



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FACT SHEET

DEFINITION

Community development enables people to work collectively to bring about positive social change. It is a long-term process which starts from people's own experiences and facilitates collective action on the issues they are most interested in.

Community development can take many forms – it is often most visible in the work of locally based organisations and groups but it can also be evident at times of crisis, when groups of interested individuals come together to take action on an issue without any formal structure or composition. We have seen many examples of the latter during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT VALUES

There are core values which are at the centre of all community development activity. These values are founded on the idea that every person has skills and knowledge to offer. For community development to be effective, people need to demonstrate these values in their approaches to individuals and communities.

CDHN recognises the value of using community development to address health inequality. Within our society, those who are affected most by health inequalities face issues such as poverty, low educational achievement, inadequate housing and poor employability prospects on a daily basis.

Values can be understood as the 'guiding principles' which help us as a community in making decisions about the type of life we want to lead.

NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS HAS IDENTIFIED FIVE KEY VALUES WHICH DIRECT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

Social Justice and Equality

Work for a more just and equal society which recognises environmental, political, cultural and economic issues.

- Celebrate the strengths, skills and assets in communities
- Acknowledge and challenge inequalities, injustice and imbalances of power
- Promote human and civil rights and responsibilities

Anti-Discrimination

Respect, value, support and promote difference and diversity whilst rejecting and challenging any form of oppression, discrimination and sectarianism.

- Recognise that discrimination works at individual, community, organisational/ institutional and societal levels
- Explore and challenge all forms of discrimination
- Develop anti-oppressive policies and practices which actively support and value diversity

Community Empowerment

Enable communities to develop confidence, capacity, skills and relationships to shape collective action and challenge imbalances of power.

- Enable communities to recognise and build on their existing skills, knowledge and expertise
- Promote the rights of communities to define themselves, their priorities and agendas for action
- Provide the space for communities to develop critical, creative, independent and active decision making and participation

Collective Action

Promote the active participation of people within communities using the power of a collective voice and goal.

- Recognise the wealth of creative and positive resources within individuals and communities
- Promote and support diverse communities to agree and take action on their common concerns and interests
- Use the power of the collective voice to plan and take collective action while respecting the rights of others

Working and Learning Together

Create and encourage opportunities for collective learning through action and shared reflection.

- Learn from shared experiences of working in collaboration
- Understand experiences in the context of wider social, political and economic forces
- Encourage critical reflection on own practice, values and beliefs

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Community Development
& Health Network

KEY ACTIONS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Understanding and Practising Community Development
- Understanding and Engaging with Communities
- Group Work and Collective Action
- Collaboration and Cross-Sectoral working
- Community Learning for Social Change
- Governance and Organisational Change

Communities can identify their own needs and actions by:

- Having access to opportunities to meet others in the community and to learn together
- Having the skills, information and knowledge needed to understand the issues in the community
- Having confidence that positive change can happen at both a personal and community level
- Being supported in addressing the power imbalances that can exist between statutory services and the community

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DURING COVID-19



There has been a long history of community development in Northern Ireland in a number of spheres, including health. Local community action played a significant, and internationally recognised, part in maintaining health and growing resilience in our troubled past. When things are at their worst, community action is at its best. Never has this been more evident than here in Northern Ireland during COVID-19.

Community development is never static and it looks much different now than it did in the 70s and 80s. It is diverse in every context because it always reflects what is relevant to each group. Throughout lockdown, communities have demonstrated proactive leadership focusing on the needs of the community when the pandemic struck.

During COVID-19, communities have come together to help those who are vulnerable, shielding or self-isolating. Within a few days of lockdown, communities throughout mobilised to provide support wherever and whenever it was needed. In times of crisis, local 'tacit knowledge' is one of the most valuable commodities.

TACIT KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge that you do not get from being taught from books but get from personal and lived experiences in a local area.

When tacit knowledge is articulated and shared, it enables communities to identify their own needs and take collective action using their strengths and resources. COVID-19 has highlighted the ability of communities to self organise in a crisis. New foodbanks were set up, neighbours checked in on each other and we saw a strong volunteer response for community pharmacy support. COVID-19 has seen new tools being used to give new life to community development in action. Social media has provided so much space to gather information in online discussions and to organise an effective community response.

A voluntary sector organisation supporting older people in the Northern area, working closely with the local community pharmacist to ensure medication deliveries were received by people self-isolating during the pandemic. Partnership working, good communication and sharing resources reduced duplication and ensured that those most at need were supported.

A Men's Shed in the Western area joined up with the local Young Farmers' Club and a mental health charity to share messages and support across the community about the importance of connections during the pandemic. Online resources and sharing of local knowledge and networks reached isolated individuals and groups across the rural area.

A community group providing information and support about benefits and foodbanks signed up to be part of the local Council and Trust Hub, using their tacit knowledge to identify those families in need and guide individuals through the process of accessing practical support. The relationships that the group already had with these families was vital in ensuring that support reached those most in disadvantaged`.