



Headlines from Community Enterprise Think Tank: *Creating sustainable communities*

Held at Trafford Hall, 22nd-23rd June 2016

1. Community enterprise is an incredibly **valuable resource** in communities. Community enterprises come in **many different shapes and sizes**, and they are involved in different activities, but they have in common that:
 - a. They exist to help the local community;
 - b. They cover a small, fairly well defined area;
 - c. They are organised by local residents or involve them heavily in their organisation;
 - d. They provide a useful service or tackle an important problem that people unite around.
2. A key contribution community enterprises make is to combat isolation and give people the **opportunity to meet, socialise and bond**. Intergenerational projects are particularly helpful as they contribute to breaking down intergenerational barriers. Community enterprise can also give people the chance to **share skills and resources**.
3. It is important to rely on a physical space as a 'base' to bring people together. Some community enterprises **own buildings, land and houses**. Others get by in premises they **rent or borrow**.
4. There is plenty of **help and support** available to community groups, especially in terms of start-up funding and advice, although smaller, truly grassroots groups often struggle to access this support or know where to begin when applying for funding. Some community enterprises are backed by **Lottery funding or the Big Local**. **Locality**, the umbrella organisation that supports Community Land Trusts and social and community enterprises, can give helpful advice to community groups when it comes to asset transfers.
5. Having **support from landlords** helps. Some landlords offer targeted support to individual tenants or groups who want to set up community or social enterprises. The idea of **co-production** is gaining momentum - whereby a local authority, housing association or other established organisation works with residents to set up and run something for the benefit of the community.
6. **Volunteers are vital** to the survival of most community enterprises. Volunteering is great for **confidence building** at the individual level, and is often a lifeline for people who are unemployed, elderly or disabled. Any contribution, however small, is valuable, but it is crucial to find people who are consistent and reliable.

7. **Getting people involved** as volunteers is becoming more and more difficult, and retaining volunteers is also a problem. It is important to make volunteers feel **valued and appreciated**, and offer them support, co-ordination and supervision.
8. **Training for community volunteers** and for those setting up a community enterprise is invaluable. Several groups referred to **Trafford Hall's own training programmes** as being a valuable resource.
9. **Funding** has become increasingly a problem and as result it is a **constant struggle to make ends meet**. Community groups need to find creative and innovative ways to raise funds, such as crowd-funding, the donation-based 'pay as you feel' approach, or charging those who can afford to pay to cross subsidise service for those who cannot. The key to survive times of hardship is to be flexible and open to change. Several participants referred to Trafford Hall's **small grant programme** following training that helped kick-start their project. As little as £200 could make a big difference.
10. There is sometimes a **tension between** running a community enterprise **helping** a low-income community and **charging** enough for particular services to cover the cost.
11. You need **people with a vision** of what they are trying to achieve, but you also need a commitment to the area and backing from other residents. What is needed is a rallying point capable of getting people together so it is important to make sure that people **buy into that vision**. Sometimes a **problem acts as a big motivator**. When people see a need, they usually want to do something about it.
12. Building up support in the area with very **visible local activities**, e.g. community barbecue, street markets, cake stalls, Christmas parties, family events, will create momentum behind an idea. Door knocking is also a very effective way of getting people interested in what a community enterprise is doing.
13. Sometimes **neglect** of an area or a building gives you the **opportunity to do something**. Community enterprises can play a crucial role in neighbourhood regeneration as they the potential to show that **neighbourhoods are loved**. **Community spirit** can be re-built, and community events and get together are all effective ways to transform places into thriving communities where people want to live.
14. **Negotiating and reaching agreement** is key to progress. Setting up a community enterprise and turning it into a successful community venture takes lots of time and effort, and there are several obstacles on the way. There are times when it is difficult to get the light at the end of the tunnel but the key to success is **to be persistent**.
15. Several participants raised the problem of "rules and regulations", "health and safety" and other barriers to simply "getting on with the job". It sometimes involves "jumping through hoops" but it has to be done. **Team work** is also crucial to achieve results and go through challenging times without losing stamina. **Motivation and determination** are key ingredients to success.