

'A Community Profile'

**A Group of Young People living in a small
South Wales Valley Village**

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AIM

The aim of this paper is to provide a community profile of a group of young people living in a small South Wales valley community, taking into account statistical information and the views, hopes and aspirations of the young people and key adults.

Equality of Opportunity & Valuing Diversity

Before involving young people in this profile I sought informed consent from their parents. I endeavoured to treat all individuals with respect and positive regard, and encouraged others to do the same. If oppressive language or behaviour was used I took into account the seriousness of the incident and group dynamics in deciding an effective response. Coleman and Hendry (1999) define anti-social behaviour as 'behaviour that is criminal, although not necessarily resulting in prosecution'. I would disagree with this definition in this case and suggest that within this community antisocial behaviour is 'behaviour that is contrary to the customs of society and causing annoyance to others' (Concise OED, 2002: 58).

Methods, Subjects and Context

The intervention included four group work sessions with the group of seven young people and semi-structured interviews with two Community Educators and one Community Development Worker. One session was spent walking around the wider community with the group in order to gain an understanding of how they perceived the community and how the community regarded them. Seven young people were involved from the outset of the project. Four male and three female, the average age was 14, the youngest 11, the eldest 16. Six out of the seven young people live on a council housing estate known locally as 'the site'.

Geography

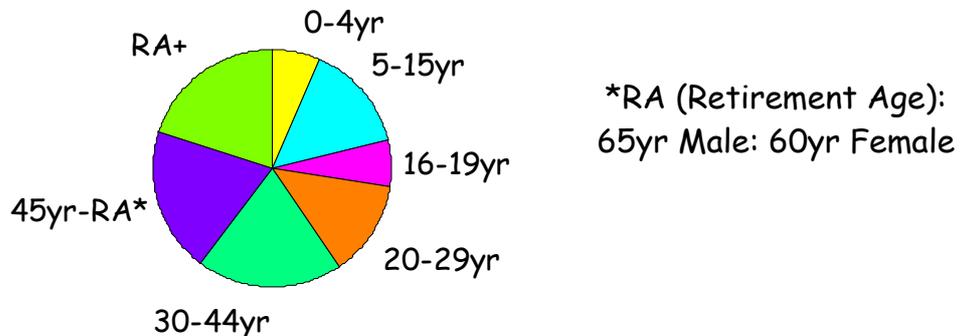
The village is one of three scattered within the valley. The village is a typical ribbon community existing at the head of the valley, 12 miles north of the nearest town (Population 35000). The village is situated close to the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park in a rural upland district.

The Wider Community

As with Wales and the UK, the average population of the wider community is growing older. This is in part due to the post war baby boom, better health, leading to greater longevity; smaller family size; and changing socio-economic climate (Jefferies and Smith, 1990: 30).

The population of the village was 2346 persons at the time of the 1991 census, 497 people were aged 0-15yr and 442 people were aged 16-29yr. Although population as a whole fell by 7% between 1992-1997. Within the wider community, 0.1% of the population (3 people) were described as being from 'Chinese or other groups', 0.2% (7 people) were described as being Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi.

**Figure 1. Population of the village by Age-Group
1991 Census**



Unlike many areas in the UK, the wider community remains heavily dependent on manufacturing which accounts for about 35% of employment within the Unitary Authority, more than twice the UK average. Coal still has importance in the wider community; two opencast sites provide valuable local jobs.

Table 2 is included as it contains specific data on the ward rank among the 865 electoral wards in Wales. Factors of deprivation in domains are intrinsically linked to the lives of the group and, as such are a key aspect of assessing their development needs.

Table 1. Multiple Deprivation Index for the village

Index of Multiple Deprivation rank within Local Authority	Index of Multiple deprivation	Income Domain	Employment Domain	Health Domain	Education Domain	Housing Domain	Access Domain
	Rank in Wales						
12	97	243	76	69	73	665	349

Previous Youth Work within the Community

At the time of this study the village had been targeted for youth work. However, the Local Authority funded part time youth club, which used to function in a local residents association hall in the neighbourhood, had been closed for over a year. In addition to centre based work the group had worked with detached youth workers for over three years. The local voluntary sector development trust had a full time youth worker who worked in the village and the neighbouring two communities providing activity based interventions.

‘Young people are a big issue everywhere, there’s one group that dominate how the village feels’ said the Community Development worker. Due to the neighbourhood’s high rate per capita of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, a TV company made a film about young people and the village. The young people and parents featured in the programme were portrayed negatively and as a result were reluctant to be interviewed for this study. I hope to interview some parents in the near future to further inform stage two of this intervention.

Joined Up Working?

Members of the group have contact with numerous agencies, including those Popple’s Model would describe as Community Education and Community Organisations (Popple, 1995). In addition to this a plethora of statutory agencies are involved with the individuals and the families.

Table 2. The Groups Involvement with other Agencies

Agency	No. of the group involved	Male	Female
Education Psychology	6	3	3
Bereavement Counselling	1		1
Acceptable Behaviour Contract	4	4	
Education Welfare Service	7	4	3
Voluntary Sector Youth Provision	7	4	3
Local Authority Youth Centre	7	4	3
Not in Education, Training or Employment	1		1
Educated Otherwise than at School	4	3	1

Members of the group are quite sophisticated in their use of different local youth facilities, including the local development trust youth provision and local maintained youth provision. Currently three of the group are temporarily excluded from the local youth club.

This exclusion is one aspect of the effect of their antisocial behaviour. Antisocial behaviour has many signs. As Rutter et al. (1998) state, ‘acknowledging the heterogeneity of antisocial behaviour has obvious

consequences for the way it is studied and dealt with'. This heterogeneity will be a key factor when teasing out development needs and subsequent learning needs of the group. A construct for framing learning needs is provided by van der Zee (1996: 163).

Due to the community being compact and with a relatively stable mature population, some within the group also feel labelled due to the reputation gained by their parents and grandparents. 'It's because of the name isn't it?' says Lee. This legacy and visibility are well understood characteristics of living in a 'collapsed industrial society' (Phillips and Skinner, 1994). This notion of visibility was mentioned twice in conversation with the Community Educators, 'funding was spent on cameras (CCTV), people in power should be working to get a better life for people, not spying on them'.

It is worth sticking with the term community, with qualifications, rather than using an alternate term. Cohen's concept in Smith (1994: 156) that 'a community has two related aspects, that is things in common, and things that set them apart from others' brings me to an understanding that the group see themselves as a community of place, but also a community of interest, as a minority group within the wider community. Smith's work on terminology and community (pp 156) is helpful here. However, I have used the term 'the group' to mean the group of young people directly involved in the intervention, the term 'neighbourhood', to mean the area where they live, and the term 'wider community' to mean the village as a whole.

Facilities and Infrastructure

The three communities within the valley have no bank or building society between them. At the time of the study the village had no café, it was the only community in the County Borough without a community centre, it had a part time 'maintained library' on the primary school site, no nursing home and extremely limited play facilities. Many residents within the wider community were unhappy about the perceived lack of time spent in the village by the community police officer. There is an extremely active St John Ambulance group which operates a number of age related groups. All in all, facilities for all members of the community are diminishing at a considerable rate.

Bilingualism and Heritage

At the time of the 1991 Census 621 people spoke Welsh, 450 people spoke and read the language and 348 people spoke, read and wrote Welsh. No primary data is available to describe the use of other languages. Currently a schism is developing within the wider community. This resurgence of interest in the Welsh language is a positive development in the preservation of the culture and heritage of Wales, however, none of the group are educated through the medium of Welsh.

The Intervention

Group work

Methods of intervention and recording varied between discussion and recording on flip chart with young people, drawing 'their' community, to video recording of young people and three interviews with local community educators and a community development worker (Pople, 1995).

This profile was to inform future work in the wider community and so when discussing intervention with individuals, pseudonyms have been used to protect their identity. This project was a progression of the groups involvement in planning a Youth Justice Board funded holiday scheme for themselves and the wider community. As Dalrymple and Burke (1995: 135) suggest 'planning, if it is to be effective and of good quality, should incorporate the active involvement of users'.

Members of the group are adopting recognisable roles. Jason and Lee are beginning to bring some productive leadership. Lisa is keen to carry out the role of secretary, recording the agreements made in meetings. Adey is youngest, and the joker in the group. Marie is the mediator when conflicts arise. Even though the individuals have different status outside the group (Vernelle, 1994), the individuals are showing a willingness to take on new roles with altered status within the group during the interventions. In addition, the individuals who might be perceived as more dominant outside the group seem content with the shift in roles within the group work. The only exception to this was Jason, a leader outside the group who walked out of the first session and hasn't yet returned.

The Efficacy of Community Profiling

After the interviews and discussion with colleagues and friends I came to a greater understanding of the value of talking to local people in gathering information. This reinforced the point made by Dalrymple and Burke (1995: 134) that 'it is the listening that is most important, as this provides us with the information that enables us to gain a fuller understanding of the issues'.

The latest ward-level socio-economic information available is over 10 years old. This is wholly unsatisfactory. There are other weaknesses in statistical information, inasmuch as it does not describe pockets of relative deprivation at a sub-ward level. The Social Exclusion Unit Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy consultation stated that 'many local authority districts suffer from extreme deprivation. But the most severe extremes occur within smaller areas – neighbourhoods'. Also, misinterpretation of the needs can occur if data is poorly analysed, or if inappropriate data is sourced in the first place.

Any profile can only discuss the community being looked into. In this case there are another 150 or so young people within the wider community of the same ages as those described here.

Estimating Development Needs

Assessing need is a complex process. It involves making judgements, and to a certain extent assumptions about the circumstances affecting individuals.

The group are aware of the circumstances of their lives and feel strongly the relative deprivation separating them from others within the wider community. Future interventions will seek to enable individuals to succeed, to make inroads into this sense of hopelessness. In order to grow, to develop, future interventions should allow every opportunity for regular opportunities to achieve.

In developing any hypothesis about community it is important to develop a holistic understanding of group and community based on information which is primary and secondary, both qualitative and quantitative. One of the shortcomings of the philosophy of Cresswell (1992) was the 'problem' oriented approach adopted.

Conclusions

A great deal has been learned about the situation of the young people within the group, aspects of their personalities, likes and dislikes, about their learning styles and their norms. It has become apparent that almost all the group need to enhance their emotional intelligence (Handy, 1997: 212). It has been learned that positive outcomes can be gained from the groups active involvement in planning, monitoring and evaluating work. It is difficult to prove a link but the recent holiday scheme run in the village was the first where none of the group have been sent home from trips or excluded from activities, it was the first they had been actively involved in putting together.

It was reassuring to hear from community workers that they are open to ways of working that are responsive to needs. One Community Educator said 'Young people are the route of all issues, at the moment they have very limited options, they need things to do'. This is reinforced by a consultation carried out by the Streetwise project (2000).

Evidence shows that the group have acute development needs, this is supported by the fact that they have limited social skills and a difficulty coping with their role and, indeed, their rights and responsibilities within both the neighbourhood and the wider community. In order to work with them to bring about change it was necessary to increase their knowledge, skills and abilities in this area.

It has become apparent in sessions three and four that the females in the group sometimes feel intimidated in the group. This came out as a result of a visit to the group work by an older group of young men. This issue of intimidation will be a focus of work with the young women.

The need to increase skills and knowledge is not confined to the young people, but also extends to parents and decision makers. In relation to a question on gaps between needs and resources, the response from a Community Educator was 'we don't know what resources are available, perhaps we need to carry out political lobbying'. In terms of moving forward this agenda, a series of meetings have been arranged between key organisations to agree how the organisations can work together in the village in an empowering way.

Some of the young men within the group frequently committed low-level criminal acts. The average age of these young men was 14 years. Recognising that the peak age of offending for young men is 18 years (Coleman and Hendry: 182). One approach might have involved teaching social skills linked to a programme emphasising the personal benefits of avoidance of offending. Another appropriate intervention at this stage could have offered a mixed programme including social skills development work; confidence building and citizenship skills as well as fun activities.

A number of the group had significant caring responsibilities for younger siblings. One development need was illustrated by the fact that these young people were expected to carry out this role for which they may have had some of the skills, but perhaps not the necessary knowledge or ability to cope in a difficult situation.

There was a need for members of the group to develop a greater awareness of responsible health behaviours and a more positive attitude toward their own health and that of other group members. A programme of issue based work could have been developed to raise and address issues of risky behaviour. Some aspects of this could have been taken forward using gender based methods (Batsleer, 1996).

The findings of this profile were to be used to increase colleagues awareness of some of the needs of the group in order to enable a multi-modal intervention. One Community Educator was keen to say that 'the needs of the community are not currently being met'. One means of responding to the needs of families is to put a programme of work in place which meets their diverse needs. Subsequently, a programme of Community Education which looked to intervene on a family level (Coleman and Hendry, 1999: 187), a peer group level and a neighbourhood level could have been developed, taking into account the five points suggested by van der Zee (1996: 165) for the development of a learning society.

There was a great deal of evidence to show that employment is among the most powerful of all options in combating antisocial behaviour (Lipsey, 1995). Any subsequent programme of issue based work could have contained content on securing and maintaining employment. The group feel harassed by the police in the wider community. The programme of issue based work will contain detail on young people's rights and responsibilities and the effect of enhanced social skills.

A comprehensive needs analysis was carried out in the village over the next few months as part of the Welsh Assembly Government Communities First agenda. One Community Educator was keen to point out that 'Funding should be provided but as well as using questionnaires, it is vital to carry out research on a one to one basis. Only then will the power shift, if families in communities are actively involved'.

Individuals within the group and their parents had significant contact with professionals. A greater understanding of the legislation, policies and

guidelines which apply to their lives and with a greater ability to communicate effectively, would have benefited all concerned. This would have enabled young people and their parents to better understand and negotiate the detail of the services they receive from agencies. Ultimately, this would achieve a more effective end result for the individuals, their families and the community. To quote Freire in Dalrymple and Burke (1995: 15) 'In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limited situation which they can transform'.

These conclusions were further discussed with the group and key individuals to establish a programme for joint working at a neighbourhood level, taking into account local capacity and regeneration initiatives such as Communities First, Objective 1 funding and additional funding as appropriate.

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