

Knowledge is Power

WHAT DOES GORBALS NEED TO FLOURISH: A CALL TO ACTION

Report on our community action research project
September 2021 – June 2022

Crossroads Youth & Community Association



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Executive Summary

Once a vibrant and active community, the Gorbals of 2021 / 22 is disjointed, disconnected and disempowered. The poverty, which is increasingly hidden as the community continues to be 'regenerated' is sorely felt, with families struggling to meet their basic needs, with added stress of consumer expectations around Christmas time.

Isolation and lack of well-being has been exacerbated by the pandemic and there is a sense that there is limited understanding of the different cultures living alongside, but separated from each other. There is little evidence of hope and an absence of the advice and support services which local people need. The community don't feel safe.

In order to flourish, Gorbals needs community action to tackle the issues that have been identified, to build the bonds and connections that strengthen communities and improve the quality of community life.

**"The community don't
feel safe."**

**"Gorbals needs
community action."**

Introduction

Background to the Research

This community action research was developed by Crossroads Youth and Community Association (CYCA) with initial involvement of *Bridging the Gap (BtG), both organisations are embedded in the community of Gorbals in the Southside of Glasgow.

CYCA was founded in 1968 and is a registered Scottish charity. Based in 'The Barn', our own community centre building, we deliver youth work and community development work reaching over 600 people annually in Gorbals and Govanhill, adjacent areas in the inner city of Glasgow, with very different histories, cultures and socio-economic challenges.

Throughout almost sixty years of activity Crossroads has remained true to the vision of its founder members – “everyone has the right to live gloriously: whatever in society prevents this should be attacked and whatever in the individual helps this should be nurtured”.

- Bridging the Gap had to step back from the project early 2022 due to staffing issues.

**"Everyone has the right to live gloriously:
Whatever in society prevents this should be
attacked and whatever in the individual
helps this should be nurtured."**

Geoff Shaw - founding member of CYCA

Research Proposal

Our initial focus, pre-pandemic had been on local mental health services. However, the impact of the pandemic on communities and individuals, already experiencing disadvantage and inequalities made us question and ultimately change our focus to find out what is preventing Gorbals from being a flourishing community and what has been the impact of the pandemic on individuals, families and the community.

In the context of a global pandemic, which has exposed the glaring economic, gender and race inequalities, we wanted to find out a bit more about the impact on the community and what supports might be needed by the community to go beyond recovery to renewal, where the community might flourish.

We hoped to achieve the following outcomes:

- Key issues preventing the community flourishing will be identified;
- Key elements which help the community to flourish will be identified;
- Planning of services and supports will be informed by the research;
- Any further research needed will be identified.

Research Process & Methods

We established a research group, consisting of one staff member and two community researchers from each of our organisations. The research team, began with a basic questionnaire, during October and November 2021 to find out what local people felt about their community. From our 90 responses, 80 were from BAME community.

We followed this up by a second questionnaire in December, to find out how the pandemic affected individuals, families and the community and to ask what supports would be needed to enable the community to flourish. This questionnaire was online, to limit face to face contact as COVID cases rose significantly towards the end of 2021. There were 25 online responses.

It wasn't until April that we were able to hold a focus group, due to restrictions and impacts of COVID. Despite advertising widely and offering participation vouchers, we only had 6 participants. The group began by considering what a flourishing community might look like as a way of identifying what key themes might be preventing or helping Gorbals flourishing. Discussions were able to place individual issues (private troubles) within the context of broader public issues.

The biggest challenge of this community action research has been developing and maintaining involvement of the community, many of whom found it difficult to break out of the 'bubbles' developed to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, during the pandemic.

Research Findings

WHAT IS PREVENTING GORBALS BECOMING A FLOURISHING COMMUNITY?

"Lack of services and opportunities"

"Limited freedoms and supports"

"Disconnection and lack of understanding across
cultural groups"

"Environmental issues"

WHAT WOULD HELP GORBALS FLOURISH?

"More services, opportunities and support"

"Improvement in environment"

"Help with financial hardships would
make things better"

Research Findings

From private troubles to public issues

It was clear from the responses to the questionnaires that the pandemic had affected people very deeply: stress, fear and isolation were the predominant impacts on wellbeing. Poverty was highlighted repeatedly with evidence of local people struggling to meet the most basic needs of food and fuel.

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS ON PUBLIC ISSUES

"Poverty"

"Mental well-being issues"

"The sensation of being cut off from one another. This could be a result of people's poverty and mental health issues because of COVID"

"Misunderstanding how people from different cultural backgrounds can connect with one another"

"It is necessary to develop hope in the young generation about their future and to encourage them to become more involved in their community"

"There is need for community action"

"Environmental issues, the need of better recycling, transportation (suggestion to have a community bus), more playgrounds for children"

Research Findings

It is interesting that the focus group was unable to identify themes from the questionnaire responses that could help Gorbals flourish.

Instead some suggestions from their own perspective were made about what might help:

- Advice services available within the community
- Family holiday scheme
- Improved community safety
- Networks of support
- Befriending scheme

Research Findings

What do people like about Gorbals

So, what were the things that local people said they liked about Gorbals? It was heartening to find that, even in the midst of a pandemic, local people identified Gorbals as a friendly and caring community with a good range of activities for children and young people and close to the city Centre.

People Make Gorbals

Very peaceful and caring community

The oneness of the community

The people, the community. Very homely and accommodating

It's a friendly community and everyone looks after one another

The neighbours are very kind. The housing association also are there to listen

It's a quiet nice place to bring up kids

Very caring community

Key Findings

What we have learned

If we were to present key findings in the context of our knowledge and history as organisation that is embedded in the community and create a story which picks out the nuances from what is not said, for example, no one identified Gorbals as active, no-one described Gorbals as influential, the need for community action was mentioned, poverty was identified as an individual experience ('Private trouble') rather than a common ('public issue'). This is what the story might look like:

“Once a vibrant and active community, the Gorbals of 2021 / 22 is disjointed, disconnected and disempowered. The poverty, which is increasingly hidden as the community continues to be ‘regenerated’ is sorely felt, with families struggling to meet their basic needs, with added stress of consumer expectations around Christmas time. Isolation and lack of well-being has been exacerbated by the pandemic and there is a sense that there is limited understanding of the different cultures living alongside, but separated from each other. There is little evidence of hope and an absence of the advice and support services which local people need. The community don’t feel safe. In order to flourish, Gorbals needs community action to tackle the issues that have been identified, to build the bonds and connections that strengthen communities and improve the quality of community life.”

Actions

Recommendations and planned actions for your organisation

It is clear from the lack of depth of this research, that there is a need to dig deeper. Our key recommendation is therefore to build on the community involvement in the research team and in the focus group to develop a community action group to analyse and collectivise the findings and to identify actions that the community could take to bring about positive change and improve the quality of community life.

We will do this by:

- Publishing a statement on our finding and our broader knowledge of the community to encourage local people to become involved;
- Supporting local people to form an action group;
- Facilitating the analysis of findings “what we already know” and identify what else, if anything, we need to know more about the key themes;
- Providing ongoing skilled community development support to the group to develop vision and action plan which would achieve the positive change and bring Gorbals nearer to being a flourishing community.

Actions Already Taken -- if applicable

The Board of CYCA has launched a statement on our website and social media which draws on the research and knowledge of the Gorbals community. This statement is a ‘**call to action**’.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful for the excellent ongoing support from **Poverty Alliance** and the resource materials and networking opportunities from **Scottish Community Development Centre**.

Above all, we wish to thank the **local people** who took the time to contribute, despite the challenges of inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic.