

**Supporting the whole person through an integrated locality approach:
What does the locality approach mean for CVA?**

1. Introduction

1.1 The voluntary and community sector (VCS) specialises in taking an holistic approach that identifies the full context within which a person defines their needs and aspirations. Its appreciation of the whole person has informed its preventative work, that itself puts a premium on personal resilience and the value of strong communities. The VCS' grounding in local communities is another of its enduring strengths and a key reason why, from CVA's perspective, sustainable investment in the VCS' work will secure the best outcomes for Croydon people. This report examines how the VCS supports the whole person most effectively by ensuring that relationship-building and the asset-based approach are at the heart of integrated locality working.

2. Putting Prevention into practice

2.1 From CVA's perspective the essence of a localities approach is its recognition that local people play indispensable roles in shaping the place they live and in driving social change. An integrated locality approach is one that manages to bring local stakeholders into play as collaborators with local people in the creation of healthy, safe and enterprising communities. Collaboration across an integrated locality supports the whole person most effectively when underpinned by a strong social infrastructure in which relationships have been built through volunteering, peer-support and community connections. This relationship-building nurtures trust and self-confidence, paves the way for personal development and underpins the preventative approach taken by community-based groups. Prevention is key to effective localities working – as it is to the transformation of health & social care and the public health approach to violence reduction - all of which identify the need for upstream solutions that tackle root causes.

2.2 Prevention in the VCS is practiced by supportive neighbours, volunteers, mentors and community workers who start by seeing their friend, neighbour or mentee as a whole person coping with a unique set of circumstances that need working through in order to find a way forward. Working towards outcomes like quality of life, well-being, independence and community cohesion is easier when the foundations set by strong relationship-building and community connections are in place.

2.3 The One Croydon aim - *to encourage connections and community and personal resilience; increasing coherence of access to voluntary and community sector activities that improve health outcomes and reduce reliance on General Practice* – makes this link between personal resilience and strong communities. We know that the individual's participation in social activities can bring personal health and wellbeing benefits that also deliver a broader outcome in which communities are safer and more vibrant places to live. Healthy, independent people are more likely to lead happy, fulfilling lives - and if people feel part of an active community they are more likely to feel safe and less likely to feel lonely.

3. Developing Local Assets

3.1 Relationship-building and prevention are two defining characteristics of the VCS, with a third being an holistic approach that sees every person as influenced by a wide range of experiences. As with the contextual safeguarding approach, community groups providing holistic services acknowledge that no-one operates in a vacuum and none of the issues impacting on a person's life can be overlooked. Locality working brings into play a fourth characteristic – an asset-based approach that supports people to be the best they can both individually and together.

3.2 Since 2010, when the *We Love Thornton Heath* project began supporting the community networks that now underpin Croydon's model of social prescribing, CVA has used *asset based community development* (ABCD) as a strategy for nurturing people's talent and empowering communities to lead from within. Rather than ascribing a set of needs and problems to each person the ABCD practitioner identifies their potential, supporting people to proactively manage their own health. Through peer-support and social activity the ABCD approach replaces dependency with interdependency, preventing social isolation and nurturing a strong sense of belonging in each locality.

3.3 From CVA's perspective, the locality approach will achieve transformational outcomes – such as more resilient communities supporting well-connected people to successfully manage their own health and well-being – by enabling the VCS to do what it does best: run aspirational and positive activities that also address social and emotional health issues. Along with our VCS partners, CVA has supported local people to develop grassroots activities across the whole borough – as captured by *Connect Well Croydon*, our quality-assured database and referrals system – and as the new Primary Care Networks take shape CVA will support our VCS partners to form health and wellbeing collectives in partnership with local GPs, faith groups, resident associations, schools, sports clubs and other stakeholders taking an integrated locality approach.

4. Bringing people together in their locality

Case study 1:

As part of the wider Best Start programme, a partnership of five local voluntary sector organisations (Croydon Voluntary Action, Family Centre New Addington, Home-Start Croydon, Acorns 2 Oaks and St John the Evangelist) is delivering a neighbourhood based programme for parents with children under the age of 5, bringing local people together to make their communities more interesting, healthy, safe and welcoming places to live. We support and nurture the passions and interests of local parents and carers, engaging them at their level in what they feel passionate enough to act upon. We bring them to the driving seat, nurturing them to be active rather than passive citizens across the three Planning areas:

- **Planning Area 1:** Home-Start Croydon (1 part time builder) in Thornton Heath & St John the Evangelist (1 part time builder) in Upper Norwood/South Norwood
- **Planning Area 2:** Home-Start Croydon (1 part time builder) in Waddon, Acorns 2 Oaks (2 part time builders) in Selhurst and Broad Green
- **Planning Area 3:** Family Centre New Addington (1 full time builder) in New Addington and Fieldway; Home-Start Croydon (1 part time builder) in Heathfield

Community Builders in the VCS act as the initiators, supporters and mentors who, after finding a handful of local people who are known by and who know their neighbours (we call them Connectors), galvanizes curiosity, energy, loyalty and kindness to build strong foundations for an empowered neighbourhood. This is done through:

- Hundreds of conversations with parents, carers, groups, informal clubs and other social networks to uncover people's strengths, stories, ideas, hopes, skills, passions and resources to understand what it is that local people care enough about to work together to change
- Activities, including asset mapping of the neighbourhood, bringing together people through community fun events, support for local residents initiating new community and grassroots projects

Case Study 2:

As part of the Day Opportunities Programme, Community Connectors have been supporting a range of residents at risk, disabled people and their carers to connect to groups, associations and activities in Thornton Heath. Residents have been invited to contribute their gifts to developing new community led activity and deeper relationships within their community. The signposting work has involved supporting the development of hubs through the Social Prescribing initiative at the Parchmore Medical Centre and the Plug-In project based at the St Pauls church hall. The key community led activities that the Community Builder has worked alongside to both involve residents and offer opportunities to participate include:

- Manor Farm Nature Space
- Thornton Heath Community Garden
- Unique Roots healthy living sites
- Thornton Heath Arts Week
- Thornton Heath Community Action Team
- St Pauls Church 'Plug In' initiative

Thornton Heath has a strong community feel and record of achievement and the project has played a part in connecting more people to what exists already and what can be built and animated in the future. The success of the community led initiatives shows that 'meeting people locally and sharing experience can reduce feelings of isolation and be a source of friendship and mutual support'. Even when people are quite self-sufficient 'getting to know people locally can be rewarding for companionship, support and well-being'. Through their opportunities to meet others we also found that people have:

- Increased connections and opportunities and grown in confidence

- Linked to groups and activities
- Gained support and then begun to pass their experience on to others, finding ways to help them get involved

5. The Contextual Approach

5.1 From an integrated locality approach to the preventative approach and from the holistic approach to the asset-based approach there is a clear emphasis on the means we use to engage the whole person. Relationship-building is a skill that properly used can build resilience and sustainable futures. So what is needed for it to work well? When considering what makes a good mentor, befriender or community worker in the VCS we look for signs of emotional intelligence - listening skills, an affinity for teamwork and the empathy to understand what makes a person tick. If these are missing from the skill set a volunteer or community worker may not be equipped to make the necessary investment in people over a sufficient period of time. When it comes to building trust and mutual understanding – the essence of relationship-building - it's unlikely that anything other than face-to-face contact will work, ideally within an environment that puts everyone at ease.

5.2 From CVA's perspective the evidence base supporting locality working is built on human story-telling, with a tapestry of 'whole person' case-studies making the case for a greater investment in relationship and community building. In capturing the effectiveness of locality working from a VCS perspective we expect to show that the foundations must be in place – strong relationships, good connections and a real sense of community – and that only a bottom-up process can lay these foundations and provide local people with the space to design and deliver their own solutions.

6. Making the Case

6.1 CVA will continue to champion the asset-based approach through its participation on the Health and Wellbeing Board and its role on the One Croydon Strategic Delivery Board. By taking a lead on VCS partnership bidding CVA will continue to leverage external funding into the borough to support projects prioritising the contribution that local people make in supporting each other to secure better futures within a safer and healthier environment.

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