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Introduction and background

Resilience is a concept that is very current. Recent high profile events such as extreme weather or the threatened loss of major employers raises questions about the vulnerability of people and communities and how well positioned we are to respond to difficulties. Responding well to life's challenges is vital to wellbeing.

New and multiple challenges continue to emerge. Austerity and welfare reform threaten the coping resources of individuals and families. Climate change, fuel crises and changing populations raise questions about how well our established ways of life will cope with fundamental change. In times of change, known and unknown, understanding sources of resilience becomes key to supporting both individuals and communities and freeing their assets.

To explore these issues, on February 6th 2014, more than 80 delegates – from the NHS, community practitioners, voluntary sector and local authorities (Appendix 1) came together at The Lighthouse in Glasgow to attend an event entitled '*Resilience – supporting transformation in people and communities*'. The event was hosted by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), Community Development Association Scotland (CDAS), Community Learning and Development (CLD) Standards Council for Scotland and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH).

Event overview

The event brought together a wide range of people and organisations that are interested in learning more about the resilience concept and resilience perspectives. The event was focused on providing a forum to:

- explore use of the resilience concept in practice
- share examples of resilience in action
- share an understanding of what makes resilience possible.

The event was opened and chaired by Andy Milne, Board Member of the Community Development Alliance Scotland. Andy introduced the concept of resilience and asked delegates to think about and record what resilience meant to them at the start of the event. This question would then be revisited at the end of the event (see pages 6-7 for how participants responded). The event programme is presented in Appendix 2.

Throughout the course of the event, graphic artist Graham Ogilvie captured the discussion, the range of perspectives and recorded the event through a series of drawings. During the coffee break and over lunch delegates were asked to indicate which drawings resonated most with them.

The first part of the morning was made up of three presentations given by Pete Seaman of GCPH, Fiona Garven of SCDC and Rory MacLeod of the CLD Standards Council for Scotland. In the second half of the morning, delegates

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engaged in discussion around their tables about ‘what makes a community resilient?’ and ‘how do we build resilient communities’. Following feedback from tables, the discussion focused on what needs to happen and the actions required to embed resilience thinking in a number of areas. Delegates were then given the opportunity to indicate their top priorities for action using the flipcharts generated during the plenary discussions, before the event concluded with lunch.

A blog written by Fiona Garven about the evidence for resilience for public health from a community development perspective can be accessed from the GCPH website^a.

Presentation slides from the event may also be viewed online^b.

^a Fiona Garven’s blog is available at: www.gcph.co.uk/latest/blogs/481_resilience_for_public_health_supporting_transformation_in_people_and_communities

^b Presentation slides from the resilience event are available here: www.gcph.co.uk/events/145

Introducing the resilience perspective

1. Pete Seaman, Glasgow Centre for Population Health

Pete's presentation was entitled 'Resilience for public health: supporting transformation in people and communities'. It addressed definitions of resilience and why the concept was of renewed interest in the current context of multiple and unpredictable changes and challenges. Pete stressed that in terms of the concerns of public health, resilience should focus on allowing and supporting adaptation and transformation in the face of unpredictable and unknowable change. Resilience is therefore not simply about maintaining pre-crisis functioning in the face of change or challenge because the context in which this functioning was successful has changed irreversibly.

Definitions of resilience

- An ability to withstand stress and challenge
- *Preparedness, planning and mitigation*
- For public health needs to take account of social disease conditions: e.g. poverty, inequality, worklessness, isolation, decreased mental health



As part of Pete's presentation, a short animation to support the understanding of the concept of resilience was shown^c. The animation highlights how various forms of individual and social capital are required for transformative resilience at the individual level and describes what's important to help individuals thrive in challenging circumstances.

A scene from the resilience animation.



Pete concluded by showing how actions at the level of the economy, governance and infrastructure might look if keeping open the sources of adaptive and transformational resilience were the guiding principles of policy.

^c View the five minute animation on the GCPH website here:
www.gcph.co.uk/work_themes/theme_4_assets_and_resilience/resilience_and_public_health

2. Fiona Garven, Scottish Community Development Centre

Fiona responded to and reflected on the new research published by the GCPH from a community development perspective. Fiona's presentation considered the concept of resilience as an important way to understand what is needed to help build our most vulnerable communities. She highlighted the important links between individual and community resilience and the roles of community development, community empowerment and participatory democracy in supporting the building and maintenance of resilient communities. Fiona also spoke about the critical move away from thinking mainly about resilience in individual terms, recognising instead that individual and community resilience are co-dependent.

Fiona then asked 'how do we start to build more resilient communities?' Many people are ready and willing to act together to provide better chances for local people, improve the local environment and create new opportunities for learning and participation. However, Fiona argued, we must engage the motivation and capacities that already exist in communities, and properly design and resource neighbourhood work to build stronger local networks which can exert influence about community priorities and issues. There is also a need to reduce the barriers we put in place to prevent communities from doing good things, and divert resources away from costly bureaucratic systems to community organisations, acknowledging and trusting that they are often best placed to apply those resources to addressing local needs.

sedc
scottish
community
development
centre

The research...

- Helps us to consider resilience in its broadest terms
- Challenges resilience as an individual trait
- Asserts that individual resilience and community resilience are inter dependent

In closing, Fiona emphasised that we have the research evidence, now we need the will to make it happen.

3. Rory MacLeod, CLD Standards Council for Scotland

Rory also responded to and reflected on the new research published by the GCPH from a community learning and development perspective. Rory opened his presentation with the quote:

“There’s no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Rory spoke of the importance of working with communities to discover their priorities, rather than those of local services and organisations. He also discussed the significance and value of building relationships and networks – this is often done informally “*over a cup of tea*”. Rory highlighted the importance of capacity building within local communities and emphasised the role of local people being involved in the building of the organisation: developing new opportunities, joint problem-solving, and focusing on what can be built, rather than what’s missing.



Rory spoke about the six characteristics of a learning organisation which are also important for learning at the community level, namely a motivated workforce, enhanced learning, a supportive culture, an empowered management, a shared vision and enabling structures. He also talked of the skills and talents those working within communities require, whether professional staff or local residents. Lastly, Rory highlighted the importance of letting go of the past and moving on with the future, listening to local suggestions without judging, and learning and helping as much as is possible within communities.

What does ‘resilience’ mean?

At the beginning of the event, delegates were asked to consider and record an answer to the question ‘What does resilience mean to you?’. Responses were largely characterised by the notion of bouncing-back and returning to the status quo.

“Strength and an ability to cope and flourish.”

“Bounce-back-ability. Withstanding knockbacks.”

“Resilience is having the strength of character to cope with challenging situations.”

“People having tools, knowledge and skills to cope with different situations they face throughout life and communities.”

It is clear from the range of responses that, on the whole, resilience was thought of as an internally-possessed characteristic which requires drawing on strength, determination, and an ability to cope. The word ‘confidence’ was used repeatedly.



“Sustain activities to grow confidence and take action.”

“Confidence, knowledge, skills to deal with daily problems and stresses.”

“Adapting to change – flexibility, confidence – solving problems at local level.”

Also noteworthy were references to power, politics and resources in relation to resilience.

“Individuals withstanding what outside orgs do to them.”

“Imparting knowledge so a person / group know what to do in a crisis.”

“Resisting policies and practices foisted on communities.”

In terms of power relationships, in the morning session a dichotomy was evident – while some responses were about resisting and challenging, others were about imparting knowledge and taking top-down approaches.

The same question, ‘what does resilience mean to you?’, was posed again at the end of the event, following the presentations and discussions. Responses this time related more to the theme of power, to changing current practice and striving for equity. The importance of a sense of collectivism as related to resilience was apparent across both the morning and afternoon responses, but was more marked in the responses given following the workshop.

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“The strength of mutually dependant relationships within communities where neighbour to neighbour we begin to think of each other’s needs more than our own.”

“The opportunities and public spaces that enable diversity of people to connect.”

“Collective persistence and determination.”

“Capability of individuals to come together as a community to understand, face and learn from challenges, using all the resources available to them.”

The language used in responses gathered at the end of the workshop showed greater concern about adapting, transforming and responding positively to events and change. Further, as opposed to the morning responses, the afternoon answers were peppered with statements of intent and action.

“Converting conviction to conduct – a little less conversation, a little more action, please.”

“Need for a new language that is engaging and relevant for local people. Some faith that getting involved will lead to change.”

“Empowering people through recognising strengths.”

“Bring people and organisations together within communities to work together and not against or alone.”

Table discussions

Following the morning presentations and activities, during two table discussions delegates were encouraged to discuss:

1. *What makes a community resilient?*
2. *How do we build resilient communities?*

The following is a synthesis of the main themes that emerged during the table discussions.

Discussion 1: ‘What makes a community resilient?’

All tables discussed a resilient community as connected and cohesive, with strength coming from a connected community made up of diverse individuals.

“Family/friends networks.”

“Cross-generational connections.”

A role for individuals in achieving this as “community champions” and “facilitators, linkers-in” was recognised by a number of groups. However, resilience was also clearly seen as rooted in unity at a community level; a shared identity is key, through a “strong self definition of [the] community” and a “common purpose”. Many felt that the mutually-supportive nature of a connected and cohesive community gives rise to resilience.

Power and engagement emerged clearly as themes. Resilience stems from an empowered community, which has ownership, control and decision-making powers. This comes from both attitudes of individuals and organisational structures and systems.

“Active and willing to be responsible.”

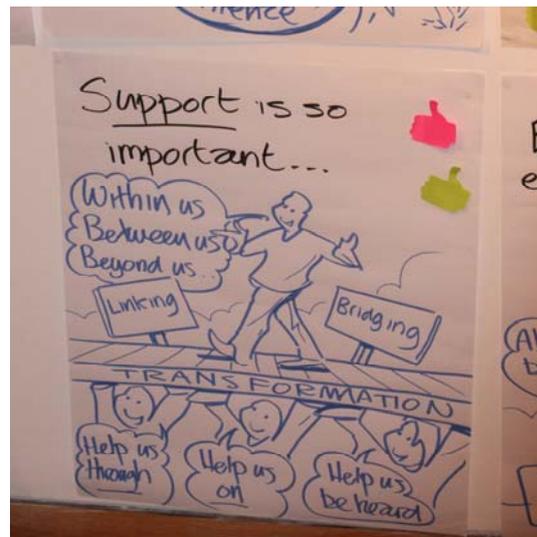
“Sense of responsibility to give something to the community.”

And:

“Effective structures – opportunity to voice and share issues.”

“Effective local democratic structures.”

“Planning on a human scale.”



A trusting relationship between the community and these organisations is necessary for organisations and individuals to be able to shape communities and change together, with people and the community at the heart of the process.

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As well as the importance of these organisational structures and community engagement with them, physical infrastructure was seen as shaping and influencing the resilience of a community. Having key resources such as good public services, traffic management and housing can make a big difference. Many felt that an essential resource was having “*spaces where people can come together*” and that the infrastructure should provide “*points of connection*” for community members.

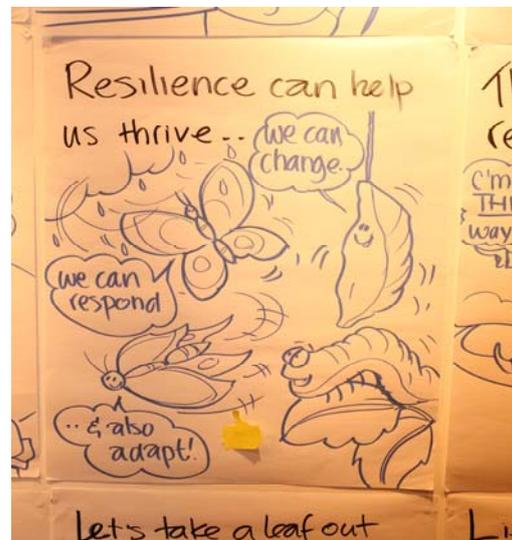
Resilience was seen as having a strong temporal connection. Links between past and present can shape a community and its resilience, as can attitudes towards the future. Particularly, a shared history can unite communities and contribute to a shared identity.

“*Shared history/narrative (what’s it like – what unites you? e.g. communities affected by miners’ strikes.)*”



While a “*relationship with the past*” plays a role, it is also important for communities to be “*moving forward*” and “*forward thinking*” in order to be resilient. Being allowed the time to change is also key as resilience was seen as a slowly “*evolving process*”. Knowledge, skills and understanding were seen to be key to positive community evolution. Those working within the community all have a need for “*shared knowledge and understanding*” of the community in all its complexity.

In all this, the community members are seen as the focus of and the key to a positive future, with collective adaptability and can-do attitudes of the community seen as crucial. “*Absence of fear – existence of confidence*” allows communities to take a positive approach, thinking about “*what people want to do*”, “*looking at solutions not problems*” and focusing on “*unlocking assets and resources*”. The discussion groups also placed strong emphasis on the ability of communities and individuals to change and adapt, often seeing resilient communities as those that are positively changing. “*Creativity*” and “*risk taking*” were suggested as enablers of positive change and “*perseverance*” and “*the capacity for resistance and defending what is valued*” as necessary for communities to implement the changes in the communities in which they live and/or work.



Discussion 2: ‘How do we build resilient communities?’

For the second group discussion, each event participant moved to a different table to try to ensure new conversations and perspectives from the many sectors represented at the event. For most groups the initial conversations focused on the question of what do we mean by ‘community’, and the many communities an individual can belong to, from communities of interest and friendship to geographical and online communities.

“Many types of community, all important in building resilience of individuals.”

“Communities of home, interest, friendship, online, geographical, identity, what you care about.”

The importance of *“recognising what’s already there”* emerged clearly from groups in relation to individual and community assets – people, skills, experience, knowledge – and valuing people’s contributions, connections, interests and collective abilities, as well as working with people.

The discussion also focused on conditions that are required to enable resilience to grow, flourish and develop and some of the potential structural barriers. At the level of the community, the provision of spaces to allow people to meet was highlighted. There was an emphasis on building around existing community facilities and resources, with a range of opportunities that people can get involved in, both formal and informal (*“tea and scones”*), with (physical and financial) resources in place to support involvement and delivery.

“Create opportunities for people to come together and discover.”

“Provide opportunities and resources.”

The identification and role of community leaders and activists was also noted by many as important in driving forward community priorities and activities which are *“locally owned”*.

“Find the community connectors and support them (both organisations and individuals).”

The significance of priorities being led by local people, who *“feel that their views count”* and their *“voice is heard”*, and who are *“part of the solution not the problem”* came through strongly.



From a structural perspective, the need for both a long-term view and investment in communities were noted, moving from project and grant funding towards longer-term sustainability. The sharing of power and resources between communities and organisations and services, demonstrating *“real partnership working and trust”* and *“valuing and understanding diversity”* emerged strongly in

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discussions. The importance of understanding local circumstances and listening to communities, and achieving a *“balance between taking risks and innovation”* were highlighted.

Discussions also raised the importance of questioning how we currently do things – systems, structures and processes – and the need for greater debate as to how we influence changes in culture.

“Lets not get too romantic about community; [we] need to recognise and acknowledge local tensions and power struggles that exclude some.”

Plenary discussion: priorities and next steps

The plenary discussion was wide-ranging and, in an effort to bring about focus, the Chair asked participants to identify solutions that encompassed the action areas of: **research, national policy, practice development, and local planning**. The discussion was recorded on flipcharts and each participant was latterly invited to use three sticky dots to indicate which of the ideas resonated most for them.

In terms of **research**, the most popular idea (indicated by the preference dots) was taking an objective look at professional mindsets and cultures and how these can present obstacles to allowing resilience and diversity to be released in communities.

Suggestions were provided as to how ways of working could become more facilitative. Participatory budgeting was widely discussed in this context, as a means of drawing on community strengths and perceptions, rather than “*building capacity*” – such terminology indicating a perceived absence of capacity and deficit. Linked to this were ideas of communities being “*othered*” in current ways of working.

The **national policy** suggestions revealed a concern that policy did not reflect the challenges, strengths and desires of communities and, again, the idea that professionals are alienated from those they serve. For example, it was felt a review of the current value base of the economy was required. Further, it was felt that it can be difficult to talk about human dimensions of experience such as ‘love’ or ‘happiness’, particularly during the era of austerity.



The **practice development** opportunities reflected the belief that the sources of resilience were already in communities and required the removal of barriers to expression rather than addressing a community deficit. Having belief in communities and allowing them to take risks was a popular option. Risk aversion in accountability processes was identified as a factor which prevented the flourishing of communities’ adaptive capacity and transformative potential.

Having a diversity of opportunities for people to engage with their communities was considered key; as was reconceptualising funding as ‘investment’ (investors in the business world often take a long-term view of investment, rather than focusing on immediately measurable gains). Further, helping practitioners move away from their current mindset to embrace the kinds of perspectives required (treating communities as ‘human’) was suggested.

Local planning suggestions were consistent with the theme of releasing capacity through engaging with communities on human terms as a corrective to the

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potentially alienating gaze of bureaucratic planning. Jointly popular were calls for participatory budgeting and places and spaces for dialogue and conversation. Also, making community assets, such as schools, available to the community was also a popular idea.

Conclusions and reflections from the organisers

In planning the event, the identification of the future action areas (research, national policy, and so on) was led by the concerns of the organising organisations, rather than those emerging from the floor. A key motif in the feedback was of how a resilience perspective requires fundamental change not in communities but in our policy-makers, bureaucracies and accountability processes. We had looked for solutions in the form of activities and policy decisions. The participants felt a much deeper level of consideration and action was required.

Feedback received from event participants raised a number of points for the future exploration of resilience. In moving forward, we have an ambition to work with smaller groups to explore how practitioners can utilise the resilience concept in a manner which takes less of our perspective for granted. Working with smaller groups will allow us to explore in-depth tangible examples of problems, challenges or ways of working that are 'live' in communities or policy areas.

A 'community of practice' could be developed to further pursue this area of interest, allowing ongoing engagement with a wide range of practitioners, researchers and policy-makers that would allow the percolation of ideas across multiple levels.

From the many contributions and discussions at the event, our attention has been drawn to a number of overarching points, which we need to be aware of as we progress this area of interest:

- The human scale and human dimension needs to come to the fore in practice delivery and policy development. It is currently obstructed.
- Communities need to feel in control of, and responsible for their future development, and that their sources of adaptation and transformation are discovered and led locally.
- What we already know was reiterated; that language should not reflect deficits but support a grammar of releasing and mobilising existing resources and potential.
- Our temporal perspective requires change; from quick-fix project funding to long-term investment and recognising that adaptive capacity is grounded in an understanding of the past as much as the future.
- We need accountability without stifling creativity, calculated risk and local innovation.



Event Chair, Andy Milne, gives his seal of approval to one of the cartoons inspired by the discussion.

Appendix A: Event programme



‘Resilience – supporting transformation in people and communities’

Thursday 6th February 2014

9.30am – 1.15pm

The Lighthouse, Mitchell Lane, Glasgow G1 3NU

Programme

9.30 – 10.00	Coffee and registration
10.00 – 10.20	Welcome and introduction from the Chair <i>Andy Milne, Board Member, Community Development Alliance Scotland</i>
10.20 – 11.20	The resilience perspective <i>Pete Seaman, Glasgow Centre for Population Health</i> <i>Fiona Garven, Scottish Community Development Centre</i> <i>Rory MacLeod, CLD Standards Council for Scotland</i>
11.20 – 11.40	Discussion: what makes a community resilient?
11.40 – 11.50	Tea/coffee
11.50 – 12.30	Discussion: how do we build resilient communities?
12.30 – 1.00	Feedback and plenary discussion: what next?
1.00 – 1.15	Prioritising and next steps
1.15	Close and lunch

If you would like to follow or contribute on Twitter, please use the hashtag #rescommunities

Appendix B: Delegate list

DELEGATE LIST		
Resilience – supporting transformation in people and communities 6th February 2014		
First name	Last name	Organisation
Mary	Ballantyne	SAMH
John	Batchelor	Healthy n Happy Community Development Trust
Angie	Bennett	East Ayrshire Council
Laura	Bennison	National Museums Scotland
Jenny	Brotchie	Carnegie UK Trust
Susan	Calcluth	British Red Cross
Katriona	Carmichael	Scottish Government
Anne	Clarke	NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Bill	Clements	CVS Inverclyde
Penny	Cole	North Glasgow Community Food Initiative
Elaine	Connolly	Scottish Refugee Council
Jim	Connie	British Red Cross
David	Cowan	Scottish Government
Helen	Crawford	Queens Cross Housing Association
Pam	Crosthwaite	North Ayrshire Council
David	Cruickshank	Lambhill Stables
Lisa	Curtice	The Alliance
Mick	Doyle	Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Service
Jamie	Ferguson	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Stephen	Frame	Education Scotland
John	Galt	Glasgow City Council
Fiona	Garven	SCDC
Kathleen	Glazik	Scottish Government
Suzanne	Glennie	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Bill	Gray	Community Food and Health (Scotland)
Douglas	Guest	Equality Human Rights
Maddy	Halliday	Life Changes Trust Ltd
Angus	Hardie	Scottish Community Alliance
Marie	Hedges	East Renfrewshire CHCP
Jayne	Hopkins	Asset Based Consulting
Trevor	Hopkins	Asset Based Consulting
Chris	Jamieson	Glasgow City Council
Carole	Jenkins	Dundee City Council
Katie	Kelly	East Ayrshire Council
Mark	Langdon	North United Communities
Colin	Lindsay	University of Strathclyde
Alison	Linyard	International Futures Forum
Neil	Lovelock	Dumbarton Road Corridor Environment Trust
Katrina	MacFarlane	East Renfrewshire CHCP
Fiona	MacLeod	British Red Cross
Rory	MacLeod	CLD Standards Council for Scotland
Rachel	McAdams	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Claire	McKechnie	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Jennifer	McLean	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Gehan	MacLeod	GalGael Trust
Valerie	McNeice	Glasgow Centre for Population Health

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Mark	McRitchie	Community Central Hall
Hazel-Ann	McWhirter	East Renfrewshire CHCP
Andy	Milne	SURF
Charlotte	Mitchell	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Laura	Moran	Glasgow City Council
Shirley	Morgan	North Ayrshire Council
Fiona	Moss	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Rose	Murdoch	Dumfries and Galloway Council
Jean	Murray	Glen Oaks Housing Association
Maggie	Paterson	Inverclyde Council
Morag	Paterson	Fife Council
Nicky	Paton	LinkLiving Ltd
Steven	Paxton	Voluntary Action Fund
Lynn	Pilkington	NUS Scotland
Kevin	Robertson	Fife Council
Colin	Ross	CLD Standards Council for Scotland
Pete	Seaman	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Fraser	Shaw	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Jackie	Shearer	Dennistoun Community Council
David	Sherlock	South Ayrshire Council
Geri	Sinclair	CVS Inverclyde
Heather	Sloan	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Peter	Taylor	Community Development Association Scotland
Joanna	Teuton	NHS Health Scotland
Maria	Throp	University of Stirling
Ralph	Throp	Scottish Government
Susan	Toal	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Janet	Tobin	NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde
Nick	Wilding	Scottish Social Services Council
Emma	Witney	Zero Tolerance
Gregor	Yates	Glasgow Centre for Population Health
Eric	Young	West Dunbartonshire Council