

Stronger Communities Sustainable Lives

Community Lives Consortium works to support people who have learning disabilities to live valued and empowered lives in the communities of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot.

Rick Wilson is the Chief Executive of the Consortium and has produced this document as part of the process of reviewing the Consortium's long term goals and ways of working.

Introduction

The Consortium's experience is in supporting people who have learning disabilities to live in the community. I am very concerned about the sustainability of the way we provide social care for all vulnerable adults in the face of the difficult issues that we all face such as peak oil, climate change, economic instability and the aging population.

I feel that the only way to address this is to develop ways of helping communities to become more resilient, and better able to communicate and work together to meet its shared needs. This it will be better able to support its vulnerable members.

I think that this is not possible or desirable to do in isolation from other strategies to support community empowerment that are necessary to address issues ranging from community safety, poverty reduction, political engagement, carbon reduction, food and energy security.

I would like to start a discussion with people with a range of backgrounds to explore what such a model of community development and empowerment would look like and then if these discussions are useful to explore opportunities for action research in this area.

In this discussion document I will start by discussing some of the key issues affecting the sustainable delivery of community support for vulnerable adults and then draw out the common themes I see with other community development agenda's, I will finally outline a proposal for pulling together a discussion process for a shared enquiry to explore this issue.

The challenges for sustainable social care over the next 30 years.

In many ways the development of social care in the community in over the last 50 years has been very successful. Agencies have become more effective in providing support to people living in the community, however due to; growing expectation, a greater appreciation of individual rights, increasing fear of risk, and increasing regulation, these services have become more technical and resource heavy per person.

The relationships between agencies, the people served and the public has also changed. The move to supporting people with more complex needs in the community occurred during a time when families and community groups have been losing the capacity to provide support. Extended families have become more geographically distant and more people have been brought into work. The public although increasingly tolerant of the continuing presence of vulnerable adults have an expectation that they will be efficiently supported by professional supporters to get on with their own lives.

This way of delivering support is coming under strain:

- More people with very complex needs are surviving childhood and are living to older ages due to improving health care.
- The general population is aging, this will mean that there are a greater number of people who need assistance. This will also mean that the potential tax revenue for costly services is declining, and the proportion of the population free to give assistance voluntarily or as a professional is also declining.
- There is strong evidence that while being highly successful in helping people to be in the community, we have had much less success in helping people to become part of their community. Thus loneliness is a growing issue.

Looking into the future further issues are likely to develop:

Both peak oil and climate change will further destabilise both communities and government, this will have a number of impacts.

- Declining revenues for services as the economy becomes less stable and expenditure needs to address these issues.
- Decreasing community cohesiveness due to stress, uncertainty, growing social inequality, and fluctuating resources.
- Increasing immigration due to global economic and environmental pressure.



For these reasons it is clear that we are moving in to a community that needs to move from:

- The many paying for the support of the few.
- To the many providing support to the many.

I feel we can address these issues through a process of community empowerment and a shift in our values base towards self help and mutual assistance. Professional services within this world shift from service provider to support enabler.

What are the underlying common themes that need to be addressed?

Looking behind this process I feel there are some themes that are true of the social care agenda that also underpin other community based agendas. I think that it is important to recognise general themes because it highlights why it will be difficult to resolve these problems in isolation.

- **From Citizens to Consumers** – I believe that we have become increasingly passive in our role as community members. The expectations on us have shifts from being collectively active concerned citizens to becoming passive individually focussed consumers. This is apparent in within social care, but I think it is also true in areas as wide as community safety and local political engagement.
- **From Government to Service Provider** – Our expectation of government has also changed from the ‘government representing the citizen’ to the ‘government serving the consumer’. This is a move from a two way expectation of rights and responsibilities to a one way expectation that in return for money services are provided. I see this in a general unwillingness to be involved in helping people to get by, alongside an increase in willingness to complain when people are inconvenienced by people’s lives and services.
- **From the local to the ‘ideal’** – We have moved from valuing goals or solutions based on local experiences, skills and resources and have replaced these with aspirations which are based on ‘ideal’ market projected presentations of wealth and success.

These themes are certainly affecting our ability to create local sustainable community based solutions for social care, but I also see these issues equally frustrating areas as widely spaced as local democracy and the Transition Town movement.



Building a shared discussion and enquiry

I would like to start a shared enquiry into the types of approaches to community development that can explore these sustainability issues.

- Initially I want to use this document to bring together a group of people with different community focused interests to explore common ground and frameworks for action.
- I will then create tools for open information sharing and discussion of this issue using both the web and face to face discussion. We can thus build up a collective agenda for action.
- I would like this enquiry to map the areas of community development practice that could work together to address these issues and engage in action research to develop effective shared methods for engaging with these issues.

This is really a request for an open collaborative discussion, thus the only suggestions I can make are open ended and tentative. We in Community Lives Consortium have a growing sense of the need for a new framework for action for the people that we serve as well as a definite view that there are definite connections to be made with crosscutting agendas. We look forward to exploring these issues.

To get involved in this discussion please contact:

Rick Wilson rick@communitylives.co.uk 01792 646640

You can get more information about the Consortium at our website at www.communitylives.co.uk

