

## **How can Community Anchors contribute to the overall social improvement and well-being of a locality?**

### **Christopher Durkin**

I sit on a man's back, choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am very sorry for him and wish to ease his lot by all possible means -except by getting off his back.

### **Leo Tolstoy**

This short paper looks at the developing importance of community anchors. It will attempt to locate them in a wider policy context and looks at their importance as part of a broader based neighbourhood regeneration strategy. In the workshop we will look further at how the issues of partnership, competition and local relationships with community groups can ensure Community Anchors have a greater impact than they might otherwise have had.

The Home Office Civil Renewal Unit's framework for community capacity building; "Firm Foundations" (2004) defined Community anchor organisations as having at least four common features:

- they are controlled by local residents and/or representatives of local groups;
- they address the needs of their area in a multi-purpose, holistic way;
- they are committed to the involvement of all sections of their community, including marginalised groups, and
- they facilitate the development of the communities in their area.

The Community Alliance widens the definition and sees Community anchors as independent community-led organisations which "...are multi-purpose and provide holistic solutions to local problems and challenges, bringing out the best in people and agencies. They are there for the long term, not just the quick fix. Community anchors are often the driving force in community renewal."

The Community Alliance goes even further and outlines what they see as the key characteristics of Community anchors which they feel are likely to provide:

- A building: a physical space which is community controlled, owned or led;
- A focus for services and activities meeting local need;
- A vehicle for local voices to be heard, needs to be identified and for local leaders and community groups to be supported;
- A platform for community development, promoting cohesion while respecting diversity;
- A home for the community sector which is supportive of the growth and development of community groups;
- A means of promoting community led enterprise, generating independent income while having a social, economic and environmental impact;
- A forum for dialogue within communities, creating community led solutions, and
- A bridge between communities and the state which promotes and brings about social change.

What we can see in both definitions is the emphasis on the local; community anchors are 'place-based organisations' that are located in specific geographical communities. The strength of these institutions from a Government perspective is that they are very much part of their community and are seen as key components in a strategy for development and capacity building in a broader approach of neighbourhood renewal. Anchor institutions are seen as organisations that can lever "...their assets and revenues to promote local..." (The Netter Center for Community Partnerships 2008: 10) development. This is why the government is placing an emphasis on organisational capacity development, for example, by providing funding to community anchors "...to develop sustainable social enterprise solutions" (H.M.S.O 2007: 8).

In understanding the increasing importance of community anchors we need to go back to the election of New Labour in 1997. Labour placed a

great deal of emphasis on the need to tackle 'social exclusion' which was seen as being a shorthand term:

*'for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown'. (<http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/glossary.asp#S> )*

In understanding Labour's policy direction it is important to remember that there was no real change in economic ideology i.e. they believed in the same neo liberal agenda as the previous Conservative administration. However, in developing their policies Labour had been heavily influenced by communitarian thinking of the sociologists Etzioni and Giddens. Calder (2004) argues that there are two fundamental aspects of this approach, firstly the importance of community and secondly the importance of civil society. Within this context is the importance of rights, responsibilities and the need for active citizens. In welfare terms the major difference was not in terms of provider, but in terms of focus, in particular the importance of targeting welfare provision to those most in need. From a societal perspective the labour party placed a considerable emphasis on the need to develop social capital and central to this ideology was the need to develop a strong voluntary and community sector.

Social Capital was defined Robert Putnam in his seminal book Bowling Alone, as:

*"... features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives... Social capital, in short, refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust. (Putnam 2000: 664-5<sup>i</sup>).*

It is often referred to as "...the glue that helps hold individuals together as a community". Muir R. (2006: 6)

Three types of social capital		
Type of social capital	Type of relationship	Contributes to
<b>Bonding</b> Ties among people who are similar to each other in certain respects (age, sex, ethnicity, social class)	Horizontal	Social support, especially in times of need
<b>Bridging</b> Ties among people who are different from one another	Horizontal	Social cohesion, democratic dialogue, civic identity
<b>Linking</b> Ties with those in authority	Vertical	Democratic life, responsive public services, legitimacy of public institutions

Source: Adapted from Jochum et al (2005)

The diagram<sup>ii</sup> above is helpful in that it divides social capital into three broad categories together with the contribution they are perceived to make to community life.

The importance of social capital in this context relates to the issue of social exclusion and recognition that in areas where social exclusion is seen to be an issue, social networks are perceived to be weak. Since the 1980's it has been recognised that many issues of social exclusion are geographically based, located in certain neighbourhoods and that these areas are also generally distinguished by poor services. The Labour government has, as part of its broader policy objectives, aimed to 'empower communities' with an expectation that the people would become 'active citizens' identifying problems and ultimately finding solutions for the problems (Pierson, J. 2002).

What needs to be recognised is that neighbourhood issues and problems do not require single solutions, they are complex and require multi-faceted responses if the deep seated problems are going to be addressed. The role of local democratic institutions within this policy perspective are seen as 'place shapers', broadly operating as part of the infrastructure and not necessarily the deliverers of services. The emphasis on who provides

the services is now seen as less important; what is seen as crucial is finding the most appropriate provider. In this context the Procurement and Commissioning policies of the local authority becomes the fulcrum on which the whole process hangs together they provide the structure and an environment for the development of services.

As part of this process of development there has also been a move of underused assets from the local authority to the community through the Community Assets programme.<sup>iii</sup> It is within this sphere that Community Anchors are seen as central; because of their location, their understanding of local need and the fact that the building(s) is owned by the community. However, it is not the existence of the building per se that is important but the role it plays as part of a wider community network. It can be seen as a 'community hub' that potentially joins a number of networks together; users, residents, other voluntary and community organisations, the local authority and even the private sector.

Community Matters sees Community Anchors as taking on five roles:

**Role 1: Service Provision** - Community anchors provide local services and act as a gateway to helping people get access to the other services they need

**Role 2: Resourcing** - Community anchors help bring money and opportunities into a neighbourhood from the local authority, external funders and other agencies.

**Role 3: Advocacy** - Community anchors call for change in policy and practice

- Act as a catalyst of change in public services and regeneration programmes
- Help people to get involved in groups and have a say about local issues and services
- Mobilise local democracy

**Role 4: Supporting community organisations-** Community anchors support community organisations through community capacity building, helping groups develop their skills, organisation, representation and involvement

**Role 5: Strengthening community participation** - Community anchors support active citizenship and contribute to civil renewal. (Linham S.)

Gillians L & Nock M argue that what distinguishes community anchor organisations from voluntary sector infrastructure organisations like Volunteer Centres is that Community Anchor's put "...considerable emphasis on providing direct services to its local community as well as supporting and developing smaller local groups" (Gillians L & Nock M 2007: 5). To function successfully community organisations need to form partnerships and alliances in order to be able to address complex issues.

Partnership working can be seen to operate on a number of levels. In welfare services, the importance of working in partnership has been recognised for a number of years. For instance, in the area of children protection one of the guiding principles of the Children Act 1989 is the need for professionals to work in 'partnership' with children, families and other professionals. However, the majority of child protection enquiries have shown both how difficult it is to work in this way and the consequences when it does not work. Although this notion of partnership working is individualised and related to the needs of a specific child or children, it does highlight the need in all community based projects to involve service users and local residents in both the development and running of projects.

Although the Government wants organisations to work in partnership, each organisation will have a number of different reasons for collaborating. Rochester and Woods (2005:6) identified what they see as three principal "drivers" of collaboration:

- The need to address issues or unmet needs which required a multi-agency response;
- The need to develop, improve or extend existing service provision, and
- The need to develop organisational capacity.

It must be remembered that all partnerships take time to develop, require resources and a shared vision if they are to be sustainable. Rochester and

Woods (2005) talk about the need for any partnership to get over the “trust threshold” to ensure a strategy for the long term. They also recognise that once developed, if a partnership is going to survive and prosper, it will need to be ‘worked on’ and if it is to be ‘time limited’ there will need to be an exit strategy.

### **What are the benefits of partnership working?**

- Reduced isolation;
- Allows services to be delivered in a collaborative way – also seen as potential for synergies through the sharing of resources;
- For many it will provide them with access to local knowledge;
- Development of a shared vision;
- Openness;
- Access of some types of funding
- Reduction of service duplication

### **What are the Barriers?**

- Initial shared vision may disappear
- Poor communication
- Funding- organisations main reason for forming a partnership is to access funds
- Culture clash: - due to a variety of reasons, including different values
- Disparity in size and wealth–issues of power
- Competition between organisations and ‘territorialism’
- Lack of clarity about roles and responsibility
- Lack of time
- Lack of trust
- Tensions between the needs of the organisation

There is no one size that fits all, as community anchors will each develop in different ways. What the bullet points above show is the complexity of partnership working and the need to take time both in setting it up and ensuring it functions in an optimum way. The range of partnerships formed will differ, as will the size and scale of operations and the motives

of the organisations wanting to form these partnerships. The forming of partnerships is important for addressing the complexity of social issues, albeit it must be recognised that these partnerships operate in competitive environments, which could ultimately affect the long term viability of a project.

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<sup>i</sup> Putnam R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, cited in Muir, R. (2006)

<sup>ii</sup> Jochum V, Patten B, Wilding K (2005) *Civil Renewal and Active Citizenship: A guide to the debate*, London: National Council for Voluntary Organisations cited in Muir R (2006:7)

<sup>iii</sup> See Community Assets programme [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third\\_sector/community\\_action/community\\_assets.aspx](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/community_action/community_assets.aspx) .(accessed 29/5/2009)