

Together We Can!

Evaluation Report – Year 1 (2017)

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1 Introducing Together We Can!

Welcome to the very first annual evaluation report for *TogetherWeCan!*. In it you will find an introduction to the project, and the Firs and Bromford neighbourhood in which we live and work. We will take you on a journey through the first year of the project, from our initial plans and hopes for it, through what has actually happened this year, to what we have heard from our neighbours about the difference it has made so far. You will find stories of a neighbourhood that has more places where people can feel like they belong, and of neighbours who feel more connected to each other, more able to overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives, and more able to share their passions and skills with each other.

A core commitment of the *TogetherWeCan!* project is to open up a space to experiment – to try out ideas and approaches that are ‘locally-grown’, innovative, and sometimes even a bit risky – and to *learn* from those experiments, both from what has gone well, and from what has proved more difficult. Here, then, we will also share some of what we have learnt so far – and what we’re planning and hoping to do in the next year of the project.

Come with us on the journey!

1.1 Setting the Scene

Together We Can! is a 3-year intergenerational, community-building project within the Firs & Bromford neighbourhood (east Birmingham), undertaken as a partnership between Worth Unlimited, Open Door Community Foundation, and Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together.

Across the two ‘age bands’ (young people and adults), *TWC!* pursues three parallel ‘strands’ of work:

- **‘street connecting’** - making connections with, and between, local people, and growing new forms of associational life from those connections;
- **‘doing stuff together’** - facilitating places and groups which local people feel they belong and can contribute to;
- **‘support and development’** - supporting local people to grow in the confidence, skills and connections needed to be able to participate in and contribute to the life of their neighbourhood, and wider world.

Through a range of focused activity, *TWC!* brings together youth work and adult-focused community work to maximise the opportunities for intergenerational (as well as cross-cultural) interaction and relationship-building. Our overall aim is to contribute to “a flourishing community, with flourishing connections between flourishing people”. We seek to help and support our local people to establish sustainable livelihoods, understood as encompassing and developing a holistic range of assets including personal skills and strong social networks, as well as financial security.

Money and People

TogetherWeCan! represents a significant financial investment in the Firs & Bromford estate, with funding coming primarily from the Big Lottery Fund ‘Reaching Communities’ programme, and from

BLF's 'Big Local' programme in the Firs & Bromford, led by the local residents group Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together. With this funding, *TWC!!* employs 4 full-time workers:

- An adult-focused **Street Connector Mentor** (Paul Wright), who finds, supports and works alongside local 'connectors' and people with ideas for local groups and activities
- An adult-focused **Support & Development Worker** (Sarah Maxfield), who facilitates regular 'places of welcome' and supports people to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community, and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives
- A **Street Connector for Young People** (Dan Sandford-Smith), who leads on our street-based engagement ('detached work') with local young people, and our intergenerational social action work
- A **Support & Development Worker for Young People** (Flo Berrow), who supports young people to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community, and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives, and also assists with the detached youth work

TogetherWeCan! is also supported with additional time and resource from Worth Unlimited (the Hub is the *TWC!*'s workers' full-time office base, and Worth's CEO chairs the project steering group and attends team meetings) and Hodge Hill Church, with Al Barrett giving significant time to leading team meetings, project management, and co-ordinating the evaluation process. Thrive Together Birmingham have also provided (free) non-managerial supervision for our Support & Development Worker (Adults), a role which has proved particularly intense and demanding emotionally.

Our Neighbourhood

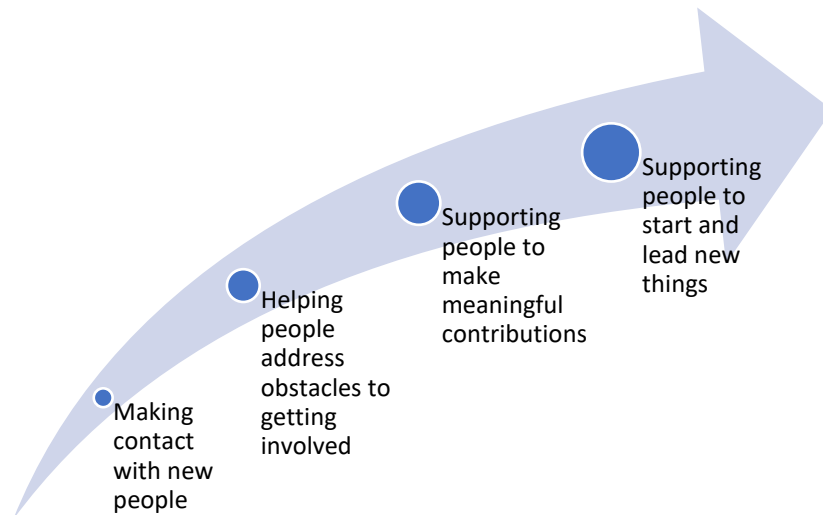
'Firs & Bromford' is a neighbourhood built in the 1950s (Firs) and 1960s (Bromford), on the eastern edge of the city of Birmingham. Like many other 'outer estates' built at a similar time, it has clear edges (including the M6 motorway to the north), and only a few access roads on and off the estate. There are three primary schools on the estate (and a cluster of primary and secondary schools just to the south of the neighbourhood, although these tend to serve the central Hodge Hill area more than Firs & Bromford). There are also two church buildings (one Roman Catholic, one Pentecostal), two Birmingham City Council-run community buildings, and a Children's Centre. While some of these buildings are well-used by the community, some of the others are not. A vital 'base' (staff offices and one venue for groups and activities) for the *TogetherWeCan!* project is The Hub, run by Worth Unlimited as a youth centre since 2010.

When the estate was built, the first residents were almost entirely of White British or Irish heritage. In the last decade, this has begun to change quite dramatically, and now close to half the residents of Firs & Bromford are from African, African-Caribbean, Asian and Eastern European backgrounds. One of the foundation stones of *TogetherWeCan!* is the vision statement of Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together (FBNT Big Local Plan 2012):

*"We wish to develop our community into a place where all feel welcome,
all feel that they belong and all feel that they can flourish,
whatever path has brought us to live together"*

The project '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. If local residents feel **more connected to their neighbours**, if they're **better able to overcome obstacles** to living flourishing lives, and if they're **more able to share their passions, gifts and skills** with their neighbours, then *TogetherWeCan!* will be achieving its key outcomes.

1.2 How It Works - Our 'Theory of Change'

Growing a flourishing local community is not like operating a machine. It's not as simple as putting something in at one end, pulling a few levers, pressing a few buttons, and seeing the finished product pop out at the other end. We tend to think of it more 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.

TogetherWeCan! is part of the 'ecology' of the Firs & Bromford neighbourhood – but it is only a *part*. What we do through *TWC!* we hope makes a positive difference locally, but when change happens in our neighbourhood it is never just down to what we have done. Nevertheless, we hope that through the main activities of *TogetherWeCan!* (Street Connecting, Support and Development, and 'Doing Stuff Together'), we can make a significant and unique contribution towards realising Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together's vision of a flourishing local community and achieving *TWC!*'s key outcomes (see above).

Very early on in the life of this project, we identified two important added elements to this 'ecology'. The first was the vital importance of **places and groups where people can feel they belong, and where they feel they can make a contribution**. Connecting neighbours together can sometimes happen by chance in the street – but much more often it happens when people have the opportunity to gather together and spend time in each other's company getting to know each other better. Supporting people to grow in confidence often needs generous amounts of time spent 1-2-1 with someone, where they can be the sole centre of attention. But for each of us to begin to make a contribution of our own

passions, gifts and skills, we need spaces where we can deepen our friendships with others and feel like we share in the ownership of what happens.

This learning has resulted in a development of our 'Theory of Change' (see diagram below) and anticipated outcomes, compared with our original Big Lottery Fund - Reaching Communities funding application. Where originally we saw 'people having more opportunities to do things with their neighbours' as an indicator of people being 'better connected to their neighbours' (Outcome 1), and people setting up new groups, activities and enterprises as an indicator of people being 'more able to share their passions and skills' (Outcome 3), we now see both of these primarily as indicators of people having more places and groups to which they feel they can belong and contribute (an additional Outcome 4).

A second additional element was an awareness that **how we do things is as important as what we do**. For the staff and volunteers involved in *TogetherWeCan!*, the way we approach our neighbours and relate them, the feel of the spaces we are involved in facilitating, and the part we play in the wider stories of the neighbourhood, are perhaps more crucial than the detail of the activities we undertake from day to day. At the beginning of the *TWC!* project, we identified six of these 'how-factors' (and have refined and added to them as we've learnt this year – see Section 5, below):

- A belief in people – their value, and their potential
- A commitment to long-term presence in this neighbourhood
- Creating spaces and places that feel safe and welcoming
- Growing relationships of trust
- Prioritizing action that is led by local residents, not by 'professionals' or external 'helpers'
- The importance of hearing, sharing and celebrating local stories

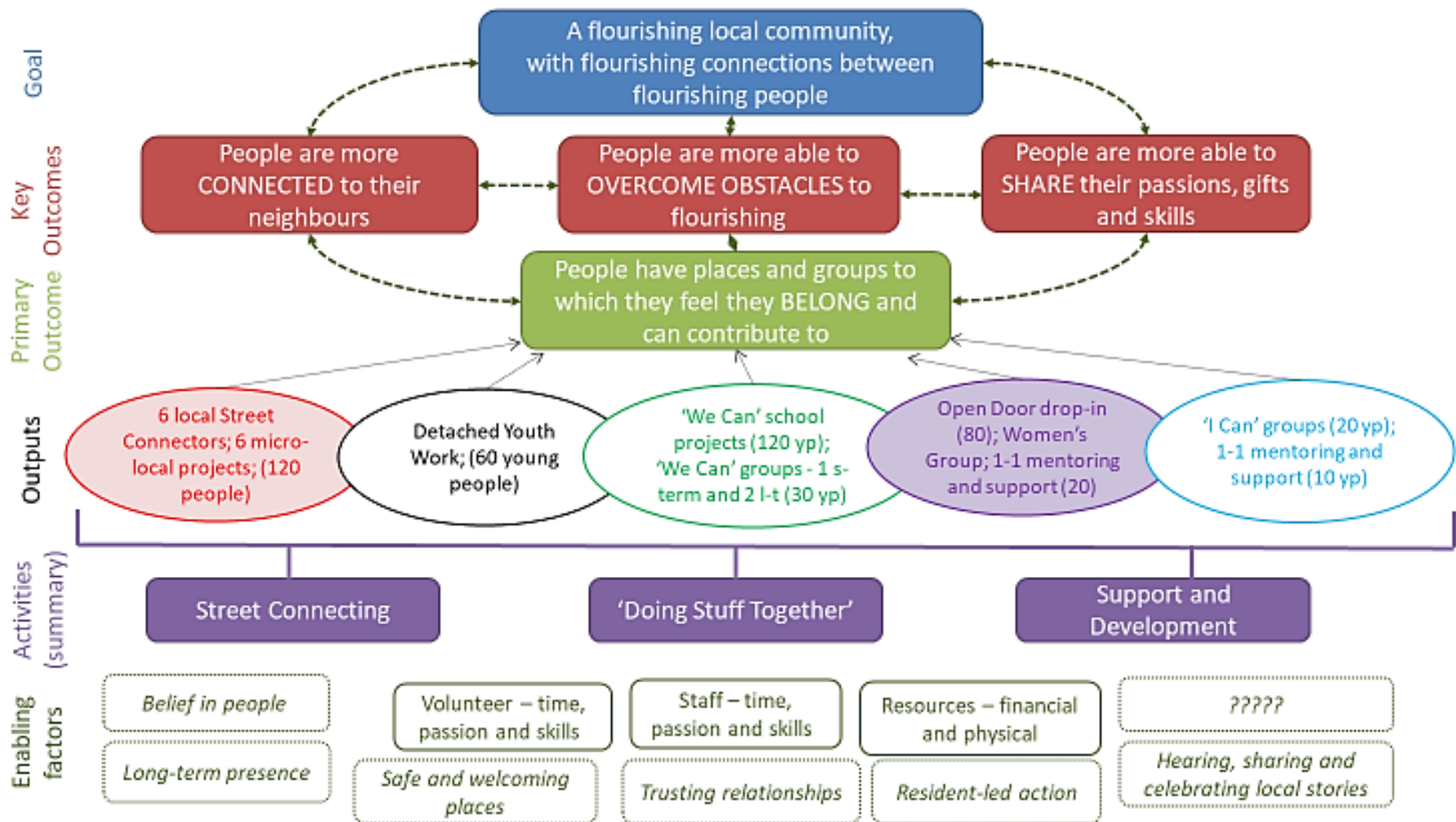
1.3 Evaluation and Reflection

In keeping with the ethos of the project, the *TogetherWeCan!* reflection and evaluation takes an intentional participatory and self-evaluative approach. Supported by an external evaluation partner, Jane Perry, the staff team worked together to design a mixed-mode monitoring and evaluation approach which creates quantitative and qualitative information regarding *TWC!* activities/outputs (process) and outcomes (impact) – see Appendix A for full details. Jane has worked closely with the team throughout the year, assisting with design and implementation of monitoring/evaluation. This provided additional technical skills and expertise, together with a degree of external oversight.

Information captured through monitoring and evaluation has been integrated with an on-going programme of reflection, facilitated by Nurture Development. This two-way conversation allows real-time learning to be captured and assessed against wider evidence, in turn shaping future monitoring, evaluation and reflection activity.

This report presents a summary of that learning for Year 1.

Our Theory of Change



2 What have we achieved?

In this section, we'll outline what we have *done* this year (2017) through the various strands of work of the *TogetherWeCan!* project, and some facts and figures about *how many local residents* we have engaged with and supported so far. We'll also share some initial reflections on how things have worked *in practice* (compared with the *theory* we outlined in Section 1.2, above) – what's happened as we expected, and some of the surprises we've encountered in the past year. For a summary of some of the facts and figures in this section, see Appendix C at the end of this report.

2.1 Street Connecting

Adults

Paul Wright, our Street Connector Mentor (employed by Open Door Community Foundation) has been engaged in four main strands of work this year:

- Engaging neighbours through door-step conversations (as part of the Street Connectors team), 'Hodge Hill Cuppa' sessions (engaging parents at the end of the school day, over a cuppa in the school playground), and other local events
- Supporting neighbours to plan and run 'micro-local' street events (focused in on just one street, a green space, or a small cluster of neighbouring streets)
- Supporting resident-led groups, activities and projects to start, grow and develop (including coordinating 'PIE' events for people with ideas to present them to other neighbours, and to bid for small grants to help make their ideas happen)
- Supporting and mentoring a growing number of active residents, as regular street connectors, street event organisers, project leaders and project volunteers



During this first year of *TogetherWeCan!* Paul and the team, including 5 regular volunteer Street Connectors, have worked with a further 9 residents to plan and run 7 street events (including knocking on doors of the neighbours immediately local to the event). Another 17 people who have been involved in setting up and/or leading local groups, activities and projects – and through them supported a further 58 volunteers within those projects. Of those projects, 4 have been brand new developments in 2017 (see Section 3, below for more details).

As a result, we've found ourselves engaging with 124 people in door-step conversations, 348 people (144 adults and 204 children) through 'micro-level' street events, and a total of 662 through other community events locally. These achievements are considerably above and beyond our original Year 1 targets.¹

The success of the **street events** in particular, especially during the warmer months of the year, has been particularly notable in this first year of the project, and has shown the particular 'pulling power' of having an event right on your doorstep, with a face-to-face invitation coming from immediate neighbours, and the opportunity to 'bring and share' at a scale that makes each person's contribution feel both manageable and meaningful.



¹ Year 1 Target - to recruit 6 local residents (as 'connectors') to develop 6 events or projects, through which we would engage 120 neighbours.

Case study: FAB Kids

Through doorstep conversations, our Street Connector team picked up from a number of residents a need for 'stay & play' children's groups locally. The team emphasised that we *work with* local people to set things up, and don't ourselves 'provide'.

In one conversation on the streets, Paul was chatting about this idea with some mums. They talked of their poor experience of the local Children's Centre, but also of skills and experience they had in childcare. Paul wondered if they'd be up for setting something up – and they were passionate and enthusiastic in response.

Paul helped them find some training, and also linked them up with someone else who'd recently become a grandma, who had experience of supporting Kids Club at the Hub.

After a trial event in summer 2017, 'FAB Kids' launched at the Hub, which they quickly outgrew, and moved to the larger space at Bromford Bridge Christian Church.

Worth Unlimited provides FAB Kids with an organisational 'umbrella' (to ensure areas like volunteer recruitment and safeguarding are done as well as possible), and *TWC!* workers (Dan and Janey from Worth Unlimited) have found ways of 'getting stuck in' and being part of the team – while keeping the leadership of the FAB Kids mums.

FAB Kids now runs a weekly after-school club as well as the weekly Stay & Play and numbers in both groups are continuing to grow. FAB Kids mums and nans have also started coming to the weekly Open Door Community Lunch and actively helping with other community events. As a result of the deepening relationships with the *TWC!* team, Sarah has worked with three of the mums on benefits and family issues.

Through *TWC!* connections, FAB Kids mums approached St Wilfrid's Community Centre about the possibility of a 'Family Disco' night – which is now a popular, twice-monthly community event.



Young People

Our youth-focused team (Dan Sandford-Smith and Flo Berrow, employed by Worth Unlimited) has been connecting with local young people, and connecting them together with other young people and their adult neighbours, through three main strands of work:

- Detached youth work sessions, in parks and other green spaces, outside shops and other places where young people gather locally, and in spaces like The Real Junk Food Kitchen (see above)
- Short-term 'We Can' social action projects with young people from local primary (Tame Valley Academy and Heathlands) and secondary (Park Hall Academy) schools, working with classes of young people to plan, deliver and evaluate a project, based in the Firs and Bromford neighbourhood, that helps make the neighbourhood a better place to live
- Locally based 'We Can' groups, meeting together after school and in the school holidays, engaging in short-term and longer-term intergenerational social action projects in the neighbourhood

Again, we have exceeded all our initial targets², engaging 99 young people through detached work, 34 in local 'We Can' groups, and 290 through the schools projects. This last figure is particularly high, as we were able to engage an additional local primary school (Heathlands) to those with whom we already had positive partnerships.



² Our Year 1 targets were to engage 60 young people through street-based detached work, 120 young people through school 'We Can' projects, and 30 young people through the ongoing locally-based 'We Can' groups.

Case study: intergenerational social action

One of the Year 6 classes from Tame Valley Academy, working with Dan, through 8 weeks of planning sessions (which included walk-abouts on the estate, and thinking about what makes an ideal community), began to come up with ideas focusing in on food, and activities with older people.

Through a link forged in previous social action projects with Ambridge House (the community centre attached to a sheltered housing scheme), the young people settled on plans for an afternoon tea at Ambridge, with each pupil inviting either their own grandparent, or an older local neighbour.

The young people served food and drinks at the afternoon tea, but also sat with the older people they had invited, and with the help of conversation starters, told stories together, and found out interesting things about each other.

For one older person, recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's, the visit from neighbour Elaine and two young people to invite her down to the event was the critical step for her to re-connect with neighbours she hadn't spent time with for months.

One of the young people, with her nan, applied for funding from a PIE event to continue the afternoon teas into the future.



2.2 Support and Development

Adults

Sarah Maxfield (employed by Open Door Community Foundation) leads on our support and development work with local adults, and specifically through three main strands of work:

- Leading the team (staff and volunteers) that hosts the weekly Open Door drop-in session at The Hub, offering a 'place of welcome' and hospitality, a listening ear, and multiple forms of practical support, from using computers and accessing the internet, to help writing CVs and applying for jobs, to support and advice (through our partnerships with Birmingham Community Law Centre, Crisis and St Martin's Centre for Health and Healing) about benefits entitlements and challenging unfair decisions. Open Door also leads in to a weekly Community Lunch which both encourages people to bring and share together and provides food for people to be able to take away with them to use during the week.
- Leading the facilitation of weekly Women's Group sessions, at Ambridge House, that bring together women from many different nationalities to plan, lead and share activities together (many centred around cooking and eating).
- Working with people on a 1-2-1 basis, through both referrals (from local primary schools) and self-referrals (dropping in to Open Door or other regular groups), to support people through crisis situations (e.g. eviction), to navigate systems (e.g. applying for benefits and challenging unfair decisions), and to grow in confidence to be able to participate in local groups and activities (e.g. through emotional support, making introductions, and accompanying to groups).

Sarah also works together with Paul on the weekly 'Hodge Hill Cuppa' sessions, engaging local primary school parents at the end of the school day.

In Year 1, Sarah has supporting 87 people through Open Door, and 30 people through 1-2-1s. We also engaged 71 people through Community Lunches, and 55 women through Women's Group. Again, this exceeds the original targets for this work.³



One of the challenges this year has been in our efforts to establish a second venue for an Open Door drop-in session, at the Firs end of the neighbourhood. Initially promising conversations, first with

³ to engage and support 80 people through twice-weekly Open Door drop-in sessions, and support 20 people through 1-2-1 work

Hodge Hill Primary Care Centre, and then with Firs Primary School, both ended up floundering, when neither institution was able to make available a regular, accessible space in which drop-ins could happen. The surprising growth of The Real Junk Food Kitchen at St Wilfrid's Community Centre (on the Firs part of the estate), however, has almost by accident created a second thriving 'place of welcome' and mutual support, and one of our plans for 2018 is to more closely connect the support resources of Open Door with the people who come to TRJFK.

Young People

Flo Berrow's support and development work with young people parallels that of Sarah's work with adults (see above), and often overlaps, with Flo supporting the weekly Open Door drop-in sessions, and Flo and Sarah working together to support both adults and young people in family contexts. As well as supporting Dan in the youth-focused connecting work (see above), Flo also leads on two distinct strands of work:

- Facilitating weekly 'I Can' groups – a drop-in environment tailored specifically for young people, along similar lines to the all-age Open Door drop-ins
- Supporting young people 1-2-1, on both an appointment and drop-in basis

Over this first year of this work (begun 'from scratch', in contrast to Open Door's already well-established format), we have met our target to support 20 young people through 'I Can' drop-ins, and dramatically exceeded our target for 1-2-1 work, supporting 29 young people⁴.



⁴ Year 1 targets: to develop twice-weekly 'I Can' groups to engage and support 20 young people, and to support 10 young people through 1-2-1 work.

Case study: family support

A is a young man who Flo met through detached work at the park, and who occasionally popped in to Thursday 'We Can' sessions, but wasn't really engaged in these. In a conversation between A and Flo, they discovered that they had both gone to the same school. A shared that he was struggling at school and that the teachers didn't understand his ADHD. At one detached work session, A told Flo that he'd been kicked out of school, in the middle of preparing for GCSEs.

Flo had met A's mum and dad occasionally while out at the park, and arranged to meet with mum to support her to help A with exam revision. Flo also tried to get in touch with school to get A's exam timetable.

During A's first exam, his mum phoned Flo to say that A was causing trouble. Flo went to school immediately, who agreed to work with Flo to support A through his GCSEs. A started coming to the Hub several times a week, including to Open Door drop-ins, with *TWC!* staff and volunteers supporting him with exam revision.

Sarah supported A's parents to apply for the benefits they were entitled to, and a successful mandatory reconsideration on one benefits application. Flo and Sarah supported to A to access a travel pass for college, which he is now attending regularly.

Dad said the *TWC!* team restored his faith in 'professionals' – their local rootedness, their 'bridging' between different organisations, and their persistent advocacy.

3 Our Impact: More Places to Belong

In Firs & Bromford in 2017, we have seen a significant growth in the number of places, spaces and groups where people can come and meet other neighbours, make friends, and feel they belong and can make a meaningful contribution. Some of those new places are as a direct result of *TogetherWeCan!*'s work, and other spaces and groups are better connected together, and with local residents, because of our work.

Early in 2017, the *TWC!* team mapped out the core *TWC!* activities, other local associations we had connections with, and groups that had recently begun through our 6-month pilot of the Street Connecting approach. We tried to locate activities in relation to two axes: adult-focused, intergenerational, and youth-focused (vertical axis); and Street Connecting, 'Doing Stuff Together', and Support & Development (horizontal axis) – have a look at Activities Map 1 on the next page.

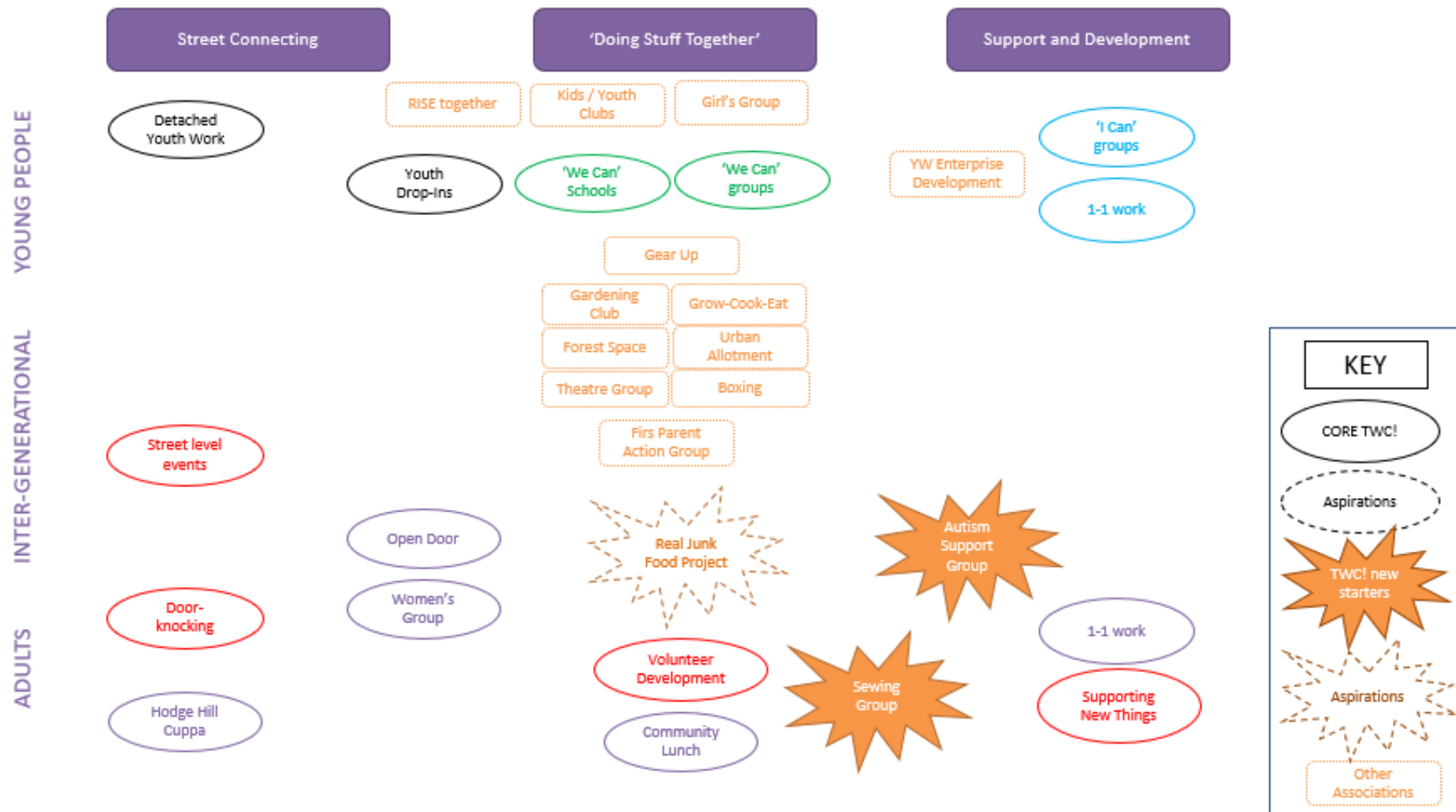
Over the course of 2017, at least four brand new groups have developed as a direct result of *TWC!*'s encouragement, support and development:

- The Real Junk Food Kitchen (TRJFK) – a weekly community café, based at St Wilfrid's Community Centre (see Case Study, below)
- FAB Kids 'Stay & Plays' and After-School Clubs – based at Bromford Bridge Christian Church and the Hub (see Case Study in Section 2.1, above)
- A weekly Arts, Crafts & Flower-arranging group – based at Ambridge House
- A group planning and developing a 'Bromford Village Green' area – with raised beds and benches, with further developments in tandem with Birmingham City Council's plans for spatial regeneration of that part of the estate

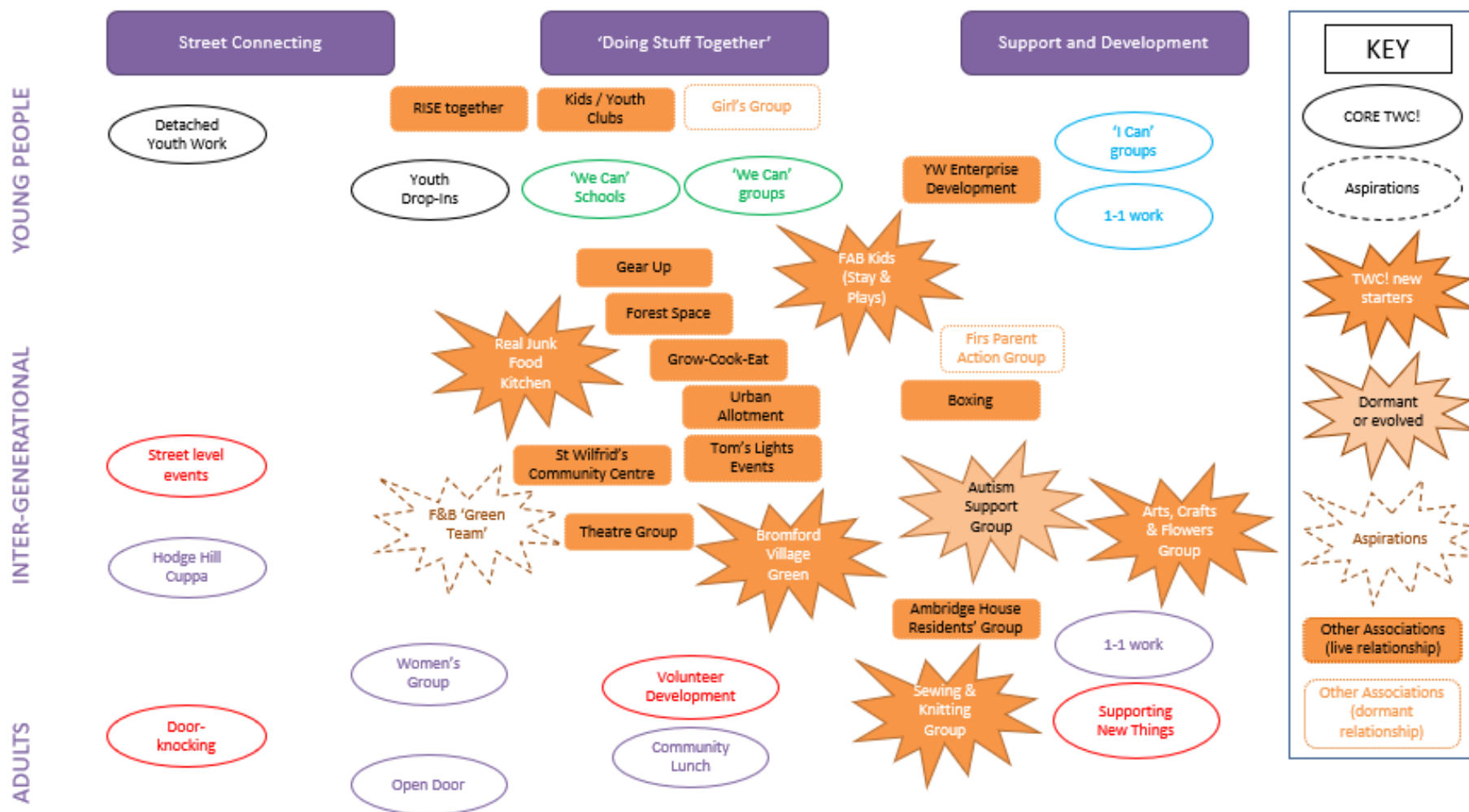
In January 2018, we reviewed and updated our first activities map, including new groups that have started this year with support from our Street Connecting work (see section 2.1, above), and groups that we have grown and deepened connections with through our work – compare Activities Map 2, on p.19, below.



Activities Map 1 (Jan 2017)



Activities Map 2 (Jan 2018)



As discussed in section 1.2, above, the vital importance of these ‘places of belonging’ is a major part of our learning from Year 1. This has led us to emphasise the primacy of **people having more places and groups to which they feel they can belong and contribute** (an additional Outcome 4), expressed as **people having more opportunities to do things with their neighbours** and **people setting up new groups, activities and enterprises**.

More opportunities to do things with our neighbours

As we did evaluation questionnaires with people in late 2017, the growth in ‘places of belonging’ came through clearly. It enabled us to sit down with more people to *do* the questionnaires with, than we would have been able to otherwise. It also dramatically increased the positive responses we had to the question about ‘more opportunities to do things with your neighbours’: 75 participants surveyed said there were (our target for the year was 30).

People setting up new groups, activities and enterprises

We had also dramatically underestimated the number of people that would have vision and enthusiasm for setting up new groups and activities or want support with developing existing groups and activities. While we gave ourselves a modest target of 2 people for Year 1, in fact we found ourselves working with 17 people to set up and develop new groups, activities and enterprises.

Groups, activities and enterprises growing in confidence, participation, and autonomy

One very significant shift in our thinking, coming out of our experience over the course of Year 1 of *TogetherWeCan!* was to be more attentive to ‘what happens next’ after new groups, activities and enterprises are set up. For some groups, initially enthusiastic participants would begin to drift off, leaving a small and sometimes fragile ‘core’. Group leaders too found their first enthusiasm tested, as groups went through ‘low patches’ or faced their own fragility. For other groups, the challenges were less to do with small numbers than with rapid growth, and the need for added capacity – in physical space, or volunteer helpers. *TWC!* staff members have had previous experience of these kind of dynamics of group evolution (not least Sarah Maxfield with both Open Door drop-ins and Women’s Group). That experience has been invaluable as we have sought (particularly through Paul’s work as Street Connector Mentor) to support other people on similar journeys with their own groups – with the aim of growing the confidence of group leaders, growing levels of participation within the groups, and growing the group’s sense of autonomy, needing less ongoing support from the *TWC!* team.



Case study: the Real Junk Food Kitchen

The Real Junk Food Kitchen is now a popular weekly 'bumping space' locally, welcoming over 100 people (adults and children) every Thursday through the doors of St Wilfrid's Community Centre, a volunteer-run centre, attached to the local Roman Catholic Church.

TRJFK diverts good quality food from restaurants and supermarkets which would otherwise be thrown away (through The Real Junk Food Project in central Birmingham), and the first spark of possibility happened in a Harvest Festival service at Hodge Hill Church. Pete looked at a box of the thrown-away food and decided he wanted to do something, using his skills from his catering background.

Paul had conversations with Karen and Steve from St Wilfrid's Community Centre, who were already supporting another *TWC!*-supported group, and they were up for trying out 'the Kitchen' at St Wilf's. The first pilot of TRJFK was catering for the Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together open evening in Nov 2016.

With Pete pulling in more volunteers, Paul supported Pete to do a presentation to a PIE event, for a small amount of 'kickstarter' funding. The Kitchen launched properly in March 2017, serving hot meals every Thursday, lunch-time and tea-time (after school).

Tea-time got very busy, very quickly, and was feeling too much for the initial team of volunteers by July. A shout-out on Facebook was enough to pull in new volunteers for the tea-time shift, with added support with kids activities brought in through *TWC!*'s Dan and Flo, intentionally encouraging parents to do creative activities with their children.

Some of the women from Women's Group have moved across to being 'Junk Food' regulars, and have found new opportunities for connection and volunteering. 'The Kitchen' has become a buzzing hub of connectivity, with lots of people interacting with each other that otherwise wouldn't naturally meet.

The Junk Food team have recently secured funding to expand and upgrade the kitchen at St Wilf's, so TRJFK can continue to grow.

4 Our Impact: The Power of Connection

In this section we will outline more of what we've heard from participants (through questionnaires and more in-depth case studies) about the difference the work of *TogetherWeCan!* has made to them – in their sense of connectedness, their confidence, and their opportunities to share their passions and skills with their neighbours.

From almost 700 local people (over 335 adults and 350 young people) with whom we have significant engagement⁵ through *TogetherWeCan!*, we have this year gathered feedback from over 192 participants: 92 adults, 100 young people⁶. Appendix A gives more details of the *method* we've used to seek feedback from participants and *why* we've chosen to do it that way. Here we share something of the *content* of that feedback – both the *numbers* of people responding positively to our evaluation questions, and *what people said* when we asked them to share something of their experience of, and reflections on, our work.

4.1 More connected to our neighbours

TogetherWeCan! wants to see more people connected to their neighbours, across age and ethnic differences, in relationships of trust, friendship and mutual support (Outcome 1, see Appendix D). This year 108 people reported **knowing more of their neighbours by name**, and 28 reported **having more neighbours they could turn to for help**.⁷

What's best about Junk Food Project is you get old and young, all different races, they're all in the same room, and they're all mixing... Don't get me wrong, I remember the first time, they'd all come in, sit down, everybody sat like that, nobody said a word to each other... but the way he [Paul] would place people, you could see his little mind ticking over, and he were placing people in different places, making sure... and now, they're leaving here talking, they're coming in here talking, they've got new friends out of it.
(Steve)

I just used to stay at home as a housewife, not getting out much... but there's loads of ladies telling me there's a women's group that did loads of cooking and everything... that's how I got involved... .. and I just mixed in well with all the people there... just having a chat with everyone, getting to know everyone, different cultures... it was really good... Since then I haven't missed a women's group, I try to go every week... with my new friends I've been out for meals... plus personally I can talk to them about anything, if I've got a problem, I know they can help me... If Women's Group wasn't there I don't know what I would do – it's good to get to know people more, and I've made loads of friends
(‘Salma’)

⁵ ‘Significant engagement’ refers to participants with whom was *TWC!* in repeated contact, such that we obtained consent to include their name and personal details on the project database.

⁶ It was not appropriate to ask all questions in all contexts, or possible to cover all participants – so overall outcomes are likely to be higher.

⁷ Our targets were 75 and 25 respectively.

Junk Food – the people there are absolutely lovely – all of them, they’re all so friendly... it’s like another family, all just come together... it’s knowing I’ve got someone I can talk to – different people – I’m not so lonely – if I’ve got a problem with the babby, it’s knowing that there’s someone there that will listen – I’ve made loads more friends... I wish I knew people like I knew now, back then – just someone to talk to – I’ve always been close to the kids, but now it’s like other people I can talk to...

(JoJo)

Women's Group has enabled me to get to know my neighbours better. I used to know a lot of people to say hello to at the school gates, but through Women's Group I've got to know them much better, and now class them as friends.

I feel I have developed an extended family since getting more involved and can always turn to them if I need help.

(FAB Kids)

4.2 More able to overcome obstacles

We also want to see people feeling more able to overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives. For *TogetherWeCan!*, that means that people are growing in confidence, skills and connections to build more sustainable livelihoods.

In a ‘livelihood’ we include people’s financial resources (income, savings), physical resources (furniture, white goods, phone, etc), personal resources (physical and mental wellbeing), and social resources (connections to other people). By ‘more sustainable’, we mean more able to survive shocks (e.g. the washing machine breaking down, or losing a job), and moving from ‘just about coping’ towards thriving and living life to the full.

76 of our participants this year have said they have **grown in confidence and skills for employment-readiness** (our target was 25). 81 people report feeling **more confident to cope when life is tough** (target 30). And 78 say that they feel **more confident to participate in local groups and activities** as a result of their involvement in *TWC!*.

Since coming to Open Door, I've become more outgoing and have more confidence. I'm not the vulnerable girl in the shell anymore

[Through Open Door] I feel more connected to people, and have had help to work through complex situations. I now have a support network, which wasn't there before, which has given me a new direction in life

Case study: support work (adults)

One of the areas of our work in which we underestimated the scale and intensity of the task is our work in supporting adults who are facing immediate and often overwhelming obstacles to living flourishing lives and being able to bring their unique contributions to community life.

Benefits

Through Open Door drop-ins, 1-to-1 support work, and our partnership with Birmingham Community Law Centre, Sarah and the Open Door team have supported at least nine people to navigate the complex and demanding social security system, including challenging decisions where they have been unfair. This has included helping people fill in application forms for Working Tax Credits, Child Tax Credits and Child Benefit, Attendance Allowance, Employment Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments. We have also helped people put together their application forms and associated evidence for mandatory reconsiderations, in some cases accompanying neighbours to court hearings. As a result, we have enabled local residents to receive over £13,000 in backdated benefits, and to receive benefits that they are entitled to on an ongoing basis.

Housing

We have supported over 22 neighbours with housing issues this year, including six people who were at the stage of being threatened with legal action and/or eviction. We have supported people to claim discretionary housing payments, put together payment plans, and negotiate court hearings. We have also supported neighbours who have been made homeless – or have had trouble in and around their home - through fires, domestic violence and hostile neighbours, helping people liaise with police and the city council, and linking them up with neighbours who have been able to support with furniture and other practical essentials. We have helped 14 people to navigate the Birmingham City Council online housing application system.

Immigration, Employment and Travel

We have supported six neighbours with applications for Biometric Residence Permits, or for permanent residency status, and in one case liaising with the Home Office in a situation of domestic violence. We have worked with 21 people to support them to write CVs, and search and apply for jobs. We have also supported six neighbours to apply for passports, bus passes, and blue disability badges.

‘Since coming in, I feel I have improved in confidence. I feel stronger in myself to cope with some of the situations I may not have been able to have managed before. It’s been helpful just to have space to talk 1-2-1 with someone (Sarah), and be honest with someone which is something I didn’t have before. This has all helped me begin to cope more when life is tough. It has also been really helpful to have someone walking alongside me with the benefit related issues, and understanding the systems, as it’s such a difficult system to navigate’

I believe these [‘We Can’] projects make a huge difference to the students and the communities and enable them to give back and take pride in what they do. Through the projects we see students’ self-esteem and confidence grow and they feel proud of their community. It gives our students a sense of belonging and helps to bridge the generation gap. We see this reflected in their academic achievement and improved behaviour, and their whole demeanour can change. 70% of our students achieve A-C in Citizenship and a huge part of this is down to the quality community projects they take part in.

(Lesley Browne, Park Hall Academy)



I’ve always enjoyed helping people... I just love people – mainly the older generation... it’s only now that I’m actually learning to get on with the younger generation as well... I used to shy away from groups, and now I want to talk in groups... I’ve always got on with absolutely everybody, but this has amplified it... It is the feeling, that you’re falling in love – when people say, “why do you do it?” – I struggle to put it into words, I love it, I’d love to do it forever. It’s just... being wanted, and being useful – that’s it – I’m actually useful here, I actually really am making a difference.

(Steve)

4.3 More able to share passions and skills

The third area where we have wanted to see *TogetherWeCan!* participants growing, is in feeling more able to share their passions, gifts and skills with their neighbours. 66 people said they felt **more confident to share** their passions, gifts and skills, and 52 said they had **more opportunities to share** them with their neighbours.⁸ If people have more opportunities to share, then that in itself enables more people to grow in confidence – but our evidence suggests that more direct support through *TWC!* is also a significant factor in participants growing in confidence to identify, and to share with others, their passions, gifts and skills.

[Through Women's Group] I am now happy to bake in front of people and with people, which is something I've never done before

Through coming to Open Door and Community Lunch every week, I have been able to take up my hobby again and share it with others... Sharing this helps create a feeling of satisfaction for me

Through the autism group, I have been able to share my experiences, and get more knowledge through connections

They've made us grow, made us mix more, made us realise our potential – if we want to do something, "come on, let's do it!"
(Steve)

Before being asked to get involved [with FAB Kids] I didn't really leave the house 5 years. Now I have so many opportunities to get involved

It's getting me out of the house - I used to just sit in the house doing absolutely nothing... now the whole family's involved

⁸ Year 1 targets were 30 and 25, respectively.

Case study: Skye

In May 2017, the TWC! team, in partnership with Hodge Hill Church, hosted a national gathering of ABCD (asset-based community development) community-builders. Several of our neighbours here shared their stories, including Jo, one of our Street Connectors, and Skye, who is 15.

'It started off by coming to the youth group at "The Hub" to hang out with friends and a chance to meet new people my age. After a while I stopped coming as much and was hanging about on the streets a lot more, I gave up boxing and started to get into a bit of trouble with my mates.

'After a while I re-joined the group and it developed into a Youth Social Action Group called "WeCan". As part of this project we planned a community project at a local sheltered housing centre to plant flowers and make a garden for the local community and residents to enjoy. Doing this project made me want to get more involved in my local community and have opportunities to "Give back".

'One of the reasons I started getting more involved was seeing the reaction on people's faces when we helped them out, even if it was something small, such as litter picking or clearing leaves from their Garden. I also wanted to get involved because Bromford was getting a bad reputation on what people thought Bromford was until we stepped in and made a difference. I wanted to show people the Bromford wasn't all bad, not every young person was a trouble maker and that we could make a difference to it.

'A couple weeks back we met an elderly woman named Barbara Johnson who asked us if we could clean leaves from by her gate as there was loads and couldn't do it by herself so we stepped in and did it for her Barbara then told us that she was an evacuee from WW2. We were all shocked, she then began to tell us her journey through out the war we were all amazed it was also a great and an amazing experience for us we all loved it and for that reason is why we love doing what we do. It's amazing how as we give back we get a lot from it too. I would never have met Barbara had it not been for this project.

'We recently started a new project "Bromford Village Green". We painted the posts, built flower beds and painted the walls which were covered in graffiti at Bromford shops. Since then it looks a million times better and day in and day out we get a lot of people in the community saying how good it looks and how well we have done. It was also amazing to work with some older residents like Michael and Lumpy on this project who helped build the beds. If it wasn't for being involved in these projects I would never have spoken to them.

'Doing these projects and feeling more connected made me feel proud. It was good to try to change people's thoughts about young people. It made me feel more part of the community and that people might trust me more. I am more than happy to be a part this ongoing adventure with the hub to help more people in the community to build and make a better place for people on the estate.'

5 What's Making It Work?

In this section we'll share more of what we're learning on the *TogetherWeCan!* journey, and in particular what we think makes *TWC!* distinctive, and what seems to make it *work*. We'll draw more on what we've heard from *participants* through questionnaires and 1-2-1 interviews, but also on the learning that has come through other opportunities for reflection, including: *TWC!* team and steering group meetings; reflection sessions with our external evaluation support partners (Shaun Burnett and Cormac Russell from Nurture Development, and freelance researcher Jane Perry); and, gatherings of local connectors and group leaders, facilitated by our Street Connector Mentor and/or our external evaluation support partners

5.1 'Golden threads'

Out of these various opportunities for reflection, evaluation and learning, have emerged a number of 'golden threads' (extending and developing what in section 1.2, above, we called the 'how-factors' of the project):

Golden Thread 1. **Relationships of trust**

Between practitioners and residents, and between neighbour and neighbour, relationships have to 'go deep enough' for trust to grow – for people to begin to express themselves, to try things that might feel risky; and to sometimes be able to speak words of challenge.

He's really good with people, he can sit down with almost anybody, make them feel at ease, get them involved, find their good points, and work with them and everything – I count him as a really good friend.

(Steve)

Golden Thread 2. **Space matters**

This is about physical space (a room, a building, an outdoor environment) but also about the 'space' (and time) created for particular gatherings, or conversations. Spaces need to feel welcoming and safe enough, for relationships to deepen. They need to be generous, and not always task-focused, so that people can connect with each other, hang out, cook up ideas together.

All of them down there, you walk into the Hub and there's like this friendly atmosphere – you know some places you go and it feels like they're looking down on you – here they just talk to you on a level, no matter what your circumstances (JoJo)

Golden Thread 3. **Stories matter**

Stories are a fundamental way of expressing ‘how things are’, as well as ‘how things have been’ and ‘how things could be’. Hearing and sharing stories has been a fundamental way of us deepening our relationships as neighbours, and of learning together. Celebrating local stories (of both individuals and groups of people) generates energy for new things to emerge. Vital ‘energising’ moments in the past year have included the gathering of some of the key connectors / group leaders to share the stories of how their groups had developed, and the Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together ‘open evening’ which included giving awards to recognise and celebrate individuals and groups that had made a particular contribution to the community.

Golden Thread 4. **Bringing ourselves to work (as practitioners)**

Although some of us are paid to work in this neighbourhood, a vital element of our relationships with our neighbours is not being ‘robots’ or detached ‘professionals’, but *being ourselves* and *seeking friendship* – being authentic, compassionate and assertive in our support of others, and vulnerable enough to receive the gifts and support that others bring to us.

It’s really helped that you’re all local. It’s made a real difference not having to travel to meet someone I didn’t know to get help or support. I’ve got a long term relationship with you all which has helped, and means I trust you. I see you all at different events and groups which means I can access help at more places – there are less barriers to overcome. It makes me feel good that I’ve got skills I can use to help others.

(Dale)

Golden Thread 5. **A long-term commitment to consistent presence**

In contrast to many other paid practitioners, and party politicians, the timescale of our commitment (as individuals and as organisations) is not limited to short-term funding or election cycles. We are committed to taking ‘the long view’ in our relationships with our neighbours – recognising that friendships require consistency from *individuals*, not just organizations; and acknowledging that significant change often happens over generations (e.g. seeing young people we’ve worked with becoming adults).

Having a close working relationship with you over numerous years makes getting these projects sorted really easy. You have a great track record of successful projects so I am always confident it will benefit our students. We can rely on you and your team and you are rooted in the community so know what the community needs and that the ideas have come from the community itself. It also impacts on wider staff who come and support the projects. It's such a caring, pro-active, enabling atmosphere.

(Lesley Browne, Park Hall Academy)

Golden Thread 6. ***We are constantly 'widening the circles', 'hunting the edges'***

Alongside deepening relationships with those we have already got to know, we are sustained by a discontent with the limits of our circles of relationship: constantly seeking ways to broaden the conversation, draw in new connectors and contributors, seek out and welcome those 'on the edges' of our work and our community.

Golden Thread 7. ***Working towards a shift in neighbourhood culture***

We believe in people – in their value, and their potential – but we also believe in the value and potential of our neighbourhood. Rather than seeking a shift in the behaviour of individuals, we are wanting to shift the culture of the neighbourhood as a whole – towards being a place where neighbours look out for each other, where everyone is seen as having something to contribute.

"Paul's forever saying Thank You – Pete from the kitchen said, 'you don't realise how much you're appreciated, so every now and then I'm going to tell you' – it's nice to feel it.... I've never had it before" (JoJo)

Golden Thread 8. ***Constantly shifting from 'doing for / with' to 'done by'***

Across all our work, while we recognise that what we do can make a positive difference, we seek to prioritise action and agency that is *done by* and led by local residents, and not by 'professionals' or paid 'helpers'. While there are situations where it is appropriate or necessary to do things *for* or *with* our neighbours (with a paid staff member taking the initiative), we seek to be constantly alert to how that can shift to being 'done by' our neighbours.

Golden Thread 9. ***Getting the scale right***

The size of our neighbourhood (approx. 3,000 homes, 8,000 residents) is significant. It is big enough to hold a lot of diversity, but small enough to have a sense of coherence to it. Much that has been

successful this year, however (from street events to new ‘places of welcome’) has been closer to what we are calling ‘micro-local’ – just one or two streets away from home. On this scale, it has proved much more possible for people to get to know neighbours by name, and to feel like they can make a meaningful contribution, rather than just be a ‘consumer’ (as is much more often the case in big-scale community events like the Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together ‘summer event’).

Golden Thread 10. **Partnerships that work – for us**

The final ‘golden thread’ from this first year of *TogetherWeCan!* has been about the value of partnerships with external organisations. Some of these have brought significant challenges (see ‘Challenge 4’, below), but those that have worked well have enabled us to refer some of our neighbours to providers of specialist advice and support – around benefits and legal issues (Birmingham Community Law Centre), housing and homelessness (Crisis) and, most recently, debt and therapeutic counselling (St Martin’s Centre for Health and Healing). These partnerships have worked because a ‘referral’ has not meant us ‘letting go’ of a local resident – they have all maintained ongoing relationships with us through local community activities, but a specialist worker has ‘walked with them’ for a while. The partnerships have also been effective because we have had not only a good relationship of mutual trust and understanding with a key point of contact on a regular basis, but in the case of all three organisations, have also found someone in a senior organisational position who has ‘got’ our approach, and has been an effective influencer within their organisation for the kind of relationships we are committed to.

5.2 Challenges

Making this distinctive approach *work* in practice is not always straightforward, and often brings with it certain challenges: hurdles to be overcome, dilemmas to be wrestled with, or costs that just have to be borne. Again, reflection on our experience of this first year has highlighted some of these challenges.

Challenge 1. The crises and strains on local residents caused by systemic pressures

Alongside the many positive outcomes achieved through the community-building approach outlined above, there is a significant element of fragility built into our work precisely because it is grounded on the agency and leadership of local residents who are often battling with some of the toughest challenges of life: poor health, precarious employment, low incomes, and family tensions, to name but a few. When these are combined with systemic pressures (e.g. unfair benefits decisions, incompetent, if not hostile, benefits and immigration systems, the rise of zero-hours contracts, inadequate social housing provision, cuts to advice services and legal aid, under-resourcing of health care, schools, social care, etc.), ‘fragility’ can often slip into ‘crisis’.

The work particularly of our adult-focused Community Support & Development Worker in the past year has at times come close to being overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the local need for crisis support. The dramatic reduction of other potential partner organisations across the city (e.g. CAB) has added to that sense of being overwhelmed. Developing partnerships with Crisis and St Martin’s Centre for Health and Healing (in Central Birmingham), alongside the established partnership with Birmingham Community Law Centre, have gone a little way to alleviate this pressure, but the

challenges from these systemic pressures remains great and, if anything, looks set to increase in the coming year (e.g. with the introduction of Universal Credit).

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *How are current policy and systemic changes (e.g. Universal Credit, Brexit) likely to affect our work in the coming year?*

ACTIONS:

- *Continue to develop links with specialist partner organisations, where possible.*
- *Continue to explore relationships with campaigning groups, e.g. Citizens UK, Church Action on Poverty, to support and contribute to wider campaigns.*

Challenge 2. The time and energy required to support a growing community

In a more positive sense, the sheer number of active local residents and new groups that have emerged over the past year has presented its own challenges, as even with an intentionally ‘hands-off’ approach, the time and energy required to support all that is growing here is huge. As with the support work, so also with the street connecting work, we have already found ourselves coming up against the limits of our capacity, and (particularly in the street connecting work) having to acknowledge that that is simply ‘how it is’.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *How do we recognize when we’ve reached our limits? How do we respond to neighbours and/or re-shape our current work, as a result?*

ACTIONS:

- *Street Connector Mentor (and other team members) to invest more time into developing peer-to-peer support (e.g. gatherings for connectors & group leaders), slowly reducing dependency on staff support.*

Challenge 3. Deepening connections between different generations and ethnic backgrounds

While we can point to some great examples in the past year of people coming together across generations and ethnic backgrounds, getting to know each other by name and deepening relationships between them, there is still plenty more work to do. The ethnicity breakdown of our participants looks relatively close to the make-up of our neighbourhood, but the makeup of some of our groups (e.g. Open Door drop-in) is predominantly white, while other groups (e.g. Women’s Group) the makeup is mostly non-white (mostly of Asian and African background). While the diversity of participants in The Real Junk Food Project, for example, looks more healthy, the slow, patient work of relationship-building across divides, across our work, requires deeper, more intentional effort. A key part of this intentionality acknowledges that the paid *TogetherWeCan!* team is all white, and will seek to be more active in finding and nurturing active connectors and group leaders from the black and minority ethnic backgrounds represented locally.

Similarly, the ‘We Can’ social action work is still predominantly led by paid workers with young people, with occasional (and immensely significant) examples of intergenerational, neighbourly relationships being built, rather than this being the ‘norm’ for such work.

ACTIONS:

- *Deepening our intentional work of building bridges between people of different ethnic groups, and between groups and activities that are more 'monochrome'.*
- *Being more intentional in seeking out and nurturing active connectors and group leaders from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.*
- *Being more intentional about drawing other local adults into the 'We Can' social action projects at an early stage in the process.*

Challenge 4. Engaging with local men, and drawing them into participation

The other area where we are aware that our engagement is unrepresentative of the makeup of the estate, is the limited extent to which we have so far been able to engage local men. The primary reason for this is that the vast majority of our connecting work, and groups and activities, happen during the day when more men than women are away from the neighbourhood, in paid employment. Open Door is the notable exception to this overall picture, where the majority of our regular participants are male (but either retired, seeking work, or out of work for health reasons).

ACTIONS:

- *Extend door-knocking to evenings and weekends, when some working men may be at home (although many work irregular shift patterns)*

Challenge 5. Finding support from organisations with shared values

There have been a number of examples, over the past year, of *TogetherWeCan!* staff seeking to develop working partnerships with other organizations (both local and wider) which have proved challenging because of a relatively thin overlap of shared values and approach. When we have found a key person in such organizations who has 'got' the way we do things, there has often been the beginnings of a fruitful relationship, but if that person then moves on, or is not in a position to make critical organizational decisions, then the relationship has often foundered. At times this has had a negative impact on our work: we supported a school-based parent action group until the school shifted its strategic priorities; an external organisation providing ESOL classes failed to understand the relational work needed to recruit and sustain participant involvement, leading to the classes being cancelled. Just as much of our own learning has come through a 'praxis' approach (get involved, and then reflect on what we have experienced), so the best examples of partnership work have been when another practitioner has been able to experience something of our approach in practice here.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *What criteria do we use to judge whether an organization is a promising potential partner?*
- *How can we be clearer about the critical importance of a key person-to-person relationship (especially someone in a senior / influential position)?*
- *How can we build a 'praxis'-learning approach into early stages of new partnership relationships?*

ACTION:

- *Develop ‘rules of engagement’ template for exploring and starting new partnerships – criteria for assessing, process of ‘contracting’ together, expectations of ongoing relationship, etc*

Challenge 6. Moving from ‘doing for’ to ‘done by’ when people (residents and staff) are under multiple pressures

We recognise that for practitioners it is often quicker and more straightforward, in the short term at least, to do things *for* people rather than seek to enable them to do things for themselves – and is therefore particularly tempting when staff are under time pressure. We have also encountered this year, particularly in our support work, local residents who are under such extreme (and often multiple) life pressures that they seem stuck in needing practitioners to ‘do for’ them. We have reflected that most relationships are made up of varying proportions of ‘doing for’, ‘doing with’ and ‘done by’, and that our goal is to help people move towards *interdependence* within community, rather than total *independence* as individuals. The odd extreme example of a relationship that feels stuck in ‘doing for’ mode should not be allowed to dominate either our time and effort or our imagination.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *How can we continue to enlarge the space where neighbours are helping each other?*
- *How do we judge (especially but not only with young people) when people are ready to shift from ‘for/with’ to ‘by’, without setting them up for failure?*
- *How can we hold open spaces for people, once they’ve experienced ‘help’, to come back and help others?*
- *How can we help our groups develop into spaces that help people into ‘done by’ roles?*

ACTIONS:

- *Open Door drop-in team to be more intentional in inviting people into active roles (e.g. welcoming, making tea, listening to others, helping use computers, etc.) and to be more alert to discerning when people can do things by themselves from the beginning (i.e. not letting the extreme cases to define the ‘norm’)*
- *Open Door to introduce post-community-lunch space for people to share their talents with others (e.g. baking ‘class’, singing session)*

Challenge 7. Helping groups, in their development, discover their vision, values and connectedness to the bigger picture

One of the dilemmas we’re finding, in supporting new groups to develop, rather than running things ourselves, is that those groups aren’t necessarily ‘signed up’ to the same core values and approach as *TogetherWeCan!* as a whole. Constantly ‘widening the circle’, for example, is sometimes replaced by an inward-looking ‘cliqueyness’. Groups often don’t have that sense of being part of the wider ‘ecology’ of the neighbourhood. But how do we help them towards such a sense, or the importance of inclusivity, without coming across as ‘telling them what to do’, or ‘taking over’?

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *At what points along the way can we help a group begin to articulate their own...*
 - *Vision (“what’s the best this group can be?”)*
 - *Values (“what’s most important about how we do this?”)*
 - *Connectedness (“what part of the bigger picture can we be?”)*
- *In what ways can we play a part in slowing down the journey of a new group from ‘idea’ to ‘launch’ – to build in more time for reflection?*

ACTIONS:

- *Street Connector Mentor (and other team members) to be more intentional in conversations in early development of new groups*
- *Group Leaders’ Gatherings to have an intentional focus on helping leaders articulate their sense of vision, values & connectedness*
- *‘We Can’ projects (especially school groups) to draw in local adult residents from the beginning, to share something of ‘the neighbourhood story’ – and at the other end of the process, to reflect together on ‘where does this story go next?’*

Challenge 8. Maintaining a level of coordination across a complex project

From its inception, *TogetherWeCan!* was always going to be a complex project, working across all age bands, with workers from two organisations, combining responsive support work with completely unpredictable connecting – and seeing what developed! The sheer scale of engagement and activity in the first year of the project has, if anything, multiplied the complexity. Developing monitoring and evaluation tools for this innovative project has also not been able to be a case of ‘pulling something off the shelf’ – but instead working closely alongside team members to discern what are the most appropriate ways of seeking feedback and stimulating reflection.

With hindsight, we underestimated the need for a coordinator / project manager role, and with the transition of the Worth Unlimited Branch Director to ODCF as Street Connector Mentor (Paul Wright), lost the ‘added value’ (of project management beyond the *TWC!* worker roles) from the Worth Unlimited side of the partnership. In the event, Hodge Hill Church have gifted Revd Al Barrett’s time not just as line manager of the two ODCF workers (and effective CEO of ODCF), but also as *de facto* project manager, coordinating team and steering group meetings, staff monthly reporting, reporting to funders and reflection/evaluation – a collection of tasks which at times has put Al, and the working of the project, under strain.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *How effectively would *TWC!* be working, if it were not for this gifted time from Hodge Hill Church? Are there ways of specifying the ‘project manager’ role in more detail so that it could, in principle, be funded, and recruited to, if Al were no longer in the role?*

ACTIONS:

- *Build in a budget line for 'project management' – to recognise the time currently given to that task, and to be more realistic about this need in future plans*
- *Jane Perry (external evaluation support partner) to phone in to monthly team meetings, to aid direct communication and exploration of monitoring & evaluation questions*

Challenge 9. Meeting organizational running costs beyond project delivery

Linked to the previous point, the original *TogetherWeCan!* bid to Big Lottery Fund attempted to come close to 'full cost recovery', but in fact underestimated the organizational running costs of ODCF (which is currently solely focused on delivering the adult-focused strand of *TWC!*), as well as the level of gifted time required from Hodge Hill Church. For ODCF, this currently means that sparse reserves are being used to cover unavoidable costs such as paying for annual accounts to be examined.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- *Are there other 'hidden costs / contributions' that are currently unaccounted for in the *TWC!* budget?*

ACTIONS:

- **TWC!* steering group to review Year 2 budget and amend budget lines accordingly – if necessary, reducing project running costs to cover organizational running costs*

6 What's Next?

Our primary objectives for Year 2 of this 3-year project are to build on the achievements of Year 1, to be more intentional in sticking to the 'golden threads' we have identified in this report, and to respond to the challenges also identified here. If there is a subtle shift of focus across the project in Year 2, it is 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 'hunting the edges' and 'widening the circles', to engage more and more of our neighbours in the Firs & Bromford. The points below draw together the 'action' points identified in Section 5.

6.1 *Street Connecting (Adults)*

- Street Connector Mentor (and other team members) to invest more time into developing peer-to-peer support (e.g. gatherings for connectors & group leaders), slowly reducing dependency on staff support
- Deepening our intentional work of building bridges between people of different ethnic groups, and between groups and activities that are more 'monochrome'
- Being more intentional in seeking out and nurturing active connectors and group leaders from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- Extend door-knocking to evenings and weekends, when some working men may be at home (although many work irregular shift patterns)
- Street Connector Mentor (and other team members) to be more intentional in conversations in early development of new groups
- Group Leaders' Gatherings to have an intentional focus on helping leaders articulate their sense of vision, values & connectedness

6.2 *Social Action work (Young People)*

- 'We Can' projects (especially school groups) to draw in local adult residents from the beginning, to share something of 'the neighbourhood story' – and at the other end of the process, to reflect together on 'where does this story go next?'

6.3 *Support and Development work (Adults & Young People)*

- Continue to develop links with specialist partner organisations, where possible
- Continue to explore relationships with campaigning groups, e.g. Citizens UK, Church Action on Poverty, to support and contribute to wider campaigns
- Open Door drop-in team to be more intentional in inviting people into active roles (e.g. welcoming, making tea, listening to others, helping use computers, etc.) and to be more alert to discerning when people can do things by themselves from the beginning (i.e. not letting the extreme cases to define the 'norm')
- Open Door to introduce post-community-lunch space for people to share their talents with others (e.g. baking 'class', singing session)
- Focus more on team development and strengthening presence at TRJFK as a second place of

support as well as encounter

6.4 Monitoring & Evaluation

- Emerging themes to explore in Year 2 evaluation questions for Year 2:
 - How is *TWC!* situated within the wider ecology of the Firs and Bromford neighbourhood: What are the wider factors which influence our activities and outcomes? Are there any other unintended impacts of our work?
 - How do we support groups to develop their resilience, 'stickability', inclusivity, and capacity to nurture their participants?
 - How do we intentionally build relationships across differences of generation and ethnic background?
 - What can be learnt from how our support work (with adults and young people facing obstacles/challenges) contributes to successful outcomes, in terms of livelihoods and participation?
- Jane Perry (external evaluation support partner) to phone in to monthly team meetings, to aid direct communication and exploration of monitoring & evaluation questions

6.5 Across the project

- Develop an intentional focus on building 'resilience' into the growing ecology of community groups and connections (as well as continuing to support the development of 'new' things)
- Develop a 'rules of engagement' template for exploring and starting new partnerships – criteria for assessing, process of 'contracting' together, expectations of ongoing relationship, etc
- Build in a budget line for 'project management' – to recognise the time currently given to that task, and to be more realistic about this need in future plans. *TWC!* steering group to review Year 2 budget and amend budget lines accordingly – if necessary, reducing project running costs to cover organizational running costs.

APPENDIX A – Methodology

This evaluation of Year 1 of the *TogetherWeCan!* project was designed to use monitoring and other gathered evidence to:

- Capture and reflect on the *TWC!* project – what we do (activities/outputs) and what is achieved (change/outcomes) – and our part in the wider growth and change of the neighbourhood within which it is set
- Communicate the impact of our work and our learning around it
- Help *TWC!* partners to grow and change as a result of our learning
- Shape the direction and execution of *TWC!* in the subsequent 2 years

Our Approach

As discussed above, the *TogetherWeCan!* reflection and evaluation took an intentional participatory and self-evaluative approach. The staff team worked together to design a mixed-mode monitoring and evaluation approach which creates quantitative and qualitative information regarding *TWC!* activities/outputs (process) and outcomes (impact). This information is integrated with learning captured from an on-going programme of reflection, facilitated by Nurture Development. This two-way conversation allows real-time learning to be captured and assessed against wider evidence, in turn shaping future monitoring, evaluation and reflection activity.

The evaluation approach is theory-based, using a Theory of Change approach to draw out the underlying logic of the *TWC!* programme and assess that against its operation in practice. It also incorporates a developmental element, seeking to continually reflect on and refine the Theory of Change over the life of the project, understanding and addressing emerging issues in context.

Focus

With agreement with the *TogetherWeCan!* steering group, the focus of reflection and evaluation work will develop across the 3 years of the *TWC!* project:

- Year 1 – Understanding how we work: What is working? And why?
- Year 2 – Demonstrating and understanding change: What happens because of *TWC!*'s work? Including immediate and wider, intended and unintended, consequences?
- Year 3 – Bringing all together in a final report.

Scope

Reflection and evaluation has focused on *TogetherWeCan!* activities delivered in the Firs and Bromford Estate. We sought to gather views from all key stakeholders, identified as: **participants** – young people & adults who take part in *TWC!* activities, as individuals and groups (e.g. 'We Can' group, Women's Group, YSA, groups supported by Street Connector); **staff**; **volunteers**, and **external partners** – Firs and Bromford Neighbours Together, schools, venue 'hosts'/ co-creators.

Owing to the nature of the project (and time and resource constraints), it was not possible to gain views from members of the local community who do not participate in *TWC!* activities, or took part at some stage, but are not currently participating. It was also felt not to be appropriate to attempt to collect information regarding participants' overall perceptions of *TWC!* (because young people/adults relate to individual workers and activities, not the project as a whole).

Capturing the Story

Design of systems for ongoing collection of monitoring data regarding activities, outputs and, where appropriate, outcomes, was a major focus during Year 1.

Monitoring data

The nature of participant engagement with *TogetherWeCan!* differs considerably between the different activities, particularly in terms of depth and regularity of contact. Monitoring tools needed to be designed to accommodate that difference, collecting an appropriate level of information in appropriate ways/times.

Regular recording activities (and their outputs) therefore depend on the nature of the group, but include:

- **Registration Forms** – details of individual participants, including contact details, demographic information and a baseline measure of community involvement.
- **Attendance** – the amount of information collected about participants will vary according to type of session/activity:
 - **Attendance Register:** for activities where a registration form has been completed, cross-referencing attendance registers with registration forms
 - **Attendance Sheet:** for activities without a registration form but where some sort of sign-in is appropriate - blank sheet for people to sign-in, with name and contact number/email (and, where possible, ethnicity, age, gender)
 - **Attendance Record:** where recording details of individuals isn't possible/desirable – collect headline no. of adults and children attending, with estimates of age, gender, ethnicity breakdowns (where possible)
- **Session Records** – details of each session, including staff and volunteer contributions
- Details of the **Support Work** carried out during Open Door and 1-1 sessions:
 - **Enquiries** – details of each enquiry raised (linked to individual record)
 - **Support records** – details of each support session (linked to enquiries and individual records) including measures of 'distance travelled' using outcome star or similar indicator of progress
- **Timesheets** – records of staff time on different activities.

Note: for schools' work, anonymised demographic and attendance information was provided by school.

Evaluation and Reflection

As well as regular capture of *TogetherWeCan!* activities, outputs and outcomes, the project design includes a regular rhythm of reflection and evaluation:

- **Face-face questionnaires:**
 - **Event questionnaires** – collecting views (and reported outcomes) from adult participants at big community events and micro-local street events; conducted face-face by staff/volunteers during the event (58 responses)
 - **Project questionnaires** – collecting views (and reported outcomes) from adults regularly

participating in group events - Open Door (7), Women's Group (8), TRJFK (11), Stay & Play (1), Community Lunch (3) conducted face-face by staff in the fourth quarter of the year

- **Individual support questionnaires** – collecting views (and reported outcomes) from those receiving 1-1 support work (4 adults; 10 young people); conducted, as appropriate, as part of on-going support work (with detailed outcome monitoring beginning from fourth quarter of the year).
- **Outcome Stars (Youth Social Action projects)** - collected from young people at the beginning and end of We-Can (Schools – 63; Groups – 9) and I-Can (9)

Overall, 192 questionnaires were completed (92 adults, 100 young people - around 28% of the 685 named participants on the TogetherWeCan! database). It was not appropriate to ask all questions in all contexts; some questionnaires were developed late in the year and not used extensively. This is work in progress for Year 2.

Quantitative measures were also supplemented by more open, detailed, qualitative information, captured through questionnaires and **detailed story collection (in-depth interviews)**. In Year 1, in-depth case-study material was gathered through staff interviews with 7 participants across a range of projects, plus additional interviews with two key representatives of other 'stakeholder' organisations (one local secondary school, and the City Council Place Manager).

Regular opportunities for project staff to reflect on progress were provided by monthly team meetings, supplemented by a programme of reflection sessions, facilitated by Nurture Development. Initially reflections sessions were held with staff and key volunteers. One session in November 2017 included a wider group of project participants. Information from all group reflection sessions was captured and fed back to inform ongoing learning and development, as well as this report.

All monitoring and evaluation activities included gaining explicit, informed consent from participants to capture and hold information, and to contact them again in the future.

APPENDIX B – Staff job descriptions and key activities

Street Connector Mentor

- Finding & ‘recruiting’ local Street Connectors
- Supporting groups of Street Connectors to plan & deliver micro-local events / activities
- Recording and following up contacts made through street connector work and events
- Prep work, monitoring & evaluation, team meetings, etc

Note: Early evaluation work expressed the Street Connector Mentor role in four core activities: Volunteer Development; Door-knocking; Street-level Events and Supporting New Things

Community Support & Development Worker

- Twice-weekly Open Door drop-in support sessions (6 hrs/wk)
- Weekly Women’s Group sessions (3 hrs/wk)
- 10-20 hrs/wk 1-to-1 mentoring & support
- Prep work, monitoring & evaluation, team meetings, etc

Note: Early evaluation work identified two further activities considered to be a core part of the Community Support & Development Worker Role: Community Lunch and Hodge Hill Cuppa.

Street Connector (young people)

- 8 hrs/wk detached youth work, alongside Support Worker (young people)
- Leading short-term ‘We Can’ projects in partnership with local primary & secondary schools (in school hours) (c. 6 hrs/wk)
- Leading ongoing weekly ‘We Can’ groups (outside school hours) (8 hrs/wk)
- Liaising with schools & community groups to develop ‘We Can’ projects
- Prep work, monitoring & evaluation, team meetings, etc

Note: Early evaluation work identified running Youth Drop-Ins as a separate activity within the Street Connector (young people) role.

Support & Development Worker (young people)

- Twice-weekly ‘I Can’ groups (4 hrs/wk)
- 10-20 hrs/wk of 1-to-1 mentoring & support
- 8 hrs/wk detached youth work, alongside Street Connector (young people)
- Prep work, monitoring & evaluation, team meetings, etc

Note: Early evaluation work identified running Youth Drop-Ins as a separate activity within the Youth Support & Development Worker role, but for reporting purposes these were later combined with We Can and I Can Groups (17/03/17)

APPENDIX C – TWC! Activities and Outputs

STREET CONNECTOR MENTOR

Activity	Output	Target	Year 1 total
Door-knocking / Street Connecting	Door-step conversations		124
	Hodge Hill Cuppa sessions		29
	Engaging people through street events	120	348 (144 adults, 204 children)
	Engaging people through other events		662
Street -level events	No. of street level events/activities	6	7
Supporting new things	No. of new groups / activities		4
Volunteer Development	No. Street Connectors (regular door-knocking)	6	5
	No. Street Connectors (street events)		9
	No. supported to set-up new projects (leads)		17
	No. project volunteers supported		58

SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT WORKER (ADULTS)

Activity	Output	Target	Year 1 total
Open Door drop-in	No. sessions		38
	No. people engaged	80	87
Women's Group	No. sessions		37
	No. people engaged		55
Community Lunch	No. sessions		38
	No. people engaged		71
1-2-1 support work	No. sessions		61
	No. people supported	20	30

STREET CONNECTOR (YOUNG PEOPLE)

Activity	Output	Target	Year 1 total
Detached youth work	No. sessions		90
	No. YP engaged	60	99
'We Can' school projects	No. sessions		36
	No. YP engaged	120	290
Short-term & long-term 'We Can' groups	No. sessions		58
	No. YP engaged	30	34

SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT WORKER (YOUNG PEOPLE)

Activity	Output	Target	Year 1 total
'I Can' groups	No. sessions		38
	No. YP engaged	20	20
1-2-1 support work	No. sessions		170
	No. YP supported	10	29

APPENDIX D – Outcomes: What difference did we make?

The table below presents high-level outcome data, aggregated across project strands. As outlined in Appendix 1, outcomes were collected via questionnaires conducted at events or in the fourth quarter of Year 1. In total 192 questionnaires were completed (around 28% of the 685 named participants on the *TWC!* database). It was not appropriate to ask all questions in all contexts, or possible to cover all participants – so overall outcomes are likely to be higher.

OUTCOME	INDICATOR	Target Year 1 (3 Years)	Actual Year 1
Outcome 1 - People are more CONNECTED to their neighbours across age & ethnic differences, in relationships of trust, friendship & mutual support.	1.0	Participants report meeting new neighbours	68
	1.1	Participants report knowing more of their neighbours by name	75 (300)
	1.3	Participants report having more neighbours they can turn to for help	25 (100)
Outcome 2 - People are more able to OVERCOME OBSTACLES to flourishing – having grown in confidence, skills & connections to build more sustainable livelihoods (financial, personal, social)	2.1	Participants report a growth in confidence and skills for employment-readiness	25 (95)
	2.2.	Participants report feeling more confident to cope when life is tough	30 (150)
	2.3	Participants report feeling more confident to participate in local groups & activities	30 (150)
	2.4	Evidence of participants' growth in financial/personal/physical/social livelihood(s)	n/a
Outcome 3 People are more able to SHARE their passions, gifts and skills having grown in confidence & connections to share their passions, gifts and skills with their neighbours	3.1	Participants report feeling more confident to share their passions, gifts and skills with their neighbours	30 (150)
	3.2	Participants report having more opportunities to share their passions, gifts and skills with their neighbours	25 (100)
Outcome 4 - People have more places and groups to which they feel they can BELONG and contribute to	4.1	New groups, activities and enterprises have started, directly or indirectly related to <i>TWC!</i>	n/a
	4.2	Groups, activities and enterprises are growing in confidence, participation and/or autonomy.	n/a
	4.3 (1.2)	Participants report having more opportunities to do things with their neighbours	30 (150)
	4.4 (3.3)	Participants report having set up new groups, activities and enterprises in which other local people have participated	2 (10)

As discussed in Section 1.2, the *TWC!* outcome framework was adjusted early in Year 1 to reflect developing understanding of the project's theory of change⁹.

⁹ The initial *TWC!* project plan proposed 3 key outcomes. Discussion at staff awayday (03/01/17) regarding streamlining of ODCF and *TWC!* theories of change, resulted in identification of a fourth intermediary outcome 'People have more places and groups to which they feel they can BELONG and contribute to'. Indicators 1.2 ('more opportunities to do things with their neighbours') and 3.3 ('new groups, activities and enterprises') were transferred to Outcome 4. A new indicator – 'participants report meeting new neighbours' – was introduced to Outcome 1.

APPENDIX E – Monitoring data by ethnicity, gender and age

ETHNICITY	N	%
White		
English / Scottish / Welsh / Northern Irish / UK	157 + 84 = 241	59.4%
Irish	6	1.5%
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0	0
Any other white background	9 + 7 = 16	3.9%
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups		
Mixed ethnic background	10 + 6 = 16	3.9%
Asian / Asian UK		
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	33 + 11 = 44	10.8%
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	2	0.5%
Any other Asian background	13 + 1 = 14	3.4%
Black / African / Caribbean / Black UK		
African	25 + 7 = 32	7.9%
Caribbean	8 + 7 = 15	3.7%
Any other Black / African / Caribbean	13	3.2%
Other ethnic group		
Arab	4 + 3 = 7	1.7%
Other	0	0
Not stated	55 + 22 = 77	
Total	335 + 148 = 483	(406 stated)
GENDER		
Male	92	27.6%
Female	241	72.4%
Not Stated	2	
Total	335 (adults only)	333
AGE		
0 - 24 years	20 + 330 = 350	52.6%
25 - 64 years	122 + 169* = 291	43.7%
65+ years	10 + 14 * = 24	3.6%
Not Stated (adults) – guessed as *	183	
Total	335 + 330 = 665	665

APPENDIX F – Expenditure breakdown

INCOME		BUDGET	ACTUAL	
Reaching Communities	£	129,944	129,388	100%
Firs and Bromford Neighbours To	£	37,083	37,083	100%
Other	£	12,285	-	0%
Total		<u>£ 179,312</u>	<u>166,471</u>	
EXPENSE		BUDGET	ACTUAL	
Salaries, NI & Pension				
Total Salaries, NI & Pension	£	111,040	£ 109,500	
Other revenue costs				
Recruitment	£	250	£ -	0%
Training	£	1,000	£ 624	62%
Travel	£	400	£ 149	37%
Sessional workers (ODCF)	£	2,656	£ 405	15%
Mobile phone	£	720	£ 904	126%
External evaluation	£	5,000	£ 5,042	101%
BCLC	£	4,200	£ -	0%
Building capabilities	£	15,000	£ 7,781	52%
Project running costs				
We Can groups / projects	£	3,000	£ 1,404	47%
I Can groups	£	1,000	£ -	0%
Open Door drop-ins	£	1,000	£ 809	81%
Women's Group	£	1,000	£ 664	66%
Street Connector resources	£	3,000	£ 1,984	66%
Overheads				
Line management (WU)	£	4,800	£ 4,845	101%
Line management (ODCF)	£	4,800	£ -	0%
Financial management (WU)	£	4,800	£ 4,800	100%
Financial management (ODCF)	£	3,600	£ 3,600	100%
Venue costs (The Hub)	£	7,250	£ 6,925	96%
Utilities (The Hub)	£	3,350	£ 3,245	97%
Insurances, legal fees, etc	£	1,446	£ 2,276	157%
TOTAL		<u>£ 179,312</u>	<u>£ 154,956</u>	86%
Balance (income - expense)			<u>£ 11,515</u>	
To be carried fwd (Building Capabilities)			£ 7,219	
Final end of year balance			<u>£ 4,296</u>	

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