

Link Up - A new model for community intervention.



Background

Within some communities in Scotland people are facing multiple levels of deprivation. People struggle to create sustainable livelihoods for themselves and social inequality is widening. Within vulnerable communities, people can be less resilient to shocks and stresses and individuals' expectations of what they are able to do and achieve can be low.

Predominant models of support focus on the needs and deficiencies in a community and often don't build the capacity of individuals. People and communities are increasingly being characterised by the problems they face, and can become disempowered, passive and dependent recipients of expensive services.

'When people care enough to act, change will occur.... think about the unrecognised capacities in every community, find them and provide opportunities for people to offer them.'

'Relationships build a community, we need to build them and utilise them, put citizens at the centre and engage them as actors, not recipients'

Dr Harry Burns (GIRFEC in Dundee - Making it Happen' Conference, November 2010)

Over the past year Inspiring Scotland has been designing an asset based programme which will focus on individuals' capacities (that may be unknown to them) rather than on their deficits and explore how this starting point can improve a community's effectiveness in addressing its own needs.

The Link Up programme will look at how strengthening social networks, and facilitating opportunities for people to help each other, builds trust. It will also explore how supporting others increases the confidence and capacity of individuals to seek solutions to their own problems instead of outsourcing their needs to external organisations - whether within the statutory or voluntary sector.

The Link Up proposal

With funding from the Scottish Government 'Cashback for Communities' programme, Link Up will develop and evaluate a method that builds the abilities of individuals and communities to start creating solutions to local issues. Inspiring Scotland aim to improve the resilience of vulnerable communities, and improve their ability to cope with the things they struggle with in life.

The Link Up programme will focus on and explore two principles of wider asset-based approaches. It will look at:

- **Connecting People:** *How better relationships, networks and connections between people in a community can improve wellbeing and enable individuals to get the support they need from within their community.*
- **Giving and Confidence:** *How enabling people to provide mutually beneficial activities and be part of their own solutions, rather than defined as a 'problem', can increase their confidence, self-esteem, self efficacy, coping strategies, resilience and personal resources.*

Over time, the programme will explore how an increase in community led activity improves well-being, community resilience and integration. Emergent outcomes related to health, education, skills, experience and fear of crime will also be captured as the programme develops.



The Link Up programme

Rather than invest in new community projects that will require external funding to be sustained and where 'workers' deliver to individuals, Inspiring Scotland will test the Link Up proposal by investing in people.

In collaboration with stakeholders, Inspiring Scotland will identify 8-10 locations in Scotland where communities experience high rates of crime or elevated levels of fear. Community Catalysts, Activators or Organisers (or whatever name suits the community they are working in), will then be employed to co-ordinate and facilitate links (or small projects) between groups of people who will undertake mutually beneficial activities.

The activities may be quite simple and may initially seem low grade, but will be scalable and start to hit some of the more intangible initial outcomes such as improving relationships, trust and social connections, that provide the foundation for building more robust results.

A Host organisation will also be identified and funded in each of the 10 areas to employ and support the Community Organiser and work in close partnership with Inspiring Scotland to ensure engagement of local strategic and delivery partners and effective measurement of emergent outcomes.

What will the Community Organiser do?

- Identify and facilitate opportunities for activities that enable groups within the community to connect, share knowledge and skills or simply provide each other with practical assistance.
- Recruit between 8-10 groups of local people to work together on 4-5 links (projects) undertaking activities for mutual benefit
- Identify local assets including existing social networks, skills & knowledge of local residents, effective local community & voluntary organisations & physical and economic resources.

An example Link (project)

A group of local youths were starting to cause low grade nuisance in the centre of the village. A small grant was used to buy the young people bicycles, which they had full use of.

The 'price' of these bikes was that mid week they would collect grocery lists from isolated older people. These were then compiled by a local food co-op, and on Saturdays the young people used bike trailers to drop off the fresh fruit and veg.

The positive outcomes for the young people include:

- increased physical activity (and all concurrent benefits),
- prevention of engagement with criminal justice systems
- greater self confidence and self respect, respect and acknowledgement within their communities.
- a 180° turnaround from becoming a public nuisance, and all its consequences.

The benefits for the older people are just as strong with:

- reduced isolation,
- improved nutrition,
- positive connections with their community,
- improved mental health.

Although it required an initial catalyst individual & project, the benefits to the young and older people came from each other - not from that worker.

Neither group would traditionally have seen themselves as volunteers, and probably would not have come forward as such believing that they had nothing to offer - but actually BOTH sets of individuals had significant contributions to make to the wellbeing of their community.

What will the Host Organisation do?

The Host Organisation in each area will provide a management structure for the Community organiser. They will employ them to work on Inspiring Scotland's Link Up programme and help them overcome barriers to delivery. This will include liaising and networking with local strategic and delivery partners. The Host Organisation will work in partnership with Inspiring Scotland and contribute to the measuring and reporting of the impact of the Community Organiser's work in the local area. They will work with local partners to recognise, record, and report emergent outcomes from each community link (project).

What will Inspiring Scotland do?

Inspiring Scotland will work in close partnership with the Host Organisation and Community Organiser to develop each local programme and the accompanying impact measurement framework. Alongside this, Inspiring Scotland will broker and facilitate pro-bono support to Organisers and Host Organisations. In addition to analysing and reporting on the impact of Link Up activity, Inspiring Scotland will research existing community based empowerment methods and tools and liaise and learn from other asset based approaches in Scotland, and more broadly.

How is the process different from other Inspiring Scotland programmes?

In the early stages of the Link Up programme, Inspiring Scotland will not be seeking 'applicants' for funding or looking for groups with existing projects to invest in. Instead, Inspiring Scotland will look for organisations to act as partners to deliver and explore the Link Up approach, whether as a Host Organisation or as members of a local steering group.

Host Organisations will have good existing relationships in the community with an understanding of the area and landscape of the location they are working in. They will have the capacity, with Inspiring Scotland, to find and support the Community Organiser. They will have a drive and focus for change and will be comfortable working in a close, honest partnership with Inspiring Scotland.

Funding will cover the cost of the Community Organiser, front-line set up costs and contribute to Host Organisation support costs. Funding is not available for an established or 'stand-alone' project however, as the programme is essentially exploring and developing Inspiring Scotland's model.



What is Inspiring Scotland?

Inspiring Scotland is unique partnership amongst the private, public and not-for-profit sector in Scotland, using the principles of venture philanthropy.

We invest money and skills in Scottish charities to improve the lives of Scotland's most vulnerable people - long-term. We aim to create sustained change, tackling tough social issues, operating at a scale where significant social impact is possible.

We provide long-term financial support and a wide range of non-cash assistance (pro-bono professional services, high calibre volunteers, liaison with wider stakeholders etc) to carefully selected social ventures prepared to work in partnership.

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