

Together We Can!

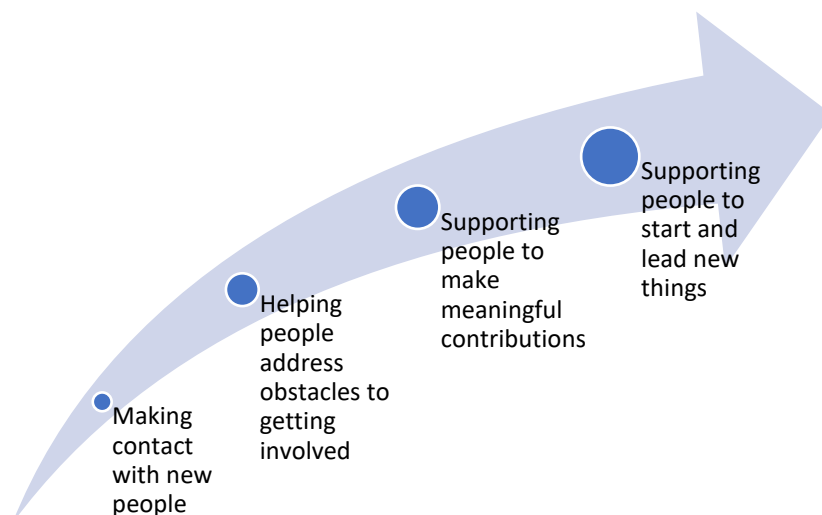
Year 2 (2018) Summary Report

Together We Can! is a 3-year intergenerational, community-building project within the Firs & Bromford neighbourhood (east Birmingham). Much has changed and developed within our neighbourhood and our project. This summary will take you on a journey through the second year of *TWC!*, outlining what we have done this year, and what our neighbours are saying about the difference it is making. For more detail on any of the areas summarised below, get hold of a copy of our full, 60-page annual report – available at <http://opendoorcf.co.uk/evaluations/>

A flourishing local community, with flourishing connections between flourishing people

The *Together We Can!* pathway

TogetherWeCan! activities seek to support both young people and adults on a developmental journey from ‘first contact’, through ‘clearing obstacles’ and ‘pathways in to participation’, towards being able to ‘make meaningful contributions’ (within the neighbourhood and beyond), and to develop skills, confidence and connections to initiate and lead their own groups and activities. We call this our project ‘pathway’ – but we recognise that people will join the journey at different stages, that the journey is not necessarily a straight line, and that not everyone will want to become a group or activity leader.



Together We Can! is funded and supported by:

Local Trust

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NEIGHBOURS TOGETHER



LOTTERY FUNDED

What have we done this year?

Year 2 has seen a subtle shift in from an emphasis on 'enabling the new' towards *deepening and strengthening the things that are now beginning to develop* – relationships, groups, and individuals – while not losing that ongoing commitment to engage more of our neighbours.

Through partnerships with other local organisations, two further paid workers have joined the 4 members of the *TWC!* core team (Paul, Lucy, Dan & Flo), developing our work in 'green spaces' (Cath) and with families with younger children (Ria).

This year Paul has grown the regular Street Connector team to 7, with 4 additional residents supporting the connecting work around particular street events. The team supported 10 street events this year, and a further 11 people have been supported to set up and/or lead 7 new local groups, activities and projects – with a further 54 local residents engaging within those projects as active volunteers. As a result, we've found ourselves engaging with 119 people in door-step conversations, and a massive 388 people (160 adults and 228 children) through 'micro-level' street events.

Dan has led on our detached youth work (engaging 85 young people) and 'We Can' school projects (151 young people). 27 young people participated in our locally-based 'We Can' groups during 2018.

Lucy has led the teams that host Open Door drop-in sessions at the Hub (engaging 114 local people) and Women's Group sessions at Ambridge House (involving 64 women). She has also worked with 33 people this year offering 1-2-1 support.

Flo has supported 24 young people through 'I Can' drop-ins, and 28 young people through 1-2-1 work, as well as supporting new and established youth drop-ins and youth clubs, and detached youth work.

Our 'golden threads':

- Relationships have to 'go deep enough' for trust to grow
- Spaces (both physical spaces and particular gatherings) need to feel welcoming, generous and safe enough for relationships to deepen
- Hearing, sharing and celebrating local stories deepens our relationships and generates energy for new things to emerge
- As paid practitioners, we seek to 'bring ourselves to work', seeking friendship with our neighbours and receiving the gifts and support that others bring to us
- A long-term commitment to consistent presence, looking for change over generations – not short-term funding cycles
- Consistently 'widening the circles', 'hunting the edges', so that we are always drawing in new people as connectors, contributors and community leaders
- Constantly shifting, in our work, from paid practitioners doing things 'for' or 'with' our neighbours, to activity that is 'done by' our neighbours, working together
- Getting the scale right: working within a neighbourhood big enough to hold a lot of diversity, but small enough to have a sense of coherence; and recognising that many neighbours will only get to know each other in meaningful ways on a 'micro-local' (i.e. street-level) scale
- Investing time and effort in partnerships where there is a trusted point of contact who understands and supports our approach

What difference are we making?

Local people (both young people and adults) are telling us there are **more opportunities to do things with their neighbours**. In 2018 we supported the development of 11 new locally-rooted, resident-led groups here: 6 groups through and beyond 'PIE' (small grant) events, and 5 additional groups. These have included: 'Flavours of Hodge Hill' (cooking classes, breakfasts and events catering); beauty classes; 'B36 Fitness' classes; 'Making Friends through Arts & Crafts'; 'Showcasing Art'; a new after-school club; Zumba classes; a 'Walk & Talk' group; a litter-picking group; a Girls' Group led by local young adult women; and a heritage project led by local young people.

We are also finding that, through the work that we've been doing, local people are feeling **more connected to their neighbours**, across age and ethnic differences, in relationships of trust, friendship and mutual support. Local residents know more of their neighbours by name, and say they have more neighbours they can turn to for help.

People are also growing in confidence, skills and connections to **overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives**. Residents are growing in confidence and skills for employment-readiness, feeling more confident to cope when life is tough, and feeling more confident to participate in local groups and activities as a result of their involvement in *TWC!*.

At the heart of *TogetherWeCan!* is a commitment to increasing the ability of local people to **share their passions, gifts and skills with their neighbours**. People are telling us both that they feel more *confident* to share those gifts, and that they have more *opportunities* to share them.

What are we learning?

TogetherWeCan! is committed to ongoing processes of reflecting on what we do, and learning from both what's gone well, and what has been more challenging. Here's some of what we're learning.

Getting people involved

- Street Connecting (door-knocking) and Street Events (focused on small areas within the wider neighbourhood) are a vital cornerstone for building engagement with our neighbours, through intentional conversations with those we meet.
- 'Places of Welcome' are vital 'entry points' for neighbours to get their first taste of community involvement, as well as deepening their sense of belonging and their ability to contribute. The arrangement of the space, the tone of the welcome, and the ethos of inclusion and participation, are all essential elements of a flourishing 'Place of Welcome'.
- Personal invitation, and specific encouragement, from 'key people' in our neighbourhood, is a vital way of drawing people into involvement, and supporting them to share their gifts.

Nurturing welcoming, resilient groups

- People who are starting local groups almost always begin with lots of enthusiasm and energy, but have often found it harder going as time has gone on – with 'ups and downs' in attendance, and fragilities in both relationships between people, and for people in their own lives.
- Group leaders talk about the importance of creating the right 'atmosphere', and the need for personal qualities like confidence, patience, empathy, openness and a passion for community.
- More than anything else, many of the groups we have supported have highlighted the importance of working as a *team*, rather than relying on one or two 'group leaders' – with a high level of shared responsibility for 'making it happen' together.
- Alongside existing team members, some groups recognised the importance of being constantly on the look-out for the contributions that a new participant / team member can bring, and also identifying previously untapped gifts of existing team members.

Nurturing and supporting 'key people'

- As well as group leaders and team members, we are discovering the vital contribution to community-building made by local 'connectors': people who are well-trusted but often 'under the radar', excellent listeners but also 'the gift of the gab', and keen to uncover people's gifts.
- We have heard many key people locally talk about the pressures on their lives of money struggles, of their time in the community being squeezed by paid work, of family / caring demands, and of traumatic experiences (e.g. bereavement, illness) both past and present
- This year has highlighted the need to explore more intentional forms of *peer support* (e.g. through small-scale, locally-rooted social enterprises like Listen Threads), alongside the support people find already through involvement in groups, and 1-2-1 support and mentoring.

Importance of community venues

- 2018 has highlighted the vital importance of community venues that: are close to where people live; offer a diverse range of free or low-cost spaces for groups and activities; and are consistent, friendly and generous in their welcome.
- A number of our groups have struggled this year to find the right venue in the right place locally. For some, creating temporary 'pop-up' venues (e.g. 'Pop-Up Places of Welcome' & pop-up Junk Food venues) has been worth the high effort involved.

Contributing to the 'community ecology'

Through *TWC!*'s work, we have begun to think of a flourishing local community as an 'ecology' – a complex system of living organisms, connected together in relationships of interdependence. If one part of the ecology changes, it affects all the other parts, often in ways that are unpredictable. For Firs & Bromford, we are learning that this requires, among other factors:

- Growing and multiplying spaces for connection, support and participation
- The inter-connected work of place-making: developing the physical environment, growing community buildings and services, and deepening a strong, positive sense of community
- Developing 'community *institutions*' and 'community *traditions*' – regular (often annual) gatherings and events that both offer spaces for story-sharing and celebrating, but also themselves *contribute* to the collective story
- Growing the connections between groups, collaborating together and supporting each other, rather than defending their own 'patch'
- A shared commitment to 'widening the circles' of participation – in groups, and at the 'community family' level – and expanding our horizons through contact with other places

What happens next?

Community change takes time! As we begin Year 3 of this 3-year-funded project, it is necessary not just to plan for the next 12 months, but to ask serious questions about what develops beyond the lifetime of *TWC!*. Here are just a few of our priorities for this next phase:

- Being more intentional in supporting the growth and development of *teams* – and spaces for peer support and development (including small-scale social enterprises)
- Developing informal and more formal learning opportunities, to enable people to develop personally, and to develop skills and wisdom for group, team and community leadership
- Promoting and supporting collaboration between different groups, places and activities, in the work of 'place-making' and the further development of community 'traditions'
- Finding and nurturing active connectors and group leaders from the black and minority ethnic backgrounds represented locally