



LANGLEES

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING - WHAT WE'VE LEARNED



SNAPSHOT

March 2020 was the month when everything closed. This was when community members most needed support. The Langlees community came together to quickly set up networks that could provide this support, and allow community voices to be heard. Langlees Primary School were fundamental in this process. By using the local knowledge and trusting relationships built up over time, the Community Co-ordinator was able to direct the right support to the people that were local to the area, and were supporting the individuals most in need.

In 2020, the Baby & Toddler group came from a conversation during a community event. New mothers wanted to set up a group to support new parents which would allow toddlers a place to play with other kids, and be a safe place for parents to feel supported with any niggles they had as a new mum.

A student placement was supported for a third year, this year's project set up a local cooking group requested by community members. The Community Cooking Project was supported through Ideas into Action funding. A group of six participants were supported in a variety of ways to help develop goals, which each individual hoped to achieve. For example, confidence to interact with people, cooking skills, budgeting skills, and anxiety issues. Through weekly sessions, each participant worked alongside the placement student. The programme involved cooking a variety of meals and going through a certified health and hygiene course.

Forth Valley Food Alliance formed in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Several similar projects all working alongside the communities came together to create a food forum.

Health - Wellbeing support in the community

Conversations at a local primary school identified a group of parents whose mental health was suffering due to the restrictions and the school closures implemented in response to Coronavirus. Family supports that parents had previously relied on were no longer available, the pressures of navigating the pandemic while living in poverty, and heightened anxiety surrounding Coronavirus were proving overwhelming for some.

The Community Co-ordinator facilitated support to parents with provided a range of resources such as jigsaws, mindfulness colouring books, knitting, word searches and tips for relaxation. These were distributed to the parents through the local school and were gratefully received. Further resources were sourced when another community partner, Hidden Treasures, were closing down.

One parent stated that she was coping all day but when her children went to bed she couldn't relax. She had read the same lines of a novel over and over again as her concentration wasn't there. The variety of activities she was given meant that she could switch her focus more often which helped to improve her concentration. "It was great to have a variety of things to do, I wouldn't have thought about colouring in as a way to relax but the mindfulness colouring was a great help". Another parent reported that, "the knitting and crochet was a trip down memory lane to me being back in school and I'm chuffed that I remembered how to knit". Feedback from other parents was highly positive and the project was a great success.



Forth Valley Food Alliance

During the pandemic several projects, all working alongside the community around food provision, were supported to come together to create a food forum. Langlees Food Initiative was part of the initial group and was receiving donations from other local food groups. During the first few months of the pandemic, the local Co-ordinator was asked to help facilitate conversations across a potential food alliance. The Co-ordinator supported the initial set up of the group by facilitating an online meeting space, reaching out to groups, bringing ideas together, and liaising with individuals to see if there was interest to form a committee.

Individual food groups were finding that people were delivering food aid to areas that were already supported by food provision. The main purpose of creating the food alliance was to create a joined up approach, so that members of the alliance were aware of support to people within and outwith their own community. After initial conversations, well established groups introduced and connected people across communities, and almost instantly they were sharing food and linking in other organisations. This brought energy and motivation to the food alliance, and the platform has been a great place to support new groups, share excess food and build connections with food partners who all have a focus on reducing food poverty.

The network has been a place that has supported groups to share thoughts and ideas, and most importantly to identify where groups can work together. The key to this process has been fostering connections and strong relationships. Future sustainability will depend on what communities choose to go forward with after the pandemic. Moving forwards, the group will continue to meet regularly online. They are now constituted as a local food network, with an aim of sharing skills knowledge and resources.



Partnership working in response to Coronavirus

When schools closed, the local Co-ordinator made contact with local schools to discuss how we could come together to support families in need within the community. Navigating the pandemic while living with poverty and deprivation was placing people and families under tremendous pressure. Shops were empty of products or only the most expensive lines of products were available. Large families were restricted to three items of some products, which meant they had to shop more often, putting them at increased risk of exposure to Coronavirus.

Families were unable to access online orders due to financial constraints and lack of mobile data. The number of partners working alongside the school increased from four to nearly 30. These partners were able to support families with fresh, frozen and ambient foods, hot meals, gas and electricity, resources to support health and wellbeing, grants to help support families who were furloughed or who fell just below the threshold from increased financial support from the government. This support was viewed very positively within the community. One parent reported, "it's been a god send, I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't been able to get the support. The way you've pulled all this support together has been brilliant, the hot meals have been a great help. I've been so worried about buying school clothes as we don't get a school clothing grant. With me not working my wee cleaning jobs just now it's really a struggle. Thanks for taking the pressure off."

What have we learned together?

Learning that is coming from the community is hard to measure when not physically in a place, although there has been a lot of feedback on the issues below:

Access to community space continues to be a challenge in Langlees, and has been highlighted as an important issue for many communities this year. Places and spaces for communities to come together physically, or virtually, have never been more needed.

Digital Connectivity has great advantages for meeting people, although this process has not been easy or accessible to everyone and some people in Langlees have struggled to get digitally connected.

The most important theme this year was partnership working. Where there was increased partnership working, there were more opportunities to spread information, connect people to support and avoid duplicating effort. Throughout the last year, over 30 partnerships were formed whilst the Co-ordinator was working from home. Before taking a step out of the community physically, this did not seem possible, however, watching the community take control has been inspiring. Directing all kinds of support to one partner (the primary school hub) who could support the community daily, was a simple solution that has supported the people in Langlees over the last year. The learning from that is you don't always need to be physically there in a place to support people, the important part is when they call, you are able to respond.



What happens next?

Bainsford Community Hall Group have plans to develop a community space that can provide long term community activity. It will also house local partners that will support community aspirations, such as a community café for people to come together for social activities & training opportunities, and a retail space for Hidden Treasure. The space will also create new opportunities to develop community-led initiatives.

Community conversations are taking place locally in Langlees, between communities and Falkirk Council Locality Planning. Although at the early stages of conversations, the community are part of the decisions that will affect their local community and have taken forward ideas to support long-term planning at the grassroots level.

Participatory budgeting is also underway with groups submitting an interest in how the money should be allocated across areas and services.



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People in Place - moving forwards

People in Place continue to work alongside nine communities in Scotland, supporting local people to connect, collaborate on ideas and take action to create positive change. The local activity and learning from each community help shape plans for the place, the wider programme and policy.

Coronavirus has brought additional challenges to communities and amplified existing inequalities. Across each community the themes of participation, voice and space continue to be evident. Similar challenges were observed across the communities because of coronavirus, including food insecurity, digital access, and financial concerns.

Within each community, individuals, groups, and organisations responded quickly, coordinating support to those that required it, through local knowledge, connections, and access to resources. The pandemic has evidenced the importance and value of communities coming together, having a say in decisions and control over resources, and opened new relationships with local government. Community Co-ordinators were able to support local responses by helping to connect community members together with groups and partner organisations through the relationships established prior to the pandemic. Adaptability in approach was also key as well as providing support with accessing available funding.

Corra will continue to support communities to connect, share learning, and use their voice to influence systems and processes. This will require creative approaches that bring communities and partners together in spaces, whether physical or digital, without barriers to participation so that everyone, including those furthest from power, can contribute towards building forward better.



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