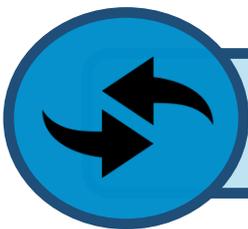# Community Development in Greater Bedminster

A total of ten community development projects were commissioned as part of the BAB programme, all with a slightly different focus working in different areas of Bristol. The project in Greater Bedminster, delivered by St Monica Trust, ran from December 2015 – February 2019.

In May 2019, the Community Development Worker presented at a Share & Learn meeting for BAB-funded community development workers. This Learning Digest summarises the key learning from this project.
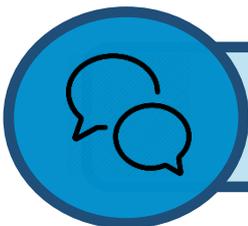
Shifting models of community development

A key aspect of this project is that St Monica Trust had previously been undertaking community development work in Greater Bedminster before the BAB programme started. Funding through the BAB programme involved a **shift towards a community development model that is more asset-based.**

In contrast to an organisation newly starting community development within an area, it can be **challenging to facilitate a shift in approach for work that has already begun**. While community development workers may be familiar with the principles and language of the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, **it can be difficult to explain this** to people on the street. There was an expectation that, as a larger charitable organisation, St Monica Trust would provide and run activities for older people and there was a lack of interest from people wanting to take things forward themselves. As such, the project felt there were some negative feelings from older people at the beginning of the project who may have felt abandoned by the bigger organisations in the city.

For example, the project assumed that volunteers involved in long-running groups would welcome the support to be independent rather than overseen by St Monica Trust, especially as it would mean more autonomy and less paperwork for them. However some groups did not welcome this shift. **This culture can be created at the outset** when groups form, so that they feel a sense of ownership over the group and are on board with boundaries of the worker's role from the start.

Trialling methods of community engagement

As with many of the other community development projects within the BAB programme, paper booklets were produced informing people of the groups and activities available for those aged

50+ in their local area. However while some people will pick up a leaflet and go along to a group for the first time, other people will not do this regardless of what the leaflet looks like. **The only way to reach and engage some people is through speaking to them face-to-face.**

The project trialled a number of different ways to meet and engage older people who they had not engaged with before. One of these methods was through **large public events** such as an annual wellbeing day with a variety of stalls and taster sessions from different organisations and groups. Although these large events attracted a good number of older people to attend, these attendees were mostly already engaging with the project; **they were not a successful way for this project to involve new people.**

Another method of engagement trialled by the project was using **pop-up stalls**, for example having a stall at an existing community event. This stall was interactive and involved activities such as people putting a pin on a map to indicate where they live, and discussing what they would like to see in the area. Although this worked to a certain extent, and was useful as an asset-mapping tool, the event trialled by the project did not itself attract many older people and therefore careful thought needs to go into **choosing an event that is appropriate for the demographic** in that area.

They also trialled having a **pop-up stall within the local library**, which was more successful in reaching older people than the other community event. However a challenge with this approach is that **people often assume you are selling them something**, and do not always want to pause what they are doing to have an open conversation.

Although time-intensive, the project found that **door knocking** was a successful way to meet older people who otherwise would not engage with the project. Similarly going up to a stranger, for example in a café, and starting a conversation can sometimes be nerve-wracking. It helps to have already **prepared some open questions** you might want to ask them, or you can **use a prop such as a leaflet** or document to begin the conversation and break the ice.

As a worker, if you don't live in the area yourself then it can take a longer time to build up trusting relationships with residents. It can often be easier to engage the community if you **have a volunteer or resident with you.**

Supporting and developing activities

The project supported 12 new activities to begin in Greater Bedminster. Of these, 9 have become independent and now run themselves independently from any input from St Monica Trust.

The project believes that the success of these groups partly stems from doing a suitable amount of **groundwork beforehand to make sure there is enough interest** there from the community. Although initial ideas sometimes came from the Advisory Group, the project often did taster sessions of a new group or class in order to assess interest levels.

Furthermore, whenever a new group or activity started, St Monica Trust ensured that the **venues chosen were appropriate** for the activity and **easy for people to get to**, increasing the likelihood that people will attend. They also carried out a lot of **promotional work**, both printed and online, including leaflets. Having the project's support also meant that new groups could take a **longer time to build momentum** and gain participants rather than needing to cover their costs right from the very beginning.

The project established a partnership network of over 60 organisations working with older people in Greater Bedminster, with the aim of increased collaboration, sharing knowledge and skills, and improving service provision. The project believes this was successful partly because older people's wellbeing and loneliness were high on people's radars at the time, including media coverage and the launch of the BAB programme. They also believe it helped that they **undertook surveys to decide what the themes of each meeting should be**, and booked speakers to ensure the meetings were valuable to those who came. However, although there was some interest in this network continuing after the BAB funding, it was not possible to come to a collective agreement on the way forward before the end of the project.

Working in partnership with different groups and organisations enabled the project to be successful with local fundraising, bringing money into Greater Bedminster. The project **supported individual groups with their fundraising** ideas and helped them decide what to charge participants in order for them to build up enough funding to keep going.