PLUGGING THE GAP

TURNING STRANGERS INTO NEIGHBOURS

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Plugging the Gap

The UK is facing the largest public sector spending cuts since the 1970s. Faced with the challenges this brings, there is a need for rapid and focused thinking. If citizens are expected to 'do more' we are going to need new kinds of services in order to support them to this end. As further tough policy and funding choices are made, can new forms of community engagement and social enterprise help to bridge the gap, ensuring that the most vulnerable and poorest are not left behind?

Through a series of papers published throughout 2012, Plugging the Gap will address these questions and develop ideas for practical responses to the shrinking state and cuts to services. The project will focus on how local services, citizens, networks and community assets can be better deployed to plug the gap of a shrinking state, while speaking to longer term questions around the shape of services and citizens' roles in delivering these. It will seek to generate debate and action amongst RSA's 27,000-strong Fellowship and broader stakeholders and identify opportunities and barriers to innovation in austerity.

In this paper Nicola Bacon argues that pragmatic and tested approaches to building resilience in local communities has the potential not only to help communities respond to the impact of austerity, but also tackle local problems when traditional approaches have been found wanting.

About the author

Nicola Bacon is a Founding Director of Social Life, a new social enterprise whose mission is to reconnect placemaking with people's everyday experience and the way that communities work. It works internationally with communities, built environment professionals, public agencies and governments, putting people and social need at the heart of the way cities, towns and new developments are planned, developed and manage.

Until July 2012 Nicola led the Young Foundation's work on communities as their Director of Local and Advisory Projects. For six years, Nicola developed the organisation's work with local authorities and other partner agencies on local social innovation, setting up major programmes on communities, wellbeing and resilience, preventative investment, and local innovation, as well as overseeing the London Collaborative. She is now a Young Foundation Fellow.

Before joining the Young Foundation, Nicola worked at the Home Office where she was a Deputy Director of the Anti-social Behaviour Unit and was Director of Safe in the City, an award winning SRB-funded action research programme set up to pilot new ways of preventing youth homelessness in London by working with young people and their families. She was also Director of Policy at Shelter where she carried out major projects on housing investment, housing benefit and changes needed to the homelessness legislation.

Introduction

This paper is published as part of the RSA's Plugging the Gap series. The RSA's approach informs our work on how we respond to austerity, reduced public spending and the challenges these bring; whether this is increased unemployment, slow growth or the changing shape, role and size of the state. These require us all not just to seek new ways of doing things in the short term, but also to ensure that we remain focused on our longer-term aspirations and are tapped into broader trends, so that we emerge from the current fiscal crisis 'facing the right way'.

It is only right that arguments continue about where the impact of the economic crisis and reductions in public spending are being felt most keenly, about the speed of deficit reduction and the optimum level of debt and size of the state. But while they have taken on an urgency in the current environment, even before the financial crisis, there was a broad consensus behind a need for a fundamental shift in public service productivity but that this depended on better leverage of individual and community self-help.

For the right this would happen through increased localism, as the state withdraws the centre. For the left, change would occur through redesigning the state as an agent of empowerment. For the RSA the question is this: faced with having to make rapid, top down cuts, are local authorities not just making short-term efficiency savings but re-thinking and re-engineering how they approach services with an emphasis on engaging local people and developing community-based provision?

The risk is that the economic climate and the hardship it is causing, crowds out important questions about the extent to which modern public services can meet our needs and expectations. In the face of cuts, there is some understandable suspicion that issues like citizen empowerment – and talk of the Big Society – serve at best as distractions. But as cuts continue to bite, engaging the public in delivery, and being clearer about the desired outcomes we want, becomes even more pressing.

The funding squeeze should prompt us all to ask not just what can we do differently, but whether there are new things we should be doing. Business as usual – however many efficiency measures are made – will not do. We need to continue to ask deeper questions about what longer-term outcomes we seek and the role of individuals, communities and the market – alongside public and voluntary services – need to play in achieving these.

Before the credit crunch of 2008, the RSA had been exploring how public services – largely developed in the post-war period – needed to be reshaped if they were to respond to the modern world, the changing expectations and needs of the public and the major challenges of the 21st century. This paper draws on work of the 2020 Public Services Trust hosted

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by the RSA, in particular the 2020 Public Services Commission, which it hosted and which published its concluding report in autumn 2010.

The Commission started its work before the financial crisis hit. However, its deliberations took place against the backdrop of economic crisis. It articulated a longer-term vision of post-Beveridge public services and made the case for why this vision was not a luxury – to be set aside in times of austerity – but necessary if we are to emerge from the lean years on the right path.

It concluded that public service reform should be driven, and its success measured, by the extent to which services increased social productivity: the degree to which services enable people to contribute to meeting their own needs individually and collectively. The Commission argued for the need for three major changes to take place in the way we reform and deliver public services: a shift in culture; a shift in power; and a shift in finance.

It argued for a culture of democratic participation and social responsibility with services doing much more to engage and involve people and their communities in securing better outcomes. The state alone – big or small – cannot achieve this and neither can the market. By way of illustration, the Commission argued that rather than allow cash strapped public realm services such as libraries, parks and leisure centres to close, wherever possible these should be run as mutuals by local people.

The Commission argued that the current Whitehall model could not deliver the integrated and personalised public services that citizens need. It recommended that citizens not just be enabled to participate more, but allowed to take more control of the money spent on services such as long-term care, health and skills, backed up by choice advisers or mentors.

Underpinning these changes – both of which 'implicate' ordinary people more in the delivery and value of public services – should be a shift in finance so that communities become more aware of the cost of services and use them responsibly. The Commission recommended wider use of payment by results and the extension of social impact bond approaches to preventative services.

The Plugging the Gap project takes these themes and some of the Commission's core insights and attempts to apply them to discreet areas. At the heart of the notion of social productivity is the empowerment of local citizen and community.

Increasing the social productivity of public services – particularly in times of austerity and where resources in some areas are being squeezed significantly – requires better participation and stewardship by local citizens, enabled not just by local authorities but by the range of organisations working at the local level. Indeed, part of the justification for the government's Big Society strategy was recognition that the community and voluntary sector are often effective at engaging with service users and the broader community, particularly 'harder to reach' groups.

Since 2010, the RSA's Connected Communities programme has been exploring new forms of community regeneration. It has emphasised the need for 'whole person' approaches and, in particular, those based on a deeper understanding of the powerful role that social networks could play in helping individuals and communities to make positive change. All the Plugging the Gap papers chime with this agenda.

Turning strangers into neighbours

For the last 30 years, a series of policy initiatives have targeted our most deprived and disadvantaged communities in an attempt to make them stable places where residents can thrive. This approach to area regeneration emerged from the post mortem after the 1981 English city riots, and the publication of the Scarman report focusing on events in Brixton that April.[53]

If we stand back and look at the legacy of regeneration policy across the UK since then, it is impossible not to be struck by the tenacity of deprivation and the difficulty of shifting it from those places where it was – and still is – most entrenched. We have to question, given that many areas that are now deprived have been so for decades, seemingly immune to intervention, whether our recent history of tackling place-based deprivation and disadvantage has always represented money well spent.

The impact of regeneration policy and specific initiatives, both on neighbourhoods and residents, has been mixed. Although there have been some fantastic examples where interventions have transformed local areas and communities, the total impact has not resulted in the step change in life chances for residents that was the intention of those who crafted and delivered the policies.

Now as we reflect on the summer of disorder of 2011, we need to find fresh approaches that can be delivered in an age of low public spending and a shrinking state. The impact of recession on the marginal areas, which struggle to remain economically viable, will be harsh: these areas will be slowest to recover if or when the economy strengthens. We also know that in the coming years inequality is likely to grow. The amount of public sector investment available to alleviate the problems of the areas with the most engrained problems will be minimal compared to past decades. There is no money in sight for a new generation of big infrastructure spending.

Our work in many different areas characterised as 'deprived' and 'disadvantaged' has led us to conclude that we need to find new ways to put the lived experience of residents at the centre of regeneration policy and practice. We need to build on local assets and boost resilience in a way that both supports mobility for those who wish to leave, and stability for people who choose to stay in the areas that they call home.

This focus on experience and psychological needs emphasises the ways in which a sense of belonging and wellbeing (and other emotional factors) can inhibit, or enable, people to thrive and have a voice. It demands a detailed understanding of community dynamics and of environmental

psychology, as well as traditional skills of community development and design. Alongside this runs a continued commitment to addressing the causes and impacts of poverty and inequality.

This paper focuses on two specific elements of this approach, proposing achievable options that can be tested within current financial and resource constraints.

First, we focus on resilience; what it is that makes people bounce back in the face of adversity? This means looking at the assets within a community as well as its vulnerabilities, aiming to strengthen the factors – both social and structural – that help people thrive.

Second, we explore the viable ways of turning 'strangers into neighbours'. There is mounting evidence that local social networks are an important ingredient underpinning local wellbeing and resilience. The release of the first analysis of the ONS's wellbeing data has confirmed this, stating that 'the amount and quality of social connections with people around us are an essential part of our wellbeing'.[2]

The approach is pragmatic. While public spending remains low, and while the mainstream political consensus remains in favour of the small(er) state, we need to find low cost ways to do what we can to support those hardest hit by wider economic problems, to equip people who are facing the greatest inequality of life chances with resources that improve their chances to thrive.

The backdrop

We are now seeing the end of an era of large-scale investment in area-based regeneration and neighbourhood renewal initiatives, the largest and most recent being the 39 New Deal for Communities (NDC) schemes that ran for 10 years from 2000 and 2001. These grew out of a faith in big government and a wish to try and find lasting solutions for areas that were failing economically, by intervening through complex programmes involving multiple agencies working through different structures.

The approach to area regeneration that has characterised the last 30 years emerged in the wake of the riots in Brixton, Chapeltown, Harmsworth and other urban centres in 1981. Lord Scarman's report into the causes of the Brixton riots reflected the thinking of the Environment Secretary at the time, Michael Heseltine, who took three weeks out to go to Liverpool to try and fathom "what had gone wrong for this great English city".[3] In his paper to Margaret Thatcher, *It Took a Riot*, Heseltine made the case for a more activist government inner-city strategy.[4]

Until 2010, both national and local policy approaches to regenerating the areas that struggle most focused largely on addressing the symptoms of deprivation – crime, grime and anti-social behaviour – with less emphasis on the underlying social issues and dynamics that trap particular neighbourhoods and their residents in poverty. Undoubtedly, long-term economic decline is the main cause of deprivation at the local level. However, its consequences are multi-faceted. The experience of living in difficult areas can damage families and individuals across generations. Unpicking the impact of this is complex, demanding responses that meet both material and psychological needs.

In the past few years the Young Foundation, through its major neighbourhoods programmes,[5] worked in South Shields, East Malling in Kent,

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Coventry,[6] Barking, and Lozells in Birmingham.[7] This work highlighted the psychosocial factors that often collude with poverty to cramp options for residents: low self-esteem, stunted aspirations, chaotic parenting and grandparenting, post-natal depression, unhappiness, poor levels of wellbeing and resilience. It also revealed that residents were often happy with life in places that policymakers considered problematic, where strong local friendship and family networks contributed to a sense of belonging and overall quality of life, in spite of material deprivation.

The existence or absence of local social and family networks can have profound effects – both negative and positive – on wellbeing and resilience.[8] The Young Foundation's work found examples of young people being stopped from going to higher education because it was not 'what was done' in that area, and of hostility to behaviour that was different from the dominant group.

For every positive example of the power of local social relationships to help communities bond and thrive, there are others where tensions within tightly knit communities become the focus of local disputes, even spilling over into active discrimination and violence. Strong norms and behaviours can underpin community solidarity, but can also curtail options for individuals.

The coalition government's Big Society agenda invites communities to take control of services and public sector functions. It proposes action to fill the gaps where the state has divested. However, we know that running libraries and taking over local assets is a minority activity – very few people have the time, the energy or the confidence to take on running public services. These are activities that suit those with power and personal resources rather than those that have neither. Although it cannot ever compensate for the difference in power between communities, building resilience by boosting positive social networks is one way to try to create the social wealth we all need.

Why now?

It is well recognised that poverty clusters in particular geographical concentrations and is not evenly distributed. There is a broad consensus that poverty levels are unlikely to go down in the short to medium term and may well increase.

In 2008, over five million people lived in the most deprived areas in England and nearly two million of them – 38 percent – were income deprived. Almost all – 98 percent – of the most deprived pockets of deprivation are in urban areas.[9] Deprivation covers a multitude of deficits in people's lives, with consequences for communities including higher crime, lower levels of educational achievement and poor health. The infant mortality rate in the most deprived local authorities in England is 25 percent higher than the national average.

Deprived areas are complex places, often with vivid histories and multiple local narratives, not just defined by their relative disadvantage. Jaywick in Essex, near Clacton on Sea, assessed to be the most deprived small area in England in the 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation, is one such example. The town has a proud history, part of the plotlands movement of the 1920s and 1930s, when many city dwellers longing for a different experience bought land in small strips. After the Second World War, most plotlands were bulldozed but the Jaywick residents hung on, going to court in 1970 to preserve

their homes. It is claimed that the area has a proud tradition of self-reliance.[10] But the area is also relatively isolated, in a risky flood zone and many properties have deteriorated. There are plans to demolish the older housing. Three years ago, Peter Turpin, a British National Party (BNP) councillor from Essex Forest, described it as a "shanty town". Others disagreed. Dan Casey, a resident of Jaywick and a member of the local forum and residents' group, believed Turpin's comments were out of line. Most Jaywick residents, he said, were proud to live in the area: "I would never class it as a shanty town. We moved here five years ago and we think it is wonderful."[11]

Like Jaywick, nearly nine out of the 10 small areas ('super output areas') counted as being the most deprived in 2010 were also in this category in 2007.[12] Many of these communities, in spite of significant public investment, did not share in the prosperity of the 2000s. For these places recession has endured since the pits closed or industry shut down.[13]

The statistics show that between 2007 and 2010, the relatively small number of areas that shifted in terms of their relative deprivation were more affluent areas that became less so.[14] Heriot Watt University recently concluded that a significant number of marginal housing areas are, by 2020, unlikely to recover to 2006 levels and that some weaker areas may become unviable. This creates the prospect of abandonment and 'grassing over',[15] threatening a 'Detroit situation' for some cities outside London.

For more than 40 years, governments have tried to improve the prospects for deprived urban neighbourhoods. Initiatives have included Urban Development Corporations, the Urban Programme, City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget as well as the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal from 1998 onwards. The incoming Labour government in1997 made tackling the problems of the most disadvantaged areas a priority. The newly elected Prime Minister stated: "Often huge sums of money have been spent on repairing buildings and giving estates a new coat of paint, but without matching investment in skills, education and opportunities for the people who live there."[16]

The Blair government's flagship New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme spent a total of £1.71 billion between 1999/2000 and 2007/08.[17] This substantial sum is only a fraction of the total regeneration budget in this period. In the two years alone from 2009 to 2011, total regeneration spend in England has been estimated to be over £10 billion.[18]

The legacy of these interventions is patchy. The overall evaluation of the NDC areas concluded that the programme led to more net change of place-related, rather than people-related, outcomes.[19] NDCs made most impact on improving their areas; on lawlessness, dereliction, and fear of crime. But there was less change on indicators relating to quality of life and education, on perceptions of whether residents felt they could influence decisions and if neighbours look out for each other. Ipsos MORI's analysis of NDC data showed that community involvement in NDC areas had negligible impacts on how people felt about the area they lived in, their quality of life, their feeling of being part of the community and their trust in the local authority.[20] The number of people on benefits actually went up in NDC areas, though this may have been a symptom of changes in benefit regimes.[21]

Alongside the formal evaluations, two narratives are often told about what goes wrong with regeneration schemes, in the UK and globally. The first is the story of gentrification: the area improves so much that property

prices soar and long-standing residents sell up to benefit from house price increases or are forced to move to cheaper areas.

The second story is that spending on infrastructure and training enables more able and socially mobile residents to move on, leaving the area physically improved but flatlining on unemployment, education, crime and poverty. Manchester City Council identified the exodus of more successful residents from improving deprived areas as a key barrier to the success of their regeneration policies. The need to look at how to make people feel better about where they lived, to improve their wellbeing and resilience, was one of the drivers of the City Council's interest in wellbeing and their involvement in the Local Wellbeing Project.[22]

What seems to be common to these narratives – from the formal evaluations, to the rage of the community activist protesting at gentrification – is that, in spite of their stated intentions, it is the physicality of a place that regeneration programmes target, rather than the needs of the people.

The current government's approach to regeneration is different to the last. It is characterised by localism, with different stakeholders – from civic leaders to businesses – determining what they think is appropriate, and government declining to prescribe what should be done.[23] The political preference for the small state model, and the lack of funding for any other approach, creates an imperative to find different approaches to supporting residents in deprived areas.

People centred regeneration

The relationship between how people feel about the places they live, their quality of life and deprivation levels is complex. A Young Foundation report[24] explored the lives of families living on low incomes in Teeside, looking at how people were meeting their needs in a time of economic recession. Despite the difficulties associated with financial pressures, high levels of debt, poor employment prospects and low educational achievement, there were few signs that material poverty necessarily means a low quality of life. The research illustrated the importance of informal mutual support to surviving on low incomes. People who can draw on extended families and wider networks of friends are more likely to be resilient to shocks that might push others further into difficulty.

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Through a number of different projects we have been looking at practical ways to turn 'stuck communities' into places that can thrive.[25] Being 'stuck' means problems are not resolved, residents find it hard to tackle long-standing problems, few people leave the area for work, young people struggle to make different life choices from their parents. Contrast this with more 'dynamic' communities: where there is mobility and a sense of future possibilities and a prospect of turning difficult situations around. These loose definitions – stuck and dynamic – resonate with residents and professionals. They provide a different framework for thinking about communities, moving on from the focus on deficits – unemployment, poverty, poor education and health – that has driven mainstream regeneration policy over the last 30 years.

The literature surrounding happiness and wellbeing demonstrates that people's satisfaction with their lives is not necessarily affected by the factors popularly thought to be influential, such as income, car ownership, or having a big house. Informal activities, including physical activity, volunteering and participation in civil society organisations, have an important influence on

people's levels of satisfaction with their lives. Crucially, there is a strong correlation between knowing one's neighbours and higher levels of wellbeing.[26]

A critical conclusion of this work is that relationships between people are central; a concept we have returned to repeatedly is the idea of 'resilience'.

Resilience, crudely, is the capacity of individuals and communities to bounce back after shock. People differ enormously in their reaction when bad things happen. Some are crushed, blaming themselves for what goes wrong, when others – facing similar circumstances – move on and some even thrive on the experience. Communities differ in how their residents collectively deal with difficulties. There is a huge difference between the resilience that enables us to stoically endure difficulties – what we have called 'survival resilience' – and that which enables people to move on from adversity and take advantage of new opportunities. We call this 'adaptive resilience'.

Resilience means different things according to context. For many in local government, it refers to preparations for emergencies ranging from terrorism to flood. In environmental sciences it captures a species ability to adapt to threat, including climate change.

Resilience is also politically flexible. It appeals to those who want the state to retreat, to allow people to sink or swim and resolve their own problems. It has been critiqued as erecting yet another barrier for poor people to overcome to get along in life: not only do they have to overcome disadvantage and discrimination, but we expect them to become super-humanly tough as well. Another analysis of resilience sees it as something that can be boosted and grown; a way of supporting people to develop the internal capacities that their life experience has limited.

Newham Council in London has, since 2011, started to put community resilience at the centre of their strategies. The report[27] summarising their policy agenda states: "For us resilience is about more than an ability to bounce back from a single damaging event. It is about possessing a set of skills and having access to the resources that allow us to negotiate the challenges we all experience… in contrast to much of the current government rhetoric on poverty and social mobility [we] recognise the importance of external factors in shaping our lives. Our personal skills, experiences and upbringing are essential to our resilience but these are intertwined with the resilience of the communities we live in and the economic circumstances we face."

Resilience and neighbourliness

There is evidence of a correlation between strong social networks and wellbeing: those who know more people in their local neighbourhood tend to be happier than those who do not. There is also a relationship between strong social networks and belonging, community cohesion and 'collective efficacy' (residents' willingness to intervene if they witness problem behaviour). There is also a link between strong networks and actual, as well as perceived, lower crime and anti-social behaviour.[28]

Community psychologists have long noted that child abuse rates are higher where neighbourhood cohesion is lower.[29] Where civic engagement in community affairs is higher, teachers report higher levels of parental support and lower levels of student misbehaviour.[30] One American study found that the benefits of social relationships are greater than from regular exercise and similar to stopping smoking (if you smoke 15

cigarettes a day). What they call 'low social interaction' – isolation – has the same health risk as not exercising and being an alcoholic.[31]

Michael Young's work in Bethnal Green in the 1950s[32] described a community where families lived close by and older people had, on average, 13 relatives living within a mile radius.[33] In this context neighbourliness was the norm. Local social relationships were based on strong social ties within, and between families, who lived, and expected to live, in close geographical proximity.

This world no longer exists, pushed aside by a more mobile, aspirational but more atomised society. Neighbourliness in most 21st century developed cities is voluntary, characterised by weak social ties. The benefits can be someone who can take in parcels, feed pets, maybe hold keys, carry out informal childcare and becomes a friend. But interactions with other people can be negative experiences, and many people have a neighbour they dread bumping into. A major study of the 1970's British 'good neighbours' schemes ended with a simple conclusion that "good fences make good neighbours".[34] Social relationships work best when there are boundaries, and people are able to choose who they become friendly with.

Writers disagree about the impact of urban living on behaviour and attitudes. In 1903 sociologist George Simmel wrote of the "mental attitude of metropolitans toward one another [that] we may designate, from a formal point of view, as reserve.[35] As a result of this reserve, we frequently do not even know by sight those who have been our neighbours for years. It is this reserve which in the eyes of the small-town people makes us appear to be cold and heartless."

Richard Sennett in 1970 argued the opposite view, stating that only in "dense, disorderly, overwhelming cities, with their rich mix of different classes, ethnicities and cultures, do we learn the true complexity of life and human relations".

The work of Oxford Professor of Psychology, Miles Hewstone also emphasises the value of contact between neighbours. His research has explored what happens to relationships between different groups in conflict areas. His work – in Northern Ireland, areas of Hindu-Muslim conflict in India and in former Yugoslavia – has established that when we have more contact with people from other backgrounds, understanding increases and hostility reduces. This challenges the more popularly accepted (within the UK and US) 'threat' theory,[36] which proposes that more diversity leads to more misunderstanding and competition, and increased prejudice. Hewstone's work suggests the opposite; that so long as there is contact (which is not always the case) diverse populations can develop understanding and less discomfort between different groups.[37]

Using a resilience analysis to boost environmental sustainability

As part of its early work Social Life was commissioned by the Institute for Sustainability to explore the dynamics of community life in the Poplar area of London's East End. The aim of this work was to generate a detailed picture of the Poplar and Bromley-by-Bow neighbourhoods by exploring resident and stakeholder networks, community assets and vulnerabilities, and community engagement structures that could be mobilised to involve residents in a range of initiatives designed to change behaviour to reduce carbon emissions and tackle climate change.

This case study shows how a resilience analysis at local level can help achieve wider objectives, in this case boosting environmental sustainability. A key element of this work was a wellbeing and resilience analysis based on the Young Foundation's WARM framework, supplemented by interviews with residents and stakeholders and community asset mapping.

Overall, the results suggest that residents in Bromley-by-Bow are faring much worse than the national average across key wellbeing and resilience indicators. Residents found it harder to draw on emotional support, struggled to cope financially and emotionally, and were generally less satisfied with their life when compared to national averages. The work confirmed that the neighbourhood faces severe challenges including isolation and low resilience and tensions between different groups (including young and older residents, Muslim and white British residents, and longstanding residents and new more affluent incomers) as well as poor quality housing and infrastructure in parts of the area, and high youth unemployment. However, there are strong local assets to build on. The neighbourhood has relatively high levels of local social capital, is well served by community organisations, and there are strong, formal and informal local networks to connect with.

The power of the WARM analysis is to show how, within the broad picture of the area, the situation for different groups varies. WARM analyses national datasets by social groups[38] and uses this to predict how these are likely to be faring. Whilst wellbeing levels were significantly below the national average across all groups living in the area, this was particularly marked some within the Asian community and Afro-Caribbean communities. Resilience also was low across all groups, but highest amongst some Asian households.

Levels of wellbeing and resilience were mapped across the area, with 'red' indicating lower levels, and 'green' higher levels.
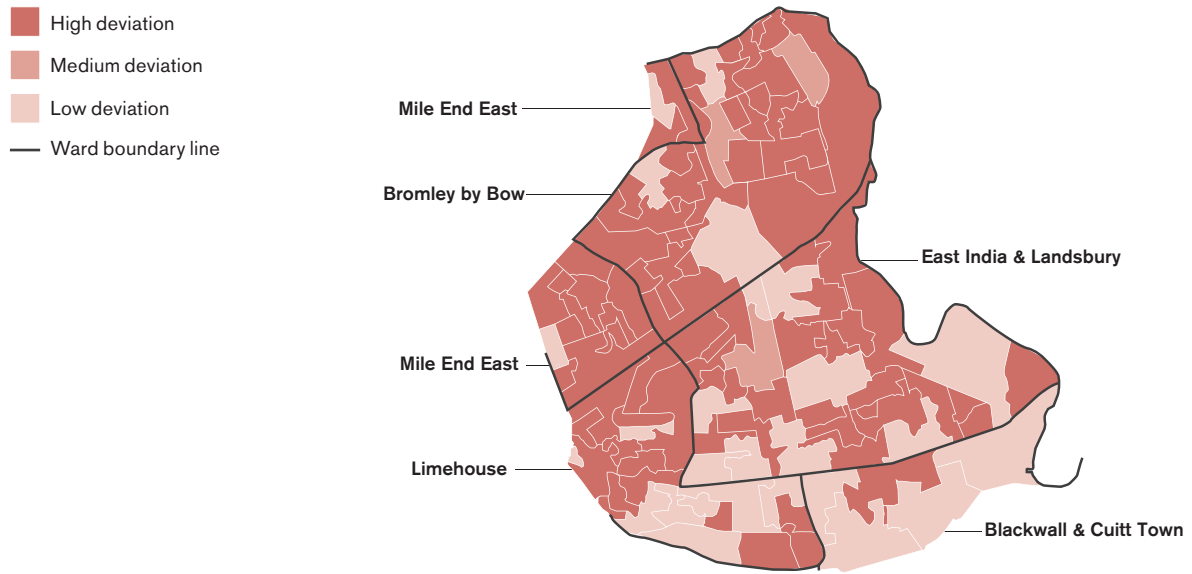
The detailed assessment will feed into the Institute for Sustainability's strategy for engaging and involving this community in a range of initiatives to change behaviour to improve environmental sustainability, alongside addressing the wider social issues of the area.

Considerable research has been conducted by academic institutions – including RESOLVE at Surrey University and the Sustainable Lifestyles Research Group – to understand the drivers of pro-environmental behaviour. This tends to focus on how individuals negotiate tensions and conflicts between the desire to make 'green' choices and the emotional and practical obstacles they face.

The WARM analysis gives a fine-grained analysis of the community-wide factors that could help or hinder behaviour change. In Poplar, strong local networks emerge as an asset, low involvement in formal groups suggests potential for broader engagement, and the high resilience of certain communities suggests potential for targeting these groups as early adopters of specific behaviour change initiatives. The analysis also points to potential synergies where improving environmental sustainability can boost social sustainability. For example, community based activities that can both galvanise behaviour change and tackle emotional isolation have the potential to improve sustainability outcomes, benefit individuals psychological wellbeing, and through boosting resilience, enable residents to thrive more broadly.

Wellbeing in Poplar

High deviation
Medium deviation
Low deviation
Ward boundary line

Mile End East
Bromley by Bow
East India & Landsbury
Mile End East
Limehouse
Blackwall & Cuitt Town

Resilience in Poplar

High deviation
Medium deviation
Low deviation
Ward boundary line

Mile End East
Bromley by Bow
East India & Landsbury
Mile End East
Limehouse
Blackwall & Cuitt Town

Plugging the Gap: turning strangers into neighbours

Face Up: resilience training for young people involved in criminal gangs

In 2010 the Young Foundation was commissioned by the Safer Harrow partnership to develop and pilot an emotional resilience programme to target 14 to 19-year-old males who congregated in the Wealdstone corridor area. In the early part of 2011, the Young Foundation alongside Harrow Metropolitan Police, the University of East London and the London Borough of Harrow delivered Face Up, an emotional resilience programme for young people who are at risk of offending, or who have offended and were involved in gang activities.

This was a fresh approach to working with gangs to reduce anti-social behaviour. There were initial doubts that a formalised programme over three consecutive evenings could attract and retain this group of young people who were disengaged from education, and often banned or uninterested in youth provision. Despite this the programme, which ran in the early months of 2011, succeeded in engaging 15 young people identified by local agencies as being significantly involved in crime connected to the 'Grey Set' gang.

Face Up aims to develop flexibility of thinking, self worth, the ability to self-regulate emotions and behaviours and increase awareness of the impact of anti-social behaviour. It enables young people to understand how we make sense of the world and explore alternative ways of thinking. The materials were designed to capture some of the experiences and narratives from young people that live in Harrow.

In total, 22 staff from Harrow police force, youth services and the local voluntary sector received three days training to deliver Face Up. This included three young men aged between 19 and 21 years who volunteered with Harrow youth services. The programme was delivered to the young people by a selection of trained professionals.

The Young Foundation, Harrow Council and the Harrow police targeted and engaged young people sensitively in the run up to the training. Harrow Police intensified their use of dispersal orders aimed at the most criminally active members of the gang, enabling the programme to target other gang members, to stem escalation of their criminal activities.

Initial feedback from the group was extremely positive and they were able to reflect on some of the concepts that had been discussed during the programme. The young people showed an appetite for similar projects and attended a follow up session showcasing the videos and music they created during the Face Up sessions.

Analysis of local area data and local knowledge from the police suggests that 10 out of the 15 young males have subsequently not been involved in any known offending, re-offending or anti-social behaviour in the area.

Interviews with senior staff, including those from the council and the police highlighted two significant areas of impact: a significant decrease in crime in the area (the level of crime and anti-social behaviour is below the expected trajectory and the fear of anti-social behaviour has also been reduced); and an improvement in relationships between third sector agencies, the local authority and the police. The Borough Commander Dalwardin Babu commentated "I walked through the area and to me it seemed there was a great difference. I didn't see the Grey Set at all".

The RSA's Recovery resilience

The RSA's Whole Person Recovery programme explores how people suffering from substance misuse problems can acquire and connect to the personal, social and community resources they need to sustain their recovery in the long-term. Substance misuse problems can overrun and blight a community, diminishing its social and economic capital. Individuals caught in addiction can struggle to realise their aspirations and potential. Substance misuse is not only about effective treatment, but also about resilience, and the social and economic inclusion that needs to be co-produced in and with communities.

'Recovery capital' improves the resilience of individuals as they continue their recovery journeys. At the heart of the approach are 'Recovery Alliances': broad partnerships of local stakeholders including service users, employers, public and third sector front line and strategic staff, councillors, RSA Fellows and other citizens who come together to provide support, information and opportunity to those recovering from substance misuse that they would otherwise not be able to access.

Alliance members develop a rich understanding of recovery through their participation, improve the orientation of their own (and their organisation's) attitudes and practices towards supporting recovery, and co-produce recovery capital by helping deliver a range of initiatives in their local communities. They are effective hubs for turning strangers into neighbours.

The range of initiatives Alliances undertake pass on valuable skills and opportunities to recovering substance misusers, help to address the core problem of drug and alcohol addiction, and also generate broader community resilience. To a significant extent, a community's ability to recover from problems – individually and collectively – is dependent on the strength and effectiveness of its social networks. The collective resilience built through Alliances includes everyone in local communities, including some of the most marginalised citizens.

The RSA's Whole Person Recovery programme is building resilient recovery communities in West Kent through a team of Recovery Community Organisers and three Recovery Alliances at Maidstone, Gravesend and Tonbridge (see www.thersa.org/projects/recovery).

Community resilience in the London Borough of Newham

The London Borough of Newham has made resilience a strategic priority. In Newham, "resilience" has been interpreted as the ability to navigate social and economic challenges by enabling people and communities to draw on and build their individual and collective narratives, skills and assets. This is also relevant to the way that communities are structured in terms of their social networks and the consequent flow of information, influence, opportunities, and innovation.

The RSA and the Campaign Company have been working with the London Borough of Newham to map components of resilience in three case study areas: East Ham, Royal Docks, and Stratford. This work has focused on three dimensions of resilience, defined as those who:

- are able to handle challenges and setbacks, and have the skills and resources to make the most of opportunities (personal resilience)
- belong to strong and diverse sets of networks, and have people they can turn to for advice and support (community resilience)
- have real employment opportunities, are able to withstand changes in their financial circumstances, and have good quality, secure work (economic resilience).

The project has explored questions such as which residents and communities are most likely to prove resilient to government cuts and recession and why; which service hubs do most to support resilience and why; what role do community groups, businesses and frontline staff play in nurturing resilience; and how can service providers adapt what they do to help individuals and communities build resilience? The team have used two analytical approaches rarely used by public service providers: social network and psychographic analysis.

This approach enables understanding of which individuals may be poorly networked but optimistic and adaptive, or vice versa. A family may have limited financial means but having a wider network can help them sustain a financial shock, without support from service providers. It also builds an understanding of how to engage and communicate with different people and groups, what their communication preferences are, what they care about, and who will pass the communication on to whom.

The topline findings of the research show that Newham has a high proportion of "Prospectors", people who are most motivated by esteem and success. This group tends to be optimistic and focused on the opportunities in front of them. Newer economic migrants (typically younger members of black and minority ethnic groups) are also more likely to be Prospectors. The aspirational values of this group chime well with the London Borough of Newham's ambitions to increase the economic success of the borough. But for many of these residents, living in Newham is the first step in their plan to achieve economic success. Many will choose to move on as their personal circumstances improve.

Different network structures provide different types of support and challenges for Newham residents. In terms of economic resilience for example, two thirds of employers recruit using word of mouth, and over half of employers say they *only* recruit using word of mouth. Use of any other recruitment method is low. However, people born in Newham are less than half as likely to know someone who is in a position to employ someone as those born outside Newham; and unemployed people are more likely to be connected to each other than to employed people. This can make it hard for some to find local jobs.

By merging values and network analysis, a more sophisticated approach to communicating with the community can be developed, with to the aim of weaving more socially productive and resilient social networks. Messages can be tailored according to the psychological preferences of different groups, and landed in the most appropriate and helpful hubs in the community.

Plugging the gap?

If there is no new money for large scale area regeneration in the foreseeable future, but a pressing need for support for communities living in places most affected by the collapse of local economies, then it is important to find tangible, practical low cost ways to support residents and communities that can be taken forward now. The option of doing nothing, of letting areas fail completely, has unacceptable human consequences.

Resilience, and key aspects of this – local social relationships – can be boosted in neighbourhoods, regardless of the social class and incomes of their residents. It is relatively inexpensive to promote activities – local festivals, clean up days and street parties, for example – that build social networks. In Denmark, new mothers are routinely offered a list of the email addresses of other new mothers living in the same area. It is up to them whether they follow this up.

The more we strengthen local assets – and people here are key – the more we will equip communities to self-organise, help young people find opportunities, and bridge the vast gaps left by the shrinking state. These programmes cannot substitute for the expensive interventions that are needed to transform local economies, but they can help people weather the recession, which will have the longest consequences for those living in the most marginal areas.

So what can be done? Two areas have potential. First, *build the resilience* of key groups and individuals: look at the assets of a community as well as its vulnerabilities and looking to strengthen the factors that help people thrive. Second, find viable ways to *turn strangers into neighbours*, boosting the collective capacity of the community by strengthening local social relationships.

These areas are both experimental but can draw on existing practice. They lend themselves to doing a series of strong local prototypes, which would allow us to test different approaches incrementally, learning from mistakes and what it is that works. This would rapidly progress our understanding of how to develop fresh thinking and practice in meeting the needs of people in the most difficult areas.

Building resilience

Whilst there is a wealth of data in the UK that explores the circumstances of local areas, it primarily focuses on deprivation and disadvantage; deficits that need to be remedied. The Young Foundation's WARM (Wellbeing and Resilience Measurement) framework[39] takes a different starting point. WARM brings together a wide range of indicators to measure wellbeing (how people feel about themselves and their communities) and resilience (the capacity of people and communities to bounce back after shock or

Plugging the Gap: turning strangers into neighbours

in the face of adversity). WARM captures both a community's assets – including levels of social capital, good schools and public services, or high educational achievement – as well as its vulnerabilities, including levels of depression and unemployment.

WARM data, corroborated by discussions with communities and local agencies, can pinpoint the groups who are least resilient, and those who, against the odds, appear to be coping. It can be used to plan interventions aimed at the individuals and groups whose resilience may be weakest.

Over the last three years, the RSA's Connected Communities programme has developed methods of mapping the assets and interests of local communities; of understanding how people connect through social networks (or not); and of using this information to grow more inclusive, supportive and productive local relationships.

There is emerging evidence about the potential of interventions using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques to boost the resilience of individuals, taking as the starting point the belief that resilience can be taught.[40] This work has grown out of the US positive psychology movement, and the work of academics like Professor Martin Seligman from Penn State University.

There is emerging evidence about the potential of interventions based on CBT, taking as the starting point the belief that resilience can be taught

This approach has been already tested in different contexts, The Local Wellbeing Project[41] trialed the UK Resilience Programme in 22 schools over three years. The Department for Education funded evaluation, carried out by the London School of Economics[42] found a significant improvement in pupils' depression and anxiety symptom scores, school attendance rates, academic attainment in English, with a higher impact on pupils entitled to free school meals, who had not attained the national targets at Key Stage 2, and who had worse initial symptoms of depression or anxiety. A new unit set up within Hertfordshire Council, 'How to Thrive', is developing training programmes based on this pilot for Childrens' Services and cross sector leadership.[43] The Australian BounceBack! programme has been successfully used in Scotland: in 2010 Bounce Back program was awarded a Silver Medal in the Perth and Kinross Council Awards after it was rolled out in 16 schools.[44]

The Young Foundation has trialed a similar approach, commissioned by the Safer Harrow Partnership, developing and piloting an emotional resilience programme targeting young people aged 14 to 19 who are offending or at risk of offending and involved with gang activity (see page 15).[45] In spite of initial anxieties about the wisdom of teaching a group of young people so entrenched in difficulties to be even tougher, local support was generated for an approach that builds thinking skills, helping young people to make wiser choices.

The Full of Life programme, a peer-to-peer community-based intervention to promote emotional resilience skills has been piloted in Lambeth and Kingston-upon-Thames in London. The aim of Full of Life is to improve the wellbeing and resilience of people aged 65 and over who are experiencing isolation, mild anxiety or depression.

Turn strangers into neighbours
Building weak ties between people living in the same neighbourhoods is key to building resilience. Whilst this can have its pitfalls: neighbour disputes, clashes of culture, lifestyles, faith, age and social class; it remains

true that neighbourliness and social networks are a critical protective factors against many neighbourhood problems.

The success of the Big Lunch and the potential of a number of digital networks, from US based homeelephant.com (the social network designed to tear down (figuratively) fences) to eco-teams,[46] points to how we could test different ways to develop local social networks. The U – a citizens university[47] supported by the NESTA and the Young Foundation – organises short courses in local areas, run by volunteers, on the topics that will get people to come out on a cold night, including first aid training, how to build a local website, sustainable living and conflict resolution. The Circle Movement, pioneered by Participle in Southwark, is a membership organisation for older people, aiming to 'take care of everyday worries' and support social networks.[48]

For the past three years, the RSA's Citizen Power Peterborough programme has piloted different ways of fostering neighbourliness and mobilising people to overcome local challenges, from drug dependence to anti-social behaviour. The Peterborough Curriculum project is one example: it partners schools with community organisations and neighbourhoods to link what young people learn with where they live. Another example is their Arts and Social Change initiative which has established a network of local artists and civic entrepreneurs who co-design small-scale interventions to improve community spirit.

We can use the 'two factors' theory, which posits that if neighbours can identify two things in common, they are more likely to find common ground and the basis for an ongoing relationship. Two people who live in the same area share one common factor, the place they call home. The second factor could be having young children, going to the same church, mosque, synagogue, temple or gurdwara. Having children at the same school, gardening, cycling, dog ownership are also bonds.

Opinions polarise on whether digital technologies are more likely to obliterate local identity (by putting networks in hyperspace or strengthening communities of interest) or whether they are key tools in building local bonds. Some very local websites, including the East Dulwich Forum[49] and Harringay Online,[50] are very successful, but cover sizeable areas of London with very mixed populations. Our work in local areas using digital technology has stressed that it is a useful tool when it comes to hyper localism, rather than a game changer.[51]

But options remain untested. What if, in a local area, people's email addresses were circulated? Could this be done through an anonymised portal, which gave every house and flat its own addressed based email which residents could use (or chose to ignore)? Would this help people get to know each other? Could this be a starting point for new conversations and activities? What is the optimum size for local websites?

Next steps

Local agencies, politicians and communities want to find ways to protect deprived areas from the sharp end of spending cuts and recession. But they all struggle to find ways to square the circle of rising need and dwindling resources. Although the link between innovation and financial imperative is well recognised,[52] in the face of community pressures, rising social needs, radical downsizing across agencies and rapidly changing policy

frameworks, it is proving difficult for policymakers, politicians and practitioners to find the space to think creatively about new cheaper options that can potentially deliver what traditional programmes found difficult.

The approach set out in this paper to pragmatically build resilience in local communities, with a focus on turning strangers into neighbours, has the potential to be tested in different sites, prototyping rather than piloting the approach to allow learning and evolution at pace. This would build on the work of agencies (at national and local level), community and residents groups, offering a new approach to improving lives and life chances of the people living in the places under the greatest stress.

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