Draft framework for measuring Community Spirit

Introduction

In December 2018, Royal Society for Public Health in partnership with Locality were commissioned by the Health Foundation to develop and test a framework and indicators to understand and measure community spirit.

This document is the testing prototype of our framework and it draws on existing literature, experts and the views of the public to better understand the factors which make up strong and healthy communities, in particular the facets which make up community spirit.

The framework is intended for any individual, group or organisation with an interest in improving health and/or wellbeing of communities. Whether they are community organisations, commissioners, or community leaders they are all encouraged to use this framework to support their communities.

This framework seeks to provide communities with a practical tool to collectively reflect on the barriers to, and factors which, underpin strong and healthy communities, with a particular focus on community spirit.

This framework provides:

1. A proposed definition of community spirit informed by a literature review and tested with community organisations.

2. A conceptual framework for community spirit outlining its component parts and ways in which they can be measured.

3. A suggested step-by-step guide for organisations wanting to measure community spirit within their neighbourhoods.

This framework will be further validated with a group of six communities who will be testing the framework within their places between March and May 2020.

Context – Why is community spirit important for health?

Health inequalities are unfair and avoidable differences between people within society. They are the result of imbalances of power, wealth and resources and underpinned by the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age (Michael Marmot, 2010).

Neighbourhood deprivation increases the risk of poor physical and mental health. The 2010 Marmot Review on health inequalities in England demonstrated the extent to which social and economic deprivation impacts on health. The study highlights that people living in the most deprived neighbourhoods die earlier and spend more of their lives with disability than people living in the richest (Michael Marmot, 2010).

Furthermore, a recent UK wide study from What Works Wellbeing studied the links between wellbeing of residents in a local area and community conditions. People's level of wellbeing, and changes in their wellbeing over time was associated with aspects of deprivation at the neighbourhood level, as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Those living in more deprived neighbourhoods had lower levels of social cohesion in their area and weaker sense of attachment to their neighbourhoods (Sarah Curtis, 2019).

Strengthening community spirit is particularly important for the health and wellbeing of economically deprived communities. The 2010 Marmot Review shows that just under one fifth (19%) of people living in the most deprived areas of England have a severe lack of social support, compared to 12% in the least deprived areas (Michael Marmot, 2010). Lack of social networks, support and chronic loneliness produces long-term damage to physical health, has an impact on individual resilience, and can lead to engagement in unhealthy behaviours (Mental Health Foundation 2010).

Community spirit helps develop communities by building stronger relationships, promoting sense of belonging and strengthening cohesion and commitment to collective action. As such, the positive effects of community spirit can be at individual and collective level, empowering individuals and bringing communities together to improve their circumstances.

What is community spirit?

The feelings of connection and belonging to a community and our ability to come together to improve wellbeing for everybody.

'community spirit' evokes images of people coming together to support each other or getting together to take action for or against something they think might impact their community. In this framework we define Community Spirit as:

However, community spirit means different things in different places and can be influenced by social dynamics and the different assets available to communities. As such, this definition and framework intends to facilitate the process of defining it in different communities under different contexts; it is not set in stone.

The characteristics of community spirit

What makes up community spirit? Our research and engagement with communities identified the following four characteristics:

Figure 1: Community spirit characteristics
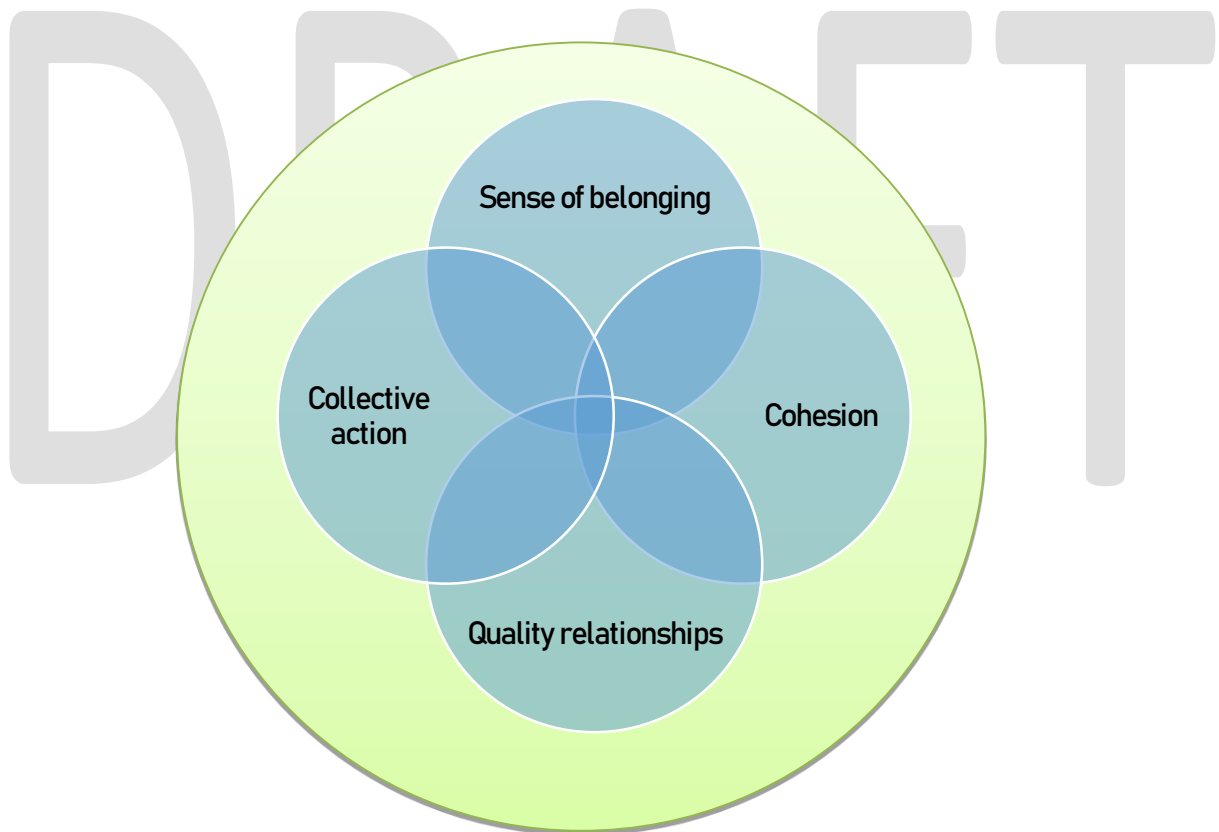
- ❖ **Sense of belonging:** people expect to feel and believe they fit and have a place within a group or community and, as such, they are willing to support its improvement of development (Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory , 1986).

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❖ **Cohesion**: describes the ability of all communities to function and grow in harmony together rather than in conflict. It implies that individuals have the right to equality (of treatment, access to services etc) and involves respect and appreciation of the diverse nature of communities (Home Office, 2005).

❖ **Quality of relationships**: refers to the feelings of connection, reciprocity and mutual support between members of the community.

❖ **Collective action**: refers to people coming together to tackle an issue, support other people or improve their community's conditions. It involves people giving their time and/or other assets for the common good, for example through volunteering to community owned service, peer support schemes and leading initiatives (New Economics Foundation and the Office for Civil Society, 2016).

These are the foundation characteristics that our research has highlighted. However, there may be other characteristics to add depending on the context of your community. For example, in your community there may be strong collective action around one key local issue, , but not so much on others, which are equally important but only affect a small group.

Assessing Community Spirit

Defining and assessing Community Spirit is a step towards building stronger relationships, promoting sense of belonging and strengthening cohesion and commitment to collective action. However, community spirit is a nebulous concept that can be difficult to assess or measure.

It should be assessed with the community and using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods which allow for the voices and ideas of as many members of the community to be heard. For example:

Dimensions of community spirit	Indicators	Methodology
Sense of belonging	Feelings of belonging to immediate neighbourhood	**Quantitatively** Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level): • 'in your immediate neighbourhood, how strongly do you feel you belong'

		Qualitatively Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with member of the community. For example: How would you describe your sense role within your community?
Cohesion	Feelings of trust in people in the neighbourhood Perceptions of diversity in the neighbourhood The level of mixing of people with different backgrounds Observed group diversity.	**Quantitatively** Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level): • 'Trust in people living in the neighbourhood' • 'This local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together' • 'Friends similarities to respondent in terms of ethnicity, religion, education and age groups' **Qualitatively** Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with member of the community. Key questions may include: • How would you describe the relationships of trust and respect between the members of your community? • What are your thoughts in terms of the diversity there is in your community? • Who should be part of this group and why?
Quality of relationships,	Feelings of loneliness and isolation in adults, children and young people with and without disabilities. Face to face contact with family or friends once a week or more.	**Quantitatively** Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level): • How often do you feel lonely? • 'How often do you chat to any of your neighbours, more than just to say hello?' • 'How often do you meet up in person with family or friends once a week or more.

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	Perceptions regarding social support.	• 'Extent to which people agree there are people they can really count on to listen, help or socialise' **Qualitatively** Semi-structured interviews or focus groups with member of the community. Key questions may include: • How would you describe the relationships of support within your community? • How does the community look after the elderly, sick and disabled people?

Collective or social action	Extent to which people are involved in civic engagement (participation in democratic processes, consultations and activism).
	
	People's involvement in social action to, for example,:
	
	- improve or create a new service/amenity
	
	- stop the closure of a service/amenity, or
	
	- organise a community event.
	
	Extent to which people take part in formal volunteering
		Quantitatively
		
		Questionnaire using validated questions from the Community Life Survey (annual, LSOA-level):
		
		• 'People in this neighbourhood pull together to improve the area'
		
		• In which of the following have you been involved in the 12 months:
		
		  - Setting up a new service/amenity
		
		  - Stopping the closure of a service/amenity
		
		  - Stopping something happening in the local area
		
		  - Running a local service on a voluntary basis
		
		  - Helping to organise a street party or community event.
		
		• 'When people in this area get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that the area is run'
		
		Qualitatively
		
		Mapping local community assets, including local groups, community spaces, events and campaigns. Identifying strengths, opportunities and places of value to the community.

To facilitate the process of measuring community spirit in a place-based community, this framework suggests a step by step guide with templates and links to other relevant tools.

The idea is that the information and data generated can be used by communities, to inform the development of community action plans that will help improve community wellbeing.

The step by step guide is currently being developed and will be validated at a workshop with 6 communities in Spring 2020. The first edition of the guide will be launched in late Summer.

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