Living with Hope

Summary of research

'Living with Hope' describes a process of practice research carried out through the multi agency Kincardine and Mearns Community Wellbeing Network from 2016-18. Though focused on one area of Aberdeenshire the findings of the research have relevance across the whole of the region. At a time of restricted resources across all sectors it is crucial that available resources are focused wisely – this report offers important insights into how this might work.

The issue

The aim of the research was to explore factors that contributed to (lack of) engagement with activities that sought to promote individual and community wellbeing. The Community Wellbeing Network had strong anecdotal evidence that there was a lack of take up of such activities in K and M.

The process

The research consisted of two parts:

- A piece of participatory research led by Professor Karen McArdle from the University of Aberdeen working with focus groups in local communities.
- Follow up workshops organised by the Community Wellbeing Network to validate and extend understanding of this research.

Key findings

- The often stated barriers to engagement such as transport, information/awareness and practical support with things like childcare were not seen as key. Importantly , nor does there seem to be a lack of or the wrong services and activities. So it is not a matter of more service and activity provision.

- Reasons for lack of engagement lie rather with a dynamic mix of culture, social isolation and lack of empowerment which mean that people struggle to access these activities. The north east culture of self reliance is still strong but is at odds with the realities of many rapidly changing communities, meaning that there are not the community structures in place to provide this self reliance in practice. These changing communities have resulted in and exacerbated social isolation both for

long time residents harking back to a community that no longer exists and for incomers who have little time to contribute to building community. The rhetoric of community empowerment is regarded as just that with communities seeing themselves as being expected to take on more but within a context of broader insecurity and lack of support for this process. Organisations working in and supporting communities also feel increasingly disempowered themselves with short term funding, job insecurity and a lack of valuing of the role of long term development work.

- People will engage better in wellbeing activities and services through a long term process of community development which addresses these linked issues of culture, social isolation and empowerment. In practice this might mean the building of confidence and skills in individuals and the support for communities and groups to become more genuinely inclusive.

- There is a need to reframe services so as to encourage greater participation. This is not just a matter of better marketing (though certainly services do need to be marketed in a way which reduces stigma); it's also a matter of trying to break down the distinction between being a giver and receiver towards a process in which mutual benefit is understood.

Next steps

- **Strategic**

To use the report to influence change at strategic level

- **Partnership**

To develop stronger support for organisations and communities through the newly formed Welfare and Wellbeing Network

- **Community**

To pilot a timebank

Links to full reports