



AN INSIGHT REPORT

PROGRESS AND LEARNING SO FAR

April 2015



Introduction

Animating Assets is a new collaborative programme facilitated by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH). Over an 18-month period, from March 2014 to June 2015, we aim to support the development of asset-based approaches to a range of health and social wellbeing issues in Scotland as identified by local communities. This will be achieved through a process of co-creation, innovation and evaluation. The Animating Assets programme sees assets as including the successes, strengths and skills of the people and organisations that live, work or volunteer in an area, as well as the more tangible physical assets existing in the community which support community activity.

The aim of this research and learning programme is to produce new evidence of the impact made by asset-based interventions on health and wellbeing, and to investigate how existing services and/or systems can change to effect tangible and sustainable improvement and outcomes through alternative approaches.

Crucially, Animating Assets takes a 'whole systems' approach. There is a growing body of evidence to show that asset-based approaches for health improvement work well in community-based projects¹. What we know less about is what difference this way of working makes when tackling health improvement that requires co-ordinated work from a range of partners, across a whole community. As Animating Assets is working with communities and across multiple agencies, it is anticipated that the programme will be able to provide evidence of the difference this makes.

Animating Assets is now taking shape and progressing in a number of areas of Scotland and this Insights Report presents progress and activity so far in the local research sites. The report encompasses our learning so far and the next steps needed, as well as our aspirations for the local sites. This report also presents an opportunity for us to consider and share the learning emerging from Animating Assets about asset-based working in community settings, and how, and if, the characteristics of this way of working can be taken on more fully by services working in communities. The report also considers how this learning can support work in relation to asset-based practice and action at local and national levels.

¹ McLean JS, McNeice V. *Assets in Action. Illustrating asset-based approaches for health improvement*. GCPH 2012.

Our action research approach

'Animating Assets' is a collaborative action research and learning programme.

Action research involves researchers working alongside people so that everyone can try out, develop and learn from different ways of doing things. Taking an action research approach is open ended and does not begin with a fixed question. It begins with an idea that can be developed. The research process itself is the developmental process of following through the idea, seeing how it works, and continually checking whether it is in line with what you wish to happen. McNiff and Whitehead (2006) call this an 'action-reflection cycle'², as shown in Figure 1 below.

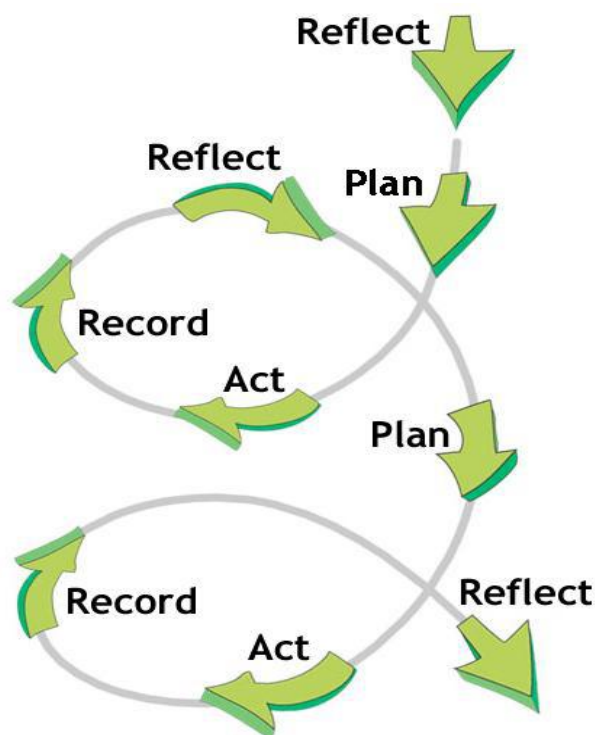


Figure 1. The action reflection cycle

There is a strong similarity between the values and principles that underpin an asset-based approach and action research. For example, action research is appreciative in that it recognises strengths and assets as a starting point for inquiry and builds and embeds resilience and capacity through the process of research itself. For this reason appreciative inquiry has been adapted for use with the 'action research sites'. Appreciative inquiry "*advocates collective inquiry into the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be, followed by collective design of a desired future state*" (Bushe, 2013)³. The approach

² McNiff, J. Whitehead J. *All you need to know about action research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. 2006, p9

³ Bushe, G.R. [The Appreciative Inquiry Model](#). In Kessler, E. (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Management Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 2013.

involves a cycle of four processes: discover, dream, design, and destiny (or deploy) as shown in Figure 2.

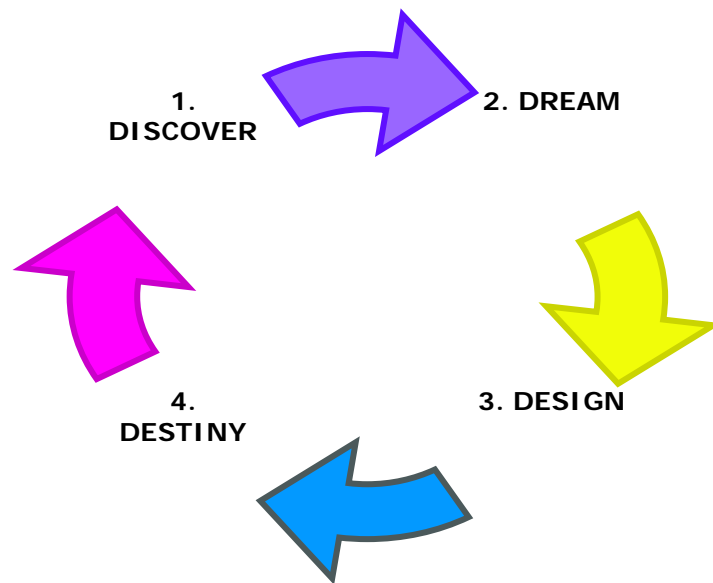


Figure 2. The appreciative inquiry model

Through taking an action research approach, it is hoped that Animating Assets will help local people, community groups and services build skills and connections that recognise and reflect:

- community needs and the problems that local people face,
- the strengths and abilities of the community,
- services and resources available to the local community and highlight any gaps,
- what sort of action is needed and how it can be taken and best supported.

Asset-based approaches and a way of seeing the world

Interest in, and the evidence base for, asset-based approaches continues to grow. We have learnt that many people are now convinced of the importance of taking an asset-based approach and of being able to talk about the value of building the skills, strengths and successes of individuals and communities. Animating Assets is focused on having more of these types of positive conversations about things that statistics often don't tell us and to support local people and organisations to work together and gather evidence of the difference it makes to work in this way.

Asset-based approaches are not a prescriptive set of operations that can be easily 'scaled up' or 'rolled out' but are forms of engagement and relationship building that enable strengths, capacities and abilities to be identified and developed for positive outcomes. They promote capacity, connectedness and social capital and recognise and build on a combination of the human, social and physical capital that exists within local communities.

Asset-based approaches are underpinned by a set of values and principles and a way of thinking about the world. In Animating Assets we actively remember these principles, as shown here in our practical, visual infographic card (Figure 3). This helps us to be mindful of our focus on assets and strengths, allows us to consider and view our conversations through an 'assets lens' and discuss an alternative narrative that values the positive aspects of individuals and communities. Indeed, by recognising the value and contribution that individual people have to offer, these principles can be applied in any setting.



Figure 3. Animating Assets visual infographic

Our aims and evidence gathering approach

In order to synthesise our learning from Animating Assets for each site specifically and across the whole programme, we aim to gather evidence of processes, outcomes and impacts. We are gathering evidence about asset-based working to help us uncover how adopting and embedding the characteristics of asset-based working can be taken on more fully by communities and local services. We are also seeking to identify how existing systems could change to effect sustainable and longer-term improvements in health and wellbeing through working differently.

While the programme has developed over time and been responsive to local circumstances and areas of interest, these aims, outlined below, continue to reflect the overall purpose of the work.

To aid our evidence-gathering processes, our aims are broadly translated into three key dimensions which we wish to explore and understand:

1. Understanding the nature of asset-based approaches – **insights**
2. Adopting and embedding asset-based working – **actions**
3. Making a difference by taking an asset-based approach – **impacts**

Observation/reflection	
Insights	Understanding the nature of asset-based approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local assets.• Local problems and deficits.• Descriptions of asset-based approaches and language used.
Actions	Adopting and embedding asset-based approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Things that support asset-based approaches.• Barriers to/challenges of asset-based approaches.• Role of systems, services and organisations.
Impacts	The effects of Animating Assets and taking an asset-based approach <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New or different action being stimulated by result of Animating Assets.• Differences of working in this way.• Health, social or personal outcomes and impacts.

Individual observations of these dimensions are captured in our observation framework, which are used at Animating Assets meetings and events to record what the members of the action research sites think as they consider their local areas from an assets perspective. The observation framework encourages members to reflect on the challenges and pertinent issues, actions, activities and behaviours that support or challenge/limit asset-based working locally, as well as the difference that working or thinking from an assets perspective makes and the impact of this research and learning programme. A range of creative techniques are also being used to reveal and

gather evidence and learning to feed into the research process. These techniques are designed to build the capabilities of community members at the same time.

Action research sites – progress so far...

Where? The community of Milton in the north west of Glasgow.

Why? Milton (and Lambhill) is a neighbourhood in the north west of Glasgow with a population of 13,481⁴. The area was recognised by the NHS in Glasgow as being an area of limited investment and an area with significant health inequalities. Animating Assets was invited by the NHS to support and facilitate partnership working between local services and the third sector and to build on the local enthusiasm for working differently for better health outcomes recognising the richness and resourcefulness of the community. The communities of Milton and Lambhill are also identified within the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership 'Thriving Places' as communities of intensive enhanced activity⁵.

With whom? Animating Assets is working with the NW Health Improvement Team for NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Love Milton, North Glasgow Community Food Initiative, LifeLink, Just Like Us Milton, Milton Parish Church, Milton Talks, North Glasgow Healthy Living Centre, Glasgow Club Milton, Nu Communities (The Huts).

What's happening? Animating Assets facilitated two local events in April and May 2014. These attracted a good cross-section of people connected to organisations in Milton or those that work in the area. The events focused on the opportunities to build on what is happening already and encouraging a forward focus on collaborating to make sure more positive things happen. Following the second event, 'Connecting Milton' was established as a cross organisation group aiming to work together to better link to each other and to other services and to highlight to organisations and local residents the groups, activities and resources available in Milton. Since then, Connecting Milton meetings have taken place on a regular basis and collective action has seen the development and circulation of the first edition of a community newsletter 'Milton's Voice', and a community walkabout⁶ has taken place, with a focus on the assets and resources within the community. A community twitter hashtag, #CelebrateMilton, has also been set up. A clear link has also been established between Animating Assets/Connecting Milton and Milton Talks, a community-led resident survey.

Next steps? The group continues to meet monthly and is now undertaking the preparation of a 'digital story' documenting through stories, images and quotes of the Animating Assets Milton journey. A map of the land use in Milton is being prepared to stimulate discussion and possible collective action. Further editions of the community newsletter are also planned. Furthermore, a community event is planned for March 2015 to showcase local activity, share learning from Animating Assets in Milton and to highlight feedback from Milton Talks so far, with the invitation extended to local statutory sector organisations, housing, community policing, and local business owners.

⁴ Understanding Glasgow. *Lambhill and Milton*.

http://www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles/3_nw_sector/5_lambhill_and_milton

⁵ Thriving Places neighbourhood approach - this approach will centre on CPP partners working collaboratively with one another and with communities, to make better use of existing resources and assets, many of which are already embedded in communities themselves (GCC, August 2013).

⁶ Harris R. *A walkabout with Connecting Milton action research hub*. Weblog (accessed March 2015).

Where? The communities of Barmulloch and Balornock in the North East of Glasgow.

Why? Balornock and Barmulloch is a neighbourhood in the north east of Glasgow with a population of 7,235⁷. The area was recognised by the NHS in Glasgow as being an area of limited investment and an area with significant health inequalities. Animating Assets was invited by the NHS to support and facilitate partnership working between local services and the third sector and to build on the local enthusiasm for working differently for better health outcomes recognising the richness and resourcefulness of the community.

With whom? Animating Assets is working with the NE Health Improvement Team for NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, North Glasgow Healthy Living Community, Glasgow Housing Association, Cali Thistle, LifeLink, Glasgow Kelvin College, Barmulloch Community Development Company (BCDC), Tron St Mary's, Tron St Mary's Climate Change Project, Brunswick Youth Centre, James McLean Project, Beatroute Arts project, North Glasgow Food Initiative.

What's happening? An initial local meeting took place in May 2014 that was not well attended. Local one to one meetings during the autumn proved more successful in generating interest and a successful and lively meeting took place in early January 2015 with a number of local organisations who are active in the communities of Barmulloch and Balornock. Building on the identification of community assets and existing resources, a small number of possible areas for collective community action were identified and further discussions are taking place. A 'community breakfast' of local organisations also took place in January to bring together local people, groups and organisations to encourage information sharing and networking.

Next steps? The group continues to meet every six weeks and this is starting to be a useful forum for coordinating (and so animating) the assets of the area. Like Milton, there is interest in creating a 'digital story' documenting the Animating Assets Barmulloch and Balornock journey through stories, images and quotes. Discussions are ongoing as to the creation of a 'community calendar' of events and activities for the area. After a successful first community breakfast, breakfast networking meetings will now take place every two months. Furthermore, after the January 2015 meeting, a small number of local individuals are now working together to explore the possibility of arranging Christmas lights in Barmulloch Park and a community-torch light procession and carol concert.

⁷ Understanding Glasgow. *Balornock and Barmulloch*.

http://www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles/1_ne_sector/8_balornock_and_barmulloch

Where? Edinburgh South

Why? Animating Assets were invited by Edinburgh City Council to support a partnership approach to investigating and reducing risk-taking behaviour amongst young people.

With whom? Edinburgh City Council (South Neighbourhood Team, Children and Families Team, Children's Practice, Community Safety, Community Learning and Development, Partnership and Information, Services for Communities) Gracemount and Liberton High Schools, Health Opportunities Team, NHS Lothian Public Health Department, Healthy Respect, Police Scotland, Moredun Library, Liberton Kirk, Health Opportunities Team, Inchpark Community Sports Club, School Nursing, Children 1st. Close links have also been established with the Youth Talk Action Group.

What's happening? The group first met under the Animating Assets banner in May 2014, although many individuals had worked in partnership previously. Their focus is on reducing risk-taking behaviour in young people and they began by discussing the issue and mapping the assets of relevant resources and organisations. It became clear that not only was partnership working strong in the area but that the views of young people had already been sought through the Youth Talk Action Group. However this had not specifically addressed the question of risk taking behaviour. A local voluntary organisation and the Community Learning and Development team agreed to work with young people to get their views using four questions which were adapted by the young people themselves. The responses were discussed and collated in an accessible visual format (example presented in Appendix 1).

Next steps? We want to ensure that young people's views on risk-taking and what support they need around it are fed into the neighbourhood planning process. The Youth Talk Action Group has set a precedent for this. Over the next two months we will be supporting young people to consult other young people through workshops to take place in 'Meaningful May'. Their views will be fed back to the Youth Talks Action Group in June 2015. Through this process the views and priorities of young people will be fed into the community planning process.

Where? Edinburgh South West, including the communities of Sighthill, Gorgie, Fountainbridge and Craiglockhart.

Why? Animating Assets were invited by the Drugs and Alcohol team at Edinburgh City Council to support a partnership approach to reducing risk-taking behaviour amongst young people particularly in relation to substance misuse.

With whom? Edinburgh City Council (Community Learning and Development, Children and Families Team, Young People's Substance Misuse Service), Dunedin Canmore Youth Projects, Aberlour, Wester Hailes Youth Agency, Police Scotland, local GPs.

What's happening? The group first met under the Animating Assets banner in May 2014, although many individuals had worked in partnership previously. Their focus is on reducing the impact of substance misuse on young people. They began by discussing the issue and mapping the assets of relevant resources and organisations. It became clear that although there are a lot of services in the area for young people and good partnership working, outlying areas are not always well served and we have little idea about what support young people think they need around risk taking. Voluntary organisations and the Community Learning and Development team were asked to seek the views of young people, using an initial four questions which were then adapted following feedback from the young people themselves. Responses were discussed and collated in an accessible visual format. The infographics are now being used by young people to consult other young people (example presented in Appendix 1).

Next steps? The local Youth Forum and Westerhailes Youth Agency are currently supporting young people to take the consultation wider. The young people will host an event for service providers in June 2015 outlining the issues they have identified and coming up with ideas and solutions together on how these issues could be addressed.

Associate sites – progress so far...

Animating Assets also agreed to support three further 'associate' sites with a lighter touch of input. These areas have been selected on the basis that they are already using a cross-sector asset-based approach to addressing an issue of health inequality in a local context.

Support takes the form of a series of review sessions with teams of practitioners from across sectors and community members. These review sessions aim to firstly, reflect on what they are learning about asset-based approaches, what they are, how they are different to traditional approaches and what impact they are making, and secondly to plan to extend the approach on the basis of their learning.

One of the sites, Craigneuk, has found it difficult to make full use of the intervention. So we have diverted some of the resource to Aberdeen where the local authority and NHS Grampian are interested in finding out more about setting up an asset-based approach to integration at a locality level.

Our associate sites are:

- Craigneuk, Lanarkshire
- Lochend, Edinburgh
- Girvan, South Ayrshire

Where? Craigneuk, Motherwell

With whom? A range of different partners including health, local authority (including education), the voluntary sector and the local community.

Why? The regeneration initiative in Craigneuk aims to put the community firmly at the heart of revitalising the area. Animating Assets was asked to support this process.

What's happening? The Animating Assets team have met council and health officers three times over the course of the last 12 months. Several ideas have been put forward for supporting both the Craigneuk Estates Team and the Community Participation Group. In reality however, both groups have had a lot on their agendas and are also receiving support from other areas e.g. the Improvement Service.

Next steps? We have agreed to attend the next meeting of the evaluation sub-group of the Craigneuk Estates Team, to undertake an 'assets audit' with them, examining together how much of their practice already reflects an asset-based approach and how much they still need to strengthen and develop.

Where? Total Neighbourhood East, Lochend, Edinburgh

Why? Total Neighbourhood East aims to explore how collaboration can be both an asset as a way of working and as a way of developing further assets in the form of personal connections and information.

With whom? NHS Lothian, Edinburgh Community Food, Edinburgh College, City of Edinburgh (libraries and Community Learning and Development), Edinburgh Community Cafe customers, staff and volunteers (www.edinburghcommunitycafes.org.uk).

What's happening? Two projects are being undertaken by Total Neighbourhood East. A community cafe photography project is already underway. This project brings together the 46 Community Cafes in Edinburgh with a group of nine 4th year BA Photography students doing a final year course in Collaboration. The students are involved in taking photographs at the cafes and these will be used to raise the profile of the cafes in the area and in the recovery networks in the city.

Next steps? This work is ongoing. Our role is to assist in the capture, recording and sharing of the collaborative photographic approach being undertaken. The work is posing a number of questions, including: How does it work to develop social capital for individuals? How does it help to create, maintain and develop new relationships, connections and networks? Are these connections a resource for people? An initial session with the students took place in January 2015 to explain our interest and begin to engage the students in a story gathering and sense making process. It is expected that further sessions will enable the students to share their photographs and accounts of this work, and that this will provide useful insights and learning.

There is interest in a second project but this has not yet started. 'Animating Information' would seek to explore how to move from an approach that sees assets as codified information in a database to one where people become active 'knowledge brokers', with the interests and skills to proactively seek, share and keep up-to-date information that is important to them and to others in the community and are able to encourage reciprocal behaviour in others.

Where? Girvan, South Ayrshire

With whom? Local communities and local agencies.

Why? Animating Assets was invited to support a new cross-sector approach to locality planning in Girvan.

What's happening? The People Powered Health and Wellbeing Initiative is already mapping assets and supporting local communities to have a voice in Girvan. At the same time there is a long history of strong partnership working in the area. Animating Assets will be working with both communities and agencies to support the assets of local communities, and integrating the voice of local people into local planning structures.

Next steps? We are liaising with the People Powered Health and Wellbeing Initiative with the intention of supporting joint meetings with local planners and the community in May/June 2015.

Reflecting on our learning so far...

Our learning so far across the four Action Research Sites is set out below in terms of our three dimensions - ‘Insights’, ‘Actions’ and ‘Impacts’.

Throughout this section quotes have been used to illustrate points of evidence and learning. The quotes included were captured at meetings in the four main action research sites, and are drawn from community members and representatives of local agencies and voluntary groups. The quotes are not attributed to specific individuals as the focus was on ideas and reflections. As part of the evidence-gathering approach, a record was made of all those who attended meetings.

Insights

Insights	<p>Understanding the nature of asset-based approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local assets. • Local problems and deficits. • Descriptions of asset-based approaches and language used.
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Across the four Animating Assets research sites, ‘**assets**’ are seen in a range of ways from local people’s skills and knowledge, to the physical buildings in the area and the opportunities and services they offer, to local groups and organisations working together for the benefit of the whole community and local population.

“The best assets we’ve got are the people themselves.”

“This area has lots of assets of many different types.”

Local people, groups and organisations are seen to be at the centre of local activity, with a clear aim of “*doing the best we can*” for local residents, with “*real passion and desire*” and “*looking out for each other*”. The number of different organisations active within communities was recognised as a key resource and strength, however, poor **connections** and lack of **awareness of each other** often means that in practice they can be working against each other, for participants, and for funding. This is a common theme across sites:

“We need to find a way to work together without stepping on each other’s toes”.

“There are opportunities and services out there – people just need to know about them.”

“We [main community groups] agreed to complement what one another’s doing, not compete.”

The way that assets are spoken about in local communities and within services demonstrates that the **language** of assets encompasses many elements and “*means different things to different people*”. Furthermore, it highlights that it is appropriate to interpret asset-based working in a range of ways, often depending on the setting. Asset-based approaches may not be clearly understood by those on the ground and can be hard to describe initially. This lack of clarity and agreement about the term

and what types of assets an 'asset-based approach' is intended to refer to often causes confusion and the "need to make sure we are all on the same page and talking about the same thing" was clear. Ensuring that conversations, often about challenging issues, needs or local priorities, were viewed through an 'assets lens' was found to bring a "fresh perspective" and provided an "opportunity to have a similar conversation but with a different focus".

"I think that the approach is really helpful and vitally important at this time as quite frankly we lack the tools and vocabulary to engage in such strength's based approaches."

"Just being here means you will answer positively."

Whether intentionally or not, problems tend to feature heavily in the way in which people view their assets and the way in which people come together, approach and focus on joint working.

Partnership working and effective collaboration and communication are seen to be important roles for organisations where ensuring "connecting people and organisations is key". Indeed in many areas "partnership working is pretty strong already".

"It is about connectedness and personal buy-in where people own the solution."

A common issue has provided a particular focus in two of the research sites, which are taking "Relationships based approaches to working with young people and the community". Within these sites, partnership working is already well established. It is recognised, however that there is a need to "better join up" and create "better connections" to ensure consistency of approaches and support for local people; to provide opportunities to look at what they are currently doing together; and "to identify gaps and what could be done better". With a focus on young people, the views of this group are central to the partnership in developing and "delivering projects that young people want to see".

While some organisations in the research site areas have been active for decades, it is also clear "the assets and resources that exist at present are very fragile" and there is a need for skills and resources to maintain and sustain them. Information and information sharing were also noted to be important assets – "stopping and information sharing – taking stock of what's happening".

Reflecting upon local and organisational **history** and the past was also seen as important in recognising the assets that now exist.

"[lived] experience is our biggest asset."

A "need to look towards the future and build on that" was seen to be important in "changing the story" with a focus more towards the assets that exist and "building on the strengths that people have" has been an important part of the Animating Assets journey so far. Nonetheless the "past shouldn't be seen as a barrier to changing the future".

The two Glasgow research sites, although different communities facing their own challenges, felt that they were both communities that were often “*forgotten about*” due to their geographical locations on the outskirts of the city and the lack of investment by statutory services, which is (possibly) now changing.

“You don’t come through Milton unless you’re going to Milton.”

“Change is happening here but not quickly enough.”

Changing the narrative towards the things that local people value was found to be “*empowering*” for people and helped uncover untapped potential within individuals, groups and organisations “*to work a little bit differently*”. The language used by practitioners to describe young people was appreciative and focused on their assets and strengths. Young people were seen as able to support themselves and one another, and to have the capacity to say what is needed in their local areas to support them.

Engaging with young people was seen as a positive and important aspect of service delivery planning. However, in practice, it was not always easy to do it. Voluntary organisations and Community Learning and Development were engaging with young people in a variety of ways on an ongoing basis, but they were not always using these opportunities to find out young peoples’ views. Local organisations that were aware of young people’s views did not always have the time or capacity to feed these back into the planning process.

Actions

Actions	Adopting and embedding asset-based approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Things that support asset-based approaches.• Barriers to/challenges of asset-based approaches.• Role of systems, services and organisations.
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Across all Animating Assets research sites, the importance of building and valuing **relationships** cannot be underestimated. These mutual, effective relationships take time to develop and need to be nurtured. It is also clear that it is important to get to know the community in different ways and over time – establishing who are the key players and what are the tensions. It is essential to have good foundations in place with a clear understanding of the community you are working in so that the partnership is able to move forward productively and collectively.

“It’s much bigger than us just doing some wee things.”

“It seems right for services to be taking a facilitative role in encouraging this approach, but hard for them to leave their professional agendas and views.”

Time, across all sites, groups and organisations, is a precious commodity. Working in an asset-based way takes time: time to build relationships, make connections and have conversations; time to actively shift the focus from a deficit approach to one using an ‘assets lens’; time to reflect about how people currently work; and time to consider what difference working in an asset-based way may make. This way of working is still seen as *“an extra part of the day job”* and not a core function, despite being cited in policy.

While personal approaches are important in holding people together, a **common issue**, helps people to come together to start with. Furthermore, by considering the common issue through an ‘assets lens’, and by being in an ‘asset-focussed environment’ different conversations *“focused on the solutions”* and *“alternative ways of working”* emerge. **Better awareness** of what each other is doing, as well as who each other works with who other groups are delivering to, and how; also supports asset-based ways of working.

However, at present a number of **barriers** to asset-based working also exist. Although the enthusiasm, energy and the motivation of people is clear, time and their personal capacity to get involved also emerges clearly from discussions, and may impact on progress locally.

“Need to be creative with the way organisations work but should acknowledge people are already doing tons – can’t just keep squeezing more and more out of people.”

Recognising and valuing **different ways of working** across services and sectors, from very structured to more flexible working approaches, is important, as is seeking to find an area of common ground. Statutory services often have clear processes and procedures in place, which can feel *“disabling”* when trying to work differently, and often, due to changes in systems, feel that they have less contact with local people.

Different ways of working also means making best use of creative techniques to elicit shared understanding and to empower community members, who might not otherwise have felt able to make their views known.

Other **important questions** and issues which have been emerging clearly in discussions include: how in practice do we firmly put people and community at the heart of the work we do and build and value their strengths? Furthermore, although Animating Assets has connected and engaged with a large number of local groups, organisations and services in the research sites, questions arise as to “*who counts as the community and who should be in the room?*” Should we embrace the people in the room as the “*right people to be there*” or should Animating Assets always be looking to attract new people and organisations as the programme progresses? At the same time lack of consistency, for some, in attendance at Animating Assets meetings has meant that it is often difficult to move on and build on previous ideas. These are questions which we will continue to debate in local areas.

Existing and historical relationships between individuals and organisations has also been found to be challenging at the community level “*leaving the past in the past and moving forward together*”. The language of ‘asset-based approaches’ and understanding what Animating Assets can offer and will be able to support is also revisited regularly as part of the programme, to ensure that it stays fresh, and that there is agreement about what we are discussing to ensure that conversations are positively framed.

Linkage to ongoing and new local initiatives, e.g. the community-led survey by Milton Talks and the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership neighbourhood approach, Thriving Places, will further support asset-based working within local communities. In this way it is hoped that the work becomes embedded within the local area, and that the groups established through the work of Animating Assets have the potential to be sustainable.

Impacts

Impacts	<p>The effects of Animating Assets and taking an asset-based approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New or different action being stimulated by result of Animating Assets.• Differences of working in this way.• Health, social or personal outcomes and impacts.
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At this stage of the Animating Assets journey, the **strengths and impacts** of the approach being taken lie in a number of areas.

Animating Assets is continuing to bring a diverse range of people and organisations together and “*providing a space*” for **conversations** to take place. It has also facilitated conversations and activities with local communities around local priorities and common areas of interest and built the **capacity for collective action**. Animating Assets has also brought a “*new perspective*” and a “*new way of looking at things*” with a clear focus on the assets and strengths of people, groups, communities and organisations, individually and collectively, and of celebrating successes.

“An opportunity to have a different kind of conversation.”

The groups, organisations and services engaged with Animating Assets have also spoken positively about the opportunities, through the space/forum created, to get to know other organisations and services working in the local area that they didn’t know about previously and to have opportunities to share information about their own activities and programmes. Relationships, partnership working and connections between these organisations have been established, and stories of them supporting each other and working together have been shared.

A number of **tangible local impacts** of the work of the local groups are now becoming visible, alongside the development of relationships, better communication channels and more effective partnership working. These local impacts include the development of a community newsletter, the establishment of networking community breakfasts, a community showcase event and the development of a series of infographics around issues of young people and risk-taking. In Edinburgh, it is hoped that the overall impact will be a clear mechanism for young people’s voice’s to be heard and included in local community planning.

Discussion and reflections

A growing number of Scottish policy and strategy documents highlight and emphasise the value of working in an asset-based way. Animating Assets thus continues to be undertaken in a context of emerging calls for evidence of the effectiveness of asset-based approaches in delivering health improvement outcomes and of tackling health and social inequalities. The Animating Assets research and learning programme aims to generate new ways of thinking about assets in the context of local problems, by providing support for real-time learning from real-life situations. Although this work is ongoing, a number of points of learning and reflection are worthy of further consideration and reflection at this time.

Through Animating Assets we have found that working and researching in this area takes time and requires patience and perseverance. The buy-in and early development phase of this programme with local research sites was considerable. This has impacted on the action phase of the programme. Time is a precious commodity for all those engaged with Animating Assets locally, whether working in statutory sector organisations or voluntary organisations or groups, this includes time out of delivery of their service and 'day job' and time to attend meetings. Although interest and engagement with this programme has been successful, this is often seen as an 'extra' and a 'nice to do' rather than a core function of an individual's role. In the case of statutory organisations, this is despite policy endorsement of the need for more asset-based working in community settings. Nonetheless, there is growing recognition that providing the space for positive conversations and thereby building capacity for collective action is vital.

Indeed, building and sustaining effective relationships have been crucial at every stage of the Animating Assets programme, but this role is often undervalued and not seen as 'valid' work. We have found that unless good relationships and connections are in place and individuals have a clear sense of purpose of the work and their role, across the programme and within communities, the work will not progress. As we move into the final phase of the programme, we are seeing results from the perseverance and time put in to the work of the programme. Animating assets is helping to foster new collaborations, new connections, and new networks as well as helping to identify new possibilities, at local and national levels. The programme has worked hard, alongside, and supported by, local contacts, to ensure good representation of individuals and organisations from across communities to inform collective action and activity. This has proved challenging sometimes due to the nature of local political and historical issues, or issues of capacity, but also where there has been a lack of a clear sense of what's in it for individuals or organisations. This has to be balanced with a recognition that we should not focus so much on representation that we put off proceeding. In fact, we have found that as the work and activity of the research sites has become more 'animated' locally, new people and organisations are becoming involved.

As discussed in the Findings section, the language of assets and asset-based approaches mean different things to different people in a range of different contexts. For many, this is a new way of describing good 'community development'. For others, it is helpful to have a specifically appreciative language to help them describe how they work, how they engage with people and the relationships they build for positive outcomes. While not denying people do have needs and can live in challenging

circumstances, working in an asset-based way starts from the premise that individuals and communities also have knowledge, connections, capacity and resources that can be mobilised in order to produce better health outcomes. Due to existing issues and concerns within communities, trying to maintain a focus on strengths and assets rather than deficits and problems has been challenging. The development of the visual tool (as shown in Figure 3), which highlights the principles of an asset-based approach, has been a useful resource for supporting different kinds of conversations with a focus on positive capacity and capability. It has essentially been about helping people to view the issue through an 'assets lens'.

Finally, across all the research sites engaged with Animating Assets, it is evident that these services are trying to work differently within systems that find it difficult to work in a different way. The key individuals and organisations engaged have been proactive and embraced opportunities to work with one another, learn about the individual and organisational assets that exist locally, make connections for the common good and to work differently to tackle intractable problems and persistent inequalities. This work can, however, be constrained by issues of funding, statutory sector regulations and capacity. The challenges in doing more of this therefore lie in changing organisational cultures; enabling professional freedom and new working practices to develop; and in understanding local priorities, areas of concern and interest.

Going forward...

Animating Assets will continue to actively support work across a number of research sites with the aim of improving local partnership working within and across services and sectors. The work will also continue to support locally driven collective reflection, action, learning and practice.

In going forward, Animating Assets will continue to explore, capture and learn from local activity that seeks to effect change and sustainable improvements through working differently and using alternative approaches. The programme will record and share experiences, stories, insights and evidence of working in this asset-based way across existing systems and services.

In addition to traditional means of reporting and evidence capture and synthesis, Animating Assets will work with the Glasgow research sites to develop 'Digital Stories' (see Appendix 2). These will capture participants' experiences of what is different about working in an asset-based way and how this has developed in their local areas, as well as the wider Animating Assets journey. This approach has been received enthusiastically by the Connecting Milton group, and will be adapted for use across the other action research sites as appropriate. This approach will facilitate self-reflection of those engaged with Animating Assets and support an empowering collective dialogue.

It is envisaged that the Digital Stories will be a resource for multiple audiences:

- The community itself, who may use it to demonstrate how they are using an assets-based approach, the journey they have taken and perhaps as part of submissions for future funding bids;
- To inform local organisations and agencies as they develop community-led plans;
- As a resource for the wider sector to demonstrate asset-based working in action.

In Edinburgh, we hope to capture the views and experiences of the young people engaged with Animating Assets around issues of risk-taking behaviours and substance misuse in a visual way either through film or developing more posters and cards.

Furthermore, to complement the Digital Stories and young people's films, a series of in-depth interviews will be undertaken with key stakeholders across research sites to investigate the wider impact of Animating Assets. The interviews will be semi-structured in nature but will explore why particular individuals chose to become involved in Animating Assets, the reasons for choosing the specific research sites, whether multi-agency working in these areas has changed, the perceived impact on how services are delivered locally, as well as the overall journey of the Animating Assets in the area.

Within this report we have shared our learning so far from Animating Assets, yet a number of questions of interest remain and we look forward to exploring them in more depth across individual research sites, and collectively. In particular, we hope to investigate:

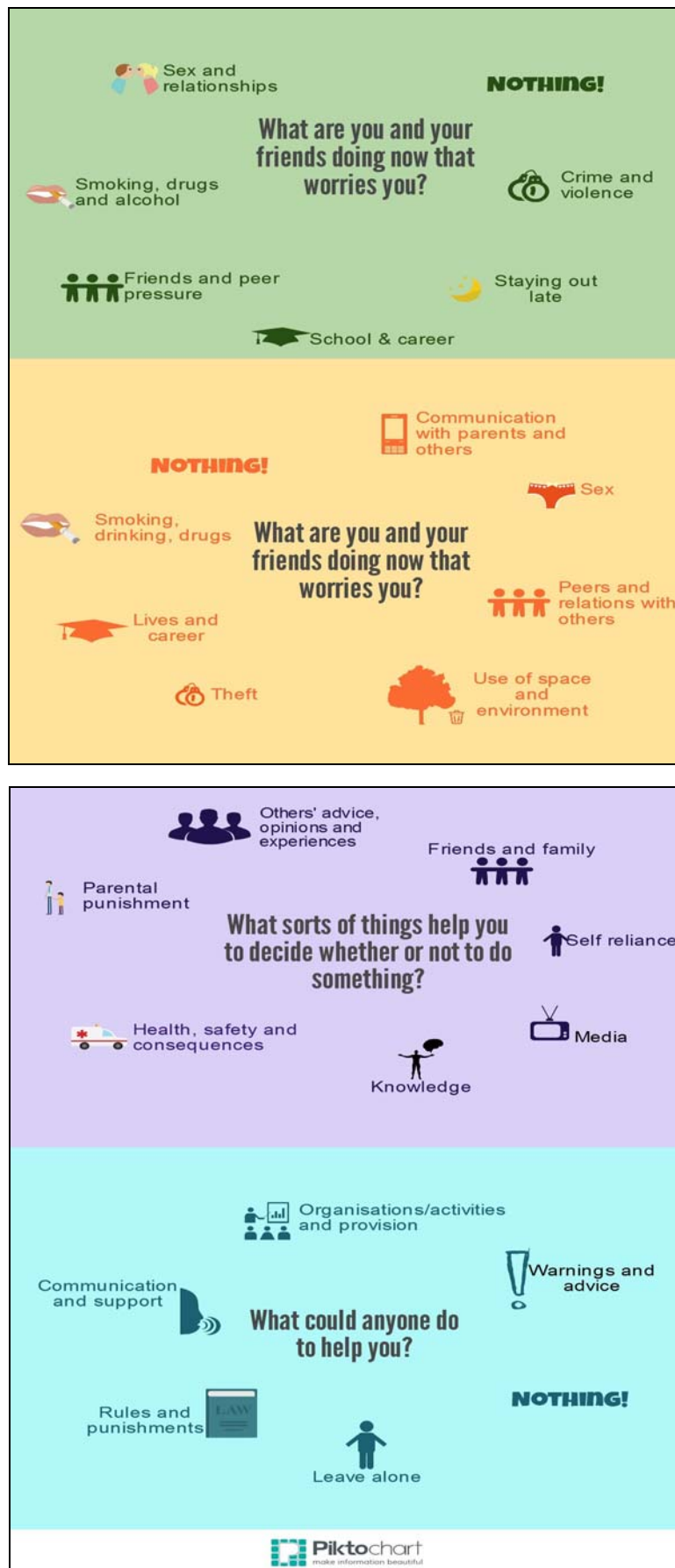
- how adopting and embedding the characteristics of asset-based working can be taken on more fully by services and organisations; and
- how existing systems can change to effect tangible and sustainable improvement through alternative approaches and working differently with communities.

Furthermore, we will also continue to consider:

- what are the skills, attitudes, values and capacities that support asset-based approaches amongst staff and communities and how can they be developed and sustained?
- what are the organisational strategic, operational and cultural conditions that enable asset-based approaches to thrive, or which hinder them?
- what is the likely health and social outcomes of asset-based approaches and how can these be recognised?
- how does building on individual and community assets achieve positive health and social outcomes?
- how can asset-based working best be measured and evaluated?
- what funding and resource provision arrangements enable the sustainability of asset-based approaches?

A final Animating Assets report on our research and learning will be published later in 2015. This will be launched alongside an event to share our findings, showcase the digital stories and young people's films and celebrate the local partnership and activity that is taking place in communities across Scotland.

Appendix 1. Visual infographics developed following consultation with young people in Edinburgh.



Appendix 2. Creating a Digital Story for Milton

Digital Stories are short, personal, multimedia narratives or stories. They could be called 'mini-movies', although they usually involve still photographs rather than video. The Digital Story has three elements:

- a narration track – different people talking about their experience.
- a photo stream – a series of still photos that are displayed alongside the narration.
- a music track – quiet unobtrusive music in the background.

All photos and music used need to be copyright free; some images and music are available on this basis on the web, but it is preferable that we develop our own wherever possible. Our final story is expected to be about ten minutes long.

The steps below outline how a Digital Story could be developed for Milton. SCDC and GCPH would take responsibility for managing the process and handling the technical aspects of constructing the Digital Story.

We expect the process to be engaging and will seek to involve people as much as possible in the process of creating the final version. Our hope is to build the process of recording into the activities that the Connecting Milton group are already engaged in.

1. Taking photos

During the Animating Assets project, people are asked to take photos within the community and local organisations. This could mean asking community members and other people to take photos during community events, such as a walkabout or community breakfast.

Everyone's photos, whether from disposable or digital cameras or mobile phones are collected together and printed. The GCPH will collate the

photographs. Note that not all photographs will be used (see below); once we know which ones we wish to use, a protocol will be developed so that people can give their permission for the photograph to be used.

2. Reflecting on the photos (individually and collectively)

During a later community event, people will be asked to select their most significant photo from the collection. They are then encouraged to reflect on:

- what the photo means to them or their community,
- why that is significant,
- how the photo fits in the journey of the Animating Assets project,
- how the asset-based approach has influenced them.

We hope to be able to record audio of key parts of these reflections so that we can begin to construct the narration track of the story.

At the same time, a collective reflection on the photos would take place. The photos are displayed alongside flipcharts with similar questions to the bullets above. Everyone is encouraged to write their thoughts and reflections on sticky notes and add them to the flipcharts.

3. Identifying key themes and developing the narration for the digital story

A small group of volunteers from the larger Connecting Milton group work together to review the captured recordings, flipchart notes and photos. Key themes are identified and the outline of the narration is drafted. This could develop around the 'journey' of Animating Assets in Milton. This outline is presented back to the larger Connecting Milton group for comment. The small group then proceeds to edit the Digital Story.

Feb 2015