

Together We Can!

Evaluation Report – Year 3 (2019)

compiled by

Revd Dr Al Barrett, ODCF Trustee,
TWC! project manager

Jane Perry, Freelance Social Researcher,
TWC! external evaluation support



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1 Introducing *Together We Can!*

Welcome to the third annual evaluation report for *TogetherWeCan!*

As in our earlier annual reports, you will find here an introduction to the project, and to the Firs and Bromford neighbourhood in which we live and work. Much has changed and developed over the three years since *TWC!* began. This report outlines significant changes within the project itself over that time, as well as what we have done this year (2019). We're also proud to be able to report what our neighbours are saying about the difference it is making: you will find here stories of a neighbourhood that has more places where people can feel like they belong, and of neighbours who feel more connected to each other, more able to overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives, and more able to share their passions and skills with each other.

A core commitment of *TWC!* is to open up a space to experiment – to try out ideas and approaches that are 'locally-grown', innovative, and sometimes even a bit risky – and to *learn* from those experiments, both from what has gone well and from what has proved more difficult. This report continues our developing practice of sharing some of what, alongside our neighbours, we are continuing to learn – and what we're planning to do in this next year of the project – and beyond.

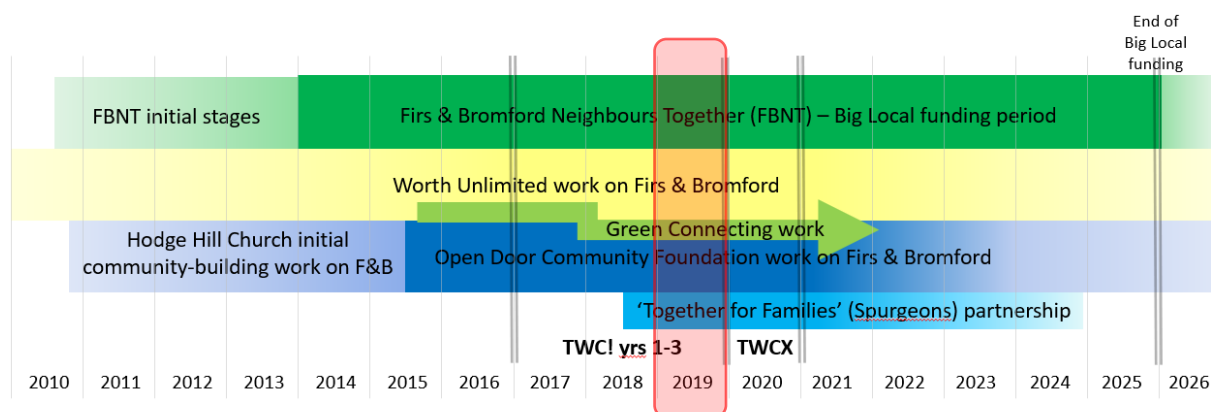
Come with us as the journey continues!

1.1 *Setting the Scene*

TogetherWeCan! was initially a 3-year (Jan 2017 – Dec 2019) intergenerational, community-building project within the Firs & Bromford neighbourhood (east Birmingham), undertaken as a partnership between Worth Unlimited (WU – youth work), Open Door Community Foundation (ODCF – adult-focused community-building) and Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together (FBNT – board of local residents funded by Big Local). Since September 2018, *TWC!* has also included the 'Together for Families' partnership with Tame Valley Children's Centre (run by Spurgeons), focused on local families with under 5s.

TWC!'s initial three years has now been extended ('*TWCX*') for a further year (Jan – Dec 2020), while FBNT develop a vision and plan for up to 2026 (the end of FBNT's Big Local funding) and beyond and the three partner organisations work together to discern the ongoing role of *TogetherWeCan!* in supporting the implementation of that 2026 vision.

Figure 1 *Timeline for TogetherWeCan! and its constituent partner organisations*



What do we do?

Across the three 'age bands' of our work (young people, adults, and families with under 5s), *TogetherWeCan!* pursues three parallel 'strands' of work:

- **'street connecting'** - making connections with, and between, local people, and growing new forms of associational life from those connections;
- **'doing stuff together'** - facilitating places and groups which local people feel they belong and can contribute to;
- **'support and development'** - supporting local people to grow in the confidence, skills and connections needed to be able to participate in and contribute to the life of their neighbourhood, and wider world.

Through a range of focused activity, *TWC!* brings together children-, youth- and adult-focused community work to maximise the opportunities for intergenerational (as well as cross-cultural) interaction and relationship-building. Our overall aim is to contribute to *"a flourishing community, with flourishing connections between flourishing people"*. We also seek to help and support our local people to establish sustainable livelihoods, understood as encompassing and developing a holistic range of assets including personal skills and strong social networks, as well as financial security.

Money and People

TogetherWeCan! represents a significant financial investment in the Firs & Bromford estate, with funding from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) 'Reaching Communities' programme and from BLF's 'Big Local' programme, led by the local residents group, Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together. With this funding, *TWC!* employs 4 full-time workers:

- An adult-focused **Street Connector Mentor** (Paul Wright, ODCF), who finds, supports and works alongside local 'connectors' and people with ideas for local groups and activities
- An adult-focused **Support & Development Worker** (Lucy Poulson, ODCF), who facilitates regular 'places of welcome' and supports people to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community, and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives
- A **Street Connector for Young People** (Dan Sandford-Smith, Worth Unlimited) who leads on our street-based engagement ('detached work') with local young people, and our intergenerational social action work
- A **Support & Development Worker for Young People** (Flo Berrow, Worth Unlimited), who supports young people to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community, and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives, and also assists with the detached youth work

In addition to the *TWC!* 'core team', the project is also supported by:

- A half-time **Green Connector** (Cath Fletcher, ODCF, fully-funded by FBNT), using key 'green spaces' around the neighbourhood as contexts within which to engage new people and support local residents to develop and sustain teams, groups and activities focused on gardening, growing things and/or environmental development.

- A full-time **Families Connector** (Ria Evans, employed and fully-funded by the Spurgeons 'Together for Families' programme), sitting within both the Tame Valley Children's Centre staff team and the TWC! team, with a particular focus on connecting with, and supporting local people to develop activities with, parents with children under 5 years old.
- A monthly session (and on-the-phone advice) from a **Legal Advisor** specialising in social security benefits, through a contract with Birmingham Community Law Centre.

TogetherWeCan! is also supported with additional time and resource (not funded by TWC!) from:

- **Worth Unlimited:** running 'the Hub' as a youth and community centre and TWC!'s workers' full-time office base; Worth's CEO (Tim Evans) chairs the project steering group and attends team meetings, in addition to his new part-time paid role for TWC! (see below)
- **Hodge Hill Church:** the local Church of England vicar, Revd Al Barrett, gives significant time to leading team meetings, project management, and co-ordinating the evaluation process
- **Thrive Together Birmingham:** offers significant support to the project, particularly through Jo Bagby's consultative role on the Board of Open Door Community Foundation

Our neighbourhood

'Firs & Bromford' is a neighbourhood built in the 1950s (Firs) and 1960s (Bromford), on the eastern edge of the city of Birmingham. Like many other 'outer estates' built at a similar time, it has clear edges (including the M6 motorway to the north), and only a few access roads on and off the estate. There are three primary schools on the estate (and a cluster of primary and secondary schools just to the south of the neighbourhood, although these tend to serve the central Hodge Hill area more than Firs & Bromford). There are also two church buildings (one Roman Catholic, one Pentecostal), two Birmingham City Council-run community buildings, and a Children's Centre. While some of these buildings are well-used by the community, some of the others are not. A vital 'base' (staff offices and one venue for groups and activities) for the *TogetherWeCan!* project is The Hub, run by Worth Unlimited as a youth centre since 2010 – see map below (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

When the estate was built, the first residents were almost entirely of White British or Irish heritage. In the last decade, this has begun to change quite dramatically, and now close to half the residents of Firs & Bromford are from African, African-Caribbean, Asian and Eastern European backgrounds. One of the foundation stones of *TogetherWeCan!* is the vision statement of Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together (FBNT Big Local Plan 2012):

"We wish to develop our community into a place where all feel welcome, all feel that they belong and all feel that they can flourish, whatever path has brought us to live together."





----- Weekly door-knocking (2019)

----- Street event door-knocking (2019)

● Connectors' homes

Main venues for groups & activities:

- ① the Hub (Worth Unlimited)
- ② Ambridge House (Birmingham City Council)
- ③ St Wilfrid's Community Centre
- ④ Community Forest Space @ Tame Valley Academy
- ⑤ CAFLO Community Centre (formerly Wellbeing Hub)
- ⑥ Tame Valley (Primary) Academy & Children's Centre
- ⑦ Firs Primary School
- ⑧ Bluebell Woods
- ⑨ Shawsdale 'Green'
- ⑩ Bromford 'Village Green'

2019 Street events in other locations:

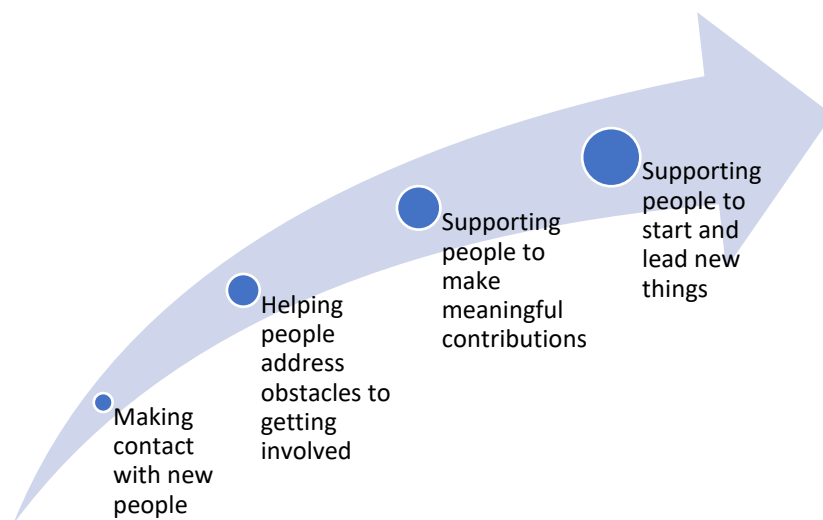
- ① Berrandale / The Moors
- ② Arkle Croft
- ③ Collingbourne Avenue
- ④ Hyperion Way
- ⑤ Hillcross Walk / Shawsdale Road
- ⑥ Ambridge House
- ⑦ The Paddock [not in 2019]
- ⑧ Bromford Fish Bar
- ⑨ Tom's Lights [not in 2019]
- ⑩ Larkspur Croft [new in 2019]

Figure 2 Firs & Bromford neighbourhood with key TWC! locations

The project 'pathway' and key outcomes

TogetherWeCan! activities seek to support both young people and adults on a developmental journey from 'first contact', through 'clearing obstacles' and 'pathways in to participation', towards being able to 'make meaningful contributions' (within the neighbourhood and beyond), and to develop skills, confidence and connections to initiate and lead their own groups and activities.

Figure 2 *TWC! Project Pathway*



We call this our project 'pathway' – but we recognise that people will join the journey at different stages, that the journey is not necessarily a straight line, and that not everyone will want to become a group or activity leader. If local residents feel **more connected to their neighbours**, if they're **better able to overcome obstacles** to living flourishing lives, and if they're **more able to share their passions, gifts and skills** with their neighbours – undergirded by a rich and interconnected mix of **places and groups where people can feel they belong, and where they feel they can make a contribution** – then *TogetherWeCan!* is achieving its key outcomes.

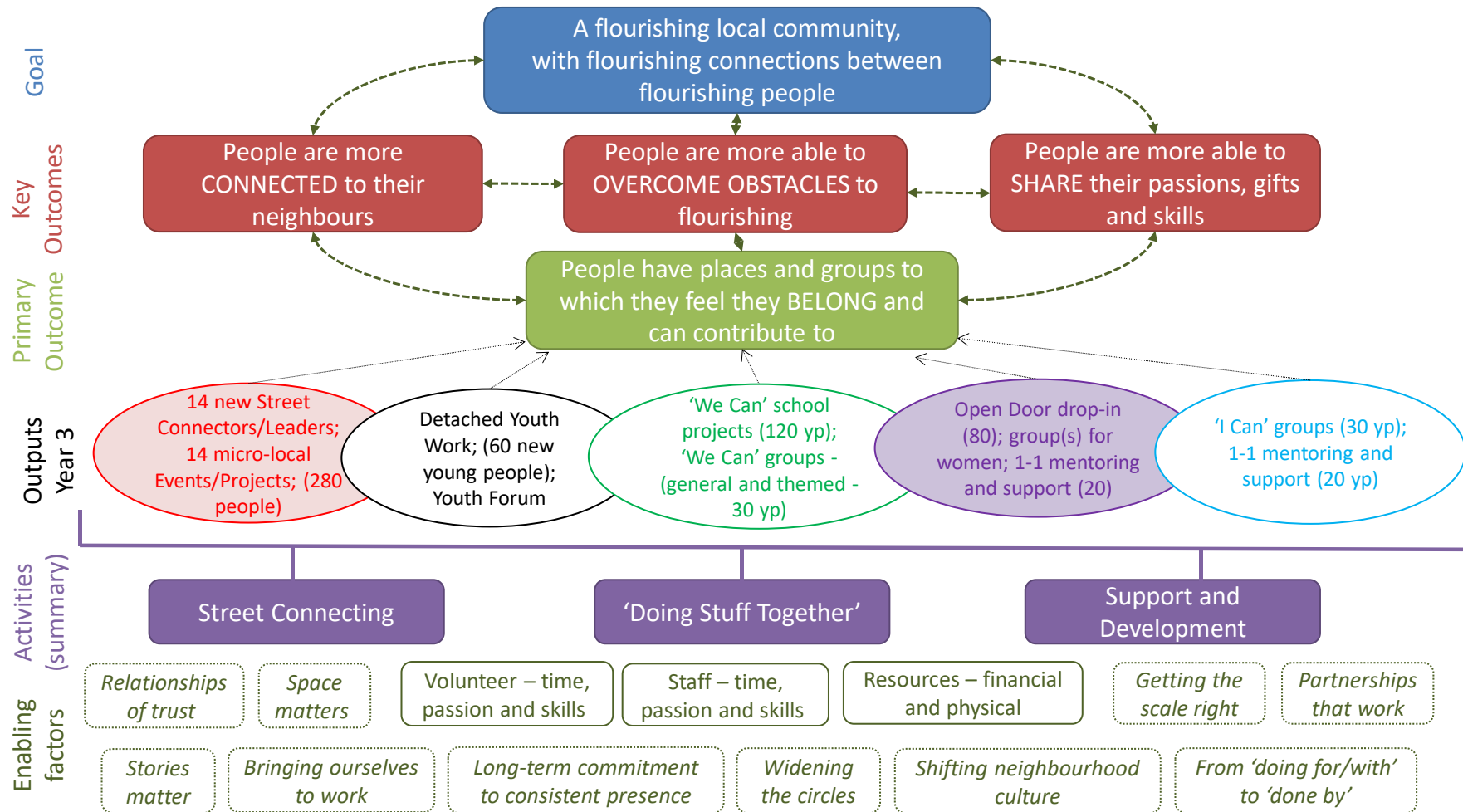
1.2 How It Works - Our 'Theory of Change'

Growing a flourishing local community is not like operating a machine. It's not as simple as putting something in at one end, pulling a few levers, pressing a few buttons, and seeing the finished product pop out at the other end. We think of it more as an 'ecology' – a complex system of living organisms, connected together in relationships of interdependence. If one part of the ecology changes, it affects all the other parts, often in ways that are unpredictable.

TogetherWeCan! is part of the 'ecology' of the Firs & Bromford neighbourhood – but it is only a *part*. What we do through *TWC!* we hope makes a positive difference locally, but when change happens in our neighbourhood it is never just down to what we have done. Nevertheless, we hope that through the main activities of *TogetherWeCan!* (Street Connecting, Support and Development, and 'Doing Stuff Together'), we can make a significant and unique contribution towards realising Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together's vision of a flourishing local community and achieving *TWC!*'s key outcomes.

Figure 3 shows our 'Theory of Change', showing the foundational 'enabling factors' which shape *how* we work as much as *what* we do (see 'Golden Threads', section 4.1 below), moving upwards through our key activities and associated outputs, towards the outcomes we have already outlined above.

Figure 3 TWC! Theory of Change (outputs updated for Year 3)



1.3 What's Changed in 2019?

2019 has been a significant year for the *TogetherWeCan!* programme (see Figure 1, above):

- as the third and final year of the initial funding from the Big Lottery (Reaching Communities) Fund and FBNT, the *TWC!* team worked to achieve the outputs and outcomes we had committed to in our original funding application – and also continued to adjust and develop our work in the light of what we had learnt in years 1 and 2;
- as FBNT's priorities continued to develop, in conversation with *TWC!*'s work and learning, we sought to respond to those changing priorities in key objectives we set ourselves for the year;
- in line with our developing learning and evolving priorities, *TWC!* has drawn into its work and reflection other members of the local Worth Unlimited team, some added capacity to develop our learning and training programme, and external support around enterprise and fundraising;
- once the additional extension year ('*TWCX*') was agreed, we have begun work supporting FBNT's wider 2026 vision and plan development process, out of which we will discern the future role and direction for *TWC!* beyond December 2020.

The *TWC!* pathway

The learning from years 1 & 2 of *TogetherWeCan!* highlighted the complexity of the reality (compared with the necessary simplicity of the *TWC!* pathway – Figure 2, above), but also significant places where our pathway required some amending (see Figure 4, below):

- The significance of 'Places of Welcome' as 'entry points' for people to begin to get involved – beyond the 'first contact' of our connecting activities
- The inextricability of 'barrier-removing' support and more positive mentoring to enable people to make meaningful contributions locally
- The significance of *teams* – alongside the more individual model of 'group leader' – in enabling people to grow and deepen in the contributions they make
- The recognition that such teams often then resource and add capacity to many of the activities associated with 'connecting' and 'Places of Welcome' locally
- The emerging importance of formal and informal learning opportunities, to enable people to develop personally, and to develop skills and wisdom for group, team and community leadership

Figure 4
Revised *TWC!* Project Pathway



Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together priorities 2019

Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together (FBNT) is both a partner in *TWC!* and one of our two core funders (alongside Big Lottery Reaching Communities funding). A key part of *TWC!*'s work, therefore, is to support FBNT to deliver on its identified priorities. In January 2019, FBNT, in conversation with *TWC!*, agreed four revised priorities for the year (each with related actions, see Y2 pp.45ff.):

1. to work towards developing and implementing a Village Vision that is sustainable beyond Big Local
2. to draw even more people into involvement and to continue to understand what people are passionate about
3. to support & encourage other people to do stuff and make sure it is sustainable
4. to nurture a sustainable community-wide network [what *TWC!* calls the local 'ecology'] of interconnected individuals, groups & places

TWC! key objectives 2019

In response to FBNT's revised priorities, and responding to our learning and evaluation over the first two years of *TogetherWeCan!*, our Year 2 evaluation report identified a number of key objectives for *TWC!* Year 3, both addressing themes which are relevant across the whole project, and for specific work streams (including new work streams focusing on 'growing leaders' and 'social enterprise'). The former are outlined here, and the latter are detailed in the relevant sections of Chapter 2.

- **Nurturing welcoming, resilient groups** (see Yr 2 report, section 4.2, p.35)
 - CONTINUE to invest time and energy in 'being / doing *with*' groups, rather than trying to push them too quickly into the autonomous, 'done *by*' space
 - CONTINUE to seek to help groups reflect on the diverse contributions within the group, their impact on participants and the wider community, the tension of 'bonding vs welcome', the life cycle of a group, and their learning / development needs as a group
 - DEVELOP a focus on supporting the development of *teams* (rather than exclusively on 'group leaders'), growing the opportunities for peer mentoring and supporting individuals within teams
- **Supporting and developing community venues** (see Yr 2 report, section 4.4, p.39)
 - CONTINUE to offer the Hub as an 'incubator space' for new groups and activities to start and develop
 - CONTINUE to invest time and energy in 'pop-up' spaces, in different parts of the neighbourhood, as an opportunity both to engage new people and to 'test out' the possibilities of different locations
 - CONTINUE to explore, with local partners, the possibility of developing other 'Hub-like' spaces, in different parts of the neighbourhood
 - EXPLORE, in partnership with Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together, the possibilities of developing "a network of buildings and spaces that promotes a shared ethos and a spirit of co-operation" (see FBNT priorities)

- **Contributing to the ‘community ecology’** (see Yr 2 report, Section 5, p.41)
 - CONTINUE to support, in partnership with Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together:
 - The growth & multiplication of resident-led ‘connecting spaces’
 - The growth & multiplication of resident-led ‘supportive spaces’
 - The work of resident-led ‘place-making’ (e.g. through FBNT’s ‘Village Vision’, identified in FBNT priorities, above)
 - The growth & multiplication of resident-led ‘community traditions’
 - Other locally-rooted groups and agencies to strengthen and multiply their connections, and to ‘widen their circles’ of participation
 - The development of experiential and learning trips out, beyond the local neighbourhood, to broaden our horizons and imaginations

Additional roles supporting TWC!’s development work

To better equip *TWC!* in its evolving roles around supporting neighbours’ learning, training and development, sustaining and developing locally-rooted social enterprises, and supporting groups to develop towards sustainability, *TWC!* has re-structured its budget and some of its organizational mechanics to draw in people with expertise, capacity and a particular focus in these areas:

- employing a part-time **Learning & Training Co-ordinator** (Tim Evans, WU), identifying and coordinating learning and training opportunities for *TWC!* staff, ‘volunteers’ and other local participants – both delivered locally and further afield;
- drawing in Worth Unlimited’s **social enterprise development workers** (Jane Barrett & Stewart Boyle), who oversee the development of Gear-up (bike sales and repairs), and Listen Threads (branded and bespoke clothing production), based in the ‘Enterprise Hub’ next door to the Hub;
- paying an **enterprise consultant** (Pete Twilley, Staffordshire University), alongside Jane Barrett offering 1-2-1 mentoring time and leading a ‘developing enterprise’ course for local residents;
- working more closely with Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together’s **funding consultant** (Alan Crawford), supporting local groups and organisations to develop business plans and apply for grant funding.

Looking beyond TWC! phase one – developing a ‘2026 vision’

In early 2019, we engaged in positive conversations with both Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together and The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF – what was previously the Big Lottery Fund) about a second phase of *TogetherWeCan!* (‘TWC2’), anticipated to last from January 2020 to December 2022 – an evolution of *TWC!* based on our learning and development in the first two years of phase one. As those conversations progressed, however, TNLCF encouraged us to ‘think longer’ – an affirmation of our fundamental commitment to patient, long-term community culture change – and to more closely align our future plans with those of Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together. Both funders agreed to fund a fourth, extension year (‘TWCX’) on that basis, continuing the work of *TWC!* phase one, and to do the work of aligning ourselves to be the ‘support vehicle’ that enables FBNT to deliver on their future plans.

In the second half of 2019, therefore, *TWC!* took the lead, on behalf of FBNT, on a community-wide consultation process with Firs & Bromford residents, to help FBNT put together a widely-owned Vision and Plan for 2026 (the end of Big Local funding here) and beyond – due to be signed off by FBNT Board in April 2020. *TWCX* (Jan-Dec 2020) includes funding to analyse the data gleaned from that consultation process, and then to ‘test out’ the emerging Vision and Plan with local residents.

1.4 Reflection and Evaluation

In keeping with the ethos of the project, the *TWC!* reflection and evaluation takes an intentionally participatory and self-evaluative approach, supported by Revd Al Barrett and external evaluation partner Jane Perry. Both quantitative and qualitative data has been collected regarding *TWC!* activities/outputs (process) and outcomes (impact) – this year primarily through an extensive Summer Consultation programme and ongoing ‘outcomes stars’ from the youth social action projects (see separate Annex document, *TWC! in Numbers*). Jane has continued to work closely with the team throughout the year, assisting with the ongoing development and implementation of monitoring/evaluation, providing additional technical skills and expertise and a degree of external oversight, and supplying analyses of the data for this report.

Information captured through monitoring and evaluation has been integrated with an ongoing programme of reflection – both as a staff team, and with neighbours locally – including a day of listening and reflecting, led by local connectors and supported by Cormac Russell of Nurture Development (an international leader in community-building thinking and practice), a 2-day residential trip to Dovedale for emerging leaders, and several other locally-based gatherings facilitated by local leaders. This two-way conversation allows real-time learning to be captured and assessed against wider evidence, in turn shaping future monitoring, evaluation and reflection activity.

This report presents a summary of that learning for Year 3, and across the three years of this initial phase of *TWC!*.



Above: 'Listening day' gathering with Cormac Russell
Right: Creative responses in the Summer Consultation



2 What have we done this year?

This section outlines what we have *done* in Year 3 (January to December 2019) through the various strands of work of the *TogetherWeCan!* project, and some facts and figures about *how many local residents* we have engaged with and supported across the three years of this first phase of *TWC!*.

Further detail for all the figures in this section is provided in an accompanying (separate) Annex - '*TogetherWeCan! in Numbers*'.

2.1 Street Connecting

We use the term 'street-connecting' to describe *TogetherWeCan!* activity which seeks to make contact with local residents, encouraging and enabling them to connect with each other and participate in activities with their neighbours.

Adults

During 2019, the objectives of our adult-focused connecting work were to:

- CONTINUE to build on the work of Street Connecting and Street Events, as a primary way of getting more people involved;
- CONTINUE our commitment to "finding and nurturing active connectors and group leaders from the black and minority ethnic backgrounds represented locally";
- DEVELOP regular habits of a growing 'connectors team' meeting, learning and celebrating together.

Over the year, Paul Wright, our Street Connector Mentor, has continued to co-ordinate *TWC!* engagement in four main strands of work:

- **Regularly engaging neighbours through door-step conversations with the Street Connectors Team, 'Pop-Up Place of Welcome' ('PUPOW') sessions¹ and other local events** – during 2019, the regular Street Connector team grew to 11, with 4 new members joining over the year. A wider team has emerged from the core Street Connector team, specifically to support Street Events – again this team has grown to 20 connectors, 9 of whom were new during Year 3. Figure 5 shows the growth of the Street connector team from 2017-2019, demonstrating the retention of a core of connectors but also the openness to new people.
- **Co-ordinating and supporting seasonal/holiday activities (especially Christmas & summer)** – *TWC!* also played a central role in initiating seasonal activities which allow neighbours to connect as well as supporting number of wider local events, organised by other community groups: Our Christmas Event was attended by c.150 adults and 150 children, whilst c.50-60 neighbours (adults and young people) supported Santa in doing his rounds of local streets over 3 weeks in December. Over the summer, in addition to Street Events & other core *TWC* activities (e.g. Arts Café), we hosted 8 inter-generational activities and 5 additional evening sessions for young people. The

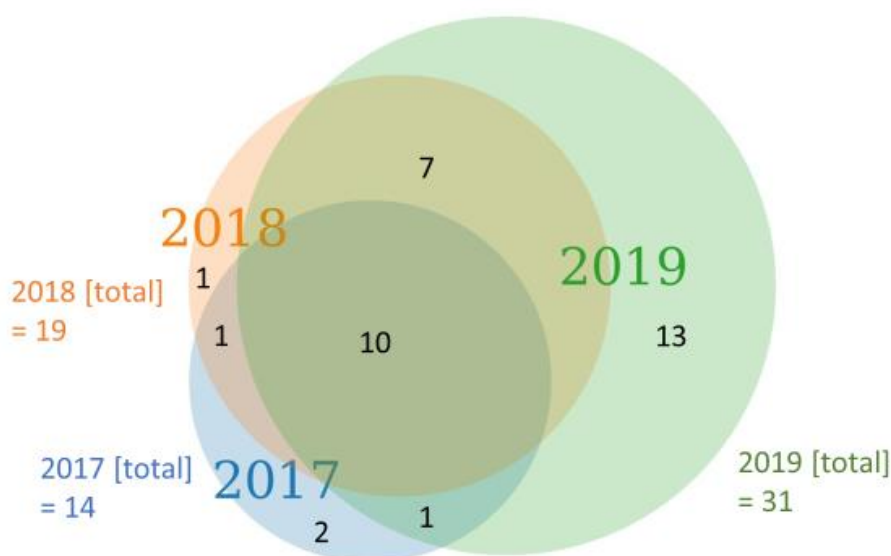
¹ 20 sessions this year, engaging parents at the end of the school day, over a cuppa in the school playground, PUPOW are a development of the earlier 'Hodge Hill Cuppa' sessions, reaching more schools/parents - with an estimated average of 20 drinks served, resulting in 10 meaningful conversations each session.

main Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together summer event alone was attended by c. 500 people.

- **Supporting neighbours to plan and run ‘micro-local’ Street Events** - focused in on just one street, a green space, or a small cluster of neighbouring streets. During 2019, we hosted 9 Street Events with a registered attendance of over 461 people (184 adults and 277 children)², 148 of whom (56 adults and 92 children) were registered for the first time.
- **Supporting resident-led groups, activities and projects to start, grow and develop.** In Year 3, the emphasis of Paul’s work shifted towards supporting the growth and development of 12 existing groups (started in Years 1 and 2), as well as 2 new groups – an after-school club at St Wilfrid’s and Firs Families Club (alongside the newly-formed Men’s Group and Book Club supported by Lucy) – which started during the year (see Section 3.1).
- **Supporting and mentoring a growing number of active residents, as regular street connectors, street event organisers, project leaders and project volunteers.** As participation has grown, supporting and mentoring has become an increasingly important, and time-consuming, part of Paul’s role. Around 50-60 local residents are engaged with TWC! projects as street connectors or active volunteers. This number fluctuates, owing to personal circumstances and nature of projects being developed, but data indicates a stable but growing team.

“Going out Street Connecting, I’ve spent a lot of time in a listening role in the community, which has been a great opportunity to learn and hear what local people think... [I’ve got more involved] because I have become more passionate about my area and the people. The more I talk to people the more I want to be able to help and get involved. I have a better understanding of what I am passionate about.” (Amy)

Figure 5 Growth of Street Connector Team (Regular and Street Events) 2017-2019



² Registered attendance at 8 out of 9 events – individuals may have attended more than one event.

Street Connecting (Young People) – ACHIEVEMENTS Years 1-3

Over the 3 years, *TogetherWeCan!* 'Street Connecting' has resulted in explosion of neighbourhood activity and 'places to belong' (see Section 3.1) which has considerably exceeded our original target.

So far, 28 local residents have been supported to set-up new community initiatives, with a total of 83 local people engaged as connectors or project volunteers.

Together, we've hosted 26 separate Street Events and 26 other activities and groups - of which, 14 are still live, 2 are dormant, whilst 10 have come to an end or developed into other things.

Total registered attendance at Street Events alone across the 3 years has reached 1207 (490 adults, 717 children), with a further c. 600-800 additional attendances per year at other larger street/community events, where registration was not possible.

This demonstrates the success of the 'door-knocking' and 'street event' models of connecting with neighbours – together with the time and energy intensive nature of work to support new and growing groups, and the volunteers who lead them.

Young people

2019 objectives for our Youth Street-Connecting work were to:

- CONTINUE our commitment to “drawing other local adults into the ‘We Can’ social action projects at an early stage in the process”;
- CONTINUE to support and develop the emerging ‘youth forum’, and mentoring young people to develop community leadership skills;
- CONTINUE to support the coordination of the FBNT summer programme, promoting the further development of resident-led, intergenerational activities;
- Support the DEVELOPMENT of inter-generational, resident-led holiday activities in other school holiday periods (e.g. Christmas, Easter, half-term holidays);
- DEVELOP short-term social action projects into longer-term, or annual/seasonal, activities;
- EXPLORE the possibility of developing resources / training to develop the skills and confidence of local adults who want to engage in youth work.

During Year 3, our youth-focused team - Dan Sandford-Smith and Flo Berrow - have continued connecting with local young people, giving them opportunities to connect together with other young people and their adult neighbours, through three main strands of work:

- 64 detached youth work sessions, in local parks and other green spaces, outside shops and other places where young people gather locally, and in bumping spaces like The Real Junk Food Kitchen and community events – engaging with 138 young people
- 5 'We Can' social action projects with local schools, engaging 158 young people from local primary (Tame Valley Academy, Firs Academy and Heathlands Academy) and secondary (Park Hall Academy) schools, working with classes of young people to plan, deliver and evaluate a community focussed project, based in the Firs and Bromford neighbourhood, that helps make the neighbourhood a better place to live and connect with their neighbours. These included projects developing green spaces, Great British Clean Up, community Litter picks, campaigning and fundraising around issues of environment, heritage and Homelessness.

- 2 locally based 'We Can' groups, meeting together after school and in the school holidays, engaging in short-term and longer-term intergenerational social action projects in the neighbourhood (Including projects such as community clean up's, Youth Iftar, Knife Angel Walk [see case studies, p.30 & p.33], green space development, Afternoon Tea's and more) – 47 sessions in 2019, engaging 38 young people

In addition, Dan and Flo worked in partnership with the wider TWC! team to facilitate wider programme of connecting activities, including:

- Summer programme, supporting WeCan group to organise the weekly wet games sessions ('slip & slide'), supporting a small group of older young people who attended Dovedale residential, supporting all the summer-focused Street Events and a small number of core young people (and the youth connector team) involved in setting up and being around, engaging young people in consultation activities.
- Working with new local groups CanYouRelate, B36 Fitness & O'Dells Boxing Club to deliver an intensive programme of sports- and music-focused activities over the October half term, including the inter-generational table tennis tournament [see case study, p.30] and an afternoon tea led by Girls Group, in partnership with local adult leaders at Ambridge House.
- After-school WeCan group @ Firs for summer term with heritage focus
- A 'pathway' of open-access youth clubs – from Kids Club (7-11s) through to Youth Club (11+), Girls Group (11-14 focus, with older young people & young adults as young leaders), and the 2 WeCan long-term social action groups. This 'pathway' has aided our retention of young people, where in previous years we have often 'lost' many at the primary-secondary transition point, and not retained young people off the back of school projects.

2019 has also seen the development of a Youth Connecting team: three adults (Amy, Laura and Clare) have moved from having a broad community involvement to realising their passion is working with young people. After initial training with adult-focused team plus a further 3 youth-focused sessions, the team now lead on youth connecting activities and attend monthly wider EBNS team meetings with paid staff. Growing numbers of young people are also involved in leadership in some form – at different age stages, leading in different ways (e.g. Katie, age 12, involved in leading Kids Group, Skye and others, age 17/18, supporting older youth work).

We are continuing to invest in training, mentoring and support for our volunteers: Clare and Stewart (the Worth Unlimited Gear-Up worker) have enrolled in 'Urban Changemakers', a personal & leadership development programme which will feed into youth leadership work in 2020. Preparations are also in place to enable the first cohort of c.10 volunteers to undertake a youth work course.

"I used to attend kids club occasionally... but now I've now got involved in more community events, meeting new people and using my skills more. I helped out over the summer at street events, and help to organise the afternoon teas. Now I help in kids club as a young leader, as well as attending girls group, youth club and youth social action. I basically do a bit of everything! Having a role and some responsibility means that I feel more enthusiastic about the groups, and I want to help other younger people in the way older young people helped me." (Katie)

Street Connecting (Young People) – ACHIEVEMENTS Years 1-3

Over the three years, total recorded contacts with young people through detached youth work have reached 322 and a staggering 599 young people have attended our school 'We Can' projects – considerably higher than our original targets¹. In addition, engagement with our 'We Can' groups outside of school has reached 99, again above target in total.

One of the challenges we have been grappling with is how most effectively to 'feed' new young people from school projects into *existing* 'We Can' groups, which often have established peer relationships and group dynamics.

New 'We Can' groups for each year's new cohort after school, along with the new open-access youth clubs and more targeted youth provision (including a neighbour-led Girls Group - see below), have had a big impact on our ability to retain young people. We have a much larger core number of young people involved in WeCan YSA on a regular basis, with over 20 engaging regularly, compared to 10 in previous years. The number of young people that attend youth provision numerous times a week has also increased.

There continue to be more local adults wanting to get involved, and develop skills and experience in youth work locally, along with the development of other local groups (e.g. Can you relate, B36 Fit et al.) wanting to do more inter-generational work with young people.

This continues to raise questions both of *capacity to lead and support groups* (and detached youth work), and of *capacity and resources to develop volunteers* to engage in youth work.

2.2 Support and Development

The vision of TogetherWeCan! Support & Development work – with adults and young people - is to facilitate regular 'places of welcome', through which people can be supported to grow in confidence to identify and share their gifts, skills and passions, be active participants in their community, and overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives.

The 2019 objectives for this work were to:

- DEVELOP more structured ways of following up ('checking in' with) adults and young people who have moved beyond intensive support;
- EXPLORE more crossover between male and female workers to allow for gender-appropriate support;
- EXPLORE the possibilities (and the resourcing needs) of developing more intentional 'peer support' spaces – extending the support offer beyond 1-2-1 worker time – including (but not only) support for those dealing with trauma.

Adults

In 2019, our adult-focused Community Support & Development Worker (Lucy Poulson) has been working to develop four core areas:

- Supporting core local **places of welcome** and encounter, including:
 - Leading the team (staff and volunteers) that hosts the weekly **Open Door** drop-in session at The Hub, offering a 'place of welcome' and hospitality, a listening ear, and multiple forms of practical support, from using computers and accessing the internet, to help writing CVs and

applying for jobs, to support and advice (through our partnership with Birmingham Community Law Centre) about benefits entitlements and challenging unfair decisions.

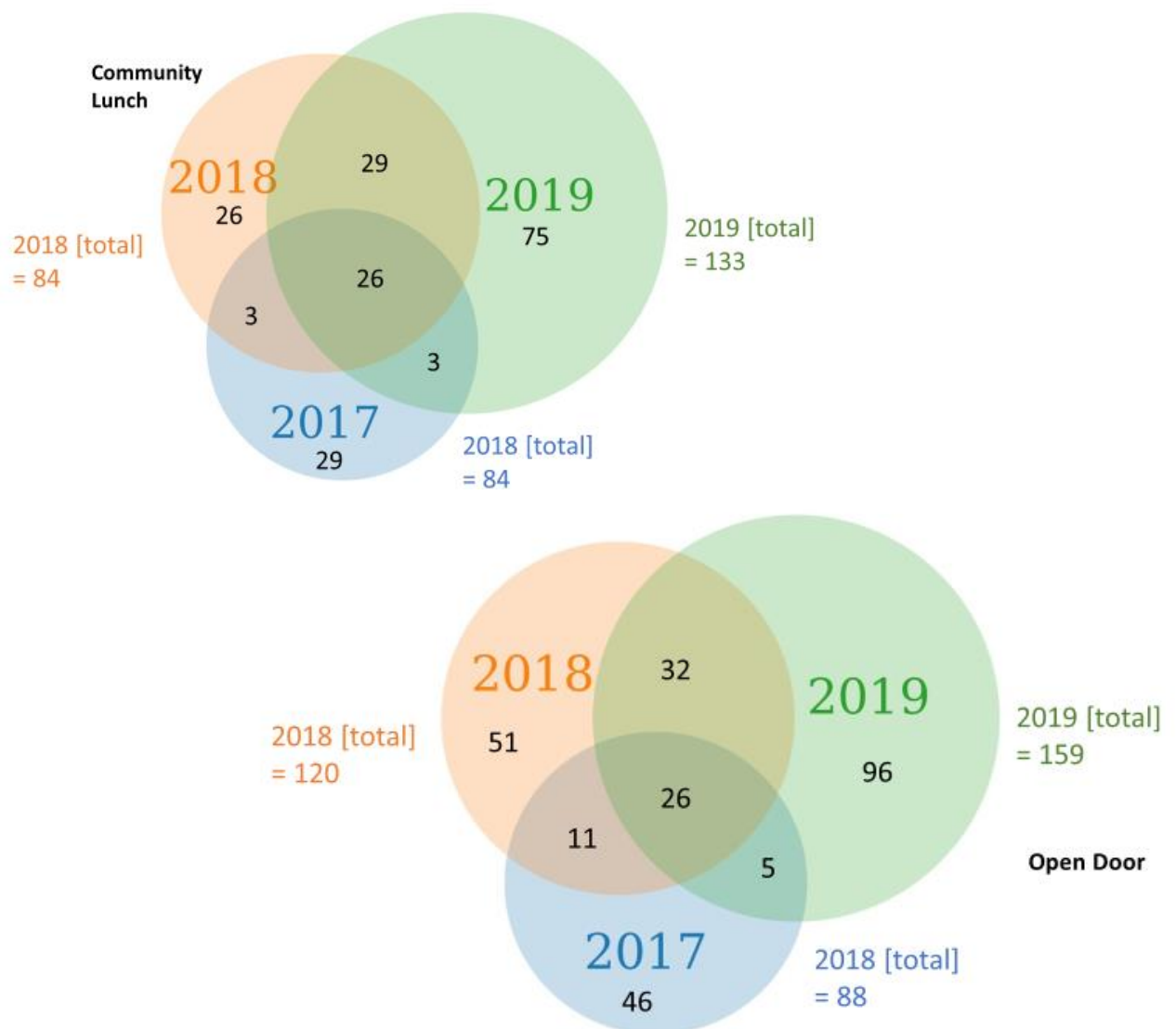
In 2019, 159 local people, of which 96 were new to Open Door, engaged with support through 43 sessions.

- o Supporting the Open Door drop-in team to host a weekly **Community Lunch** which both encourages people to bring and share together and provides food for people to be able to take away with them to use during the week.

In 2019, 43 Community Lunches were attended by 133 local people, of which 75 were new to Community Lunch.

Figure 6 illustrates the growth of these 'places of welcome' over the 3 years, demonstrating the retention and expansion regular attenders over 2-3 years but also openness to others.

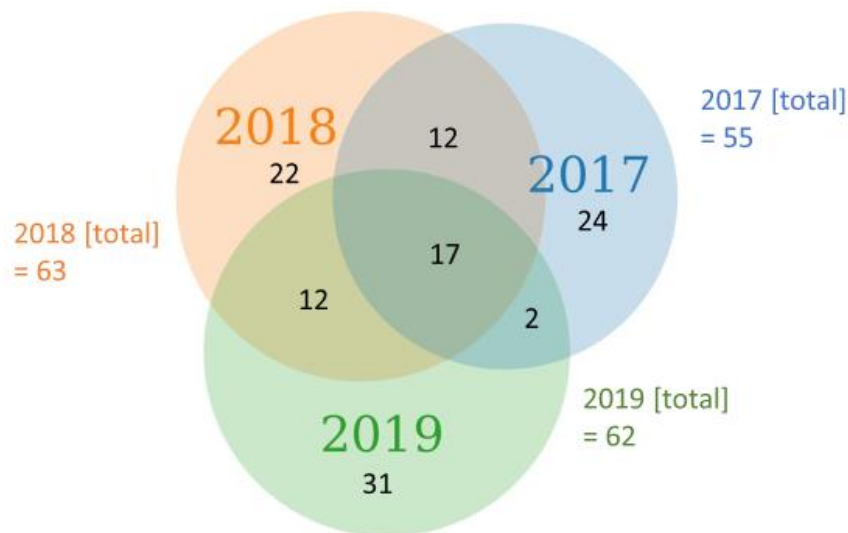
Figure 6 Growth of Community Lunch and Open Door 2017-2019



- Facilitating the weekly **Women's Group** sessions, at Ambridge House, as a 'Place of Welcome' that brings together women from many different nationalities for connection, friendship and sharing their gifts and skills together;

In 2019, 62 women attended Women's Group, of which 31 were new to the group. Women's Group has seen a greater turn-over of individuals and so slower growth.

Figure 7 Growth of Women's Group 2017-2019



- Supporting The Real Junk Food Kitchen, Pop-Up Places of Welcome and Firs Families Club;
- Engaging local **women** through those places and other local spaces;
- Working alongside our Street Connector Mentor to develop these as spaces that can both support the emergence of new local leaders, and enable the 'incubation' of new experiences and ideas which can then be developed further in other spaces and times of the week;
- Working on a **1-2-1** basis, with 36 individuals (30 of whom were new in 2019) through referrals from local primary schools and self-referrals through Open Door or other regular groups, including supporting and mentoring individuals to grow in confidence (e.g. through emotional support, making introductions, and accompanying to groups), towards greater participation and contribution in local groups and activities; supporting people through crisis situations (e.g. eviction), to navigate systems (e.g. applying for benefits and challenging unfair decisions).

In the past year the idea of a **Men's Group**, which originated with one of our long-standing Open Door drop-in participants, has developed into a thriving monthly gathering, usually cooking and eating brunch together, with leadership from local neighbours and a couple of non-local Open Door volunteers, and light-touch support from Lucy [see case study, p.32].

Lucy has also been driving the development of a number of arts- and wellbeing-focused spaces, in partnership with local residents, including:

- a monthly **Arts Café**, operating on a 'bring and share' model – so far attended by 26 local over 9 sessions;

- occasional creative- and/or support-focused sessions after Community Lunch on Tuesday afternoons;
- ‘**Wellbeing Wednesday**’ trips to wellbeing facilities in the wider area, e.g. Erdington swimming pool;
- **trips to theatre productions** at the Birmingham REP - with a total of 35 neighbours so far attending shows;
- a resident-led **book club**, which originated as a spin-off from a theatre trip to see “*Pride and Prejudice (*sort of)*” – with 13 members meeting over 11 sessions so far [see case study, p.29].

Support and Development (Adults) – ACHIEVEMENTS Years 1-3

Over the 3 years, we have engaged with and supported 267 local people through Open Door, 191 people through Community Lunch, and 120 women through Women’s Group. We have also supported at least 78 people through Sarah and Lucy’s 1-2-1 work. Again, these figures significantly exceed the original target of engaging and supporting 80 people each year through drop-in sessions, and offering 1-2-1 support to 20 people each year.

Emerging analysis (see Figures 6 and 7, above) shows that each established area of support and development work has grown year on year, reflecting development of a healthy core of people attending in more than 1 year, whilst maintaining an openness to new people.

Young people

As well as supporting Dan in the youth-focused connecting work (see above), Flo Berrow’s role parallels and supports *TWC!*’s work with adults, contributing to *TWC!* staff presence at the weekly Open Door drop-in and The Real Junk Food Kitchen sessions and working with colleagues to support both adults and young people in family contexts .

Objectives for Youth Support and Development in Year 3 were to:

- CONTINUE to invest more time and energy in open-access youth clubs as (replacing the ‘I Can’ drop-ins as the ‘entry point’ for support);
- EXPLORE appropriate resources / courses to offer ‘foundation skills’ learning for teenagers and young adults.

As a result, Flo’s 2019 Support and Development work with young people included:

- supporting new and more well-established youth drop-ins, youth clubs and girls groups – in particular, during Year 3, 23 young people were engaged through Girls Group (over 35 sessions) and 4 young people engaged in Open Door – emphasizing its development as an intergenerational space.
- Providing intensive 1-2-1 support to 20 young people referred by schools and other organisations
- Supporting young people 1-2-1 during open access sessions (Girls Group, Youth Club and Friday Kids Club), on a drop-in basis at the Hub at other times, and by appointment.

Support and Development (Young People) – ACHIEVEMENTS Years 1-3

Years 1 and 2 saw a subtle but significant shift in Flo's work from more organised I-Can groups to a combination of less formal youth drop-ins and 1-2-1 support. Alongside this, we also began to explore alternative ways of offering more structured opportunities for young people to learn, grow and develop in confidence, skills and other personal capacities.

These shifts mean it is not straight-forward to summarise Flo's work over the 3 years in cumulative totals.

Over the 3 years, Flo has engaged with 20-30 young people each year through various youth provision (meeting our original target), and offered 1-2-1 support to around 30 young people each year (well above original target). Resulting, overall in providing support and development opportunities for c.75 young people in total.



2.3 Green connecting

Cath Fletcher, our half-term Green Connector, has five key aspects to her role:

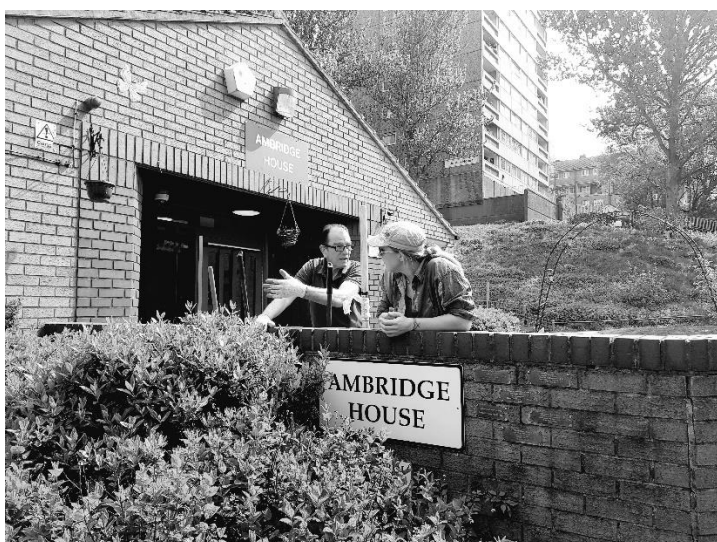
- **Teams** – encouraging, supporting and developing resident-led activities in local green spaces, building a team of 'green champions' who can take the lead on green-focused activities, and linking local people with learning and training opportunities, both locally-delivered and further afield
- **Spaces** – working with neighbours to develop new and existing green spaces, both larger scale and 'micro' sites
- **Participation** – drawing more people into using the green spaces and engaging in green-focused activities
- **Partnerships** – drawing in other organisations, and building a network of partners supporting the use and development of local green spaces
- **Village Vision** – working in partnership with other aspects of the wider local Village Vision, including heritage, arts and wellbeing, and supporting the development of community traditions / rhythms focused around green spaces (e.g. spring bluebell walks, summer garden parties, Bromford in Bloom)

Over 2019 Cath has been involved in supporting and/or convening:

- Ambridge House Gardening Group (weekly in spring/summer, fortnightly in autumn/winter), including planting a small ‘food forest’ (fruit trees, fruit and veg in raised beds, etc)
- Forest Space community activities, and other group use (e.g. Tame Valley Academy school groups, young people, men’s group)
- Bluebell Woods activities
- Litter picking group (weekly)
- Green champions gatherings

In total Cath has engaged with c.95 adults and 115 children over the year, worked closely with 26 emerging Green Champions, supporting 2 of them to engage in non-local training opportunities. Across the estate, 15 new resident-led planting sites have been identified, which will form a key focus of Cath’s work in 2020. She has also worked with 5 local residents on a gold-award-winning showcase garden for the RHS Chatsworth Flower Show 2019, and has begun work with neighbours on a border garden for the BBC Gardener’s World Show 2020.

“with the help of Cath, [at Ambridge House] we organised in the summer a weekly gardening club – in the autumn fortnightly, and monthly in the winter. Recently Cath got a load of fruit trees, and we’ve had some planting sessions. And soon we’ll be planting herbs, bushes and plants. I’m not a gardener, but I really love gardening. So I’ve got involved and it’s done me the world of good.” (Barry T)



2.4 Connecting with families

Spurgeons’ ‘Together for Families’ worker, Ria Evans, has been working alongside *TWC!* as our ‘Families Connector’ (her remit is specifically focused on families with under 5s), leading some regular sessions with local neighbours supporting, and in other sessions supporting neighbours to take the lead (including 5 who’ve been supported into volunteering / training in 2019). Overall, in 2019 Ria

supported activities engaging with 102 families, including 136 children. Key activities this year have included:

- **Forest play** (in the Community Forest Space, with support from our Green Connector, Cath) – 10 sessions, engaging 6 families, including 9 children.
- **Parent & Baby play** – 13 sessions, engaging 16 families.
- **FAB Church** (alongside local emerging leaders and more established volunteers from Hodge Hill Church) – monthly gatherings for the leadership team, and holiday clubs at Easter, May half-term, summer & Oct half-term, engaging 12 families.
- **Firs Families Club** (alongside Street Connector Mentor, Paul and other TWC! core staff and neighbours) – 13 sessions (Mar-July) @ St Wilfrid’s Community Centre and 7 ‘pop-up’ sessions (July-Oct) on Shawsdale Green, engaging 33 families, 81 children (8 new families, 21 new children), comprising:

0-5s	6-8s	9-11s	12+
30	26	20	5

2.5 Growing leaders – training and development opportunities for ‘key people’

The Year 2 report described identification of a developing vision for nurturing and supporting key people (see Yr 2 report, section 4.3, p.37). Specific objectives for 2019 were to:

- DEVELOP the ways in which we intentionally invest time and energy in supporting the development of ‘key people’ in our neighbourhood;
- DEVELOP a ‘learning menu’ (alongside existing ‘learning circles’ and story-sharing spaces) – offering one-off sessions (targeted or open access, as appropriate) with input including: developing a ‘community safeguarding’ culture, community organizing skills, conflict resolution, first aid and mental health first aid;
- CONTINUE to support, in partnership with Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together;
- CONTINUE to develop experiential and learning trips out, beyond the local neighbourhood, to broaden our horizons and imaginations.

A more intentional programme of learning, training and development opportunities began (as a new ‘work stream’ within TWC!) in 2019, coordinated by Tim Evans. This has included:

- **First Aid training** (March) – 6 participants
- **‘safe and well’ community safeguarding training** (March) – initially for staff team and core Open Door volunteers, exploring ways of nurturing a culture among group participants and neighbours, that seeks to ensure neighbours are ‘safe and well’.
- **Mental Health First Aid training** (April) – 2 participants
- **training and deploying ‘community listeners’** (a day in May & across the summer programme) – a growing team of local people (8 so far – including many of the regular Street Connecting team, but also stretching wider) committed to engaging in intentional listening conversations with neighbours, within existing groups and activities and beyond. The team have engaged in: 2

training/preparation sessions; debrief sessions after each group/activity they have visited; a wider community gathering to share their findings with other neighbours, connectors and leaders locally (May); and a debrief and reflection session after the summer programme (Sept).

- **listening & communication skills** (June) – an open invitation session to neighbours, with 15 participants, covering basic skills for good listening and communication within family, group and community contexts;
- **residential in Dovedale** (August) – a 2-day residential for emerging community leaders and connectors, with 22 adults, 8 young people (10-18s) and 14 children (under 10s) attending [see case study, p.25].

Further work has gone into developing a more extensive learning programme, including a monthly rhythm of gatherings for learning and reflection, in 2020.

2.6 Social enterprises

Another developing strand of our work has been engagement with social enterprise (see Yr 2 report, section 6, p.48). Our 2019 objectives for this area included:

- CONTINUE to pilot, evaluate and further develop the ‘developing enterprise’ course with local people;
- DEVELOP the links between TWC!’s core activities and Worth Unlimited’s two ‘core’ social enterprises (Gear-up and Listen Threads) – as vital spaces for supporting and developing young people and young adults as ‘key people’ within the neighbourhood;
- EXPLORE the possibility of an ‘enterprise hub’ space for incubating, and connecting between, locally-grown micro-enterprises.

During 2019, Listen Threads – our clothing based social enterprise – has gone from strength-to-strength, with 9 local young people now engaging regularly to design, produce and sell a range of unique clothing. The Gear-up bike workshop has continued to provide work experience & shop-based mentoring to 5 local young people.

To support this work, a ‘developing enterprise’ course was delivered by Jane Barrett and Pete Twilley, with 7 participants, across 8 sessions, including:

- Introduction to enterprise
- What is your business?
- Identifying stakeholders, competition and market research
- Getting money in and managing it
- Business planning, monitoring and evaluation

The course has also been accompanied by ongoing weekly mentoring with one participant (a key member of Listen Threads) and 4 additional sessions of 1-2-1 mentoring with another participant, who has also benefited from 5 additional coaching sessions with an expert business coach, paid for from TWC!’s enterprise budget [see case study, p.35].

Case study: Dovedale residential trip

The 2-day residential to Dovedale was a very significant 'milestone moment' for many of our emerging community leaders and connectors. 22 adults and 22 children and young people stayed overnight together in self-catering accommodation, and as well as some structured sessions (focused on self-awareness, identifying personal 'roots', passions, skills and hopes, as well as hopes for the future of our community), there were hill walks, plenty of games and shared meals together, and lots of free time for relationship-building.

Deepening relationships – across a wide range of neighbours

'Getting away from home' was hugely significant. For some families it doubled as an (albeit brief) 'summer holiday', but for everyone it was a valued opportunity to spend extended time together, to get to know a wide range of neighbours more deeply (including some more on the 'fringes' of TWC!'s growing 'core'), and to bond over both the 'household tasks' (cooking, washing up together) and the big adventures. The culture of looking out for each other, of 'family', that many TWC! participants talk about, was deepened and reinforced here.

*"I've known, I've seen and spoken to people,
but not really had in-depth conversations with them before" (Jim)*

*"to spend more time with people, in your pyjamas, being relaxed, that was lovely...
we all looked out for each other, and each other's kids – it was family" (Clare)*

*"there was always someone to talk to, even if you woke up early, or on the night when all the
kids were going to bed – some people don't get that at home" (Amy)*

Children and adults together

Although much of TWC!'s work is focused on building up intergenerational relationships, Dovedale was also a great opportunity for children and adults to share life together and grow deeper friendships beyond immediate family lines.

*"Me and Saira, we've seen each other at school, but on that trip we actually spoke, and our
kids were playing, and now our kids are friends, we've bonded – that probably would have
taken a lot longer if Dovedale hadn't happened" (Amy)*

*"It created a bit of magic as well, a lot of magic – seeing the kids enjoying themselves – the
kids were amazing, not one phone, no TV, just fresh air – to see them climbing the trees... And
seeing adults and kids bonding – magical!" (Jim)*

Shared challenges and achievements

The shared adventure of climbing a steep hill (Thorpe Cloud) was hugely significant for many participants – both as an individual achievement and a collective experience.

"to achieve that hill – Yes! – I was so proud, I got to the top!" (Clare)

*"it wasn't that some people carried on and others were left behind, we all waited for each
other – it was that support, all this encouragement you had off people, it was like 'yes, I'm
going to do this!'... and then when we got to the top, we were all laughing and joking" (Amy)*

Building trust to engage more deeply – balancing ‘learning’ and ‘playing’

Several participants observed that as relationships of trust deepened between them, and as some of the outdoor challenges opened up new horizons of possibility, that then enabled them to engage more deeply in the more structured, reflective elements of the programme, intensifying the potential for learning together. People felt safer to step out of their usual ‘comfort zones’ – and grew together in their collective resilience and capacity to work as a team.

‘little practical tasks to do together, time to just talk together, building up friendship and trust – then when it came to structured sessions, it makes you more open, because you’re more comfortable with each other’ (Penny)

‘and that [climbing the hill] went into, when we did the bear cards session [on feelings], you feel like you’re actually already with a group of friends, and you can be a bit more honest than you usually would’ (Amy)

Adding to the shared story

Although the group conversation reflecting on the Dovedale trip happened some 6 months after the event, participants still spoke with energy and enthusiasm about the experience. There was a strong sense that its effects were hugely positive and long-lasting.

“We shared things – some of us struggled, but it still gets spoken about now” (Clare)

“it’s instilled in everyone’s memories – there’s one thing that really stands out for me, and it was that I’m lucky to be a part of this lot, these are my people” (Amy)

Aspects to develop further

Among both neighbours and staff, there is a shared enthusiasm for: making the residential trip away an annual tradition; extending its duration (i.e. 2 nights); drawing in more emerging leaders/connectors (including addressing cultural barriers that might be preventing a broader ethnic mix); including more opportunities for structured intergenerational team-building activities & reflection (bringing young and adult leaders together); and bringing in external/paid support with children’s activities to free up local leaders to engage more fully – all as part of an ongoing learning programme that both prepares for, and builds on, the time away.



3 What difference are we making?

This section highlights some of the significant differences *TogetherWeCan!* is making to our neighbourhood, as we map out the multiplication and development of ‘places to belong’, and share some of what we’ve heard from participants about their sense of growth in connectedness, confidence, and opportunities to share their passions and skills with their neighbours.

A separate, detailed Annex ‘*TogetherWeCan! in Numbers*’ gives more details of the *method* we’ve used to seek feedback from participants and *why* we’ve chosen to do it that way, as well as setting out our outcomes in full. Here we share something of the *content* of that feedback – both the *numbers* of people responding positively to our evaluation questions, and *what people said* when we asked them to share something of their experience of, and reflections on, our work.

3.1 More places to belong

A broad, diverse mix of sustainable places, spaces and groups where people can come and meet other neighbours, make friends, and feel they belong and can make a meaningful contribution, is foundational to the kind of neighbourhood-level change we are aiming for. After the explosion of new groups and activities in Year 1, with significant additional growth in Year 2, the anticipated slow-down eventually arrived in Year 3, enabling Paul, our Street Connector Mentor, to re-focus his time and energy away from the ‘new’, towards supporting existing groups to become stronger and more sustainable.

- Four new predominantly neighbour-led groups – an **after-school club at St Wilfrid’s** (an idea first proposed at a 2018 PIE event), **Firs Families Club**, **Men’s group** [see case study, p.32], and the **Book Club** that has ‘spun off’ from the community theatre trips [case study, p.29] – have started this year. Other new groups and activities launched in 2019 have been led or supported by other TWC! core or associate staff: Wellbeing Wednesdays, Arts Café, and Theatre trips (Lucy); Forest play, Parent & baby play, and FAB Church (Ria).
- **Afternoon teas at Ambridge House** have been ‘re-launched’ by a group of young people involved in the long-term ‘WeCan’ social action group.
- Two groups remain ‘pre-launch’ – **Zumba classes** and **Beauty classes** – their originators having been supported to develop the ideas and test them out (primarily in the context of Women’s Group). They are still waiting for the right synchronicity of time and energy capacity in their leaders, with suitable local venues and levels of interest among neighbours.
- Other groups have become dormant or come to an end – at least for the time being – including ‘Walk & Talk’, ‘Making Friends through Arts & Craft’, the ‘Autism Support Group’, ‘FAB Kids Stay & Play’, and ‘Karaoke nights @ St Wilf’s’.
- Independently of TWC!, ‘**CanYouRelate**’ has emerged as a significant local organisation committed to empowering young people through sports, activities and mentoring. TWC! have engaged in some fruitful partnership work with them in 2019, with the potential for that to grow and develop.

More Places to Belong (Outcome 4) – PROGRESS Years 1-3

The wide range of new groups and activities has enabled further progress on two of our key outcomes in 2019:

- 116 neighbours (90% of adults asked, 76% of young people) reported having **more opportunities to do things with their neighbours** – bringing our cumulative total to 251 (75-60-116), considerably above our original target of 150 (30-50-70)
- Over the 3 years, the total number of **neighbours supported to set up new groups, activities and enterprises in which other local people have participated** has reached 29, nearly 3 times our original target of 10

3.2 More connected to our neighbours

TogetherWeCan! wants to see more people connected to their neighbours, across age and ethnic differences, in relationships of trust, friendship and mutual support (Outcome 1).

More Connected to Our Neighbours (Outcome 1) – PROGRESS Years 1-3

In 2019:

- 139 people (95 adults, 44 young people) reported **knowing more of their neighbours by name**, 88% of adults asked – bringing our cumulative total to 357 (original target:300)
- 108 people (83 adults, 25 young people) reported **having more neighbours they could turn to for help**, 79% of adults asked – bringing our cumulative total to 176 (original target:100)

“I didn’t really come out, two years ago. Getting involved in the Hub has made me come out more. I feel confidence in people and feel like they’re kind of my family to me now. It makes me happy. You can walk down the road and recognise somebody and have a conversation with them.” (Mel)

“It’s brought me out of my shell. Meeting other people from other backgrounds, other ethnicities and religions. At the end of the day, we’ve all got to live together, haven’t we? So let’s get on with just liking each other! I’ve got to know loads of new people, and many of them I’d now class as friends. And the others, hopefully we’ll become friends in the future.” (Jim)

Case study: theatre trips and book club

Birmingham has a rich arts and cultural 'scene', but much of it is inaccessible for most Firs and Bromford residents – with financial cost and travel being very obvious barriers, as well as more hidden worries about whether 'that kind of thing' is for 'people like us'. Nevertheless, during 2019 TWC! has been able to organise three trips to the Birmingham REP theatre for neighbours (prioritising those who are regular participants, connectors or leaders in community activities), to see *The Lovely Bones*, *Pride and Prejudice* (* sort of), and *Peter Pan*. Lucy Poulson, our Community Support & Development Worker, is also co-ordinator of Hodge Hill Arts Forum, and through the forum, has been able to access large numbers of last-minute tickets either for free, or at a greatly reduced price – enabling 34 local residents to go on at least one of the trips, with around a third of those going to the theatre for the first time ever.

The second trip also sparked the beginnings of a community book club: 'have you read *Pride and Prejudice*?' – 'let's read it together!'. Meeting pretty much every week since, at Hodge Hill Church's 'Old Rectory Community House', people have caught 'the reading bug', growing in confidence to read out loud to each other, many of whom have barely touched a book since they left school.

"The first time I had ever gone to the theatre was when Lucy had some tickets and asked me if I wanted to go - that was to see The Lovely Bones. So when she told me she had some more I jumped at the chance and even joined a book club so I could be able to understand the production more. Without being offered the ticket I don't think I would ever have gone to the theatre and found out I really enjoyed it, and I don't think I would have spent money before on buying tickets but now I am thinking of taking my daughter in the new year." (Amy)

"As someone who has never been to the theatre before I wasn't quite sure what to expect. So when Lucy gave me the opportunity to visit The REP to watch Pride and Prejudice I was super excited, as we are currently reading the book in Book Club. As a single mom there is no way I would have been able to afford to go, hence why this is my first ever visit. My experience of the theatre was literally more than I could have ever imagined. I felt all the emotions possible watching the play, and came away from The REP feeling empowered as a woman, and just happy to have been able to share the evening with friends." (Laura)

"Just getting the chance to read with people – normally you just sit at home and read on your own, and you don't get to talk about it because no one knows what you're talking about – but you get to share that passion! It's the friendships – we've bonded, we've clicked as a group"



Case study: from breaking fast to table tennis

Mohammed (17) first got involved when he was coming home from college one day during Ramadan (the holy Muslim month of fasting).

“Dan and a few young people were doing an activity outside The Hub and I stopped to chat to them. While speaking to Dan we started to chat about Ramadan and then he mentioned that some young people were planning a ‘Youth Iftar’ and asked if I would like to come and be a part of it. I was really surprised that the Hub was helping young people to put this on and so I wanted to be involved.” (Mohammed)



Mohammed joined Imad and Omar to plan the Iftar (shared meal at sunset to break the fast together) and invited some of his friends along on the night, including Arshan (also 17). Since then, both boys have been regulars at Wednesday night youth club at the Hub, and the ‘WeCan’ social action group on Thursdays as well.

“Over time we’ve been encouraged to get more involved and get to know more people in the Hub but also in the wider community. Once Dan was playing table tennis with us and spoke to us about how good we were and how it would be good if we could use this skill to benefit more people. So together we planned to put on a community table tennis tournament during half-term holidays.” (Arshan)

Dan gave the boys a £50 budget for equipment, flyers and a trophy. He also supported them to make connections with CAFLO Community Centre to host the tournament.

“The event was really good, we invited some friends along and other young people from the Hub also came. We had some adults come that we had never met before and it was a real laugh to play table tennis together. Some of them have even asked when the next one is and if we could do it more often.”

“We are both now part of the youth forum and we attend some evening sessions helping us to be better leaders and helping us to think of how we can do more stuff like this with more people. We’ve gone from not attending at all, to attending a club, to now running a community event. We’ve got to know a lot more young people and adults that we’d never met before.” (Mohammed & Arshan)

3.3 More able to overcome obstacles

We also want to see people feeling more able to overcome obstacles to living flourishing lives. For *TogetherWeCan!*, that means that people feel supported to build more sustainable livelihoods (including but not limited to employment),³ but more specifically, that people are growing in confidence, skills and connections, to be better able to cope when life is tough, and to make a valued and ongoing contribution to community life.

More Able to Overcome Obstacles (Outcome 2) – PROGRESS Years 1-3

In 2019:

- 87 people (67 adults, 20 young people) said they had **grown in confidence and skills for employment-readiness** – bringing our cumulative total to 237 (original target: 95)⁴
- 122 people (87 adults, 35 young people) reported feeling **more confident to cope when life is tough**, 86% of adults asked – bringing our cumulative total to 303 (original target: 150)
- 130 people (97 adults, 33 young people) say that they feel **more confident to participate in local groups and activities**, 92% of adults asked – bringing our cumulative total to 324 (original target: 150)

“[It’s increased my] confidence overall. I used to just drop [my daughter] off to school, went home and just waited until it was time to pick her up... So it’s given me a purpose. Brought me out of my shell. Less antisocial. Made loads of new friends in the process.” (Laura)

“Street Connecting, I’ve always understood the importance of it, but actually doing it, it’s made me see how much more important it is, and I enjoy doing it. Sometimes for people there are a lot of barriers in the way, a lot of people have never heard of the Hub and what goes on here, a lot of people are lacking in confidence, got depression – so if you can make that first contact, friendly, chatting, then next time you see them at the shop it’s like, ‘Oh hello!’ – and it might be a long process, but hopefully they’ll be able to walk into the Hub because they know a few people here. It’s just having conversations with people, just getting to know people – I’ve lived here 43 years, and there are people I don’t know, haven’t spoken to, so it’s having the opportunity to speak to other people and find out what their stories are.” (Clare)

³ In a ‘livelihood’ we include people’s financial resources (income, savings), physical resources (furniture, white goods, phone, etc), personal resources (physical and mental wellbeing), and social resources (connections to other people). By ‘more sustainable’, we mean more able to survive shocks (e.g. the washing machine breaking down, or losing a job), and moving from ‘just about coping’ towards thriving and living life to the full.

⁴ (see footnote 4, above)

Case study: Men's group

Over the first two years of *TWC!* we were conscious that men were significantly under-represented among our participants (consistently making up around 25% of our totals) – and also that we had nothing equivalent to Women's Group, offering a women-only space for belonging and mutual support. Mick, a regular member of Open Door drop-in for a couple of years, had by the latter stages of 2018 become an active part of the team (welcoming people and making drinks, engaging people in conversation) [see Open Door case study, Y2 p.17]. Lucy had also been working with Mick for a while to support him as he sought to offer ongoing pastoral support to various friends and neighbours beyond Open Door.

"Myself and Lucy got together, and we just wanted something for the guys of our age bracket – 45, 50+ – somewhere where we could all get together, where we could all have a chat about what was going on in our lives, and ways of making things better for us, as a group" (Mick)

Lucy worked with Mick to develop the idea, and invited a couple of other key male Open Door team members to support Mick to get a Men's Group up and running. Brian and Andy would 'hold the space', and Mick would be the key connector, bringing people in.

"We've not advertised much – but you just tell Mick, and it's done, people come" (Brian)

Men's brunches at the Hub have now been running monthly since June 2019, with a number of additional gatherings, including a summer barbeque in the Community Forest Space, and some 'research trips' to other men-focused projects e.g. Men's Sheds. Six months on, various 'spin-off' ideas are in the pipeline, including a local 'men's shed' and a walking football club.

"this is the only thing where men can get together and talk about things we want to talk about" (Barry M)

"for me personally, I got welcomed in here – I've been feeling isolated, lonely – but I've met some nice people here, I've made some good friends – it's been good for my mental health" (Steve)

"it's good it's every month now, we've got it established, and now you can bring your mates along, you know it's going to happen, you know the food's good, you know everyone's welcome" (Jim)



Case study: the knife vigil – hope out of tragedy

After 18 year old Jordan Moazami was stabbed, in April 2019, in Welsh House Farm (a west Birmingham neighbourhood with which *TogetherWeCan!* has engaged in a number of shared projects), *TWC!* staff were involved in helping to organise a vigil for Jordan in Birmingham city centre, around the 27ft 'Knife Angel' sculpture that was visiting the city during May and June. The Knife Angel was made from over 100,000 knives collected from knife amnesty bins across the country. Some of the knives were inscribed with messages from those who have lost loved ones, while others bear messages of regret from those who have committed crimes and now campaign against knife-related violence.



On the evening of the vigil, around 20 young people from Firs and Bromford and 10 adults (including some newly-recruited volunteers) walked together the six miles from the Hub into the city centre. The walk itself offered a space for many serious and profound conversations, and as the group approached central Birmingham, emotions were running high – some of the young people were showing signs of getting quite anxious and 'jumpy', especially when they encountered young people from other areas.

One of the event leaders greeted the Firs and Bromford group when they arrived – deeply touched that they had walked so far to be there. They were eventually joined by over 200 from across the city, listening to speakers including Jordan's nan, and Welsh House Farm youth worker Steve Hirst:

"What has happened this evening, is people have come from forgotten places: from places that our society say are no good. That nothing good comes from those places. If Jordan would want anything from this moment now, I'm convinced he would want us to make a stand and show this city, show this country, that these places have people with real heart, with real spirit, and more than anything, love."

In the weeks after the vigil, *TWC!*'s older WeCan group spent several sessions 'debriefing' and reflecting on the experience – which has had a lasting impact not just on many of our young people, but on adult staff and neighbours too.

"Originally it was the knife walk. They asked if I could give them a hand with that, and I was like, 'yeah, I can walk to town and back, no problem'. And it was seeing the passion in the young people that made me want to join and be part of their journey. It was amazing." (Amy)

[See B31 blog article on the Knife Angel vigil here: <http://b31.org.uk/2019/06/jordan-moazami-family-friends-community-stand-against-city-knife-violence-at-knife-angel-vigil/>]

3.4 More able to share passions and skills

he third area where we have wanted to see *TogetherWeCan!* participants growing, is in feeling more able to share their passions, gifts and skills with their neighbours.

More Able to Share Passions, Gifts and Skills (Outcome 3) – PROGRESS Years 1-3

In 2019

- 120 people (91 adults, 29 young people) said they felt **more confident to share** their passions, gifts and skills, 89% of adults asked – bringing our cumulative total to 294 (original target: 150)
- 115 people (80 adults, 35 young people) said they had **more opportunities to share** them with their neighbours – bringing our cumulative total to 259 (original target: 100).

Responses to this objective show significant growth over the 3 years, demonstrating that *TWC!*'s ongoing direct support for participants and the continuing growth of the local 'community ecology' itself, are enabling more and more people to grow in confidence to identify, and to share with others, their passions, gifts and skills.

"My confidence has soared. Compared to how I was last year, I know who I am as a person, I know my strengths and weaknesses, I'm very sure of myself, and I think that's [been] helped by people giving me a role, giving me a job to do, and genuinely believing in me, knowing that, like 'you can do this', and I think that's really helped." (Amy)

"There's a lot of things I can do, but now I know there are a lot of things I can do better. So to be able to use my past, use my experiences... I was embarrassed, ashamed of my past, but now I'm not. That's my story, and that's what's led me here today. And now I know I can help other people, from my experience." (Clare)

'Developing enterprise' course

As a result of the 'developing enterprise' course and the surrounding mentoring work, all seven participants reported growth in confidence, knowledge/understanding and skills to develop their enterprise ideas [see Nicola's story, below]. A summary of initial and final star charts is presented here:

Outcome	Initial score out of 5	Final score out of 5	Average Increase
Speaking in a group	2.83	3.83	1.00
Doing a presentation to a group	1.83	3.00	1.17
Telling others about my ideas	2.83	3.83	1.00
Understanding the skills needed to start a business/enterprise	2.16	4.16	2.00
Knowing what I need to do next for my business/enterprise	2.00	4.00	2.00
Undertaking research into my business/enterprise	2.3	4.00	1.70
Knowing how to make and manage money	2.00	4.00	2.00
Totals	15.95/35	26.82/35	10.87/35

Case study: Nicola's story

Nicola was one of the participants on the 'developing enterprise' course delivered by TWC! in 2019. These are her words:

"I spoke to Karen at one of the groups at St Wilfrid's [Community Centre], and I told her about lots of the ideas I had and she told me to come to a PIE event. So I came to a PIE event in 2018, said the kind of things I wanted to do, and slowly but surely they're coming into place.

"[In 2019] I did the enterprise course, and that was really good. It was more of a refresher for me because I've studied business at uni, but it helped me understand more of the jargon and to focus better on what I really wanted to do in growing my business. I got a lot more direction and what was possible and what wasn't and what I needed to do. The lesson plans were structured really well. There was a lot of feedback, and it was really good for me to verbalise and really think about what I wanted and get it down onto paper.

"[Soon after the course,] Janey [one of Worth Unlimited's social enterprise staff] introduced me to Steve, a business advisor at the Pumphouse gym [in nearby Erdington]. So I went for some business advice [funded through TWC!] and we went through what I wanted to do, what my ideas for the future were, and he noticed that sometimes I have a thousand ideas and I run away with them, and he helped me slow down and focus on what I could possibly do now. He offered me a room there – which is where I do my massages now. And I'm looking to offer the stress management stuff [here in Firs & Bromford], through workshops and 1-to-1 sessions with people.

"I feel a lot more focused, a lot more hopeful that I can do stuff, and make an impact in the community. And I want to put myself up for more stuff, training in more areas, and hopefully do a load more stuff here and be utilised by you guys [i.e. within TWC!'s work] more."



4 What have we learnt – so far?

Three years in to *TogetherWeCan!*, what have we learnt so far? This section distils the learning from our Year 1 (2017) and Year 2 (2018) reports, with additional learning from the past year (2019).

4.1 Foundations of our approach – ‘golden threads’

Fundamental to *TogetherWeCan!* is a distinctive *approach* to neighbourhood-based community-building. In Year 1 we identified a number of ‘golden threads’ that make up this approach, and these have endured, with some additions and refining, over these first three years of the project.

Figure 8 ‘Golden Threads’ of our approach



1. Our community, for it to grow and flourish, needs the specific **gifts** of every local resident – often neighbours will need help identifying what their gifts are, encouragement to believe those gifts are valuable, and support to work out where and how to share them.
2. ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ – but we also believe we can’t build meaningful community without the involvement, gifts and leadership of **children and young people**. While we understand that children, young people and adults benefit from spending some time in separate spaces, our best hopes for community here are that we’re able to nurture and sustain spaces of intergenerational encounter, participation and leadership.
3. Relationships (between everyone involved in the community-building journey) have to ‘go deep enough’ for **trust** to grow.
4. A **long-term** commitment – to the journey of community-building, and to consistent presence as practitioners – is vital. Significant, lasting change in a neighbourhood works in generational timescales – not short-term funding cycles.
5. Our aim is a shift in the **culture** of the *neighbourhood*, not just of individuals and groups within it. This involves nurturing a ‘community spirit’ – where local people are proud of their community as a place where neighbours look out for each other and everyone’s contribution is valued – that is present already, and remembered from the past, but has often been forgotten or hidden.
6. Small is beautiful – the importance of getting the **scale** right: working within a neighbourhood big enough to hold a lot of diversity, but small enough to have a sense of coherence; and recognising that many neighbours will only get to know each other in meaningful ways on a ‘micro-local’ (i.e. street-level) scale.
7. We are constantly seeking to ‘**widen the circles**’, ‘hunt the edges’, so that we are always discovering and drawing in new people as connectors, contributors and community leaders.
8. We continue to sustain, develop and seek to multiply community **spaces** (both physical venues and particular gatherings) for **belonging, connection** and **support** – spaces that feel **safe, welcoming** and **nurturing** enough for trusting and mutually supportive relationships to grow, and for people to grow in confidence, to find their voice, and discover and share their passions, gifts and skills. NB. the *multiplication*, rather than *growth*, of spaces enables us to ‘widen the circles’ while holding to the value of small-scale gatherings.
9. Those of us who are paid practitioners understand ourselves as neighbours too (whether or not we live locally), and seek to ‘**bring ourselves to work**’, seeking friendship with our neighbours and receiving the gifts, support and challenges that they offer to us.
10. Those of us who are paid practitioners are seeking to **support our neighbours to take the lead**: constantly seeking to ‘de-centre’ ourselves from doing things *for* our neighbours, to supporting activity that is led *by* our neighbours working together – ‘leading by stepping back’.
11. A flourishing community needs ways to enable the regular hearing, sharing and celebrating of **local stories**, deepens our relationships with each other, learning from what has been, and generating energy for new things to emerge.
12. We will invest time and effort in **partnerships** where there is a trusted point of contact who

'gets' our approach – has seen it in action, understands and is enthusiastic in supporting it.

13. Among local groups and organisations, we pursue and encourage an understanding of being **interconnected** with other groups and organisations within something bigger than all of us (an interdependent 'community ecology'), sharing with each other our spaces, energy, learning and other resources – but we respect and understand the importance for groups of their own **autonomy** and space.
14. The work of **place-making** – making changes to the physical environment of a neighbourhood as part of the community-building journey – is best led by local people, and requires not just a building up of community '**spirit**' (a sense of connectedness and belonging among neighbours), but also community '**institutions**' (mature and resilient neighbour-led organisations) and community '**traditions**' (established and consistent rhythms of life, activity and celebration, that turn local spaces into familiar, loved places).

While some of these 'golden threads' have remained a consistent 'given' underlying our work, others have been at the heart of some of the *challenges* that we have wrestled with, and *learning* that we have acquired through experimenting and reflecting together, along the way.

We address some of these in more detail below, exploring for each the following questions: First, what are **challenges**? Second, what are the '**key ingredients**' that are working? (NB. further exploration of the distinctive contribution of *TWC!* is found in Appendix 1) And finally, what **further intentional work** has been identified for the next phase of *TWC!*'s life?

4.2 Widening the circles

'Widening the circles' for us includes at least five inter-related objectives:

- increasing the *number* of local people participating in community groups and activities;
- reaching sections of our community that are under-represented in the groups and activities we support;
- encouraging greater and more meaningful *interaction* between different sections of our community that might otherwise not be interacting;
- supporting other local groups to increase the numbers and diversity of their participants;
- developing the diversity of people represented in local *connecting* and *leadership* roles – including in the leadership of the *TogetherWeCan!* programme itself.

Within all of these inter-related objectives, building trust ('Golden Thread' #3, above) is crucial. In our experience locally, trust between neighbours – especially across different sections of the community – often starts from quite a low 'baseline', and is always slow and time-consuming to build up.

Widening the circles: what are the challenges?

- People from **minority ethnic backgrounds** (Y1 p.30; Y2 p.19) – overall the ethnic breakdown of our participants (around 55% White-British, 45% from other ethnic groups - see Annex – Table 10) is not significantly different to the neighbourhood as a whole⁵. However, some groups remain more predominantly white in their makeup (e.g. Community Lunch), while a

⁵ Source: Local Insight profile for 'Firs and Bromford' area, LI - Local Trust (Big Local) Report -22 January 2019

few groups (e.g. Women's Group) are made up mostly of people of colour (mostly from Asian and African backgrounds). We are also conscious that the overwhelming proportion of those currently in regular connecting or leadership roles are white – as is the entire paid staff team (both the *TWC!* 'core' staff and those working in roles supporting or alongside *TWC!*). Language has also been identified as a barrier for some neighbours.

- **Men** (Y1 p.31; Y2 p.19) – men have been consistently under-represented among both our participants and connector/leadership roles – Open Door drop-in being a significant exception.
- **People working during the day** (Y3 consultation) – we have, as yet, been less effective at engaging with local people in paid employment, especially those who are not around the neighbourhood during week-days, and are only potentially free on evenings and weekends.
- **Parents with young children during the day** (Y3 consultation) – the under-provision locally of flexible, affordable childcare, has been highlighted as a significant barrier for many parents (mostly mums) of under 5s, to participation in many community activities that are primarily adult-focused
- **Local geography** (Y2 p.39-40) – while our 'reach' across the Firs and Bromford estates is fairly comprehensive, the uneven distribution of appropriate venues for groups and activities (mostly on the Bromford side of the neighbourhood, with much less on the Firs) certainly puts extra obstacles in the way of participants, group leaders and staff being able to maximise the potential of *TWC!*'s community-building activities.
- **Age** (Y1 p.30-1; Y3 consultation) – while some of our activities and events are genuinely intergenerational, and a few involve young people in their planning and leadership, there still remains huge potential to support young people into leadership roles, and enlarge the spaces for intergenerational engagement and learning. While there are a couple of significant local venues intentionally geared towards young people (the Hub and CAFLO Community Centre), the absence of any large indoor venue for sport locally is a significant barrier to engaging with young people.
- **People (esp children) with special needs** (Y3 consultation) – some parents have highlighted the extra barriers for children with special needs (e.g. autism), to participation in many youth-focused and intergenerational activities – particularly in busy, noisy and visually over-stimulating spaces.
- **People struggling with mental health challenges** (Y3 consultation) – ranging from low confidence levels to chronic social anxiety and intense crisis moments, mental health challenges can present significant barriers to people coming out of their homes and getting involved in wider community activities.
- **Low income** (Y3 consultation) – although most groups and activities supported through *TWC!* are either free or very low-cost, many residents on low incomes would struggle to access things with a higher, or more regular cost attached.
- **Growing & multiplying the 'bumping spaces'** (Y2, p.41) – key to 'widening the circles' is supporting more local people to create, sustain and develop more 'bumping spaces' across our neighbourhood.

Widening the circles: what 'key ingredients' are working?

- Street Connecting (Y2 p.10-11) and Street Events (Y2 p.33-5) - The growing annual rhythm of micro-local Street Events, supported by both event-focused Street Connecting and the regular weekly door-knocking by the core Street Connecting team, are central to our ongoing efforts to 'widen the circles' and 'hunt the edges'.

Over the last three years we have found that Street Events:

- **come as close to people's doorstep as possible** – minimising the barriers, especially for people with physical mobility or social anxiety challenges;
- **create naturally intergenerational, inter-ethnic spaces** – more diverse in age and ethnicity than any of our regular spaces;
- **build micro-local engagement over time** – all of our Street Events have grown in attendance, year-on-year, retaining previous attendees and adding new people each time;
- **feed attendees into other groups & activities** – Street Events are often cited as the first point of contact for people who have then engaged more regularly with other things;
- **grow the number and diversity of local connectors/leaders** – because a Street Event's success relies strongly on the invitation and welcome offered by residents in the immediate vicinity of the event, increasing the number of these events each year has enabled us to intentionally seek out a more diverse cross-section of local hosts who are supported to take 'first steps' into community connector/leadership;
- are a relatively easy way of **growing and multiplying the number of 'bumping spaces'** locally, with local residents taking the lead in preparing, hosting and repeating them.

"I got involved in the Street Connecting and listening, which is great for me because I'm very chatty and a good listener. ... I've loved every minute. I love listening to people... Sometimes, we've come across people who've been really negative about the neighbourhood, hating it and wanting it all knocked down, but by the end of the conversation, we've got them turned round and they're like, 'yes, if we have a street party out here I might come along'." (Jim)

- **Detached youth work** – while usually more worker-led, and not usually involving immediate neighbours – and therefore not naturally as intergenerational – as street events, regular detached work continues to be one significant means of 'first contact' with local young people
- **Intentional conversations, personal invitations & offers of accompaniment** - Key to the work of the Street Connecting team, and to the ability of Street Events to 'feed' people in to other groups and activities, is the role of personal, intentional conversation, that focuses on what the neighbour is interested in or passionate about, and seeks to identify possibilities for them to get more involved in local community life, to bring their particular gifts (passions, knowledge, experience, skills, connections, etc) as valued contributions, and to find a sense of

belonging, friendship and mutual support among other neighbours. Especially among those with less confidence to venture out of their homes into unfamiliar spaces, what has often made the vital difference has been the offer, from someone they've already been speaking to, to come and call for them and accompany them to a group or activity – and/or the promise that they will see familiar faces there when they arrive.

“I’ve been able to drag other friends along with me who wouldn’t otherwise come!” (Katie)

“The first 12 months here I was depressed, I was only going out to the shops... and I kept myself to myself... And it was by chance that I met Mary and Elaine – they’ve organised the [Ambridge House] garden for 8 years... and I came down one Sunday morning, Mary had just come out of hospital, and I saw them digging a hole and I asked them what they were doing. Well, they were planting a rose bush in the memorial garden, and I said, ‘I can do that!’. And I met Revd Jenni for the first time – she came and did a little [memorial] service for the residents. Basically, through that day, meeting Mary and Elaine and Jenni, I found out about Tuesday mornings [Open Door], and that’s how I got involved.” (Barry T)

- **Places of Welcome as ‘entry points’** (Y2 p.34) - Alongside the annual rhythm of Street Events, the weekly regularity of Places of Welcome offer proven ‘entry points’ for neighbours into meaningful participation in community life. While these vital community spaces often have a core of ‘regulars’, a careful maintenance of their ethos ensures that they don’t turn into static cliques, but are consistently welcoming and drawing in new participants. The specific, intentional focus of some of these PoWs has also been a significant factor in our ability to address some of our key challenges in ‘widening the circles’:
 - **Women’s Group** and the work with **parents with under 5s** (through our Spurgeons partnership) are significant spaces for engaging with women from black and minority ethnic backgrounds;
 - The beginning of a monthly, neighbour-led **Men’s Group** in 2019 has been significant both in supporting existing male participants and drawing new men into participation; alongside **Open Door** (primarily for adults) and **Listen Threads** (for young women) it is also a significant place of support for those struggling with mental health challenges (see further in section 4.3, below);
 - **Youth drop-ins** (including open access groups like Kids Club and Girls Group, the more task-focused WeCan groups, and to some extent the social enterprises Listen Threads and Gear-up) continue to be a primary ‘entry point’ for young people into the ‘community ecology’
 - Using **‘pop-up venues’** (Y2 p.40) – for the weekly school-playground Pop-Up Places of Welcome, and the weekly (if seasonal) Firs Families Club – has gone some way to addressing the geographical challenge of not having useable permanent venues in the right places within the neighbourhood, the benefits largely outweighing the extra

effort, and storage challenges, that accompany this way of working.

- **Partnership work with schools and Children's Centre** - Working with local primary schools (e.g. short-term WeCan sessions with years 5 & 6, 1-2-1 mentoring sessions, and green activities) are an effective way of making contact with large new cohorts of young people each year, and drawing some of these into more ongoing activities (e.g. youth clubs, WeCan groups). They have also sometimes drawn parents into participation, and opened up possibilities for offering whole-family support. Our 'Families Connector', working between *TWC!* and the Tame Valley Children's Centre team, is also engaging new parents and parents of young children who are not involved in other *TWC!* activities. One of the challenges here is working out 'pathways across' to enable these parents to venture into the wider *TWC!*-supported 'ecology'.
- **Offering arts engagement opportunities through links with external partners** - Through *TWC!*'s close links with Hodge Hill Arts Forum (through our Community Support & Development Worker, Lucy Poulson), we have been able to take increasing numbers of neighbours (adults, young people and children) to performances at the REP Theatre (in Birmingham city centre), with tickets supplied either free or at very low cost (which would normally be beyond the reach of most local residents). Going as a group, we have been able to ensure additional support has been in place for people who would otherwise struggle to access and participate in such theatre trips. The book club that emerged from the second theatre trip [see case study, p.29] has also been immensely significant for many participants, in enabling them to access, and heightening their enjoyment, of the theatre experience.
- **Intergenerational projects** – central to our growing intergenerational work is the **summer programme** (Y2 p.14) (which now includes young people in the planning and leading of activities, as well as wide-scale participation) and the '**WeCan**' youth social action programme. A small number of 'WeCan'-initiated projects have developed and evolved to become established, youth-led intergenerational activities (Y2, p.13) – the afternoon teas (Y1, p.11) being one key example. The youth-led, intergenerational table-tennis competition, in October half-term 2019 [case study, p.30], looks like it may well have a similar potential for becoming an established community tradition. One or two **other local organisations** have emerged over the last three years with a focus on intergenerational events, among them *CanYouRelate*, who have demonstrated an ability to draw in sections of the community (particular from black and minority ethnic backgrounds) that core *TWC!* work has not yet engaged.

Widening the circles: what are the next steps?

To continue to 'widen the circles', we have identified the following further intentional work for *TWC!*'s next phase:

- **People from minority ethnic backgrounds (BAME)**

The *TWC!* team and steering group have identified working on ethnic diversity (in participation and leadership) as a key priority for the next phase of *TWC!* – including some key specific actions:

- working with existing BAME Street Connectors to disseminate basic non-English language skills and cultural awareness across the Street Connecting team, to translate key publicity, and to plan and deliver some events and activities celebrating specific national cultures represented locally (including Community Iftar and a 'Somalia Day');

- work with emerging BAME women emerging as leaders within Women's Group to 're-boot' the group with the leadership shifted to local women, supported by *TWC!*'s workers (rather than the other way round);
- youth team to intentionally invest in recruiting and supporting the development of young leaders from BAME backgrounds;
- support young people to develop Black History Month activities and to share in leadership of Community Iftar (fast-breaking meal in Ramadan);
- continue to engage other local organisations (especially *CanYouRelate*) who are engaging with BAME neighbours beyond *TWC!*'s current participants, to seek mutual learning, support and development;
- *TWC!* team to work with an external consultant/trainer to enable deeper internal reflection on unconscious bias, de-centering whiteness, and supporting BAME neighbours to take the lead;
- **Men**
 - Community Support & Development Worker to continue to support local leaders to develop the monthly Men's Brunch [see case study] and activities / ideas that emerge from that group
- **People working during the day**
 - *TWC!* team to work with FBNT to explore ways of developing more evening- and weekend-focused connecting, activities and groups
- **Parents with young children during the day**
 - *TWC!* Families Connector to work with wider team to explore ways to develop 'pathways across' from targeted 'parents-with-under-5s' groups & activities, to the wider *TWC!*-supported 'ecology' (including provision of childcare and/or groups with 'parallel' activities for adults and young children)
- **Local geography**
 - Street Connector (Adults) to continue to support the development of 'pop-up' events in different parts of the neighbourhood
 - *TWC!* to investigate the feasibility of (a) a mobile venue (e.g. double-decker bus), and/or (b) low-key community transport (e.g. minibus)
- **Age**
 - Street Connector (Young People) to continue to work with adult-focused *TWC!* colleagues to draw more adult neighbours into the 'WeCan' YSA projects
 - Support local adults into 1-2-1 mentoring roles – in *TWC!* youth groups and in schools
- **People with special needs**
 - incorporating 'sensory spaces' and 'quiet hours' into bigger community events

4.3 Spaces for belonging, connection and support

A fundamental building-block of our community-building work is to sustain, develop and multiply community spaces (both physical venues and particular gatherings) where people feel they belong, are able to connect with others, and find support to overcome obstacles to flourishing, and to grow in confidence, connections and participation.

Spaces: what are the challenges?

- **Systemic pressures on local residents** (Y2 p.18, Y3 p.37-8) mean that financial, housing and food insecurity, mental and physical health challenges, the demands of caring for others, and the role of trauma in people's lives, are significantly more prevalent than in more affluent communities – these factors have an impact both on the intensity of the support needed, and the ability to engage with it consistently.
- **Inadequate support from statutory systems** – the flip-side of the systemic *pressures* on people's lives is the widespread system *failure* to support people adequately, or quickly enough – e.g. with changes in financial circumstance and/or housing needs, with mental health struggles and crises, etc. This in turn puts more pressure on our locally rooted workers, and the wider community 'ecology' – both largely without the relevant professional qualifications – to 'fill the gaps'.
- **Neighbours getting more deeply involved in community activities** is a central goal of *TWC!*'s work, and brings with it all kinds of positive benefits – but can, for some people, at times becoming overwhelming, risking forms of physical and/or emotional burnout. It can also, for many neighbours, involve having to face personal and relational challenges (e.g. past trauma and/or present conflict), which has required additional support from paid staff and others.
- **Neighbours moving into paid work** – a number of neighbours who have been heavily involved in, and sometimes leading, community activities, have moved into paid employment (often as a direct result of their growth in confidence, skills and connections through their community involvement). The down-side of such moves, however, has often been felt as people have consequently had to juggle extra commitments, and, by having to step back from some community involvement, have lost some of the local network that has been enabling them to survive, grow and flourish.

Spaces: what are the 'key ingredients' that are working?

- **Informal support through local groups, activities & Places of Welcome – and key people within them** (Y2 p.38) – central to our approach is a trust in the growing local 'ecology' of groups, activities, places and relationships, to be the primary source of belonging, connection and support for people. Within these groups and activities, some people have emerged (not necessarily the 'leaders' or 'connectors') as playing a vital role, offering a listening ear, or more intensive and/or ongoing pastoral support.
- **Intentional peer-group (and dispersed) support** (Y2 p.38, 41) – complements *informal* support with various spaces where support is more intentionally and explicitly part of the 'agenda' of a group – or of a dispersed network of friends and neighbours supporting an individual or family. Examples include the emergence and support of Men's Group [see case study, p.32], the ongoing holistic support and development shared by participants in Listen

Threads, and a WhatsApp group coordinating support for an elderly resident (who also attends some community activities).

“Looking after [an elderly neighbour]. It’s been a dream come true for me, really. I’ve always wanted to get into caring. So looking after him is second to none. He’s still mobile, he can get about, and I bring him over to Open Door on a Tuesday, to Junk Food Kitchen on a Thursday, and we chat about the old times. And I just keep him company, and sometimes he keeps me company.” (Jim)

- **1-2-1 ‘barrier removing’ support & mentoring** (within and outside other community activities, and in schools) (Y2 p.38) – working more intensively with individuals (adults and young people) and intergenerationally within families, to enable them to tackle specific barriers to their flourishing, often for short, finite phases, but in some cases (and more commonly with young people) supporting a person to grow and develop over a much longer time-scale – and often working most intensively with people still ‘on the edges’ of community activity and involvement.
- **Wellbeing spaces for connectors/leaders** – over the past year, we’ve seen a significant proliferation of the number of regular spaces dedicated to fun and creative activities that intentionally support and enrich participants’ physical and emotional wellbeing – and particularly for people that have become active connectors/leaders in other community activities. Helping such people to balance ‘giving out’ with spaces to ‘just be’ has become an important aspect of TWC!’s direction of travel. Examples include Arts Café, green space activities, post-Community-Lunch sessions on Tuesday afternoons, ‘Wellbeing Wednesday’ swimming trips, and trips to the theatre and the spin-off (resident-led) book club [see case study, p.29]. Some of these spaces have also been hugely positive for people who have been supported intensively through TWC!’s barrier-removing work.
- **A well-connected core staff team** – alongside all kinds of invaluable informal support within the wider community ‘ecology’, neighbours will often seek finite bits of support from different paid staff members in different times and places – the joined-up nature of our staff team enables that support to have a level of consistency and coordination.

“it’s a big part of me here [the Hub], now. It’s like a second home to me. Because you’re welcomed, and you’re cared for. I really feel like I’m welcome here, and it just feels like a home. There’s always someone for a chat.” (Mel)

Spaces: what are the next steps?

To continue to create spaces for belonging, connection and support, we have identified the following further intentional work for TWC!’s next phase:

- Offer training/learning opportunities to enable neighbours / groups to be more intentional about offering support – including identifying and supporting key ‘pastoral’ neighbours

- Continue to build up and support the ongoing development of intentional spaces of peer-group support (e.g. Men’s Group, Listen Threads)
- Acknowledge the distinctive role of the ‘barrier-remover’ worker(s) within and beyond community activities – especially in working 1-2-1 with those whose lives are most fragile and unpredictable – and to free up these worker(s) for flexible / ‘floating’ roles in those activities where possible
- Exploring further the ‘Quing’ model (pioneered on the Isle of Man) – as a way of supporting the personal development of both emerging leaders/connectors (adults) and those more ‘on the edges’, through peer-to-peer mentoring and ‘discovery cafés’
- Continue to explore ways of addressing the ‘gap’ (locally) in more professionally-focused mental health support for people going through crises or with ongoing mental health challenges – from signposting to external agencies, to more ‘embedded’ partnerships (along similar lines to our established partnership with Birmingham Community Law Centre)
- Offering more intentional support for neighbours transitioning into paid employment, to work out and establish healthy and realistic balances between paid work and community involvement
- Being more intentional in enabling young people to learn ‘life skills’ (e.g. managing money) – embedding within / drawing on existing groups & activities (e.g. cooking skills via TRJFK)



4.4 ***Nurturing neighbour-led activity & learning***

Nurturing groups, activities and traditions that are genuinely *neighbour-led* is another cornerstone of our community-building approach.

Nurturing: what are the challenges?

- **Moving, as workers, from ‘doing for’ to ‘done by’** – resisting the expectations, internal and external, to be the ones taking the initiative, articulating the vision, ‘holding the spaces’ – and instead continuing ‘to enlarge the space where neighbours are helping each other’ (Y2 p.20). Although this is particularly important in our adult-focused work, we are increasingly paying attention to it as a key challenge within our youth work, seeking to ‘de-centre’ the role of the youth worker (see section 4.7, below).

- **Sustaining/growing the capacity to support a growing number of active local residents and groups** (Y2 p.18) – not just in the ‘development’ phase (i.e. moving from ‘for’ to ‘by’) but also in a more ‘ad hoc’ way further down the developmental road, as groups and individuals hit challenges, crises, and new opportunities.
- **Supporting neighbours to negotiate the tension between ideals** (e.g. stable, consistent, confident leadership) **and the messy reality** – acknowledging that all of us are on journeys of learning and development (which include things ‘not working out’), and that we all have our weaknesses, fragilities, friction-points and crises.
- **Shifting the location of ‘technical’ skills from the ‘professional’ domain to the ‘community’ domain** – finding appropriate and realistic ways (which often demand an investment of time and patience) to help people learn directly from workers, access external training, or discover among their neighbours, the more ‘technical’ skills that are sometimes required – e.g. horticulture, safeguarding, book-keeping, navigating statutory systems, etc.

Nurturing: what are the ‘key ingredients’ that are working?

- **Creating a ‘culture of contribution’ in key community spaces** (e.g. in Places of Welcome – see case study on Open Door, Y2, p.20)
 - Maintaining an ongoing habit of inviting people into active roles
 - Being alert to discerning when people can do things by themselves from the beginning – rather than starting with ‘doing for’
 - Holding open spaces where people can share their talents with others

“We used to do the gardening club in the summer, Wednesday afternoons, and a couple of mums contacted me (through the FBNT website) and said with the school run in the afternoons they couldn’t make it, so could we organise a morning session? I’ve got the keys to the cupboard, so I did – it was something different, it was good.” (Barry T)

- **Supporting the development of teams, rather than individuals**, where possible (Y2, p.36-7)
 - Encouraging a ‘team culture’ of mutual care and support, and the valuing of diverse and complementary gifts within the team
 - Being alert to the possibility of contributions from new team members – and untapped gifts of existing team members
 - Naming and expressing thanks for each participant’s specific contributions
 - Helping teams notice and remember their journey of development (its ups and its downs), the ‘fruits of their labour’, and the significance of their contribution to the wider community ecology
 - Helping teams identify what they want / need to learn – and to access that learning in ways appropriate to the team

- Identifying ‘key people’, naming key roles** - As the local ‘community ecology’ has grown and become more complex, we’ve become increasingly conscious of the multiplicity of different roles that play a part within that ecology. Using the broad-brush terms ‘volunteers’, ‘community leaders’ or ‘key people’ doesn’t do justice to that complexity, and often leaves people struggling to identify themselves and their roles within such a title. Naming even some of the variety of more specific leadership / connectorship (and ‘pastoral’ – see section 4.3, above) roles is helping us help our neighbours to identify their particular gifts, and – if there are several that resonate – where their energy and focus is currently sitting. It also helps us support them to find their ‘best fit’ within teams, and to develop in their roles and their personal sense of identity and agency.

“I’m a connector. I don’t like to take the glory. I’m a team player. If it’s my idea but someone else runs with it and it works, I’m quite happy. It’s community. I’m no longer going to call myself a volunteer, I am a youth connector” (Clare)

Figure 9 Naming local leadership / connectorship roles



- Supporting ‘key people’** - 1-2-1 support and mentoring for key people remains an essential way of investing in local residents’ growth in participation and leadership, and their personal development – as well as support through personal and collective challenges. Such mentoring is particularly helpful as people shift from one role into another, and/or inhabit multiple roles – and as new people are drawn in to fill roles that others have moved on from, a key part of our support is enabling emerging leaders to begin to support those who are ‘coming up behind them’ (i.e. taking on roles that these emerging leaders have previously filled themselves). As noted above (in 5.3), this 1-2-1 support is now more intentionally complemented by ‘wellbeing spaces’, to enable key people to balance ‘giving out’ with space to ‘just be’.

- **Developing a programme of story-sharing, learning and discovery** - Creating spaces to hear, share and celebrate the stories of neighbours, of groups, and of our growing and developing community, remains a central aspect of our work, and one which has developed significantly in the past year.

Supporting and equipping neighbours to engage in intentional ‘listening’ within existing groups and activities, and beyond, has generated energy both amongst those listened to, and among the listeners: participants had conversations with people they’d never spoken to before; and reflected back not only on *what* they’d been hearing, but also on the experience of listening itself, and the sense of significant responsibility attached to the role. The need for further learning/training opportunities around e.g. handling group dynamics and conflict was also underlined by this process (see Y2, p.38).

“that’s why we’re starting our walking group – hopefully bring in more people... from the encouragement and support we’ve got from everyone else, that’s what’s made us branch out, and think, we want to do something for our community... we walk on our own anyway, we could keep it as just us, but we want to invite other people who might not come out of the house... and that would bring them in here as well...” (Amy & Laura)

- **Trips away, broadening horizons (Y2, p.43)** - Trips for small and large groups of neighbours, as well as for individuals, away from the neighbourhood, have been a vital component in broadening people’s horizons – both ‘what’s out there’, and ‘what’s possible here / for us’ – and this has been reinforced in 2019 with a group trip to Todmorden to see and hear about their ‘Incredible Edible’ journey, a couple of our key leaders joining the ‘Urban Changemakers’ programme, and the first residential trip to Dovedale for emerging leaders and connectors [see case study, p.25]. For participants on the ‘developing enterprise’ course to be able to connect with established enterprises in other places, hear their stories and see them in action, has also been a key element to that programme’s success [see case study, p.35].

“I’ve been doing Urban Changemakers. I’ve volunteered here for many years, and I do a lot of things, but it was understanding my Why – why I do things. And growing my strengths. ... It made me want to take things further – I’ve been taking more of a lead, in doing the youth work. So instead of just turning up and asking ‘what are we doing today?’, I’ve wanted to do more activities. And I’ve been getting more involved in the street connecting, not just with adults but with the youth as well. It’s opened my mind up to a lot of things to make me want to move forward, instead of just being in the same place. It’s not ‘ooh, someone else can do that’, it’s ‘I want to do that’. Having more of an opinion. And connecting better with the team.” (Clare)

Nurturing: what are the next steps?

To continue to nurture neighbour-led activity and learning, we have identified the following further intentional work for TWC!'s next phase::

- **Annual residential** – to establish this as a regular part of our community's annual rhythms, with more time (i.e. 2 nights), drawing in more emerging leaders/connectors, more opportunities for intergenerational activity & reflection (bringing young and adult leaders together), and external/paid support with children's activities to free up local leaders to engage more fully.
- **Additional day trips away during the year** – to expand our capacity for horizon-widening, team-building opportunities.
- **Further developing ongoing learning programme** – including an ongoing focus on personal and collective story-sharing, and more intentionally using art, photography and drama.
- **Youth leadership programme** – a monthly leadership evening for emerging young leaders, equipping them to engage more confidently in community residencials, FBNT board, etc.
- More intentionality about sharing our intergenerational community-building approach (both locally and wider, with other neighbourhoods and organisations)
 - helping local people identify and understand more deeply the 'Golden Threads' of our approach through the collective sharing and developing of our 'neighbourhood story/ies' (with support from an external 'alongsider')
 - identifying and supporting those who have significant influence shaping the culture of our local groups and activities ('culture-shapers')
 - supporting neighbours to tell some of our 'neighbourhood story/ies' and share some of our approach, both in wider forums both locally and in other places ('story-tellers')
 - begin to develop an 'offer' (both free and income-generating) to host structured neighbourhood visits, and lead workshops to share our ongoing learning
- **Explore possibility of formal/informal apprenticeships** – working towards local residents taking on significant elements of what are currently *TWC!* staff roles, through informal shadowing and more formal paid apprenticeship roles



4.5 Supporting the work of place-making

As neighbour-led community-building activity has broadened and deepened, both the desire and capacity to tackle *physical* change within the neighbourhood have also increased. There is a timeliness about this aspect of our developing work, for reasons outlined below – but it is also a significant ongoing dimension of the ‘culture shift’ we are seeking in our neighbourhood (see ‘Golden Threads’, 5.1 above). Our distinctive approach in the early stages of this aspect of our work has been recognised and explored in the Big Local report ‘Big Local experiences of regeneration and development’.⁶

Place-making: what are the challenges?

- **Physical developments** are happening – led by external agencies: blocks of flats are continuing to come down, major work has started to build flood defences, new houses are planned to be built. Significantly, these developments have been initiated in a ‘piecemeal’ way, with different pieces of work led by different agencies, rather than a joined-up strategic approach from statutory agencies.
- Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together is beginning to more seriously consider its **long-term legacy** – including the possibility of leaving behind physical/environmental developments – with the end of Big Local funding in 2026.
- As more activities have been happening in local **green spaces**, there is a greater need and desire to develop the potential of such spaces.
- As the ‘community ecology’ of groups and activities continues to grow, we increasingly come up against the limits of the existing network of **community venues** – geographically, financially, and in terms of availability, space, facilities and ethos (see Y2, p.39-40)
- The arrangement of the physical environment can sometimes help, and sometimes hinder, the forms of connectedness and flourishing that are growing in our neighbourhood – requiring ‘**re-shaping**’ to best serve the process of building community.
- Tensions in **power and pace**: holding the tension between the power and potential fast pace of resident-led activity (i.e. ideas to re-shape or develop spaces) and the power and often slow pace of statutory processes (e.g. land use permissions from local government).
- A diverse mix of developments done ‘**for**’, ‘**with**’ and ‘**by**’ local residents – and the potential for confusion between these different forms of relationship between agencies and local community.
- The **limits of local capacity and skills** to drive the implementation of a neighbour-led physical redevelopment programme – alongside our primary focus on relationship-focused community-building.
- **Helping local residents to engage with wider, neighbourhood-scale** possibilities and developments, beyond their micro-local experience, concerns and priorities.
- **Growing the leadership** of this process beyond a small sub-section of local community leaders.

⁶ <https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Developing-Potential-Big-Local-experiences-of-regeneration.pdf>

Place-making: what are the 'key ingredients' that are working?

- A coherent, joined-up, resident-led '**village vision**' process, led by Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together but seeking the widest possible local involvement, intended to bring together all aspects of physical redevelopment (both locally- and externally-led) into one conversation, organised around the goal of a flourishing, interconnected community – and prioritising the voice and agency of local residents.
- **Community venues** that are geographically well-distributed, are financially accessible for low-income groups and activities, have diverse spaces (e.g. big and small, kitchens, gardens, etc), and have an ethos of welcome, warmth, generosity, inclusivity and non-anxious collaboration – what some have called a 'soul' (Y2, p.39-40).
- **Green spaces** that are open, accessible, hospitable to gatherings and activities, and include both natural and crafted beauty.
- **Intergenerational activity** to maintain, develop and creatively use community venues and green spaces, increasing a sense of collective pride and ownership, across generations.
- Alongside the nurturing of an interconnected, welcoming, celebratory **community 'spirit'** within our community-building work, building up resilient, inclusive and collaborative **community 'institutions'** (e.g. Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together, the Hub and its related organisations, Bromford Theatre Group and others) that can take responsibility for holding, sharing, developing and implementing our shared vision and ethos. (Y2, p.41-2)
- A growing pattern of **community 'traditions'**, throughout the year, and usually linked to particular local places, that both offer spaces for story-sharing and celebrating, but also themselves 'make memories', *contributing* to the growing collective story, sense of communal identity and expectations of 'how we do things here' (e.g. Santa's Sleigh, the Christmas panto, community nativity play and other Christmas events; a Community Iftar every Ramadan; FBNT's annual Open Evening and awards ceremony; etc).
- The work (both structured and focused, and more informal and ongoing) of **communicating about and connecting people in** to venues, spaces and traditions.

Place-making: what are the next steps?

To continue to support the work of place-making, we have identified the following further intentional work for TWC!'s next phase:

- Supporting FBNT to draw further local residents (and other local groups) into the process of shaping and developing the Village Vision process
- (with additional staffing capacity – led by Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together, either within or beyond the *TWC!* 'umbrella') project managing the implementation of the Village Vision and its associated large-scale physical redevelopment projects – including heritage- and arts-focused projects

4.6 Supporting groups to develop and connect

A recurring theme across these first three years of reflection and evaluation on *TogetherWeCan!*'s work has focused on how we can support groups (both under our 'umbrella' of support, and established or emerging independently within the wider community) to grow, keep going and thrive, and to contribute to, and find support within, the wider community 'ecology' that we're seeking to nurture.

Supporting groups: what are the challenges?

- **External and internal pressures on groups** (Y2 p.35)
 - *External* factors depressing participation (e.g. communication, language barriers, weather), or hindering the group's functioning (e.g. availability / accessibility / appropriateness of venue, lack of storage, etc. – see 5.5, above)
 - *Internal* factors including:
 - Financial sustainability – including raising money from grants, and difficulties around charging for activities
 - Tensions in internal group dynamics
 - Personal fragilities & life pressures of group leaders
 - Natural tendencies of groups towards an inward-looking 'cliqueyness'
- **Tensions between internal maintenance and external connectedness / collaboration** (Y1 p.32-33, Y2 p.20-1, p.42-3)
 - Limited capacity of group leaders for *both* maintaining and developing groups (and venues) *and* wider engagement and collaboration (see e.g. Y2 p.18)
 - Frictions rooted in a 'territorial' defensiveness – especially when linked to a community building or space (i.e. *physical* territory), or to wider community conversations, vision and decision-making processes (i.e. *discursive* territory)
 - The wider community as the forum for clashes between group leaders, all similarly 'passionate, strong-minded people'
 - Group leaders and participants don't have a sense of being part of the wider, mutually-supporting community 'ecology'
 - The tightrope of trying to support groups to reflect on their vision, values and connectedness without being perceived to be 'telling them what to do' or 'taking over'

Supporting groups: what are the 'key ingredients' that are working?

- **Internal qualities** of flourishing groups (Y2 p.36-7)
 - *Creating the right 'atmosphere'*: 'relaxed', 'welcoming', 'calm' and 'friendly' were mentioned, among other qualities:
 - *Personal qualities* among group leaders, team members and other 'key people': confidence, patience, a passion for community, empathy, speaking and listening skills, a sense of humour, a non-judgmental open-mindedness, love and – for some – faith.

- *Working as a team – or ‘family’* – ‘making it happen together’, rather than relying on one or two ‘group leaders’
- Always alert to the possibility of new contributions
- **Practical operation** of groups (Y2 p.36-7)
 - an ability to adapt to changing circumstances
 - the importance of re-investing any income earned, into the development of the group
 - making sessions as regular and consistent as possible
 - keeping channels of communication among the team as good as possible
- **Group-specific support** from *TWC!* (Y2 p.37), helping participants, groups and leaders to:
 - engage in ongoing reflection, and identify what, when & how they want/need to learn;
 - name and appreciate every person’s contribution to the group;
 - notice and remember the ‘fruit of their labour’;
 - understand the significance of their contribution to the wider ‘ecology’ – and the possibility of finding support and collaboration within that wider circle;
 - negotiate the tension between internal *bonding* and *welcoming* in new members;
 - understand, and stay resilient through, the ups and downs of a group’s life cycle;
 - access funding and other kinds of technical support.
- Coordinating a **programme of learning and development opportunities**, offered not just to neighbours directly involved in *TWC!* activities but also (at least some sessions) to participants in non-*TWC!*-supported groups – including exploring the vision, values and connectedness of groups and activities within the wider community ‘ecology’
- Identifying **opportunities for short-term collaboration or support**, to enable relationships of trust to deepen and mutual understanding and learning (e.g. co-planning and co-delivering youth-focused holiday activities with *CanYouRelate*; supporting Open Door participants to engage with CAFLO Community Centre’s Christmas dinner)
- The work (both structured and focused, and more informal and ongoing) of **communicating about and connecting people in** to groups and activities (as well as venues, spaces and traditions – see section 4.5, above).

Supporting groups: what are the next steps?

To continue to support groups to develop and connect, we have identified the following further intentional work for *TWC!*’s next phase:

- *TWC!* team mapping relationships with local groups and other organisations, and identifying further opportunities to support and/or collaborate
- Alongside investing in active and emerging connectors and leaders under the *TWC!* ‘umbrella’, identify and offer some opportunities for wider engagement in learning, development and story-sharing

- Maximising and developing opportunities to celebrate and showcase – and stimulate conversation among – the full breadth of the local community ‘ecology’, within and beyond the TWC! ‘umbrella’

4.7 Youth work and community-building

2019 has seen a significant shift in the TWC! youth team’s thinking, in terms of integrating asset-based community development (ABCD) principles (underlying many of our ‘Golden Threads’) into TWC!’s youth work.

Youth work and community building: what are the challenges?

- **Challenging societal narratives** – that see young people as a ‘problem’ and adults generally as ‘unsafe’ – while holding to ‘safeguarding best practice’
- Negotiating the tension between the work of ‘**space-creating/holding**’ (e.g. youth clubs as ‘safe spaces’) with ‘**leading by stepping back**’ (i.e. expanding *neighbour-led* space)
- Balancing young people’s ‘**journeying towards maturity**’ with the belief in their capacity for **agency and leadership**

Youth work and community building: what are the ‘key ingredients’ that are working?

- seeing **interdependence-within-community** as the goal of ABCD youth work
- understanding the ‘**journeying towards maturity**’ as a task for both young people *and adults* (including workers) – embracing and seeking out opportunities to learn together
- always being alert to young people’s passions, gifts and skills – and to where those might intersect with other local needs and wants
- creating and encouraging spaces for intergenerational encounter, story-sharing and interdependence
- seeking to ‘widen the circles’ of local adults that young people can identify as ‘safe’ – and linking worker-led youth clubs to other local spaces that young people can identify as ‘safe’

The specific contribution of TWC! to these ‘key ingredients’ can be identified as:

- **de-centering** – but not demeaning – youth work, resisting our (as workers) addictions to being needed, being (exclusively) ‘safe’, being ‘helpful’
- youth workers functioning as ‘**connectors / bridge-builders**’ between adult neighbours and young people, and between adult neighbours and young people’s parents – so that parents feel able / safe to entrust their children to other adult neighbours

Youth work and community building: what are the next steps?

To continue to create spaces for belonging, connection and support, we have identified the following further intentional work for TWC!’s next phase:

- TWC! youth-focused team members to continue exploring, questioning, learning together:
 - Within wider ABCD reflection and training locally – with wider team & neighbours

- Drawing young leaders into reflection & training opportunities alongside adults
- Looking for and visiting examples of good practice elsewhere
- Continue investing in emerging young leaders, as participants in local decision-making processes (e.g. FBNT Board)
- Being more intentional about creating spaces & opportunities for genuine inter-generational encounter – to widen young people’s circles of ‘safe adults’

Laura: “it’s just getting to... watch them [young people participating in youth clubs] blossom... and sometimes we’ll see them and they don’t even look at you, and then a few weeks later they’ll come running up to us... the fact that we’ve made an impact on their life that they’ve missed us... I feel like I mother them all now...”

Amy: “and they can joke with us, but there have been times when they come to us for genuine advice, and that’s when you’re like, I’m the adult in this situation!”

Laura: “when I was their age I didn’t have anyone like that, so I could have gone on the wrong path – we play a part in keeping them on the right path – I love it!”

4.8 Growing social enterprise

Worth Unlimited’s two core social enterprises on the Firs & Bromford, Gear-up and Listen Threads (see case study, Y2 p.31), have emerged as highly significant, multi-faceted spaces – especially for older young people and young adults – functioning as both ‘entry points’ and spaces of ongoing support, and also spaces that facilitate participants’ learning, development and growth into leadership roles.

Social enterprise: what are the challenges?

- Negotiating the tensions between:
 - **social impact** and **income generation**;
 - being ‘**safe** places’ of support, pastoral care and personal / emotional development, and **challenging** young people to take risks with entrepreneurial ideas;
 - high **expectations** (from both participants and wider organization) of what’s possible, with the harder **reality** of developing and sustaining a business;
 - a **focused** ‘Enterprise Hub’ space, within a wider **informal** community ‘ecology’.
- Limits / gaps in **people** (with the necessary knowledge and skills), **resources** (money, especially) and **ideas** (for innovative products):
 - **People**: lack of general business skills (accounts, sales, IT) and more specific expertise (e.g. around particular enterprise ideas); capacity of individual staff to manage every aspect of a social enterprise;

- **Resources:** not enough ‘pump priming’ investment to get an enterprise (i.e. Listen Threads) properly ‘off the ground’; little profit selling to neighbours in a low-income neighbourhood; meeting the ongoing lease on the Enterprise Hub building;
- **Ideas:** trying to sell products (e.g. bikes, clothing) into saturated markets.

Social Enterprise: what are the ‘key ingredients’ that are working?

- Social enterprises as **holistic spaces**, functioning at multiple levels of the *TWC!* pathway:
 - Offering safety, consistency, regularity (meeting times, relationships with staff & other participants) – and plenty of ‘time to talk’ alongside working;
 - Starting something as a group, rather than as an individual (as with a lot of adult-led groups locally), enables greater resilience;
 - Being able to feed participants in from other *TWC!* activities, and also offer mentoring and work placements (e.g. from schools).
- **The Enterprise Hub**
 - as a physical space to ‘host’ & sell (including functioning as another local ‘bumping space’), and enabling creative cross-over between the two enterprises
 - offering an open invitation – within existing enterprises (‘come as you are and we’ll find something for you to do/contribute’), and for new possibilities (‘bring your idea and we’ll help you develop it’)
- **Linking selling and telling stories** – sales and enterprise development offer opportunities for participants to tell their stories (individual and collective), and for others (both locally and wider) to ‘buy into the story’

Social Enterprise: what are the next steps?

- Seeking out and naming ‘craftspeople’ within the wider community as another local asset
- More intentionality in shaping the culture of the Enterprise Hub (as a place for developing enterprise ideas) – e.g. starting fortnightly ‘Fix & Feast’ sessions
- Further developing links & presence beyond the local for sales, experience and story-telling opportunities (e.g. market stalls, conferences)
- Working on drawing participants and customers further into the Enterprise Hub ‘family’ (e.g. more regular participation in social activities like community cycle rides)
- Contributing to the development of local traditions (e.g. monthly market), selling locally-rooted products and services
- Building up teams of front-line workers (e.g. bike mechanics), to enable core staff members to step back into more oversight / development roles

5 What's next?

As we explained in the introduction (section 1.1, above), Jan – Dec 2020 is a vital *transition* year for *TogetherWeCan!*, continuing to sustain and develop the work that has become well-established over the last three years, which this report has described and evaluated, while also supporting local residents to contribute to, develop and agree a vision and plan (led by Firs & Bromford Neighbours Together) that looks towards 2026 and beyond.

For 2020, this includes an additional focus on supporting neighbours to feel:

- more confident to be able to access support somewhere in the neighbourhood
- better-equipped *to enable the participation of others*, including:
 - a. feeling more confident to connect with neighbours they don't already know
 - b. feeling more confident to invite neighbours to participate in groups / activities
 - c. feeling more confident to play a part in enabling groups / activities to happen
- that they have had some meaningful involvement in the process of developing a 2026 Vision that includes them, and that includes opportunities for them to get involved in turning it into a reality.

The findings from our extensive consultation work in Summer 2019 will be published in a separate document in early 2020, as will the wider 2026 Vision work, by April 2020. As that FBNT 2026 Vision and Plan emerges, *TWC!* will be working with neighbours, staff, funders and other partners to strategically reconfigure its own work – as *TogetherWeCan!* phase 2 (Jan 2021 onwards) – to best support the implementation of FBNT's vision, working towards a confident, flourishing, interconnected community 'ecology' that is much less dependent on grant-funded, paid staff for its ongoing sustainability and development.

Key to that reconfiguring will be the ongoing work of identifying the 'key ingredients' of a flourishing neighbourhood 'ecology' (see section 4, above), the forms of neighbour-led activity (within those key ingredients) that already exist and are continuing to grow, and what distinctive contribution *TWC!* needs to play to support these ongoing developments. This report concludes with a summary of those activities, as they currently stand.

Appendix 1 - Specific contributions of *TWC!* staff to the ‘key ingredients’

Widening the Circles

‘Key ingredient’	Neighbour-led activity	TWC! staff role
Street Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expecting a Street Event to repeat annually • Increased willingness to take the lead on planning & leading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinating calendar of Street Events • Liaising with local hosts • Supporting set-up & pack-down stages
Street Connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing in confidence and autonomy as a team • Supporting local hosts in preparation for Street Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying & drawing in new team members • Regularly accompanying team for door-knocking • Gathering team for training, debrief & reflection sessions • Supporting team members’ general wellbeing
Detached youth work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More local connectors joining the ‘youth connector’ team, engaging with young people through detached youth work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying & drawing in new team members • Regularly leading team for detached youth work / ‘youth connecting’ • Gathering team for training, debrief & reflection sessions • Supporting team members’ general wellbeing
Intentional conversations, personal invitations & accompaniment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most conversations, invitations & offers come from team members (e.g. Street Connectors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting team members to identify & remember key elements of intentional conversations
Places of Welcome as ‘entry points’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcoming, building relationships & offering support to other participants • Starting new PoWs (e.g. Men’s Group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying & drawing in new team members • ‘Holding open’ spaces and holding hosting teams to the PoW ethos • Working with neighbours to develop new PoWs • Set-up, pack-down & storage of equipment for pop-up venues
Partnership work with schools and Children’s Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some involvement in WeCan projects • Possibility for getting involved in 1-2-1 mentoring in schools • Co-leading groups for parents with under 5s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading on WeCan projects • Offering 1-2-1 mentoring in schools • Leading groups for under 5s • Supporting neighbours to co-lead groups for under 5s
Offering arts engagement opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbours accompanying each other to access and enjoy theatre trips together • Neighbour-led book club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaising with theatre re: tickets • Coordinating transport for neighbours • Supporting neighbours to access and enjoy theatre trips together

Intergenerational projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generating ideas for YSA projects and ‘delivering’ • Developing some YSA projects into established activities • Other local organisations delivering intergenerational events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinating summer programme • Leading WeCan YSA programme (liaising with schools, leading prep sessions, supervising activities, etc) • Engaging with other local organisations to seek mutual learning & offer support
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Spaces for belonging, connection and support

‘Key ingredient’	Neighbour-led activity	TWC! staff role
Informal support through the growing local ‘ecology’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading & participating in groups & activities, caring for each other • key people as listeners and/or more intensive / ongoing pastoral support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting groups & activities, via group leaders & developing teams • supporting key ‘pastoral’ people within groups and teams – offering ‘care for the carers’
Intentional peer-group (and dispersed) support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intentional mutual support within groups • coordinating support for individuals / families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encouraging intentionality re: peer support • supporting reflection on the effectiveness of support • offering ‘care for the carers’
1-2-1 ‘barrier removing’ support & mentoring (within & outside other community activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more intensive support drawing on specific experience / knowledge / skills • being on-call and responsive ‘out-of-hours’, driving, accompanying to appointments, etc. • acting as a ‘bridge’ (for supported individuals) into other community activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more intensive support drawing on specific experience / knowledge / skills • being on-call and responsive ‘out-of-hours’ (and sometimes interrupting other work activities), driving, accompanying to appointments, etc. • acting as a ‘bridge’ (for supported individuals) into other community activities • liaising with other organisations (voluntary & statutory) – incl safeguarding • coordinating & developing volunteer support • offering training & support for other 1-2-1 support volunteers, and ‘caring for the carers’
Wellbeing spaces for connectors / leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading & participating in groups & activities, caring for each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leading & sustaining key ‘wellbeing spaces’ • ‘caring for the carers’
Well-connected core staff team		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular team meetings & appropriate information sharing across team

Nurturing neighbour-led activity and learning

'Key ingredient'	Neighbour-led activity	TWC! staff role
Creating a 'culture of contribution' in key community spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking on active roles • Encouraging others into active roles • Nurturing and sustaining a 'culture of contribution' – including welcoming / receiving the contributions of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading in communicating, nurturing and sustaining a 'culture of contribution' – including welcoming / receiving the contributions of others • Being alert to discerning when people can do things for themselves – rather than starting with 'doing for' • Supporting people to identify their passions, gifts and skills • Encouraging others into active roles
Supporting the development of <i>teams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading, nurturing & sustaining a 'team culture' of mutual care & support • Being alert to the untapped gifts & contributions of new & existing team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading, nurturing & sustaining a 'team culture' of mutual care & support • Being alert to the untapped gifts & contributions of new & existing team members • Naming & expressing thanks for people's contributions • Helping teams notice & remember their journey of development & their wider contribution locally • Helping teams identify what they want / need to learn, & to access that learning
Identifying 'key people', naming key roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping team members identify and grow into their roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with teams (& team leaders) to help people identify and grow into their roles • Supporting individuals to identify their different roles in different contexts, and where they want / need to grow & develop
Supporting 'key people'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emerging leaders supporting those who are 'coming up behind them' – taking on roles that they have previously filled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2-1 support & mentoring, supporting key people in personal development, and through changes in roles and personal / collective challenges
Developing a programme of story-sharing, learning and discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participating, and sharing wisdom and experience, within story-sharing and learning contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating programme of story-sharing, learning & discovery opportunities • Delivering some sessions within programme • Ongoing facilitation of individual & group reflection, building on learning in programmed sessions
Trips away, broadening horizons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participating in trips away, and encouraging other neighbours to get involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating trips away • Supporting neighbours to engage, and to reflect on their experiences

Supporting the work of place-making

'Key ingredient'	Neighbour-led activity	TWC! staff role
Village Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FBNT leading the Village Vision process • Neighbours contributing to the vision, and leading on its implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting FBNT to lead the Village Vision process • Engaging with neighbours so that their voices, ideas and action are at the heart of the vision
Community venues & green spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighbours running existing community venues • Neighbours contributing to the vision, development and running of new community venues • Neighbours developing and maintaining existing green spaces • Neighbours developing new green spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to run the Hub as a key community venue, modelling the ethos described here • Supporting other local venues to develop their 'offer', their ethos and their connectedness within the local 'ecology' (including connecting with potential resources & partner agencies) • Supporting neighbours to develop the vision for new community venues • Supporting neighbours to maintain and develop new and existing green spaces
Intergenerational activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local young people and adults working together on activities to maintain, develop and creatively use local venues and green spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading youth social action projects, connecting young people with adults to maintain, develop and creatively use local venues and green spaces
Community 'institutions'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading, participating in and developing community 'institutions' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting local leaders to lead existing community 'institutions', and to develop their connectedness within the local 'ecology' • Supporting neighbours to engage with and get involved in existing community 'institutions' • Supporting neighbours to develop new community 'institutions'
Community 'traditions'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading, participating in and developing community 'traditions' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting local leaders to lead existing community 'traditions', and to develop their connectedness within the local 'ecology' • Supporting neighbours to engage with and get involved in existing community 'traditions' • Supporting neighbours to develop new community 'traditions'
Communicating & connecting re: venues, spaces and traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informally communicating with neighbours • More structured & focused connecting with neighbours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting neighbours in informally communicating and connecting • Supporting neighbours / teams to engage in more structured communication (e.g. newsletter) and connecting (e.g. Street Connecting & street events)

Supporting groups to develop and connect

'Key ingredient'	Neighbour-led activity	TWC! staff role
Internal qualities & practical operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating atmosphere, personal qualities, team work, alert to new contributions • Adapting to change, reinvesting income, consistency, communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting with ongoing reflection & learning within the group context
Learning & development programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively participating in learning & development programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating learning & development programme
Short-term collaboration or support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and engaging in short-term opportunities for collaboration or support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and engaging in short-term opportunities for collaboration or support
Communicating and connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with <i>TWC!</i> staff to communicate details of group activities • Being open to <i>TWC!</i> connectors linking neighbours into groups and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collating and disseminating information re: group activities (e.g. through Street Connecting and events) • Supporting neighbours to engage with groups and activities



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