



From Assets to Action:

**A Decade of Growing
Stronger Communities**



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Introduction

Since 2011, Forever Manchester have channelled community support through an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. This approach focuses on identifying and leveraging the existing strengths and assets within communities; asking **'what's strong?'** instead of **'what's wrong?'**. Community Builders (CBs) use the ABCD approach to work closely with residents to build relationships, map community assets, and support local initiatives.

Over the past 14 years, Forever Manchester's ABCD programmes have made a significant impact on communities across Greater Manchester (GM). This report provides a comprehensive overview of the outcomes and achievements of Forever Manchester's ABCD programmes, highlighting the CBs role in fostering more connected, stronger, and happier communities.

To date, CBs have delivered the following activity as part of ABCD programmes:

- ∞ Engaging with nearly 6,000 people through meaningful interactions known as 'bumps'.
- ∞ Delivering an estimated 70,000 hours of community work across seven of the ten GM boroughs.
- ∞ Delivering ABCD training to 383 residents, and 1,167 professionals.
- ∞ Delivering 'Cool to be Kind' training, which builds confidence, community pride, and develops leadership skills, to 1,650 young people.
- ∞ Supporting community members to apply for 385 Great Stuff Awards, valuing £116,200.

ABCD outcomes can be as varied as the communities they are delivered in; CBs do not arrive in communities with a checklist of ABCD outcomes they plan to achieve. This epitomises their person-led and place-based approach but can make celebrating their achievements difficult.

Through comprehensive case studies, consultations with communities and professionals, and detailed analysis of the extensive data recorded by CBs, an outcomes framework has been developed to define the

features, and evidence the value, of the more connected, stronger, and happier communities that CBs work to create through ABCD.

The features of **'more connected'** communities include increased connections via resident-led social activities, an awareness of local groups, networks, public services and assets, strong peer support networks, community pride and a culture of volunteering. More connected communities also contain empowered young people and increased digital inclusion.

Evidence of more connected communities, after a programme of ABCD, include the following positive changes reported by residents:

- ∞ 92% have more friends and connections in their community
- ∞ 88% start to take part in community projects
- ∞ 84% feel more positive about their community and area

The features of **'stronger'** communities include access to training, skills and flexible funding opportunities, strong community leadership, collaboration and connections between residents and public services, resilient local people who feel valued and have access to opportunities for economic improvement, and communities that have plans in place for long-term success.

Evidence of stronger communities, after a programme of ABCD, include the following positive changes reported by residents:

- ∞ 63% feel like they make a difference to people's lives
- ∞ 61% feel like what they do in their community is important
- ∞ 35% feel more positive about their community and area

The features of 'happier' communities include increased physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, access to joyful events and inclusive spaces, opportunities available for personal growth, strong local connections, and local people that feel safe, free and like they belong.

Evidence of happier communities, after a programme of ABCD, include the following positive changes reported by residents:

- ∞ 65% have better mental health
- ∞ 49% have become more physically active
- ∞ 49% have increased their self-esteem

A central principle of the ABCD approach is working with communities to help them identify their own strengths and assets, not arriving in an area and prescribing a 'cure' for perceived deficiencies:

"It's having the grace to ask communities and people what they need, not telling them what you're going to give them... You don't need to be in control of people's lives. You just need to walk with them."

Community Builder

This approach has proved effective at engaging with communities that may have, at times, found it difficult to access or connect with traditional public services:

"It was her persona and the way she never pushed, said "come here, do that". It was never like that; it was always in our time. If you wanted to do something [she'd] advise you and help you out, but there was never any push, they never took over."

Community member

Community members speak highly of the personable and enthusiastic approach CBs take. Through CB support, people have changed their lives for the better; becoming less isolated, healthier, and feeling empowered to use their skills and strengths to help others in their community.

The impact of Forever Manchester's ABCD programmes over the past 14 years has been profound and far-reaching. By focusing on the strengths and assets within communities, CBs have fostered a sense of belonging, empowerment, and resilience amongst residents.

Value for money analysis reveals that, in two multi-year programmes, ABCD activities achieved a social return of £6.68 per £1 of investment. This demonstrates that ABCD programmes deliver strong social value relative to the resources invested.

The achievements outlined in this report demonstrate the effectiveness of the ABCD approach and the dedication of CBs in creating positive change.



Forever Manchester asked Forever Consulting to assess how much of a difference the charity made to local communities in 2023. Forever Consulting provides social and economic research and consultancy services. They are a social enterprise that reinvests all profits into grassroots community activities through Forever Manchester. Even though they support Forever Manchester in this way, they are independent, and so is this report.



The Aim Of This Report

ABCD programmes are as wide-ranging and diverse as the communities CBs deliver them in. Therefore, the simple question 'what do they do?' is not always the easiest to answer. CBs do not arrive in communities with a 'to-do' list that, if ticked off, can achieve easily defined and quantifiable outcomes.

The outcomes ABCD programmes can help achieve are wide-reaching and potentially life-changing for communities and individuals. The purpose of this report is to define and evidence the impact Forever Manchester's ABCD approach has demonstrated over the past 14 years.

Methodology

This report is based on the following in-depth research activities:

- ∞ Desk-based review of ABCD and CB documentation, including programme overview, logic chain, previous impact report, recruitment pack, and other associated policy and guidance.
- ∞ Outcomes Framework development to define what constitutes a 'more connected, stronger and happier community', what outcomes can be associated with this, and the measures that can be used to demonstrate it.
- ∞ In-depth consultations with three CBs, four community members, and one professional stakeholder working in the community.
- ∞ Data analysis of delivery, outcomes and funding award data.
- ∞ Social return on investment (SROI) analysis.
- ∞ Qualitative assessment against the Outcomes Framework, to validate SROI findings and demonstrate unquantifiable impacts, including through detailed case studies.
- ∞ Wider impacts analysis to identify impact outside the Outcomes Framework, including mapping of delivery hours, feedback on CBs, connectivity visualisations, and training data.

Project scope

Forever Manchester have delivered ABCD programmes in GM since 2011. This report examines activity up to August 2025, exploring the following research questions:

- ∞ Who are the CBs, their history and which communities have they supported through ABCD?
- ∞ Why do CBs operate in their chosen areas? Who benefits from their work? How much support has been provided?
- ∞ How does the ABCD approach, and CBs skills and delivery, contribute to its impact?
- ∞ What does a more connected, stronger, and happier community look like? What outcomes should be expected, and how can these be measured?
- ∞ What impact have ABCD programmes had on creating more connected, stronger, and happier communities? What are the stories that demonstrate the long-term impacts of ABCD against this purpose?
- ∞ What social return on investment has been achieved in Ardwick and Wythenshawe (the two most recently completed ABCD programmes) and how does this apply elsewhere?
- ∞ What has been the impact of the Great Stuff Awards?
- ∞ How sustainable are the outcomes achieved by ABCD programmes? Do residents continue to use the skills they've learnt? Does the training with public sector organisations leave a legacy?

Data is presented for the full delivery period, unless otherwise stated.



What Is ABCD And Community Building?

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

ABCD is a different way of thinking about how to work for change, starting from a place of possibilities, strengths and capabilities, as opposed to problems and deficiencies. It changes the starting question:

"It changes the focus of what's wrong, to what's strong. ABCD is a strength-based methodology that encourages people to use their assets, skills, knowledge and connections to look at what they can do for themselves, rather than becoming passive recipients of services."

Community Builder

ABCD operates on the assumption that everyone, regardless of their background, has unique gifts, skills and passions to offer. It also assumes that people have internal motivations to act, which can release these resources for the good of themselves and their wider community.

ABCD recognises that there are five key assets in every community: individuals, community groups, service providers, physical assets, and connections...

By recognising the inherent strengths found in every community and individual, ABCD revitalises local initiatives and helps to recast relationships between institutions, associations, and residents so that communities are built from the inside out, rather than the outside in.

Forever Manchester has been a UK leader in ABCD since 2011, and, building on its extensive experience working in local communities, has developed a range of tools to help organisations adopt an ABCD approach. Forever Manchester delivers Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accredited training in communities and organisations across the UK.

ABCD methodology



Community Builders (CBs)

CBs work in localities for two to four years, depending on the size of the area, the community, and funding available. The ultimate aim of CBs is to help make more connected, stronger and happier communities. CBs define these as:

CB definition of a more connected, stronger and happier community

As a Community Builder, what does a more connected, stronger and happier community look like to you?

A community that knows what is going on at any time. People knowing about the different assets they're able to tap into. Groups knowing each other exist, what equipment they have that can be shared collaboratively. A community that has friends in their neighbours, and a community that shows resilience.

Getting the community spirit back in places... people being happier, people having more skills, and people doing fun things.

People understand their worth, and wake up and feel good, and are proud of where they live.



What Is ABCD And Community Building?

Community Builders (CBs)

CBs approach is grounded in ABCD, and is resident-led, place-based, and takes time; relationship building is key, and is guided by the following aim:

“Find what’s great in a community and encourage more of it.”

Community Builder

CBs use the ABCD approach in communities to get to know as many people as possible, finding out what they love about where they live, and what they like to do in their neighbourhood.

CBs discover what interests and passions people have and work closely with them to turn their great ideas into reality, helping to make a real difference to their lives and the lives of others.



When CBs arrive in an area they focus on identifying and mapping community assets, engaging existing community groups and starting conversations with those not presently engaged in wider community projects, making connections between people and encouraging new activity.

CBs approach is as varied as the communities they work in, but often includes the following key activities:

- ∞ Connecting with new residents via bumping spaces (spaces where people are likely to ‘bump’ into each other and interact). Identifying skills and assets and bringing these together to stimulate new community activity.
- ∞ Asset mapping: a process where a group is encouraged to study a map of their local community and plot its ‘assets’ e.g. physical spaces, public services, groups and clubs. This helps everyone to understand what is there, what can be utilised, transformed and linked. This is an ongoing process within a community, and the asset map is a living tool for all stakeholders.
- ∞ Identifying Community Connectors: Connectors are individuals from the community who are well-connected, positive and well trusted. They can be crucial to building trust in a community and supporting CBs to connect to individuals outside of known activity and assets.

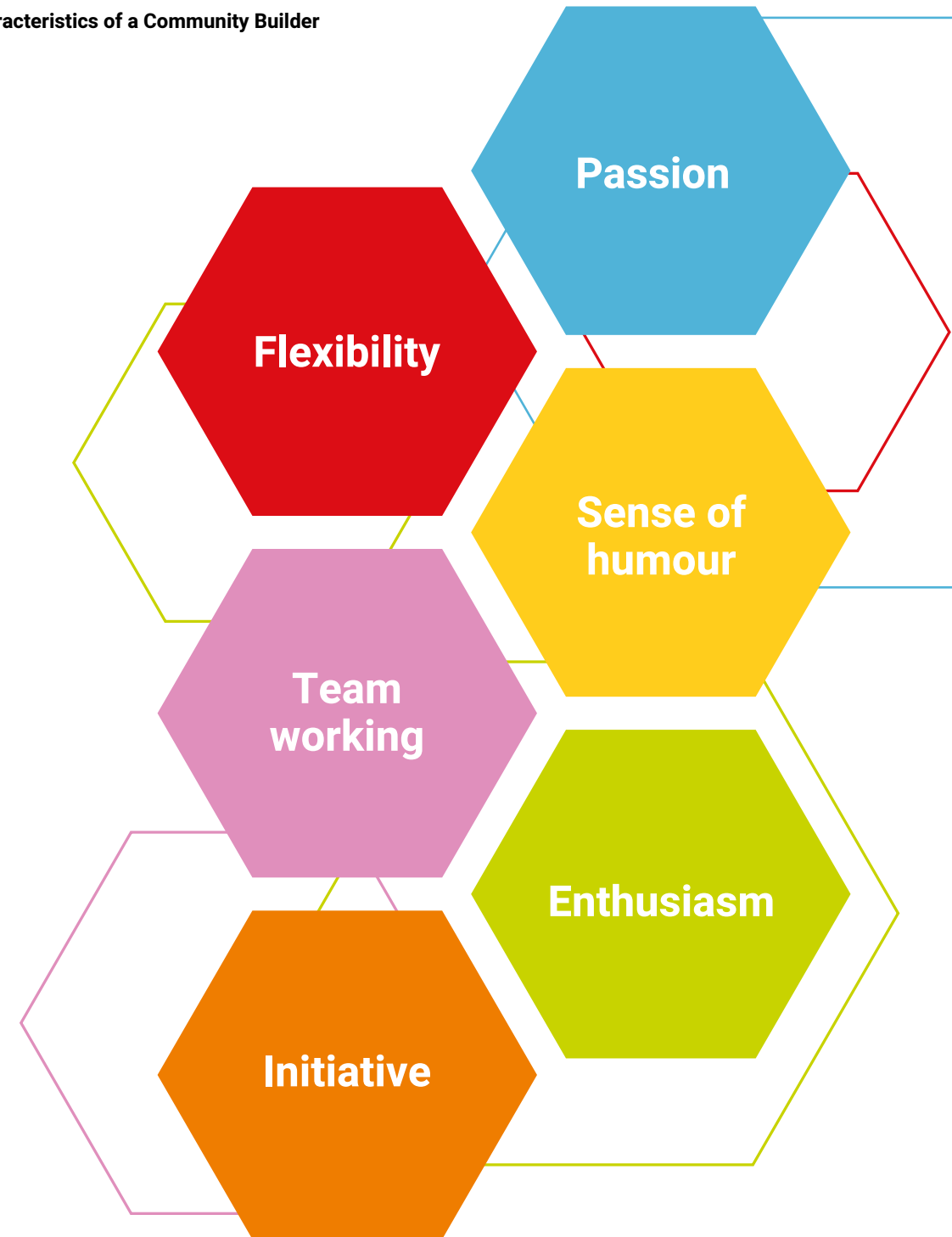
Forever Manchester currently employs three full-time CBs who work across GM. Figure 1 outlines some of the key characteristics of CBs.

Asked to describe the characteristics of a CB, one professional stakeholder described them as:

“Very open minded, very friendly. Great communication skills, very organised because there’s a lot to do. A lot of empathy, and really just good fun.”

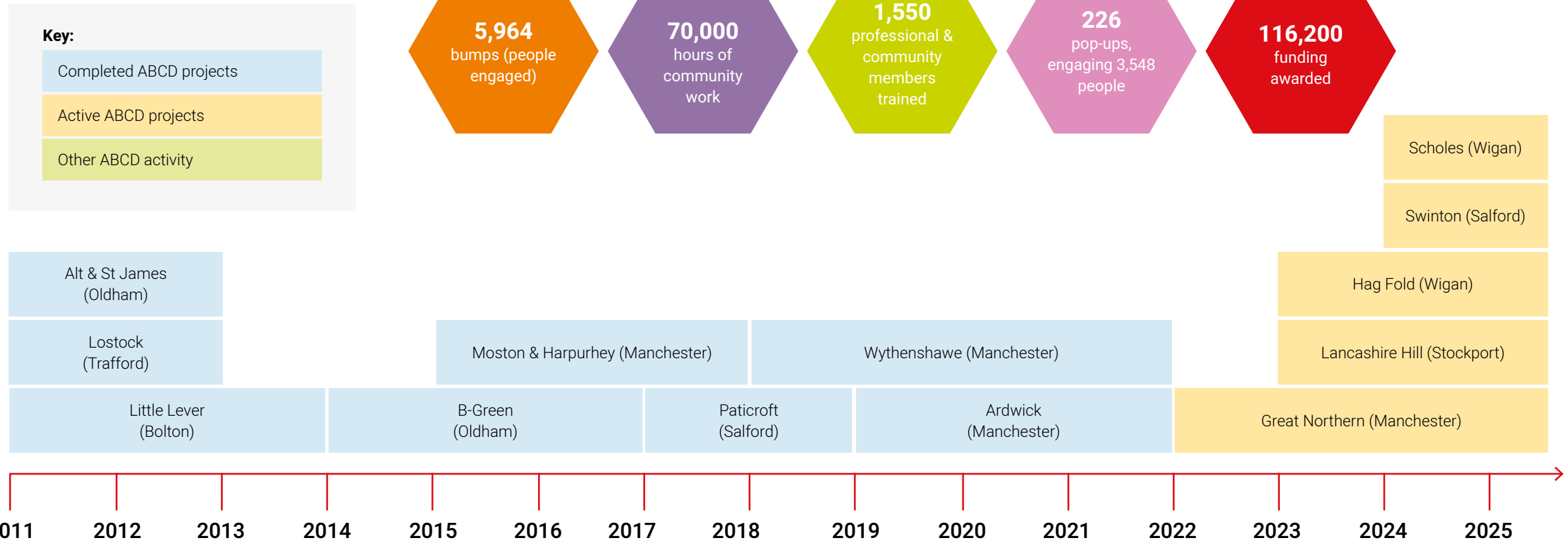
Professional Stakeholder

Figure 1: Characteristics of a Community Builder



What Is ABCD And Community Building?

A timeline of ABCD activity by Forever Manchester



Great Stuff Awards (formerly known as 'Cash 4 Graft'), has awarded 385 grants with a value of £116,200.

CBs began offering ABCD training to professionals in 2013 it became CPD certified in 2023. 1,167 professionals have been trained.

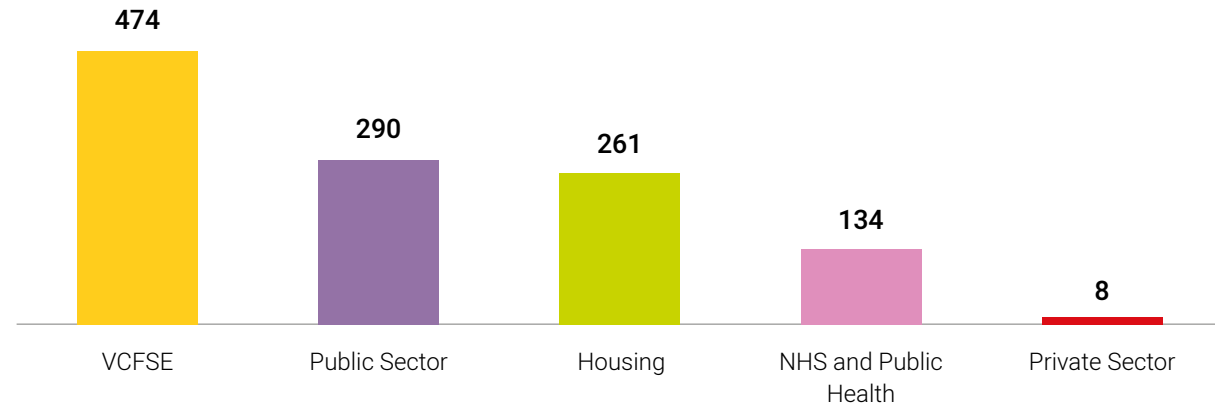
Cool to be Kind (C2BK) launched in 2015 and has been delivered to 1,650 children and young people across Greater Manchester. CB2K is a training session that covers kindness strengths, community projects and reflections. It is a three-phase journey (dream build, celebrate) encouraging empathy, teamwork and civic responsibility, and promotes positive behaviour and emotional wellbeing.

What Is ABCD And Community Building?

The success of ABCD training to community members led to Forever Manchester expanding the offer to professionals in other organisations working with communities...

Forever Manchester's ABCD training is CPD certified and has been successfully delivered to 1,167 professionals working in 112 organisations across the UK:

ABCD trainees by organisation type (n=1,167)



Feedback from trainees emphasises how effective it is at reframing how communities are viewed.

"It will influence how I work with the neighbourhood teams, rather than just using the data to look for issues and deficits, I'll tease out strengths and positives."

ABCD Trainee

"Thinking about grassroots groups that are happening in my area I often feel there's not much going on, but I've not been looking for groups in the best way."

ABCD Trainee

Case Study 1: Combined ABCD training with professionals and community members

CBs were approached by a service called The Big Life Group in Wythenshawe who had seen an asset map created by CBs and the local community. They wanted to use the map as part of their social prescribing programme run by their wellbeing coaches in partnership with the NHS health and social care team.

With the residents being the forefront of ABCD it was arranged that CBs would deliver a training session to both services and residents at the same time. This proved highly effective and led to a better relationship between services and residents.



Good Stuff: How We Do It

This section outlines the key features of the ABCD approach to working in communities. Highlighting the flexibility, authenticity and trust that is central to it; the focus on community assets and empowering people to act, and how this can lead to stronger relationships with other services and organisations.

The ABCD approach is committed to asking people what they can do, not telling them what they should do. Listening and facilitating conversations are vital elements...

Throughout the communities they work in delivering ABCD programmes, CBs show their commitment to listening to the strengths, needs and ambitions of communities. Asked how this approach differs to traditional top-down statutory service delivery, CBs emphasise the importance of reducing the traditional power imbalance that can occur in community work:

"It's having the grace to ask communities and people what they need, not telling them what you're going to give them... You don't need to be in control of people's lives. You just need to walk with them."

Community Builder

The effectiveness of this approach, particularly the focus on facilitation and support, is received positively by community members:

"It was her persona and the way she never pushed, said "come here, do that". It was never like that; it was always in our time. If you wanted to do something [she'd] advise you and help you out, but there was never any push, they never took over."

Community member

Community members also appreciate CBs' communication style that makes it clear they are being listened to:

"They were just a joy to work with. Because they were brilliant builders, but also brilliant communicators as well. And that's such a difference, when people feel that they're being listened to."

Community member

CBs do not work in isolation to other activity occurring in communities, including that provided by statutory services. Their ABCD approach is built around identifying assets, and nurturing relationships between community members and organisations...

CBs take a significant amount of time understanding an area, from in-depth research before they arrive, observing areas on the ground, to talking with community members. This approach builds trust and confidence in the authenticity of CBs. Consequently, CBs can gain a deeper insight into communities, and this can lead to better relationships between community members and public services:

"We hear stuff that the [public] services will never hear. We build a very different relationship and hopefully when they jump on board with services, they get the benefit of that."

Community Builder

CBs build relationships with other organisations and actors working in communities, including LA services, Councillors, MPs and local health services.

Asset-mapping with community members is central to this approach, as it can reframe services as something that can be used by community members to achieve their own goals, rather than as simply a transactional provider:

"My role as a Community Builder is to listen to the ideas of local people, build on them and figure ways people's skills can be integrated into the community. It's not just about facilitating projects. It's about nurturing relationships, amplifying local voices, and creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and valued."

Community Builder

A strengths-based approach is central to how CBs work in an ABCD way in communities. This approach is designed to emphasise the strengths of areas that may have been previously defined by their perceived deficiencies...



Using their ABCD approach, CBs work to change the narrative in communities that have been defined by social and economic deprivation data and negative media reports, by focusing on the strengths that already exist in an area:

"People are living in areas that are being called 'deprived', we go there and ask: 'what are you good at?', 'what do you love doing in your spare time?'. No-one else is asking people in these so-called deprived areas, they're just being told 'you're going to live 10 years less than the person two postcodes over.'"

Community Builder

CBs have a suite of ABCD training tools they use with communities to help them identify their strengths and assets.

The 'We Can Game' is a process of mapping the skills of individuals within a community and is used by CBs to get people thinking differently about their skills and assets. It can also be used to identify other people to involve in future activities. Participants are given a stack of 100 cards, each with a skill written on them. They then sort the cards into what they can do, what they know someone else in the community can do, and what they need to find someone to do.

'Head, Hands and Hearts' asks people to identify their individual assets related to their: 'Head', things they know something about and would enjoy talking about with others; 'Heart', things people are passionate about and make them act; and 'Hands' things or skills people know how to do and could potentially share with others.

Through the assets and strengths identified during these activities, relationships are built with different sections of the community for shared benefit.

ABCD Impact

ABCD outcomes are wide ranging, diverse and dependent on the communities they are delivered in and with. ABCD programmes do not have a one-size-fits-all approach, consequently the outcomes achieved are not universal or uniform...

The overarching aim of ABCD is to create more connected, stronger and happier communities. What this looks like can differ across areas. The following framework (Table 1) is based on analysis of the previous 14 years of ABCD programme outcomes. It identifies the key features of a more connected, stronger and happier community, the outcomes associated with it, and examples of where this has been achieved.

Examples are based on an analysis of the full range of ABCD activity, interviews with key stakeholders, case studies, and feedback data from recent projects. Feedback data is collected from individual 'bumps' to understand any positive changes and personal outcomes experienced.

Data is based on 171 'bump' feedback forms from recently completed projects in Ardwick (2022), Wythenshawe (2022), and Patricroft (2019), and Great Stuff Awards received by groups in Ardwick and Wythenshawe.

In addition to collecting feedback data, when CBs start work in an area, they map the number of people they know in the community and how they are connected, they record the connections they make throughout their ABCD work and produce the same map when they finish (Appendix 1). Appendix 1 is taken from Ardwick and showcases the dramatic increase in the number of people they get to know and the scale of connections that are built in the three years CBs are active in an area.

Overall, the following examples in Table 1 reveal the positive changes experienced in communities where ABCD programmes have been delivered, including increases in understanding and appreciation of the assets available locally, feelings of self-worth and empowerment from participating, and personal improvements to mental and physical health.



Table 1: ABCD Outcomes Framework

Understand The Breadth Of Change

'More connected' features:	'More connected' outcomes:	'More connected' examples:
New connections, including across different demographics.	Residents from diverse backgrounds (including different ages, socioeconomic status, abilities and cultural identities) form new relationships through inclusive and welcoming community spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ 92% of people have more friends and connections in their community. ∞ Appendix 1.
Empowered young people.	Young people play an active role in decision-making and leadership, forging bonds across generations and increasing youth confidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ 1,650 young people completed 'Cool to be Kind' training. ∞ Case study 3.
Resident-led social activities available.	Community members lead social and creative activities that bring people together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ 385 Great Stuff Awards, totalling £116,200 of funding. ∞ 68% Great Stuff Awards funding specifically spent on social and creative activities.
Awareness of local groups, networks and assets.	People discover and connect with more local people, groups, assets, networks and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ 93% of people increased their awareness of projects and groups in their community. ∞ 88% of people start taking part in projects. ∞ Asset-mapping activity completed as part of all CB activity.
Strong peer support networks.	Informal networks of mutual support strengthen social ties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Case study 3.
A culture of volunteering.	A strong culture of volunteering builds trust and shared purpose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ 41% of people started volunteering.
Digital inclusion.	Access to and confidence using digital tools to connect with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ CB activity continued through the COVID-19 lockdowns, with community members given zoom licenses and training, and summer roadshows for children and their families switching to online events.
Community pride.	People feel proud of their neighbourhood and its identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ 84% of people felt more positive about their community and area.

ABCD Impact

A Stronger Community

'Stronger' features:	'Stronger' outcomes:	'Stronger' examples:
Access to training and skills development.	Local people gain skills and confidence to lead community initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 383 community members completed ABCD training throughout all completed CB projects over the past 14 years, this equates to 43 people on average, per project.
Access to flexible funding opportunities.	Residents access funding to act on ideas without formal barriers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case Study 7. 385 Great Stuff Awards funding totalling £116,200 awarded. "It's easier than you think... there's money there to be spent for community events." – Community member
Strong community leadership.	Residents take ownership of tools and knowledge to sustain local work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case Study 1.
Collaboration between residents and public services.	Communities work better with public services to improve their neighbourhoods. Public services embed CB practices into their approaches, so they provide more effective support to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asset mapping with services, including community 'waste warrior' group working in partnership with local authority team to tackle fly-tipping. Case study 5.
Local people feel valued.	People feel their involvement is meaningful and valued.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 61% of people felt what they do in their community is important. Case study 2.
Plans are in place for long-term success.	Communities are equipped to continue thriving; confident of their skills and accessing local assets and services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% of people, when asked if they had any 'future community plans', responded positively, committing to continuing or starting community projects and groups in their area. "I have so many things I want to do. I want to attend groups, start more groups, help other families and find work." – Community member "Thanks to meeting [CBs] I am now set up as a CIC. I will be working with a local school [CB] connected me to." – Community member
Resilient local people.	Communities are better able to adapt to challenges (e.g. cost of living, climate events, service cuts).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 383 people completed full ABCD training. Case study 4.
Opportunities are available for economic improvement.	Increased pathways to employment or financial resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 35% of people increased their employment opportunities.

A Happier Community

'Happier' features:	'Happier' outcomes:	'Happier' examples:
Access to joyful events.	Shared celebrations and creative activities spark joy and connection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 385 Great Stuff Awards funding totalling £116,200 awarded. 68% Great Stuff Awards funding specifically spent on social activities. Case study 4. We did the Easter hunt... hundreds of Easter eggs, kids everywhere running around having a laugh. – Community member
Mental wellbeing.	Community involvement supports better mental health and wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 65% of people reported better mental health. Case study 7.
Good physical health.	People participate in community groups and activities that improve their physical health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 49% of people became more physically active.
Opportunities are available for personal growth.	People gain confidence and pursue new learning and opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 41% of people increased their skills, and 58% started to use the skills and knowledge they already had.
Access to inclusive spaces.	Activities are welcoming and accessible to all.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asset mapping inclusive of all community members and activities. Great Stuff Awards application criteria is significantly less restrictive than traditional funds, reducing barriers to access. Snowball effect of successful community activity and the effectiveness of word-of-mouth information sharing that encourages participation and reduced isolation.
Local people have a sense of purpose.	People feel they make a positive difference in their community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 61% of people felt that what they do in their community is important. 95% of people have plans for future community activity that involves continuing their current activity or starting something new. Case study 6.
Emotional wellbeing.	Community life fosters appreciation, hope and emotional support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 49% of people increased their self-esteem. Case study 2.
Local people feel like they belong.	People feel valued in their community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 63% of people felt like they make a difference to people's lives.
Local people feel safe and free.	Feeling safe to be oneself and move freely in public spaces—especially for women, LGBTQ+ people, and marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great Stuff Awards funding awarded for variety of cultural, identity, and religious celebrations and activities. Community member describing their summer picnic event as: "A safe, inclusive and culturally sensitive environment where women could meet, build friendships and experience joy in a supportive setting."

Case Study 1:

Stronger Community Leadership

Forever Manchester began working in Hag Fold, Wigan, in 2023, during which time they met a local yoga teacher.

The yoga teacher was concerned about the isolation and loneliness many women experience after childbirth. She wanted to do something about it, but her insurance didn't cover her to work with new mums for up to six weeks post-birth.

Following discussions with CBs and consulting the community via social media, she identified that there were many new mums locally who were looking for ways to socialise after giving birth. From this, the 'Mums for Mums' group was formed.

Using the ABCD methodology, the yoga teacher assessed the physical assets of the local area and decided that The Snug would be the perfect base to meet the needs of the group. She approached The Snug, and they were thrilled to host and be able to support a grassroots community project.

The group's launch was made possible via a Great Stuff Award. CBs attended the first group session to build relationships with the mums, learn about their talents, passions, and interests, and encourage greater community involvement.

The initiative demonstrates strong community leadership by identifying a gap, starting a conversation, and becoming a support network for many mums locally. The yoga teacher also connected to services by reaching out to the local midwifery and health visiting teams, inviting them to join the group and connect with women who could benefit from their services.

"[CBs have] been amazing. If we need additional support because demand is so high, they'll help me find more funding. They want this to be a valuable space for the community."

Community member

As the group has grown, some women have taken on roles and responsibilities to help formalise the group. They have formed a supportive network, offering advice and assistance to one another. A WhatsApp group with over 45 members has been created, where members share advice, pass down clothes and nappies that babies may have grown out of, and socialise.

Mums for Mums has successfully created a strong peer support network, raised awareness of local groups and assets, and demonstrated strong community leadership. With the support of CBs, the initiative continues to thrive and make a positive impact on the lives of new mums in the community, including through the creation of long-term connections and friendships.

Headline from 'I Love Manchester' website

From postnatal depression to empowering mums everywhere – one mum's mission to help others

Mums for Mums, born out of the darkest postnatal depression, is now a huge lifeline for new mums across Greater Manchester.

Case Study 2:

Wellbeing And A Sense Of Purpose

A lifelong local resident of Wythenshawe first met CBs at a pop-up he heard about through his wife, whose local group were also engaging with CBs.

CBs connected with the resident and learnt about his skills, talents, and passions. He wasn't in work, and he had little confidence but started to attend groups that his wife was involved with and offered his support.

Following the COVID-19 lockdowns, the resident was exploring ways to improve his mental health and wellbeing, as well as his fitness, as he had started to feel deflated. He had also been speaking to some of his neighbours and peers who were feeling the same after being inside for so long. Following these conversations, the resident came up with the idea of setting up a walking football club, and with the support of CBs, they mapped local assets to find pitches and other groups.

Great Stuff Awards funded 10 weeks of pitch hire, and the Wythenshawe Warriors Walking Football was established, and now boasts 55 active members.

The sense of purpose and increased emotional wellbeing the resident experienced as a result of their initial work with CBs has completely changed their life:

"[Since meeting CBs] I've never looked back, really. It's made me who I am today, people regard me as a community champion now, and it's all because of this simple step I made four years ago. If you'd have asked me back then, I would never have thought I'd be able to do any of this."

Community member

The resident built on the ABCD skills they developed with CBs and went on to found the Wythenshawe Men's Group, providing a safe space for men to socialise and support each other.

CBs guidance was instrumental in the resident's journey, providing them with the tools and knowledge to form committees, apply for grants, and organise community events.

The Wythenshawe Men's Group now has 150 members and organises regular activities. The group's success has had a ripple effect, inspiring other community initiatives and fostering a sense of pride and connection among residents.

"It's having a tremendous impact. Without these groups, Wythenshawe would be a much sadder place."

Community member

This local resident's story is a testament to the transformative power of community support and engagement. The CBs dedication and personalised approach have not only helped the resident rebuild their life but also supported them to strengthen the Wythenshawe community.



Wythenshawe Warriors

Case Study 3:

Empowered Young People And Peer Support

Forever Manchester started working in the Great Northern in 2022. The Great Northern is a development in the city centre of Manchester that includes apartments, bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. CBs were funded as part of the developer's social value commitment.

CBs quickly found that the needs of the community in a city-centre residential area were very similar to those on the larger housing estates they often work in. Residents were concerned about social isolation, they wanted to feel part of their community, have peer support and access to inclusive spaces.

CBs met a resident who was concerned about her children becoming isolated as they were neurodivergent and home-schooled. Using the dedicated community space within the development, the Village Hall, the resident created a meetup for local teenagers in similar circumstances.

With the support of CBs, the resident's initial idea has grown to be an established community resource called 'A Quiet Space for Teens'. The group provides a social, safe, and supportive space for young people to take part in skills development, games and arts and crafts. On average, over 20 families participate weekly, with the help of three volunteers.

"A Facebook group was set up and started reaching out to others in similar circumstances, and now, two years down the line, they're doing lots of amazing things. It's attended by 11 to 18-year-olds, and they completely decide how it works; they've recently done podcast training."

Community Builder

Great Northern Village Hall community space



Value For Money

This section presents the Value for Money of two recent ABCD programmes in Ardwick (2019-2022), and Wythenshawe (2018-2022).

Results

The analysis, based on reported results and outcomes, shows that ABCD activities in Ardwick and Wythenshawe achieved a social return of investment of:

£6.68

Social return on investment



This demonstrates that ABCD activities deliver strong social value relative to the resources invested. While there are no comparable SROI ratios due to the unique nature of the ABCD approach, the strength of the calculated ratio reinforces its effectiveness and impact on communities.

*This was assessed using a social return on investment approach. The methodology is set out in Appendix 3.

Great Stuff Awards

This section outlines what the Great Stuff Awards is, how much funding has been awarded, what it is used for, and case studies that showcase the impact it can have.

The Great Stuff awards, formerly known as Cash 4 Graft, is a pot of funding held by Forever Manchester that is designed for grassroots community activity...

To date, 385 grants valuing £116,200 have been awarded to grassroots community groups throughout GM. A "grassroots community group" does not need to be constituted, and the application process is simple, with no requirement for formal accounting and policy information.

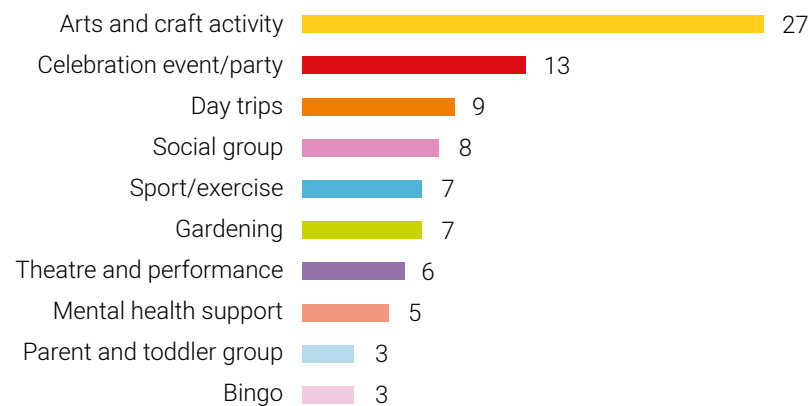
The ease of which people can apply, and the added support CBs can provide applicants, reduces the burden on applicants who may have no previous experience applying for funding.

In Ardwick and Wythenshawe between 2018/19 and 2022, £30,234 Great Stuff Awards funding was awarded to 88 groups, reaching approximately 5,831 people. Activity has varied, as outlined in Figure 2:

Many groups delivered activity that ran across the different themes in Figure 2. Some examples of group activity made possible by Great Stuff Awards include:

- ∞ Providing a safe space for women to talk, express themselves and celebrate their journeys through spoken word.
- ∞ A knitting and craft social group in a new extra care supported accommodation block, set up to reduce social isolation as new neighbours get to know each other.
- ∞ An online book club for children and families to discuss and celebrate Black History Month.
- ∞ A local community put on their own pantomime and celebration due to the prohibitive costs of tickets and travel to see a professional pantomime at Christmas.

Figure 2: Type of activity funded by Great Stuff Awards in Ardwick and Wythenshawe (n=88):



"Great Stuff is an excellent tool. It allows people to do good things in their community without them having to become a more formalised group. If they chose to become more formalised, great, but it allows groups the freedom to do good things, without jumping through hoops."

Community Builder



Case Study 4:

Great Stuff Awards in Lancashire Hill

In Lancashire Hill, Stockport, the Great Stuff Awards funding has been instrumental in fostering community engagement and supporting various projects. To date, 15 projects have been awarded £3,000:

- ∞ Tuesday Wellbeing Café
- ∞ Coronation Party
- ∞ Summer Fun for Kids
- ∞ Summer Community Party
- ∞ Art Competition
- ∞ Community Christmas Party
- ∞ Winter Warmer for Lancashire Hill
- ∞ Kids Club
- ∞ Oromo Foundation
- ∞ Bread Making
- ∞ Craft Club
- ∞ Greenspace Volunteers
- ∞ Lenham Close
- ∞ Brinnington Green Space
- ∞ Lanky Hill Dance Kids

One notable success story is the Mother's Day Craft Club. A local resident, passionate about crafts, organised a community event where children decorated latte mugs and filled them with donated chocolates as Mother's Day gifts. The event was a huge success, with around 40 children participating. This initiative led to the creation of an after-school craft club, which received funding and support from the community.

Another significant achievement is the resident-led holiday club. In response to the lack of accessible holiday activities for children, the community organised their own holiday club. The group received support from Forever Manchester and successfully ran a range of activities, including arts and crafts, traditional games, and nature hunts. The club's success demonstrated the community's resilience and resourcefulness.

The Great Stuff Awards has had a profound impact on the Lancashire Hill community. It has empowered residents to take ownership of their community, fostered stronger connections, and provided opportunities for children and families to engage in positive activities.



Lancashire Hill Holiday Club

Case Study 5:

Great Stuff Awards in Benchill



Benchill Winter Warmer

A local resident applied for Great Stuff Awards for litter picking equipment to set up a local litter picking team. Following the award, she engaged and motivated her neighbours to take ownership of their road and encouraged them to help keep the area clean and tidy.

Through this activity the resident was introduced to many neighbours and was able to build positive relationships and started working in partnership with the local organisers of street events at Halloween and Christmas to make sure the area was left clean and tidy after events. She was also introduced to Benchill Community Centre where she offered to litter pick the grounds, she was also able to build a positive relationship with Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) staff members.

As well as her passion for litter picking and the environment, the resident had many other skills and talents such as cooking and baking. She worked alongside her neighbours to teach them how to use the scraps that would normally be food waste and turn them into a healthy alternative.

One of the staff members from Benchill Community Centre, who lives on the same street as the resident

had approached her with an initiative called 'Winter Warmer'. The idea was to create a warm space where a free hot meal could be accessed by residents to support them with the cost-of-living crisis. With the support of CBs they looked at the assets of the area and ways they could bring the Winter Warmer Initiative to life. They got in touch with other community centres, local shops, and sourced support without applying for funding. They approached WCHG who allowed them to have free room hire for six months.

The resident now cooks three times a week, making sure each person that attends has access to a free hot meal. She has drawn up a 'how-to' menu, showing everyone how it's made and how to use food waste. She also runs workshops showing people basic cooking skills.

The resident's journey, from a simple community litter picking activity, to running their own initiatives and supporting others, showcases the impact a small amount of funding can have, and how it can be a catalyst for greater community engagement and support.

Forever: We Move But The Story Continues

ABCD programmes help communities grow their ideas into established groups that can independently deliver and increase their offer to local communities...

What start out as ideas of ways to make their local area more connected, stronger and happier by identifying and utilising existing strengths and skills, have grown into established groups that can continue long after CBs have stopped working in an area.

For example, one group in the Great Northern project began as a mental health support meeting for local men. They've grown from providing a safe space to talk, to offering guitar lessons, chess groups, poetry slams and kickboxing:

"I think really the big impact has been hand holding people who start with just an idea for something they want to do, and helping them to get it set up in the right way...then helping them get access to funding, some Great Stuff, but other funding as well...[one local group] are at a stage now where they're set up as a full charity, they've grown exponentially."

Professional Stakeholder

CBs use the ABCD approach to work effectively at building on the skills people have, and many groups have gone on to apply for additional funding outside of Forever Manchester and Great Stuff Awards.

Connections made between people in communities have shown to be long-lasting, regardless of their formality; from shared volunteering opportunities, mutual support networks, through to new friendships...

CBs work to help community members connect with each other for their mutual benefit, and feedback emphasises the strength of these connections:

"Of course the money helped at first, but when that leaves it's friends that are left. I started the WhatsApp group for the women for picnics and that's grown so much since. Through that women exchange items or donate things to each other, and they still do this, three years after [CBs] left."

Community member

Beyond the practical, tangible changes, a key legacy of ABCD is the happiness that has been instilled in people, sometimes helping to break long-term cycles of behaviour...

Reduced isolation, first-time employment, reduction in 'frequent flyer' visits to health services; these are all longer-term outcomes reported by people to CBs who've taken part in ABCD activity. People report feeling happier, healthier, and having greater self-worth, all of which has had a direct impact on their everyday lives:

"Its lasting change for these women, they are happier. They've always had the passion but now they have the opportunities."

Community member



Case Study 6:

The Forever

When CBs first met a local resident in West Gorton in 2019, they found a woman eager to connect but held back by isolation and unfamiliar systems. Having fled war in Syria, the resident arrived in the UK with no connections and limited access to services.

“It was winter and I didn’t know anyone or the transport system, had nowhere to go and felt lonely. I tried joining council-held training sessions but was told I wasn’t eligible because I didn’t have the right permit. It was so disappointing when I wanted to do something but just wasn’t getting the right support.”

Community member

A former teacher with 15 years’ experience, the resident had always been active in her Syrian community, organising school exhibitions and extracurricular classes to upskill children. But in West Gorton, she struggled to find a way to contribute. That changed when she met CBs:

“They came and took my hand and gave me the support. [CBs] understand what women need, which is to feel listened to and understood; they’re special.”

Community member

The CB’s approach was simple but transformative: they listened, encouraged, and walked alongside the resident as she rebuilt her community life. With their support, the resident formed a women’s group that runs picnics in the park, where women and children, often new to the UK, cook dishes and vote for a winner. The resident also started a cooking club in her home with

four people, which grew into a community centre-based activity at a venue CBs helped secure.

Passionate about Syrian cuisine, the resident used the club to share her heritage and connect with neighbours. The cooking sessions became a bridge between cultures, attracting residents from across the community. During the pandemic, she volunteered to cook for vulnerable neighbours and made Eid sweets to distribute locally.

Importantly, the changes have lasted. The resident started a WhatsApp group for local women, now a space for sharing, donating, and supporting one another. Ten volunteers help run the group, and several members also volunteer at the Syrian Association.

She continues to lead five weekly summer sports sessions for children, fortnightly coffee mornings, and arts and crafts activities. Much of this is made possible through City Council funding, something she credits CBs with giving her the confidence and know-how to pursue.

This local resident’s story is a testament to the lasting legacy of CBs. Their personalised, strengths-based approach not only helped her reconnect and thrive, but continues to ripple outward, sustaining community activity, confidence, and connections for years after they’ve gone.



Case Study 7:

Ongoing Participation and Development

A few months into working in Ardwick, CBs were approached by a local resident who asked if they could speak with her sister. She was concerned that her sister was struggling with her mental health and hoped that becoming more connected to the community might help. This moment marked a turning point; it showed that residents were beginning to value and trust the CB approach in their area.

CBs spent time getting to know the sister, learning about her interests and what might help her feel more confident. Through these conversations, the resident shared her passion for weaving and her desire to use it to connect with others. With encouragement and support, she applied for the Great Stuff Awards and used it to purchase equipment and launch a weaving group.

The group offered residents the chance to learn how to make their own looms using wool or recycled fabric and explore different weaving techniques from concept to finished product. Sessions were designed to be hands-on and accessible, with the resident introducing tools like plastic needles and DIY looms, offering taster workshops to other organisations in the area. The group quickly became a calm, creative space where people could learn, talk, and support one another.

Thanks to the success of the weaving group, the resident was invited by a local housing provider to take part in a project using arts and crafts to encourage residents to talk about anti-social behaviour with the police. Her confidence continued to grow.

CBs subsequently sent the resident details of an opportunity to showcase her artwork, meaning she went on to create a beautiful piece of artwork entitled ‘Woman’, which was entered into the Great Northern’s art exhibition, raising money for Forever Manchester.

This resident’s journey shows how CBs create the conditions for long-term change. By unlocking individual strengths and supporting people to act on their ideas, they help residents build confidence, lead activity, and form lasting connections. In Ardwick, the weaving group continues to run, new partnerships have formed, and the resident remains a visible and active contributor to community life; evidence of a legacy that endures well beyond the CB’s time in the area.

Conclusion

ABCD activity is as diverse as the communities it's delivered in, and the outcomes achieved since 2011 cannot be reduced to a neat list. However, potential funders need to understand what they can expect for their investment. The framework (Table 1 & 2) developed in this report outlines what more connected, stronger and happier communities look like...

Through in-depth case studies, consultations with communities and professionals, and analysis of the extensive data CBs record, this report has revealed the depth of activity undertaken via ABCD programmes with community members to help them identify and harness their existing strengths.

The key benefits of the ABCD approach include its flexibility, authenticity, and trust-building capabilities. Through this resident-led and place-based approach, CBs take the time to build relationships and understand the unique strengths and needs of each community. This method not only helps communities identify and leverage their existing assets but also encourages a sense of ownership and pride.

CBs demonstrate the effectiveness of walking alongside residents, providing advice and guidance, as

opposed to simply telling people what to do. The ABCD approach ensures impacts are sustainable, as communities are empowered to use their existing strengths and assets.

The ABCD approach is designed to be adaptable to various areas and circumstances, making it effective regardless of a community's perceived level of comfort or deprivation.

Forever Manchester's ABCD programmes have a proven track record of helping communities across GM become more connected, stronger and happier. This report has evidenced how ABCD could work effectively across all ten boroughs of GM.

The outcomes identified in this report should be widely celebrated.

Table 2: Summary of CB Outcomes Framework

Features of more 'connected' communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ New connections ∞ Empowered young people ∞ Resident-led social activities ∞ Awareness of local groups, networks and assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Strong peer support networks ∞ A culture of volunteering ∞ Digital inclusion ∞ Community pride
Features of 'stronger' communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Access to training and skills development ∞ Access to flexible funding opportunities ∞ People feel valued ∞ Opportunities are available for economic improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Strong community leadership ∞ Collaboration between residents and public services ∞ Plans are in place for long-term success ∞ Resilient people
Features of 'happier' communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Access to joyful events ∞ Mental wellbeing ∞ Good physical health ∞ Strong, local social connections ∞ Opportunities available for personal growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ∞ Access to inclusive spaces ∞ People have a sense of purpose ∞ Emotional wellbeing ∞ People feel like they belong ∞ People feel safe and free



How To Get Involved?

Real community helps deepen and refine our sense of inclusion, belonging and place, it brings out the best in us.

Forever Manchester's role is to be the champion of local people who are prepared to do extraordinary things to make our communities thrive, and to make sure that the talents, skills and assets that we all possess get a chance to be put into action.

We'd like to thank our generous donors who have helped us on our ABCD journey. Particular thanks go to the Hogben Family Trust, the Zochonis Charitable Trust, and the Baker Family Trust whose vision in supporting this work has enabled us to get so far.

If you would like to find out more about investing in local communities across Greater Manchester, please get in touch.

I think we'll get along.

Cheers!

Nick Massey CBE

Forever Manchester Chief Executive

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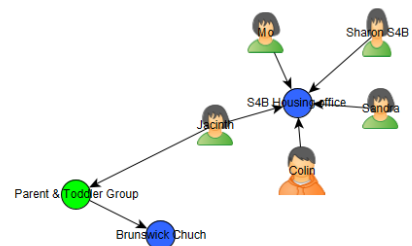
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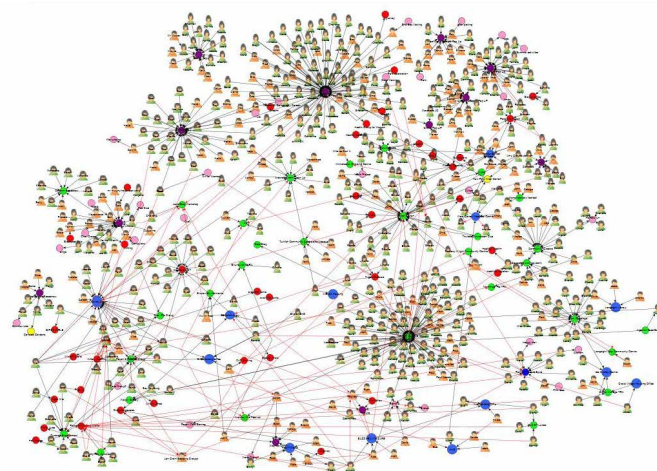
Appendix 1:

The Impact Of Connections

Number of people, organisations and groups. CBs knew in Ardwick in August 2019



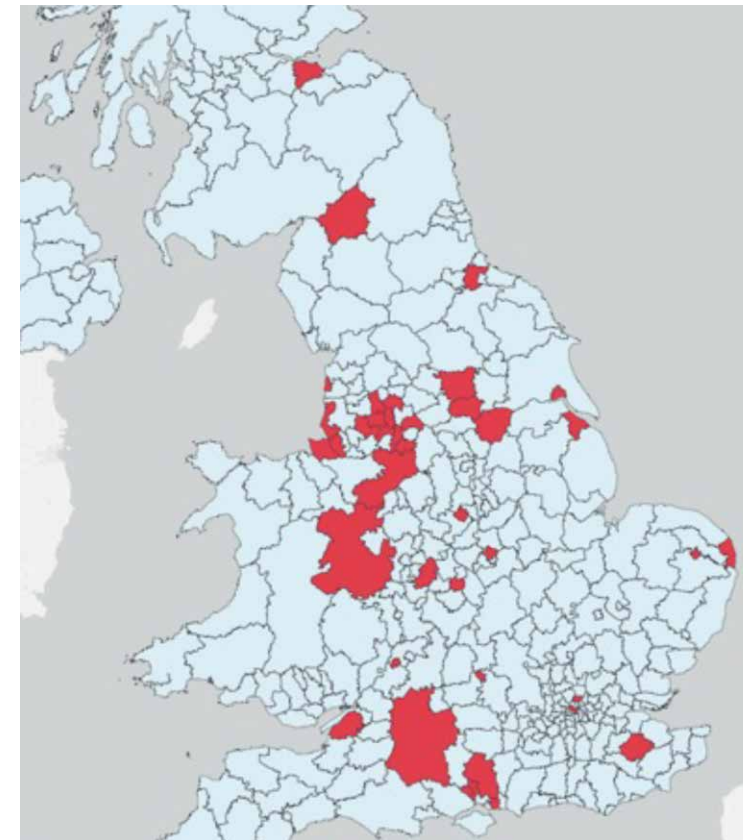
Number of people, organisations and groups CBs knew, and connections created, in Ardwick in August 2022



Appendix 2:

ABCD Training Delivered, By Location

ABCD training delivered to professionals, by location



Appendix 3:

Value For Money

This section presents the Value for Money of two recent ABCD programmes in Ardwick (2019-2022), and Wythenshawe (2018-2022).

Value for money has been assessed using a Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach. This has involved defining, quantifying and monetising the benefits of ABCD activities compared against CB salaries to determine the ratio of social return per £1 of investment. The SROI has been conducted in line with the HM Treasury Green Book, the Cabinet Guide to Social Return on Investment (2012), and wider technical guidance, where relevant.

Costs

Costs are based on actual spend of £192,500 between 2018-2022.

Benefits

Benefits were identified using feedback forms completed by a subset of residents in Ardwick and Wythenshawe, and the reported outcomes have been extrapolated to estimate the benefits for all recorded bumps in each area. The SROI analysis is based on several monetised benefits achieved in the areas, which include:

- ∞ 397 new volunteers
- ∞ 700 people with new friends or connections in the community
- ∞ 390 people with improved self-esteem
- ∞ 328 people with increased skills
- ∞ 570 people with improved mental health
- ∞ 442 people who are more physically active
- ∞ 590 people who feel more positive about their community and area

Adjustments

The gross benefits were adjusted to account for additionality and to derive net impacts. This means estimating the level of impact that would have occurred anyway without the CB activities. The following factors were applied:

- ∞ Deadweight – a measure of the amount of outcome that would have happened even if the activity had not taken place.
- ∞ Displacement – an assessment of how much of the outcome was displaced from elsewhere.
- ∞ Attribution – an assessment of how much the outcome was caused by the programme versus the contribution of other organisations or people.
- ∞ Drop off – the deterioration of an outcome over time.

Valuations were applied to each benefit based on relevant benchmarks taken from several accepted sources.

Other adjustments made in line with HM Treasury and Cabinet Office SROI guidance include:

- ∞ Adjusting all values to reflect 2025 prices.
- ∞ Discounting values using a 3.5% rate, as advised by HM Treasury.
- ∞ The timescale of impact and duration of effects.



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