

Community Pride: Need, opportunity, impact

**A report by the Community Audit and
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This research study ¹was undertaken over a 3 month period in 2010 and was funded by the ESRC as part of the ‘Taking Part Capacity Building Cluster’ (CBC) (2008-2012) whose remit is to develop innovative approaches to community engagement and empowerment. The cluster has a particular emphasis upon enabling the voices of the most disadvantaged groups to be heard effectively, as part of wider agendas for social change, social solidarity and social justice. The aim of this particular research study was to identify key practices which could help develop local communities’ sustainability and draw out the key, transferable elements of their work that might influence the policy and practices of others working in similar fields in other areas.

The initial phases of the research aimed to provide a contextual overview of the work of the organisation, *Community Pride Unit*, and its impact upon a range of communities involved in their Schools of Participation ² across the Manchester and Salford areas. A key objective of Community Pride’s work is to promote and facilitate, rather than drive and determine, the involvement of groups and individuals in the decision-making processes and practices that affect their own lives. Community Pride aims to encourage participants to continue the work long after the organisation itself has completed the formal work with the group or community in question. Interviews were conducted between March and October 2010 with a number of Community Pride colleagues as well as participants from some of the communities they had worked with. From these discussions and subsequent analysis the following themes emerged:

Key Successes

- A strong team imbued with passion and commitment is vital to the success of an organisation like Community Pride and its work but this can only be sustained in the long-term with sufficient resources and capacity
- The organisation galvanised local people to realise they had common concerns about local issues on which they could benefit from working together and determining their own agenda.
- Community Pride supported communities in encouraging planning, evaluation and reflection as a way of improving effectiveness
- Through their participation in the evaluation and their interaction with Community Pride staff and colleagues, several of the participants were able, for

¹ This report would not have been possible without the invaluable support of all those who kindly agreed to participate in the research study. A copy of the report will be made available to all those involved.

² ‘Schools of Participation are an alternative space where people meet to reflect on their reality, share experiences, gain skills, learn together and plan actions to have more control over what is happening in their lives and their communities’ Community Pride

the first time, to genuinely reflect upon their own experience and the challenges they face on a daily basis.

- It was important to Community Pride that the evaluation articulated, not only the context within which they operate, but in addition their positive impact within the community to help support the sustainability of the organisation itself in terms of future funding applications
- The commitment and passion from Community Pride, in terms of both practice and policy, helps maximise engagement between organisations such as themselves and their local communities

Key challenges

- Such a commitment, however, is not without its challenges, and one of the main barriers to success identified by all participants was the issue of sustainability – without the continuing support of organisations like Community Pride how can sustainability be encouraged within communities where confidence, self-motivation and resources are non-existent?
- The study is limited in terms of the numbers willing to participate in the study - despite the willingness of many community groups to engage in grassroots activities, participative monitoring and evaluation processes may on occasions make unrealistic demands on people's time (Mayo & Rooke, 2008: 372). There is often a fundamental reliance on the good-will of people to participate in evaluations.
- Challenges also exist in terms of bringing diverse communities with diverse needs together regularly over a set period of time both on a practical and a financial level
- Communication is not always effective between different agencies and organisations – there needs to be a common understanding of the different roles each plays in the community and the mutual support which can be offered
- Lack of funding prohibits the continuation of valuable work or the development of new projects

In order to understand more fully the underlying principles which motivate Community Pride, it was important to firstly outline the socio-historical context which has influenced Community Pride's development and direction to date.

There exists in the region a dichotomy of opportunity/renewal opposed to exclusion/deprivation that emphasises the injustice of continuing exclusion and disadvantage, and establishes an important point regarding the role that organisations like Community Pride can play. If there were no new opportunities, no redevelopment, and no positive stories to be told, then the 'problem' facing areas such as Manchester and Salford would simply be too big to contemplate, and would certainly be beyond the scope of small third-sector organisations focussed upon direct engagement with affected communities to challenge with any degree of success. It is precisely this co-existence of opportunity and deprivation that actively *creates* the very space in which organisations such as Community Pride can and do work. Ground-level, first-engagement activities have a vital role to play in supporting communities to overcome disadvantage and deprivation by engaging with the processes that might positively impact upon their situation.

Manchester and Salford: the painful legacy of industrialisation

In many ways, Manchester and Salford share something of a unique history owing to their status as two of the first truly industrial towns. In a little over 40 years, between 1811 and 1851, the population of Manchester and the surrounding towns doubled – twice. Its centrality to the economic revolution that was to encompass the globe gave Manchester an 'almost mythic status as the emblem of the new order of things' (Kidd, 2002). This staggering rate of expansion and development brought its own unique set of problems – not only economic, but social, in terms of high aggregations of working class communities, experiencing harsh and unforgiving levels of deprivation which in turn would ferment social movements that would influence not only Britain but the rest of the industrialised world.

In contrast over the latter part of the twentieth century, Manchester and Salford experienced a long and painful history of de-industrialisation, as many traditional industries struggled to adapt to modern economic realities, with huge loss of employment and equivalent rises in exclusion, disadvantage and the decay of the urban environment. The loss of industry and employment, and the rise in associated social challenges, has been acutely felt across Manchester and Salford and despite considerable investment over the last decade these two cities continue to experience significant levels of social and economic deprivation in certain areas.

Of course it is true to say that the level of investment over the past decade has enabled both Manchester and Salford to re-invent themselves as vibrant and cosmopolitan cities and have helped to shift perceptions of the region as a whole. In 2002, Manchester hosted

the Commonwealth Games, which resulted in major investment in the East Manchester region. In their study on the impact of the Games, Newby (2003) argues that:

Many of the social indicators of improvement, such as crime reduction and changes in the perception of crime, health improvements, and resident satisfaction can be attributed to the wider regeneration effort and improvements to service provision by providers. However, the development of two of the key building blocks to social regeneration - confidence and pride - were assisted by the hosting of the Commonwealth Games (2003:77³)

Clearly the role local communities can play in improving social regeneration is also crucial:

Community development has been and remains an intrinsic part of social and economic development. By its nature, however, community development works largely behind the scenes, out of the glare of political and media headlines. But it is fundamental to overcoming poverty, spreading prosperity, coping with social change and invigorating democracy (NWTWC & Neighbourhoods NW, 2011)

Over recent years local communities in Salford have worked with other agencies (police, local authorities, schools) to dramatically reduce gun-related crimes in the area. As one police chief has remarked, it is “[t]he community [which] has the ‘best understanding’ about how to stop young people becoming the next generation of gang members”, and it is only through engaging with this community - and allowing them to lead efforts to challenge dangerous behaviours - that true change has come about.⁴ Such engagement was not only important to address the clear problem within the area, but also in helping communities to demonstrate the positive stories they saw. As the mother of one victim emphasised in a contribution to a 2009 article in *The Guardian*:

It's also a chance to convince everyone else that Moss Side isn't a bad place to live at all," [said Patsy McKie] - encouraging new residents, shoppers, businesses and students from Manchester's universities, which are partly in the ward. "It's always been the case that the people who are most frightened of it are the people who don't live here."⁵

Thus, the engagement of local communities can not only help address the challenges facing the area, but also encourages a more recognisable and positive narrative to be told in the public domain. Similarly, and as recent work undertaken by the *ESRC Taking Part Capacity Building Cluster* has shown, many other examples of community-led projects

³ Accessed: <http://www.gameslegacy.co.uk/files/LN%20Final%20Dissertation.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/apr/11/moss-side-shootings-gooch-gang>

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/apr/11/moss-side-shootings-gooch-gang>

which have taken an active lead in driving the regeneration of local communities are present (CAEC, 2010).⁶ However, it is also apparent that there is something of a challenging dichotomy within the area. The redevelopment of Manchester and Salford, the huge investment after years of neglect, the civic enterprises, the promotion of the area as a hub of creativity and innovation, has clearly not been to the benefit of all. Indeed, many of the social ills that characterised the cities in the 1990s and at the turn of the millennium continue to exist. As McKay and Davey (2005) comment:

Manchester is pivotal to the success of the North West as a whole and boasts its own international airport. It has not always been like this. It has taken a great deal of effort to generate the success which Manchester is currently enjoying. Despite that success there are many areas of Greater Manchester, both inside and outside the city centre, in which there is still substantial poverty and deprivation⁷

The question, therefore, is what can be done in order to address these continuing problems if the benefits of extensive redevelopment and civic renewal have not yet permeated into the wider community?

Renewing communities, inside-out: Assets-Based Community Development as a theoretical framework

Addressing economic and social disadvantage, and the problems of exclusion that go hand in hand with deprivation, takes a concerted degree of investment, support and engagement. However, it also requires something more. Even the most well-funded ventures will struggle to elicit support from those they seek to help, and subsequently stand a greater chance of failing to achieve their goals, if they do not take in to account the communities' perspectives. Indeed, it might be argued that redevelopment - of buildings, of infrastructure - can take place from without, but unless it is both guided by and undertaken in consultation with the local community its long-term chances of success are low.

For many years regeneration initiatives have been led from what is termed a 'needs', or 'deficit', perspective. In a deficit model of development, areas and communities beset by deprivation and disadvantage are identified as 'lacking' certain resources, skills, experiences etc and the 'solution' to social problems lies outside of the community. It is something that is offered and imposed from outside, and usually involves third parties external to the locality working to address challenges on behalf of the area - but not, necessarily, *with* those most affected. As Mathie and Cunningham (2002) illustrate, a development agenda imposed from outside of the community and drawing on the language of need and deficit leads to three interlinked issues developing. First, the

⁶ Available at: <http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rH%2FnaVRUtt0%3D&tabid=565>

⁷ Accessed from website: www.vivacity2020.eu/.../Shopping%20and%20Crime%20-%20Manchester%20Case%20Study.doc

language of ‘need’ necessitates the use and extension of a negative narrative around communities. Places and people experiencing challenges are cast, wholesale, as experiencing problems that are pervasive, consistent and universal, and that the only route to addressing these is to ‘bring in’ expertise from more ‘able’ communities. Thus, the approach - whilst well-meaning - undermines local perspectives and assumes the absence of local capacity to understand and rectify such challenges. Such a theoretical basis can serve to entrench the exclusion and disadvantage it seeks to resolve, casting whole communities as helpless and needy.

In conjunction with this, community leaders find it necessary to underline and emphasise social and economic problems in order to compete for external assistance and funding:

One of the main effects is that leadership denigrates the community. Leaders find that the best way to attract institutional resources is to play up the severity of problems. Local leadership is judged on how many resources are attracted to the community, not on how self-reliant the community has become (Mathie and Cunningham, 2002⁸)

Therefore the narratives associated with areas experiencing challenges come to be viewed extremely negatively beyond the boundaries of the community - whole areas suffer from a vicious circle of negative perception, reinforced by leading voices within the community who are forced to speak the language of deficit and need in public forums. This, in turn, leads to a certain disconnect: first, between communities facing challenges and the wider society in which they live and also within the community itself, as the narratives presented in media portrayals begin to diverge from the everyday lived experiences of those living in such areas. In a sense, such persistent, negative portrayals help to create exclusion and disadvantage - communities cast as being ‘in decline’ become areas to be avoided by new businesses, new residents, etc., and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Finally, as ‘problems’ are increasingly cast as something too significant for communities to take on, and the preserve of outside agencies, development undertaken from a deficit perspective suggests that communities cannot ‘help themselves’, hence can lead to a reliance on external actors:

...another consequence is that local groups begin to deal more with external institutions than with groups in their own community. This reinforces the notion that ‘only outside experts can provide real help’ and further weakens neighbour-to-neighbour links (Mathie and Cunningham, 2002)

The approach therefore actively discourages engagement by the local community in and through the narrative it presents.

⁸ For page reference please refer to:
http://www.coady.stfx.ca/resources/publications/publications_occasional_citizens.html

In their work, Mathie and Cunningham (2002, 2008) argue in favour of an approach that has been called ABCD - or *Assets-Based Community Development* (ABCD). In this paradigm, rather than taking the needs of communities and attempting to deduce what is lacking in terms of skills and capacities as the starting point, ABCD instead seeks to identify, through engagement with the community in question, the assets they have at their disposal. According to the authors, communities are encouraged to:

...see value in resources that would otherwise have been ignored, unrealized or dismissed... Such unrealized resources include not only personal attributes, but also the relationship networks among people... By mobilizing these informal networks, formal institutional resources can be activated - such as local government, formal community-based organizations, and private enterprise. In fact, the key to ABCD is the power of local associations to drive the development process and to leverage additional support... (Mathie and Cunningham, 2002)

Thus, external agencies continue to play an important role; the difference is that it is the needs identified within the community, by the community, in dialogues with local actors that drive the agenda.

Policy and practice are in effect driven by those who will be subject to their actions, hence they 'buy in' and the utilisation of local knowledge and understanding enhances the capacity of outside agencies to work productively in communities experiencing social and economic challenges. The key methods of ABCD have been summarised by Mathie and Cunningham (2002) as:

- Collecting stories about community successes and identifying the capacities of communities that contributed to success
- Organising a core group to carry the process forward
- Mapping completely the capacities and assets of individuals, associations, and local institutions
- Building relationships among local assets for mutually beneficial problem-solving within the community.
- Mobilising the community's assets fully for economic development and information sharing purposes
- Convening as broadly representative a group as possible for the purposes of building a community vision and plan
- Leveraging activities, investments and resources from outside the community to support asset based, locally defined development

This framework provides an excellent tool to support analysis of the work of Community Pride as an organisation, and can help to explain the successes it has experienced in engaging so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ and ‘excluded’ communities to affect change on a personal, policy and community level.

Community Pride: Origins, objectives and the notion of ‘power’

This section will seek to establish both the ‘implementation’ effects – those findings that are related to context-specific factors such as the organisational set-up, qualities of individual actors involved in the processes, etc. – and the ‘process’ effects, i.e., those impacts that can be said to emanate from the conceptual, theoretical and programmatic frameworks that underpin the work, and can be used to suggest more ‘fuzzy generalisations’ (Bassey, 1999).

The Community Pride Unit (CPU) was established in 1999 as part of the charity *Church Action on Poverty* (CAP). Working towards social justice for disadvantaged and excluded groups, communities and individuals, CAP looks to motivate and mobilise churches and church-based groups, and to work in partnership with people experiencing poverty themselves to try and find solutions to overcome any challenges they face. At the core of the organisation’s activities lie two key objectives: to enable people in poverty to improve their quality of life through more sustainable livelihoods and to give a voice to those excluded as a result of the forces of deprivation and disadvantage.⁹ Emerging as a part of CAP, Community Pride’s principles in many ways reflect those of its ‘parent organisation’ with its core function stated as being:¹⁰

...To seek out solutions to the problems of poverty and exclusion in Manchester and Salford. Community Pride identifies a central cause of poverty and social exclusion as the inequality of power between those who live in cities and those who control what happens in them... Community Pride works with excluded communities and individual grassroots activists, community groups and faith-based projects in Manchester, Salford and beyond...

Community Pride’s methodology is based upon the educational theory of Paulo Friere. Friere’s methods focused upon informal or popular education (education of the people)

⁹ <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/about-us>

¹⁰ <http://communityprideunit.wordpress.com/about/>

and grassroots participation. For Community Pride this involves working with some of the most marginalised groups and individuals in the community who then define and set the criteria, determining what development means in their own context.

...such participation leads inevitably to increased democratization, a renewal or invention of new local democratic instruments which enable communities to gain some control over their own social realities, or at least some capacity for confronting external challenges bearing down on them.' (Garavan 2010:160).

A staff member from Community Pride explained that whilst the direction they wanted to follow was clear to them, it sometimes raised issues with the organisations with which it had the closest links:

Bearing in mind we were set up by Church Action [on Poverty], along the way some of our work has been challenging to the churches- in the end some of the churches just didn't want to know – you know the model of empowerment is fairly radical and just too much for some – though we did receive 5 years of funding from one church which enabled us to develop the Schools of Participation so I have to hand it to them! (Community Pride staff)

Interestingly it was also the communities who at times were unsure and sceptical of the role of the churches in the process particularly where they felt these institutions had been motivated to become involved due to the considerable regeneration funds available:

I remember being shocked that the fact that some of the residents came to lambaste the churches – they said “the only reason who are interested now and you are getting involved because there is lottery money” and actually from that day forward some those particular residents resisted any involvement from the churches and think we were both somewhat tarred by that and that made it very difficult (CP staff)

The interviewee felt, however, that this had not deterred them in the long-term and had in fact just added another dimension to their identity and their working practice. Of course different groups do not always want to 'change' the same things and these comments should be interpreted as representing the integrity and honesty which motivate the organisation.

Whilst other, similar organisations (in terms of funding, status, focus) may offer more clearly defined services such as training and education, or offer a programme of work with a pre-defined aim in mind, the particular emphasis in Community Pride's activities,

combined with analysis of 'power' as it is embodied in policy and the processes and practices of civic engagement, is indeed a unique approach. Thus, the group provided what has been described as:

An authentic commitment to developing community-led approaches to tackling issues of poverty and disadvantage...which is able to respond flexibly to the abilities, needs and priorities of the grassroots activists, community groups and faith-based projects with which it works
(Community Pride staff)

What begins to emerge is a recurring set of themes evident in the objectives and approach that Community Pride seeks to represent, an indelibly-linked tripartite commitment to understanding, promoting and influencing of: grassroots activity; the processes and practices of policy development and implementation; and (the nodal point which joins the micro sphere of grassroots with the macro world of policy) the function, use and exploitation of 'power'. As Russell (2006) argues in a previous study:

...conscious that knowledge is power, hence the emphasis placed on keeping up to date with policy developments, conveying them in an accessible form and enabling groups to think through their relevance and implications for their own activities... [As one interviewee reported, Community Pride] 'interpret for community activists what government initiatives are about and draw out messages from local experience to pass back to policy makers'

Clearly, there is a close relationship in the work of the unit between these macro and micro levels, and on facilitating actors on both sides to engage with the issues that emerge from the intersection between policy and practice. In working with communities to understand the working of 'power' and how they themselves might influence the context in which they exist, it is easy to caricature the work of Community Pride as 'empowerment', of bringing power to excluded communities so that they might positively impact on the forces which influence their lives. This, however, would be to undersell the way in which Community Pride views 'power':

What we do is to try and facilitate the power of people. It's not that people don't have power; it is helping them understand what power people have and how they can use it effectively (Community Pride staff)

Thus, while the imperfect language of empowerment is drawn upon in order to explain aspects of their work, it is a nuanced and - if not quite unique - highly individual understanding that is being drawn upon. For Community Pride, the work they undertake does not provide access to a privileged source of 'power' from which participants were previously excluded, nor do they 'release' communities from the restraints of sociological forces which had hitherto rendered them powerless: in these terms, the role Community Pride plays is to support individuals and communities to analyse and understand the

nature of power that they *already* possess, and consequently working with and alongside these groups to explore ways in which this power might be expressed most effectively to effect changes which *they* deem important.

Working together: Partners, participants and the challenge of aiming high

Over the past decade, Community Pride has worked with a wide range of different organisations representing the interests of disadvantaged communities. In the first three years of their work, data from the organisation shows they have worked with:

- Over 200 individuals, 85 community groups and 40 local churches in order to develop an acute understanding of the key challenges that create and sustain poverty and social exclusion;
- More than 15 voluntary-sector partners, on both local and national stages, to create opportunities for grassroots activists, community groups and faith-based projects to engage with relevant policy debates;
- Six local communities in Manchester and Salford as part of local regeneration efforts;
- 40 grassroots activists from across the Manchester and Salford areas in a policy debate and community leadership training event.

As can be seen, even in the early years of community engagement, the unit was able to engage with a considerable number of stakeholders on projects and activities that worked on a number of levels. Similarly, in the period following this, Russell (2006) demonstrated how, over the next three years, Community Pride continued along this path to widespread, grassroots involvement - indeed, the following years saw an expansion in the number of beneficial engagements, citing work with over 500 individuals and more than 200 different voluntary and community groups from across the Manchester and Salford region, while more recently the last two years have seen work undertaken with more than 600 individuals, from over 20 nationalities. In this more recent period, those engaging with the work of Community Pride have represented a broad spectrum of the diverse communities of Manchester and Salford, including:

- Gypsy and Traveller communities in the North West
- Refugees and people seeking asylum from a wide range of countries
- Homeless men
- South Asian women
- DeafBlind people
- People with learning disabilities
- People engaged with work in the Informal Economy
- Representatives from an housing estate facing significant social and economic

challenges, including acute unemployment

What is clear is that Community Pride is an organisation, which, in making the most of its limited resources, has presented the illusion of having a greater capacity than it does in reality:

The range and impact of its work can be misleading by giving the impression of a much larger organisation than it really is... this can be a weakness of the voluntary sector, but this time points to the typical weakness of severely limited resources. Various dangers can arise from being overstretched... Exploiting the advantages of being small and distinctive requires having a very clear mission and strategy and keeping in view the necessary balance of skills across the team. [Community Pride] has a big vision... [but] it is necessary to be patient and recognise [Community Pride's] own and others' constraints. Yet keeping hopes and dreams alive may have just as much impact as some of the more easily quantified activities... (Russell, 2006)

Schools of Participation

Since 2005, Community Pride have co-ordinated and facilitated a number of 'Schools of Participation' in Greater Manchester. e.g. Schools with Refugees and People Seeking Asylum, Deaf and Deafblind People, Asian Women, Workers of the Informal Economy, NACRO (an organisation working with and for homeless men) and residents of deprived communities. The Schools aim to strengthen the capacity of individuals, local groups and organisations to play an active role, to have a greater say, be mobilised and take action to improve their communities:

Our Schools of Participation we see those as alternative spaces where people can meet, reflect and set their own agenda and their own plan of action ...in the School you have the opportunity for people to actually make those decisions themselves (Community Pride staff)

Schools are based on a participatory action-learning process where 'formal' sessions are combined with practical activities and are designed with the participants to make sure it responds to their needs. Community Pride believe that the success of these Schools demonstrates the inherent ability of people to learn, identify their problems and their strengths, work as a team and collectively develop effective alternatives to bring about change. The participants who agreed to take part in this study were drawn from three diverse Schools of Participation based in the Greater Manchester and Salford area: Cheetham Hill, Refugee and Asylum Group and NACRO.

In order to more fully understand the aims and ethos of Community Pride, it was felt appropriate, methodologically, to draw upon the case study work of Robert K Yin who defines the case study approach as an 'empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used' (Yin, 1984:23). By adopting an interpretive approach it is possible to explore a range of perspectives and shared meanings in order to develop insights into specific situations and context through the collection of qualitative data.

In this study a range of evidence was analysed in order to ensure triangulation including historical records, organisational documentation as well as detailed interviews with 3 key decision-makers and staff at Community Pride and four participants who taken part in the Schools of Participation. Involving participants in the monitoring and evaluation stage was viewed as a crucial part of the process by Community Pride and the University research team as reflected by Mayo's and Rooke's article which explores the use of participatory approaches to evaluate programmes in order to: 'provide comprehensive, regular, comparative, externally validated and transparent ways of facilitating learning and dialogue, rather than simply undertaking traditional evaluations, at the end of a particular programme' (2008:373)

It is hoped that this data will demonstrate the positive role Community Pride has played within a number of local communities and both the short term and long term impact this involvement has had on both participants and the communities they live in. Finally, it is hoped that not only will the evaluation provide an opportunity for all those involved in the study to reflect and comment upon their experiences but also that some of the findings will help support funding applications in the future.

The framework of interview questions was based around a number of key issues, including: the design of the evaluation study to ensure it was ‘fit for purpose’; the perceptions of Community Pride professionals around the role and principles of the organisation, its impact in the community and the challenges it has faced in terms of its working practices; the perceptions of community partners on the role and impact of Community Pride in the community.

Case Study 1 – Community Pride

From the initial interviews conducted with staff from Community Pride it was clear that they hoped the evaluation study would highlight the relevance of the organisation not just in terms of past achievements but also crucially in terms of their future relevance in the context of the Big Society. The organisation had worked with so many individuals and agencies over the years that there were also concerns that the evaluation might struggle to find its own identity:

It's whether it's about the impact we've had on a person's life in terms of their own personal development or whether it's the bigger issues like regeneration or that sort of thing because we could identify all those different kinds of people to talk to but it changes the type of evaluation needed (Community Pride staff)

After some detailed discussions between the researcher and the organisation, it was agreed that a small number of case studies should be identified to ensure the data was as rich and in-depth as possible. Staff acknowledged that in recent years they had not always reflected upon and recorded their successes in as much detail as they would have liked:

We were always so busy keeping the wolf from the door that we didn't do enough writing up and reflection on work that we had done...I mean over the years we did reflect seriously with our management committee on what had been achieved but possibly we didn't evidence it properly at the time (Community Pride staff)

Key enablers and barriers to success

In terms of the role and purpose of the organisation it was apparent from the interviews conducted that all the staff strongly believed the organisation offered a unique ‘service’ to the community:

We were essentially about enabling grassroots people to bring about change in their own communities and not just about taking action locally but trying to link up their experience and trying to influence change at a

national level through policy – I think we were unique in that we linked up grassroots activity with national policy - we were different because we were actually offering them empowerment or rather what we do is try and facilitate the power people have – giving them the opportunity to understand what power they have and how they can use it – we were fairly overt about that and that’s what made us a bit different (Community Pride staff)

...we accompany and support people in certain situations to enable them to stop what is happening in their communities in order to better influence and have more control over decisions being made – we offer opportunities for people to get to grips with real-life situations so that they feel more in control... And also to uniquely to share whatever resources we have to enable them to equip themselves to be involved but to be involved effectively (Community Pride staff)

One key leader felt the organisation’s identity had in part been influenced by their own interest and commitment to international development theories and methodologies such as the work of Paulo Freire:

I had been working with those kinds of tools and methodologies since the seventies and it was seeing how we could adapt some of those theories to a different kind of context – you know Britain in the nineties...(Community Pride staff)

Staff also felt it was important to stress the role of the organisation in terms of a facilitator rather than a service-provider where the focus is primarily on the learning process that **increases** the capacity of individuals and groups. The aim is that the process gives a sense of ownership to the community, and its findings, which in turn leads to an investment in the outcomes:

It’s not that others don’t do similar work. I think what makes us different; we are fairly unique in that we’re not a service provider in the traditional sense... We were about enabling grassroots people to make changes and to effect change in their local communities - and not just at a local level, but in trying to link up those experiences with policy, and to influence change at a national level (Community Pride staff)

It is also clear from the interviews that having a strong team who share a passion and desire to improve the sector has been integral to the organisation's success and reputation. All those interviewed highlighted periods of stress and frustration where they had to think innovatively and creatively in order to fulfil their responsibilities to the community:

One of the good things about us is that we have been very adaptable and flexible to changing circumstances and so I want whatever work we can do to demonstrate our ability to meet the changing contexts in which we find ourselves...it means we can deliver the same level of quality work to empower people whatever the context or climate (Community Pride staff)

We've always punched above our weight, and that's stressful. We've always had a lot of work and little resource. But we have a small team who are very committed and this has worked better than when we tried to expand actually (Community Pride staff)

This ability of organisations to punch above their weight as a result of 'strategic partnerships, commitment and a passion for the sector' (Cox & Schmuecker, 2010: 28) is a common theme amongst organisations like Community Pride. Staff were also keen to emphasise how because their work is underpinned by a commitment to the participatory approach which places the interests of its participants at the *core* of their practice this has resulted in the organisation gaining widespread respect among communities and the wider public and private sector:

People hear about our work and they want to work with us and want us to work with them. There's no way you can just do a 'School of Participation', you need the experience and background, but people want us to be involved (Community Pride staff)

Although at times during the interviews it emerged that there had been tensions with other organisations and some of the challenges Community Pride has faced have been working with certain partners there has been perhaps a lack of shared understanding of working priorities or the kind of work Community Pride promotes:

Challenges have involved working with other organisations who have not understood the level of resources and support required to ensure projects are successful or that if the group has chosen a particular night to meet or direction to take that needs to be respected as we gave them the space to make those choices...now what you (the funder) need to do is to link in with where they are to ask what help and support do they need now - they just don't get it...we do all this work to get people engaged and really passionately involved and trained up and then there's nothing there to support any ongoing work (Community Pride staff)

I think sometimes we got into a lot of trouble because we were overt about what we did and we didn't try to hide the fact that what we were offering was an empowerment agenda and at times were marginalized by certain organizations who thought they had to control the process- particularly in

East Manchester in terms of the whole regeneration process (Community Pride staff)

Sometimes, maybe we're our own worst enemy, but we can't say what we need to say and do what we do without coming up against people who don't understand or who don't want things to change (Community Pride staff)

At times the organisation has had no choice but to operate outside of the process and this hindered their ability to fully engage with the community. There was also a perception that where an agenda had already been set rather than developed through consultation and engagement with the community this was when initiatives – particularly regeneration ones which affected the whole community - were most likely to fail:

The way they controlled the process was phenomenal – they had all the spin right but in the longer term when you looked at the actual outcomes particularly in terms of economic development were very very poor – the change that was anticipated didn't happen because the transformation wasn't radical enough at the grassroots for there to be sustainable long term effects – there was a lot of obvious change to infrastructure – to physical regeneration but not to the community itself and that's what matters (Community Pride staff)

They felt their work was most successful when they were viewed as equal partners in the process for example when they worked with Oxfam UK Poverty Programme in Salford 'where people felt they owned the process' (CP staff). Community Pride suggested that other partners should use an international development tool known as participatory appraisal described as: 'a broad empowerment approach that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages grassroots action...The term Participatory Appraisal describes a family of approaches that enable local people to identify their own priorities and make their own decisions about the future, with the organising agency facilitating, listening and learning'¹¹ From an early stage in the process Community Pride worked with Oxfam to train local people in the tools of participatory appraisal and helped create opportunities to enable them to participate fully in the process:

Things were not just to them – the residents in Salford resisted successfully against some initiatives they didn't allow certain things to happen to them and they kept control of the process to a certain extent (Community Pride staff)

Unsurprisingly other barriers to success identified by interviewees centred around lack of funding as well as often a lack of time and expertise to source new financial resources. As highlighted in the recent Institute for Public Policy Report:

¹¹ <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Participatory+Appraisal> (accessed 15/4/11)

Both procurement and commissioning offer a route to sustainability for many social and community enterprises and yet our research shows that most community and social enterprises experience significant barriers in accessing such funding (2010:48)

Staff agreed that they faced a constant battle to secure funding and ensure they were financially secure and viable:

We are always delivering on a shoestring and no matter how hard we try to plan, and we have, we're here again, and it's the same it's 2010... and we got pots of money and now we are back again in a situation where we have very little money (Community Pride staff)

Interviewees also cited the difficulties in obtaining funding for the *type* of participatory work they undertake which often do not have tangible or explicit outcomes from the outset so these could not be included in the funding applications. Respondents also identified Community Pride's lack of capacity to develop long-term projects which would offer greater sustainable impacts to the community groups they worked with as well as to Community Pride itself:

We've not got enough capacity to do the work that we are supposed to be doing and that's connected to funding...and there's so much we could do and it's so frustrating because we just can't stretch ourselves anymore (Community Pride staff)

What we've done is manage on small pots of funding when we've not had big pots of money... [in recent years] we have mostly had to do our best with what is available, be flexible and creative (Community Pride staff)

Despite the fact the organisation had always been very responsive to changing climates and levels of available funding some staff felt they should have developed training programmes where they could have shared their tools and knowledge earlier on:

A weakness has been that we didn't train more people up with the skills needed to help support the work we do – we are doing it now but we should have been doing it a few years ago! But then again maybe we didn't really have enough staff do that and the other work we do so it is difficult to do everything at once sometimes even if you know it has to be done (Community Pride staff)

There were also examples of new and innovative international projects which had recently been developed and which now could not continue due to lack of funding - despite the obvious benefits to participants. At times even with adequate resources it was just the logistics involved in terms of co-ordinating community groups with specific needs which proved to be the most challenging:

Sometimes it is stressful to even manage the whole process and get groups of people together for Schools of Participation because their needs are so different and profound (Community Pride staff)

However, despite the setbacks they felt they had suffered in terms of lack of resources and the vulnerability of their situation, staff felt this had enabled them to survive in situations comparable to those they engage with in the community:

To live in a very fragile situation, while keeping the integrity of the work and having to do the work, be committed, even though we have not had any comfort or security- it's not easy...the good side of that for me, maybe, is that we've always on the edge and lived alongside people who are in exactly the same situation so I feel we have lived through the reality of what it is like for a lot of our people – and that's a good sign and people do respect us for that as we have always kept going and always been there for people and done our very best to respond when we've needed to (Community Pride staff)

When asked about the future of Community Pride, interviewees were confident that they would continue their work in some form or another although they acknowledged they would have to wait and see what resources might be available under the Big Society agenda and also – crucially - how people decided to accept those changes:

Can we use the Big Society in partnership with others to make the concept work for us so that we can carry on doing the good work regardless of their agenda or do we say we can't work with that because there are certain values and principles at stake and we might need to look at other ways of doing what we do (Community Pride staff)

In practical terms, Community Pride are currently expanding their network of colleagues who have the skills, values and principles to undertake the work they do which will address some of the capacity issues. They are also developing a new toolkit around Schools of Participation which will be used as a training resource for a series of introductory workshops around their role and the methodologies they use:

The key thing about the Schools of Participation is that you start from people's agendas – you don't go in and tell them I'm going to deliver a

training programme for you and this is what you will be doing – in fact when you first go in you don't know what you will be doing or what the agenda or outcomes will be – it's nerve-wracking but you have to trust the process – and it is a delicate process but you have to give them the opportunity to do it themselves –you have to facilitate it and help them plan it and it's a very labour intensive process but it's so powerful...and I think that's part of the joy and excitement of the work (Community Pride staff)

Case Study 2 – School of Participation with Refugees and People Seeking Asylum

Take Part Salford ¹²set up a School of Participation with 17 people from six different Refugee and Asylum Seeker Organisations. The participants, through the School of Participation, identified a number of issues affecting their community, particularly related to hate crime and the standard of accommodation provided through the private sector. A number of partnerships were developed to address these concerns including Salix Homes and Salford Police. A recent evaluation of this initiative (Marmion, 2011) outlines a number of benefits highlighted by participants including: greater engagement with those making service delivery decisions; a feeling of empowerment to make the decisions about the issues that affected their community; an opportunity for collective decision making; an increased awareness of the support services available and how to access and influence them; and a greater sense of ownership with regards to service development (2011:10).

Partners also cited a number of benefits they had gained from the partnership which included an increase in their understanding of the issues; an opportunity to develop greater trust between the delivery partners and the beneficiaries and importantly an opportunity to talk directly to those in need rather than via professional support workers (2011:10)

Through long discussions with one of the lead members of the refugee group as part of this evaluation study it was possible to draw out some detailed data relating to her experience and her perceptions of the role of Community Pride.

It was clear from the discussions that the interviewee felt she had gained a great deal from the School particularly in terms of development of her skills and knowledge:

¹² The Take Part Pathfinder Programme was designed to support improvements against the previous Governments National Indicator (NI) System. With particular reference to NI 3 which measured civic participation in local areas with the aim of narrowing gaps between groups in order to raise involvement of disadvantaged sections of society and NI 4 which measured the number of people who felt they could influence decision making in their locality. The Take Part Programme was developed in partnership with the Community Development Foundation who in turn commissioned local Pathfinders. These Pathfinders included the Salford Take Part Pathfinder delivered by a partnership between Community Pride Unit (based at Church Action on Poverty) and Manchester Metropolitan University's Community Audit and Evaluation Centre.

From the school of participation I learnt many many things – it was very useful for me I learned how to work in a team, how to listen to the other people...I learned that if you are a leader you can't just run about with everyone else you have to learn a different opinion...you have to work in a team as there are lots of people from different countries like the Congo, Cameroon, Afghanistan (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum).

The skills I have gained from the School and putting them into practice are listening and communication and to listen to the opinions of the other people it is very very important for me and very useful (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum).

For this particular individual the School had encouraged her not only to meet new people but had also opened up a wealth of new prospects:

Without the School I wouldn't know that place or Salix Homes...they are running some computer courses and courses to go and knock on doors to ask people about their needs they give us more opportunities to go out and if I was at home I shouldn't know about this type of thing...This SoP has been like a door which has opened different windows on my life (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum)

When asked about her understanding of the role of Community Pride there was a strong sense of admiration and respect for the work they do:

Community Pride give more power to the local community...they give us the power to have a say to say something about our local community – to give us more chance to say if it doesn't work you can't keep quiet about it (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum)

This comment reflects Community Pride's commitment to giving a voice to isolated and vulnerable communities. This notion of empowerment is not only key to their ethos but also an outcome of effective community engagement. However, if organisations do not have the capacity or resources to engage with communities and help them develop the skills they need to drive forward their own agendas then the idea of empowerment becomes a hollow concept:

Sustained success in tackling neighbourhood deprivation will depend heavily on an approach which releases the capacity within these communities themselves...(Communities and Local Government, 2009:5)

In response to the idea of developing partnerships within communities to further

maximise engagement, the interviewee also highlighted the benefits of working with other agencies which echoes findings from other studies (Cox & Schmuecker. 2010) which stress the need for community groups and organisations to work more closely together to share good practice and resources:

We went to MRSN to talk about what they do and then we bring some idea from there to our group – we support MRSN and MRSN support us so if we had a meeting we can invite them so all of us would work together hand by hand to make ourselves strong (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum).

Before in Salford the police and the housing provider didn't work together now because of the SoP we have put all of them together and now they are working hand by hand (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum).

The participant understood the difficulty of continuing the School without the support of an organisation like Community Pride but felt confident enough to continue the work herself:

I know this school will not be finished it will carry on but my objective is to add the other people - I know most of the asylum seekers stay at home they have nothing to do they don't know where to go...maybe they are the problem so let one of them put their thinking hats on at the School of Participation – now they are able to go somewhere. (Participant from the School for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum)

Case Study 3 – Waterloo Road East Estate School of Participation

Participants in this group identified several barriers to success which related to the motivation of the community itself rather than to the direct involvement of Community Pride. They acknowledged that Community Pride had facilitated their initial discussions but that since then they had struggled to achieve the momentum they had initially hoped for due to the prevailing apathy of their community:

Community Pride brought us together and it was an effort originally meant as a broader spectrum but have focussed ourselves to the issue about green spaces. The object of the group is to make the changes throughout Cheetham not just these green spaces – we are hoping the green space will be the first initial thing and then we will get a snowball

effect from that but getting the first handful of snow is proving to be harder than I thought (Participant from the School in Cheetham Hill)

When I heard of an opportunity to get to know more people I just said yes and we all just started getting together – we want to improve the estate and bring people closer to try and make a community – now you could walk round and past people and you don't know who they are, years ago you would meet people on the street and stop and talk to them and have a conversation with them (Participant from the School in Cheetham Hill)

But apathy and lack of commitment from other members of the community was beginning to have a demoralising effect on those members who were still committed to the group:

We know what we want but whether we can get it – we keep trying and have been for quite a while – we keep sticking leaflets through doors – a lot of parents just want something where the children can go – they are dropped off or let go they (parents) don't want to be there they just want to be sat at home – get the kids out of the way someone else is looking after them- nobody wants to get involved (Participant from the School in Cheetham Hill)

They also reflected on the difficulties of initiating and implementing events without funding and the Catch 22 situation this naturally perpetuates – without the events to bring communities together it is difficult to motivate groups of individuals to work together to affect any real or lasting change:

I used to volunteer work on playschemes we used to do it in summer with about 8 or 9 parent volunteers – we used to take kids on days out to Southport – they loved it but there's no funding for it now – we used to take them swimming and up onto the fields and play rounders and football...we just need to get people out of their houses and they need to have a reason to do that and come and have a look and think that looks nice and that something is happening in the community (Participant from the School in Cheetham Hill).

As recent research argues (Rowson *et al*, 2010): ‘despite lack of awareness of, interest in, or cynicism towards formally organised means of addressing social problems...most ‘disengaged’ people do have social ties within their communities through a variety of channels. Such ties are important because they provide leverage points to improve people’s lives, but at present they are rarely acknowledged and seldom used’ (2010:13). However lack of commitment and motivation are sometimes prevalent amongst disadvantaged communities and whilst community cohesion and integration are vital

components to the success of projects like this it is not always possible with limited resources to tackle these issues on a long-term basis.

Case Study 4 – School of Participation for Homeless Men

One of the key community workers for the School described his experience as ‘life-changing’ and felt there had been real commitment and engagement from those involved in the School from the outset:

I had been in a violent relationship and suffered a breakdown and ended up losing my accommodation and was blacklisted and ended up going into supported housing and then I stumbled across Community Pride and after just being in for a couple of months started studying counselling and working as a volunteer and kept myself quite busy really...I heard about CP because they were doing a project at the Wilson Carlyle (supported housing) and after the first day noticed that I had bought in a load of food and I had catering in my background so thought doing the catering myself might be a way of working with the service users and getting more people involved. I identified who the service users were as I had lived in the same environment and the same house for a couple of months and they all worked really hard as a group to get things done (School of Participation for Homeless Men)

Through his association with the School he was able to discover an outlet for his own skills and knowledge as a chef and as a consequence motivate others to work on a related project to improve their skills as well. Echoing the views expressed by other participants earlier in this study the relationship with Community Pride opened up new opportunities for him:

For me personally I suppose it's the self-realisation or actualisation that there was another road I could go down and I have been in catering for 20 odd years so this was completely new to me and I felt I was done that there was nothing left in life for me and it opened up so many doors (School of Participation for Homeless Men)

For him it was a journey of self-discovery which resulted in him not only taking the lead with the group but developing new organisational and mentoring skills:

When the Community Pride started from the second day I gathered a group together and some would write down a menu and then we would decide what to cook - some would go shopping coz we were talking 30 odd and chaotic group so some would do the cooking some would do the washing up so everyone had some involvement within it and I suppose I almost become a mentor with the other residents because they listened to

me and I would always listen to them and would always make time for them (School of Participation for Homeless Men))

In response to questions regarding his perception of the role of Community Pride in accordance with previous comments he also used the word 'empowerment':

I just knew that Community Pride were working with MMU and it was all about empowering and people having a voice and really learning new skills or showing people how to get new skills like listening and doing more group work...I saw them as a way of empowering people to have a voice coz it's all about service-user involvement isn't it? Community Pride's role was one of 'you will be listened to' kind of quite authoritarian in some ways but they took what she said on board and listened to what she was saying and I think that they felt they established trust and that's not always easily done but it was also getting them to realise there was a structure and a way of going about it...and we ended up going to the MP and having a voice...and he did listen and take some stuff on board but again there's only so much you can do (School of Participation for Homeless Men))

For this interviewee it was not just about motivating the group itself to succeed in its goals it was also a process of self-discovery for himself.

When asked if he felt there were any barriers to the success of such an initiative he argued there could have been greater support from the university involved in terms of working out the group's initial objectives. He also identified two other areas of concern: accommodation and continuity:

I think what would change them would help – I guess it's difficult coz what I would have liked to have seen was more accommodation and more move ons and that didn't happen in the end - however in the long term the likelihood is that hostels will close and it will go to floating support where they are in houses anyway so ultimately you think we are probably going to get there anyway it's just it's going to be happening in a different way so maybe perhaps we should have looked at other options more maybe we didn't explore but then it wasn't our field although the university you would have thought may have been able to brainstorm a bit? That was the only disappointing thing about it – the one negative is some probably felt too empowered and drifted back more to a aggressive assertive than just assertive –also they've been in the system for years so whilst the project worked in that period for some of them it takes longer than just 3 or 6 months to sort things through for the long-term (School of Participation for Homeless Men))

The importance of committing to a long-term investment with certain community groups

is a common concern for many third sector and voluntary organisations as highlighted in a recent TUC report (2011):

Capacity issues may exist in communities that traditionally have lower volunteer rates, e.g. those most deprived neighbourhoods. This isn't because people living in those places have some antipathy towards voluntary engagement, it's because they are more likely to face challenges such as ill health or unemployment which make it harder for them to get engaged.¹³

¹³ *A Future for Civil Society* – (2011) TUC Conference Report

Overwhelmingly community groups perceived the impact of Community Pride as a positive one. They all agreed that the organisation had been fundamental in galvanizing community engagement and it was clear that not only had groups benefited from the initiative but individuals within each group had as well. All of those involved felt they had gained new skills around a variety of areas including: leadership, IT, management, mentoring etc and greatly valued the opportunity Community Pride had provided enabling them to integrate more fully within their local environment and develop relationships with others in their community.

The new political climate and recent public funding cuts have resulted in significant changes for many third sector organisations and their partners. In order to ensure the sustainability of social and community enterprises there has to be targeted funding and support from a wide range of organisations (like Community Pride) and individuals across the public, private and voluntary sectors (Cox & Schmuecker, 2010: 6).

It is clear from this research that Community Pride have enabled projects to grow and flourish in the most deprived and disadvantaged areas often from hard work and commitment alone and as a result their work is highly valued amongst those they engage with:

How they do it is quite unbelievable, I think there's, there's two of them usually, and they are always so supportive of so many people, and they've helped me personally in a lot of ways (NACRO)

Findings from this study also demonstrate the extent to which Community Pride become involved with community projects and how important it is to them to respond to their needs. Other research studies (Cox & Schmuecker, 2010; Rowson *et al*, 2010) also emphasise the importance of organisations understanding the complexities of communities they work with and the need for flexibility in dealing with them within an ever-changing political landscape:

A more contemporary concept of communities needs to be employed, one which recognises the dynamism, creativity and responsiveness – as well as the conflict – they embody (Rowson *et al*, 2010:1)

A key message to emerge from the research is the disappointment and frustration expressed by both interviewees and Community Pride staff that this type of work is not sustainable and that outcomes are often intangible and hard to 'measure' and therefore often under-valued by funding organisations. Without either Community Pride's initial intervention or their continued support most community-led initiatives will simply fail to get off the ground despite the willingness of many communities to become involved in such programmes so that: 'they can influence and transform all factors affecting the conditions of their lives' (The Community Development Challenge, Communities and local government, 2007:17).

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