

Our Neighbourhood Network



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The purpose of this report is to evaluate through stories and statistics the impact of the Our Neighbourhood Network (ONN) over its five-year duration and learn from its challenges as well as celebrate its successes.

Our Neighbourhood Network is a community movement based in Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset.

It is supported by five-year funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and managed by Alliance Homes. The funding, initiated in January 2019, enabled the employment of three project workers, project running expenses, sessional workers and evaluation costs to facilitate ONNs activities.

Collaborating with residents, voluntary groups and organisations, ONN aims to strengthen community resilience by promoting the growth of social connections.

At its core, Our Neighbourhood Network enables social connections to enrich community life and foster well-being.

This report will focus on assessing the projects impact on overall wellbeing and health, using the framework of “The Five Community Attributes” which was agreed in 2020. We will look at stories that showcase enhanced connectivity, collaboration, resilience, collective capacity and confidence in the community.

Please watch our [evaluation video](#) to hear residents speak about how the Our Neighbourhood Network project has improved the health of individuals and the broader community.



In **January 2019**, Our Neighbourhood Network set out to enable:

The improvement of the health, wellbeing and resilience of the local community.



People to gain skills and qualifications which will support them to realise their aspirations.



People to overcome barriers which currently separate them from their aspirations.



Local leaders to develop the skills and resources to build on the project's legacy.

Forming a plan

At the start of the project contributors from local community groups, voluntary groups and organisations met over the course of a few workshops to agree a course of action. The concept of the Our Neighbourhood Network emerged from this process.

The Map we made together shows that in some areas there was already a wealth of resources to build on, but other areas lacked bumping spaces where people could meet, socialise and hold regular activities.

The idea of using underutilised shops as community spaces emerged from these conversations.



Community hubs

A commitment was secured from Alliance Homes to use three empty shops, one on each of the local housing estates. These shops would be used as our community hubs. Investment was also made to transform Coleridge Road allotment site into our 4th outdoor hub, Coleridge Road Community Garden.

Within a month of the community hub opening at 3 Loxton Road, around 30 people were attending weekly groups, including yoga, craft club and coffee mornings, most of which were independently run by local people.



Four Community Hubs have been established during the course of the project, providing places for people to connect through all manner of activities, some facilitated by community workers and others self organising.

In February 2020, the project team hosted their first gathering in the newly launched Community Hub at 3 Loxton Road. Over 40 people attended during the afternoon, local musicians brought instruments, and had a jamming session and a huge feast was laid out thanks to everyone bringing food to share.

Two new groups formed as a result of the first gathering. An outdoor gathering soon followed at Coleridge Road Community Garden. Thirty people got together around a bonfire to share their news and enjoy pizza.

“

It was so good, I really hope we have another one. It was completely inter generational, and everyone came together.

”

Sazia Salim



Covid pandemic

During the first wave of Covid-19, in March 2020, the community hubs were closed and the project team were unable to conduct any face to face activities.

Despite the challenges, the project workers created new Facebook pages for each of the hubs increasing the online connections with over 750 people.

Messenger became a popular tool for the Community Workers to keep in touch with isolated individuals and has remained an active method of communication throughout the project.



Recognising the impact of the community hubs closure, adjustments were made by Alliance Homes in line with Government guidelines allowing certain activities to proceed with safety measures during subsequent lockdowns.



2021 saw the re-launch of our community hubs at the Sub-Station and 3 Loxton Road, which had been closed during the pandemic, and the launch of our newly refurbished hub at 7 Aller Parade. Within days of the hub opening its doors, local groups began to meet providing crucial opportunities for people to re-connect with friends and neighbours.



7 Aller Parade underwent refurbishment, benefiting from social value contributions from Alliance Homes contractors. The renovation included the installation of a new kitchen, which is now the heart of the hub, along with an upgraded floor and new doors.

Throughout lockdown, the Community Gardeners, along with a few local residents continued to care for the green spaces around the neighbourhood. Providing access to our green spaces during the pandemic was vital for supporting people's mental-health and well-being. As restrictions were lifted, we saw a small number of gardening volunteers return and their help was invaluable in the preparation for our new outdoor community hub on Coleridge Road. The Gardening project, 'Growing Together', has provided employment for local people as sessional workers. £170,889 was invested by Alliance Homes and our supply chain to develop the infrastructure for horticultural engagement.

Social Value contributions from Alliance Homes' contractors worth £38,840 delivered improvements to the community hubs including new shutters and a new kitchen.



From **2021 - 2023**, there was a significant increase in the development of new groups and activities across all community hubs, signifying the natural expansion of ONN. By the end of December 2023, the total number of different groups utilising the hubs had grown to 34.

These groups encompass a variety of community-led initiatives, such as a parent toddler group, 'Aller Tots' at 7 Aller Parade and the craft group at 3 Loxton Road, which is run by a team of local creatives. Local organisations, like the South Weston Activities Network (SWAN), utilise the hubs for youth-orientated work and activities, as well as the Young Peoples forum. At 3 Loxton Road, the Wednesday group - a weekly social gathering for adults with learning disabilities regularly attracts over 40 people. The Sub Station hub serves as a space for the community development team from the For All Healthy Living Centre, where they implement food initiatives and host health-related groups in partnership with North Somerset Council and Public Health.



Coleridge Road Community Garden - outdoor hub has over seven regular groups using the space weekly, including Nature Tots, Weston College, and volunteer drop in sessions. Coleridge Road Community Garden is a favourite venue among local people for hosting gatherings and events. The autumnal gathering is popular among local families, with pumpkin carving always the firm favourite activity.

Response to the cost of living crisis

The cost of living crisis posed a variety of challenges. To respond, the hubs adapted some of their sessions into 'Community Living Rooms', offering a comfortable, safe and warm space with hot refreshments for those seeking warmth and companionship. The Community Living Rooms soon grew in popularity and consistently welcomed between 15 and 18 people. Due to the popularity of the Community Living Rooms and the new formation of friendships among local people the Our Neighbourhood Network team made the decision to continue the sessions as weekly coffee morning drop-ins all year round.



Community Living Room at 7 Aller Parade

Community hubs



The community hubs play a crucial role in fostering positive community-led change and provide much needed spaces for people to gather and host community activities, bringing together individuals from all walks of life. The hubs have become home to various groups who meet regularly and people attending these groups are forming lasting friendships and become involved in other aspects of community life.

“

Being part of a creative group that meet at the hub became my life line when my life was tough, and I struggled to the point where I felt my life had no purpose. Joining the group gave me a sense of belonging and I soon started to feel valued. I have made new friends, we regularly meet up for coffee or to go on shopping trips together outside of the hub. Being part of this group has saved my life.

”

Sally's shared experience



Community hub feedback

One of our Neighbourhood Network's significant contributions to improving conditions for positive community-led change has been the development of the community hubs. Networks emerge when people have opportunities to connect, and the provision of the hub spaces for this to happen is reflected in the positive feedback and the impact that the hubs have had on individual lives. This highlights the importance of such community spaces in nurturing connection, support, and wellbeing.

"the hub is a special place for me where i meet people. its a place where i can relax, and be me"

Danny

"Having access to the hub for our group has been vital in enabling us to keep our meetings going."

Jeanette

Wednesday group leader

"Having a warm place to go to during the winter months was truly a blessing. The support I received from the hub's community helped me get back on my feet. I now visit every week, even on sunny days!"

Carol

"Having the opportunity to gather at the outdoor community hub for craft sessions was the one thing that helped me cope during Covid. Without this, my depression would have certainly worsened."

David

"the gatherings at the community garden are amazing. My kids love making potions in the mud kitchen and making fresh apple juice is just the best!"

Tori

"Christmas Dinner at the hub was the best time ever, great food, great company and lots of giggles. It beats spending Christmas on my own".

Josie

Coming to the hub and chatting to my friends is far more fun than being on my own at home watching TV. I would miss the hub if it was not here."

Harry

"It's wonderful that my friend and I can use the hub to organize our parent group. The hub provides an excellent space for toddlers to play and for us to catch up with other parent friends."

Amy

"encouraging my son to help with the crafts at the family fun day has been a real boost for his confidence. Thankyou"

Rita

Chet's story

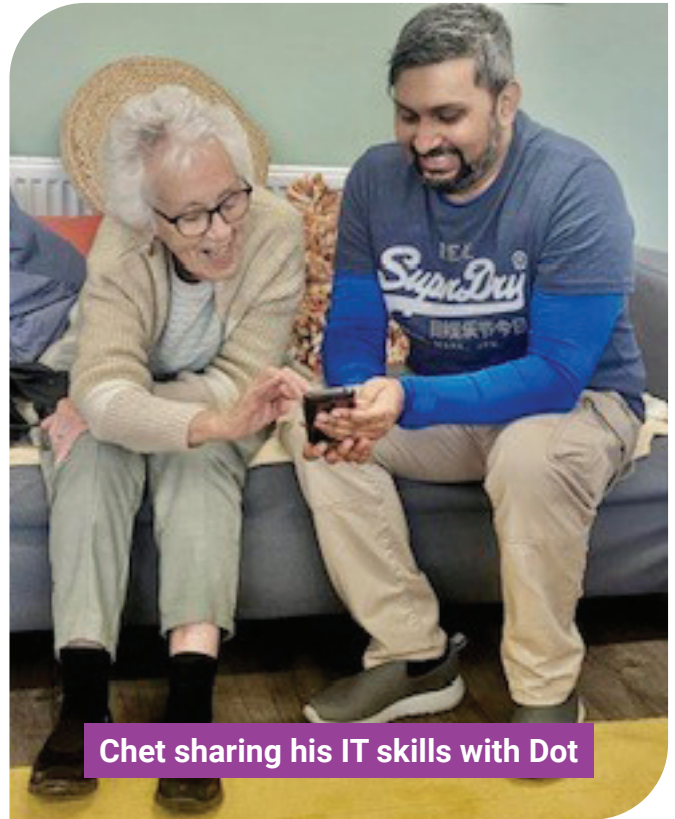
Chet's involvement with Our Neighbourhood Network extends beyond his own progression from a volunteer into a paid Community Development Worker role.

“

It all started when I decided to volunteer at the community hub, I was already involved in a few other volunteering roles around town but something about this project just clicked for me. Volunteering at the hub felt different, I felt supported and valued as part of the team, plus it fit nicely around my other commitments, I realised that this was where my heart belonged. So, I decided to dive in deeper and invest more time volunteering at the hubs. When a paid position came up, I decided to take the leap and apply for the job, the rest is history!

”

Chet



Chet sharing his IT skills with Dot

Chet's positive experiences and sense of belonging has encouraged him to recruit new volunteers like, Ian a Chef and Dave, a Florist who both bring diverse skill sets to the project. This approach not only enriches the community hubs but also strengthens community cohesion.

In 2023, Chet played a key role in establishing a weekly social group aimed at promoting positive mental health among men. The group gathers weekly to socialise, enjoy pizza, play games, participate in barber nights, and have conversations with other men in a supportive and safe environment. A local barber Jack offered his barbering services during one of the sessions, activities like these are good for positive health and encourage people to come and join in.

Chet's story serves as a testament to the transformative impact of grass roots initiatives in building stronger, more resilient communities.



The five community attributes



In 2020, Alison Gilchrist, author of *The Well-Connected Community*, collaborated with the project team to help work out what they would expect to see if the project was having a positive effect. They were looking for signs that the community was more **Connected**, **Collaborative** and **Resilient**, that it had greater **Collective Capacity** and increased **Confidence**.



Our Neighbourhood Network is dedicated to connecting people and facilitating community-led change. Understanding the impact of such a complex system can be challenging, as outcomes are often unpredictable and require a different approach beyond measuring inputs and outputs. The five community attributes provided a framework for assessing the project's impact on overall wellbeing and health, helping us determine if our efforts were successful in nurturing positive change within the community. The framework was adopted and modified by North Somerset Council and Weston Town Council for the purpose of their own community development strategies.

Connectivity

Connectivity embodies the intricate network of informal relationships, contacts and informal links between individuals, groups and organisations within our neighbourhoods.



Feedback gathered from regular attendees of our community hub's coffee morning highlighted the diverse pathways that people had to community engagement. Some described their initial involvement stemmed from connections with friends, neighbours, or community workers which had led them too join in with other groups. Others mentioned that how initially joining one group had led them to the discovery of joining another groups and activities.

Enhanced connectivity is evident when people have plenty of safe and accessible spaces, opportunities to meet, engage and communicate with one another, whether through informal gatherings, social media platforms or at more formal networking meetings.

Jane's story

Jane started volunteering with the Community Allotment group where she made connections with people who were also involved with other local groups, this led Jane to join the Colouring Club at the Community Hub, and the Shakespeare Court Craft group.

Through Jane's involvement in the Community Hubs and through her new connections, Jane began encouraging more people to join. Bringing new people along has helped the group to grow and become well-established.

The group now organise coach trips several times a year under the name 'The Out and Abouters'. Through her new formed friendships Jane was invited to go along to the Wednesday social group, where she is now an active member.



Collaboration

Collaboration refers to the willingness and opportunities to work together on joint projects or in ways that provide complementary services and activities. It reflects improved cooperation and better coordination, as well as a decrease in unhelpful competition between projects and organisations. Collaboration increases if people actively look for ways to exchange ideas, align activities and share resources. Disagreements and tensions can be dealt with openly and constructively so that positive relationships develop based on trust and mutual respect.

Sazia Salim, a community development worker at the For All Healthy Living Centre, explains that collaborating with the Our Neighbourhood Network team has informed her approach to the 'Lifetime of Experience' project, helping her develop strengths-based ways of working and confidence in her job role. The relationship between Our Neighbourhood Network team and Sazia has been mutually beneficial for both projects, particularly in regard to the development of the community hubs.

The Our Neighbour Network has helped shape the types of activities being offered by other organisations, encouraging strengths-based approaches. An example of this was a screen printing course held at the Aller Parade hub which was provided remotely through Weston Artspace and facilitated by local artist Zara Lott.



“

It's wonderful that I have been able to be part of this; if it were in town, then I wouldn't have been able to get there. Its great that creative opportunities are on my doorstep.

”

Artspace participant



Resilience

Resilience describes the ability or resourcefulness of communities to respond positively to change and disruption. It involves recovery and creativity, requiring flexibility and persistence rather than rigidity. Increased resilience requires resourcefulness and a willingness to learn from mistakes and setbacks, enabling the exploration of alternative approaches to getting things done. A positive mind set and flexibility are essential, alongside a shared ability to reflect on experiences, adjust activities and modify expectations. The Covid-19 pandemic serves as an example of how the project team had to quickly adapt, to ensure that they stayed connected to people in the community even through difficult circumstances.

The impact of hub closures prompted learning and disruption during the first wave of Covid-19, as the project team couldn't engage in face-to-face activities. However, the Government guidelines were adjusted for the second lockdown, allowing certain activities to go ahead with safety restrictions in place. The use of Coleridge Road community garden outdoor hub, and the Great Rhyne allotment space became a safe space where people could continue to meet and connect in small groups. The launch of social media platforms gave the project an online presence and helped those on-line stay connected, socially distanced walks, delivering arts packs and fresh produce from the community allotment enabled the team to stay connected.



“

Having a beautiful safe space where I can meet up with my Sister and her children has been what's kept me going through lockdown.

”

Victoria



Between lockdowns, the project team hosted weekly outdoor coffee mornings in the community orchard in order to maintain some of the energy that had built up prior to the first lockdown. Following the Government's "Rule of Six" guidance and clever planning meant that small numbers of people could attend the coffee mornings providing much needed support face to face to conversations. Victoria and her family regularly met for a socially distance coffee and chat in our green spaces.

Collective capability

Collective capability is about the combined knowledge skills, energy and shared resources that are available within local communities, so that members of the community can independently establish and maintain projects, activities and locally-run organisations. Collective capability includes the level of peoples willingness to volunteer to help run and manage small-scale imitative as well as those taking on leadership positions. Residents already have many strengths but these can be enhanced individually and collectively through external training and peer learning.

Mo's story

Mo has been an integral part of the Our Neighbourhood Network project from the beginning. Mo regularly volunteers at the community hubs and always gets involved with events and gatherings. Mo is famous among local people for her home baked banana bread and always brings along plenty to share.

Mo recognised at the onset of the project that a community space was needed as an essential ingredient in all three estates for people to meet up and have a place they could call their own.

Mo said "it's been interesting to observe the development of the community hubs, and to be part of their journey. The closure of the hubs during Covid-19 pandemic was challenging, and I wondered if they would ever re-open because they were still in their infancy when the lockdown happened. So, it was a relief to see people return and start to engage in community activities again once they had re-opened. Though they were quiet at first, momentum soon picked up. We have a variety of different groups using the space and for many people coming to activities at the hub has become their lifeline."

Mo thoroughly enjoys spending time at the community hubs, especially when she is offering peer support and sharing her skills with others.



“

Being connected to my community is important to me and volunteering provides me with a meaningful way to achieve this. I have enjoyed being part of Our Neighbourhood journey, experiencing highs and lows along the way.

”

Mo

Collective efficacy or confidence

Collective efficacy is based on a shared belief that the community or group has the ability to influence decisions that affect what happens in the area and to initiate change to make things happen. It's about the confidence and loyalty that community members have in themselves and each other, and in their trust that local organisations will act in the interests or on behalf of the whole community.

David's story St John's outdoor gym

David wanted to join a gym near his home and found that the costs were too high. He had seen pictures of an outdoor gym online, which was free for the public to use and thought it would be a good idea to have one on the Bournville Estate.

Our Neighbourhood team helped David decide on a course of action. He conducted a survey and collected over 40 expressions of support. Working with the Our Neighbourhood team, he formed a project group. The group met regularly and identified a site central to all three estate's, they secured the support from the council and other stakeholders, they identified funding and suppliers.



David celebrating the installation of the new open-air gym, three years after he came up with the idea. The St Johns Open-air gym was installed in December 2021 and officially opened by the Mayor in March 2022.



Projects like St Johns Open-air gym exemplifies a sense of pride in the neighbourhood, and a belief that the investment in time and energy is worth the effort.

“

Looking back, it's hard to believe how far I have come. I didn't realise it would take so long or how hard it would be, but I am proud I have seen it through. The thing that surprised me the most was discovering how many people supported my idea once I had found the confidence to ask.

”

David

Groups accessing our community hubs and green spaces

Over the last year of the project we have witnessed a rapid growth in participation. In year 5, we have 34 groups who regularly access the hubs (see below). A total of 12,767 community members engaged in activities at our hubs and green spaces. It is worth noting that these figures represent participation rather than unique individuals, as some people may attend multiple times. Our community garden produced and distributed 481Kg of fresh fruit and vegetables among the local community. Volunteers play a key role donating 2035 hours of their time to the community Garden.



Our Community Garden produced and distributed 481Kg of fresh fruit and vegetables among the local community.

Physical activity:

- Yoga Dance class
- Baby massage
- Seated exercise
- Gardening
- Adult drama

Food and nutrition:

- Community gardening
- Pop-up veg stalls
- Cookery clubs
- Nutrition advice sessions
- Parent Cookery club

Cost of living:

- Community living rooms or warm spaces
- Seasonal activities (e.g., Christmas lunches)

Children's and young people's health:

- Parent and toddler group
- Nature tots
- Young people leadership development group
- Family after school club
- Outdoor Child minding Group
- Youth Forum

Mental health:

- Art and craft groups
- Knitting groups
- Gardening volunteering
- Coffee mornings
- Bi-monthly gatherings
- Bereavement group
- Domestic support group
- Learning disability social groups
- Men's wellbeing group
- Holistic Therapies group

General groups and organisations

- Coronation residents association
- Weston Scouts
- Weston Homemakers
- Public Health - health screening
- Weston College gardening
- South Weston Activities Network
- Super Culture
- XTND
- Next link

Our Neighbourhood Network

2023-2024 Finance Report

Due to strong network growth, including the expansion of community groups at the hubs, combined with cost of living and inflationary pressure, the underspend from year 4 and Lottery funding for year 5 ending 31st January 2024 has been fully utilized. This leaves a closing balance of -£248.00. Alliance Homes has made up this small shortfall.

23-24 Opening balance		£24,069
23-24 Estimates	Budget	Total
Total Income	£32,030	£32,030
Staff costs		
Salary, ER NI and pension	£34,247	£37,297
Overtime	£0	£0
Mileage and subs	£150	£312
Total Staff costs	£34,397	£37,609
General activities	£7,658	£10,460
Overheads		
Management fees (Helen Wheelock)	£7,451	£8,279
Total overheads	£7,451	£8,279
Total costs	£49,505	£56,347
23-24 Surplus/-Deficit	-£17,475	-£24,317
XCH Estimated 23-24 closing balance		-£248

Conclusion

The Our Neighbourhood Network has served as a catalyst for positive community-led change and is supported by evidence through the significant increase in new groups and activities, along with the rising numbers of volunteers and attendees across all four community hubs.

The application of strengths based thinking in recruitment for community-based roles, and the uptake of use in the community hubs by groups that have become self organising has enabled ONN to grow organically in directions that were never imagined at the start of the project.

The growth of networks and friendships organically emerging from the Our Neighbourhood Network further demonstrates its impact, and how they have increased community connectivity, collaborating with partner organisations , stimulating infrastructure investment and the support of local leadership.

Lessons learnt from the interim evaluation in year 4 were implemented in our final year, leading to improved publicity strategies, enhanced community engagement and stronger connections with local organisations and initiatives.

Despite facing challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, the resilience of the community and the crucial role of the project workers in maintaining momentum and nurturing networks within the community and the hubs became apparent.

This underscores the lasting legacy of the project by supporting continued community growth and well-being in the Bournville, Coronation and Oldmixon areas of Weston-Super-Mare.

Acknowledgements

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