

Lending a hand:

The value of 'light touch' support in empowering communities



In January 2003, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation launched its Neighbourhood Programme. A new departure for the Foundation, this sought to support community empowerment not through a major funding programme but through 'light touch' support and networking. The Programme – which works with 20 groups and projects at neighbourhood level and covers England, Scotland and Wales – is still underway and will continue until June 2006. This summary has been written by the team evaluating the Programme and highlights the lessons so far.

Lessons so far from the JRF Neighbourhood Programme suggest that:

- The current policy emphasis on neighbourhoods and community empowerment in all three countries offers many opportunities for engagement. But the range of opportunities and the pace of policy change mean that groups find themselves operating in a complex and sometimes contradictory environment.
- The current policy emphasis on the neighbourhood is welcome if local residents are to have a real say in the services and decisions that affect their lives. But real change will be needed in local authorities and other public bodies if systems and cultures of working are to deliver on the neighbourhoods agenda. These still tend to place residents at a disadvantage even where there is a will to engage at this level.
- Equally important is the need to ensure that groups are neither working in isolation from each other nor competing for attention and resources.
- Within this context, the JRF Neighbourhood Programme demonstrates the value of having a trusted 'ally' who can offer support, technical expertise and recognition. Access to mediation and brokerage can be particularly important in overcoming the barriers to empowerment.
- Groups have also appreciated the opportunity to network, to get to know more about what other groups are doing and to contribute to national events.
- It is important to allow the necessary time to develop trust if groups are to be able to use this kind of 'light touch' support effectively.

Introduction

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Neighbourhood Programme is an important new departure for the JRF and also unusual for a charitable foundation. It is testing out ways of supporting community empowerment, not through a major funding initiative, but through 'light-touch' support and networking. The Programme is working with twenty community groups or projects. These are at different stages of development and are operating in five different contexts: Scotland, Wales and three English regions – the South West, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the West Midlands.

This interim summary describes the policy context in which the Programme was set up, what it aims to achieve, how it has operated so far and how its resources have been used. The summary identifies the key empowerment challenges facing these groups and how the Programme has contributed to their capacity to address these challenges so far. The summary ends with recommendations for policy-makers and other stakeholders concerned with neighbourhood renewal and community engagement.

Policy context

Over recent years the environment in which community groups operate has become both more open and more complex. Government has introduced a wide range of new multi-sector partnerships, sources of funding, and agreements (e.g. compacts). Through these, local authorities, other public agencies (e.g. Primary Healthcare Trusts), voluntary organisations and different central government departments are encouraged to work with communities to tackle long-running problems in cities and disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Box 1: Community-centred programmes

The flagship programmes for community-centred neighbourhood renewal in the three countries include:

- **England:** the New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders, the Single Community Programme;
- **Scotland:** the Community Planning Partnerships and the Community Regeneration Fund;
- **Wales:** Communities First.



Members of Caia Park Partnership and other local organisations sign an agreement on partnership working on this large estate in Wrexham

New government initiatives have learnt from the past. Thus, in England, Scotland and Wales, the major Programmes introduced to support neighbourhood renewal (see Box 1) all emphasise the role that local residents must play if sustainable change is to be achieved.

In all three countries, communities are expected to be involved alongside public and private sector agencies in strategic partnerships charged with developing neighbourhood renewal and more general community strategies. In England, a commitment has been made to devolve some budgets and decision-making to neighbourhood level. In Scotland, community planning partnerships across all the statutory services are required not only at local authority level but more locally (although how 'local' is not specified). The voluntary and community sector has also been given high priority in each country, with the introduction of compacts and strategies developed both to increase capacity on the ground and to support the voluntary and community sector infrastructure. Community-based organisations in all three countries are also being encouraged to play a greater role in service delivery through social enterprise and other measures.

Research from the JRF and others over the years has demonstrated the significant progress that community groups and organisations can make, especially given time and resources, in improving the quality of life in their neighbourhoods, gaining prestige and influence at local, regional and national level, and developing effective practice that has inspired others elsewhere.

At the same time, that research has shown that there are still many barriers to be overcome if community and residents groups are to engage effectively in the renewal of their neighbourhoods.

- If more decisions and services are to be delivered at neighbourhood level, more needs to be done to ensure that local authorities and other public bodies have the systems, commitment and capacity to operate effectively at this level.
- In particular, there is still a lot to do to convince local authority officers and councillors of the value and importance of working with local residents and to change cultures of working that place local residents at a disadvantage, even where there is a will to engage. There are also other local participants – Registered Social Landlords for example – whose cultures and ways of working need to change if local residents are to become more central to neighbourhood renewal.



St Paul's Unlimited Partnership is working on improving basic services, including street cleaning and rubbish

- In neighbourhoods with resources, separate groups, communities and projects may be working in isolation from each other, at cross purposes or even competing for funds and political attention.
- In neighbourhoods without resources, groups are often very fragile indeed, relying on the energies and commitment of very few individuals.
- Even the most successful organisations face problems of sustainability when initial funding runs out. They can find themselves out in the cold when local administrations change.

Groups find that government policies themselves give conflicting messages. On the one hand, community participation is encouraged; on the other, the performance measures and targets that public authorities have to meet – as well as incentive structures – mean that community involvement is pushed down the agenda and, in some cases, actively discouraged. On the one hand, there is a recognition that turning the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods around takes time; on the other, political timescales demand immediate returns and new policies are introduced before existing programmes have had time to prove themselves.

It is also important to recognise that devolving services and budgets down to local authority and even neighbourhood level, while welcome in many ways, will not in itself empower communities. This will depend on how far local authorities and other local power holders are themselves prepared to share power. Effective community empowerment depends not only on the willingness of partners to support community engagement; it also depends on them having the capacity – confidence, skills, systems and resources – at all levels to do this. All the research evidence on partnerships in neighbourhood renewal and other policy areas suggests that effective community engagement and trust between partners requires time, resources, continuity and a solid foundation in local community activity. It also suggests that robust support from the centre or the region is needed to ensure that partners have the confidence, skills and incentive to work in new ways.

The JRF Neighbourhood Programme

Building on the research and analysis that it has carried out over many years, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Neighbourhood Programme aims to:

- develop networks of mutual support between community organisations;
- transfer knowledge of ‘what works’ to these organisations; and
- improve their access to local power holders.

To achieve these aims, the Programme offers a range of ‘light-touch’ support to twenty groups and projects in three English regions (the West Midlands, the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber), Scotland and Wales.

Box 2: The Neighbourhood Programme resources

- **Funds:** small amounts of credit (between £5000 and £10,000 over the three years of the Programme).
- **Development support:** a facilitator to work with the group/project and offer advice and support (between 15 and 30 days over three years).
- **Networking:** opportunities to meet with other projects at a regional and national level.
- **Access to information:** a website and signposting to relevant JRF and other research.
- **Brokerage:** mediation between groups and projects in the neighbourhood and between groups and local power holders, normally the local authority.
- **Kite-marking:** the use of the JRF name informally or by formal letter of introduction.
- **National platform:** Opportunities to share experience more widely at national events.

The Neighbourhood Programme has been successful in attracting both a wide geographical spread of projects and a range of projects in terms of size, capacity and history. Some of the projects are led by community activists, rather than by professionals. This direct involvement of community activists in the Programme is seen as a particularly important feature.

How the resources have been used

Facilitation, the networking events and the leverage provided by the JRF name have so far proved to be the most popular resources in the Programme. The website has been the least popular; this suggests that widespread assumptions about the accessibility and popularity of the internet as a means of communication for residents can be misplaced. Brokerage, kite-marking and contributing to national events have developed as important features since the Programme started.

The Programme has five facilitators – one for each English region and one each for Scotland and Wales. One particular feature of the facilitator's role which has proved useful in many cases has been **action planning**. This was introduced to help the JRF allocate Programme resources and provide a benchmark for assessing progress. The JRF has been relatively light in its programme demands, compared with other funding programmes. Nonetheless, for several groups, being part of such a programme was a completely new experience: some saw the requirement for an action plan as bureaucratic. In retrospect, however, most groups and projects found the action planning process useful. Using a variety of methods to review and revise action plans has helped them to refocus, to be more ambitious or more realistic, and to learn from what has happened. It has also encouraged groups to be more strategic rather than allowing their agenda to be determined by outside events.



A food and dance festival highlights the growing sense of community spirit in Bothtown



The new community building is lowered into place in Bothtown

Where has the Programme been most effective?

The Neighbourhood Programme has provided a unique opportunity for a range of projects – including community-led projects and community activists – to network, to gain access to skilled facilitation and to link into policy agendas and an information resource. There are examples of groups and projects which appear to have ‘flowered’ under this Programme, with members becoming more confident, more strategic and more reflective. With a small amount of input and low level resources, they are delivering on the government's agenda as well as their own – building social capital, and influencing local priorities and the delivery of local services.

So far, engagement with the Programme appears to have been particularly effective when:

- There was a relationship between the facilitator and the project/group before the Programme started.
- Where the facilitator has taken a ‘pro-active’ approach rather than waiting for projects to come forward with requests for help.
- Where the project/group contains a ‘champion’ for the Programme who has a clear idea of what it can offer and a commitment to making it work.
- Where there is a clear regional or country policy focus for empowerment work (e.g. Scotland).
- Where the project faces a crisis, requiring resources that are readily available in the Programme (e.g. mediation and brokering).

Box 3: How the Programme has worked in one neighbourhood

The JRF Programme has provided an element of support not readily available before to Boothtown, which has benefited from facilitator advice and support, networking opportunities and credit. In addition to meeting some of its stated practical aims – the development of a community building, developing activities for children and young people, and building a growing sense of community spirit – the project has made effective use of JRF support to develop a sense of pride and confidence and to put itself ‘on the map’.

Key growth and development points include:

- Handling group conflict effectively in order to work together successfully.
- Increasing the number of active members taking on the workload.
- Developing a good public profile: the group feels it is being listened to at last, it is now taken very seriously by some key organisations locally, and members of the project have become involved in a number of town-wide organisations. Other groups in the town have sought advice from them.
- Taking part in the regional networking event and all the national networking events of the Programme. These networking events have provided opportunities to learn from others, and in turn to be a provider of advice and experience. The recognition that the project itself has something to offer other organisations led to a showcase of its experiences at the National Regeneration Convention.

The confidence that comes from all these examples itself contributes to the future sustainability of the project. The evidence suggests that the limited support available through the JRF programme has been both appropriate and invaluable.

How the Programme has empowered communities

The applications that groups and projects made to become part of the Programme provide a useful picture of the range of problems community groups encounter in trying to develop an effective voice. While most will be familiar and echo the research reported above, the experience in the Programme suggests that they still merit repeating and underlining and that they need to be revisited even by experienced practitioners and communities. They are easily overlooked or taken as read in designing new programmes and policies. There are still many people in positions of power for whom involving communities is effectively a new challenge.

Barriers to empowerment

- Local activity is dependent on too few people.
- Leadership/organisational capacity is limited – for example in terms of planning, management and financial skills and resources.
- Communities in the neighbourhood are divided and fragmented.
- Groups are dependent on short-term funding, with poor prospects of long-term sustainability.
- Policy is not geared to local need – there is no real dialogue between power holders and local communities.
- Many local authorities still do not have clear devolved mechanisms in place to engage people in policy at neighbourhood level or to ensure that mainstream departments can respond to neighbourhood priorities. Area forums and similar structures, where they exist, are still often at ward or district level.

So, how has the Programme helped with these?

The ingredients of successful empowerment

A good foundation of community involvement

This is an issue for most groups as they get started, and when local activity is driven by the efforts of one or two people. But even experienced community projects cannot take community involvement for granted and must continue to work at it. Groups on the Programme were particularly keen to get more young people involved.

How it works: Involving more people

The JRF facilitator helped Oak Crescent Residents Group, a small community group in the West Midlands, to organise a 'Scene on the Green', with help from the JRF facilitator. This included consultation games to get residents thinking about the group and the kinds of contribution they could make.

In the West Midlands, the regional facilitator has also helped the small Lodge Farm Residents Association to put together a users group to manage their Community Centre.

In Ty Sign, where local community activity was very dependent on the energies of a few committed residents, the group is convinced that: "we would not still be here without you ... we might have crumbled". Suggestions made by the facilitator have contributed to a rapid expansion in the group, with fundraising bringing in "loads of money", including the resources to employ a worker. The newly refurbished coffee shop and computer suite is now designated as an official FE learning centre.

Organisational capacity

Being effective in the neighbourhood requires a range of skills: running an organisation, effective meeting skills, mapping local needs, planning and implementing a programme of work. Facilitators spent most of their time in the first year of the Programme supporting groups in building their capacity and helping them get the resources to achieve their aims. In several regions, facilitators have acted as mentors for hard-pressed and isolated workers (e.g. in Boscombe in the South West and Gellideg in Wales) supporting them to focus on strategic issues and to delegate administrative responsibilities.

Small amounts of **credit** can give groups an opportunity to run training sessions, or to go on visits and share experience with other projects.

How it works: Running the organisation effectively

The Eastfield Pact began life as a council-initiated response to EU Objective 2 funding requirements, but with help from the JRF facilitator for Yorkshire and the Humber, the resident chair is growing in confidence, taking more control of the meetings, preparing agendas in advance with officers and thinking strategically about the future of the area. She is now working closely with the council's Regeneration Unit to develop a ten-year vision and neighbourhood plan. The Eastfield Pact has also started to think about what kind of organisation they wish to be and visited a similar organisation in Whitby to discuss constitutions and company status.

In Caia Park, the Welsh facilitator has been training the board members to handle the affairs of a large and complex community organisation and to update their constitution to reflect the changing form of their organisation.

How it works: A little money goes a long way

Credit has been spent on community events, room hire with refreshments, equipment, e.g. tents and marquees for a festival, an Eid party, travel to JRF national/regional events, consultation/advice, training, marketing/publicity, a planning application for a community building, software for a bilingual newsletter, childcare, regeneration magazines and newsletters, a shutter for a community shop and LEGO®. One group keeps its credit as a reserve to use on expenses, e.g. for travel to a conference.



Moving into new premises, Ty Sign and Local Communities Partnership celebrate passing a major milestone on this Welsh estate

Working effectively together

Many neighbourhoods are made up of several **different communities**. It is valuable to have a trusted outsider who can help to mediate and establish a dialogue between different interests.

How it works: Working in diverse communities

In Swindon, in the South West, the Broad Street Community Council has established an 'arm's length' group – The Broad Street Community Group – and has used JRF funds and facilitator support to broaden its constituency. This has taken the form of seeking to engage representatives of the mainly, but not exclusively, Muslim community in sharing information about the many 'good news' projects that happen locally but are perhaps taken for granted. 'Be proud of our Area' will be a phrase for 2006! It is also exploring how to respond to key issues and provide services for a more diverse range of communities in the neighbourhood.

Southside Housing Association, in Pollokshields, Glasgow has been working to bring together community leaders and community organisations for the first time across this multi-racial neighbourhood. The new East Pollokshields Community Planning Partnership (EPCPP) has now been established and has focused its initial energies overseeing the carrying out of a Community Profiling exercise. This exercise has helped to unite different community interests around a number of agreed priorities identified through this exercise. The EPCPP will now provide a vehicle through which the community can take forward these issues and seek to influence Glasgow City Council's own aspirations for community planning.

Some neighbourhoods are also 'home' to a number of **different initiatives**, each of which has its own targets to meet and reputation to establish. Having an outside broker can help to establish better working relationships, while having a 'champion' can help groups who still feel they have been excluded to be taken more seriously.

How it works: Developing cohesion through brokerage

In Caia Park, the local authority took the decision to set up a completely new neighbourhood organisation to become the lead body for Communities First. This created a risk that the work of the established Caia Park Partnership might be duplicated or undermined.

The facilitator for Wales brokered a number of meetings between the two organisations and other agencies based in the neighbourhood with a view to developing a code of practice to govern relationships between them. The established community organisation has been very pleased with the outcome: previously competing organisations are now civil to one another and are meeting to discuss how to implement joint working. They feel that the facilitator handled a 'potentially explosive situation' very well.

In another neighbourhood, a small and isolated project, funded under the Single Regeneration Budget, had been operating for some time when two new high-profile neighbourhood initiatives came onto the patch. The facilitator helped to broker an 'away day' between the three initiatives. This explored ways in which they could work together more effectively and give local residents a clearer idea of what each project was about.

Subsequently, a change of personnel at the Regional Development Agency led to problems. The worker was again able to turn to the facilitator as a trusted third party to act as a sounding board and source of support through difficult negotiations. While, as yet, these issues have not all been successfully resolved, the JRF Programme has provided this project with a sense of its own value and provided an isolated worker with support that is not available locally.

Being taken seriously by local power-holders

Many groups still struggle to **make an impact** on local authorities and other public services. Access to external support can give groups more confidence and help them to feel less isolated. This is another area where an outside broker and champion can help a group to be taken more seriously and to negotiate more effectively

with its more powerful partners. When asked if they had used the JRF name, one project replied:

“Yes, constantly – at every public event and in every funding application.”

Others said that:

“JRF is the magic word around here. Amazing! Quite early on, we mentioned JRF in a meeting with Landfill Credit people and heads shot up.”

“We name drop all the time ... It is quite prestigious to be part of the programme.”

Relationships with power holders are not always cordial, however, and part of JRF’s role has been to try and mend the fences between communities and local authorities.

The JRF is also addressing this issue at a **national level**. Scottish projects have met with the Scottish Executive to discuss the implementation of Community Planning (see below). In England, the JRF has held a national workshop with local authorities to discuss community empowerment and it plans further workshops in Scotland and Wales. Opportunities to speak at national conferences organised by the JRF have also given Programme participants the opportunity to talk to policy makers and validated their local experience.



Unprecedented participation in the arts is having a positive impact on the new image of Castle Vale

How it works: Being taken seriously by the council

In Norfolk Park, where relationships with the local authority were going through a difficult period, the Yorkshire facilitator held a series of mediation interviews with stakeholders and JRF organised a brokering meeting with the local authority. This has led to a series of subsequent meetings between the community organisation and the local authority to develop new approaches to problems on the estate.

In East Renfrewshire, the Empowering Communities Group (ECG) set up a meeting with key officers for the local authority to discuss community planning. The JRF name was ‘a foot in the door’ and involving the facilitator meant that it was possible to draw on wider experience in the discussions. The authority felt it stimulated their thinking and a follow-up meeting with councillors has been organised. All this is helping to raise the profile of the ECG in the community planning process.

How it works: Working together to influence policy

All four of the Scottish neighbourhoods in the programme are involved, in different ways, in seeking to influence the implementation by local authorities of ‘Community Planning’, as required by the new Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. The groups have benefited greatly from having, through the JRF Programme, the services of a facilitator who has a very good firsthand knowledge about how this policy is being implemented in different areas. One initiative has been to organise a meeting at which representatives from all four groups were able to put forward their views and concerns regarding community planning to representatives of the Scottish Executive, Communities Scotland and Audit Scotland.



Springbourne Family Support works closely with children and families in Boscombe, Bournemouth, helping to raise confidence and self-esteem

What we have learnt so far

The experience of the Programme suggests that the kinds of 'light touch' support it offers can add significant value. But there are still a number of challenges to be addressed in offering these resources. It is also important to recognise that this is a very small Programme. If this kind of support is to be expanded, it is important to think about how others – in local authorities, other public bodies, the voluntary sector and business – could provide similar support.

- It is easy to underestimate how isolated many groups are. In the JRF Programme they have particularly appreciated the opportunity that **networking** offers to share experience with other similar groups, to find out that the pressures they face are not unique and to learn from each other.

Supporters in local authorities, voluntary organisations and other organisations can help them a great deal by putting small and inexperienced organisations in touch with other organisations who can offer support or giving them information about work similar to theirs. However, at the same time it is important to recognise that many neighbourhood groups have limited time at their disposal and may find it difficult to justify attending meetings and networking events, which take them away from the front line.

- Despite reservations from some groups, **action planning** has proved a useful resource to most projects, especially those who have not engaged in similar exercises before. However, this was not always the case. Some projects already faced demands to produce action plans or workplaces for other funders or other purposes: this additional planning process felt like a step too far. It is important for funders to ensure there is a good fit between the plans they require and existing planning processes and schedules within groups and projects.

- Access to **independent facilitation** has proved invaluable for a number of groups. Mediation and brokerage has emerged as a particularly important resource – one that needs to be more generally available. Experience so far suggests that such a service needs to be able to draw on trusted outsiders who can command the respect of all parties, with relevant experience and some independence.

There are examples in some parts of the country of local agencies that have successfully taken on this role. There are also parallels between the brokerage service provided by the Foundation in this Programme and the Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor service offered by Government Offices. But the evidence from the Programme so far suggests that there is scope for this service to be extended or for such a facility to be attached to regional voluntary and community sector networks.

Another lesson from the Programme is that it is important to get the right balance between opening new doors for groups and enabling them to negotiate effectively on their own behalf, on the one hand, and taking over from the group on the other. It is important that brokerage does not make them feel dependent on outside help to achieve their aims and therefore even more disempowered.

- Access to **resources** is critical if groups are to effect change. However hard they work, it is hard for a few committed people to sustain community activity, involve more people and exercise real influence without support. Having adequate support will be doubly important as decisions and budgets are devolved to neighbourhood level. Otherwise devolution will go no further than institutions with professional resources and administrative back-up.



Clouds Working Recovery has enabled people coming through recovery to get both carpentry skills and social training in Boscombe, Bournemouth

Principles for effective community support

The Programme has reinforced a number of familiar messages about how support is most effectively provided to communities in any initiative.

Give programmes time to work

Setting up a Programme takes more time than most funders allow. JRF recognised this in principle but, like too many other funders, it failed to allow the necessary time for participants to get to grips with the Programme, to develop their action plans and work out how to use the Programme effectively. It is crucial in planning budgets for community empowerment initiatives to allow a sufficient lead-in time to plan and negotiate clear agreements, as well as sufficient flexibility in the budget to allow for slower expenditure in the initial stages while everyone gets up to speed.

Take account of what is already on the ground

While some participating neighbourhoods have never been involved in a national programme before, many play host to several different initiatives. This creates competition for the limited time and resources that people in communities have. The Programme has been working with some groups and projects who feel they have been upstaged by newer, 'shinier' initiatives while others have had to spend precious time renegotiating the work they are already doing with new partners or through new sets of guidelines.

Have realistic expectations

Many community groups are small, fragile, isolated and over-dependent on a single leader. More established community organisations still have to grapple with short-term project funding, delivering underfunded front-line services, excessive monitoring demands, and enervating and competing partnership working arrangements. It is important not to expect too much of community organisations in terms of the time they can commit, the speed at which they can work or the diversity they can represent.

Provide continuity of personnel

Too often, groups and projects make significant progress and begin to build trust and clarity about expectations only to find themselves back to square one when a key contact moves on. The pace of change in neighbourhood renewal has often meant that good people who have developed skills in working with communities are promoted or moved to a newer initiative. While it is impossible to expect complete continuity, organisations working with communities need to recognise the importance of stability in building trust and to find ways of ensuring that gains made and understandings reached are not lost.

Allow for responsible financial planning

Authorities need to be far more sensitive to the difficulties faced by groups and community projects when they are waiting to see if funding will be continued. A stop-start approach to funding results in projects losing good staff and losing momentum. It also puts great stress on already stretched community members who have to try to keep things going. In cases where funding is withdrawn, it is imperative that support is given to help groups to consider how to continue their work.

Box 4: Financial stability

One project had to put all of its Neighbourhood Renewal funded staff on redundancy notices in February 2004. The initial allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal funding had come to an end. While there were plans to convert to a commissioning process, the setting-up of the necessary procedures and panels had not been completed. Meanwhile, the project was dependent on three-month extensions of funding. Eventually, the council took the decision to move some of the staff to the council payroll while extending the funding for the others. Despite these measures, two key members of staff were lost, and due to the uncertainty over a period of nine months altogether, many other staff suffered loss of morale, with some urgently looking for other job opportunities in an attempt to protect their incomes.

Summary of recommendations

For policy makers and funders, it is important to:

- Give programmes time to work and, especially, time to establish a firm foundation – a rushed start will have costs down the line.
- Fit new programmes into the existing landscape, rather than disrupting existing networks and arrangements.
- Promote and reward long-term investment in neighbourhood planning, neighbourhood structures and community empowerment by public bodies.
- Consider how the evident need for brokering and mediation can be met and financed. Appropriate services to identify and meet need could be located within government offices, the Scottish Executive or the Welsh Assembly (building on the Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor model) or the voluntary and community sector infrastructure.

For local authorities and other partners, it is important to:

- Develop devolved mechanisms and support to ensure that services and decisionmakers can and will respond effectively to neighbourhood plans, priorities and structures.
- Make and communicate funding decisions in good time.
- Invest resources in community development as the foundation for effective engagement and representation.
- Avoid reinforcing or even setting up divisions between communities.

- Recognise that conflict may be part of developing effective relationships with communities and use independent mediation and brokering to free up stalled relations with community organisations.
- Have realistic expectations of community leaders and representatives and avoid overloading them.
- Set clear expectations for the ways in which community organisations may be involved in decision making (e.g. through local compacts); develop joint training for partnership working across all three sectors.

For community organisations, it is important to:

- Recognise the value of action planning: analysing local problems, developing the plan and using evaluation to assess progress.
- Find ways of spreading the load in community organisations, beyond the overloaded project leaders.
- Use formal partnerships as an opportunity to develop informal working relationships beyond the formal partnership meetings – this is where most progress will be made.
- Ensure that unresolved differences are not swept under carpet or left to fester – finding new ways of looking at difficult issues with the help of an external facilitator can help community organisations to identify common ground and to see beyond the conflicts to the possibilities for change and development.

About the JRF Neighbourhood Programme

This document was written by the Evaluation Team who have been assessing the JRF Neighbourhood Programme. The members of the Team are Mandy Wilson, Pete Wilde, Derrick Purdue, and team leader Professor Marilyn Taylor of the University of the West of England.

This summary was based on the Interim Report produced by the Evaluation Team in January 2005. The full report is an internal document and therefore not for publication, but the key lessons emerging from the Programme to date are summarised here. A final report on the JRF Neighbourhood Programme will be published in Autumn 2006.

In early 2003 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation invited 20 neighbourhoods in England, Scotland and Wales to join its Neighbourhood Programme. The neighbourhoods are:

Scotland

East Pollokshields, Glasgow (Southside Housing Association)
Barrhead, East Renfrewshire (Empowering Communities Group)
Faifley, Clydebank (Faifley Neighbourhood Forum)
Greater Pilton, Edinburgh (The Pilton Partnership)

Wales

Caia Park Wrexham (Caia Park Partnership Limited)
Llanharan, Rhondda Cynon and Taff (Llanharan Community Development Project)
Gellideg, Merthyr Tydfil (Gellideg Foundation Group)
Ty Sign and Risca, Caerphilly (Ty Sign Local Communities Partnership)

Yorkshire and the Humber

Eastfield Estate Scarborough (Eastfield Neighbourhood Partnership)
Norfolk Park Sheffield (Norfolk Park Community Forum)
Boothtown, Halifax (The Boothtown Partnership)
Todmorden, Caldergate (Integrate)

West Midlands

Lodge Farm, Dudley (Lodge Farm Network Association)
Canley, Coventry (Canley Residents Action Group)
Langland, Malvern (Oak Crescent Residents Group)
Castle Vale, Birmingham (Castle Vale Housing Action Trust)

South West

St Paul's, Bristol (St Paul's Unlimited Community Partnership)
Barne Barton and St Budeaux, Plymouth (Tamar Development Trust)
Boscombe, Bournemouth (Boscombe Working Community Partnership)
Broad Street Area, Swindon (Broad Street Community Council)

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Email: info@jrf.org.uk**

