

Methil



WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING - WHAT WE'VE LEARNED



SNAPSHOT

- Health Issues In the Community (HIICS) course continues in 2022.
- Equalities discussions in Methil.
- Doon The Dam (DTD) group events continue.
- DTD group brings community grantmaking and the Small Fish Fund (SFF) to Methil and Levenmouth.
- Corra and OnFife Project - Community Facilitator team engages community members on past and future possibilities on social history/heritage and arts/cultural activities in the Levenmouth area.
- The History Group continues community research and highlights the need for the Heritage Centre to reopen.
- School Exclusions Event in Glasgow.
- Community members gain a wider understanding of the impacts of school exclusions in Scotland and the UK.

Health Issues In the Community Course – Supported by the DTD group

From January to August local community members enjoyed five evenings of research, talk, laughs, learning and fish and chips at Methilhill and Denbeath Parish Church Hall. The course ignited many lively conversations about inequality and health implications in Methil, Levenmouth and across Central and West Fife communities. It explored the specific health impacts related to social, economic, political and environmental contexts - our work, living conditions, housing, social lives and wider impacts of pollution and climate change. See highlights of each module below.

History – Environmental and industrial impacts on our health

We had a visiting scholar from the University of Glasgow – Dr Ewan Gibbs, a social and economic historian researching the impact of energy production and the effects of deindustrialisation on mining communities across Scotland. The community commented on the local history of the energy sector – the legacy of coal mining and impacts on the local economy, environment, and community health.

Looking at statistics

The group looked at SIMD stats from various communities in Fife and discussed why did stats vary across Fife communities? Community members also commented on their own experiences across generations. Would these stats have been the same for grandparents, great grandparents?

Cost of living

We discussed the cost of living/fuel crisis and how this is affecting Levenmouth communities. What are various explanations about what is causing this crisis? How is the crisis being averted in some countries and contexts? How are governments reacting to the crisis and could energy companies be benefiting from the crisis? What would we do if we were in government?

This course was important for community members to be able to get together to discuss what is affecting their lives, and to think about what can be done about it!

In November the Doon the Dam (DTD) Group presented their experience and learnings from the HIICS course to approximately 200 delegates at the Church of Scotland Fife Poverty Forum.

DTD raised issues of community realities - low incomes and the lack of good jobs and the increased cost of living are increasing health inequalities in Methil and Levenmouth. The group also reinforced the notion - they do not see themselves or the community as deprived and helpless but as rich in community spirit and collective strengths. They inherited a community history of combating adversity, being creative, courageous, and inspired by one another, still doing great things. They are not statistics. This was very powerful and a refreshing tone to begin the conference. The group stayed for the whole event and were approached by conference members about their unique perspective and presentation - which differed from a dependence and victimised approach.



EQUALITIES IN LEVENMOUTH

During 2022 Corra and Methilhill and Denbeath Parish Church had a series of meetings with the police about growing inequalities in the area. We felt it necessary to begin conversations about possible human rights concerns and instances of hate, discrimination and harassment within the community and in/through services provided by the public, community or private sector. These discussions led to preliminary conversations with the public sector and community groups across age groups and communities. However, we did not complete the work and intend to continue next year. In 2023, there will be more opportunities to widen these discussions. Do community members feel we can have a fairer and more equal Levenmouth and how?

DOON THE DAM EVENTS CONTINUE

Nature walks doon the dam and a ceilidh

During the summer and autumn on a few occasions the DTD group took their chairs, walking boots, coffee, tea, biscuits and nature packs doon the dam for a community walkabout and afterwards had a seat and blether under the gazebo!! In November DTD group invited community members to dance off their stress through various reels, and traditional dances – we had to learn/relearn.

Gallatown bike hub visit...inspiration and ideas from kirkcaldy!

Our group visit consisted of community and Methilhill Community Children's Initiative (MCCI) members from Methil – 8 adults and 7 young people.

Staff shared the Hub history, describing the lengthy process to acquire the building, land, space, hub and gradual development of the bike track and adventure playground. They stressed the importance of prioritising young people, family, and wider engagement from the very beginning of the idea – to understand what the community wanted to do with this space - which was the former Gallatown Bowling Club. The Hub staff stressed it has been a journey.

Some members were so inspired by this visit that they started to discuss the possibility of a similar hub at Methilhill. Watch this space!



(Image: Example bikes in Canada)

DTD group also feel such a hub should be explored for Doon the Dam – a real community hub for all ages, like the Gallatown – designed, planned and implemented with the community as partners from start to finish.

The DTD group also talked about the idea of a Peoples Park doon the dam, drawing on ideas from other countries - areas for sports, creative play/place based art, paddling pool/water play, zip lines, puppet theatre, reflexology garden, lots of seating, table tennis concrete tables, adventure playground, bike tracks, and multi-use pathways for everyone to use.

There could be bike hire – for individuals or groups. Young people can be the drivers/peddlers of bikes – as volunteers or for a part time job/placement. At least one community hub doon the dam and small sheds throughout the park for tea and coffee. Jobs for young people and all ages at the people's park – building community wealth.



SMALL FISH FUND

DTD group brings Community Grant Making to Methil and Levenmouth

The Doon the Dam group were interested in the concept of community grant making through the Comic Relief #ShiftThePower fund. This was a local opportunity to widen access and the ways grants/funding are usually allocated. During initial discussions we discussed how some funding processes can exclude community groups in Methil and Levenmouth. This is where the term small fish emerged!

The group wanted to try a different method - a participatory process and ground up approach. Through discussions with Corra staff they found the idea of collective decision making a novel approach. It became an appealing idea - how to make funding more accessible, equitable and transparent to/with local people and communities.

In the beginning, the fund was to be located with Methil groups but later this was expanded to Levenmouth. DTD followed a model guided by a simple application process, community information sessions and transparent decision making followed by a series of events/visits which provided opportunities for funded community groups to network, meet and visit one another's projects. Community groups expressed how they felt part of something bigger than their own project - they felt part of a shoal of small fishes in Methil and Levenmouth!!

The doon the dam group found the SFF a rewarding experience. It was way more than they expected - not just about a grant or money but it's about relationship building and hopefully bigger and better things in 2023!

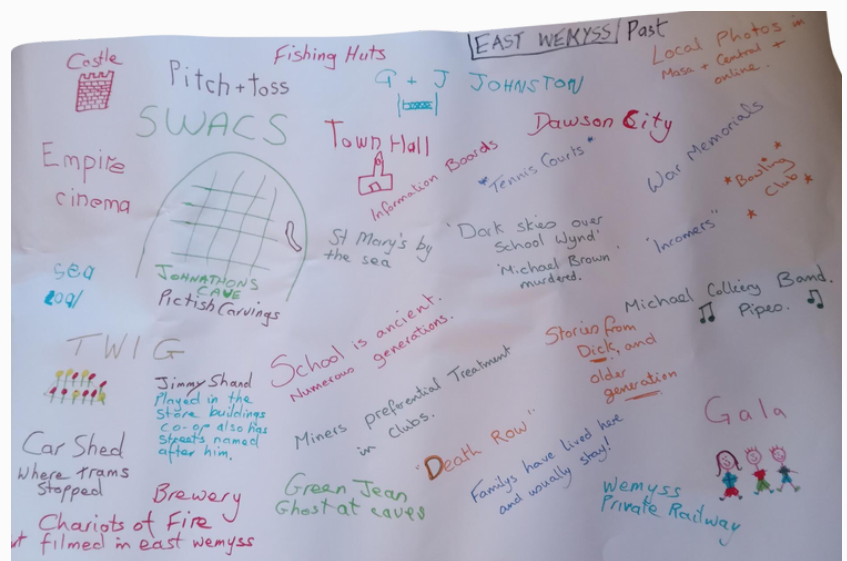


“Huge thank you to the organisation for doing this. DTD group and Corra staff were really helpful. There was a genuine interest in what we were doing and the process was easy.

COMMUNITY IDEAS GATHERED - CORRA AND ONFIFE

During the summer, Corra and OnFife had discussions regarding working together on a community project - primarily to seek ideas from local communities about the past and how to enhance history, heritage, cultural and arts activities in Levenmouth.

Corra sought a small group of community members to co-facilitate a series of workshops and by mid-November we were ready to go! Facilitators received training on popular education methods then it was lift off!



There were 5 community workshops across Methil, Buckhaven, Methilhill and East Wemyss - across all age groups - young people and adults. Two sessions were held down at the Methil Heritage Centre (MHC) bringing in community members who had previous links to

COMMUNITY IDEAS GATHERED - CORRA AND ONFIFE... CONTD.

the setup of the centre. It was fascinating to hear their stories/ ideas of the past and future of the MHC and local history/arts/cultural lives.

We have gathered some innovative and exciting ideas about what communities would like in the future and will have more sessions in early 2023. Discussion findings to date highlight arts, creativity, performance, history, and heritage opportunities which were widely accessible, at no or little cost. Community members were vocal about the need to involve young people in future creative arts and history opportunities and intergenerational engagement - with schools and in the community. There will be a final event in 2023 bringing all participants together to discuss the ideas gathered and to form a community group to co-develop actions alongside OnFife in future.

HISTORY GROUP CONTINUES TO INSPIRE LEARNING AND RESEARCH

During 2022 the Methil History Group had a few community meetings about re-opening the Methil Heritage Centre and wrote about their concerns to the local newspaper in May 2022.

The need for a local archive/history centre was heightened through a local PhD student researcher's interviews with the history group about their lives. We discussed how usually university research projects data or recordings remain in university libraries. This became an interesting discussion among the group as they felt 'their stories/history recordings' may not be accessible to the majority of community members in the Methil and Levenmouth area.

This led to a discussion about ownership of community knowledge, cultivating a community resource in places such as the Methil Heritage Centre and local libraries. They concluded that if local resources and storage facilities - like Methil Heritage Centre - are supported and maintained - opportunities to gather, co-interpret, co-produce and co-reflect community history/stories/lives can become community history of the future.



The group continued to do research in 2022 - Kirkland's History, Poor Houses, studying old maps, the docks through the ages, researching old local history books, influence of coal on development of communities and the system of land ownership and local people's lives and work. There were also two trips to the National Library of Scotland to research old local maps and resources related to Methil and surrounding areas social history. Library staff also gave us a talk and tour of resources held on site in Edinburgh. It was fascinating!



SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS EVENT IN GLASGOW

In November 2022 a couple of community members from Falkirk and Methil accompanied Corra Co-ordinators to a documentary screening in Glasgow.

The event was concerned about an increase in school exclusions in Scotland and the UK and how these affect the learning, school completion, employment and future opportunities of young people, particularly in low income communities.

The forum organisers invited the Scottish Children Rights Commissioner who expressed school exclusions are indeed a violation of Children's Rights which impact families and the school's wider community.

After the Glasgow event, a local Methil resident began to plan a possible film screening in Levenmouth for early 2023.

The hope is to create a space that promotes frank, open discussions about school exclusions with young people, community members, community agencies and schools over what creative approaches can be implemented with young people and families – at the centre of any solutions.



What have we learned?

Asset based approaches to community development reinforce a sense of community history, pride, place and belonging.

Community members do not want to be identified as a statistic – to be cautious of only SIMD stats and a labelling/stigmatising approach to community development/engagement.

Encourage opportunities for community members to amplify their voice on community issues and development. These should be authentic equitable spaces to share power, perspectives, planning, solutions, ideas, and action.

There is an appetite to learn from and engage with other community groups/projects outside Levenmouth to see what they have learnt and built in their own communities.

People are keen to think out the box and imagine what could be possible in Methil – community members have spaces to plan, dream and build from strength to strength.

Importance of widening opportunities for community members to build skills, confidence and on the job experience in community development and leadership.



What happens next?

Encourage community members critical voice and leadership in major community projects, planning, implementation, action, and evaluation.

Support community groups/members leadership development – learning, mentorship, and community of practice.

More local history work – building local oral history sources/archives with community members, schools, community groups and partners. Focus on intergenerational projects.

Continuing focus on equity and inclusion in schools and communities.

Promotion on keeping, increasing, and widening access to green and recreational spaces for families, young people, and all community members in Methil and Levenmouth. Climate and economic justice.

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Creating more spaces and partnerships to widen artistic and creative opportunities within Methil across all ages/social identities.

People in Place – Moving Forwards

Communities are facing a critical moment of transition as they begin to emerge from the pandemic and grapple with the rising cost of living. We are seeing and hearing, in addition to deep and difficult issues, new priorities emerging and an urgency to act from community members.

The time is now! We know from communities, local authorities and other partners that this a 'moment in time' for communities to create changes that address immediate issues and to truly imagine a better future.

To support that process, we will focus our work around three key elements.

- Priorities – we know that communities' priorities are changing. We can play an important role in supporting priorities to be shaped and shared.
- Plans – supporting communities to set out their priorities and actions to achieve them in a 'community-owned' plan.
- Partnerships – we have a key role to play in connecting with partners who can help to produce the plan and/or help deliver on community priorities.

These 'three P's' help build upon the strong foundations – of skills, knowledge, trust and relationships - that have been established to date and will continue to be instrumental in the work.



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