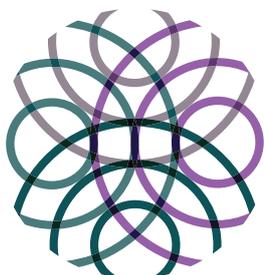


Getting Alongside Communities Insights from 2020



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Reflections

This report reflects on Corra Foundation's experiences of delivering its place-based programme. It is based on the insights from Corra's Community Co-ordinators and the people they work alongside in nine communities across Scotland.

The pandemic has shown how communities came together, a response based on people understanding their community and unique understanding of local needs. Delivering a place-based approach at a distance, in line with government guidance and restrictions, brought challenges. Working to maintain the connections and relationships that have developed through place-based working was central to Corra's approach.

Brokering Connections

- **By building on the trust, relationships and connections previously established with communities, Corra was able to recognise and respond to what people in their local community needed.**

During 2019 Corra had already supported communities to establish their own food co-operatives and food shares. These existing initiatives enabled areas like Langlees and Dunterlie to help co-ordinate food provision and support.



In 2020, the Community Co-ordinator in Langlees supported conversations with local community projects to join up efforts around food provision. Local food shares were coming together to address the barriers people were facing in accessing food. The local school were proactively reaching out to families as well as other residents. The network created opportunities to share thoughts and ideas and work together to reduce food poverty in the area.

Community Co-ordinators were able to share information about food provision and support through new and established Facebook pages for the community.

During 2020 more communities and groups took a lead in securing additional resources including financial assistance, whilst working closely with local authorities, charities, other communities and funders. Corra offered a route to additional funding but also helped facilitate conversations with local authorities and third sector partners.

Supporting Relationships

- **Being a supportive and a friendly voice to individuals and communities who have experienced increased feelings of isolation due to the pandemic.**

Maintaining informal connections such as telephone calls and texting was important. For example, in Methil the Community Co-ordinator made use of conference calls to check in with and connect local community members when they couldn't meet in person.

- **Being aware and involved in co-ordinated responses between communities, local authorities, charities and community groups.**

This helped increase trust with communities and offered a more flexible response. Corra convened a Community of Practice involving eight local authorities to discuss opportunities and challenges, share resources and pull together some of the learning from different areas.

A new partner network, with over 50 people involved, was established in West Dunbartonshire focused on working together, sharing information and resources.



- **The pivotal role of digital platforms to engage with local authorities, charities, and community groups.**



In the last year, Community Co-ordinators saw a 44.3% increase in Facebook activity

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17,698

The number of Facebook connections made in 2020

Existing Facebook pages were utilised, and new Facebook groups were quickly set up to maintain connections and share information.

Community Co-ordinators also encouraged community groups to continue to engage with one another. While in-person activity was particularly hard during lockdown, routes were identified to help support online activities.

The Buckhaven Bakers started live online bakery sessions and the Chair-based exercise group in Blacklands continued to meet up via Zoom.

In Methil community members from groups found it difficult to stay home and missed the social connections of meetings. Throughout lockdown local people carried on their own community learning projects, for example creating crafting videos to share with other community members.

Responding to local need

- In the early part of the pandemic, money was one of the biggest concerns for local families and communities. Inequalities such as access to digital were further heightened as a result of the pandemic. One community reflected that many families who were affected by furlough required more support.

Many Co-ordinators had conversations with local people on the difficulties of moving online. For instance, some people weren't confident in using digital equipment or felt anxious that others would judge the inside of their homes, during Zoom video calls. While digital equipment was available through **Connecting Scotland** or other local organisations people still asked for help (e.g. building skills, and confidence) with schooling, work, and maintaining social connections online.



In Castlehill, the Co-ordinator contributed to conversations with local and national organisations about the anxieties felt by the local families including concerns about home schooling along with the high costs of data and internet.



Corra distributed £6,669 through the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund towards accessing digital equipment as well as covering data and mobile costs.

Co-ordinators in Dunterlie, Methil and Carbrain also worked with local partners to support **Connecting Scotland** in distributing digital devices. The initiative was well received and highlighted the demand for digital equipment. Community Co-ordinators were directly involved in supporting the distribution of devices across Dunterlie and Methil.

In Dunterlie, the Co-ordinator is participating in local network meetings about digital inclusion which developed out of partnerships built through distributing Connecting Scotland devices. The Co-ordinator is working towards bringing community members on board to ensure communities' voices are being represented and heard.

- Food insecurity was another issue identified by Co-ordinators during the last year. In several areas multiple partners were involved in supporting and co-ordinating responses that recognised different needs of the community, such as supporting the provision of hot meals and food parcels through to food vouchers.



In Carbrain, the Co-ordinator worked closely with the **local Community Council Food Project** who responded to the food emergency. At the height of lockdown in April and May 2020, the project was distributing 500 meals in one week. The group had to respond quickly to ensure support was there for people in their community. This included working with others to avoid duplication of support, identifying suitable premises, securing resources.

- While additional investment was vital communities were mindful of how people felt about receiving support.

The Ohana Club in Fernhill did not want families to feel further marginalised by distributing food parcels. The group responded by using the grant funds to purchase and distribute food vouchers, home energy top ups and mobile data top ups.



Corra distributed £164,917 of Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund across the nine local areas to support food initiatives.

In Cumnock, a local football club, Cumnock Juniors Community Enterprise, started a food hub to distribute food packages to local families. The Co-ordinator is contributing to conversations to help build on connections between local organisations in the area to expand the support for families in the community and beyond.



What's next for Corra?

As lockdown restrictions ease, Corra continues to reflect on its approach to supporting people and their communities to have their voices and ideas heard. Community Co-ordinators are beginning to transition back into communities and are exploring approaches that build on the learning from the past year, whilst supporting local people to have the space, time and resources they need.

Supporting relationships

- **Opportunities for communities to find ways that enable safe and supportive reconnections.**

There is even more recognition of the importance of relationships. Support in 2020 included reaching out to people who have felt isolated or anxious. For instance, supporting people to meet up safely when allowed to do so including parent and toddlers meet ups, organised exercise groups, walking groups and continuing to hold Zoom meetings to discuss matters that are important to the community.

In Dunterlie, the Co-ordinator is supporting conversations around the use of Dunterlie Resource Centre as restrictions are being eased. Prior to the pandemic, there was already a strong interest and discussions with the local community about the use of the centre. The Co-ordinator is supporting this and exploring how community members and local partners can work together to make the most out of the centre.

Physical spaces

- **Scoping and working with communities to think creatively about space and what resources they need to help bring ideas to reality.**

The importance of creating spaces that are open and accessible to all has already been a long-identified priority. To help foster relationships, communities need a place to meet and connect with each other. Many communities have seen local venues closed or re-purposed due to the pandemic, further reducing or entirely removing access to space. Conversations with local partners including local authorities over the last year could be a catalyst to rethink the physical space needs. For example, in Buckhaven, the Community Co-ordinator has been supporting residents of the Bird Housing Scheme and the local park **improvement group**, which aims to support residents' ambitions of improving the area, including creating space for outdoor sports, tree planting and creating more local events.

In Carbrain, changes to the local primary school layout meant the loss of a community meeting space. The Community Co-ordinator is currently working with different local partners such as the Community Council and the local church to find new spaces in the area for people to come together, connect and build relationships.



The Co-ordinator in Methil is making connections with Methil Community Children's Initiative and is supporting local groups to make use of their building and garden.

Going forward, it will also be important to consider the changing nature of physical spaces, especially in the immediate emergence out of lockdown. In Dunterlie and Fernhill, Co-ordinators are involved in helping local groups to tidy gardens and outdoor spaces to use for community activities.

Voice

- **Helping community members feel their voice and opinions are heard and can find ways to influence decision-making.**

Communities' confidence to advocate and identify the opportunities and needs for their local areas has increased. The team of Community Co-ordinators are committed to working alongside people to support their ideas for change and share their local expertise.

In Castlehill local community members have established a group to identify opportunities that were both accessible and affordable to local families. This group recognised their voice mattered. For example, the Community Action Group worked with the local authority to organise uplifts of large items and a skip for people to deposit unwanted items in response to the local issue of fly-tipping and street littering.

In Langlees there are increasing connections between community groups and the Local Authority. Local community members are working together to support the Bainsford Hall, including applying for funding for repairs and upgrades. Long-term, there are plans for the hall to be community-managed, with more community-led activities taking place.

Partners including local authorities have been increasingly reliant on communities over the last year. As we look to build forward better following the pandemic, amplifying voices from across the communities Corra works alongside is more important than ever.

Re-engaging with ideas and opportunities



In 2020, over 60% of Corra funded community ideas were driven, designed and delivered by community members.

- **What skills and support are needed now that help ideas into action?**

Co-ordinators continue to facilitate and work with communities to support the skills to bring ideas to life. Given the role of community groups over the last year there has been increasing support to help

broker connections and assist with funding and planning. This is likely to become even more important. Including navigating resources and budgets, talking through governance and accountability, and encouraging local involvement.

In Cumnock the Community Co-ordinator has been working with local people and Shire Housing Association to support the development of a Men's Shed Group. The group are being supported to establish their own governance structure, Community Asset Transfer and access to small sums of money.

Corra is currently supporting approaches where community members have more say on funding for their local area. In Blacklands community members are progressing a participatory budgeting approach. Dunterlie, Carbrain and Castlehill are delivering community-led grant making programmes.

Advocating

- **Working with others to highlight community responses to local need.**

Prior to the pandemic 41% of ideas developed by community members focused on tackling poverty in their local areas. This increased over 2020 with a significant demand placed on food support, access to digital devices as well as rising concerns about money and income.

Working alongside people, Corra can help local areas to see other community responses, sharing knowledge and highlighting what works to local and national decision makers that can make a difference. Corra has already identified collaborations that aim to address inequalities.

Community Co-ordinators have brought together community members from Buckhaven, Langlees, Bainsford and Dunterlie to participate in the **Nourish Scotland** project: "Our Right to Food: Affording to Eat Well in Scotland". The group has been coming together as community advisors, facilitated by Nourish Scotland, to help understand how families shop, cook and eat. This will help local and national decision-makers explore how accessible healthy and enjoyable food is for people in Scotland.

Publications

The **2020 annual updates** provide a snapshot of key insights and learning from each of the communities Corra works alongside. It reflects on the ways community initiatives have adapted during the coronavirus crisis as well as the challenges communities experienced during the pandemic.

Insights from Corra and the communities it works alongside have also contributed to two reports. **Working Better Together in Place** (a report on place-based approaches being delivered across Scotland) and **Together We Help** (Commissioned action research showing the power of community action in response to the coronavirus crisis).

A Note to our Partners

The past year has shown more than ever the importance of collaboration. Corra is deeply grateful to all of its partners, including communities, charities, national and local government and other trusts and foundations. There are too many to name here, but the team would like to extend a sincere thanks to every one of them.

This paper is part of a series of reports capturing learning from across Corra Foundation's work. You can find the **2020 Impact Report** and the **2020 Learning and Insights from Grant Making** reports online.

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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