

# Communities in recession

## The reality in four neighbourhoods

by Karen Day



JOSEPH ROWNTREE  
FOUNDATION

### About the author

Karen Day is a freelance journalist with 15 years' experience of writing and reporting on public and social policy.

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### About JRF

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust are two independent charities that work together to understand the root causes of social problems, identify ways of overcoming them, and show how social needs can be met in practise.

This project is part of JRF's work highlighting the circumstances of disadvantaged people and communities during the recession. The views expressed, however, are those of the author and the people she spoke to as part of the project, and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

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# Intro

Broad Green | Gellideg | Barkerend | Hedworth

As the recession has taken hold in the UK, debate has raged over fiscal stimulus packages, banking bailouts and now when it will officially end. But while unemployment has continued to rise and businesses fail, there has been little focus on its effect on communities, particularly the most deprived.

To understand how this recession is impacting on poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged people, I visited four communities with different experiences: Broad Green in Swindon, a once prosperous growth town; Gellideg in Merthyr Tydfil, an isolated rural community; Barkerend, an inner city neighbourhood in Bradford; and the Hedworth Estate in Jarrow, a former coalfield area.

I spent a week in each community during July and August 2009; interviewing residents, neighbourhood workers, volunteers, public servants and politicians. I met a wide cross-section of these communities including young people, older people, families, unemployed people and local business owners. I was granted access to community meetings, local clubs

and schools, and let into people's homes and private lives.

These four places are examples of how economic decline has crept up on some places and how others have never recovered from previous recessions decades ago. With unemployment and deprivation a fact of life, they are testament to how far there is to go in tackling inequality in communities across the country.

Nevertheless, I found remarkable community spirit in many of these places. They highlighted for me the importance of public services in shoring up and helping to create social and community infrastructures. They are proof of what can be achieved when services work for and in partnership with communities. And the devastating impact when they don't.

They also point to the potential legacies of this recession, public service cuts and high youth unemployment. As the debate now switches to when the recession will officially end, many communities like these fear they could be hit even harder by another downturn when services and grants are reduced and they are left without the cushion of community support. The return to growth, which some are predicting will begin by early next year, could mask the real impact for these communities.

For young people, this is already their recession. Youth unemployment is very high and in every community I heard tales of people associating this with crime, drugs and alcohol abuse. There is a danger that we will be left with a forgotten, disaffected generation

of 16- to 24-year-olds with little experience of work and rock-bottom aspirations.

I hope this special report, along with its sister publication looking at the evidence from research and unemployment data, shows how the recession is affecting people in deprived communities. How it is far from the middle-class recession that was predicted, affecting vulnerable people and those already on low incomes. And, as we begin to move into the next stages of this downturn, how its full force will continue to be felt by communities up and down the country.

**Karen Day**

# Broad Green – Swindon

Broad Green | Gellideg | Barkerend | Hedworth

People often use the word rich to describe Broad Green in central Swindon. But this community of 1,700 homes is neither wealthy nor affluent; its richness comes from its vast cultural diversity.



For decades Broad Green has been a hub for new economic migrants attracted by the abundance of low-skilled jobs and cheap Victorian housing. Its ability to adapt to and cater for over 25 different communities – and its old-fashioned alleyways and varied churches, mosques and shops – means Broad Green exists almost in isolation from the rest of Swindon, a town that is 90 per cent white.

But its dependence on low-skilled work means the recession has hit particularly hard here. Swindon, a former 'growth town', has been stopped in its tracks with a 200 per cent increase in Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claims in 12 months, taking it above the national average for the first time in 20 years. In Broad Green over 8 per cent of the working population is now claiming JSA, compared to 5.4 per

cent across the rest of the town. Over 40 per cent of its redundancies in the last 12 months have been in manufacturing, including 1,300 job losses at Honda, and 39 per cent in retail and hotels. The collapse of Woolworths alone saw the loss of 450 jobs with the closure of a major depot. Over 44 per cent of jobseekers in Broad Green are looking for unskilled work, the type that is now most scarce.

John Taylor, volunteer for the community council, chats to Azim Khan.



Walking around the main streets of Broad Green – Manchester Road and Broad Street – there are few outward signs of recession. Its homes are predominately owner-occupied with a plethora of privately rented houses in multiple occupation. Out of the dozens of grocery, electrical repair, fashion, bathroom and tile shops, there's just one boarded-up retail unit, which contrasts sharply with Swindon's town centre. The local economy appears to be thriving and it's a place where you can buy just about anything from a luxury £28,000 Lotus sports car to apples imported from Turkey and reconditioned washing machines. The streets are clean with just the odd bit of dumped rubbish in the alleyways and neighbours call to each other across the street.

This was a community on the up. The locals renamed it Broad

Green to shake off its grim 'red light district' image and prostitutes no longer come from as far as Bristol to work here. It is less of a transitory place now and people tend to put down roots, including a large number of Goan families who have settled here in the past five years. Youngsters and the local police tell me that inter-racial tensions have calmed and now there's little violence. John Taylor, a local volunteer for the Broad Green Community Council, the local residents' association, shows me around the streets, pointing out the results of its recent Streets for Living project. He describes many of the houses as 'care worn' but says people do take more pride in their community now. I quickly get a sense of a community spirit. But, as John points out, regardless of the town's recent job losses, many

already live a hard life here.

He points me in the direction of people who have lived and worked in Broad Green for several years. I visit Budgie who runs the local grocery shop on Broad Street. He's on his third recession and chats as customers come in and out. He's seen the community change vastly over the years with different nationalities coming and going and says the place has improved. He works 13 hours a day and says business has always been hard but it's quieter than usual. His neighbour, Peter Newson, runs one of the more unusual businesses in Broad Green, an electrical contractor. At 63 he had planned to take it easy this year but instead is working longer hours. Both are confident about weathering the recession and Peter says the last one was much worse for him. He retrained

then as a bus driver, a skill he now uses as a dial-a-ride volunteer for older people.

I ask how people have been affected by the loss of jobs at Honda and I meet Tomas and Martin. Both worked in the motor manufacturing industry and both have very different experiences since losing their jobs. Tomas, (see case study) was made redundant earlier this year and is already back in temporary work at the Royal Mail's recently expanded sorting office, a £20-million pound project completed this summer and one of the town's few green shoots.

'I've always found good jobs, but I've seen people that can't find them,' he tells me.

Martin is one of those people. At 45 he lost his job at Honda last April. Since then his relationship has broken down and he's moved

to another part of Swindon to live with his parents. He says if you have qualifications or a degree there's a lot of work, but for him it's a struggle. What keeps him going is volunteering at the local radio station. We meet at the Turkish restaurant on Manchester Road, which at lunchtime is buzzing, and he sits wearing his official Swindon 105.5 blue fleece. His eyes light up as he describes his own brass band show and some of the skills he's learned.

'I never imagined I'd be able to do some of the things I can now,' he says. 'It's really boosted my confidence. I don't know what I'd do without it, probably just sit indoors and look at four walls. I hope it'll open new doors for me.'

'We now get ex-managing directors, graduates who can't get jobs and people just made redundant looking for experience.'

*Shirley, radio station manager*

Shirley, the station manager and a former BBC radio journalist, joins us and says she's currently overwhelmed with requests for volunteering.

'I can't cope with the demand,' she tells me. 'We now get ex-managing directors, graduates who can't get jobs and people just made redundant looking

for experience. I've asked the volunteer bureau to stop sending people my way.'

Shirley works across the community, training people in broadcasting skills so they can make their own programmes. Ellen, a hairdresser with a business on Manchester Road, and George, a vocal youngster, are her latest

recruits. She plans to have them broadcasting direct from Broad Green.

'We want to give local people their voice. Radio can be a great leveller. It provides new skills and a wonderful introduction to the media,' she says.

It is the lack of such new skills and training that is a major concern for Swindon, which lags behind the rest of the UK in terms of its residents' qualifications. In Broad Green over a third of the population has no qualifications and only 17.5 per cent have a higher qualification – the national average for NVQ4 and above is 28 per cent.

'A recessionary period ought to be a good time to start train-



Shop-owners Peter Newson and Jaswinder Kaur.



Hairdresser Ellen Osa (left) is volunteering for the local radio station, run by Shirley Ludford (right).

## Case study

### Views from local young people

It's a Tuesday morning two weeks before the end of the summer term and I'm at St Joseph's school in Swindon, facing a room of 11 children aged between 11 and 17. The recession has particularly hit young people here, with youth unemployment up 200 per cent, and I'm curious about how kids here view the future and how it's impacting on their families.

One shy 12-year-old girl, with her arms wrapped around her body, tells the group how both her parents have lost their jobs. She says her mum gets depressed and her dad 'just angry' and they have cash problems. Her pain and embarrassment are obvious and we move quickly on. A bright 14-year-old, describes her dad as one of the lucky ones.

'He works for Honda and took a big pay cut, but at least he still has a job,' she says. 'I try and think about the cost of things more now and don't ask for them.'

One of the girls rolls down her school sweatshirt sleeve; it's several inches too short.

'My mum is trying to save money on school uniforms', she smiles ruefully. Another girl talks about her father, a regional manager for a bank. He's held on to his job but has to work longer hours.

'He gets quite angry sometimes,' she says.

Two 17-year-old girls have crucial decisions to make on their futures.

'This has affected what I do next,' one says. 'I won't be going to university in London, it's too expensive. The recession has pushed me towards a four-year degree. I hope after that there will be more jobs out there.'

The other girl is less sure of what she wants to do after school and wants to stay on as long as she can.

'School days are the best of your life. I don't want to leave here, I feel safe here.'



ing people for new things,' says Derique Montaut, Broad Green's ward councillor, who believes the council and colleges have failed to deliver in the past.

There is talk of devising a skills strategy and trying to persuade a university to base a campus here but residents are frustrated by the generally slow response to the economic downturn.

'Residents here need short-term help', says Karen Leakey, chair of the community council. 'I think the job situation is the worst it has ever been.'

'Once the losses start they  
tend to snowball'

*Alan Smithers, pastor, Open Hands  
Christian Church*

We're sitting in Karen's living room on a Friday afternoon. She's a local childminder and has seen her business dwindle over recent months. Now she says much of the support jobseekers need is being left to the community.

This is nothing new in Broad Green and it's a place that is used to helping itself and looking after its own. The Catholic Church runs soup kitchens and outreach projects, the mosques look after Muslim residents and the Open

Hands Christian Church provides travel expenses and even glasses to its jobseekers. Its pastor, Alan Smithers, says it's not easy to find jobs for unskilled workers.

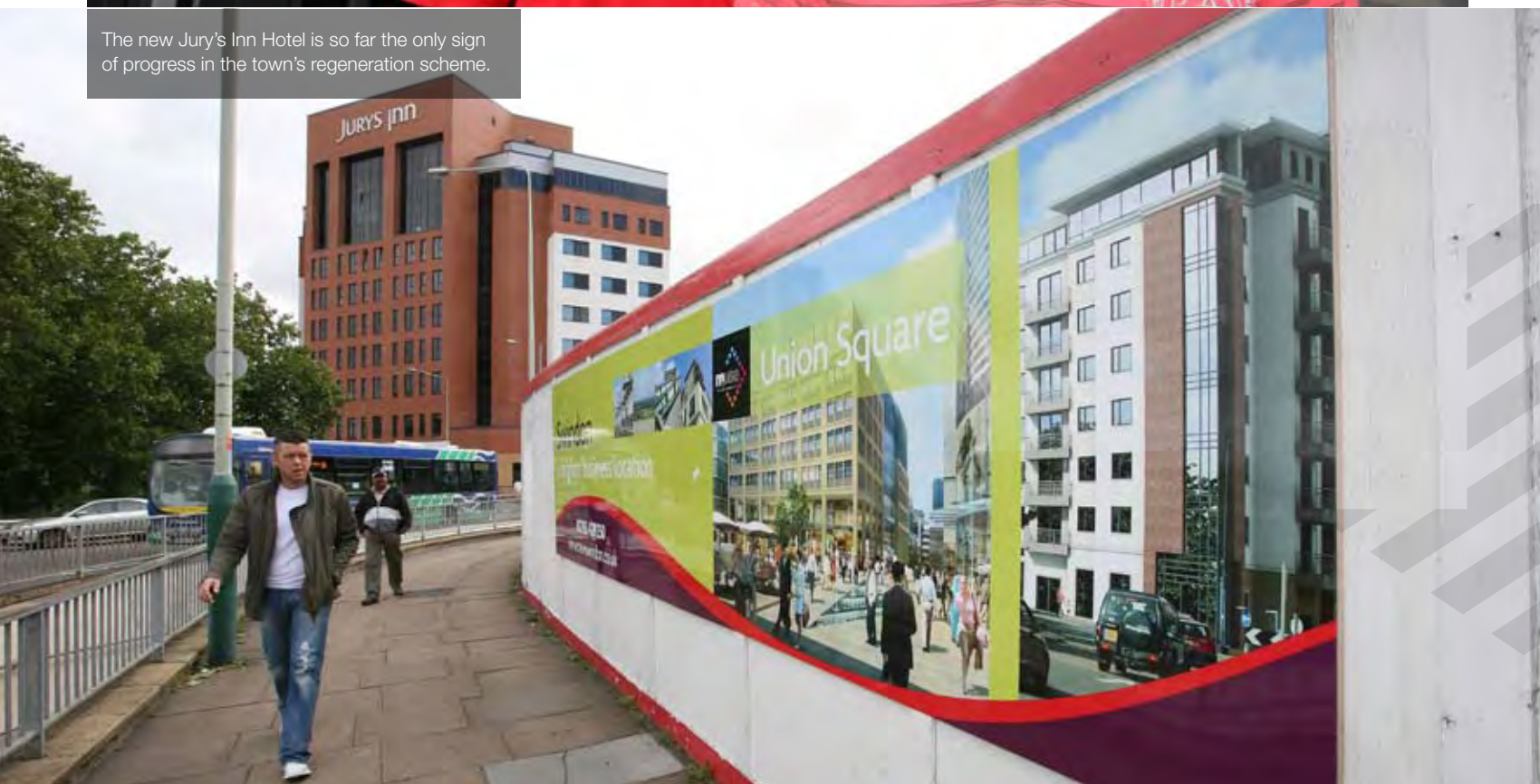
'Once the losses start they tend to snowball', he tells me over a cup of tea in the church's café. Open Hands is planning to launch a debt counselling service later this year to meet the demand for help and advice on finance and mortgages.

For some, including community volunteer Norma Thomson, the way organisations here tend to look after their own people means



The Turkish community is one of many in Broad Green.

The new Jury's Inn Hotel is so far the only sign of progress in the town's regeneration scheme.





Karen Leahey, childminder and chair of the community council, with her husband, Kevin.

there's less room for community cohesion. But it does mean that Broad Green is more resilient and more able to cope in times of hardship.

Now many in the community are keen that Broad Green's improvements, its engagement with residents, reduction in prostitution, crime and racial tensions aren't undermined by economic decline.

'I just hope people don't start looking inwardly and pointing fingers if things get worse,' one resident told me. 'It won't be done with open racism but it will

cause tensions we don't need.'

A potential green shoot for Broad Green was the town centre's multi-million-pound, 50,000-square-foot regeneration scheme. Residents here are cynical about the project on their doorstep. The white hoardings surrounding the cleared land advertise what could have been before the recession: new retail outlets, a primary care trust and housing. Instead the land lies derelict and the adjacent car park is used by the local soup kitchen in the evenings. The only sign

of movement is the new Jury's Inn Hotel, the most noticeable landmark as the train pulls into Swindon. It opened in June in anticipation of the redevelopment and looks out of place sandwiched between white hoardings and Broad Green.

The council is now rethinking the project after its major developer went into administration and is expected to try and continue on a smaller scale. It is already winding down its regeneration company.

The community council is now lobbying for the hoardings to be

taken down and for some of the land to be used as a park area for the local youngsters, who have a pitifully small patch of grass to play on. Karen adds that they are still hopeful they'll get some community benefits from section 106 agreements, which the council usually negotiates with developers. But nothing has ever been promised. She knows here's a danger that when Swindon does pick up, Broad Green will remain an island looking out across a sea of new development, while life goes on as always.

## Case study // Tomas

Tomas settled in Broad Green from Goa nine years ago with his wife and family. They were employed in the local motor manufacturing industry: his daughter and son-in-law at Honda and Tomas at a subsidiary.

He first came to Broad Green to stay with a friend who was living here. He says there was plenty of work then but now jobs are much harder to come by. In March he opted for redundancy after his employer said it wanted to reduce its staffing levels.

In the meantime, Honda had closed its plant for four months, laying off staff and making 1,300 redundant. His daughter Vanessa and son-in-law say they haven't been too badly affected and describe how

well Honda has communicated with its workers. Vanessa, who was on maternity leave, was offered extended development leave, which gives employees time out to do training. She took the option, was paid 50 per cent of her basic salary and was able to spend more time with her children. She's now back test-driving cars at Honda and says she's happy to stay there. The company is introducing new models, which means it will go forward, she says.

After two months visiting family in Goa, Tomas landed temporary work at Royal Mail's newly expanded depot. He says they call him when they have work, which is fairly regularly.

# Gellideg – Merthyr Tydfil

Broad Green | Gellideg | Barkerend | Hedworth

‘Recession, what recession?’ I’m told when I ask to come to the Gellideg Estate in Merthyr Tydfil. The economic gloom blighting communities across Wales has had little impact here and despite obvious signs in the town a mile or so down the hill, life here goes on as usual.



But this small community isn’t recession-proof or somehow immune from economic decline; it’s just the opposite. Economic and social depression is a constant state of life here. Whether boom or gloom there’s the same unemployment and the same number of people claiming incapacity benefit – it’s a community that’s never come out of recession. One resident tells me that people used to joke that the best thing

about Gellideg was the road out. The estate had built up a lingering reputation for ‘problem families’, anti-social behaviour and generational unemployment and is one of the most deprived in Merthyr. It’s a typical post-war council estate built to house workers from the old mining and manufacturing industries. Homes are neatly arranged around greens or along narrow roads with grass verges and front gardens. But its setting,

tucked peacefully into the rolling Welsh hills with fresh, crisp air and commanding views over neighbouring towns, adds to Gellideg’s sense of splendid isolation. Plenty of people are still born and buried here and some choose to return after decades away. It’s a place that has a strong sense of community and belonging.

But this sense of community is no accident of history or tradition. It stems from people’s weariness



Gellideg's hillside location adds to its sense of isolation.

## Case study

### The Environmental Task Force

Pink and red flowers have been freshly planted in neat beds near Gellideg's shops. Two days later and they are starting to thrive.

The estate now has its own Environmental Task Force, funded for two years through the Welsh Assembly's rural development plan. It provides jobs and training to local 16-to-20-year-olds as well as sprucing up the estate. Brian, the Task Force supervisor, has lived on the estate for 40 years and retired from his job as a school caretaker last year. Knowing that he was 'handy' around his garden, the foundation asked him to take on the role and now he looks after three trainees. I bump into him and his team all week, gardening, planting the flowers, trimming the estate's verges and litter picking in yellow vests.

The Task Force keeps Brian busy and allows him to pass on some of his practical experience. He also knows what it's like to be unemployed. In his early 50s he was made redundant from a local factory and says he was then 'financially well off'. After six months of gardening and DIY, he decided to look for another job. It took him two years and in the process he became depressed.

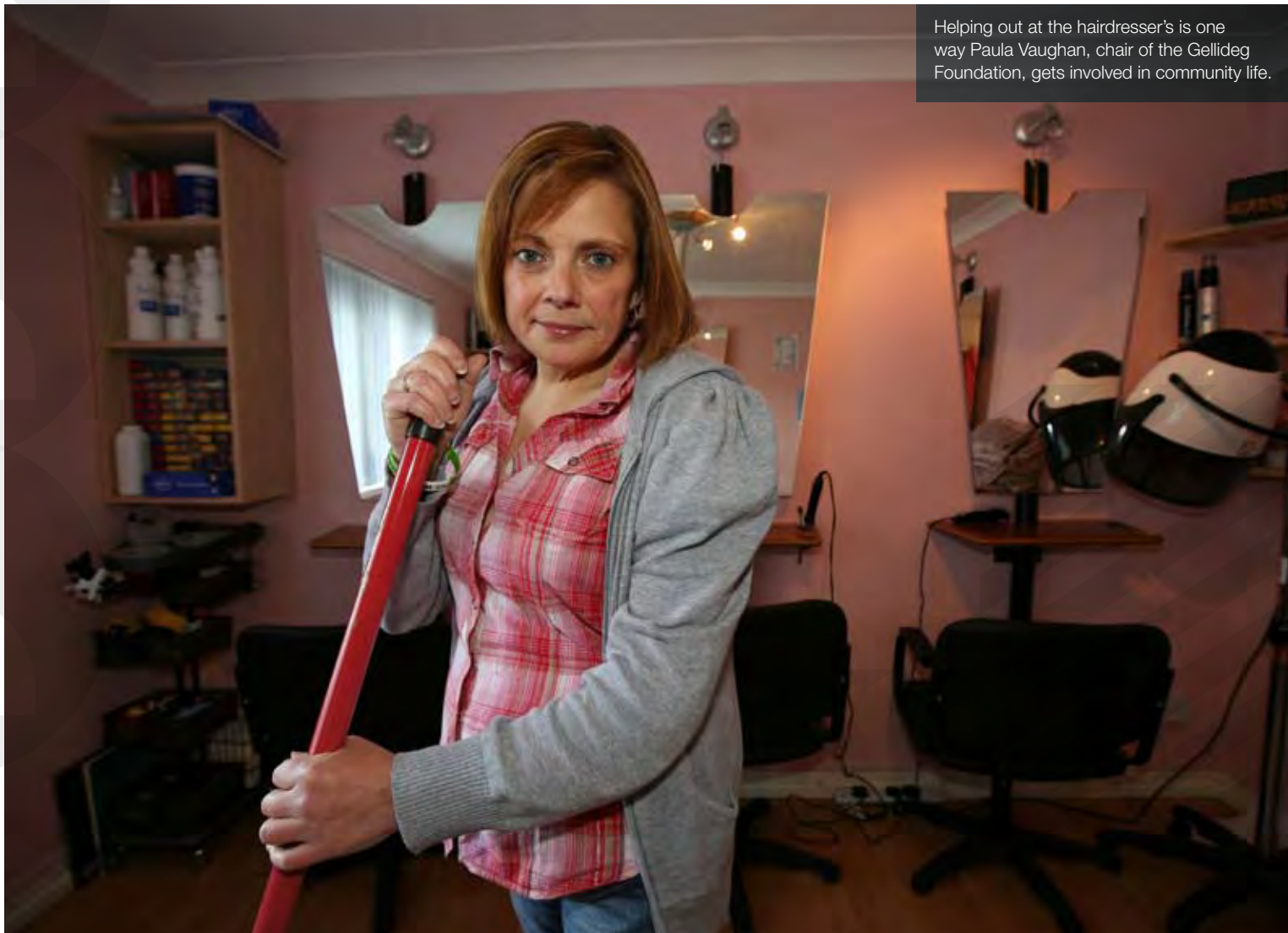
'It really upset me and I went on the sick with my nerves,' he says candidly.

One of Brian's trainees is 18-year-old Katie. She joined the Task Force in November after responding to a flyer sent round the estate. She says she's been 'taught loads' by Brian already and has been on numerous courses on landscape gardening. Katie can walk around the estate and see her own work, and admits to getting annoyed when the local kids vandalise flowerbeds or hanging baskets. But says people are starting to notice.

'One man phoned the Merthyr Express and told them to come up and have a look,' she says as she walks over to Brian's van to help him unload the strimmers and tools.

➤ Gellideg's Environmental Task Force keeps the estate tidy while offering jobs and training for local young people.





Helping out at the hairdresser's is one way Paula Vaughan, chair of the Gellideg Foundation, gets involved in community life.

of the estate's poor condition, from feeling unsafe at night and from outsiders telling them how to get back to work. Eleven years ago, eight mothers on the estate decided to organise themselves and formed the Gellideg Foundation Group. Now, it's hard to find anyone in Gellideg who doesn't have some connection with the foundation, which is now more of a social enterprise. It's a focal point of the estate and has undoubtedly strengthened the community's ties while providing local jobs, training and work experience.

But it's interesting in a town so geared up to tackle its long-term unemployment that the foundation has felt the need to evolve in the way it has. Merthyr has seen unemployment jump 89 per cent in 12 months and has higher-than-average numbers of worklessness and lone parents. There's

just about every advice outlet a jobseeker could wish for in Merthyr, with recruitment companies, training, volunteer agencies and charities competing for space with the usual retail outlets.

aspirations to achieve better.'

It seems hard for people like Colette to talk dispassionately about life on the estate, to do it without feeling disloyal or overlooking those that really can't work.

'People here don't feel excluded.  
They've no aspirations to achieve better.'  
*Colette, project manager,  
Gellideg Foundation*

Colette, project manager at the foundation, says that it's all right having all these training and employment schemes but none of them tackle the root cause of long-term unemployment in Gellideg: low social aspirations.

'People here don't feel excluded,' she says. 'They've no

'There is generational unemployment and people are dependent on benefits.'

She says unemployment is a way of life for some families here. There isn't a working culture and few get up in the morning and say: 'Today I'm going to work.' Over the years, she says, families

get trapped by the security of benefits and it's hard for people to step into employment when that culture is so ingrained. She says members of her family were once the same and she left school with little regard for education and even less for her first YTS scheme. She barely remembers the last recession because her family were already careful about what they spent. And she says that for some people little on the estate has changed since.

Colette says the next task for the foundation is to tackle Gellideg's low aspirations. But I sense the foundation has already tentatively begun that. I lose count of the people who tell me they don't know what they'd do if they didn't help out at the Wednesday hairdressers, or go to the walking club, or the Tuesday tea dance. For many this social infrastructure is crucial and some wonder

if they'd even be here without it, while others say they'd probably be depressed.

Breaking the security of benefits is no easy task and one that has challenged successive governments. I can see why Gellideg's time bank scheme, run through the Welsh Assembly's Communities First programme, is so popular. It provides a form of work experience and social interaction without eroding the security of their benefits – another reason why the foundation says it's all about getting people a better quality of life, whether they're unemployed or not.

I meet Helen in the community café. She runs the time bank and is speckled with paint after decorating her new home on the estate. The bank now has 220 regular volunteers, 150 of whom are children, who work on the estate in return for credits. It encourages people to 'get out', she says, and can lead to work for some. I admit that out of 600 families, 220 volunteers is impressive. She nods and says people would do more but the hours have to be restricted.

It's interesting that despite such levels of generational unemployment, there's such a strong community work ethic here. I wonder why this can't translate into paid employment. Colette says it's a gradual process and people need more skills. For the odd few it has worked, boosting self-confidence and providing a transition from long-term unemployment into a job, but she adds that Merthyr isn't exactly awash with opportunities.

I leave the café with Paula, chair of the foundation and also born and bred on the estate. She's taking me over to the Tuesday afternoon tea dance in St Luke's church hall, one of the foundation's healthy living schemes. Paula sits at the door taking the £1 entry money as people slowly stream in. I continue to bump into her over the next few days, taking bookings at the hairdressers on Wednesdays and making sure the therapy suite is in order. Unable to work due to a medical condition



Colette Watkins, project manager at the Gellideg Foundation.

*'The programme of work up in Gellideg is not only providing services, it's empowering people,'*

*Paul Brown, local independent councillor*

she says the few things that she can do for the foundation make a 'hell of a difference' to her life.

It's getting noisy in the hall as tea dancers prepare to take off round the room. I decline the frequent invitations to dance and chat with those sitting out about their views on the recession. As pensioners they've tightened their belts and bemoan the low interest on their savings, but the free bus pass is a boon. They all say they shop around and were brought up to manage. They have sympathy for the younger generation, who have no such training.

'The youngsters have it harder,' says one. 'We've all done it before when we were younger so it's nothing new to us. It's always been that way.'

The following morning in the bustle of the hairdressers, one or two express the same sentiments. Marie, who is in her late 50s and has lived on the estate for nine years, is most vocal. She says the banks have encouraged young-

sters with excessive lending, and that many haven't been brought up to be responsible and have gotten into debt that way.

'They don't appreciate things, they have no value, it's all throw away. I keep things for years and I know what it's like to have nothing.'

A few of the clients talk of husbands and sons unable to find work. One woman's son is even considering joining the army as a last resort.

The foundation is a lifeline for many here but how it develops in future is unclear. Over the years, the foundation has benefited from public and voluntary sector grants and is dependent on them for many of its activities and programmes, from the environmental task force that cleans up the estate to the Monday afternoon craft classes. So far people on the estate see this as a 'private sector' recession affecting the banks and people working in industry. When the public recession starts,

they know things will change in Gellideg.

The local independent councillor, Paul Brown, is warning of cuts from the council next year. He says there's already speculation that the Welsh Assembly will start reducing public spending across all services in the next two years.

'The programme of work up in Gellideg is not only providing services, it's empowering people,' he told me. 'At some stage in the not-too-distant future they'll have to rely less on the council.'

He says policing on the estate has already been cut back, despite problems with teenage drinking outside its two off-licences.

Most of the foundation's volunteers and workers are aware of what could be coming. The catering club team was due to become self-sufficient from September, selling its produce from its classes and activities in the café. The hairdresser's is moving to an empty shop in the estate's parade of four, with plans to allow one of the local college students to rent a chair.

But Colette is also concerned about the impact on local families. Just under a third of people in Merthyr are employed in the public sector, in local hospitals, the council, schools, colleges and the Welsh Assembly, and most other jobs are in low-paid manual work. I learn that the estate also has a problem with drink and drug abuse by young people, with children as young as 11 drinking outside the shops, even in the mornings. Colette says the community needs to build up its resilience now, particularly in family intervention, youth work, mentoring and linking with agencies such as Bridges to Work to get people adaptable skills. She wants to get these links in place in order to 'recession-proof' and has already written grant applications and has started searching for a family support worker.

'Sometimes it can be a swing door up here with agencies just coming in and out. Someone has to join up and we'll do it in the community.'

# Crafting a new career

Maria, 45, sits in one of the Foundation's training rooms on a glum Monday afternoon. She runs a regular craft class and teaches people on the estate how to make cards. It's funded through a small grant from the Welsh Assembly.

Maria has been unemployed and receiving sickness benefits since last April. She suffers from bouts

of depression and arthritis and after both flared up, left her job at Asda, but she says her mind is set on returning to work.

She views herself as lucky after the Jobcentre put her on a pilot scheme called the Conditions Management programme to help her cope with depression and get back to work.

'People don't always get such help, but because I'd come out of work and on the sick they guided me and pushed this way,' she says.

The programme is a holistic series of courses including five weeks of group therapy, physiotherapy and mood management. She's impressed by the programme so far and says the Jobcentre is clear it won't push her back to work or contradict her. She says she'd like to open a craft shop, to show people what she's

interested in, and has already completed a computer course, to help with the Foundation, and a holistic therapy course.

In the meantime, the Foundation has been a lifeline. 'Getting out of the house and talking to people can be half the battle', she says. 'You know in your mind what you have to do, but sometimes you need a push.' Without the Foundation and the friends she now has here, Maria says she would have just given up and gone back to live with her mum.

■ Maria Owen (centre) runs a regular craft class at the Gellideg Foundation.



# Barkerend – Bradford

Broad Green | Gellideg | **Barkerend** | Hedworth

Barkerend is an ethnically diverse, urban community on the outskirts of Bradford city centre. For an outsider it's hard to see where it begins and where it ends, from the bustling Leeds Road, where people come from miles around to shop, to the quieter, residential Barkerend Road, where people stroll slowly up and down the hill.



Of all the communities I visit, Barkerend is the most complex and difficult to comprehend. Residents hold strong – sometimes conflicting – views. People appear to live side-by-side with little interaction, while those I spoke to share a deep sense of disaffection because they don't see life here getting any better.

In all the measures of deprivation – income, unemployment, health, education, housing and

crime – Barkerend fares among the worst in the city and has already been hit disproportionately by the recession. Across Bradford, Jobseeker's Allowance rates stand at 5.2 per cent, the highest for 12 years. In Barkerend it's at 8.3 per cent, a 2.7 per cent increase in 12 months. Youth unemployment has reached record levels with one in every five 16-to-24-year-olds out of work. Unemployment has hit low-skilled,

manual workers the hardest, the very people that tend to live here. There are above-average numbers of lone parents living in poor, overcrowded housing that is already under pressure from a growing population.

One upside is Barkerend's diverse local economy, which appears to be flourishing and provides the community with some resilience. Leeds Road, one of the main arterial routes out of the city,

is laden with restaurants, cafés and takeaways. This long, busy road is also lined with Asian clothing shops, jewellers, garages and beauty salons. On Garnett Street, which links Leeds and Barkerend roads, there's a mix of light manufacturing and import companies, all of which allow people to live and work within their own communities.

My taxi pulls into the back of Karmand Community Centre on a rainy summer morning. Karmand is the focal point of this community. Here I find the welfare and immigration adviser, the local policeman and councillor, who pass through frequently, a café, the youth club and even a regeneration company.

The centre was established over 25 years ago, donated by the neighbouring church during another recession. People then had migrated from the Indian

sub-continent to work in the city's textile industry. When it collapsed they found themselves out of work and under-skilled. People I speak to claim that nothing much has changed.

Mohammed Jamil, one of Barkerend's local councillors, speaks quickly and passionately about life here. We're sitting in Karmand's chilly community café and he shows me the ward's deprivation profile. It makes for grim reading.

'Look at this,' he says, 'it's all there but people here are forgotten. We urgently need assistance but we get ignored.'

He talks about relationships breaking down because of overcrowding, how the only role models kids have are drug dealers and how unemployed people just give up.

'The enthusiasm is here but people don't know where to start. Agencies like Jobcentre Plus



Councillor Jamil talks to local people about regeneration.

'The enthusiasm is here but people don't know where to start.'

*Mohammed Jamil, local councillor*

Mohammed Jamil, one of Barkerend's local councillors, feels people in this community have been 'forgotten'.





A group of women walk through a residential area of Barkerend.

never come here. We should be going forward, but we're not, we're going back.'

When I point to the new facilities across the street from Karmand – a school, children's trust and recreation centre – he concedes that they've had a 'shot of funding' but says it's not much after '30 or 40 years of nothing'.

I talk to Raja, the council's assistant area co-ordinator for Bradford North, who is responsible for community engagement in the area. He says that the 'bigger picture' in Barkerend hasn't improved.

'People see that the roads are swept and drains cleaned but that's it. Some people can't see any change and some feel they aren't listened to.'

He says he's seen a difference in the area in the last 12 months as the recession has started to bite. Crime is on the increase and more are living in overcrowded conditions, leading to health problems such as asthma.

'We are trying to respond positively', he says. 'We're trying to organise days of action so people tell us their priorities. Then they can see that we can address their issues.'

Some of this community's sense of cynicism and reluctance to engage hasn't been helped by its perceptions of a recent regeneration scheme, Regen2000 (see case study). What this seven-year, £128-million programme has achieved is disputed in the community. Rashid, the Karmand centre's manager, claims that people were consulted extensively, but when the cash came, it was spent elsewhere.

'The community feels very let down,' he says.

The same, I'm told, could be said of Barkerend's young people. Bradford is a young city and virtually everyone I talk to says youth crime is a serious problem, with Barkerend fast becoming a hub for drugs. The city has a high unemployment rate for 16-24-year-olds, with 9 per cent claiming Jobseeker's Allowance – the national average is 6 per cent. In Barkerend, this rockets to 17.3

## Case study // Regeneration

The Salwar Kameez flutter in the breeze as a group of women hurry along the footpaths of the Myra Shay Park. Its manicured paths and planted trees surround a recreation centre, one of Barkerend's most visible legacies of Regen2000.

Barkerend Road, along with Leeds Road, Bradford Moor and Laisterdyke, were chosen for a seven-year regeneration scheme designed to tackle high unemployment, poor housing, high crime, poor health and boost the local economy. The scheme was funded by £28.5m of the Government's Single Regeneration Budget, with an additional £100m of public and private investment.

It ended in September last year, just as the recession started to take hold, and should have helped build the community's resilience. But instead it is a source of conflict in the community. The people I interview in Barkerend are highly disparaging about the scheme and claim that it achieved little for them. They're critical of the council and the regeneration company and say neither listened to what they wanted.

David, the council's assistant director for housing, concedes that there were problems in the

early years. He says it took time to organise and there was 'lots of falling out between' groups. A change of management at the regeneration company hampered progress further and most projects were delivered in the latter part of the scheme. He says some residents don't feel ownership over the projects, but for all those that are critical there are just as many who are positive.

I'm given a tour of some of the project sites by Nasim, a former officer at Regen2000 and now the director of Inspired Neighbourhoods, the council's successor community asset company.

He says that regeneration will never please everyone.

'There are people that still feel they didn't get anything out of it. But we've helped businesses to thrive here, employing lots of local people and they can see physical changes.'

He says that over 900 jobs were created and the legacy of Regen2000 is still coming though. He points out the businesses that were helped on Leeds Road and says 104

projects were delivered and all their targets met.

The source of friction appears to stem from an expansion of the scheme's boundaries into the city centre. Nasim says refurbishing offices in Cathedral Quarter and establishing a new call centre were part of the job creation programme, which has benefited the labour market in Barkerend. But he acknowledges that not everyone in Barkerend sees it in the same way.

Nasim, however, still has ambitions for Barkerend. As he drives me around he shows me the land he'd still like to develop and the streets that need regenerating. Along with David, he's drawn up a community plan to ensure the area 'is a priority for the council'. It was accepted in September and David says it sets out an investment framework to develop the Bradford/Leeds corridor, the area around Leeds Road.

'The area has had false dawns in the past,' says David. 'Things have been a long time coming and we needed to get the ball rolling so people can see things happening.'

► Barkerend Road is one of the areas that was chosen for a seven-year regeneration scheme.





This office in the Karmand Community Centre is home to a regeneration company.



Plans for a new £1.5 million sports facility will be a boost for young people in Barkerend.

per cent with one in five out of work. Despite an array of training providers the city also has a high number of people not in education, employment or training – 11.5 per cent compared to the national rate of 7.5 per cent.

I spoke to youth and community workers in the city who were concerned that such high unemployment and poor opportunities will result in a generation with rock-bottom aspirations. They told me that constant training and lack of jobs frustrates youngsters here and adds to their disaffection.

‘There has been an explosion of providers and they all do the same courses,’ one tells me. ‘But what does that get you? At the end of it there’s nothing and it all seems pointless to them.’

I think back to the new skills centre I’d been shown. It was set up in anticipation of a surge in the construction industry, which was expected to earn the city £1bn in five years. But there’s a crater-like hole in the middle of Bradford city centre, dating back to before the recession, which would have been a new Westfield Shopping

community co-ordinator Raja says that, with little money to spend, kids tend to stay in the area and on the streets and people are already associating increases in burglary and anti-social behaviour with young people.

The youth workers say their focus now is to develop social skills, get youngsters ready for employment and ensure they are more outward-looking. This seems a wide agenda and one usually shared across families, faiths and schools. When I point this out they just shrug and say for some there’s just not the social infrastructure.

‘People tend to stay in their enclave but if you’re going for a job it might not be in an Asian place, for example. Our job is to get them ready – to help them with the social skills that employers want, so they can compete for jobs,’ one explains.

They say that through group work and targeted programmes they can help some of the most disadvantaged kids in Barkerend.

But like most public service workers I talk to across all the communities, they fear future

‘There has been an explosion of providers and they all do the same courses. But what does that get you?’  
*Youth worker*

Centre, and the heart seems to have been ripped out of the city. Scores of young people have been trained to build something that seems permanently on hold.

The youth workers say aspirations here are increasingly shaped by the drugs trade, and the poor interaction between the Asian, White and Eastern European youngsters only adds to their isolation and poor social skills. Com-

public service cuts. They have already been asking for assurances on funding, and say that community centres have already been closed across the city. They fear their jobs will either be cut or subsumed into other services. They say the impact of youth work is harder to quantify and those are the sorts of services likely to face least political opposition to cuts. They have been in youth work for

What does the future hold for young people in Barkerend?

Terraced housing in Barkerend, a community with a growing population.



decades and worry about who will pick up their work.

Back at Karmand, there's some progress. Rashid has his own plan for the area's youngsters: to build a £1.5m sports facility at the back of the centre. He hopes to channel the energy of the community and even the county's kids into cricket and athletics. It's a plan he's been nursing for 15 years and has previously struggled to raise

the capital and secure the land. But it's moving forward. Diggers are now levelling the land and he's pleased that progress is now being made and the community will see some change. He says it's often down to them to help themselves.

'The first thing the community says is "what are we doing for our own people?".'

## Case study // A graduate seeking work

'I never thought I'd be back working in my own community with my own people,' a 23-year-old graduate from Barkerend tells me. She asks me not to use her name and says she's 'unusual' compared to other British Pakistani girls in the community.

She got out of the 'BD3 bubble', as she calls it, to go to university and then completed a master's degree. She thought a good degree would mean a good job, but then the recession came and she was forced to rethink her career path. She planned to go to London and applied for jobs in the civil service but was unsuccessful. She's now back in Barkerend, living with her parents and getting paid for two days a week in an office and volunteering for the rest.

She tells me of her job applications and says it's disheartening when you put 'your heart and soul into it and they don't even write back'. She says graduates are now up

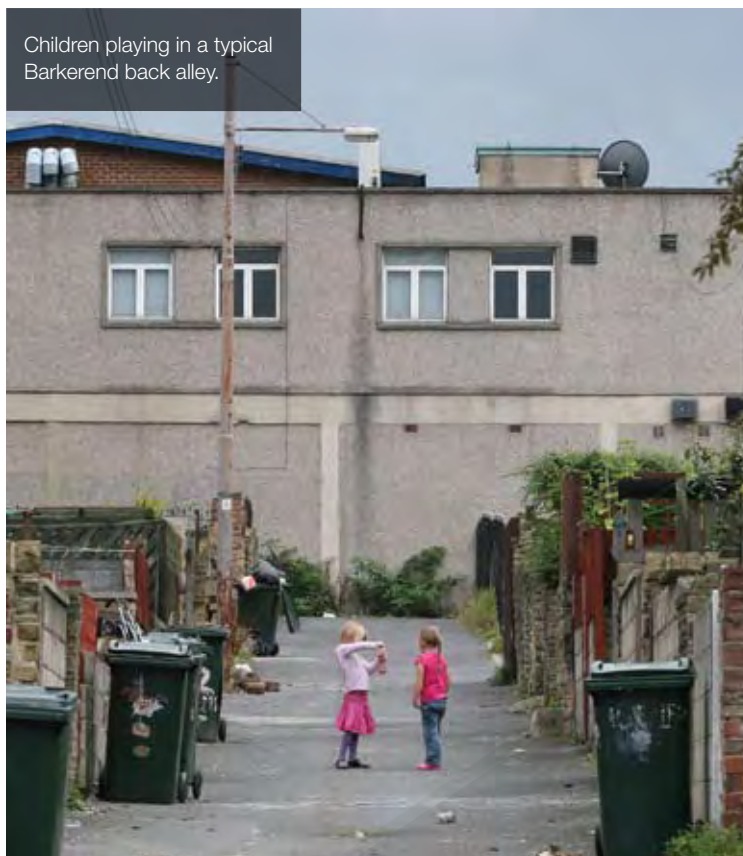
against middle managers with experience for the same jobs and she can no longer see a clear career route. She admits to feeling stuck in Barkerend and wonders how far her background or even the colour of her skin is holding her back.

'Sometimes when I make that tick against the equality monitoring sheet I feel the colour of my skin matters. My friends who come from middle-class backgrounds have jobs already and I wonder whether I'm in this position because of where I come from.'

She acknowledges that she's one of thousands of graduates released into the jobs market during a recession, but she can't help getting angry and feeling disappointed that she's back in her 'bubble'.

'Getting out enhances your aspirations and desires of what you want out of life. But now I think if I'd have left school at 16 and got a job I'd be better off today.'

Children playing in a typical Barkerend back alley.



# Hedworth Estate – Jarrow

Broad Green | Gellideg | Barkerend | Hedworth

It can take two hours just to buy a loaf of bread on the Hedworth Estate in Jarrow. Here everyone knows each other, and people stop on street corners and outside the shops just to pass the time of day.



The estate, built for the Jarrow overspill after the war, has a sleepy, rural feel to it. But for years its levels of deprivation were masked by the affluence of its neighbouring estates. Unemployment has long been a fact of life here and the estate has South Tyneside's highest rates of sickness benefits claims and economic inactivity. It's the result of the slow demise of the area's mainstay industries, coal mining

and shipbuilding. And regardless of this recession, it is one of the borough's hotspots for tackling worklessness.

It's easy to see why the problems of Hedworth had been overlooked. Walking around the streets, along Fellgate Avenue and past the shops, it's not a place that has recognisable signs of deprivation. The semi-detached houses, with their white windows and doors, are set in generous

gardens along either tree-lined roads or well-kept greens. There are rows of garages and a new children's play area. On the edge is a curious strip of grass that divides Hedworth and a more affluent estate, Fellgate. It's almost exclusively white here and is a place people tend to stay, with the rare empty home snapped up by residents' growing extended families. People also have a strong sense of identity; they're from the

Hedworth Estate first and Jarrow second.

Like most of the places I visit, Hedworth has its recession stories. People talk of their neighbours with sons and grandchildren out of work – of the rise in rent arrears and debts, the soaring cost of utility and food prices, even of an increase in fly tipping now residents have to pay for collections. I talk to Alison, who works in the local post office and grocery shop. She says she first started noticing customers asking for one or two pounds to top up their electricity and gas cards, instead of the usual five or ten. Then, despite the same number of people coming through the door, people started buying less.

‘Our orders for stock have halved,’ she says. ‘People will pick up things and put them back. They aren’t even buying alcohol – they used to buy four cans on weekends but even that’s not happening.’

She says the Post Office’s once single pile of giro’s has now tripled to three. In another of the local grocery stores they’ve taken to selling two bottles of wine for the price of one while reducing the cost of some essentials such as milk.

Despite this, there are still people that say life is just the same: you make do or you do without.

Hedworth is in a borough that traditionally fares badly in recessions and finds it difficult to claw its way out. Last year, South Tyneside’s claimant rate for Jobseeker’s Allowance was 4.4 per cent; now it has hit 6.8 per cent. Yet, in May and June there was a consistent drop, the largest in five years, which bucked the national trend. The decrease was a matter of a few hundred claimants and the borough is waiting to see if this is consistently repeated before it starts to shout about it. But it does point to efforts to tackle endemic unemployment



and how South Tyneside may be more prepared for this recession than some.

Here, the reaction to long-term economic decline has resulted in a much tighter support infrastructure and more emphasis on community development than other places I visited. I got the sense

that Hedworth was being guided rather than being left to organise itself and there are undoubtedly close relationships between parts of the community and the local service providers, which residents told me generally listened and got things done in the way they want them. The estate’s support work-



Hedworth’s playgroup (both pictures on this page) is one of the local groups based at the community centre.



Detached youth worker Ray Whalen (left) with support worker Martin Conway.

ers were also more visible and certainly more accessible than I've seen anywhere, all of which is having an impact, however minor.

Phil, the borough's community co-ordinator, admits it's taken some time to build bridges with Hedworth's residents. He suggests that the estate was somehow previously forgotten – even the local bus services used to skip around it. People used to feel let

down, he says, and now services levels have been brought up to what they should have been. We sit in Jarrow Town Hall, a splendid old building that gives you a full sense of the area's economic history, as Phil talks about breaking down some of the cynicism on the estate.

It began with training a group of residents to interview their neighbours about the service

'People here don't ask for the world – they just want simple solutions.'  
*Martin, community support worker*



Lynne McElwee (left) and Anita Collier at the community bungalow, where residents' meetings are held.

they wanted and needed – a so-called participatory appraisal approach. It gives people much more influence over what's happening to them, he claims, and it's the residents that break down the barriers. The appraisal highlighted lack of jobs, poor transport links, ill health and high crime as the main concerns on Hedworth estate. These formed the basis of an action plan and as people see results they feel much more involved in decision-making, Phil says. Crucially, it has also given the authority and its service colleagues an understanding of how people respond to public services. Later I meet Martin, the estate's community support worker, and he adds that people are now more

keen to work with local agencies.

'People here don't ask for the world – they just want simple solutions. The training taught them that no problem's insurmountable and they seem to have adopted that since,' he says as he gives me a tour of the estate.

But I'm keen to get the residents' views and Martin puts me in touch with Linda Hemmer, chair of the Hedworth Residents' Association. Linda, who's lived on the estate most of her life, shares the same drive and passion as Colette in Gellideg. She admits to never letting things go until she's got what she wants – the new children's play area being a case in point. She tells me that it was the appraisal work that highlighted

A view of the Hedworth estate.



how many were out of work, had free school meals or were single parents on Hedworth. She says the estate is now getting a lot more help and points to Making Headway, an employment scheme focusing on the estate's lone parents and incapacity benefit claimants (see case study).

As we talk it emerges that Linda also works in job creation, helping people with disabilities to find work. Now she says she has to make her clients aware that instead of 30 people going for a job there might be 230. It's a fulfilling role, she says, and she's proof to her clients that those with disabilities can work. Linda has dyslexia and for years she just thought she was 'thick'. She came through a similar programme to the one she now works on and was diagnosed when she made it to university nine years ago.

As people begin to file into the estate's community bungalow for the monthly residents' meeting, she describes the relationship be-



Sharon Tyerman (left) and Maureen Tait in the post office, where customers are cutting back on their spending.

# Help from familiar faces

Nicola and her colleagues are minor celebrities in Jarrow and Hedworth. Their faces are plastered on posters, leaflets and billboards inviting people to sign up to Making Headway if they want to find a job.

The scheme, officially launched in May, is unique to South Tyneside. It links up the council and Jobcentre Plus with the community and voluntary sectors to help lone parents and those on incapacity benefit find work. It's not mandatory or tied to any benefits and people get the same employment worker for one-on-one support throughout the process. 'From the moment they sign up they get me, then once

they're in employment for another six months,' Nicola says.

The scheme emerged out of the community development work across the borough. Martin, Hedworth's support worker, says people don't like being pushed on to various agencies.

'They won't turn up or apply if there's no consistency,' he explains. 'Here, once they know who the key individuals are they'll keep seeing the same faces.'

The project is also mobile and goes out into the community to try and reach people that may otherwise slip through the net. As well as regular outreach sessions across her patch, Nicola

distributes leaflets, goes to fun days and even knocks on doors cold calling, although she says she tends to get lots of people sitting with the curtains closed. The most successful place to reach potential clients, she says, is the supermarket Morrisons. She says people tend to be more relaxed and willing to talk there and she's started taking along a list of current vacancies.

'People are really surprised that there are jobs available,' she says.

Nicola explains that as soon as people sign up they get travel vouchers for the Metro, and these continue for another three months once they're in work.

'For my clients that helps to increase their confidence,' she says, 'being able to get out and about.'

The first meeting is just to get to know them and see what training and support they might be looking for. The second is a more formal assessment, in which she looks at the different areas in their life to set an action plan. She has a number of clients who are lone parents and she's finding them training and work experience opportunities. Using the scheme's partners, she can also find out when businesses are likely to be recruiting and can prepare her clients.

The recession, she says, shouldn't have a great effect on the scheme as it is targeted at the longer-term unemployed. In the scheme's first three months she's got five people into work and her colleague four.

► Employment support worker Nicola Zielinski of Making Headway helps Richard Johns with his queries in the organisation's mobile office.



This green area separates Hedworth from the neighbouring Fellgate estate.



‘Our orders for stock have halved,’ she says. ‘People will pick up things and put them back.’

*Alison, Hedworth post office*

tween the association, council, police and housing as ‘fantastic’. The meetings help to get things done and they’ve proved that working together is not about a ‘boat load’ of money, Linda tells me.

‘If it’s going to cost an arm and a leg then we’ll work towards it,’ she says. ‘But it’s just as much about what the residents can do. It’s not just about what they can give us. It’s a two-way thing – we have to give as well.’

There are seven members here tonight, plus Martin, who goes to every meeting to report on council matters or give advice. Linda says she’d like to have more, but people prefer not to get involved so ‘each to their own’.

‘At least it’s not just me gobbling off on my own any more.’

It’s clear the association is the route into the estate. Tonight they have another guest, Nick, a health development worker. He wants to interest residents in a holistic health training course to help tackle poor health here and he knows he’s got to get it past Linda and the association first. A few offer to sign up for it, try it out and, if they’re impressed, recommend it through a leaflet drop on the estate.

But, I’m curious to know what other residents think, those that don’t want to take part. Plenty of people tell me that life on the estate has improved, although some can’t say why. They say that the estate walkabouts, instituted

by the association, have helped to reduce crime and pinpoint some of its more troublesome characters. I meet Muriel, who’s lived on the estate 42 years and says she still won’t venture into some parts late at night.

‘It is much better than it was. We did have some trouble on the estate with gangs of young ones hanging about the shops and garages but it’s tons better.’

Later I notice youngsters congregating around the shops and riding about on bikes and the same ones appear again in the evening.

It’s clear that here some progress has been made with identifying the estate’s problems. But, as in Gellideg, there is the spectre of public service cuts. The first sign was the summer closure of the estate’s housing office run by South Tyneside Homes. I’m told it was closed because it didn’t comply with disability laws, but that the new drop-in sessions at the community bungalow don’t either. It’s caused outrage on the estate and people fear that it’s been closed to save money. Alison in the post office says that people are now coming and asking her advice on letters and rent arrears.

I pop into one of the new drop-in sessions on Thursday morning and meet Leslie, a housing advice officer. She admits she’s unhappy about the closure of the housing office and is due to retire in a few weeks’ time. Residents, she says will have to pay the bus fare into Jarrow, but the post office there is also about to be refurbished and they’ll have to use automated machines when it’s finished. She agrees with Linda that people will miss the personal touch and says it shouldn’t always be about money.

The long-term future of Martin’s role may also be under question. It’s not clear if the funding to sustain community support will be available in the next few years. Phil admits they’re working on making the community more self-sufficient and have set up a more formal partnership chaired by a local councillor, but Linda says they rely heavily on Martin.

‘If we haven’t proved the importance of that role yet, then I don’t know how we’re going to. I can only say how good we are because of the people we have working with us and supporting us. Without that, we’d just be a little residents’ group.’

Chemist Jean Lucas speaks to Linda Hemmer, chair of the residents’ association.





# In summary

Broad Green | Gellideg | Barkerend | Hedworth

These four communities highlight some of the effects of the recession across the country, from the social and economic impact of job losses to disaffected young people and stalled regeneration.

What I have seen and heard across this summer suggests to me that the current debate over the official end of the recession is premature. All the political parties have acknowledged the inevitable future reduction in public services, fuelled by higher public borrowing and a decrease in tax receipts. But what hasn't been recognised is the potential impact these cuts may have, triggering a second recession unique to deprived communities. Many of these places are dependent on public services – from free school buses to drug outreach services, even police community support officers – to cushion their community infrastructure. In the rush to proclaim the end of the economic downturn, these places could be overlooked just as these cuts start to bite, pulling them further into poverty and widening the gap in inequalities even more.

## **Broad Green – Swindon**

Swindon is a town that has been knocked off its feet by the recession but which has been slow to respond to its communities' increasing needs. Broad Green is more resilient than most, with a tight-knit community infrastructure. However a dependence on low-skilled manual work and a poor educational infrastructure may hinder the community's and the town's long-term recovery.

## **Gellideg – Merthyr Tydfil**

Gellideg's charitable foundation and its social enterprises have helped to improve the lives of people on the estate. But this work is vulnerable to public service cuts and just as the recession may be officially ending elsewhere, its impact will only start to be felt in Gellideg.

## **Barkerend – Bradford**

Here the community has a huge youth unemployment problem, with one in five 16-to-24-year-olds out of work. There are fears that public service cuts may have a disproportionate impact on young people. While a seven-year, £128m regeneration scheme, completed last year, it has divided the community and many question its benefits. Deprivation, unemployment and poor housing remain problems.

## **Hedworth Estate – Jarrow**

This is an example of a local authority and community working in partnership, rather than at odds. The council has made efforts to understand the community's needs and there are close ties with housing and police. It has developed innovative employment support to tackle its high levels of unemployment and was one of the few places to see a decrease in JSA rates in May and June. But, as in Bradford and Gellideg, the community has voiced concerns about whether this level of support will continue under future public spending constraints.





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