

# An evaluation of Senior Network Support (Leeds) – SeNS

## Final Report

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## Glossary

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
AGE	Action for Gipton Elderly
ASC	Adult Social Care
CB	Community Builder
CC	Community Connector
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
FLAH	Farsley Live at Home Scheme
LA	Little Acorns (in Calverley)
LCC	Leeds City Council
LOPF	Leeds Older People’s Forum
LSM	Learning Sites Meeting
MEA	Middleton Elderly Aid
ND	Nurture Development
NHS	National Health Service
NNS	Neighbourhood Network Scheme
SeNS	Senior Network Support

## Executive Summary

Leeds City Council Adult Social Care and Libraries set out to do something different with SeNS rather than provide a traditional service or network to the lonely elderly people of Leeds. They wanted to test their role in sharing council assets and drawing on the assets of local people, where possible reaching the “unengaged” through a whole community approach while also adding value to the Neighbourhood Network Scheme. They chose to pilot an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach which focuses on the positive: on the assets and strengths present in a community, mobilising these assets, passions and skills, community driven and based on relationship and skill sharing.

### **Stories from Participants**

The stories collected from the groups set up by SeNS show how the new activities are attracting isolated older and younger people, many of whom have experienced heavy loss or life changes. People have been drawn together into companionship, friendships and new groupings by an enthusiasm for learning or sharing a skill or gift. Leaders of groups experience benefits too and enjoy their roles.

There are powerful examples of newfound confidence and increased awareness of other people in the community, and their needs and gifts. The activities appear to show elements of self help and individual/citizen agency and a small decrease of dependence on local organisations to provide. The activities have had a positive ripple effect in the lives of some group members enhancing their relationships with family and others, beyond the group meetings themselves.

### **Achievements by the Community Connectors (CCs)**

CCs are growing in their understanding of their role and there seems little doubt in their minds of the value of the work they have been doing in connecting people, and the need for it. The language they use to describe their involvement and the project varies considerably amongst the individuals but they mostly have a growing understanding of citizen led activity, though they need more leadership to achieve it more effectively in practice.

Most CCs are very clear that they have benefited from their involvement; they have been on journeys of self-discovery as well as becoming more deeply engaged with their own communities. Most of the CCs could be said to experience a form of joy in the work. The stories confirm the importance of being embedded in and passionate about where they live.

Even with CCs who have paid most attention to ABCD principles, there is a tendency to frame purpose and activities in terms of deficits (as in “lonely”, “isolated”, “ill”, “invisible”). This goes hand in hand with the impetus of CCs to offer to be in helping or fixing mode. None of the CCs seemed particularly aware of the asset mapping process as a tool and the street level work could have had more emphasis.

## **Community Builders' Responses**

Community Builders (CBs) described the benefits of an ABCD approach as giving local people a voice and the choice to form new groups and friendships to share skills with each other and to have control over what they would like to see happening in their area. One CB described the approach as listening rather than talking, observing people and being open to suggestions. She has attempted to observe positive behaviours amongst the people associating and then give positive feedback to reinforce good practices like being welcoming to strangers, because “small gestures make a difference”.

Also notable are the emotional and personal reactions CBs have expressed: feeling honoured and proud, feeling inspired, and “being blown away” by witnessing some of the SeNS initiated activities of local people. Professional experiences like this are quite special and bring renewed passion and effectiveness to a working life.

The notion of “stepping back” ran counter to the considerable management and delivery skills of CBs. They were frustrated at the slow pace of change when they were advised not to have the answers, start the activities or be overly proactive. Each CB conformed to varying degrees. It took time for CBs to adapt and adopt any street level methods but they eventually got the hang of it. It is an approach that requires support and coaching for specific skills and confidence.

## **Achievements from Leeds City Council – Adult Social Care (ASC) and Libraries**

Both departments were exposed to complex concepts of agency (as in the ability of individuals to act) and transfer of power and responsibility. According to ASC staff, the SeNS outcomes were mainly achieved through the ability of CBs and CCs to spend time in the community “having conversations”. It is clear that ASC officers gained valuable *experiential learning* about the location, role and methods of community builders. The *variation* in community builder “journeys” in their unique localities, together with some of the challenges on the way, also afforded LCC officers a richer source of learning.

They are pleased that the participating Neighbourhood Network Schemes appear to have been inspired and informed by a strengths based approach. The closer contact with the NNS was welcomed as it gave them all greater insights into each other’s roles, which could have benefits in the future. In their view, the NNS are likely to sustain some of these practices beyond the lifetime of SeNS.

ASC were aware that the SeNS project was a relatively limited application of ABCD. They did not know at the start which of the several elements of the approach could be inculcated and adopted during the project. They commended the flexibility of ND and their *appreciative and developmental* style, applied through the mentoring and the learning sites meetings.

Libraries adopted new principles and styles of work too: the Virtual Networks strand used ABCD principles to listen and respond to the interests, needs and wants of older people resulting in more reflexive and responsive approaches to the teaching of ICT/digital/networking skills. Libraries developed new partnerships with NNS and other organisations that work with older people. Libraries originally planned to *adapt* their existing provision but instead they are pleased to have introduced *new* provision through the SeNS funding.

The mentoring and guidance in ABCD from ND was valued by LCC officers and CBs. It played an essential role in developing wider and deeper understandings of good practice in strengths based community and relationship building. The learning sites meetings were an opportunity to share practice, consider the elements of the approach and be invigorated.

### **The Response from Nurture Development (ND)**

Nurture Development were clearly impressed by much of the work done by the CBs and the CCs and with the experiences and reports from individuals in the community. For ND, deep change is indicated by a relocation of authority and the absence of a pre-engagement agenda. There were nascent signs that such a shift of authority was beginning to take shape and ND can be credited with enabling this, backed by the officers from ASC Commissioning who led the SeNS project, undertaking a form of “disruptive innovation”.

ND were “pleasantly surprised by the *remarkable* journeys” that the three CBs took with local people in their respective areas and elaborated that to a greater or lesser extent, CBs had grappled with the challenges of the approach and changing their mindsets, they had taken steps to relinquish control and direction, they showed considerable engagement with and understanding of the philosophy of an asset based approach.

ND believes that the narratives collected from CBs, CCs and local people provide a powerful indication that a difference has been made with a modest investment.

### **Looking Ahead**

There are positive signs for Adult Social Care that some of the ABCD style practices and principles have taken root through the work in the pilot at the three NNS organisations. They have begun an exploration of ways in which they should support a strengths based approach, beyond the usual contracting framework which seeks definite service related outcomes. They want to develop their understanding of what changes it could mean for elderly people and the whole community in Leeds.

Community Connectors felt they had been given visibility and legitimacy to do the connecting by being part of SeNS. Some of the connections being made are subtle and potentially more deep seated than those from a more traditional group starting in a community centre without the SeNS ABCD ethos. In such cases, CB and CC are trying to weave people together in groups/associations and as individuals. They are the “social glue”.

Participants are gaining companionship, “we stick together,” in purposeful activity, but also learn new skills, through exchange and collaborative efforts, through undertaking some “work”. Some are becoming more confident and it is diffusing into other parts of their lives. There is a sense of openness and that many things are possible. Others have started from a position of struggle and survival; they speak of no longer being “invisible” and of having a (newfound) “voice” and wanting to encourage others to give voice to their experiences.

From CBs, CCs and others there is a sense that small scale actions and gestures of care and communication in everyday situations are important for a community’s well-being.

# 1. Introduction to SeNS and ABCD

## What was SeNS?

SeNS was an EU funded transnational project in Leeds under the Interreg IVB programme of the European Regional Development Fund. The aim was to reduce loneliness in the older population across Leeds and to reach those who weren't taking up or engaging with activities or social networks. It ran from July 2013 to an extension in February 2015.

### **A summary of the transnational project's aims:**

- To create and strengthen social networks for senior citizens
- To develop and test a strategy in order to create and strengthen such networks
- To develop a series of innovative instruments to create and strengthen such networks
- To raise the awareness about active ageing amongst the senior population in medium sized cities in NW Europe.

### **In the Leeds SeNS project there were two strands:**

- Major Strand – testing Asset Based Community Development (ABCD – see below) in three contrasting areas of Leeds
- Minor Strand – improving digital provision for older people through the city wide library service.

## **Changes and activities anticipated in Leeds**

The starting point for Leeds City Council Adult Social Care (ASC) Commissioning officers and their colleagues in Libraries was that councils alone cannot set up services to solve isolation and loneliness. This is better tackled by people knowing their neighbours and people in their local area.

### **The intentions for the SeNS experiment were to:**

- Add value to Leeds' Neighbourhood Networks
- Explore the potential to reach people not engaged in services
- Encourage a whole community approach to tackling social isolation or loneliness
- Try something different; not set up new services
- Build on existing assets
- Use council and community assets
- Understand the council's role in enabling such an approach which would be different, and not a commissioning role focused on deficits.

## **The ABCD approach in SeNS, Leeds**

SeNS was piloted in Leeds, in three different areas:

- Calverley: Geographically isolated on the outskirts of Leeds and constrained by road networks and poor transport links and although Farsley Live at Home Scheme do deliver some services in Calverley, they don't have a physical presence there.
- Middleton Park: High density housing with no real centre. High levels of deprivation, crime and poor health.
- Harehills: A geographically large and culturally diverse area. The area has poor housing and health inequalities.

An established third sector partner, the Neighbourhood Network Service (NNS) for the area, was appointed as "sponsor" in each area. The three NNS (or sponsoring organisations) were Farsley Live at Home Scheme, Action for Gipton Elderly (AGE) and Middleton Elderly Aid. Each organisation identified a person to act as the "community builder" (CB) for either seven or 10 hours per week, and had a budget of £15k to set up a community small sparks Fund. The community builders received training in the ABCD approach. A community builder is the critical link in an ABCD project. The NNS have 8 year on-going contracts with the council and have been delivering community based services for some time

CBs based in the local NNS were to find the "community connectors" (CC). In ABCD terminology CCs are generally people who engage with others in the community, identify the assets of local residents and begin to support people to get connected to each other. They also help the people identify themes and issues that are of interest. Later it was hoped that people would attend an "ideas fair" celebrating activity to date and looking for further shared concerns and interests. At any point, people could apply to the "small sparks Fund" for start-up funding to put their ideas into practice. The funding was not available to existing constituted groups.

Leeds SeNS ABCD pilot can be characterised as a relatively (small scale) funding driven experiment; this distinguishes it from many other applications of the ABCD approach in the US and the UK which are generally not based on the need to allocate funds to support new group development. The first session with the ABCD experts, Nurture Development (ND) was entitled: How to use Asset Based Community Development when allocating European Match Funding in three "learning sites" in Leeds, April 2013.<sup>1</sup>

The Libraries element of the project delivered the ICT strand of the project to link virtual with actual networks. One aim was to increase the awareness of the Leeds Directory ([www.leedsdirectory.org](http://www.leedsdirectory.org)) as a central point for people in the city to find out information regarding local networks and resources for older people. This was to be achieved by training library staff who would promote the site to library users. The second aim was to increase

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to pilot ABCD methods was introduced later in the ERDF project lifecycle after funding commitments had been made to the local organisations based on the original funding bid so the funding focus had to remain.

digital awareness and inclusion amongst older people by training them to use online social media.<sup>2</sup>

### **Key elements of ABCD theory and practice**

ABCD is a strengths based approach to working with communities which focuses on the positive: on the assets and strengths present in a community, mobilising these assets, passions and skills, community driven (“from the inside out” involving the funder, the sponsor and CB “stepping back” and so not doing it for them). It is based on relationship and skill sharing. There is considerable literature and practice, based on work over twenty to thirty years.

Nurture Development, a leading consultancy in strengths based approaches, were commissioned by LCC in 2013 to support SeNS apply an ABCD perspective to community building.

ND’s proposition for ABCD in Leeds was to “resolve loneliness by hospitality, bringing people from the margins in, in an exchange of gifts”. ND explains that everyone has gifts that can be valued and shared. “People who are often labelled by their problems (e.g. their addictions, diseases or poverty), also have positive attributes.” Gifts of the head are things we know about; gifts of the hands are things we know how to do; gifts of the heart are things we care deeply about.

The focus on “hospitality” was ND’s way of encouraging and conceptualising a move away from what was essentially a deficit, loneliness. It is fundamental to ABCD that focusing on a “problem”, as in the starting point for SeNS, like loneliness *is* problematic. According to ND, it individualises, medicalises and leads to potentially unsustainable and institutionally led solutions like friendship groups, programmatic interests and service focused solutions which in ABCD terms don’t sufficiently build community cohesion.

Although an introduction to ABCD can be schematised into the ND’s “six step” activity (see below), it is also characterised by its advocates as “a way of operating” in which, according to ND, you don’t get ABCD, “it gets you”. The asset based or strengths based approach encourages “associational approaches”, which are not institutionally led. Positive changes around hospitality and loneliness can happen because associational life revolves around people’s pre-existing strengths – their passions and skills and interests which they can be motivated or facilitated to share. The strengths based community development approach used in SeNS therefore aimed to increase associational life, increase hospitality and increase the involvement of the “marginalised”. Who exactly is marginalised is not an absolute and is defined flexibly in relation to each specific circumstance and context: people who might feel or be perceived to be more on the “outside” of a particular group/situation/ community/ activity/locality and so on.

An association for Nurture Development is free (and has no paid worker routinely organising it), informal and involves three or more people coming together. While communities almost by definition exist with some degree of “boundedness” (of place, or interest, or some other

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<sup>2</sup> Over 150 staff attended training sessions delivered by staff from Leeds Directory. The outcomes and achievements for the second aim are described later, in the body of the report.

characteristics) the paradox in building community is to acknowledge that there may well be in and out groups, but the challenge is to apply the antidote and “invite strangers in”.

### **The basic six step process in ABCD**

This section is based on ND training material.

**First** The community builder finds “connectors”: people who are known by and who know their neighbours.

**Second** Connectors ‘asset map’ all the hidden treasures – the people, connections, places, informal associations – already there in the community

**Third** Connectors find more connectors like themselves and discover what specific activities/actions that people would like to develop, focussing on positives

**Fourth** People form themselves into action groups around the specific activities that they want to do to improve the community

**Fifth** Make seed-funding available (preferably as a development fund rather than a grant)

**Sixth** People share their experiences and achievements with each other and plan together for the future (in celebratory, investigative event/s). They decide what more they can do using assets from within their community. They consider ‘What do they need outside agencies to do for them’?

Having followed these steps, sponsorship groups can better understand exactly what it is that local people care about and what they are prepared to do to change things.

## **2. Evaluation methodology**

SeNS was intended to be an experimental even an “emergent”<sup>3</sup> pilot project, with few traditional specific outcomes or measures at the start, except those devised for the requirements of the ERDF funding and its monitoring, which were not the subject of this evaluation as such.<sup>4</sup>

### **Evaluation approach:**

MACE offered a positive, critical friend stance with adaptive methodology aimed at being pragmatic (working with project constraints). In practice, there were four other key

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<sup>3</sup> Emergent practice does not start with a rigid theory but is reflective and learns from insights gained through interaction with the problem and the context. It is useful when situations are complex and interconnected. Nurture Development emphasised this quality of practice to the evaluators.

<sup>4</sup> The project has a set of target audiences and agreed outputs:

- ABCD strand of activity - 30 networks developed (120 meetings held with 720 participants)
- ICT strand of activity – 15 networks developed (60 meetings held with 360 participants)
- 6 council services improved
- 20 people trained
- 50 new members of the library
- 6 partnerships created

principles: i) being facilitative, ii) offering sense making, iii) focusing on learning offering a more “developmental evaluation”, and iv) using creative approaches to draw out and map individual and collective responses to the project.

#### **Evaluation methodology:**

MACE combined standard tools and practices with a limited, modified use of the outcome mapping methodology<sup>5</sup>, and creative, interactive approaches. It employed rapid reconnaissance, participant observation at project development meetings (learning sites meetings (LSM)), outcome challenge and progress marker development, semi structured interviews face to face and by telephone, story telling, video and community theatre engagement techniques (“flash forward”).

Outcome mapping was used in much simplified form. It allowed for each area to set broad aspirations for the community but remain flexible and open to emergent developments and learning. An “outcome challenge” for the journey, which focused on desired changes in people’s behaviour, actions and relationships, was set. This was complemented by a series of “progress markers”. The challenge and markers were devised by two CBs, with support from the evaluator. The use of outcome mapping was in keeping with the philosophy of ABCD and the emergent nature of the project as it focused on a range of possible results and does not wholly rely on a predetermined sequence of activities or outcomes. The markers attempted to draw out the evidence of movement towards achieving the challenge and were non linear. Progress markers were designed to focus attention on positive changes in each area. In the simplified version, community builders were encouraged to build their evidence for claiming the results that were achieved. The final review from CBs is included in section 4 on achievements.

#### **Evaluation framework:**

This was focused on the main aspiration of the ASC and Libraries lead officers’ intention to gather stories from the project: that is, their directive that this pilot and evaluation should provide qualitative rather than quantitative evidence. The original tender evaluation framework was also modified in light of project practice, in particular the strong lead role of Nurture Development (ND) in facilitating the developmental aspects of the project and the (informal) learning framework.

We asked:

- What were the achievements in outcomes in the community and for relationships between the NNS and the council (originally: did the ABCD method and strategy work in Leeds)? We collected data on reported changes in behaviour, actions and relationships of people in the community, and looked at relationships between the council and the NNS.
- What was learnt about processes during the project (originally: how did the project methods, tools and instruments work)? We examined set up, operations including asset mapping, reviews and revisions of the approach/the project in Leeds.

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Resources/Publications/Pages/IDRCBookDetails.aspx?PublicationID=121>

- Was the approach sustainable? What was identified as potential for innovative ways of working (by the council)? We gathered data on key elements of sustainability (resources, deployment, methods and relationships) and looked for emergent signs of different ways a local council and its adult care services could work with older people.

### 3. Structure and rationale of the report

The evaluation report which follows is structured into four areas:

- Achievements and changes arising from the SeNS project (section 4)
- Learning from the SeNS process (section 5)
- Sustainability, future practice, and potential innovations (section 6)
- Findings and recommendations (section 7).

Each of these warrants some explanation. First, the rationale for what is included links to the spirit of the philosophy of ABCD, that is: that voices from the less powerful should be heard; that agency should be transferred to the ordinary citizen. Thus although we have summarised these narratives, we have aimed allow the voices, nascent changes and dilemmas as fully heard as possible. The opinions are the respondents. Some facts have not been checked.

In section 4 on achievements we include a brief report in tabular form of the *outcome challenges* and *progress markers* developed by two of the Community Builders, together with a series of responses from sets of key project stakeholders: local people, community connectors, the lead officers in LCC (ASC and Libraries) and the ABCD developmental consultants Nurture Development.

In section 5 on process we include responses to the running and delivery of the project from community builders, LCC ASC, Libraries and ND.

Similarly in section 6 on the future we include responses to the running and delivery of the project from community builders, LCC ASC and ND.

## 4. Achievements and changes arising from the SeNS project

### 1. Progress marked by CB in Middleton

The final review presented below comes from a written response by the Middleton CB, Janet.<sup>6</sup> There are further narratives from CBs, which focus on **process** but also include descriptions of positive outcomes. Further evidence of progress can be seen in the testaments of the community connectors and local people included below.

#### Outcome Challenge

Middleton (SeNS ABCD) project intends to see older people especially engaging in more activities across the area, meeting up to be sociable, sharing skills, and enjoying each other's

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<sup>6</sup> It was not possible therefore to ask follow up questions to clarify the evidence being offered.

company. All parts of Middleton, even those traditionally not involved, will be represented so all older people have a chance to connect and to give and receive. Older people will have more choices about how they connect in their local area and in overcoming isolation. Middleton (SeNS ABCD) project intends to see intergenerational relationships and activities improving attitudes and behaviour to the benefit of old and young.

Progress Markers		Evidence
<b>Expect to see</b>		
1	More people, especially older people, of Middleton working together, sharing ideas and skills and willing to co-operate	<i>CB expects the groups to continue to grow and that will enable more residents to attend.</i>
2	More older people joining the 5 groups established by March 2014	<i>There has been a 6th group set up; a resident has got a terrarium (garden in a glass bowl) group on a Thursday morning which is very popular with new residents joining in to make their own little garden</i>
3	CCs going to places where young people go and socialise, to share hobbies and skills	<i>CB tried this at the youth club but it was not successful. Her successor may try and achieve this</i>
<b>Like to see</b>		
4	A variety of new groups formed through CCs reaching out to new potential skill sharers (of gifts of head, hands and heart)	<i>CB achieved the new group and CCs are still out there talking about SeNS</i>
5	More men involved as CCs, sharers and participators in activities and relationships	<i>They now have more men at the groups trying out new skills, e.g. the baking and the terrarium making is very popular</i>
6	More CCs based in the Westwoods and Bodmin area going around talking, building connections and eventually activities	<i>CB reported that it's been very hard but the new CC is still working in that area</i>
7	Older and younger people meeting together sharing skills etc and showing more positive attitudes towards each other including more understanding and respect of older people's experience and wisdom	<i>They have had a grandchild baking with their grandma. CB hopes it is something that will happen in the future</i>
8	An increase of word of mouth communication, e.g. on the streets, in shops, in pubs, through CCs connections and this helps older people in Middleton including the really isolated know more about what is happening in the area	<i>We are still out and about talking to the residents and the new CB has ideas of her own</i>
<b>Love to see</b>		
9	People who "don't know what they are missing", who are very isolated yet happy at home, coming out and getting more involved, sharing their skills and enjoying the activities	<i>They have had a lot of new people attending the groups: they have made walking sticks and attended the baking group. CB would love to see it been attended by more isolated people, this has proven hard as they just are happy in their own homes.</i>

10	Groups, activities and relationships in Middleton which are successful, stable and secure, sustained by focused and more sociable residents who are "pleasing themselves" when they join in. These relationships and activities can continue without input from CB.	<i>CB feels very honoured to have taken part in this project; she is proud that the residents are taking charge of the groups themselves and sure this will continue in the future.</i>
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## 2. Progress marked by CB in Calverley

The final review presented below comes from a written response by the Calverley CB, Gaynor.<sup>7</sup> There are further narratives from CBs which focus on **process** but also include descriptions of additional positive outcomes. Previous reviews revealed further comparable evidence supporting progress as do the testaments of local community connectors such as S (see below).

### Outcome challenge

(Little Acorns) LA intends to see more isolated older people attending existing groups which run in the area. LA intends to see existing groups (organisations/associations) actively reaching out to new members and participants. More local people will feel that they exist and are 'on the radar' and are welcome to join in. LA intends to see that older people in the Calverley community feel part of a community which cares and values and wants their participation for themselves, and their Calverley citizenship. LA intends to see younger Calverley citizens involved in intergenerational connections.

Progress Markers	Evidence
<b>Expect to see</b>	
1	Isolated older adults who live in Calverley are happy to attend new & old activities or groups  <i>CB reported that she had seen and met new older adults attending different groups in Calverley. By witnessing this she realised that the time spent by herself and connectors in the community has encouraged new people to attend new groups. This is something she hoped would happen and is delighted people are making the effort and feel welcome when they visit a new group.</i>
2	The early recruited community connectors are happy to talk and spread the word about Little Acorns making connections  <i>The community connectors are still connecting and feel happy that their work is making a difference to people's lives. They speak to people in the community and are so happy when they don't need to introduce themselves (known as Little Acorns Connectors).</i>

<sup>7</sup> It was not possible therefore to ask follow up questions to clarify the evidence being offered.

3	New groups and friendships are established, building on local people's gifts of the head, hands & heart	<i>CB explained she finds it very difficult to put into words but the community has changed, there is a sense of community spirit and she believes that's down to her connectors and her; someone showing an interest in them and spending time chatting about their interests etc.</i>
4	The ideas fair is supported by the community and well attended	<i>CB was disappointed with the ideas fairs (it rained both times and people didn't want to face the weather). On the other hand, CB reported that Calverley carnival was very successful and they spoke to lots of people: a new bingo group started from a conversation on that day, so it was a success.</i>
5	People becoming more engaged and connected with the older adults in their community.	<i>No specific evidence supplied.<sup>8</sup></i>
<b>Like to see</b>		
6	More people who want to become community connectors and feel passionate enough to make changes	<i>See above.</i>
7	Members of the community who want to regularly share their gifts	<i>Members of the community are sharing gifts on a smaller scale than CB imagined. A lady told her that she was helped with her shopping bags by a young man (teenager) who had never spoken to her before and lived in her street He had been at Calverley Carnival and CB explained to him about the work she was doing in the community. The lady has promised to make him some mince pies nearer to Christmas as a thank you.</i>
8	Existing groups organisers are actively welcoming and encouraging new users by e.g. bring a friend night	<i>Some members of different groups have invited neighbours along to join in and this has been successful.</i>
9	New community connectors are recruited through the ideas fair and relationships are built	<i>CB said her connectors are always on the look out for new connectors and encourage people to get involved. They have had many chats about this and they always discuss Little Acorns with new people.</i>
10	Community connectors and group leaders become the eyes and ears of the	<i>No specific evidence supplied</i>

<sup>8</sup> Evaluator encouraged CBs to keep written records of the major and minor examples which could illustrate such a change in behaviour, relationships and actions in each community. CBs produced their best evidence when interviewed by evaluators but this was not possible within scope. The love to see section are the most difficult to achieve and we would expect less evidence at this stage in the work. Some information gathered in interim interviews may not be included here due to scoping issues. Further work is needed on the capture of evidence for progress marking.

	community (caring & observing) noticing if people are feeling happy or sad, are they joining in or participating?	
11	Older and younger Calverley citizens spending quality time together and sharing their gifts. Having time for each other (having patience, having respect):	<i>Nearer Christmas a dance group is performing in a local hall, CB hopes by inviting all walks of life this will be a good place for people to get to know each other.</i>
12	More informal help being given by younger people to older people and older people sharing their knowledge and life experiences.	
13	Older adults are welcomed into schools and are giving talks about their experiences and having conversations.	<i>No evidence supplied</i>
<b>Love to see</b>		
14	All residents of Calverley have heard of Little Acorns and have been thinking of ways in which they can help.	<i>CB believes that most residents in Calverley have heard of LA, in actual fact she doesn't even need to introduce herself anymore when in the community.</i>
15	The citizens of Calverley, especially the younger ones, will feel they want to stay in Calverley because there is a good sense of community and a good place to live. Feeling that they want to grow old in Calverley knowing they will be valued and respected: CB reiterated her sense of greater community spirit. She hasn't spoken to any younger people but their parents are getting involved and she thinks that will have a long term effect.	<i>No specific evidence supplied</i>
16	More Calverley citizens are actively involved in creating a Calverley village to be proud of and take responsibility for their own community.	<i>No specific evidence supplied</i>
17	The community to know their neighbours and be more community minded:	<i>CB explained her thoughts for the future and how having a community builder has helped Calverley get its mojo back, people are more thoughtful and are thinking more about others. Without the funding some of the new groups would have struggled to get started and Little Acorns has encouraged new ideas. She wants to continue her work in Calverley, not because people aren't passionate about their community, but because having someone that shows an interest has definitely helped people change.</i>

### 3. Narratives of changes and achievements from the informal associations/groups and individuals in the three NNS areas

The narratives are based on interviews and discussions with MACE evaluators. Some of these were one to one and others were drawn from group discussions.<sup>9</sup>

All these narratives are rich in signs of understanding and potential and should be read in conjunction with the summaries but also with fresh eyes as they offer opportunities for constructive discussion and reflection about the ABCD approach, the pilots in Leeds and methods of community building, including the formation of groups and the recruitment, support and development of community connectors.

Some of the stories contained personal information about people in the community and although those who spoke to the evaluators agreed they could be quoted, to give greater privacy we have used letters instead of names.

#### Summary of findings based on stories of the groups set up with small sparks funding

These stories show how the new activities are attracting isolated older and younger people, many of whom have experienced heavy loss or life changes. People have been drawn together into companionship, friendships and new groupings by an enthusiasm for learning or sharing a skill or gift. Leaders of groups experience benefits too and enjoy their roles. There are powerful examples of newfound confidence and increased awareness of other people in the community, and their needs and gifts. The activities have had a positive ripple effect in the lives of some group members enhancing their relationships with family and others, beyond the group meetings themselves.

The activities appear to show elements of self help and individual/citizen agency and a small decrease of dependence on local organisations to provide. This may allow the groups and activities to sustain beyond the SeNS funding period. There is the potential to develop holistic approaches to involve all age groups while ensuring older people are engaged. There is also the potential to reduce the use of traditional 'marketing methods' like leafleting and increase street level work advocated within ABCD. The language of needs and issues continues to be used by contributors which suggests it is relatively hard to shift to a strengths based perspective from a deficit one. Nevertheless there are positive signs and some individuals have taken up the call of ABCD to self determination or "agency" and self help.

#### *The Baking Group*

This group started meeting once a week at Middleton Elderly Aid centre to try new recipes, perfect their baking skills and exchange their views and news. Led by A, a Middleton community connector, she saw baking as a way of getting people out of their homes and giving them something to look forward to. She was identified as having this skill when they were "talking about things they might be able to with the elderly...(but) I am not a professional!"

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<sup>9</sup> While retaining the spirit of the interviews, they have been edited and not verbatim. However, opinions expressed in the interviews are those of the interviewees and the accuracy or validity of the statements have not been checked or approved by MACE.

CB circulated leaflets, to the “little communities” around the area including the sheltered housing. It started with three people and grew to five. Each week they choose what to bake next so A. can get the ingredients ready, creating a large print recipe drawn from books/packaging etc. The group members are content with one session a week due to their other commitments.

A. has seen shyness overcome and is excited that the confidence in the group has grown as well as their baking skills: they have become more independent cooks. All cakes and bakes now ‘literally fly off the shelves’ as they are sold at cut price to other centre users.

One member, B’s husband died young at 58 and she still misses him very much. B, herself is 74, hadn’t baked in over eleven years and hardly left her flat in all that time. She is a changed woman. “I had gone into my shell,” she said. CB Janet invited her to help start a baking group. “I made the first cake and it was beautiful ...everybody thought it and I felt over the moon, over the moon. I’m more confident now than what I ever was”. B. speaks enthusiastically and movingly about her cookery book, the feature on her baking in the Middleton Elderly Aid magazine, and her role presenting leaving flowers to Janet.

The one man in the group, J, speaks of the benefits he has gained from participating in SeNS and the Middleton Elderly Aid. He has survived a divorce and contrived to stay in Middleton against the odds because he loves the area. After four and half years pretty housebound, only going out to the local shop, staff persuaded him to come to the centre coffee morning and “it snowballed from there”. He attended three times a week and then joined the SeNS inspired baking group.

J. testifies to the effectiveness of baking too. “It has changed me. I’m a very busy man now, I’ve definitely become more confident” – and is particularly proud of his Victoria sandwich cake, if a little disparaging of any Yorkshire men who say they can’t bake. Now he takes his baking down to his wider family and it makes him “feel great”. He has reconnected and deepened his relationship and contacts with his family after a period of “not bothering with them”.

He’s learnt other valuable skills too, like using his hands to make a curtain rod at the walking stick group. Of his involvement in these SeNS activities, he says, “When we get together we have all sorts of new ideas as well. These activities have made a heck of a difference”. He knows the centre organiser (who is CB) has been important but he is determined to keep the (baking) group going after she leaves. He said he and A. “are the bosses now”.

Emboldened as a group, they are writing to Jamie Oliver asking for quick and easy, affordable and wholesome recipes for single people on their own, pointing out that they don’t have the money for his ministry of food course at Leeds market!

For the future, group leader/CC A thinks that some money might be needed for the ingredients and also that they could use a bigger kitchen with more cookers so more than five people can bake at the same time.

### *The Terrarium Group*

A simple request from K. to the community builder to keep an eye out for glass containers and old vases in charity shops, a photo of a terrarium, and a plea from a centre user “to make me one?” led to K. saying “No, I won’t make you one but I will show you how to make one” and the Terrarium group was born from existing centre users initially. One month in, and a whole plethora of customised and personalised planted and decorated gardens have been made by group members who are enjoying the activity, can make a terrarium quite quickly in a single session and have plants to learn about and look after at home. Worried that they wouldn’t survive, in fact the opposite has happened as the group has learnt to look after their terrarium gardens.

K. is aware of enabling teaching methods: he shows rather than lectures; he gets members of the group to mix with people they haven’t met before. He sees the group activity as a way of attracting isolated people into the centre. “Everyone of them has said, when people have seen them, they say ‘where did you get that from’, and they can turn round and say ‘I made it’. It gives them a right sense of achievement,” when they prompt admiration from family and friends. And it is gardening that can be done in a flat!

K. also recognises the value for himself. “I go because I get a lot from it as well as give to it.” He enjoys the conversations, and from being someone who can research on the internet and advise on gardening. It is his enthusiasm that he is sharing.

He believes that the council has a role to play in providing start up money for materials but thinks that the products could be sold to raise some income.

### *The Walking Stick Group*

Middleton has R.’s wife to thank because she volunteered his services when Middleton Elderly Aid’s CB was looking for people to share their skills and hobbies. R. has been making walking sticks for about 30 years, and so he set up the Walking Stick group for people to come to the centre on a Monday morning, have a sociable dinner and a productive time making a walking stick.

The group started small and then others joined, usually making just one stick. Now a small group of men meet regularly to make sticks and even bring their own experiences to bear. They keep receipts and balance out the expenditure within the small sparks grant that enabled them to buy the first lot of materials like glue and the antlers used for handles. After the first people had been in and made one, R. saw the way for “me, J. and E. to sort of stick together” and since then they’ve been making and selling walking sticks for the community at affordable knock down prices.

This core group of three admit to getting pleasure out of meeting and talking together, as well as the making and the sharing of skills. E., in his mid 80s, was an engineer and a motor mechanic and looks forward to coming to the group. And as R. agrees it’s been of benefit to them all “so there’s bits that he knows that I didn’t, you know making job easier, so we have a right good time we do, we get on about all sorts”. And the three of them have branched out, learning new skills and meeting the needs of other centre users. A. now has a new

dusting rod for those out of the reach places and J. solved the problem of having difficulty drawing his curtains by designing and making a curtain-pulling rod.

#### *K. and the Poetry workshops.*

K. is a young Muslim woman who has lived in Harehills all her life. She is a single parent with two daughters. In addition to being a full-time parent she is studying to become a paramedic assistant.

K. came to the poetry workshops in May 2014 encouraged to do so by her cousin. At that time, K. felt herself becoming isolated and she had experienced a loss of confidence as a result of the end of her marriage and being a domestic violence survivor.

The five poetry workshops were held weekly at the Echo Centre in Harehills. They were the initiative of the Harehills' community connector who recognised a need in the local community for women to come together to share stories and find support.

Working with local poet Michelle Scally Clarke, the group was encouraged to share their ideas and their work. K.'s transformation into a key and lively contributor to the group was rapid and she quickly found her voice. She has since written many poems and finds writing about her life and experiences a really helpful way to manage the stresses and anxieties of life. She is more confident in herself.

The impact on K. of being part of the group has been profound and she now is keen to spread the message to encourage others to give voice to their experiences. She says: "If I can do it, anyone can do it". She now aims to support other women to make positive changes in their lives, "to tell about my struggles, to share and support other women with the problems they face", she explained.

A key motivation is also that she is a positive role model for her own daughters. The poetry workshops provided a catalyst for K. to make many positive changes to her life and the impact of this will be of benefit to her children and her wider community.

#### **4. Narratives about changes and achievements from the community connectors (all areas)**

These narratives are based on interviews and discussions with MACE evaluators. Some of these were one to one and are longer and others were drawn from group discussions.

#### **Summary of findings based on stories from Community Connectors**

The accounts of CCs usually reflect the nature of their localities and the style of working of their CB, that is, more or less interventionist, more or less focused on spending the small sparks funding allocation, more or less street work focused. Their accounts also depend upon their own drivers, passions and personalities. CCs are growing in their understanding of their role though interpreting it in light of their context. Some CCs were always skilful, confident communicators while others have developed their capacities in the pilot. The language they use to describe their involvement and the project varies considerably amongst the individuals, again reflecting their understanding and their context.

Nevertheless there seems little doubt in their minds of the value of the work they have been doing in connecting people, and the need for it. And these accounts evidence increases in networking and association and show that they mostly have a growing understanding of citizen led activity, though they need more leadership to achieve it more effectively in practice.

There are some other common themes.

Several stories are insightful about diversity, sameness and difference and where different responses for specific groups of people might be needed. While one pilot area has worked across a wider age range, the other two show signs of wanting to adopt more of a whole community approach. Several accounts feature examples of the fortuitous, of serendipity, where chance conversations led on to community building. Most CCs are very clear that they have benefited from their involvement, as much as others; they have been on journeys of self discovery as well as becoming more deeply engaged with their own communities. Most CCs could be said to experience a form of joy in the work. The stories confirm the importance of CCs being embedded in and passionate about where they live. They are also testament to the importance of validation: CCs like being a formal CC in a named project with a purpose, especially for those who have done more street level work beyond a centre's walls.

The work of CCs has included creative activities, in effect addressing "deficits" through drawing out people's assets – in telling or dramatising their own stories, writing poetry, having a voice, finding commonality. The prompt may be a deficit but the activity is strength based.

There are also some limitations to note.

Even with CCs who have paid most attention to ABCD principles, there is a tendency to frame purpose and activities in terms of deficits (as in "lonely", "isolated", "ill", "invisible"). This goes hand in hand with the impetus of CCs to offer to be in helping or fixing mode. Second, none of CCs seemed particularly aware of the asset mapping process as a tool. Third, detail of street level work did not feature much in the accounts.

Overall, the engagement and enthusiasm of these connectors offers a very positive start, even if concepts and practices of strength based community building need further development.

#### *Community connector A.*

A. likes elderly people. For her, being a CC means helping people in the area that she lives in and "involving the elderly or whoever (is on their own)." She loves seeing how happy they are meeting up. "At home they'd be sat watching TV, bored out of their heads and talking to nobody...thinking I've got nowt to do...Look how they are communicating, it's wonderful." A. believes that "the essence of it (is) the looking forward to something that (they actually want to do), once a week; they know it's coming and (she) thinks it really does work." She believes the new activities have drawn them together.

A. reminds us that people can be on their own, behind their closed doors, almost invisible. She says now the others don't have to be invisible anymore. She herself really enjoys getting out, baking with others and watching it "fly off shelf like hot cakes. Literally. We can't keep it in."

A. is confident the networking will go from strength to strength "as the need is there." She sees an increased number of groups meeting at Middleton and the way the community builder encourages people "to say what they would like to try in the future, through notices and so on."

*Community connector J.*

J. recognises that there are a lot of lonely people and he wants to "try" to help further by starting his own Facebook page and writing in the newsletter to extol the virtues of the activities and being in the club at Middleton Elderly Aid.

He is very aware of the isolation of men sat in their houses, perhaps after a divorce, and emphasises strongly the importance of a social life. To his mind, women socialise "more easily". As men often lose touch with old work mates, they need "something special." Four new men came to the centre as a taster, got on well so came back, then the group grew to ten. They variously get involved in the walking stick and terrarium groups as well as baking and dominoes.

J. envisages a better time when there is a bigger centre so the various groups can "join up" and in his words, the cliques are abolished. He also has plans to get more women involved in dominoes and start a mixed team to challenge other groups. And he sees a great opportunity to bring more men he knows in through darts and mixed groups for curling, which can be done from a wheelchair.

His heartfelt statements expressed his vision. "This is enough now. I want to build this up, Janet (CB) made a good foundation, good roots here and I don't want them to wither, I want to expand them and become part of Middleton, and for the older end (to) say it's a piece of theirs. They own it." But he also thinks the council has a role in funding and other support, to supplement local fundraising and for starting new activities.

*Community connector K.*

K. has been the lead for the Terrarium group. He has an employment background in Adult Social Care and with the Neighbourhood Network Services, lives locally and kept in touch with Middleton Elderly Aid.

K. is committed to attracting younger people into the centre and showing them that it is not all the smell of "boiled cabbage, talk about dentures and bingo." As he explains, these activities are something different to do and he encourages others to "start a group."

K. commented on the difficulties housebound people have getting out to the Middleton centre based activities. He suggested that some people could be more mobile if they were

more motivated. He has mobility issues himself but he knows he could come by bus (if he had to). He is happy to visit people at home as well so long as he can limit his total input to one day a week. He has also noticed that some people need help with their gardens, which is not something for him. And he thinks they could all keep in touch through the newsletter. He believes the group activities either need money from the council for materials or a way of making money by selling the terrariums.

The following two accounts are longer and offer more in depth detail about being a community connector. As do the previous accounts, they offer opportunities to learn about the potential of strength based work and the SeNS pilots in Leeds.

*Community connector AH. (H for Harehills)*

AH works part-time at the Pakistani Centre, Harehills and has lived in the area for 18 years. But it was AH. talking about her volunteering activities which led Harehills CB Karen to recruit her.<sup>10</sup>

For AH. the best thing about being a CC is the “wider scope” to talk about issues that affect all women and getting to know more women who reflect the diverse community in Harehills. She has talked as a connector with women (for the most part), mostly Asian and including Iranian, Iraqi, Sudanese, Afghani, and Romany.

AH. has become more confident, communicative and sociable over time through experience in her working and personal life where she explained she is a mother of mixed race children. AH. considers herself to be a problem solver and a talker! She finds “isolated people by accident” and can talk to anyone, bringing them “out of their shells”. AH. has been talking to people on the street, when she is out shopping, at the till, or picking up her grandchildren from school. Part of her ability to work as a CC in Harehills stems from the fact that she is perceived by (Asian) as an honorary “Apne” (one of us/ours) rather than an ordinary “Gory” or white woman.

As a CC she provides an opportunity to talk about personal issues and was surprised by the benefits she herself gets. “It brings out things in me and allows me to express my vulnerabilities. It really was an eye-opener for me. I thought I was doing it for the benefit of others ... It’s like paying it forward. I enjoy the feeling of giving to others.”

AH. “connected in” a number of women including: an Afghani refugee whose journey to the UK was very long and traumatic who has set up a health group. Through the poetry group she built her public speaking and writing skills and confidence and now Michelle Scally Clarke is helping her write a book. In another case, AH. Informally and casually taught an elderly Pakistani women to speak some English and become more sociable, finally calling AH. “sister” as a sign of their important relationship. Many women were quite timid when they joined the SeNS groups. Sometimes, like K (see above), they “just came alive” as AH. describes it.

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<sup>10</sup> Comment: In interview AH said this was to help create “a sort of consortium for older adults, particularly ethnic minorities to make them aware of what was available for them locally.”

AH.'s role with the activities set up in Harehills was to approach women in the Echo centre or in the wider community who might benefit. Later she looked for crossovers (between groups).

The Poetry group was catalysed by "a need for expression" and stemmed from some existing work (craft focused) within the Asian community (to de-stigmatise mental health issues). AH. asked the poet Michelle Scally Clarke to work with this group because they had stories to tell. The poetry group, around five women, introduced her to potential connector, K. and also gave AH the idea of activities in care homes.

The Chai and Drama group was formed of eight people to enable women to acknowledge how they were experiencing domestic violence and hate crimes. Name calling was being tolerated as "just one of those things". The group was a response to the need to make hate crimes more visible by reporting them. AH. drew on her experience of supporting and speaking up for mixed race families. Later AH. opened up the group's drama performances by encouraging a variety of people to attend.

As a CC, AH. uses street based communications and her personal, community and professional networks, including the Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Forum whom she praised. In addition, focus groups at the Echo Centre helped identify what the women wanted to do. In AH.'s view women from different cultures experience the same issues, which come up over and over again: problems with kids, drugs, domestic violence. By October 2014, AH. had talked to many individuals and groups about the area and the issues. Although not an ABCD ideas fair as such, at the Harehills Health and Wellbeing event participants concluded they needed more "joined up thinking" around older people, more information about activities and what was available, and solutions to poor public transport.

AH. believes women and children (as women get stronger) were getting and giving the most in the Harehills SeNS project. In her estimation about 30% of all the people she brought into the new activities were previously uninvolved locally. All the groups led to more informal meeting or networking. She feels she helped direct the community building.

In terms of change and innovation AH. says the SeNS project legitimised her natural ability to talk (and connect people to each other, activities or information). Being a formal CC (who already knew the area well)<sup>11</sup> gave her better access and confidence to talk to strangers in the street.

AH. is most proud of carrying the message to women about having a voice and hope for change, and knowing they can help themselves. As diversity is really important to her, she is also proud of getting involved with different women. It is her firm belief that the same issues affect everybody, Asian, black and white. "It doesn't matter where you are from or what your culture is, there are ways of discovering your similarities and working together. If each one of us just helped one other person then it could make such an impact."

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<sup>11</sup> Comment: No asset map produced in Harehills. People like AH have "asset maps" in their heads.

### *Community Connector S.*

S. has lived in Calverley for 30 years. She is retired from working in colleges with people with learning disabilities. She was already involved in Farsley Live at Home Scheme before becoming a CC early in the SeNS project.

For S. the best thing about being a community connector is feeling very useful helping others in the community. "CCs are people who talk to people in the community about the (SeNS project) Little Acorns, which is a new initiative for all members of the community but particularly the elderly; the aim to combat loneliness which is a big problem; and their feelings of invisibility and having no use."

S. sees herself as a good communicator and sociable. "I am friendly and confident. Reasonably outgoing, loving, kind. I hate people to be lonely, it's a big motivator." Revealingly, she found that being a connector enabled her to "enact ... more positive parts of my personality. Being a CC has made me realise that I have more to offer..."

Community builder, Gaynor, was S.'s main source of advice about being a CC, through "in depth chats". The concepts and approach were initially difficult to grasp but she found she just needed to start, so she found out about what was needed by asking if people needed any help and saying, "Do you want to be part of the community?"

Initially S. approached her friends and neighbours and having become more confident about speaking to strangers, she progressed to talk to various local groups (e.g. Slimming World), and also handing out leaflets. While she listened to people, she made connections in her mind between them and what knowledge and skills they might need or share. Examples of these interests and skills include sewing and knitting, office and research skills, gardening and photography. As it was a new venture, she usually passed the information to Gaynor (CB) who does "the actual connecting". S. also offered her own personal and practical skills like computing (e.g. Excel), research, teaching.

S. has facilitated many informal connections described here but has not herself run or initiated any of the formal small sparks funded associations of three or more in Calverley.

Connections S. did make include the following; an elderly woman who was a great seamstress teaches and offers her services, increasing her interactions with others; an older healer offering free sessions, has benefited from more company, and this then led to a chance link with a flower arranger who now helps at a church; and a retired music teacher who is also a carer has offered her music skills, which gives her an outlet. S. also encouraged support and connections for an isolated ill person.

Prior to becoming a CC, S. had not known all the formal and informal activities in the area. She did know a bit about local churches, classes and coffee mornings, and theatrical groups. Although she wasn't involved in the Calverley asset mapping, she has gained insight through her own connecting. "Being a CC has opened up my eyes to the network of people in terms of their skills..." and who is willing to share. She feels she helped direct the community building.

S. is inspired by trying to educate people about Little Acorns, and sharing her enthusiasm, confidence and experience about how it can work and grow. With more people involved at

the grass roots, she believes it has the potential to fill a gap, to help the elderly, lonely, ill or isolated with no family support and no means of getting out and about. She would like an older person to be able to “pick up the phone and ask for help and (for) someone (to be) there. This could be anyone with a need in the community.”

While she has focused on older people of her generation and thinks the elderly age group are getting the most from Little Acorns so far, she says she could connect with young or younger people. “I can grow into it. That would do me good. Little Acorns is about breaking down the barriers between the young and the old. “

S. appreciates how loneliness can strike almost anyone and also has personal stories of how good connections, sharing and exchange amongst neighbours can forge friendships and support between the generations. S. believes hundreds of people could offer “the smallest acts of kindness that grow into support within a community.”

“What is life if it isn’t the everyday? For some it is crucial to have the contact with the everyday. The banter about the everyday little things. I have seen the power of what can be done.”

S.’s positive perception of her local area and community has not changed through her work with Little Acorns as she was welcomed when she moved to Calverley. But being a CC has sharpened her awareness of our use of time, the role of self interest and the diminished sense of community.

S. is proud of being capable of being a CC and doing the work, and grasping the approach of Little Acorns. “Little Acorns can offer that social glue. It is a subtle thing that takes some understanding. We all have it in us, to help others. I’ve become more aware of my own gifts and skills and potential...people skills...(diplomacy)...teaching...I have the ability to help people to be happy. This is a gift I didn’t know I had.”

## **5. Achievements from an LCC ASC Commissioning standpoint**

These achievements are drawn from a semi-structured interview undertaken by the evaluator.

Overall, ASC SeNS lead officers believe they have realised their plans for learning and for change. In particular, it is clear they gained valuable *experiential learning* about the location, role and methods of community builders. They now feel more competent to support the recruitment of CBs in any wider programme. They are pleased that the participating NNS appear to have been inspired and informed by a strengths based approach which transfers agency and choice to citizens about activities and association. In their view, the NNS are likely to sustain some of these practices beyond the lifetime of SeNS. The pilot has given ASC commissioning officers more confidence to pursue alternative, more facilitative approaches to meeting statutory requirements, for example under the Care Act (2014).

According to ASC staff, the SeNS outcomes were mainly achieved through the ability of CBs and CCs to spend time in the community “having conversations”, supported by the

mentoring service provided by ND, and the flexible application by ND of selected ABCD practices. ASC were aware that the SeNS project was a relatively limited application of ABCD. They did not know at the start which of the several elements of the approach could be inculcated and adopted during the project. They commended the flexibility of ND and their *appreciative and developmental* style, applied through the mentoring and the learning sites meetings.

## **6. Achievements from an LCC Libraries standpoint**

These achievements are drawn from a written response to questions from the evaluator.

According to the Libraries' lead officer, the Virtual Networks strand of the SeNS project has been very successful. They developed new IT/internet learning sessions for older people using iPads and mobile Wi-Fi. This complements the IT/internet learning sessions in libraries, where they use a desktop PC to show people how to get online.

Leeds Library IT/internet sessions are traditionally chosen from a prospectus designed by library staff and each session has pre-defined learning outcomes. The Virtual Networks sessions used ABCD principles to listen and respond to the interests, needs and wants of older people. Sessions were tailored to meet their requirements. They used the assets of the groups visited. This included the community venues where Libraries delivered sessions and the existing skills, knowledge and equipment of older people to add value to the sessions.

Over 200 older people have attended these Virtual Networks sessions. Libraries developed new partnerships with Neighbourhood Network Schemes and other organisations that work with older people.

Libraries believe they did more than they set out to do. The initial idea for the Virtual Networks strand was to adapt the existing library IT/internet sessions to add a social/networking element. They had some success with this in the early stages, such as the library knitting group who set up a Facebook page to showcase their work and encourage new members to join the group.

Libraries originally planned to *adapt* their existing provision but instead they are pleased to have introduced *new* provision through the SeNS funding.

## **7. Achievements from an ND standpoint**

These achievements are drawn from a semi structured interview undertaken by the evaluator.

In light of early concerns (see below), ND were "pleasantly surprised by the *remarkable* journeys" that the three CBs took with local people in their respective areas. ND took the chance to commend them personally in September 2014, for their energy and some "brilliant" work. They had "deepened their humanity". Later ND elaborated further: to a greater or lesser extent, CBs had grappled with the challenges of the approach and changing their mindsets, they had taken steps to relinquish control and direction, and they showed considerable engagement with and understanding of the philosophy of an asset based approach.

ND looks for depth – both conceptual and in application and there were the signs that this was developing. Something was “ignited” in Leeds. And ND enthused that it was illustrated “wonderfully” in elements of the evaluation film both conceptually and practically by CCs, group leaders and individual people.

Complex dynamics in diverse communities can throw up positive reciprocity and there are significant examples of this in Harehills particularly, with “new” communities coming forward to engage with more established residents and communities.

ND illustrated progress in relation to marginal people through a story they had heard from Leeds, which can be seen as a “humble beginning” – a glimmering of the growth of inter dependency which bucks a trend towards isolation and specialisation. This was a case of someone with Alzheimer’s who was getting more informal support and was not automatically seen as being the responsibility of an external, specialist, professional service to be served separately, away from their community.

The SeNS project, according to ND, was not scoped or resourced to comprehensively collect a great deal of the quantitative or qualitative data about newly established informal associations of citizens in groups or one to one. But ND points out that the project has probably engaged hundreds of people over the three areas and with the SeNS funded work with Libraries. ND believes that these figures and the narratives collected from CBs, CCs and local people (presented above, and narrated in mentoring sessions and other meetings) provide a powerful indication that a difference has been made with a modest investment. ND acknowledged that an extended experiment could try to count “in a deeper way” and to capture more of the qualitative change too.

## **5. Learning from the SeNS process**

There are six learning narratives in this section: three from CBs, and additional responses from Leeds City Council and Nurture Development. They are drawn from either an interview or a written response to questions from the evaluator.

### **1. Community builders’ responses on the process: Middleton**

At first Janet had doubts about SeNS working in Middleton. She found it very hard to get people to understand ABCD and it was very frustrating for her. After months of going to all the community meeting and events in Middleton, she began to “walk the streets” and speak to people face to face. “This was the best way of getting people to understand what SENS was about. Things then started to happen with people coming forward to be connectors, enabling (me) to move forward.”

Janet also found useful asset mapping and the element of the initial training where they talked about skills they could share and things they wanted to learn. Janet herself researched and created the Middleton Asset Map, which displays the activities and events happening locally.

According to Janet, Middleton connectors are “local people who are passionate about their community and bringing people together.” She recruited a number of connectors who remained constant and active throughout the project. At first she helped some of them with ideas of how to start connecting with the local people. After time all the connectors had a

good understanding of how they were to be involved in the project. Janet did walkabouts on her own and with connectors. During the project she shared elements of the guidance about ABCD with the connectors, “(her) way”, assisted by the mentoring which helped her understand how to approach and speak to connectors.

Janet explained that citizen led activities are those set up by the residents themselves, where they “take control”. Middleton groups set themselves up and managed recruitment to the new groups and the budgets for purchasing materials etc. As part of this, connectors knocked on doors and went to local cafes to encourage new people to join the new groups. Some of these new people experienced positive changes as a result of attending groups. “One of the ladies attends every week and has started baking in her own home for the first time in 10 years”.

Middleton did not have an “ideas fair”, Janet preferred to hold several informal coffee mornings which allowed her to talk more about the SeNS project. However, as part of SeNS and its evaluation by MACE, there was a special Middleton event for the SeNS groups and others who meet at the MEA centre through the week. They enjoyed each other’s company so it was a pleasurable and successful day.

The small sparks fund was “useful” according to Janet because “it allowed new activities to start and members of the community have made friends and are now socialising with each other.” Janet has had good take up of the groups and hopes they will continue in the future.

Janet was satisfied with the “well organised” events run by the council as part of SeNS. She commented that there was too much paperwork at first and too many meetings. She appreciated the input of Nurture Development who “were always there if you needed information or help”. In particular, the ND mentor listened and helped and pointed out “the different options on how to develop the project.” Janet reported that when she made suggestions about practice she was always advised to try to keep to the ABCD method but was allowed to “input my own way of working.” Overall, fitting the community builder role with her regular job worked reasonably but it was sometimes hard.

Janet believes an ABCD approach as used in SeNS has given the people choice and control over what they would like to see happening in their area. They have the opportunity to develop new groups to share skills with each other.

Janet’s (Middleton) points about the future and sustainability are contained in section 6 below.

## **2. Community builders’ responses on the process: Calverley**

Gaynor, community builder in Calverley works for Farsley Live at Home Scheme based in Farsley, the NNS which serves both areas/villages. She suggested that Calverley’s residents may have particular circumstances because younger members of families have moved away leaving older people more isolated. The area has no high street and very few amenities, unlike Farsley. Older people are helped to shop by the FLAH minibus trips to the supermarket. In the first few months, the local community were wary and even prickly about what Gaynor was doing with Little Acorns (the name for SeNS in Calverley). About six

months in, she had spoken to a lot of people and the reactions were finally getting more positive and “warmer” and the community connectors were also doing their work.

When she was doing the outreach, Gaynor liked to speak about getting back to an “old school way of thinking”, having time for others and “knowing your neighbour”. She emphasised the ABCD concepts of having a “passion” and sharing gifts and knowledge with others.

Eventually Gaynor felt she and the project were being accepted in this village environment with its “independent” residents. During the next three months, conversations were better and they had a better understanding of what SeNS was about. Gaynor even thought they were more positive about the future and enjoying the “positive vibes that CB and CCs bring”. Gaynor is known as the Little Acorns lady.

Gaynor didn’t attend the ND project inception training session on ABCD (her manager did). However, she did apply the asset mapping process that she says helped her a lot, as it gave her a different perspective on Calverley. Her work on foot was complemented by the map’s “aerial view”. She created the map with CCs, using the knowledge gained from them and being in the locality herself and adding information she found online. The map will be updated with the newer group.

CCs in Calverley were mostly natural networkers and relationship builders, though one woman who was initially quiet has since “blossomed”. Gaynor, like other CBs, spent time with CCs explaining the concept of SeNS; having conversations she intended to be enjoyable, and not “heavy”. She supported them when they experienced “coolness” towards LA in Calverley. Gaynor did not share any written material about SeNS/ABCD but explained the approach to CCs verbally. She called her group of nine CCs small. She does not like to expect too much from them. They have been having monthly meetings. There are further “connecting people” in the community who are not formally CCs.

Gaynor has personally been inspired by her CB role and she gives some additional voluntary time especially at the weekends. She adapted to doing the work on foot, going to the different groups, and “not being the scarlet pimpernel”. Talking would not necessarily be about Little Acorns but would be conversations about people’s lives and preoccupations. Gaynor now feels more accepted by the community and even a person with whom people felt happy to share difficult experiences.

Gaynor talked about examples of connecting and building work: neighbourly conversations about someone not seen around which led to tentative house calls, and then participation in a local club; another man with a disability was approached by a CC and now attends the FLAH lunch club; the encouragement of thinking about others (in everyday acts of kindness); the intergenerational example of the 17 year old helping an older woman across the road; an art group which has evolved with new members and teacher out of an existing women’s group.

Gaynor’s approach in Calverley has been to wait patiently for connections to be made and following a kind of ABCD protocol, holding back, not initiating activities herself even though she has been full of ideas. “There could have been twenty groups but I was advised not to do that”. The most she does is plant seeds and hope that their confidence to connect will

develop. Gaynor thinks groups that form without her intensive input will have more “longevity”. So by the time of the evaluation, not as many groups as the funding would allow have started (three). Setting targets in SeNS (for example at the April 2014 LSM) made little difference because she was “not going to force things on people because that is not how it would happen.” However, she did admit to being frustrated about being advised against proactively starting more groups.

Gaynor reported that she had run two “badly attended” ideas fairs (especially due to poor weather). Her approach as CB has been to build on the themes of concern and interest from CCs’ conversations in the community. She also promoted LA at the Calverley Carnival, preferring walking about to standing at a stall, giving out leaflets and team working with CCs. This has been a more successful experience. However, if the library is available at no cost she might try another fair now. Her aim would be to involve all kinds of people, get some of their ideas, and identify people who want to get involved. She was planning a CB led event entitled ‘Do you know your neighbour?’ Gaynor’s strategy was therefore to piggyback on existing local events to promote LA and to focus on “little things”, not big things, like large events. She wanted the project to continue, not end with a celebration!

Although Gaynor did not disburse very much small sparks monies, she thinks it is a really helpful and essential element because it “makes people want to get involved, and provides a little bit of help to get started”. She has also thought the leaflets prepared by library staff were very helpful.

Gaynor has found fitting in the work as well as her normal duties and doing it comprehensively, including monitoring, in the seven hours very challenging. She has endeavoured to apply ABCD principles because this is a trial/pilot and she wants to build on ABCD foundations regardless of the nature of her area. She has done the extra hours voluntarily in order to keep up the contact and connections. Another issue taking time has been negotiating the funding criteria with LCC for small sparks monies for a Calverley project.

Gaynor has found input from ND about ABCD and SeNS very interesting and the ND mentoring especially supportive, for example about the time she needed to take to get involved in a community as a builder. She particularly appreciated the face to face sessions but the ND mentor was also a valuable point of contact for information or queries.

Gaynor thinks the ABCD approach makes sense, despite her desire to be more proactive in starting groups. Its benefits include listening and not dictating to the community and finding out what they think is needed and wanted. She feels listening rather than talking, observing people and being open to suggestions are key elements. She has attempted to observe positive behaviours amongst the people associating and then give positive feedback to reinforce good practices like being welcoming to strangers, because “small gestures make a difference”. She would not change much about the arrangements for a similar project.

Gaynor’s points about the future and sustainability are contained in section 6 below.

### 3. Community builders responses on the process: Harehills

Karen explained that the SeNS project in Harehills was slow to start due to “language barriers”, where she spent a lot of time in one to one meetings, communicating in “broken English”. Later she used interpreters (see below).

During the project they used “most of the materials” from the training sessions on ABCD with ND, “especially the skills sharing - the method of gifts of the head heart and hands”.

Karen did not know the connectors or whether they were “natural communicators” before she recruited them. She attended a number of community meetings and “walked the streets talking to people”. She described CCs as ordinary people from a range of cultures who wanted to “give something to their community” and were able to communicate about SeNS.

Karen reported that the local residents in Harehills decided for themselves what group activities they would like. For example, a group of women from the Pakistani centre come forward with the idea of a poetry group, which led to them writing “very emotional poems”.

The groups ran independently after the application had been approved, where the residents took the lead and went on to run their own newly formed activities and events. Initially CCs brought an interpreter with them to help fill in the small sparks application.

Karen shared the ND guidance on ABCD with CCs, along with lots of good information and guidance from her discussions with the ND mentor. The asset based mapping (see below) also helped CCs as there were local meeting points they did not know about.

Harehills CCs were local people of all ages who attended various groups of all cultures and many local events held in Harehills. They spoke about the small sparks fund and “recruited local people who were passionate about helping the community”.

Karen reported that CCs had a “difficult job breaking down barriers and getting the trust of the different communities” in Harehills. She explained that CCs visited various community centres to “try and speak to the younger people to encourage their grandparents and families to get together and form new friendships and to share their skills with each other”. Later the local people who had formed the new groups continued to associate.

To support CCs to identify community themes of importance, Karen walked the streets with them, visited groups and centres and then attended events and festivals. To create the asset map, Harehills SeNS researched existing activity and community buildings, schools, and places of worship in Harehills, focusing on buildings that might be useful in the future. They update their map when necessary.

Rather than a full celebratory “ideas fair”, they held a coffee morning to enable local residents and CCs to meet and form friendships. Additionally they have attended local events/fairs in Harehills and the Syrian festival. Karen intends to support an event around February 2015 involving all the people and activities funded by SeNS so they can all meet. She will propose they meet up regularly to network, share ideas and involve more people.

Karen explained that (the sponsor NNS) AGE (based in Gipton) networks extensively already, but the small sparks fund, was different in that it “opened up a different way of approaching

local people. It brought many local people together who would definitely not have had the courage to come forward themselves with ideas and skills that they were willing to share”.

When asked about target setting and whether it was helpful, Karen explained again that the development of the work was slow to start, mainly because of language and the need to match CCs with members from specific communities, and give support with form filling. After this, and through speaking to many organisations, the applications started arriving. Several were “great” and according to Karen will continue to thrive beyond the funding period for SeNS finishes. Further groups were also set up outside Harehills, without SeNS funding, and continue.

Karen was satisfied with the organisational arrangements with local authority staff, who were always responsive and gave “full support”. She was also positive about the support from ND, in meetings and from the mentor, as she always “listened, never judged and gave good advice and was a great help throughout the project”.

If she wanted to do things in a different way Karen said “we always tried to stick to the ABCD method (but) if we came across a problem we would discuss it with the council first and take advice from them”.

Much time in Harehills for the community builder, Karen, was spent responding to the cultural diversity of the area, and building trust. They found “a local person who could speak many languages to help with the language barrier”. To help groups complete applications to small sparks, Karen held many one to ones, with “one form sometimes taking many weeks to fill in”.

For Karen, the benefit of the ABCD approach was that it gives local people a voice and the choice and control to form new groups and friendships.

#### **4. LCC – Adult Social Care Commissioning officers’ responses on the process**

Adult Social Care and Library officers’ intention was to pilot a new approach to working with the elderly. This was to be a learning opportunity to investigate quite a radical change in orientation about the way a council could support elderly people.

SeNS lead officers in ASC Commissioning remained closely in touch with the SeNS project during its lifetime. Through a series of mechanisms, they guided the NNS and CBs, ensuring the project ran within the parameters they had set to meet the EDRF funding requirements *and* the mission for the project. Together with the consultants in asset based community development Nurture Development, they steered the Leeds based practitioners working as CBs from the three selected NNS to remain true to the experiment. This meant the NNS staff coming to understand and themselves use some of the community building principles and practices from the strength based perspective at the core of ABCD.

LCC set up comprehensive project management and required regular monitoring information from the NNS/CB, but they did not focus on generating a detailed quantitative analysis of the impact of SeNS. This was partly because of resourcing and the short time frame. Their plan was to gather stories from the pilot to provide a tentative indication of the viability and the effectiveness of the strengths based orientation or perspective. The

evaluation has geared itself to gather qualitative evidence about any changes achieved, and examining some of the processes.

ASC chose three very different areas of Leeds for the SeNS pilot. In practice there were differences in the localities and also between the NNS as organisations and the individual CBs. There were variations in work context, roles, their availability, personal styles, and interpretations of the pilot and its intentions. To use ND's metaphors, each NNS took a slightly different "journey" using the ABCD "compass". This has also provided a rich source of learning for LCC and for ND, and more grist or added value to the shared learning process at the various meetings of the LCC officers and CBs.

ASC considers that there were four key constraints affecting the progress of the project: the timeframe, the project being money led (disbursement of the small sparks funds), overall spending rules, and NNS staffing changes.

1. The **timeframe** was condensed because of bureaucratic delays, and in any case was very short in community development terms.
2. A relatively<sup>12</sup> substantial **budget** (the small sparks fund) motivated an imperative for CBs to proactively find activities to spend on. CBs tended to orient more to this funding than to ground level community building, or alternatively, to be worried about not spending. The strengths based approach advocated by ND advises that *money follow local initiative and action rather than precede it*.
3. The EDRF programme **spending rules** had somewhat less flexibility than LCC's own funding rules. They determined where project money could be spent<sup>13</sup>; negotiations and communication on this took up management and project time, at least to start with.
4. In different ways at each of the three NNS there were particular **staffing issues**, which also constrained the depth of the community building work. The Middleton CB left her post in July, which meant the project slowed. The Calverley CB's line manager left in July, leaving CB with more work as part of the covering arrangements, which impacted on the SeNS project. The Harehills CB was in fact the NNS manager from Action for Gipton Elderly who chose to take on the role herself.

## 5. Libraries response on the process

Libraries found the new approach had a number of advantages:

1. **Flexibility:** The content of the library Virtual Network sessions was determined by the people who attended them. They tailored the sessions to appeal to their hobbies and interests. This contrasted with the sessions in Libraries where session content was pre-defined.

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<sup>12</sup> Large in the context of spending constraints nationally.

<sup>13</sup> The funding had to be spent on activities involving three or more people, including older people, in the area of benefit, and was not for constituted groups.

2. **Mobility:** They delivered Virtual Networks sessions in community venues rather than in Libraries. The ABCD element of SeNS was being piloted in three areas of Leeds but the Virtual Networks strand was citywide. This meant that Libraries could respond positively to requests from any older people's group or organisation.
3. **Accessibility:** Libraries found that iPads were much more accessible for older people than traditional desktop PCs. Library ICT sessions usually were started by teaching mouse and keyboard skills and it was some time before people were online. Virtual Networks sessions started with people's interests and they were online within minutes.

The Libraries lead officer explained that SeNS was just the latest example of collaboration between Libraries and ASC. One of the main benefits in SeNS was the contacts that ASC had with the Neighbourhood Network Schemes, Leeds Older People's Forum and other older people's organisations and settings. These contacts and some personal introductions helped Libraries to develop new partnerships and deliver sessions in new places.

## 6. Nurture Development's responses on the process

Nurture Development has contracts to introduce strengths based approaches in a number of sites or settings in the UK and beyond. ND stresses the variety of contexts, vocabularies, and "journeys" which these approaches support and use. A major part of the ABCD journey for organisations and individuals is usually the shift from a deficit based to an "asset" or "strength based" perspective and associated practices. But there are other important features of the perspective and prescriptions which ND shared with the SeNS stakeholders, including the evaluators, during the project.

One is "relocating authority" which in the Leeds context meant moving control, choice and agency about activities **to** informal groupings or associations of people, who can be called "citizens", and by implication **away from** organisations like LCC and the NNS. Strength based practice in community building must enable activities and informal associations which are "citizen led". This involves intentionally "stepping back" which can be a major practice change for organisations and individuals. In time these can lead to "wider discussions" amongst a cross section of the community, even cutting "traditional fault lines, and obvious signs that traditional power and budget holders ("professionals" of various sorts) do not put their own interests above citizens – the "*uncredentialed ... regular people*".

Councils and voluntary organisations/charities should also move away from a "rescue model". Strength based practice also avoids a "pre-engagement agenda" which might include starting out with ideas about what is needed or wanted and what already exists in the community. Rather it asks people what they care about and nurtures "gift exchange" and "reciprocity".

That this is complex work is fairly obvious. And ND does not appear to subscribe to a soft notion of community relations. They recognise that all individuals and groups of people have complex but legitimate self interests. It is the role of an effective CB to work with tensions and ambiguity, and neither be "naïve" or dismissive about offers of engagement.

So the point of ABCD is to enable a greater level of “inter dependency” and communities which are “more hospitable” including to those who are “marginal”. Interdependency occurs amongst people in many ways. It can be depicted in a four quadrant model:

- Quadrant 1: people with the same label<sup>14</sup>
- Quadrant 2: immediate & extended family
- Quadrant 3: professionals paid to care for them
- Quadrant 4: unpaid, diverse relationships beyond the other 3 quadrants above. In ABCD this is the critical space to pay attention to.

According to ND, SeNS in Leeds was an experiment with a modest investment which was at heart a “grass roots grants allocation project with a strengths based perspective”. The overall resources and cost of ND’s support work were relatively limited.

As part of the induction process, ND worked with ASC and Library officers and staff from the three NNS on a two day “training course” in Spring 2013. At this stage CBs had been selected and NNS had signed up to the SeNS project. Rather than a “full blown immersion” in ABCD, ND realised the experiment would be an attempt to try a new way of working (within existing practices). As they argue it, ABCD should not generally be used as a yardstick but as a set of practices instead. ND therefore envisaged that the SeNS project process as planned would allow *reflections on practice*. ND’s early concerns were twofold: the conventional service delivery orientations of both council and NNS; and the imperative to spend a pre-allocated amount of money (historically built into the ERDF grant for SeNS) which ND worried might detract from testing new ways of working.

For ND, part of their implicit *theory of change* includes ideas about “disruptive innovation and innovators”, because in the case of SeNS, and its local authority initiated context, strength based approach runs counter to current funding regimes and the service model. Innovation can be triggered at any level or institution, in a neighbourhood or in a council department. They encourage individuals to strive for this role and seek to identify likely candidates who can be change makers. For instance, it is innovatory to introduce strength based approaches which work, leading to fewer traditional *clients for some organisations*, so organisations using and supporting strength based approach need to be rewarded and not penalised for the new work they are doing *and also for reducing the number of their traditional clients*.

## 6. Sustainability, future practice, and potential innovations

Four sets of partners or stakeholders in the SeNS project had the opportunity to talk to the evaluators MACE about how they wanted to see the work go forward and these remarks are outlined first. There are also signs amongst ordinary citizens whose voices are included above that they have ideas about how things might be done differently in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, lonely, ill, disabled, elderly, migrant and so on.

### 3.1 Community connectors – looking ahead

S. from Calverley thinks Little Acorns could interconnect with other organisations, as they would benefit from what we offer. She would like the considerable support and guidance from Gaynor to continue as otherwise she would feel too isolated and not feel part of something. “I don’t think I’d be as good as I am without Gaynor, who kicked it off and keeps it going. We all need each other, Gaynor can’t do it on her own”. S. is not sure whether money is needed for this work based on her personal journey as a CC where she has not facilitated any groups (of three or more) using small sparks.

When AH was asked about what organisations should be involved sustaining the work like SeNS in Harehills, she argued that the NHS needed to be involved doing the work and she said the local authority should “prioritise the community more”.

She also explained that the Harehills CB Karen had catalysed her, as she sees it, an appropriate role for Action for Gipton Elderly. She believes they can empower “people to take charge, take control and we are going to do this for ourselves. People like me aren’t rare. It is being given permission to go and connect with your own community. People can think it has to be your job to connect others, but it doesn’t have to be like that, to care about other human beings, that is the message”. Now with her confidence and experience she believes she could manage with less back up, with a little money, which sometimes helps for transport, food, leaflets.

### 3.2 Community Builders – looking ahead

Janet’s future practice would incorporate use of asset mapping, connectors and encouraging members to share knowledge and skills. Janet’s learning points for the future are:

- Listen to what the members need and want
- Allow resources to be used differently and not just limited to new groups, because of the number of activities that stop after a while due to lack of funding.
- Encourage other organisations to join with us to help reduce social isolation and bring people together
- Have more advertising from the council and the SeNS team
- Be more flexible about how the money can be used.

Gaynor has taken the sharing self supporting approach of an ABCD group into her mainstream work in nearby Farsley, particularly by setting up a group without a formal paid craft teacher. She thinks her work style was already aligned with an enabling approach but from ABCD/SeNS she has taken up the concept of “sharing gifts” into her (future) practice. Gaynor’s learning points for the future are:

- CB is the key factor.
- Get the right kind of CB who can relate to the specific community. Not every CB could work in any area

- Provide support for CB and the project
- Recognise that it takes time to build community so sustain this work and support little acorns into the future
- Provide funding for groups even after set up, at least a little to sustain, to hire rooms etc
- Give CB a minimum of 10 hours a week or even 14
- Let CB have a base in the area so people can drop in during the one office based day
- Make sure all CBs get a chance to do the training and meet other participants more informally in a project like SeNS before the first working meetings
- Do not make the spending of a specific allocated amount of money (e.g. for small sparks)<sup>15</sup> a key indicator of success
- Recognise that when it comes to evaluation, change is hard to pin down (or “bottle”) and provide evidence for when it is based on sense of or “feeling” of greater community connections.

Karen’s future practice would incorporate the asset mapping, encouraging more people to share their skills, and a focus on intergenerational work with older and younger people. Karen’s learning points for the future are:

- Benefit people with dementia and people who need extra care by including them.
- Allow repeat funding for a group proved to be a success so they can share their knowledge with new members, where they have matched the funding (with time, skills and passion)
- expand the people and organisations who can apply for the small sparks funding.

### 3.3 Leeds City Council Adult Social Care Commissioning – looking ahead

ASC is using the SeNS pilot to explore a number of possibilities for the future. They want to determine what changes to commissioning practices might lead to better outcomes in the community. So ASC learning and sustainability findings from this “inquiry” are twofold: the first relates to the pilot with the three NNS; the second concerns the potential take up and resourcing of comprehensive strengths based approaches with elderly people and the wider community in Leeds.

There are positive signs for ASC that some of the ABCD style practices and principles have taken root through the work in the pilot at the three NNS organisations. However, ASC is realistic about the limiting effects of NNS service delivery missions and imperatives, NNS staff changes, and the challenge of community building, which they recognise needs to be more firmly embedded. Usefully, on the basis of SeNS they now have a better idea of what community builders need to be able to do. They are considering the best institutional and

<sup>15</sup> Calverley small sparks funding was “underspending” in autumn 2014, because CB was following ABCD principles and waiting for citizen led ideas to fund rather than being very proactive herself.

structural arrangements for the identification, recruitment and location of CBs. They have begun an exploration of ways in which ASC and Libraries officers should support a strengths based approach, and beyond the usual contracting framework which seeks definite service related outcomes.

In the interim, to enhance their understanding of impact, ASC officers have proposed the idea of having further direct contact with the evolving associations in the three pilot areas during the last months of the project. SeNS has had to achieve change in a short time and some of the developments have established beyond the end of the MACE evaluation timetable. This should give them more insight into the changes being enabled by community connectors and amongst those who are meeting and associating.

The SeNS lead officers in ASC are already attracted to an “investment” approach to the community it serves, to support and facilitate community building. They know this will require them to move from a traditional service contracting framework (with needs analysis, specification of services and outcomes, procurement etc.). What is motivating this is the conclusion that when the contribution of the council is framed conventionally, in terms of needs and services, this inevitably “shapes what you get”. By implication, this is not positive, rather it can be limiting. ASC officers and their Library colleagues, on the strength of the pilot, are considerably impressed by the value of a strengths based approach and they would thus like to support a more comprehensive, pure bred version of it in Leeds. This would include more time than was scoped for SeNS to support and develop community building techniques. Through more strengths based work, they want to develop their understanding of what changes it could mean for elderly people and the whole community in Leeds.

### **3.5 Libraries – looking ahead**

Libraries regularly work with ASC on projects across the city, from memory sessions supporting people with dementia to reminiscence sessions or sessions for people with learning difficulties. They have an Older People's Project team that leads on service developments for older people. ASC and Libraries have shared their learning from the SeNS project with Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF), who will be incorporating elements in their Big Lottery funded 'Time to Shine' project.

When free Wi-Fi is installed in libraries, people may expect sessions where they can get help and support to use their own devices. Libraries officers believe the lessons from SeNS and delivering Virtual Networks sessions will stand them in good stead as they prepare for Wi-Fi in libraries. They have a project team looking at the use Digital and Creative Technologies in libraries and the person who has delivered all of the Virtual Networks sessions is a member of that team. They will continue to develop and deliver Virtual Networks sessions to Neighbourhood Network Schemes and others in order to connect people and establish new networks

### **3.4 Nurture Development – looking ahead**

For ND the “journey” is never wrong but they did articulate to MACE how a further ND supported journey to a strengths based community building approach could look in Leeds, based on the SeNS pilot and their other experience.

For instance ND could be involved in helping to “formulate the questions” and working on the detail of the “investment”, using creative and *appreciative* techniques to find out what is already happening in the locality. They could then be involved at neighbourhood level and in CB selection processes. They could advise on different models of hosting and sponsorship of CBs. After this, the early training/extended mentoring sessions should be an opportunity for organisations and individuals to actively opt in, if they feel the approach is right for them. At this stage a *learning framework* could be devised because the process is conceived as a learning experience, which requires support, tailored to you and your starting point. CBs (and CCs) need to be natural networkers (who can be nurtured to be “comfortable” in the role). A more comprehensive programme of strengths based work can be planned to model and teach more CB and CC techniques including street level work, and have more “learning conversations” than were possible in the SeNS project. With ND’s help, local projects could be “co-designed and engagement strategies developed”.

## **7. Evaluation findings and recommendations**

### **Findings and recommendations: the evaluators’ perspective**

The SeNS ABCD project in Leeds had several key actors (or “stakeholders”) whose accounts and perspectives are reflected above. This last section is the evaluators’ account. It presents MACE’s findings through the evaluation lens (focusing on the process, changes, and finally sustainability, future practice and potential innovations) while referring to the varying perspectives of key actors. This interpretation is offered in the spirit of learning and developmental evaluation; it is selective, oriented towards the future, and not a comprehensive review of every element of the project. A limited number of recommendations arising from the findings are integrated into the text.

#### **Findings on the process**

##### **Setting up, training and operations**

SeNS evolved into strengths based project but didn’t start life that way. The faltering start, efforts to clarify the mission, and the funding parameters constrained both the time available, and the selection of sponsors and participants. Nevertheless, in a short period, three locally based voluntary organisations were actively engaged in varying ways, especially by late Spring 2014. None had used ABCD in any formal sense before.

The mentoring and guidance in ABCD from ND was valued by LCC officers and CBs. It played an essential role in developing wider and deeper understandings of good practice in strengths based community and relationship building. The learning sites meetings were an opportunity to share practice, consider the elements of the approach (including the six steps) and be invigorated. They explored concepts and offered practice with the language of strengths based work. They also provided insight for the evaluation. ND gave guidance that was needed by LCC between meetings. The one to one ABCD mentoring sessions from ND were particularly praised by CBs. They appeared to get more and more out of them as the project progressed, and they tested and examined their ideas and experience through the ABCD prism.

Early LSM and project meetings were opportunities for questions and challenges to be raised. Challenges from experienced practitioners about ways to community build or ways to 'serve' or care for a group of people are inevitable. Some of these challenges might have been better dealt with before recruitment and inception of a project.

At the start the three CBs were nervous or sceptical about ABCD. While LCC officers were also learning, they were responsive but determined about the overall direction for the project. This process of discovery also meant CB uncertainty had to be contained by LCC officers and ND. ND encouraged the SeNS community builders to understand the philosophy of strengths based community building and to adopt the steps. Although the approach does have expectations and prescriptions, in practice the guidance in SeNS was not rigid: both LCC and ND sought to draw out good practice and local change in the three areas through explanation and compromise, and allow the project to be emergent.

CBs developed constructive relationships with council officers, welcomed the small sparks money for the most part, took advice, built relationships, and made use of services like marketing materials and venues from Libraries. There were negotiations about the use of the funding as part of the learning process; learning about how to mesh the funding criteria with ABCD principles. There were also complaints about the number of meetings and the monitoring paperwork<sup>16</sup> in the context of the hours funded for SeNS<sup>17</sup> but overall CBs (and NNS) appeared positive about LCC and the practical support they received.

SeNS sought to make a qualitative change in (older) peoples lives with a relatively small amount of seed money (small sparks) and project time, and very modest amounts of funded face to face street based work because CBs only worked seven to ten hours per week.

It is accepted that the community builder is the keystone in ABCD. ABCD practitioners may not encourage it, but it is possible to devise a person specification to recruit the best possible CBs. None of the SeNS CBs would have met all these criteria fully. Their commentaries and responses in this report give hints of this. They found applying the approach, even to the "grass roots grants allocation" quite a challenge; they experienced doubt, frustration in trying to explain ABCD, and even forms of rejection from people in their community. They needed to be robust and ultimately confident. However, in practice, all grasped the nettle and worked in new ways (mostly notably *talking to people out and about on the street*) and reaching out to new communities, especially in Harehills During the project, they enabled new opportunities for association for several people in their localities. Previous sections of this report and the accounts have illustrated a range of positive changes. The narratives and commentary from ND and LCC support a positive view too.

Also notable are the emotional and personal reactions CB have expressed: feeling honoured and proud, feeling inspired, and "being blown away" by witnessing some of the SeNS

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<sup>16</sup> See analysis and recommendations on evaluation below.

<sup>17</sup> As well as the learning sites meetings which focused on the approach and the changes, there were project management meetings with LCC officers.

initiated activities of local people. Professional experiences like this are quite special and bring renewed passion and effectiveness to a working life.

### **The use of elements of the ABCD approach**

ND has stated that SeNS was not intended to be a full blown ABCD project but was largely a “grass roots grants allocation with a strengths based perspective”. But SeNS started with ABCD training, sustained by the LSM and the mentoring. LCC’s objective within the EDRF funding included “testing ABCD”.

CBs were encouraged in various contexts to follow the **six steps** (first outlined in section 1): find connectors; asset map; find more connectors; form groups and associations; make development fund available; share, celebrate and plan more activities. The use of the steps is now reviewed and includes consideration of four specific elements of the SeNS ABCD process: street level work, stepping back, welcoming the “marginal”, involving the whole community.

After the keystone **community builder** is in place, the next most important building blocks in ABCD are the **community connectors**. In each of the SeNS localities they managed to recruit six to nine community connectors over a period of six to 15 months; the voices of some of these are captured in section 4. By October 2014, the main impetus for CC recruitment appeared to remain with CBs. It is not clear how many additional connectors CCs in particular recruited.

The feedback from CCs and group leaders in terms of their practice sheds light in various ways. It is significant that they felt they had been given visibility and legitimacy to do the connecting *by being part of SeNS*. One said they needed permission to do this (unpaid work). They generally liked having a community builder to work with, but varied in their need for back up. Some CCs and CBs clearly embraced street level talking, when they could put up their antennae and think about who to connect, and what to recommend. CCs had varying histories with previous work in community groups and their community but they all brought their own strengths and interests and skills to the project, if not every element of an ideal CC specification. If they weren’t confident connectors at first, it is suggested that they grew into the role, having their eyes opened to the skills and experiences of the people they were connecting to. One spoke of the need for special action to reach out to men who become isolated after retirement or divorce because they are not such good socialisers as women. Another argued that the shared experiences of women cut across culture and ethnicity and to which she responded in setting up very diverse groups.

**Street level work** was expected to reach members of the community and residents that don’t attend existing clubs, services or organisations; in this case people who were older, lonely or isolated who were the target of the EDRF funding programme focused on seniors networking. Engaging those who didn’t already attend a centre or have a circle of relatives or friends locally was explicitly part of the project’s aspiration. During the learning sites meetings, ND maintained the view that mass leafleting does not properly reach such a group, and street level work and multiple conversations spreading through a small and defined locality was a better approach.

It took time for CBs to adapt and adopt any street level methods. Their normal practice in the NNS is to run services and activities, undertake marketing about these services and perhaps go out to people who have been referred. They also found the approach of ABCD hard to grasp initially and therefore hard to explain. Their feedback showed that eventually they got the hang of the activity and began to see the value of engaging and explaining face to face on the street. It is an approach that requires support and coaching for specific skills and confidence.

The **asset map** is a critical tool within the ABCD approach. Ideally the community connectors through their grassroots connecting work at street level create this. It especially but not exclusively maps the small and medium scale interests, skills, friendships, and informal associations, and “hunting for hidden treasures – people, physical spaces, resources and connections. It is this activity which is designed to reveal the positive assets in the community amongst residents. It is expected to demonstrate graphically the potential for connections, “gift exchange” and reciprocity. SeNS CBs appeared to find getting started on creating the map a burden. Perhaps in early 2014, CBs did not have appropriate CCs or found it impossible to devolve the responsibility to connectors. They may not have grasped its value and purpose. However, by late 2014, CBs reported they found the asset map process and output useful (in one case described as an aerial view to complement the close in, street level work). The first maps did finally inspire a wish to do further mapping work with CCs, and make very interesting viewing, with obvious potential.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of creating new groups and gatherings was to facilitate community building (for a variety of purposes) and ‘interdependency”, through the catalysing of associations of people, one to one connections, and neighbourly, hospitable behaviour. These associations could be as small as three people to qualify for seed funds. ABCD sees associations as the building blocks of a wider more proactive and engaged community which increases the sharing and reciprocating of gifts and activities, and sees what else needs doing with the skills and passions available. SeNS in the three areas was orientated to spending a budget of allocated money to seed fund such associations. In the best scenario these associations rise from the grass roots, needing only the lightest touch of cultivation from a connector or a builder. The reality in SeNS was marked in its variation. One CB assiduously avoided over facilitation and fewer new associations or groups started or were funded in her area; in the other two, there was more direction either by CB or by key CCs and new groups ran or still run, though prompted by very different processes. In order to confirm the impact of these groups longer term (especially the time limited ones), individuals’ relations and connections and engagements into the future could be followed up.

CBs were not given formal targets to meet in their work (except as a stimulus to action in April 2014’s learning sites meeting). Nevertheless the question is inevitably asked: how many people did SeNS touch? There are concentric circles of engagement. In the centre the number who attended groups and funded events across the three pilots was about 150. Around this were visits to events and groups by CBs and CCs to promote and explain SeNS, estimated at 600. There are no disaggregated figures for conversations “on the street”

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<sup>18</sup> The Asset Maps as developed in Leeds could not be resized for this report and there are also reproduction permissions required as they are OS based maps.

which are just as important. Libraries worked with over 200 people. This was the beginning of a community building project and the next step could look at engagement strategies to involve people more regularly and in the most inclusive way.

The **small sparks fund** was conceived by ND (and LCC) as “developmental” money to jumpstart new associations. In Leeds up to £500 per group was spent on a range of activities and is, from the feedback, seen by local people, CCs and CBs as more or less essential. In strengths based practice the money follows activity and CBs are discouraged from turning to such sources of help first. The advice from an ABCD perspective is that new associations and activities should first seek help in kind from the community so that they avoid dependence on funding and thus maximise sustainability. There are signs that one or two of the groups described earlier in section 4 aspire to self sufficiency and sustainability. SeNS operated in Harehills so there will be an opportunity to see how such sustainability evolves in one of the poorest communities in Leeds. It may however be difficult to continue the generation of new groups/associations if the precedent of money has been too well established in people’s minds.

The sixth step is an **ideas fair**. This is seen as the culmination of a substantial period of nurturing groups and building community. In one area, CB is now planning a more fully fledged ideas fair. However, there were no major and celebratory ideas fairs within the spirit of the ABCD approach held in Leeds during the evaluation process. This was mainly due to the time needed for sufficient community activity and motivation. Instead key players like CCs and CBs explained that they found out what to do locally (what was wanted/needed/cared about) through talking, listening, leafleting, getting the message out connecting and linking up, doing the mapping, holding focus groups, going to other events and talking about/promoting SeNS.

The notion of “**stepping back**” ran counter to the considerable management and delivery skills of CBs. They were accustomed to assessing need and devising solutions, possibly even “rescuing people”. They were frustrated at the slow pace of change when they were advised not to have the answers, start the activities or be overly proactive. Each CB conformed to varying degrees. Over time they all increasingly embraced the concept of citizen led activity albeit exhibiting telling signs of “being in charge”, in relation to groups, CCs and individuals. However, sometimes citizens (community connectors, local people) did not fully take responsibility, with their own “agency”. They expected CB and the NNS to continue in the role of provider, rescuer or organiser. Moving to a citizen led stance takes a different mindset for all parties.

**Involving the whole community** is part of the strengths based approach which aims to empower and employ the assets of a whole community instead of labelling and segmenting communities by care need, illness, disability or demographic. As one of CCs aptly asserted, it is not just older people who are lonely. Each of the SeNS CBs responded to this whole community approach to a degree but it was in Harehills where the boundaries between older people and the rest were most thoroughly broken down, and group members were from all age groups. This came about when CB found she could only reach older people, especially those in Harehills’ black and minority ethnic communities, through a range of organisations and people and activities, not just those serving or relating to elderly people.

She set aside her traditional client focus and connected with as many as she could contact who would help, taking herself outside her comfort zone.

However, one of the aspirations (of ND at least) was to engage the most **marginal**, those on the periphery of communities, defined on a community or locality basis. There many examples of isolated people being drawn in, and some nascent suggestions of, for instance someone with dementia being responded to by ordinary unspecialised community members, there was not a great deal of evidence of this and so there is some way to go here.

### **Findings regarding changes and achievements through SeNS**

The next part of this section draws findings and recommendations from the changes seen from the various perspectives. It opens with some interpretations and reflections arising from the stories of people on the ground who have been involved in SeNS activities. The full stories are in section 4.

#### **Changes (based on accounts from people in the community)**

Groups, networks and befriending schemes for older people exist all over the UK and many of them offer much needed and appreciated companionship and support. This is not to deny or diminish the very powerful and moving testament from several SeNS participants included in section 4<sup>19</sup> but they are common reactions to fellowship, and shared experiences and struggle. So is there anything different or additional about the work of SeNS in Calverley, Middleton and Harehills? The evaluators find that:

There is a layer of people involved in SeNS who are neither paid nor traditional volunteers. CCs have in effect been charged with having conversations, finding out about what people care about and what they can do for each other, and bringing these people together. They are different from other volunteers because they do not “do” for people, and they don’t quite know what they are looking for, or what they might find. Many of the SeNS CCs have an asset and a “needs map” in their heads. They seem genuinely excited about the project or the approach.

The connections being made (for instance in Calverley) are subtle and potentially more deep seated than those from a more traditional group based in a community centre without the SeNS ABCD ethos. CB and CCs are trying to weave people together in groups/associations and as individuals. They are the “social glue”. There is a nascent feeling that the community just might be coming alive because of the focus of interest in individuals from CB and CCs.

Participants in many of the groups (for example in Middleton) can see that ordinary people like themselves are undertaking some “work” and sharing skills. Leaders and CCs are enjoying receiving praise, the occasion to share enthusiasms and conversations, and the opportunity to find different strengths and skills in themselves. Participants are gaining companionship, “we stick together,” in purposeful activity, but also learn new skills, through

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<sup>19</sup> Stories about dislocation from family, isolation, relationship breakdown, violence, loss of confidence and motivation.

exchange and collaborative efforts. Some are becoming more confident and it is diffusing into other parts of their lives.

Participants like group members, CCs and group leaders are indicating through their use of language at least that they are more in the driving seat than before. Taking ownership with statements like “we are the bosses now,” and “it’s a piece of theirs – they own it”. There is a sense of openness and that many things are possible. Individuals and CCs can see what needs doing and what might be initiated. Others have started from a position of struggle and survival; they speak of not being “invisible” or having a (newfound) “voice” and wanting to encourage others to give voice to their experiences.

From CBs, CCs and others there is a sense that small scale actions and gestures of care and communication in everyday situations are important for a community’s well being.

### **Changes (LCC)**

The LCC set out to do something different with SeNS rather than provide a traditional service or network to the lonely elderly people of Leeds. They wanted to test their role in sharing council assets and drawing on the assets of local people, where possible reaching the “unengaged” through a whole community approach while also adding value to NNS.

All but the first of these objectives and aims have been examined in some way by the evaluation. Use of the assets of local people, reaching the unengaged and using a whole community approach were discussed above. How the final objective, the relationship between LCC and NNS added value follows.

SeNS was an experimental project and an experiential learning opportunity for LCC officers. It allowed them to get closer to people in the community and those who work with them than perhaps is normal, for commissioning officers, if not for Libraries. Libraries adopted new principles and styles of work too: more reflexive and responsive approaches to teaching ICT/digital/networking skills. The *variation* in community builder “journeys” with the “ABCD compass” in their unique localities, together with some of the challenges on the way, also afforded LCC officers a richer source of learning. Both departments of the local authority were exposed to complex concepts of agency (as in the ability of individuals to act) and transfer of power and responsibility. Through their project management and support roles ASC and Libraries had closer contact with NNS. This was welcomed as it gave them all greater insights into each other’s roles, which could have benefits in the future. The added value was then a two way street.

However, the local authority as the managing agent for the ERDF funding had to retain a firm project management role with detailed monitoring and relatively close scrutiny. This is not readily consonant with a devolved, community led approach. See the findings on sustainability and the future for more analysis.

### **Changes (Nurture Development)**

ND were clearly impressed by much of the work done by CBs and CCs and with the experiences and reports from individuals in the community. For ND deep change is indicated by a relocation of authority and the absence of a *pre-engagement* agenda. As we have already suggested, although the practice was mixed mainly due to the funding drivers at the

level of the authority and in the NNS, there were nascent signs that such a shift of authority was beginning to take shape and ND can be credited with enabling this, backed by the officers from ASC Commissioning who led the SeNS project, undertaking a form of “disruptive innovation”.

### **Recommendations**

The individual CBs and CCs should be commended for their personal contributions and their particular ABCD journeys.

A project building on SeNS should have explicit and interactive processes of initial engagement of sponsors and community builders, and ensure that ethos and approach and not funding are the main drivers for the sponsoring body

A strengths based project’s approach should actively encourage engagement and discussion in the community about

- Relocating agency and authority to the community and individuals
- Moving away from deficit language and “frames” about people, towards a strengths/assets focus

A similar or more ambitious project than SeNS would benefit from helping all participants have more understanding in advance, more lead in and preparation time, as well as much longer to community build.

CBs should have sufficient funded days per week to do street work and devise ways to reach and engage the widest possible population including the “marginal” within the locality, where debate should take place about the definitions of marginal and hospitable.

The balance of the project’s learning and support methods should be in favour of developing understanding, commitment, and skills including in:

- Relocating agency and authority to the community and individuals and “stepping back” so that the activities are based on local peoples gifts and they are in control
- Adopting a strengths/assets ethos.

### **Findings concerning sustainability, future practice and potential innovations**

CBs, CC and local people in the three pilot areas will almost certainly have expectations about what happens in their area on the basis of the positive SeNS experience. They have suggestions for improvement and ways to sustain the work, all of which could be debated at grass roots level. Some CCs feel the need for a supportive and active CB. One CB has a number of suggestions about CB role and the role of the small sparks fund. Others want changes in the rules for spending. These were outlined above.

ASC Commissioning officers have taken this learning opportunity seriously and wish to continue to understand how SeNS has impacted on local people now that there are established groups/associations and new relationships and behaviours in the community. They could also benefit from considering more closely the differences in practice across the

three areas, asking which methods will sustain, which people stay engaged and how, seeking to track some individuals and groups over time. There are further remarks about evaluation which link to this point below. Libraries have been inspired to mainstream the SeNS learning and offer the people of Leeds more creative digital services and networking help that they want, which builds more closely on their skills and interests.

Given the grass roots enthusiasm in the three areas for this work, it seems appropriate that the work is taken forward, to avoid the sense that the ERDF funding helped the local authority parachute in and then walk away at the project end. The NNS have learnt enough about the deployment of resources, the ABCD approach, methods that work in their localities, and the relationships required to continue this work, with some ongoing guidance, and commitment from the council and local authority officers.

### **Recommendations**

The SeNS work in its current modest form could be continued and developed in the three pilot areas with a relatively small amount of funding.

The NNS could consider rebalancing overall budget to increase the hours of CB, sustain some mentoring while offering a lower development fund amount (small sparks).

The council could consider providing for this from its mainstream budgets or the NNS could seek (part of) the funding from other sources.

**Expanding the work** Both ASC Commissioning and ND are interested in innovating more radically by setting up a more thorough ongoing strengths based programme in Leeds, with the suggestion of more intensive input from ND, and including a slower, more considered development phase. This alternative to traditional commissioning of service provision is cast as an “investment approach”. There is merit in this and it can be set in the context of the Care Act (2014). This requires local authorities to act in a preventative way, to work with “their communities... (and) help to keep adult people well and independent”<sup>20</sup>, to focus on support as well as care, and to have the well being of people at the forefront, and including the importance of social contact.

**Monitoring and evaluation** ND also have a vision of “disruptive innovators” and “disruptive innovation” as a path to better, more supportive communities. ND sees some signs of this in the SeNS experiment, in the practice and reflections of people in the community and amongst officers supporting the approach. A strengths based approach to stronger, more cohesive or interconnected communities is innovative so will need strong evidence of effectiveness. It will have to contend with or be creative about the language of “service provision” in the Care Act, because an ABCD approach does challenge or question a service

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<sup>20</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/366080/Factsheet\\_1\\_-\\_General\\_responsibilities.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/366080/Factsheet_1_-_General_responsibilities.pdf)

<http://www.independentage.org/guides/what-does-the-care-act-mean-for-me-getting-social-care-support-under-the-new-law-in-england/>

delivery perspective in relation to community building. The Act is based on a framework which still emphasises more traditionally conceived services, the creation of local markets and formal, institutional providers, as well as addressing well being.

The SeNS project undertook monitoring to satisfy its funders, but the evaluation by MACE was commissioned to generate more qualitative evidence in the shape of stories from the community, CCs and from CBs. A future project or programme might spend more time thinking about learning and evaluation and integrate them more fully into project management and the learning process with ND/ABCD capacity builders. First, this would engage CBs more actively in evaluation as a development and support tool and help them collate evidence so they care about what it can show and how it helps. Second, it could guide and encourage the devolving of responsibility to CCs in: the story collection, the people and association counting and mapping, and discussions of how many of the marginal (and how they should be defined) had been welcomed in to community and association. This could be integrated with any mentoring.

It is also possible that support for a community building approach by the council might lead to various organisations losing some clients, if community based self help and association increased. A simple tally of clients should not then be the only way to assess an intervention or service. It would be appropriate to assess local well being, and association measures, and also the contributions made by organisations to the overall community building process.

Targets may be stultifying and inappropriate in some projects, but the outcome challenge and progress marker approach has advantages. It can be democratically developed with all stakeholders and more fully embedded. It gives direction without being overly linear, and a clarity which can still allow for emergence and re-orientation. It focuses on desired changes in people's behaviour, actions and relationships. In addition, if key players like CCs, CBs and group leaders count little and often, and they meet to learn and share, then it would be possible to aggregate figures without it becoming onerous or rigid. If a wider programme of community building to engage older/adult people in the community is worth doing it will be because it can draw in a large number of people and knowing something about their circumstances. It would be necessary to balance the 'emergent' and process oriented ways of ABCD which do not specify outcomes, with more citizen led monitoring and evaluation strategies to count new associations and track/identify/pinpoint changes, positives and even improvements in individuals' experiences of their lives and communities.

### **Recommendations**

ABCD can be a flexible approach and it is clear that in SeNS there was uneven development where some elements fired up faster than others. The implicit theory of change behind strengths based process has sufficient cogency so

LCC should consider how to introduce and maintain a strengths based approach which:

- Goes beyond the pilot experiment and planning for more intensive community building mechanisms to be firmly established, with a sufficient time frame

- Invites more debate involving councillors, officers of the local authority and in communities, to gain understanding and engagement with the ABCD ethos and approach to improving lives and communities in Leeds
- Asks whose commitment should be sought to give legitimacy and longevity to this work
- Addresses the paradox of how a council (and other potential statutory partners) can enable or fund a grass roots “movement”
- Engages in more discussion about whose capacity is built, by whom and how.

Sets up and fully integrates arrangements for learning through monitoring and evaluation:

- Citizen led community building should embrace an aspiration to reach out to the marginal and to increase radically the numbers of people engaged and in association
- CBs could develop their own creative, accessible and simple ways to mark change, moving beyond traditional management monitoring forms. For example, methods for capturing accounts from the community could include the use of small video cameras and audio recorders by citizens on a regular basis. The approach should be learning oriented
- Citizen led monitoring and evaluation strategies could focus on counting new associations and aspiring to track/identify/pinpoint changes, positives and even improvements in individuals’ experiences
- Elements of outcome mapping methodology could be more systematically applied, with more collective work to agree challenges and markers.

December 2014