

Growing GM Live Well: UK evidence for community power



Community-powered
change and the impact
for people, places and
public services

February 2025

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Introduction to the evidence map

[GM Live Well](#) is Greater Manchester's commitment to ensuring great everyday support is available in every neighbourhood.

Together, communities, partners and public services can tackle inequalities by changing how we work together to grow community-led approaches that are enabled by a system of preventative support.

Greater Manchester - like many other places across the UK - recognises that pulling off this vision requires a fundamentally new approach to working with communities. One that unlocks the power of communities to grow local solutions and work alongside public services in transformative ways. In GM, and across the UK, many small pockets of shining examples where communities are taking the lead demonstrate better outcomes for local people and public services.

For Greater Manchester, community power charts a new, and hopeful direction. Live Well has the potential to bring communities and public services together in powerful ways to reduce inequalities. The devolution of power and resources to the city-region must come alongside greater community power to make this real.

However, the full potential of community power is not fully understood. Whilst few people argue that communities don't play a vital role in helping people to live well, many feel they can't demonstrate the true impact of this work and, therefore, make the case for more of it.

This resource assembles the evidence base for putting communities in the lead, highlights the impact for people, places and public services, and shows where it's already happening in Greater Manchester.

How to use this evidence map

Use it to...

- **Deepen your understanding** of the impact community power can have on people, communities and systems of public services
- **Connect your own work** to grow community power to a national evidence base and demonstrate your impact
- **Develop your own narrative** of why more investment in communities will lead to better outcomes in your community, organisation or sector
- **Start a conversation and build others' understanding** on the value of community power in neighbourhoods and public services

What we mean when we talk about community power?

There are a multitude of definitions for community power. The organic, relational and local nature of community power makes it difficult to define as it manifests in a wonderfully diverse range of activities, approaches and initiatives.

Fundamentally, community power captures a wide range of action which is underpinned by “the principle that communities have knowledge, skills and assets which mean they are well placed to identify and understand what they need to resolve any challenges they face, and to thrive.” (New Local & Local Trust, 2021). Community power, if understood and nurtured by practitioners and policymakers, has the potential to create more resilient places and enable prevention-focused public services.

Community power in Greater Manchester

Community power is already thriving in Greater Manchester’s communities and neighbourhoods where people come together to overcome challenges and take meaningful action to support one another.

Measuring community power

However, there has been a long-standing challenge in demonstrating the impact of community power. While its impact is vast, proving the value of community-led initiatives in traditional, evidence-based policy-making “requires them to demonstrate their worth according to measures that are not set up to recognise their value” (New Local & Local Trust, 2021). A lack of shared language and standardised metrics, the long-term nature of its impact (often over decades), and its predisposition to qualitative insights over quantitative data, means its value and potential is not fully recognised in our systems of public services.

But, the evidence for community power is mounting. Taken together, the UK evidence base proves that community power can tackle inequalities, embed prevention in local places, and create cost savings. Live Well, in the context of Greater Manchester’s devolution deal, has the opportunity to realise this potential through deeper and more localised sharing of power.

How we made this

Scope

This research focused on UK-based literature from the last fifteen years that demonstrates the tangible impact of community-led initiatives. Desk research identified key research teams, thought leaders, and organisations working on evidencing the impact of community power.

Methodology

Fifty relevant sources were identified: 16 from think tanks/consultancies, 15 from charity/third-sector organisations, 12 academic papers, and 7 government reports. These included original research, evaluations and literature reviews. These were initially coded against New Local's six impact themes, with emerging themes noted. A glossary of key terms and frameworks was also created to capture the diverse language around community power and inform further desk research.

Based on deep reading and coding, New Local's impact themes were adapted to reflect new evidence or nuance identified in the literature. The sources were mapped to the new impact themes, drawing out sub themes, and tested this with individuals who are working to put communities in the lead in Greater Manchester.



What this evidence map includes

This resource lays out the evidence to date for community power using 7 key impact themes which demonstrate real and substantive impact for people, communities and public services. Surrounding each impact theme are a set of corresponding sub-themes. The sub themes are not an exhaustive list, but rather can be added to over time as the evidence base for community power grows. The literature which supports each key impact theme is placed around each key impact theme on the map. The size of the impact theme demonstrates the quantity of evidence which supports it, to date.

Importantly, the 7 key impact themes are interconnected and fluid, they cannot be considered in silos. Rather, their interwoven nature has a multiplying effect so that impact in one area can activate or enhance impact in another.



The impact of community power

The evidence sets out seven ways community power has real, tangible impact on people and systems of public services:

1 Improves individual health and wellbeing

Empowering people to be active participants in their mental and physical health and wellbeing can improve and sustain individual health and wellbeing outcomes, through participation in peer-support groups and community-led approaches which enable people to decide what matters most to them.

2 Strengthens community wellbeing and resilience

Developing social networks and relationships alongside supporting people with resources and wider social and physical infrastructure, can enable community action to improve wellbeing and resilience locally.

3 Grows community capabilities for inclusive growth

Increasing the knowledge and skills of communities, supporting educational attainment and expanding the range of opportunities for jobs and local entrepreneurship can drive local economic growth that is inclusive and sustainable.

4 Builds cohesive communities

Building cohesive communities through community-led initiatives increases a sense of belonging and pride, reduces stigma, and amplifies the voices of marginalised groups, ensuring greater distribution and connectedness of opportunities and resources across community groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

5 Enhances civic participation

Growing the capacity for ongoing citizen involvement is increasingly recognised as a route to build wider legitimacy in decision-making, improve outcomes for local people and ease difficulties faced by public institutions tackling complex policy challenges in a context of public distrust and frustration.

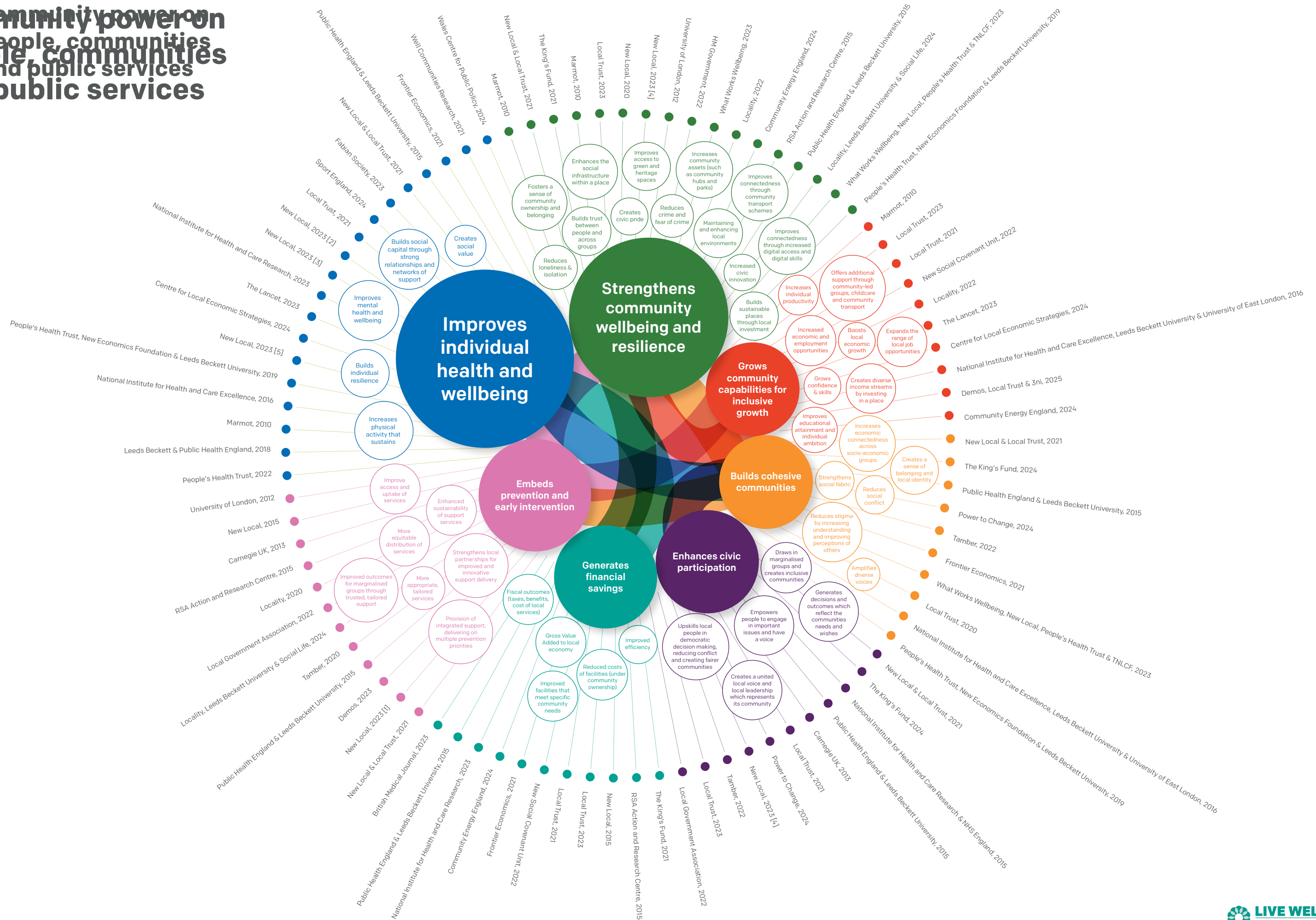
6 Generates financial savings

Investing in community power approaches can generate greater impact for existing spend and save money in the longer-term through reduced spending on crime, healthcare and employment services and increased economic opportunities for people.

7 Embeds prevention and early intervention in a place

Places that strengthen local partnerships and invest in the capabilities of communities improve the range, quality, accessibility, integration and sustainability of preventative services, ultimately creating tailored and connected support embedded in the fabric of a place.

The impact of community power on people, communities and public services





Reform Radio

A not-for-profit online radio station and production company that uses radio and media as a tool to engage young adults into high quality creative training and to support them to build meaningful careers.

✦ Impact

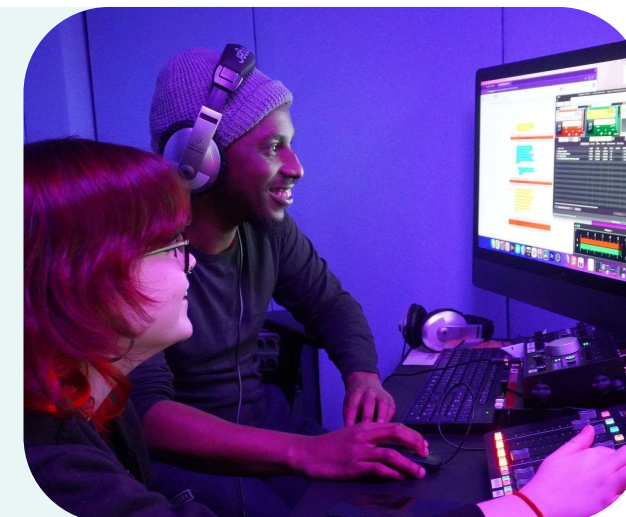
In 2023/24, Reform Radio:

- Delivered **716 free creative sessions to 580 participants**
- Delivered employment and creative skills training to **247** young adults
- **86%** of those progressed onto employment, education, training, and volunteering
- **Re-invested £751,406** into the cultural economy in GM through paid positions
- **69% of employees** have progressed directly from their own programmes
- **519 DJs broadcast** original shows across their station
- Reached an online audience of **1.47 million**



Community
Wealth

GM



Practice features

- Youth-led
- Governance structure enables community-led
- Public and private finance

What is it?

In 2013, three friends saw how the rapidly growing online radio scene could engage young people looking for employment. Self-funding a pilot to prove their concept - they guided five young people to produce a world-class radio show in just a week.

How did they do it?

Beginning broadcasting first in the basement of their house share, they grew into Coronation Street's former dubbing studios, and then into a warehouse with space for high end studios, workshops, and their office.

By generating revenue both in public sector funding and as a production company, Reform Radio can offer both training and employment opportunities. They equip young people with both practical skills i.e. DJ, podcasting, video production

freelancer in the creative industry i.e. filing taxes, applying for funding, and growing a network.

Their ability to engage young people is no accident - Reform Radio embeds the community they serve into their governance structure. Their advisory board reserves the role of Chair for a young person (under 30), includes alumni now working in the industry, reflects the diversity of the communities they serve, and aims for 70% of the board to be under 30.



Beyond Empower

Born from the direct, lived experience of disabled people - Beyond Empower helps places #DoltDifferently to make activity, health, and life more accessible and inclusive for disabled people.



Community
Action



Trafford, Salford, & Tameside

✦ Impact

- Initial pilot project assessed to generate **£25.45 of social value per £1 invested**
- Trafford Council Public Health receive a **£3.33 value in return for every £1 invested**
- From inception - October 2024, **95% of people** in Salford maintain activity independently three months beyond Empower You and **82% maintain activity independently twelve months beyond Empower You**
- From inception - April 2024, **77% of people have improved physical health** twelve months beyond Empower You
- In 2021/22, 10 providers saw an average **89% increase** in the number of disabled people accessing support



Practice features

- Alternatives to services
- Led by lived experience
- Reimagining social care
- Community capacity

What is it?

Founder, Ben Andrews, has retinitis pigmentosa - a degenerative visual impairment that involves the rapid loss of eyesight. The condition is hereditary and Ben grew up with a parent being blind.

At the gym with his family, Ben noticed firstly how difficult navigating a gym was with a visual impairment and secondly, how it got easier the more they attended as staff became more aware of how to support people.

Ben believes health inequalities for disabled people are largely to do with lack of access - so Beyond Empower aims to help society #DoltDifferently.



How did they do it?

Ben incubated his idea through Unlimited Potential, securing funding from Salford CCG's Innovation Fund and support to develop a business case that ensured sustainability of his pilot project - Empower You.

Empower You builds on the assets in communities by identifying an existing activity which an individual would like to become involved in. Uniquely, and as a result of leading by lived experience, their offer involves three elements: supporting the individual in their chosen activity, helping them identify a buddy who goes on the journey with them

(moving away from traditional caring relationships), and upskilling the activity provider to deliver more inclusive provision. This approach means that Empower You increases community capacity to support disabled people within mainstream provision - resulting in less demand for specialist providers.

Despite strong outcomes, Empower You struggled to secure funding for a 1:1 approach. Trafford Public Health commissioned a group based Empower You which led to commissioning in three GM boroughs.

In 2021, Empower You became its own entity: Beyond Empower. Securing funding from the National Lottery, Beyond Empower are developing a community based social care offer rooted in the same Empower You approach of removing barriers to existing assets in the community that disabled people want to access. They also offer consultancy to organisations wanting to #DoltDifferently to break down barriers for disabled people with clients including LA infrastructure teams, schools, and leisure organisations.



Peel Park Pavilion Regeneration

Charity CommUNITY Little Hulton employed community researchers who recommended renovating their local park's pavilion then pulled together partners to design and build it with the community.

✦ Impact

- **£1 million** capital investment into community
- Over **200 volunteers** involved in the build
- Four community researchers employed on a **living wage**
- **Purpose-built community centre** and base for local charity



Practice features

- Community led & co-designed regeneration
- Participatory construction

Salford



Community
**Action and
Wealth**



What is it?

Little Hulton was selected as a Big Local area (receiving £1 million) after a Neighbourhood Manager from Salford City Council put the town forward.

Local people made up the partnership board which began meeting in 2012 before spinning out into CommUNITY Little Hulton in 2019. In both its forms, a mission has persisted: improve Peel Park.



How did they do it?

CommUNITY Little Hulton wanted improvements to Peel Park to be led by the community so partnered with the University of Salford to deliver a co-research project. They employed local people on a living wage and trained them to conduct the research and engagement and co-create a report with the University of Salford. The researchers proposed two huge changes to the park: a new Pump Track for bikes, scooters, skateboards, and rollerblades and renovating Peel Park Pavillion CommUNITY Little Hulton fundraised and delivered the Pump Track which is well used by local young people. Next on the list was the pavilion renovation.

CommUNITY Little Hulton approached Albert Gubay Foundation (who own the company that manage nearby Ellesmere Shopping Centre in Walkden) for contributory funding for the renovation. They offered to fund the entire project, and experienced in property, take on the lease. Community focused architecture specialists Architecture Unknown chose WikiHouse construction (if IKEA met construction) meaning that 200 volunteers, including local school children, have helped construct the building.

Throughout the long process, CommUNITY Little Hulton have also leveraged relationships with private sector organisations to support the parks improvement e.g. securing local housing repairs company Liberty to donate £1500 worth of grounds maintenance & arborist time and time from local waste company Kenny Waste to clear an overgrown area. Once complete, local construction firm Seddon donated the time of 17 new local apprentices to erect bug boxes, paint railings, treat the park's sleeper wall, and construct new compost bins and railway sleepers.

The building will begin to be used in January 2025 with a full opening set for February 2025.



Employing local people in Coldhurst

Noticing that their workforce did not reflect the local population, Northern Care Alliance worked alongside local communities to widen access to quality work with successful results.

Oldham



Community
Wealth



✦ Impact

- In the first 6 months, they recruited **166 pre-employment learners** (who were previously on benefits)
- Their employment rate of local people went from 45% in July 2019, to 57.8% in March 2021, to **65.2% in 2023**.
- **Pre-employment opportunities are a pipeline** for the whole health and social care sector



Practice features

- Combining data and community experience to reduce inequalities
- Co-design
- Alternatives to services

What is it?

Northern Care Alliance identified that their workforce were older, less diverse, and more affluent than the population locally.

Northern Care Alliance identify themselves as an anchor institution, so worked with CLES to explore ways to make sure that the communities most local to them are able to access their employment opportunities.

Together, CLES and Northern Care Alliance mapped their employment profile, and identified deprived postcodes where they are not employing people. The work began with Royal Oldham Hospital and neighbouring community Coldhurst.



How did they do it?

Northern Care Alliance then worked in conjunction with the local community to generate new ideas to better connect them as an employer to the talent available in their most local communities. Together, they designed specific pre-employment training packages to help these local residents to enter their workplace. Fundamentally, these packages aim to help people for whom structural inequalities have prevented their talent from shining. For example, they are calibrated to help groups, such as BAME people, get ready for work.

Through co-design, they understood the importance of pre-employment and work opportunities, not sitting in isolation and really helping people secure meaningful paid work. So, they reserve entry level positions for those who have undertaken this training and this bypasses the advert and interview process that proves a barrier to entry and focuses instead on values based recruitment.

Northern Care Alliance also changed their recruitment fairs from standalone events in the hospital to as guests at events in community venues where local people already were.

To embed the approach, Northern Care Alliance has a Widening Participation Team dedicated to opening up better opportunities for local people to access NHS careers as well as to help them develop when in post. They are also working with young people in communities, using NHS Career Ambassadors to be positive role models in communities that they identify with and offering work experience to young people who live in the areas that they work.



Douglas Valley Community & Beehive Community Centre

As austerity threatens community assets, Wigan Council enables communities to revitalise their assets through asset transfer and provides independent support to help communities do so

Wigan



Community
Wealth



✦ Impact

- Increased usage from 15 hours a week **to over 60**
- **Attracted £15,000 investment** immediately
- **Generating £2000** income within the first two months of opening
- **300 visitors** per week
- **Increased accessibility** through installing a handrail
- One part-time **paid position**



Practice features

- Infrastructure and support to enable community wealth
- Asset transfer

What is it?

Recognising that community groups hold 'soft' assets in skills, knowledge, and volunteer time whilst the Council often holds the 'hard' assets that they rely on in buildings, playing fields, and bowling greens.

Under the financial pressures of austerity, Wigan Council sought to find new ways to protect these assets and to do so in the spirit of the Wigan Deal - working collaboratively and in partnership with communities.



How did they do it?

Since 2015, Douglas Valley Community has worked in partnership with Wigan Borough Council to provide independent support to organisations who wish to apply for an asset transfer from Wigan Council. They have supported the transfer of numerous assets and also offer community centre management.

The Council acknowledges that without this offer, they would not have been able to afford to keep the assets running and many of the vital local assets that have been transferred have gained a new lease of life under community control.

Community groups are able to access funding and resources not available to the Council.

An example is Lindale Adult Day Centre; an underused asset in one of the most isolated areas within the Wigan Borough. Without an obvious local group poised to take over the building, Wigan advertised the building as available for asset transfer.

This led to the forming of a new community group who could manage and develop the building into a community hub. With help from Douglas Valley Community, they submitted an application for transfer along with a business plan and in 2016, the community group took over the building and renamed it 'Beehive Community Centre'.



New Pioneers and Maverick Lab

Employment support service co-designed with the community and delivered together by partners



Community
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Wealth**

Rochdale



✦ Impact

- **119 pioneers** attending a training opportunity
- **115 pioneers** attended learning groups or labs
- **63 pioneers** gained recognised qualifications
- **31 pioneers** gained employment



Practice features

- Co-design
- Basic income trial
- Strengths based approach
- Partnership project

What is it?

College Bank and Lower Falinge are communities next to Rochdale Town Centre. Though small in geographical size, they fit 1200 homes.

Like many areas of Greater Manchester, too often these areas have been defined by statistics that capture 'needs' rather than the strengths and identity of the communities as a whole. For College Bank and Lower Falinge though, this image has travelled further, negative, damaging and unfair headlines about the area specifically began in 2010. Since, national articles about poverty, inequality, and division will often feature the same overcast picture of the area.

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing wanted to increase employment and career progression for people in College Bank and Lower Falinge. Rather than make decisions about the community for them, as has been reinforced in how the community is portrayed nationally, they wanted the approach to be community led.



How did they do it?

Rochdale Boroughwide Housing and the RSA started with the local community. They highlighted the need not just for any job but for secure work that pays well. People also felt employment support services be designed to local communities as well as offering mentoring and skill sharing.

This led to the design of New Pioneers - a project rooted in the knowledge through the community that so many people are willing and able to work more but are stuck in a situation of underemployment.

The initial pilot combines three elements:

1. A new pioneers income as a basic income instead of existing benefits to provide financial stability and flexibility for pioneers to make longer term planning of their careers and lives
2. A multilingual team of career brokers to provide personalised, intensive support to guide pioneers in investing in themselves and building networks of support
3. A community space integral to the wider physical regeneration of the neighbourhoods where the programme can be based to enable activities, learning, networking, and communities of mutual support and aspiration.

The programme has since been expanded to include Heywood and the community centre includes a community cafe too. The basic income trial became difficult to implement locally where national rules around bus passes, prescriptions, and free school meals remained in place.

New Pioneers is run as a partnership between Rochdale Council, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing, and Maverick Lab CIC, a not-for-profit social enterprise based in the community, who also offer mental health awareness training for employers.



Neurodiversity in Schools

A transformation programme led by people with lived experience to promote whole school culture change around understanding of autism to create more inclusive schools

GM



Community
**Action and
Power**



✦ Impact

- **Co-produced training programme** not only delivered for schools but also to other practitioners
- Peer support between parents
- Autistic children introduced to a **peer group** for support
- **Schools have implemented changes including:**
 - **Suspensions reduced** in schools taking part
 - **Significant reductions in exclusions** of young people with autism in schools that taken part



Practice features

- Co-production
- Social model of disability
- Peer support
- Culture change
- Community of practice

What is it?

Autism research charity Autistica highlights the experiences of autistic children at school with figures suggesting they are more likely to experience bullying, mental health problems, and to be left out of activities.

For parents, the Council for Disabled Children note specific challenges and trends in relation to neurodiverse children and education; the impact of 'zero tolerance' behaviour policies on rising school exclusions, the link between undiagnosed SEND and poor emotional wellbeing, increases in fixed term and unlawful exclusions, rising elective home education, and exclusion of younger children.

The Autism in Schools project, learning from accelerator work in other regions, aimed to increase the inclusion and support for autistic children in schools and arrived in Greater Manchester in 2021.



How did they do it?

The project initially piloted with 13 schools in Rochdale, Oldham, Manchester, and Wigan. The schools were chosen to reflect a mix of needs and ages to enable a smoother spread of the approach. The method, co-production of solutions, is consistent across all schools and so the outcomes can differ school by school.

Every locality has two co-leads, one of which is a parent carer, and each school involved must have a parent-carer group and a children & young people's voice group to guide the work. Together, they co-produce solutions and deliver better outcomes for autistic children & young people.

Some of the co-produced solutions include co-produced learning modules, a continuation of parent-carer groups to enable peer support, a bespoke 'understanding myself' offer for young people and their peers, autism awareness being embedded in assemblies and activities, as well as work to develop friendship groups for children and young people with autism.

The project has spread across Greater Manchester and relaunched in 2024 as the Neurodiversity in Education Programme. There is also a community of practice to share ideas across schools.

Whilst the full report is yet to be published, early evidence suggests that suspensions are down in all schools which have taken part and there have been no exclusions of autistic people from those schools involved.



Game Changing Community Programme

Peer led programme brings together Wigan's sporting assets to create community-led approach to improving mental health

Wigan



Community Action



✦ Impact

- **Reliable improvement** in reported quality of life between the first and last session
- Participants average **quality of life score moved** from the clinical range (typical of those with mental health difficulties) into scores expected of the general population
- Participants report making **new friends**
- Participants report being **able to return to work**
- Participant now undertaking a PT qualification



Practice features

- Peer support
- Peer employment
- Partnership programme
- Social response to mental health

What is it?

Living Well systems are designed to support people whose needs are too complex to be met by primary care but are often excluded from the strict criteria of secondary care. Living Well systems treat people as citizens within communities, rather than as mental health patients, and embrace the whole person. In Greater Manchester, each locality has its own Living Well system that has been co-designed with people with lived experience of mental health. Regardless of local offer - all Living Well systems recognise that all aspects of our lives can impact our mental health, so feature multi-agency teams, including peer workers, and networks of support from across the local VCSE ecosystem, health, care, housing, debt advice, employment and other services.

By recognising people as citizens within communities, Living Well systems connect to the assets of communities to enable a longer term network of support and change how a whole community responds to and looks after those with poor mental health.

In Wigan, a peer worker led on building an offer that connects to the established and successful sports clubs which the borough is home to and forms a huge part of Wigan's identity.



How did they do it?

A peer worker who has been involved in Living Well since the initial co-design of the system in Wigan could see a connection between the sporting identity of Wigan and the impact that physical activity can have on mental health.

He approached Wigan Athletic's Community Trust to design and eventually a partnership ensued with the Wigan Living Well team, BeWell (leisure organisation),

Wigan Rebuild with Hope, Wigan Athletics' Community Trust, and Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust.

The programme uses a trauma-informed approach; putting peer support, physical activity, and the empowerment of individuals at the forefront of its design.

The programme is delivered over 12 weeks to a group of up to 10 people who are referred to the programme by Wigan's Living Well team.

The programme has a routine that is followed each week: a peer led session, try a new physical activity, and attend the gym together with access to a personal trainer. Those involved in the programme receive a membership to the BeWell leisure facilities for the 3 months of the programme. Peer workers from Living Well attend every session with the people involved and take part as participants.

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- Strengthens community wellbeing and resilience
- Grows community capabilities for inclusive growth
- Builds cohesive communities
- Enhances civic participation
- Generates financial savings
- Embeds prevention and early intervention in a place

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