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Using an asset-based approach to explore the benefits of involvement in community-centred initiatives

Jo Brooks, Alison Bravington, Alison Rodriguez,
Barry Percy-Smith, Nigel King

Background to the study

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- Changes to public health responsibilities in UK in a time of austerity

- An **assets approach** balances traditional focus on health *deficits* with an equal focus on health *assets* (resources for creating health/ wellbeing)

- What assets and collective resources are available to local communities in a deprived area – and how might these be utilised in terms of public health goals?

Overview of study design

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- **Phase 1**: Half-day city wide stakeholder workshop ;
- **Phase 2**: Community focus groups (n = 12) with a diverse range of groups in contrasting local areas;
- **Phase 3**: Case study interviews (n=12);
- **Phase 4**: Presentation of findings to community groups and stakeholders;
- **Phase 5**: Final report

Key stakeholder workshops

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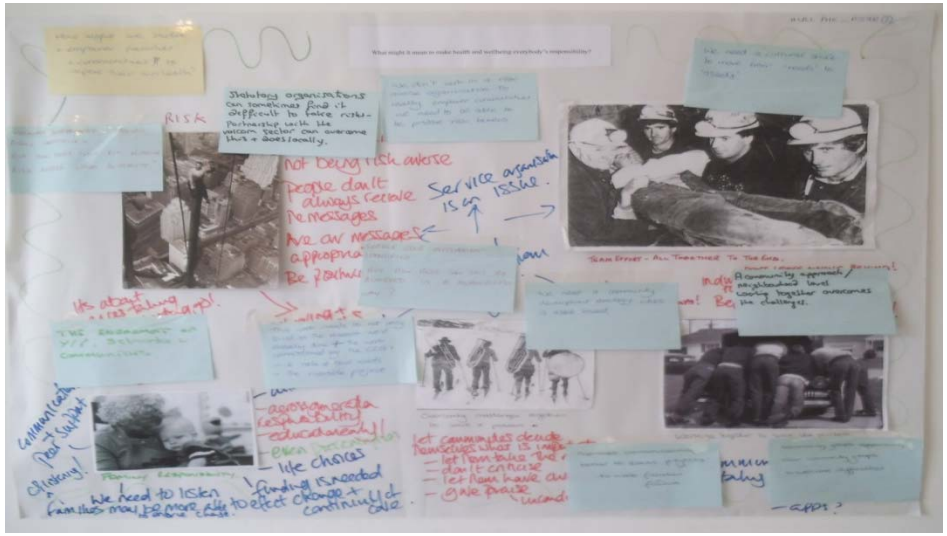
- Warm up plenary
- Photo elicitation
- Interactive Q&A
- Final plenary

- Collated findings used in design of subsequent inquiry stages



Participating groups

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Over 65's weekly exercise class

Youth organisation working with young people struggling in/ excluded from mainstream education

Eastern European group (offering advice services and community events)

Mobile youth club covering local estates

Doula and breastfeeding peer support group

Community arts group

Diabetes peer and family support group

Lottery funded community food growing initiative

Social prescribing project

Carers' information and support service

Support service for asylum seekers and refugees

Social housing tenants' forum

fessionals

2014

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Interviews

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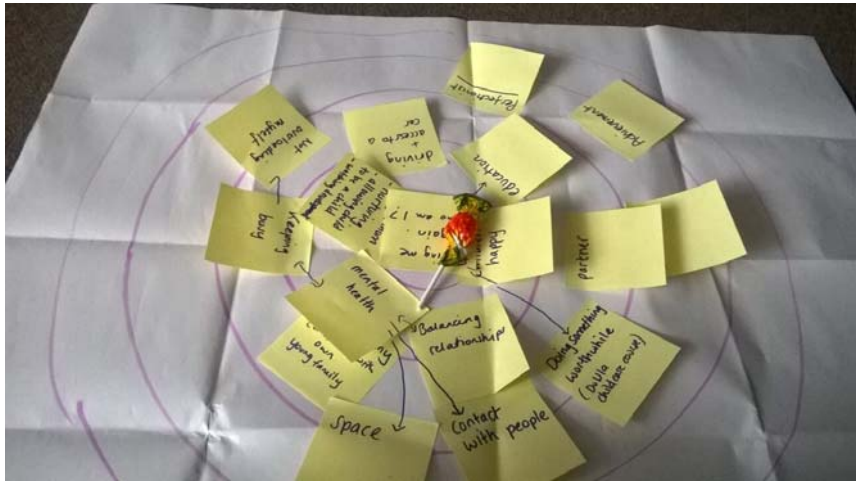

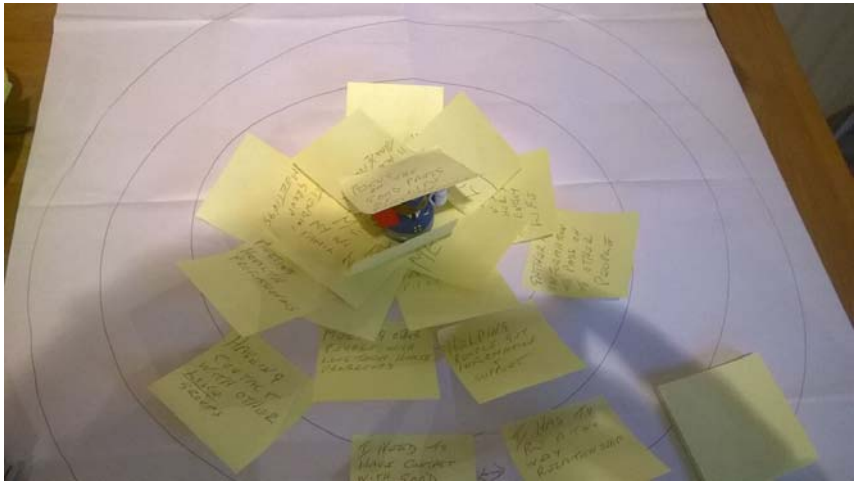

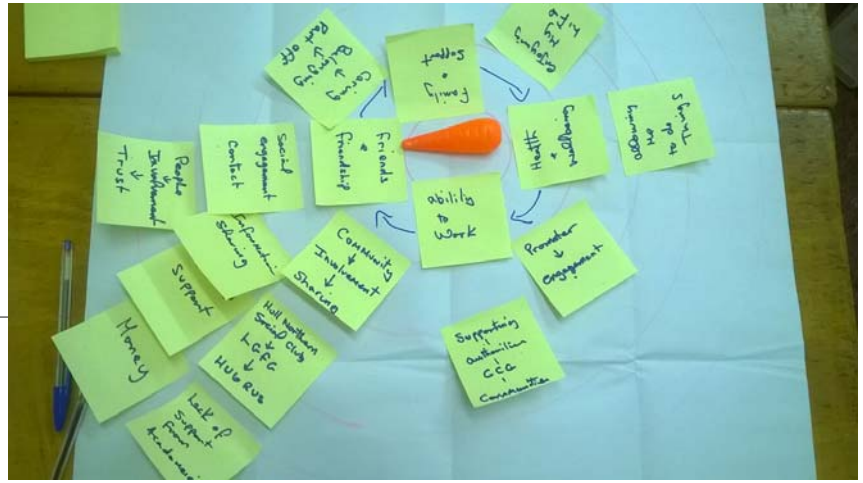

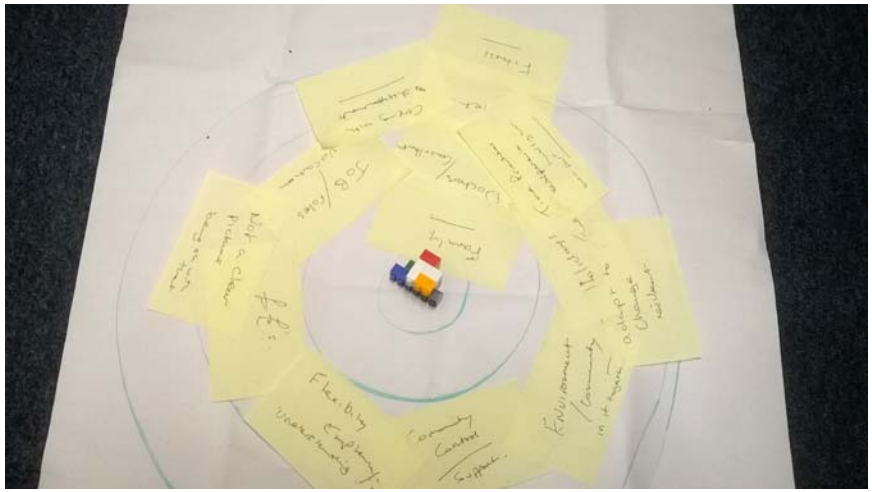

Analysis

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- **Template Analysis** (King, 2012; Brooks et al, 2015)
- *A priori* themes from Morgan & Ziglio's (2007, 2010) asset model (individual, community, organisational/ institutional)
- Final top level themes:

1. Role of wider societal context and issues;
2. Role for outside professionals, statutory services and agencies;
3. Relationships with other local communities and groups;
4. Assets identified in relation to own local community;
5. Assets identified as deriving from the group;
6. Personal/ individual assets and benefits.

Groups are specific (*from Tenants' forum*)

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A community is self-defining, in many ways, you know, a community is what you think it is individually. You know, I do consider myself as part of my estate. There are others there who think I'm just me and my family sort of thing. It's a self-defining issue, its depending on what you, your particular interests and values are, what you define your community to be.

Filling the gaps
(*from Social Prescribing Group*)

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Mental health services, up until about 15 years ago, used to be a sponge that would just kind of pick people up and say 'Well we'll look after you, we don't really know what's wrong with you, but we'll look after you', and now they're ditching all those people or not accepting referrals… I really feel very strongly that a lot of people have been left behind and seeing the kind of people who get referred to me, it's genuinely sort of heart-warming and depressing at the same time that there's an awful lot of lost souls out there and they really do need just someone to metaphorically put an arm round them and say 'Look, it's ok, I'm here and I'm willing to listen'.

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Flexibility
(from youth organisation working with excluded pupils)

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- We've got one kid at the minute, this is his third year. Normally they'd stay a term, that's the normal rules. But what we don't want to do is close the door on these young people, because if we close the door, where else is it going to open? There's lots of organisations that won't take these young people, in some organisations, you'd be out the door and you'd never come back again, a lot of organisations like ours are quick to say that's it, you're gone.

- *Yeah,* (names student) *came in the other day and he was like "I got kicked out of* (names organisation)" *and I was like "Why?" and he was like "I pushed someone". I thought bloody hell, if we kicked people out for pushing people, we wouldn't have no students!*

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Looking after your own *(from mobile youth group)*

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Our ethos is people who live on the estate are looking after their own, it's always been people on the estate that we've employed. They're known as neighbours and friends, and it works. If you got someone from some agency who comes in and has got all the degrees going, a lovely, lovely girl but she has no idea how they live on here, no idea that parents who are on low pay won't have their tea because the kids will, you know, and things like that… What we do up here could be done city wide and the council would save money and, no disrespect to professional people, the success is because they live here… In the last few years, we've seen a real significant drop in vandalism, theft, and what we think it is, is the work that started ten years ago on 6 and 7 year olds. We're benefiting now, because them 16 and 17 year olds are not getting into bother now, they're working with us.

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Value and savings
(from Over 65's weekly exercise class)

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- *If it wasn't for this I know you'd be sat at home*
- *I would be*
- *We all would, and it's how do you put a price on that in terms of public health*
- *And where else can you go for £2 on a night out?*

Benefits of participation (*from Lottery funded community food growing initiative)*

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It has been fantastic for me, health wise, mental health wise. It's helped me to be able to relax down, become myself again, stop the isolation, because when you have a mental health problem, you withdraw. Although I'm a very sort of people person, I didn't want to talk to people, and I knew if I wanted to go back out to work, I would have to crack that and this project has done exactly that. I'm ready to go back to work now and want to go back to work and feel that I am competent to go back to work. But if you'd have asked me that six months ago, I'd have told you no…. the way that everybody has been, where it's non-discriminatory, everybody accepts everybody on an equal level. I've been treated exactly the same as everybody else and it's been really wonderful … we're just from different walks of life and we just take care of one another and, you know, if someone's doing a job and they can see its taking a bit more effort, just jump on and just help finish the job. So I mean its, its been really, really, mental health wise, very beneficial for me.

Conclusions

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- Clear impact and value of community initiatives
- Number of ways groups can be usefully supported by professionals - role for Community Development Workers?
- Recognised need to engage with local communities as a strategy for health improvement (Public Health England, 2015)
- Need to develop alternative ways to monitor and evaluate change?
- The role of qualitative research