

How to: Build community resilience



Credit: Anna Sass/Mind

The power of community to support mental wellbeing across the UK

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in partnership with





Introduction

Community resilience is the ability to respond to challenges and support members of the community. Co-op, Mind, SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health) and Inspire have worked in partnership to bring communities together to improve mental wellbeing.

We've carried out [research](#) to find out which factors support community resilience. And we've delivered more than 60 new resilience-based projects in communities across the UK. They've helped more than 30,000 people to improve their mental wellbeing and feel more connected to their communities.

We've learned a lot, and we want to share this with community groups, organisations and volunteers around the country.

Whether you're running a sports group, a community cafe, a faith group or a mental wellbeing support group, we hope our practical tips can help you build your community's resilience.

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1. Know your community

Knowing your community has two stages – first, define your community, then get to know them.

Community can mean lots of different things, so understand the community you're working with. It might be a school, workplace, faith group. Or perhaps it's a particular demographic – such as working mums, young Muslim men, or older people experiencing poverty.

Once you've defined your community, get to know them, and the communities around them.

Key takeaways:

- Do you know what else is going on in your community? How about in other communities in your local area? Neighbouring areas? Beyond the mental health sector? A great way to build community resilience is to know your community so you can make links with other organisations and refer people to other services for support.
- Community mapping – if an up to date asset map exists, use and promote this before creating your own. If not, you could start a live map or community directory. Make sure you regularly update it, and dedicate resource to promoting it so others can contribute.
- Be flexible and adaptable to your communities' needs. Who isn't showing up at your service? Why? What changes might you be able to make to entice them in?
- Remember – geographic identities can differ even in comparatively small areas. Don't make assumptions based on neighbouring towns or similar-seeming communities.



Case study

Inspire's 'Healthy Restart' is a tailored programme based on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing, with modules including sleep, health anxieties, healthy eating, coping with emotions, self-esteem and mindfulness. The team completed a mapping exercise with community leaders in each of the 4 local areas where Healthy Restart was provided. This allowed them to tailor the programme to the specific needs of each community.



2. Build relationships

Relationships are the cornerstone of resilient communities. When you have strong relationships with other people and organisations in your community, you can trust and support each other.

Building relationships takes time, but it pays off in the long run. When challenges or opportunities arise, having strong relationships means you can quickly respond as a community.

Key takeaways:

- Put aside time and invest energy in building relationships.
- Find and connect to existing community groups. Attending events, services and workshops from other organisations is an effective way to kick-start relationships.
- Make contact with the intention to start an ongoing, mutual relationship. Be open to learning and shaping each other's work.



Case study

Bath Mind created Community Unity Days, where they provided short courses and group activities for local people and organisations. These led to the development of an excellent relationship with a local college. As a result, someone with a construction background at the college improved the outdoor space at Bath Mind to make it more accessible for people with disabilities.

3. Listen and co-produce

Listen to the feedback of the people using your group or service. Where possible, involve them in the design, improvement and delivery of your work. This will improve your organisation, build community resilience, and help your participants feel more engaged with the service.

Key takeaways:

- Listen and engage with the community you're trying to reach - don't assume you know what they want or need
- Hold regular 'Learn & Act' sessions throughout your project to gather feedback from participants on what's working and what could be done differently. Use this feedback to adapt and continually improve your project.
- Use the **Plan > Act > Reflect > Learn** cycle



Adapted from Revans, R.W., Action Learning, New Techniques for Management, Blond & Briggs, 1980



Case study

Newport Mind engaged with young people to find out what prevents them from seeking help with their mental wellbeing. They found out that they want to speak to someone who has had similar experiences, rather than a mental health professional. In response, Newport Mind placed young volunteers in local youth-based community groups. Young people attending the groups said they felt more comfortable opening up about their mental wellbeing and knew where to go for further support.

"It was great to see our young people engage and feel safe to openly speak about topics that can be sensitive."

Youth group leader



4. Collaborate

Many organisations have limited resources, and we can't all be experts in everything. Collaborating with other organisations can be a great way to work together for mutual benefit. It can also be a way to reach a new audience or fill a gap in support. Successful collaboration can strengthen the resilience of both groups and the communities they support.

Key takeaways:

- Harness the power of a community connector. A dedicated resource focused on connecting beneficiaries into other community activities is powerful for your organisation and builds community resilience.
- Be flexible. Consider: What can other organisations do better than you? What are your [underline your] unique strengths? How might you enhance their offer? How might they enhance your offer?
- By contributing to other projects, you build your credibility as well as providing mutual benefit.

Case study

Coventry and Warwickshire Mind took mental health support into communities instead of expecting people to come to them. Their wellbeing worker collaborated with local groups and organisations offering 1:1 drop in sessions and group sharing sessions. This included weekly groups for men living at Salvation Army, creating a space for residents to open up about their mental wellbeing, often for the first time:

"I've been struggling with my mental health from a young age and never received support. Since being able to talk about how I'm feeling I can cope with my emotions better and feel I am depressed less often. I've started talking to other men at Salvation Army about how I'm feeling which helps." Salvation Army resident



5. Plan for sustainability

Forward planning can help your project succeed in the long term. Involving others within your community not only helps to build community resilience, but increases the likelihood of the project being sustainable.

Practical tips:

- Use the Community Resilience Framework to create a plan to make your group sustainable over time. The framework can also help you to evaluate your progress.
- Peer support works. Make training peer supporters or volunteers part of your project's model.
- Sustainability is challenging. Partnership working can be the key to unlock longevity beyond funding.
- Build on existing services for more impact. You can usually start quicker when you're not starting from scratch.

Case study

SAMH delivered Sunflower Cafe service at a community centre in Scotland. A group of regular participants in a project were empowered to take ownership of the group after the funding finished, with support from volunteers of the local charity. Through their relationship with the community centre owner, they were offered the space for free and encouraged to continue the group. This meant they could continue to support their wellbeing and that of the wider community.