THE IMPACT OF ASSETS-BASED COMMUNITY INTEGRATION INITIATIVES IN SCOTTISH AND DANISH LOCATIONS

Ross Deuchar
Professor and Assistant Dean
University of the West of Scotland
ross.deuchar@uws.ac.uk

Tony Bone
Former Chief Inspector
Police Scotland
afbo@me.com

Summary: This report summarises the insights from a recent SIPR Research Fellowship project implemented by the University of the West of Scotland and Police Scotland. The research was focused on exploring the impact of implementing assets-based community networking initiatives on public perceptions about youth violence, on the building of social capital and on the motivation and morale of local community police officers in disadvantaged communities in Copenhagen and Glasgow. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community officers, residents and members of local agencies in two socially deprived urban communities in both cities during the implementation phase of assets-based networking projects. The findings illustrate that, in both communities, community officers actively illustrated to local residents their genuine desire to listen to their concerns, fostered open, democratic dialogue among local groups of people and encouraged residents to see the value in their own skills and resources. As a result, opportunities arose for galvanizing social capital and promoting positive contagion within these disadvantaged communities. The report draws attention to the successes of each localized initiative, while also highlighting some important Nordic European policy implications for community policing – in particular, the need to sustain police commitment to the initiatives over time and to maintain the motivation of individual officers involved in the strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Evidence suggests that, while instances of youth violence and gang culture have fallen in many European states, local people living in deprived, densely populated urban areas are more likely to have high perceptions of and fear about youth disorder and to view young people's behaviour as problematic (Deuchar et al., 2014). A substantial body of work has also demonstrated that relationships between young people, local residents and the police in socially deprived communities are often fraught with mutual distrust and stereotyping (see Deuchar *et al.,* 2014 for review). The Scottish Government's new strategy for justice in Scotland highlights the need to promote information-sharing and partnership work and to empower local communities to prevent crime and eliminate fear, alarm and distress about criminality (Scottish Government, 2012). One new strategy is the implementation of community 'listening events' (Durie *et al.,* 2004), where members of Police Scotland's Licensing and Violence Reduction Division support and empower local residents in disadvantaged communities to use their own skills and talents, working alongside service providers to make the changes that they wish to see in their area. It has been argued that 'flourishing' communities can only emerge where there is open and deliberative dialogue involving individuals listening to each other, engaging in critical thinking and reasoned argument (Loader, 1996). Indeed, it has also been argued that local community members can build enhanced levels of resilience through focusing on their own collective resources and assets (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003; Whiting *et al.,* 2012). It is, of course, recognized that these approaches are not unique to Scotland. For instance, Greater Manchester Police has established independent advisory groups and community networks involving local residents, relevant agencies and young people. These types of initiatives have also emerged in other parts of northern Europe; for instance, some departments within the Danish National Police Force (Politi) are beginning to implement similar strategies. In recent years, community officers in the Nørrebro area of Copenhagen have begun to arrange local 'community networks' where they meet with local residents, members

of local businesses and agencies, current and reformed young offenders to discuss issues and problems and stimulate local solutions.

The focus of our Fellowship project was to explore and analyze the impact of implementing assets-based community networking initiatives on local public perceptions about youth violence, on the building of localized social capital and on the motivation and morale of local patrol and community officers in socially deprived communities in Copenhagen and Scotland. We anticipated that a comparative study of similar initiatives in these two diverse settings could lead to important insights that could potentially stimulate important Nordic European policy implications for community policing. Working closely with Danish Politi officers in the summer of 2014, we set up semi-structured interviews with 12 local residents (including 3 young people and 5 youth workers), 4 police officers and a local community worker (and former police officer) in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, during the implementation phase of a local 'community network'. Later, during an implementation period of community 'listening events' in Govan, Glasgow, led by the LVRD within Police Scotland but implemented in partnership with a range of local freelance artists, community-based third sector agencies and local residents, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 people involved with the local community including 6 local residents, 1 local councillor, 2 youth workers and three local social entrepreneurs and 4 local community police officers. During interviews in both settings, questions were designed to explore the impact of the assets-based community networking initiatives on building social capital (Putnam, 2000). Local perceptions about youth disorder and violence were explored in both settings, while interviews with police officers were focused on exploring the impact of the initiatives on their motivation and morale.

MAJOR FINDINGS TO DATE

Insights from the Community Network in Nørrebro, Copenhagen
The data we gathered from Danish participants suggested that the neighbourhood of Nørrebro was one which had suffered for many years from unemployment and social deprivation. Local people explained that most of the residents regarded themselves as socialists, and the physical infrastructure within the neighbourhood promoted a sense of social integration since Municipality-owned social housing sat alongside owner-occupied homes in many of the streets. Behind the social housing, back courtyards were shared and we observed the way in which groups of local residents would mingle and engage in informal gatherings and inter-generational conversation. Similarly, people would also congregate out on the streets in front of their houses or in the local 'Blaagaards Plads' which sat at the centre of the neighbourhood. Several residents described the existence of an 'outside livingroom' in the local community, but the majority of those who gathered together outside were ethnic Danes and some local residents were concerned that the Roma community tended to be distanced from the rest of the neighbourhood. Thus, while social equality existed, there appeared to be cultural divisions within the community which were difficult to overcome.

For many years, young male members of a local street gang who were attached to Blaagaards Plads were locked in organised violent conflict with the Hell's Angels biker gang. Younger men from communities beyond Nørrebro who viewed themselves as loyal to the Blaagaards Plads gang formed the newly named 'Loyal To Familia' gang – or LTF for short. Over time, the young members of LTF – who were mostly from ethnic minority groups – began to wear hooded tops with LTF emblazoned on them and also adorned LTF tattoos; they would enter Nørrebro and intimidate local residents. Hence, a great deal of tension began to exist among local people towards ethnic minority young people. Even although the gang wars had ended several years ago, public fear about youth crime and the demonization of young ethnic minority males hanging around the streets remained high. In a strong attempt to enable local community spirit to re-emerge, local residents had converted a local building in Blaagaards Plads into a 'People's House' where members of the older and younger generation could socialise and attempt to build a sense of mutual trust and respect.

Against the backdrop of a community which had traditionally oriented around socialist values, had become labelled in the media as a ghetto because of the presence of social housing and gang problems but whose residents were attempting to build a renewed sense of trust, reciprocity and inter-generational connectedness, it appeared that there was strong local animosity towards the police. The animosity had arisen because (1) a number of violent arrests of local gang members had taken place within the community, where the young men were humiliated in public; (2) some local young people felt they were repeatedly stopped and searched without explanation; (3) some ethnic minorities believed that the police were racist, and had a tendency to discriminate against and stigmatize young immigrants and (4) there had been a recent incident where a local police officer had pushed a local disabled man out of his wheelchair onto the ground; the incident had been filmed by local residents and posted on Facebook and had also reached the local news. The local community-oriented police

officers we interviewed were conscious of the animosity that had existed in Nørrebro towards them, but felt that they had worked hard to overcome this and to build renewed feelings of localised trust. Officers who were part of the local community team viewed their top priority as being out on the streets, being seen by local people, listening to their problems and placing an emphasis on crime prevention. They talked about the way in which they had deliberately encouraged local residents to come and have coffee with them at 'hotspot' areas in the community where local members of the LTF would tend to congregate – thus providing a deterrent effect and helping local people to feel safer. Officers would also regularly walk around and talk to local social workers, youth workers and school teachers in order to build a sense of trust, and they felt that most community members felt reassured by this high visibility approach.

One young community officer, Søren, had attended several international gang seminars in his own personal time, which were led by academics and practitioners. Also in his own personal time, he had joined study groups that visited Chicago and Manchester where he was introduced to several innovative violence prevention initiatives such as the work of community street pastors and the practice of establishing community focus groups and 'listening events'. He returned from these trips inspired and began to take a more liberal view of how best to address community safety issues, and the need to take a proactive (as opposed to a reactive) approach to policing in order to address the underlying issues in young men's lives that often lead them into street violence. He decided to create a community network in Nørrebro, and - drawing on existing relationships he had established in the local neighbourhood – slowly began to convince people that he was there to support them and that their voices could be heard. The community network's membership comprised local social workers, members of School Boards, representatives from the Municipality, local residents and gang members and meetings took place monthly. During the meetings of the network, local residents were given the opportunity to ask young gang members questions, began to hear about their perspectives and slowly began to have more empathy for their situations. Several large public meetings were also arranged, where local people had the opportunity to ask questions of a panel consisting of police officers, Municipality members, social workers, local volunteers and emergency services; gang leaders were also in attendance. By initiating open dialogue among diverse members of the local community, wider forms of *bonding* and *bridging* social capital emerged (Putnam, 2000): while localised trust was deepened between the participating young gang members and those with whom they were already familiar (such as social workers and some local volunteers), the meetings also enabled previously unconnected people and organisations to communicate and collaborate in order to consider the way in which their collective quality of life could be improved. Norms of support were expanded, socialisation networks widened and trust, reciprocity and social cohesion deepened. As part of the *bridging* social capital that emerged, *linking* social capital also came to the fore through the active dialogue and engagement between local residents (including ethnic minority young men who were members of gangs) and the traditional authoritative organisation of the police, which was represented by Søren (Putnam, 2000; Western *et al.,* 2005). A more sustained period of relative peace emerged between the LTF and the Hell's Angels, and local residents began to realise that young people of all cultures needed more support, and deserve to be consulted rather than negatively labelled and demonized. During the meetings of the community network, local residents, agency members, young people and police officers made fledgling attempts to orient towards shared objectives for future localised change and development (Innes and Jones, 2006). Søren became more passionate about his role within the community, and one other local officer who worked closely with him realized the enormous satisfaction that can come from understanding the reasons behind young people's criminal activities and being able to steer them in more positive directions through focusing on problem-oriented, preventative policing and building positive relationships.

However, although Søren and his colleague were motivated and inspired by the impact of the community network and the pioneering collaboration and social capital which emerged within it, their other colleagues in the police were less than supportive. Søren was frequently told that the community-centred approach he used was seen as a 'soft' way of doing police work, and that the community network itself had very little to do with real policing. After a decade of working as a police officer, Søren reached the stage where he felt increasingly tired of the way in which the police priorities continued to be focused on authoritarian enforcement and decided to leave the force in order to take up a new post as an Operations Manager running the local 'People's House' where local people (including gang members) hang out together and where network meetings and workshops take place, and a local café sells food and drink. Although the community network continued under the leadership of Søren's closest colleague, it lost some of the momentum it had had when Søren was in post.

Insights from Community Listening Events in Govan, Glasgow
Similar to the neighbourhood of Nørrebro, the data we gathered from Scottish participants suggested that the neighbourhood of Govan was one which had also suffered for many years from unemployment and social deprivation. Added comparisons can be made from the fact that most local people in Govan would probably

regard themselves as socialists (albeit currently under a different party political banner), and also that the physical infrastructure within the neighbourhood has traditionally promoted social integration since the days of the old Govan Burgh, which for a period in history was recognised not so much as a part of, but as a neighbour of, the city of Glasgow. Furthermore, in recent years the new Govan has welcomed owner-occupied homes alongside social housing into many of its streets. As a result, new people are now being attracted to Govan, reversing a trend of the last few decades brought about mainly by the demise of the Govan Shipyards and more recently by the deindustrialisation of traditional forms of employment. However, in spite of the remaining social challenges within the area we observed the renowned community spirit as well as the myriad of community groups consisting of key workers and local residents who also mingle and engage in formal and informal gatherings. While high levels of social equality exist in Govan, we also found that there appeared to be cultural divisions within the community which were difficult to overcome. In particular, Govan has been home to a community of 'Show People' for many years who have been marginalised behind their boundary fence.

For many years, the neighbourhood of Govan has also been home to territorial gangs, as primarily young males seek membership and personal identity to alleviate symptoms of hopelessness and unemployment. However, unlike the more organised hierarchical gang culture of Nørrebro, we found that the gangs in Govan tended to be motivated by protecting geographical boundaries by resorting to violence and disorder rather than pursuing illegal profits. Consequently, the long-held traditions of previously celebrated occasions like the Govan Fair had been blighted by conflict between local gangs looking for a stage to display their combative skills. In particular, Elder Park (a local treasure betrothed to the people of Govan by a 19th Century philanthropist) had been the focal point to settle local rivalries resulting in running battles. This was exacerbated by local authority measures which blocked traditional fairground rides due to health and safety concerns on the very location known as the 'Fair Field' (or Fairfield as it is known locally), which led to the permanent postponement of Govan Fair festivities. In recent years, as a result of the combination of increased use of police enforcement tactics such as 'stop and search', along with engagement of multiple youth community groups, the threat from local gangs has diminished.

Set against this backdrop of ingrained social dysfunction allied to growing disempowerment or disenchantment, an opportunity arose to apply the principles of the Strengths Based Approach (or Assets Based Approach) to community development in the Govan area. Not without its difficulties, the success of this approach relies on true empowerment of residents and community groups while significantly adjusting the mindsets of service providers to create an equilibrium of understanding. Key to such a marriage of equals is always the need for an understanding of each other's role and a willingness of service providers to forego elements of control and adopt the role of facilitator. However, principles on their own are unlikely to enable significant community transformation and great reliance was placed on the learned outcomes from the 'Old Beacon Project' in Falmouth, Cornwall, initiated by Ms Hazel Stutely OBE (a Health Visitor), who began a process of revitalising a blighted estate by introducing a series of 'Listening Events', which led to greater trust and understanding between residents and service providers. A source of energy was detected in the form of the frustrated aspirations of the people of Govan - they saw themselves as important ambassadors of their rich heritage, clearly illustrated by sentiments of local show people who have been resident in the heart of Govan for many, many years. However, the show people were generally regarded by 'Govanites' as outsiders and they even perceived themselves as targets for special attention from residents and local police alike. However, the plight of the show people has always been enhanced by their desire to share their unquenchable thirst for eccentricity and flamboyant parades. Disturbingly, their opportunities for maximising the positivity of the 'Govan Fair' along with associated parades and crowning of the Fair Queen celebrations were, in recent years, inhibited by the growing penchant for violence among Govan's burgeoning reputation for gang violence. Some would go as far as to say that violent tendencies and the continuous cycle of retribution, where reporting victimisation to the police wasn't an option, had become the norm. The importance of the 'Govan Fair' as a potential conduit for lasting change became crystal clear. Here was an opportunity to galvanise extensive community support that might just be quite transformational.

A crucial step in the process was permission from local police commanders and staff to engage so freely and with such openness. However, there was a clear understanding from the outset that the ultimate aim of the Assets Based Policing Approach should adhere to national scrutiny arrangements as a result of the formation of the Police Service of Scotland and local priorities set through a process of consultation. As a result, significant control for the planning of events was handed over by the local police to the residents' 'Govan Fair' committee. A process of transformation emerged whereby community police officers adjusted to their new role as facilitators. Local police agreed to requests to consider an enhanced 'Govan Fair' 2014 and agreed to train local residents as marshalls and stewards for the big annual event. Instead of flooding the local area with high visibility police officers, local people were given vests and trained on the art of crowd control and traffic

management. According to local residents, a kind of positive contagion appeared to spread before, during and after the fair and procession which resulted in a completely different type of event from the one experienced over the last few years. The atmosphere was safe, happy and family-friendly where if any sort of police-related incident occurred it was dealt with quickly and proportionately; or in the words of one resident, 'without any overreaction from the police'. A real sense of pride and achievement began to spread and one local police officer commented that he would have been happy to bring his own family along. All this was a far cry from the 'Govan Fair' of recent decades where alcohol fuelled violence and disorder were anticipated and generally accepted as normal behaviour. Significantly, reported violent crime was virtually non-existent throughout the 'Govan Fair' celebrations, and local fear and anxiety about youth disorder also diminished.

Crucially, the local community identified the neighbourhood issues of greatest concern but they also identified the solutions and how they as participants could deploy their skills and talents to make a lasting difference. Putnam (2000) refers to civic participation as an antidote to social isolation, especially in the form of volunteering within local communities. The examples from Govan also provide clear evidence of the benefits of social capital in terms of connectedness enhancing social cohesion and trust between individuals and with service providers like the police. The strengths-based approach enabled a period of respite for residents and created space for greater momentum around one key initiative, namely the 'Govan Fair' along with its associated processions and celebrations. Furthermore, the local community police officers reported that the positive contagion continued beyond the 'Govan Fair' events and on into the annual Orange Parade, which is regarded by many local people and beyond as a significant tradition in the area. One senior officer commented, 'I can't quite put my finger on it but there was a different vibe from before'. He also went on to say, 'I was speaking to other cops (on duty at the Orange parade) …. they were saying that they felt that …. what had been developed as a result of the Govan Fair had maybe had a positive impact on the local Orange Parades ... onlookers just seemed a lot happier'. That said, there was also a perception of wholehearted resistance and scepticism from some established local community groups reliant on external funding for their existence and who possibly feared interference from new groups and loss of revenue.

Running in tandem with this collaborative police and community approach on the Govan Fair was the 'We are Listening' initiative sponsored by Creative Scotland. This involved permission from the local area commander to site three artists in residence within the local Govan Police Office. Once an element of trust was established they were given free rein to visit the internal environs of the station. An interesting relationship developed, especially with the introduction of an acknowledgement booth in the canteen where police officers were encouraged to identify the personal strengths they would most like to be recognised for. Once officers and local residents realised there was significant commonality between them, a sense of togetherness emerged. This simple step began to raise morale, trust and confidence. Furthermore, the artists engendered a distinct sense of recognition and respect of diversity without the need to reference legislation or policy, and instead this was replaced by an instinctive understanding. An example of this new sense of openness was evident when a large group of youths were stopped and searched by police officers within the premises of a local youth group. A greater sense of equilibrium and awareness of each other's role now exists while local police officers have started to frequent the local youth group on a more informal basis. Residents commented on a new 'feel-good' factor, reportedly due to a perception that community police officers were genuinely listening. Notably, agreement has now been reached by residents and local police that a collaborative planning process for the 'Govan Fair' celebrations will now become a permanent fixture. Participants also seemed surprised at the commonality between artistic expression and community policing in the sense that art, in its different forms, can provide a welcome diversion from the strains of community life. The local senior community policing Inspector who has fulfilled a variety of roles throughout his 30 years in the police fully embraced the Strengths Based Approach to policing a local community like Govan. He extolled the virtues of 'Listening Events' as an extension of traditional forms of consultation where local strengths, talents and assets were uncovered. In particular he referred to the new 'Govan Fair' wardens who were previously unknown to local services, but with little training they became key volunteers in the local area during an event they cared about quite deeply. He went onto identify three important elements: commitment, identifying assets and listening; and the importance of continuity and legacy as a means of sustaining strong community relations.

Conclusion
Fundamental to achieving a positive culture of collaboration in both Govan and Nørrebro has been proving to local residents that there is a genuine desire to listen to concerns and ensuring local people are at the heart of decision-making processes. The success of the assets-based community networking initiatives in both communities illustrate that local feelings of fear and anxiety about youth crime and violence can only be resolved through a holistic, multi-agency approach with an emphasis on crime prevention and the building of local cohesion and reciprocity among disparate groups. There is clearly a strong link between the promotion of

open, democratic dialogue among local groups of people, the presence of 'pastoral policing' via roles such as those embraced by community police officers, the fostering of power-sharing processes and the building of social capital and orientation towards shared objectives (McCoy and Scully, 2002; Innes and Jones, 2006; Frondigoun *et al.,* 2013; Deuchar et al., 2014). Across Nordic Europe, there is a need for the police to learn from case studies such as the ones emerging from our research in order to become confident in facilitating more opportunities for local communities to be encouraged to see the value in their own assets and to drive evidence-led community development processes themselves. In so doing, community officers can actively support local people to become conduits for galvanising wider community support and fostering positive contagion within disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Where individual community police officers are involved in this type of work, there needs to be support from the wider organization in order to minimize the fragility that can often occur where networks rely on one officer working alone and in order to ensure that the operational work of the wider organization does not undermine the values being promoted by community-based officers. Groups of officers who are highly committed to encouraging community integration and promoting localized assets should be able to gain affirmation and motivation from within their organization for the work they are doing, and believe that their ongoing efforts will be legitimately viewed as 'real' police work. Finally, officers need to ensure that localised trust and cohesion is sustained by continually placing local people at the heart of local decision-making processes.

FUTURE WORK

As a further means of disseminating the insights from the research, the researchers intend to prepare a full academic article to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for potential publication. In addition, they plan to design and deliver a series of continuing professional development enrichment sessions for serving officers on the use of assets-based integration strategies as a means of building safe, inclusive and flourishing communities. Due to the inter-disciplinary nature of the work, it is anticipated that these sessions will also hold appeal to other professional groups, including youth and community workers, teachers and social workers.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Deuchar, R., Miller, J. and Barrow, M. (2014) Breaking down barriers with the usual suspects: Findings from a research-informed intervention with police, young people and residents in the West of Scotland. *Youth Justice.* DOI: 10.1177/1473225414530538.

Durie, R., Wyatt, K. and Stuteley, H. (2004) Community regeneration and complexity, in: D. Kernick (ed) *Complexity and Healthcare Organisation: A View from the Street.* London: Radcliffe Medical Press.

Frondigoun L, Smith R. and McLeod I. (2013) *The Campus Police Officer: Past, Present and Future.* Dundee: SIPR.

Innes M and Jones V (2006) *Neighbourhood Security and Urban Change.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Loader, I (1996) *Youth, Policing and Democracy.* London: Palgrave.

Mathie A and Cunningham G (2003) From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice* 13(5): 474-486.

McCoy, ML. and Scully PL (2002) Deliberative dialogue to expand civic engagement: What kind of talk does democracy need? *National Civic Review* 91(2): 117-135.

Putnam R (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Scottish Government (2012) *The Strategy for Justice in Scotland.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Western J, Stimson R, Baum S. and Van Gellecum Y. (2005) Measuring community strength and social capital. *Regional Studies* 39(8): 1095-1109.

Whiting L, Kendall S and Willis W (2012) An assets-based approach: An alternative health promotion strategy? *Community Practitioner* 85(1): 25-28.