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Community Business Mutual Aid: summary of discussions to date

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This is an emerging picture from the front-line, summarised from questions sent across the network and the fortnightly Tuesday Zoom calls. We have organised these by themes, including a summary of ‘hot topics’ common to many of those themes.

Over time it is intended to:

- Help those new to the network get up to speed with what is happening and get the most from the fortnightly calls.
- Build a picture of the key challenges and solutions community businesses are adopting.
- Provide quick tips and links to inspiring examples for community businesses to take inspiration and practically apply that learning to their own situation.

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‘Hot topics’ – regularly repeated topics and questions relevant to all themes

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Our [resources](#) page lists a range of useful resources connected to all these themes – the links from these pages are the *best source of up to date information on the government and sector grants and support available*. This includes upcoming or recently recorded *webinars that are free to access from across sector bodies*.

Our [stories](#) page lists blogs, articles and case studies for ideas and inspiration from other community businesses.

Looking to the future

After the initial weeks focussed on immediate and practical challenges and the vital support needed for people in many of our communities, it has been increasingly turning not just to immediate crisis response but how community businesses create opportunities to reshape future economic, social and environmental systems. There is a feeling community businesses are uniquely placed – at the heart of a local, community partnerships but with a more outward look and ‘global’ focus, crossing boundaries between public sector, private sector and social sector. Lots of people have volunteered to help, many more than are required - many may fade away as they go back to work or other activities, but need to think about why they volunteered, what might they get out of it, what skills they have and how their enthusiasm could be harnessed in the longer term. The surge in volunteering is unprecedented, how can this be harnessed?

Making the case for the social economy

There is a desire to be much more bullish than we have been before, to remain realistic but also hopeful, *“these rules suck, we want new rules”*. This will continue to be a focus of future calls, with themes looking at areas community businesses might work together on to amplify voice and develop practical proposals. These discussions will be brought together at the end of each call in the regular ‘revolution room’ which has so far focussed on the ‘food system’, ‘health & social care’ and ‘community assets and ownership’. *We want to galvanise and need the support from across the sector and beyond – not just crisis support but to start building for the future now, so there is no return to ‘normal’*.

We’re all social businesses now – blurring the lines is critical to future success

There continues to be a blurring of lines between community businesses, small businesses, local authorities, micro-enterprises and individuals in the community. Can society better recognise solidarity with other local organisations which often means community businesses show more in common with a local business than for example a national charity? Playing this cross-sector ‘knitting’ role is generally easier for community businesses than any others including their funders. Do funders, regulators and central government need to understand that such a blurring represents strength rather than dividing between traditional and simplistic ‘sector’ lines *-can we get beyond a definition of community that is purely social sector focussed but recognises the blurring of the lines? Can we take the opportunity to make the case for different rules around e.g. charitable funding and support which often constrains such entrepreneurialism and resilience locally? Can we weave more local systems of support and infrastructure that build on community connection and resilience and invest in these properly as a sector?*

Community assets

Pubs, shops sports clubs and other community assets are under acute threat. What was already a major challenge to maintain social infrastructure has now got a great deal more challenging and there are likely to be many closures or sell offs over the coming months. There are also potentially assets we could be buying and preserving for the community now, but all the funds have stopped.

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There are many ideas and examples we could build from now. *How can we work with each other, funders and central government to protect and maintain community assets? How can your movement use our tools and techniques to protect social infrastructure? Is this a time to start creating mechanisms to put up assets especially in so-called left behind places and combine those with a community businesses 'community enabler; or 'knitting' together role?*

Co-operative unions and networks

There is now more focus on supporting and nurturing micro-enterprises, with a widening role for community business to be at the heart of networks of micro-enterprises co-operating together or creating micro-business unions for example. This is absolutely vital and is something current funding, crisis responses have not recognised or properly considered. *Alongside sector bodies how might we support each other and the micro-businesses on which our work and many communities rely, now more than ever? How can we make the case to funders how important it is to support community businesses to support their wider networks of micro-enterprises?*

Working with local authorities

There has been an increase in the need for local authorities to work with community businesses or to look at alternative ways of supporting their communities. There are increasing examples of great partnerships with local authorities, as well as some local authorities ramping up their engagement in ways which are cutting across or undermining the efforts of community businesses, rather than working positively with them. *How can we work much more proactively with local authorities on shaping the future relationships and local systems, across areas such as procurement, planning, community infrastructure and assets, social impact funding? How might this link to recasting the social infrastructure role – the community enabler or knitter role not just of individuals but of all institutions and aspects of the community?*

Covid responses have been addressing short-term issues, but have also uncovered existing needs - how can/should they be addressed in the longer-term? Local Authorities are financially changed, but may have a role in supporting and facilitating the numerous groups that have sprung up to create a more sustainable long-term solution, potentially with grant and other funding sources. This needs to be driven bottom-up by the groups.

The digital divide

Many of those most vulnerable don't have access to the internet through computers or smartphones and this is an ever-growing concern, especially as a whole raft of services move steadily more and more online. This is going to last for a long time and connection is more vital than ever as we approach significant mental health crisis and a loneliness pandemic that was always there and is now just growing. *Getting people online or more immediately connecting in other ways is an increasing priority* – for sharing information; keeping people engaged, entertained and connected; and for accessing support/ services.

To mobilise or mothball

This is a time when community businesses want and need to *mobilise rather than mothball* their operations. However, the furlough scheme has encouraged mothballing; the government support for charities is not helping most community businesses; and given their varied legal forms and sectors community business are often caught in the middle of what support is available and at risk of being left behind. This will last for many months and we could lose large parts of the sector when it is needed most. *We need sector bodies to continue to keep making this case for all legal forms within the community business movement. We need to start being much more proactive*

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about making the case for the social economy and investment – to do this we have to break out of political siloes and we will need to make a case connected to broader messages that define community beyond civil society or the social sector.

Business continuity

Most organisations are facing income loss with estimates on average of between 25% to 30% or more. Some have lost their income completely and are in danger of going out of business. Even where it is possible to ‘mothball’ a business and rely on e.g. furloughing staff this creates additional challenges of potentially losing skilled staff, maintaining staff morale and thus maintaining operations and services not just immediately but into the future. Funders are starting to step up more with immediate funding, but this will still be insufficient for many. *We need to start planning not just for the immediate issues but for the longer-term fallout across the community business sector. Are there opportunities to support each other more through e.g. time banks and skills swaps and how can we facilitate this? Can we build more formal structures like secondary co-ops more quickly? How can we reimagine our business models in this way, working that through together?*

As businesses start to re-open, resources were thrown together quickly, assuming it would be for a few weeks. There will be a need to plan how to support things in the long-term. Community Businesses that rely on trading income will need to get those income streams back up, but the community support needs are still there.

Mental health and wellbeing

An increasing concern for many over time – for staff and volunteers as much as those in the communities that we are supporting. The crisis is already upon us, and the loneliness pandemic that was always there is getting worse. Connection, which community businesses are so well placed to support is needed more than ever. *Sharing more best practice on this would be very helpful and likely to be needed for many months to come. Can we wrap this up into the broader case for the social economy and community businesses?*

Delivering services safely – safeguarding, personal protection and food prep

Managing *safeguarding* concerns and getting a clear picture of those that might be most vulnerable in communities where there are gaps in contacts is still a regular theme, though has been less pronounced in recent weeks as many have established new protocols. Knowing what the guidelines really are for everything from food to shopping delivery, and *being able to train staff and volunteers on the issues of personal safety, food hygiene and safeguarding online from reliable sources for the sector* would still be helpful, as would continuing to *lobby for speeding up access to DBS checks* – not just right now but for the future – is this a chance to reform what for many is a slow and constraining factor.

Reconfiguring business and payment options

Many are having to reconfigure their business models very quickly e.g. to online services to maintain their businesses and keep support to those they work with. There is a lack of certainty about whether people can move business models online and charge for things when so much is now being provided for free. Many are adopting “pay as you feel” or crowdfunding donations with reasonable success. It is still a recurring issue on *how to collect payment either online or door to door safely* e.g. for tasks, food deliveries, etc though many have now made suitable arrangements for the short term. The initial issue, however has highlighted that whilst there are many options out there they often come with challenges in setting up quickly (verification can take a long time and the unusual legal models of community businesses exacerbate this; finding

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ways for people to pay who are not online e.g. card readers where there is a shortage of these and no shops open). Success often comes from partnership with others who have these facilities, but not always easy to do. Helping *collate or design and get access to such tools and options could be really useful for a national body to consider or provide training on* again not necessarily right now, but also for the future. This might include *VAT implications* to taking payments / delivering to people and how to account for these types of payments.

Managing cashflow

Increasing concerns not just on overall business health but on cash-flow. The focus for many is on the medium to long-term impact and how to plan ahead. Many community businesses look likely to fail. It has been emphasised by many how important it is to keep *clear logs of actions, decisions and cash-flow forecasts* – not just to manage now but to enable community businesses to have information and build trust when securing future grants and donations (including government ones).

Online & offline connection (service, information & entertainment)

Introduction

Social capital is vital in the effective delivery of core community work. In our communities where we have already established trust, purpose and value we are able to respond instantly to community needs.

Its important to help people understand that bringing the isolated out of loneliness will not only benefit the lonely, but those right across their friendship network. The book 'Connected' highlights the greater susceptibility towards loneliness for those connected to people who experience loneliness - emotions have a contagion of their own, and it is therefore in the wider community's interest to ensure that nobody falls between the cracks or their despair will spread as the virus.

A key aspect is ensuring that activities providing connectivity, and health & wellbeing services are accessible to all, with lower income families often needing support. Most are faced with financial constraints that prevent them from participating – whether they are online or offline.

The need for online social connection and entertainment

There are a variety of reasons to connect people online e.g.

- For people in recovery from substance misuse, isolation is the worst thing. Ideas to keep them connected are needed.
- For Friday Friends seniors club at the Bevy Community Pub in Brighton, there is a need to keep them entertained despite lack of experience and trust in tech.
- We've seen girl guides meetings online and cases of holding church services too (but remember to mute people when they sing the hymns!)
- Many that generally run a face to face sessions directly with local people, or to self-employed people/ microenterprises are wanting to maintain a service and connection as well – many have moved online already or will need support to do so to diversify their offer.

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- There is a huge amount of furloughing in the creative sector and a desire to connect creative capacity with community needs.
- There is a need to support staff wellbeing and facing the challenges that some staff are on the frontline, some self-isolating, some furloughed.
- There is a recognition of the need to keep members and like-minded organisations across the country connected and informed as easily as possible.
- Recognise that online contribution to wellbeing is about **socialising** as well as practical support.
- The importance of **fun** is coming through strongly across all these lines of online connection.

Challenges

- At the Bevy digital help programmes don't often get a lot of action, in part because of a lack of trust.
- Generally, in recent years the reputation of tech has taken a knock and emphasises divisions, and that needs dealing with e.g. Older people and younger people have different problems with tech. Often for older people they have an old device, or a bad experience with a device, so then become reluctant to upgrade and communicate that way. For young people, if a payment has been declined they can feel awkward about returning to online platforms.
- One of the things that didn't work was in a community with lots of elderly people locally, and with folk not very techy, and isolated. They put out loads and loads of info, recruited a massive bank of people and not one person rang the helpline. Chat line 1 was setup for shopping, but ended up being for social chats as well. Chat line 2 was setup as more of a helpline/chat, to combat social isolation but no-one rang it. What they did was transfer volunteers over to Chat line 1 so folks could shop and chat. As a result there is a question whether loneliness is seen as a stigma, so people don't ask for help. There is more to be learned about why people do or don't reach out.

Platforms for online connection

- [Zoom](#) is the 'go-to' choice for most. Many have tried [Google Hangouts](#) which have very good video quality, can share pics, more of a chat, but can be hit-and-miss with sound and visuals. [HouseParty](#) allows many users to chat simultaneously but was mentioned as having had some 'scare stories' recently (but the saferkid.com reviews the risk as low).
- [FaceTime](#) and [Skype](#) have also been used by many, as well as [Microsoft Teams](#) to maximise potential connections.
- There are also specific apps for different kinds of formats – e.g. [QuizUp](#) for quizzes or [Kahoot!](#) for various learning offers either as surveys or live online.
- [Whereby](#) is easier to use than zoom from a rubbish device like an old kindle. Don't have to download anything. The account-holder emails the link and the participant just clicks it to go straight to web browser.

Structuring online activities

We are all used to planning and facilitating interactive/participative workshops. We need to understand how best to make that work online:

- It is crucial to have some structure, if not an agenda.

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- Two roles needed: Facilitator (leads the interaction) and Producer (technical lead). Introduce them at the start.
- Ground rules. Worth having a set of starting points for what works – e.g. renaming function on Zoom (could use first name, gender pronoun, location); muting when not speaking; using gallery view so you can see everyone; use speaker view when doing introductions; waving when you want to speak; mute if you want to type.
- Positive response to the CB Mutual Aid approach, starting with music and a screenshare slide to describe what's going to happen.
- Quizzes on Zoom as an example– mute everyone, do picture rounds, music rounds. Unmute at the end to share answers. Can do quizzes on Skype where people screenshot their answers and send them through to the quizmaster.
- Karaoke – mix of zoom and Watch Together – put on videos from YouTube is also possible.
- Use oral history. Share pics of local buildings/spaces and ask for memories.

Being aware of legalities of going online

When connecting communities through digital activities it is worth considering any impact on legal liability status if instructions are not provided face to face. This could be reviewed with insurers, for example, if offering online yoga - might the instructor have any risk of legal action should a student be injured through their participation in the class?

Digital presence for assets?

Where community work has involved construction or development of community assets how can the momentum be continued during lockdown / partial lockdown? One solution is to focus on developing a digital identity for the asset to come to help demonstrate the need for funding opportunities of the future and to engage potential future stakeholders and users even before the bricks are laid.

Online access / getting people online

- The digital divide is playing out “laptops and phones are the new loo roll”.
- How we get people online is a key question. As time passes, we need to find ways of getting people online, as many services, including GP appointments, move online. As community businesses, we are often working in tech poor areas, making our communities less adaptable / even more vulnerable during this time.
- For more vulnerable people (e.g. neuro-diverse) they are relying often on carers or parents.
- Use existing trust networks to vouch for someone that can help getting someone online.
- Onion Collective has sent out a special edition newsletter asking if people have tech / internet in their houses and asking them to call a helpline if they don't.
- Is there potential to work with other trusted local organisations to facilitate a tech roll out, especially in the elderly groups, where peer support / encouragement would be essential.
- However, there is a need for agencies to be genuinely helpful – listening to what we need and not duplicating effort, and not responding in ways that dampen community response and engagement.
- Encourage newbies to phone into Zoom for example so they can see what's happening on screen but can't be seen. Then they get more comfortable and can come into the room fully next time.

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- For those with broadband but who have never used online apps/social media potential to:
 - access phones through [Online Centres Network](#) which is now donating phones.
 - ask the local [C19 Mutual Aid](#) group whether they have volunteers who can help people get online (e.g. onto a zoom call) – they may also be able to help with credit on phones which is becoming a bigger issue.
 - Citizens Online (which has a branch in Brighton) have networks of champions who can help. We should be thinking in terms of ‘training the trainers’ to distribute skills as widely as possible
- For those without broadband:
 - We need to think about mobile platforms. Think mobile first – recognise that (young) people have been watching more and more video content on phones for a while and your offer needs to work on a small screen.
 - There is an initiative in Germany to help migrants involved encouraging individuals at home to create a public log-in for their broadband (or just gift it to a neighbour by creating a log-in specific for them). That overcomes the worry about security because they wouldn’t be logged in through the individual’s own account.
 - Some efforts are being made by mobile/internet providers and there are some campaigns – we will update if we find more.
 - Potential use of buildings as hubs so that people can tap into their Wi-Fi from outside/nearby.
 - A technical response would be a mesh network where you can use the Wi-Fi without logging in or paying – something to explore further or look out for others doing.
- The provision of Amazon Alexa’s to people’s homes is possible too. If pre-programmed for the recipients to prevent expensive and valuable hardware being left in its box due to an uncertainty of how to install them, these voice activated devices can prove a lifeline to many. Local information can be sourced and a responsive voice can provide information or entertainment on demand.
- Could we empower carers to provide the necessary support to individuals to get them online, so that they can then gain access to the growing provision of online content and support.
- For those with basic levels of knowledge it is also possible to provide online classes and drop-in sessions for people to ask for IT support from experts (minimal levels of ability and the existence of connected devices is of course a pre-requisite of this support though).

Providing ‘offline’ support safely whilst managing safeguarding challenges

- Importance of offline communication, such as phone calls, especially for the elderly is common.
- Need to ensure that nobody falls outside the net of community.
- With such a significant proportion of community outreach programmes taking place on various digital platforms we run a great risk of not casting out the net of support to those that may well be our most vulnerable citizens. It is necessary to think beyond the provision of zoom calls and opportunities to email help centres for support that is required as these options are not available to those who do not possess the hardware, software, or the confidence and knowledge to operate them.
- How best to facilitate support, in the form of essential deliveries and how to best facilitate this in a way that’s safe and contactless. ‘SumUp’ was presented as a payment solution working effectively for the Onion Collective in Watchet that removes the need for cash. Machines can be loaned from furloughed local businesses.

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- Safeguarding (both the people we're supporting and volunteers), especially retrospectively, for a system that was set up at speed remains a key challenge – the need to sidestep bureaucracy to enable a nimble and effective response vs the need to stay safe.

New ways of providing services and offers

- Participatory City (Barking and Dagenham) had to temporarily close buildings and moved services online. In doing so, attracted new participants so will keep this 'additional' offer in the future. They alongside other local organisations have been working closely with the Local Authority and created new ways of working that build closer local connections.
- Inspired Neighbourhoods (Bradford), new working structures (working from home etc) have transformed the way they work and offers opportunities for efficiency and flexibility if sustained
- Onion Collective – Watchet – has seen collaboration between local groups. Volunteers and local shops, putting systems in place to shop for others and deal with the finances related to that. There could be other occasions for CB's to offer support to statutory sector eg re-ablement teams and hospital discharge teams now that systems are in place.
- Be Inspired – Leicester. Crisis has forced them to offer more choice to local people - for example foodbank now offering deliveries and support such as benefits / debt advice now being offered through different channels as well. Clear that for some, despite the crisis, this choice has been very welcome and identified new people offering support. Maintaining these different service delivery channels needs to be sustained.
- Role of Mutual Aid Groups has been great resource for connecting people locally. Challenge that without support these groups (and their volunteers) will probably dissipate after the crisis - explored in more detail by Vidhya Alakeson (P2C) in recent [blog](#)

Payment options 'offline'

- Harder when people are not connected or usually use cash.
- Can be helpful if this can be based on trust backed by a small float – and then see if other ways people can pay e.g. (Can you pay? Can a relative / friend pay? Can you provide a cheque? If nothing else is possible, costs covered using the emergency float, and recovered at a later date).
- Many are using similar informal systems, such as charities acting as a conduit and taking cheques etc.
- At Onion Collective they are using SumUp to take contactless payments for shopping on the doorstep, with a deferred payment system agreed with local shops for this service. This system also allows for payments to be made over the phone. This means that relatives can pay on behalf of a person needing help, and we can then collect their shopping.
- Questions also remain about whether there are any VAT implications to taking payments / delivering to people and how to account for these types of payments.

Community news

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- Independent, community news is vital in many communities and a major source of locally-produced and locally-focused news, so that local people can access information about the local response to Covid-10, as well keeping in touch with local news in a broader sense, staying connected and engaged in their local community.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people happy to explain more)

- [“Isolation Station Hastings”](#) has come about because of existing relationships between tech people/companies, creative producers and wider community.
- [“Chichester Community Development Trust”](#) have created a range of online services, as well as videos and support to help people get online.
- [“Onion Collective, Watchet”](#) – including details of “SumUp” – an app to take contactless payments at the doorstep, with a deferred payment from the shop.
- [“Social Spider CIC”](#) publishes a number of community newspapers and faces unprecedented challenges.
- [“Hastings Emergency Action Response Team”](#) – including details of Nationbuilder – a CRM system that’s currently free for those responding to Covid19, to monitor a database of volunteers.
- There are a number of campaigns to help broaden digital access, including [Operation WiFi](#) that community businesses may want to get behind.
- Other places could set out to find local creatives and tech people through existing clusters or via the [local C19 Mutual Aid group](#).
- See the [Coronavirus Tech Handbook](#), a rapidly evolving resource with thousands of expert contributors for more tech information.
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Managing food preparation, delivery and/or distribution

Food supply

- There is an erratic supply of donated goods and foodstuffs. Issues with stock availability.
- There is the need to be creative about addressing food shortages – use of catering suppliers, re-packaging of bulk produce like flour.

Food preparation

- There are concerns about level, need and requirements for deep cleaning of premises when it comes to food.
- You need a super safe kitchen - see government regulations, and there are other tools on YouTube
- Safe cooking, chilling and reheating is critical.
- Get in touch with your local environmental health officer if you aren’t already.
- Keep a space free of all “traffic” – people, equipment, smokers!

Food delivery and payment

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- Most shops are cutting hours and moving to deliveries. Some closed altogether. Some closed except for deliveries.
For those not already set up as good centre, but were previously e.g. community hubs they have found that shopping is difficult and can quickly overwhelm their systems, so they have instead set up a system with a local wholesaler where they provide standard small, medium and large essential grocery boxes for people who are able to pay but can't get deliveries. This makes for a simple system of support.
- One of the things that worked is the strength of existing community, with strong relationships with shops, so a system of support could be established quickly. Resident base is quite elderly, others ready to help were butchers, greengrocers, local coop gave staff time to help pack, deferred payments for shopping.
- Efforts are being made to schedule volunteers to build resilience – e.g. family groups working together.
- Delivery & collection-safe methods - ask others rather than make up your own and make sure volunteers are signing up to risk protocols. A Big emphasis on volunteer networks understanding allergens and food handling and distribution issues being important – so get those protocols clear and get people trained and signed up to them.
- There is a need for basic training, risk assessment for lots of new volunteers while maintaining social distancing guidelines – very difficult.
- Minimal interaction best but connection still vital so use delivery as a means to check in on people for those who already live in difficult circumstances and have a chat (at safe distance). Alienating the alienated doesn't help keep folk safe.
- Payment is best done online. Homebaked have used a 30-day free Shopify account for the moment, the Bevy are using PayPal donations on a "pay as you feel" basis but have run into some issues with a €2k limit on donations before having to provide company number and as a co-operative it is taking longer to verify. Investigating Stripe as an alternative and also mobile card machines.

Food system

- Local food has proved to be even more essential in difficult times as his seasonal, fresh produce. We would be interested in hearing more ideas about going green.
- There is a hole in the supply chain that new entrants including community businesses couldn't join in a crisis.
- Models such as "dial a ride" vans and drivers that take e.g. elderly people to the shops are folding – but these were essential before and right now even more so. From a systems perspective we need funders to be thinking about how these business can be part of a local approach.
- How do we learn from this outside of the consumables issue? the focus on food is great, but building community beyond delivery is critical.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people involved who are happy to explain more)

- ["The Bevy Community Pub, Brighton"](#) - including more on all these areas from supply, to food prep, to delivery.
- ["Bretforton Community Shop"](#) in Worcestershire has repurposed the community shop for grocery delivery.

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- “[Onion Collective, Watchet](#)” – including details of “SumUp” – an app to take contactless payments at the doorstep, with a deferred payment from the shop.
- See also [Homebaked](#)
- [Lids in Liverpool](#) is run by a chef but basically has created a delivery service & website for small businesses. It uses local taxi drivers to keep them in work. Easy model but it works.
- See also [Chichester at home](#), and [Farm Urban - Greens for Good](#), using Agile a bike based delivery service to deliver their food commercially & a gift a box scheme for the vulnerable.
- Weekly calls via Plunkett Foundation for community pubs and shops along with updates on the supply issue [here](#).
- Information and online training on food preparation, hygiene and delivery from the Open Food Network [here](#).
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Maintaining community-based health and social care

Remodelling the business

- A lot of organisations are thinking about survival strategies in current period (Rescue); how they are going to build sustainable business post Covid (Rebuild) and what other opportunities are available to generate income, be sustainable and new markets (Reinvent)
- Most Charity/ VCSE and Community Businesses are transforming their services to digital platforms.
- Organisations are providing support during Covid 19 emergency period which shows our sectors impact on Health and Social Care
- This could be a good time to try and press cases for funding and delivering differently – plenty of staff are not in Coronavirus mode and have time to talk about these things (time they usually don’t have) e.g. funders, NHS backroom staff/ Commissioners.
- Re: capacity if resources are not being used – maybe think differently about how to put to use e.g. an example from Kitty’s launderette in Liverpool where they were asking health / social care if they wanted to use the washing machines.
- There was a recognition that some social care providers models won’t survive COVID generating local gaps, especially in those areas where “normal” delivery was already a challenge for business models. (e.g rural Somerset)
- There will be a need to continue to support community organisations whose delivery has been impacted by COVID-19 who provide the outlets for vulnerable / isolated ppl: the organisations to whom social prescribers refer.
- Discussion about the establishment of locally-based micro-enterprises (esp. self-employed) in the health & social care world and the potential of turning volunteering into paid employment (e.g. for personal care) – example given of Hub on the Hill / Telford (an example of a community asset supporting this work) with ongoing CQC assessment of how they can create a methodology of quality assuring in this micro world.

Inequality

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- Health inequalities were very apparent before this crisis. These are now being re-inforced in terms of unfair impact of Covid-19 on different groups. Therefore evidence needs to be added to other evidence to force greater effort to address inequalities.

Personalised care

- Demand for services is going up rather than down – as well as usual demand for care new people are coming and seeking support for anxiety, assurances relating to Covid-19 and its impact, depression due to loss of income/ job and uncertain future, loss of loved ones, bereavement, welfare rights and debt for example.
- However, delivering personalised care is very difficult at this time:
 - Centres are closed, but it is not an easy decision to furlough staff as recruitment of suitable people into personal care roles is challenging at the best of times – so furloughing workforce means the workforce might go elsewhere (very competitive market for staff).
 - Lack of PPE equipment.
 - Significant difficulties in doing this sort of personal support from the end of a phone if someone is particularly vulnerable. As one example, older service users often do not like support service through telephone – it can be very difficult to relate to therapists with visual clues. Also, many find it difficult to discuss their challenges in front of their families. One participant found that this is especially feedback from South Asian Women using their service for example.
 - Getting and paying for IT packages and equipment, as well as developing digital platforms and training quickly.
 - Safeguarding challenge e.g. one service user could not be contacted, which was reported to police and GP surgery. There was a long and difficult discussion regarding who's responsibility it was to go out and check on service user. There are also growing concerns about DBS checks which take too long to come through.
- There are some good examples of trying to deliver things remotely:
 - Inspired Neighbourhoods already had cloud-based IT system and VOIP based telephones with apps on mobile phones to receive and make telephone calls, allowing staff flexibility to connect with systems, access data file and interact with service users 24/7, 365 day a year from any location. They have also transferred equipment and established a receptionist at one of their receptionists' homes which can be shared with another receptionist if required. The service has been promoted this through networks, social media and 'single point of contact' number provided by Bradford Council.
 - Headways in London supports people with head injuries. They have delivered a programme on 'explains the service they offer and how people can access this service. Their key workers are engaging existing and new service users through telephone service and FaceTime. They have also delivered support packs through the post.
 - Keighley GP surgery have established 'E-consult' service. Patient can use this service to send message to GP's and they will receive a response within 24 hours.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people involved who are happy to explain more)

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- “[Inspired Neighbourhoods Group](#)” has been taking its mental health support services from ‘face to face’ to digital.
- See also [Kitty’s Launderette](#) in Liverpool and [Cellar Trust](#) in Bradford.
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Recognising and supporting Micro-enterprises in your network

What is the issue, why is this important?

1. Micro-enterprises need to SURVIVE the crisis. And since some won’t survive we need to recognise the impact that will have on individuals. So we need support for re-skilling and starting anew.
2. Local communities need services, skills and employment. The need for community-based small enterprise has never been greater, yet many face big challenges.
3. In order to survive they will need to ADAPT/TRANSFORM business models.

How can we strengthen and support those in our network or create access to opportunity? Do we now have a chance to create a new approach? Need for transformational business support in some instances, rather than ‘traditional’ tweaking the model – and there is a significant lack of suitable advice/appropriate models (“pivoting” doesn’t work as the assumptions it’s based on don’t fully apply - an analogy being that micro enterprises are no longer managing their risks or business like a game of poker, but it’s now craps).

Some of the issues facing micro-enterprises

- Providing voluntary help to micro-enterprises while struggling with our own cashflow
- Trying to find people that can set up social care enterprises
- Note that social care enterprises are not part of the social care workforce, not counted for PPE, care badge, permissions etc. Need allies.
- Supporting refugees and BAME micro-enterprises
- Cracks in government support – especially for limited companies
- Sharing learning to make a louder voice
- Trying to go online
- Safe working practices
- Wellbeing and survival of individuals, remaining human
- Long-term future
- Varying access to grants, funds and process in different parts of the country Hackney giving the example of needing hands on cash now, Manchester giving the example that resources were there but only accessible by the well-established. Capacity can be limited by a lack of funds and connections to funders. We don’t want to create volunteer schemes, we want to create excellent, prosperous, ethical services.
- A recognition that although digital has it’s merits currently not everyone can operate here and how do we crack accessibility to enable opportunity, alongside looking at ‘what is beyond digital/virtual’

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The question of scale

Social enterprise has focused on small things that will grow rather than lots of different little things. We feel the 'small is resilient' message needs to be shared. How to create more power and mutuality at that level. How sole traders can create more voice and support one another. In social care the voice being heard is the big companies, commissioners will revert back to thinking big.

How to support microenterprises

- To survive and adapt micro-enterprises will need support. 'Taking from the best' in refreshing and re-imagining business support to enable community businesses to play this role into the future. We also need for formats of support to be off-line as well as virtual: can't assume all areas have sufficient connectivity infrastructure (or that it will be consistently 'up').
- The learning from the floods was **don't separate the business from the person** - need better blended support for the business and the individual (although beware tax implications). This is particularly relevant in the refugee/BAME sector..
- There are questions regarding the overlap between small business and charitable allowances and facilities – it gets confusing as community businesses.
- Use podcasts to share knowhow and as a marketing tool.
- There are a number of micro businesses that have survived being flooded in the past few years – learn from them.
- Facebook group sharing case studies: 'hidden, home based and self-employed businesses'
- Ask customers about their capacity (time) and ability (tech and kit) to move to online for doing business and receiving support.
- Community businesses are used to being resilient and know how to bootstrap.
- Platforms for click-and-collect are being created to enable community businesses to continue to operate.
- Having to go online is forcing us up our game. And oh are people game (even the technophobes)!
- The capabilities that a network would need to support start-ups and enterprise growth:
 - Patient coaching
 - Skills, insight, experience, knowledge, confidence
 - Entrepreneurial culture - taking initiative
 - Emotional connection / walk with you
 - Connections / credibility / access to market
 - Show your face - events/ forum etc
 - Targeting engagement & activities to remove barriers for marginalised groups (mums returning / additional support needs/ offenders /)
 - Creating a culture

Role of funders, support organisations, networks and unions

- Support orgs need to step up and provide clear reassurance, representation and 121 support e.g. Plunkett Foundation made the link between small community shops and knowledge via association of convenience stores.
- There is a role for networks of micro-enterprises co-operating together or creating micro-business unions potentially. Coordination and Voice – potential for micro-enterprises to link outwards and upwards through existing local networks and their relationships with the likes of FSB.

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- Can we **apply pressure to funders**. They need to understand that transition is part of emergency response and make their thinking transparent. Could they find new forms for seed money -there is lots of learning going on from new people coming together and they need to open up funding to support a massive emergence of new businesses. In particular, could they blur the line more between community business (various quasi-charitable approaches) and local business (profit-focused but tethered to place).
- **Power to Change** emergency funding, for example is welcome but doesn't work for the larger scale high-% trading organisations, and doesn't work for the small community businesses that were starting up and haven't begun trading. Could there be an added focus on workspace as support space for emergency micro-enterprises that work with and through community businesses?
- Can we apply **pressure to unions** to actually support freelancers and micro-enterprises - where are the unions for the precarious/portfolio workers? Unity Community don't seem to be doing much, "not very outward-looking or inclusive or present" [quote from a Unite Community member]. They use scale to get better deals – e.g. insurance, H&S training but they don't represent you in your work, not helping members to go online or to access grants. Think E-bay workers with one power structure, compared to garden designers with lots of different clients. But there's a wealth of feisty activists who do good stuff (Know Your Rights etc).
- We also need to **sustain pressure for government investment** in 'thick' public broadband.
- Examples as to how support for micro-biz is adapting to online eg. Virtual Soup and instant cash events (Flourish Together), BUZZ digital transfer (Community Catalysts), Digital literacy initiative one of 4 key areas being looked at by MoHack and consultants and support from around the world now being online so a global - local peer and specialist support network is now more possible than ever.

Language is important!

- 'Vulnerable' is very much deficit-based language. Use 'at risk' or 'deemed to be at risk', which don't imply weak or inadequate or lesser. DNR notices on people with disabilities and older people are being accepted in a new way. We need to push back against the language of deficit – it has real life and death outcomes.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Mental health and wellbeing is a concern that we must work with alongside enterprise support.
- We need a groundswell of goodwill that connects people.
- Ongoing stresses and difficulties at Micro-Biz level. Support sector also over worked, we never get time to ask 'How are we being good to ourselves?' although acknowledged an issue.

Challenges

- There has been a recent upsurge in health and care interests from micro enterprises but they face challenges around compliance, capacity and those being Self-employed.
- Commissioning barriers are an ongoing issue. Uncertainty on what Local Authorities base decisions on.
- Uncertainty over how to pitch risk given a potentially changeable future.
- Current networks don't focus on responding to opportunity, change and uncertainty.

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- Access to market is one of the biggest issues in H & SC. How can misconceptions be removed and how can small enterprises enter a big market, what sort of culture change is needed?

Our voice & influence to shape the future – and the role of CBs in this

- The lines between business/individual blur
- “We’re all social businesses now” – we need to support microenterprises that aren’t trade Community Businesses (e.g. a chef who starts a meals for homeless people delivery business with his own van). There is a risk (identified long ago by Laurence de Marco in his great [Senscot](#) blogs) that blurring the lines between CBs and ‘social businesses’ is the fast route to social enterprise being taken over by McKinsey consultants and banks (as happened in Australia 10 years ago). But this is different – this is about recognising solidarity with other local businesses. An important step and one that is generally easier for CBs themselves than it is for their funders.
- There is a real challenge of proven peer support models in the current age of isolation, which will be moving to the age of distancing. For example, in the context of workspace, this undermines the opportunities for serendipity and ‘water cooler moments’.
- Maybe also role for workspaces or similar points for micro-enterprise connection and support to reimagine their role beyond own tenants but rather as a natural focal point for wider economy/community.
- To do this there needs to be financial support for workspace or similar providers (landlords, catalysts, supporters) – making the transition themselves and providing support to others – both their own tenants and others who may be ‘under the radar’. They are currently ‘being squeezed from both ends’ in their own business challenges and those of their tenants. Could we pitch support at levels of mindset that businesses are moving through (survival, transformation, return, etc)?
- We need to think about future-casting – 20 year/100 year framework - from survival (get grants and start working online), to future-casting – relax and inspire: “Government broad-brush approach doesn’t take account of micro-level reality in general, let alone within the community business world.”
- Focus on mutuality, take steps to draw individual enterprises into a group identity for common purpose. For example garden designers, hard landscapers, arborealists, urban farmers, food supply businesses, forest education, outdoor learning – a dozen micro-enterprises coming together to set some rates and standards and practices.
- Influence the rules and regulations that make collaboration difficult – e.g. tax laws around self-employment
- Influence the culture in LAs so they see (e.g. social care) micro-enterprises as valid frontline and better than the big organisations.

An outcome of the CB Mutual Aid sessions is that the people on the call agreed to re-group to continue the conversation and look at routes to offering some sounding board / peer support beyond the CB Mutual discussion and share learning back to the CB Mutual Aid resources/ stories section. (Nickala offered to set this up and share learning back)

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people involved who are happy to explain more)

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- [“Isolation Station” in Hastings](#) is a good case study of online connection and supporting microenterprises.
- [Flourish Together CIC](#) have been creating virtual ‘Detroit soup’ gatherings to pitch ideas for the community and provide small investments for women as a source of social change.
- [Diversity Business Incubator in Plymouth](#) seeing this overlap very strongly; their help to small businesses includes having to deliver food to support individuals
- [Community Catalysts](#) have also worked with a wide variety of small and micro-enterprises across the country for many years, primarily in health and social care. About 40% of Community Catalyst clients are sole traders.
- [United Voices of the World](#) – a grassroots trade union of migrant and precarious workers (based at Cambridge House, south east London)
- [GMB](#) has track record of sticking up for precarious (e.g. coffee shops, Amazon workers etc)
- [Coworker.org](#) is the equivalent of a crowdfunder platform for unionisation. May offer an opportunity. The co-founder of Coworker, Michelle Miller wrote [this thought piece](#) about the Union of the Future.
- There is a community called ‘micro business matters’ run by <https://www.microbusinesssteam.com/About>
- This [TED talk](#) on this for employee-led network, but might provide some ideas for micro-businesses, and the existing [freelancers union](#) offers some interesting models too. We are also seeing platforms like [this](#) to create solidarity and mutual support across employees in response to COVID-19.
- [Charities Excellence Framework](#) tool is a useful diagnostic, creating a dashboard for your organisation profile that is good for relevant funding links and can lead to a quality mark (Note that the C19 Funders Database on the Charities Excellence portal includes grants for individuals e.g. if you used to work in x field)
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Working in partnership with Local Authorities and Business

Increase in need for collaboration with local authorities

The recent crisis that we are all dealing with has meant that there has been an increase in the need for local authorities to work with community businesses or to look at alternative ways of supporting their communities.

Changing our model and demonstrating the value-add

Many of us are needing to repurpose our traditional models. There is the difficulty of not being able to trade within the initial business model, so we need to be really flexible and for community businesses work together. Working with others, particularly Local Authorities can strengthen the model and there is a real appetite amongst many for deeper partnership now (though of course that does vary from across the country).

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Perhaps we can position more strongly than ever as community enablers, we have a strong track record and have proved our worth during the early parts of the crisis in particular as first respondents – we could work on what this might look like together - start with an idea then find the right people to support its development as a small group - often the pattern of development and it feels that the door is now open to a different way of work which needs to be harnessed.

Questions

- In the re-build > what will:
 - The role of LA in local economic development?
 - The role of Business in the civic space?
- Will councils now be more willing to work with local org on community services to solve problems and provide facilities?
 - HMOs
 - Community services
 - Isolation / loneliness
 - Capacity for prevention work
- Will councils be willing to give good contracts or access to market?
- Who can get product market fit?
- Will Businesses commission community services and take on people that have been trained by them?

Opportunities & challenges of working with local authorities

We need to look at what opportunities this creates going forward. Key themes that are emerging are as follows:

- At the beginning of the crisis a lot of promises that were made have never been followed through with. Which in turn has created the need to explore new partnerships.
- In some areas it is apparent that LA's are struggling with the current situation and in some cases seemed to have disappeared.
- There are increasing examples of some local authorities ramping up their engagement in ways which are cutting across or undermining the efforts of community businesses, rather than working positively with them. Let's not allow any repeat expectation of 'big society' - using volunteers to replace essential services which instead deserve to be properly funded and valued.
- How do we learn from previous experiences? Recently in some areas communities have had to respond to floods which has meant that the connection between community businesses and LA's have been vital.
- It is important that we don't miss the opportunity to strengthen our position or adapt to meet our needs, but would this mean that we would need to change our business model? Cashflow – In times like this where a business handles a lot of cash this may become difficult and could CB need to find ways of unlocking new funding streams.
- Connections are key – some organisations find it difficult to work with LA's as they are either new or maybe do not have good contacts within the LA. This raises the question of how people become connected and who they need to be connected to.
- We are aware that collectively we are having an impact but how do we measure this and how do we show people, especially the LA, what that impact has been.
- In some areas it is apparent that LA's are struggling with the current situation and in some cases seemed to have disappeared.

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- The procurement process can at times be difficult and problematic. There is a need for this to be simplified and made more nimble and can this happen now but also stay in place for the future.
- There is also a need for planners to be flexible. Rigid processes can be a hindrance to development.
- Now that a new way of work has bedded in, we are seeing in some areas that LA's are reverting to type. At the beginning of the crisis they become more responsive but as time has gone on they have drifted back to a situation where process and procedure seems more important than action.
- Are we entering a new phase of austerity and what does it look like? Are we as community businesses able to learn from the current situation to ensure that we are better placed if this is the case.

Forging future partnerships

- The new way of work has created the opportunity for new partnerships especially with corporates or local businesses that may not in the first instance seem to be natural partners. For example in one area a local restaurant has changed its business model and working in partnership with a CB is delivering meals to vulnerable people.
- The current crisis has forced us all to look or explore new partnerships. In some cases this could be with private businesses and with well-established local businesses.
- Can we work proactively with local authorities on shaping the future relationships?
- Nimble procurement – Is this an opportunity for LA's to rethink their procurement procedures and be more flexible with their approach. This would ensure that service provision is in place when it is needed and where it is needed.
- Good community infrastructure – this is important even more now than ever before but there is a need for organisations to show its importance and how it can benefit the wider community.
- Can we look at different ways of funding e.g. Community bonds instead of shares? CB's are doing social impact for council, so it's not that they don't recognise the importance they just aren't progressive enough to fund them perhaps?
- Liverpool City Region started doing lots of work on understanding the social economy and how can the region's economy become more social. Lots of work over several years has gone into it but actually now starting to change their thinking – what wider opportunities like this might there be? As well as considering all the above a couple of points came out which may influence how the sector moves on and a question that keeps being asked is: What would have happened if we weren't here? Alongside that CB are often seen as working differently to everyone else but maybe we should promote and applaud this and let people know that actually just because we may seem to be different it doesn't mean it is a bad thing.
- Flourish Together has partnerships with local councils, NatWest and a national education trust who have been flexible and supportive partners during this time - going to them directly to develop new work/programmes at this time and also allowing them to creatively repurpose some of their original work to benefit social entrepreneurs directly encouraging them to be part of 'Resilience and Recovery strategies' in Manchester and to create small cash investment.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people involved who are happy to explain more)

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- “[Hastings Emergency Action Response Team](#)” – a case study of a wide local partnerships to create a volunteer hub (includes details of Nationbuilder – a CRM system that’s currently free for those responding to Covid19, to monitor a database of volunteers).
- “[Selgars Mill](#)” in Devon is a centre which is working closely with Mid-Devon District Council to provide residential placements for people most at risk
- A guide from Nurture Development with a series of resources to support professionals and institutions to work alongside communities [here](#).
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Looking after yourself and those around you: Well-being

Staying in touch with your team

People are struggling with high levels of stress. One person had a member of staff in recovery who had relapsed. Alcohol use is going up across the workforce.

A theme for everyone has been to balance the differing needs of staff in different situations – i.e. those working from home and those still working on the frontline. Both envy each other and have different support needs.

Everyone struggling with best way to support furloughed workers as well as active volunteers:

- Generally thought it best not to invite to team meetings, one suggestion was to have social evenings on Zoom.
- Keeping team meetings is really important. Most people trying to do some online regular team meetings via e.g. Zoom or a daily ‘check-in’ or even ‘check-out’ every day or two.
- Useful to mix up how we keep in touch – telephone calls as well as Zoom.
- Managers doing regular short check-ins with staff very helpful even if 2 minute phone call
- Using WhatsApp groups can be helpful.
- Several people have found Microsoft Teams useful to support collaborative remote working and this in itself supports wellbeing.
- People with children seem to be struggling particularly and we need to try to support them.
- We need to be much more flexible about working times – people’s lives have changed so much, and may need to flex their working hours around home schooling, the daily outdoor exercise etc. Equally we have to understand some people may actively want to hold time boundaries and others may want to stretch their work out. There is no one true way to respond.
- There was a strong message that we shouldn’t be expecting the same level of productivity. People are living through a trauma and will be having a wide range of responses. We need to allow this.

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The long haul

- This situation will have impacts for everyone long-term. Suggestions to ensure you keep up the connection and flexibility, not just limit it to 'crisis'
- Training is useful – how to have difficult conversations, getting used to doing training online, opening up discussions not just to work calls but how people are coping and feeling so there is permission to voice concerns and get support if needed – otherwise goes unheard.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people involved who are happy to explain more)

- "[Project 6](#)" in Bradford has been offering daily (week days only) "Caremongering" sessions since the second week of lockdown – the idea was to theme these around the 5-Ways to wellbeing.
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Crowdfunding / donations

Crowdfunding

- Could be a really good indicator of local support and strength in the business, which may prove crucial in the long-run for demonstrating business viability to e.g. potential grant givers and investors.
- It seems that people in many locations are still interested in making pledges on community projects as donations etc; numbers of pledging were holding up pre-and-post lockdown in a few examples.
- Having good visibility of cashflow was crucial, and recommended a rolling 13-week cashflow. This would be crucial to have visibility about the pressures to come (to identify if there was a need to undertake crowdfunding) and to use as evidence of competence etc with potential grant funding support in coming weeks and months.
- There could be potential to create a community share issue as share capital was ideal for supporting short-term cashflow pressures such as businesses are facing now. However, some share issues seemed to be proceeding OK, whereas others weren't doing so well so not an even picture (and those seemingly not affected by CV-19 were long-planned capital development projects). It seems like where the main investor pool is the general public more broadly, the share issue might struggle, whereas higher-net worth investors might still be interested in making long-term patient investments. Critical to any form of crowdfunding or share issues was a pool of potential donors/investors who the Community Business is aware of and has contact details for, and is in regular communication with them, with meaningful engagement. If this isn't where your community business is, then this will need to be developed as a matter of urgency. Luckily, people seem ready and willing to engage with community projects, especially via Facebook.

Resources and case studies

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(all case studies include contact details of people happy to explain more)

- See case study of a campaign launched at the [Crauford Arms in Maidenhead](#).
- See case study of the [Bevy Community Pub](#) has successfully launched a donate page for its work receiving significant donations.
- [Crowdfunder](#) has launched schemes which may be of specific interest.
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Preserving community assets and physical social infrastructure

Great mix of perspectives on the issue

- People who are successfully championing the CBS model locally in order to take over buildings, and running community hubs
- Funders and advisors (Plunkett, Locality, Architectural Heritage Fund) looking to learn more about the pressures community assets are under, and exploring how to protect heritage/assets from property developers.
- Co-operators & Community ownership “takeover” practitioners (inc pubs & football club)
- Regeneration officers looking to coordinate a local civil society response, and also understand what it takes to build an ecosystem of community business, CLTs etc where communities can take advantage of these opportunities
- Community hubs have become stronger in their role of “cogs of connection” - connecting residents with a range of different services and building the layers of response – from grassroots mutual aid, to city or county wide statutory provision.

Observations

Community hubs across the board had seen three emerging developments due to the Covid outbreak:

1. They were forming new partnerships with a range of other organisations in their locality
2. They were recruiting new volunteers reflecting the current circumstances i.e. older volunteers were more likely to be shielding, while younger volunteers were emerging through having more time due to being furloughed.
3. They were reaching new services users that they hadn't previously engaged with

Recognition that community hubs have a greater role now in being the focal point of “local intelligence” - where they can combine an understanding of the more removed demographic data with the knowledge generated through a personal connection with households, residents and neighbourhoods in their patch. This means that community hubs could potentially have a greater role in working with statutory bodies to ensure services and information get to the households that would really benefit from the support on offer from a range of providers

Opportunity: Many privately-owned bits of social infrastructure (e.g. pubs) are under threat and could possibly become community-owned

Threat

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We need to find ways to make sure co-op or community-owned assets stay in business and remain community-owned

- Many community-owned hubs are struggling from lack of rental income
- E.g. We're likely to lose a lot of pubs - it's hard to plan past June.
- Impact will be felt hardest in the most deprived areas, also where it is hardest to raise capital to own assets from e.g. community shares and where there is least access to skills capital (e.g. accountants, lawyers as members)
- Business plans are in disarray, making it difficult to run community share offers
- Many community (esp privately owned) assets / social infrastructure don't have Asset of Community Value (ACV) designations, and many ACVs will expire soon
- There's a good chance that assets could become cheap in the near future, but how can communities take advantage ahead of vulture capitalists?
- However many community hubs are demonstrating the value of their position and local relationships through their agile and adaptive response to COVID crisis
- A lot of the proposed solutions focus on loans or equity but the expected recession (and current reduced trade) is a profit & loss not a cashflow issue.
- Local authorities define/interpret "community use" differently. Really hard to prove that land has been used for community uses (unless its public/charitable spaces)
- ACV was weak tool when it started, but planning regulations changed and made it stronger. CAMRA used to be able to register them, but it's been challenged in the courts. It's currently down to local community to form unincorporated body, prove links with the pub etc. It can be hard to get them together.
- Access to capital is difficult generally and even if the money can be raised within 6 months, there isn't any obligation for sellers to accept that offer (example of a group that raised the amount to offer but the seller waited until after the 6 months and is now hanging on for a higher offer on the open market almost 12 months).

Ideas

Co-ops of co-ops

- Or even co-ops of community organisations, spaces, parks, pubs, small businesses and micro-enterprises.
- Or a "Super-CBS" in each locality to [A] sponsor ACVs, [B] create further CBS structures to make it easier to take certain assets into community ownership ("shadow CBS"?), [C] organise 'community bailouts' to support small independent businesses using forms of patient capital, though a CBS still needs to have a local connection (as defined in the 2012 regulations)
- Could not only provide ability to lean on each other in hard times, as well as back office e.g. HR and Finance support, but also could be created as a means to purchase assets, especially in deprived areas, and then transfer ownership / control to locals over time.
- A combination of buying co-ops, Mutual Guarantee Schemes and a central asset owner. Could leverage finance against existing stock - that's how larger housing coops developed their estate.
- Also an opportunity to use purchasing power to start supplying goods This could improve profitability for member co-ops if membership includes e.g. pubs who are not leasing the co-op's assets but want to purchase beer/food/services. A menu of options and services would make for a more resilient model.

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- Being developed actively for pubs at the moment, Student Co-op Homes model has effectively taken a similar idea live and has happened recently for community energy sector as well.
- Key to making it work:
 - The key to any consortium /service co-op is clear membership and service agreements – and involve the potential members from day 1.
 - Big challenge is getting the initial capital, Student Co-op Homes did a share issue in 2019, very scalable model and easy to manage. Was on EtheX, attracting HNWI's.
 - However, this can miss the local asset connection, which is what attracts community shares and the community element becomes diluted. Build on the booster/ matching idea – but can't buy asset and then go and find a community, the community has to be there!
 - Hard to connect with a national movement. Maybe use national bodies, e.g. CAMRA for pubs and build in opportunity for community to 'buy back' over time (though examples of this intention never actually resulting in community buy back).
 - Creating a business model for this would be a great step, learning from what's there already including clear risk appraisal. Can you combine models e.g. housing and pubs to make it viable and so there is a plan B.
 - Worker co-ops might be a route into this as well.
 - Question: Do we want to get into bidding wars with disaster capitalists? That can hurt later performance.

Other ideas

- Support that community assets might need:
 - Help with rental negotiations (many community orgs both landlords and tenants)
 - Help needed to run cashflow forecasts and see the pinch points ahead
- Can we develop a narrative around how well community assets and businesses have responded to the crisis? (Better than top-down)
- A cross-UK fund is needed to allow communities to invest in assets (see Headingley Development Trust for inspiration)
- Building from last year's Protecting Community Assets Inquiry <http://www.protecting-community-assets.org.uk> This had a number of ideas which we may now have an opportunity to get behind, in particular:
 - There are social investors now very seriously looking at the idea of a Rescue Fund for community assets - could we connect (we have an opportunity to)
 - Co-ops UK have proposed something which looks like a community asset 'protector' role in their submission to government re: COVID-19 insolvency rules, and a number of community assets around the country are interested in this as an extension of the ACV laws - could we reconnect with MHCLG who were involved in this inquiry to push for taking this further, along with other funders involved?
- Scotland is further ahead with land reform than us. Much more transparency on land ownership, a 2016 land reform Act, and as of May 2020, a new compulsory community right to buy for sustainable development - doesn't require a willing seller! Could be an aspirational model.
- Getting 21 signatures in lockdown is hard! Some take email, some need physical. Useful to have existing organisations help i.e CLTs, Development Trusts.

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- National bodies won't work alone, there has to have a local focus in the area . There can only be local branches of national groups if the local group has separate legal incorporation

Examples and Challenges

From York Central Co-owned

- Brownfield site - wanted parts of the development to be in the hands of the community so network building is necessary -
- Co-owned neighbourhoods
- Have a redlined area within the overall development - want to put flesh on the bones of the idea.
- Creating spaces to enable community to get involved
- Reshaping economics - investment and ownership for common benefit
- Creating and generating networks for exchanging skills to make this vision happen
- How to make it work from scratch? To really get communities involved
- Scale: lots of mutual aid groups happening, council-generated conversations about local economic recovery - how do we connect across the scales
- Getting beyond usual suspects - making it really diverse, now and in the future - the involvement. Democratic and effective.

Participatory City, Barking & Dagenham

- Universal Basic Everything - <https://medium.com/@TessyBritton/universal-basic-everything-f149afc4cef1>. already building networks of friendship and community with over 6000 people. Have had to close our shops and assets - for our remaining 18 months, we want to build UBE - systems that are tangible and intangible - relationships, services and products along three levels:
 - Street
 - Neighbourhood
 - Borough level
- We can use practical starter kits, e.g. pots, seeds, sheds, to start community growing etc.
- Borough - building a platform that creates the essentials - co-op platform for food, clothing, homeware, growing, ceramics.
- Questions - Who do we learn from? Who do we collaborate with? Who funds it?

Hero Project, TH!NK FC, Coalville CAN CBS

- We help communities set up CBS. We're doing it in Coalville. We are the catalyst. 11 people from the community, with different experiences as the steering group. No-one had ever heard of CBS! We need people and councils to understand them.
- We've picked 3 at-risk buildings. Council and Co-op Group own them. Potential Enterprise space, community café. But we need funding - Co-op unwilling to give it away (although board is favourable). There's an amazing (potentially) market space that the council is leaving. Could be multi-purpose event space. Exercise dogs?
- Aiming to create a Community Wealth Fund
- Challenges
 - Nobody knows what a CBS is - we've set one up
 - Way of working - disconnect between purpose/values of council/Co-op and their managers.
 - Lack of finance and time

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- We've put ACVs on all of them, applied to AHF, applied to Hive, and LandAid
- We need to buy in expertise - the community needs to buy it in.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people happy to explain more)

- Oliver Holtaway & Dan Gregory's [original paper](#) regarding local "super-CBS" structures that can register ACVs and act as a vehicle for community share offers.
- [Radical Routes](#) – network of housing co-ops, worker co-ops and social centre.
- [Protecting Community Assets Inquiry](#) report with a range of links to other sources of information and research on community hubs, as well as some practical ideas for the future we could adapt / get behind.
- Reach Fund is available to help get investment <https://www.sibgroup.org.uk/reach>
- Architectural Heritage Fund Booster Programme is still live - can match 100K and provide 10K of grant support to develop a share issue <http://ahfund.org.uk/england>
- www.yorspace.org in York is a CBS, and a Community Land Trust, and just raised over £420k in community shares for community owned affordable homes.
- Example of a co-op eco system example in Liège, Belgium
<https://www.robhoptkins.net/2018/03/26/a-delicious-taste-of-the-future-in-liege/>
- Example of a worker cooperative in Spain
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mondragon_Corporation
- Example of a co-op model in Cleveland, US <https://community-wealth.org/content/cleveland-model-how-evergreen-cooperatives-are-building-community-wealth>
- Universal Basic Everything <https://medium.com/@TessyBritton/universal-basic-everything-f149afc4cef1>
- Tomorrow Today Streets <https://medium.com/@TessyBritton/tomorrow-today-streets-2a6159ee78f0>
- Report from Locality on Community Hubs: <https://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/We-were-built-for-this-Locality-2020.06.13.pdf>.

See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Making the case for the social economy

Introduction

The lack of government support for charities and social enterprises through Covid shows the need for the social economy to get its message(s) across more effectively to both policy makers and the wider public.

This is both in terms of making the case about the good that social economy organisations do and their need for relevant support - and about the need for systems change to move towards a wider economy that meets social needs.

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There is a need to communicate that the social economy is a serious part of the economy rather than a fluffy, nice to have.

Messaging around the social economy.

Identified three reasons why the social economy's messaging needs to change.

- **Internal** - The social economy covers a diverse range of activities. What actually is the social economy and can we all, internally, agree that the social economy are any organisations or enterprises that fill in the gaps that governments neglect or that Big Society is not responsible for?
- **External** - social enterprises are not taken seriously by governments and authorities because they do not fit a normative paradigm. As such, they may be seen as frivolous. We identified that when a neoliberal form of capitalism places great emphasis on the production of labour that generates greater capital then unpaid labour or labour that promotes happiness and a greater quality of life are not considered to be productive.
- **The social enterprise sector** does not have a big media, campaigning or marketing lobby that represents or speaks up for the sector- or at least it does not do this well enough (said some people in our group) Although [this report](#) and others are very useful the question is who is actually seeing them? Does Social Enterprise UK really do enough marketing to change the perception of social enterprises and their value within society?

The results have been the ability for the government to ignore us in this crisis. We want to use covid-19 as a moment to shine a spotlight on the integral services provided by the social economy.

Potential response?

We need to work out what role we could usefully carry out amongst the range of campaigns and initiatives currently being undertaken to address this challenge.

It was felt that direct engagement with government was - for better or worse - primarily the role of social economy infrastructure bodies, and that we could focus on engaging with the wider public.

It may be useful to carry out some initial research into people's current views on the social economy - To what extent is the problem lack of knowledge and understanding? To what extent are people actively hostile?

We know that many social economy organisations are able to build a strong reputation with the public in their local area - and there is plenty of positive news coverage of individual organisations.

Challenges

- The challenge is how we can get beyond this to build a wider case for the social economy - beyond that recognition of individual organisations.
- There is a question on how we prevent the volunteer model scuppering the economy of local enterprises – whether social or regular businesses.

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Next steps are to clarify the intended audience and begin to develop the messages that we are seeking to communicate - while considering the best routes and methods for doing so.

Resources and case studies

(all case studies include contact details of people happy to explain more)

- [David Floyd from Social Spider on why funding for the social economy is nowhere near enough.](#)
- [Jess Prendergrast from the Onion Collective on the critical lessons Covid-19 has shown us, and why we shouldn't forget them](#)
- [Jess Steele, from WRNV Hastings argues for the three big shifts, prompted by Covid-19, that could positively shape the future of Hastings.](#)
- [Iain Chambers from Brighton's Bevy pub reflects on the early impact of COVID-19 and 'travelling at the speed of trust'](#)
- See the [resources](#) and [stories](#) section of the website for more.

Solidarity for communities and Community Businesses

Questions on solidarity

- Its difficult to change the systems we don't like. How can we build systems that benefit everyone?
- How can we embrace inclusivity at a local level when core groups are not respecting social distancing? It's difficult to be excluding.
- How can we develop open conversation through listening roles?
- Is it possible to move away from top-down paternalistic approaches of 'telling' people what to do?
- How can we hold the tension between creativity and the loss that comes with change? Does having an equal voice and decision making provide the answers to providing sustainable solutions?
- What would future society be like if we had a democratic children's, or multigenerational, education program?
- How can people meet off-line to discuss ideas and bring them back to the network?

Solidarity means for us:

- Working together for a common cause - how do we find the compromise(s) needed in order to achieve shared goals.
- Supporting everyone who are the most vulnerable.
- Identifying common values, know that the the means do not justify the ends and the way we do what we do is important.
- Tricky issues surrounding inclusivity: who do we include/exclude and who exclude themselves? This resonated with the current situation in the US.
- Really listening, making an effort to respond to every community and Peer group.
- Share good practice and learn from each other - refer back to source and summarise themes
- Bring in additional individuals and organisations

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- Participate in valuable reflection and distillation for the increased resilience of community businesses
- Take up networking opportunities
- Keep defining/refining expectations of the solidarity room
- Have authentic discussions within and whilst finding your 'tribe'

What has solidarity meant in the pandemic?

- Positive aspect of Covid19 thus far is the unleashing of people power at a local level, particularly with commonality across social businesses
- Insights emerging that crisis of economy is really for big business - community and family owned business are sustained by local population/pre-existing positive relationships
- Discussion surrounding 'goodies' and 'badies' - this leads to polarisation when we are trying to unite, return to community cohesion and encourage collaboration
- Focus on opportunities for acting in global unison.

What solidarity could mean for this network:

- Peers supporting peers.
- Incredible patchwork quilt: what are we 'stitching together'.
- Minefield of inclusivity and difficulties of engagement and changing mindsets.
- Dilemma surrounding freedom of speech, finding the balance between intention and impact are considered important.
- Acknowledgement by those present that we might prefer to stand FOR something, rather than be 'anti'. However important a stance might be how can we ensure that standing for something or with someone has the same potency? What action(s) might be taken that is practical, tangible, manageable and has impact?
- How do organisations respond to the needs of the individual? Acknowledging the 'I' in the 'we'. Discussion of the french word "accompagnement", which most closely translates to 'walking alongside'. What would society look/feel like if we were to take this definition of Solidarity though all stratae?
- In discussing important societal changes and current affairs e.g. monuments being pulled down, it was felt that it is important to hang onto some elements of history in order that we do not have to relearn it in the future. How do we do this in a way that is culturally sensitive and respectful to individuals and communities most adversely affected?
- How do we ensure that we hear, and are changed by, the voices in society that are disempowered and marginalised?

It's difficult to change the systems we don't like. How can we build systems that benefit everyone?

- We tend not to engage with systems we don't like. Therefore, by definition we won't change them. Can we take our non-engagement with systems we do not like as an indicator that these are the systems we MUST engage with, simply in order to change them?
- A potential approach to building better systems might include working together across a variety of spheres/services/voices/stakeholders on shared design and consensus building processes.

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- How can we find ways to ensure that all voices are heard and included in finding answers to this question. It is important to acknowledge that speaking and writing can be inefficient ways of communicating at times. Suggested use of clean language questioning style, social dreaming or other creative and exploratory approaches.
- Reflecting upon the word 'difficult' in the first part of the question - could this be explored. There may well be value in exploring the difficulty, understanding and sitting with it, before trying to fix, change or move to problem solving and solution focussed tasks. This was echoic of the initial discussion, remaining mindful of not throwing things away so that we do not have to relearn/repeat mistakes again in the future.

Transitioning from crisis to sustainability

From a diverse group of community businesses there was general consensus that the use of "tech" learnt as a response to lock down could be applied and integrated into building more resilient community businesses.

Generally it was seen as a way of extending existing services to more people in the community by using a blended approach.

There is a recognition that there shouldn't be an over reliance on tech - hence the blended approach. Not everyone will have access to the technology. A lending scheme was one suggestion of how people could participate remotely. A "tool test" room as suggested elsewhere in this group would be a great idea and help community businesses learn what works well and how to apply the tech.

Transition themes

- **Better management and the ability to meet quickly** and more frequently meant better and faster discussions and decisions. It also meant management and staff could be more engaged.
- **Ability to reduce operational costs.** Space used for administration could be repurposed to generate income in community hubs with more admin work being done remotely. Alternatively, rental costs could be saved by moving non-customer facing work to more home working.
- **The generation of goodwill.** As community businesses have responded to the Covid crisis. How can this goodwill be harnessed to support sustainability? More volunteers? Community share offers and fund raising to extend and develop services? All themes that can be further explored.

Overall, the view seemed to be evolution, rather than radical change

Questions/challenges to explore

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- Will we see a sustained appetite for exercise and wellbeing? How can community businesses deliver this at a local level?
- Buying local products? Will residents drift back to supermarkets, or will they look at buying more locally in a greener more sustainable way from community businesses?
- Will more people returning to work still find time to volunteer and develop local community businesses?
- New mutual aid groups are morphing into something more formalised / established (creating themselves as new legal entities) – in some instances this may fill gaps in the post-lockdown world (which existed before or which have arisen because of / during COVID), in others it may duplicate / overload existing provision.

Examples

- Community Centre planning to install a giant TV screen so housebound community members could join events like Tai Chi and Yoga remotely.
- Lunch clubs supplemented by delivery services to allow people to join community lunch groups remotely.
- Telephone help lines to reach out to the housebound and the digitally excluded.
- Food distribution services in partnership with organisations like Fair Share.

Addressing inequality

Concern about not being good at connecting with minority groups, and needing advice.
Understanding what should change?

Opportunity/Challenge questions

There is an opportunity for a new conversation to start on structural inequality and racism and key questions.

- If you are privileged what are you prepared to give up?
- Where are the community you want to reach?
- What's your own bubble like? How diverse is it?
- What stops you reaching out?
- Skills. Sometimes BAME groups have funds, and governance in place, sometimes one not the other. Need people with skills on boards.

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The 'revolution room' – how community businesses can shape the future

Covid-19 as a catalyst for the next economy

Economic topics through a social, environmental and place-based lens

What is our proposed model of economics? Are we shifting the current rules or entirely re-writing them?

Here, we want to create theory from the bottom up, as an appropriate approach for our sector. At the applied level, shock is getting to the heart of what does and doesn't work in the current system. How can we take these lessons on the ground and apply them to the macro level?

A detailed summary of each topic can be found [here](#).

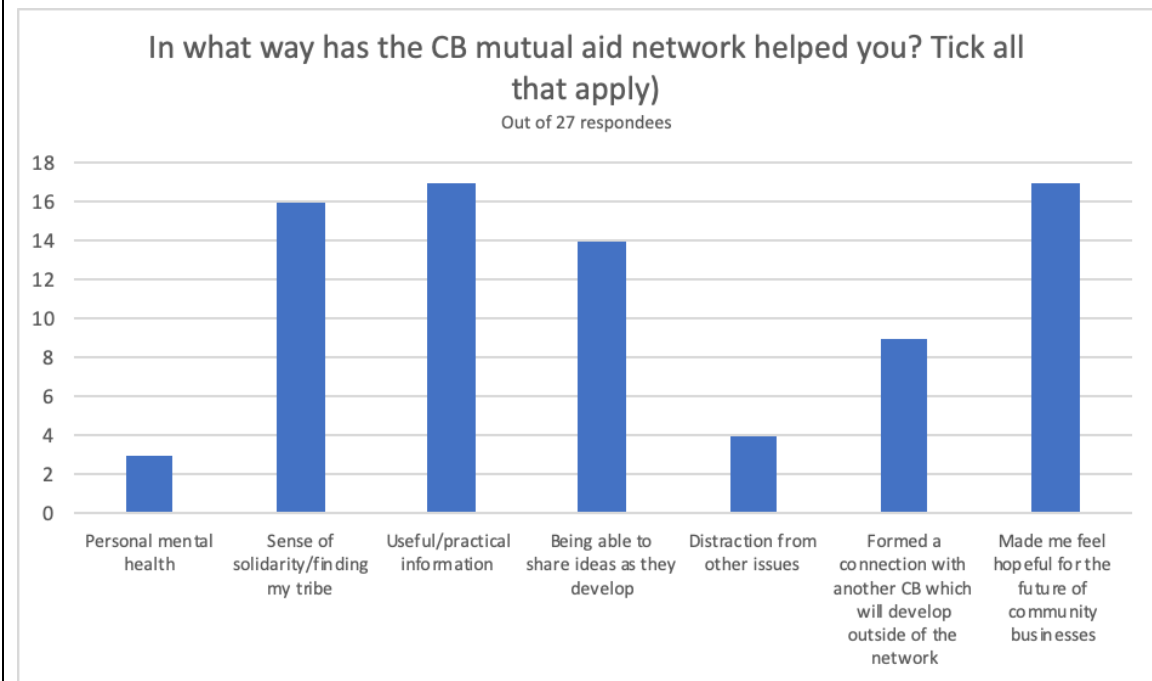
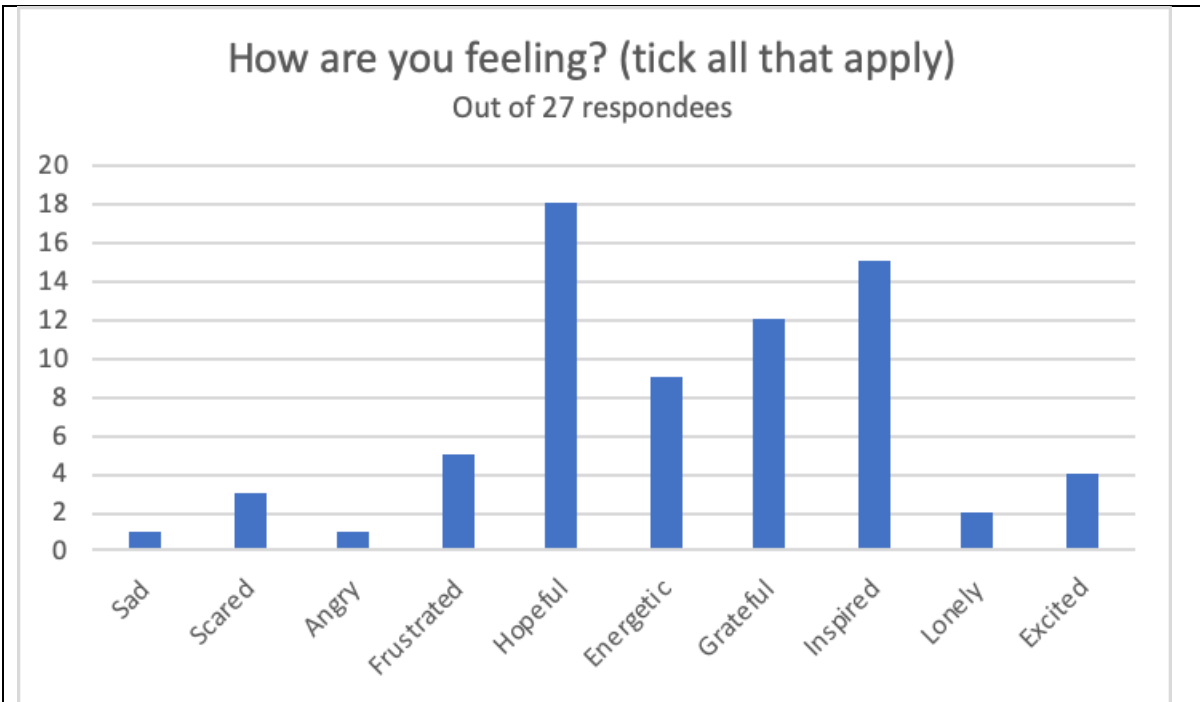
Topics from the revolution room to date:

- Topic 1: Food
- Topic 2: Health & social care
- Topic 3: Community assets & ownership
- Topic 4: Education

CB Mutual Aid - Participant Feedback

Feedback 16th June

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