

research
in practice
for adults

What is...
***community
capacity?***



Dartington

What is ...

community capacity?



A community can be people who live in the same area or people who share a particular interest or goal. What is meant by a community's capacity is the strengths and skills of its people, and how much they're able to use these to improve life for each other. While 'community capacity' may be an unfamiliar phrase, it simply refers to how inclusive and welcoming a community is.

An individual's strengths and skills become part of community capacity whenever that person helps family, friends or neighbours, joins a community group, volunteers, campaigns on an issue or takes part in community events. All these things can help to make that individual healthier and happier, and do the same for their community.

Communities where people are active and engaged in these ways are ones where people are more likely to feel safe and included - whatever their age, background or ability. Places with strong social networks are places where people live longer, healthier and happier lives.

How does...

community capacity work?



These days, much can isolate us from each other and make us less likely to give or receive help. This is damaging to our health and happiness. Individuals can strengthen their communities and benefit their own and others' health by, for example, talking to their neighbours, joining or forming groups, making new friends, campaigning, volunteering, and complaining when things don't work!

As shrinking budgets mean changes to many traditional council services, there is an urgent need for communities, councils, businesses and charities to work together in new ways and transform how services are run. This has to fit with the council's duty to promote people's well-being and to work to prevent, delay or reduce people's care and support needs. The council also has a responsibility to provide information to all, so community groups and charities need to keep the council up-to-date with their contact details and activities.

The council can promote and support community capacity by:

- > meeting face to face with community groups
- > ensuring that people's voices are heard in the decisions that affect where they live
- > maximising the accessibility of facilities like parks, libraries and swimming pools
- > making rooms available to community groups
- > reaching out to socially excluded groups, such as older people and people with disabilities
- > recognising that disadvantaged communities are likely to need greater investment to build capacity
- > giving people and social care workers regular opportunities to develop ideas and solutions together
- > finding ways to reduce 'red tape' that might prevent community groups holding events
- > supporting the locally elected councillor to represent community needs and views.

Schemes which can strengthen social networks include:

- > **Timebanking**
Where people offer their particular skills and receive help from others in return.
- > **Community navigator scheme**
Where the navigator's role is to help people find the groups and activities that suit them, drawing on local knowledge and promoting independence.
- > **Befriending scheme**
Helping volunteers to offer companionship to people who are lonely or isolated.
- > **Circles of support**
Where a group of friends meet regularly to help a 'focus person' achieve their personal goals.
- > **Community gardening/wildlife protection project**
- > **Healthy walks scheme**
- > **Inclusive arts festival**
- > **Promotion of adult learning**
- > **'Adopt' your area scheme**

There is 'community spirit'.

We understand what help we can get from the council and from other organisations.

Any care and support I receive enables me to be involved in my community.

We are supported to run groups and socialise.

How do ...

I know if things are working well?

I feel welcomed, included and safe on the streets.

Local organisations listen to the community and know what matters to it.

I have a say in how the services I use are run.

We do what we can to improve our neighbourhoods.

We know how to campaign to change things in our neighbourhood.

My friends and neighbours and I look out for each other.

All people are valued for their unique talent, skills and gifts, and are able to contribute as full and equal citizens.

My neighbourhood is accessible, safe and welcoming to all - regardless of their age, abilities or care and support needs.

Practical advice



Joining community groups can improve health and happiness. Ask at the council, library or community centre about community groups and activities in your area. If the service or activity you would like isn't happening, could you and people you know do anything to start it?

Talk to family, friends and neighbours about what you can do to improve where you live and tell the council, your MP and local businesses and charities what you think.

Tell your council how it can best support you to stay happy, healthy and independent.

Look for ways to make your community stronger and more welcoming for all.

Make sure you keep the council up-to-date with your contact information and activities, so others can find you.

Look for opportunities to get involved with activities to help build the community you want to live in.

research
in practice
for adults

A community's capacity is the extent to which community members support one another and are encouraged to be actively involved in groups, services, activities and events. It is about how much people feel included, valued, respected and understood. This down-to-earth, jargon-free guide explores these ideas.

This guide has been produced by **Research in Practice for Adults**. We are a charity that uses evidence from research and people's experiences to help understand adult social care and to improve how it works.

Author: Bruce McClure

Many thanks to: Jayne Bentley and Richard Humphries for their comments on this resource.

www.ripfa.org.uk

June 2015

Dartington