

Co-Creating Strong Communities

The Co-Creating Strong Communities event brought together people from across Corra's People in Place programme and supported reflection, connection, and discussion around future action.

There were a broad mix of attendees, including community members, funders, other place-based partners, local and National government. The discussions and activities allowed for everyone in attendance to focus on communities' current priorities, future aspirations, and the collective actions that will be needed to achieve them.

The atmosphere on the day was electric; people were sharing their experiences and connecting with each other in ways that just haven't been possible throughout the pandemic. It also allowed for lots of discussion around how different communities have approached similar issues and the accomplishments of community groups in how they have supported their communities through these difficult times.

"I really enjoyed meeting the different community representatives and hearing about their focus and priorities"

Throughout the day sessions focussed on different themes and people moved from working in groups with people from their communities to mixing in with people from other areas, this allowed for both in-depth conversation specific to each community as well as an opportunity to share learning, practice, and approaches with others.

These discussions were wide ranging but similar themes emerged across the day, such as

- **Collaboration** There is a feeling that the massive amount of partnership working during the pandemic was incredibly beneficial to communities and had a positive impact on the view of volunteers. However, it is also felt that as we have transitioned out of the pandemic the older ways of working and what is sometimes felt as a disregarding attitude toward community groups has crept back
- **Celebrating and strengthening** During the pandemic community groups had to change what they did quite drastically and there needs to be recognition for all the work that was done to support communities as well as building on the skills and achievements of these local volunteers
- **Services** The need for support services increased during the pandemic and for lots of people these services are still needed within communities. There is a feeling that services aren't there to the extent they are needed.
- **Community Participation** As community groups return to their usual activities there seems to be an increased sense of community spirit locally and that the way they had worked with services throughout the pandemic had increased the connectedness of community-based work with larger services and organisations operating within the area. Some areas are seeing an increase to the amount of activity happening locally too.

"Covid has brought togetherness to community"

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Actions for Corra

While there are many benefits to simply making time and space for people to be together it was also important that a set of actions and behaviours were established for how communities would like to move forward with their ideas, building on the momentum galvanised at the event.

As evidenced by the event, collective effort is integral to creating strong places and communities. In addition to progressing shared actions that celebrate and strengthen community achievements, Corra will have a particular focus on:

- **Evolving our approach**...building on discussions at the event, learning from the programme and pandemic response to:
 - Renew the focus of Getting Alongside Communities around Priorities, Plans and Partnerships in order to best support community ambitions to be achieved.
 - Move from co-design to delivery of Participatory Scotland with residents of Scotland's larger towns and cities.
- **Relationships** are key to building partnerships and networks within communities and to learning and sharing practice with other communities.
 - Corra will continue to support communities to identify, create and strengthen links with local organisations and groups that can support the communities to realise their ideas.
 - Corra will commit to creating more opportunities for communities that enable connections and information/knowledge exchange.
- **Capacity and support** for community ideas, and a willingness to work creatively and flexibly, nurtures growth and development within communities.
 - Corra will continue to work with individuals and groups within each community, supporting and providing capacity-building opportunities that will help communities achieve their goals.





Being in the 'now'...

Working in groups comprised of people from across the different communities, people discussed the current circumstances in their own areas.

"The discussions were very useful in acknowledging the difficulties that we have faced during the pandemic, and we continue to face going forward in the cost-of-living crisis."

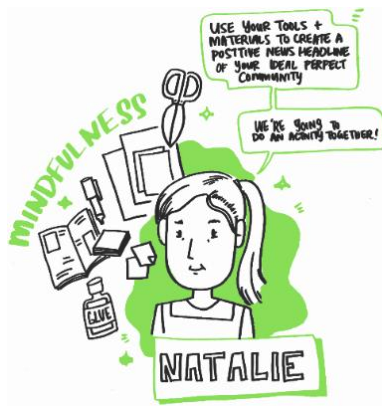
Discussions included stories and anecdotes of experiences, issues, and highlights from specific communities. This revealed that many of the issues and experiences over the past two years have been similar and felt keenly across all the communities – this provided a sense of shared experience and allowed for relationships to form and strengthen in the groups.

Information from each table was gathered on post-it notes and written directly onto paper tables cloths, this has been included the appendices. Across all the discussions some common themes emerged:

- **Continuing Crisis** The pandemic brought with it fear and uncertainty for people around the world, for some this has not fully subsided and the flexibility and adaptations that were made by services during the pandemic are still very much required. This has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, which is having massively detrimental impacts on people's abilities to cope.
- **Space** While some areas are seeing a return to community activities others are not seeing things open back up at the pace wanted by local people. Many communities are taking advantage of opportunities around asset-transfer to gain a sense of ownership of the assets but for others access to space for community activity continues to be a real barrier to realising their dreams and meeting their needs.
- **Covid** Many people were desperate for a return to 'normality' or life before covid and have transitioned back into community activity but for some there is still uncertainty and even fear around being in public or crowded spaces. This has meant that while many community groups are getting back to usual activity, they are also providing ongoing support for their communities
- **Flexible funding** Funders and services both had to adapt and change how they work in order to support communities throughout the pandemic. While some areas are seeing positive changes being made standard practice, others are seeing a return to pre-pandemic ways of working that are inflexible or unreachable for local communities. It was recognised that if this flexibility in working could be maintained it would be a mutual benefit to both service providers and communities

"Feel we are still on a treadmill"





Imagining the Future

Participants worked with other people from their community to imagine the future, working together to lay out their ambitions and hopes for their community. This was led by Natalie, a community member from Cumnock, and was an interactive and creative session involving the use of

print materials to create a newspaper with stories from your perfect community.

Each creation had its own style and highlighted the positive aspects of each community's personality. The newspapers were then presented by participants from each group, and it became clear that although each represented a different community, all the communities had shared goals, dreams and visions that aligned well with others.



When imagining the future participants expressed their views on how they want their community to be a place other people want to be part of and they spoke of their desire to become aspirational places; where there is a focus on wellbeing and family, with strong community connections and guiding values that all contribute to making their community better places for people to live and grow.





Skills and Direction

After exploring where communities currently are, and uncovering the hopes that people have for their communities, everyone spent some time thinking about the skills needed and direction that should be adopted to realise these aspirations and desires.

This time allowed for individuals to have deeper conversations around how they felt about the processes and systems at play within their communities, how these

affect communities and ways they help and hinder developments and progress on the ground. It allowed people to explore how things could be and what skills would be needed to make these happen. They also explored measures that need to be put in place and the systems that need to both be involved and be willing to change so that this positive vision people have for their community can be realised.

Discussions were captured at each table by individuals recording information on the tablecloths, all of these have been transcribed and can be found in the appendices. Consistent themes emerged across all the discussions, including

- **Developing Collaboration** and strengthening partnership working
- **Continuing** flexible approaches to providing support
- **Expanding** participation within the community
- **Strengthening** community voice within collective decision-making and service design
- **Increasing** capacity and training for community volunteers

When exploring the skills and direction needed for communities to realise their vision for a positive future, there was a sense of real motivation coming off the back of the pandemic.

We need leadership which embrace the mavericks + risk takers." Neil McInroy

People have seen that things can be done differently and at a much quicker pace. There are strong feelings that we shouldn't be going back to the way things were and while we see some examples of lasting change to systems, processes, and approaches within communities we are also seeing that many large institutions and organisations are returning to old ways of working despite what works for communities and the people they work with.

Being able to link in cross-community with other people on a similar journey has allowed for the sharing of ideas, ways of working and learning from experience that has been lacking due to limited contact throughout the pandemic and there was a clear desire for more opportunities and platforms to be created that would allow for people to come together more regularly. This is something Corra will look to explore with communities, strengthening connections between the communities and allowing for more connections to flourish.



Appendix One – Being in the ‘now’...

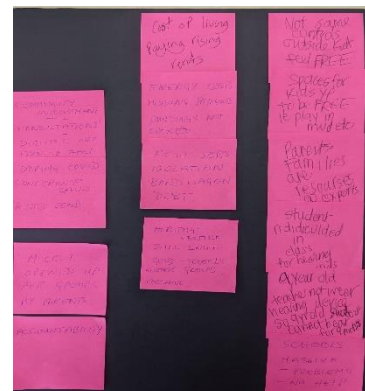
- Historical feeling that the council hasn't listened
- Hard to find info on council services
- Bottlenecks – waiting for answers
- Local communication needs improving
- Disconnect from services
- Men's Shed @ Bainsford
- Same old faces – need new views
- Some folk are hard to reach
- Feeling that things won't change?
- Issues need dealt with from young age
- Perception of area all wrong
- Get rid of BAD history, start fresh
- Services listening in person
- New events for kids with police + fire service
- Recording local voices and stories

- Funding opportunities – need to combine efforts
- Orgs not working together
- Tackle trauma health issues
- All services to work together
- Need community working better together
- Build on relationships in community
- Need skills to help deliver work locally
- Community needs to see things happen
- Community action plan moving forward
- School song workshops



- Community involvement
- Consultations
- Digital not face to face
- During covid, conference calls a god send
- MCCI opened up for groups by parents
- Accountability
- Cost of living, paying rising rents
- Energy costs missing payments
- Buildings not opened
- Few jobs
- Isolation
- Band Wagon
- Debt
- Heritage centre still shut
- Good – schools, resource groups, archive

- Not same controls outside – kids feel FREE
- Spaces for kids YP to be FREE i.e. play in mud
- Parents, families are resources and experts
- Student ridiculed in class for hearing aids
- 9-year-old, teacher not wearing hearing device so 9 year old student cannot hear for 9 months
- Schools massive - problems - no help



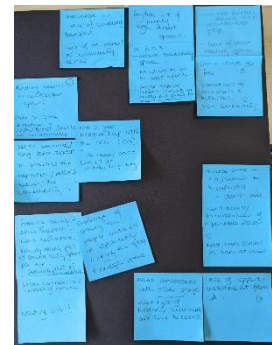
- Dunterlie is doing well
- Back to pre-pandemic levels
- Important to come back together - lots of isolation.
- Dunterlie running as a community centre brings people in
- Open day a big success
- Funding has made this possible
- Cost of living crisis response not as fast or as big as pandemic
- Having a worker has helped
- Pandemic has got volunteers ready for next crisis
- BARRIER – Lack of control of the community centre
- RISK – No matter how much support we put in place – it won't be enough to support people through the cost-of-living crisis

- Heating hubs – not properly thought through
- Not relying on one person
- Doesn't do anything about the problems – lots of people can't access
- STRENGTH – local organisations with good community investment+ presence
- STRENGTH – lots of volunteers + voluntary activity
- Foodshare became based in community centre during pandemic – needed service



- Challenge, lack of community transport
- Lack of anchor, no community council
- Anytime use of empty High street spaces
- For future: - access community space, - no where to go to keep warm – people talking about sitting on buses all day to keep warm
- West end buzzers – unconstituted group – lack of venue meeting space
- Get a venue for free
- Donations of materials & resources from community
- Funding access unconstituted groups
- Able to come together and understand skills in community
- Waiting list!
- Not a good relationship with the TSI – no voice, or don't turn up at partnership meetings

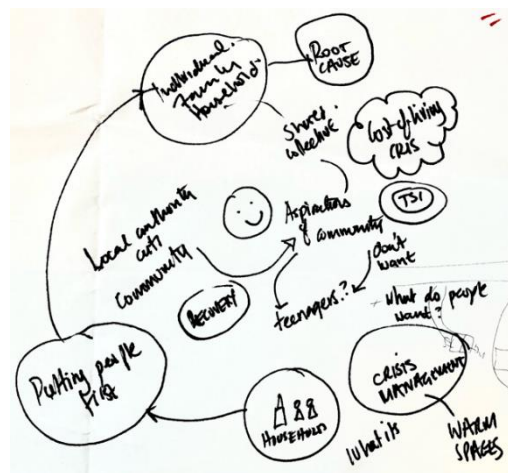
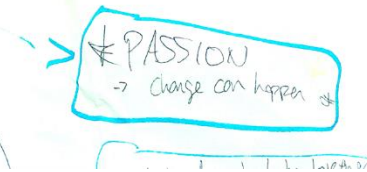
- Feeling better about 'myself' was isolated, mixing, being part of community great for MH – feeling part of community
- Local connections – word of mouth
- Diverse area, v. affluent to v. deprived – don't mix
- Need access/ availability of responsible person
- Made scrubs for team at CHAS
- Make connections with other groups
- What type of funding available and how to access
- Lack of support/ investment from local authority
- Challenge of getting new people involved in supporting running the group + enough space



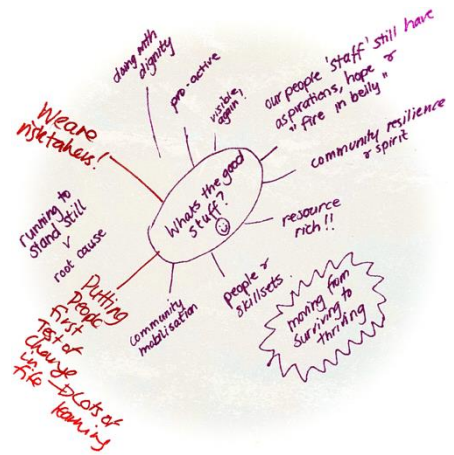
- Challenges of cooking or heating. Teaching cooking skills more of a challenge now due to energy crisis
- Formulating new plans for new issues – (microwave recipes)
- Still hard to reach people
- Public sector resources
- Difficult to source funding – can only deal with certain stuff – difficult and frustration to affect bigger change
- Good – Local communities Hub joining together to help the wider community
- Scared not actually out of it – life has returned to normal but has it?
- Trauma in families not able to cope and effect on children who have already suffered through pandemic
- Particular problem for older people
- Trauma on children anxiety over money or addictions
- On the treadmill – can't really move forward. Still putting out fires.
- Some people don't want to come out!
- Feels like Covid recovery isn't done yet and now we have another crisis
- Don't feel relaxed as pandemic not quite over but into the frying pan of cost of living crisis. Still very vulnerable, people in Covid situation.
- Trauma caused by poverty both parents and kids
- Trauma of Covid affecting all families. NO extra supports. Support poor for ASN before, worse now.
- On tender hooks, not confident – is covid over
- Cost of living crisis from frying pan to fire
- Concern about how we can continue to survive
- Not enough Statutory services
- Nothing for extra support services – for additional needs
- Money struggles - struggle reaching people that need help
- Important to keep our hubs open but what happens when our money runs out? All support left to our groups with government not acknowledging expecting us to mop up
- No one size fits all, so services need to be flexible to support vulnerable communities. Baseline needs are different and need to be acknowledged.
- Support being left to groups in community, not government
- Acknowledging that the 3rd sector did more good + support than mainstream organisations. Disconnect between local authority and 3rd sector.
- Doing many projects through Covid to help families and now it's back to normal groups and those families are still struggling.
- Connections, are they still working? Need to build on this.
- Understanding needs, not just doing what we think
- Earmarked funding to support groups going forward
- Community still needed to support families, but community needs funds
- Communities still not back to normal
- Continue to do what we are doing



- Challenges
 - Need to get pride back into the area
 - Need wider 3rd sector support and collaboration to continue
 - No council involvement with groups – or very little involvement
 - Corra and council need to get a better relationship at ground level
 - People seem to be “WAITING”
 - Resource vs demand
 - Agreeing action takes collaboration
 - Community needs have changed
 - Reaching wider community
 - Orgs/people are “shoehorned” through processes
 - People aren’t getting the right support
 - Specialist support services aren’t available (e.g support for ex-offenders)
- Successes
 - Community based hubs
 - ERC one stop
 - Space development in Cumnock
 - People have built lots of new skills – need opportunities to keep using/develop
- Community being heard
 - Lots of activity going on
 - Need loads of new people on board
 - Services engaging with communities is important
 - Need for community-led support
- Voices of young people needed – more groups and skills
- People need trained up to deal with these issues
 - Mental health issues need addressed
 - School kids – cyberbullying
 - Drugs and alcohol – abuse
 - Needs to push awareness
- Silo’s working, funding and budgets
- Covid
 - Lots of learning
 - Red tape removed
 - Broadened approach
 - Need to continue and not go back
 - One door approach in ERC successful
- Crisis management mode
 - Hangover from covid response
 - Cost of living crisis
 - Budget cuts to services- prevention and support gets lost
 - Real needs not being met
 - Mental health and well-being
- We are...
 - Risk takers



- Running to stand still
- Putting people first (lots of learning from test of change in Fife)
- Doing with dignity
- Pro-active
- Visible again
- Hopeful
- Aspirational
- Resource rich
- Moving from surviving to thriving
- We have...
 - Fire in our belly
 - Resilience
 - Community spirit
 - People
 - Skill sets
 - Mobilisation



Appendix Three – Skills and Direction...

- Community-led decision making
 - Organisational culture/mindshift
 - Developing skills to support other people/services to do it
 - Supporting local people to have skills and confidence
 - Raising awareness among services of community's role in decision making
- How we work together
 - Power in communities: nobody knows the community better than the people who live there
 - Share each groups best things
 - Inter-generational events
 - Make people believe that they matter
 - Excite people about where they come from, balance the negative picture
 - Transparency about decision making – put everything on the table for all to see
 - Relationships NOT engagement with community
- Staying power
 - Stickability
 - Dependability
 - Community support
 - Continuity important
 - Consistency and regularly committed
- Ordinary people living extraordinary lives
 - Reacting to external events
 - If you have got skills and talents, use them!
- Change needed in how funders deliver
 - Need to work together instead of in isolation
 - Need to make application process that enables collaboration and reduces competition
 - Need to enable sharing of learning on a frequent and regular basis
- Opportunities for people to be together
- Better community engagement
 - Need a shift from crisis management to prevention and real involvement
- Networking
- Collaboration
 - Shared resources and decision making
- Health issues in the community
 - Inequalities workshops
 - Friday fish and chips
- Open and inclusive spaces
- Community pop-ups
 - Widen out, more welcoming
 - Go to where the people are already comfortable and at ease
- “What is the risk or cost of not doing something?”

FUNDERS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER
INSTEAD OF IN ISOLATION.
FUNDERS HAVE TO MAKE APPLICATION
PROCESS THAT ENABLE COLLABORATION
+ REDUCE COMPETITION.
FUNDERS HAVE TO ENABLE SHARING OF
LEARNING ON A FREQUENT + REGULAR BASIS

