

AMPLIFY

VOICES & ACTION IN PLACES

2018

WHAT IS AMPLIFY?

Designed and developed by the Young Foundation in partnership with communities, Amplify responds to the real, lived experiences of people and the communities in which they live and is based on the principles of listening deeply and treading carefully. Amplify connects people to take action together. It combines research, community engagement and action to spark new ideas for tackling the key challenges faced by communities.



WHY DO WE NEED AMPLIFY?

As a nation of communities, we are currently facing a range of pressing social, economic and political challenges. The current context is in many ways one of division and disconnection between people, communities and institutions – epitomised most clearly by the result of the referendum to leave the European Union in 2016. Coupled with this, as a result of a period of austerity, communities and individuals have and are experiencing deep cuts to public services and support, which, along with increased costs of living, are contributing to poverty rates that are rising for the first time in 20 years.¹

However, this does not mean that communities are passively accepting these challenges. In fact there is growing evidence of active and vibrant communities coming together to improve the quality of life and opportunities in the places they live, as demonstrated by the fact that the number of people participating in volunteer work increases year on year.² Our Amplify work to date has revealed that there are often many innovative forms of voluntary community action, however, these actions often go unrecognised.³ Communities and neighbourhoods, such as Granby in Liverpool⁴ and The Diamond Project⁵ in Belfast, which have seen groups of residents transforming the physical landscape of their neighbourhoods, are displaying high levels of cohesion and resilience in the face of stark challenges.

In addition, we have seen increasing dissatisfaction with policy solutions which are based on an over-reliance on population-level statistics and fail to recognise people's lived experiences at the local level. Recognising this, many key institutions are increasingly 'turning to place' and the resources of civil society as the answer to many of our deepest challenges, as highlighted by the Localism Act (2011).

We argue that there is a need for a new approach which brings the spirit of the Localism Act to life. A solution based on the principles that communities are the experts on their own lives, they are already working to improve their lives and the lives of others, and, with the resources and permission to act, they are a crucial component in efforts to tackle societal challenges. **Amplify provides the tools and skills to engage with communities differently and more effectively, as genuine partners in change, to amplify the inspiring work and action that communities are already doing.**

1 JRF (2017) UK Poverty 2017. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

2 ONS (2017) Measures of National Wellbeing. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/dvc364/dashboard/index.html>.

3 Hodgson, M. (2017) A Tale of Two Cities: Community Perspectives and Narratives on Inequality, Struggle, Hope and Change. The Young Foundation, London.

4 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/nov/27/liverpool-locals-rook-control-long-neglected-streets>.

5 http://www.amplifyni.org/the_diamond

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Amplify, drawing on the expertise built up over The Young Foundation's 60 years of supporting community transformation across the UK and beyond, seeks to stimulate and support locally driven processes of change. It does this by working with communities to a) Understand their shared experiences, and b) Establish shared narratives of a better future.

We seek to channel this understanding into a self-sustaining social movement, connecting insight to real action – innovation – which drives this change forward. The process for achieving this change is outlined in the Amplify roadmap below.

Unlike traditional community planning processes our approach harnesses the diverse contributions of actors across all sectors and all parts of the community, facilitating an organic response that provides more space for innovation than can be achieved through a project or programme management methodology. We do this through a systematic process that combines:



- **Ethnographic and participatory research:** Ethnography provides deep insights into place-specific realities, exploring real-life experiences as well as the opportunities for, and barriers to, change. This approach is complemented by a range of creative and participatory research techniques (such as, appreciative enquiry, photographic community mapping, peer video and film making and day in the life methods) that allow co-creation of outputs.

- **Storytelling and co-creation** to build collective understanding of local experiences so people can find common ground and build shared narratives of the future they want for their communities and identify the actions and innovations (new and existing) with the potential to deliver that change.

- **Social innovation, design and investment support** to enable the development and growth of the promising organisations, initiatives and collaborations (both small and large scale) needed to make change happen. Our established programme of innovation support draws on The Young Foundation's long history of developing, supporting and powering social and community action, including Reimagining Rent, The Young Academy, Social Innovation Exchange (SIX), School for Social Entrepreneurs, Uprising, Action for Happiness and Agenda.

- **Movement building** to facilitate the growth of connected networks of people working and learning together, on and offline, in and around particular places. This approach is designed to make the transition from isolated projects to collective impact which challenges the status quo and builds in sustainability.

The process is transformative in both its means and ends. Our methodology has the potential to change the big story of a place because it continually compares, questions and challenges this story with new insights and voices including those which were previously unheard. Likewise, the process of co-creation can be transformative for those involved, particularly if they are not used to engaging with others on the basis of equality, mutual respect and collaboration.⁶ Through this process they may access networks and connections, which support personal agency or provide solidarity. And they obtain the support (resource-based or social) needed to implement or progress new ideas.

⁶ RSA (2016) Economics for Everyone. <https://medium.com/rsa-journal/economics-for-everyone-45aaaf2e6fc7>

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

The Young Foundation has carried out Amplify programmes across the UK, including in Northern Ireland, Leeds, Sheffield and Wales, and is currently conducting community research in Essex, Corby and London. We are constantly learning from our work and using our experience to refine and develop our approach. Each place has unique experiences, knowledge and understanding. However some common themes have emerged across places:⁷

- **Significance of place:** People have strong connections to 'place'. These connections are geographical but they are also cultural, social, physical, kin based and economic. The value which they attach to place often links to the decisions they make and the actions they take.
- **Lack of voice:** Many people feel excluded, particularly when it comes to decisions that are made about their towns and communities. People feel that current methods of consultation/ participation are not effective for actually hearing what they have to say and acting on it.
- **Narrative of exclusion:** Likewise, people feel excluded from certain places and spaces because of where they live or certain characteristics that are attributed to them. This impacts on people's ability to fully participate and access resources and support.

“ People in the area feel that they have been part of project after project, they feel disheartened. A big community centre has been built but people don't feel comfortable in it, it doesn't feel like their space... People feel disempowered, they feel like it doesn't matter what they do decisions are being made anyway. But they do care about their community.”

Port Talbot, Community Capacity Officer, Amplify Wales

- **Existence of single, often negative, narratives about places:** People believe that if they live in a place, then regardless of what they do and what they have to offer, they are framed by others as having certain characteristics, challenges and aspirations on the basis of living there. Communities are labelled as 'deprived' or 'only coping'. This 'labelling' can lead to a very stop-start experience of development and can be exacerbated by funding mechanisms (for example having to demonstrate that you are an area of deprivation in order to access funds).

⁷ Green, H. & Hodgson, M. (2017) Valuing Place: The importance of place for understanding inequality and taking action in Wales. The Young Foundation: London; Hodgson, M. (2017). A Tale of Two Cities: Community Perspectives and Narratives on Inequality, Struggle, Hope and Change. The Young Foundation: London.

- **People are active in trying to change and improve their areas:** Across all communities we have found that people are strongly invested in their communities and are active in trying to implement positive change. These actions are often small scale and informal and yet are often the cornerstone of community resilience and wellbeing.

- **These actions are often overlooked and unrecognised:** Due to prevailing ideas about the actors and agencies who can make change happen, these more informal actions often go unrecognised. The types of action that are supported are instead those which are carried out by institutions and organisations that are more able to measure worth or show impact.

- **Need for changing in funding mechanisms:** Current funding processes can be very intimidating and excluding. We identify a need for funding mechanisms which recognise community action and innovation of all sizes and levels of formality. This would support community-led innovation which is often more connected to the needs of the community which it serves.

- **The significance of genuine participation and co-creation:** Across places we have found that people are invested in, and want to act around their communities but are often not given the ‘permission to act’. Meaningful engagement and co-creation, facilitated by local researchers, is vital to start a process of understanding community needs.

“ My hometown has a really embedded culture of just getting on with it, not grumbling and being down to earth. We have always been good at coming up with radical and simple solutions to social struggles.”

Participant, Amplify Leeds



IMPACTS

Amplify can change understandings, narratives and perceptions, of communities as well as of institutions. It catalyses community action and movement building and enables funders and authorities to work with communities in new and radical ways. In 2016 alone, Amplify has gathered over 1000 individual stories about inequality and action from communities across the UK. We have engaged with over 1500 organisations and stakeholders and helped grow more than 70 community led innovations and collaborations. Key outcomes include:

- **Increased voice:** By going through the process of Amplify communities have reported developing their own voice and using it to move forward towards action. This confidence stems directly from involvement in the ethnographic process which is participant led, and allows for the development of shared narratives which may differ from dominant narratives. Sharing these narratives more widely can lead to greater understanding and changes in the way that communities are viewed.

Individuals from one Amplify community in Leeds reported increased confidence in speaking about their needs following their participation in the research process and the development of a shared community narrative. They felt like their experience had helped them to develop their voice, allowing them greater participation.

- **Community connections:** The Amplify methodology necessitates engagement with the broadest possible range of stakeholders, including residents, businesses, local authorities, charities and religious institutions. Through Amplify we have provided platforms for the possibility of new connections.

- **Developing community resource:** We train local researchers and programme managers to develop skills which remain in the community after the duration of the project.

- **Increased understanding of communities:** Closer engagement with communities has facilitated better understanding by those with current decision-making power, including local authorities, local agencies and funders. For example, Amplify insights have been recognised at an executive level by the government in Northern Ireland.

- **Increased recognition of community agency and possibility:** Amplify reveals the, often unrecognised, actions that are already happening in places, allowing councils and other bodies to understand their communities better and to better support these actions.

- **Improved service design:** Leeds council reported changing aspects of service design after their involvement with Amplify. Changes include introducing new opportunities for community engagement such as community drop-ins, and the introduction of a community police officer after hearing that people felt unsafe in certain areas.

- **Supporting community action and social innovation:** Across the three Amplify programmes which have included innovation support we have delivered support to a total of 67 community projects and collaborations, such as Libby's Café in Connah's Quay and Madlug in Northern Ireland. In addition to innovation support, we have also supported these projects to develop a shared local identity as initiatives which are working to address challenges in their towns and communities.

In one Amplify Cymru location there was a core challenge of a lack of understanding between organisations and actors in the community and large institutions in the area who dominated the policy landscape. Through the presence of Amplify and the facilitation of community events, these actors and organisations were able to communicate with the institutions and reposition themselves as co-contributors to change, rather than as beneficiaries.

GLOW

GLOW (Giving Life Opportunities to Women) is a registered charity that currently operates in West Belfast and Shankill empowering women and young girls from aged 10. Established in 2011, GLOW was developed from a common desire of women in the local communities of Falls/Shankill to address issues facing their peers such as, low self-esteem & confidence, declining mental health, isolation and a lack of purpose.

GLOW was offered a place on the Accelerator programme and attended a Coffee morning in the Thinking Cup in October 2016, before the 2017 Accelerator programme began formally in March 2017.

Following their involvement in Amplify NI the existing GLOW life coaching social enterprise has been reappraised and repositioned in the market place. The Accelerator Programme's focus on story telling also provided GLOW with the momentum to publish a book chronicling 10 short stories of the personal development journeys of women and young girls who have participated in their programmes. This has and continues to be an income generator for the organisation.

The Accelerator Programme Mentor is in regular contact with GLOW to assist them with social innovation concepts and community connectivity.

ABER FOOD SURPLUS

Aber Food Surplus is an organisation aiming to reduce food waste in Aberystwyth. The three founders were part of the Amplify cohort in 2016 and in the subsequent year have managed to scale considerably, securing premises for their warehouse through local networks and being successful in a bid for Welsh government and European funding.

In a follow up conversation, one of the group said:

“We do look back on those workshops and reflect

...I think we would have got here anyway but Amplify helped us speed things up

...It gave us motivation, helped us to clarify and to think about who we connect with”

VISION FOR AMPLIFY

Amplify is designed as a replicable model that can connect with multiple place based interventions, serving as a first necessary step for funders, social investors and entrepreneurs needing to understand the geographic place in which they want to work. Amplify is built as a flexible methodology which is able to be responsive to the needs of the community.

Learning from the Amplify journey we know that the most successful Amplify programmes are those that are given time to build momentum and movement within a place. We are committed to the long term vision and know that good relationships are essential in supporting this. The vision of working with local people and organisations, embedded in the community is also central to its success.

As Amplify progresses we are continuing to refine our methods, including current work in Northern Ireland to improve the co-creation process in order to drive more action and innovation that is community-led and builds on insights from the research and community engagement.

Amplify also works across themes, as well as places. We are currently supporting young people to take action on issues they care about through Amplify Youth. This work also acts as a way of yielding better data for policy-makers and funders, giving richer insight on how they might frame their interventions to give the best results.

For more information please get in touch: hello@youngfoundation.org



APPENDIX 1: PREVIOUS AND EXISTING AMPLIFY PROGRAMMES

AMPLIFY NI

PLACE

Working intensely in three communities:

Belfast, Derry/ London Derry and Enniskillen

FUNDER

Big Lottery Fund Northern Ireland; the Building Change Trust; the Northern Ireland Department of Social Development

TIMESCALE

5 years

METHODS

- Ethnographic research
- Building blocks' approach – variety of research methods 'built' together in different formations as appropriate with different groups.
- Co-creation methods including storytelling and Amplify 'sessions'
- Innovation support at different levels, including working on an approach to supporting initial idea development.

OUTPUTS

- [Fertile Ground: Creating the conditions for social innovation to flourish in Northern Ireland](#)
- [Community Powered Change: Telling stories, growing ideas](#)

AMPLIFY LEEDS

PLACE

Working closely in three communities across Leeds

FUNDER

JRF; Leeds City Council

TIMESCALE

12 months

METHODS

- 40 Stakeholder interviews
- Four informal group conversations per area
- ‘Light touch’ engagement/ research
- Day-in-the-life
- Household survey
- Three ‘imagination garden’ community engagement events
- Participatory video
- Workshop-based programme of innovation support

OUTPUTS

- [A Story of Leeds](#)
- [A Tale of Two Cities](#)
- [Leeds posters – example](#)

AMPLIFY SHEFFIELD

PLACE

Three communities across Sheffield

FUNDER

Power to Change

TIMESCALE

6 months

METHODS

- Explicit focus on community businesses
- Rapid engagement: semi structured interviews with local leaders, community business people and stakeholders
- Light-touch techniques: prompt questions that open up opportunities for more significant engagement
- Personification activity
- ‘Living walls’ for people to present feedback
- Community events

OUTPUTS

- [Amplify Sheffield](#)

AMPLIFY CYMRU

PLACE

Three communities across Wales: Aberystwyth, Connah’s Quay and Port Talbot

FUNDER

Welsh Government

TIMESCALE

9-12 months

METHODS

- Ethnographic research: snowballing approach; interviews and follow up conversations.
- Seven Wales-wide stakeholder interviews.
- Two co-creation workshops in each location
- Workshop based programme of innovation support in two of the three locations

OUTPUTS

- [Amplify Cymru Story book](#)
- [Valuing Place: The importance of place for understanding inequality and taking action in Wales](#)

