

Together for Change Forum | Fforwm Gyda'n Gilydd dros Newid

Does it Count? | A yw'n Cyfrif?

Communities and Community Development Research and Evaluation

EVENT REPORT

By Amy Gill

Date and time

Tuesday 13 April, 10:00-11:45

Purpose

First in the Together for Change Forum Series, the Does it Count? online event included four presentations on communities and community development research and evaluation. Aimed at communities, third, public and private sector researchers, practitioners, planners and managers, it included facilitated discussion on what constitutes evidence of impact in community development and how the evidence base can be built.

Agenda

10:00 Introduction

10:05 **Welcome and Introduction** by Together for Change Programme Lead Sue Denman

10:15 Discussion groups and feedback on the questions:

- What are your experiences and/or expectations of what constitutes 'evidence' in asset-based community development?
- What are the gaps on our knowledge in the region and Wales?
- How can we work together to fill those gaps?

10:45 Break

10:50 Presentation: **Qualitative Impact Protocol (QuIP) and Causal Map – an exploration of the determinants of wellbeing in an asset-based approach** – Jessie Buchanan & **Most Significant Change Pembrokeshire stories: a secondary data analysis** – Gill Toms

11.10 Presentation: **Weathering the Storms – the hidden value of community anchor organisations** – Russell Todd

11.25 Presentation: **The Evaluation of the West Wales Care Partnership's Programme 7** – Sue Chichlowska

11.40 Closing remarks

11.45 Finish

Attendees

There were 35 attendees from the public, private and third sectors who collectively covered research, policy and practice.

Key points of group discussion

Following the presentations, attendees were divided into small break-out rooms to discuss three questions:

What are your experiences and/or expectations of what constitutes 'evidence' in asset-based community development?

Experience

- Collating data.
- Assets; places/people (e.g. potential service user)/ buildings.
- Housing; county councils don't have joined-up policy with local people for social/any housing.
- There are different types of evidence – both long and short feedback loops.
- Evidence is part of funding and will strengthen further funding applications. There is a focus on and a place for numbers but quantitative data alone doesn't reflect the picture properly.
- Gathering evidence of impact sometimes feels like a competitive process.

Expectation

- Recognised evidence should be realistic and proportionate; what constitutes recognised evidence?
- Both quantitative and qualitative, not either/or. There should be a balance of quantitative data and community assets. Bring together assets/priorities at the core; strengthen them and use them to support wellbeing.
- The type of evidence that is collected should be coproduced as much as possible, We should use creative methods to get feedback through stories, and gather evidence from all.
- Some results are hard to control, but sometimes the unexpected findings are the most interesting. Keep an open series of methods of evaluation and not be too structured – a problem with some funders.

What are the gaps in our knowledge in the region and Wales?

- Knowledge of ABCD; how a community perceives its wellbeing; what does 'wellbeing' really mean and how could wellbeing be improved?
- There will be differences post-COVID.
- There are gaps, but not everyone has the same gaps.
- We don't know about all the gaps because you don't know what you don't know.
- From projects when the funding runs out; this leads to a lack of sustainability and having to deal with short termism. Timescales often appear to be arbitrary.

Qualitative and Quantitative

- It can be hard and different for a smaller organisation (especially if rural) to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. How can we measure experiences and quantify the value of relationships?
- How can qualitative and quantitative data be used effectively?

Sharing information

- Communication; being aware of others' progress and sharing our own. How and what do we share?
- Can more organisations share data? Are there differences in how organisations gather and collate?
- Organisations are nervous about sharing because they are often chasing similar/the same funding pots.

Knowledge and Training

- Are there enough experts, researchers and training? Some organisations, volunteering groups and individuals are not equipped to collate and record evidence or understand what 'evidence' includes and how to record it.
- GDPR and regulations regarding photographic evidence can make it difficult to evidence or make people nervous of collecting data.
- How do we help people at community level feel comfortable with evaluating? Give people £100 and they are happy to be innovative. Ask them to evaluate it, and they aren't as comfortable with the process.

Reach

- Are needs being met? What to do about unmet needs?
- How to engage with and reach everyone? How to know who is missed and encourage people to get involved whilst still considering that not everyone wants to take part.
- Find different ways for people to use their voice – remember the importance of the user voice and their stories.
- How do we hear from more deprived communities (where people aren't able to navigate the system in the same way as communities with high social capital) and strengthen them?
- Knowing what communities want; organisations tend to expect that communities want the same as they do. Often this is not the case.

How can we work together to fill those gaps?

Invest/Fund

- Invest resources in national/regional organisations to do the evaluations of a selection of projects. Groups could then access this knowledge bank, apply a local dimension, and use it to 'prove the case' in their bids. They could then concentrate on delivering the projects for their communities. They would still report on their projects, but less on the complexities of, for example, wellbeing. This happens in medicine; there is no requirement to keep proving that something still works. Why is there an expectation in community development to keep proving it in each and every case?

- Devolve the money, power, and decision making and give it to town and community councils as they have a huge understanding of their communities.
- Too much bureaucracy; smaller funding pots are needed to support small communities in their development instead of focusing on large ones with unrealistic spending times and lengthy evaluation forms.

Share

- Sharing evidence to make it accessible, especially to communities – perhaps through agreements. Universities appear to have preferred geographical areas in which evidence is shared, but not between other universities or other bodies undertaking research. Removing the impediment that stops this happening would be beneficial as evidence does open doors. Data shared should be the bulk of the data.
- Use case studies to show and reflect, and act as a model for others to use.
- How do we bridge the gap between individual and collective?
- A central online repository to share information collected would be useful, e.g. ‘Connect Pembrokeshire Platform’.

Map

- Develop strategic/better mapping to see what there is (this appears easier in the health boards than county councils or third sector); this requires commitment to a long-term project.
- Create a community wellbeing index (could be too digital or exclusive?) to see how a community feels about its area, then coproduce, monitor, evaluate. Would be short-term for funding and a quantitative and qualitative mix for evaluation.

Plan

- Look at the mindset for new initiatives, write things down that could be useful; evidencing and evaluation should start from the beginning when the bid is submitted.
- Reflective evaluation and build knowledge; consider the time needed to evaluate if crucial. E.g. the task is often slotted into existing roles where the person then lacks the time carry it out.
- Communities are so dynamic, so it is often about finding time to record and identify relevant evidence.
- Understanding the right time to evaluate; can depend on user, e.g. inappropriate to bring up feedback when someone is upset and does not trust you yet.
- Evaluation should be everyone’s business. Everyone needs to sign up to the same way of working and consideration should be given to:
 - What is useful?
 - Are we just box ticking?
 - What is the purpose of the evaluation and research?
 - Think about who it is for and how it will benefit the majority/user. Ensure it is not shaped around funding.

Connect

- Village connectors who know their areas/people and act as advocates.
- Referrals often come through as 'loneliness', but we soon see other needs and issues, which enables support to be personalised and advocates used.
 - Identify people in need; use drop ins and local spaces in more local areas; set up groups and forums where coproduction is key, to avoid missing people and hard-to-reach groups.
 - Create a way of hearing true voices of people who have used the services without it being overly rigorous – perhaps not granular detail, but overall feeling to check if on the right track. Quantifying is hard - perhaps surveys could be used to ask people in communities how they feel.
- Be creative in engaging with people.
- More conversations and events such as this are needed.

Collaborate and Listen

- Partnership and collaborative working. Strengthen what is available and support each other in further development.
- 'Big Beasts' need to listen to smaller groups to identify how to support them and make the evaluation process easier.
- Coproduction has to be given time. Often there are pressures from local authorities and health boards on communities to fulfil narrow criteria and move at a certain pace, but real change moves at their pace. Trust the communities to know what is best for them; Ask them the ways they think should be used to measure their outcomes.
- We need to take a big leap of faith, e.g. BCT Invest Local programme in Hakin and Hubberston
- Reflect more using storytelling and case studies There is sometimes stigma around people coming forward to ask for support or to get involved in a community project.
- Using Action Learning Sets as a methodology. It is a great forum for peer mentoring.

Learn from others

- Adapting tools for communities; develop evidencing tools learnt in youth work such as smiley faces to record feelings; or learn from the commercial world and pick up on a quick feedback loop on what communities are thinking/feeling/their opinions? If metrics start to fall, then use this loop to adapt and perhaps change what is being delivered.

Measure outcomes

- Consider an outcome focus – what are the outcomes that different activities aim to achieve? Measuring wellbeing is difficult – measuring outcomes is simple and works well.
- E.g. with MSC or an 'outcome star' using the 'I' statements to create visual web to show the outcome measures. MSC looks at what things are like now and before; personal, human stories add to the quantitative data. This method is sustainable but funders require many stories as well as many people to prove it.

General challenges

- Often government agendas determine the evidence that is asked to be collected.
- If we let the evidence determine the service, we will have to keep collecting it.

- People often try to prove what they know to outside bodies.
- There is pressure from funders; to provide more, that you will be super-impactful with each person, and to reach more-and-more people.
- Public sector research is often short term. There have been good pilot projects but there is no money to sustain them in the long term; the public sector provides services to fill gaps; but they ask the wrong questions.
- The public sector should evaluate if they should be doing something first rather than just evaluate what they've done.
- Traditionally the health boards deal with illness, and Public Health Wales deals with wellness. HDUHB's recent Framework talks about prevention and wellbeing, but will take time for it to become embedded in culture.

Abstracts of presentations

[Does it Count? programme](#)

[Does it Count? presentations and event recording](#)

Sue Denman Welcome and Introduction

Individuals and groups have been very effective in protecting their communities during the pandemic, and by doing so have taken pressure off services. They have demonstrated that they definitely 'count' in that they will be crucial to recovery and rebuilding strength as we move towards a 'new normal' in Wales and beyond.

But do they 'count' in research and evaluation terms? I am referring here to quantitative methods that are so highly valued by policy makers and some grant givers. In my introduction to the event, I will examine the differences in thinking on what constitutes robust methods in research and evaluation and their appropriateness to asset-based approaches to community development. I will also present up-to-date evidence to show that 'people power' can have positive effects on the wellbeing of individuals and communities, and benefit public services too.

Jessie Buchanan Qualitative Impact Protocol (QuIP) and Causal Map – an exploration of the determinants of wellbeing in an asset-based approach

An exploratory study led by Together for Change that is piloting a qualitative research method in Pembrokeshire. The study will consider the utility of an approach informed by QuIP and the use of the Causal Map application in being able to establish a baseline knowledge of the key factors and influences that affect the wellbeing of individuals and place-based communities at a community or town level. This presentation will focus upon the project methodology.

Gill Toms Most Significant Change Pembrokeshire stories: a secondary data analysis

This short presentation will provide an overview of the Most Significant Change approach and explain the rationale for the secondary data analysis. The secondary analysis considered the role of volunteering in wellbeing and prevention work impacts. It also considered the benefits of exploring most significant change stories using different forms of analysis. This is an ongoing analysis and initial findings will be shared and next steps considered.

Russell Todd Weathering the Storms – the hidden value of community anchor organisations

The term 'Community Anchor Organisations' refers to those locally-rooted organisations that are independent of the state; owned by and accountable to the community; and part of a social infrastructure which responds in a multiplicity of ways to emerging community concerns and ambitions. When Anchors' existence is threatened, so too are a web of productive relationships and partnerships which link individuals and small community groups to each other, and to organisations that have the potential power and resources to improve people's living and working conditions.

The end of the Communities First programme in 2018 was one such threat (but there have been others) and the Weathering the Storms report was motivated by wanting to know more about what Anchors are, what values they hold, what they contribute to the wellbeing of communities, and how they challenge and influence the development of policy, public services, and the economy of Wales as a whole.

The enquiry started in 2019 and was intended to be a co-produced piece of research with 11 Anchors across a diverse geography of Wales. But the COVID-19 pandemic emerged and the research found itself in a vastly different context as the Anchors attempted to respond to local needs, both individually and as part of their wider web of social networks and infrastructure.

The presentation will provide an overview of the key findings under the following headings:

- Central characteristics of Community Anchor Organisations
- How Anchors operate
- Their relationships and networks

It will also highlight several ideas and themes informed by and related to Anchors' experiences for communities policy in Wales.

Sue Chichlowska The Evaluation of the West Wales Care Partnership's Programme 7

Sue will be presenting insights from a snapshot of a qualitative evaluation of community connector activity across the three counties of West Wales. The role of a link worker/community connector/social prescriber/networker is to engage people in community activity to increase connections for all, to reduce loneliness and build wellbeing. The three counties deliver the service through the health sector, social care and the third sector. The challenge is to accurately evaluate the impact of these services when they are delivered from different perspectives with different governance, finance and process demands. Research, evaluation, quality improvement and audit are all important tools for understanding the effectiveness of delivering our services. Sue's presentation will address the practicalities of using different protocols for answering different questions and how we best use and disseminate the learning from our attempts at evaluating the impact, efficacy and effectiveness of service delivery.

Evaluation of the event

Some main themes arose from the group discussions. In particular, the expectations of outside bodies, such as local authorities, health boards and government with respect to how communities gather and disseminate evidence. Further challenges include the pressures of funding and the unrealistic timing and pace at which communities are expected to work. A possible solution may be to give communities access to training and experts for guidance with collecting and sharing data effectively. The groups mentioned several different evaluation techniques, such as MSC, ABCD and outcome measures, as well as the importance of ensuring a balance is achieved, that is, ensuring both quantitative and qualitative methods are used together, rather than one dominating. It is believed that coproduction could be used to help achieve the difficult task of measuring experiences, for example, through forums, drop-ins and groups, where the focus is on employing creative communication strategies to share information. It was widely agreed that trusting and investing in communities is highly valued.

Poll Results:

Overall, what is your opinion of today's Forum event?

64% - very good

36% - good

Would you like Together for Change to organise more meetings on the theme of Community Development?

92% - yes

8% - not sure

Feedback:

"A very well run and successful morning with plenty of points to ponder and hopefully further developments for us all ahead."

"An interesting session."

"It all went extremely well – professionally managed and executed and obviously very well prepared – thank you."

"The event was terrific and really thought provoking."

Next event

Spotlight on Community Art - The Value of the Arts on the Wellbeing of Communities

Thursday 20 May 10:00-11:45