Communities R Us
new and established communities working together
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hact
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Foreword by Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Communities R Us: new and established communities working together

British society has been greatly enriched by the huge contribution made by new and emerging communities. In our towns and cities people from different backgrounds live side by side. Living in a diverse community is largely a positive experience for many, but we do recognise that at times there can be a sense of mistrust between the established and newer members of some communities. To overcome these challenges it is important that we provide practical ways to encourage greater understanding and respect between people from different backgrounds.

I believe that the Communities R Us project provides an effective response to the challenges which have emerged in some communities due to new patterns of migration. It focused on bringing local people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds together, to work in partnership to affect positive and long-term change to the communities in which they live.

We are committed to supporting initiatives which share our aim of building greater social cohesion as we understand that real change can only be realised at local level with the involvement of all groups within the local community. To achieve this we need to ensure that everyone is able to feel they have a stake in the local area in which they live – no one should feel disengaged or excluded from their community.

I believe that Communities R Us taps into the potential that exists within all of our communities to break down the barriers that can often lead to exclusion and division. The initiative brings together practical structures which give communities the confidence to learn more about the people they share their local environment with. This is vital if we are to create strong, cohesive and sustainable communities.
Preface and acknowledgements

This report is designed to share the learning from Communities R Us with people who wish to promote cohesion in their neighbourhoods including tenant, resident and community groups and people from local authorities and housing organisations who want to support them.

The impetus for hact establishing Communities R Us was the poor and over-hasty implementation of asylum seeker dispersal in deprived areas around the UK in 2000. Hact pioneers housing solutions for marginalised groups and, as part of our Refugee Housing Integration Programme, we wanted to explore how new communities could be supported to settle in these areas by facilitating their engagement with longer term, more established communities. The overarching objective was to help people to feel a greater sense of neighbourliness through working together to identify and tackle local issues.

We would particularly like to acknowledge and thank Mandy Wilson and Tricia Zipfel, the project evaluators and report authors, and the local people and groups for their leadership of, and reflection about, the challenges of bringing people together in all three pilot areas: New Moss Brook, Harpurhey in North Manchester; Agbrigg and Belle Vue in Wakefield; and the Derby Road/Deane Road area in Bolton.

The pilot neighbourhoods are characterised by growing diversity as a result of migration and rapid population change. Each area also included an element of private rented housing accommodating mainly short term residents; increasingly migrant workers from eastern Europe. Inevitably a high turnover of people can make community development activities such as Communities R Us especially difficult.

The role of project partners is described in section 4. We are grateful to them for getting engaged and supporting the pilots. Local authorities were project partners in all three areas. We learned that their backing for such small-scale, community led initiatives and making links with wider community cohesion strategies and Local Area Agreements can be vital in promoting their establishment and sustainability.

We are also grateful to the Advisory Group members for sharing their widespread expertise:

- Ted Cantle CBE (Chair) – Associate Director of the IDeA
- Dr Khurshid Ahmed CBE – Chief Executive of Dudley Muslim Association and Chair of the British Muslim Forum
- Dr A. Azim EL-Hassan – originator of the project idea and hact associate
- Vaughan Jones – Director of Praxis
- Raja Miah MBE – Director of PeaceMaker
- Kirsteen Tait – Communities R Us Project Co-ordinator until 2007 and hact associate
- Prof. Roger Zetter – Director of the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

Heather Petch, hact director
**Glossary**

ALMO  Arms Length Management Organisation  
BCH  Bolton Community Homes  
BME  Black and Minority Ethnic  
ESOL  English for Speakers of Other Languages  
Hact  Housing Associations’ Charitable Trust  
ICAR  Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees  
LSP  Local Strategic Partnership  
MDC  Metropolitan District Council  
NMB  New Moss Brook  
NBSCA  New Bolton Somali Community Association  
NRCP  Neighbourhood Renewal Community Programmes  
PCT  Primary Care Trust  
RASA  Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advocacy project  
RCO  Refugee Community Organisation  
WAWA  Wakefield Asian Welfare Association  

**Communities R Us pilot project areas**

Lower Deane, Bolton  
Agbrigg and Belle Vue, Wakefield  
New Moss Brook in Harpurhey, Manchester
Communities R Us aimed to strengthen the sense of community and increase opportunities for day-to-day neighbourliness in areas where recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers were being housed within established local communities. The latter included white, BME and refugee communities who had lived in the UK for more than one generation. The newcomers included asylum seekers, economic migrants and recently settled refugees from many different backgrounds. Communities R Us brought them together and provided resources to develop small-scale community-based projects that reflected their shared concerns and aspirations for their families and for the neighbourhood.

The pilot projects
Three neighbourhoods in Bolton, Manchester and Wakefield were selected as pilot projects. Each one had experienced recent refugee or new migrant settlement; there was some evidence of underlying tension between people living in these areas; and not much was being done to encourage neighbourliness across different communities.

The aim of the pilots was to enable residents from diverse backgrounds to meet as individuals, work together on shared projects, and as a result build the sort of relationships that would combat negative stereotyping and enable refugees and new migrants to settle more easily and contribute to their neighbourhood.

Hact provided around £10,000 per pilot, as well as external support to help residents identify common hopes and concerns, and work together to develop a programme of small-scale activities.

Each project differed in a number of ways, including:
- size and make-up of the neighbourhood;
- the development timeframe;
- the management arrangements;
- the action planning process;
- the activities themselves, which ranged from hanging baskets and drama about drugs awareness, to sports and arts projects;
- the roles of the key players.

The impact
The three pilots enabled residents’ associations, refugee community organisations (RCOs) and individual community members to do something positive for their neighbourhoods. Evidence from observation and interviews with a broad range of stakeholders suggests that Communities R Us:
- reinforced the aspirations of residents who wanted to improve their neighbourhoods and increase neighbourliness, and enabled them to act together to make a difference;
- opened up a dialogue across a range of cultural and ethnic groups about issues people have in common;
- enabled connections to be made that led to partnership working between residents, community groups, voluntary and public agencies, by using a focused initiative they could all buy into;
• **gave people the confidence** that they can make a difference, thereby generating a sense of community pride;
• **helped challenge some stereotypes** and break down barriers at an individual level, enabling new friendships to develop;
• **gave all residents an opportunity** to better understand the diverse communities in their neighbourhood, to make new connections with their neighbours and to play more of a leading role in the improvement process;
• **built people's interest** in developing their own skills and created a demand for more community-based training opportunities;
• **acted as a catalyst** for community organisations to work beyond their own community and to develop projects open to everyone in the area;
• **focused the attention** of a range of key agencies on the need for, and the challenges of, building relationships across diverse communities in an area.

**The difficulties**

These impacts varied across the three pilot neighbourhoods. Each project encountered some difficulties and each one had different strengths and weaknesses.

• The quality of outreach work varied. Where it was successful, newly settled refugee families were identified and encouraged to get involved. Where it was less effective, they had a lower profile within the project.
• In one project, the disaffection and marginalisation of some long-established residents made it extremely difficult to get elderly residents to recognise that newer residents might share their concerns, let alone persuade them to participate in joint activities.
• How the projects linked into local neighbourhood management structures and other services affected their ability to tackle complex issues like drugs and also their long-term sustainability.
• In developing community ownership and local leadership, each project had to take into account the local context, local personalities, and build from existing levels of community organisation.
• Some of the issues that most concerned residents could not be addressed by small-scale community projects alone. For example, in one neighbourhood, Communities R Us provided a framework for an honest discussion about the impact of drugs on children and families. This increased local understanding and informal support, but it was not enough to provide a solution to this highly contentious and complex issue.
• Even the most enjoyable joint activities did not mean that racism, cultural barriers and misunderstandings simply disappeared overnight. Building trust and confidence between people from such different backgrounds was never going to be quick and easy, and as the project came to an end, it was clear that more work was needed to build on the personal relationships and every-day contact that Communities R Us had encouraged.

**The lessons**

All three pilot projects were in neighbourhoods where people felt under pressure because of high turnover and an increasingly diverse population. They were also places where newcomers from many different backgrounds were trying to cope in new and often uncomfortable surroundings. Despite many similarities, the particular circumstances of each neighbourhood were very different and, not surprisingly, the pilots did not produce a single ‘blue-print’ for change. However it was possible to draw lessons from their collective experience that may be of value to other local communities in similar situations.
1. In order to break down barriers, build relationships and increase trust between people from diverse backgrounds, it is important to start small and bring people together in a small area of a few streets to address issues that concern everyone. At this level it is possible to make contact with almost everyone. Once people have achieved real change, even on a small scale, they are more likely to feel able to work together on more difficult and complex problems. There is also the potential for the approach cascading into neighbouring areas.

2. In areas where there are tensions between different groups, local communities will need skilled community development support to help them reach out to new people, develop a joint agenda for action and begin to work together effectively to achieve change.

3. The purpose of the project needs to be clear to all concerned. The funding body may need to negotiate with local people in order to establish a shared vision of the aims of the project, clarity about who needs to be involved and agreement about how it might be developed. Equally, it is important to ensure that careful planning does not stifle the community’s own capacity to define the problems that they want to tackle and to set out their own aspirations and ambitions.

4. On its own, a relatively small, one-off project cannot create a strong cohesive community. It might provide a catalyst for change to begin, and it might have a significant impact on the lives of some individuals, but to be of long-term value, it needs to be part of a much longer and systematic process of community building.

5. To that end, small projects need to be positioned so that they do not operate in isolation, but are valued and supported by a wider partnership of agencies that have a role and responsibilities in the neighbourhood and can attract additional resources. Where there is a local management presence, the support of the local team can be crucial for the future funding and long-term sustainability of community-based projects.

6. Participative evaluation should be built into community projects from the outset in order to provide a baseline against which to measure change, and also to enable local people to define desired outcomes and success criteria from their perspective. This will ensure that the project is not simply a ‘top-down’ initiative. It can also encourage critical reflection and self-evaluation throughout the development process and as a result increase the sense of local ownership and control.

7. Small scale community activity can provide a solid foundation for a strong, cohesive community. The message for national policy makers and local delivery agencies is clear. Investment in small-scale community initiatives matters enormously. These projects build powerful links between people and deliver valuable improvements that can transform the quality of people’s every-day lives. They cost very little, but if delivered well, are worth every penny.

Communities R Us does not provide a solution to racial tensions and the complex issue of community cohesion, but it does offer an important starting point. The approach is simple and manageable. It demonstrates that relatively modest resources can begin to make a difference, even in the face of quite complex problems. It starts with the conviction that people have more in common than things that divide them, and it helps local residents to see they can do things together and make change happen.
It also demonstrates that, if the benefits of community action are to be of lasting value, this sort of project cannot be a one-off, short-term initiative. Ongoing investment in small-scale community activity needs to be a fundamental part of any strategy to strengthen local communities, especially where integration and social cohesion present particular challenges for both newly arrived residents and existing communities.
“We all have to take responsibility – indigenous population and newer communities.”
A migrant worker from eastern Europe living in Wakefield

“The project did change people’s attitudes. They began to empathise with each other and realised that they shared the same problems. For the first time they were able to talk about issues like drugs more openly – before it had been a taboo subject.”
Local worker in Bolton

“The fact that we did it ourselves meant there was a strong sense of community ownership.”
Local resident in Manchester

“Residents themselves are more aware of their own skills.”
Local council officer in Manchester

“Something like Communities R Us can’t ever replace the need for a proper community development strategy. It can kick start things and help to find people in a position to make change happen, but it needs to link into other things in the neighbourhood – the context is crucial.”
Senior officer in Bolton Community Homes

Communities R Us was delivered as part of hact’s Refugee Housing Integration Programme. Hact pioneers housing solutions for people on the margins of mainstream provision by supporting innovative projects that not only have a local impact, but also provide lessons for policy and practice at national level.

The Communities R Us project was conceived in 2003 in response to growing concerns that the poorly planned and enforced dispersal of asylum seekers was exacerbating tensions with existing communities in severely deprived areas. Hact believed this problem would get worse unless simultaneous attention was paid to supporting refugees and asylum seekers and also to addressing the needs and concerns of everyone living in the areas where they were being housed.

The purpose of Communities R Us was to promote integration and good neighbourliness by bringing people together to tackle shared problems. Its focus was on refugees and asylum seekers, as well as existing, well-established communities. These included black and minority ethnic communities, some of whom had lived in these areas for three or more generations. As the project developed, it included other newcomers, primarily economic migrants from eastern Europe.

This report tells the story of what happened in the three pilot neighbourhoods in Bolton, Manchester and Wakefield from 2005-2008. It looks at the similarities and differences between them and assesses the impact they had on the people and on the places.

Drawing on the views and experiences of the participants, the report highlights lessons for other residents’ groups, social housing providers, other public sector services and local agencies in similar neighbourhoods undergoing rapid change in population, where building community cohesion is a high priority.
Young activists at the community festival in New Moss Brook, Manchester.

A busy street in Lower Deane, Bolton.

Residents of Lower Deane.

Bolton at Home housing. Quebec Street in Lower Deane, Bolton.
2.1 The context

The current asylum seeker dispersal system has been characterised by use of low demand housing in very poor neighbourhoods, and dependency on overstretched services. Government policy then encourages refugees to settle in their areas of dispersal, once they have permission to remain in the UK. Since the project began in 2003/4, there has also been a significant increase of new migrants from eastern Europe.

In many dispersal areas there has been little, if any, previous history of migrant settlement. So very vulnerable people often find themselves placed without choice in neighbourhoods where local residents, themselves often struggling to cope, may feel threatened by the arrival of newcomers. In these situations, many refugees and asylum seekers experience racism and harassment and, despite the availability of housing, they may be reluctant to settle down in these areas because they feel unwelcome and unsafe. They often respond by maintaining as low a profile as possible and as a result can remain isolated and disengaged from the people around them. Instead of thriving in a mutually supportive community, different groups can end up living parallel lives in close proximity with all the potential for mutual misunderstanding and conflict that that creates.

Support for refugees and asylum seekers is provided around the country through a range of national and local organisations. In many areas, local refugee community organisations (RCOs) also help their own community members to find their feet and feel safe. They provide advice and informal support and act as a bridge to mainstream services and other local groups. Understandably these agencies focus mainly on the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Recent research, however, has highlighted the importance of also working with existing communities if real integration is to be achieved. A research report published by ICAR, entitled Understanding the Stranger, called for even-handedness in the use of resources to support asylum seekers and refugees at local level. It pointed to the importance of work that linked different communities in order to tackle misunderstanding, build better relationships and increase community cohesion.

2.2 Hact’s response

Hact was concerned that most of the work being done to reduce local tensions tended to focus on limited ‘myth-busting’ initiatives. Very few projects involved housing or neighbourhood managers, or supported integration through a community development approach. Very few took on board the fact that changes in service provision, development of new initiatives and environmental improvements in the neighbourhood mattered to everyone. Very few sought to help local communities to respond to significant shifts in the population. And there was little recognition of the important role that existing residents groups could play, provided they are supported and trusted locally, in influencing local dynamics and challenging negative attitudes and lack of understanding.

Communities R Us was developed to respond to these issues as part of hact’s Refugee Housing Integration Programme. This programme consisted of several projects that aimed to achieve more integrated and inclusive neighbourhoods and to increase the quality of housing available to refugees by:
• integrating the housing needs and aspirations of refugee communities into mainstream housing policy and practice;
• increasing the capacity of refugee communities to participate in the development of housing services appropriate to their needs; and
• developing sustainable partnership working between emerging refugee communities and mainstream housing providers.

The distinctive feature of Communities R Us was that the pilots would work across all communities in a neighbourhood and address issues of integration and cohesion by identifying common ground and developing community responses to shared concerns.

2.3 Objectives

Many neighbourhoods in the UK are experiencing a high turnover of residents and increasing diversity as the local population changes. This can be very unsettling for established communities and also for families trying to put down roots in a new area. Faced with these pressures, many people withdraw from the wider community and only feel ‘at home’ when they are behind their own front doors. This does not make for strong communities and can exacerbate problems of alienation and misunderstanding.

“It's hard to get to know so many newcomers. In the past people would ask about you – not in a nosey way, but just taking an interest. Now people are reluctant to do that – you can't be sure how someone will react. We are beginning to communicate more in these streets, but we still have a way to go.”

Local resident in Manchester

In these circumstances, it is often the little things that matter – knowing your neighbours, being able to chat and ask for help when you are stuck, being surrounded by friendly faces rather than hostility or fear. For that to be the norm, you need relationships – and for that, you need to have a reason to connect, an opportunity to do things together.

Communities R Us was set up to support and learn from local neighbourhood initiatives that sought to make connections between people – to encourage neighbourliness, reduce misunderstanding and build positive relationships. It grew out of the recognition that building positive relationships between different groups is vital for the well-being of the whole community, for long-standing residents as well as new arrivals. It also assumed that this process needs to start at neighbourhood level in order to provide strong foundations from which to promote community cohesion more widely. It used relatively small amounts of investment to bring people together to identify common hopes and concerns and address these issues by working together on small-scale local projects. Its aim was to kick-start a process that would reduce fear and anxiety on all sides, and enable people to feel positive about diversity and proud of their community.

“Even in this small area of five streets there has been quite a bit of negativity between streets, whereas the Communities R Us project was not at all competitive. Once the baskets were up, people would say: ‘you've done really well in your street – it looks lovely’.”

Local worker in Manchester
This isn't rocket science. A little money and community development support can go a long way – but it isn't always easy either.

Communities R Us did not aim to create a single ‘model’ to be replicated in other places. Instead it wanted to provide a range of insights and lessons that could help others shape similar positive local neighbourhood initiatives in the future.

"People round here have a strong sense of the need to be good neighbours and they won't tolerate racism, but there is also a lot of confusion and ignorance about refugees and asylum seekers. The general sympathy and concern can often be combined with strong prejudices under the surface."

Local community worker
Private sector and owner occupied housing in Lower Deane, Bolton.

A young girl practises her football skills with a Bolton Wanderers trainer. The NBSCA run football training and a tournament, called the Cohesion Cup, for Lower Deane residents. Inter-racial teams are a condition of entry to the tournament.

New Moss Brook residents club together at the community hanging baskets day.
3.1 Selection criteria

To identify the three pilot projects, hact explored the idea and negotiated with a number of agencies in seven local authority areas that had prioritised improving community cohesion. Bolton, Manchester and Wakefield were selected but insights were also gleaned from the selection process, which included discussions with people and projects in Hastings, Peterborough, Sheffield, Sunderland and Stoke-on-Trent.

The aim of the selection process was to identify potential pilot projects that fell within official government dispersal areas and would also be different enough to provide lessons that might be transferable across the UK. In addition, hact had recently set up a refugee housing partnership project – Accommodate – which brought together refugee community organisations, housing providers and statutory bodies to improve housing and integration for refugees in five locations. Hact was keen to deliver a Communities R Us pilot in at least one of these areas so that the project might benefit from the wider networks and greater understanding of local issues generated by the Accommodate project.

Bolton was identified as a likely pilot area at an early stage because the local housing partnership, Bolton Community Homes (BCH), was already working with hact as part of Accommodate and had contributed funding to the project. After a year of wider scoping work, proposals were invited from six other potential projects. Applications were followed by an interview and visit.

The following criteria were used to assess proposals:

- projects should cover a diversity of social, economic and political circumstances, diversity in ethnic profile and housing tenure and type;
- they should reflect obvious need and potential for change;
- there should be a basic community/resident infrastructure and an identifiable refugee group;
- there should be specific local issues around which people could organise activities;
- there should be a commitment by existing and new communities to work together on the project;
- there should be significant numbers of refugee residents;
- there should be a clear presence of local inspiration or leadership.

Assessment of the proposals led to the selection of two more projects: one led by Manchester Refugee Support Network (subsequently replaced as lead agency by Refugee Action); the other led by Wakefield Metropolitan District Council.

The three chosen pilots were Lower Deane in Bolton, Agbrigg and Belle Vue ward in Wakefield and New Moss Brook in Harpurhey, Manchester.
3.2 Bolton

The **Lower Deane** pilot area forms a triangle delineated by Derby Road, Deane Road and Quebec Street, stretching out from near the city centre. The main roads provide natural boundaries, there are lots of businesses including Kurdish shops and restaurants on Derby Road, and there is a large student population.

Over 5,000 people live in the area, with long-term white residents making up slightly less than half the population (45%), about 20% of whom are elderly. There is a well-established BME (mainly Asian) population (50%), as well as a significant number of newly arrived refugees including Somalis, Iraqi Kurds, Iranians and Congolese. It is a very mixed and rapidly changing community. BCH chose the area because, although it was a vibrant community, there were underlying tensions between different groups.

Of the 2,196 households in the Lower Deane area, over half live in social housing (mainly council owned and managed by Bolton at Home, an ALMO). Just over a third own their own homes and about 5% are renting privately. Most of the properties are terraced houses with some flats and accommodation for the elderly. Bolton at Home runs the neighbourhood office and manages the neighbourhood panel. This was for residents, councillors and officers to meet on a regular basis to develop local area plans and deal with management issues. This structure was about to change at the time of publication.

3.3 Manchester

By contrast, **New Moss Brook** is a small enclave of just five streets, comprising 173 terraced houses and a population of around 500 residents. It sits within the ward of Harpurhey, north Manchester. It forms a sort of cul-de-sac in that every street dead-ends, and as a result there is no through traffic and the area feels very self-contained and quiet. There are no shops or other facilities in the immediate area, although the local community centre and the main Harpurhey shopping centre are both less than ten minutes walk away.

Like most of north Manchester, New Moss Brook has traditionally been a very white area, but this picture is beginning to change. In 2007 there were about 15 BME families in the area (9% of the total), including refugees from Africa, as well as long-standing immigrant families from Asia and the Caribbean and some east European economic migrants. The council predicts that by 2012, the proportion of BME residents in north Manchester is likely to increase by around 35% – a more rapid increase than in any other part of the city.

Most of the houses are rented from private landlords (50%). One in five are owned by a housing association and 30% are owner occupied. The area had been designated for demolition as part of the strategy of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder. These plans were shelved in 2005, however, following an effective campaign by the residents, reinforced by rising house prices and increased demand, partly due to the housing needs of newly arrived refugees. This victory boosted the resident association's confidence, and it was they who took the initiative in seeking to have Communities R Us based in their area. They were keen to work across the whole community and welcomed Communities R Us as a positive initiative. Other partners felt that, in the wider Manchester context, the project could provide a model to help people cope with rapid change and address any tensions this might generate.
The neighbourhood team is based a couple of miles away and there is no local management presence in the area. Nonetheless, New Moss Brook residents regularly attend local housing forums and the ward committee and they have a close working relationship with many council officers.

### 3.4 Wakefield

The ward of Agbrigg and Belle Vue is similar in size to Lower Deane with a population of just under 5,000 people. It has a long-term white population, and many of the 13.3% Asian/South Asian community have also lived in the area for some time. 7.2% of residents were born outside the UK. In addition to refugees and asylum seekers, there is a growing population of east European migrant workers. A long-standing community of gypsies and travellers is based on a permanent site at the edge of the area.

The majority of residents own their own homes, though 15% of the housing stock in the area is privately rented, much of it of low quality. Agbrigg and Belle Vue are two distinct areas with arguably several neighbourhoods within them. There has been little mixing between community groups in the area and on the whole a relatively low level of organised community activity. This was compounded in 2006 by the closure of WAWA (Wakefield Asian Welfare Association) the organisation that ran the local community centre. The summer floods of 2007 affected the area, and many people have commented on how this crisis brought different communities together.

Agbrigg and Belle Vue have been prioritised as a neighbourhood management pilot with a particular focus on neighbourhood governance. The neighbourhood management team is based in the community centre, now run by the council, alongside the newly located community development and health team.
A drama performance brings people together in Lower Deane, Bolton.

A family in Lower Deane, Bolton.

Anne Athanassi and Matthew Daniel chair and vice chair of the New Moss Brook Residents’ Association receive their Mancunian Awards from the Lord Mayor Mavis Smitheman with Andrew Jones, Ward Co-ordination Support Officer for Harpurhey and Moston.

Residents of Agbrigg and Belle Vue, Wakefield, get creative at a community arts session.
4 How Communities R Us worked

4.1 Getting the pilots off the ground

4.1.1 Starting points
The starting point for each of the three pilots was quite different.

Each was led by a different sort of local agency. In Bolton, a local housing partnership (Bolton Community Homes) led the pilot, working with a local community arts project and local RCOs. In Manchester, a voluntary sector organisation (Refugee Action) took the lead, working closely with a local residents’ association, the council’s ward support officer and the community network. In Wakefield, the local authority led the pilot, working in partnership with a refugee support and advice agency (Refugee and Asylum Seeker Advocacy project – RASA) and a steering group of local statutory and voluntary sector agencies.

In Bolton, the involvement of BCH in Communities R Us sat neatly within its wider role of trying to join up regeneration activities and develop sustainable mixed communities.

Hact was keen that the pilots should be developed from the bottom-up and be shaped and owned by local communities. This was the first pilot to start, so a BCH officer and the hact project coordinator initially spent a lot of time exploring the organisational capacity of the area. A number of local voluntary sector groups and the nearby university expressed interest in Communities R Us. Plans to work with these groups were put to one side, however, after a chance encounter with a local community worker from Bolton Multicultural Arts opened up the possibility of developing the project from a more grassroots perspective, by working with a group of trained Community Ambassadors. Most of the Community Ambassadors lived in the area and were part of Bolton Voluntary Service Council’s Community Empowerment Network. They undertook door-to-door interviews to find out what people thought about the area. They also aimed to identify and encourage families and individuals who might not already be involved in any local activities or groups. Some of the people who were interviewed got involved in a drama performance that was based on the interviews, and also participated in the activities that followed it.

“After I was interviewed they needed people for the drama. My kids got involved and then they dragged me along. It was lots of effort, but great fun and a very good outcome.”
Local resident in Lower Deane, Bolton

In Manchester, there were two other key stakeholders in addition to Refugee Action: New Moss Brook (NMB) Residents’ Association, who had heard about Communities R Us and asked to be one of the pilots; and the local neighbourhood office. All three had strong motivations for involvement in Communities R Us.

Refugee Action was already running a racial harassment prevention project in the area. It was keen to develop proactive strategies to prevent conflict arising in areas where refugees were being housed and had recognised the importance of working, not only with refugees, but with the wider community as well. The residents’ association was fresh from the success of saving their houses from demolition, helped in part by increased housing demand from newcomers.
They were keen to involve everyone in improving the area even more. Like Refugee Action, the council saw preventative strategies as a high priority for areas facing major population turnover like Harpurhey. They had also earmarked New Moss Brook as one of four areas in which to test out a new form of neighbourhood charter, the Mancunian Agreement.

In Wakefield, the Metropolitan District Council was the main stakeholder, working closely with RASA. Early on in the development of the pilot, a steering group of public and third sector partners already involved in the area was established. It included the Primary Care Trust (PCT), other council departments, a local councillor, Wakefield District Housing, Voluntary Action Wakefield and the Community Empowerment Network. Motivation for involvement varied across these agencies, but the low level of organised community activity meant that anything that increased neighbourliness between the settled communities and newer communities was seen as a step forward.

**Observation**

It does not matter where the initiative for this kind of project comes from. It is, however, helpful if the lead organisation is local and trusted, has a real stake in the project and is prepared to work with others to develop a broad-based commitment to the project. It needs the lead organisation to support local residents to take on responsibility and ownership of the project. It should also be prepared to intervene if necessary to ensure the project is inclusive and to keep the project focused on its objectives.

“Residents do turn to local people first for informal advice and support – there’s a small network of ‘wise people’ who are relied upon.”

Council officer in Manchester

**4.1.2 Structure of the pilots**

The involvement of a wide range of organisations meant each pilot developed a different structure.

In Bolton, there was no formal steering group. Initial plans to establish a network of voluntary sector and other interested local organisations were dropped in favour of a more bottom-up and less structured approach. This rested on the involvement of residents as individuals rather than from established community groups, an approach that was felt more likely to engage with new people in a non-directive way. The local residents’ association was not enthusiastic about the project and none of the local refugee community organisations felt they should take the lead. The New Bolton Somali Community Association, an RCO, was involved throughout, however, and has played a significant role in moving things forward since 2007.

In Manchester, the pilot benefited from strong council and voluntary sector backing. A statement of expectations, agreed at the outset, ensured that there was no ambiguity about the
focus on both long-term and newer residents and the link between Communities R Us and the council’s own agenda. The intended outcomes were very clear:

“For existing residents it was hoped that the project would:
• increase the support base for progressive local residents;
• increase access to information about newer residents;
• build stronger bonds between individuals and increase trust shown towards new residents.

For newer residents, it was hoped that the project would:
• increase feelings of acceptance and refugees’ ability to engage locally;
• strengthen bonds between individuals and increase confidence to participate;
• increase input into city-wide discourse on social capital and the Mancunian Agreement.”

Refugee Action was also keen to respond positively to the enthusiasm of the residents’ association to be involved. They negotiated a service level agreement and transferred the funds for the pilot work incrementally to the association, enhancing their sense of ownership and enabling them to take a lead.

In Wakefield, the pilot was driven primarily by the public and voluntary sector with limited community input, partly reflecting the lack of active and organised community groups in the area. The development of the Communities R Us pilot also coincided with the creation of a new local agency presence, which included the council’s neighbourhood management team and PCT community development staff. The involvement of the local councillor in the steering group provided a community perspective. Attempts were made to attract individuals in the feedback event and the follow up activities.

**Observation**

While there is a need for a lead organisation to carry out the role of accountable body, provide support and co-ordinate the project, partnership working is a key feature of every pilot. This involves building links with residents and community groups, engaging with voluntary sector organisations and with the council, and positioning the project so that it does not work in isolation from other longer-term neighbourhood work. It also needs to be open to, and encourage the engagement of, people who are not involved in existing groups.

### 4.2 Developing local activities

#### 4.2.1 Community based research

In all three pilot areas, outreach and information gathering was the first task.

In Bolton’s Lower Deane, the pilot built on the experience of the community network, which had employed local people to work on a sessional basis as Community Ambassadors in other contexts. These eight ambassadors were crucial to the early success of the Bolton pilot, as they reflected the different cultures and languages of people in the area. They were inducted and briefed about Communities R Us to do more than simply complete a survey: they helped develop the survey questionnaire, they engaged with interviewees on the doorstep and they encouraged people to attend the follow-up public meeting.
In September and October 2006, 19 Asians, 14 refugees (from Liberia, Ivory Coast, Sudan, Iraq (Kurdish) and Somalia), and 15 long-term white residents were asked about their aspirations and concerns for their neighbourhood. Once the survey was completed, they encouraged residents to get involved in planning and preparing a drama that was based entirely on issues raised in the survey.

“People said this was a rough area – it had a reputation for drug dealing – but I didn't find it unsafe. It was important to visit people in the evenings, to spend time with them and be prepared to talk and explain about Communities R Us. Once people felt relaxed they enjoyed the interview and had loads to say. The response was very positive, including from people who spoke no English.”

Community Ambassador, outreach worker

During the summer of 2007, and following discussions with Bolton, the pilot in Wakefield’s Agbrigg and Belle Vue area adopted a similar approach. It advertised for local people with relevant language skills and community knowledge to undertake survey work. Ten people were then appointed to work on a sessional basis and were given training in interviewing and communication skills. They then surveyed over 70 residents. A focus group also formed part of the research process, involving people from different backgrounds, and providing significant ‘local intelligence’ to the project.

In Manchester’s New Moss Brook, an informal house-to-house survey was undertaken by members of the residents’ association and the Communities R Us worker from Refugee Action with support from a locally based council officer.

**Observation**

In all three cases, the interviews were intended to be community-friendly, offering lots of opportunity for people to say what they really thought. A clear message from the Bolton pilot is that this is the way to gain trust. Equally, in Wakefield, the interviewers were seen to be able to connect with people the agencies couldn't have reached: “People trusted the interviewers enough to say what they felt. Whilst before we sensed that there were tensions between communities, now we know there really are.”

**4.2.2 Identifying local issues**

The three consultations were valuable not only in informing follow-up activities but also in making individual agencies more aware of the issues that residents felt were having a negative impact on the area.

Common themes emerged as well as specific local irritations. Drug use, anti-social behaviour, litter and community safety were significant in all three areas. Traffic and car parking were identified in Bolton and Wakefield, and housing was raised in Manchester. In all three areas, BME residents, including many from well-established communities, had experienced threatening situations and talked about feeling insecure and isolated. In Wakefield’s Agbrigg and Belle Vue, antagonism was mostly expressed towards asylum seekers and migrant workers. Despite this negativity, there was also a clear sense that people wanted to do something to improve their neighbourhood.
Observation

The surveys showed that the lack of day-to-day communication between people meant that many of their perceptions and feelings about each other were not rooted in reality. An interviewer in Wakefield’s Agbrigg and Belle Vue, himself a migrant worker, expressed surprise that people in the settled community were (also) decent and (also) wanted to change things: “Mainly everybody wants to live a better life with a better environment, but they don’t feel they have the ability to do anything about it.”

4.2.3 Analysis and planning

The availability of Communities R Us funding meant that some action could be taken to address the issues raised in the surveys. The three pilots devised different ways to feed back the survey findings to residents and involve them in agreeing an action plan.

In Lower Deane, drama was used to reflect some powerful and controversial messages back to an audience of over 100 residents from different local communities, including many recently arrived refugees. Eight sketches were written, based on the survey responses, and actors came forward from the local Somali, Indian Hindu, Muslim Asian and Kurdish communities. Mime helped to overcome language barriers and ensure that everyone got the message.

“When people saw the sketches about drugs, they were very quiet. I think they were amazed to have their own experiences reflected back to them in this way. Everyone understood, even if they spoke no English. One mum realised that the ‘sweets’ her young son had been given in the playground were actually drugs.”

Local worker

The audience was given the opportunity to comment, by using post-it notes and in a workshop discussion held immediately afterwards. The drama allowed difficult issues, like racist abuse between different minority ethnic groups and drug use within the community, to be raised in a non-threatening way. It enabled the community to confront subjects often ignored because of embarrassment, cultural taboos or simply lack of awareness. It held up a mirror to the community, while providing people with a sort of barrier to hide behind.

As one participant commented:

“The drama was brilliant – we should do more of this … Putting things across in this way appeals to young people much more than meetings … It got the point across and expressed exactly how it feels and what racism does to you.”

In New Moss Brook, a professional facilitator was brought in to manage a consultation event that explored options and potential solutions. His role proved important in ensuring full participation and providing an independent perspective. Residents agreed that their priorities were to have:

- a clean community with no litter or dumped rubbish;
- more flowers/gardens to soften the street scene;
- opportunities for people to come together;
- integration of all members of the community, including young and old.
People in Agbrigg and Belle Vue learnt from Bolton’s experience and also used drama to provoke discussion, though in a slightly different way. Findings from the research informed the script for a professional theatre group to perform an interactive sketch. This reflected a life-like situation where a migrant worker, a landlord and a neighbour were embroiled in misunderstandings and tensions. Sections of the play were then re-run and the audience was invited to comment and to challenge what was happening.

Observation
The use of different creative methods, such as the drama in Bolton, to open up dialogue between different groups is significant. It enabled people to communicate despite language barriers. It allowed sensitive issues to be recognised and explored in a non-threatening way. It got people involved who would never have felt comfortable participating in a formal meeting. It was fun – something that can make all the difference in the way people relate to one-another. The sense of local ownership of the project was determined by the ability of the pilots to spend time exploring the issues and reaching consensus with residents about what their priorities really were.

4.2.4 Community action
A significant element of Communities R Us was the £3,000 grant available for follow up activities that were designed and led by residents working together. In Bolton and Manchester, once priorities had been identified, a smaller group of residents and Communities R Us support workers met to develop a more detailed action plan. In New Moss Brook, residents moved quickly from the consultation event in March 2007 to activities just two months later.

“People seemed to appreciate this no beating around the bush approach. It instilled a sense of purpose and energy which was reflected in the speed with which things happened after the consultation.”

Community Empowerment Network worker in Manchester

In the Bolton and Wakefield projects, activities stretched out six months or more after the drama feedback events. This made it more difficult to maintain momentum.

In Lower Deane, the planning group decided to hold a series of Deane and Derby days to follow up on the consultation and drama. It was agreed that the first of these events should be a food hygiene course, because of the potential to feature food from different cultures. It was attended by ten women from different ethnic backgrounds, all of whom gained the qualification needed to allow them to cook for public events.

The second day addressed the most urgent issue raised by residents – drugs. This event was attended by about 40 people, many of them from outside the area, with food provided by the women who had just completed their training. Although residents found the information about drugs and drug-related behaviour useful, it was not clear what more could be done through Communities R Us to resolve such a complex problem.

After the summer activities, the Communities R Us project came to a standstill for a few months. For many people, especially newer residents, the pilot had opened things up.
The drama had involved people of all ages, it had given some of the women a voice they had not had before, and many of them had grown in confidence. For some individuals the pilot had had a significant impact and a number of residents wanted to do more.

Tension between racial groups remained a problem, especially between groups of young people. The elderly, whatever their background, felt threatened by their behaviour and worried about the potential for conflict. This feeling of unease enhanced the sense that more effort was needed to build links across communities in the Lower Deane area. But it was not clear what the pilot should do next, who should take the lead or how it might be embedded into other longer-term work in the neighbourhood.

The Communities R Us pilot in New Moss Brook began in November 2006. It had completed its outreach and consultation work, planning process, and delivery of two activities within eight months, creating momentum and a real sense of achievement.

Residents decided to organise a litter pick and hanging basket project, followed by a community festival. This provided a clear focus for the group and they moved quickly to make things happen. A Communities R Us planning group began to meet regularly, and around 28 people, including four refugees, attended each meeting. This was significant in an area where virtually every other residents’ association was composed of white residents.

The litter pick and hanging basket day attracted about 100 residents: 60 were adults, 40 were young people, and there were two east European families among the 25 ethnic minority residents. More than one hundred baskets were planted and put up along the five streets. The vice-chair of the residents’ association noted that this was the largest turn out of residents he had seen. One notable success was the way different groups worked together to put up brackets on houses.

“Everyone got involved in putting the baskets together. One young man who had recently moved here – he is a refugee from Africa – came and helped put up brackets for the elderly people. Before that some people had complained about music and other things, but after he came and helped, people saw him and his friends in a different light and changed their opinions.”

Local resident

A month later, the residents’ association held a community festival attended by 160 people from the immediate and surrounding areas, including the Mayor, local councillors and council workers. The event was used to formally launch the Mancunian Agreement. A steel band and a disco provided music. There was food, games, a fancy dress competition and certificates were awarded to children who had helped with the litter pick in May. This all created an atmosphere in which people seemed to mix easily and really enjoy themselves. Both events also gave people something to talk about:

“The project brought people together who had previously never spoken to each other. It got them thinking about neighbourliness and the importance of putting some effort into building a community.”

Local worker
“Working on the baskets gave us something in common, something to talk about. It’s not always easy to know what to say to people you don’t already know well – you need a talking point and the project gave us that.”

Local resident

In Agbrigg and Belle Vue, steering group members hoped that ideas for activities would come from the survey responses and the workshop. Unfortunately, there were no clear priorities, so the steering group spent a lot of time trying to identify what would be most appropriate for the different local communities.

More opportunities for young people was one frequent response to questions about how the local area could be improved. The lack of opportunities for different communities to come together was also identified as a contributing factor to misunderstandings between people. The priority for any activities was to get people working together and having fun. So the Communities R Us steering group decided to run a sports activity week, a community art day and a local photography project.

Two local sports development workers arranged a four-day sports programme, mainly consisting of football and cricket for 11-18 year olds during the Easter holidays. The activities were open to all young people, and great efforts were made to reach out to the different communities in the area, but most of the young people who came were Asian or white. The sessions were nonetheless successful and enjoyed by all who attended.

A community artist was commissioned to work with residents to create artwork for the community centre. Participants ranged in age from 2 to over 60. They included men and women, and came from different ethnic backgrounds. Four pictures were created: a bilingual ‘welcome picture’; a pictorial map of Wakefield; portraits of local people; and a picture created from images of what people liked best about Agbrigg and Belle Vue. The artworks will enhance the community centre, which has been undergoing a transformation in recent months as it begins to be used again by the whole community.

A hundred disposable cameras were made available to anyone who lived in Agbrigg and Belle Vue to take photos of things that were important to them, which showed something of their life in the neighbourhood. Over 40 were returned from across the community. A competition was held with a first prize that included a digital camera for a local community group. The photos provide a record of the diversity and similarities of the lives of residents. They also provide an opportunity to see the neighbourhood through other people’s eyes and provoke greater awareness.
Observation

The small scale, but significant improvements to the appearance of Manchester’s New Moss Brook worked well because they were simple, easy to organise and allowed everyone to participate. They also provided opportunities for people to help each other and gave an immediate sense of collective satisfaction. The pace at which they moved from planning to action generated momentum and a real sense of achievement. The celebratory and sporting events in all the projects provided opportunities for minority communities to make a distinct contribution, reflecting their own cultures and traditions. The activities weren’t always easy to set up and their potential for bringing different cultures together was not always fully realised. Some of the more complex issues such as drugs and serious anti-social behaviour cannot be resolved by community events alone, and require more long-term input from service providers and other partners.
Residents of Agbrigg and Belle Vue, Wakefield, show the results of their creative work.

Wakefield is brought to life by Agbrigg and Belle Vue residents' colourful map of the city.
In developing Communities R Us, hact hoped that each pilot would begin to reduce fear and anxiety between different communities and help residents to feel positive about each other and proud of their community. The core question for hact was whether an intervention like Communities R Us could act as a tipping point to get things moving in the right direction by:

- challenging assumptions;
- increasing knowledge and understanding between groups; and
- helping people see that they can do things for themselves to make change happen.

The pilot projects themselves also identified what they hoped to achieve including:

- increased contact and communication between residents;
- better lines of communication between residents and service providers;
- greater personal and community confidence;
- greater integration between existing and newer communities;
- improvements in the overall quality of community life, eg, decent housing conditions for all, improved local environment.

See Appendix 2 for the evaluation framework produced by the projects themselves.

### 5.1 Bolton

In Lower Deane, the pilot:

- opened up a dialogue across a range of cultural and ethnic groups about issues they faced in common. In particular, the drama created a different sort of space in which people who had not previously spoken out were able to share their experiences and explore sensitive issues in a non-threatening way;
- had a profound impact on a number of individuals, increasing their awareness and giving them more confidence to acknowledge and address difficult problems such as drugs and racist abuse within BME communities;
- resulted in some of the actors remaining friends afterwards. A number of women undertook training. A core group of five to six women is still keen to do more;
- was a catalyst for one of the lead refugee organisations in the area, New Bolton Somali Community Association, to take the decision to work beyond its own community and to open up its projects to everyone in the area.

“After the drama, some of the problems were resolved – just getting them out into the open was important. People felt very happy about that.”

Community Ambassador

Difficulties were encountered along the way and these will need to be tackled if Communities R Us is to have a constructive legacy.
Despite making great efforts to involve the local residents' association, the pilot project failed to persuade people from the white community to get involved. Some local residents said this was because people were angry that a local general store, used regularly by elderly residents, had closed down and re-opened as a cash and carry used mainly by Bolton's Asian community. Some customers came from out of the area and parking problems soon emerged. This affected the local bus service, which was also a lifeline for many older people living in the nearby sheltered housing. So many people, especially the elderly, felt particularly aggrieved at this time and did not want to identify with the project.

In spite of initial intentions to work with other local organisations, the project was not closely linked into other initiatives such as the council's neighbourhood management arrangements or the neighbourhood panel, both of which might have enabled it to get wider community support and involvement.

Concerns about the area, however, mean that local agencies are continuing to play an active role. Since 2007, the New Bolton Somali Community Association has begun to take more of a lead, building on the aims and values of Communities R Us. They have opened up many of their activities to other groups and organised a local football tournament, called the Cohesion Cup, which made inter-racial teams a condition of entry. This was very successful and has encouraged them to think of other ways in which they might help to connect people in the area. The fact that a refugee community organisation is prepared to embrace and celebrate diversity in this way, and work to build relationships across all communities, has huge significance in an area like Lower Deane.

5.2 Manchester

In New Moss Brook, the pilot:

- reinforced the inclinations of the residents' association to take the issue of neighbourliness seriously, providing a focus for them to strengthen community relations in a way that complemented the work the council was doing through the Mancunian Agreement;
- enabled the implications of diversity in rapidly changing neighbourhoods to be discussed more openly. The links with the council meant that the experience provided a model that could be used by other communities in Harpurhey at a time of considerable upheaval and change;
- gave this small community a high profile and made residents even more confident about their capacity to change things – through links with Refugee Action, the neighbourhood office and recognition by the Mayor and councillors;
- brought people together and generated a sense of pride and mutual support. It helped to challenge some stereotypes and break down barriers at an individual level. It helped create a more friendly and relaxed atmosphere, partly because the activities were so inclusive and enabled everyone to participate;
- had a positive impact on general neighbourliness. Everyone, including long standing residents, appears to have felt a new sense of responsibility towards each other, simply because they now knew each other better.

“Residents do have a lot of influence. A few years ago we campaigned to stop the demolition. That was a huge success and it brought together the five streets. We won respect through that fight and it showed there were lots of good people in the area – plus a few bad eggs.”

Local resident
Not everything has been plain sailing, though. The partnership with the council, for example, did not prevent the hanging baskets from being removed during the facelift improvement work. So far these have not been replaced. If local residents and other stakeholders continue to meet, talk and work together there is no doubt that improvements to New Moss Brook could be maintained and further developed. Plans for a community garden and allotments are being considered and if, through this sort of project, relationships between different groups are strengthened, New Moss Brook could also offer a positive model for community cohesion to other neighbourhoods in Manchester and elsewhere.

“It has definitely increased people’s hope in the future and sense that things are improving.”

Local resident

5.3 Wakefield

In Agbrigg and Belle Vue, the pilot:

• focused the attention of a range of key agencies on the need for, and the challenges of, building relationships across communities in the area;
• created greater partnership working between agencies through a focused initiative that they could all buy into;
• gave some new residents a positive role through the interviewing process, helping them to make connections and enabling them to better understand the community into which they have been housed;
• uncovered issues and tensions which may have been previously assumed but never evidenced, both through the survey findings and again through the drama;
• provided the inspiration for stimulating joint efforts to tackle such issues.

Having started the process, Wakefield MDC and its partners now have to see through the implications of what they have found and build this into ongoing local initiatives, for example through the neighbourhood management project. This will be difficult and uncomfortable for some, but the first base has been reached and there are increased local resources that can make a difference.

“The hact project has stimulated activity ... neighbourhood management should be able to pick up on and continue the agenda.”

Local council officer

Overall, the evidence from the pilot projects suggests that an initiative like Communities R Us can bring people together who might otherwise not even feel able to say ‘hello’ in passing. It can challenge stereotypes and encourage more positive attitudes and behaviour. It can open up the scope for greater understanding between culturally distinct groups. It can increase residents’ confidence to embrace values and take a stand that might be unpopular, going against the grain of the wider community. The Communities R Us projects have also begun to generate positive news stories to counter the negative media coverage they are used to receiving – though getting the local media to promote ‘good news’ stories about these neighbourhoods can be an uphill struggle.

The pilots also indicate, however, that a range of factors can make such an initiative more or less successful. It is these conditions that inform the next section.
The value of small grants programmes to local communities has been well documented elsewhere. Especially in deprived areas, a small injection of resources, alongside community development support, can build residents’ confidence and capacity to develop a range of grassroots projects. Communities R Us applies this approach specifically in neighbourhoods where local communities may feel under pressure because of high turnover and changes in the make-up of the population, and where newcomers from many different backgrounds are trying to put down roots and cope in strange and sometimes hostile surroundings.

The three pilots shared a commitment to the Communities R Us aims but implemented them in very different ways. This is as it should be – no one size fits all. The pilots were shaped by the particulars of each neighbourhood, and as a result had different strengths and weaknesses, and different lessons to offer.

### 6.1 Choosing the neighbourhood

#### 6.1.1 Size

Neighbourhoods often have their own natural boundaries and can vary in size. In choosing a neighbourhood for a project like Communities R Us, however, there are strong arguments for starting small while simultaneously thinking big.

The value of focusing on a relatively small neighbourhood is that:
- a small grant is likely to have much more impact if it is focused on a small area;
- being able to contact people door-to-door makes it easier to link up with all members of the community, particularly new members such as refugees;
- it is easier to reach out to other residents who are not already involved in local activities and create a critical mass of support;
- people are more likely to see immediate benefits to their neighbourhood and to identify more closely with the improvements;

- building relationships is, by definition, a very personal matter. While it is important to do this at every level, if you want to change perceptions and strengthen day-to-day links between people, it is better to start at street level.

But there are drawbacks:
- a small neighbourhood might feel claustrophobic, especially if people feel under pressure to get involved. When it comes to being neighbourly, it is important to get a healthy balance;
- a small neighbourhood may not be well placed to attract the sort of support needed from voluntary sector organisations or the council, to make this sort of project a success over the long-term;
- bigger areas provide a potentially greater population mix and larger pool of people from whom to draw the time, skills and expertise needed for local projects.

If starting small, projects may have the potential to create a precedent or model for similar action in other neighbourhoods, so as to influence a wider area.

Ultimately, boundaries may need to be flexible – after all, neighbourhoods tend to leak – but, as one project participant commented, “for this sort of project, geography matters”.

### SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Should we start small with an easily identifiable neighbourhood or go large and benefit from a wider pool of people and organisations?
6.1.2 History and context
The history and context of any area where work is needed to build stronger communities is likely to be difficult, with existing tensions, rivalries and, in some cases, actual conflict. This is precisely why it is important to develop projects that bring people together, build relationships and work to prevent divisions from developing in the first place.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER
Are there organisations already in the area that are likely to get involved and are open to working with others?

New Moss Brook is comprised of just five streets, but it has a clear identity and boundaries. By contrast, the Lower Deane area and the Agbrigg and Belle Vue ward are much larger. They both incorporate a number of neighbourhoods with distinct identities for the people who live there. There are pros and cons for each. In New Moss Brook, you can't help but bump into your neighbours when you step outside your front door, so knocking on every door is a manageable activity and local activity really does mean local. In the two other areas, there is a larger pool of people from which to draw time, knowledge and expertise, but involving them is a bigger challenge. In all cases, good relationships need to be developed to sustain the energy for change over the long term.

Agbrigg and Belle Vue has few community resources or facilities and several segregated ethnic communities. The Communities R Us pilot started in a difficult climate, with the recent closure of a local voluntary organisation and change in ownership of the community centre, loss of resources to an established community association, some antagonism towards the council, and low morale. This does not make it an area to avoid, but if a project like Communities R Us is to be a catalyst for community activity, these complexities need to be taken into account.

It is essential to understand the local context.

- The reality on the ground will be messy. There may already be lots going on – or not much at all. There may be resistance from some groups, conflict between others and complex local power dynamics that make co-operation difficult.

- Equally, local experience can get in the way – a reduction in community resources or a community group with a poor reputation can have a negative impact on people's willingness to get involved.

- The existence of a community group or neighbourhood body that is open and trusted and willing to take on the project can make all the difference between a modest impact and a more long-lasting achievement. It could be a residents' association, a community forum or some other community project or voluntary organisation such as a refugee community organisation. What is critical is a commitment to work across communities and community groups.

- If no such group exists, it is likely to take a long time and some intensive community development work to build a community organisation from scratch. This is something that would be beyond the scope of this kind of project.

- The choice of an accessible focal point or base for project meetings and activities is also significant. Everyone needs to feel comfortable travelling to it and being there.

- Dramatic incidents or gradual changes in a neighbourhood can influence whether people respond positively to this kind of initiative or not. On the other hand, a project that brings people together in this way can help overcome tensions that may have arisen from recent events or changes in the local area.
6.2 Setting up the project

6.2.1 Leadership, ownership and management arrangements
Community ownership is essential if small-scale projects like Communities R Us are to succeed in the short-run and survive as long-term initiatives. How you position a project within the community, however, can be a sensitive issue, especially if there are underlying tensions between different groups. It is therefore helpful to have the involvement of a respected local organisation that is not based in the neighbourhood, as well as possibly a range of other partners.

Partners can play a key role in providing:
- clarity about the underlying aims of the project, helping develop the vision and objectives and ensuring that the work remains focused;
- community development resources and expertise;
- specific knowledge of, and links with, different ethnic groups, including language skills;
- project management support, including help with financial accountability;
- a sounding board and independent recourse if the project hits problems;
- connections between a small neighbourhood initiative and wider strategies;
- additional support during the project and after it has ended – including some continuity in order to ensure the work is sustainable;
- recognition for valuable local work, helping identify and disseminate the learning, and ensuring the project has a high profile.

However:
- partner organisations need to be able to work with residents in a sensitive way, ensuring that they are supporting from behind rather than leading from the front. Getting the right balance is not always easy;
- clarity about the aims underlying the project’s vision must be shared by all involved. This means taking the time to discuss the project properly at the outset. It may help to produce a short leaflet so that everyone knows what they are signing up to and what is expected.

New Moss Brook, Communities R Us and the Mancunian Agreement were mutually reinforcing because they all emphasized the need for residents to welcome newcomers. So key stakeholders – the residents’ association, Refugee Action and the council – were in agreement and very clear about the outcomes they wanted from the project, and the residents were encouraged and supported to take the lead.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

How can we ensure that the local community feels a sense of ‘ownership’ and what scope is there for partnership working?

6.2.2 Making local links
Communities R Us illustrates very clearly that a small, one-off initiative cannot, on its own, transform relationships between diverse communities in a particular neighbourhood. It might provide a catalyst for changes to begin, and it might have a major impact on some individuals, but to be of real long-term value, it needs to be part of a much longer process of community building.
• The project needs to be positioned carefully alongside other initiatives, whether run by the community, the voluntary sector or the council.

• It is important to understand how other local initiatives can help, or get in the way.

• This will involve brokering respective roles at the start of the process, ensuring that all key stakeholders are on board.

• It is important to avoid duplicating other initiatives, overloading people with surveys, and putting too much burden on a few active individuals.

• The potential for sustaining initiatives such as Communities R Us is greater when the project is reinforced by other local initiatives.

• Connecting with other programmes and resources can add value to a small-scale project. The police, health services, local schools, further education colleges, a local university, faith-based organisations, all have an interest in or duty to foster community cohesion. They might welcome ways of connecting more deeply with local communities.

In all three areas, there is the potential for other initiatives to continue the process started by Communities R Us. In New Moss Brook, close links with the neighbourhood office has led to further funding and support. In Agbrigg and Belle Vue, the neighbourhood management pilot has opened up the community centre as a local and accessible resource and is establishing a governance structure involving residents to build on the Communities R Us experience. In Lower Deane, the New Bolton Somali Community Association is continuing the spirit of Communities R Us by opening up its activities to other communities and organising joint sports activities.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Do we know what else is happening in the area, and how can we work together for mutual and community benefit?

6.3 Development process

6.3.1 Outreach and planning

An effective project needs to have a clear vision, an idea of how that might be achieved and clarity about who needs to be involved and in what way. It is also important that careful planning does not stifle the flexibility necessary for a genuinely bottom-up approach that enables local communities to define their problems, aspirations and ambitions. To get the balance right, residents and agencies developing the project need to think ahead about different aspects, including:

• getting to know your community by finding out who lives in your neighbourhood and who else has a stake in making it a good place to live;

• identifying local needs and issues and using methods that involve residents in the process by door knocking, resident interviews, focus groups and use of existing survey material;

• listening to and understanding local priorities and seeking to address problems that matter most to people;

• identifying who else can contribute – those local agencies and community groups who have time, resources and an interest in the issues;

• allowing enough time to plan, develop and deliver the project;

• agreeing an overall timeframe in which to try to deliver results and think about how good relations built during the project can be maintained once the project ends;

• thinking about how you will create and maintain momentum throughout the project so that people stay on board and stay involved.
6.3.2 A framework for evaluation

It is important to think about evaluation at the beginning of the project, rather than treat it as an afterthought. It is difficult to measure impacts unless there is clarity about expected outcomes and how they will be measured, and unless some sort of baseline has been established at the outset. Although it can be difficult to get data for small neighbourhoods, information based on ‘super output areas’ is increasingly available and relevant. Local authorities that have chosen to use national indicators 1-4 to measure performance should also be able to provide reliable data about residents’ attitudes and perceptions. The difficulty may be in applying it to very small neighbourhoods and relating any changes in the data to specific interventions.

Community involvement in assessing progress is another powerful reason to ensure that evaluation is an integral part of the project. It provides an opportunity for residents to define their objectives, describe what they want out of the project and how they would measure success. This ensures the project is not simply a ‘top-down’ initiative and that it can open up important issues that non-residents might have overlooked. It also encourages a culture of reflection and self-evaluation within the project, and can increase the likelihood of success precisely because people are scrutinising their own practice as things progress. To work well, this sort of participative and formative evaluation requires a degree of trust and openness, but it can also generate those values if it is done as part of a community development strategy to engage and empower local people.

The national indicators were introduced by the Government in April 2008 to monitor the performance of local authorities and local authority partnerships. Indicators 1-4 are:

1. Proportion of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area;
2. Proportion of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood;
3. Civic participation in the local area;
4. Proportion of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality.

Although no baseline data was established at the outset of Communities R Us, all three pilots developed a joint planning framework to inform the evaluation based on the following four questions:

- What is the project trying to address? E.g. contact and communication between residents;
- What can you do to make change happen? E.g. build personal relationships, encourage residents to come together on a regular basis;
- How will you know you are getting there – what will tell you? E.g. people taking responsibility for addressing issues;
- What do you want to achieve? E.g. more neighbourliness, greater integration between residents, a stronger more unified voice for the community.

See Appendix A for the full evaluation framework.
6.3.3 Developing activities
The way projects are carried out and the type of activities you select are what will potentially carry the project forward. It is therefore important to:

- make sure activities address local priorities;
- find ways to ensure cross-community involvement by using venues where people feel safe, being culturally sensitive in terms of language and food, and by ensuring that the way events and activities are run is genuinely inclusive;
- make sure the activities are designed to encourage the involvement of all communities so that residents can work together;
- be realistic about what can be achieved in the short-term – to begin with small scale events may be more manageable; people will be more likely to get involved if they can see how the activities might make a difference;
- create the right atmosphere for future involvement and development.

The feedback event in Bolton attracted over 100 people from many different local communities. It drew on the issues and concerns highlighted in the interviews which were relevant to all sections of the community. By using mime, the drama performance connected with everyone. The workshops were carried out in several community languages to overcome language barriers. Fun and social activities were important too, including henna painting, a prize draw and lots of food from different cultures. Everyone was encouraged to focus on opportunities and to make suggestions about further activities.

6.3.4 Community development
In areas where people are struggling on low incomes, living in poor housing, and where there is a level of discomfort and misunderstanding between different communities, people may well need a lot of encouragement and support if they are to get involved. As a resident in one of the pilots noted:

“You have to start with the humanness of everyone and work from there. It takes time.”

Skilled community development work may be needed in order to:

- reach out to people, build relationships with individuals and support their involvement;
- ensure all groups are included and new people are involved;
- build relationships, despite an often transient population and communities with a high turnover of residents;
- encourage and support local leadership;
- encourage joint working at local level – this may mean developing skills and capacity for collaboration with others and brokering links between organisations and individuals;
- make best use of existing community resources, such as local councillors who may be keen to help, or piggy back on other activities, and embed the project within longer term developments.
6.4 Sustainability

6.4.1 Joining things up
The question of sustainability needs to be thought about at the beginning of a project, not the end. Positioning the project so that it complements similar work already going on in the area, and looking for additional sources of support and funding, is important from the outset. This clearly happened in Manchester where Communities R Us and the council’s Mancunian Agreement initiative had similar objectives and worked in a way that was mutually reinforcing. The council hoped to use the experience in New Moss Brook to inform work across the ward. So it had a vested interest in the project and helped cover some of the costs associated with Communities R Us activities, partly in cash and also in kind.

6.4.2 Leverage
Even if relatively small amounts of money are made available to local communities, they can provide leverage to attract additional resources from the council and others in the public, voluntary and private sectors. Once local people decide to act together, they are likely to be in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes and outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Improving communication</strong>&lt;br&gt;between and across residents, community groups and support agencies</td>
<td>Safer, livable communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Creating structure – networks and partnership</strong>&lt;br&gt;clarity regarding aims, roles and responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Generating knowledge and understanding</strong>&lt;br&gt;about who lives in the area, issues and aspirations; provide regular and prompt feedback to needs, ideas and suggestions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Building confidence</strong>&lt;br&gt;recognise people's vulnerability and provide appropriate support so that they feel they can make a difference</td>
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<td><strong>5. Enabling involvement</strong>&lt;br&gt;in all aspects of the project, from the steering group to the events</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. Facilitating integration/cohesion</strong>&lt;br&gt;between individual residents and community groups</td>
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New Moss Brook benefited from a significant level of community development support, especially for such a small neighbourhood. Not only did Refugee Action provide a community worker throughout the project, but residents also got support from the council’s ward support officer and from the community network.
a strong position to secure funding from initiatives such as Britain in Bloom for environmental improvements, or ESOL money to develop survey and outreach skills. Getting the information and developing the skills to make these applications and manage grant funding needs to be an inherent part of making a local project sustainable.

6.4.3 Added value
The projects need to look to the added value that can be built into small-scale activities. Bolton's certificated food hygiene course is a good example, helping to provide transferable skills and increase job opportunities for the women who did the course. This could have been built into other aspects of Communities R Us, such as the survey work and the gardening projects. Such projects could also attract positive publicity. If the local media can be persuaded to cover 'good news' stories from neighbourhoods that are usually portrayed as 'nothing but trouble', that can not only change perceptions, but also inspire others to follow their example.

6.4.4 Ensuring a lasting impact
Projects like Communities R Us are never an end in themselves. They can bring people together, improve understanding and increase neighbourliness. If they are to help create stronger and more cohesive communities, more will be needed beyond the project itself. As one member of one of the lead agencies said, "We are just dipping our toes in the water".

If the changes are to be sustainable, it is important to:

- make sure that activities have a real impact – such that people cannot fail to notice and are likely to take pride in;
- keep relationships and communication alive as the project develops;
- plan for follow up work long before the project comes to an end;
- embed the project in wider developments, seeking allies and practical support from other stakeholders;
- identify other resources and support for ongoing community activities.
Sharing reflections at the Bolton pilot’s consultation day.

Young Lower Deane residents and Bolton Wanderers trainers enjoy a NSBCA run football training.

Children prepare for a fancy dress competition at the New Moss Brook festival, in North Manchester, where newcomers are made to feel welcome.
Communities R Us represents a manageable approach to the complex task of building strong, cohesive communities in neighbourhoods experiencing high turnover and increasing diversity of local residents. It starts with a positive ethos that people have more in common than things that divide them. It aims to create understanding and build relationships between residents who live side by side in the same neighbourhood. In the process, it helps people to see just how much they can do together to make change happen.

The three pilot projects contributed valuable learning in different ways and in different contexts. They have demonstrated the potential for relatively small projects like this to:

- **reinforce the aspirations of residents** who want to improve their neighbourhoods, increase neighbourliness, and enable them to act together to make a difference;
- **open up a dialogue** across a range of cultural and ethnic groups about issues people have in common and help air sensitive issues relating to diversity;
- **enable connections** to be made that lead to partnership working between residents, community groups, voluntary and public agencies;
- **give people the confidence** that they can make a difference, thereby generating a sense of community pride;
- **encourage a greater sense of responsibility** for the neighbourhood and for each other;
- **help challenge some stereotypes** and break down barriers at an individual level, enabling new friendships to develop;
- **give all residents an opportunity** to better understand the diverse communities in their neighbourhood, to make new connections with their neighbours and to play more of a leading role in the improvement process;
- **build people’s interest** in developing their own skills and create a demand for more community-based training opportunities;
- **act as a catalyst** for community organisations to work beyond their own community and to develop projects open to everyone in the area;
- **focus the attention** of a range of key agencies on the need for, and the challenges of, building relationships across diverse communities in an area;
- **encourage partnership** working between agencies through a focused initiative that they can all buy into.

This type of initiative isn’t easy. Recognising and confronting sensitive issues requires vision, planning and careful reflection. The way a project like this is carried out will determine its success and its sustainability. As one of the members of one of the pilots noted, “Our vision was clear, but exactly how to deliver it was not quite so obvious”. In the end, a lot of it is down to the people who get involved.

Overall this approach:

- **offers an opportunity to increase knowledge and understanding** between residents who live side by side in the same neighbourhood;
• **presents a focus for building relationships** and breaking down barriers between individuals and different cultural and ethnic groups;

• **gives residents a positive role in the process**, helping them to make connections and also enabling them to better understand their neighbourhood;

• **stimulates dialogue** and enables sensitive issues to be aired and discussed – potentially tackling difficult matters in a proactive way;

• **creates opportunities for joint working** between residents, community groups and local agencies.
The Communities R Us pilot projects show that in terms of breaking down barriers, building relationships and increasing trust between people, ‘small really is beautiful’. In addition, it demonstrates that a great deal can be achieved by supporting community action at this level. It is important to value this work since it provides the foundation for a strong, cohesive community.

The projects have given us a glimpse of how the experience of working together can result in powerful changes in people’s attitudes and behaviour towards each other. Residents have talked about recognising the human face of others, and by working on common problems, people who once saw each other as strangers, now see each other as neighbours, and in some cases as friends. The community organisations that took a lead in the projects are more confident and more ambitious in their aims for the future. If they are supported locally, there is real potential to build on the energy and drive that has been stimulated by Communities R Us.

The message for national policy makers and local delivery agencies is clear. Investment in small-scale community initiatives, that build links between people and deliver modest improvements to the quality of people’s every-day lives, matter enormously. They cost very little, but if delivered well, are worth every penny.

The National Audit Office recognised this in its 2004 evaluation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Community Programmes (NRCP). They even produced a separate report to inspire local groups to follow the lead set by a range of impressive local projects developed through the NRCP small grants programme. The Audit Commission also made a very clear recommendation that this sort of investment in building social capital at neighbourhood level should be maintained.

The challenge now is to get local authorities and other Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) members – the police, local schools, health services – to give this sort of investment priority within their Local Area Agreements. It should be part of their response to the duty to involve as well as being integral to a comprehensive strategy to prevent conflict, tap local resources, and build strong and genuinely cohesive communities.

There are practical lessons from the pilot projects for community and voluntary sector organisations, usually at the forefront of community development, about what works and about the pitfalls to avoid. There are important messages from Communities R Us for policy makers and public sector delivery bodies in a position to support this sort of grass-roots work, and who need to recognise its value.

Hopefully the projects will also inspire other residents groups to say ‘we can do that’, and press hard to get the support they need to strengthen their own communities from within.
### Appendix 1

**The Communities R Us approach: actions to take and actions to avoid ...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions to take</th>
<th>Actions to avoid</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make sure you understand the local context, have talked to people in the local</td>
<td>Don’t make assumptions about an area – do some careful research. Don’t select an</td>
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<tr>
<td>community and are focusing on a neighbourhood that they identify with.</td>
<td>area that people would not think of as a ‘neighbourhood’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discuss the project with other key stakeholders to get their support and the</td>
<td>Don’t assume the project can stand alone, but also don’t allow other stakeholders</td>
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<td>right level of involvement from them.</td>
<td>to control it.</td>
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<td>Gather baseline data for the neighbourhood, ward and city.</td>
<td>Don’t wait until the project is coming to an end to establish baseline information.</td>
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<td>Build a relationship with key community groups to ensure a sense of ‘ownership’</td>
<td>Don’t rush: it takes time to get to know local people and build trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use skilled outreach people and local knowledge to make links with people who</td>
<td>Don’t parachute outsiders in to do surveys or other outreach work – use local</td>
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<td>are not already involved in community groups.</td>
<td>intelligence, local networks and make this part of the project.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be clear about your overall objectives but flexible enough to enable the</td>
<td>Don’t allow others to high-jack the agenda, but also don’t impose your own agenda.</td>
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<td>community to shape the project as it develops – remember, the process is the</td>
<td>Getting the right balance of top-down and bottom-up guidance and management is</td>
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<tr>
<td>project.</td>
<td>crucial.</td>
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<td>Make sure you communicate the project well so that even people not directly</td>
<td>Don’t forget to publicise what is happening so that new people have the chance</td>
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<td>involved are aware of it and have the opportunity to join in.</td>
<td>to get involved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make links with other relevant projects in the neighbourhood and the wider</td>
<td>Don’t forget to position the project so it contributes to wider initiatives for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>area – build on existing networks.</td>
<td>change – don’t try to go it alone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use the project to lever in funding and other support – think about what will</td>
<td>Don’t think about the project in isolation as a one-off, time limited intervention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>be needed to make the project sustainable long before it ends.</td>
<td>Don’t leave planning your exit until the last minute.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify and support community leaders including people who can provide</td>
<td>Don’t simply rely on existing groups or work with the existing leadership – think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership from diverse communities.</td>
<td>about the untapped potential within the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage people to think about actions that are realistic, feasible and</td>
<td>Don’t take on a huge or complex project – make sure actions deliver results that</td>
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<tr>
<td>capable of making a difference.</td>
<td>people can see and feel proud of.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make sure people have fun. Be creative, find out what others have to offer and</td>
<td>Don’t stick to your comfort zone – don’t forget to use cultural diversity to</td>
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<td>use the diversity of your community as a valuable resource.</td>
<td>challenge and enrich the project.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 2: Communities R Us evaluation framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the project trying to address?</th>
<th>What can you do to make change happen/how can YOU make a difference?</th>
<th>How will you know you are getting there – what will tell you?</th>
<th>What do you want to achieve? What results do you want to/did you achieve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Contact and communication between residents | • Build personal relationships  
• Encourage residents to come together on a regular basis  
• Shift perceptions by modelling good practice – eg local people working together  
• Use participatory approaches at events to ensure that people mix across groupings. | • People coming together to represent the local community and taking responsibility for addressing issues  
• Groups willing to share resources. | • More neighbourliness  
Greater integration between residents  
A stronger more unified voice for the community. |
| Communication between residents and service providers | • Identify opportunities to raise awareness amongst residents of services available and amongst service providers of the need to ‘reach out’. | • Better information and accessible key services  
• Increased take up from newer residents. | • More dialogue and stronger partnerships between residents and support groups. |
| Personal and community confidence | • Hold community events where residents get to know others  
“*You have to start with the humanness of everyone and work from there. It takes time.*”  
• Provide a route to get people together around issues they share – eg drugs  
“The fact that we did it ourselves meant there was strong sense of community ownership.”  
• Build on these relationships to try to motivate people to become involved  
• Get local schools and colleges linked into wider community to help increase involvement. | • Residents talking to each other, being friendly, helpful and showing respect to each other  
• Community taking more responsibility and dealing with local issues  
• Increased attendance at meetings and community events  
• Happy people/happy children. | • Greater thought and respect for neighbours  
“Residents now feel they have more influence and a voice that will be heard – local councillors and the mayor have noticed what is being done and have more respect for the area. Residents themselves are more aware of their own skills” .  
• Hope! Opportunities.  
Involvement. Self-worth.  
Safer communities- need a local strategy, devised by local people. |
| Greater integration between host and newer communities | • Go out into the community  
• Meet people on a 1:1 basis  
• Provide events for community engagement  
• Raise awareness of different cultures and practices to reduce misunderstandings. | • More positive media coverage of the area  
• People willing to help one another  
• Children bringing people together – play groups/schemes. | • Positive attitudes, more accepting, more open-minded  
A more cohesive community. |
| Improved quality of community life e.g. decent housing conditions for all, improved local environment | • Information re rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants  
• Compulsory licensing for private landlords  
• Ask people the best way forward  
• Improve bin collection/recycling  
• Involve community leaders – groups, mosques, churches, schools  
• Awareness raising – leaflets, visits etc. | • Council enforcement of licensing scheme and code of practice  
• Increase in recycling  
• Reduction in the number of extra collections and special clean-ups needed. | • A local Tenants Association working alongside housing services  
• People empowered to challenge each other and have a collective sense of ownership. |
Appendix 3: other resources

A lot done, a lot to do: Our vision for an integrated Britain; Commission for Racial Equality (2007) *Free download www.equalityhumanrights.com


Building a picture of community cohesion – A guide for Local Authorities and their partners; Home Office, LGA, CRE, ODPM and NRU *Free download www.communities.gov.uk


Changing neighbourhoods: Lessons from the JRF Neighbourhood Programme; Taylor, M., Wilson, M., Purdue, D. and Wilde, P.; Joseph Rowntree Foundation/Policy Press, York/Bristol (2007) *Free download www.jrf.org.uk. Also available to download are separate summaries linked to this report looking at lessons relating to: community engagement and community leadership, diversity, being taken seriously by power-holders and funding.


Community cohesion: a new framework for race and diversity; Cantle, T.; Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke (2005)


Connecting Communities in Neighbourhoods – the ‘what works’ guide for organisations working with refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers in neighbourhood renewal areas; Communities and Local Government (2007) *Free download www.neighbourhood.gov.uk

Contested Communities: Experiences, Struggles, Policies; Hoggett, P. (ed); Policy Press, Bristol (1997)

Delivering housing services to support community cohesion: A Scoping Paper for the Chartered Institute of Housing; Robinson, D.; Sheffield Hallam University Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research *Free download www.cih.org


Great people, great places: Promoting positive community cohesion through the work of Groundwork Trusts; Groundwork; Groundwork Birmingham and Solihull, Birmingham (2006) *Free download www.groundwork-birmingham.org.uk


How to ... unite new and existing communities; New Start magazine, 20.4.07

How to Set up a Refugee Community Organisation; FCDL and MRSN (2008)


Injustices of engagement: issues in housing needs assessments with minority ethnic communities; Temple, B. and Steele, A.; Housing Studies vol 19, no. 4, pp. 541-556; Routledge (2004)


People & participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making; INVOLVE (2005) *Free download www.involve.org.uk


Still Surviving and Now Settling; Refugees, Asylum Seekers and a Renewed Role for Housing Associations; Zetter, R. and Pearl, M.; Research report for Housing Corporation; (2005) *Free download www.housingcorp.gov.uk


What works in community involvement in area-based initiatives? A systematic review of the literature; Burton, P. et al, University of Bristol and University of Glasgow; Home Office online report 53/04 *Free download www.homeoffice.gov.uk
Communities R Us: new and established communities working together

This report shares the learning from hact’s Communities R Us project. It is designed for people living in and supporting communities where there have been recent and rapid changes in population as a result of migration. It is essential reading for tenants’ and residents’ groups, local community groups, refugee & migrant organisations, neighbourhood support officers and individuals and agencies working to improve community cohesion. Drawing on learning from hact’s three Communities R Us pilot projects, this report demonstrates how long-term residents and more recently arrived refugees and other migrants can meet as individuals and build relationships through tackling shared concerns about their neighbourhood.