



David Robinson

Out of the Ordinary

Learning from the Community Links approach to social regeneration

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David Robinson



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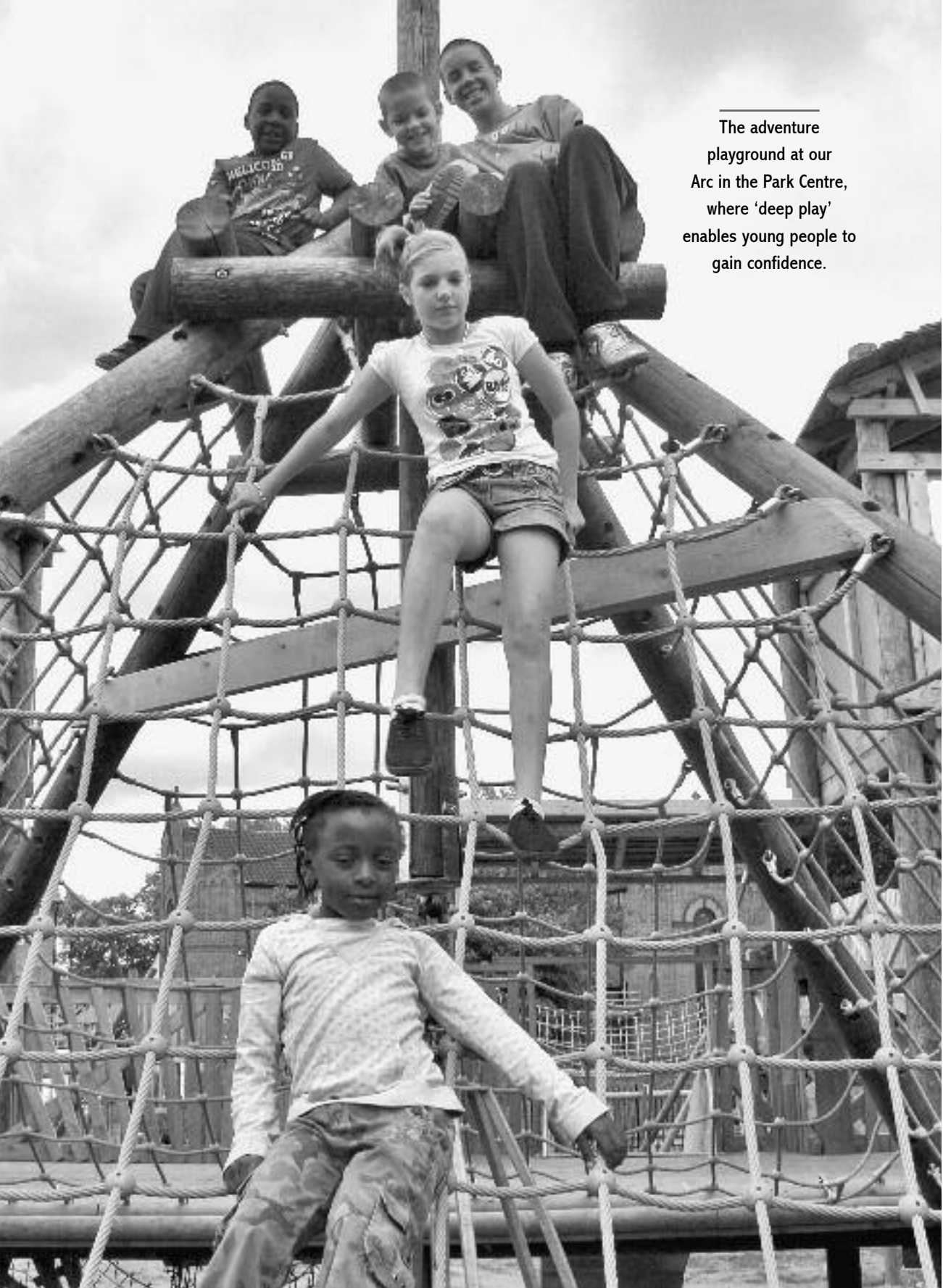
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For what it's worth

This book is published without a cover price. In an 'Out of the Ordinary' approach to charging we trust our readers to have a look at the contents, evaluate it for themselves and send us what they think the book is worth to them. Money received will be used to continue sharing the lessons of what we have achieved in east London.

You can make a contribution to Community Links via our website
www.bit.ly/outoftheordinary



The adventure
playground at our
Arc in the Park Centre,
where 'deep play'
enables young people to
gain confidence.

Introduction

THIS SHORT STUDY explains the Community Links approach to local social regeneration and, with the help of service users, staff and external partners, considers the learning.

Community Links is the UK's largest local multi-purpose community organisation. We work in twenty-one centres across east London with more than 30,000 vulnerable children, young people, adults and older people encouraging and supporting individuals and communities to build their own ladders out of poverty. We maximise our impact through our national programme, drawing out the learning from our local work and sharing it with practitioners and policy makers.

Much of our work – advice services, children's clubs, youth activities, and employment projects – is delivered through Community Hubs; multi-function neighbourhood centres with a high level of user involvement. We work with one another to lead successful independent lives and to thrive together and we are proud of the results – within the first year of opening the Rokeby Hub, for instance, reported crime on the estate fell by 56% (*London Borough of Newham, 2010*).

In this study we show how the quality of the user experience at Community Links is determined by the expectations that we hold for the behaviours of our staff and the qualities that we develop in the places where they work.

The approach of the worker is characterised by a set of competencies which can be taught, managed, appraised and replicated. Appropriate buildings create the conditions in which relationships thrive. Again, these ‘qualities of place’ can be identified and reproduced.

None of this is sufficient in isolation. All of it matters together.

Our study concludes with a set of recommendations to government for sustaining, developing and replicating the Community Links model. Collectively these would do more than contribute to the reform of public services. They would transform them.

We all have the potential to do better. We all need the support of others. We all have something to contribute

We at Community Links are proud of this story, but there are many days when we need to do more. We all have the potential to do better. We all need the support of others. We all have something to contribute. Our story is rooted in these beliefs.

It is a story both of, and for, hearts and minds. Our work is dependant on the big-hearted enthusiasm of those who deliver it or fund it. Their passion is informed and directed by clear policies and responsive programmes that build on founding principles honed by experience. We share it all to inspire partners who might work with us or might support our work, to help practitioners elsewhere and to inform the development of policy.

We are grateful to all those who have participated and contributed over the last three decades and to those who, for the purposes of this study, have shared with me what they have learnt. Thank you all.

Jude's Story

My name is Jude; I am 19 and study music at university. We moved around a lot when I was little but after my father died we settled down in Stratford. I have seen the area change and reform ... a lot of things have happened there, good things and bad things.

The green was often used as a base for criminal activities. I remember a couple of times where cars had been stolen and set alight. But the area has improved and I think it has a lot to do with the Community Links Centre.



I got involved volunteering with Community Links and eventually I got a job as a paid youth worker. A wonderful lady that works for Community Links knew that I could dance and she talked about the opportunity to teach dance with a project called 'Streetz on da green'. We started off practicing at the community centre but now we are in Maryland studios. We managed to get some funding from Life Bank and from

that we have been able to pay the trainers, myself included, and for the studio hire.

Community Links has enabled me to come a step closer to my goals and to achieve my ambitions.



Arc in the Park: Community Links'
open-access adventure playground

Section One

First Principles: The foundations of our work

SPEND TIME AT COMMUNITY LINKS and you could dance, groom a horse, play bingo, play the drums or play Tarzan on the zip wire. You might learn to read or learn to give advice. Or maybe both. You could talk or you could listen, help others or be helped to get a job or childcare or training, to mend a relationship, to manage a debt, to sort a problem, to sort lots of problems, to set goals, to reach for them and to party.

Our facilities include Arc in the Park adventure playground, Outdoors in the City Adventure Centre, Newham City Farm and our independent school, Education Links for children who are struggling in the mainstream. We run training programmes, children's clubs and advice services and a network of sixty different community services and projects serving more than 30,000 people of all ages.

Much of this work is delivered from Community Hubs – neighbourhood-based centres where the local community is engaged in identifying and meeting local needs and where the services are designed to:

Raise Aspirations Build confidence and life skills, empowering people to

A fence at the top of the cliff is always better than an ambulance at the bottom

explore their dreams, set realistic and achievable goals and fulfill their potential.

Extend Opportunities Supporting those for whom the transitions, from school to college, perhaps, or into employment do not run smoothly, enabling them to get back on track and make a positive contribution to their own lives and to the community.

To thrive and be free is a shared aspiration. It is what we all want for ourselves, our families and our communities

Tackle Poverty Ensuring families can meet their basic material needs – adequate income, appropriate housing, a safe and stable environment –and build a brighter future.

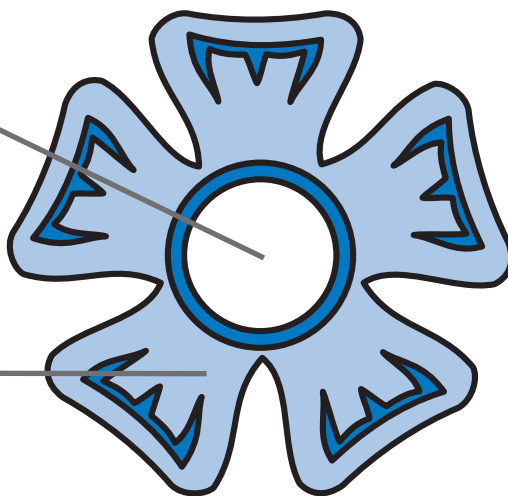
Strengthen Communities Helping people to feel safer, building bridges across ages and cultures, and working to build a better society for all.

The services that are open to everyone include generic youth work, open access play, family projects, open door advice, employment guidance,

Community Links Flower Model

At the heart of what we do are **early action services**, involving our community in identifying local needs and delivering the solutions.

These are supplemented by our **specialist services**, reaching out to respond to needs which the community is unable to meet themselves.



Community Links provide both services – building fences at the top of the cliff, as well as running ambulances at the bottom.

The more effective our early action services are, the fewer people need our specialist support.

and support for emerging groups. These services are at the heart of what we do and we think of them as the kind of ‘early action’ that can enable service users to build successful independent lives.

Specialist services supplement the open provision and respond to needs that the community cannot meet without specialised help. These are accessed by referral and include targeted youth work with young people who have particular needs, alternative education and dedicated employment support.

We have found that intense estate-based community action work and the strong relationships formed between project workers and the wider local community can have a powerful and lasting impact on the lives and the well-being of local people. It can reduce the need for some more expensive acute services but, very importantly, it is not an alternative to statutory provision. We work in close partnership with schools, social services, police, health services and others and particularly value our close, long-standing and multi-faceted relationship with the London Borough of Newham. It also needs to be stressed that although the Community Links approach is cost effective it isn’t cost free. Our current budget runs to approximately £11 million. Again, we value the confidence and support of our funding partners, particularly the local authority.

These services are at the heart of what we do, and we think of them as the kind of ‘early action’ that can enable service users to build successful independent lives

A set of fundamental principles have underpinned our work and remained constant since we began more than thirty years ago. These principles determine what we do, how we develop facilities and services and what we expect of our staff.

- **We all have potential.** The individual is the author of their own life. They can and should rise as far as their talents can take them. We all need support at some time in our lives and, because of poverty, prejudice or lack of opportunity some need more than others. With the right training, advice, personal or practical support and access to resources, everyone has the potential to achieve great things.
- **Those who experience a problem understand it best.** Realising that asset and using it to help others is often the first step towards personal fulfilment and of benefit to the wider community. Most of our frontline

services are delivered, in whole or in part, by people who first became involved as service users. We believe that it is through learning to tackle our own challenges and supporting others on a similar journey that we arrive together at long-term sustainable solutions.

The Community Links approach is cost effective; it isn't cost free

- **Needs are indivisible.** It is impossible to help a young person who is struggling at school without knowing about and tackling problems at home. Relationships in the family may be excessively stretched by financial problems, perhaps a pending eviction or mounting debt.

Addressing any one of these problems on its own may be of limited value. Many services are highly specialised and service users bounce from one agency to another. At Community Links we work with all ages and tackle a variety of needs with a wide range of projects.

- **People change lives.** It is not only possible for one human being to make a real and lasting difference to another, it is often, in the most difficult circumstances, the only thing that ever does. Practical support or the transfer of knowledge creates the conditions for progress, but it is the deeper qualities of a relationship that have the power to transform. One-to-one 'deep value' relationships are our beating heart at Community Links, tackling need, unlocking potential and releasing a sense of purpose and of self-belief.

- **A fence at the top of the cliff is always better than an ambulance at the bottom.** We build on strengths, empowering, supporting and enabling our service users to build successful lives, to thrive. This is positive early action or prevention, but we are cautious about how we use these terms. We all need help at some time in our lives and there should be no negative label attached to services that provide it.

When a parent takes a child swimming or to the park they don't think of it as a diversion from crime. They think of it as fun, part of a happy childhood. Also perhaps as a safe and stimulating activity, constructive or healthy or educational and maybe even, in a rocky period, as a stitch in time. Just as families don't talk about preventing a negative so we at Community Links focus our early action on the positive.

- **With, not for.** *How* we deliver support is just as important as *what* we deliver and is key to maximising the value and the efficiency of any service. We don't seek to control people or to manage them, but to be the enabler in the lives of others that makes them free from

dependency. To thrive and be free is a shared aspiration. It is what we all want for ourselves, our families and our communities and it is what we want for our service users at Community Links.

Hannah's Story

Hannah is a graduate of Future Links, Community Links new intensive, practical programme for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

I was a student on Community Links very first Future Links course. Whilst on the course I gained lots of new skills and developed the skills I already possessed. As I enjoyed the experience so much I wanted to continue to help others that would be enrolling for future courses.

Being a peer mentor has been a fantastic experience. I have met some great young people, some of them I will continue to class as my friends. Having the opportunity to assist Tracy with her administration duties and support the young people has, and will, enable me to develop further in my chosen career.

Another Future Links participant said:

Future Links opened up so many doors for me. I feel like I've achieved more in the last two months at Future Links than I did in the last five years at school.



At Rokeby and our other Hubs, we work with statutory sector partners.

Section Two

Makings of success: What works and why

MOST OF OUR SERVICES are delivered through Hubs – neighbourhood centres offering a wide range of activities. What works best and what doesn't, how does it work and why? What are the flaws, the gaps and the obstacles? What can we and others learn and do better?

For this study we have spoken to service users and to staff, paid and unpaid, primarily associated with the Rokeby Hub; a single-storey, purpose-built community centre in Stratford. The building is attractive but small – essentially one large room and one small room plus kitchen, toilets, garden and outdoor play space. It is not obviously unusual and few of the activities at Rokeby are original – holiday play schemes and after school clubs, youth nights and advice sessions.

If the constituent parts are unexceptional, the results are out of the ordinary. Since opening in 2009 there has been a 48% drop in reported incidents of anti-social behaviour on the local estate (from 477 to 211), and a 56% drop in reported crime – both attributed by the police to the work of the Hub. Prior to the Centre opening, 85% of the local residents that we interviewed said there was nothing to do in the area, 70% admitted to being afraid of going out after dark and 75% were in fear of crime – burglary, car crime and robbery. According to these local



Rokeby Hub

The Rokeby Centre in Stratford was built in partnership by Community Links, Newham Council and the Private Equity Foundation, and opened just over a year ago. The centre is buzzing with activity from nine in the morning until nine at night and has quickly become a real focal point for the community.

Around 200 people use the centre every week, attending activities such as ‘stay and play’ for toddlers and carers, open access play sessions for children after school, youth clubs, football tournaments, coffee mornings, legal advice, employment guidance and exercise classes for over-50s. The range of activities change from time to time as we ask local people what they would like to see at the Centre and an active local user group (which includes children and young people) meets every six weeks to plan the programme.

Activities over the past year range from learning Capoeira and streetdance to a cooking club, walking group and computer classes. In addition the staff and user group also organise one-off events ranging from children’s parties and theatre trips, to knife-crime workshops for young people, community fun days and BBQ lunches.

Everyone is using the centre, there’s somewhere to go and meet friends and things to do now

residents, Rokeby Green was an area where youths hung out and where there had been incidents of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Twelve months after the Centre opened, 80% of local people interviewed felt that the area had changed for the better

Many of our service users lead complicated lives. They have contact with schools, social services, counsellors, health workers, sometimes police, probation or prison service, often other specialist agencies. Most of these are long-term relationships with organisations, invariably very big organisations, and rarely long-term with any single individual. Most are relatively impersonal. Again and again our service users referred to the agency or the job title but seldom named an individual.

Community Links is part of this crowded landscape but with some unique advantages. Unlike most of those other services, our users *choose* to come to Community Links. They are not here because they have to be. We are relatively small, it's easier to nurture the personal and though demand is greater than supply and needs are growing constantly, we have more control over our own work loads than staff in many statutory services. Our education staff, for instance, might work one-to-one or one-to-three with very challenging children, not with 28 others in the classroom. We are an independent organisation. Our freedom is a privilege. Individually and collectively we have a responsibility to learn from what works, incorporate the learning, share with others, change and develop.

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Our Community Hubs are based on that learning. They are responsive and flexible, without a fixed shape or programme but a set of values. Some of those values are expressed through the design or the use of the building, some through the people who work in them as paid staff or as volunteers.

Through a series of individual and group conversations with service users, staff and external partners, we have endeavoured to understand what works. We have asked of our places and our people, what are the makings of success?

First **our places**, then **our people**.



Football in the Multi-use Games Area (MUGA)
at the Rokeby Hub.

Section Three

Our Places: More than a building

OUR COMMUNITY HUBS offer a range of services. Although the title ‘Hub’ is relatively recent we have always operated from multi-purpose buildings from our first tiny lock-up shop in East Ham back in 1977. However, housing a range of disparate and unconnected activities under one roof is not in itself a sufficiently helpful service for anyone, particularly for people whose lives are already complicated, often troubled and sometimes chaotic. The programme of activities, the services provided and the links between them all matter. More intangible but equally important is the culture, the ‘feel’ and most of all the values. We asked service users and staff, paid and voluntary, to define what makes a Hub work for them and why. From these conversations we identified four sets of ‘qualities of place’.

The first set concerns borders

Ease of Access Hubs primarily serve a neighbourhood. Our neighbourhoods are defined by the people who live in them and don’t necessarily correspond to wards. Shops are often the focal point, even a single shop can be the attractor. Primary schools are important gathering places for parents as well as children and any kind of open space, even a wide corner, can serve the same role for adolescents. Unlike a rural village the estates on which we work are not self-contained communities. One

estate runs into another, 'borders' are ill-defined and frequently crossed for work or secondary school or worship. But most of our respondents did have a very clear sense of their neighbourhood – the patch that is served by the Hub – and it is relatively small. We asked, 'how far might you expect to walk to get to a Hub?' Fifteen minutes was the average answer for adults. Walking time was less important to young people. Physical landmarks were more important. *I wouldn't go the other side of the station* but the notional borders were broadly similar.

Serving the whole community 'Community' was more variably defined. Some thought of 'our community' as a particular ethnic group. Others thought it was the people who had been in an area for a long time. One service user at Rokeby felt unable to answer some questions because *I'm not from round here, I'm from Poplar* even though Poplar is just a couple of miles away and she had moved nine years ago. Those who were most active at the Hub consistently thought 'neighbourhood' and 'community' were different ways of saying the same thing. The community are the people who currently live or work in the neighbourhood.

Connectors not dividers At best these shared ideas about neighbourhood and community bring people together. Whole community events – like a summer-time Big Lunch at the Rokeby Hub – attracted a diverse and representative crowd. Some regular activities like the Thursday Steel Drums, are similarly successful at involving the whole community.

These connections don't just happen. They are planned and organised with staff actively reaching out to more excluded groups

These connections don't just happen. They are planned and organised with staff actively reaching out to more excluded groups. This builds social capital. The process, once begun, has its own momentum. One respondent, for example, talked about befriending an elderly lady whose husband had died at Christmas and about organising shopping for her with neighbours she had met through the Hub.

However, coming together can also involve shutting out. An excessively rigid definition of 'our neighbourhood' or 'our community' can limit and divide. There is a real and current danger here. We regularly see young people who are afraid of applying for work just three or four miles away and, at its most extreme, 'post-code wars' between groups of adolescents have claimed several lives in east London in recent years.

We have to build confidence and connections and to open up

opportunities, not to close them down. Strong and resilient people will exploit those opportunities and seek out their own. This means that we need to think about permeable borders for a Hub, not solid boundaries.

Some services delivered through the Hubs don't work solely in or for a single neighbourhood, and those that do consciously seek to open doors and open minds. The Community Links S-Team takes young people from one estate to play football against another, and the Youth Media project brings young people together from different youth clubs to work on joint projects. Staff at Education Links are asking the young people who come from Custom House and from Stratford to sit down together and help us think through what we can do to help young people feel less constrained by where they live, and to feel free to move about.

So, Hubs:

- Serve a self-defined neighbourhood, broadly within 15 minutes walking time.
- Pro-actively seek to engage all residents.
- Build and nurture strong, caring communities.
- Recognise borders but challenge boundaries. Opening doors and opening minds to positive opportunities and relationships outside the neighbourhood.

The second set concerns 'feelings':

These are the hardest qualities to pin down but in each case we can identify the contributors:

Feeling Safe One single mother who is also a full-time adult carer, talked about knowing her children could come to the Hub in event of emergency, even when the children's schemes aren't open. *I know they'll be OK here*'. She was talking about physical safety, but others spoke also of a sense that it is 'safe' to talk, to share concerns without fearing the consequences.

Over further conversations it became clear that these feelings of safety were rooted in a careful balance of case by case flexibility within the boundaries of some very clear rules. The family feel able to call at anytime, but the door has an entry phone which can only be operated by staff. Service users feel able to talk openly and informally but they know that confidentiality will be strictly respected.

Feeling Welcome This is, in part, derived from the management of

activities which are very clearly open to everyone; children with disabilities are supported to participate fully some with one-to-one support, boys and girls bake cakes together and play football, teenagers and pensioners, white and black play the drums together on Thursday evenings.

It is important that the Hub doesn't feel like a place for people with problems. You might come here because you have a problem, or to help out, or to have fun. Maybe all three at different times, or at the same time. There is no stigma attached to the building, and you can't make assumptions about people who come through the door.

It is from these practical and overtly inclusive policies that the sense of welcome first emerges. One young woman with a learning disability first attended occasional sessions with her sister and now spends much of the week without her at the Rokeby Hub, sometimes participating in specific group activities, sometimes just chatting or watching TV. One young man had been a regular at the youth club evenings but is currently at the Hub throughout the day, almost every day, after attempting suicide. Both felt not only welcome but also needed, describing to us, with justifiable pride, how they '*helped out*'. It is hard to codify and to generalise from the process which embraces their contribution and meets their needs – the relationship is so personal. The Hub works for them because they feel needed rather than needy, welcome, at home and, critically, here on their own terms.

Feeling in charge A sense of belonging and also of control was important to many respondents. There was an understanding that services weren't for them or directed at them but were developed together.

Many respondents, including the two in the section above, talked about '*our*' coffee morning, '*our*' kitchen, '*our*' bingo club even about activities or facilities they didn't use personally. No particular meaning was intended here, but it might be considered a proxy for success. Certainly '*their*' coffee morning, '*their*' kitchen or '*their*' Bingo would signal failure or at least unfinished business.

There are two important points here. First, those who experience a problem are best placed to understand it and, with help, to develop an appropriate solution. This is the most practical and pragmatic approach. Secondly, *feeling* in control of our own lives is important to us all. Feeling powerless, constantly at the behest of others, stresses, demoralises and undermines.

Henry Ford said *'believe you can or believe you can't, either way, you're right'*. Feeling in charge and *being* in charge aren't peripheral. Shared responsibility is at the core of the Community Links mission and reflected in all aspects of planning, delivery and management.

So, Hubs feel:

- Safe but also open; free and flexible but also managed carefully.
- Welcoming, warm, inclusive. Everyone needed, not needy.
- *'Ours'*.

The third set concerns programmes:

Sum of the parts Hubs offer a range of services and activities first for practical reasons; needs are indivisible and tackling one problem without addressing others is of limited value. Locating the services in the same place helps to connect them, to make them accessible, convenient and easy to find. Benefits advice alongside job search alongside training alongside childcare ... all practical connections.

Client bounce is a costly and common problem in public services as clients move from one agency to another, often supplying the same information over and over again and never quite finding the support they need. Within the Hub model there is no wrong door, thus improving the service and reducing the cost for the individual and for the state.

We need to be clear that Community Links cannot, does not and should not do everything. We *can* be a point of entry into more complex services. We *can* offer familiar and comfortable territory in which those services can be delivered and we *can* help service users identify and access the additional services that they need.

Many other benefits spin off from the multi-service approach. Here are three examples:

- Different age groups, faiths and ethnicities come together. Outdoor games in the 'MUGA' (the Multi-Use Games Area, surfaced, fenced and equipped for outdoor games) at Rokeby often engage a wide age range without any artificial engineering. An activity which is advertised as 'intergenerational' isn't obviously attractive to anybody. An activity that

those who experience a problem are best placed to understand it and, with help, to develop an appropriate solution

just *is* intergenerational, benefits everyone. Teenagers from the Asta Centre, for instance, now regularly attend Tenants Association meetings and young people at Rokeby run computer classes for older people.

- Much of our work is about building confidence and self-belief. Taking the first step to seek help, to join a programme is often the hardest. Doing it where you are already comfortable, with the people and the place makes it easier.
- We know that a practical service can create the conditions for progress but it is the deeper qualities of a relationship that have the power to transform. Deep value relationships thrive on familiarity. When one young man sought personal advice from the Hub manager it wasn't because she is a mental health professional. It was because he has been to the youth club, to play schemes and to other activities. He knows the worker well and he trusts her.

Manageable Scale These benefits are only achieved if the services and the Hub overall are of a '*manageable size*'. Respondents discussed this a lot. For some, 'manageable' meant small, the smaller the better, but there was also a recognition that it isn't practical to offer a variety of activity for very small numbers. We have to balance intimacy and familiarity with the need for a range of facilities and opportunities. Respondents who know the Community Links network well, contrasted Rokeby (average number of users per week 200) with the 4,000 weekly users of services we provide at Canning Town Public Hall. As the facility gets bigger there is pressure to develop narrower, more specialist 'sub' units, diluting the benefits of the multiple approach. The practical advantages of 'one roof' are not affected, but it gets harder to exploit the other potential benefits in a bigger space, serving more people from a larger community.

Shared responsibility is
at the core of the
Community Links mission

Celebrate the positives A feature of many programmes is the emphasis on celebration. Every achievement is recognised, shared and enjoyed. For some this might mean an exam result or some kind of external accreditation, for others it might mean turning up regularly or behaving responsibly for one month. We don't highlight the weaknesses, we build on the strengths. There are many aspects to this.

First, it's fun. Many of our service users experience multiple disadvantages. Tackling those challenges is rarely enjoyable. Recognition

is an unusual experience, incentives and rewards are unexpected and enjoyed, often by the whole family.

Secondly, it builds cohesion. A success for one is celebrated as a success for us all. The group is strengthened by this positive affirmation.

Thirdly, it generates the shared history that sustains the individual, the family and the wider group. The memories and the photos of '*our party*', '*our awards night*' help to connect us, to shape our view of ourselves and of one another and to make the programme, the group, and, by extension, the Hub and Community Links overall, something we are proud to be a part of. As we were shown photos, by parents in particular, there was a strong sense that this shared history contributed very powerfully to the reputation of Community Links and to users' feelings about the Hub and especially about the people in it, staff and other users, and about themselves.

Responsive If we were making a pink and purple phone and all our retailers said that customers didn't like the colour, what would we do? Asking customers what they want and trying some alternative colours would be a smarter response than trying to persuade customers to like pink and purple but that's not always the approach of organisations that are set in their ways. Is a youth club most needed when it's usually provided, from 7.00 to 9.00 on Tuesdays or on Saturdays? We should expect to listen and to respond to the needs of the consumer, not the other way round. We should do this regularly, not expect last year's services to meet needs today, and we should be flexible enough to change as needed. There can be a tension here: delivery organisations like three-year funding and funders like definite plans but we both have to recognise that needs don't develop on a fixed cycle and nor should we.

So Hubs offer a menu of activities that are:

- Varied but well-connected.
- Big enough to meet a range of needs. Small enough to promise intimacy.
- Focused on the positives and building on strengths.
- Responding to local needs.

The fourth set concerns facilities

One of the most striking observations about our conversations at Rokeby was the extent to which almost everyone began their answers to open-

ended questions by talking about people – staff and service users – and relationships, rather than the physical facilities. Then they talked about what they did, which sometimes led into discussing the facilities. *‘There are lights in the MUGA so we can use it in the evenings even in the winter’*. It was only with prompting that most got to mention the building at all.

This was surprising, because the Rokeby Hub is a special place in a very ordinary landscape. Community facilities are often well worn, inefficient and poorly maintained. The Hub, in contrast, is a unique, purpose built centre with all indoor and outdoor facilities designed for their present usage and in excellent condition. It is less than two years old and planned to be energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

We might draw two conclusions from this. **First**, for most people the Hub did mean, first and foremost, a set of relationships. However, those relationships would not have begun and could not be sustained without a physical locus. Perhaps it’s like asking the audience about the quality of a concert. They probably won’t speak about the acoustics of the theatre or

the sight lines but without any theatre or even without this particular venue the experience would have been different.

public facilities like Post Offices or health centres or Police Stations are often poorly maintained in the poorest communities

Secondly, public facilities like Post Offices or health centres or Police Stations are often poorly maintained in the poorest communities. These are public goods and standards shouldn’t vary but, too often, they do. Decent, clean, well-maintained buildings that are fit for purpose should be the norm.

Perhaps poor standards at the Hub, like poor acoustics at the concert, would have generated comment and complaint. Good ones should be unremarkable.

Almost all the comment there was about the physical resources focused on the outdoor space – the MUGA, the playground and the garden. This was often contrasted with home; *‘there’s nowhere for the kids to let off steam’*, and with the waste land that was there before the Hub was built; *‘Cars used to be dumped here. You wouldn’t want to walk across or let the kids play.’*

Richard Louv (2005) has written about the damaging effects of ‘natural deficit disorder’, when children have no contact with nature, no access to open space, no freedom and opportunity to play outside. External play

space is now an Ofsted requirement for many of our children's programmes, but with facilities like Newham City Farm, Outdoors in the City, Play Sow and Grow and Arc in the Park we go way beyond the conventional school playground. We are reclaiming adventure and discovery for children who have, typically, no experience of nature or of outdoor play. Some of these facilities are, or are becoming, Hubs. All are used for inter-Hub activities.

First appearances matter, too. It may seem trivial but the 'shades of beige' community facility that looks dull inevitably fails to attract. Several respondents spoke about being intrigued by the Rokeby Hub before coming in. The Hubs look vibrant, interesting and attractive.

So, Hub facilities should:

- Be clean, well-maintained and fit for a range of uses if not necessarily originally designed for them. These qualities in any single Hub in our network should be 'ordinary' and 'unremarkable'.
- Include the outdoors.
- Look attractive.

Putting it all together . . .

From these 'qualities of place' an identity emerges. When an apparently very ordinary launderette in Deptford was recently threatened with closure 150 people spontaneously protested, not because of its architecture or even its washing machines but because generations of young people had such happy memories of hanging out there. We develop affection for a building from the experience of using it, from the sum of the parts. From affection we develop trust, commitment and ownership and eventually a reputation is built.

Each of our qualities of place is important, but it is from the combination, and from the user experience of that combination, that we build the distinctive identity of a Community Links Hub.



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from the Rokeby Hub

Section Four

Our People: More than instinct

WE FOUND THAT MOST STAFF AND SERVICE USERS we spoke to shared a presumption that outstanding community workers, voluntary or paid, were born with an instinctive approach not shaped by training or experience ... *'It's not like they're workers'* one respondent said, *'The people here really care about our family'*.

Certainly, we see a lot of people who are distressed at Community Links. The instinctive human reaction is to put an arm around them. As a society we have become so afraid of abuse, and confused by it, that we ask our teachers to care for our children, our care staff to look after our elders, our social workers to support our most troubled parents. Then we tie their

 More than 1,000 people are engaged every week in the delivery of Community Links' services. Of our 327 employees (170 full-time and 157 part-time) almost exactly half live locally, a further 15% live in neighbouring areas, 31% are current or recent service users, 20% were volunteers first, New Deal placements or Junior Leaders before joining the salaried team. 1,688 volunteers were regularly and formally engaged in our work during 2009/10, committing a total of 24,153 hours. (*Community Links, July 2010 figures*).

arms behind their backs. We should be relentlessly diligent in selecting, checking, training and managing staff for these positions. Then we should trust them.

In the most challenging circumstances Community Links staff achieve results because they don't only care about a child's safety, or their SATs grades, or their behaviour on the street. **They care about the well-being of the whole child.** And because that is likely to demand a different response every time they have the training and support to act responsibly, flexibly and appropriately and to be confident that their judgement is trusted.

This is not the same as being a friend, at least not an uncritical one. Sometimes our staff, particularly those involved in education and youth work, will say and do things that will make them unpopular. We work with people to help them address and change aspects of their lives. That can be difficult and demanding but we are doing no-one any favours if we simply sympathise. Sometimes we work with people whose behaviour towards others is unacceptable, illegal perhaps, maybe dangerous. It is our responsibility to help them face theirs and to change. Tough love is an overworked cliché but the phrase does capture the point.

Caring relationships are at the heart of what we do but our work is much more than instinctive. When our respondents began to identify the characteristics of an effective worker it became clear that they were describing a skill set, not a personality. It's not just what they are – it's also what they do. These are practical approaches to the work which the most effective staff consistently deliver, which they expect of themselves and of those they manage or support, and which were recognised and valued by service users.

One group of respondents talked, in this context, about 'professionalism'. This was not about creating distance or building an elite status but about a consistency and a confidence in behaviour which spoke to them of a 'quiet professionalism'.

From these conversations we distilled a series of fifteen expectations. A set of competencies flow from these expectations which can be articulated, required, taught, managed, appraised and replicated.

We expect

- **Influence, not control** Practical support or the transfer of knowledge creates the conditions for progress but it is the deeper qualities of a relationship that have the power to transform. The most effective

community workers, advice workers, youth workers, don't seek to control people or make them dependant, but to be the influence on the lives of others that makes them free. They guide, they support and they influence.

In *Time Well Spent* (CoSA, 2009) we showed that this approach to developing 'deep value' relationships was not only valued by service users but also produced better long-term outcomes, more effective and efficient services and ultimately cost savings. We are currently working on ways of both measuring and costing deep value.

■ **To always see the person, not the problem** No matter how challenging, it is the behaviour that's bad, not the child.

■ **Consistency** Our working arrangements should help one to one relationships to build over time. Service users lamented, but had grown to expect, constant churn amongst staff in other agencies. Our users should know where and when to find workers they trust and be confident that, wherever possible, they will be able to work with the same people over a sustained period. We are not a large organisation but we do run many services. Staff should be able to deal with an issue or at least remain involved with it, not endlessly refer on and lose touch. Service users valued longevity very highly and Community Links has very high staff retention rates. One mother talked about her childhood experience of one worker at the centre her daughter now attends. We can't guarantee that staff will never move on, but we can ensure that internal protocols exploit this asset wherever possible.

■ **Respect** We can't expect people to value themselves or believe in themselves if we don't treat them as equals, valuing and believing in them as we expect others to value and believe in us. Respect demands sensitivity and flexibility. Calling a grandmother by her first name on early acquaintance may be not be a good start, but to do otherwise with a younger person would be odd and discomfoting. Respect begins with understanding and empathising with another person's experience and expectations.

■ **A belief in potential** *'My boy had been written off'*, one mother told

the most effective
community workers don't
seek to control people or
make them dependent, but
to be the influence that
makes them free

us *'but not here'*. We recognise that setbacks and disappointments are part of learning and development. One worker talked about a child who took nine months to speak to her, let alone confide. We believe that we are all capable of great things. Some need encouragement, advice, training, practical support. Many need unconditional time. We believe in potential and we persevere.

■ **To build on strengths** The belief in potential is rooted in an understanding of present strengths. Ours is not a deficit model. It is about recognising and bringing out the skills and the capacity that our service users already have. We build on the strengths.

■ **No judgements** *'I'm a Canning Town Mum'* one leader said; *'you can't shock me'*. Part of the power of our work is derived from our lack of power. Unlike other agencies we can't evict anyone, stop a client's benefits or take away their children. *'However essential, these things'*

we don't control or direct
but nor are we neutral.
We want, with a passion, the
best outcome

one worker with previous experience as a council social worker said *'inevitably stop you getting alongside people'*. Our independence opens a precious opportunity for full and honest relationships, but that opportunity will shut again very quickly if we are fazed or shocked by what we learn or if we are overtly judgemental.

■ **Passion** We're not judgmental and we don't control or direct, but nor are we neutral. We want, with a passion, the best outcome.

■ **Total trust** The best staff members build and nurture confidential relationships. They do exactly what they say they are going to do, honestly and reliably. Many of our service users have been let down in the past. Rock solid reliability is the foundation of the trusting relationship.

■ **Willingness** There was a repeated assumption that rationing services or benefits was a necessary part of the role of some public officials but that Community Links staff were not similarly constrained. Neither part of this assumption is entirely accurate but it is certainly true that Community Links staff would be expected to have the knowledge, the confidence and the empathy to help service users to access their entitlements and we would believe that such support is an important part of our role.

'Willingness' was a word that was used frequently in this and other contexts. In earlier work at Community Links we have suggested that willingness rather than a sense of duty is the underlying requirement for an effective public servant or volunteer. 'People chose to be willing citizens not because they are forced from without but because they are compelled from within. This motivation ... sets a course for action that is positive, creative, proactive and energetic ... and much more likely to be sustained than if a person is motivated by doing what they're told or by feeling guilty' (CoSA, 2008 p6)

■ **Active collaborators** Concerns were expressed about workers who don't collaborate. As child abuse inquiries have repeatedly shown, this is very important and we can't expect others to collaborate if we do not also co-operate. Our reach must include people whose professional role has no explicit caring component but who are regarded locally as of service to the community. A postman who is particularly aware of older people on the estate, and the manager of the corner shop were both mentioned several times in our conversations. Café staff also commonly feature. Building knowledge of and a relationship with these 'consequential strangers' (Blau & Fingerman, 2009) is part of the job of building a capable and caring community.

People chose to be willing citizens not because they are forced from without, but because they are compelled from within

■ **Positive Listeners** 'What do you want to do?' Not, 'I know what we'll do with you'. Effective staff listen well. And when they do talk, tone matters as much as substance. They are friendly and approachable; their language is positive and natural and avoids jargon and formality.

■ **Clear rules** One worker described her style as '*motherly, with a boundary side*'. Others used different phrases, but there was clear agreement that there must be rules around any piece of work or individual relationship and that the rules must be clear, explicit from the outset, few in number and non-negotiable.

■ **Learners as well as teachers** The journey from service user to volunteer to paid-worker to manager has always been strongly supported at Community Links. Most of our frontline services are delivered, wholly or in part, by people who have been, or perhaps still are, service users. This starts with the volunteer Play Rangers (eight- to

eleven-year-olds) in our out-of-school provision, and the principle runs through out our programmes. One play worker captured the value of the approach, *'we learnt what to do here when we were young. Now it's like crossing the road. You just know what to do'*.

People who experience a problem understand it best, but we're not romantic about this. Experience alone is not enough. We must expect to challenge, to learn and to get better. This is not just about organised training, although that must be involved. The best workers learn also from experience and reflection, alone and with others.

- **Flexibility** The liberty to act flexibly is a consequence of our freedom from statutory functions. It is also a responsibility. Good staff work across a spectrum of acceptable behaviours, making judgments and choices within that spectrum. Empowering colleagues and service users to feel confident, to take initiative and to exercise discretion within the framework of personal responsibility and shared expectations is more demanding than working to rules, but also more effective and more fulfilling. Collectively therefore, the foregoing expectations are a culture not a code.

Putting it all together

Aspirations and achievements are lifted simultaneously. So are our expectations, of ourselves and of one another. The rising tide lifts all boats

The role of the Links worker that emerges from our conversations is part adviser, part carer, mentor, supporter, builder, explainer, It is similar to that which Bob Holman has described as 'resourceful friendship' (*Holman, 1997*). He has shown how the approach can not only develop individual potential but also foster collective action. At Rokeby we have seen exactly the same pattern with Capoeira, street dance, cooking, walking and computer groups all initiated and organised by centre-users; knife crime workshops, theatre trips, parties, fun-days and barbeques run together. These activities benefit the individual and introduce a multiplier effect. They help to build a supportive, confident and capable community, reducing the likelihood of individual regression. Aspirations and achievements are lifted simultaneously. So are our expectations, of ourselves and of one another. The rising tide lifts all boats.

In his book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg considers the role of

the ‘third place’ between work or school and home. He says that an effective third place is ‘the heart of a community’s social vitality and grassroots of a democracy’ (*Oldenburg 1991*). We see this most clearly in the collective action which generates its own momentum in a successful Hub.

The experience of a service user at a Community Links Hub is thus determined by the combination of the expectations that we hold for the behaviour of our staff and the qualities that we develop in the places where they work. We aim to deliver an approach that is reflective, planned, measured, managed, cohesive, constant and ‘quietly professional’.

Terry’s Story

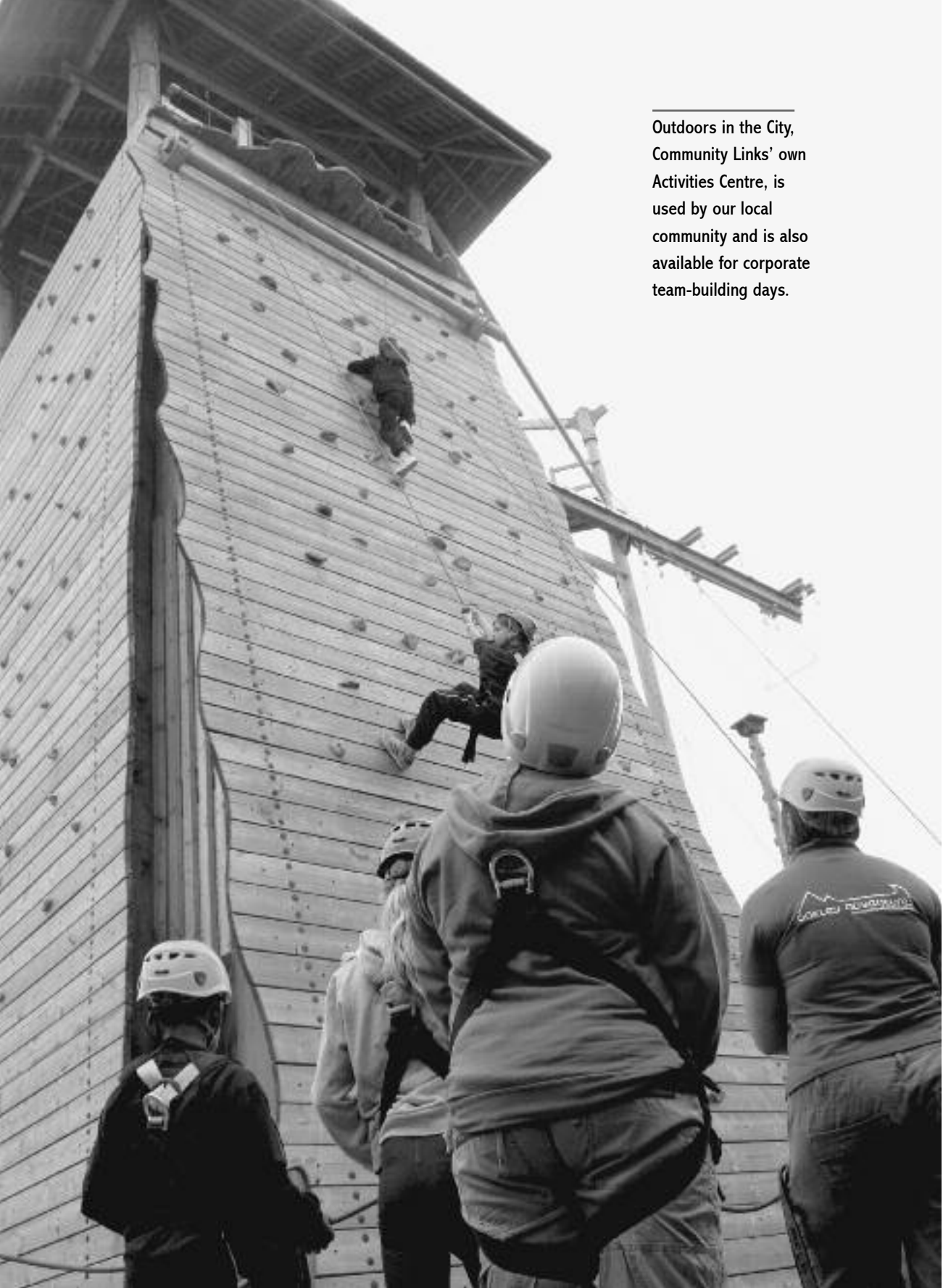


‘I’ve been coming to Community Links’ Arc in the Park centre since I was four years old.

I grew up here, I remember running home from school to make sure I was one of the first ones through the doors. They looked after me, took me under their wing, kept me out of trouble.

When I left school I went to work in a jeweller’s shop, but it wasn’t for me. I’d always wanted to work with kids, so I asked if I could come back and volunteer.

Mike Crim took me on for a year and half, and put me on some courses – I did my NVQ Level 2 (in playwork). They put me on the straight and narrow, so much so that I ended up getting a job here. Now I’m coordinator of the youth club on a Tuesday and Thursday, and I’ve just started my NVQ 3. It’s an ongoing process that I never want to leave.



Outdoors in the City,
Community Links' own
Activities Centre, is
used by our local
community and is also
available for corporate
team-building days.

Section Five

The difference made: Outcomes from the Community Links approach

IF THE COMMUNITY LINKS APPROACH to social regeneration is different, we also need to develop distinct ways of measuring it. Traditional outcomes (the results funders pay for) seek to bring about a specific change, often very short-term and invariably in isolation from a broader social environment or from local or individual circumstances. Securing a job might, for instance, be one such short-term outcome, but job sustainability in the longer term is, in part, dependent on external circumstances. We achieve short-term results through our Hubs, but we add value with an approach which recognises and embraces the factors that underpin long-term sustainability.

These include:

- The complex and multiple connections between social issues, and how these affect individual outcomes in both the short-term and the long-term.
- The significance not only of the quality of the service but also of the qualities of the relationship between service user and provider.
- The need to address causes as well as effects (which frequently translates into early action and preventative services).
- The importance of community-based focus – not just individuals but

groups of people experiencing positive change together, simultaneously lifting aspiration and achievement.

- The role of user participation in identifying issues and in forging and delivering solutions, that respond appropriately to local need.
- The psychological benefit of people feeling needed not needy, trusted and empowered.

At the start of Section Two we reported on the 48% drop in reported incidents of anti-social behaviour on the Rokeby estate and the 56% drop in recorded crime – both attributed by the police to the work of the Hub.

Eighty per cent of local people interviewed felt that the area had changed for the better in the twelve months since the Hub opened

We also quote the research finding on quality of life – 80% of local people interviewed felt that the area had changed for the better in the twelve months since the Hub opened.

These two results are interesting for their difference. The first hits the traditional outcome button; the second is less well acknowledged (or funded) but is equally important to the healthy development of the community.

This suggests that a balanced assessment of the Community Links approach to social regeneration (or, indeed any other approach) would consider three different sets of outcomes, as follows.

- **Primary outcomes** Our work at the Rokeby Hub is often funded on the basis of the number of people we get through the door, for example the numbers of children participating in open access play or numbers of families attending events. The primary *outcomes* of our work with these individuals are things like their increase in self-confidence or a move into employment.
- **Aggregated outcomes** Where no single intervention may be solely responsible for the total solution, but where each one has clearly contributed and where the long-term outcome is achieved by working collaboratively with other agencies. Although the police attribute the reduction in crime to the work of the Hub, we would want to acknowledge the contribution of other partners and recognise these figures as an example of an aggregated outcome.
- **Rising tide outcomes** Where all boats are lifted, the sustained impact is collective and may be ‘hard’ (fewer GP visits) or self-reported (such as

feeling that the community is safer).

Each category of outcome is valid, but arguably the aggregated outcomes add greatest value for the efficient use of resources and rising-tide outcomes for sustainability. Conventionally, however, only the first set, the primaries, are recognised by government and paid for, not just by government but by others too. In part this is because of the perceived difficulties with measurement and attribution, but we would be understanding only a small part of the Community Links approach and recognising only a fraction of its potential if we didn't attempt to map the full range of outcomes.

Primary, aggregated and rising-tide outcomes are all derived as a result of activity occurring within or through the Hub. They all occur at the end of a process, but it is also possible to identify 'process indicators' which give confidence that an outcome will be achieved without waiting for final results. The qualities of place and the staff competencies outlined in sections three and four are core components of an infrastructure that enables outcomes to be derived. They provide the basis of a process measurement set. On page 37, for instance, is the measurement set that can be applied to our qualities of place.

With both outcomes and indicators there is a prior and larger question which we've not discussed: who decides what to count?

In this study and elsewhere we talk about doing things 'with, not for' people, using an 'empowering' approach with 'people who experience a problem and understand it best'. User involvement in service planning and delivery is implicit in all this, but less evident in the process of identifying and evaluating outcomes and indicators. It could be argued that service users and practitioners – not funders – have the most comprehensive understanding of what needs to be done and thus should be involved in establishing the indicators.

The development of commissioning offers an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive and collaborative approach and one that gives proper weight to the three categories of outcome. Much of our Hub work on, for instance, generic youth programmes or open access play has been funded by local and central government solely on the basis of the primary

we would be understanding only a small part of the Community Links approach and recognising only a fraction of its potential if we didn't attempt to map the full range of outcomes

outcomes. We know, however, that the primaries have, at best, only a partial relationship to the changes that the funder wants to achieve. With the ever increasing pressure on both funder and funded to deliver and to evidence more value-adding outcomes it would be a timely moment for service users, service providers and commissioners to be more thoughtful in working together on jointly defining both what to count and how to count it.

Toni's Story

Toni is a resident near the Rokeby Hub and mother of three girls aged 13, 10 and 3.

When I first moved to this area I felt quite lonely, you never used to see anybody around unless people cut across the green to get to the shops. You could sit indoors and not see or speak to anyone for weeks.

We used to have a lot of issues three or four years ago, with youths on motor bikes on the green and riding them along the pavements – it was terrifying. We used to have cars set alight and once a caravan was set alight. There used to be a gang over at the benches and I couldn't let my kids out to play.

The centre has made a massive impact. We come here four times a week now, and I have become involved in planning activities and leafleting for the centre. I always know where my kids are and that they are safe.

Measuring the Process

Community Links Qualities of Place	Process Indicator	Process Measure
Borders		
Ease of access	Hub serves a self- (and well-) defined neighbourhood	Catchment area clearly identifiable by potential users
Serving the whole community	All residents are pro-actively engaged	Active engagement of excluded groups; inclusion of all who approach
Connectors not dividers	Borders are recognised, but boundaries are challenged	Support and services across and beyond the community
Feelings		
Feeling safe	Hub provides an environment that is 'safe'	Users feel they can share their concerns in confidence
Feeling welcome	All individuals are valued and made to feel welcome	Clear policies and practices; self-reported feeling of inclusiveness
Feeling in charge	Hub is 'owned' by the neighbourhood	Activities (and infrastructure) developed in conjunction with users
Programmes		
Sum of the parts	Support provided is varied and interconnected	Clear, appropriate services, and efficient external signposting
Manageable scale	Support meets range of needs, but feels 'intimate' to users	Users feel they can access to the support they need
Celebrate the positives	All activities focus on the positives and strengths	Regular formal (individual and collective) recognition
Responsive	Services meet both individual and collective needs	Regular input into design from full range of users
Facilities		
Fit for purpose	Premises are clean, appropriate, and well-maintained	Maintenance and cleaning schedules; reported accidents
External play space	Adventure and discovery are encouraged through contact with nature	Clearly defined, safe but challenging outdoor environment
Good appearance	Hub feels vibrant, interesting and attractive	Innovative design, and regular re-assessment



In 2010 more than 20,000 people attended forty community events we ran or supported.

Section Six

A progressive vision: Reflections on the story

THE PHRASE WE APPLIED to the physical appearance of the least impressive services was ‘shades of beige’ services. We might employ it equally to describe a set of objectives that are worthy but unoriginal, an activity that is functional but unexciting, staff who are competent but not inspiring.

Our principles, our people, our programmes and our places are drawn from a richer palette, but there is no Big Society epiphany here. Throughout the life of Community Links successive governments have supported aspects of our work and become increasingly interested in the community sector. Each have applied their own language and distinctive priorities but the fundamentals in our work have for many years underpinned successful community development work in settlements, social action centres and other public and community agencies. This is not to belittle government interest. We welcome it. But it is to put it in the bigger context of timeless values and well-tested models.

The Community Links approach is not based exclusively on narrow programmes that cater specifically for ‘people with problems’ – we all need help at some times in our lives. And it’s not about highly specialised experts in a ‘Broken Britain’ – we all have something to contribute.

But nor, critically, is it just nice people in pleasant buildings being kind to one another.

It is a deliberate alchemy of considered principles, places that are planned with attention to detail and people who are carefully trained and well supported. It is thoughtfully managed and measured and it reflects Community Links' learning over the last thirty years.

This is not a brand new philosophy of social regeneration but it is an authentic story. Recommendations for government and other partners might be derived from seven insights that emerge from it.

- **TO THRIVE AND BE FREE IS A SHARED ASPIRATION.** It is what we all want for ourselves and our families and for our communities.
- **THE BEST EARLY ACTION IS THE MOST ORDINARY.** A fence at the top of the cliff is always preferable to an ambulance at the bottom.
- **PEOPLE CHANGE LIVES.** Practical knowledge and resources are necessary to thrive and be free, but it is the 'deep value' powers of an appropriate relationship that have the power to transform.
- **IT CAN BE BOTTLED.** The approach of the Links worker is characterized by a set of behaviours. These can be clearly articulated as competencies which can be and should be required, taught, managed, appraised and replicated.
- **CONTEXT SHAPES CONTENT.** Appropriate buildings create the conditions in which relationships thrive.
- **NONE OF THIS MATTERS IN ISOLATION.** All of it matters together.
- **THE RISING TIDE.** The 'whole community' approach multiplies the progress of the individual raising aspirations and achievement across the community.

How does this story sit in the context of wider thinking about public services and what are the implications? Four outstanding books have attracted exceptional attention on this territory in recent years.

Richard Layard has shown how a sense of well-being influences our mental and physical health, our personal relationships and our school or work performances. Feeling good about our services isn't a luxury. It directly affects outcomes (*Layard, 2005*). Amitai Etzioni considered the importance of the community and how a sense of belonging contributes to its strength and capacity (*Etzioni, 1993*). Robert Putnam demonstrated the value of volunteering and civic engagement, not only for the beneficiary but also for the wider neighbourhood and for the individual willing citizen (*Putnam, 2000*).

Finally and most recently Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett made the case that fairer and more equal societies are also happier and healthier (*Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009*).

We might draw together this body of work to suggest a set of broad expectations to usefully inform the development of our public provision.

- The **essentials**. We need and should expect clear quality standards.
- A sense of **purpose** (*Putnam*). We need and should expect opportunities and assistance to engage in the delivery of services.
- A sense of **belonging**. We need to know that others care about us and we about them (*Etzioni*). We should expect personalised provision within a supportive community.
- A sense of **control**. We need to determine our own destiny (*Layard*), and should expect the freedom, the opportunity and the support to participate in governance and management.
- And finally, a sense of **fairness** and **equality** in all aspects of delivery (*Wilkinson and Pickett*). We need to believe and should expect to know that we are neither more nor less well treated than others.

This theoretical construct fleshes out much of the rhetoric on public services, where there is currently considerable confluence across the political spectrum. It builds on the principles of the welfare state whilst also addressing Lord Beveridge's unfinished business. He focused on the five great 'Giants' (want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness) (*Beveridge, 1942*), but worried that he had underplayed the importance of 'services of a kind that money cannot buy'. His twentieth-century welfare state, enlarged with these five expectations, would become a twenty-first century 'partner state'. Services delivered by government, or bought by it and delivered on its behalf would be replaced by a more dynamic and progressive set of relationships between state and citizen, providers and service users. No longer passive recipients, but active and empowered collaborators. It is a progressive vision for the future of the welfare state.

Coming back down to ground, the Community Links' model is effectively these five expectations and this theoretical construct made real. Clear quality standards, opportunities to engage, personalised services within a supportive community, the chance and the support to participate in governance and a passionate commitment to social justice. The Community Links' approach is the progressive vision, in action.



Play Sow and Grow is a Community Links open access play centre, running family activities with an environmental theme.

Section Seven

Ten Recommendations for government

THE LANDSCAPE IS CHANGING RAPIDLY and will change more. Many reforms are planned by new ministers. Much of the underpinning vision of the Big Society resonates with our aspirations, whilst cuts and realignments in public expenditure, local and national will drive other changes as yet unspecified but surely on the way.

Change creates opportunity. There will be a new settlement between individuals and the community, state and citizen, public, private and voluntary sectors. It could reflect our experience. If not now, perhaps that experience could shape the reforms of a future administration. Either way, we have modelled some different and successful ways of meeting needs and working with local people. We suggest some practical steps for maintaining, improving and replicating the model.

The Community Links approach has been shown to work and is highly cost-effective but it isn't cost free. How, in these straitened times, can funding be found to pay for sustaining it and developing it?

Any solution needs to find new ways around two big obstacles:

First, we know that effective early action saves money in the long term, but acute or remedial services can't just stop until the early intervention bears fruit. Spending on both during a period of transition is clearly unaffordable. How do we become a society that prevents social problems

from arising, rather than one that copes with their consequences?

Second, we know that the kind of holistic service offered by the Links model generates primary, aggregated and rising tide outcomes. Work with young people, for instance, might save time and money for the police, the school, the local council, the probation service. Less stressed parents might make fewer demands on the NHS and perhaps return to work, requiring less support from the benefits budget. A spiralling cycle of dependency and cost is reversed, with multiple benefits for the public purse, but who should pay for the project? Community Links is funded from more than one hundred pots, eating up scarce resources on continuous bid writing and reporting but, even now, savings arising from our work accrue to many more public budgets.

We suggest:

How do we become a society that prevents social problems from arising rather than one that copes with their consequences?

An early action economy We can never become an early action society without becoming an early action economy. This may challenge Treasury orthodoxy but without appropriate economic intervention we will always be tinkering at the margins. The Stern Review on the economics of climate change (*Stern, 2007*), led to a series of radical policies in the last years of the Labour government and influenced policy across the world, but it was originally conceived as an initiative of the chancellor to explore, specifically, the economic rationale for government action on climate change. Early action needs its own Stern review. At the time

of writing Graham Allen has just been appointed to lead a Cabinet Office review on early intervention (*DWP, 2010*). If Allen's review is similarly visionary and ambitious it might have a similar impact. The auguries are encouraging. He has already pointed out in the House that prioritising early action need not be a further burden on the economy but rather 'a contribution to the structural deficit' (*Hansard, 2010, b*). Making the economic case is critical. Early action is not just one more demand on the public purse. It is the way of reducing the deficit that effects sustainable, positive social change and contributes to long-term growth.

Milestones for early action Arguably, the case for early action has been better made and acted upon in health. Where in social policy is the equivalent of the old Health Education Council programmes, for instance,

of regular check ups, scanning, well-woman clinics or, especially, of the wider understanding that the public health of the future is shaped by sanitation, housing and so on, today? What determines future ‘public well-being’ and how are we shaping it?

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century there was a gathering belief that public health was a proper concern for government. At first this was a minority view widely considered to be naïve and idealistic, then a gradual recognition that the issues were of economic as well as moral and social importance and that their implications touched the whole community and all its interests. Legislation was enacted and investment committed over a wide range of concerns from sewage systems to housing but all underpinned by a recognition that was novel at the time and would have seemed peculiar to previous generations, a recognition that this was essentially the right thing to do, a shared responsibility in pursuit of a common goal. Within a generation concern for public health had moved from minority fad to common sense.

Sanitation and decent housing are effectively the ‘early actions’ that improve standards of public health. How do we similarly prioritise and promote the early actions that shape ‘public well-being’, that enable us all to ‘thrive and be free’?

New ministers accept the principle. David Laws – the coalition government’s first Chief Secretary – told parliament ‘we will have to try to maintain the services that we particularly value and that protect individuals in society who are on very low incomes. We need to protect investments that have the potential to pay off in the future’ (*Hansard 2010, b*). The new Prime Minister has promised that ‘Britain’s unavoidable deficit reduction will be carried out in way that strengthens and unites the country’ (*Cameron, 2010*), and Nick Clegg has recognised ‘the importance of early intervention, of helping families to prevent problems rather than pick up the pieces once it’s already too late’ (*Clegg, 2010*).

A swift and radical switch of resources from acute services to prevention is not practical but a steady, incremental migration would be realistic

A swift and radical switch of resources from acute services to prevention is not practical but a steady, incremental migration would be realistic.

As a first, practical step we suggest that public services should commit

to an increasing proportion of their resources spent on early action – prevention and early intervention. The government approach to the reduction of carbon emissions is not dissimilar. Absolute proportions will vary from service to service but if the aspiration is to gradually shift the balance, government departments and local authorities could drive the progression by establishing and publishing **Early Action Milestones**.

Targets can incentivise the wrong behaviour and we are interested in process and inputs as well as outcomes, but we do need some mechanism for determining a clear direction of travel and for encouraging and evaluating progress. We suggest that the forward thinking service of the twenty-first century should be developing transition plans, promoting their aspirations for early action and the milestones on that journey. For example, ‘we spend 5% of our budget on prevention and early intervention. We aim to increase that proportion by 5% each year for the next three years’.

Commissioners, charitable trusts, the Big Lottery could incentivise and sustain the transition in the third sector with milestones of their own; ‘we invest 8% of our grants in early action. We aim to increase that proportion by 4% each year for the next three years’.

Publicising and promoting this good practice would frame it as the expected behaviour of a progressive, forward-thinking organisation. The best examples might be recognised with awards or accreditation.

If we seek this shift across the public domain we must drive it through our public servants – appraisals should reflect the expectation and, of course, if we expect open and ambitious milestones from the funders we should expect it also of the funded – the organisations delivering the services from community groups to council departments. ‘Sixty per cent of our income is spent on early action. We aim to increase that proportion by 8% for the next three years.’

Early Action Investment Bank Development work on a Social Investment Bank using unclaimed assets began under the last government and continues under the badge of the Big Society Bank. It will begin investing in early 2011. Might it focus in whole or in part on early action?

£1 billion funding for a new Green Investment Bank was announced in March 2010. It is to be capitalised from the sale of public assets. Might the model be replicated around early action?

Either such bank might be a cornerstone investor in Social Impact Bonds.

Social Impact Bonds Community Links is part of the team, led by Social Finance, that invented, designed and built the Social Impact Bond (SIB). Social Impact Bonds raise funds from non-government investors to pay for the provision of services. If the services make a difference and social outcomes improve, investors receive success payments from the public purse. The size of those payments depends on the scale of the success

There is much work still to be done on building the market beyond a handful of pilots and onto the new asset class which would be capable of transforming our public services. This development will demand investment, vision and patience from investors, delivery agencies and government, but we believe that the SIB, and derivations of this model, (we are now working on a local Community Impact Bond for instance) is, potentially, the turn-key enabling government to shift money from ambulances to fences without spending twice or abandoning the most desperate.

In the meantime...

Big Picture Commissioning We are often wrestling with a misalignment of incentives which arises because the department that funds the service is not the one that financially benefits from its success. For example, children's services might fund early action with pre-school children, but not benefit from the savings which result from reduced offending. The commissioner for outcome-based financing, particularly with the SIB, must be the department that financially benefits from the success of the service, not the department that would traditionally deliver the service. For example, Family Nurse Partnerships deliver cost savings to local children's services, education and justice and so should be commissioned by a Director of Children's Services rather than the Health service.

Big Picture Commissioning recognises that one department's objectives might best be delivered by an approach that usually sits elsewhere. For example, cleaner streets might be delivered by more street cleaners or it might result from supporting outreach youth work or children's clubs which encourage young people to respect and develop a pride in their own neighbourhood. Outcomes-based Big Picture Commissioning, which defined the goal (for example, cleaner

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streets) but not the process, would result in youth work funded from the street cleaning budget, and cleaner streets.

Government should incentivise this Big Picture approach as part of the solution to the misalignment of incentives and as a useful step towards integrated budgets.

Integrated budgets Ministers may well intend to protect the most vulnerable from bearing the biggest share of the public expenditure cuts, but multiple service users inevitably will suffer most if government impose multiple cuts. Cabinet secretary Gus O'Donnell has therefore suggested 'single issue' budgets for cross-departmental priorities, such as tackling poverty or social exclusion (*cited in Sherman, 2010*). This would require ministers to assess the overall impact of spending cuts in, say, children's services, youth work, drug treatment, specialist counselling.

The O'Donnell idea mitigates an unintended consequence of the current spending review but it also has a bigger, longer term merit. Through the Community Links work on Social Enterprise Zones, we were putting the case for integrated budgets 13 years ago (*Robinson, Dunn, and Balintyne, 1998*). The Total Place programme, piloted in 13 areas, has shown most recently what could be achieved (*Office of Public Management, 2009*). It has recognised that government services are

connected and overlap. Budgeting and policy-making must therefore break down the silos and start from the needs and resources of the whole area.

These ideas challenge sectional interests. Discussing them is difficult – implementing them even harder – but policy-makers local and national will be missing the most useful lesson from the Community Links experience, and much else besides, and losing the best opportunity to do better with less if they don't engage robustly with the various proposals for

pooling budgets behind big objectives.

Share the savings We know that an ASBO costs £5,350 (*Home Office 2002*). If the ASBO is breached (and 42% of them are), the police estimate that the cost can reach £100,000. Over the last year on the Rokeby estate there has been a 56% reduction in reported crime – from 477 to 211 instances – and a 48% reduction in anti-social incidents – from 168 to 88.

policy makers ... will be missing the most useful lesson from the Community Links experience ... if they don't engage robustly with the various proposals for pooling budgets behind big objectives

With half these savings we could do much more. The state would still spend less this year and we would increase the likelihood of further savings in years to come. Ministers should take the lead, identify other targets such as GP visits or school exclusions, price them and challenge the community: reduce these bills, share the savings. No tenders or cumbersome application forms, just do it and prove you did it.

Streamline and Socialise Government support for commissioners The Community Alliance, the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations and PricewaterhouseCoopers suggest that government could improve commissioning by streamlining, joining up and ‘socialising’ the support it makes available to public sector commissioners. This would simplify the bid process, improve the likelihood of winning funds for our work and reduce back office costs for applicants and for government.

Specifically they recommend ‘streamlining the growing multitude of support and development programmes aimed at improving volume and effectiveness of commissioning within the sector. Examples are The Department of Health’s World Class Commissioning programme, The Department of Environment’s Commissioning Support programme, and The Office for Civil Society’s (OCS) National Programme on Third Sector Commissioning. This might be done under the auspices of the The Office of Government Commerce in the Cabinet Office. Not only would this result in significant savings, it would also harness the knowledge and best practice within the sector and government, to much greater effect. As a result, Government support for commissioners would be more joined up and consistent so increasing the likelihood of joint commissioning arrangements. By being under the same roof as OCS, there would be significant benefits in linking with the support that Government already makes available to providers of public services (through capacity-building programmes etc.), and crucially with that of external organisations (such as ACEVO, bassac, DTA, Community Matters) who are working to strengthen community organisations increasing their skills, scalability and confidence.’

They have further proposed that, as independent support agencies they come together and work as a cross-departmental unit, akin to the Asset Transfer Unit, to build this support in an efficient and coherent manner, thus mirroring the Office of Government Commerce model but for the independent sector. This would be linked to but not necessarily funded by

the Cabinet Office. In addition they have called for *'all support in commissioning to be founded on pro-social principles. Social outcomes should be afforded added value and recognised as offering significant benefit to the public purse and should be a key objective in defining all commissioning outcomes'*.

The implementation of these recommendations would enhance the likelihood of funding for multi-function organisations like Community Links, and for the replication of the kind of cross-silo work that we undertake.

Replicate the Links worker model within public services We described the Links worker as part adviser, part carer, mentor, supporter, builder, explainer. 'Resourceful friends', Bob Holman called them, others a 'Family Support worker' or a 'Consistent Trusted Adult'. The holistic approach is not unique or untested by others – Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse (FARE) adopt a similar model in Glasgow, Shelter in Knowsley and Participle in Swindon – but it is still unusual, particularly in public sector services. We've seen what this one-to-one, deep value approach, done well, can offer, particularly to families who are experiencing multiple disadvantages and have relationships with many agencies. Potentially it could be a model for other professions and eventually replace some other roles and so cut costs.

It is not uncommon for some of our service users to have contact with as many as a dozen agencies. Unsurprisingly, the relationship is invariably distant and often more of a burden than a benefit. How could any harassed parent maintain relationships with twelve professionals? You would need a diary secretary just to manage the appointments. Perhaps you could only make it work by meeting rarely – so rarely in fact that there was no real relationship, trust or confidence.

Writing in *The Guardian* about the 'family Q' case in March 2010, Madeline Bunting noted that it involved 'no less than 16 case conferences; the review of the case acknowledged that all the staff were competent and motivated but were "stuck" ... the system is so preoccupied with following procedures that it simply gridlocks'. Child abuse inquiries from Maria Colwell in 1973, to Victoria Climbié in 2005 and Khyra Ishaq in 2010, have repeatedly told the same desperate tale. Too often, they report, too many do too little too infrequently, when what the family needs most is one person who can see the full picture on the lid of the jigsaw, who can link the pieces, and who can support reliably and consistently.

Maybe social care has become too complicated. We first made this observation more than five years ago (*Robinson, 2005*), and suggested that we might create a new role. The idea generated debate then. It should be revived. Link Workers could be well trained in the expectations that we have outlined. They would be local people who would work with just a few families and they would be well paid for a responsible job. Ultimately, however, the service would be no more expensive than lots of people working with lots of families in a superficial way. In fact it would be cheaper.

Government would have to challenge some of the boundaries between social services, housing, health, education, probation and the voluntary and statutory sectors, and there would still be some need for specialists. But essentially an effective Link worker would

reduce the numbers needing highly specialised support. It is a practical model for statutory and third sector services working together, reducing long-term dependency on expensive services and achieving more with less.

Make Every Child Matter on the ground We have at Community Links day-to-day experience of tackling social exclusion and also the facility for reflecting on that experience and sharing the learning with policymakers and other practitioners. We often see, and point out, the differences between tackling an issue on the statute book and tackling it on the ground. The theoretically sensible Common Assessment Framework is one such example.

It should require statutory providers to welcome and embrace the role of independent agencies like Community Links. In practice there is a widely held sense amongst staff we spoke to, that professional barriers and perceptions of elitism often obstruct full and open co-operation. Community Links staff spend significantly more time with service users than most service providers are generally able to afford. To not value the experience of the frontline worker in these cases is irresponsible and potentially dangerous.

Finally, incentivise

■ **The right personal behaviour** Encouraging and building on positive behaviour is an important feature of the Community Links approach but not of UK government policy, although it can be seen in

the family needs ... one person who can see the full picture on the lid of the jigsaw, who can link the pieces, and who can support reliably and consistently

other countries. In Vancouver, for instance, police officers were required to spot positive actions and to give a 'Positive Ticket' (vouchers for movies, community sports centre access, and suchlike). This eventually grew into a range of relationship-building activities between young people in the community and the police officers – youth and police basketball games for example. This initiative has seen a 41% reduction in youth crime in Vancouver.

- **The right organisational behaviour** The Community Links approach is about more than the co-location of services, but it wouldn't work at the most basic level if there wasn't a range of services and activities going on under one roof. Incremental steps towards greater collaboration might begin with co-location. Government could offer financial incentives for, for instance, locating social workers in schools, co-locating voluntary and statutory services or bringing together schools, libraries and children's centres. Shared marketing or back office services, joint events and eventually common strategy could follow. Although public savings would not be the objective, over time it would be a more efficient as well as a more effective way of working.
- **The right staff behaviour** If working with others is a priority, it should be included in job specifications, induction, in-service training and above all appraisals.
- **... And stop incentivising the wrong things** This might seem to be too obvious to be worth saying but too often public services are incentivised (that's to say, paid) to achieve outcomes that are at best peripheral, sometimes counter, to the long-term interests of the service user. For instance, third-sector funding programmes which use the most basic primary outcomes and evaluate on this narrow and short-term basis, rather than on the basis of lives changed in the longer term.

Putting it altogether

These conclusions are derived from Community Links experience. Collectively our recommendations would do more than contribute to the reform of public services. They would transform them.

Summary of our Ten Recommendations for government

- 1 PROMOTE AN EARLY ACTION ECONOMY**

Develop a range of economic interventions which would increase the proportion of resources spent on early action – prevention and early intervention.
- 2 BEGIN TRANSITION PLANNING**

Establish and publish Early Action Milestones; framing behaviours expected of progressive, forward-thinking organisations and recognising or accrediting best practice.
- 3 DEVELOP AN EARLY ACTION INVESTMENT BANK**

Development work on a Social Investment Bank using unclaimed assets began under the last government and continues as the Big Society Bank. Might it, or a dedicated early action investment bank modelled on the Green Investment Bank, focus on early action?
- 4 EMBED SOCIAL IMPACT BONDS**

Building the market and proving the model could shift money from ambulances to fences without spending twice or abandoning the most desperate.
- 5 EMBRACE BIG PICTURE COMMISSIONING**

Defining the desired outcomes, not proscribing the process and allowing flexibility in delivering service improvements.
- 6 ADOPT SHARED BUDGETS**

Government services are connected and overlap. Savings in one service area could release funds to do more in another – accelerating further savings.
- 7 STREAMLINE SUPPORT FOR COMMISSIONERS**

Joining-up support to public sector commissioners would simplify bid processes and reduce back office costs for applicants and for government.
- 8 ESTABLISH LINK WORKERS**

An effective Link worker with a one-to-one relationship with service users could work across statutory and third-sector provision, would reduce the numbers needing highly specialised support, reduce long-term dependency and achieve more with less.
- 9 MAKE EVERY CHILD MATTER ON THE GROUND**

An improved professional partnership between staff in statutory agencies and their voluntary sector colleagues would ensure efficient application of resources as well as providing a better service.
- 10 INCENTIVISE THE RIGHT BEHAVIOURS**

Incentivise service user, staff and organisational behaviours which are consistent with the Community Links approach and stop incentivising those that aren't.



Our Community Development team regularly assess local needs to gauge how people feel about their neighbourhood.

Section Eight

What do you think?



HIS BOOK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED without a cover price because we want our readers to consider the contents, evaluate it for themselves and send us what they think the book is worth to them.

In the same spirit of honesty and collaboration we'd like to share your views and your experience. Please go to www.bit.ly/outoftheordinary to follow and join the discussion. You can also use this website address to contribute funds. To whet your appetite here are two perspectives. We are grateful to Bob Holman and Paul Twivy for starting the discussion here.



Bob Holman has been working in and writing about community development for more than half a century as a local authority childcare officer, a social policy professor and for many, many years a practicing community worker living and working in Easterhouse and, before that, in Southdown. He is the hugely respected author of numerous books and articles, the most recent of which is *Keir Hardie. Labour's Greatest Leader?* (Lion Hudson, 2010).



Togetherness against Adversity

I have known Community Links since its modest beginnings in 1977 and have rejoiced in its growth to a large voluntary organisation without losing its local roots and impact. Its participants have

refused to compromise their principles, have not been integrated into the establishment and it has remained an agency which is run for and mainly by working-class people.

The Past

Seventy years ago the area in which Community Links is now situated was being heavily bombed in the London blitz. I can identify with the area and the experience because, in nearby Ilford and Barking, my family also endured the blitz.

The damage and suffering drove people together. Of course, local authority services, the police and doctors were essential. But survival came because thousands of ordinary people put out fires, took in the homeless, ran rest and food centres and rescued those in danger. I came home from school to find our home destroyed by a V2 rocket with my mum and brother inside. They were dug out injured but alive. We never knew who found them, they did not want thanks or recognition. This involvement opened the eyes of ordinary people that together they could be an important force. Their new aspirations and their votes led to the welfare state.

Reading Out of the Ordinary, I see the same spirit of togetherness against adversity. I believe that this spirit by people born without power and wealth can again change society for good.

The Present

The Community Links approach to social regeneration has been successful. The smallish Rokeby Hub achieved a 48% drop in reported incidents of anti-social behaviour, while local residents are sure that their neighbourhood has changed for the better.

This success has not been wrought by the dazzling (and often short-lived) innovations so beloved by funders. On the contrary, the Hub is characterised by ordinary activities like toddler and parent groups, youth clubs, play sessions, legal advice and so on. These are the services which residents, not outsiders, want and to which they respond.

Further, these services are conveyed without blame or stigma. Recent studies have revealed that approaches which regard users as druggies or spongers actually undermine the recipients. This is not to say that people approaching Community Links do not have problems. Rather it means that those with problems are seen as valuable residents who can contribute to society. Moreover, they walk through the doors as members of the neighbourhood, not under any off-putting and condemning title.

This open approach, an inclusive not an exclusive one, is especially

important as present government cuts are leading to programmes which save money by concentrating just on those with the most troublesome problems. The much praised Sure Start is now to focus just on hard-to-reach families and not on a mixture of families from the same area. Voluntary bodies like Community Links have a vital role in preserving an approach which draws together people with different needs but from a common neighbourhood. In serving that neighbourhood all can find fulfilment.

The Future

The prime minister has talked much about the Big Society with voluntary bodies expanding. Yet cuts to the voluntary sector have been a part of the economic cuts. Significantly, within this local groups are suffering more severely than the large national societies who may also gain if they receive contracts to take over services previously run by statutory organisations. Given its praise of the voluntary sector in general, the government surely needs a policy to ensure that smaller and local voluntary groups can continue.

In 2002, the then leader of the Conservative Party, Iain Duncan Smith, came to the east end of Glasgow and visited Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse (FARE), the project with which I have had a long association. Within FARE and like groups, he was impressed that they were long-term, in contrast with projects run by outsiders which lasted for three years and then folded. He was right. Recently, I attended the wedding of a 31-year-old man from Easterhouse, from a difficult and disadvantaged beginning; he has made it to a senior position in a sports charity. It has taken 20 years since he first walked into our youth club. Community Links has lasted even longer. It is the long-term relationships with staff and neighbours, through good and bad times, that are essential.

Iain Duncan Smith promised that, if he became prime minister, he would legislate to allow central government to directly fund smaller voluntary groups. For instance, if the group raised £40,000 it would be given a grant for £20,000 – enough to finance one staff member and so ensure survival. The overall amount of grants would be tiny compared with the bonuses still awarded to the private bankers who brought about the recession. Iain Duncan Smith is now a member of the cabinet and should press for this reform.

We want a thousand voluntary bodies which reflect the approach of Community Links. The outcome would be new strengths for the very areas about to be hit hardest by the coalition government's economic policies.



Paul Twivy is chief executive of the Big Society Network (www.thebigsociety.co.uk) which was launched by David Cameron in early 2010. He is or has been centrally involved in Comic Relief, TimeBank, We Are what we Do and Pilotlight, and was most recently the founding CEO of the Big Lunch. Alongside all this he has also managed a very successful career in advertising and communications, variously leading some of the largest agencies in Europe.

Reflections

It is characteristically generous and radical of David Robinson and Community Links that Out of the Ordinary, David's exceptional compendium of wisdom about social regeneration drawn from over 30 years of experience, is offered up freely to 'our readers to send us what they think it is worth to them.' My view is that what is offered is priceless.

I am currently trying to turn The Big Society vision into something practical, enabling, imaginative and rewarding for as many citizens as possible. My efforts are now largely focused on setting up a citizens' mutual called 'Your Square Mile'. Every citizen in the UK will be eligible to join and receive both UK-wide and highly local advice, support and tools to make change in their local areas. It is with this ambitious objective in mind that I want to comment on Out of the Ordinary.

David and Community Links speak with the soft and wise voice of longevity. Rightly, the study refers to many government ideologies and leaders coming and going during the 33 years that Community Links has developed a body of best practice and humanity that is possibly unequalled in the voluntary sector. David patiently states that the ideas contained in this study may have to wait for another administration to turn them into reality but I fervently hope that they inform and make real the current Coalition Government's Big Society ideas.

There are a number of key points I would like to pick out. There is a recognition of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: that creating a safe, accessible and warm Community Hub is the foundation of the pyramid in changing lives. Most frontline services are provided by people who started as service users at Community Links and then journeyed up the ladder from service user to volunteer to paid-worker to manager. This is the basis for optimism in tough areas.

We need to recognise that many of the 238,000 estimated social entrepreneurs in this country often start in tough circumstances and

progress via small steps into creating remarkable organisations.

The study points out that we must make people feel ‘needed not needy’. We need to demonstrate to them that a painful life experience they have survived or mastered could be the key to mentoring someone else through the same experience. We need to recognise that only ex-offenders can truly understand and best help offenders wanting to reform.

I am inspired by the idea of Link Workers – frontline workers from the local community who, working holistically with all the problems of a small number of troubled individuals or families whom they get to know very well, and act as a ‘total perspective’ portal for other more specialist statutory or third-sector provision. This is both a very powerful and practical idea, especially when so many challenged families are dealing with up to twelve Government agencies. Service users bouncing from one agency to the other is a costly and common problem in public services.

Link Workers also demonstrate the very powerful theme running through the study that independent front-line agencies mustn’t be viewed as kind amateurs by specialist providers. They are far more skilful than such condescension allows.

There is a vital distinction made between cost-effective and cost-free services. Community Links costs £11million annually to run but delivers exceptional value.

Another key theme is that one-to-one relationships of ‘deep value’ are the only truly effective way of tackling tough social issues, and that simple actions such as taking a child swimming is the first step towards transforming their self-esteem and therefore their lives. Compare and contrast this with the multiple but often impersonal services delivered by the state.

In thinking about how people might define and claim their ‘Square Mile’ of neighbourhood and start to change it for the better, I found several jewels. The first is that 15 minutes walk roughly defines a neighbourhood, at least in urban areas. The second is that neighbourhoods are defined by people and don’t necessarily correspond to wards.

The third was that self-defined neighbourhoods mustn’t become enclaves, they must have permeable borders. This corresponds to my theory that ‘square miles’ should be twinned and should consciously exchange ideas, people and activities with adjacent neighbourhoods.

Finally, the learning that effective community centres are multi-purpose but develop narrower and specialist sub units if they get too big, is invaluable.

It's also fascinating to think about the diversity of hubs, of true 'third places'. As David points out, they can be a launderette! The two things they must never be are unsafe and dull.

Co-creation of products by consumers is a growing and progressive trend in the commercial world. How refreshing then to see this principle in the work of Community Links in which service-users co-design the services they want; in which staff are given clear values and behaviours as a framework, but are encouraged to be flexible with individual clients: freedom within a framework. Indeed, once thoroughly vetted, staff are totally trusted.

Another passion of mine is the role within every square mile of the postman, the lollipop lady, the corner-shop manager as active collaborators in delivering social regeneration and this shines through in Newham.

The suggestions to Government are very clear and could be transformational. I particularly admire the idea of prioritising 'early action' interventions – the fence at edge of the cliff not the ambulance at the bottom – whilst recognising the need to transition to these from the curative approach. These, as David points out, could be institutionalised by Social Impact Bonds, by the Big Society Bank, the lottery funds and foundations focusing more and more on funding early interventions.

Embracing Big Picture Commissioning and promoting the idea of shared funding in Government go hand-in-hand and will make Government work much more effective; Family Nurse Partnerships deliver cost-savings to local children's services, education and justice and so should be commissioned by a Director of Children's Services rather than the Health Service. This is the real value of joined-up Government.

Above all else, the principles behind David's approach – that we are all simultaneously vulnerable and capable; that we need a 'partner state' as a modern re-interpretation of the welfare state – are not just profoundly humane but intensely practical.



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Community Links Publications

We share the learning of our work in east London through our publications, events, training and paid consultancy. Here are some of our other publications which are available through our website. www.community-links.org/our-national-work

Unconditional Leadership by David Robinson

Now in its second edition, this is a book about leadership... with attitude. The book describes a values-driven approach to developing people, building teams and maximising results. £12.99

Making Links: 15 Visions of Community

To mark our 30th anniversary we invited some friends to take a look with us at the state of our communities and, perhaps more importantly, where we are going. Contributors from the worlds of business, politics and voluntary organisations write in a personal capacity about community. £12.99

Living Values by Geraldine Blake, David Robinson and Matthew Smerdon

Reporting the findings of our Collaborative Inquiry into the values of the third sector this publication includes inspiring examples of organisations putting their values into action; thought-provoking comment from sector practitioners and a toolkit of practical exercises to get people talking about values. Free on request or by download.

Strengthening Communities

A short pictorial report summarising some of the local work undertaken by our community development team. Free on request or by download.

■ *Many more of our research finding, reports and how-to guides are available to buy or download from our website. Keep up with latest news on our regularly updated blog www.community-links.org/linksuk*



Out of the Ordinary is the story of Community Links at its absolute best. Using the example of Rokeby Hub, this book shares their practical, on-the-ground learning and experience through their relationships with the communities they serve. It then expands this real world knowledge of what genuinely makes a difference into policy and funding recommendations that will genuinely transform our communities and society for the better. I commend this book for anyone who is serious about making a sustainable positive difference in social change.

Professor Alex Linley, Director, Capp

Timely and to the point, with stimulating real life examples and pertinent ideas for funders – real food for thought. And a good read!

Nicola Pollock, Director of grant-making, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

In this powerful little book David Robinson shows clearly how Community Links' success is rooted in authenticity – authentic relations at the community level and the holistic embrace of a set of clearly described principles. The book is a challenge to practitioners and policy makers – it shows us how we might realistically transform public services today.

Hilary Cottam, Principal Partner at Participle

Community Links really is Out of the Ordinary; I have known and respected Community Links for many years and see it more as an institution than an organisation – modelling a whole new way of working that really does build on the talent, inspiration and know-how of residents, visitors, users and staff alike. This approach injects hope and aspiration into communities the state has traditionally failed. Put simply, this has changed the lives of many who have come into contact with Links.

Ben Hughes, Chief Executive, bassac

Voluntary bodies like Community Links have a vital role in preserving an approach which draws together people with different needs, but from a common neighbourhood. In serving that neighbourhood all can find fulfilment. We want a thousand voluntary bodies which reflect the approach of Community Links.

Bob Holman, author and community worker

It is characteristically generous and radical of David Robinson and Community Links that *Out of the Ordinary*, David's exceptional compendium of wisdom about social regeneration drawn from over 30 years of experience, is offered up freely to 'our readers to send us what they think it is worth to them.' My view is that what is offered is priceless.

Paul Twivy, Chief Executive, The Big Society Network

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