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A Neighbourhood Community Psychologist: Potential and possibilities

We recognise that some psychologists, working in services or with civil society organisations, already combine various elements of neighbourhood or community working. These ideas are for those who do not, but would like to, or those who would like to develop this work. We have presented ideas in the form of a job description for a Neighbourhood Community Psychologist. Individual 'job requirements' can be lifted and put beside other work, or the whole set could be used to create a new kind of post. We have also offered items that could form all or part of a person specification. Some case studies of psychological neighbourhood work are presented.

We hope this will be useful to commissioners, local authority teams, applied psychologists and other community workers who want to know what kind of knowledge, skills and resources such a role could bring to their organisations and/or services.

1. Why a Neighbourhood Psychologist?

People's experiences of Covid-19 and the various degrees of lockdowns, have demonstrated the importance of neighbourhood and community in people's lives. A neighbourhood is a place that is local in scale and recognised by residents, workers and visitors as meaningful. The numerous ways in which citizen participation has enabled people to get through, and mitigate the impacts of isolation, as well as aid access to essential goods and services, have served to support overstretched public health, social care and education services in maintaining people's wellbeing. Citizen participation has also contributed to community resilience (CAR, 2020), which can be understood as 'Overcoming adversity, whilst also potentially changing, or even dramatically transforming, (aspects of) that adversity' (Hart et al., 2016: 3). Without strong neighbourhood connections, we have seen people from many different kinds of groups rendered more socially, economically and clinically vulnerable to psychological strain and distress. Where neighbourhoods can function to include, they can also function to exclude.

Walker (2020:53) suggests the time is now to 'embed psychologists in local authorities to develop, with local communities, the evidence base for preventative interventions to improve public health' in order to help prevent distress and improve citizen participation. The primary purpose of such a role would be to work with others to provide such an evidence base, using co-production and co-design methods, and supplementing and enhancing existing community services (see for example, Kagan et al., 2020). Such a role should be of interest to health, neighbourhood and social care commissioners, as well as those in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Public Health England (2015) and NICE guidance (2016) also advocate for the importance of community centred approaches and community engagement

in tackling health inequalities and improving population health and wellbeing – this role could support these approaches in partnership with other occupations.

Whilst community psychology would be the obvious place to start in thinking about such a role, in the UK, because of the paucity of training in community psychology, it is probably most useful to think about how other kinds of applied psychologists (such as, for example, organisational, educational, health, clinical, counselling, or forensic) might further adapt their practices in order to fill the 'neighbourhood psychologist' niche.

WHAT MIGHT PSYCHOLOGISTS ADD TO EXISTING COMMUNITY PRACTICE?

In some places, but by no means all, there are community practitioners who are also concerned with citizen participation and with improving public health and wellbeing. Psychologists would bring distinct knowledge, skills and capabilities, which include: (i) a comprehensive understanding of theories and relevant evidence about behaviour and experiences – all in a wide social context, including bio-psycho-social theories, but extending these to an understanding of historical, cultural, policy and political contexts; (ii) an understanding of the different forms of capital and dimensions of place that impinge upon people's lives; (iii) skills of working with people face-to-face, in groups and across organisational boundaries, and of recognising and working with power, conflict and difference; (iv) a sound understanding of psychologically informed policies and practices, which include the emotional, spiritual, social, personal and interpersonal facets of both personal and collective wellbeing; and (v) the ability to co-design complex research programmes, capable of addressing difficult social issues, with reflection and learning at their core.

2. Job description for a Neighbourhood Psychologist

Purpose of the role:

- To bring a range of psychological skills, knowledge and experience to enhancing community resilience, citizen empowerment and positive place identity

and/or

- To support the local authority deliver on its ambitions for community empowerment, cooperation and engagement and the wellbeing of its citizens

and/or

- To develop, with local communities, the evidence base for preventative interventions to improve, for example, community resilience, public health and aspects of wellbeing that are important to local people

and/or

- To deliver programmes of training and development for the authority's workforce, and for the public, on participatory, asset-based working with local communities

and/or

- To ensure all local policies are psychologically informed in their development and assessment of impact on public health, citizen wellbeing and community resilience.

WHAT MIGHT THE ROLE OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD PSYCHOLOGIST INCLUDE?

We have summarised the role of the Neighbourhood Psychologist who might be placed either (i) in the neighbourhood (including, for example, with housing groups, community development trusts, or anchor organisations), or (ii) with the Local Authority. There are, of course other possibilities for employment. The Third Sector may employ or work jointly with statutory services to manage the employment of neighbourhood psychologists. Or, a neighbourhood psychology service could operate on a self employed, social enterprise basis, either in partnership with statutory (and even independent) services or taking commissions from the public sector.

Working in a neighbourhood: Working in partnership with or for community groups and organisations (including further and higher education)

From whatever professional base, psychologists could work more in collaboration with others to a) ensure psychological needs and interventions are understood; b) build on the assets and strengths of groups and communities; c) maximise the resources available to them; and d) ensure that practice and policy is firmly grounded in local experiences and needs.

KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY

a. Psychologically-informed expertise to support service design, strategy and policy development

- Offer psychologically informed input into strategies and policies, their development, review and evolution, insofar as they affect communities and neighbourhoods

- Support and initiate creative ways to transfer resources to those who need it most, including local community organisations – e.g. support for fundraising, bid writing, crowdfunding or identifying other forms of resources to support local groups.

b. Partnerships and alliances

- Use a range of interpersonal and group skills to build and strengthen partnerships, alliances, networks and connections within neighbourhoods and beyond (e.g. with local colleges, schools and universities, training agencies) and demonstrating the efficacy of these alliances

- Build partnerships and solidarity with and between local community organisations or grassroots groups – reaching out to them and offering mutual support with humility – recognising they are the leaders

- Address social issues through partnership work with relevant organisations, joint campaigns and supporting local community action

- Act as an impartial member of a wide stakeholder community, in order to help to remove perceived barriers between other stakeholders, such as community groups and services or local authorities

- Be seen as an active, involved, trusted intermediary capable of acting as a catalyst for change and critical challenge.

c. Psychologically informed place making and sense of community

- Use community-led change methods, such as participatory planning, community organising, asset-based community development, community leadership programmes and supporting community groups, including mutual aid groups, in order to engage citizens in place-making goals and activities

- Identify the gaps in provision and the invisibility of people or groups: Community mapping – support and share, with local people where possible, who and which groups and organisations are in the local area, and which could usefully be connected together. Ask what are we asking for, what do groups need, which groups should be connected? and what resources do we have?

- Use participatory methods to work with citizens on how to affect change. This might include critical exploration, with local people, in order to understand who has what kinds of power locally and what can be done to influence them and the systems of which they are a part- Power mapping – such as that advocated by, for example, David Smail

- Identify the changing pattern of services and their impact – Service mapping – what is continuing? What's being closed down? Who might this affect?

- Support the development and evaluation of new, inclusive and participatory neighbourhood and community (of place and identity) spaces and forums – online and face-to-face

- Support individuals and groups to work together effectively, working with conflict and building in resilience, self and collective care and personal and collective wellbeing in to all work

- If working within professional psychological services, use the ecological framework model in clinical formulation – how are the social and economic structures and unequal power affecting people's psychological experience – see this practice example with excluded young people and how might they become or remain active citizens.

d. Advocacy and solidarity

- Spend time with people and develop <u>psychosocial accompaniment as psychological practice</u> – that is, 'bearing witness' being alongside as people experience this pandemic or other adverse events, not trying to change them, but bearing witness to their experiences of injustice and working with them to ensure that their experiences are heard and understood by those who can make change happen

- Support local people to ensure their voices are heard when policy decisions or practice changes occur without consultation and that will have an impact on their lives (for example, changes to bus routes, library opening times, leisure centre closures)

- Enable people to access resources and advocating for them where needed e.g. <u>www.turn2us.org.uk</u>

- Lobby local government to ensure the needs of marginalised groups are understood (e.g. new police powers, Mental Health Act changes, social care changes); writing emails to local councillors, attending (virtual) council meetings (if they are happening) and reporting back to community groups and agencies

- Draw on <u>racial injustice briefing papers</u> and other relevant briefings to hold, and enable citizens to hold leaders to account (team/service/organisation/local authority/national government leaders) around how responses to adverse events such as Covid-19 may exacerbate injustice and inequalities, and offer solutions and support to take action (this might include, for example, asking questions by email, FOI requests, writing blogs, using social media, press, starting working groups, creating a collective, joining campaigns, asking local organisations to join campaigns, writing guidance, procedures, or policies that try to mitigate for injustice).

e. Research and evaluation

- Bring to bear expertise in co-designing complex research and evaluation projects, utilising a range of relevant research paradigms, providing a local evidence base of 'what works', why, and how.

- Advocate for different approaches to psychological and health research as part of a wider education in <u>decolonising psychological research and practice</u>. Undertake action research and action learning cycles involving citizens as co- and community researchers in design, execution and dissemination of action based projects.

- Write well documented reports about issues affecting local people, human services and civil society organisations

- Communicate research and evaluation both verbally and in writing, to a range of different audiences.

Working with or for local authorities (on strategic and authority-wide issues)

An alternative place to be located, rather than in neighbourhoods, services or with civil society organisations, is to work, directly, in, for or with local authorities (we recognise that working in neighbourhoods or some services may also be working for a Local Authority). A Local Authority base would enable psychologists from whichever professional background to ensure borough-wide policies were psychologically informed, worked to prevent ill-health and promote well-being; enabled participation and cooperation and contributed to community resilience, citizen empowerment and positive sense of community and place.

KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY

a. Psychologically-informed expertise to support service design, strategy and policy development

- Offer psychologically-informed input into district and authority-wide strategies and policies beyond those targeting mental health and wellbeing. Strategies could include: spatial, economic, transport, neighbourhoods and community, culture, education, public health and social care strategies and their associated services, all of which have psychological consequences and affect both sense of community and community resilience.

- Write briefing papers for policy-makers – by drawing on an ecological systems framework, draw attention to ideas and areas that policy-makers may not have considered

- Demonstrate to policy makers how different groups are affected by current policies by collating different forms of information and undertaking support for well designed co-research with citizens, to investigate the possibilities for relevant changes

- Ensure, through skilled verbal and written communication, that service and political leaders are aware of latest briefings, such as racial injustice briefing papers, in order to hold them to account for how adverse events have affected and exacerbated injustice and inequalities, authority-wide, and offer strategies for reduce these impacts

- Co-design processes that enhance borough-wide, collective wellbeing by virtue of being more participatory and communicate these widely

- Build capacity for others to use participatory processes and workshops with marginalised groups or communities so that they are better able, for example, to take part in public consultations; in the development of neighbourhood plans; and in collective place-making activities.

b. Partnerships and alliances

- Work to develop links across and between public services, civil society groups and other stakeholders in order to build linking capital, maximise resources in neighbourhoods and enhance citizen participation

- Assess and ensure that intelligence from neighbourhoods is communicated to relevant stakeholders

- Enable organisations (services, political leaders) and citizens to understand how the needs of the most marginalised groups are being met, through asking questions and offering training workshops, making available relevant reports (such as during the pandemic Doctors of the World) and offer support for action

- Monitor and report on the effectiveness of partnership working across the authority.

c. Psychologically informed place making and sense of community

- Deliver training and education programmes, across the authority workforce and for the general public, to enhance the understanding of components of good public health and wellbeing, community resilience, participation and psychological sense of community

- Co-design some action research projects that involve citizens in decisions about placemaking for flourishing and liveable neighbourhoods, utilising the place standard, for example, and ensure these are resourced, delivered and reported appropriately

- Support and develop local authority strategies to address the social and economic determinants of individual and collective wellbeing and to prevent psychological distress, such as local inclusive economic strategies, a 'health-in-all-policies' approach and/or creating psychologically healthy workplaces.

d. Inclusion and empowerment

- Develop the capacity for working with marginalised groups and communities, through working across agency boundaries (public, private, community and voluntary sector) to identify training needs, CPD opportunities and co-deliver, with citizens, training and education, in order to understand marginalisation and how to work within an ecological framework

- Ensure that authority policies and practices are culturally, (dis)ability, sexuality and age-safe through detailed scrutiny of policies (with citizens where possible), and that equality impact assessments are carried out and reported on a regular basis

- Design processes that enhance wellbeing by virtue of being participatory, in order to empower citizens and increase the likelihood they are able, for example, to take part in public consultations; in the development of neighbourhood plans; and in collective place-making activities. This could include direct work with communities or with public services or with local authority, health or education departments, so as to build their capacity to enable effective community voice.

e. Research and evaluation

- With other neighbourhood workers, establish frameworks and undertake evaluation of neighbourhood policies, utilising (participatory) action research processes where possible, and ensure findings and recommendations are widely disseminated and acted upon

- Deliver CPD and training opportunities on participatory and creative methods of social research in order the build capacity for citizens and for professionals working with citizens on research relevant to their neighbourhoods

- Build capacity for evaluation by running workshops for both professionals and the public on different ways in which evaluation can be built into project and service delivery work, including co-research, and participatory methods of data collection, analysis and reporting

- Work with information and intelligence units within the major public services to identify gaps in knowledge and areas that could usefully be enhanced through citizen-led research

- Work with local Higher Education Institutions to build programmes of research and attract additional resources for neighbourhood research

- Ensure that there are adequate procedures for ethical scrutiny of research plans.

f. Professional

In all of the above work according to the professional guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS) , and also:

- Place listening at the forefront of everything you do

- Build reflective and reflexive practice skills and put these at the heart of every aspect of the work

- Ensure you have support in the workplace and if working as a 'detached' worker that there are adequate professional discussion opportunities and personal risk management procedures are in place

- Know when to pull back and be able to respect and work with a position of 'not knowing' and offer your expertise in a spirit of partnership and curiosity.

3. Person specification

Purpose:

- To bring a range of psychological skills, knowledge and experience to enhancing community resilience, citizen empowerment and positive place identity

and/or

- To support the local authority to deliver on its ambitions for community empowerment, cooperation and engagement and the wellbeing of its citizens

and/or

- To develop, with local communities, the evidence base for preventative interventions to improve, for example, community resilience, public health and aspects of wellbeing that are important to local people

and/or

- To deliver programmes of training and development for the authority's workforce, and for the public, on participatory, asset-based working with local communities.

Essential criteria, beyond which a person could not be appointed. Desirable criteria, extra qualities which can be sued to distinguish between those who meet essential criteria.

Essential	Desirable
Education/qualifications needed to be able to carry out the job description	
• Education in Psychology and eligibility for Graduate Membership of the British Psychological Society	• Qualifications in social research methods, community psychology, teaching or training, community development, public health, youth work, or equivalent • Professional qualifications in any field of psychology.
Experience needed to be able to carry out the job description	
• Experience of working with members of the public and professionals concerned with the enhancement of wellbeing and/or community resilience • Experience of working from an asset-based and preventative perspective in public, voluntary or community services • Experience of designing and delivering effective training programmes to a range of different groups • Experience of being an advocate for people using or trying to use public, voluntary or community services • Experience of project or service development • Experience of a completed research evaluation of a service or a project.	• Experience of working to enhance public health or mental health in a community setting • Experience of co-production • Experience of either community organising, community development or youth work • Experience of playing a major role in a successful bid for funding • Successful completion of a participatory research project.
Knowledge needed to be able to carry out the job description	
• Knowledge of a range of psychological perspectives on personal, interpersonal and social change • Knowledge of ecological and systems models as applied to social change • Knowledge of asset-based ways of working • Knowledge of a range of community-led, participative change processes • Knowledge of theories of empowerment, participation and engagement	• Knowledge of community development frameworks • Understanding different approaches to organisational change • Knowledge of the determinants of wellbeing

- Knowledge of effective training methods

- Knowledge of relevant local and national policies affecting the lives of people, families and neighbourhood groups

- Good understanding of how policy is developed and routes to influencing policy

- Good understanding of contemporary thoughts around marginalisation, discrimination and equality

- Knowledge of empowerment and participatory research strategies**.**

- Knowledge about a range of relevant evaluation and research strategies, including, for example, different forms of action research, realistic evaluation, fourth generation evaluation, empowerment evaluation

- Knowledge of theories of community, neighbourhood and social capital.

Skills and abilities needed to be able to carry out the job description

- Ability to value, integrate and bridge multiple world views, cultures and identities and to enable people with diverse views to find what they have in common

- Ability to motivate others, promote genuine representation and respect for all community members

- Ability to use authentic, non-hostile communication skills and to hold 'difficult conversations'

- Ability to work with and facilitate a range of different community and professional groups in face-to-face and online situations

- Ability to work with others to map a community, bring different partners on board, and help the community develop a vision and take actions that will contribute towards a sustainable, healthy community

- Ability to establish and implement monitoring and evaluation frameworks in order to demonstrate the efficacy of community led change

- Ability to work with others to undertake a community strengths-and-assets and stakeholder analyses

- Ability to partner with community stakeholders to plan, develop and sustain preventative neighbourhood projects

- Ability to develop meaningful links and alliances between different groups and stakeholders

- Good conflict management, negotiation and decision making skills

- Ability to be calm and diffuse conflict situations.

- Demonstrated networking ability

- The ability to articulate an inclusive, preventative perspective

- Good public speaking and presentation skills with the ability to engage a wide range of audiences.

Policy:

- Experience of contributing to and/or influencing local policies on any one of the following: health, wellbeing, community development

- The ability to build and sustain effective communication and working relationships with policy makers, elected officials and community members

- The ability to analyse policy in terms of its impact on neighbourhoods and those most marginalised

- The ability to write a policy brief

- Ability to design, implement and report, with community members, research and/or evaluation studies that address complex social issues

- Ability to interpret social statistics and to work with community members to increase their statistical capabilities.

Organisation:

- Good IT skills and ability to use social media and write press reports

- Ability to communicate, not only with project partners, but the wider public, to strengthen capabilities and awareness, or for advocacy

- Ability to identify and integrate use of material and human resources in pursuit of successful project implementation

- Ability to prepare project proposals and bids for funding

- Ability to manage workloads and levels of stress in self and others.

Other requirements needed to be able to carry out the JD

- Full Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

- Commitment to social justice and to promoting equal opportunities

- Willingness to engage in appropriate professional supervision and maintain professional networks for consultation and support

- Willingness to stay abreast of national and international developments in neighbourhood working and contribute to developing resources and knowledge to reflect the changing landscape.

- Direct or indirect experience of social marginality or of being a a member of a marginalised group.

4. Case examples: Working differently

1. MAC-UK – AN INCLUSIVE WAY OF WORKING DURING COVID-19 – SALLY ZLOTOWITZ, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE MAC-UK TEAM AND YOUNG PEOPLE

What we've been doing as Community Psychologists at MAC-UK in our work with excluded young people since Covid-19.

- Finding ways to carry out a **rapid listening exercise** (via Instagram and through asking young people directly) of excluded young people's concerns and then generating activities based on this, in partnership with them where possible. This led to the publication of a report about future recommendations for lockdown and support of excluded young people.

- Ensuring young people can access welfare systems

- Finding ways of amplifying the contributions excluded young people are making to the issues around the pandemic, i.e. the ways they are helping others, for example, their caring responsibilities, their musical expression – all of which remain invisible

- Thinking through how we can support excluded young people to be part of different types of mutual aid (mutual aid groups might not suit them) – so how can they 'co-produce' remotely and how can we harness their skills and knowledge during these times?

- Writing a briefing paper for policy-makers and the police about our/young people's main concerns about the new Coronavirus Act 2020

- Reading about framing and strategic messaging so as to win over people who don't just think like us – e.g. the Frameworks Institute and Public Interest Research Centre guidance

- Reaching out to other organisations in our sector who work with marginalised young people to invite collaboration and co-producing activities/sharing learning together

- Reaching out to grassroots groups who work with excluded young people and inviting mutual support

- Working remotely with young people to maintain trusted relationships – regular calls, check ins and chats – ensuring they are up to date with information, aware of misinformation, holding them in mind

- How to create fun and humour together as a team and with young people – e.g. setting up a meme Whatsapp group

- Creative use of social media to stay connected with young people – e.g. via Instagram and exploring gaming as a way of staying connected online safely (e.g. via playstation games)

- Joined a grassroots social action group who are putting together virtual workshops for young people about their rights in the face of new police powers and creating memes to spread about their rights

- Reading various reports about how this is affecting marginalised groups and thinking how it applies to our practice – holding virtual reflective practice groups

- Will reach out to police colleagues to understand their concerns about serious youth violence etc at this time but also to share our concerns about changes to police practice

- Thinking about the 'underground economy' some young people work in this – how do we support them if they are losing their income?

- Inviting young people to write a blog about the impact of the Coronavirus Act and the measures on excluded young people – risks and opportunities

- Signing and sharing petitions around digital inclusion campaigns (free wifi for all) #operationwifi

- Regular team check ins with colleagues, creating music playlists (asking young people for tunes), creativity at home lists, getting fit together,

- Working closely with our youth employees to ensure they have everything they need to be able to continue contributing and using their skills in their teams

- Strategising to think about 'what next' after Covid-19 and what is our role in creating social change, e.g. how can we contribute to the #BuildBackBetter and #BlackLivesMatter movements.

2. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND COVID: AN INSIDER STORY – SUE NORTHROP

As a Community Councillor, I volunteered to lead our Community Emergency Resilience Team. These community led teams were set up as part of the Scottish Government's Resilient Communities initiative, covered by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Contingency Planning (Scotland) Regulations 2005. Usually led by Community Councils, teams develop and deliver Community Emergency Resilience (CER) Plans to mobilise community support when over the five months the team of 13 achieved a great deal, working collaboratively. We developed a resilience team and action plan and delivered projects providing essential support. Community conversations highlighted that the main gap was support for older, socially isolated people. But we were also very aware that Covid-19 made everyone vulnerable and things were changing rapidly.

Whilst the plan 'emerged' and flexed as things changed, from the start our work was rooted in community psychology theory, practice and values, based on my 'day job' running Dementia Friendly East Lothian CIC (DFEL). The Action Plan was developed with a focus on using methods that built individual and community capacity.

- We helped people to help themselves, stay safe and build skills and connections. For example, we only shopped if there was no alternative, often this was for people who were very socially isolated and really appreciated a friendly face. We supported 150 vulnerable households, three local care homes and seven retirement housing complexes – shopping, prescriptions and free local newspapers.

- We utilised local time and expertise and developed inclusive ways people could get involved: we set up a volunteer database of 250 people, and 50 people have offered to volunteer for future events and emergencies; we set up a Resilience Fund and asked for donations to the kindness hampers to socially isolated people, care facilities, NHS and Social Care Services and staff; we established a games library

- Where possible we supported people to access existing community services and support, connecting them to the life of the community

- We recognised the different ways of connecting and sustaining valued relationships, for example, via the Street Links project (a hyper-local network of 82 neighbours covering 96 per cent of the town); the Digital Inclusion project (with Rotary and the Community Council – 25 gifted, project continues) and a Microwebsite – weelocals.com so people knew who was delivering and how to access it

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- We recognised it had to be made easy to follow guidelines. As lockdown ended, we set up the face coverings project, giving key workers, vulnerable people and school pupils free face coverings so they were able to get out with more confidence and safely, and we recruited volunteer (often people shielding) stitchers to make coverings.

- We created a sense of 'us', a sense of community – We communicated via a new micro-website, Facebook and WhatsApp groups, weekly newspaper column, leaflets and posters; and developed the Puffins and Smiles projects, where children drew NHS Rainbow Puffins and smiles for people to put in their windows – an intergenerational project to bring the community together, so everyone felt connected, including across generations

- We focus on the community's assets – in Covid-19, we realised that assets were a resource but also that some were at risk from Covid-19. We enhanced the Community Assets Register to look specifically at the people, places, networks and resources we have in our community that we can draw on and what we wanted to protect and support. This also provided the basis for a communication network

- We recognised the importance of reflection and learning. We held three community workshops on Zoom and an online survey to review and learn; established suite of data bases, Slack workspace, and produced a final report and conversations with key partners North Berwick Community Resilience Report: Covid-19.

Being a psychologist has provided a wealth of experience and knowledge and skills to apply in a complex and evolving situation and to draw on with the Community Emergency Resilience Team. That includes being part of a psychological community. The Community Psychology Section has been a great source of encouragement and support over Covid-19 and beyond – a sounding board, a refuge, a source of ideas and experience.

A community psychology 'lens' gave a focus on the whole community, capacities and the long term impact of our work as well as promoting community learning, running and reporting on the community workshops as part of a legacy and resource for the community.

Organisational psychology gave me knowledge and skills to lead a team of volunteers through a long-standing and complex crisis. I knew about different models of leadership and how and when they worked; could work with formal and informal team roles and dynamics, conflict management, managing change, assessing risk and planning.

Research – Analytical and research skills were essential to making sense of swathes of information that started coming out after the first stage of Covid-19 and ensuing we could reinforce the most important messages clearly in our community. They also came in very valuable in capturing our experience and learning in the final report.

Whilst we wanted to build sustainable capacity in the community, the resilience team was always there to fill a temporary gap and we had to create a space for the community to respond and fill the gap we left behind. And critically for the Council to take back responsibilities we had taken on in their absence.

3. GIRLS GANG: A CASE STUDY EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN ACTION: SUZANNE WILSON

Girls Gang is a youth social action group which stemmed out of a community research project led by UCLan, called Connected Communities, where I initially worked with children and young people (CYP) from two small coastal communities in Cumbria experiencing significant poverty (see the reports for Mirehouse and Woodhouse here). Within the Woodhouse project I worked with ten girls

aged 10 and 11 years old, who participated in research methods workshops where they learned about various data gathering techniques, along with ethical considerations and health and safety protocol. Accompanied by local police officers, the girls knocked on the doors of residents in their local community and conducted short doorstep interviews, where they gathered information about resident's wellbeing, their social networks and their views about the community. The girls then lead the qualitative coding of the data, generating key themes from the research. The results of the research have been presented by the girls to a number of audiences, including their family and peers, local councillors, and students, staff and third sector organisations at the University of Cumbria and the University of Central Lancashire.

The process of being involved in the community research encouraged the girls to reflect on their community and their role within it. This ignited a strong desire to continue to work to help strengthen the community. After being led by UCLan for two years, it is now managed by South Whitehaven Youth Partnership. Since the girls got together they have undertaken many social action activities. These include, but are not limited to, organising a number of litter picks, running a dementia friendly cafe, writing and starring in a mental health awareness film, working with the local borough council to create a Children Charter, and creating welfare packs for local CYP during the Covid-19 lockdown. Through their involvement in Girls Gang, the girls have reported gains in confidence, access to new personal development experiences and a stronger sense of citizenship and belonging. Furthermore, three parents of the group are now trustees of a local community charity, all of whom had no previous experience of charity governance.

WHAT ROLE DID COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PLAY IN THIS PROJECT?

As a Community Psychologist, I was able to bring a range of skills and expertise to the research across Cumbria:

Psychologically-informed expertise

My clinical experience working in mental health and as an assistant psychologist equipped me with excellent communication skills to engage with a range of stakeholders, including CYP from marginalised groups and elected members from the local authorities. This also informed a considered approach to working with the CYP, acknowledging the bio-psycho-social barriers they may be facing. I applied developmental and social psychological theories to deliver an inclusive and welcoming recruitment and engagement strategy with local groups, drawing on well-established theories such as Tajfel's Social Identity Theory and Vygotsky's Cognitive Development Theory of child development. Knowledge of eco-systems, such as Bronfenbrenner's Exo-system, also provided me with the ability to view the different structures in which the CYP operated, which were considered in developing a space for they felt they had power and a degree of control.

Research and evaluation

Through a strong background in psychological research, trained to Masters level, I was able to reflect on the best ways to ensure that robust research methods were used, not only in the door to door research but also in assessing the impact of involvement in PAR on the CYP. The CYP and a number of other groups of young people in the area were provided in depth training in research skills. I even held a full day social science festival where nearly 100 local primary school children explored different creative research methods they could use to better understand their community. I have also provided guidance to local authority members in how to effectively communicate with CYP when carrying out focus group consultations, something of which isn't mandatory for elected members.

Partnerships and alliances

I was able to develop and establish strong links between the Local Authorities and the CYP I worked with. This was realised in a number of ways. Strong alliances of support and encouragement was shown by elected members, for example, with the local Elected Mayor and Leader of the County Council attending a number of the <u>public events held by the young people</u>. Partnerships were developed between local authorities and community youth groups and schools, whereby they worked together, and continue to do so, to ensure that the local borough council ensures that all policies have the welfare and interest of CYP at their heart.

Inclusion and empowerment

Providing opportunities for CYP in marginalised positions was my main ambition for this project as I believe it can be a <u>powerful tool to promote empowerment</u>. Through developing youth led, asset-based programmes I was able to work with the community and the local authorities to help build capacity and meet the needs of local communities. Launching the registered charity <u>West Cumbria Community Action Trust</u> and the development of <u>Copeland Borough Council's Children's Charter</u> are to name a few. These relationships are still in place, and members of the Local Authorities continue to engage with these CYP and others to help inform their practice.

4. FOOD INSECURITY AND COVID-19 – THE WORTHING FOOD FOUNDATION – CARL WALKER

Background

UNICEF estimated in 2017 that 19 per cent of children under the age of 15 live with someone who faces moderate or severe food insecurity. Trussell Trust recently reported an 81 per cent increase in people needing support from food banks at the end of March compared with the same time last year. Moreover, demand from children for food bank services increased by 121 per cent in this time. A separate YouGov survey commissioned by the Food Foundation in April found five million people in the UK living in households with children under 18 had experienced food insecurity since the lockdown started. That's double the level of food insecurity among households with children reported by the Food Standards Agency in 2018 (5.7 per cent). It would appear that hunger, and specifically children's hunger, is on the rise in the UK at present.

The project

In terms of our own organisation, our food bank is part of the Worthing Food Foundation. We began as a mutual aid group in March, providing community shopping for food and prescriptions and dog walking. Soon we had 200 volunteers and were supporting hundreds of local people who were isolating. It became clear that many of the people who needed food couldn't pay and so we started a local foodbank. Prior to our inception in March 2020, 93 per cent of our users had previously cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food. We currently provide nutritionally balanced food support to over 200 people a week in Worthing. Some of these are one-off packages and others constitute longer term support. 70 per cent of our users have children in the house and a number have babies who request infant formula and/or baby food. We run a non-referral system, preferring to provide dignified food support for people in immediate need and providing further support and signposting once food supply is stabilised.

The role

As a Community Psychologist, I've been involved in

- Starting and co-coordinating both the mutual aid group and the food bank

- Helping to develop a participatory evaluation of the project with a number of people who use the foodbank. I'm now leading on a project on co-production across the Adur and Worthing food network and this includes all local community groups, local authorities and food providers

- I've also brokered relationships between Local Authorities, our charity and other local food suppliers. These relationships have been centrally important in our success. This has meant building links and developing a sensitive and dignified pathway for further support for people, in tandem with 'One Stop Junction', a council service supporting those on low incomes maximise their incomes. I've also built relationships and pathways with local schools such that they have become donation points for us and we in turn have delivered free school meals to families during the first lockdown.

- I've been a key part of developing psychologically-informed strategies including our strategic approach to communications, donations drives, equalities and safeguarding

- I've written several blogs for the organisation, highlighting the links between the work of the organisation and key community psychology principles.

In doing these and other support tasks I have brought a range of psychological skills, knowledge and experience to enhancing community resilience in Worthing and supported the local authorities (Adur and Worthing Council and West Sussex County Council) to deliver on their ambitions for cooperation and engagement for the wellbeing of their citizens.

Through the Food Network we are starting to coproduce an evidence base for preventative interventions in food security. I have mobilised my community psychology experience and training to address social issues through partnership work with a range of disparate organisations, developed joint campaigns to secure funding and donations and supported local community action in the area of food security. A key element of this work has been lobbying the Local Authorities (we are a split tier council) to ensure the food and hygiene needs of marginalised groups are understood and addressed. As a result of this we have provided healthy, balanced food for 250 people per week (which works out at almost 5000 meals per month) in a dignified and respectful way.

- Coordinated and delivered hundreds of mutual aid food and prescription deliveries for local isolating residents

- Raised nearly £40,000 in grant and donation income for a local information

- Delivered 500 Christmas lunches per week in the holidays

- Opened a school uniform exchange shop and delivered winter coats and free pre-used school uniform to hundreds of local parents

- Developed an organisation, largely run on community psychology principles, with over 200 volunteers.

5. SOME IDEAS TO INTEGRATE WITH PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Some of these things are harder to do remotely but may still be possible.

- Contact local community organisation and bodies – including, for example, community councils, councils for voluntary service, community development trusts

- Listen – to what matters to them, what they are already doing, what their issues are and how you might help

- Use the communication channels they use – Facebook, Zoom, Teams, email networks, WhatsApp groups, Telegraph. Be mindful of digital exclusion and try to accommodate direct contacts by phone, or door knocking – even the post!

- Constantly review 'who is not in the room' – take the lead from local communities' concerns about social isolation and exclusion

- Who has access to helping others as well as being helped? Starting small scale 'peer support' or mutual aid projects within your service – who can support who at this time?

- Build on what is already happening – support and build on what is there – include local businesses, faith groups, craft groups, Rotary, dog walkers, sports associations

- Don't assume you know best

- Starting small scale 'prevention' and co-production projects – what are some of the key determinants that are affecting a marginalised group – how could you take action with that group to try and change those determinants?

- Starting small scale online 'creative' projects – how can you amplify people's creativity and can their creativity be harnessed to express to/communicate with others as is needed for most marginalised groups

- Work with and for community led groups and community events, so your work builds sustainable connections

- Leave a great legacy – ensure the community feels that they have made a difference and you have helped.

- Carry out small scale participatory action research on the impact of Covid-19 with a particular group – how you can use this to lift the voices of those whose experiences are unheard – look into organisations like 'On Our Radar' and their toolkits.

CONTRIBUTORS

This document was prepared by all members of the BPS Covid-19 Workstream -Community Resilience and Community Action with the assistance of some external reviewers.

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