptions of VCS groups and organisations as to whether their **general volume of activity** is growing. The fifth seeks to capture areas of growth of **delivery of public services by the VCS**.

This is a very brief overview - for example, the first layer of these indicators, under each of the 5 themes is:

- % of residents who feel that they can influence decisions affecting their local area
- % of residents who feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds can get on well together
- % of residents who affirm that they carried out voluntary work in an organisation once a month or more in the past year
- % of VCS groups and organisations affirming growth in activity over the past year in terms of (i) financial turnover and (ii) volunteering
- Proportion of services in selected public service areas delivered by VCS organisations on behalf of the local authority

These are then elaborated as measures expand into more detail. The 3 core indicators will be used by all Local Authorities in their LAAs by 2007. We are

currently designing training to help LAs use the indicators and we are currently seeking resources to carry out longitudinal research, preferably over 10 years, which will enable us to measure this progress of a stronger and, therefore, safer community.

So, at a national policy level CDF endeavours to ensure that the some of the fundamental elements which demonstrate how a community feels, or doesn't feel, empowered, inclusive and active can be brought out and action taken to increase the strength of the community. We would hope that the obvious solution lies in the principles, practices and approaches of community development.

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