Understanding community need at Woodhall Community Centre

SJOG research series

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Introduction

When developing a new service or initiative it is imperative to understand the needs of the people who may use the new service. Ensuring that their needs and voices are captured at the very start of idea generation means that they shape the service offer from the off.

This is the ethos of user centred design - putting the people who at the heart of the design process. This prevents the risk of developing services which are not needed or those that fail to deliver.

Woodhall Community Centre, located in Peartree ward of Welwyn Garden City, is a large building which, in the past, has been a hub for all things, ranging from hosting concerts through to providing a café and clubs for local people. When developing new service opportunities to rejuvenate the community centre, it was important that we meaningfully consulted with the local community.

Local context

Peartree ward is one of the most deprived wards in Welwyn Garden City. Just over fifteen percent of the population (n=1001) stated that they live with a long term health problem or disability which limits their day to day activities (Herts Insight, 2016). Furthermore, there is a high number of economically inactive people in the community (26%).

Youth support is needed. Welwyn Garden City accounts for of 63% of all anti-social behaviour by young people in the Welwyn and Hatfield area. There are specific hotspots. Woodhall (Peartree area) has the highest prevalence, while Peartree has experienced an increase in offences of 71% between 2017-2018 (YMCA, 2018). Anti-social behaviour and lack of community provision has been cited as causes. There are knock on impacts, with poorer mental wellbeing seen in both boys and girls and an increase in those that do and are likely carrying weapons and join gangs (YMCA, 2018).

Older adults also need support. The Marmot Review (2010) found that those living in deprived areas of the country had less good health outcomes and that:

> *"There is a gap of 18.4 years in healthy life expectancy for women in England's 10% most and least deprived area" (Marmot, 2010)*

Not only did this highlight a shorter life but also that illness based on social inequality accounts for productivity losses of £31-33 Billion (across the UK as a whole), in short that people living in less affluent areas were less healthy. This trend is mirrored in the Peartree ward (see table 1).

Table 1 – Comparison of life expectancy figures for boys/girls born 2009-13 across two wards in Welwyn Garden City. *Note,* Welwyn East represents highest figures in area.

	Life expectancy (yrs, source Office for national statistics)		
	Welwyn East	**Peartree ward**	**Differences (yrs)**
Boys (born 2009-13)	84	77	- 7yrs
Girls (born 2009-13)	90	82	- 8yrs

The needs of people living in these communities does not stop just at improving physical health outcomes, but covers the wider social determinants of health. Determinants of health were captured in a recent report by SJOG Hospitaller Services. In a survey of n=112 people who currently work in or are supported by 12 of SJOG's services around the UK, three key themes of relationships, meaningful activities and health and wellbeing made respondents life worthwhile. These were mapped against the health foundations social determinants of health (see figure 1) and provide a vehicle to analyses the results of the outcome of the consultation in order to address the holistic needs that may emerge.
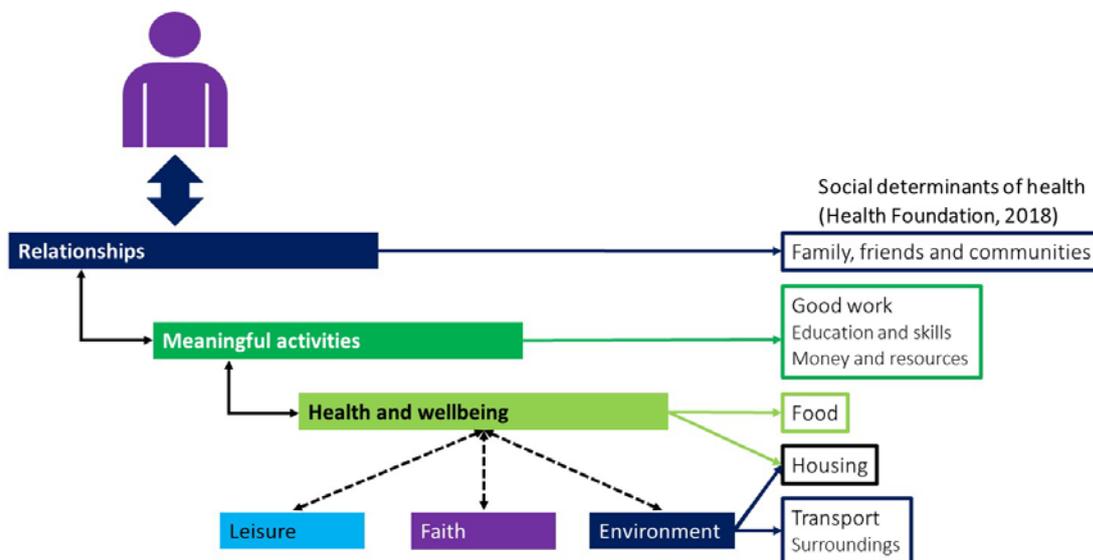

Figure 1. Model of a life worthwhile integrated with the social determinant of health put forward by the Health Foundation, 2018, taken from Mackrill, 2019.

Aim

This report details the result of the consultation with 62 people who live in or around the Peartree ward in Welwyn Garden City. The aim was to engage with them to capture ideas for service provision that would support them and the community in their lives and address gaps in current service provision

Method

To reach as many people as possible the consultation took a two stage approach. Part A took place during the Peartree family fun day which ran for 4 hours on a Saturday

afternoon in June 2019 from Woodhall community centre. The aim was to quickly engage people who visited the day through a short activity and conversation.

A voting exercise was used where individuals were asked to vote on the 5 most important services that could be provided at the centre from a list of:

- A place to meet / eat
- Recreation activities for young people
- Job clubs
- Help gaining qualifications
- Job search / work skills
- Volunteering opportunities
- Talking to employers
- Wellbeing support
- 1-2-1 support
- IT skills / digital skills
- Help with childcare while training

The list was created from reviewing what had previously been on offer at the centre, gaps in current community provision, and drawing on the research that took place when developing a large scale community project based in Leicestershire in 2018.

Each person was given 5 tokens and asked to vote on which were most important to them. They could vote on one service if they wish, or they could spread across 5. Their reasons for voting were detailed on 'genius idea' cards. These were used to understand the specific details around each of the service themes above and what they might want from them.

Part B consisted of a focus group with eight people who live in and around Welwyn Garden City. All are currently supported by SJOG services (either intensive housing management or residential care). The focus group was held in Woodhall community centre and was part of the SJOG co-production group, Taking Part.

An overview of the consultation in part A was given along with the results. The group were facilitated to discuss what they would want out of the centre and how it could be used by them. Discussion was captured through note taking by the authors (JM and SB).

Participants

A total of 62 people took part in the consultation (52 in part A and 8 in part B). Specific demographic details were not captured. Reasons for this were twofold; firstly, to ensure engagement was quick and non-intrusive (particularly in part A), and secondly, to ensure that the whole community engaged rather than targeting specific strata with determined sample sizes within each.

Analysis

Frequency analysis took place to identify the services people wanted most based on voting. Genius cards were clustered to each service in order to identify the specific details that people discussed. Other comments made, and captured through note taking, were analysed and grouped to provide additional context and narrative.

Results and discussion

The results, based on frequency, are shown in table 2. These are described in more detail below along with supporting evidence.

Table 2 – Results from voting exercise of consultation

Theme	Frequency of votes (part A and part B)	Percentage (%)
Recreation activities for young people	52	84
A place to meet / eat	50	81
Wellbeing support	40	65
Job search / work skills	24	39
IT skills / Digital skills	23	37
Help gaining qualifications	22	35
Help with childcare while training	22	35
1-2-1 support	19	31
Job clubs	18	29
Volunteering opportunities	15	24
Talking to employers	9	15
Total number of people (n=)	**62**	

Recreation activities for young people

SJOG's previous research has shown that relationships are of fundamental importance to people in making their life worthwhile (Mackrill, 2019). As one adult commented there is a need for "[a] *space for children to play and make friends".* There was a clear need to provide youth activities for young people living in and around Peartree ward with 84% of people (n=52) voting for this.

It was commented that local youth clubs have declined and there is little provision to support teenagers, particularly those from ages 13-17. Specific comments around youth support were:

> *"There is nothing around here for young people"*
> *"Space for children to play and make friends"*
> *"Dance clubs, trampoline and gymnastics"*
> *"Space to do graffiti"*

From a survey involving 2,200 young people, the YMCA (2018) reported that within Welwyn and Hatfield there is a lack of non-payable youth clubs which has a direct link to crime and anti-social behaviour in the area. There is a lack of this provision particularly on a Saturday. Therefore, free to use clubs and drop in spaces may actively engage young people, giving them meaningful activities and purpose.

Through engagement of this type it is possible to give ownership of clubs so they become co-created and run by young people. Establishing a youth leader scheme is one option whereby young people, selected through an application process, would assist in the planning and delivery of youth provision. This might include anything from peer mentoring, delivering activities, to learning and developing practical skills such as cookery or cash handling.

A place to meet / eat

During part B, the focus group commented that provision of a community café would be beneficial along with a "*space to pop in*" and meet people. When discussing this further, the grouped discussed that it would make a *"community of your own"* and an opportunity to meet more people and build social networks.

This echoes the need to have meaningful relationships. One of the facilitators of this was not just having a space, but a place that makes people feel *"home"*. Research has shown that a homely atmosphere is important to engage people in use of wellbeing services (see Payne et al., 2015). The same can be said here. By creating a space that is welcoming and homely, people in the community may be more likely to engage and take up other offers of support that are present through the centre.

Wellbeing support

Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1946). This was echoed in the consultation. 65% of responses requested support physical (activity and diet) and mental wellbeing:

> *"Education on diets and food groups would be beneficial"*
> *"it's not easy for young people around here – mental health"*

Therefore, provision needs to support both adults and children. Peartree already have a community wellbeing partnership where a variety of providers offer specific activities that address health and wellbeing. Ensuring these are offered and are easily accessible, both in location and cost, is a way for needs to be met.

Mental wellbeing levels in the area are lower than the national average for young people (aged 10-18) with girls having lower mental wellbeing than boys (YMCA, 2018). Furthermore, there is a correlation between poor mental wellbeing and young people carrying a weapon (YMCA, 2018). The WHO (2014) define mental health as, as state of wellbeing in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the

normal stresses of life and can work productively, fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his community. Therefore, wellbeing support that considers mental wellbeing will not only help improve the outcomes at an individual level but may have a positive effect on the community as a whole.

Other areas to consider

Job search/work skills

Courses on job searching, work readiness skills and digital literacy were discussed after the three key areas above. Support in job search or work skills was promoted.

> "*we need that* [job search/work skills] *around here*"

In 2011 (see Herts Insight), it was reported that n=1,220 (26%) of people aged 18-74 were economically inactive in the Peartree ward out of a total population of 4,705. Therefore, adequate and accessible support of working age adults who are economically inactive to understand and develop work skills would be beneficial, and meet a need in the area.

Digital skills

Deficiency in digital literacy was also mentioned. The availability of technology was not cited as a problem but understanding and skills to work and take full benefit of technology was. In part B of the consultation the group thought would be beneficial. As more services and local information is moved online, social isolation can be manifested through a lack in digital literacy skills.

> "*you feel cut off because it is part of everyone's life, but if you can't use it...*"

Evidence shows digital technology has impact at the micro (individual) and macro (societal) specifically in relation to inclusion (Hall et a., 2015). There are dangers of a digital divide specifically for older adults if digital skills are not supported - digital technology enhances inclusion (Hall et al. 2015).

For young people digital literacy was not cited as a problem, but a social environment to use technology was. It was requested that a gaming club for younger people would be a good activity to provide and provide networking. There is opportunity to consider cross generational project, that use buddy schemes for younger people to teach older people on using everyday technology.

What next?

There is a clear need for provision in the area. In Welwyn Garden City the average house price is £375,658 (Rightmove, 2019), over £100K more than the average UK house price of £244,567 (UK house pricing index, 2019). As one one-person quoted.

> "*it's hard to be poor in a rich area*"

As a results, provision need to reach young people, the older adults and those who are vulnerable to exclusion through disability. The Marmot review (2010) highlighted 6 areas for change to improve inequality. This consultation has highlighted the need to address two of these:

- enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives
- creating and developing sustainable places and communities

The services that can help address these can also be mapped around strengthening the themes of; relationships, meaningful activities and wellbeing. By structuring services and activities in this way, a comprehensive offer can be put in place to support the people most in need in a holistic way that is of benefit to the whole community. Potential service provision to be developed is listed in table 2 below.

In order for these activities to be free to access, an important finding highlighted by the YMCA (2018) funding is required. With further development, the insights and evidence provided here will be used to source funding to provide support to the local community.

There is a need for a co-ordinated effort. Linking with current provision and appropriate partners is key to ensuring the best services are delivered for the benefit of the community. By doing this a compelling case for support can be created to ensure that funding and investment is secured.

Once achieved sustainability is key. By delivering services and co-creating them with the people who will use them, a sense of ownership can be established to ensure the provision continues through sustainable community engagement.

Table 2 – Potential service provision defined by the consultation and supporting evidence

Theme of support	Age group		
	Young people (10-18yrs)	**Working age adults**	**Older and vulnerable adults**
Relationships	Safe place to meet with friends and to make friends		A place to meet and eat through provision of a community café Cross generational mentoring
Meaningful activities	Youth clubs with informal activities on offer that aren't specified Youth leadership scheme Specific activity groups such as dance, gymnastics, graffiti, gaming Tackling youth crime and anti-social behavior with activities co-designed by young people	Work skills clubs	Digital literacy skills workshops Work skills clubs
Wellbeing	Mental health support on offer through informal support at youth club events and scheduled support		Workshops on exercise and healthy eating
Cross cutting themes from Marmot (2010)	Enabling all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives Creating and developing sustainable places and communities		

Potential service offer

Acknowledgements

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