Children and the Big Society

Backing communities to keep the next generation safe and happy

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action for **children**

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Contents

Foreword

Action for Children has a clear vision for a UK society transformed in its values and attitudes to children and families. A society where positive childhood becomes the norm and neglect becomes a rare exception. Communities have a crucial role to play in achieving this.

We have a proud heritage of supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. For over 140 years we have worked within local communities to help children, young people and their families build the confidence, skills and connections needed to break cycles of neglect and deprivation.

The people we help often face the multiple disadvantages of acute personal and family difficulties, on top of community-based problems, such as economic deprivation and high rates of unemployment, crime and substance misuse. In these circumstances it is essential that solutions for children, young people and families are part of wider and serious attempts to rebuild communities, and in this way create 'social capital' for people who might otherwise live isolated and vulnerable lives. Only by putting children and their families at the centre of our vision for communities can we improve their safety and wellbeing.

Giving local people a role and responsibility in turning around their own lives and the prospects of the community – some call it the 'Big Society' or 'Good Society' - is nothing new. Action for Children and other charities have been transforming lives and neighbourhoods in this way for over a century. We know that the resilience and potential of children and young people can shine through in even the most difficult circumstances, if they have positive and stable relationships and support. Giving young people an active and meaningful part to play in the community around them can keep them safe and transform the aspirations of individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities, helping break inter-generational cycles of deprivation and neglect.

This is not easy. Serious attempts to build social capital, particularly amongst insular and fractious communities, require trust, innovation and a long-term professional input. But if these elements are in place, supportive local networks, connections and relationships can flourish. This is the best form of early intervention, and can prevent the need for "last resort" services when things go seriously wrong, quite apart from preventing hardship and distress.

We are delighted to work with ResPublica to produce this report. As two leading independent organisations, we share a common goal to achieve a step-change in the sustained development of social capital for children and young people in our communities, and the report highlights the leading edge work of civil society organisations such as Action for Children who are already showing the way. We are also sending a clear message to Government. We must put the needs of children and their families at the centre of efforts to build social capital. The "big society" agenda must do more to involve children and young people, and particularly those who are most vulnerable and their families.

The Coalition Government has made clear its intention to promote early intervention programmes and approaches. It has also made clear its intention to offer far greater civic involvement for individuals in their communities. The recommendations made here are critical in order to bring these two ambitions together. The development of social capital for children and young people is the very essence of early intervention. It also tackles wider social problems by breaking down fear and mistrust across generations and social boundaries.

This report makes the case for Government to open up its 'big society' proposals to children and young people, particularly those who face disadvantage and neglect. If the current, or any future Government is serious about early intervention, and serious about truly opening up community engagement to those that can most benefit from it, then now is the time to take the bold steps outlined in this report.

Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive, Action for Children

Preface

by Phillip Blond, Director, ResPublica

A major part of the Coalition Government's agenda is to encourage greater local decision making and a shift in the ownership of assets and of initiative into the hands of local groups and communities. At ResPublica we believe that these changes can be used to deliver new ways of supporting children, young people and families.

Building connections between children and connections between families – that is, developing social capital around children - makes children safer. Research comparing the experience of children living in different communities shows strong correlations between low levels of trust and low quality of environment on the one hand and poor health, negligent parenting, child abuse and low achievement on the other hand. Programmes that systematically build connections and social capital show remarkable results, both in terms of how a community can develop new norms of good neighbourliness, and in terms of child health and safety.

Social capital can be built and enhanced in many different ways. Changes in the manner in which current services are delivered can create extra connections between families and children, in informal ways (how space is designed for example) and in purposeful ways, such as by creating networks of care between families. Schools and youth groups can connect families and existing organisations in the community not necessarily directly connected with children – such as fire-fighters and the police – can also be willing contributors to local activities that keep children safe. Mentors and inter-generational projects are very effective in creating new connections between peer groups and across generations, tackling widespread mistrust and spreading the task of parenting into the community.

Community development programmes, which explicitly aim to build up communities, can have a major impact on the strength of communities. Examples of community development from the USA and the UK show remarkable results both in terms of changing social norms of good neighbourliness - simply creating a happy place for children to live - and improved child safety. In this report we make a number of recommendations for taking forward and learning from the many best practices that exist. We also call on Government to support and prioritise the development of communities through the Community Organiser programme, the National Citizens Service and the provisions of the Localism Bill.

Executive Summary

The Big Society agenda: where are the children?

The Coalition Government has made clear its intention to encourage greater participation in local decision making and to shift ownership of assets and of initiative into the hands of local individual, groups and communities[1]. This agenda has enormous potential for delivering new ways of supporting children, young people and families, but the connections between the Big Society agenda and children have not been fully considered. How do we ensure that children and young people – often members of a community with only a small voice – can contribute to building and can benefit from safe and friendly communities?

In this report we put the spotlight on children, young people and their families. We map out ways to generate child-friendly and family-friendly communities and explore how this can transform the well-being, safety and life chances of children and young people.

A village to raise a child

In this report we explore how we can support the efforts everyone undertakes in communities - children, young people, families and others – to make their community a better and safer place, using all their knowledge, resourcefulness, skills, networks and willingness to engage in local initiatives.

We have a particularly poor record on the care of children – in 2007 UNICEF rated UK bottom of the league of developed countries in terms of children's overall well-being and in particular in relation to children's experience of family and friends. Neglect of children has not diminished over the years and child poverty has stabilised and is now likely to get worse owing to the economic environment. Both severely limit the ability of children to form the friendships and networks that allow them to move forward in the world.

Pressures on families have 'intensified' parenting, with more and more control of children's activities; mothers and fathers may be working more but they are also spending more time directly supervising their children's activities, particularly outside the home. Children play unsupervised outside much less than they used to – a response to the increase in traffic, the fear of strangers, poor facilities and a widespread mistrust of young people within communities.

Social capital

Social capital describes the connections and trust between people in communities and neighbourhoods. It allows individuals and communities to act individually and collectively to improve their situation and to access resources.

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1. www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/coalition-documents

In this report we distinguish three different types of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking.

Bonding social capital describes strong ties within an homogenous group or family. It is a vital support for getting by on an everyday basis; but it can also have a negative effect for closed groups, if combined with few resources and few other networks. This can hold members of the group back and from achieving more.

Bridging social capital describes connections between neighbours, families and groups with different backgrounds, such as connections between young and old people, or networks between groups from different ethnic backgrounds. This is essential for getting ahead as it has the potential to open up new worlds to individuals.

Linking social capital describes the connections across boundaries between families and professionals such as social services and teachers. A person or group with linking social capital is able to get resources and information within and beyond the community.

Much research has been undertaken that shows the well-being and resilience of children is strongly linked to their stock of social capital and the quality of their neighbourhood. In short, well-connected children and young people do better. Social capital works by providing children and families with constant routine or 'natural' support from friends and neighbours so that a build-up of stress, difficulty and unhappiness does not lead to crisis and the need for acute intervention.

Social capital has degraded considerably in the UK over the past four decades. This report makes recommendations for how social capital can be built up again for the benefit of children, young people and families.

Building social capital

Adaptations in the way that current services are delivered can create extra connections between families and children – informal ways (how space is designed for example) and purposeful ways, such as creating networks of care between families and engaging users in planning and managing projects. An extension of this approach is co-production – where the users of the service specifically become partners and the emphasis of the service becomes to facilitate users to create solutions rather than to fix things itself.

Existing organisations in the community not necessarily directly connected with children – such as fire-fighters and the police – can be willing contributors to local activities that keep children safe. Meanwhile, schools and youth groups can connect families and can help to create a new generation of social entrepreneurs to undertake local action in the future.

Mentors and inter-generational projects can create new connections between peer groups and across generations, tackling widespread mistrust and spreading the task of parenting into the community.

Developing communities

Community development connects individuals in a community to well connected others – the "weaving of networks". The overall aim is to make cooperation and mutual support a social norm within a community or neighbourhood. "Keeping children safe" is a highly effective call to action in community development programmes. The approach goes beyond the development of services, to build a "core economy" that produces love and caring, where there are opportunities for people to earn entitlements to support in exchange for contributing their own skills, knowledge and time.

Development of a whole community requires skilled community organisers, who do not seek specific outcomes but who facilitate the agreement of action within the community. The first step of community development is to map the assets, hopes and fears of the community, and to understand the networks that already operate.

When asked, children and young people express strong views about what they want in relation to their communities and neighbourhoods – to be able to make a positive contribution, to be trusted, to have a nice place in which to live, to be safe.

Examples of community development from USA and UK show remarkable results both in terms of changing social norms of good neighbourliness - simply creating a happy place for children to live - and improved child safety. Without doubt, building social capital makes children safer and is extremely cost effective.

Family and community policy

For 20 years, UK family policy has increasingly supported collaboration around caring for children – among family members and among people and agencies within communities. Child protection policy, however, has not significantly developed community approaches in UK, despite a number of demonstration projects.

Under the last Labour Government, there was a wide range of community development initiatives, and now community organising, localism and volunteering are flagship policies of the current Government's Big Society agenda. This agenda remains disconnected from children and families, but there is great potential for applying these approaches to keep children safe.

Taking forward best practice

Children's services, such as maternity units, Children's Centres, play services and schools, can work systematically to facilitate connections among children, mothers, fathers, grandparents and all men and women within a community who want the opportunity to care for children and young people. By adopting the idea of co-production – where people are not just users, but indispensible partners in delivery of good outcomes, people who have vital strengths, assets and networks – organisations can do much to build norms of mutual and reciprocal care within a community.

Time banks are a particularly valuable tool, because they create a currency that measures and values giving and receiving of love and care – they shift the focus from "what can I get?" to "what can I give?" and from "what are my needs?" to "what are my strengths?"

Youth groups can provide opportunities for children and young people to contribute actively to making their communities safer and better places to live. Youth groups can provide opportunities not just to volunteer, but to be a social entrepreneur – to devise new solutions and develop new projects to improve the community and neighbourhood.

Mentoring for children and young people provides a valuable opportunity for connections to be made across different groups and ages, and provides a vital extra support to parents 'from the village'. Similarly, inter-generational projects can help to re-build trust between young and old.

Listed within this report are some of the examples of how social capital has been developed and sustained to achieve results for children and young people and particularly to keep children safe. A repository of case studies used in this report and other materials on best practices can be found on Action for Children's website, www.actionforchildren.org.uk.

Political recommendations

The Coalition Government's Big Society programme offers the potential for the development of social capital. In order that this opportunity is taken for children and young people, the Government must:

• Ensure that the new Community Organiser programme for England includes a focus on children and young people within their local communities, and on reaching people in the most isolated and deprived communities. This must include specific success measures for the programme as a whole, to increase children's wellbeing, and to ensure organisers themselves receive training in how to achieve results for children and young people[2].

• Pilot a number of large-scale and comprehensive community building projects, as detailed in this report, with the specific aim of keeping children safe through the development of social capital and preventing the need for acute and crisis intervention.

• Ensure that the roll-out and success measures of the National Citizens Service[3] are based on the success of providers in keeping young people safe through the development of community focussed social capital, particularly within areas of deprivation.

• Extend the 'right to challenge' within the localism and public service reform agendas, to give opportunities and support for children and young people to challenge and influence local planning and spending decisions that affect them.

• In revising the framework of statutory guidance for local authorities, take steps to ensure that local assets that keep children safe and develop social capital, such as parks, playgrounds and children's centres, are retained.

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2.   The programme involves the creation of 5,000 full-time community organisers over the lifetime of the current Parliament and it is recommended that a significant proportion of these organisers work in programmes designed to safeguard children.
3.   The National Citizens service will operate from July 2011 onwards to mix sixteen year olds from a variety of backgrounds and involve them in projects to help improve their communities.

Part One: Introduction – "It takes a village to raise a child"

Introduction

In this chapter we ask how we can get behind children, young people, parents and others in the community in order to help them keep children safe. We review the UK's track record in caring well for children. We look at ways that the community – "the village" - can do more to keep children safe, before problems accumulate to the extent that professional services have to be called in.

1.1 The power of looking out for each other

This report is about the 21st century village – the people that are around children when they grow up and the place in which they grow up. The responsibility for, and privilege of, caring for children does not rest just with the parents, nor just with the family as a whole. Everyone living in a neighbourhood with children shares the role of keeping them safe and helping their families to do so. How a community cares for its children is a litmus test for the health of that community.

How can we get behind the efforts of children, young people, families and communities who work to keep children and young people safe, particularly the most vulnerable? For theirs are the hands that do, the eyes that see, the ears that hear and nothing can be done without them. How can we help communities to act early and stem the flow of children who suffer neglect and abuse and end up needing professional services?

In this report we talk about "keeping children safe". This is the same as the technical term, "safeguarding", but uses language that has been repeatedly found to be highly motivating in work within communities, appealing to the human instinct to care for and protect children – anyone's children. Keeping children safe, or safeguarding, has the following three components:[4]

• Protecting children from bad things – abuse, neglect, poor health.
• Bringing children up with safe and good care.
• Giving children good chances for their future life.

Our starting point is the knowledge, the commitment, the inexhaustible resourcefulness and the ability that children, young people, families and all caring adults have when it comes to making the world safer for children – this instinct to care together for all children is a crowning feature of the human race. In this report, we see the power of children, families and others *looking out for each other*.

The currency of this power is "social capital" – the connections around children and families that open up networks to resources and that enable collective action. But social capital in the UK has been eroded in the last decades. 97% of communities in the UK are more socially fragmented than they were 40 years ago.[5] The level of social trust has almost halved in this period, affecting deprived communities the most.[6]

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4. See www.safeguardingchildren.org.uk. This approach can be found in the Government's *Every Child Matters* report (2003), the Children Bill of 2004, the Childcare Act of 2006 and the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* paper in 2010.
5. Dorling D et al. (2008), p29
6. See ESDS International, www.esds.ac.uk/international/access/133239.asp & Almond G & Verba S (1963)

We start this report by looking at the track record of keeping children safe in the UK. During the late 1990s, a group of 13 teenagers in Washington DC formed a Youth Grand Jury to investigate what the city was doing to reduce and prevent substance misuse among young people.[7]
Their report, Speaking Truth to Power, indicted the Mayor, the drug agency and the District Government for failing to fund any prevention and treatment programmes. If children were to sit in judgment on our track record of keeping children safe in the UK, what would their verdict be?

1.2 The UK in the dock: our track record on child welfare

1.2.1 UNICEF report on child welfare in UK

In 2007, UNICEF published a well publicised and much discussed report comparing indicators of child welfare in the UK and elsewhere. The report showed British children to be, on average, among the least happy in the developed world.[8]

Overall quality of life: UK ranked 21st out of 21

Family and friendships – 21st
British children were found to have the worst relationships on average in the developed world. Less than two-thirds of British families said they ate together regularly. Britain was also ranked last when relationships among 11-15 year olds were examined.

Health and safety - 12th
Children born in wealthy nations now enjoy unprecedented levels of health and safety. Britain found itself ranked second behind Sweden as the place where children are least likely to die in an accident. However, this good performance was marred by the UK's relatively high rates of infant mortality and low birth weight. The UK also fared poorly when it came to the proportion of children aged 12 months to 23 months immunised against the major vaccine-preventable diseases, for which it was ranked in the bottom third.

Sex, drink and drugs – 21st
The UK easily outstripped all other countries when it came to bad and risky behaviour. British children were more likely to have been drunk or had sex than those of any other country. The UK also had the second highest teenage pregnancy rate. British teenagers were much more likely to be involved in a fight in the past 12 months than other nationalities and more likely to have been bullied.

Education - 17th
Regarded by UNICEF as vital to a child's future life chances, Britain fared relatively well when 15 year olds' ability in reading, maths and science was assessed, ranking ninth. But the UK's overall position fell when its poor record in persuading pupils to stay on in education and training was taken into account.

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7. Story quoted in New Economics Foundation (2008)
8. UNICEF (2007)

Poverty and inequality - 18th
Despite being the fifth largest economy, Britain was ranked 18th for material well-being, ahead of Ireland, Hungary and Poland. When it came to the number of children living in households where income was less than 50% of the national median, the UK was ahead only of the US. British children were also among the most likely to have a jobless parent and Britain was in the bottom third for homes with less than 10 books.

Happiness - 20th
British children consider themselves the least content on average in the wealthy world. More than a fifth of UK youngsters said they rated their physical and mental health as poor - Latvia, Russia and Lithuania fared worse. Girls reported lower levels of satisfaction than boys. UK youngsters were among the least likely to enjoy school or to rate their happiness levels as above average. Overall, they were the most likely to admit to feeling left out, awkward and lonely.

1.2.2 Maltreatment

Action for Children has estimated that up to 1.5 million children are affected by neglect in UK – defined as a serious failure to meet a child's basic physical and psychological needs. In a survey of 3,000 8-10 year olds, 61% had seen suspected signs of neglect in their peers.[9]

A major survey of maltreatment of children was published early in 2011 and compared surveys in 1998 and 2009 of 18-24 year olds who were asked to look back at their childhood. This showed reduced levels of abuse in that period but not in parental neglect. Measures of neglect in this study were going hungry, being dirty, being left in the care of younger siblings and not being taken to the doctor when ill.[10]

	1998	2009
Physical violence from adult, one or more times	13.2%	9.9%
Physical violence from adult, regularly	5.7%	1.8%
Sexual abuse	6.8%	5.0%
Verbal violence	14.5%	6.0%
Neglect, just one kind	10.0%	10.0%
Neglect, two or more kinds	2.0%	2.0%

9. Action for Children (2010)
10. NSPCC (2011)

Another part of this study took a snapshot of the experiences of 11-17 year olds:

- 6.9% were physically hit by an adult; parents were responsible in 55% of cases.
- 4.8% were sexually assaulted by an adult or another child or young person.
- 9.8% experienced severe neglect.
- 18.6% - all the above put together, equivalent to 973,000 children.

The consequences of neglect typically include poor social skills, lack of friends and being bullied,[11] all things that undermine the ability of children to form the connections around them on which they depend for happiness and well-being.

1.2.3 Child poverty[12]

The most widely used definition of poverty is "income poverty" - where a household income is less than 60% of the median UK income after housing costs have been paid. This is £247/week for a parent living alone with two children (5 -14 years old) and £333/week for a couple living with children (5-14 years old). Poverty defined in this way has been decreasing for the last 10 years, but rose in 2005/06 and 2006/07, falling again very slightly in 2007/08.

The Government's *Households Below Average Income* annual survey showed that in 2008/09, 13.4 million people were income poor, 53% of whom are in households that included at least one child. Poverty is linked to reduced educational achievement. For example, 93% of pupils in the richest tenth of areas of England score at or above level 2 reading at Key Stage 1, but only 73% reach this in the poorest tenth of areas. The same correlation is true for poverty and health.

Social participation is radically less in poor households, indicating a marked inequality in the connections and social capital that these children have access to.

Parents wanted but could not afford…	Poorest fifth	Richest fifth
A hobby or leisure activity for their children	15%	0%
To have friends round for tea or a snack once a fortnight	18%	0%
To send their children on a school trip at least once a term	12%	0%
To have a one-week holiday away from home with family	60%	4%

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11.   Action for Children (2009)
12.   All figures in this section taken from Child Poverty Action Group (2010)

The role of poverty itself in making children unhappy is not completely clear, however. Preliminary results from the major UK Government longitudinal survey, Understanding Society, covering 100,000 people in 40,000 households, does not show a link between poverty and child happiness when other factors are taken into account – family composition and socio-demographic status.[13] Relationships have a bigger impact on child happiness – the relationship between the parents, the child's relationship with siblings and with others at school.[14]

1.2.4 Pressures on parenting – the erosion of community care for children

Long-term trends in industrial and post-industrial western societies indicate that families have become smaller in size, and more isolated from extended family and community connections, as work has moved out of the home and local area. This has changed the way that children are cared for, from a collective pattern to an individual one. Mothers are still too often expected to take on the role of managing families while there are correspondingly low expectations on everyone else to play an active part.

While there still exists a big gap in time spent caring for children between mothers and fathers, there has been an increase in the time spent caring for children by both parents.[15] Changes to the economy over the last 50 years are challenging the primary carer model. It is not possible for most families to survive on the income of just one parent. 50% of mothers of 9 month old babies are in employment[16]. There is also a growing recognition of the need to support grandparents' caring roles.[17]

1.2.5 The reduction in public space

Gordon Jack, in his study, *Place Matters*, has referred to the "shrinking world of childhood".[18] A focus group study of parents and children in 2010 showed that parents believe there are fewer opportunities for outdoor free play than there were during their own childhoods.[19]

In an ICM poll in 2010, 47% of adults thought it was unsafe for children to play outside unsupervised, yet 73% of children want to play outside more.[20] Many parents think it is bad parenting to let children play unsupervised outside.[21] Parents also worry about other people: 55% of parents in the aforementioned ICM poll worried that the noise their children would make outside might upset the neighbours.

A wide variety of reasons for this phenomenon have been found in the research.

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13. Knies G (2011)
14. Wolke D and Skew AJ (2011); Ermish J et al. (2011)
15. Oxford University Press Release, 7 April 2010, *Parents treble time they spend on childcare compared with 1975*, reporting on a paper delivered at a conference by Prof Oriel Sullivan. This press release achieved substantial coverage in the mainstream press. See also Fatherhood Institute (2011)
16. Dex S & Ward H (2007)
17. See Grandparents Association (www.grandparents-association.org.uk) and Grandparents Plus (www.grandparentsplus.org.uk)
18. Jack G (2010)
19. Gleave J (2010)
20. Playday 2010 Research; Jack G (2010)
21. Gleave J (2010)

Traffic

Traffic is rated highly as a concern of both parents and children.[22] Speeding and bad driving are key fears among children.[23]

The danger is real. Road traffic in UK has grown by 85% since 1980.[24] In 2009, 1,656 child pedestrians were killed or seriously injured, though this is 61% less than the average for 1994-1998[25] and the UK rates top of the industrialised world for child road safety as we have seen above in the UNICEF report, section 1.2.1.

Fear of teenagers, fear of antisocial behaviour

In our own focus groups of children for this project, fear of teenagers, particularly groups of boys, featured strongly. This finding is replicated in the research.[26]

Adults regarding children as a nuisance – a lack of trust in the community

Children often report being regarded as a nuisance and being 'moved on'.[27] A group of young people simply socialising outdoors can be perceived as a threat by other residents in the neighbourhood.

In a survey of 1001 7-17 year olds in 2010, around one quarter of 7-17 year olds and around a half of 16-17 year olds said they had been treated unfairly because of their age when out shopping, using public transport or using local leisure facilities.[28]

There is a lack of connection between generations in the UK as extended families have become less connected and as social activities have become more divided according to age group. 80% of 15-24 year olds have no friends in their 70s and 70% of those older than 75 have no friends in their 30s. This lack of connection leads to mistrust. An Age Concern Survey in 2006 found that one third of older people fear crime and say this makes them feel lonely and isolated. Of those surveyed, 72% believed that older people are more likely to be a victim of street crime.[29] Research shows that when people of different ages have contact with each other, their overall attitude to the other group changes for the better.[30]

Youth crime is not actually on the increase and the reaction against anti-social behaviour is often an over-reaction to minor problems.[31] Indeed, sometimes, it is the young people themselves that are most vulnerable and need protection.[32]

Poor facilities and lack of space

Poor facilities and the lack of space come further down the list of reasons given by children for not using public space - the problem of there being 'nothing to do'.[33]

22. Boyland M (2007); Gleave J (2010)
23. Barnardos (2005)
24. Department for Transport (2009)
25. Department for Transport (2010)
26. Camina M (2004); Boyland M (2007); Gleave J (2010)
27. Gleave J (2010); Boyland M (2007)
28. Children's Rights Alliance for England (2010)
29. Age Concern (2002)
30. Age UK (2011)
31. Gill T (2007)
32. Cops D (2009)
33. Gleave J (2010); Boyland M (2007); Jack G (2010)

Stranger danger

Very high on the list of parents' and children's fears is the fear of strangers – of kidnap and abduction. [34] This issue came up in the focus groups of children that we organised for this research. When asked whom they trust, children put adults into the following order, most trusted first: known adults, a woman with small children, a woman, a man.[35] The widespread concern about strangers has been fuelled by high profile cases of child abduction and murder in the last decades.

This widely held fear of strangers feeds through also to the strangers themselves and has created reluctance among many to help a child in distress or danger.[36] An ICM poll in 2010 found 44% of men and 28% of women were wary of helping a child in need of assistance, for fear of misinterpretation.[37]

This fear is completely out of proportion to reality. Compared to 1,656 road traffic deaths and serious injuries among child pedestrians each year, and 1-2 murders of children every week by a family member or other known adult, an average of 6 children every year are killed by strangers and there has been no increase or decrease in this for many years.[38]

Frank Furedi has analysed this scare-driven "be careful, you may get hurt" approach in his book, *Culture of Fear* (2002). Furedi observes that the fear of strangers starts in the maternity unit, with a fear of the abduction of the baby. A whole genre of advice to parents and children about stranger danger has grown up.

Tim Gill, in a study of children in public space, has argued that exaggerated feelings of stranger danger are bad for children – it creates misplaced anxiety, makes controlling parenting a mark of good parenting, and undermines the trust between individuals that is the building block of social capital.[39] Gill quotes the example of a young girl in 2002, who escaped from her nursery and drowned in a nearby pond. The inquest heard from a man who passed by but did not respond because he thought his intervention might be interpreted as an abduction by a stranger.

1.3 The response – a village to care for a child?

The response to the ever-growing pressure on families has been to expand the role of services and facilities. State spending on family support increased by 61% between 1997 and 2006.[40] In this report we consider an additional response, one that comes one step before referring a child or family to an externally funded professional. We look at the community around the child, in line with how parenting has been organised since the dawn of the human race - the "village".

The charity Action for Children has noted the problem of "inadequate recognition, promotion and use of children and families' wider networks to promote well-being and help sustain positive change over the long-term."[41] Action for Children advocates working with children and families, building on their interests, knowledge, experience, skills and networks, in order to shape their external environment, not just seeing children and families as passive recipients of services. The organisation advocates early engagement to prevent the accumulation of problems that so often lead to neglect and abuse and the need for formal professional intervention.

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34. Gleave J (2010)
35. Barnes J et al. (2006)
36. Gleave J (2010); Boyland M (2007)
37. *Playday 2010 Research*
38. Gill T (2007)
39. Ib.
40. Daly M (2010)
41. Action for Children and nef (2009)

In this report we ask: can the community itself, and the people living within it, take more ownership of the task of keeping local children safe, reaching out to and caring for isolated and marginalised families? Could the first line of defence against abuse and neglect – namely early and on-going care and support to prevent the accumulation of risks to children - be a community that looks out for children and families, sees distress when it is present and responds attentively in an attitude of good neighbourliness? Can reciprocal arrangements be developed, where the norm is not just to receive support and feel entitled to it, but also to give?

Can there be more collaboration between community and services, in line with their very real interdependence to achieve any outcome, so that children and families are partners, not just customers, helping each other to make the links to the right services and support?

1.4 Conclusion

The whole community has the responsibility for and the privilege of looking after children and young people and keeping them safe. In this report we explore how we can support the efforts everyone undertakes in communities - children, young people, families and others – to make the community a better and safer place, using all their knowledge, resourcefulness, skills, networks and willingness to engage.

We have a particularly poor record on the care of children – in 2007 UNICEF rated UK bottom of the league of developed countries in terms of children's overall well-being and in particular in relation to children's experience of family and friends. Neglect of children has not diminished over the years and child poverty has stabilised and is now likely to get worse owing to the economic environment. Both severely limit the ability of children to form the friendships and networks that allow them to move forward in the world.

Pressures on families have 'intensified' parenting, with more and more control of children's activities; mothers and fathers may be working more but they are also spending more time directly supervising their children's activities, particularly outside the home. Children play unsupervised outside much less than they used to – a response to the increase in traffic, the fear of strangers, poor facilities and a widespread mistrust of young people within communities.

The remainder of this report is set out as follows:
- In Chapter 2, we describe the different forms of social capital and look at the correlation between children's welfare and social capital.
- In Chapter 3, we look at a wide variety of projects working with children, young people and families that actively create social capital.
- In Chapter 4, we review full-scale community development programmes that build social capital around the aim of keeping children safe.
- In Chapter 5, we describe the evolution of policies for families and communities over the last three decades, and points to the lack of social capital and community-based work in keeping children safe.
- In Chapter 6, we draw conclusions and make proposals for both practice and policy.

Part Two: Social capital – well connected families and children do better

Introduction

In this section we define social capital and describe three types – bonding, bridging and linking social capital. We recognise that not all social capital works for the good. We review the correlations between social capital and child well-being.

2.1 Definitions

Social capital is a way of describing and analysing the connections between people. There is a multiplicity of definitions and lively debate between different schools of thought. The following are examples.

- "Some aspects of social structure that facilitate certain actions of individuals within the structure" (Coleman 1988).
- "The capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structure" (Portes 1998).
- "Features of social organisation, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam 2000).
- "Resources available to individuals and communities through their social relationships" (Kawachi et al. 2004).
- "The information, trust and norms of reciprocity inhering in one's social networks" (Woolcock 1998).

These are not contradictory – they are views of the same situation from different angles. They have two things in common – **social capital allows individuals and communities to act individually and collectively to improve their situation, and it enables them to secure resources.**

We talk about both "community" and "neighbourhood". A neighbourhood is geographical whereas a community forms around a common interest or experience and is not necessarily geographical. When discussing the care and protection of children, both are highly relevant - both neighbourhoods and communities playing an important role.

We apply the concept to children and talk about "social capital around children" – that is, the connections that children and their families have. Putnam, in his seminal book, Bowling Alone, sums up social capital in relation to children – "social capital keeps bad things from happening to good kids."[42] Children, however, rarely feature in the social capital literature.[43]

Much social capital resides within families – the number of people in a parental role and the relationships between them, the interest of adults in the child's life, the level of support for and monitoring of the child's well-being, the availability of extended family. All these bring about

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42. Putnam R (2000), p296
43. Leonard M (2005)

direct benefits for children[44] and, indeed, are the biggest influences on child well-being.[45] We do not, however, focus on these aspects of social capital, focusing instead on the neighbourhood and community. But we also know that the environment in which parents bring up children has a critical impact on their capacity to give good parental care.[46]

2.2 Types of social capital

Putnam (2000) and also Woolcock (1998) have defined a useful typology of social capital that helps us look at the different types of connections around children and families.

Bonding social capital – this describes the connections within a group – family, close friends, an homogeneous group; such connections are crucial for "getting by".[47]

Bridging social capital – this describes the connections between neighbours and groups with different interests and/or different backgrounds; these connections can cross class, race, ethnicity and gender; such connections are useful for "getting ahead".[48]

Linking social capital – this describes the connections across explicit, formal or institutionalised boundaries, such as between communities and professionals working in the community;[49] an individual with good social capital of this kind is able to get resources, ideas and information from institutions within and beyond the community.[50]

2.3 The dark side of social capital and how it can be overcome

Bonding social capital is crucial for getting by, but it can also perpetuate disadvantage. People with few resources and smaller networks can form strong bonds that do not mobilise better resources, or even actively prevent people from accessing them. [51] Some groups perpetuate destructive behaviour, for example peer groups that encourage low attainment.[52] This tendency for social capital to build itself in its own image perpetuates inequalities between the haves and have-nots.[53]

Bonding social capital can have advantages and disadvantages at the same time. Consider the strongly bonded groups of mothers that often form round services for pre-school children. These provide vital support to mothers in a similar and equally unfamiliar situation and they are connected to the centre and all the further connections the centre has. And yet these groups can be exclusive of other parents – mothers who are different or fathers. Groups of mothers dependent on each other and with a strong belief in the primary carer idea, often supported by professionals

44. Ferguson KM (2006)

45. Jack G (2006)

46. Ib.

47. Woolcock M (1998); Woolcock M (2001); Putnam R (2000)

48. Ib.

49. Szretzer S & Woolcock M (2004)

50. Woolcock M & Narayan D (2000); Woolcock (2001)

51. Portes A (1998)

52. An ethnographic study of a disadvantaged high school in Clarendon Heights in the US, looked at a peer group, "Hallway Hangers" that devalued conventional success and levelled down its members' aspirations. Macleod J (1987)

53. Rowson J et al. (2010)

with similar ideas, may weaken investment in the parental partnership at home, which has more influence on child well-being.[54] Where services take the trouble to organise groups of fathers, such as Children North East in Newcastle, similar problems of cliques occur, so the service makes a particular effort to renew the groups, constantly moving the fathers on into other networks[55] and building bridging social capital.

Similarly bridging capital can have a downside – if connections are used by individuals to get out of a community rather than to stay within it and invest in it. The exit of well-connected people is a problem is some areas of severe economic decline.

Ideally a mix of all three types of social capital is present. For example, bridging social capital can overcome the exclusiveness of groups with strong bonding capital. Linking social capital can help groups who seem self-sufficient to access new information and services.

2.4 Social capital protects children

2.4.1 Large scale studies

There is a wealth of evidence that plentiful social capital protects children and that a low level of social capital puts them at greater risk of poor health, child abuse and low educational achievement.[56] Studies in the 1960s were already showing that parents who are more isolated are more likely to maltreat children[57] and the issue has been carefully studied ever since. The US Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect has stated "dysfunctional families are often part of a dysfunctional environment".[58] The UK National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse in 1996 identified the promotion of a child-friendly community through community development as one of the overarching means of preventing children abuse.[59]

The UK based Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) covered 14,256 children and finds a correlation between area poverty and the maltreatment of children – children in council owned homes were seven times more likely to suffer abuse.[60] This study found that the rate of childhood abuse correlates with family mobility and weak social networks. Another large Australian study of 4,983 4-5 year olds in 257 neighbourhoods found a correlation between conduct disorders and low socio-economic status, low neighbourhood safety and a low sense of belonging.[61]

The UK Government funded Understanding Society study, covering 100,000 people in 40,000 households, has recently reported on environmental factors in relations to sense of community.[62]

54. Adrienne Burgess, Fatherhood Institute, personal communication
55. Ib.
56. Gordon J (2006)
57. Young L (1964)
58. Quoted in Barnes J et al. (2006)
59. Wright S (2004)
60. Ib., p55
61. Edwards B & Broomfield LM (2009)
62. Buck N & Rabe B (2011)

A sense of community is positively correlated with:

- Being older.
- Being female.
- Having more children.
- Being better educated.
- Being a home owner.
- Being a resident for a long time.
- Living in an area of less deprivation.

2.4.2 Social support networks

Children whose families enjoy rich social networks have been found to achieve better outcomes – less dropping out of school less membership of gangs, less delinquency, better employment and less depression in teenage years.[63]

Research on resilience in children – the ability to 'bounce back' and to cope with difficult circumstances - has shown that supportive relationships are a key factor, not just within the family, but with peers, neighbours and supportive adults.[64] Strategies to build resilience proposed by Action for Children include creating the different forms of social capital around the child at every age – networks for parents of babies and pre-school children; friendships for children of primary school age; social support networks, mentors and opportunities to help others and "make a difference" for teenagers.

High population mobility erodes social capital – it is associated with high levels of crime and victimisation and this association is larger than that with poverty.[65] People constantly on the move cannot build local networks. A study of families whose children had been admitted with physical injuries due to child abuse found that 66% of the families had been at their latest address less than 10 months and only 5% kept their location unchanged for 30 months or longer.[66]

2.4.3 Quality of neighbourhood

Parental perceptions of the quality of the neighbourhood correlate with outcomes for children. Better perceptions link to less depression, violence and delinquency and better physical and mental health and educational achievement.[67]

For children particularly, the quality of their surrounding environment is consistently an issue of primary concern,[68] impacting heavily on their quality of life.[69]

63. Ferguson KM (2006)
64. Action for Children (2007)
65. Crutchfield R et al. (1982), Sampson R et al. (1997)
66. Lauer et al. (1974)
67. Ferguson KM (2006)
68. Ib., pp143-5; Camina M (2004); Gill T (2008)
69. Barnes J et al. (2006), p133 *Children and Families in Communities* (NSPCC/Wiley), p133

James Q Wilson's "broken windows" theory (1982) proposes that the appearance of the neighbourhood influences behaviours such as high risk sexual behaviours.[70] In a study in South Carolina USA, reported in 2010, neighbourhood characteristics observable on a drive-through accounted for 23% of the variance in parent perceptions of children's safety in the home, even when social class and residential stability were statistically controlled.[71]

Mayer and Jencks (1989) have termed the influence of disorganised communities on children "contagion" – if children grow up in a community characterised by crime and alcohol or drug abuse, the children will be more likely to do these things themselves.[72]

Gordon Jack (2004, 2006) argues that place – where children "feel at home" – provides a sense of identity and this is closely and causally related to well-being. A more positive experience of a place, for example a positive perception of traffic and crime and the degree of surveillance and regulation, leads to a stronger attachment to place. Jack looked at children in the care system who had repeatedly been moved around and unable to form an attachment to place: such children suffer from a decreased sense of self, increased levels of anxiety and greater vulnerability to depression.[73]

2.4.4 Other factors

Other factors found to correlate with positive child outcomes are greater engagement by parents in local organisations, perceptions by parents of trust and safety in a neighbourhood, the degree of family participation in a religious community and the quality of the schools.[74]

Ethnic diversity does not appear to erode social capital, even given the tendency for individuals to socialise only with those within their own ethnic groups. In a recent study, no connection was found that could not be explained by the generally increased deprivation of racially diverse neighbourhoods.[75]

2.4.5 Parenting in a harsh environment

One of the means by which social capital works is by providing families and children with multiple opportunities to share and deal with problems at an early stage – this prevents the "accumulation of risk" over time, something that undermines the resilience of children.[76]

Lower opportunities for social interaction lead to more stress, worse health and more problems caring for children.[77] Conversely, social capital is associated with decreases in the chance of neglectful parenting, harsh parenting and domestic violence.[78] Factors reducing risk of abuse and neglect by 2-5 year olds include religious affiliation, perceived social support for mother, and support within the neighbourhood.[79]

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70. Wilson JQ & Kelling G (1982)
71. McDonell JR (2007)
72. Mayer SE & Jencks C (1989), p1441
73. Jack G (2010)
74. Ferguson KM (2006)
75. Letki N (2011)
76. Action for Children (2007)
77. Jack G (2004); Jack G (2006)
78. Zolotor AJ & Runyan DK (2006)
79. Runyan DK et al. (1998)

Parenting tends to be harsher in a hostile environment, but this is not necessarily bad parenting – it can be done without any decrease in affection and could be a necessary adaptation to raising children in the absence of collective socialisation outside the home.[80]

2.5 Conclusion

Social capital describes the connections and trust between people in communities and neighbourhoods. It allows individuals and communities to act individually and collectively to improve their situation and to access resources.

In this report we distinguish three different types of social capital – bonding, bridging and linking.

Bonding social capital describes strong ties within an homogenous group or family. It is a vital support for getting by on an everyday basis; but it can also have a negative effect for closed groups, if combined with few resources and few other networks. This can hold members of the group back and from achieving more.

Bridging social capital describes connections between neighbours, families and groups with different backgrounds, such as connections between young and old people, or networks between groups from different ethnic backgrounds. This is essential for getting ahead as it has the potential to open up new worlds to individuals.

Linking social capital describes the connections across boundaries between families and professionals such as social services and teachers. A person or group with linking social capital is able to get resources and information within and beyond the community.

Much research has been undertaken that shows the well-being and resilience of children is strongly linked to their stock of social capital and the quality of their neighbourhood. In short, well-connected children and young people do better. Social capital works by providing children and families with constant routine or 'natural' support from friends and neighbours so that a build-up of stress, difficulty and unhappiness does not lead to crisis and the need for acute intervention.

Social capital has degraded considerably in the UK over the past four decades. This report makes recommendations for how social capital can be built up again for the benefit of children, young people and families.

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80.   Barnes J et al. (2006)

Part Three: Building social capital around existing projects

Introduction

In this chapter we look at a wide variety of projects working with children, young people and families that specifically create social capital – connections between people in the community and neighbourhood to improve the situation for children and families "in the village".

3.1 Building social capital through children's services

Mario Luis Small, in his book *Unanticipated Gains* (2009), makes the case that organisations within a community are uniquely able to generate social capital in the way they go about their daily business – companies, gyms, schools, childcare facilities, places of worship and so on. Relatively simple adaptations in the way they operate can radically change the amount of social capital that they generate. Take a laundrette for example: if people are encouraged to stay in order to supervise their washing, the laundrette becomes a meeting place where people regularly spend a substantial amount of time together. Small makes the point that existing organisations are already rich in resources, able to create networks through which resources transfer and are around long enough for the slow process of building social capital. Based on a study of mothers using childcare centres in New York, Small found that participation by mothers resulted in lower material and mental hardship, largely through the formation of friendships between them. But he found that some centres created much more of this kind of benefit than others and it was not related to extra spending. Small identified four ways of creating social capital.

- Create the conditions for people to interact with each other and form connections 'by accident' while in the course of the normal activity. The space and timing of dropping off and picking up children can be arranged to increase connections. Events for children can be organised such that participation by parents is encouraged and connections are made. Small defines the kinds of conditions that do this well – frequent contact, lengthy contact, a relaxed 'non-competitive' situation. Small observes that childcare centres can nurture remarkably intimate relationships of trust between mothers - the organisation acts as a kind of endorser of these connections, adding to the trust. (We saw in section 2.3, however, how this social capital can raise problems as well and needs to be managed well by the service to ensure that individuals are not held back or excluded.)

- Actively organise people to look after each other – more experienced parents working with new parents, older children connecting with younger children in school (buddies, mentors, mixing years circles of friends and so on), emergency contact networks among parents that specifically include more isolated families.

- Channel specific responsibilities to members/users such that, in order to gain the benefits of the organisation, they have to plan together and work together – examples might include fund-raising for better facilities, improving the premises, requiring parents to participate in a day trip with the children, involving parents in hiring staff, a local campaign against cuts etc. If there is more to do, there is more to gain in terms of social capital. Mutual solidarity around a shared campaign that requires planning and organising together is one of the strongest forms of social capital, sometimes called "collective efficacy".

- Connect users to external resources - employment, educational opportunities for children, health and wellbeing services, cultural opportunities, community development projects and thus strengthening linking social capital. This can be done by distributing information, making referrals, negotiating free or discounted services for users. Small observes that this function is more important in poorer areas where this linking social capital is in shorter supply.

These approaches were adopted into the philosophy of Sure Start and other family projects and are now widespread in UK.

Case study: Action for Children's Warren Park Children's Centre, Kingston – connecting disabled children with other children

Warren Park Children's Centre provides special support services for disabled children and their families. Particular attention has been paid to enabling the children to participate in sport – football and cricket – and in the performing arts – with the aim of being able to join other children who are not disabled.

Case study: St Michael's Fellowship, Brixton – building connections between families through food and film

St Michael's Fellowship has an active programme of engaging with young mothers and fathers. Cook Up sessions offer mothers the opportunity to cook together, learning how to cook low-cost nutritional meals with basic ingredients, and then eating together with the children. The friendships created in these sessions continue outside the service and reduce the mothers' isolation. Meanwhile, as part of an active programme of engaging young fathers, St Michael's Fellowship engaged young fathers and mothers in the production of two film dramas, one on the impact of domestic violence on children (Kim) and one about the importance of mothers and fathers cooperating and the importance of children knowing both parents where this is safe (Big Man). Having pulled together a wide range of young men and women in a joint creative project, the film was screened in local cinemas to packed audiences of young families and prompted frank discussions about the need for cooperation between mothers and fathers. The participation in a joint creative project created new bonds and developed new skills among young parents in the community.

Case study: Action for Children's Leamington and Warwick West Children's Centres – creating an informal space for families to meet each other, no strings attached

The Leamington and Warwick West Children's Centres work on the premise that the building of supportive and trusting relationships is key to accessing both formal and informal support – for both the parents and their children. Based on this mediatory model, the team has set up a coffee shop for parents with children under 5 to act as a place in which such relationships could be formed. The shop has been purposefully set up on the end of the high street closest to areas of disadvantage in order to catch the parents from such estates as they walk into Brunswick town centre. With no barriers to entry or sign up forms required, the coffee shop has become a welcoming and friendly atmosphere for the surrounding neighbourhoods, attracting over 500 families accessing the shop since it opened in 2003.

3.2 Co-production and time banks

Working together on a project within a community is one of the most effective ways of building social capital. Services can be co-produced with those who use the services, creating not only better services, but greater connections between those delivering them.

Action for Children and the New Economics Foundation have taken forward the idea of co-production in relation to children's services.[81] ResPublica has developed these ideas also in two earlier reports. In The Civil Effect, local "co-commissioning" hubs are proposed to stimulate co-creation and co-production of services, pulling in local skills and capabilities.[82] The earlier report, The Ownership State, goes yet further, proposing not just co-production but co-ownership of services.[83]

The co-production idea recognises the reality that all the outcomes sought by public services, such as health and high achievement, are actually fundamentally dependent on users and cannot be delivered without them.[84] A focus on outcomes inevitably leads to the need for people to become partners and co-producers. In co-production, people are assets and their networks and skills and commitment are resources worthy of investing in. The whole producer/consumer distinction breaks down. Management, leadership and authority become devolved. Involving children in this way builds their self-esteem, develops their team-working skills and their social skills, and widens their networks. They become the change, and the role of the service is to facilitate, not to fix. The result is networks of mutual support within the community that engage families and children,

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81. Action for Children and nef (2009)
82. Singh A (2010)
83. Blond P (2009)
84. Cummins J & Miller C (2007)

with reciprocal giving and receiving. These act earlier than formal services do and generate a much more preventative approach, tackling problems before they escalate and accumulate. Long-term relationships and a social norm of good neighbourliness emerge.[85]

This approach goes well beyond common approaches in work with families and children. Co-production is not:

- Consultation with people by managers of a service.
- Services just based in the community that do not involve reciprocal giving and receiving.
- Personalised budgets that are about empowering users of services, rather than developing reciprocity.

One particularly valuable tool in co-production can be time banking, which creates a currency for the contribution of everyone, allowing all contributions of care to be measured and valued and to earn entitlements to other things. Time banks create reciprocity, equality and all three kinds of social capital, bonding, bridging and linking. They have been used in work with young offenders[86], providing them with benefits such as driving lessons, education and access to social events in exchange for their contributing time to the community. Time banking has been used by the London and South Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust in work with young adults with mental health problems. Time banks are used in mutual childminding arrangements – Time Banks UK has published guidelines about how to make such arrangements in a safe way.[87]

Case study: Glyncoch Youth Time Banking Project, Pontypridd, South Wales – making contribution to the community a way of earning entitlements to benefits within the community

Glyncoch is a housing estate on the outskirts of Pontypridd in South Wales. It is an area of high unemployment, high child poverty and low educational achievement. The contributions of time by young people to community project earn them credits that can be used to go on trips and take part in activities. In order to obtain these benefits, the young people are helped to consider their particular skills, talents and experiences can be applied to local problems. This has led to the creation of a number of new initiatives, such as environmental projects, sexual health education sessions, the development of a DVD on arson, youth groups and support for other community groups.

85. New Economics Foundation (2008)
86. Drakeford M & Gregory L (2010)
87. www.timebanking.org

Case study: Learning to Lead at the Blue School, Somerset – children decide what needs to be done and work together to get it done

Learning to Lead was developed by a teacher and a parent in the Blue School in Wells, Somerset. Students identify what they think is needed to improve their school and then self-elect themselves into student-led teams, in which they develop their areas and are responsible for turning their ideas into positive action. This has involved over 250 of the 1500 children in the school, with 22 teams, including Healthy Living, Africa School, Beautiful School and Finance Support. Students learn team working, agenda planning, goal setting, budgeting, management and accountability. The initiative has started to spread to other schools across UK.

3.3 Mobilising the wider community around children

Caring for children can mobilise a whole community, men as well as women, building social capital around families and children.

As part of a community development project in South Carolina USA, described more fully in chapter 4, two-thirds of the most active group of volunteers were men. For example, fire-fighters volunteered to participate in community activities to keep children safe. Fire-fighters are uniformed, respected in the community, employed to care for the community and are frequently available. The fire-fighters not only gave time, but also space – a drop-in for mothers was created at a fire station.

Case study: Rothbury fire services and children's services build a dual purpose centre and help each other in keeping children safe

In Rothbury, Northumberland, children's services and the Fire and Rescue service pooled budgets to refurbish a disused ambulance station to house both a Children's Centre and a fire-station on one site. After a unique collaboration in the design process, the centre

opened in May 2009, with an observation window in the community room allowing the children to see the fire engines. This co-location instantly triggered the formation of new social capital. The centre is constantly busy and vibrant as different people interact. Two days every week a firefighter opens the Children's Centre and is present to advise parents on safety and sell safety equipment for homes. Meanwhile the firefighters learn more about keeping children safe. Different networks are created as two workforces interact, one largely female, one largely male.

Case study: Met-Track – the police supporting young people in the community

John Powell, a Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police in London, founded Met-Track in the borough of Bexley in 2005 "to offer sport as the healthy alternative in life to young people who might not otherwise necessarily get the opportunity".[88] Met-Track organised showcase events in different London boroughs where children from all local secondary schools were invited to sample a day's coaching by leading athletes at an international level. Interested youth could then get further involved by participating in weekly squad training by an international level athlete. Currently, Met-Track also offers instruction by leading dance instructors and coaches or players from local professional football clubs. Given its cost effectiveness and the ease with which it can be replicated, Met-Track has grown to be present in 19 of London's 32 boroughs. Speaking about the journey of Met-Track and the impact it has had, the founder John Powell shared with ResPublica:

"*Met-Track has had a huge impact on hundreds, if not thousands of young Londoners' lives, steering them away from the anti-social behaviour or offending radar. We are immensely proud that well over 80% of the young people who engage with Met-Track either stop offending, or avoid offending and make positive life decisions as the result of mentoring by our coaches.*

I have personally taken on three Met-Track recruits in my voluntary role as a sprints coach, and their lives have changed forever. They have experienced national and international competition, travelled to America, and completely turned previously negative lifestyles around for the good - all due to turning up one day with a pair of trainers to a local Met-Track session!"

3.4 Schools as an engine of social capital

Schools are at the heart of every community and are a major builder of social capital simply by connecting children with each other. Schools routinely promote specific programmes to enhance these connections, for example promoting respect and listening and tackling socially disruptive behaviour. Engaging with parents is also widely seen as good practice, supporting them as co-producers of their children's success in education. Some schools, however, take social capital building to a much higher level than others.

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88.   Met Track, see www.met-track.com

Case study: Coopers Lane Primary School, Lewisham – a systematic programme to involve mothers and fathers to improve educational activities, save money and build connections between families and children

Coopers Lane Primary School in Lewisham has a strong programme of involving both mothers and fathers in the school. (One of the barriers faced at the start was fear that involvement of fathers could usurp the position of mothers. The head teacher worked hard with the mothers to sell the idea of collective care of children and now mothers are a key agent for recruiting fathers.)

A group of fathers (and a few mothers) recently dredged the school pond and are currently building a Peace Garden, led by a father who is professional designer. Social activity has development among these parents as a result.

The key to success is the very high expectations of fathers and mothers to be actively involved. The head teacher, for example, does not accept that employment should get in the way of parents' helping and regularly offers to phone employers himself to explain the importance to children and community of parents being available to help in the school.

The school is able to demonstrate bottom-line improvements that justify the programme to the educational establishment – better school grades as a result of parents helping with English and maths (for which they get training from the school), reduced maintenance costs (parents cleaning windows and carrying out gardening and maintenance work saves the school about £15,000 each year), good behaviour in school and strong school-parent relationships, and improved performance in football as a result of engaging a now highly qualified coach.

3.5 Youth groups – creating a new generation of social entrepreneurs

Youth groups are, of course, a form of building social capital among young people. Some youth groups, however, go further by organising activities for the young people that specifically build social capital in the community, not just between the young people themselves. This was the idea behind Youth Action Groups, set up to address crime and safety issues, with young people as the main agents of change. Youth Action Groups have addressed a multiplicity of issues – cleaning streets and grounds, visiting the elderly, raising funds for facilities, counselling peers to reduce truancy, making links to primary schools, promoting drug awareness, tackling shop-lifting, tackling the carrying of weapons.[89] Similarly the charity Groundwork works with local commercial organisations to involve children at risk in work to improve the community, an approach that has led to reductions in crime and greater involvement in the community by young people.[90]

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89. Pru Youth Action (undated, NCB library)
90. Youth Works, see www.youth-works.com

The new National Citizenship Service, described in section 5.3, an initiative of the current Government, builds on the principle of mobilising 16 year olds to consider local problems and think of ways of solving them.

Case study: Safety Squads – organising children to make their communities safer

"In Safety Squad we help look after the environment and make our community better to live in" – child participant.

"We help the community by stopping things that make us feel unsafe like bullying and graffiti" – child participant.

Safety Squads, run by Safety-Net in Brighton enable children between the ages of 8 and 13 to explore ways in which their community can be made safer. Bevendean Safety Squad, recruited from Bevendean Primary School, engages the children through a number of different mediums (drama, art, dance, discussion) in order to highlight issues of concern. One concern that emerged was that the local park did not feel like a safe and enjoyable place to play and was in desperate need of new equipment. The children then researched playgrounds in other areas in order to determine what they wanted. A vote on the type and style of play equipment took place amongst 400 children in the school and after much campaigning and letter writing to the local council, a new playground was built. But then older children spread graffiti on the playground equipment, upsetting the younger children and making them feel unsafe again.

"We feel unsafe in our park because older children have put horrible graffiti on the equipment we chose to be there" – child participant.

The concern was brought forward to the anti-graffiti team at the local council who agreed to remove it. In addition, the local council granted the Safety Squad with the funding required for the children to create a video in which they could express their safety concerns to others in the community – particularly for the culprits behind the graffiti.

3.6 Mentors – expanding the work of parenting into the community

Mentoring is a prime example of how the role of parenting can be extended into "the village". Such schemes broaden the child's support network by providing the opportunity to bond with other reliable adults (or older children) whom they can trust. It works better when the volunteer knows the family and works with the parents as a team.[91]

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91. Meier R (2008)

Case study: Action for Children and Chance UK mentoring scheme in Knowsley, Liverpool

In partnership with Action for Children, Chance UK in Liverpool provides one-to-one mentoring for children aged 5-11 with behavioural difficulties. The mentoring programme receives referrals from the local primary schools, often receiving children that are close to permanent exclusion from school. The mentor, who is usually a volunteer from within the same community, can aid the child's self-esteem and cultivate their personal strengths through a number of activities such as sports, visiting museums, making scrapbooks, or anything that the child might be interested in.

The Goldsmiths London University report on the impact of the programme found that the mentoring reduced behavioural difficulties for 98% of children, with 51% no longer classed as having a behavioural difficulty. Social skills and academic achievement also improved.

Case study: Action for Children Two of a Kind – peer Independent Visitor scheme for young people in care

Action for Children's Two of a Kind service is a peer Independent Visitor scheme for young people in care in London. It aims to recruit Independent Visitors with personal experience of being in care. Independent Visitors are matched with young people in care, a process that involves social workers and carers and a risk assessment. The aim is to help the child in care grow, develop and reach their potential, with the help of a supportive, trusting and encouraging relationship.

To ensure the best possible outcomes for the young person and the Independent Visitor, Action for Children provides constant support - regular face-to-face meetings and contact by telephone and email, daily if necessary. Action for Children also provides social training and events, appraisal and evaluation meetings. In addition there is individualised training and the option of gaining accreditation for the Independent Visitor.

In addition to children, parents and families may need peer mentors too.

Case study: Volunteers in Child Protection

The Community Service Volunteers' "Volunteers in Child Protection" (VICP) scheme, which has a presence in Bromley, Islington, Lewisham, Southend-on-Sea and Coventry, links families with volunteers who can provide friendship, advice and practical support, whether it is a helping hand, kind word or listening ear. The scheme works closely with Children's Services, highlighting families with children who have been placed on a child protection plan. When first piloted, the project was found to have prevented all children from moving back onto the then Child Protection Register over the course of a year.

Case study: programme working with minority ethnic children

Children from minority ethnic backgrounds sometimes face more specific challenges. Some, for example, struggle against high levels of mistrust often encouraged by the media, very low levels of expectation and respect, and a lack of identity. A variety of programmes have developed in response to this challenge – From Boyhood to Manhood Foundation, boys2MEN (which includes a focus on working with young black fathers to break the cycle of isolation), and Minority Ethnic Role Models for Learning and Inspiration (MERLIN).[92]

3.7 Inter-generational connections

Some programmes specifically target the problems of lack of trust between generations by organising activities that bring them together to reduce mutual mistrust and provide mutual help.

Case study: Fishburn in Bloom

The Fishburn in Bloom programme draws children and older people together to care for their community. Initiated by Age Concern in 2003 and taken on by the local Neighbourhood Watch team (and Parish committee), the inter-generational project taught people of all ages how to plant flowers and shrubs in their local area.

92. Reach (2007)

Case study: Mentoring Project, Haywood Engineering College

The transition between primary to secondary school for children can often be stressful and daunting. The mentoring project in Haywood recruits over 50s to offer a supportive role for the children who might struggle with the transition, for example, those lacking organisational skills or concentration in lessons.

Case study: Shipley Area Action Plan

The Area Action Plan in Shipley has sought to improve intergenerational cohesion and community safety through a number of projects and activities. One such project worked with a primary school for six weeks, inviting older people to join discussions and games with the children after school. Each week, the session was based on a particular theme, such as 'play', 'games' or 'the home' and all were encouraged to talk about the topic from their own experience. Participants were able to bring in items that they use or used to use when a child. Some of the children subsequently volunteered to visit older people in their homes.

3.8 Place

Building together a good place to live is a key tool for building connections within a community. The think-tank, Demos, has proposed the idea of "playable space" – not just spaces that have specifically been designated for play, but space where play is possible.[93] The Dutch initiative, "woonerf" or Home Zones, for example, has sought to promote safer and more welcoming streets by discouraging overwhelming traffic and instead encouraging pedestrians and cyclists. Although not legislated in the UK, a number of pilots continue to run and have been shown to result in children playing out more and more interaction among adults.[94]

Case Study: Action for Children and the Ramblers - Furness Families Walk4Life

In 2009, the Department of Health asked the Ramblers in partnership with Action for Children to develop a walking programme specifically targeted at families. The result was the Furness Families Walk4Life programme – a 12-week programme to encourage regular independent walking close to home as part of everyday life.

continued

93. Beunderman J et al. (2007)
94. Gill T (2007); Jack G (2010)

The programme focused on getting families walking together, engaging parents and carers as well as their children, and making walking an integral part of family life. The programme was delivered between May and August 2009 through Action for Children Children's Centres in Barrow-in-Furness. 119 participants took part, collectively walking 220 times with an average of six participants in each walk.

Researchers from the British Heart Foundation evaluated the pilot. The evaluation highlighted the breadth of the benefits of walking beyond simple physical health. Exploring the outdoors on foot not only fires children's imagination, but is also a journey of discovery for the adults, some of whom have lived in the same area for many years. Through the programme they discovered previously unknown aspects of their local environment.

Case study: Notting Hill Adventure Playground – creating a playground that connects children to each other

Adventure playgrounds provide a local, communal space in which children can freely gather around a shared activity. Notting Hill's adventure playground has, over the years, become a local 'hub' for the surrounding neighbourhoods, drawing children from a large span of ages (up to the age of 15), disabilities and a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds. For many local children, the playground offers open space that they would not otherwise experience at home. Set apart from the tower blocks and concrete surroundings, the playground offers a distinct area of tranquillity for the local children by including, as part of its design, a built-in waterfall, plant life and areas of enclosure and quiet such as a small cave that was built on the request of the children.

Notting Hill adventure playground is designed to stimulate connections between children. Parents are not permitted to stay inside the playground area itself, but can supervise from just outside. The swings form a structural circle that allows the children to face inwards and chat to one another. More quiet places to talk to others are available by the stream that runs slightly removed from the central activity.

Case study: The Woodlands Field Neighbourhood Learning Centre, Wales – creating a community hub out of a derelict wasteland

In the ward of St Cadocs and Penygarn in Torfaen, one of the most socially and economically deprived areas in Wales, a great concern among residents was the number of children forced to play on the streets owing to the lack of any suitable play facility or organised activity.

A piece of derelict land that was proving expensive to the council because of continual dumping was granted on long lease to the Penygarn Residents Association for recreational use. Woodlands Field Limited was subsequently created, using the derelict land to provide recreation and leisure activities for adults and children. In 2008, and at a cost of £660,000, a Neighbourhood Learning Centre or Log Cabin was also constructed to provide additional space for large-scale social and educational events, a training room and IT suite as well as office space for the day-to-day administration.

Since the construction of the Log Cabin, the Centre Manager Kevin Weaver notes a significant increase in engagement from partner agencies and professional services:

"The current projects on offer have more than doubled over the last year and the centre is now a thriving community hub engaging with over 50,000 visitors and users in the past two years."

The centre runs employment schemes, healthy eating programmes, a Sure Start and youth support activities. An allotment project brings different generations together around growing food.

Case study: Gravestone Detectives in Seaham – building children's identity with a place by studying graveyards

Groundwork's Gravestone Detectives was a local heritage project in Seaham that sought to connect local schools with local heritage sites. The project had been developed in partnership with The Friends of St Mary the Virgin Church and worked with young people from local primary and secondary schools. Over 200 students and more than 15 adults and staff participated in a project to explore the history of people buried in the churchyard. Introductory sessions gave children knowledge of local history sources and heritage research techniques. The project also engaged with non-traditional learners through hands-on research and fieldwork. The schools participated in visits to the church and also the Durham Records Office.

Underlying the research were themes of war, the church, the rich and poor, and the sea. Children were also encouraged to understand the history behind the church and the reasons for the current state of its churchyard and gravestones. About the experience of the participants, a co-ordinator shared:

"The children who took part were excited by the idea of working outside the classroom and unusual activities such as studying old census records at Durham records office, exploring the changing maps of Seaham in class or carrying out grounds exploration and gravestone rubbings within the grounds of St Mary the Virgin church."

The research undertaken by the children informed the content of the interpretive boards that were installed in the churchyard to inform visitors.

3.9 Using the internet to build local social capital

The internet has been put to good use to stimulate local face-to-face support between families. Such contact can foster invaluable relationships between parents and the wider community of parents who have or have had similar or different experiences. By facilitating the sharing of experiences, parental concerns and advice, parents, particularly those who cannot rely on large networks of social support or have access to the many educational resources available about parenting, find themselves in a better position to make informed choices relating to their parenting behaviours and children's well-being. Some families do not use the internet, so this approach, like any other, does not reach 100% of those who might need it.

Case study: Network 6.2 – parents organising reciprocal local care using the internet[95]

In South Carolina, as part of a programme described in the next chapter, a local church created an email network, Network 6.2 (based on Galatians 6.2: "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.") If any family needs help, they can broadcast this in an email. In order to ensure a norm of reciprocity, a condition of participating was to accept help as well as give help, at least once a month. The norm of reciprocity emerged through the giving of meals.

Case study: Netmums - using a national on-line network to stimulate face-to-face interactions at community level

Netmums has more users – 880,000 active members and 28 million page views every month. The social network specifically promotes local networking – the website is divided into over 150 local sites and members can register into these local networks. There are opportunities for meeting up with local mothers and finding out what is going on locally. Netmums works to integrate its services with local children's services and is used by many as a resource.

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95. Taylor D & McLeigh J (in press)

3.10 Conclusion

Adaptations in the way that current services are delivered can create extra connections between families and children – informal ways (how space is designed for example) and purposeful ways, such as creating networks of care between families and engaging users in planning and managing projects. An extension of this approach is co-production – where the users of the service specifically become partners and the emphasis of the service becomes to facilitate users to create solutions rather than to fix things itself.

Existing organisations in the community not necessarily directly connected with children – such as fire-fighters and the police – can be willing contributors to local activities that keep children safe, thus strengthening local social capital. Meanwhile, schools and youth groups can connect families and can help to create a new generation of social entrepreneurs to undertake local action in the future.

Mentors and inter-generational projects can create new connections between peer groups and across generations, tackling widespread mistrust and spreading the task of parenting into the community, in line with the idea of a village raising a child.

Part Four: Developing a community

Introduction

In this chapter we look at full-scale community development programmes that mobilise whole communities to build social capital around children. We look at how they are implemented, led by community organisers. We review some leading examples of community development programmes set up to keep children safe.

4.1 Developing a community around the safety of children

The aim of developing a community is essentially to connect individuals to well-connected others, be they individuals or organisations,[96] with particular attention to the most isolated.[97] The aim is to make cooperation between people a social norm.[98] The cooperation can take different forms – for example, a can-do entrepreneurial approach to getting problems sorted out, or it may require more of a challenge to authority if resources are being misapplied – in the introduction (1.1) we saw the example of a Youth Grand Jury indicting the authorities for failing to deliver effectively on drug abuse. This is termed "collective efficacy".

In this report we focus on keeping children safe. This happens to be a highly effective rallying call for community development projects.[99] Children are uniquely able to build social ties within communities,[100] both within networks of interest (e.g. families with children) or within neighbourhoods (e.g. around public spaces).

Building a community allows people to move beyond just being service users. Successful approaches allow people not only an entitlement to receive, but also build an obligation to give, fostering reciprocity, trust, respect and high expectations of one another. It defines people by their strengths[101] – what they can contribute, rather than by their needs. Where children and young people are involved, it is about giving them autonomy and responsibility and having high expectations of and respect for their potential role in the community.

The New Economics Foundation has termed this the "core economy":
"*Family, neighbourhood, community are the core economy. The core economy produces: love and caring, coming to each other's rescue, democracy and social justice.*"[102]

The New Economics Foundation argues that we have been responsible for free-riding on the core economy, just as we have done with the environment, because the value of love, care, mentoring and social justice is hard to quantify, has no currency of exchange, and has been rendered invisible in traditional economics.

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96. Rowson J et al. (2010)
97. Barnes J et al. (2006), pp97-8
98. Fehr E & Fischbacher U (2005)
99. Barnes J et al. (2006), pp91-4
100. Gleave J (2010)
101. Barnes J et al. (2006), pp87-9
102. New Economics Foundation (2008)

Services will always be necessary for children and families, but they are not sufficient by themselves.

> "*We will be unable to create the core economy of the future so long as we live in a bifurcated world where all social problems are relegated either to paid professionals or to volunteers whose role is typically restricted to functioning as free labour within the silos of the non-profit world…. We will not get there simply by expanding an entitlement system which apportions public benefits based on negatives and deficiencies: what one lacks, what disability one has, what misfortune one has suffered.*"[103]

Key challenges faced by community development that focuses on children include:

* The fact that children and young people are often in a weak position within communities.[104]
* The fact that some children and families cannot reciprocate effectively – they may be moving frequently, or suffer stigmatisation, or lack the skills to access support,[105] or be victims of neglect and abuse.
* The existence of a strong sense of entitlement to (and dependence on) state funding of services, which has, over time, eroded the capacity to negotiate and create other sources of funding.

4.2 Implementing community development approaches

Community organisers

An important requirement in any community development approach is highly skilled "community organisers" acting as catalysts and facilitators, not providers. 5,000 such organisers are due to be sent into the field, 500 paid, 4,500 voluntary, as part of a recently announced Government funded programme implemented by the charity, Locality.

Community organisers have the task of reaching out and engaging with people in the community. They listen and encourage dialogue. They do not bring any message or seek any specific outcome. They are based within a local programme but the agenda is community development, not the achievement of particular pre-set objectives by means of community development. This can create a tension between the organisation's own obligations (e.g. to funders) and the plans that the community comes up with. An honest evaluation of the NSPCC community development project in Tilbury, called Safe Kids, described it thus:

> "*At times within the development of the project, we have also grappled with the challenges of attempting to embrace community development approaches which necessitate 'professionals' being prepared to relinquish some of their authority and power to local communities. Such approaches do not necessarily fit easily alongside traditional social work approaches, particularly in the field of child protection, where workers are called on to establish and exercise professional authority in order to protect individual children.*"[106]

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103. Quotations from Professor Edgar Cahn in New Economics Foundation (2008)
104. Barnes J et al. (2006), pp91-5
105. Jack G & Gill O (2010)
106. Wright S (2004)

The evaluation goes on to describe ways the programme tried to square the circle – whilst allowing families and children to define the project, the programme continued to deliver a traditional child protection agenda. It supported community members in representing issues that do not fall directly within the child protection agenda, such as concerns about traffic and environment.

Because of the importance of the community organisers, they need to have strong backing, in the form of training and on-going support. Locality is proposing an Institute of Community Organising to deliver this support and eventually embed the community organising approach in British society.

Mapping

An important first step in developing community approaches is an investigation by local people of the reality they face – what they love, hate, fear and hope. It is a process of mutual discovery, finding the 'generative themes' that motivate people to act. The aim is to change 'the bad scene' into a specific set of issues that people can take action around – "what can we do about it?" It is a process of building self-reliance and confidence.

The Royal Society of Arts is developing an approach that starts by analysing existing social networks in a community – who is connected with whom.[107] By identifying strong networks and the people and organisations that lie at the heart of these, it becomes possible to identify channels that can most effectively carry change. In a test in New Cross in London, where they surveyed people, they found 1400 'nodes' or connection points. They found that the dustmen and postmen were better connected than local councillors, that the best connections to the most isolated individuals and families were shop-keepers and cab-drivers, that the organisation most connected both to unemployed and employed people was the local supermarket, Sainsbury's. They found that pubs and sports facilities were at the heart of large networks. They found that networks were not necessarily geographical, indeed they found some geographical features, such as a park, to be a source of division, used by only part of a community. The researchers concluded that a key method of building community is to "weave networks", specifically linking up individuals and organisations that are well connected in different parts of the community.

Another mapping approach was tested within the Craigmillar project in Edinburgh, "comprehensive neighbourhood mapping".[108] Here there was a widespread survey of data relating to children's safety in the area, with a particular effort to reach frequently overlooked individuals such as fathers, grandparents, very young parents and gang members. This mapped problems and assets, strengths and hopes within the community as a precursor to building on these assets rather than starting something completely new. The project also found the need for long-term outreach in order to win the trust and confidence of young people living in the area.

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107. Rowson J et al. (2010)
108. Nelson S & Baldwin N (2004)

4.3 Examples of community development approaches

4.3.1 Strong Communities for Children, South Carolina, USA – a full blown community development approach to keeping children safe[109]

The programme took place in two counties in north-west South Carolina, USA, an area of 30 square miles with a population of 150,000. It was initiated and managed by the Clemson University in response to the observation by the US Board on Child Abuse and Neglect that the child protection system was in crisis, depending on a reporting and response system that has punitive connotations and requires massive resources dedicated to the investigation of allegations. "We must create communities that support the families and shelter the children within them. We must take the time to see the need and lend a hand."

The programme set out to make child safety part of everyday life in the community, delivered by local people and organisations, with minimal dependence on family service professionals – "natural" help to families when they need it – in times of stress or illness or emergency. It focused on work with parents rather than directly with children and young people.

The programme went through three phases.

1. Raising awareness

The first step was to spread the word around the "Keep Kids Safe" slogan. This activity was on-going because the communities were not static.

The focus was on neglect, rather than abuse, because of its much greater prevalence. The point was made that neglectful parents are not bad or sick people, just normal people who have problems that accumulate and escalate if they do not get early support. The point was made in the awareness campaign that picking up the phone to report neglect is not enough.

Well trained and supported outreach workers spread across the community visiting organisations and households and galvanising support from all sectors – children's services, police, fire-fighters, schools, voluntary organisations, local businesses, estate agents, churches and so on. Workshops were organised in local businesses, services and other organisations.

This resulted in a growing team of volunteers for spreading the word further. Volunteers were kept within their comfort zones – so, for example, nurses would focus on the issue of health and talk to people and organisations in their own sphere.

An example of an awareness raising technique was the pledge card carrying four promises: (1) watch out for children, (2) notice and express care when a child or family has reason to rejoice, worry or grieve, (3) learn the names of the children in the ten closest homes and (4) regularly take time to help a family with young children. These were given out in pay packets and at local events. Looking back at the programme, the organisers concluded that the optimum number of community organisers would be one for every 10,000 of population.

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109.   This section is based on two sources – correspondence with the project manager, Professor Gary Melton, and a write-up of the project in 2008 in a special edition of *Family & Community Health* 31.2 entirely dedicated to articles about the programme. A special selection reporting the evaluation of the programme is in preparation for probably publication in *Child Abuse and Neglect*.

2. Mobilising to plan

The next phase involved mobilising people to start planning things. Parents were particularly invited – specifically both mothers and fathers. Sometimes this involved creating new structures in order to organise civic activity.

The development of new activities and projects was constantly encouraged – if they worked, they would spread, if they did not work, they would fade away.

The focus was constantly on building relationships among families and between families and local organisations, and building on the assets in the community – leaders, networks, facilities, culture.

3. Universal support for families

A system of enrolling every local family was set up using transition points such as the birth of a baby and the move from one school to another. Families "joined" – they were not "referred" - implying a normal social organisation. The emphasis was on group sessions rather than individual sessions in order to maximise the opportunities for connections between people. A special team of volunteers was set up to engage with more isolated families.

The support system created by parents was based on reciprocity – both giving and receiving help. It featured befriending, mentoring and the creation of long-term relationships.

Regular home visiting, as opposed to door-to-door outreach, was tried and then rejected as a method for engaging with parents. It was found to be very expensive, to exclude the family other than the mother, and it did not build social capital.

The programme took nearly two years to get a foothold and came to involve thousands of volunteers – nearly 5% of the adult population. Interestingly, about 36% of those participating were men, with two thirds of the most active volunteers being men. The extreme gender segregation in the care of children that characterises almost every service-led family programme was overcome.

The organisations that become most actively engaged were churches, then the fire service and police, then housing project, then civic organisations.

A wide variety of activities emerged from the programme, for example:

- Fire-fighters mentored children, helped pregnant teenagers and sought out resources for families in need.
- Family Activity Centres were created.
- Street carnivals and parties were organised.
- Special protection projects were initiated, such as Family Watch, which targeted the issue of shaken baby syndrome and particularly focused on fathers.
- A toy library.
- A Grandparent Committee.
- Groups focusing on developing and celebrating local distinctiveness.
- An Hispanic focus group.
- A café.

The overall result was measured through a random selection of households with young children, both in the service area and in comparable areas that did not participate. There was a normative change in the community towards attentiveness, neighbourliness and universal access to family support. A belief emerged that effective action to support families should happen and will happen.

The child safety outcomes (to be published in the autumn) were impressive. The programme saw a significant drop in the maltreatment of children in a three year period, 2004-2007 – 11% decrease in reported instances of maltreatment of children under 3 years, 41% decrease for children aged 3-4 and 8% for children aged 5-10. In the same period in a nearby control site, there were increases in reported instances for all ages of children. Hospital visits and admissions of children resulting in a diagnosis that might indicate abuse or neglect were measured: the area saw a 68% drop in such hospital visits by children, a 23% drop in such admissions to hospital of children under 3, and a 38% decrease in such admissions of children aged 3-4. Both children and parents reported a greater sense of safety (e.g. on the way to school), and greater support. Parents reported better parenting, more attention to home safety, less stress and less instances of neglect.

The evaluation found greater increases in more disadvantaged communities for variables such as perceived social support, giving and receiving help and rate of volunteering.

4.3.2 Community development approaches in UK

In the UK, there have been a number of programmes that have adopted community development approaches around the care and safety of children.

Tilbury

NSPCC set up a programme in Tilbury, just outside East London, in 2000, 'Safe Kids'. It was initiated by the local authority, Area Child Protection Committee and the local Sure Start programme. It set up in the context of a local culture of distrust of child protection professionals. The opening aims were to promote community responsibility for the protection of children, ensure high awareness of risks to children and provide strategies to deal with this, increase the safety and confidence of children in their communities, and to break down the barriers between professionals and communities.

NSPCC commissioned an independent firm to carry out a survey of view of 150 parents and 50 children.

As outlined in section 4.2.1 above, an immediate challenge was that many of the concerns expressed in this survey fitted the community agenda but not the agenda of those initiating the programme.

Time was invested in building relationships between local actors – councillors, youth services, employment services, regeneration initiatives, crime projects, street wardens, the community police and others. A community conference was organised to reach a common agenda.

One of the proposals that emerged and was acted upon was the creation of a Youth Forum to give children and young people more of a voice. As in other work with children and young people, physical aspects of the environment ranked highly in the list of concerns – clean play areas, more

street wardens and policy, better transport, less vandalism and graffiti and better leisure facilities. The evaluation stated: "We anticipate that, by enabling children to become more visible within the local community, they will also become less vulnerable."

In relation to child protection, the programme helped community groups create their own child protection policies and developed 'protective behaviours' programmes for families and training in child protection for professionals.

Canklow Estate, Rotherham[110]

This early programme in the 1980s adopted a community development approach by enhancing informal support – play schemes, youth clubs, women's groups and adult education. A five-year evaluation found significant reductions in the number of children in care or on supervision orders and that the number on the child protection register had fallen to almost zero. Greater trust between community and child welfare professions was achieved, enabling those needing help to seek it at an earlier stage.

Henley Project, Coventry[111]

The aim was to develop a community that was "informed and thoughtful" about child protection, emphasising the context of high levels of poverty, unemployment, traffic and crime. The project set up neighbourhood-based family support, community action with young people for a safer environment and partnerships between agencies and communities. The project used the same method of comprehensive neighbourhood mapping as used in Craigmillar (section 4.2.1).

4.4 Ensuring young people have a role in community development

A key priority in community development programmes is to ensure that children and young people themselves have a voice.

A good example of what young people say when asked comes through the work of the Institute for Citizenship. In 2009-2010, the Institute facilitated a regional programme for young people aged 14-19. 8,000 young people took part in 75 workshops, 5,500 completed a survey and 1,350 attended a conference in February 2010. Representatives of the young people presented their recommendations to Rt Hon George Osborne MP in September 2010. The following is the text of their recommendations concerning safer communities.[112]

> "Our schools and local areas are at the centre of our communities. It is vital that we feel safe so that we can have the confidence to make positive changes.

> "Over 45% of our generation believe adults have a negative view of young people in their area and more than 27% of young people in the North West do not feel safe where they live. In some North West communities this makes young people feel excluded due to age, background, race and religion. We want to see communities where we can become the best we can be, whatever our background.

110. Jack G & Gill O (2010)

111. Ib.

112. www.citizen.org.uk/Young_Citizens_Action_Agenda.htm

"Currently, 67% of young people in the North West feel that there are not enough spaces, facilities, and things to do in their local area. Where there are things to do, young people may not know about them.

"Some communities in the North West are very divided and we want to be at the heart of positive changes to our communities that provide good facilities, open spaces and transport links which can unite people from different communities.

"Recommendations:
* ***Creating Safe Communities:*** *We would like Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to play an active role in fostering trust between young people and the police, perhaps with more school visits.*
* ***Young People Making Everyone Feel Safe****: We understand that young people are often thought of as a 'dangerous group' by older people. It is up to us to make other people feel safe in our communities and build positive images of young people through activities such as volunteering.*
* ***Make Our Schools The Centre Of The Community:*** *We believe that our school facilities should be open to young people and the whole community beyond the school day. We would like to see schemes such as Extended Schools in all schools in the North West, to allow people to learn new skills and be creative in improving our communities.*
* ***Contributing To Our Communities****: We would like to take an active role in improving our communities, and many young people are already taking part in opportunities that allow us to have a direct, visible impact in our communities, such as Youth Fund. We would like to see more young people taking part and taking ownership of how money set aside for projects for teenagers is spent."*

4.5 Conclusion

Community development connects individuals in a community to well connected others – the "weaving of networks". The overall aim is to make cooperation and mutual support a social norm within a community or neighbourhood. "Keeping children safe" is a highly effective call to action in community development programmes. The approach goes beyond the development of services, to build a "core economy" that produces love and caring, where there are opportunities for people to earn entitlements to support in exchange for contributing their own skills, knowledge and time.

Development of a whole community requires skilled community organisers, who do not seek specific outcomes but who facilitate the agreement of action within the community. The first step of community development is to map the assets, hopes and fears of the community, and to understand the networks that already operate.

When asked, children and young people express strong views about what they want in relation to their communities and neighbourhoods – to be able to make a positive contribution, to be trusted, to have a nice place in which to live, to be safe.

Examples of community development from USA and UK show remarkable results both in terms of changing social norms of good neighbourliness – simply creating a happy place for children to live - and improved child safety. Without doubt, building social capital makes children safer and is extremely cost effective.

Part Five: Current policies, family and community

Introduction

In this chapter we review the evolution in policies on family and community over the last 30 years, starting with the Conservative Government of the 1980s and 1990s.

5.1 Family policy in England

The focus of family policy under the Conservative Government of the 1980s and 1990s was the family unit.[113] Policy was influenced by the social and economic upheavals of the prior years, concerns about families splitting up, and the perception of the unwarranted and ineffective encroachment of social services into family life. The Children Act of 1989 emphasised the rights of children in relation to the state. Measures were developed to ensure continued contribution of fathers to children after separation through the Child Support Agency. Embodied in policy and services was a traditional view of the family – a mother caring, a father earning.

The Labour Government that followed continued these themes, but introduced a more proactive approached backed by substantial state funding – spending on family increased 61% between 1997 and 2006.[114]

Labour's policy had six strands:

- Childcare Strategies, 1998 and 2004, which doubled the stock of childcare places between 1997 and 2007 and introduced financial subsidies.
- Direct financial supports in terms of tax credits and benefits.
- Family services, such as Sure Start and the Children's Fund. These had a community focus. The number of Children's Centres was 3500 by 2010.
- Employment support, for example the New Deal for Lone Parents. In 2002, a target of 70% was set for employment by lone parents; two-parent workless households were later included.
- Work/family reconciliation. Maternity leave was greatly extended through the Employment Act 2002 and Work & Families Act of 2006, reaching to 12 months, 26 weeks of it paid, and a small amount of paternity leave was introduced, 2 weeks. The right to request flexible working was introduced and expanded in 2007 to cover carers of adults also.
- Parenting support. A raft of helplines, parenting courses, relationship support services and conflict resolution services were created, many through charities. In 2007, the Government published *Every Parent Matters* as a corollary of the earlier *Every Child Matters*.

From the outset of the Labour Government, the family featured strongly, for example in *Supporting Families* (1998). The Fatherhood Institute was funded to promote the inclusion of fathers in family services, Family Group Conferencing was picked up by Government policy around 2006, Family Intervention Programmes (FIPs) and support for family relationships got increasing attention, particularly in the late period of the Labour Government. These features of policy were pulled together in the last family policy document of that Government, *Support for All* in 2010.

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113. Winter K & Connolly P (1996)
114. Daly M (2010)

Family policy under the new Coalition Government is still in formation. A continuing shift to the functioning of the whole family is very much in evidence. The first policy document made "sharing the parenting from pregnancy onwards" an objective of policy. David Cameron has shown particular interest in supporting family relationships. In the recent round of central Government funding for charities, there is money for relationship support, encouraging the involvement of fathers and extended families, and parenting programmes that specifically engage both parents instead of just one. Current work on antenatal education at the Department of Health sees a shift to group based care and routine support for the parenting partnership. The focus on early intervention continues, but state funding is being directed more at the most disadvantaged, with the intention of developing more community led approaches for universal care.

5.2 Child protection policy

The focus of child protection policy is on the efficient organisation of services that can intervene to protect children. There has been little focus on the wider social, economic and environmental circumstances in which abuse occurs[115] and little attention to the need for community based approaches – the general approach is doing things 'to' rather than 'with'. The issue of community was mentioned in the 1996 National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse – this stated that the promotion of a child-friendly community through community development was an overarching means of preventing child abuse.[116] The importance of the community is mentioned in the Department of Health's key Framework for the Assessment of Children and their Families, which says that a child's social and environmental context needs to be considered during assessment.

The enquiries by Lord Laming after the deaths of two children in North London focus on the failures of services to provide adequate care and to be coordinated with each other.[117] Only one of the 107 recommendations in the first of these reports touched on community-level factors. The latest statement of roles and responsibilities surround the safeguarding of children, Working Together to Safeguard Children (DCSF, 2010) also has little to say about community approaches. The emphasis is on sharing and collaboration between professionals. It does mention the need for communication and good relationships with the community but in a bureaucratic way. For example, where it discusses faith communities, it specifies only the procedures, practice codes and reporting requirements that faith communities should adhere to.

The difficulties of connecting the current approach to child protection with community approaches can be glimpsed in the evaluation of Local Safeguarding Children's Boards. The 2010 evaluation concluded that communication with the public is poor.[118] One respondent stated, "*I mean if you ask the man in the street what does the LSCB do, he'd have no idea.*" Another when asked about the impact of the LSCB on parents replied "*no impact whatsoever*". The evaluation also found a lack of systematic consultation with children. Only 48% of LSCBs who responded to a question about communication with voluntary and community sector organisation reported that this was well-developed. For the most part, this is communication with larger national charities – the evaluation reports difficulties in communicating with smaller community groups.

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115. Jack G (2004)
116. Wright S (2004)
117. Laming (2003); Laming (2009)
118. France A et al. (2010)

This is not for lack of interest, as one respondent (quoted only in the 2009 interim report) made clear, '*There's just been a massive voluntary sector conference on safeguarding, it was meant to be for one day, but we've now had it for two days because we had so many people wanted to come….it's not a lack of want for the voluntary sector.*'

Where community based approaches have been introduced, they have tended to be short-lived, subject to pressures from the media reporting another abuse scandal, changes in key personnel and resistance of staff who are familiar only with an individual and formal approach.[119] The pilots outlined in chapter 4 have not been adopted by Government as models to be actively promoted.

Child protection policy in US has declared the need for community approaches, although progress on the ground has not been immediate. In 1990, the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect declared that the child protection system was in a state of national emergency.[120] The Board has subsequently made the case that neighbourhood factors are a key issue in child maltreatment, that child well-being is highly related to social capital and that community approaches to tackling maltreatment of children are typically more effective.

"*A national strategy must be neighbourhood-based. In fact, it must address the viability of the neighbourhood itself….we must strengthen our neighbourhoods.*"[121]

5.3 Policies on communities

The 1980s and 1990s saw a huge growth in interest in neighbourhood and community.[122] All kinds of programmes have been rolled out – Health Action Zones, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, City Challenge (1992-1998), Single Regeneration Budget (1994-2004), New Deal for Communities (2000-2011), the Home Office Active Citizenship Centre (2005) that promoted strong empowered communities acting for themselves.

Home Zone grants provided by the Department of Transport in the late 1990s and early 2000s specifically promoted child-friendly streets. The Social Exclusion Unit was an area-based approach that specifically looked at disadvantage among families and children.

But housing, transport and planning policies contained little about children, though the Greater London Authority did initiate a child-friendly planning agenda in 2004.[123]

Furthermore, many community development approaches have displayed disappointing results, with unrealistically high expectations, insufficient local engagement and burn-out of a small core of community activists.[124] This suggests knowledge of how to make it work well needs to be promoted better.

There has been a focus on place in much policy towards children.[125] *Every Child Matters* (2003) made one of its core five objectives "Making a positive contribution: being involved with the community and society." This flagship statement of policy also allocated the responsibility for

119. Jack G & Gill O (2010)
120. Kimbrough-Melton R & Campbell D (2008)
121. USA Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993)
122. Barnes J et al. (2006), pp86-7
123. Gill T (2008)
124. Rowson J et al. (2010)
125. Gill T (2008)

caring for children to "everybody", in line with earlier policy statements. Sure Start and Extended Schools are major community-based approaches to delivering services to families and children, requiring partnership that includes parents.

The Play Strategy of 2008 envisioned neighbourhoods that are safe for play, recommending play areas free of charge in all residential areas.

> "*Strong, vibrant communities should offer a variety of places for children to play, places in which children have a stake, and that they can help shape through their active involvement in design and decision making. All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends.*"[126]

Involvement of children in local planning has also been a theme in policy, for example in the 2003 Guidance for Children's Trusts and the Children's Fund, though in the evaluation of the latter, only 9% of project managers described involvement of children as child initiated and shared with adults.[127]

Like other community development initiatives, programmes around children and families have been subject to unrealistically high expectations. Whilst North American programmes on which Sure Start was based have been evaluated on the basis of 23 years of data, the UK Government was looking for signs of impact in less than four years.[128]

The last policy initiative of the previous Government in this field, one that was as close as anything to a policy on social capital, was the *Guidance on meaningful interaction: how encouraging positive relationships between people can help build community cohesion*, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2008. It proposed better design of public space, support for volunteering and support for community mobilisers. It proposed a "culture of civility".

The current Government has advanced the idea of local action considerably, under the banner of its flagship programme, the Big Society.

The Localism Bill pledges to give communities powers to save local assets threatened with closure, by allowing them to bid for the ownership and management of community assets. It also gives community organisations the right to bid to run any local authority service – the local authority will then be legally obliged to respond. The bill aims for less bureaucracy, local rights to involvement, local control of finance, diversifying the supply of local services and greater accountability.

The programme of Community Organisers, as described in section 4.2, has been launched, with the charity, Locality, winning the contract to train and place 5,000 community organisers across England.

The new child poverty strategy of 2011 applies localism ideas to the well-being of children, *A New Approach to Child Poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming family lives*. It reminds Local Authorities of their statutory duty to consider outcomes for families when commissioning services.

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126. Department for Children, Schools and Families / Department for Culture, Media and Sports (2008)
127. Barnes J et al. (2006), pp134,136,147-8
128. Jack G (2006)

Likewise, the National Citizens Service addresses young people specifically. This is being piloted in 12 sites during the summer of 2011, involving 11,000 16 year olds doing a 7-8 week programme of voluntary work in the community – three weeks in the summer, two away from home, and then 30 hours of work part-time. The aim is to extend this to be available to all 16 year olds in UK. An explicit aim of the programme is to given young people the opportunity to devise and implement projects to improve the local community – a major investment in creating a new army of social entrepreneurs.

The social mobility strategy, *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers*, addresses the dangers of social capital – the manner in which it draws apart the haves and have-nots. This strategy focuses on the need for inclusiveness in building connections within communities – around early years care, schools and the move into employment.

This focus on community, is not confined to Government. It has, for example, been picked up by the Big Lottery Fund, which announced this year that all its funding will focus on communities, on "people powered change". Big Lottery is specifically including funding for projects with children and young people in this programme and is funding a £900,000 programme of 20 projects, Improving Futures, working with families with multiple problems. One major project being supported by Big Lottery, Your Square Mile, will create a digital platform for any area in UK to record information about local groups, local opportunities and local support services.

At the same time as all this, severe cuts in public funding are reducing the ability of local organisations, particularly smaller ones, to develop community building programmes. The Local Government Association did a survey of local authorities in March 2011 to see what they were cutting back.[129] Second only to central services (back-office functions such as administration, human resources, finance and IT) councils are cutting back on services for young people. LGA has said that the speed of the cuts is preventing the development of new and innovative ways of financing and delivering services – closure is the only option in many cases. So there is a very mixed picture of progress.

5.4 Conclusion

For 20 years, UK family policy has increasingly supported collaboration around caring for children – among family members and among people and agencies within communities. Child protection policy, however, has not significantly developed community approaches in UK, despite a number of demonstration projects.

Under the last Labour Government there was a wide range of community development initiatives, and now community organising, localism and volunteering are flagship policies of the current Government's Big Society agenda. This agenda remains disconnected from children and families, but there is great potential for applying these approaches to keep children safe.

129. Local Government Association (2011), *Report of the Council Budges, Spending and Saving Survey 2011*

Part Six: Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Building connections *between* children and connections *between* families – that is, developing social capital around children - makes children safer. Research comparing the experience of children living in different communities shows strong correlations between low levels of trust and low quality of environment on the one hand and poor health, negligent parenting, child abuse and low achievement on the other hand. Programmes that systematically build connections and social capital show remarkable results, both in terms of how a community can develop new norms of good neighbourliness, and in terms of child health and safety.

Well-connected mothers and fathers who enjoy routine and simple support from friends and neighbours from the earliest years of their children's lives are less likely to accumulate the stress and difficulties that so easily lead to crisis. Children in well-connected families are more resilient, more able to bounce back from difficult situations.

A collective approach to supporting parenting, where there is acceptance of responsibility for all parents and children within the community, is what we must strive to achieve. Only in recent centuries in developed countries have family units become small and in recent decades parents have been able to rely on others even less – families are more mobile, more people in wider families are working, outdoor spaces have become less safe, neighbourhoods have become less trusted, and there is a strong pressure on parents to supervise children intensely at all times.

It is possible to build connections between children and between families – it is easy and it does not cost extra. Family services can organise activities and the management of activities in ways that enhance the interaction and participation of families. Services can go further and adopt the principle of 'co-production', where users become partners, where the service facilitates rather than fixes, and where *everyone* gives *and* receives. Some services have started using time banks, such as Glyngoch Youth Time Bank in Pontypridd, giving credits to all those who give of their time so that they can earn entitlement to services and support. Time banking radically shifts the question from "what are my needs?" to "what are my strengths, what can I give?"

There is enormous potential within communities for keeping children safe – a wide variety of people volunteer to contribute when given a chance. The substantial participation of men in activities to keep children safe when there is the opportunity is striking, as was shown in the Strong Communities for Children project in South Carolina USA. Those that already work to protect the community have been seen to be willing contributors, as shown by the joint fire station/Children's Centre in Rothbury and Met-Track in London. Schools can be high-powered engines for creating connections between mothers, fathers, grandparents and children, as demonstrated by Coopers Lane Primary School in Lewisham.

Mentoring of children and young people who are struggling has shown to be effective, for example through Action for Children's Mentoring Plus and through Volunteers in Child Protection run by Community Service Volunteers, particularly when done in close partnership with mothers and/or fathers. Inter-generational activities are a good way to re-connect old and young, as demonstrated by Fishburn in Bloom, the Shipley Area Action Plan and the Haywood Engineering College Mentoring Project.

Public space is vital to children – every time they are asked what they would like for their community, clean and safe public space comes at or near the top of the list of priorities – children hate litter, graffiti and vandalism. Children and young people enjoy the opportunity to make their neighbourhood better, as shown by the In My Backyard programme run by Save the Children and by the Safety Squads in Brighton.

Building communities involves creating new connections within a community or neighbourhood, in particular connecting isolated families and children to well-connected others. The aim of developing a community is to build new norms of good neighbourliness so that routine and 'natural' support between people spreads. Keeping children safe is a mission that lies at the heart of many community development programmes, and children themselves have a major contribution to make to this communal effort.

Young people can be recruited and trained as community organisers and social entrepreneurs – identifying problems in their community, thinking up solutions and mobilising people to implement the solution. The Blue School in Somerset is an example of children taking full responsibility for delivering solutions.

Family policy in UK is continually moving towards more emphasis on partnership in parenting between mothers, fathers, grandparents and other carers. Meanwhile there is an explosion of interest in communities helping themselves - the Big Society. Connecting these two agendas – supporting families and building communities – carries enormous potential for children and young people in UK.

6.2 Principles

The following are some of the key principles that emerge from programmes that mobilise communities and neighbourhoods around the care of children and young people.

Connections
- Children who are well connected to other children, other families and organisations in the community do better – they are more resilient.
- Mothers and fathers who are well connected also do better – in the early years of a child's life connectedness stems the accumulation of stress and anxiety can lead to neglect and abuse.
- People getting to know each other within communities is a first step towards creating new norms of good neighbourliness.

Expectations
- The responsibility for and privilege of caring for children belongs to everyone and whole communities.
- High expectations, respect and trust bring the best out in people – children, teenagers, the elderly, mothers, fathers, grandparents all want to give, to be trusted, to implement solutions to problems. Almost everybody can give, even the most vulnerable, if they have the right support.
- Family services do better when they see children, young people, mothers, fathers, grandparents and others as having the knowledge, strengths and connections to be effective partners in delivering good outcomes.

Local organisations are a rich resource for building networks of trust and help around children – schools, fire services, police, and employers.

6.3 Taking forward best practice

Children's services, such as maternity units, Children's Centres, play services and schools, can work systematically to facilitate connections among children, mothers, fathers, grandparents and all men and women within a community who want the opportunity to care for children and young people. By adopting the idea of co-production – where people are not just users, but indispensible partners in delivery of good outcomes, people who have vital strengths, assets and networks – organisations can do much to build norms of mutual and reciprocal care within a community.

Time banks are a particularly valuable tool, because they create a currency that measures and values giving and receiving of love and care – they shift the focus from "what can I get?" to "what can I give?" and from "what are my needs?" to "what are my strengths?"

Youth groups can provide opportunities for children and young people to contribute actively to making their communities safer and better places to live. Youth groups can provide opportunities not just to volunteer, but to be a social entrepreneur – to devise new solutions and develop new projects to improve the community and neighbourhood.

Mentoring for children and young people provides a valuable opportunity for connections to be made across different groups and ages, and provides a vital extra support to parents 'from the village'. Similarly, inter-generational projects can help to re-build trust between young and old.

Listed within this report are some of the examples of how social capital has been developed and sustained to achieve results for children and young people and particularly to keep children safe. A repository of case studies used in this report and other materials on best practices can be found on Action for Children's website, www.actionforchildren.org.uk.

6.4 Political recommendations

The Coalition Government's Big Society programme offers the potential for the development of social capital. In order that this opportunity is taken for children and young people, the Government must:

• Ensure that the new Community Organiser programme for England includes a focus on children and young people within their local communities, and on reaching people in the most isolated and deprived communities. This must include specific success measures for the programme as a whole, to increase children's wellbeing, and to ensure organisers themselves receive training in how to achieve results for children and young people.

• Pilot a number of large-scale and comprehensive community building projects, as detailed in this report, with the specific aim of keeping children safe through the development of social capital and preventing the need for acute and crisis intervention.

• Ensure that the roll-out and success measures of the National Citizens Service are based on the success of providers in keeping young people safe through the development of community focussed social capital, particularly within areas of deprivation.

• Extend the 'right to challenge' within the localism and public service reform agendas, to give opportunities and support for children and young people to challenge and influence local planning and spending decisions that affect them.

• In revising the framework of statutory guidance for local authorities, take steps to ensure that local assets that keep children safe and develop social capital, such as parks, playgrounds and children's centres, are retained.

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Action for Children is committed to helping the most vulnerable and neglected children and young people break through injustice, deprivation and inequality, so they can achieve their full potential. We work with around 200,000 children, young people and their families through nearly 480 projects in local communities across the UK. We also promote social justice by lobbying and campaigning for change.

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"*It is essential that solutions for children, young people and families are part of wider and serious attempts to rebuild communities, and in this way create 'social capital' for people who might otherwise live isolated and vulnerable lives. Only by putting children and their families at the centre of our vision for communities can we improve their safety and wellbeing.*"

Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive, Action for Children

"*Building connections between children and connections between families – that is, developing social capital around children - makes children safer. Research comparing the experience of children living in different communities shows strong correlations between low levels of trust and low quality of environment on the one hand and poor health, negligent parenting, child abuse and low achievement on the other hand. Programmes that systematically build connections and social capital show remarkable results, both in terms of how a community can develop new norms of good neighbourliness, and in terms of child health and safety.*"

Phillip Blond, Director, ResPublica

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