Learning, soft skills and community regeneration: A case study analysis

Robert John Cornwall

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School of Social Sciences
Cardiff University

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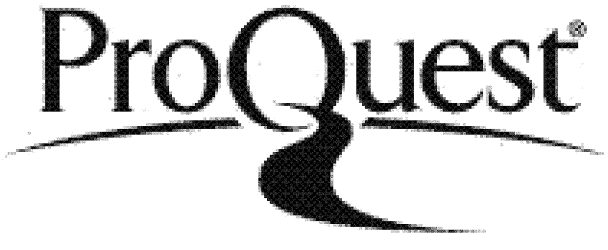

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Special thanks are due to my wife, Rosamund for her patience and understanding.

I would like to dedicate this work to the residents of disadvantaged communities throughout Wales in the hope that it will contribute to understanding how to help them to improve the quality of their lives.

Abstract

The focus of this study is to reflect critically on current policy and practice concerning social exclusion with a view to contributing ideas to improve the lives of people who inhabit our most disadvantaged communities. Three main arguments are developed. Firstly, that engagement in lifelong learning is now central to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. These are more widely known as soft skills. Secondly that these soft skills remain little understood, particularly among managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies. Finally, this lack of understanding results in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

A case study involving participant observation was conducted in a disadvantaged community in the south Wales Valleys. The study found that engagement in lifelong learning is now essential to ensure social inclusion and residents require a formidable portfolio of skills to learn their way out of social exclusion. The new policy emphasis on residents becoming co-responsible and empowered citizens places a greater significance on soft skills within the context of learning for health and well being, learning for socially active citizenship and learning for economically active citizenship. Despite this, soft skills were little understood among community regenerators and community based learning and support provision to enable residents to acquire soft skills was inadequate.

Other policy and practical impediments to soft skills development were found and these, together with the implications for national policies to ensure social inclusion and more importantly the residents of our most disadvantaged communities are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The decline in the economic fortunes of the south Wales Valleys since the end of the Second World War and its traumatic consequences for the people who live there has been the subject of numerous studies, research papers and publications. Governments of both political persuasions have tried unsuccessfully to revitalise the local economy to ensure that there are sufficient jobs to enable those who lost their livelihood to find alternative employment. Primary industries such as coal mining and steel making practically disappeared with indecent haste along with the industries that serviced them. The situation was compounded further by the increased demand for female labour and significantly less opportunities for males resulting from the decline of manufacturing industries and the new working practices that accompanied this. Whole communities were both devastated and destabilised as mass unemployment degenerated into long-term worklessness, economic inactivity, benefits dependency and social exclusion.

An insider perspective on the economic decline of the south Wales Valleys

The effects of unemployment upon individuals and our communities in the south Wales Valleys have dominated the writer's working life. Joining what was then the Ministry of Labour in the early 1960s his career spanned four decades. Working at a local operational as well as at national policy level enabled an insider perspective (Jorgensen 1989; Spradley 1980) on labour market, vocational training and unemployment benefit policy development of the various Conservative and Labour administrations as well as their impact on unemployed people and employers. For example the early years witnessed the demise of the central government interventionist approach typified by: Selective Employment Tax; Industrial Training Boards; Government Training Centres; Industrial Rehabilitation Units and claimant information, counselling, advice and guidance services available to all through a national network of employment exchanges. Whereas the United Kingdom economy experienced cyclical periods of boom and bust, coal was king and Britain retained a

strong manufacturing base with "proper jobs" for unskilled and semi-skilled mainly male and relatively well-paid labour. Residents of valleys communities referred to the "factory fortnight" and the "miners' holiday" and the access roads to the main industrial estates became heavily congested with "factory traffic" each morning and evening. However, by the end of his career the Thatcher revolution had come and gone but Global competition, the knowledge economy and active labour market policies prevailed.

Those who found themselves caught up in the mass unemployment of the 1980s and 1990s encountered the full rigour of the new Stricter Benefits Regime. However, the level of advice, guidance and practical support available to them was reduced drastically. Mainstream Job Centre services such as Occupational Guidance Units, the Professional and Executive Register and job-search advice and guidance available to all were judged too expensive or of insufficient added-value and discontinued. Remaining resources were targeted at the long-term unemployed, defined as registered unemployed for 6 months or more. Newly unemployed or employed jobseekers were left with a very limited self-service vacancy display facility. The RESTART programme became the vehicle for getting the long-term unemployed back to work. This shortsighted regime saw the numbers of claimants suffering loss of benefits trebling (Murray 1996a) as benefit sanctions increased in severity. Substantial numbers transferred from unemployment benefit to incapacity related benefits to swell the ranks of the economically inactive. Whilst the official evaluation of the effect of the RESTART programme produced a positive analysis (White and Lakey 1992) this was not shared by many unemployed people. The study measured success against rather broad criteria, such as duration of claims and time taken to enter training, whereas to unemployed people success meant the helpfulness of the programme in enabling them to get a good job. Others suggested that the programme was ineffective (Banks and Davies 1990; Durning, Johnson, Shaw and Lanser 1990; McGivney 1992; Murray 1996b; Uden 1996).

Those who worked directly with the long-term unemployed were concerned about other serious deficiencies inherent in the RESTART programme. Front-line staff had no input into the design of these programmes as all were devised by Head Office officials responding to political dogma. This was rooted in a belief that an efficient

labour market controlled only by market forces was the key to increasing the number of jobs in the economy. As resources were limited, rigid eligibility criteria were introduced and no support was available until a claimant served his or her six months of unemployment. This was accompanied by a whole-scale deregulation of the labour market combined with a series of new programmes focused narrowly upon improving the job readiness and motivation of the long-term unemployed. Methods of identifying the needs of individuals and barriers to their participation in or benefiting from the experience were primitive. Support for jobseekers was contracted out to providers who were obliged to deliver services strictly in accordance with the terms and conditions of their contract. Deficiencies in Basic Skills such as Literacy and Numeracy remained undetected and the acquisition of worthwhile qualifications or skills proscribed. Because of these omissions the long-term unemployed found themselves caught up in a Catch 22 situation: placed into a job without adequate preparation → found unsuitable → made unemployed again → no longer classed as long-term unemployed → ineligible for support until served another 6 months of unemployment → underlying causes of unemployment worsens → morale plummets → disillusionment sets in → government inspired learned helplessness takes hold.

The creation of the Employment Service as a Next Steps Agency in 1990 reinforced the jobcentres' simplistic focus on matching the unemployed with available job vacancies. *Annual Performance Agreements* were concluded with its parent department and these imposed numerical targets on managers and staff. This brought about an organisational culture driven by the need to fill programmes as opposed to ascertaining and meeting the needs of the long-term unemployed who were effectively applied to the job preparation programmes on offer. The concept of learner centred learning did not embrace the unemployed and it was hardly surprising that the drop out rate for these contract driven programmes rarely fell below 50%. This was the norm for the numbers who agreed to join a course but failed to take up their place or the numbers who started but failed to complete a course. This situation has endured even after the change of administration in 1997 and resulted in staff of the mainstream contracting organisations such as the Employment Service as well as programme providers losing their expertise in identifying the personal development and learning needs of the long-term unemployed. Effectively the capacity to understand the needs

of individuals and devise local solutions to satisfy local needs became obsolete and a contract driven culture prevailed.

The loss of traditional jobs was just the beginning of a series of challenges faced by the unemployed as the labour market they knew and understood disappeared almost overnight. Whereas some traditional jobs remained, the range and types of jobs available were reshaped by new technology, downsizing, re-engineering of traditional working practices and a shift towards a knowledge based and customer focused work-force. This imposed new demands on those seeking to enter and sustain themselves in the new labour market as the concept of jobs for life was replaced by the need to become employable for life. The time-honoured practice that a person attended school, was taught appropriate subjects to enable entry to traditional jobs and joined the workforce with the bulk of their education completed disappeared. Navigating successfully the uncertain waters of the new labour market required employees to be ready, willing and able to upgrade their portfolio of experience and skills throughout their working lives. However, this was not enough to ensure employability as this imposed another important criteria, the capacity to apply knowledge and skills effectively.

The unemployed were not the only people to experience the full force of Thatcherism. Employees in the public sector suffered trauma of a less immediate yet nonetheless stressful kind as traditional values, working practices and career prospects were swept away in a series of "efficiency scrutinies" led by Sir Derek Rayner, a high profile business leader. Another captain of industry, Lord Young was appointed Secretary of State for Employment and a new style of management was driven through the Department at rapid speed. Radical changes in working practices swept away traditional bureaucracies as the new *Next Steps Agencies* became more businesslike. This had a traumatic effect on managers and staff as the traditions and values that attracted them to join the Civil Service were discarded as an ethos built upon service to the public gave way to "targeted interventions." Tried and tested procedures were dismissed as "activity" and replaced by "performance" as the ability to deliver targets and manage a budget became much more important than the ability to understand or meet the needs of the most disadvantaged in society or get the best out of staff. The scale of the change and uncertainty that accompanied this removal of traditional

values and services brought negative consequences very similar to those experienced by disadvantaged communities. In the same way that substantial numbers of residents of whole communities failed to cope with change and uncertainty and suffered a loss of traditional values, their identity, status and reason for being there, whole tiers of management as well as substantial numbers of staff found themselves in the same position.

As the Employment Service area manager responsible for the Gwent and Glamorgan valleys between 1986 and 1996 the writer experienced the effect of this enforced change and uncertainty at first hand. The closure of Oakdale Colliery in 1992 provided an unforgettable insight into its effect upon the state of mind of the 750 men employed there. The colliery had been adjudged a loss-making pit and there was speculation that one coal-face would be abandoned with the loss of a third of the workforce. Union representatives were called to a meeting with management one Thursday and arranged a mass meeting of the workforce the next morning to inform them of the outcome. At 4 pm on the Thursday the writer was informed, in confidence, by the National Coal Board that a decision had been made to close the colliery forthwith and requested a team of jobcentre staff to attend the colliery the next morning to deal with any queries concerning benefits. On entering the colliery at 9 am the next morning he was greeted by the sight of hundreds of men wandering around the pit-head in a state of shock. All were carrying a single black plastic bin-bag containing the contents of their locker. Having attended the meeting expecting to be told that some of them would be losing their jobs they were dumfounded to learn that the colliery had actually closed. They had already worked their last shift and they needed to empty their locker and leave the site as soon as possible. No one was even allowed down the pit to collect their tools from their last shift for fear of sabotage. Perhaps we should not be too surprised that many of these men who had given the best years of their lives to the coal industry never worked again after joining the rapidly growing ranks of the economically inactive.

An insight into the power of redundancy to demolish self-belief and dissolve self-confidence in an industry renowned for personal courage, indomitable spirit and team working came from another colliery closure. Penallta Colliery was almost the last mine to close in south Wales. The National Coal Board considered that the

redeployment of miners from earlier closures had been hampered by a negative perception of miners as unskilled "pick and shovel" workers and were anxious to dispel this myth. Potential employers and employment agencies were invited to go down the pit to see for themselves the range of skills the men had developed. The writer spent all of one Saturday scrambling through miles of underground passages to reach the coalface. There he was introduced to the 33 year-old team captain responsible for the shift. He explained that his role involved: negotiating the yardage to be worked for each shift with the colliery manager; agreeing the bonus to be offered to his team of eight men; ensuring that his team were trained properly including the health and safety of all who worked at the surface as well as the usual man management aspects. Lowering his head and visibly upset he added that he would never work again as "this is the only job I can do." All of his teammates within earshot were of the same belief. The worrying feature was that similar conversations took place daily among the workforce of every pit, every steel-works and every manufacturing plant that closed during that fateful era.

The genesis of the study

During this period the writer was himself "managing down" his own work-force as mandatory efficiency savings saw the payroll fall from 650 staff to less than 200, albeit over a period of 4 years. However, this was nonetheless traumatic for either the staff losing their jobs or those who remained as they struggled to cope with year on year increased performance targets despite these swingeing reductions in resources. This was achieved by merging two quite disparate organisations. The number of managers was reduced by almost half, all were required to compete for the re-engineered posts, often located in the same office occupied by them for many years and regarded as "my patch." Staff were required to learn new and what for many were threatening and stressful multiple tasks in the new and more businesslike environment. This arose from the fact that each organisation had very different management cultures based upon completely different values, processes and behaviours. Benefit service staff were office-based introverts valued for their capacity to keep their heads down, follow rules and regulations and ensure that claimants complied with a host of benefit conditions. So much so that one manager of an Unemployment Benefit Office famously remarked on a staff report that the officer

"continued to show initiative despite several warnings." Conversely, Jobcentre staff were extroverts valued for their capacity for innovation, public speaking, marketing the service to employers and developing extensive external networks. Few restrictions were imposed on their "clients" who they encouraged to be free thinking and innovative in their job-search activities. The decision to merge organisations was greeted with dismay and fear on both sides. Benefit service managers and staff doubted their capacity for public speaking and marketing whereas Jobcentre managers and staff feared that they would need to become office bound bureaucrats tied down by rules and regulations. It should be noted that all staff were educated to at least GCSE level and some managers held degree level qualifications.

Instead of simply changing the organisation the writer adopted a different approach and embarked on a sophisticated cultural change programme aimed at changing the way in which managers and staff thought and behaved. This became a six year programme of personal development and support designed to equip staff with the values, attitudes, behaviours and skills required to enable them to not only cope with but to thrive on change and uncertainty. Longitudinal staff attitude surveys, monitoring sick absence and staff turnover statistics, value for money reviews, performance indicators and customer satisfaction surveys revealed year on year improvements in operational performance and a transformation in staff attitudes, behaviour and morale. Much of the success of this cultural change programme was due to the introduction of a personal development programme that had been designed in collaboration with Bandura (self-efficacy theory) and Seligman (learned optimism). The programme was made available to both staff and jobseekers and the evaluation concluded that this had a positive influence on capacity to cope with change and disposition to take responsibility for ones own future. The remarkable effect of this programme in improving the cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills of both staff and jobseekers caused the writer to embark on a programme of research with the University of Wales Swansea. The study examined the significance of self-efficacy in enabling or disabling the participation of long term unemployed adults in learning and resulted in the award of a Master of Philosophy degree in 1999.

Shortly after leaving the Civil Service in March 1997 the writer took up employment with a community regeneration strategy in south Wales. It soon became clear that the

effects of change and uncertainty also exerted a powerful and debilitating influence over the lives of residents. Working in and among the community confirmed that residents were prevented from participation in the labour market by a wide range of barriers that were much more profound than a lack of qualifications, skills or the motivation to seek work.

Various national strategies had been introduced during the second half of the last century to regenerate disadvantaged communities and this community had been exposed to a number of these. However, little appeared to have been done to help residents come to terms with change and uncertainty, address attitudes and behaviours or to improve their low skills and qualifications base.

The writer has experienced at first hand the traumatic effects of change and uncertainty within four different domains. As a career civil servant dealing with employers, jobseekers and unemployment issues more generally. As a senior manager leading a cultural change programme using modern Human Resource Management practice. As an academic researcher studying the significance of what have become more widely known as soft skills and more recently through a number of management roles within a community regeneration strategy. This experience has confirmed that the profound effects of change and uncertainty are no respecters of intellectual capacity. These are equally traumatic to managers and staff in government departments, the employed workforce, the unemployed and economically inactive as well as to residents of our most disadvantaged communities. However, a most interesting issue has emerged. The majority in each category still manage to cope and adapt sufficiently to take advantage of the new opportunities presented within their constantly changing world. However, a minority fail to do so, succumb to stress, turn in on themselves and require intensive support to come to terms with the new way of doing things – the new culture. A significant number find the challenges beyond them, slip into dependency and helplessness and are overwhelmed by change and uncertainty that have become the hard facts of life in the 21st Century. Understanding the reasons why some people are able to cope with change and uncertainty whilst others suffer such debilitating trauma became an abiding interest for the writer. Particularly as intellectual capacity has no bearing on who swims or who sinks. This

raises an intriguing question. If intellectual capacity is not the cause of their vulnerability other explanations for this behaviour must apply?

Purpose of the study

This thesis is not concerned with developing a new theory or proving a hypothesis. Its focus is to reflect critically on current policy and practice concerning social exclusion with a view to contributing ideas to improve the lives of people who inhabit our most disadvantaged communities. It sets out to achieve this by explaining how the capacity to become an effective lifelong learner is now essential to ensure social inclusion but this remains problematic. Whereas institutional, situational and dispositional barriers to adult participation in learning are well known, efforts to attract residents of our most disadvantaged communities to engage in lifelong continue to meet with limited success. This is often attributed to a lack of motivation or apathy. However, given the scale and nature of the change and uncertainty they have experienced and continue to experience in their day-to-day lives, these explanations are both simplistic and inaccurate. An inability to cope with change and uncertainty has a crippling effect on self-belief, morale, motivation and disposition more generally. Those who are able to cope are not intellectually superior. However, they have managed to develop a range of cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills that enable them to think and behave differently.

The thesis develops three main arguments. Firstly, that engagement in lifelong learning is now central to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. These are more widely known as soft skills. Secondly that these soft skills remain little understood, particularly among managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies. Finally, this lack of understanding results in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

The consequences for policies to ensure social inclusion and more importantly the residents of our most disadvantaged communities are profound. The United Kingdom

and Welsh Assembly Governments will fail to achieve their laudable objectives for reducing social exclusion, eradicating poverty and ensuring social justice and yet again those who have suffered years of marginalisation, poverty and a miserable quality of life will be condemned to suffer indefinitely.

Structure of the thesis

This chapter provides an explanation of the aims of the study and an insight into the reasons for selecting the topic for research. The concept of social exclusion and the implications for residents of our most disadvantaged communities of the new approach to tackling social exclusion are discussed in Chapter 2. Soft skills are explained in more detail in Chapter 3. The policy imperatives driving social inclusion strategies and the contradictions inherent in these for those who live in social exclusion in Wales are discussed in Chapter 4. The research methods used for the study, how the research questions for this study were formulated and the research methods selected to address these research questions are explained in Chapter 5. A description of the area selected for study is provided in Chapter 6. The findings of the fieldwork together with a discussion of their implications are presented in two chapters. Chapter 7 provides insights of how the experiences of daily life influenced residents' perceptions, beliefs, aspirations and expectations of the regeneration processes. With a particular focus on learning, skills development and employment related issues. Chapter 8 reports how community regenerators and other relevant providers of services responded to the challenges inherent in building the capacity of residents to escape social exclusion. Chapter 9 completes the thesis with a presentation of the conclusions to be drawn from this study together with the recommendations for further action and research.

Chapter 2

Social exclusion, soft skills and regeneration

This chapter explains the concept of social exclusion and how residents of our most disadvantaged communities must now develop a formidable portfolio of skills and attitudes in order to help themselves and their community to escape social exclusion. However, this first requires that they are able to overcome a range of barriers in order to engage effectively in lifelong learning. The significance of soft skills in enabling residents to surmount these barriers and develop the disposition, motivation and capacity to both acquire as well as apply their new skills effectively to escape social exclusion is discussed. The onerous demands this places on the various agencies responsible for achieving community regeneration as they seek to develop effective strategies to enable residents to first overcome these barriers and then develop their portfolio of skills are also highlighted.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is the term used to describe what happens when:

> "... people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown" (Social Exclusion Unit 2001a p.10).

Combating social exclusion assumed high priority following the change of administration after the 1997 General Election. The Social Exclusion Unit was established to ensure that issues such as poverty, unemployment, poor skills, poor housing, high crime and low educational attainment were tackled effectively in pursuit of what the new Prime Minister described as "an inclusive society" (Blair 1998). The drive to regenerate our poorest neighbourhoods began in the late 1960s but was overwhelmed by the impact of structural economic changes including the decline in traditional industries, a reduction in unskilled jobs and the consequent increase in male and youth unemployment. This caused a polarisation of opportunities where the economic recovery benefited communities but failed to regenerate our most

disadvantaged communities and these degenerated further, even where these were in close proximity to others that managed to recover. The cost of failure is the price paid by generations of people condemned to poverty and a lower quality of life and the direct and indirect costs to society in terms of social security benefits, crime, social division and low educational achievement (Social Exclusion Unit 1998). Neighbourhood is explained in terms of:

> "There is no exact definition of what makes a neighbourhood. Local perceptions of neighbourhoods may be defined by natural dividing lines such as roads and rivers, changes in housing design or tenure, or the sense of community generated around centres such as schools, shops or transport links. Neighbourhoods vary in size, but tend to be made up of several thousand people. Many are dominated by local authority or housing association property, but others have a higher proportion of privately-owned housing" (Social Exclusion Unit 2001b p.13).

The focus of the drive to tackle social exclusion

Action was initiated on several fronts and coordinated across a number of different government departments and agencies. This may be summarised within four broad themes. Achieving full employment through the effective management of the economy to create optimum conditions to promote and support economic growth, individual enterprise and entrepreneurship, thus increasing the number of jobs available. Replacing dependency on state benefits with a culture of co-responsibility, self-help and independence through empowering residents by involving them in the process of regeneration, supported by a series of reforms of the taxation and welfare benefits system designed to make work pay. Intensive support to enable unemployed people find work through a range of New Deal programmes and related initiatives such as Employment Zones and Employment Action Teams targeted specifically at disadvantaged communities within what became known as *Welfare to Work.* A series of longer term initiatives aimed at eradicating child poverty by enhancing educational attainment and skills levels, ensuring a better start in life for all children and a focus on improvements to the education and training system more generally (Social Exclusion Unit 1998; Department for Education and Employment 2001a).

The new strategy differed significantly from previous approaches. The real scale of the problem will be addressed in the hundreds of neighbourhoods affected. The focus extends beyond housing and the physical infrastructure and addresses the underlying problems of worklessness, ill-health, crime and substandard public services such as poor schools, insufficient GPs and policing. There is considerable emphasis on local partnership working. The principle that individuals and communities help themselves to escape social exclusion becomes a fundamental requirement. A strong role is envisaged for voluntary sector and community based organisations in encouraging community participation and voluntary action due to their understanding of the needs of residents and ability to secure their trust. However, this also presents a severe test of their capacity to develop and implement effective strategies to empower residents and enable them to become socially as well as economically active citizens.

The United Kingdom Government's interpretation of a culture of co-responsibility has far reaching consequences for all of those in receipt of state benefits in Wales as it introduces:

> "... **a new emphasis on the link between economic and social policy**, for example, through putting jobs, enterprise and economic revival at the heart of the neighbourhood renewal strategy, and making tackling social exclusion a priority in spending reviews and Budgets ... **a "rights and responsibilities" approach** that makes Government help available, but requires a contribution from the individual and the community. So under New Deal benefits can be withdrawn if people do not take up opportunities; Educational Maintenance Allowances are conditional on attendance and performance; Individual Learning Accounts match a contribution from the individual and the Government; new funding for neighbourhoods is conditional on community involvement" (Social Exclusion Unit 2001a p.7). (Emphasis by bold is that of the authors).

This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

The approach adopted following devolution in Wales

The National Assembly for Wales assumed responsibility for tackling social exclusion from 1999. The new Assembly also questioned whether value for money had been obtained from traditional community regeneration initiatives. Almost £8 billion pounds per year from the Assembly budget alone was being spent but there was

insufficient evidence of any obvious improvement to justify this expenditure. Some progress had been made. However, there was lack of co-ordination, more should be done to promote effective partnership working, the short-term nature of these programmes detracted from their effectiveness and it proved too difficult for communities themselves to lead the process of devising local services to meet local needs. The effects of the wider social and economic decline had also led to residents becoming alienated from the democratic process (National Assembly for Wales 2000a and 2001a).

The Assembly's vision for a better Wales refers to communities "where the voice of local people is heard" (National Assembly for Wales 2000b p.1). Addressing social disadvantage is afforded high priority as one of three major themes to guide the development of all future policies, programmes and spending priorities. The creation of wealth and good quality jobs is a primary aim and enhancing skills and educational attainment is crucial to realising the vision. Overcoming social disadvantage is defined in terms of:

> "... the development of an inclusive society where everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential" (National Assembly for Wales 2000b p.4).

This is to be achieved by enhancing the capacity of local people to enable them to play a significant role in developing their own solutions for tackling poverty and exclusion and "unlock the potential for self-determination" (National Assembly for Wales 2000b p.7). Other policies contributing to ensuring social inclusion are aimed at improving health, social services, financial inclusion, promoting and supporting community enterprise and improving transport as a means of access to employment opportunities (ELWa 2002 and 2004; National Assembly for Wales 2000a, 2001b and 2001c; Welsh Assembly Government 2002a, 2002b, 2003a and 2003b; Welsh Development Agency 1999; Welsh Office 1999).

This emphasis on empowering residents and enhancing their capacity to enable themselves and their community to escape social exclusion heralds the age of socially active citizenship. Similarly the focus on residents assuming co-responsibility for freeing themselves from dependency upon state benefits to become economically

active introduces the concept of economically active citizenship. However, this is problematic. Progress to achieving socially as well as economically active citizenship is dependent upon residents' capacity to develop a whole new range of skills. This in turn is dependent upon a positive disposition to first engage in learning as well as both the capacity to acquire the appropriate range of skills and attitudes and the ability to apply these new skills effectively. For many residents of our disadvantaged communities this is a fearful prospect. Devising and implementing effective strategies to enable residents to face their demons and learn their way out of social exclusion presents an equally daunting range of challenges to the managers and staff of community regeneration agencies. For ease of reference the term community regenerators will now be used to describe managers and staff of community regeneration agencies.

An appreciation of the range and nature of the skills residents are now expected to learn will enable us to move on to explore the barriers they must first overcome to engage in learning and then benefit fully from the experience. The significance of soft skills is highlighted within both domains. As an increasingly important range of functional skills *per* se and as an essential set of enabling skills that underpin disposition, motivation and the capacity to acquire as well as apply knowledge and technical skills effectively. This will also enable us to understand why it is essential that community regenerators both understand the significance of soft skills and are effective in enabling residents to acquire these skills if they are ever to escape social exclusion.

The skills required to become a socially active citizen

The skills needed to contribute effectively to community regeneration equate to those required to run a small company. These include a combination of practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills such as committee skills, managing community facilities and financial management as well as a range of what are described as "soft skills" such as "personal confidence and self-esteem" (Adamson, Dearden and Castle 2001 p.21). Soft skills are considered to be important as they pre-date the acquisition of technical skills and enable participation in volunteering or community projects. The

process of enabling residents of disadvantaged communities to participate fully in the regeneration process is known as capacity building and is defined as:

> "Activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of their communities" (Home Office 2004 p.7).

A number of national studies report on the nature and range of skills required to effect social inclusion and whereas the more conventional technical skills remain relevant, the increasing importance of soft skills is highlighted. The national occupational competence standards in community development drawn up following a United Kingdom wide review focuses almost exclusively on soft skills (PAULO 2003). An analysis of these competence standards enables us to understand that "soft skills" is in itself a generic term encompassing what should more accurately be described as cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. For example, thinking effectively, self-reliance, making things happen, achieving change through empowerment, communication skills and building effective working relationships. A comprehensive review of skills required for sustainable community regeneration in England details the full range of over one hundred specific occupations across the spectrum of community regeneration and the technical skills inherent within these. However, the review recognises that these skills are insufficient to achieve sustainable community regeneration, which is dependent upon:

> "... changing the behaviour, attitudes and knowledge of everyone involved" (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2004 p.11).

There is a recommendation that training in generic skills should be compulsory for staff in core occupations and elected members should be encouraged to participate. However, it is not as prescriptive about developing the skills of residents, which suggests a lack of commitment to enabling residents to become co-responsible for the regeneration process. A framework for skills development is proposed and identifies 13 competencies relating to generic skills. Whereas this contains practical, technical and vocational/job specific skills there is again a strong emphasis on soft skills.

A Scottish review of the skills considered to be essential for practitioners, community representatives and volunteers to fulfil a wide variety of roles within community regeneration identifies three distinct groups of skills: "Process skills," enabling change to happen and are described as "people skills" or "soft skills;" "Practical skills," the functional skills that provide the means of delivering change, such as fundraising and administration of projects and "Strategic skills" that engender change (Scottish Centre for Regeneration 2004 pp.4-5). Over 20 skills are listed and again there is a strong emphasis on soft skills. Although the study explains that the process skills are referred to as people or soft skills there is confusion over the definition of soft skills. All three groups include a range of practical, technical or vocational/job specific as well as cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. The importance of soft skills features among its conclusions:

> "Most agree that all are essential, especially "process skills," [soft skills] though people may find it easier to admit to deficiencies in "practical skills" (Scottish Centre for Regeneration 2004 p.6).

Interestingly, this suggestion of a stigma attached to perceived deficiencies in soft skills is consistent with the findings of McGivney (1990). She reports that adults who do not participate in learning are often reluctant to admit that they lack confidence to the extent that they offer some other explanation to disguise this, for example, lack of time.

A review of best practice in community regeneration in Wales warns against underestimating the difficulties involved in devising and implementing effective capacity building strategies. Nevertheless, the active participation of members of the community with residents being both empowered and equipped with the skills and confidence to enable their full participation in the process is considered essential to underpin regeneration. The necessity for professionals and staff of regeneration agencies to receive training to enable them to develop more effective links with residents is also highlighted. It is also considered essential that they adopt a consultative "listening" and empowering mode and develop services "with" as opposed to delivering them "for" or "to" residents. The value of soft skills to active citizenship is also recognised:

> "Studies often distinguish between the "hard" skills associated with specific community roles and the "soft" skills of confidence, compromise, negotiation and working with others that are more generally required of active community members" (Adamson, Dearden and Castle 2001 p.5).

The scale and complexity of capacity building needs may be gauged from over thirty aspects of community regeneration identified by a local study to ascertain the training needs of community regenerators and volunteers. These include a blend of conventional technical skills and soft skills such as: enabling people to work together to develop a common vision through effective partnership working; being willing and able to take responsibility for managing resources; optimism in problem solving and inspiring enthusiasm in others; supporting risk taking and maintaining the trust and the respect of the community. The report acknowledges that whereas residents suffer a range of situational barriers that prevent their participation in training the issue of low self-confidence features prominently and this is likely to be understated. Training that enhances soft skills is particularly valued and "personal development" training is recommended by nine of the 19 people who comment upon their "experience of good training" (Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil 2003 p.16). Deficiencies in meeting the training needs of community regenerators are also identified and the report recommends action to develop common standards of training for staff including:

> "... accredited modules on community development, needs analysis, learning to learn, enhancing self-efficacy and understanding barriers to participation" (Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil 2003 p.20).

Henderson and Mayo (1998) call for a national strategy for occupational training standards for community development in Wales. They envisage this encompassing informal and formal learning within a national framework providing strategic direction at regional and area level for all involved in the community development process. This should also provide routeways to engagement in wider lifelong learning and equip residents for employment and inclusion in society more generally. Whereas such a strategy is clearly needed, this has still to be developed. The organisation responsible for identifying the capacity building requirements within the Communities First programme reports that the PAULO (2003) model is to be adapted for use in Wales (Community Development Cymru 2003). More recently the Welsh Assembly

Government commissioned this work and a draft strategic framework has at last been produced for consultation (Community Development Cymru 2006).

Soft skills also have an important influence on active citizenship through their positive effects on health and well being more generally. This is achieved from promoting co-responsibility for health and well being through realising "internal assets" (Hammond 2002 p.1) such as independence, self-direction, empowerment, resilience, problem solving skills, communication skills, social competence and a sense of purpose. There are obvious parallels between these "internal assets" and the skills needed to achieve active citizenship, with empowerment, co-responsibility and coping much in demand. Puttick (2004) considers that health and well being is related to mental attitude and people are healthier when they feel that they have control over their own lives. Furthermore, those who fail at school, are unemployed or otherwise socially excluded develop a sense of lack of control and it is this that has a direct and detrimental effect on their health.

The concept of co-responsibility for health and well being assumes even greater importance in Wales:

> "We need a step change in our attitudes to our own health. Consideration should be given to ... capacity building to increase individual and communities' recognition and acceptance of the responsibility they have for their own health and that of their children" (Wanless 2003 pp.53-54).

This has caused a complete review of the way in which health services are to be provided. The future success of the National Health Service in Wales is now dependent upon the extent to which the wider population can be persuaded to become co-responsible for managing their own wellness and illness (Welsh Assembly Government 2005a). This also increases the pressures on residents of our most disadvantaged communities as they are now also expected to develop the full range of coping skills and "positive" attitudes inherent in managing their own wellness and illness. If this initiative fails those who are unable to develop the capacity to become empowered, co-responsible citizens will find themselves even more marginalised as their ability to access to the 21st Century health service is increasingly compromised.

Empowerment has become synonymous with the concepts of capacity building, resident participation and co-responsibility. The skills required consist almost entirely of soft skills. Empowerment is the process of enabling individuals to exercise control over their own lives and is central to overcoming social exclusion, lack of social participation, integration and power (Room 1995). Participation in community regeneration activities is said to promote empowerment and result in wider benefits including enhanced employability (Adamson 1997; Morgan and Price 1992; Osmond and Morgan 1995; Schenck and Louw 1995; Schuftan 1996; Schwerin 1995; Smith 1995; Thake, 1995). The beneficial effects of personal constructs such as personal self-efficacy and an appropriate combination of cognitive and conative skills contribute to a state of empowerment (Schwerin 1995). However, this is not simply a matter of developing the right knowledge, skills and expertise, as there are profound issues of confidence, disposition and motivation at work within those who lack power and those who exercise power over them and this is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

The increasing importance of soft skills through the focus on capacity building, residents participation, co-responsibility and empowerment in pursuit of better health and socially active citizenship is mirrored in the skills required to become economically active.

The skills required to become an economically active citizen

The skills residents need to participate effectively in the regeneration process and to engage successfully in the labour market are remarkably similar. The United Kingdom Government makes a clear connection between lifelong learning, active citizenship, economic activity and social inclusion:

> "We want to create a learning society where everyone has the opportunity to update their skills and learn throughout life. This means helping people develop the skills to be successful in employment, and also means supporting learning of all kinds – including informal learning, community based learning and learning for pleasure – which can help people to overcome social disadvantage and to play a full role in society ... these two key objectives, the economic and the social are two sides of the same coin. They must be dealt with in an integrated way" (Department for Education and Skills 2001 p.9).

The following definitions are provided to enable an understanding of the relationship between conventional practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills and soft skills within the context of employability:

Skill:

> "Skill was defined by Hans Renold in 1928 as 'any combination, useful to industry, of mental and physical qualities which require considerable training to acquire' (More 1980: 15). Proctor and Dutta (1995: 30), who provide an authoritative text on skill and performance, note that 'a defining property of skill is that it develops over time with, practice.' Like Renold, Proctor and Dutta include perceptual and problem-solving skills as well as motor skills. Thus skill encompasses both manual facilities, including dexterity, and conceptual ones, including relevant knowledge and understanding" (Department for Education and Employment 1999a p.6).

Vocational skills:

> " ... occupational or technical skills needed to work within an occupation or occupational group. They are essential for undertaking certain job tasks" (Department for Education and Employment 2000 p.24).

Generic skills:

> " ... those skills which can be used across large numbers of different occupations. They include what are defined as the Key Skills - communication, problem solving, team working, IT skills, application of numbers and an ability to improve personal learning and performance. They also include reasoning skills, scheduling work and diagnosing work problems, work process management skills, visualising output, working backwards for planning purposes, and sequencing operations" (Department for Education and Employment 2000 p.24).

Personal attributes are:

> " ... more difficult to define and many have argued they are not skills at all (Keep and Mayhew, 1999). They relate to the characteristics that employers say they most often look for in an applicant when recruiting. They are frequently defined in terms of motivation, judgement, leadership and initiative. Some can be taught or learned (e.g. leadership) while others are more immutable, though not to the extent that they cannot be improved through

> some form of learning. Personal attributes encapsulate the desire of employers for employees who are flexible, adaptable, and able to cope with change and uncertainty" (Department for Education and Employment 2000 p.24).

Employability requires a range of attributes, attitudes as well as skills:

> "... their capacity to gain employment and to maintain themselves in it – depended on: their basic "employability assets" in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes; their ability to use and deploy those assets through, for example, career management skills, including awareness of opportunities in the labour market; job search skills, including the ability to use formal and informal networks; a strategic approach to labour market opportunity, including the willingness to be occupationally and physically mobile; the way in which the relevant assets are presented to employers, including through CVs and interviews; their personal circumstances, including any family circumstances that might affect their ability to seek employment; and external factors which individuals have almost no capacity to influence such as macro-economic demand, benefit rules and employer behaviour and selection procedures" (Institute for Employment Studies (1998) cited by Department for Education and Employment 1999b p. 27). (Emphasis by underlining is that of the authors).

Residents of disadvantaged communities face formidable challenges as they come to terms with the profound changes in the demand for skills and their relative value to employers. The concept of employment for life has been replaced by the need to be employable for life and it is even argued that employees of the future must take responsibility for contributing to the competitiveness of their companies (Stevens 2002). Commentators such as Handy (1995 and 1996) suggest that the magnitude of these changes might even have resulted in a change in the nature of work itself. By 1996 the government had become sufficiently concerned at the impact of these changes on the demand for skills to commission a study of the growth in "core/generic skills" (Anderson and Marshall 1996 p.1). This study is among the first to provide an explanation of employers' perceptions of skills and how these are changing to embrace a much broader range that includes the more conventional practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills as well as personal attributes and attitudes. However, the evidence examined is not wholly representative as it is based on surveys of larger and more sophisticated companies and tends to focus on the skills needs of managers. It is also acknowledges that whilst concentrating on explaining the significance of what are referred to as "occupationally non specific skills" (Anderson

and Marshall 1996 p.7) this does not imply that practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills are no longer important as the need for these is axiomatic.

In the period of full employment in post-war Britain, there was only one pre-entry test applied to potential employees "is he warm?" (Anderson and Marshall 1996 p.1), but in the very different labour market of late 20th Century:

> "... virtually all employers insist, for virtually all job applicants, upon minimum standards of personal traits and educational attainment. These are as much social, as employability basics" (Anderson and Marshall 1996 p.5)

Being a good employee is no longer defined by competence in practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills as a range of "occupationally non-specific skills" are also needed. This is attributed to the growth in new working practices such as flatter management structures, multi-skilling and multi-functional team-working and has led to a major expansion in employers' requirements for both generic skills and personal competence. Flexibility, adaptability and ability to cope with uncertainty being particularly important. The capacity to perform effectively as an employee is now directly related to the ability to develop such skills and all of these skills fall within the definition of either cognitive, conative or interpersonal skills and may be described accurately as soft skills.

Achieving a state of employability now requires a "formidable portfolio of skills" (Department for Education and Employment 1999b p.7) that incorporates literacy and numeracy, technical or "hard skills" (Department for Education and Employment 1999b p.7) as well as "key skills" (Department for Education and Employment 1999b p.7) such as communication, problem solving and team-working that have increased in importance to employers. Acquiring the necessary technical skills is no longer sufficient to ensure employability as a range of "deployment" and "coping" skills (Department for Education and Employment 1999b p.8) are also required and these include: self presentation; finding their way around the labour market; self-confidence; self-discipline; intrinsic motivation; "basic work habits, like time-keeping" (Department for Education and Employment 1999b p.8) as well as the interpersonal skills, stamina and resilience to survive the pressures of daily life and the uncertainty associated with "economic and social change" (Department for

Education and Employment 1999b p.8). These are also the skills and qualities required to enable people to become self-employed, which is an area of opportunity for residents of disadvantaged communities. Residents are also expected to become entrepreneurial within the context of coping successfully with the risks associated with the implications of the demise of jobs for life, flexible working patterns and the need to travel further afield to secure employment.

However, those who seek to create their own jobs through self-employment encounter particular difficulties. Enterprise requires "self-confidence and determination in local people and communities (HM Treasury 1999 Foreword). A number of barriers to self-employment are identified including: working capital not being available to residents who are unemployed; the complexity of the tax and benefits systems and a lack of information about them; uncertainty over income in the early stages of self-employment and the delay between committing expenditure and receiving earnings on the investment. There is also a general lack of understanding or awareness of the support available for those who might be considering self-employment, despite the range of New Deal and other similar programmes for unemployed people. Surprisingly, the Employment Service and Benefits Agency are reported as unenthusiastic about promoting self-employment (HM Treasury 1999).

An increased demand for soft skills such as understanding customer needs; communication; ability to follow instructions; showing initiative; team working and the ability to organise one's own learning is also reported in Wales (Mori Research and Business Strategies Ltd 1998; Experian Business Strategies 2004). A number of local studies confirm that the demand for these skills is also found among employers in the south Wales Valleys (Business for Merthyr (2001); LWT Marketing (1995); Management Development Network (1997); Meridien Pure (2001); Merthyr Tydfil CCET (2003); Morgan and Saunders (2001); National Assembly for Wales (2000b and 2000c); Shared Intelligence (2002); Straw (1997). Interestingly, ELWa became sufficiently interested in the increased demand for such skills to initiate "A substantive programme" to promote understanding and raise awareness of how the competitiveness of organisations may be improved through developing "High Performance Working" (ELWa 2003 p.1). More recently the evaluation of the

Blaenau Gwent JobMatch programme confirms how soft skills are now at a premium with local employers:

> "In general employers tended to be looking for "softer" skills such as reliability, motivation and enthusiasm" (Cambridge Policy Consultants 2006 p. v).

One study does doubt the value of soft skills in relation to employability. This reports that the nationally recognised Basic Skills of literacy and numeracy are more important than soft skills in determining success in the labour market. However, this research addressed two specific issues, whether literacy and numeracy skills or "good "soft skills" such as motivation and sociability" (Machin, McIntosh, Vignoles and Viitanen 2001 p.40) are more useful in ensuring well paid jobs and whether enhancing literacy and numeracy is synonymous with improved job prospects. The study applied only to individuals who had already succeeded in learning Basic Skills and is concerned with more general soft skills such as "their people skills, ability to trust others, tendency to argue, attitudes towards achievement, need for control and caring skills" (Machin, McIntosh, Vignoles and Viitanen 2001 p.12). The importance of soft skills in relation to enabling individuals to achieve higher levels of literacy and numeracy is acknowledged and the soft skills most positively associated with employment include "whether the person believes that they can usually achieve what they want in life, which has a very strong and highly significant effect" (Machin, McIntosh, Vignoles and Viitanen 2001 p.25). What is being described here is in fact personal self-efficacy and this is discussed in chapter 3.

Clearly those who are unable to acquire the full range of skills now considered essential to secure and retain a job will find themselves excluded permanently from the new labour market. The situation is even more depressing when considered within the context of the wider labour markets of Cardiff and Newport that might otherwise offer an antidote to the dearth of employment opportunities in the south Wales valleys. In addition to the practical difficulties in commuting to these areas, the nature of the employment opportunities there and the skills required to secure these jobs are quite different to those in the labour markets more familiar to residents of valleys communities (Brooksbank, Morse and Thomas 2000; Cardiff County Council 2001; DTZ Pieda Consulting 2001). For example, in Cardiff the demand for skills is

changing rapidly as the city focuses on creating new high skill, high technology jobs in high value-added sectors such as ICT and E-Commerce and Film, television and multi-media. Ominously for potential job seekers, one study concludes:

> "The findings of this report identify a substantial "gap" still in existence between the training and skills provided by the education and training sector and those required by the changing needs of the business community. These deficiencies are specifically highlighted in the survey by a shortage of individuals with specialist skills currently available in the labour market, and the general lack of "softer skills" identified in potential recruits which is now seen as a key component in businesses achieving operating competitiveness" (Brooksbank, Morse and Thomas 2000 p.33).

Employers' recruitment selection practices are also more demanding of soft skills

Employers no longer value competence *per se* and technical "know how" and "know what" must be accompanied by "can do" and "will do." Hitherto competence has required "know how" and "know what" but took no account of disposition or motivation to deploy such competence:

> "In everyday language, if an individual is 'competent,' they can perform the task or job in question, but are not necessarily demonstrating any particular skill in executing that role. As Tate (1995: 82) notes, 'the word "competent" suffers from the connotation of bare sufficiency or adequacy, as opposed to expertise'" (Department for Education and Employment 1999a pp.7-8).

Employers' recruitment selection practices therefore present formidable challenges to those who are without jobs. It is suggested that some form of "hierarchy of qualities" (Hasluck 1998 p.53) is used, which varies according to the relative state of the labour market. The underlying assessment framework includes a combination of relevant skills, qualifications, work experience, personal qualities and attributes such as attitude, motivation and personal circumstances (Snape 1998 cited by Hasluck 1998). However, at times of labour shortage qualifications, skills or work experience, are of paramount importance, conversely when labour is plentiful attitude, motivation and personal attributes take precedence. When recruiting unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers, academic and vocational qualifications and technical skills are "less important." The most frequently mentioned shortcomings are lack of motivation or

attitude, poor basic skills, unstable job record and lack of previous experience. However, qualifications and technical competence are "much more important" for clerical, sales and personal service jobs and "very much more important" for management, professional and technical vacancies (James 1997 cited by Hasluck 1998 p.55).

Furthermore, employers use a two-stage recruitment process that reinforces the value of soft skills. Written applications provide evidence of qualifications, technical skills and relevant experience and are used to decide "suitability." However, "acceptability" is determined at interview or personal contact where attitudes, motivation and personality are assessed to ascertain compatibility with organisational culture (Jenkins 1986 cited by Hasluck 1998 p.69). This distinction between technical competence and the personal qualities of applicants is also reported in other research (Ashton, Maguire and Spilsbury 1990; Edwards 1975; Maguire 1986; Meager and Metcalfe 1987; Oliver and Turton 1982) although Wood (1988) considers that technical competence and personal qualities could not be readily separated. Although the fact of being unemployed is no longer in itself a serious barrier to recruitment, duration of unemployment is of primary concern as a benchmark for motivation, attitude and enthusiasm, which takes precedence over skills and qualifications (Atkinson, Giles and Meager 1997).

As a result of these recruitment strategies residents of disadvantaged communities find themselves in serious difficulty when faced with such wide ranging and stringent selection criteria. They are doubly disadvantaged in the labour market as they are more likely to have few or no qualifications, low levels of literacy and numeracy and low self-confidence and lack "coping skills" (Department for Education and Employment 1999b p.8). Their experience of social exclusion has left them demoralised, demotivated and lacking the self assurance that employers favour when recruiting personnel, even for unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs. The traditional routeway into employment for residents of our poorest communities. The fact that employers are even more discerning and focus more on attitudes, motivation and personal attributes in deciding acceptability of applicants when labour is plentiful, disadvantages those who lack these qualities the most. There is almost a permanent pool of unskilled and semi-skilled job seekers and therefore, competition for these

jobs is always high. This creates a negative cycle of exclusion from the labour market: no or poor qualifications, no or low skills > no job > long term unemployment > no hope > demoralistion > negative attitude > no disposition or motivation to either learn new skills or gain qualifications > poor CV or job application form and sifted out as "unsuitable" or if reached interview stage, negative demeanour and personal qualities causes rejection as "unacceptable." A new vocabulary has evolved to describe people who find themselves trapped in this downward spiral and they are variously described as "least job ready," "disadvantaged by the labour market," "furthest from the labour market," "hardest to reach" or even "unemployable."

Implications for residents

Hitherto those of working age were allowed to cope passively with the personal traumas associated with social exclusion. Not any more. The notions of co-responsibility, empowerment, employability, socially as well as active citizenship requires them to shake off the stresses and strains of inter-generational unemployment, ill health and dependency. They must now acquire a formidable portfolio of skills. This also places lifelong learning at the heart of strategies for tackling social exclusion. Developing the capacity to cope with change and uncertainty as well as the disposition and motivation to engage in and benefit from learning are essential elements in building this portfolio of skills. The ability to make things happen for themselves, their family, community and employer by applying what they learn effectively in collaboration with others is also essential in utilising this portfolio to become socially as well as economically active citizens. This also means that cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills have assumed a much greater importance and have become more commonly known as soft skills.

Implications for community regenerators

The range and complexity the of skills residents now require to become socially as well as economically active citizens presents formidable challenges to community regenerators. This becomes even more problematic because a significant section of the population of disadvantaged communities are reluctant to engage in learning and there is evidence that some community regenerators require further training in order

to meet the capacity building needs of residents. Furthermore, in Wales there is no national strategy for meeting the training needs of staff engaged in this work If community regenerators are to succeed in enabling residents to become socially as well as economically active citizens they must first understand these challenges and be effective in designing and implementing appropriate strategies to enable residents to acquire their formidable portfolio of skills.

It is therefore essential that they both understand the concept of soft skills and are effective in devising effective learning strategies to enable residents to acquire them. However, this is likely to prove problematic and this is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Soft skills, learning and active citizenship

This chapter explains the significance of soft skills within three domains: enabling residents to overcome the barriers that prevent their engagement in learning; enabling residents to learn effectively and enabling residents to apply what they learn to become socially as well as economically active citizens.

Disposition and motivation to learn

Participation in learning is one of the most researched areas of adult education (Istance, Morris and Rees 1995; OECD 1979). It is well documented that whereas many residents of disadvantaged communities say that they wish to engage in learning to improve their skills they are unable to do so for a number and variety of reasons. The barriers to participation are conveniently grouped into three categories. Institutional, applying to issues to do with the way in which learning is delivered such as where courses are held, their timing or cost. Situational, to do with personal circumstances such as competing demands on time, access to transport or childcare requirements. Dispositional, relating to how positively an individual thinks or feels about the prospect of learning such as belief in ability to cope or perception of the personal value of learning to him or her (Cross 1981). The combined influence of these barriers has a profound effect on individual disposition and motivation to learn:

> "The evidence as a whole, therefore, suggests that dispositional factors - attitudes, perceptions, expectations – constitute perhaps the most powerful deterrents to participation among the groups investigated. When these are added to the numerous practical obstacles that prevent individuals from taking up educational opportunities – lack of time, money, transport, day-time facilities and childcare – the immense difficulties faced by providers wishing to recruit non-participant sections of the community can be appreciated" (McGivney 1990 p.22).

The cumulative and negative effects of prolonged unemployment cause McGivney to suggest that too much might be expected of them. An even more pessimistic view is taken by Titmus (2004) who suggests that a hard core of disaffected learners are

beyond all reach of engagement. The policy action team on jobs see the way forward through initial engagement in soft entry learning with priority being given to enhancing soft skills as part of a carefully planned strategy to prepare residents for the opportunities available to them (Department for Education and Employment 1999c). However, a review of relevant statistics is not encouraging. 50% of those who responded to the 1997 National Adult Learning Survey who had not recently participated in learning were adamant that nothing would persuade them to engage in learning. Moreover, there had been no real improvement by the 2004 survey with participation at its lowest since 1996 (19%) and rates actually declining among those in the lowest socio-economic status categories, down to only 23% of this section of the population (Aldridge and Tuckett 2004).

A review of the training needs of staff and volunteers delivering the Communities First programme locally highlights the very real effect of a fear of learning. It recommends that whereas support is required to enable residents to participate more effectively, this should be provided on an informal consultancy basis as "training" is viewed with suspicion:

> "There was also a reluctance to engage in training. The idea of training carries with it a suggestion of testing, of being challenged, the risk of failure, of not understanding and being made to feel stupid" (Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil 2003 p.2)

From the wealth of research available on adult participation in learning, four main conclusions are drawn concerning the relevance adult learning to strategies to ensure social inclusion. Adult education is least successful in engaging the hardest to reach, which includes the lower socio-economic groups. Dispositional barriers are the most significant barriers to participation. These are also the most difficult to overcome. A positive experience of learning during school years is of paramount importance in ensuring an optimistic disposition to learning in adulthood:

> "In 1961 Cyril Houle summed up a review of the factors which influence participation ... " But the most universally important factor is schooling. The higher the formal education of the adult the more likely it is that he will take part in continuing education. The amount of schooling is in fact so significant that it underlies or reinforces many of the other determinants" (Harrison 2004 p. 9).

Wiltshire's "iron law of education" explains how experience of prior learning influences disposition to participate in adult education:

> "... the more education people have had, the more likely they are to want more and the more competent they will be at getting it" (Wiltshire 1987 cited by McGivney 1990 pp.12-13).

Our education system creates a cycle of deprivation and social exclusion by modifying the expectations of children and reinforcing divisions in society based upon assessments of academic prowess (McGivney 1990). This application of subjective standards results in many judging themselves as educational failures (Hopper and Osborn 1975). This has a devastating effect on disposition to engage in any further learning:

> "People who have ostensibly "failed" in the school system do not wish to repeat that failure. Many are consequently suspicious of education in any form, even informal learning opportunities specifically designed for them ... In Britain it is indisputable that a large proportion of the adult population considers education as totally irrelevant" (McGivney 1990 pp. 19-21).

The Policy Action Team on Skills considers that the formal education and training system has failed to meet the needs of residents who believe that they have nothing to gain from improving their skills and do not appreciate how this could enhance their prospects of securing employment. Local capacity to develop and sustain projects to enable residents to improve their skills is usually weak and there is a failure to engage people and enable them to accept ownership of learning activities (Department for Education and Employment 1999b). This is consistent with an internal and unpublished Employment Service survey of unemployed people in Newport conducted by the writer in the early 1990s, which found that 75% of the registered unemployed had been involved in some form of government scheme. Many had been recycled through one scheme after another as YOP, YTS, Adult Training, Employment Training and other such schemes came and went without addressing the underlying cause of their exclusion from the labour market. The term "scheme sickness" was used to describe the considerable degree of cynicism claimants

associated with these programmes and this proved a most powerful deterrent to their further participation in learning.

Understanding disposition and motivation to learn is essential in devising strategies to enable residents to participate and accept ownership of learning:

> "A disposition to learn (or not) may therefore be the most relevant determinant, and yet the most underestimated by survey methodology" (Harrison 1993 cited by Gorard and Rees 2002 p. 82).

The significance of dispositional barriers to adult participation in learning began to emerge during the early 1970s as researchers highlighted the relevance of factors that are "internal psychological and cognitive and those derived from the individual's external environment" (Schutze and Istance 1987 p.40). Theories of motivation are grouped into three main categories: drive theories; self realisation theories and cognitive theories. The latter explains how behaviour is determined by prior experience and perceptions of one's environment (Crowder and Pupynin 1993 and 1995; Rubenson 1976; Schutze and Istance 1987).

The cognitive framework is considered to be of most value as this helps to explain how disposition to learn is determined by our primeval cognitive "fight or flight" responses and this countermands rational thought. This is explained through *Self-efficacy theory*, which enhances our understanding of the effect of expectancy-valence theories. Human beings make an instantaneous and subconscious self-evaluation about their capacity to cope with a challenge before considering their expectations from the effort required. If they judge themselves incapable then this causes them to decline the challenge Bandura (1994). This is of fundamental importance to those who seek to attract into learning those non-learners who have a weak sense of self-efficacy in learning. No amount of advertising or publicity can succeed until action is first taken to convince them that they are able to cope with the experience of learning, i.e. to enhance self-efficacy in learning. Bandura also explains how it is not the level of intellect or raw ability that governs our actions, but the strength of belief we hold about our capability to apply this intellect or innate ability. This is fundamental to our understanding of the concept of soft skills. Our belief system has a significant effect on coping with illness (Aylward 2006a), disposition to participate in learning

(Crowder and Pupynin 1995; Department for Education and Employment 1999b) and on behaviour more generally (Bandura1988; Ventrella 2001; Waitley 1997; Welsh Office 1998).

Learner identity (Weil 1986) is undoubtedly a significant determinant of adult participation in learning as well as the learning trajectory an individual follows throughout life. Gorard and Rees (2002) consider that socio-economic status and personal motivation are important in shaping learner identity. However, an alternative view is proposed:

> "To assume that socio-economic disadvantage and racial status ordain low scholastic attainment implies that poor and minority students have limited learning capability and that teachers are relatively powerless to promote academic success if their students are not socioeconomically advantaged. Superior academic attainments by efficacious schools serving almost entirely disadvantaged minority students belie this view" (Bandura 1997 p.250).

It is also important that community regenerators have positive expectations of residents and develop effective learning and support programmes aimed at enabling them to develop positive self-evaluations of their capacity to learn. Given that a capacity to engage effectively in lifelong learning is a pre-requirement for socially as well as economically active citizenship it is inevitable that those who are unable to do so are condemned to suffer social exclusion. Those judged as educational failures at school interpret this as confirmation that they are unable to learn and this negative self-evaluation causes them to develop a belief that they are unable to learn. As a result they develop a weak sense of self-efficacy in learning and thereafter avoid learning because they have developed an aversion to learning. Schutze and Istance (1987) report how this is driven and sustained by powerful subconscious forces explained by cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) and equilibrium theory (Heider 1958).

Knowledge about learning opportunities is important in enabling individuals to exercise choice over what sort of learning they engage in or whether they participate at all (Gorard and Rees 2002) However, from what we have learned of the debilitating effects of social exclusion we can appreciate that this might well have been true for the majority of adults who are able to exercise control over their own learning

trajectory. Sadly, for too many residents of our most disadvantaged communities this choice does not exist. Their prior experience of learning has been such a negative and painful process for them that they have developed a belief that they are unable to learn resulting in an aversion to learning. For them learning is no longer an option as education is simply not part of their value system and behaviour pattern (McGivney 1990).

This also suggests another imperative to achieve parity of esteem between academic and vocational attainment. If the only benchmark of success or failure in learning is academic attainment, children who have ability to learn in other fields but find that this is not valued, consequently develop the erroneous belief that they are unable to learn. This is likely to cause them to develop an aversion to learning with devastating consequences for themselves, their families and their community.

Experience from operating the Welfare to Work programme in the USA gives cause for concern, particularly in view of the introduction of a stricter benefit regime reinforcing the "rights and responsibilities" approach in the United Kingdom. The conventional strategy of providing the unemployed with short job focused training and removing perceived financial and other situational and institutional barriers preventing them from taking up employment is most successful for those who are reasonably job ready. However, those suffering multiple barriers causing them to be among the hardest to reach require more sophisticated interventions. The underlying causes of their inability to take advantage of opportunities available to them are psychological:

> "Despite mounting evidence from experience and research, the field continues to focus almost exclusively on non psychological issues in designing welfare policies and programs, but understandably, since it is easier to imagine getting a handle on more tangible problems like child care and transportation (though even they are daunting) ... an individual's decisions – to go to work assignments or not, to keep a job interview appointment or not, to access a child care subsidy or not – hinge in part on complex psychological issues such as the ability to cope with uncertainty, face unfamiliar situations, take on new challenges, and separate from children" (Herr and Wagner 2003 pp.19-20).

Many suffer a lack of a "work identity" (Wagner and Zvetina 2001 p.9). Typically for them work or activities associated with it are not part of their value system or

behaviour pattern. This is not to say that they are work-shy. They face such multiple disadvantages that cause them to devote greater priority to coping with day-to-day crises and they abandon any commitment to work related activities whenever a crisis arises, whereas a more efficacious person could cope with both. More recently it has been suggested that only 15% of those claiming incapacity benefits in Wales have a medical reason for their incapacity. A staggering 85% of those who are economically inactive suffer a range of "psychosocial" causes of their incapacitation (Aylward 2006b). The significance of the effect of psychosocial factors upon workless people and communities is also highlighted by Ritchie, Casebourne and Rick (2005).

We should not be too surprised at the increase in psychosocial factors. The corrosive effects of unemployment are well documented. Morale collapses and self-confidence evaporates along with the disposition to gain the skills and qualifications that employers value. This also causes a sense of physical and psychological isolation to the extent that ability to fulfil parental or family obligations is weakened severely (Department for Education and Employment 1999b). In areas of very high unemployment workless households are commonplace, there are few positive role models and as many as 20% of children experience inter-generational unemployment and there is particular concern over its debilitating effects:

> "... concentrated unemployment has done more damage than anything else in the poorest communities" (Social Exclusion Unit 1998 p.11).

Unemployment denies the status of citizenship and a sense of community more generally:

> "... employment has become the key to citizenship: good citizens support themselves and their families. "Self supporting" means that an individual is a citizen of equal worth to, and deserving of respect from, other employed citizens" (Pateman 1988 cited by Wharf-Higgins 1999 p.297).

High unemployment in Wales has devastated residents and communities alike as individuals, families and whole communities suffer a loss of self-confidence and hope. Over time these communities become even more disadvantaged as residents experience a quality of life that is well below the norms and expectations of wider society. Each generation becomes even more alienated as children grow up

experiencing unemployment, unstable family relationships, disaffection, delinquency and stigmatisation. This transmission of disadvantage from one generation to another is particularly damaging because of its negative effect on shaping the future prospects and sense of identity of the children of unemployed people. Prolonged unemployment effectively locks whole families into a cycle of deprivation and increased levels of poverty are attributed to unemployment, a stricter benefit regime and low wages with severe consequences for individuals and the nation (Adamson 1997; McGregor and McConnachie 1995; National Assembly for Wales 2000a; Williamson and Istance 1996).

Employment fulfils a number of beneficial functions as psychological well being is greater in those who hold satisfying jobs as compared to those who are unemployed or dissatisfied in their current job (Jahoda 1981). Unemployment or lack of job satisfaction causes higher rates of depression, a weaker work ethic and sense of control over ones life (Winefield, Winefield, Tiggermann and Goldney 1991). Disillusionment at being unable to find work increases with the duration of unemployment and causes some long term unemployed to abandon their search for jobs as self-esteem, self-efficacy and expectations of success fade away (Proudfoot, Guest, Carson, Dunn and Gray 1997). Older people suffer much greater distress (Broomhall and Winefield 1990; Rowley and Feather 1987). Disadvantages in childhood brought about by unemployment and the experience of social exclusion have a negative effect on the future prospects of children. This lasts well into adult life and is a significant factor in restricting mobility of economic status between succeeding generations (Machin 1998). Adverse effects of job insecurity on the father result in a negative effect on the work beliefs and attitude of children. However, there is no similar effect concerning job insecurity experienced by mothers, as fathers are perceived traditionally as family breadwinners. There are also fears that the widespread practice of organisational downsizing could result in larger numbers of young people entering the labour market with pessimistic work beliefs and attitudes (Barling, Dupre and Hepburn 1998). Childhood experience and parental experience of unemployment and social exclusion are associated with a wide range of negative factors in adulthood including: unemployment; benefits dependency; multiple partnerships; homelessness; extra-marital births, young parenthood and ill health (Hobcraft 1998; Office for National Statistics 1998). It is even suggested that children

who are brought up in poverty might themselves be learning to be poor and lower expectations of what their families could afford leads to children lowering their own hopes and aspirations for the future. This has an adverse effect on educational attainment and social disadvantage in childhood and increases the risk of low earnings and unemployment in adulthood (Gregg, Harkness and Machin 1999; Shropshire and Middleton 1999).

Clearly, the profound and negative effects of these factors have a significant influence over disposition to engage in learning or community based activities such as volunteering. This also demands that measures to compel people to become co-responsible for escaping economic inactivity must be devised and implemented with great care. However, the degree of understanding and sophistication of approach now required was not evident in previous mass application programmes such as RESTART. Managers and staff of job-support agencies require a degree of understanding and range of skills well beyond anything that they have been expected to demonstrate in the past. Significantly for this study, the review of economic inactivity in Wales refers to overwhelming evidence that a "people-based" approach is required and concludes that:

> "The report recommends that programmes should focus on overcoming the internal barriers faced by individuals" (National Assembly for Wales 2005 Covering letter introducing the report).

We have learned that these internal barriers relate to deficiencies in cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills and are more commonly known as soft skills. These are now considered in more detail.

Soft skills and their relationship to disposition, motivation, co-responsibility and empowerment

As residents make their way in the early years of the 21st Century they find that society today is radically different to that even their parents experienced. There is much greater emphasis on making things happen for themselves, for their families, for the organisation they work for and their community whilst the playing field never ceases to change. In a society experiencing traumatic and continuous change the

capacity to "cope" is now essential to ensure social inclusion and health and well being. Within the context of community regeneration, self-reliance, residents' participation, empowerment, partnership working and the ability to achieve mutual objectives with others places a much greater emphasis on cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. In the labour market working practices have changed radically. The drive for competitiveness has caused employers to reduce labour costs through large-scale reductions in staff as well as requiring those who manage to avoid redundancy to cope with radical changes in job-design, multi-skilling and flexible hours and work patterns. This brings a different meaning to coping and deployment skills.

Those in employment must be able to cope with the fear and uncertainty of the traumatic changes to their world of work, cope with learning different roles and responsibilities and cope with developing the flexibility to deploy their new skills effectively if they are survive the additional pressures and work-load placed upon them. Continuously improving the service they provide in the endless pursuit of expanding the customer base demands that all employees become effective life long learners. Those who lose their jobs face a life of even greater trauma and uncertainty as they attempt to navigate the new world of work and avoid drifting further away from the labour market. Those who are already workless face immense challenges as they struggle to overcome the "psychosocial" barriers and attempt to develop a bewildering portfolio of skills to ensure their employability. If we place ourselves in their shoes we find that this is to be achieved in abstract. They do not have the luxury of a regular wage or the support of a "human resources" department devising carefully worked out cultural change programmes, identifying their training needs and arranging for quality training to take place within the structure of their daily work. For them the challenge is to take responsibility for and plan their own learning and career development. Those who fall within the eligibility criteria for this or that New Deal programme have the "benefit" of a fixed number of 30 minute job focused interviews with their Personal Adviser to ascertain their minimum training needs to get them back to work as quickly as possible. Those furthest from the labour market suffer multiple disadvantages but are nonetheless required to become self-starters, make things happen for themselves and develop the disposition and motivation to build their own portfolio of skills. It is also worth reflecting upon the fact that:

> "35% receive the [incapacity] benefit due to mental/behavioural disorders. The large majority of this group have depression, anxiety or other neuroses, with only a small number having conditions such as schizophrenia or severe learning difficulties" (Department for Work and Pensions 2002 p.12).

This then is the reality of the nature and scale of the challenge many residents of our most disadvantaged communities face together with the community regenerators charged with enabling them to escape social exclusion. Residents are indeed required to develop a formidable portfolio of skills if they are to become socially and economically active or even healthy citizens. Whereas, this portfolio requires an appropriate blend of technical and soft skills, changes in the nature of work and of economic and social policy have led to an increased demand for soft skills. This also extends to personal health and well being. However, enabling residents to acquire this portfolio of skills is problematic. Due to the nature and range of disadvantage experienced in their daily lives, often from birth into adulthood, many have lost the confidence or inner strength to deploy what skills they might have once had or lack the disposition and motivation to learn new skills. There are also doubts concerning the capacity of community based regeneration agencies to understand and therefore meet these needs. In Wales there is still no recognised staff development framework or strategy for meeting the training needs of community regenerators. Furthermore, whereas the more conventional practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills are well understood, the more esoteric soft skills remain shrouded in mystery and confusion and learning strategies to address these skills are therefore likely to be ineffective.

The consultation document that introduces the new 14-19 curriculum in Wales calls for a better balance between acquiring subject knowledge and the "hard skills" (Welsh Assembly Government 2002c p.5) developed from practical, technical and occupational knowledge and the opportunity to develop personal and interpersonal "soft skills" (Welsh Assembly Government 2002c p.5) through applying skills and knowledge in real life situations. "Hard skills" refer to "what you know" whereas "soft skills" relate to "how you make use of what you know" (Welsh Assembly Government 2002c p.39). The following are listed as soft skills:

> "Communication skills; ability to learn; ability to follow instructions; understanding customer needs; organising own learning; showing initiative; team working skills; problem solving; leadership skills; management skills; working with others; improving own learning; problem solving ... handling uncertainty and risk; enterprise capability" (Welsh Assembly Government 2002c pp.39-40).

However, there is no clear or agreed definition of soft skills despite the fact that an earlier study undertaken in Wales comments upon the dearth of information and understanding of the concept. A variety of descriptions including, personal competencies, personal qualities, attitudes, behaviours, values and personal traits, had become associated with the term soft skills and it was suggested that these skills may not be related to intellectual capacity:

> "Soft skills are synonymous with personal qualities and may be (oversimplified) as 'what a person is like' rather than 'what they know' (academic qualifications) or 'what they can do' (vocational qualifications). Soft skills reflect the inner person rather than external attributes" (Management Development Network 1997 p.55).

ELWa uses the term "Essential Skills," which includes the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, key skills, generic skills, self-confidence, entrepreneurship, independent living skills, social skills and the ability to learn in its own right. It reports that too many people in Wales lack these skills despite their importance to employability, active citizenship and the well being of communities. Essential Skills are defined as:

> "Skills that we should all have, regardless of personal, social or economic circumstances, recognising that these will change over time" (ELWa 2002 p.17).

However, this definition is far too vague to be of use in assessments of individual learning needs or for devising and implementing appropriate learning and support strategies. In order to gain a more precise definition of soft skills and to understand how these influence the capacity of learners to benefit from its training programmes ELWa commissioned a study of learning and support programmes in south east Wales. This found that although the relevance of soft skills training for participants is supported strongly among training providers, there are serious deficiencies in both their understanding of soft skills and in meeting participants' learning and support

needs. For example, a list of soft skills used by the Employment Service is described as "all-encompassing, unspecific definition of possible soft skills" (Lombard 2002 p.8) and among training providers:

> "Soft skills remain an unidentified flying object, which may have something to do with CVs, interviewing, body language, getting on with people" (Lombard 2002 p.9).

The report recommends that a definition of soft skills as well as the range of skills included should be agreed, accredited training for staff introduced and a more learner centred approach to soft skill training is required. However, this never materialised. A definition of soft skills is offered in the report:

> "The ability to achieve personal goals in social situations (Lombard 1992 p.9)"

Here again the definition is more of an aspirational statement and fails to articulate whether ability refers to mental, physical or interpersonal qualities or if these relate at all.

As we have learned, soft skills encompass cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills and these are significant in determining disposition, motivation and behaviour. Within the context of learning, soft skills determine whether we participate in learning, whether we benefit from the learning experience and how effectively we apply what we learn in our everyday lives. This distinction between cognitive and conative ability is what separates technical "know how" and "know what" from "can do" and "will do." Competence without cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills is akin to owning a Ferrari without the ability to drive. In order to function effectively as economically or socially active citizens residents must be able to develop the disposition and motivation to learn, be competent at learning and adept at applying what they learn to achieve their personal goals. This is the very essence of empowerment:

> "There is much talk of "empowerment" as the vehicle for bettering personal lives. This is a badly misused construct that has become heavily infused with promotional hype, naïve grandiosity, and virtually every brand of political rhetoric. "Empowerment" is not something bestowed through edict. It is

> gained through development of personal efficacy that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove environmental constraints guarded by those whose interests are served by them. Those who exercise authority and control do not go around voluntarily granting to others power over resources and entitlements in acts of beneficence. A share of benefits and control must be negotiated through concerted effort and, often-times through prolonged struggle" (Bandura 1997 p.477).

He defines self-efficacy in terms of:

> "Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura 1997 p.3).

Bandura (1994) explains how the strength of personal self-efficacy is derived from four sources. A number of programmes have been developed using self-efficacy theory to enhance disposition and motivation. A programme aimed specifically at enhancing self-efficacy among the hardest to reach groups was particularly successful in meeting their needs by focusing learning strategies on Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy: "Mastery experiences (Herr and Wagner 2003 pp.7-13); Social Modelling (Herr and Wagner 2003 pp13-15); Social persuasion (Herr and Wagner 2003 pp.15-16) and Changing Negative Emotional Proclivities and Reinterpreting Illness" (Herr and Wagner 2003 pp.16-18). Lownsborough, Thomas and Gillinson (2004) report that impressive results were found on a support programme for long-term unemployed people where self-efficacy theory was used as an integral part of the programmes. Similar findings are reported by Caplan, Vinokur, Price and van Ryn (1989), Lombard (2002) and Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich and Price (1991). A programme of research undertaken by the writer in south Wales found that whereas self-efficacy has a profound influence on adult participation in learning among the long-term unemployed, the concept was neither understood nor addressed effectively in job-search training programmes (Cornwall 1999). How perceptions of self-efficacy influence the control we exercise over our own lives through its powerful influence over cognitive and conative skills is summarised in Fig: 1. Understanding the four sources of self-efficacy and incorporating these into capacity building strategies provide a convenient method of enhancing residents' self-efficacy.

Fig: 1 Characteristics of self-efficacy

People who have a low level of Self-Efficacy	People who have a high level of Self-Efficacy
Shy away from difficult tasks	Approach difficulties as a challenge
Have weak commitments to goals and abandon them rapidly	Have strong commitments to goals
Have low aspirations	Set challenging goals
Focus on themselves (are self diagnostic) rather than the task in hand	Are single minded and have an external focus
When faced with failure, will dwell on personal difficulties, shortcomings, obstacles and possible adverse outcomes	Put failure down to insufficient effort or resources
Are slow to recover their sense of efficacy after failure or setbacks	Quickly bounce back after failure
Give up easily in face of difficulty	Increase their efforts in face of difficulty
Have a high vulnerability to stress and despondency	Display low vulnerability to stress and despondency

Source: Pacific Institute (1996)

Three other personal constructs are essential in understanding soft skills. Locus of control. Intrinsic motivation and resilience. These combine with self-efficacy to exert a powerful influence over cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills through their effect on our behaviour. Locus of control relates to the extent to which we believe that we, as opposed to others with more power over us, are in control of our own actions and therefore whether or not we accept responsibility for our own destiny. An external locus is characterised by passivity and learned helplessness (Rotter 1966, 1990 and 1992). A high sense of self-efficacy results in a greater sense of locus of control (Phillips and Gully 1997; Wood and Bandura 1989a and 1989b). Intrinsic motivation determines whether or not we become sufficiently interested to pursue our goals. Underdeveloped soft skills are more likely to succeed if these focus on changing young people's goals as well as improving their social knowledge and skills to effect intrinsic motivation (Dodge 1989; Lombard 2002). An emphasis on creativity and innovation is also important "the two key processes that engage (Barrett 2002), provoke curiosity to learn (Lombard 1992 and 1997) and generate intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 1989) that encourages mastery orientation" (Lombard 2002 p.30). The importance of intrinsic motivation is also explained through Goal Theory. Explicit and challenging goals provide direction and purpose to behaviour that serves to enhance and sustain motivation and create the incentive to sustain effort until goals are achieved. Self-efficacy influences the choice of goals set and the higher the level of self-efficacy, the more ambitious the goals are likely to be and the higher the ultimate level of attainment. Individuals who view intelligence as

fixed, which is consistent with high performance goal orientation, are likely to enjoy lower self-efficacy than those who view intelligence as acquirable. This is consistent with high mastery goal orientation. The former tends to view mistakes as failures due to lack of innate ability and give up whereas the latter usually view mistakes as setbacks to be overcome by trying a different approach (Bandura 1994).

Resilience relates to the extent to which we are able to take setbacks in our stride and build stamina and perseverance. This also refers to the capacity to withstand negative family or peer group pressure and stay on track to realise personal goals. Perseverance and the capacity to remain on task until goals are achieved are associated with a strong sense of resilience. Within the context of learning, it is important that learners are enabled to anticipate the obstacles that lie in wait for them and through appropriate modelling and rehearsal strategies ensure effective inoculation against setbacks (Caplan, Vinokur, Price and van Ryn 1989; Price van Ryn and Vinokur 1992; Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich and Price 1991).

An appropriate combination of self-efficacy, locus of control, intrinsic motivation and resilience is of paramount importance. In relation to disposition and motivation to participate in learning this determines: whether or not we participate in learning; how far we benefit from the learning experience and how effectively we apply the knowledge, understanding and skills learned. These four personal constructs underpin cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills to the extent that they determine our aspirations and ambitions. Enable us to cope with the demands of learning as well as life in general. Put simply they determine our capacity to develop the disposition and motivation to achieve our true potential and lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Within the context of adult participation in lifelong learning this also relates to the capability or incapability to take that first step, to overcome a situational or institutional barrier that might not be perceived as a barrier to a more efficacious person. This enables soft skills to be considered within four broad categories: the cognitive or mental processing skills that enable us to make sense of the environment within which we live; the conative skills that enable us to apply the knowledge, understanding and technical skills through our behaviour; the interpersonal skills that enable us to develop effective working relationships with others and the underpinning personal

constructs that provide the necessary "inner strength" to acquire and apply knowledge, understanding and skills.

An illustration of how soft skills within each category combine with the more conventional practical, technical and vocational/job specific skills to form a portfolio of skills for active citizenship is shown in Fig: 2. The main processes that need to be in place to enable community regenerators to first engage residents in capacity building activities and then support them to ensure progression to socially or economically active citizenship are explained in diagram form in Fig: 3.

The indicative portfolio of skills in Fig: 2 contains five important features. Recognition that the skills necessary to ensure active citizenship consist of a combination of the practical, technical or vocational/job specific skills and the soft skills essential to fulfil the requirements of community based activities such as volunteering, as well as for job specifications for employment. Soft skills are separated into cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. The degree of competence in all skills intensifies as the individual progresses through a continuum from "entry level" to "highest level." An absence or major deficiency in the required degree of either the practical, technical, vocational/job specific or soft skills, or the inability to acquire them, is likely to result in a failure to succeed in contributing effectively to the regeneration process or in securing, retaining or progressing in a job. The underpinning enabling skills are those that provide the inner strength that allows individuals to cope, become co-responsible and empowered and these are the skills that underpin personal effectiveness.

Competence in these underpinning enabling skills separates effective people from ineffective people as these determine, not only how persistent and effective an individual is in securing a job, they also determine how well an individual performs within his or her job and whether and how far he or she progresses in broader career terms. In the face of discrimination and prejudice, enabling skills determine how far an individual is able to persist in battling against and overcoming these barriers. It is these skills that combine to form the personal identity of the individual and self-efficacy, locus of control, intrinsic motivation and resilience are the four pillars upon which self-reliance and independent citizenship are founded. Underpinning enabling

skills would be termed "dispositional factors" within the context of barriers to adult participation in lifelong learning as defined by Cross (1981).

This also enables clarification of Lombard's (1992) definition of soft skills and the following definition is suggested:

> "The cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills that enable disposition and motivation to acquire and apply the knowledge, understanding and range of skills necessary to succeed in life within the environment within which we live."

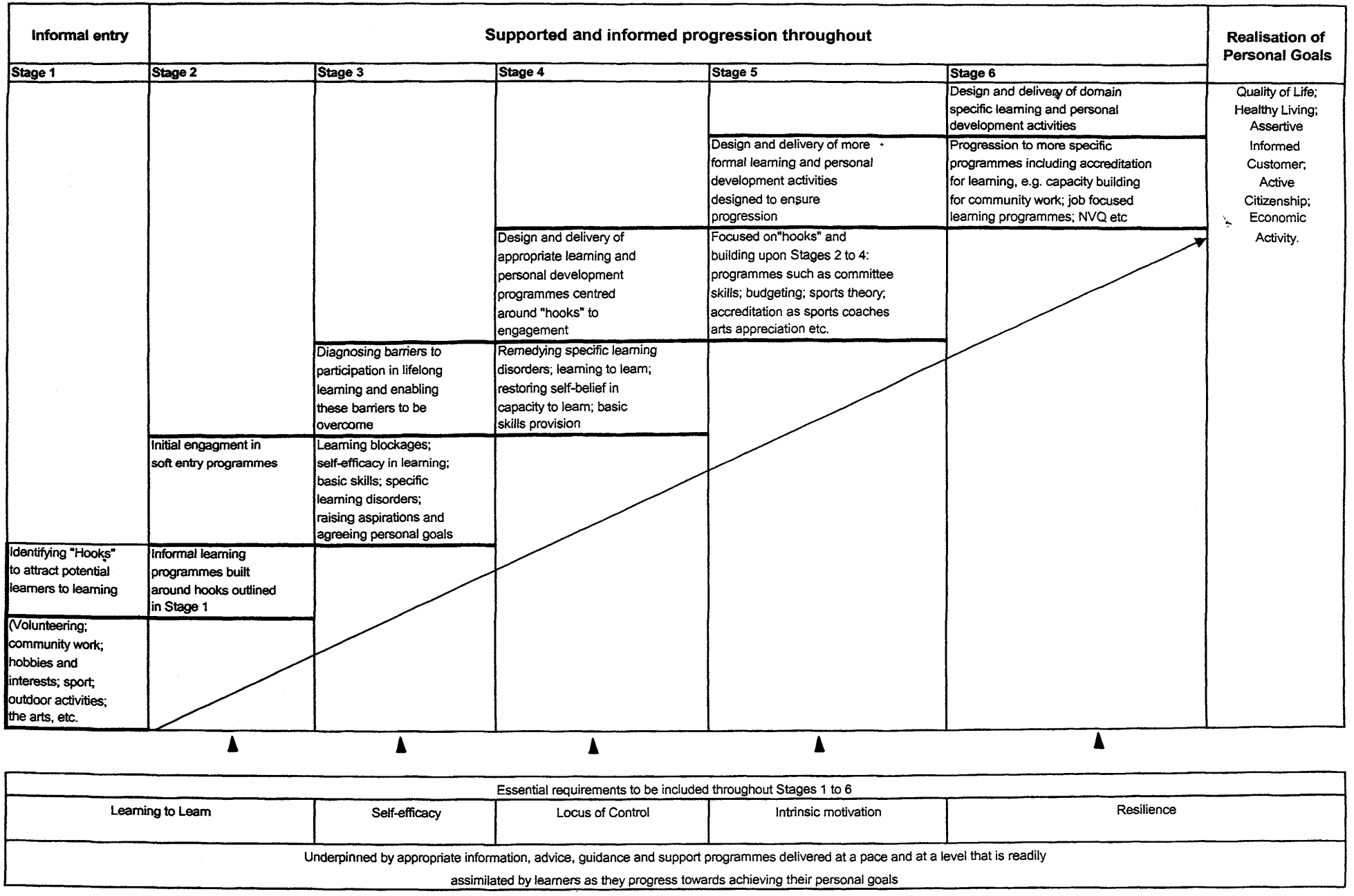
The main features of the processes illustrated in Fig: 3 take account of the need for a carefully planned strategy that recognises the need for a "step-change in the level of "first-rung" provision" (Department for Education and Employment 1999c p.13) focused upon the personal interests of potential learners supported by effective information, advice and guidance. It is essential that residents develop the belief that they are able to cope with the challenges of learning as an integral part of this strategy. For this to happen, all staff involved should be trained properly to understand fully the learning and support needs of the target group. This will then enable them to ensure that the necessary processes are in place to ensure that residents are enabled properly to engage in and benefit fully from community based learning. The barriers preventing residents from participating in learning must be identified fully. There must be mutual understanding and agreement between the learning provider and the learner as to what these barriers are, how they inhibit progress and how they will be overcome. Carefully planned learning as well as support programmes must be in place to address these barriers and these should incorporate Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy. Progress must be monitored effectively to ensure progression. A range of appropriate progression routes must be available at appropriate stages to enable each individual to progress at his or own pace until personal goals are achieved. At least initially, learning should be delivered within the community, as advocated by Adamson, Dearden and Castle (2001).

Fig: 2 Indicative Portfolio of skills required for socially or economically active citizenship

Technical, practical, or job specific skills	Cognitive skills	Conative skills	Interpersonal Skills
Management level Strategic Planning Process Design Financial Appraisal Manpower Planning Operational Planning Budgetary Control Job Design **Supervisory level** Forward planning Quality control Progress chasing Staff reporting **Professional and Technical skills** Accountancy, Medical Practitioner, Nursing Bricklaying, Carpentry Mechanical Engineering, Check-out Operating, Machine Operating Manual dexterity Ability to drive Filing, General Office Administration Committee work Credit Union cashier Residents' Board Treasurer Breakfast Club Volunteer First Aiding Literacy* Written Communication Numeracy* Information Technology**	Strategic Thinking Vision Conceptual ability Innovation Creativity Commercial orientation Business thinking Analysing Reasoning Prioritising Objectivity Judgement Sense of Perspective Problem solving**	Entrepreneurship Leadership Converting ideas into action Managing change Organisational drive Performance orientation Achievement orientation Team Selection Quality orientation Continuous-improvement Outcome- orientation Drive/stamina Organising Purposefulness Responsibility Discretion Decisiveness Decision making Resourcefulness Initiative Self reliance Reliability Conscientiousness Punctuality Attendance Presentation Cope with change, pressure, stress Positive/Optimistic Self confidence Commitment Flexibility/Adaptability Improving Own Learning** Application of Number**	Customer orientation Presenting Negotiating Values (e.g. integrity, openness, honesty) Working with others** Assertiveness Listening Persuasiveness Results through others Assertiveness Negotiating Influencing Awareness of others "Political correctness" Respect Trust Rapport Fellowship Oral Communication**
Underpinning Enabling skills Self-efficacy Locus of control Intrinsic motivation Resilience These skills are essential to the development of appropriate aspirations and ambition, establishing how high we set our personal goals and in determining the extent to which we develop: the responsibility for our own actions; the disposition and motivation to engage in an activity, e.g. learning; whether we persevere in the face of setbacks and uncertainty and how well we deploy or apply the knowledge, understanding and skills we acquire and remain on task until our personal goals are achieved.			

* Nationally recognised Basic Skills ** Nationally recognised Key Skills

FIG: 3 The gently sloping learning ramp



Other concepts are also associated with the term soft skills and a brief explanation of the most relevant or commonly used is now provided.

Erikson (1950 and 1968) explains how environmental factors influence our emotional development throughout our lifetime and how personal traits are formed. According to Erikson, human beings progress through eight stages of development and must experience a positive socialisation process as we pass through each stage before we are able to become mature and well balanced emotionally. This socialisation process determines that, unless our perception of the experiences gained in each stage is positive, this has a negative effect on the development of personal traits.

Seligman (1975 and 1991) explains the importance of learned helplessness and learned optimism and describes the characteristics of both and their influence on our behaviour. Optimism can be learned or re-taught through the process of learning a new set of cognitive skills:

> "Habits of thinking need not be forever. One of the most significant findings in psychology in the last twenty years is that individuals can choose the way they think" (Seligman 1991 p.8).

In the mid-1960s the dominant theories in psychology shifted focus from the influence of one's environment to individual expectation, preference, choice, decision and control as "Four different lines of thought converged on the proposition that self-direction, rather than outside forces, could explain human action" (Seligman 1991 p.9)

Covey (1992) distinguishes between two types of people, those he refers to as effective and by implication those who are ineffective. He argues that differences in behaviour between the two groups arise from the way in which we think and not our level of intellect or skill. We see the world through our own unique paradigm and how we perceive our world and how we respond to events is dependent on the habits we form over time. A habit is defined as "the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire" (Covey 1992 p.47), and effectiveness as the balance between "production of desired results ... and production capability, the ability or asset that produces" (Covey 1992

p.54). Effective people develop seven distinctive habits. They are proactive in taking responsibility for their own actions. They set themselves long-term goals. Are able to prioritise and focus on important issues. Are aware of their own feelings and take those of others into account. Are able to build constructive relationships. Are effective team-workers. They motivate themselves to continuously improve their self-development. In-effectiveness can be transformed to effectiveness by changing these habits through effecting shifts in thinking.

Goleman (1996 and 1998) explains how personal traits are developed and how these influence employability. He cites a number of studies to support his view that the traditional emphasis on narrow academic achievement is misplaced. Success in the new world of work no longer depends upon our ability to acquire knowledge and skill but on our capacity to apply effectively the knowledge and skills we have learned. Emotional development has a powerful influence over our capacity to learn, form effective working relationships and succeed or fail in life. Support for Goleman and another positive perspective on emotional intelligence and its effect on employability are provided by Simmons and Simmons (1997). Traditionally there has been an over-reliance on IQ scores and whereas this is of some importance, it is not an accurate predictor of job performance. A definition of emotional intelligence is provided:

> "Emotional intelligence is the emotional needs, drives, and true values of a person and guides all overt behaviour. A person's interests tell you what a person likes to do ... A person's mental and physical skills tell you what a person can do ... However, a person's emotional intelligence determines what they do and will do ... EQ largely determines your success in relating to people and your success in any given job" (Simmons and Simmons 1997 p.11).

In recent years there has been a growing interest in self-esteem. This is often put forward to explain a range of behavioural and social problems with programmes claiming to enhance self-esteem becoming a lucrative growth industry. However, self-esteem is often confused with self-efficacy whereas these are two distinct constructs with no fixed relationship. Self-esteem is concerned with self-perception of self worth (Bandura 1997). This is significant within the context of strategies to tackle social exclusion as schools regularly pursue strategies aimed at enhancing self-esteem as a valued tactic in enhancing educational attainment. Adult learning providers often

claim to raise self-esteem as part of capacity building or training for employability. Emler (2001) counsels caution and points to there being no agreed definition of self-esteem among the scientific community and the evidence of whether low self-esteem actually affects behaviour is inconclusive due to its variable quality. Before resources are committed to interventions designed to address social ills through raising self-esteem, we need to be confident of whether or not low self-esteem has negative consequences and understand what these are as well as assessing whether or not it is practical to reverse these effects by raising self-esteem. He recommends that further research be undertaken with regard to repercussions of childhood self-esteem upon economic circumstances in adult life. Similar findings are reported from a large-scale study in the USA and Canada, particularly in relation to performance in school and in work (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs 2003).

The Welsh Assembly Government has ambitious plans to secure the economic prosperity of Wales by creating a dynamic and high skills economy and an entrepreneurial culture (Welsh Development Agency 1999). Whilst it is possible to teach and train people in the mechanics of enterprise, entrepreneurship is a state of mind. This is dependent upon well developed soft skills such as vision, creativity, innovation, opportunism, personal self-efficacy, risk-taking, locus of control, intrinsic motivation, resilience, perseverance and stamina. However, people in Wales are among the most pessimistic about growing small firms, have less experience of starting new businesses, are less likely to be able to react quickly to business opportunities and have little motivation to become entrepreneurs This has profound implications for the future prosperity of Wales:

> "Wales seriously lacks an enterprise culture or, more importantly, an entrepreneurial population with the skills, motivation and abilities to identify opportunities in the market-place that can lead to the creation of new businesses ... it is clear that policies to address the development of an enterprise culture in Wales are probably the MOST IMPORTANT AND CRUCIAL ASPECT of any future strategy to develop the economic potential of Wales and the foundation of any successful revitalisation of the Welsh economy" (Jones-Evans and Brooksbank 2000 p.60). Emphasis by capitals is that of the authors.

In England, the Academy of Enterprise is pursuing an approach to promoting entrepreneurship through an education programme in schools. This is based upon the

introduction of learning strategies that enable learners to develop the necessary soft skills, centred around how we learn as opposed to what is learned and instilling within learners a set of personal qualities that will enable them to thrive in an uncertain world (Horne 2000).

Implications for this study

We have learned how residents of our most disadvantaged communities must develop a formidable range of skills if they are to escape social exclusion. This places enormous demands on them from a number of perspectives. The nature of their learning needs are as complex as they are diverse. Their experiences of social exclusion have weakened their morale and disposition to engage in learning to the extent that some even lack a learning and/or work identity. They must also overcome an equally formidable range of barriers preventing them from engaging in or benefiting from learning. This chapter has explained how soft skills relate to disposition and motivation to perform effectively in four domains. Overcoming perceived barriers to participation in learning. Building capacity to benefit from the learning experience. Enabling the application of what has been learned effectively to become a co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizen. Enabling co-responsibility for health and well being.

This also presents formidable challenges for community regenerators. They must come to terms with a new economic imperative for their work. They must understand the range of skills that residents now need if they are to succeed in building their capacity to escape social exclusion. Whereas soft skills are of increasing importance they remain shrouded in mystery and confusion. However if community regenerators are to succeed they must understand these soft skills and be effective in enabling residents to acquire them. However, there are doubts concerning the capacity of community regeneration agencies to provide the sophisticated range of support residents so clearly need as they struggle to become socially as well as economically active citizens. Managers and staff of community regeneration agencies do not have the benefit of a national competence framework or staff development strategy. Yet they are expected to devise and implement learning and support strategies that will test severely their knowledge, understanding and competence across what in effect are

four distinct specialisms: barriers to adult participation in learning; community capacity building; technical and soft skills development and job search advice and guidance.

This also begins to support the three main arguments this study set out to develop. That engagement in lifelong learning is now central to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by soft skills. Secondly that these soft skills remain little understood, particularly among those managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies. Finally, this lack of understanding results in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

We have learned how engagement in life long learning is in fact central to ensuring social inclusion and that disposition and motivation to learn as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by soft skills. Within the context of community regeneration, soft skills enable residents to overcome the barriers preventing their engagement in learning, enable them to benefit fully from the learning experience and to apply what they learn to become co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizens.

We have also learned how these soft skills remain rather esoteric and are not widely understood. Before moving on to ascertain how well community regenerators understood soft skills and how effective they were in enabling residents to acquire these skills we need to understand more about the nature and scale of the challenges they faced. The next chapter explains how these challenges are made even more difficult because of the policy framework within which they worked.

Chapter 4

Combatting social exclusion: The policy framework

This chapter explains how policies to ensure social inclusion in Wales are in fact implemented by both the United Kingdom Government and the Welsh Assembly Government. Whereas the purpose and content of these policies are very similar, the means of achieving these aims are incongruous. The success of the flagship programme for tackling social exclusion in Wales is now dependent on the effectiveness of community capacity building. However, there is evidence of scepticism concerning the focus on an economic imperative for community based learning among the community regeneration sector. There are also doubts concerning the over-reliance on supply side measures in reducing economic inactivity. The additional challenges this brings for residents and community regenerators are discussed.

We have learned how the drive to tackle social exclusion began after the 1997 General Election and how tackling unemployment and economic inactivity became central to achieving social inclusion. The Department for Work and Pensions is leading on this through its Executive Agency, Jobcentre Plus. However, none of its functions are devolved to the Welsh Assembly Government and there are no plans to do so. This has resulted in the unsatisfactory situation where a key aspect of economic and social policy is being implemented alongside the model adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government but outside of its control. A number of weaknesses are already apparent and these will be discussed as we explore the differences in the way in which policies are implemented.

The approach adopted by the Department for Work and Pensions

A new Working Age Agency is established to transform a "passive benefit system into an active welfare state" (Department for Education and Employment 2001a p.vi). The economically inactive are to experience a radical extension of active labour

market policies and a continuation of the cultural change inherent in the New Deal programme:

> "... for the first time there would be no option of a life on benefit, and this was backed up by benefit sanctions for those who repeatedly failed to attend interviews or to participate in the options available" (Department for Education and Employment 2001a p. 13).

The term economically inactive describes those of working age who are neither claiming Jobseekers Allowance nor registered as available for employment. In the main these are people aged between 16 and 65 in receipt of incapacity related benefits. Areas of greatest disadvantage are to be targeted specifically and the definition of full employment is now:

> "... employment opportunity for all, the modern definition of full employment" (Department for Education and Employment 2001a p.19).

The emergence of the Department for Work and Pensions as a key player in the strategy to tackle social exclusion is confirmed through its role in taking forward the Government's "drive to full employment and opportunity for all" Darling (2001) and determination to do more for the hardest to help. The merger of the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service to form Jobcentre Plus removes the administrative division between those who sign on for jobs and those who claim other benefits. A culture of responsibility and higher expectations is promoted in the belief that work provides cohesion and stability within communities and full employment raises expectations and helps to eradicate social exclusion. The emphasis on "rights and responsibilities" is to be reinforced with some vigour:

> "The new Department will have an overarching objective of helping people help themselves, to become independent ... Jobcentre Plus will bring in a new culture of "work first." It will enshrine the principle that everyone has an obligation to help themselves, through work wherever possible ... When people come through the door – they will no longer simply be able to ask: "What can you pay out to me?" They will have to answer the question: "What can we do to help you into a job? What skills might you need? What childcare will make it possible for you to work? What financial support can we provide to make sure you are better off in work?" (Darling 2001).

Economically inactive people are required to attend work-focused interviews, cooperate with advisers and participate in a range of activities designed to ensure their employability. Significantly, the department responsible for *Welfare to Work* undertook the third review of social exclusion in England providing further evidence of how the underlying causes of social exclusion are perceived by the United Kingdom Government. Interestingly, lifelong learning moves up the Department for Work and Pensions' agenda as a means of enabling unemployed people to not only secure employment, but also to improve their career prospects after finding a job:

> "A key part of our strategy to prevent poverty and social exclusion amongst people of working age is to encourage lifelong learning, so that people can acquire skills to help them find a job or expand their career opportunities. This includes schemes to improve adult basic skills, to make training and education affordable and accessible, and to improve the availability of information about adult training and education" (Department for Work and Pensions 2001 p.89).

Enhancing the skills of residents is "vital to the success of regeneration activity" (Department for Work and Pensions 2001 p.150) and there are to be community based strategies to "attract reluctant learners and thus help to build self-sufficient individuals and communities" (Department for Work and Pensions 2001 p150). There is also an increased emphasis on supporting children and young people in their transition to adult life through programmes to reduce the risks of disaffection, truancy, exclusion from school and teenage pregnancy. The economic activity agenda is highlighted through a range of other measures. Reducing the proportion of children living in workless households and providing financial security for parents who are unable to work. Providing more intensive support to enable parents, including single parents to re-enter the labour market. Improving access to childcare, that in itself should provide new employment opportunities.

Sadly, the Department for Work and Pension's interest in lifelong learning proves something of a false dawn and very little practical support actually materialised to enable those on benefits improve their career prospects. Apart from measures to enhance literacy and numeracy there is no intention that training for higher-level skills, for example to NVQ Level 2 and above, is to be available to people whilst in receipt of benefits. This remains a serious omission as nothing is being done to ensure that those with low or no skills avoid the low skills trap. Employers are reluctant to

train staff beyond the skills required to fulfil immediate task and those employed in low skills jobs are most vulnerable to redundancy as these low added value jobs continue to haemorrhage to low wage economies overseas (Burkitt 2001; Green 2001; Hogarth and Wilson 2001; Keep 2000 and 2005). Not only is Jobcentre Plus failing to enhance the long-term career prospects of jobseekers, doubts are raised over the capacity of its staff to fulfil the complex and onerous role that *Welfare to Work* places upon them (Bowman, Burden and Konrad 2000; Burkitt 2001).

As the level of unemployment fell, economic inactivity assumes greater priority. The impetus for this is the fact that whilst registered unemployment, as measured by the numbers actively seeking work through Jobcentres, fell considerably, the numbers claiming disability or incapacity benefits actually increased to outnumber the unemployed by three to one. Despite evidence that there had been no overall deterioration in the health of the nation. Whereas some new measures are introduced to change attitudes of both those who are economically inactive and employers who are reluctant to employ people with health problems (Department for Work and Pensions 2002 and 2003), the emphasis on simply preparing people to meet the immediate recruitment requirements of employers remains. More recently the United Kingdom Government announced a further package of measures including initiatives such as extending the Pathways to Employment programme throughout Wales. These focus on enabling those on incapacity benefits to cope better with managing their illness and cognitive behavioural therapy to instil more positive thinking. The benefit system is also to be refocused as an enabler to re-entry to the labour market by replacing Job Seekers Allowance and Incapacity Benefit with a new Employment and Support Allowance. Predictably there are also to be additional sanctions reinforcing the rights and responsibilities approach (Department for Work and Pensions 2006).

The move to reform the benefits system is most welcome but a comprehensive overhaul is necessary to enable it to complement strategies to ensure social inclusion. Anomalies in the system are blamed for the increase in the proportion of children living in lone-parent household since Labour came to power in 1997, which is in stark contrast to what has been achieved through reducing benefit dependency in the USA (Kirby 2005). The system has failed to keep pace with the radical changes in the labour market and positively discourages many from taking up the increasing number

of temporary or part-time opportunities. There are also anxieties over the time taken to restore benefits on repeat claims and this all conspires to deter people from taking up such jobs, particularly those who start from a low confidence base. This was found to have a negative effect within the context of adult participation in learning:

> "... one of the biggest barriers to participation in training or education is fear about loss or disruption of welfare benefits" (McGivney 1992 p.50).

The approach adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government

The strategy developed in Wales is framed within the "anti-poverty agenda" of the minister responsible for tackling social exclusion (Starling 2001). Empowerment of residents, capacity building and ensuring employability and encouraging economic activity feature prominently:

> "Too many community initiatives have been about going in, deciding what people want, spending a bit of money and having photographs taken before leaving. Well, not this time ... The voluntary sector are often seen as do-gooders coming in, trying to grab community funding for projects. The voluntary sector has a lot to learn in putting the needs of the communities higher. So there are clear messages I can send out to all these organisations. There is a feeling about that things will carry on as normal in Wales - well they won't. We are all here to empower our communities, to give them what they need, to put the necessary resources in ... I expect all agencies to adhere to what the Government's priorities are - and that means committing themselves to the anti-poverty agenda ... Now to the communities themselves. I want them to recognise that they are part of society. That we are here to build their capacities, to give them what they require. That may mean skills to encourage them back into economic activity ... I understand apathy. It's worsened over the years and people have no faith in anything" (Starling 2001).

The Communities First programme becomes the flagship to take this forward and achieve the related key objectives and targets for addressing poverty and ensuring social justice set out in the Assembly's strategic plan (National Assembly for Wales (2000b). Progress is monitored through a set of benchmarks grouped within six themes including "Economic Activity," "Education and Training" and "Active Community." However, some of these indicators are rather vague and more aspirational than quantifiable benchmarks. For example, under the heading of

"Economic Activity ... That a full range of services exist to enable all those of working age to achieve their potential in the labour market ... That local economic activity is promoted to secure local trading, exchange and circulation of wealth" (National Assembly for Wales 2000d page preceding Annex A).

The need to strengthen links with the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure co-ordination of non-devolved areas of responsibility such as *Welfare to Work* is recognised by both governments (National Assembly for Wales 2001a; Department for Work and Pensions 2004). This will be achieved by working closely with the Welsh Assembly Government, Careers Wales and ELWa to "ensure that shared economic and social objectives are met" (Department for Work and Pensions 2004 p.33) and establishing a Welsh Employment Advisory Panel to support this partnership. However, the existence of such a potential fault line in a key policy area does not bode well for the coordination of these programmes and services in our disadvantaged communities and weaknesses have become apparent.

Whereas economic inactivity is highlighted for action in Wales, the analysis of the problem and how it is to be addressed is weak "Economic inactivity often relates to low skills and poor health, so addressing this issue needs concerted effort on basic skills and on health promotion" (Welsh Assembly Government 2004 p.4). The Assembly's plan for tackling worklessness and enhancing skills provides further evidence of a lack of coordination between its policies for tackling economic inactivity and its wider strategy to ensure social inclusion through the Communities First programme. There is a commitment to tackle low skills and economic inactivity in the most disadvantaged communities within the context of an improving labour market and the importance of soft skills is recognised. Whereas the overall number of jobs continues to increase, the perils of the low skills trap are ignored. The measures introduced to tackle economic inactivity through cooperation with Jobcentre Plus and a new EU funded "Want-2-Work" programme fail to provide for training in higher-level skills as an integral part of the programme. Instead the emphasis is again on job focused training and a reliance on individuals and their new employers accepting responsibility for such personal development and future career progression. The plan is unequivocal about this "**Individuals** need to drive their own career development and contribute to investment in their skills" (Welsh Assembly Government 2005b

p.13). Emphasis in bold is by the authors. Somewhat ironically this is the only reference to a "rights and responsibilities" approach.

This is particularly worrying for a number of reasons. The jobs available to unemployed people do not always offer the opportunity for advancement resulting in "persistence on low pay from one year to the next" (Social Exclusion Unit 2004 p.81). Those who lack qualifications or skills are also less likely to participate in training in work or engage in learning more generally and remain the most vulnerable to unemployment. Some groups prove too difficult to reach and even when engaged in the process, progress made by individuals could be fragile and short-lived with 40% of people securing employment through New Deal for Young People becoming unemployed again within six months (Social Exclusion Unit 2004). Where jobs were available, these were not always secure, permanent or well paid and the unemployed and their families who were obliged to show "flexibility" by accepting such jobs found this a hazardous and stressful experience. One study found that 75% of jobs required such "flexibility," which became a regular pattern for some or they returned to unemployment before taking up a better job. Other family members were obliged to take up employment to make working pay and single people were less likely to take up these "flexible" jobs (White and Forth 1998). Research conducted in four unemployment black-spots in England between June 1997 and March 1998 found that the experiences of long-term unemployed people of *Welfare to Work* caused them to be very cynical (Finn, Blackmore and Nimmo 1998). Young men who lacked either adequate preparation before they entered the labour market or had insufficient skills and qualifications encountered particular difficulties. They found themselves vulnerable to repeated periods of short-term employment interspersed with unemployment, often through changes in the labour market as opposed to their unsuitability for the work available (Furlong and Cartmel 2004; Stafford, Heaver, Ashworth *et al* 1999).

Despite these concerns, the help available through Jobcentre Plus is limited to helping people into jobs and its main objectives and outcome targets relate to this function as opposed to enabling people to upgrade their skills through lifelong learning. Literacy and numeracy skills feature only as secondary, internal targets for the number of assessments undertaken and the numbers taking up courses as part of their attendance

on mainstream Jobcentre Plus programmes (National Audit Office 2004). Unfortunately, this narrow focus is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Whereas the next stage for the New Deal programme recognises the need to raise the skills level of unemployed people, it stops short of including this in the new programme. Participants are again to receive only training to ensure that they have the skills demanded in the local labour market and thereafter up-skilling to NVQ Levels 2 and 3 remains the responsibility of employers. However, adults are entitled to receive free training to achieve their first level 2 qualification (Department for Work and Pensions 2004). Subject of course, to whether or not their employer is prepared to allow this in their new job. Support for up to 33 months beyond job entry for further career progression will be available through the new Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme within New Deal. However, this is only to be piloted in a small number of areas and appears to be a reluctant and half-hearted initiative. There are no immediate plans to extend the programme nationwide and the outcome of the evaluation will not become available until 2007, indicating that a conscious and deliberate decision has been taken by the Department for Work and Pensions to focus on inactivity (Adams 2005).

This has significant implications for strategies to tackle social exclusion in Wales. Those most in need of learning new skills are invariably people who lack the confidence, disposition and motivation to do so and many of the jobs available simply entice them into the low skills trap. Clearly this does little to address the Assembly's aspirations for a high skills and high employment economy or to achieve its wider ambitions for tackling poverty and ensuring social justice. Those who need the most training and support are to be left to their own devices in developing the additional skills needed to enable them to self manage their own career and navigate the new world of work successfully. This presents substantial challenges for socially excluded people and there is no indication that this is either understood or to be addressed by the Department for Work and Pensions through *Welfare to Work* or the Welsh Assembly Government through its Communities First programme. In fact the opposite is true, as *Welfare to Work* has become a recruiting sergeant for the low skills trap. It is important to understand that it is not only the unemployed who risk entrapment The existence of a low skills equilibrium (Finegold and Soskice 1988) across the south Wales valleys has hitherto enabled those in employment who lack even the basic

skills of literacy and numeracy to manage to get by in their unskilled or low skilled jobs. However, these jobs in low value added industries continue to haemorrhage to low wage economies in Eastern Europe and beyond. Therefore, those who are currently employed in these jobs but lack the disposition or capacity to become self-reliant and self-directed lifelong learners to the extent that they are able to self-manage their own career progression, are increasingly vulnerable to suffering unemployment in the not too distant future.

The reality of the European labour market brings another and increasing threat. Unemployed people in the poorer member states are now free to compete for local jobs. The scale of increase in this inward migration into the south Wales Valleys is such that it is likely to reinforce the low skills equilibrium and distort the dynamics of the local labour market in favour of employers. Historically at times of a tightening labour market when the demand for labour began to outstrip the supply, competition for new recruits invariably forced employers to introduce incentives such as improved pay or working conditions. However, as there is now such a ready supply of labour from countries such as Poland, Portugal and the Czech Republic, no such imperative exists. This also raises the most unwelcome prospect of racial tensions. Not only are migrant workers taking up local jobs, dubious employment practices are resulting in unscrupulous recruitment agencies shipping willing migrants in only for employers to find many unsuitable. These unfortunate people find themselves stranded far from home without the means of being able to afford the return journey. Most days it is now commonplace to find them in the libraries, cafes or walking the streets of most Valleys towns.

Implemented correctly the rights and responsibilities approach has much to contribute to the process of community regeneration. Not only by helping residents back to work, but also through the potential for enabling community regenerators to engage more economically inactive people through their benefit records. However, for this to happen it is important that this potential means of access is made available in a joined up way and used to encourage and support benefit recipients to participate in wider community based activities such as volunteering and capacity building. The benefits of aligning efforts to reduce economic inactivity more closely with local community regeneration strategies are now recognised. In a study commissioned by the

Department of Work and Pensions Ritchie, Casebourne and Rick (2005) report how a new initiative is to be introduced through the Working Neighbourhood Pilot programme. Unfortunately this is being piloted in only 12 areas in Great Britain. Similarly if approached in the right way, the process of empowering disadvantaged people to take responsibility for their own future should have an uplifting effect on morale and self-confidence. However, for this to happen those who are the hardest to reach require carefully planned support. This must be focused on enabling them to develop the disposition, motivation and the capacity to learn the new skills needed to achieve a trauma free transition from dependency to self-reliant, co-responsible citizen. It is incumbent on those who design and administer what could become draconian measures if applied unthinkingly, to take great care to ensure that effective checks and balances are put in place. Those already disadvantaged by the labour market must not become even more demoralised and disempowered whilst already suffering the indignity of being without work.

Therefore, it is essential that strategies to tackle economic inactivity must be developed from a social inclusion perspective as opposed to simplistically reducing the numbers who are economically inactive by enabling people to take any available job. The real challenge is to enable all unskilled or low skilled people to improve their skills as a means of enhancing their future career prospects to avoid perpetuating the low skills trap.

Incompatible approaches to achieving co-responsibility and empowerment

Both governments aspire to effect cultural change in our most disadvantaged communities through replacing dependency on state support with co-responsibility and empowerment. However, there are fundamental differences in how this is to be achieved. The Department for Work and Pensions develops the concept of co-responsibility through its rights and responsibilities approach reinforced by benefit sanctions. However, the Welsh Assembly Government has chosen to follow a more conciliatory, community capacity building model based on consensus and partnership working. This is much more in line with traditional community development practice with its emphasis on rebuilding the social fabric of communities creating a supportive

framework enabling residents to benefit from this social infrastructure and support each other.

The terms human capital and social capital have been used to describe the capacity of individuals to play a wider role in society and the social infrastructure of a community respectively (Bourdieu 1986; Brook 2005; Coleman 1988 and 1990; Fukuyama 1995 and 2000; Halpern 1999 and 2001; Office for National Statistics 2001; Portes 1998; Putman 1993, 1995 and 2000; Woolcock 2001). The report of a national research project to examine and produce a framework for the measurement and analysis of social capital found that whereas the concept of human capital "an attribute of individuals and comprises a stock of skills, qualification and knowledge" (Office for National Statistics 2001 p.7) is well established, the concept of social capital is comparatively new and less well defined. A number of definitions exist, including those used by the OECD "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups (Cote and Healy, 2001: 41)" (Office for National Statistics 2001 p.8) and the World Bank "Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions ... Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin society – it is the glue that holds them together" (Office for National Statistics 2001 p.9).

Field (2005) provides useful insights into social capital and how "people's social relationships play a vital part in their capacity for learning (Field 2005 p. 4). His views on how a "low aspirations culture" (Field 2005 p.30) might deter people from participation in learning are particularly appropriate to this study. His explanation of "bonding," "bridging" and "linking" social capital (Field 2005 p. 34) enables an understanding of how the issues highlighted in this thesis contribute or detract from building social capital. The corrosive effects of intergenerational unemployment on the development of "bonding" capital. The gut wrenching fear of unemployment and inability to cope with change and uncertainty apparent in the brief conversation with the young mine captain deep below the Rhymney valley demolished bridging capital in that workplace. As we will learn in chapter 6, residents' feelings of helplessness and inferiority from their experiences of "partnership working" and attendance at public meetings did little to build linking capital in this community. His notion of a

"curriculum for social literacy" (Field 2005 p. 152) incorporates a range of soft skills and is particularly attractive as it adds value to the strategy illustrated in Fig: 3, the Gently sloping learning ramp.

More recently the concept of identity capital has emerged and this relates to the capacity of individuals to take responsibility for their own lives. Schuller (2004) cites Cote and Levene (2002) to explain how this concept originated within the field of social psychology and is concerned with how identity is shaped and formed. He also suggest that this might be combined with the concepts of human capital and social capital and propose a model to explain how all three contribute towards enabling individuals to benefit from learning. The concept of identity capital is particularly relevant to this study as cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills are implicit within the two types of assets Cote and Levene (2002) refer to in their explanation of identity capital:

> "... tangible assets, which are socially visible. They include such things as qualifications, and membership of networks; intangible assets, which include ego strengths such as internal locus of control, self-esteem, sense of purpose in life, ability to self-actualize, and critical thinking abilities. These ego strengths give people the capacity to understand ("ego synthetic" abilities) and negotiate ("ego executive" abilities) the various social, occupational, and personal obstacles and opportunities that they are likely to encounter throughout late modern life" (Cote and Levene 2002 p. 144).

Any ambiguity in current policy is problematic as it is likely to cause tensions and confusion in the mixed messages it conveys to community regenerators and residents alike. Residents are faced with the carrot of empowerment from those who have nothing to offer but blood sweat and volunteering and the stick of the rights and responsibilities wielded by those who have absolute power over their pocket. Empowering individuals through this process also offers a large supply of heavy sticks and a small supply of unappetising carrots. Even though this "rights and responsibilities" approach is not pursued by the Welsh Assembly Government, all welfare benefit recipients in Wales are subject to the full force of its implementation through *Welfare to Work.* Therefore, all recipients of state benefits in disadvantaged communities in Wales are subject to two quite different and contradictory capacity building regimes and compelling people to become empowered is a classic oxymoron.

This ambiguity in policy implementation is not only undesirable. It creates a fault line that runs from macro Government policy right through to community level. This introduces three serious risks that threaten the success of the Welsh Assembly Government's ambitions to ensure social inclusion in Wales.

The Communities First programme can now only succeed through empowering residents of our most disadvantaged communities

This flagship programme is heavily dependent upon the capacity of community based regeneration agencies to succeed in empowering residents. In England where the New Deal for Communities programme has been introduced in only 39 of the most disadvantaged communities each with a typical budget of £50 million over 10 years. However the Communities First programme has been introduced in almost 150 communities. Two studies were used to pinpoint the most economically and socially deprived wards (National Assembly for Wales 1999 and 2000e) but no budget is allocated to any of these communities. Instead there is to be a reliance on improving public services through the empowerment of residents. This is meant to ensure that the delivery of the almost sixty Assembly programmes and initiatives impacting at community level will be more joined-up by ensuring full and participative consultation with the community. Residents will thus be empowered to participate in the identification, design and delivery of solutions to local problems.

The high risk arises from the aspiration that funding should be diverted to fund the programmes and services identified by residents from the budgets already allocated to publicly funded organisations as opposed to allocating separate and additional budgets for regeneration projects. This does not simply signal the intention that public sector organisations should become more responsive to the needs of residents. It requires that there should be a transfer of power of decision making to them. This process is known as "programme bending" but it proving difficult to achieve, as it requires radical cultural change within organisations. There are also challenging capacity building needs on both sides. Residents must become adept at problem solving and develop sufficient self-confidence to be able to articulate their needs and ideas for improvement and service providers need to understand how to become customer led. Whereas this aspiration for citizen control is laudable and the ultimate state of

empowerment (Arnstein 1969), the success of the Communities First programme is now dependent on its capacity to empower residents and persuade service providers to accept their leadership and allocate their budgets accordingly.

In common with the United Kingdom model, the voluntary sector is expected to play a central role. However, this presents a severe test of the capacity of community regenerators in developing and implementing effective strategies to empower residents and persuade service providers to become resident led. Community regenerators will themselves require capacity building to enable them to work more effectively to empower residents and ensure better co-ordination of mainstream services. As the primary objective is to empower residents, it is axiomatic that community regenerators understand how to actually empower people. This a substantial challenge in its own right given the complexity of the task and the degree of expertise required in devising effective personal development and learning strategies. However, this capacity building must also take place within both an economic and social imperative for community regeneration. This brings into focus the two more risks. Some community regenerators might not understand or accept the economic imperative. The economic imperative might in itself be misguided.

Community regenerators will succeed in empowering residents only if they accept and understand the economic imperative for regeneration

Whereas tackling unemployment or more specifically, ensuring the employability of residents, is integral to strategies for tackling social exclusion, there is worrying evidence that this might not be accepted universally:

> "Some people felt that the strategy's focus on **jobs** was too strong, either because work is not appropriate for all (carers, severely disabled people, those too young/too old) or because work is not seen as widely available in every area. *The Strategy should improve quality of life for all in deprived neighbourhoods, whether they work or not, e.g. by improving public services, reducing crime, etc. However, increasing employment is key to turning round the fortunes of poor neighbourhoods"* (Social Exclusion Unit 2001a p.69) (Emphasis by bold and italics is that of the authors).

Significantly, the report of the Policy Action Team that considered community self-help reveals a different philosophy to that of other policy action teams. Although, this

is much closer to the Welsh Assembly Government's approach. Its content is heavily focused on the concept of "community" whereas other reports concentrated on more practical actions designed to enable "individuals" to escape social exclusion through more direct methods. The report identifies that the morale of socially excluded people is low, with residents suffering "lack of hope ... lack of energy ... lack of confidence ... lack of trust of neighbours ... of external agencies" (Home Office 1999 p.8). However, it fails to appreciate that the disappointments residents had experienced meant that their expectations and aspirations were almost certain to be pessimistically low and as equally likely to be reactionary. Its explanation of the main principles of community empowerment recognise that "The starting point for the development of a community should be the aspirations of that community not the plans of external agencies" (Home Office 1999 p.23). However, there is no reference to capacity building. The report also fails to appreciate the need to devise carefully formulated strategies to achieve cultural change and ensure that residents recognise fully the opportunities available to them. It is essential to first raise residents' aspirations so that they achieve their true potential. Unless effective capacity building strategies are introduced to enable people to believe that they have much more potential and are able to achieve outcomes that they have never previously thought possible, they will be condemned to the misery of waiting for yesterday when the world around them is already moving on to the day after tomorrow.

Further evidence of a philosophical divide within the community development sector comes in a publication recommended by the Community Development Foundation. This organisation was established by the Home Office in 1968 to promote and support new forms of community development in the UK and carries considerable influence among managers and staff of community regeneration organisations. Whereas there is some recognition of the benefits of enhancing the employability of residents, this is relegated to a minor role in the process of capacity building. There is even less emphasis on any role for community regenerators in enabling residents to progress from capacity building and voluntary activity to employability. The overall tone is one of rebuilding idealistic communities and engaging residents in the process for the common good. Aspirations to enable residents to become pro-active in learning or training to enhance employability or boost job-search activity are actually discouraged. The approach advocated is diametrically opposed to the United Kingdom

Government's strategy for eradicating social exclusion and challenges the new emphasis on increasing economic activity:

> "... job creation and refurbishment are no longer suitable starting points for a modern regeneration strategy" (Chanan, West, Garrat and Humm 1999 p.14).

The editor of the Community Development Journal welcomes the enhanced role for the voluntary sector but tempers his enthusiasm with a warning of the dangers of community development being used as a means of addressing economic inactivity (Popple and Redmond 2000). An injection of realism arrives from distant shores with a warning that "Community participation in development projects often assumes the notion of "common purpose and common good." This perspective romanticizes the people or the community, a position that is analyzed and refuted in this article" (Botes and van Rensburg 2000 p.55). They describe "nine plagues" (Botes and van Rensburg 2000 p.42) and "twelve commandments" (Botes and van Rensburg 2000 p.52) of community participation in South Africa. The paternalistic role of development professionals features at the top of their list of plagues and empowerment of residents is included among their commandments.

A review of best practice in community regeneration in Wales is unequivocal about its linkage with economic activity This envisages a strong role for community based organisations in the process of economic recovery as part of a wider strategy to achieve cultural change and ensuring the employability of residents. Schemes that are effective in overturning residents' negative attitudes to the labour market through participation in counselling, vocational guidance, vocational and personal development programmes are also recommended (Adamson 1997; McGregor and McConnachie 1995). Community development is defined as:

> "... any action or initiative which has as its objective the creation, re-creation or enhancement of community defined processes of economic, social, cultural and political regeneration of a defined spatial community" (Adamson 1997 p.8).

Community based organisations are well placed to design and deliver training that is more in tune with the capacity building needs of residents, particularly in relation to the development of "the soft, more cognitive and emotional skills that are a frequent

pre-requisite of successful labour market entry" (Adamson, Dearden and Castle 2001 p.22). These organisations are also able to form networks that could enable residents to find work as well as providing direct links with employers (Harrison and Weis 1998). It is even suggested that community groups in Wales could become more involved in providing routeways to employment through forming closer links with employers. However, opposition among some community activists persists as they fear the "dilution and co-optation of community politics" (Adamson, Dearden and Castle 2001 p.12) if community approaches are to be integrated into mainstream social policies.

Others in Wales fear that the focus on training for employability will affect adversely the wider community education agenda:

> "By becoming drawn into so many of the present government's initiatives - tackling social exclusion, educating for active citizenship and promoting lifelong learning - adult and community based education has in some ways been brought in from the cold, de-marginalised, and placed at the centre of government policy. Yet I feel worried about the extent to which social purposes have become so subordinated to economistic objectives and about the ways in which the development and exercise of critical intelligence has become so subordinated to job-related training" (Thompson 2001 p.7).

The existence of such a philosophical divide is cause for serious concern. The nature and range of challenges faced by residents demands clarity of purpose and wholehearted commitment from community regenerators in devising and implementing effective personal development and support programmes to enable them to escape social exclusion. If community regenerators are reluctant to accept the new direction set for them, efforts to address what has already proved to be an intractable problem will be dissipated and prospects of success diminished. If residents are to receive the support they need it is essential that high priority is afforded to ensuring the employability of those most disadvantaged by the labour market. This requires that community regenerators have the knowledge and understanding of the concept of employability. This in turn requires that they understand the increasing importance of soft skills and how to enable residents to acquire them.

It worth reflecting on the fact that *Welfare to Work* presents a threat to the more conventional community regeneration strategies. If these continue to fail to engage sufficient numbers of residents in the process and/or fail to build their capacity to become independent and active citizens, *Welfare to Work* has the potential to become the new strategy for community regeneration. For the first time in the history of the welfare state the government, through Jobcentre Plus, has direct access to all socially excluded people of working age who are in receipt of state benefits as well as the means of designing and delivering a range of programmes to get them into employment as quickly as possible. A capacity that community regenerators have hitherto failed to develop. The entry of the Department of Work and Pensions into the world of community regeneration has placed some clear writing on our graffiti filled walls. However *Welfare to Work* might itself be built on sand.

Welfare to Work will only succeed if there are enough suitable jobs to accommodate the economically inactive

Logically the focus on economic inactivity can only succeed in reducing worklessness if the policies to create the macro economic conditions to increase the overall number of jobs available result in sufficient suitable jobs for residents of our most deprived communities. However, this is a controversial subject. A review of welfare to work policy developments in the United Kingdom, the USA, France, Germany and The Netherlands refers to an:

> "... ideological/theoretical divide over the issue of the "Jobs Gap" between central supply-siders and local demand-siders reads like a Pinter play – two overlapping monologues, one intoning that there are jobs created everywhere and the other that there are not enough to go round" (Evans 2001 p.59).

Evans concludes that the United Kingdom Government has decided that both sides are correct. He warns against demonising "welfare" and those who depend upon it and advocates even more support for the unemployed to enable them to upgrade their skills as a means of enabling their progress from low skilled or unskilled work. The United Kingdom Governments' position is unequivocal. Whereas worklessness persists among certain groups and in particular communities, all regions experience

pockets of high or low levels of employment. Economic inactivity is not caused by a lack of jobs:

> *"The pattern of labour market disadvantage is complex and not merely regional. Acute disadvantage is concentrated within small areas within regions. The Government does not accept that the main cause of low employment and high benefit receipt is a lack of jobs. Often these areas are close to employment centres where jobs are appearing all the time and policy is focusing on connecting people with jobs"* (Social Exclusion Unit 2001a p.69). (Emphasis by italics is that of the authors).

This is sufficient justification for the Government to concentrate on ensuring that residents of disadvantaged communities are equipped properly and motivated sufficiently to gain access to these opportunities (Department for Work and Pensions 2001). However, this focus on the supply side of the labour market is problematic for another reason. In addition to being dependent upon sufficient numbers of jobs being available, it is equally important to workless people that there is a close enough match between the jobs on offer and the skills, attitudes, personal circumstances and earnings requirements of those who were unemployed or economically active. If this mismatch exists then the number of jobs available is irrelevant.

The United Kingdom's strategy for tackling unemployment originates from the Lisbon Special European Council of March 2000 and is built upon four "pillars," improving employability, developing entrepreneurship, encouraging adaptability of business and employees and strengthening equal opportunities for women and men. An account of the dynamics of the labour market in relation to the year 2000 appears to support the Government's focus on supply side measures. Employment in the United Kingdom reached record levels with over 28 million in work, the actual level of job vacancies was approaching 5.5 million and these occurred across the UK in all industries and occupations. There were less people joining the unemployment count than those leaving with over 50% leaving within three months of registering and 75% within six months. Within one year of registering 80% found work. Unemployment fell on both the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and claimant count and long-term unemployment as a proportion of unemployment continued to fall. However, in stark contrast to this encouraging picture, economic inactivity rates actually increased to 21.1% of the working age population (Department for Education and Employment

2001b). This pattern is repeated in the local authority area where this study takes place. Of those leaving the register in November 2001, 72% entered employment. However, the prospect of entering employment diminishes considerably as the length of unemployment increases beyond 12 months and the numbers economically inactive remains consistently high (Employment Service 2002). This analysis indicates that there are two categories of socially excluded residents with the least prospect of taking advantage of the employment opportunities occurring in all labour markets. Those unable to find employment within one year of joining the unemployed register and those who are economically inactive.

It is important to appreciate that the total number of job vacancies available at any one time does not equate simply to the number of new jobs created. The actual number of vacancies is determined by adding the number of new jobs created to the number of vacancies that arise from the normal rate of employee turnover within the existing workforce after deducting the number of jobs lost to redundancy. The annual employee turnover rate for employers in south Wales has been estimated at 10% (Jones 1999 p.8).

Evidence of a more buoyant local labour market was demonstrated by the number of commercial employment agencies operating in the locality as employers increasingly turned to them to solve their problems in recruiting suitable staff. Employment agencies flourished because they were attractive to employers as they provided more than a recruitment service and actually employed the staff themselves. This removed all responsibility for recruitment and personnel management from the employer for the duration of their contract. One unfortunate side effect of this growth of employment agencies in the recruitment process was that it increased the disadvantage of those who were furthest from the labour market. Commercial employment agencies only offered jobs on a temporary or short-term contract basis. These were often used by employers as "unofficial" trial periods without any organised induction training and those who were unable to impress quickly were invariably discarded. These agencies also operated on a profit-making basis. Therefore they were only interested in placing the most job-ready into employment and had neither the incentive nor the inclination to provide the degree of pre-employment or post-employment training and support that was necessary to rehabilitate successfully the most disadvantaged job-

seekers. Toynbee (2003) provides disturbing evidence of this in her accounts of how agency work operates in the National Health Service and care sector in London.

A study commissioned by the prime ministers of the United Kingdom and Italy to produce a policy response to long-term unemployment helps to explain the reasons for such a reliance on improving the supply side as the strategy for reducing worklessness. So far its findings have been only partially implemented, doubtless because some are too right-wing to find support among a substantial section of the Labour Party. *Welfare to Work* is described in terms of a "stricter benefits regime" to reduce "passive" dependence on benefits linked to an "active" labour market policy to help people back into work" (Boeri, Layard and Nickell 2000 p.13). A four-point strategy to achieve and sustain full employment is advocated. Active policies to prevent people falling into long-term unemployment supported by a modernised public employment service. Removing the option of receiving unemployment benefits indefinitely and substituting a rights and responsibilities approach, with all unemployment related benefits ending after 12 months once it is possible to offer work to everyone within the first year of unemployment. Dealing with unemployment on a regional basis by decentralising wage bargaining and related policies to create efficient local economies. Eliminating labour supply reducing policies, including early retirement and access to invalidity pensions. The view that there are only a finite number of employment opportunities available within the economy is rejected and referred to scornfully as "the lump-of-labour fallacy" (Boeri, Layard and Nickell 2000 p.14). This is considered to be founded on the false premise that full employment could only be achieved when the supply of labour matches the number of jobs available. Whilst rejecting the even more radical approach adopted in the USA where there is no safety net for those on benefit, Boeri and colleagues argue that such a reformed European *Welfare to Work* model would restore equilibrium to regional labour markets within member states. They point to the USA where similar policies resulted in a substantial increase in the numbers of jobs available to counteract the effects of polarisation of employment opportunities within a national economy. Although reform had begun in the EU, further radical action is considered necessary to "break the habit of benefit dependence" (Boeri, Layard and Nickell 2000 p.20). Further evidence of a hardening in the EU approach to tackling social exclusion

through supply side measures is its focus on improving labour market competitiveness as the means of enabling more people to enter employment (Saad 2004).

This right-wing, "market forces" view of the labour market has profound consequences for residents of our most disadvantaged communities. Whereas this might result in a net increase in the number of jobs available, these will almost certainly be low paid jobs resulting in both a low-skills and a low-pay equilibrium (Turner 2001). Others suggest that the United Kingdom labour market has undergone a seismic shift resulting in a permanent polarisation of employment opportunities. New jobs will occur at the top end but these will require higher-level skills and qualifications. New jobs will also occur at the lower end but these will be low paid and less attractive Keep (2005). Whilst it is recognised that there might well be an increase in the number of jobs available, the United Kingdom is still some way away from full employment (Robinson and Burkitt 2001). The south Wales Valleys are even further away from regaining the massive job losses suffered as a result of the collapse of the mining industry. Recovery has been hampered severely by its lack of attractiveness for investment due to the difficult terrain and the greater isolation of many of its communities (Beatty and Fothergill 2004; Beatty, Fothergill and Powell 2005; Rees and Stroud 2004). Its recovery requires a radical restructuring of the economy founded upon a regeneration strategy that recognises the necessity of a completely new role for the area restoring earnings capacity and rebuilding the social infrastructure (Rees and Stroud 2004). The Welsh Assembly Government has announced yet another strategy for the Heads of the Valleys area (Welsh Assembly Government 2006) but its approach to increasing the number of employment opportunities available is likely to have little impact on ensuring social inclusion. This relies upon retail, tourism and capitalising upon the construction opportunities created by the drive to upgrade social housing over the next decade. Admittedly construction jobs will help some people secure high paid jobs but the social housing bubble is due to burst within just a decade or so and any increase in opportunities arising from the anticipated boom arising from preparations for the 2012 Olympics will prove equally transient.

Given that the definition of poverty is a household income of below 60% of the United Kingdom median wage, the focus on retail and tourism is disturbing. A local

study of the employment opportunities created at the new retail park in Merthyr Tydfil offers little hope to those seeking to escape poverty. None of the companies pay above minimum wage nor is there any practical support offered to train beyond immediate task (North Merthyr Tydfil ESF EQUAL Regeneration Partnership 2005). This report raises the worrying prospect that current programmes lauded as successful in reducing economic inactivity are in fact removing people from unemployment but not taking them out of poverty. This is confirmed in the evaluation of the Blaenau Gwent ESF funded JobMatch programme (Cambridge Policy Consultants 2006). Despite this the programme is likely to be rolled out across the Heads of the Valleys area as the flagship programme for tackling economic inactivity funded through the new convergence arrangements. Jobs in tourism are equally low paid, often seasonal or part-time and the hours are of necessity unsocial. Unless there is a change in the economic development strategy for the Heads of the Valleys area it is difficult to see how either poverty or social justice will be addressed and the only social mobility will be upwards and outwards from the south Wales Valleys.

Interestingly, there is encouraging evidence that traditional attitudes to the labour market are beginning to change. Originally many of the replacement jobs were unattractive to former miners and taken up by women, however, more are being occupied by men. It is suggested that whereas these jobs were shunned by ex-miners themselves because they perceived this as "women's work" (Beatty, Fothergill and Powell 2005 p. 21) the new generation of men have no such inhibitions and have begun to take up these opportunities. It is now quite common to find young men as supermarket check-out operators across the south Wales Valleys.

Implications for this study

The review of the literature in this and the preceding chapters has explained how the capacity to engage effectively in lifelong learning is now essential to social inclusion but this is problematic. Residents face daunting challenges due to the scale and complexity of their learning needs and the range and nature of the barriers they must first overcome as they struggle to become co-responsible, empowered and socially as well as economically active citizens. Community regenerators face equally daunting challenges as they seek to come to terms with the new priorities for regeneration and

the scale and complexity of the learning and support needs of residents. This requires that they must in effect devise and implement learning and support strategies across four domains: barriers to adult participation in learning; community capacity building; technical and soft skills development and job search advice and guidance. Furthermore this must all take place within two contradictory cultural change strategies where there are misgivings concerning the effectiveness of the strong focus on ensuring economic activity as the means of ensuring social inclusion. Some community regenerators might be philosophically opposed to the economic imperative for community regeneration and doubts persist that sufficient suitable jobs are available. The success of the Communities First programme is also dependent upon the effectiveness of community regenerators in empowering residents. An inability to achieve this could result in the failure of the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for tackling poverty and ensuring social justice.

If all this was not enough, community regenerators must face up to their challenges without the benefit of any national staff development strategy to ensure that they are equipped properly with the knowledge and skills they need to undertake their onerous duties effectively.

This study set out to develop three main arguments. That engagement in lifelong learning is now central to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by soft skills. Secondly that these soft skills remain little understood, particularly among those managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies. Finally, this lack of understanding results in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

We have learned how engagement in life long learning is in fact central to ensuring social inclusion and that disposition and motivation to learn as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by soft skills. Within the context of community regeneration, soft skills enable residents to overcome the barriers preventing their engagement in learning, enable them to benefit fully from the learning experience and to apply what they learn to become co-

responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizens. We have also learned how these soft skills remain rather esoteric and are not widely understood.

This also shapes the precise nature of the questions to be addressed by the fieldwork study in order to develop both remaining arguments. That these soft skills remain little understood among managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies and this lack of understanding results in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

The next chapter discusses research methods and explains the research design selected for this study.

Chapter 5

Research design and methods

The purpose of this study is to reflect critically on current policy and practice concerning social exclusion with a view to contributing ideas to improve the process. Three main arguments are developed. That individual disposition to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by what have become known as soft skills. That these soft skills remain little understood, particularly among community regenerators. Finally, this lack of understanding results in inadequate provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

The literature discussed in the preceding chapters helps us to understand how residents of our most disadvantaged communities must now become co-responsible, empowered socially active as well as economically active citizens. The range and scale of the skills they require to achieve the cultural change that this entails means that the capacity to engage successfully in lifelong learning as well as with the labour market is now essential to social inclusion. However, this is problematic. Residents lack the skills required for employability and suffer a range of institutional, situational and dispositional barriers that conspire to prevent their participation in learning for employability. Not only are dispositional barriers the most significant, they are also the most difficult to overcome. The ability to surmount these barriers, benefit fully from learning and not only acquire but also to apply knowledge and skills effectively is heavily dependent upon soft skills. However, soft skills are neither widely known nor understood sufficiently. There is also evidence that some community regenerators might be reluctant to engage fully with the economic imperative for capacity building and the economic imperative itself might be misguided.

This raises the disturbing prospect that community regenerators might themselves lack the capacity to design or deliver effective soft skills provision or enable residents to become economically active. The fieldwork study has three objectives. To provide

a description of the community selected for the study and what it was like to live there. To explore how their experiences of daily life influenced residents' disposition to engage in learning and/or the regeneration process. Finally to ascertain: whether community regenerators understood and accept the new economic imperative for regeneration; how well they understood soft skills and how effectively they empowered residents and enabled them to develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to learn their way out of social exclusion.

Qualitative research methods were used as these provide an effective means of obtaining the "worms eye view" (Hakim 1988 p. 28) within the context of a single case study (Bell 1993, Maxwell 1992; Silverman 1989 and 2000). As the intention is to influence policy it is important that the findings and recommendations are accessible to a wider audience and therefore these are presented in "plain English" (Hakim 1988 p.4; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

Overview of the fieldwork study

The fieldwork study provides an account of life in one disadvantaged community in the south Wales Valleys over a period of 14 months between October 2002 and December 2003.

It explores how the experiences from living in a disadvantaged community influences residents' disposition and motivation to engage in lifelong learning and their capacity to become co-responsible, empowered and socially as well as economically active. The study therefore focuses on exploring relevant key issues. What is it like to live there? How do the pressures and demands of day-to-day-to-day life influence residents' disposition? If learning has never been a part of their experience, what does learning mean to them? If they do not have recognised skills, what do they know about skills? What does skill mean to them? If they have been out of work so long, or might never have experienced employment, what does employment mean to them? The findings are explained and discussed in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

The focus was sharply on gathering data to ascertain how well community regenerators responded to their challenges. Do they accept that regenerating

disadvantaged communities involves ensuring the capacity of residents to engage successfully with the labour market? Do they understand the learning and training strategies required to enhance individual employability as well as active citizenship through co-responsibility and empowerment? Do they understand the complex issues involved in enabling residents to overcome the dispositional barriers to participation in learning? Are they effective in enabling residents to overcome these dispositional barriers? Is the importance of soft skills and how to instil these in individuals understood? Are they effective in devising and implementing learning strategies to enhance the soft skills of residents? Is effective support available to support progression beyond capacity building and active citizenship to employability and economic activity? The findings are explained and discussed in Chapter 8.

Case studies and the suitability of this community as a case for study

The community selected for the study is one of the most economically and socially deprived in the United Kingdom. Serving a population of over 10,000 since the early 1990s, it has one of the largest and longest established community regeneration strategies in Wales. The qualifications and skills base is low and economic inactivity is endemic. The regeneration strategy incorporates a number of partner agencies specifically concerned with engaging residents in volunteering, capacity building, community based learning or finding employment. This allows the views of managers and staff as well as residents receiving support from a variety of organisations to be obtained in one setting. Studying one or a small number of settings is quite usual and does not always require a representative sample of informants (Bell 1993; Hakim 1988; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Silverman 1989 and 2000; Spradley 1980).

Observing daily life in one disadvantaged community also allows the opportunity to undertake research within the social world in its "natural state" (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995 p. 6).

The opportunity to undertake participant observation

The writer has been employed in a variety of managerial posts within this particular regeneration strategy since 1997. For ease of reference these are outlined in Fig: 4.

Fig: 4 Employment history of the writer within the community regeneration strategy

September 1997 to June 1998	June 1998 to June 1999	June 1999 to October 2002	October 2002 to present
Adviser to strategy leaders – establishing the community development trust. (Employed by Community Development Foundation Wales).	Regeneration Strategy Manager – implementing a range of EU funded projects. (Employed by Regeneration Strategy management group).	Community Workshops Training Manager – designing and implementing informal entry learning and employability programmes for residents. (Employed by local authority out-stationed within the community).	Senior manager of the Community Development Trust and Communities First Co-ordinator. (Employed by the community development trust).

Experience gained in the first two posts provided an understanding of conventional community regeneration practice. This was concerned mainly with enabling residents to have a voice to articulate their needs to service providers as well as implementing a range of projects designed to plug gaps in statutory services. Some funding was awarded for capacity building however, most projects related to additional youth-work provision, childcare and environmental improvements. Whereas the community development trust became the community's means of providing its own services, there were always difficulties in ensuring coordination with statutory provision. Invariably this meant ensuring that funding hard-earned by the community was not used to commission services that should have been provided by statutory services that failed consistently to meet community needs. An example of this occurred when EU funding and later Communities First funding was used to employ outreach youth-workers to engage the most troubled and troublesome young people as the local authority youth service excluded such people from their youth clubs. The short-term nature of grant aid was a permanent headache resulting in a disproportionate amount of management time being diverted from strategic issues to chasing funding. It was classic irony that the organisation established to remove a culture of dependency on state benefits was itself entirely dependent upon grant aid. Basically both roles were mainly concerned with fighting the community's corner with service providers, applying sticking-plasters to cover gaps in service provision and chasing and administering funds gleaned from various sources. This became a thankless as well as a pointless task. The quality of services left far too much to be desired, residents' needs were high but their expectations were low and the job of bridging the gap required an armour-plated messenger. Service providers had little idea of the concept of customer focus. They neither understood nor could be helped to understand the benefits of involving residents in the design or delivery of services and often became

hostile when presented with any suggestion that services were not meeting residents' needs. Whereas the duties were immensely interesting, strategy was all too often sacrificed for expediency and it was impossible to rise above fire fighting mode. As a result the regeneration strategy remained bogged down in dealing with the effects of social exclusion and the underlying causes remained beyond reach or even the comprehension of the statutory sector.

Ostensibly the move to the community workshops provided the opportunity to develop a more strategic approach. The workshops were located within the community and were part of the regeneration partnership but they were owned and managed by the local authority. Unfortunately throughout this period of employment the local authority suffered severe management problems resulting in its classification as a failing council and the introduction of special measures. Separate directorates were responsible for community regeneration, economic development and lifelong learning and there was little evidence of collaboration or a shared vision of how social inclusion could be achieved. Decisions appeared to be taken on personality grounds as opposed to logic or merit. Covey (1992) explains how effective people exhibit seven habits, including the capacity to first to understand and then be understood. In this authority there was only one, to first take offence and then to retaliate.

Whereas most valleys councils took the lead by investing resources in an infrastructure to provide training for unemployed residents, there was no interest or inclination to do this. The community workshops were established on the personal initiative of a senior officer within the housing department and remained at the mercy of a variety of *ad hoc* funding streams. There was little understanding or commitment to community based learning among other senior management or elected members and the workshops faced fierce opposition from mainstream learning and training providers who feared competition for income from ELWa and Employment Service contracts. This reared its ugly head when the bid was submitted to secure EU funding to establish the Neighbourhood Learning Centre. One local training provider submitted a 14-page dossier of frivolous objections to the proposal, which was rejected by the local enquiry established to consider the complaint. Sadly this delayed the application by several months denying residents this much-needed facility. From working in and among the community it soon became apparent that residents were

prevented from participation in the labour market by a wide range of barriers that were much more profound than a lack of job search skills or motivation. However, mainstream training programmes remained focused on basic job-search skills and getting participants into work as quickly as possible.

The appointment as Communities First Coordinator brought the opportunity to develop a strategic approach to tackling the underlying causes of social exclusion through its wider remit of tackling poverty and ensuring social justice. The post was most conducive for participant observation. However, this was not without its difficulties. The role of coordinator was primarily one of identifying residents' needs, articulating these to service providers to effect improvements in services as well as devising new provision to address unmet needs. The coordinator was also charged with understanding the wider regeneration context within which the various service providers operated and building partnerships with them to ensure that the diverse range of programmes and services were devised and implemented in the proverbial joined-up way. Therefore, whereas the post opened up access to privileged information from residents, policy makers and service providers alike, the writer was also personally responsible for acting upon data obtained to improve the quality of life of the main actors in the research programme. As a researcher this presented a number of practical advantages and challenges.

Working from a community building located centrally within the community provided a unique opportunity to observe the daily life of residents and how programmes and services were delivered to them. During the period of the study the writer moved freely throughout the community and met and spoke to residents as they went about their daily lives. Numerous formal and informal meetings were attended and these included: public meetings; meetings of residents' organisations, the development trust and the Communities First partnership board; social events; consultation exercises; operational meetings and presentations involving organisations and individuals providing services to residents; networking meetings with organisations and individuals that had an interest in community regeneration more generally as well as with statutory agencies. A number of agencies operated across the community including: schools, local authority departments, Jobcentre Plus, ELWa, Welsh Development Agency, the NHS Trust, Local Health Board and a variety of learning

and training providers. It proved quite straightforward to ensure that those most likely to have knowledge relevant to the research objectives were identified and included in the study (Dean, Eichorn and Dean 1967). In addition to residents the views of managers and staff of agencies concerned with community regeneration were obtained. Another significant advantage was the ease of access to relevant data and to residents as the writer was already known to the gatekeepers (Davies 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). There was no difficulty in gaining access to information or in meeting, observing and interviewing people with interviews taking place in resident's homes, community projects or community based learning programmes. However, this raised important issues of research ethics as well as the possibility that responses might be influenced by the nature of the writer's employment or because he was known to some people in the study (Davies 2003; Maxwell 1992).

Research ethics

Two main ethical issues arose. It was important that all who had information of relevance to the study were aware that data obtained might be used to inform the study. The writer was acutely aware that residents of this community were routinely subjected to a range and variety of academic research studies. This made them resentful of the fact that they had been used regularly as guinea pigs by people who had no real interest in helping to devise solutions to the problems identified by the various studies. Some residents likened this to living in a human zoo and this contributed to their sense of disillusionment. They were forever sharing their problems with people who had neither the remit nor the capacity to alleviate their plight. The potential for further tensions was avoided by being completely open and transparent from the outset. It was made clear that this study was intended to identify the underlying causes of social exclusion with a view to raising awareness of these issues and informing and improving community regeneration policy and practice. The fact that the writer did not disappear after a few weeks but remained visibly engaged with residents in improving their quality of life helped offset many of their concerns and this never became an issue during the study. This was also alleviated by writing personally to explain the purpose of the research to community gatekeepers, leaders and activists within the various committees and residents' organisations. The key

personnel of the various agencies working in the community were informed in the same way. A full explanation was also provided to all who agreed to be interviewed during the study.

The other issue concerns the importance of ensuring the anonymity of all participants. This is achieved by ensuring that when quoting directly from the accounts of individual interviews this is attributed randomly to males or females. However, all statistical data presented are attributed to the correct gender.

Reliability and validity

The writer was careful to take account of the advice contained in Bell (1993), Davies (2003) and Maxwell (1992) concerning the possible effects of his employment on the behaviour and responses of all actors within the scope of the study. The potential for bias arising from experience gained from both working previously with the long term unemployed and with residents and service providers within the local area was also taken into account and care was taken to avoid this. Oppenheim (1996) provides a checklist of the main causes of bias and the author's comments on "Impression Management" (Oppenheim 1996 p.95) were particularly helpful. The process of recalling and recording the significant events for inclusion in the daily log referred to below became a systematic means of reflecting upon each day. This proved a useful means of enabling the writer to both reflect on whether his presence had influenced events or the relevant actors role in these events as well as gauge his own response to each situation. This was particularly useful when reflecting upon emotion charged events such as public meetings called by residents to raise awareness of their plight when outbreaks of crime and anti-social behaviour occurred.

The potential pitfalls inherent in undertaking research as an informed participant observer were balanced by the added insights that such insider knowledge brought to bear on the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from the study. Appropriate checks and balances were put in place to ensure the reliability and validity of both the data obtained, the interpretation placed upon it and the conclusions drawn from the data. The writer was aware of the potential difficulties, remained determined and scrupulous in identifying all the relevant evidence and

devised effective mechanisms to enable sufficient reflexivity. Deploying triangulation techniques was also of significant assistance in ensuring the reliability and validity of this process. Despite this potential for bias, the writer feels confident that the data are reliable.

Another related issue requiring careful consideration was the fact that the writer's role and responsibilities required him to initiate action to tackle social exclusion. This provided obvious potential for influencing events being observed. Therefore, it was important to always be able to distinguish between events, actions or responses to actions initiated personally by the writer and those of his predecessors. This was less of an issue in the early stages of the research when examination of the relevant planning documentation was undertaken. However, as the study progressed there was need for constant vigilance to the effects of all new actions initiated by the writer. This was achieved by disregarding all strategies, plans, programmes and services developed by the writer during the study. For example, the Communities First Community Action Plan was produced during the period of the study but its contents were not taken into account. Similarly, where the writer initiated a meeting or discussion concerned with promoting understanding or action to introduce a new learning or support programme this was also disregarded. In practice there were very few occasions where the role of researcher and active participant came into conflict. This never occurred during any interaction with residents but tensions occasionally arose when attending meetings with service providers. For example, Communities First coordinators were generally perceived as middle managers with a wide brief requiring only a superficial knowledge and understanding of issues. Whereas the "professionals" had specialist knowledge in each particular field, operated within a traditional hierarchy and were acutely conscious of their status. Some "professionals" resented the degree of knowledge and understanding that the writer gained from participation in academic research of this kind. This usually manifested itself in a reluctance to listen to or accept suggestions for improving service delivery within their particular specialism. Sadly and rather ironically given their remit to promote and support lifelong learning, the world of education proved largely immune to outside influence. Particularly with regards to meeting the needs of the hardest to reach. A case of the unteachable in pursuit of the unreachable?

Discussions with the research supervisor highlighted an interesting issue that became more obvious as the study progressed. This was to do with "expert knowledge" that manifested itself as a form of over-familiarity with the subject matter. It became clear that issues regarded as routine, commonplace or insignificant by the writer because of his day-to-day dealings with the subject matter were of real interest or significance to his supervisor. This was addressed by recording as much detail as possible in the daily log, which was later discussed with the supervisor.

Planning the fieldwork

Planning a multi-faceted study of this kind proved to be a major logistical challenge in its own right. The writer was aware of the range and complexity of the factors that contribute to social exclusion and also of how tempting it could become to be drawn into studying all manner of interesting issues unrelated to the research questions. Therefore, a strategy was devised to ensure that the study remained focused upon only the factors and issues of relevance to providing reliable and valid data to inform the research questions. There were two main elements to this strategy. A matrix was devised to focus data collection within the parameters effectively set by the nature of the research questions and a period of 14 months was designated as the main fieldwork study.

The review of the literature

The first part of the strategy required a comprehensive review of the literature relating to six specialist areas, each with their own sources of information: social exclusion; community regeneration; the dynamics of the contemporary labour market; economic inactivity; adult participation in lifelong learning and the concept of soft skills. In order to ensure that all relevant data were reviewed, information was gathered from a wide range of sources. Government policy papers, annual reports, research and evaluation studies were obtained directly from each department or through the appropriate Internet web-sites. Academic reports and papers were obtained from the relevant journals, individual institutions and research institutes. Information on developments in tackling social exclusion, economic development and community regeneration was obtained from the specialist journals available to organisations

operating in these fields. A wide variety of specialist publications and Internet web-sites such as: Times Education Supplement; ELWa; NIACE; DEMOS; Bevan Foundation; Joseph Rowntree Foundation; CASE; NFER; IPPR as well as the university library and electronic search engines were systematically used to identify relevant reports, studies and articles. A substantial amount of useful data were also obtained from written material, attending meetings and conferences as part of the writer's day-to-day employment. All data were catalogued and filed within the six specialist areas highlighted.

The review of the literature produced a most practical benefit as information obtained from the review added considerable value to the role of Communities First Coordinator. In addition to expanding personal knowledge and understanding of the relevant specialist areas, data obtained from the review were used to submit a number of substantial and successful funding applications. For example a £1.5 million EU ESF application to secure funding to establish the Neighbourhood Learning Centre and over £3 million from the Communities First programme to add value to early years learning and finance the core running costs of the community development trust.

Conducting the fieldwork study

The fieldwork consisted of two main strands. Observation of events as they occurred randomly each day and gathering specific data from relevant sources. As resources were limited it was decided to designate a period of 14 months as the fieldwork study where data on all relevant events and issues of interest observed were recorded daily. A log was maintained throughout this period and this was completed manually at the end of each working day. Wherever possible contemporaneous notes were taken and copies of relevant documentation obtained such as agendas for meetings, supporting documentation and correspondence with service providers. Examples of opportunities available to residents were also collected. This information was filed in date order. Over the period of the study this amounted to a considerable amount of data running to several volumes and files. Maintaining these became a substantial data management undertaking. From a personal development perspective the writer found this experience to be particularly valuable in improving his effectiveness as a

Communities First Coordinator, enhancing self-discipline and objectivity as well as organising skills.

Data were gathered from three main sources. A review and analysis of the key documentation that must be in place to ensure the success of any regeneration strategy. This documentation provided an understanding of the priorities and objectives of the organisation leading the strategy and how these were formulated. Participant observation allowed day-to-day events to be witnessed as they unfolded. Interviews were also conducted with a sample of residents and managers and staff of relevant regeneration agencies to seek their views and opinions of a range of issues related to the research questions. Conducting the study in this way safeguarded its reliability and the validity through a process of triangulation (Bell 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Silverman 2000). This also enabled information gathered from one source to be used to inform and extend research questions within the overall study. For example, identifying issues for further investigation from the review of the documentation or day-to-day observations, obtaining data from interviews conducted with community regenerators and cross checking this with data obtained from interviews with a sample of residents engaged in the services provided by these agencies.

Data collection

The main planning documents such as the annual reports and the business plan of the community development trust were examined at the outset of the study. Progress reports and documentation for management meetings of both the community development trust and the three residents' boards were examined as these were held during the study period. The understanding of the relevant issues by community regenerators and the degree of priority they afforded to addressing them was obtained from observation of meetings, training events, workshops, etc and from written reports and semi-structured interviews with seven key personnel. These interviews were used to ascertain: how they perceived the needs of residents; how well they understood these needs and how well these were met by the services they provided. This encompassed knowledge and understanding of soft skills and their effectiveness in enabling residents to acquire them. It is also important to understand the context

and relationship between residents and the staff of local regeneration projects, other community based agencies and the various organisations providing services to residents from outside of the community and this was also explored.

The effectiveness of the services provided by these agencies in meeting the needs of residents was examined by observation at various staff and residents meetings, capacity building events, workshops, presentations and day-to-day discussions with staff and residents. Views were also obtained from semi-structured interviews with seven key personnel and 21 residents. One male and 12 females were engaged in volunteering and seven males and one female were participants on a New Deal programme at the Neighbourhood Learning Centre. The original intention was to interview a representative sample of residents aged between 16 and 65 years who were active in the regeneration of their community. However, the majority of activists were either females or males who were already retired and outside of the economically active category. Therefore, it was decided to include younger male residents from the community based New Deal programme in order to obtain a broader representation from the community. Biographical data on these 21 residents is contained in Fig: 5. The New Deal programme was concerned with preparing people to work on environmental projects and it was not unexpected that only one female was participating on this programme.

It was recognised that these were already likely to be sufficiently well motivated and had managed to overcome any personal barriers to their participation. The fact that only one male was involved in volunteering was significant as it proved almost impossible to engage males in any volunteering activities organised by the community development trust. However, it was decided to focus only on residents who were already engaged in the process of regeneration as attempts to access residents not already engaged would prove extremely difficult and too time consuming. The focus of this study is on the relevance of soft skills to social exclusion through their effects on residents' capacity to engage in and benefit fully from lifelong learning. Establishing the reasons why residents do not engage in the process of regeneration has already been subject to numerous research studies and therefore, it was not essential to ascertain the views of non-participants.

Fig: 5 Biographical data of 21 residents who participated in semi-structured interviews

Age	Males	Females	Total
16 – 25	7	1	8
26 – 30		3	3
31 – 40		6	6
41 – 50		3	3
51 – 60	1		1
Employment status			
Unemployed	7	6	13
Incapacitated	1	3	4
Employed Full-time		1	1
Employed part-time		3	3
Length of time since last employed			
Less than 6 months	4	2	6
7 months to I year	2	1	3
More than 1 year but less than 2 years		2	2
More than 2 years but less than 3 years		1	1
More than 3 years	2	3	5
Currently employed		4	4
Age left school			
15		2	2
16	7	11	18
17	1		1
Highest academic qualification held			
GCSE/GCE O Level	1	6	7
GCE A Level	0	0	0
Higher Qualification	0	0	0
No qualifications obtained	7	7	14
Highest level of accreditation held			
NVQ Level 1	1		1
NVQ Level 2	2	2	4
NVQ Level 3		1	1
NVQ Level 4 or higher	0	0	0
Miscellaneous accreditation certificates	5	6	11
No accreditation obtained	1	4	5
Length of time since participated in learning *before this project*			
Less than 6 months	1	4	5
7 months – 1 year	6	1	7
1 – 2 years			
2 – 3 years			
More than 3 years	1	8	9
Likelihood of participation in further learning			
Not likely to participate	2	3	5
Positive about future participation	6	10	16

It was decided to allow a substantial period of observation to first identify issues and then use the information obtained from this period of observation to inform the questions devised to guide the conduct the interviews. The seven personnel interviewed were nominated by their line managers as knowledgeable and experienced in their particular field. The timeline for the study is shown in Fig: 6

Fig: 6 Timeline for the Fieldwork Study

October 2002 – January 2003	October 2002 – July 2003	July 2003 - December 2003
Desktop review of planning reports	Daily observation and analysis of information to be tested during interviews with key personnel and residents	Semi-structured interviews with 7 key personnel and 21 residents
Daily observations continued throughout period of fieldwork study		

Research instruments selected for fieldwork study

Questionnaires

Questionnaires provide a useful means of collecting research data. However, the quality of the information obtained is dependent on the range, type and relevance of questions used. The way in which questions are constructed and presented is of paramount importance. Poorly constructed questionnaires can confuse, lead or alienate the subject. Observing the day-to-day life of residents required a degree of informality and spontaneity that did not lend itself to the use of formal questionnaires (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Oppenheim 1996) and these were not used other than to obtain relevant statistical data from the community based agencies involved.

Conducting interviews

Interviews allow the researcher to gather a range of valuable data. However, as interviewing involves an interaction between two or more people, whether face to face or by telephone, it is impossible to achieve complete impartiality or objectivity. It is inevitable that there will be some form of researcher - subject interaction and this will have some influence over the responses given by the subject and the interpretation made by the researcher. Personal background, cultural, educational and social differences are impossible to eliminate completely. The most any researcher can do to ensure optimum reliability is to recognise that they exist, to remain vigilant throughout the process to ensure that their influences are minimised and to seek to design objectivity into all interviews. Difficulties also occur in recording responses fully and accurately. The use of tape-recorders can help overcome these, but create

difficulties of their own, with the risk of inducing subjects to behave out of character because they are being recorded.

The use of pre-determined questions in structured interviews is likely to produce objective data more systematically and allow accurate longitudinal comparisons. However, the disadvantage is that additional information, which might well open up more productive avenues for the research, may emerge during an interview and the researcher will be obliged to ignore this in the interests of achieving consistency. Random, open-ended interviews are likely to produce a wider range of data to inform the research. However, this method requires a degree of discipline from the researcher if he or she is not to become lost in a mass of data, or become seduced by emerging information of personal interest. Completeness or accuracy of manual transcription or analysing tape-recorded responses is also likely to be more difficult with this method.

Face to face interviews enable the researcher to develop greater rapport with the subject and allow assessment of body language to be taken into account in evaluating responses. Telephone interviews are more impersonal, which also provides for less likelihood of personal interaction factors influencing responses. Conducting interviews with individuals or with groups allows for closer personal contact and the development of greater rapport between researcher and subject, which is usually conducive to producing more complete responses to questions. On the other hand individuals might also feel exposed, isolated or open to subsequent identification and this could inhibit their responses. Conducting interviews with groups create the opportunity for individual responses to trigger further thought and discussion and allow a situation where the contribution of the group is greater than the sum of each individual contribution. Conversely, some individuals are likely to be inhibited by others in the group and will take little, or no part, and consequently their contribution is diminished or lost. The use of focus groups is a further refinement. This involves the researcher in conducting interviews with a group of individuals who have been subject to some form of pre-selection process to ensure that the group is representative of the target population of the research study. This ensures that the collection of data is more focused and the possibility of views of subjects outside the scope of the study "contaminating" findings is avoided.

For this study informal personal interviews were used wherever possible as residents were less threatened and more inclined to contribute fully on a one-to–one informal basis. Telephone interviews were not considered viable as participants might be even more intimidated by this method as they would not be sufficiently adept at using the telephone or comfortable about using it for such a purpose. As residents were less used to being interviewed an informal and semi-structured approach was used, as this proved more productive and less stressful for interviewees. Interview schedules were produced to guide more in depth interviews with the seven key personnel and 21 residents in order to ensure that these remained focused upon obtaining views and opinions on a wide variety of topics highlighted by issues raised from earlier observations. Careful attention was paid to the method and conduct of all interviews. In the case of interviews with managers and staff of community based agencies it was decided that audio-recorded interviews would ensure continuity in the flow of the discussion and allow for information to be captured accurately. Permission to audio-record interviews was sought at the outset of each interview. Interviews with residents were not audio-taped as it was considered that they would find this intrusive.

An issue occurred during a significant number of the interviews with residents that reflected the low level of self-confidence of the interviewees. It proved difficult to achieve or maintain eye contact as many averted their eyes and looked to the floor. Few were able to develop their responses beyond a few words to the extent that it became too uncomfortable to press further or to use too many prompts. Although rather disconcerting, this was quite commonplace in day-to-day contact with residents across the community.

Interview schedules

In order to provide for the systematic and objective examination of the business plan of the lead organisation an *aide memoir* was devised to facilitate the process. See Appendix 1. An introductory brief was used for all interviewees to explain the purpose of the study and provide reassurance concerning confidentiality and impartiality. See Appendix 2.

Given the range of issues that needed to be explored with community regenerators it was recognised that the interview would be quite lengthy. Therefore, there was a need to maintain interest throughout, as well as to ensure that a wide range of issues were discussed in a manner that did not confuse or alienate the interviewee. This was achieved by devising an interview schedule that provided for a balanced use of conventional questioning and an interactive exercise that yielded information and contributed to the outcome and the flow of the interview. The interview schedule and the interactive exercise were constructed to give insight into each interviewee's knowledge and understanding of the issues discussed. Appendix 3 was used to guide the interview and Appendix 4 was used for the interactive exercise. The interview schedule also enabled relevant statistical and factual data to be collected at the outset. This part of the interview was not audio-recorded. Interviews with a sample of residents were undertaken later in the study and information gained from day-to-day observations was used to inform the content of the semi-structured interview schedule devised to guide these interviews. Appendix 5 was used to guide the interviews with residents. Biographical data was collected at the outset of each interview.

In order to ensure that the observation of capacity building activities was undertaken objectively and systematically an *aide memoir* was devised to focus the observation of these events. See Appendix 6.

Arrangements for testing the research instruments

The research instruments were tested under field conditions through a short pilot study at the local community workshops. One member of staff was interviewed along with a resident from the community who was attending a craft workshop. This allowed all research instruments to be used. The interviews took much longer than anticipated and although this did not appear to cause either interviewee any discomfort it was decided to dispense with some questions and adopt a more informal approach.

Data analysis

In practice the strategy for conducting the fieldwork worked well. It was possible to identify what the various planning documents contained and how these related to the priority afforded to the issues of interest. The daily observations provided a wealth of data and it was then possible to relate this to the research questions and identify issues that needed to be explored in more detail and/or cross checked with key personnel and/or residents. This in turn informed the range and nature of the issues to be discussed in the semi-structured interviews. For example, the absence of a focus on learning or economic inactivity identified from the examination of the planning documentation was investigated during day-to-day observations and the semi-structured interviews with both key personnel and residents to obtain and this confirmed the absence of an effective strategy to address the relevant issues.

The main difficulty concerned the sheer volume of information accumulated through the completion of the daily log and the supporting documentation. The daily log filled almost six spring-loaded box files and the supporting documentation filled another nine. This was exacerbated by the fact that as data were collected daily it was not possible to introduce any form of indexing or categorising. This meant that the only way of extracting information for analysis was by laboriously reading through all of the material and highlighting issues of significance for inclusion in the findings of the fieldwork. Apart from the time taken to complete this task and deciding which data to omit, there were no other difficulties in identifying or extracting relevant data.

As there were only 21 interviews with residents and 7 with key personnel from community based agencies the process of identifying and extracting relevant data from the notes and transcripts of these interviews was comparatively straightforward. Experience gained from an earlier programme of research was invaluable in understanding the need to take account of the ease of extracting data at the stage when the questionnaires were being designed. Here again the only issue was the wealth of interesting data obtained and deciding how to present this to support the validity and reliability of the findings. Focusing sharply on the questions to be addressed by the study and using only data of relevance to these questions achieved this.

Using a triangulation process proved manageable and worked well as this required only an analysis and cross-checking of data obtained from key documents, interviews conducted with 7 personnel from community based regeneration agencies and 21 residents and being aware of the various inter-relationship with events observed during day-to-day observation.

The findings of the fieldwork are reported in three chapters. Chapter 6 provides an account of the nature of the community and what it is like to live there. Chapter 7 explores the effect of their experiences of daily life on residents' aspirations and expectations from the regeneration process. Chapter 8 explains the roles and responsibilities of the relevant agencies and discusses: how they respond to the new economic imperative for their work; their effectiveness in empowering residents; their understanding of soft skills as well as their effectiveness in enabling residents to acquire them.

Chapter 6

Life in a disadvantaged community: An exploration

This chapter provides a brief historical account of the development of the area together with a description of the community and an account of the day-to-day experiences of the people who live there.

The Unconquerable Spirit

> "In Merthyr & District the global economic conflict during the 1920s resulted in the very rapid decline in the demand for coal; hence the output dropped to very low levels and led to extensive colliery closures. This culminated in 1930 with the cessation of iron and steel production at the giant Dowlais Works. Thus within a decade all the industries of the borough vanished. For over 170 years, employment, however tenuous, had been guaranteed by the demand for iron, steel and coal, but from 1930 only unemployment was certain. The valley was part of the "Distressed Areas of South Wales." Adversity proved a more durable cement for communities than affluence, and, when the smoke of industry cleared from the still chimneys, what had been termed picturesque industrial valley-scapes were revealed in many instances as squalid Victorian slums. Every working-class household became the front-line in an all embracing war against poverty, degradation and despair, there were no winners only survivors – "THE UNCONQUERABLE SPIRIT" (Owen and Jacob 1993 p. 3).

In less than a century the town that fuelled the Industrial Revolution in Britain was down on its knees. Its population had increased rapidly from forty or so families in 1750 to become the largest town in Wales by 1801 with a population of 8000, increasing to 46,000 by 1851. The 1930s saw 8000 miners and 3000 iron workers "thrown out of work" (Rowlands 1993 p.3). Unemployment reached 69% and remained above 60% throughout the decade. The town's plight was an agenda item for the Cabinet meeting on 2 September 1936 and later prompted a national "think tank" to suggest that it should be abandoned and its population evacuated to the Usk valley or the coast (Rowlands 1993). Instead a rescue package was implemented establishing a number of factories on new industrial estates. These factories, together with a mortally wounded coal industry, managed to provide work for another few decades, although unemployment rates remained consistently above the national

average. The unconquerable spirit was tested even further by the rapid and severe economic decline over the second half of the 20th Century. Another package of rescue measures included a massive slum clearance programme and the relocation of whole communities to new green-field sites. With this legacy the community featured in this study was born.

Its geographical boundary encompasses four distinct neighbourhoods and two electoral wards. One was rated among the 10 most deprived of the 865 wards in Wales and an active community regeneration strategy had been in place since the early 1990s. Each of these neighbourhoods had its own identity and distinctive character shaped by its history and the type and age of its housing stock. Residents were quite fiercely "territorial."

The longest established neighbourhood consisted of more traditional, privately owned terraced properties dating from the mid 19th Century. This was originally built to accommodate the influx of people attracted to the area to work in the iron and steel works as the Industrial Revolution gathered pace. People migrated there from all over the British Isles. It had its own small shopping area, a workingmen's social club, a church, two primary schools and a Roman Catholic secondary school that also served a much wider geographical area. There was a strong tradition of home ownership and a substantial majority of conventional families with a mother and father married to each other. This neighbourhood became part of the community regeneration strategy only when the Communities First programme was introduced in 2002.

During the period immediately before and just after the Second World War the local authority developed a new housing estate extending south-westward from the western border of the original settlement as part of the slum clearance programme. The new estate consisted of mainly semi-detached, enclosed houses owned and managed by the local authority and this was served by a very small shopping area, a traditional workingmen's social club and a community centre. There had been a growth in lone parent households as the children and grandchildren of the early inhabitants left the family home to settle elsewhere on the estate. A significant number of households had at least one adult who was out of work.

The local authority built another phase of the estate during the late 1950s and early 1960s as the demand for rented housing increased. Although separated by a large area of green-space and playing fields, this effectively extended the estate further south-westward. This phase reflected the low level of car ownership of the time and was an open plan design consisting of long, linear terraced blocks with open frontages and no provision for car parking or garages. A large hospital had been built in this area and also served a much wider geographical area. Other amenities consisted of a secondary school, two churches, a health centre, a workingmen's social club and a small shopping precinct. A police station had been originally located in the shopping area but was relocated to the edge of the estate after a vehicle was driven through the front of the building. The new police station operated on a part-time basis. This estate also experienced an increase in lone parent households and there were also a significant number of households with at least one adult out of work.

The final phase of development took place during the early 1970s, extending the boundary further south westward, when the local authority built another estate of properties for rent. This was a quite different design with its attempt to separate pedestrians from traffic following a form of layout developed by Clarence Stein and first applied in Radburn New Jersey in 1928. Whereas the estate was still largely open plan, it consisted of a series of "mini-communities" set out in a rigid gridiron pattern. This new and larger estate was surrounded by a ring road with pedestrian access via green areas and a number of cul-de-sacs providing access for vehicles. Houses had only "postage stamp" size garden and common frontages that afforded little privacy. Perhaps unsurprisingly this area had a rather unhappy history and suffered more than the others in terms of experiencing the ills of socio-economic decline and deprivation. The quality of construction of the properties was found wanting and this, together with the unappealing design and layout of the estate, caused a significant turnover in occupation. Many of the conventional families moved out to be replaced by families where the mother and father were unmarried or there was only one parent living in the household. The unpopularity of the area led to a large number of properties becoming vacant, dilapidated and subject to routine vandalism and theft of internal as well as external fixtures and fittings. The number of semi-derelict properties, or "voids," increased to such an extent that it necessitated a large-scale demolition programme. This resulted in a number of empty spaces, but lack of funding meant that these

remained as open and unattractive grassland. A group of residents had recently come together to improve the physical appearance of the area and this had brought about some improvement. The estate benefited from a small sub-post office cum general stores, another small general store, a small family centre operated by a national children's charity, a Community Workshops operated by the local authority, that had recently been converted into a Neighbourhood Learning Centre and a community centre, located in a former public house. This estate had the highest proportion of lone parent families and households with at least one family member who was economically inactive and it was not uncommon for none of the household to be in work.

In recent years a particularly negative and debilitating phenomenon had begun to affect all three of the local authority owned estates as the number of traditional families declined. As relationships broke down and families split up some retained the original tenancy even after new relationships were formed and they moved in with a new partner. Whereas this provided an avenue of escape if the relationship subsequently broke down it also fulfilled another purpose. It was increasingly common for one or more teenage children of either partner to take up the tenancy of the original dwelling if they became inconvenienced by the new relationship. Living unsupervised in these "second homes" invariably led to youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour as these immature "tenants" lived life to the full with little or no regard for their neighbours. The local authority had neither the resources nor the will to enforce such obvious violations of tenancy agreements. This erosion of traditional family structures had other traumatic consequences for children and young people.

Separate conversations involving two 16 year-old youths helps us to understand the emotional turmoil each experienced in their young lives. The first took place a few months after he informed the writer that his girl friend had given birth to his baby. On enquiring if the new baby was causing him any sleepless nights, he exclaimed "she doesn't sleep in my house." His puzzled tone indicated clearly his surprise that anyone should think that he and his partner actually lived together. The second conversation took place with a group of young people attending a training course. The youth concerned was new to the group and some of the others were trying to establish his identity. One asked him if his mother's name was "Sharon" and his father was

"Martin?" Without any trace of emotion he explained in a very matter of fact way that his mother was in fact "Sharon," his father had recently died "but I have got a new one now." These two short conversations provide an insight into the emotional stresses and strains that were "matter of fact experiences" that two young men, one teenage mother and her child were expected to take in their stride.

One community leader provided an interesting perspective on the social dynamics of his estate. He explained that when the original settlement was extended with the addition of three local authority estates, the first two phases were occupied by relocating whole streets of families from the same area as part of the initial slum clearance programme and this provided some cohesion within the new communities. However, this did not happen for the third and final phase of redevelopment as by then the slum clearance programme had been completed and families were allocated to the new properties "from all over the shop." Because they had not previously known each other, there was no prior history of community spirit and this never materialised.

A small number of tenants on each of the local authority estates had purchased their homes and there was a small development of privately owned houses on the perimeter of all three neighbourhoods. A nursery, infants and junior school served all three areas and these amenities were sited at a central point between the three estates.

The combined population of the community at the time of the 2001 Census was 10,287 compared with 11,940 at the 1991 Census. Three tenants and residents' associations had been established and all were instrumental in forming the regeneration strategy in the early 1990s. In 1998 this was included in what was then the National Assembly for Wales' *People in Communities* programme. In 1999 a community development trust was established to enable the community, as represented by the community activists who had founded and led the regeneration strategy, to manage its own affairs. The development trust was the lead organisation in implementing the Communities First programme and its main office was centrally located in a health centre. This was the focal point for primary health care across the community as well as providing a range of part time information and advice services

for residents. The writer was based at this community health and resource centre throughout the period of the study.

The physical environment within which people live

The final report of the Policy Action Team on Skills reports that:

> "We were both inspired and shocked by what we saw and heard. There is much excellent work that helps people in disadvantaged communities to improve their skills. It is nevertheless hard to overstate the challenges of the environment in which this work is carried on and in which people live" (DfEE 1999 p3).

As far as the three local authority owned and managed estates were concerned there was more cause for shock than inspiration. The tone was set by the general appearance of the main shopping precinct. What should be the commercial and social hub of a community had degenerated into a most uninviting and unwelcoming complex of dilapidated buildings with its skyline dominated by a derelict and unoccupied multi-storey block of flats. Years of neglect and failure to maintain the wooden fascia spanning the entire block resulted in what was left of the original white paint being replaced by an unsightly décor of rotting wood and black mould. Each shop frontage suffered a varying state of disrepair. Unsightly coils of razor wire were affixed to the whole roof section to prevent entry through the roof. This was also an effective trap for attracting discarded plastic shopping bags, the odd shoe and even items of clothing that flapped aimlessly in the wind until decay and gravity eventually caused them to disintegrate and fall to the ground. The small group of shopkeepers, fearful of the negative effect on their businesses, strived unsuccessfully to press the local authority landlord to undertake a temporary facelift until the longer term plans to redevelop the area materialised. The whole area symbolised the social and economic decay that residents had worked so hard to address through the regeneration strategy.

Photograph 1 The main shopping precinct

A casual conversation outside the precinct with one resident provided an interesting perspective on how environmental factors militate against attempts to encourage young people to take pride in their environment:

> "Just what have the kids got to be proud of around here? Take a look at the state of the place"

The Post Office was best avoided on Monday mornings as long queues formed from well before opening time to receive the various benefits that enabled so many residents to survive. The health centre was the next busiest place where the average day saw dozens of people sitting or standing whilst waiting to see one of the three doctors in attendance. The school run was more of a school walk as scores of parents, usually in groups of twos and threes, escorted their children to school. Closer observation revealed some interesting features. Whereas there were two pedestrian crossings on the busy roads near the schools, there were no crossing patrol officers employed despite the prevailing high level of unemployment and economic inactivity. The large number of men aged between late teens and mid forties who escorted their

children to school. The fact that when the weather was inclement very few men were to be seen and women were left to brave the elements.

The large general hospital located almost at the geographical centre of the community was another striking feature. The inevitable high steel security perimeter fence complete with its security-lodge hid a more revealing indicator of a community not at ease with itself. The hospital grounds contained a number of staff accommodation blocks and all were enclosed within another inner steel security fence. It is reasonable to hypothesise that the acid test of the regeneration process is the extent to which people living in this secure accommodation will, in the future, feel inclined to live in ordinary accommodation within the wider community. If it proves impossible to convince people that the quality of life available in the wider community is such that they no longer need to live under such secure conditions, then attempts to regenerate the area will have failed.

Evidence of the reliance on physical improvements as a means of regenerating the area was readily available. The ubiquitous but obtrusive six feet high steel palisade security fencing that enclosed so many houses. Eriksson's work (1950 and 1968) on the emotional development of children raises cause for concern as to what sort of mindset children might develop where they are brought up within such an environment of fear and mistrust. The well intentioned but ephemeral nature of attempts to persuade people to take greater care of the environment through involving children in creating ceramic paving tiles and adults in creating a poem in similar materials that were then embedded into new paved areas. Most of the tiles and lettering had either crumbled away or had long since been vandalised.

A number of vacant properties were to be found either individually or in small pockets throughout the three local authority estates. Despite the fact that the each building was secured with steel screens within hours of becoming vacant, these "voids" quickly became the target for criminals. The favoured method of entry was through the roof and a building rapidly lost its copper-boiler, central heating system and all associated wiring and pipe-work. Further vandalism usually followed and it was not unusual for individual properties or even whole blocks to become permanently uninhabitable as various rooms were set alight and the structure damaged

beyond repair. As long as these properties remained empty they acted as a magnet to attract small gangs of youths who then became yet another source of youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour.

On two occasions visits were made in the mid-afternoon to meet the young people causing so much distress and consternation amongst the community. On the first occasion a group of eight were found huddled in the porch of a derelict house. The scene of devastation was quite shocking. The house was located in an empty block of five surrounded by two other blocks. Only one of the houses in the block was occupied even though its windows were damaged or boarded up. There was evidence of burned out refuse bins, charred doorframes and walls as well as broken and boarded-up windows all around. One house had a partly burned out roof and its former contents littered the area. All of this devastation was within full view of occupied houses less than one hundred metres away. The young men were approachable, although it was difficult to engage them in any meaningful conversation. Aged between 15 and 18 they all claimed to be bored and one or two complained that the community development trust should be doing more for them. When asked if they were still in school, they all burst out laughing.

The conversation with one young man provided some understanding of the challenges facing those who seek to help them to become employable. He was now unemployed as he had been, "sacked from his last job" and added an expletive to describe what it was like to work there, although "the pay was good." When asked if he had thought about training he boasted loudly that he was:

> "Chucked off a scheme for smashing up the training fella's car."

This caused considerable amusement and met with the approval of the others. When asked why they did not use the local youth club, they all stated that:

> "We are banned and it is rubbish there anyway."

One 15 year old was currently excluded from school and five of the eight were attending the local Youth Inclusion Programme. When asked, if only one wish could be granted, what would that wish be? The only replies were:

"To be a millionaire."

"To have a good job."

"To get out of this dump."

"Dunno."

When it was suggested that they each might need to do something themselves to achieve their wish, there was little reaction, just laughter and grunts of disapproval. In fairness to these young people, none was threatening, aggressive or abusive and all appeared to be bored witless. The real tragedy was that these young people then had to be left to their own devices in the sure knowledge that within a few hours they would be stoned out of their mind on drink, drugs, petrol fumes or a combination of all three. The second visit a few weeks later elicited a similar reaction when a senior official from the Welsh Assembly Government was taken to witness the reality of life in the area. On this occasion some of the young men were playing football and only stopped to enquire if we were "CID?"

Some purpose designed play areas were provided. However, efforts to provide additional recreational facilities for children were hampered by residents' fears that these would attract further youth annoyance. Groups of noisy and unruly youths tended to congregate in and around such amenities from late evening until the early hours of the morning. This proved problematic when consulting residents on plans to site other much needed facilities close to any houses, particularly if a similar site had previously been vandalised in the same area. It was a fairly regular Monday morning occurrence for staff at the children's centre to call for specialist help to remove discarded syringes before children were able to use the play area attached to that centre. The situation later took a turn for the worse when a new play area was destroyed in an arson attack.

Photograph 2 Derelict houses frequented by young people

A particularly public manifestation of this phenomenon occurred towards the end of the summer when funding was secured to upgrade the surface of the local sports field as well as for fencing to protect the area from vandalism. The fence proved neither a defence nor a deterrent. Even though it was constructed of sections of tall stout steel railings and bolted to steel posts erected six feet apart, it was soon partly demolished. Car thieves viewed it as some form of test of courage and driving prowess. The challenge consisted of ramming the fence at great speed between the posts to "spin" the section on its top bar and exit the other side on to the playing field before the damaged section crashed onto the rear of the car. An error of judgement risked either smashing into one of the upright posts or impaling the rear-end of the car on the damaged section of railings as it hurtled through a 360-degree spin. Most vehicles were later set alight on or near the playing field. This activity usually took place between 10 pm and 3 am within full view of streets of houses less than 200 metres away. Of as much concern was the negative role modelling arising from the fact that this activity took on something approaching a modern-day gladiatorial contest. Large crowds of children gathered regularly to witness at first hand the inability of the

police to prevent such dangerous and damaging activity. This prevailed for several months before the police eventually acted decisively and arrested the ringleaders.

Photograph 3 The sports field boundary fence

The community was quite remote from the main centres of either shopping or employment. Car ownership was relatively low and public transport facilities were quite basic. There was no train service and the only bus service was a link to the main town centre. As there were no direct public access routes to the main centres of employment this meant that all to work journeys by public transport required at least one change of bus. Statistical data on car ownership is shown in Table 1. It should be noted that the community consisted of two adjoining electoral wards. Wherever possible, statistical data will be provided separately for each ward to provide comparisons and presented as Ward A and Ward B to maintain anonymity.

Table 1 Car ownership (2001 Census)

	Ward A	Ward B	Local Authority area
% Of households with no car or van	51.3	38.4	35.2
% Of households with 2 or more cars or vans	11.0	16.6	20.3

An innovative Employment Action Team operated in the area and introduced a mini-bus service and a car hire scheme enabling some residents to overcome their lack of transport preventing them from getting a job. Whilst not wishing to detract from what was a commendable project, it illustrated the rather piecemeal nature of support available through Department for Work and Pensions programmes. This was a small-scale project and assistance was restricted to only those who satisfied eligibility conditions related to duration of unemployment or type of benefit received. Assistance was only available for the first three months of employment on the grounds that once settled into employment the beneficiary would be able to afford to make his or her own arrangements thereafter. It was no coincidence that the Employment Action Team's contract included a premium where the jobseeker remained in employment for 13 weeks.

Unfortunately one outdated mode of transport was a persistent source of nuisance. Small herds of horses regularly roamed throughout the area in search of free grazing. Some suggested that this was a legacy of the former travelling families who lived there but retained their interests in owning and breeding horses. On one occasion fourteen were reported loose on the local playing field and it was quite common to encounter families of horses grazing the open plan front lawns of houses. Of even more concern was the fact that officers from the local authority employed to impound stray animals no longer worked in the area following threats of violence towards them from the horse owners.

The economic context within which people lived

The wider local authority area had undergone a remarkable transformation in the period preceding the fieldwork study when registered unemployment fell to almost record levels and this is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Adult Claimant Count (Job Seekers Allowance)

Area	September 1998	September 2002	September 2003	% Decrease 1998 – 2003
Local Authority Area	1717	1154	1076	37.3%
Electoral Ward A	241	147	156	35.3%
Electoral ward B	155	128	96	38.1%

However, this welcome reduction in registered unemployment must be considered in the wider context of economic inactivity and there was no corresponding decrease in this. Table 3 reveals how the number of people claiming Incapacity and Disability Benefits had remained at a fairly constant and high level.

The 2001 Census records reveal that the economic activity rate for electoral ward A was 42.7% and for electoral ward B 52.0% as compared with 54.2% for the local authority area. However, it should be noted that some reduction in economic inactivity occurs naturally. This is due to the disproportionate number of older former miners in receipt of these benefits who transfer to retirement pension at age 65.

Table 3 Incapacity and Disability Living Allowance claims

Incapacity Benefit Claimants (Aged 16 – 65)				
Area	December 1998	August 2001	August 2002	% Comparison 1998 – 2002*
Local Authority Area	7540	6980	Not Available	N/A
Electoral Ward A	900	790	777	- 13.7%
Electoral Ward B	745	700	697	- 6.4%
Disability Living Allowance Claimants (Aged 16 – 65)				
	May 1998	August 2001	August 2002	% Comparison 1998 – 2002*
Local Authority Area	5900	6370	Not Available	N/A
Electoral Ward A	860	835	823	- 4.3%
Electoral Ward B	690	730	762	+ 10.4%

*Information is not available for 2003

The range of local employment opportunities available to residents was limited. Apart from the local hospital, the local authority and the community development trust there were no employers of any size based in the community. There were a number of shops, social clubs and public houses but they were sole traders employing no more than one or two full-time staff augmented by casual and part-time staff for short periods at times of peak demand. The general hospital was the largest employer in the

local authority area employing a wide range of occupations from unskilled to very highly qualified professional staff. During the study the personnel department reported difficulty in recruiting staff for a wide range of occupations and a special initiative was introduced to enable residents to develop the skill and attitudes needed to secure employment with the hospital. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

An examination of the relevant data relating to education and skills attainment contained in Table 4 provides a clear indication of why so few residents were attractive to employers. This also indicates the scale of the challenge faced by both residents and regeneration agencies in ensuring their employability.

The nature of the challenge facing those who sought work in the wider labour market could be gauged from the type of jobs on offer. The community health centre received copies of vacancies from the jobcentre daily and placed them on display. According to the receptionist the number of vacancy notices received each week varied between ten and thirty. However, whereas a steady stream of people viewed the display it was unusual to receive more than two or three enquiries per week from residents wishing to apply for any of these jobs. The vacancies received during a typical week provide an indication of the type of jobs available and Fig: 7 contains details of the 22 vacancies received during the week selected. It will be seen that these held little appeal for residents. None of these jobs were likely to be suitable for middle-aged former miners or steel workers and there was a lack of jobs available for those with few or no qualifications or those with little or no skills. Even where little or no skills were required, the nature of work was unlikely to appeal to unemployed men, particularly young men. The income available from many of the jobs would result in the successful applicant remaining below the UK poverty level of 60% of the UK median net wage. However, examples of how some residents had made the most of the employment opportunities available were also observed.

Table 4 Baseline data on education and training

	Ward A	Ward B	LA Area
2001 census shows proportion of residents with no qualifications	57.1%	48.6%	43.9%
2001 census shows proportion of residents with highest qualification Level 1	12.2%	14.4%	15.4%
2001 census shows proportion of residents with highest qualification Level 2	13.0%	16.4%	17.1%
2001 census shows proportion of residents with highest qualification Level 3	2.8%	4.0%	4.6%
2001 Census shows proportion of residents qualified to degree level or higher	8.8%	8.6%	11.6%
BMG Survey 2004 shows proportion of adult population with deficiencies in literacy	38%	37%	N/a.
BMG Survey 2004 shows proportion of adult population with deficiencies in numeracy	44%	42%	N/a

Information held at the local secondary school shows that in 2002:

- 33% of 14 year olds with level 5 or above in core subjects.
- 23% of 16 year olds with 5 or more A*-Cs.
- 69% of 16 year olds with 5 or more A*-Gs.
- 90% of 16 year olds with at least nationally recognised qualifications.
- 46% of 19 year olds with at least intermediate level qualifications.
- 19% of 19 year olds with advanced level qualifications.
- 90% attendance.
- Unauthorised absence rate of 1%.
- Fixed term exclusions 3%.
- Permanent exclusions 0.1%.

One resident sought advice from the development trust about how she could be trained as a child-minder to earn sufficient money to enable her husband to return home to spend more time with her and their two young children. He had managed to find work in the south of England as a labourer repairing railway lines, which meant that the family were together only at weekends. Four of the residents who participated in the semi-structured interviews were in employment and one was managing to hold down two part time jobs whilst looking after her family of two young children. Towards the end of the study period staff from Jobcentre Plus reported that an informal training course designed to enable residents claiming Incapacity Benefits to gain information, advice and guidance on employment and job-search issues was abandoned because four of the six participants found employment and one joined a formal training course.

A most remarkable example of enterprise and entrepreneurship occurred during the summer holiday. Three girls aged 11, 12 and 13 borrowed a wooden trestle table from their mother and set this up in the shopping centre to sell a range of new and second-hand bric-a-brac. On calling at the health centre seeking unwanted items for their stall, one reported that they had each made a profit of £15 on the first day. They continued "trading" successfully for another three days.

Fig: 7 Details of vacancies received for display week commencing 16 June 2003

Occupation	No. of Jobs	Duration	Wages	Hours	Remarks
Delivery Driver	2	Permanent	£6 per hour	Full time	
Delivery Driver	1	Permanent	Min. wage	Part time	16 – 20 hours per week
Technician/Engineer	1	Permanent	£4.20 per hour	Full time	Training given
Production Operator	1	Temporary	£190 per week	Full time	Training given
School Clerk	1	Permanent	£10278 to £12720 pa	Part-time	15 – 20 hours per week. (Pay *pro rata*)
Clerical Assistant	2	Permanent	£10278 to £13335 pa	Full time	
Planning Clerk	1	Permanent	£10278 to £11706 pa	Full time	
Counter Clerk	1	Permanent	£5.98 per hour	Part time	18 hours per week
Receptionist	1	Permanent	£5.40 per hour	Part time	26 hours per week
IT Assistant	1	Permanent	£10278 to £13335 pa	Full time	
Registration Officer	1	Permanent	£14817 to £18582 pa	Full time	
Economy Manager	1	Permanent	£30594 pa	Full time	
Chef/Cook	1	Permanent	£177-£180 per week	Full time	Minimum of 3 years experience required
Cook	1	Permanent	£4.20 per hour	Part time	20 hours per week
Assistant Cook	1	Permanent	Min. wage	Full time	Must be experienced
Kitchen Assistant	1	Permanent	Min. wage	Full time	
Domestic Assistant	2	Permanent	£174 - £180 per week	Part time	25 hours per week. (Pay *pro rata*)
Pre-school Leader	1	Permanent	Min. wage+	Part time	16 hours per week
Pre-school Worker	1	Permanent	£4.20 per hour	Part-time	16 hours per week

The reality of the quality of life experienced by residents

Despite claims by the local police that crime was in decline, crime and the fear of crime dominated the lives of the majority of residents and some areas resembled a community under siege. The crime statistics shown in Table 5 provide an indication of the level and range of crime experienced in the area.

Anti-social behaviour and youth annoyance had reached epidemic proportions and blighted the lives of most residents. The attitudes and behaviour of children even of a young age needed to be seen in to be believed. Initiatives such as the Youth Inclusion Programme, designed to divert from criminal activity those 11 to 16 year olds identified as most at risk of offending, became overwhelmed and eventually collapsed.

A clear indication of the values and attitudes of young people could be gauged from the daily lunchtime exodus of pupils from the local high school and their almost ritualistic half-mile trek through the estate to and from the shopping centre. At these times the shopping centre was overrun by a mass of noisy and unruly teenagers who left a sea of discarded empty convenience food trays and partially consumed meals in their wake. The police response to this daily display of anti-social behaviour was to seek to persuade the school to lock pupils within the school perimeter during the lunch-hour.

Table 5 Details of recorded crime for year ended 31 March 2003

Burglaries (Dwelling)	90
Burglaries (Other)	72
Theft (Other)	161
Auto Crime	
Theft of vehicles	193
Theft from vehicles	119
Other Crime	149
Criminal damage	453
Crimes of violence	
Robbery	5
Assault	174
Sexual Offences	13
Total number of crimes reported in year ended 31 March 2003	1429
Total number of crimes reported in year ended 31 March 2002	1358

Such silo thinking would not only have resulted in an infringement of human rights, it would also have had a crippling effect on the profitability of the shopkeepers who struggled to eke out a living in this community. The obvious solution in the new era of community schools was to work in partnership with the school to bring about a change in behaviour. However, attempts to interest the school in a more strategic approach through a "whole school" policy to changing the behaviour of pupils met with little success. This was despite the fact that the nursery, infants and junior

schools had recognised the need and had already introduced a successful "whole school" behaviour programme. Another example of silo thinking emerged when the head teacher explained that their recent ESTYN inspection actually commented favourably on the behaviour of pupils. This became his justification for not taking action to review the school behaviour policy and practice. According to this report:

> "A strong feature of the school is its work with citizenship and the links that have been created locally, nationally and internationally ... The overall quality of behaviour is good. A very small minority are occasionally unruly in class or boisterous in the narrow corridors. The large majority are keen to engage in their set tasks and sustain concentration. The school has high expectations of pupils' conduct, understood by all" (A Summary Report For Parents: Inspection Under section 10 of The School Inspection Act 1996. *X* School 10 – 13 March 2003).

Sadly, ESTYN inspectors were only interested in behaviour as observed within the narrow and internal school perspective and remained completely unaware of and disinterested in the havoc that pupils wreaked on the community beyond the school gates. Ironically a representative of the local secondary school who had been invited to attend a public meeting called to discuss anti social behaviour and youth annoyance failed to do so. It was subsequently established that he was driving to the meeting when he ran into a group of a dozen or so young men wearing balaclava helmets throwing stones at cars and he returned home.

It is reasonable to speculate that a lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational attainment might be fuelling the increase in youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour in disadvantaged communities. Those who engage in anti-social behaviour usually progress through primary school without causing such mayhem despite suffering the same social and emotional baggage they carry with them to the secondary school where they become so troublesome. This cannot be all due to a negative experience of progression through puberty, although this is a factor. Otherwise all teenagers would engage in extremes of anti-social behaviour. It cannot be all due to dysfunctional families or ineffective parenting, although this is undoubtedly a major factor. Otherwise children from "normal" families would not engage in anti-social and more children from dysfunctional families would. However, if we put ourselves in the shoes of a typical disaffected or disengaged young person

passing through our secondary schools we would find that we encountered injustice and failure almost eight lessons a day. The whole purpose of being in school is to demonstrate that we are good at learning and all young people need to be reassured that they are good at what they do. However, these children find that adults, who are supposed to be their role models, inform them with monotonous regularity that what they are able to learn and what they are good at achieving does not count. The only test of their learning ability is based upon narrow academic criteria. Worse still, too many are publicly ridiculed by some teachers causing the inner-drive to preserve some semblance of self-esteem by saving face to provoke them to demonstrate their only prowess. Sadly, the only skills that many have managed to learn effectively are useful only to wreak havoc through demonstrating anti-social behaviour.

We should not be too surprised if this sense of injustice causes them such anger and resentment that they find it difficult to invite their elderly neighbours to "have a nice day" when they complain about noise, horseplay, or even gathering with groups of their friends in the street. Particularly as these young people have not yet developed the maturity of judgement or capacity for calm reflection and rationalisation that enables their teachers and other adults to contain anger and the primeval desire to retaliate. We should also remember that few teachers have any realisation of the traumas these children suffer or how this impacts on their capacity to learn. Neither do they have any understanding of the profound issues involved in providing appropriate and positive feedback in a way that does not reinforce a negative belief in their pupils' capacity to learn. It is likely that this lack of awareness and understanding creates another negative cycle: perceived unjust criticism due to failure to recognise attainment in other non-academic abilities → frustration and resentment → anger → containment (repressed) by teacher → reinforced in lesson after lesson and test after test → perception that all adults are hostile → must prove to myself and my peers that I am good at something → drive to retaliate against adults → annoy, annoy, annoy → escalation in negative behaviour → punishment, perceived as unjust criticism.

Such behaviour invariably leads to one of two outcomes. Positive intervention that enables a realisation of the futility of such actions leading to reformed behaviour or continuation of negative reinforcement of inner-drive to preserve self-respect through

anti-social behaviour. Escalation in retaliation invariably results in criminal conviction or even imprisonment. It is surely one of the greatest ironies of our education system that those who find it so unjust to have their own competence judged by a narrow criteria (examination league tables) are so enthusiastic about applying such a narrow criteria (academic prowess) to judge the learning ability of vulnerable young people and with such devastating consequences on those who find themselves labelled as the "less able."

Disturbing evidence of how these most troubled and troublesome young people are perceived and treated in one secondary school is to be found in an article written by "a senior manager in a London secondary school" published in the School Leadership section of the Times Education Supplement:

> "The long summer holidays are almost upon us. The residents of the streets around our school will be taking a deep breath as the indigestibles are turned loose. We more or less keep them in the classroom for most of the daylight hours during term, but soon six weeks of 24-hour mayhem will threaten. Who are the indigestibles? Well, almost all secondary schools have a handful, and inner-city schools such as mine have 20 or so in each year group. Every kid has his or her individual traits, but there are common features. It usually comes down to dysfunctional family life and parental neglect, sometimes with physical and verbal abuse. They usually have low literacy and numeracy skills and emotional and behavioural difficulties, often defined as attention deficit disorder. Put bluntly, they are pupils who have become alienated from learning due to persistent failure to do well" (Times Education Supplement 2004).

Clearly the unspeakable had no interest in pursuing the uneatable in this school. Interestingly, the "senior manager" does not explain the criteria he or she applies to define "persistent failure to do well." In this community the term indigestible was not used, although, one senior teacher once used the term "pond life" and another used "scum" to describe these children. Investigating a hypothesis that a lack of parity of esteem between academic and vocational attainment is a primary cause of social exclusion might prove fruitful ground for a study by some other researcher.

Several small groups of youths roamed some streets late at night causing fear and havoc. Creating loud noise by banging and kicking the doors and windows of houses. Setting fire to plastic refuse bins and responding with liberal use of foul language, verbal abuse and threats of violence to residents brave enough to object to their

behaviour. Two complete blocks of terraced houses were demolished because they were vandalised beyond repair. After a number of cases where fire crews attending incidents were attacked by groups of stone throwing youngsters, the local fire service refused to attend one area without a police escort. One police officer attending these operations summed up the situation graphically:

> "I might wear a CS gas canister and a truncheon on my belt but this does not protect me from a breeze block on the head."

The community health and resource centre did not escape unwanted attention. On three occasions bolt cutters were used to remove the padlock on the steel security gate at the front of the building. On the third occasion a large window was smashed with an iron bar found abandoned at the scene. A car belonging to the female cleaner parked outside at 8 pm had one of its windows smashed. When she went to investigate a gang of 10 to 14 year-old boys who threatened her not to call the police surrounded her. All four incidents were known to have involved an 11 year-old boy who was also responsible for setting fire to several wheelie-bins and at least one garden shed. Another incident occurred in mid-afternoon when the writer intervened to physically separate two men who crashed through the front door in a drunken brawl. This was a particularly distressing incident as a number of elderly people were sitting in the health centre waiting to see the doctor and they were subjected to a torrent of obscene language from the drunken combatants and their foul mouthed, female supporters. A few weeks later, minutes after leaving his car parked outside a visitor attending a meeting with the writer had his car broken into and his overcoat stolen.

Residents were reluctant to contact the police for fear of retribution as electronic scanners were routinely used by criminals to listen-in on police communications. This meant that information reported to the police or from the police control room, directing officers to the scenes of crimes was readily available in the community. Not only did this provide criminals with early warning that the police were on their way to a scene of crime, more sinisterly the names and addresses of those who reported crimes became public knowledge leaving them open to retribution. The situation became so serious that the local priest devised his own system to encourage residents to report crimes to him for onward and anonymous transmission to the police.

Numerous other examples of criminal activity, anti-social behaviour and youth annoyance were reported by residents, either in personal conversations or in public meetings and some were observed directly. These were invariably accompanied by an inability to persuade the authorities to take effective action to address the problems reported to them. The following examples of the more serious incidents that occurred during the study provide some indication of the nature and the scale of the problem.

Three directors of the development trust narrowly escaped serious injury when a stolen car smashed into the front garden wall of a house belonging to one of them just as they were leaving following a meeting. The car of the same householder was later vandalised in an unconnected attack. The police response was considered by those concerned to be ineffective and this resulted in an informal complaint to the divisional commander.

A serious public order situation was narrowly avoided following a fracas involving the police and members of one particularly troublesome family. A fight broke out when the police tried to impound a stolen car and the incident almost got out of hand after a large crowd gathered to prevent the police from carrying out their duties. A full scale emergency followed where the riot squad were called in and the whole estate was sealed off. The police handled this situation particularly sensitively and decided to hold off for four days before arrests were eventually effected. This allowed time for two community leaders to be enlisted to help police restore calm. One leader volunteered to visit the home of the family at the centre of the disturbance and managed to persuade the mother to act responsibly.

Most afternoons the shopping centre became an assembly point for drug addicts waiting for their dealer to deliver their "fix." As the afternoon progressed, numbers increased to about eight or ten, mainly men aged between 18 and 45, who became increasingly troublesome as they gradually succumbed to the effects of cheap cider. This behaviour was particularly intimidating for women and older people. During the summer the local shopkeepers became fearful of the effects on their business as well as on their staff and a special meeting was arranged with the police to enable these concerns to be aired. 6 female staff attended. They reported that they regularly

experienced verbal abuse and foul language from the addicts and they feared for their safety if they as much as made eye contact or spoke to these people:

> "It's intimidating, they say to us, "we know where you live."

The shopkeepers also complained about the general lack of policing in the area and that no effective action was taken to remedy a situation taking place in the full view of shoppers in the daytime. One claimed that four boys, who were obviously under-age, were seen to be drinking alcohol in full view of two police officers but no action was taken. Other comments provide an indication of the seriousness of the situation from their perspective:

> "I had to let old ladies out the back way as they were afraid to go out the front door."

> "It would be nice if you could phone the police and speak to somebody. You are holding and holding all the time."

> "The precinct must be a decent place for people to shop and not be over run by smack heads [drug addicts]"

One morning the writer attended a meeting at the local community education centre. Whilst waiting for the caretaker to open up the building the following conversation took place between a police inspector and a local councillor waiting to attend the same meeting:

Councillor,

> "All hell broke out in X Street last night. Windows were smashed in a number of houses and old ladies verbally abused by the youths who did this."

Inspector,

> "Did anyone report this to the police?"

Councillor,

"I don't think so, people are afraid to do anything about it."

Inspector,

"Well there we are then."

This was a reference to the fact that the police had challenged residents "to stand up and be counted." If they were not prepared to cooperate with the police they would be unable to help them. This was despite the fact that the police had acknowledged in public meetings that there were delays in responding to telephone calls when crimes were reported as there was insufficient manpower to police the area and priority was given to "burglaries and stabbings." Residents were also acutely aware of the widespread use of scanners to monitor police movements.

Across the road, the front door and the side panel of the caretaker's house was boarded up. When it was pointed out that this had resulted from a break-in "the other night" there was no reaction from the inspector. Ironically, the reason for the delay in opening the building was because the locks on the community education centre had only recently been changed following a break-in. Later that day a meeting, arranged specifically to examine ideas for addressing crime and disorder, was interrupted when the police sergeant was called from the meeting because a car parked outside was broken into. The sergeant's marked police vehicle was parked within a few yards of this car.

Another graphic example of how crime and the fear of crime blighted the lives of so many residents occurred during one of the semi-structured interviews with a resident. This took place at her home during lunchtime. When invited to explain what was preventing her from realising her ambitions she simply responded, "Just look out of the window. See the drug dealing sitting on the wall?" In broad daylight and in full view of passers-by, less than 30 metres away there were nine men aged between late teens to early forties sitting on the wall opposite busily purchasing their daily fixes. This was a daily occurrence and meant that she could not allow her two young children to play outside the front of her house until these men had completed their

"business" and left the area. As drug dealing was a hazardous and haphazard business, on some days these men could be hanging around outside for several hours.

Photograph 4 The "dealing wall"

Some time later in collaboration with the housing department the police launched a special operation to target drug dealers across the area and 15 were arrested. It was reported in the media that this operation had taken six months to plan. This raised interesting issues concerning the effectiveness of the police operation and highlighted another example of a lack of joined up thinking. Was it reasonable to allow the community to suffer the effects of such open drug dealing that continued to thrive during the six months that the operation took to plan? Was it sensible to focus exclusively on cutting off the supply of drugs when common logic dictated that addicts are unable to simply stop taking drugs and would inevitably be driven to finding other sources of supply? Would the scarcity of supply drive up the price of drugs and result in existing addicts participating in even more crime to be able to afford the new price? There was no contact with the partnership board at any stage of the operation. If this had happened it might have been possible to put in place a

programme of support to enable addicts to overcome their addiction as an alternative to committing even more crimes to afford the increased prices they now faced. The answer came within four days of the operation when it was reported that three "new faces" were seen offering drugs for sale near the shopping centre.

The inability of the police to tackle crime and disorder in the area was a major concern of residents and this had a significant effect upon the quality of life of people who lived and worked in the area. During the period of the study four public meetings were called specifically to address crime and community safety issues. The first was attended by 22 residents (15 females and 7 males) specifically to address concerns about youth annoyance, anti-social behaviour and drugs in the northern end of the estate. The second meeting was attended by 41 residents (30 females and 11 males) and was called specifically to enable residents of the adjacent area to express their concerns over youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour. 15 residents (9 females and 6 males) attended the third meeting to discuss common issues relating to crime and community safety.

A number of concerns were raised by residents at these meetings.

The problems being experienced now were the same as those experienced eight years ago:

> "We were promised a lot we have had nothing from it."

The neighbourhood watch organiser complained that his attempts to contact senior housing officials had failed and his telephone calls were never returned and numerous examples of criminal damage, youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour were cited. These included: late night noise; foul language; verbal abuse; threats of physical abuse; throwing stones at doors, windows and cars; joy riding and burning out cars; sales of drink, fireworks and cigarettes to children under age taking place from private houses and parents of the worst offenders ignoring complaints about their children misbehaving. Truancy was considered to be a contributory factor.

An appeal for more "street level information" by the police was met with expressions of real concern from those in fear of reprisals should they be seen near the police station or have their names mentioned over police radios. It was at this meeting that the local priest offered to act as a point of contact with the police:

> "If someone will be afraid to be seen near the police station, put their complaint in a sealed envelope addressed to the police and put it in my post box. I will hand it to the police."

One elderly lady, dismayed by the fact that there was much talking with little sign of positive action expressed her frustration forcefully:

> "Its no good having jaw bones, we need back bones."

Residents complained that there was no effective response when reporting incidents:

> "We saw a boy smashing windows and phoned the police. Nobody has been near us for over a week."

The issue of drugs was raised a number of times but this was in the context of the existence of dealers in the area as opposed to young people using drugs. Concern was expressed that the police were not affording sufficient priority to this issue:

> "Thursday is open day for drugs in the shops area."

> "90% of court cases are to do with driving offences, we need a change in priorities."

However, a ward councillor explained that five houses had been raided for drugs in the previous week.

A call from one resident for the police to change their attitude drew loud applause:

> "The police need to change their attitude. They want us to respect them, but we want respect too."

A suggestion by one person that the authorities had lost interest in them and the area in general and no longer bothered to respond to complaints met with wide agreement. The same person claimed that the housing department had a view that residents of the area did not deserve better service, although a ward councillor angrily rejected this.

Further evidence of frustration with the police arose when the senior police officer, in response to a complaint about motorcycle nuisance, asserted that:

> "If you give us the names we will do something about it."

This was met with a spontaneous and very loud chorus:

> "We have!"

In one meeting a threat to take the law into their own hands was made:

> "Three weeks ago I had three windows put in. We will form our own vigilantes if you do nothing about it."

In the same meeting evidence of intimidation was provided when a man stood up and pointed to two ladies seated near him and stated that:

> "These two people have been threatened that if they came down here tonight something will happen to them. This lady had her windows put in two weeks ago"

A disturbing feature of this situation was that no action was taken by either of the two police officers in attendance, even though intimidation of witnesses and acting outside of the law was supposed to have been viewed as a very serious matter by the police. One of the officers was a uniformed inspector who explained that resource constraints required the application of a priority system in deciding the response to calls for assistance and that more officers were deployed in the area than was earned according to the crime statistics. Even so, this amounted to only two officers available for the whole of the northern end of the valley. The officer also pointed out that whereas the police can respond to incidents they had no control over the underlying behaviour that resulted in criminal activity.

At the third meeting a resident summed up the situation sadly but succinctly:

> "45 years ago we were fighting to move into that street, now we are fighting to get out."

The fourth meeting was held to provide residents with an update on action taken following the earlier meetings and 31 attended (22 females and 9 males). It was explained that evidence had been gathered to take action against 3 families, which meant that a total of 5 cases were in the pipeline and 14 children had signed an "Acceptable Behaviour Contract." Further concerns were expressed about the process for obtaining Anti Social Behaviour Orders and the practice of re-housing unsuitable families in the area:

Councillor A,

> "Four weeks ago you gave these people forms [Incident Diaries] and told them to go home and spy on them."

Councillor B,

> "The best way to get a council house is to go to prison. You get 10 points straight away."

Comments from other residents included,

> "Why are you re-housing people who have been put out of their houses four or five times?"

> "We are afraid to go to bed up there now."

> "Are there normal people on the [waiting] list? Why can't we have some of these and not the rubbish we get allocated to us?"

Whilst some progress on the addressing these issues had been made, the legal processes clearly worked against swift and decisive action and placed the council officers and the police in a difficult position. As a result most people left the meeting with their expectations unmet and disillusionment further nourished. The reality of the

risks some faced was graphically illustrated by the comments of a resident who confided in the writer that:

> "When me and my husband leave for work at six in the morning we are scared stiff that the house will be broken into by the time we get home."

The council policy and procedure for allocating "undesirables" was considered by many residents to be a contributory factor to youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour. This was because the council had abandoned its former practice of vetting properly all tenants before allocating them a house and ensuring that these tenants were monitored closely afterwards to confirm compliance with the tenancy agreement. As a result a number of "tenants from hell" had been housed. The view was that these tenants neglected their property, lived in squalor and allowed their children to "run out of control." Foul language and threats of violence were the usual response when other tenants complained about the behaviour of their children. The council's procedure for tackling anti-social behaviour required tenants to complete an incident diary to log all examples over a period of two weeks before any action could be taken against the culprits. Where the complainant had been brave enough to maintain this diary a council official was then able to use this as evidence to approach the offending tenant to issue a formal warning to seek an improvement in the behaviour. In particularly serious cases the council could and did apply to the magistrates for an eviction order. This was standard procedure for the issue of Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs). However, this procedure required a considerable degree of courage on the part of residents, particularly when the police openly admitted their inability to provide them with adequate protection. Another negative aspect of this process was that the victim was invariably expected to continue to suffer the offending behaviour throughout the duration of the monitoring procedure. In the worst cases this continued until the perpetrator was eventually brought to justice, often weeks or even months later. It was hardly surprising that so few successful Anti Social Behaviour Orders had been executed in Wales.

Gender influences

In common with the fact that the majority of community activists were women, it was noticeable that more women than men turned up for public meetings and they were also more active in getting their viewpoint heard. In a meeting attended by 22 residents 15 were females. All seven males contributed a total of 11 comments. However, there were 25 contributions from nine of the females. In another meeting attended by 10 residents six were females. Only one of the four males contributed and he commented on 10 occasions. However, there were 47 contributions from all six females. The actual contribution made by women at these two meetings was more than treble that made by men and throughout the study it was apparent that females were much more likely than males to "stand up and be counted" by attending and contributing at such events.

Gender issues surfaced within a number of contexts and it was likely that the economic and social decline of the area had both a positive and a negative effect on equality of opportunities between males and females. Increased employment opportunities for females enabled them to enjoy the benefits hitherto only available to their counterparts in terms of status, independence, earning power, social interaction and camaraderie. This might well have encouraged their participation in the regeneration process. Conversely the traditional role of the male as the family breadwinner suffered a crushing blow as witnessed by the number of males finding themselves at a loose end during times when they would normally have been in work. The debilitating effect that this had upon morale and personal identity could only be speculated upon. However, it was noticeable that a macho culture existed and social interactions were characterised by a natural tendency for one party to seek to dominate the conversation, often by raising the voice and becoming over assertive to the point of aggression. Other remnants of a male dominated culture also prevailed through the use of terminology such as "workingmen's club" and the fact that women were not allowed to enter the bar or stand for election to the committee of either of the three social clubs on site. This effectively barred them from engaging in leisure activities such as darts, snooker and pool.

This study has a different focus and the issue of the effects of gender within the context of strategies to ensure social inclusion might provide fruitful grounds for further studies by other researchers.

The effects on residents' health and well being

The accumulated effect of the stresses and strains that were the personal costs of the reality of daily life had a debilitating effect on the health and well being of residents. Too many displayed the obvious signs of premature ageing. Pallid complexions, coughs and splutters, stooped frames and furrowed brows on faces etched with worry were the physical manifestation of this. The statistical representation of the state of the health and well being of residents is shown in Table 6. During the period of the study a large-scale action research project considered the state of health and well being of residents. Early findings indicated that back pain, arthritis, respiratory illness, heart disease, mental illness, hearing impairment, cancers and the effects of drugs, alcohol and substance misuse were the most prevalent illnesses. However, there was also ample evidence of an admirable and indomitable spirit driven by a determination not to be defeated by the circumstances that conspired against them. To understand the nature of this spirit and how this enables some residents to overcome the stresses and strains of daily life whilst others succumb is to understand the power and influence of soft skills as discussed in Chapter 3.

Table 6 Health and Well Being Data

	Ward A	Ward B	LA Area
1991 Townsend Index of Deprivation	9.0	4.3	N/a
1997-2001 Standardised Mortality Ratio for England and Wales (Males and Females)	"Highest"	"Lowest"	N/a
In 1999 National Statistics showed proportion of children living in households dependent upon Income Support	53.8%	43.5%	N/a
2001 Census shows proportion of residents reporting their health is "Good"	54.9%	57.4%	58.6%
2001 Census shows proportion of residents reporting their health is "Not Good"	21.6%	19.4%	18.1%
2001 Census shows proportion of residents reporting a Limiting long-term Illness	33.4%	31.0%	30.0%
In 2001 proportion of all new registrations on Local Authority Child Protection Register	22.0%	N/a	-
In 2001 proportion of households who were single parent households	29.1%	28.1%	28.9%
In August 2002 number of residents in receipt of Incapacity benefit	777	697	N/a
In August 2002 number of residents in receipt of Disability Living Allowance	823	762	N/a

Implications for this study

This chapter has enabled an understanding of what it was like to live in the community and how the stresses and strains of daily life influence residents' perceptions, beliefs and priorities. Earlier we learned how previous strategies to regenerate our most disadvantaged communities failed due to lack of co-ordination, ineffective partnership working and it proved too difficult for communities themselves to lead the process of devising local services to meet local needs. It is perhaps disappointing that such slow progress has been made in a community that has benefited from a regeneration strategy for almost 15 years. Of equal concern is the fact that the new approach to ensuring social inclusion in Wales is now dependent upon the process of programme bending, which in itself is dependent upon the successful achievement of three key objectives. That residents are empowered properly to ensure their voice is heard and acted upon in the design and delivery of essential services. That the providers of essential services become sufficiently customer focused to listen and respond to residents' needs. It is also necessary for all essential service providers to abandon their silos and work collaboratively to meet the profound needs of the residents of our most disadvantaged communities in the proverbial joined up way.

Already from this account of life in one such community we have learned how this was not happening with the police, the local authority and the school. Undoubtedly, residents' experience of seeking to "unlock the potential for self-determination" (National Assembly for Wales 2000b p.7) is both painful and negative. This serves to confirm their impotence, lowers their aspirations and expectations and weakens their resolve. There was no evidence of any co-responsibility on the part of representatives of these agencies to encourage and enable residents to become co-responsible, empowered or socially active citizens. Exhortations to residents to stand up and be counted only serve to demonstrate their ignorance of the dispositional barriers they faced and the surreal nature of their expectations of residents. This also leads to the conclusion that key service providers in the community were in fact reinforcing a dependency culture.

The bare statistics on reported crime fail to convey the traumatic effects of crime and the fear of crime on so many residents and it was understandable that the issue assumed such prominence in the minds of those unfortunate enough to experience it. The nature of anti-social behaviour and youth annoyance might not be as serious or life threatening in the way in which burglary, grievous bodily harm or attempted murder was perceived by the police. However, its effects on individual residents were akin to emasculation. Unemployment or ill-health are personal to the individual and corrode self-respect and self-image over time and in private. Anti-social behaviour and youth annoyance present a much more immediate and public and all the more humiliating challenge to a person's ability to protect themselves, their family and their property. This inability to exercise control to bring about any improvement or cessation had a significant and negative influence on the wider regeneration process. The sense of powerlessness it instilled among residents and the impact this in turn had upon their morale, motivation and disposition to engage in the process of regenerating their own community was obvious.

Maslow (1987) enables an understanding of how human beings are motivated according to what he refers to as a hierarchy of needs. In this community, it was difficult for residents to apply their mind to what Maslow would consider to be higher-level matters such as searching for work or participating in learning as a step on the way to finding employment. They struggled to cope with more basic needs and survive the very real threats to themselves, their family and their property. This also explains why aspirations were low. The cumulative effect of the negative aspects of the reality of daily life in this community indeed sapped the morale of residents. The various indices of deprivation proved that the area was deprived. Residents experienced deprivation at first hand and knew that they were deprived. Morale suffered further, hope evaporated, aspirations plummeted and technical skills as well as soft skills were underdeveloped. It was too simplistic for those who sought to attract residents to participate in this or that project, volunteering opportunity, soft entry or informal learning or job search programme to interpret a reluctance to do so as apathy. In reality too many were mentally exhausted by the stresses and strains of the daily grind of survival in a most hostile environment and this combined with a failure to influence service providers meant that disillusionment and not apathy was the real villain. Neither should we be surprised that those condemned to endure an

almost primeval quality of life, so easily fall prey to the more basic, affordable and invariably, unhealthy, pleasures of life that tended to be the only viable options available to them.

Given that all residents experienced a similar quality of life and the stresses and strains that this brought, it is logical to expect that all would suffer equal disadvantage. However, this was not the case. The 2001 census informs us that 42.7% of the residents in electoral ward A and 52.0% of those in electoral ward B were economically active and Table 4 reveals that 36.8% of residents in electoral ward A and 43.4% of those in electoral ward B had some qualifications. Therefore significant numbers managed to overcome disadvantage and avoided unemployment, were economically active and achieved qualifications and skills. From what we have learned about soft skills it is reasonable to conclude that those who did manage to overcome these disadvantages had managed to develop appropriate cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. There is of course another logical explanation. People in the lower socio-economic categories might be genetically or intellectually inferior to those in the higher groups. The notoriety associated with the earliest interpretation of the Bell Curve and advances in our understanding of how people think, learn and behave enable us to understand that this logic is as misguided as it is offensive.

The high level of economic inactivity meant that significant numbers of residents had not worked for many years. A substantial number had not worked for such a long time that their children had been brought up in households where no adult member of the family was in work and third generation unemployment was commonplace. This resulted in whole families genuinely believing that there was no prospect of them ever securing suitable employment and this created a cycle of deprivation among large numbers of families: no job → no prospects → negative aspirations → low levels of educational qualifications → low or no skills development → no qualifications or skills → no job. This cycle of deprivation was reinforced by regular and tangible evidence that work was beyond their reach, this in turn was due to a lack qualifications or skills and a lack of disposition to engage in learning to equip themselves with the skills to enable them to become employable.

This also confirms the scale and nature of the challenges faced by community regenerators as they come to terms with enabling residents to become co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizens. It also reinforces the requirement that they understand soft skills and are effective in enabling residents to acquire them so that they are able to develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to learn their way out of social exclusion.

The next chapter explores how this cycle of deprivation influences the perceptions, aspirations and expectations of residents in relation to learning, employment and the regeneration process.

Chapter 7

Community regeneration: Residents' perceptions, aspirations and expectations

The previous chapter described the community, what it was like to live there and how the experience of day-to day life shaped residents' beliefs, values and behaviour. This chapter explores how residents felt about their community, their neighbours and themselves. What they think needs to happen to regenerate their community? What prevents them or their neighbours from engaging in the process or from becoming socially as well as economically active citizens? What learning means to them? What they know about skills? What skill means to them? What encourage them to look for work? What prevents them from finding work? Data was gathered from three different sources: an analysis of community consultations, participant observation and informal as well as semi-structured interviews.

Community consultations

In common with participation in learning, disposition and motivation to participate in community consultations was low. Furthermore, learning or employment hardly featured in residents' thinking as expressed through these consultations.

Community consultations were the standard method of obtaining views and ideas from residents and were organised to attract as many people as possible to attend. Nine were held between June 2001 and June 2003 where the views and ideas of 1082 residents were recorded although it should be noted that some residents participated in more than one event. Despite the fact that a number of innovative methods were used to encourage more residents to participate in these events, the level of participation from a population of more than 10,000 people was low. Interestingly, in the same way that reluctant learners needed to be encouraged to participate in learning through the use of incentives, residents had to be lured to attend consultations. A variety of innovative devices were employed to encourage participation. One consultation was held to coincide with the issue of free energy saving electrical appliances (152

residents participated in this event). The cinema club was used to obtain the views and ideas of children (80 young people aged between four and 18 years of age participated). A bus was hired to tour the area parking at a number of focal points (522 residents participated). A social evening was held in the working-men's club (122 residents participated) and on another occasion Santa's Grotto was used (60 adult residents participated).

When the reasons for such low levels of participation were explored with community leaders, "apathy" and "consultation fatigue" were put forward as the most likely explanations. So many residents had become disillusioned from being invited to put forward their views and ideas on numerous occasions only to find that no effective action was taken to implement them. Reasons for failing to do so were never explained resulting in a widely held view that they were unable to influence the powers-that-be because these people were not interested in their views. This sense of disillusionment and powerlessness to influence events that affected their lives was a recurring theme throughout the study. The issue of the apparent apathy of residents was raised by a number of people from within the community and by personnel of various agencies delivering services there. However, one explanation for the low numbers of residents actively engaged in the regeneration process was undoubtedly the stresses and strains of the reality of daily life in the community as described in the previous chapter. Another was their reluctance to engage in any form of activity that might require levels of literacy, numeracy or self-expression that they perceived as beyond their capabilities or involved exposure to learning or training for the same reason.

The Community Vision Framework for the Communities First programme (Welsh Assembly Government. 2002d) consists of six key themes and these were used to produce an analysis of the nine community consultation exercises. This is contained in Table 7.

Table 7 Analysis of issues raised by 1082 residents in 9 community consultations

Theme	Number of issues raised by participants
Jobs and Business	6
Education and Training	6
Environment	66
Health and Well Being	11
Active Community	72
Crime and Community Safety	54
Total	215

The most obvious point arising from this analysis is just how little issues in relation to "Jobs and Business" or "Education and Training" featured in residents' thinking.

The six issues in connection with jobs and business were raised in only three of the nine consultations:

In one event 80 young people aged between 4 and 18 were asked to express a wish for ten years time, two comments were received:

> "To have a good job with good hours and good pay."
>
> "To be a disability teacher in a school for children with disabilities or special needs."

In another event one person listed, "Jobs" in response to a request for ideas to improve the quality of life of residents.

Three issues were suggested as priorities for action in the other event:

> "The employment of a community careers officer to get to know teenagers,"
>
> "More jobs"
>
> "Employment training opportunities for all."

The six issues in relation to education and training were also raised in only three of the consultations. In one event three priorities were suggested:

> "After school clubs."

"Better after-school provision/drop in centre."

"More classes in the residents' centre."

In another consultation "Good schools" was listed by one resident as being among the best things about living in the area. One request for action was received from each of two residents in the third event:

"More projects and training for the youth"

"Community educational schemes."

It was hardly surprising that concerns about the environment as well as crime and community safety featured highly in all consultations.

An additional consultation organised by local councillors to obtain ideas for spending an allocation of £32,000 from the Landfill Tax resulted in the funding being allocated to a range of community activities. None of these related to capacity building, learning, employability or economic activity. Although £5,000 was awarded to provide a sensory room for disabled children attending the local nursery. Further evidence of the lack of priority afforded to issues related to learning or economic activity was later demonstrated at the inaugural consultation meeting with the three councillors representing electoral Ward B on its inclusion in the Communities First programme. Their three priorities for action included:

"Apathy is the biggest enemy, you won't get people to join committees" (Councillor A).

"My biggest problem is dogs mess, this is what I get the most complaints about" (Councillor B).

"Sort the playing field out" (Councillor C).

There was no mention of learning, training, jobs, unemployment or economic activity at this meeting.

The Communities First programme is also expected to help those who live in disadvantaged communities to re-engage with democracy. The number of residents who participate in the democratic process provides an objective measure of active citizenship and information obtained from the election held nearest the study indicated a community disenchanted with local democracy. See Table 8. Of course it is possible that residents were empowered sufficiently to choose not to vote. However, the consensus of opinion was that there is no point in voting as this will not bring about any change in their quality of life.

Table 8 The proportion of the electorate that voted in the election for the 2003 Welsh Assembly Government

	% Of population who voted in 2003 Welsh Assembly Government Election
Electoral ward A	25
Electoral ward B	31
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney Constituency	32
Wales	38

Participant Observation

How far was the community empowered?

A central question concerning empowerment was the issue of who actually led the regeneration process? This depended heavily on a number of factors. Foremost among these was the personal effectiveness of community leaders. This in turn depended upon how well they were equipped with the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes they needed to enable them to take ownership of the process. In reality the odds were loaded heavily against them. Not only were the diverse and complex causes, effects and possible solutions to social exclusion taxing the minds of economists, sociologists, criminologists, educationalists, health experts and community regenerators alike. Residents never found themselves playing on a level playing field. The nature and scale of the challenges facing contemporary community regenerators places enormous demands on community leaders and that in order to be effective, a wide range of leadership skills are required and these include:

> "... ability to shape and implement a vision and build a coalition of stakeholders willing to go the distance ... inspire and motivate colleagues as

> well as partners in the wider community, analyse complex and conflicting information and not get distracted by the detail of day-to-day events" Downer (2003 p.16).

Community leaders were responsible for achieving four demanding objectives. Ensuring that the needs of their community were identified properly. Obtaining ideas for meeting these needs from fellow residents. Articulating these needs and ideas for improvement to the relevant organisations. Persuading these organisations to incorporate these ideas for improvement into the services they provided in the community. This meant that community leaders did indeed require a formidable portfolio of skills to fulfil this demanding role effectively.

Community leaders attended a wide range of meetings. Deficiencies in leadership skills manifested themselves in a number of obvious ways. There was a reluctance to think strategically, objectively or to see the bigger picture, which caused people to think and act at a very low level. Some found difficulty in planning ahead, anticipating problems and seeing things in perspective. Too many found it difficult to rise above petty squabbling, remain calm and act dispassionately in discussions. This usually led to explosions of anger in the face of opposition or failure to get their own way. This also left individuals open to manipulation and rendered them vulnerable to the more calculating and unscrupulous service providers who simply outmanoeuvred "the community." Examples of inappropriate behaviour occurred with monotonous regularity and was particularly debilitating. It occupied too much staff time, diverted them away from the main task of regenerating the area and created personal animosity and perpetuated a state of tribalism between the three main estates. This also militated against effective external networking and partnership working as staff of the statutory agencies had neither the time nor the inclination to put up with what they interpreted as petty squabbling and indecision. Much of this counter-productive activity could have been avoided had they developed the necessary cognitive, conative or interpersonal skills to enable them to achieve their objectives.

It should be noted that this is not a reflection on the intellectual ability of community leaders or any lack of dedication and commitment to their community. Beck (1999) helps us to understand the cognitive basis of anger and this is most helpful in understanding the processes at work and how such deficiencies might be overcome.

These behaviours originated from the personal backgrounds and employment experiences of community leaders. Almost all were of retirement age with little or no previous management experience. Although most had experience of committee work in various settings there was a general lack of confidence and reluctance to participate in learning to enhance leadership and management skills. This lack of confidence also manifested itself in a tendency to avoid active participation in open meetings and a reluctance to take up positions of responsibility or to represent their own neighbourhood in wider networks. Without exception all reported a negative prior experience of learning within the education system. All dedicated considerable time and effort to the work they did for their community on a purely voluntary basis. None were in the best of health. Two typical examples and a short case study illustrate these shortcomings and the negative effect on the regeneration process.

In a public meeting called to explain plans for the reorganisation of hospital services it was revealed that an acute mental health unit would be built on site and that this could be located quite close to some homes. A number of residents raised valid concerns but there was no attempt to establish a common front and they began arguing at cross-purposes with each other, sometimes quite angrily and aggressively. This allowed the hospital representatives to close the discussion down and they escaped quite lightly as no really probing questions were presented to them. However, the outburst of anger did have some effect as the hospital administrators subsequently decided to hold a much wider public consultation.

In another public meeting called to discuss youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour a community leader was seeking to express concern at shortcomings in policing but unfortunately became quite abusive allowing the police officer in attendance to close down the discussion and the point was simply lost.

The community joined forces with the local school to develop a substantial proposal for a range of sports facilities to be jointly managed by the school and the community. What should have been cause for celebration was dogged by misinformation, suspicion and ill-feeling throughout. Problems arose due mainly to the fact that the funding organisation required two separate bids that were originally being developed independently by the school and the community to be combined into a joint project.

Tensions arose almost immediately due to differences in cultural approaches to constructing the new bid. The community regeneration culture was steeped in community consultation and the "bottom-up" planning process founded upon "consensus." However, the head-teacher was more familiar with an autocratic and "top-down" management planning process founded on hierarchical status.

The resultant disharmony was made worse by the fact that the head-teacher was impatient for progress and accustomed to conducting discussions and negotiations at "management level." Community representatives lacked the self-confidence, assertiveness and general "*gravitas*" to hold their own in these joint planning meetings. This became an ongoing and debilitating saga where meetings that should have been used for open and transparent problem solving were perceived as fruitful by the school, as there was no apparent dissent with agreed courses of action. However, these were usually followed the next day by telephone calls or visits to the office from community representatives voicing dissent with the conduct of the meetings. Some of these concerns were quite petty and invariably arose from misunderstanding, misinformation, mistrust or a combination of all three. On one occasion a special meeting had to be called with a council official simply to placate two community leaders who were convinced that the school was seeking to deny community access to facilities. This was despite the fact that they knew that a safeguard would be in place that would prevent this happening through a user agreement requiring the written consent of all parties concerned.

An unfortunate outcome of this behaviour was that the credibility of community groups suffered because the "professionals" who sought to do business with them failed to understand or appreciate these cultural differences. This clearly has consequences for aspirations to empower residents to effect programme bending as unless and until these inappropriate behaviours are eradicated their views and needs will continue to be ignored. This proved to be the case in subsequent dealings between the community and the school.

There was considerable scope for the school to become a genuine and successful community focused school but this did not materialise. Community leaders lacked the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to hold their own in this partnership and

the head-teacher was reluctant to treat community leaders as equal partners. This caused considerable offence to leaders of the three residents' associations when plans to launch the community focused school were announced. The head-teacher decided to establish a company limited by guarantee in order to maximise the potential for income generation and to safeguard the school from financial risk. Three community representatives were invited to become non-executive directors of the management board of the company. However, when these representatives realised that they would have no voting rights and therefore, no direct influence in managing the company, they were deeply offended and refused to accept what they perceived as tokenism. One community leader's summed up their feelings:

> "In the community's eyes we would be seen as being taken for a ride. I can hear them now saying, "look at those monkeys thinking that they are important, when they have no authority at all." The school could decide to ignore our views and we would have no power to do anything about it."

Observing the group dynamics of public meetings raised interesting issues concerning empowerment. The way in which these meetings were organised and the respective roles and behaviour of those who organised and facilitated them influenced significantly the extent and quality of input from residents. The physical layout of the room always consisted of a "top table" where the local councillors and the representatives of the relevant agencies sat facing the audience. Whereas this arrangement appeared to be acceptable to residents, there was never any doubt where the power lay and who was in control of the meeting. The behaviour of the chairperson and some of those on the top table holding "power over" affected whether and how residents contribute views and ideas. A "macho culture" prevailed and local councillors, council officials and some community leaders invariably set the scene by seeking to dominate proceedings. There was very little evidence of common courtesy, encouragement, open-mindedness or of active listening skills being employed. It was quite common for local councillors and agency representatives to spring to the defence of their respective organisations and interrupt speakers by shouting them down when they attempted to complain or provide examples of poor service. It was not unusual for these ill-tempered exchanges to degenerate into shouting matches with some personal abuse thrown in for good measure from both sides. The norm became for those on the "top table" to seek to dominate proceedings, prove people wrong and

generally shout them into submission. Only the most confident, robust, thick-skinned, self-reliant and resilient of residents were able to withstand the heat in these kitchens. It was hardly surprising that complaints that "they just won't listen" were frequently heard. Given the sort of treatment handed out to the residents who attended these public meetings we should not be surprised that residents from this community did not appear to value public meetings or public consultations as a means of enlightenment or expression. This clearly had a negative effect on attendance as people gave up when they perceived that their views were ignored.

Several other examples of tokenism and manipulation of residents by a wide range of agencies were observed. Whilst publicly acknowledging the need to empower residents, there was a repeated failure to capitalise upon opportunities to transfer power to them. Not only did this inhibit individual residents from developing appropriate skills and attitudes, this simply reinforced their sense of disillusionment and powerlessness. This had a most negative effect on enabling residents to develop the underpinning soft skills as disposition and motivation became overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and lack of confidence. There was no evidence that those sitting at the top table appreciated their role in enabling residents to: accept responsibility for their own destiny (locus of control); develop the belief that they could control events that affect their lives (self-efficacy); set and pursue ambitious goals (intrinsic motivation) or overcome setbacks and stay on track (resilience).

Disposition and motivation to learn

Attempts to engage community leaders in capacity building proved problematic. This was despite the fact that the learning opportunities were usually held in the community and tailored to meet their personal circumstances. This was done to remove any situational or institutional barriers. A typical example concerned a personal development programme arranged to accommodate the domestic circumstances of all participants and was made available free of charge in a convenient location on site. This programme was specifically designed to enable community leaders to cope with the stresses and strains of their community duties and to enhance leadership skills and included one-to-one mentoring and support. Despite

the fact that all were actively involved in the design and planning of the programme and at least 15 agreed to participate, only two attended for the first of eight weekly sessions. It proved impossible to encourage more than three to attend. The cost to the community development trust was over £1200. The reasons for non-attendance were most revealing. A small group of intended participants had taken it upon themselves to actively dissuade fellow residents from attending, ostensibly because they did not see any value in it. This was despite the fact that the detractors were fully supportive in the meetings held to agree the content and method of delivery of the programme. It is difficult to explain this behaviour. Discussions with various individuals indicated that there were a number of other reasons for not wishing to participate. One was adamant that it was not so much a case of not "needing" training and more of not "wanting" to attend from choice, adding that:

> "I don't need training to help me to work out that I am being shafted by the school and the council."

This person also considered that she was too old to learn and although she had attended training courses in the past only some had proved useful to her, although she had learned:

> "How to attend meetings and how to hold meetings."

She also explained that she had attended a confidence building course in the past and this had helped her to understand that:

> "I know that I am a straight person and I speak my mind. I know that I get uptight and angry about things, but that's the way I am."

She readily agreed that some of her behaviours were counter productive in her role as a community leader and the personal development programme would help with these issues. Her logic in deciding not to attend any further training was that, she knew what she wanted, was not afraid to speak her mind and was now too old to change. Another explained that he was under a lot of pressure and was finding it difficult to cope with the amount of time being spent on community business. Another explained that she was under considerable pressure from the wider community who were always

complaining about not enough being done for the area. However, it was clear that some of this was self-inflicted as the individual was unaware that she often made comments or promises that rendered her a permanent hostage to fortune. It is worth repeating that all concerned knew that the programme was specifically designed to help them cope with all of these issues. All participated in the design and planning of the programme. All agreed the content, format, times and location for the programme. All had confirmed their attendance when spoken to individually a day or so before the programme was due to start. The most likely explanation for this reluctance to participate is that some lacked the belief that they could cope with the content of the programme and also feared losing face with their colleagues if they were seen to fail.

Further evidence of reluctance on the part of community leaders to participate in learning arose following an independent review of the training needs of all of the partnership boards in the local authority area. A wide range of personal development as well as technical skills training was made available to every member of the local partnership board. No one from this community took advantage of any of the opportunities offered.

A general discussion with another group of three male and four female community leaders provided further insight into the issues involved. When invited to comment upon the issues preventing them from participating in learning, dispositional barriers were graphically described:

> "I'd panic if I couldn't do it" (Female aged 40+).

> "I went on a women's returners course once. They offered tasters of things, but they didn't tell you about the full courses. There was a shed load of stuff they didn't tell us about on the taster" (Female aged mid thirties).

> "We need more people we know running these courses. People like A [local female community worker] and B [local female community worker]. We know them, they know us" (Female 40+).

There is no doubt that the most powerful barriers preventing community leaders from participating in learning were dispositional.

Perceptions of personal learning needs, skills and relevance to employment

When these seven community leaders were invited to think about their own training needs the following ideas were put forward: "Committee Skills; First Aid; Health and Hygiene and training that qualified people to work with children." The group explained that all of these courses would help them to do more for the community, particularly in organising activities for children. It is significant that it was common practice for this type of functional training to be offered to residents who became involved in volunteering of any kind. It was "off the shelf," quick and easy to deliver, inexpensive and readily available through a network voluntary sector oriented training providers.

When asked if they considered that these courses would be useful in helping them to get a job, there was a genuinely bemused silence and it was obvious that progression of this kind simply did not feature in their thinking.

An invitation to list the skills they already possessed was followed by another long pause and no ideas were suggested. When prompted to think about everyday coping skills such as running the house or bringing up children, there was general recognition that this did require considerable "experience" but this was not considered to involve skills as such. When asked what the term "skill" meant to them, there were more references to committee skills and working with children. However, this was not associated with formal learning, training or employment.

Prompts to establish understanding of soft skills elicited the following responses:

> "I went on a STEPS course, twice, and that was to do with that sort of thing" (Female aged around mid thirties).

When asked what she learned from this course:

> "Not to put myself down. I can do any job if they trained me how to do it."

[The STEPS course is a personal development course designed by The Pacific Institute Company, Seattle, USA].

After explaining that the employment situation in the area had improved and people on benefits could now receive in-work benefits to top up earnings, the discussion focused on prospects of finding a job. This met with an immediate retort about the "benefits office" owing arrears to one person already and another explained that the Jobcentre had done nothing for her:

> "She tried to get me to take a part-time job taking home £68 per week. Even after they made it up to £100, I still had to find my own transport and meals. I would only have been £15 per week better off. I can earn that on top of my benefits now" (Female aged mid thirties).

When the issue of using the experience and skills that they had gained from their community work to help move on to employment was raised, one commented:

> "It doesn't pay you to work, you get more on social" (Male aged 50+)

The interviews with 21 residents, a similar pattern emerged

Aspirations were modest and matched by low expectations. Six people reported that "nothing" was holding them back from achieving personal goals. However, soft skills featured prominently. Four mentioned a lack of confidence, one referred to "peer group pressure" and another cited "lack of motivation." Issues relating to education and training featured three times and unemployment only once.

Comments included:

> "There is nothing holding me back. I just need to find the right job" (Male New Deal participant aged 23).

> "At the moment, nothing. If I want something, I go get it. It was different a few years ago, then it would have been the kids" (Female volunteer aged 36 who was in part-time employment).

> "Fear. I am a bit nervous. I need a push, that is the way I am. I find it difficult to mix [with people] but I am getting better now" (Female volunteer aged 27 who was in part-time employment).

"I did not do very well in school. I can write but not good enough. I hold myself back" (Female volunteer aged 28).

"The fact that I have not got a driving licence or the right skills" (Male New Deal participant aged 23.

Perceptions of the regeneration process

Ideas on the issues that needing to be addressed in order to regenerate the area and improve their quality of life were dominated by crime, youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour:

"Down here it's crime, nowhere to go, drinking, drugs and pinching cars" (Female volunteer aged 32).

"Drugs, I mean the dealers and not the people who take drugs ...Young people need more to do, youth annoyance is a big issue" (Female volunteer aged 47).

"Pinching cars. The same gang is doing this from ten o'clock at night until three in the morning, up and down the street, spinning around, smashing the fence on the playing field" (Female volunteer aged 28).

An analysis of residents' views on the issues requiring action to regenerate the area is shown in Fig: 8. Unemployment was not mentioned at all and only one person referred to education:

"Education is one thing. Half the kids around here don't go to school. Also there is a lot of crime and drugs" (Female volunteer aged 27).

In addition to providing strong evidence that neither learning nor employment were part of the value system of a significant number of residents, this also indicated that resident led regeneration produces different priorities for action than those envisaged by the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First programme. This is cause for concern as it highlights the inherent weaknesses in the "bottom up" process and suggests that resident led regeneration might lead to disagreement over funding priorities and further disillusionment.

Fig: 8 Residents' perceptions of the most significant issues that needed to be addressed to regenerate the area

Issue	Number of times mentioned by:		
	Males	Females	Total
What are the biggest problems that need to be tackled to regenerate the community/improve quality of life of residents?			
Drugs	4	6	10
Youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour	2	4	6
Car theft/joy riding	1	4	5
Crime		2	2
Alcohol abuse		2	2
Lack of education/disaffection with learning		1	1
Culture	1		1
Lack of suitable accommodation	1		1
Empty properties/appearance of the area		1	1
Other reasons	1	4	5
No view	1	1	2

Some reported more than one issue

Perceptions of skills, learning, disposition to learn and their relevance to employment

It should be noted that as all of the residents interviewed were engaged in either volunteering or as participants on a New Deal programme and therefore, they were likely to be already interested and motivated to participate in the learning activities in which they were already engaged. Whilst almost all thought that it was important to have the right skills, there was a general lack of understanding of what skills were with fifteen people being unable to offer a satisfactory explanation. The three most comprehensive explanations were:

> "Being able to do the job ... if you work with computers you need to be able to type and if you are a receptionist, you need to be polite and welcoming" (Female volunteer aged 33).

> "Trained to know how to do certain jobs, like carpentry, plumbing, looking after children" (Female volunteer aged 36).

> "Not just something you have certificates for, it is about the experiences you have had. To work you need basic skills, communicating skills, getting on with work mates" (Female volunteer aged 47).

It was disturbing to find that 12 people had never heard of the term "lifelong learning" and whereas six of the others had heard of this, they could not explain what it meant.

Despite this, 17 thought that it was important to be able to learn new skills. There was strong support for the idea that being able to learn new skills and attitudes was important and that people in work should be prepared to upgrade their skills throughout their working life. This was reflected in the fact that 15 were likely to participate in future learning.

Views on whether people should be prepared to upgrade their skills throughout working life included:

> "Everybody should, even if they have been there for some time. Things change all the time, years ago there were no computers, now they are needed all the time" (Female volunteer aged 35).

> "A few years ago there were no computers, but look at it now the world is changing fast" (Female volunteer aged 36).

> "To be able to cope with change you have got to be motivated to get on with your life, to get out of a rut" (Female volunteer aged 33).

Only two people held dissenting views:

> "If they are happy in what they are doing, no. When I worked in a factory they wanted me to go higher but I was not ready, not comfortable about this. I just left, they pushed me too hard" (Female volunteer aged 27).

> "Just do the job you have been told to do and not have to learn for anything else" (Male New Deal participant aged 18).

Comments on the importance of being able to learn new skills included:

> "Life is boring if you are doing the same thing all the time. There are more opportunities if you learn new things" (Female volunteer aged 36).

> "It is important and it gives the person chance to broaden their horizons, for example to change from shop work to something else" (Female volunteer aged 33).

> "It is important and you should be encouraged to train so that you can progress to better jobs, better pay and so on" (Male volunteer aged 58).

"Better qualifications get better jobs" (Male New Deal participant aged 19).

Barriers to learning

Perceptions of the reasons preventing people from the area from participating in learning or training are summarised in Fig: 9.

Fig: 9 Factors that prevent residents from participating in learning

Issue **What do you think stops people from taking up learning or training?**	**Number of times mentioned by:**		
	Males	Females	Total
Lack of confidence	5	8	13
Apathy (They just don't bother)	2	2	4
Too lazy	2	1	3
Can't get up in the morning	2		2
Lack of childcare		2	2
Lack of transport	2		2
Difficulty in reading/writing		2	2
Family problems	1		1
Lack of time		1	1
Frightened of change		1	1
Fear of losing benefits		1	1
Cost		1	1
Don't know		2	2

Some reported more than one issue

It will be seen that soft skills featured prominently. There was also evidence of bitterness and some antipathy towards their fellow residents. Ideas on what prevented residents from participating in learning included:

> "Frightened, fear of the unknown. When you are young you liked challenge, as you get older you start to think, "will I fit in? Can I do it?" (Female volunteer aged 35).

> "Frightened of learning new things" (female volunteer aged 27).

> "They think that they cannot do it. They need their confidence built up. I was like that, no confidence" (Female volunteer aged 47).

> "Some people cannot read and write and they cannot get anywhere, they have not got the confidence" (Female volunteer aged 47).

"People are afraid really, afraid that they could be overwhelmed by whoever is taking the course" (Male volunteer aged 58).

"Personal issues, family problems, kids and that. No confidence, no transport. If more training was on site more would come forward" (Male New Deal participant aged 22.

Similar views were expressed on the barriers that prevented their fellow residents from participating in volunteering:

"Most cannot be bothered to get involved. We cannot even get them to pick their kids up after dark, they rely too much on us" (female volunteer aged 36).

"A lot have not got time. Some cannot be bothered as long as their kids are out of the way. Some have kids they cannot take – no childcare" (Female volunteer aged 31).

"I do not think that people want to commit their time. It is very time consuming, you have to go to meetings. It is also very demanding, people are quick enough to scream at you, but they cannot be bothered themselves. They would rather let someone else do it for them" (Female volunteer aged 47).

"It takes a certain type of person to do it. The general opinion of locals is that what they do, they do only for themselves. They join for self-interest and this stops others getting involved. Others are just not interested. No residents turn up to open meetings only members of the board" (Male volunteer aged 58).

Perceptions of unemployment and employment

A summary of views on unemployment and employment related issues is shown in Fig: 10. Interestingly when invited to suggest the priorities that needed to be addressed in order to regenerate the area, none considered that unemployment was the most significant problem. However, being better off in work and improving their quality of life were uppermost in residents' minds in considering what was important in encouraging people from the area to think about taking up employment:

"I did not want to live on Social for the rest of my life. My kids were growing up, I did not want to vegetate, I wanted to meet new people and have a different social life" (Female volunteer aged 36, employed part-time).

"Money, boredom at home all the time. At least I would be getting paid. Volunteering does not put food on the table does it?" (Female volunteer aged 47, employed full-time).

"To keep me off the streets, to earn myself good money, to have money in my pocket, I know I won't get into trouble then" (Female New Deal participant aged 20).

"One, bored around the house. Two, money. Three, most of my friends are now working, it's better for me as well" (Male New Deal participant aged 21).

"Comes back to salaries, but they are not very high are they?" (Male volunteer aged 58, incapacity benefit).

Interestingly when pressed to ascertain what he knew about the level of salaries on offer, he stated that he had:

"Not seen anything lately, but used to look at the cards in the jobcentre a few years ago."

This provides further support for McGivney's (1990) findings concerning the reliability of data relating to situational barriers. She reports how people sometimes put forward a practical reason for not taking a course of action, such as lack of value to them, to avoid the stigma they associate with an inability to cope with what is being offered to them.

Perceptions of the barriers that prevented people from the area from taking up employment were also explored:

"Salary is not high enough and as soon as you come off benefits you have to pay rent and so on and you are not really better off" (Male volunteer aged 58).

"There are not enough jobs, but there again it's an easy life. Some can't work, some don't want to. It's an easy life, go where they want, when they want" (Female volunteer aged 31).

"Some are just too lazy to get off their backsides and find work. Half the people up here are like that. Some just sit in the house watching the telly" (Female volunteer aged 28).

"You get more for sitting on your backside doing nothing" (Male New Deal participant aged 22).

"No qualifications, hours of work, missing out on being with friends because you are in work [and they are unemployed]" (Male New Deal participant aged 21).

Evidence of how the nature of employment or the benefits system inhibits economic activity emerged through perceptions of what discouraged residents from thinking about taking up employment:

"My eyesight, my age and low wages" (Male volunteer aged 58).

"The last job was rubbish, £84 a fortnight. I was better off on the dole" (Female New Deal participant aged 20).

"They lay you off too quick. Boring work, poor conditions. I have worked 12 hour shifts for £50 a shift standing up all the time, packing CDs into cases" (Male New Deal participant aged 19).

"Ill health. Benefits, the loss of benefits" (Female volunteer aged 47).

Interestingly, when asked if she knew how her benefits would be affected if she found a job she replied "No, would I be able to pay the bills?"

Clearly issues to do with the poverty trap featured prominently and this was compounded by negative experiences or perceptions of both the type of work and the main terms and conditions thought to be available. Other situational barriers such as disability, ill health, lack of transport and lack of childcare also featured prominently. It should be noted that the perception that some were too lazy or did not want work was a subjective judgment and was not substantiated by any objective evidence from any of the four respondents.

Some time later evidence of how the stresses and strains of daily life influence disposition to take up employment was provided by the explanation of two community activists who decided against applying for secure and well paid jobs considered to be well within their reach:

"My husband has been out of work for some time and he gets agitated if I enjoy myself too much."

"I have a lot of worry at the moment and I don't think that I could cope with something like this, not now anyway."

Fig: 10 Residents' perceptions of barriers to employment

Issue	Number of times mentioned by:		
What do you think is stopping people this area from getting jobs?	Males	Females	Total
Low pay	2	6	8
Benefits/wages (Poverty trap)	3	5	8
Laziness/don't want work	1	3	4
Childcare (Lack of)	1	2	3
Lack of skills	1		1
No Qualifications	1		1
No experience		1	1
Hours of work (Unsocial)	1		1
Drugs		1	1
Criminal records (People with)		1	1
Transport (Lack of)		1	1
Benefit rules (On part time working)		1	1
Type of work available		1	1
Asylum seekers	1		1
Other reasons		2	2
What are the things that discourage(d) you from thinking about taking up employment?			
Low wages	4	2	6
Disability/health problems	1	2	3
Transport (Lack of)	3		3
Hours of work unsuitable		3	3
Personal issues	1	2	3
Not discouraged at all	2	1	3
Childcare (Lack of)		2	2
Not wishing to leave child (Considers her child is too young)		1	1
Factory work	1		1
Boring work	1		1
Poor terms and conditions	1		1
Shift work	1		1
Attending interviews	1		1
Low confidence		1	1
Fear of leaving benefits/ Benefit rules (Concerning part-time work)		2	2
Too interested in voluntary work		1	1
Don't know		1	1

Some reported more than one issue

Views were sought on how their participation in volunteering had helped in four important aspects of employability: knowledge of the local labour market; improved prospects of finding employment; understanding of employers recruitment needs and

support available for job-search. Most did not consider that their involvement with the project had raised awareness of the local employment situation at all:

> "It has never been anything at all to do with jobs" (Male aged 58).

> "We chat about ongoing things but not about jobs" (Female aged 31).

One positive comment was received:

> "It has helped. Getting into practice, you see more people, you do here what you would do in a job. The girls talk about the jobs that they are applying for" (Female aged 27).

Similarly, most did not think that their involvement in volunteering had helped to improve prospects of finding employment for example one resident was adamant that this was not how she saw voluntary work as this was her way of:

> "Doing what I want for the community" (Female aged 31).

Another was equally unequivocal:

> "None at all it is not designed that way" (Male aged 58.)

More positive comments included:

> "Given me the confidence and the will to get back out there" (Female aged 35).

> "If you want to work with children it really helps you to get on with children and to understand their needs" (Female aged 32).

> "Making me more confident, it brings me out of myself and I learn about what jobs other girls are applying for" (Female aged 27).

> "It did help. I was more used to dealing with people. Dealing with different people, angry residents, it helped me to keep calm, how to solve their problems, who to refer them to etc." (Female aged 47).

As far as helping participants to understand employers' recruitment needs was concerned, again the majority of volunteers did not see how it had helped. More positive comments included:

> "Be more flexible in working hours. Give me a challenge and I will do it" (Female aged 31).
>
> "You have got to want to work, show that you are keen" (Female aged 32).
>
> "Making the effort. Putting yourself over well. You need talking skills and to express yourself well. Confidence to do these things, even if you cannot talk because you are shy, do not let it stop you" (Female aged 47).

Two resident suggested that their involvement in volunteering was useful in providing a reference. Another mentioned how help was available on a previous occasion when she was able to obtain information on completing application forms from a community advice worker. However, most volunteers did not know of any support available through the project to help them find work.

As far as soft skills were concerned, volunteering was clearly benefiting from their involvement in the various projects. When invited to comment on the range of skills gained from their participation it became obvious that a considerable amount and range of learning was taking place. Only four thought that they had not learned any new skills and all of the others found the experience useful or very useful. Comments on skills developed through involvement with community projects included:

> "Patience, understanding, coping with pressure, organising trips to watch my son play rugby on Saturdays and helping with organising some match day activities at the club" (Female aged 33).
>
> "Patience and how to get on with children" (Female aged 32).
>
> "Gained confidence knowing that I am helping people through what I have been through myself" (Female aged 47).
>
> "Confidence is the most in that I will sit in a meeting now and not be afraid to speak. Something I would have not done years ago" (Male aged 58).

When invited to explain how their participation in the various projects had helped them to learn new skills, whereas four volunteers did not think that their participation had helped at all, capacity building clearly was taking place. Almost all of the examples provided were to do with soft skills:

> "I would never have done computers or signing [sign language] [had I not been involved in the project]" (Female aged 36).

> "I already had the skills but the project has brought them back to life. You can still do it and it has given me that push, reminded me what I can do" (Female aged 35).

> "It has given me more confidence to learn, to meet new people. Meeting people makes you speak to others. I did not used to go anywhere, now I meet new people" (Female aged 27).

> "It brought me out of myself, made me realise that you can do it if you push yourself" (Female aged 47).

Only one person reported that she had not found the experience of volunteering useful and this was because she already considered herself to be a self-reliant and competent person.

A most significant point emerged when considering the relevance of the training received with the skills that volunteers themselves thought were necessary to operate as volunteers. All of the skills they listed are soft skills:

> "Patience and the right attitude, to want to help and getting on with people" (Female aged 33).

> "You have got to have patience. Not to come in here with the wrong attitude. Some children run around, you need to talk to them in the right tone of voice and not to scream and shout at them. You speak to children tidy and children will appreciate it more" (Female aged 32).

> "Communication skills have got to be top of the list. Listening skills. Those are the main ones" (Female aged 47).

> "Able to converse with the public, encourage them to get involved and have the confidence to speak to anyone" (Male aged 58).

The very real pressures faced by community activists also surfaced:

> "You have got to be able to bite your tongue, people are nagging all the time, we are getting it all the time, it gets me down" (Female aged 31).

Disposition towards self-employment

None of the 21 people interviewed was prepared to consider self-employment, although one had thought seriously about this but was put off when she started a course at the local college. She had intended to start her own childcare facility but when she found out what was involved she decided against this. The reasons put forward for not considering self-employment are summarised in Fig: 11.

Explanations put forward for not taking up self-employment included:

> "You need money again don't you?" (Female aged 31).
>
> "You need better qualifications to do this" (Male aged 23)
>
> "You need a trade and experience behind you" (male aged 21).
>
> "It's for the people who have got the self-belief anyway" (Female aged 47).
>
> "Not with young kids" (Female aged 36).

Fig: 11 Reasons for not taking up self-employment

Issue	Number of times mentioned by:		
	Males	Females	Total
What do you think about starting your own job through becoming self-employed?			
Not interested:	8	13	21
This is not the sort of thing I would/could do		5	5
Need capital to do this	3	3	6
No qualifications	1	1	2
Need a trade to do this	2	1	3
Need experience to do this	1		1
Lack confidence		2	2
Too young	1		1
Not with young children		1	1

Some reported more than one issue

Implications for this study

This chapter has provided insights into the onerous demands socially active citizenship placed upon the small but dedicated band of community leaders and the formidable portfolio of skills they need to fulfil their side of the rights and responsibilities bargain. Whilst this portfolio contained a range of technical skills, the skills they most needed to succeed in the important roles they played were in fact soft skills. Unfortunately, these were also the skills they lacked the most and this was also preventing their engagement in lifelong learning. Furthermore, this inability to overcome their reluctance to participate in learning was preventing them from escaping social exclusion as well as inhibiting the regeneration of their community. We also learned just how little learning or employment featured in the aspirations and expectations of their fellow residents. Awareness and understanding of the labour market or what was needed to become economically active was weak and residents were far from a state of empowerment.

However, this should not be interpreted as laziness or a culture of worklessness. A number of factors conspired to ensure that neither learning nor employment featured in their beliefs, values or behaviour patterns. The fact that previous efforts to establish community based learning programmes in the area had met with such little success in engaging residents in learning. The nature and the scale of the lack of qualifications and low levels of skills suggested negative prior experiences of learning. The high level of economic inactivity indicated negative experiences of the labour market. The poor quality of life they experienced eroded self-confidence, destroyed enthusiasm and drained their energy and stamina. From this it is possible to appreciate how the cycle of deprivation became a cycle of despair fuelled by a fear of learning as residents discovered that securing almost any job in the new labour market invariably required that they undertake learning in some form or other. A significant section of this community genuinely believed that there were no jobs available for them, the possibility of ever working again no longer existed and therefore there was no incentive to even contemplate participation in learning, particularly as this had proved such a negative and painful experience in the past. It was reasonable to conclude that employment as well as learning no longer formed part of the value system and

behaviour pattern of a significant number of residents and a negative learner as well as a negative work identity existed.

These findings not only raise concerns over the perceptions and disposition of residents, they also highlight weaknesses in the quality of information, advice, guidance and support they received from their involvement in the community regeneration process. Those with "power over" residents regularly reinforced their sense of powerlessness. Residents were acquiring some technical as well as soft skills from their involvement in these learning and volunteering activities. However, the opportunity to enable residents to progress from soft entry learning to lifelong learner, co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizenship was not utilised fully. Clearly if residents are to take a more active role in the community regeneration process or ever to become co-responsible for their own destiny they will first need to develop a belief in their ability to control events that affect their lives as well as the disposition, motivation and resilience to sustain them on the long and arduous journey to co-responsible, empowered, socially as well as economically active citizenship. Given the nature and scale of this challenge it was imperative that they received carefully planned capacity building, encouragement and support from those charged with enabling them to escape social exclusion. This in turn requires that community regenerators: accept the new economic imperative for community regeneration; understand soft skills and are effective in enabling residents to acquire them so that they are enabled to gain the disposition, motivation and resilience to learn their way out of social exclusion.

The prospects of achieving programme bending in this community were pretty remote and this does not augur well for the success of the Communities First programme.

The next chapter reports how the managers and staff of these agencies responded to the onerous challenges facing them.

Chapter 8

Community regeneration: The effectiveness of local strategies

So far we have learned how engagement in lifelong learning is now central to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by what have become known as soft skills. Although soft skills are of increasing importance within the context of ensuring social inclusion they are not widely known or understood. This chapter discusses the findings of the fieldwork in relation to the two remaining arguments that the study set out to develop. How well soft skills were understood among managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies and how effective were they in enabling residents to acquire soft skills to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion. The fieldwork study explored: how community regenerators responded to the new economic imperative for regeneration; how their contacts with residents helped or hindered empowerment; how well they understood soft skills and their effectiveness in enabling residents to acquire them.

In order to understand how effectively the various agencies responded to these challenges it is first necessary to understand their respective roles and responsibilities. There were three broad groups of agencies working in the community or influencing the work of the regeneration strategy. Agencies with a direct responsibility for either capacity building, lifelong learning or job search programmes. These included: the organisation leading the regeneration process, the community development trust; learning providers who were contracted to deliver learning programmes in the community and labour market organisations providing an outreach service to enable residents to find employment. Another group provided ancillary services not necessarily related to capacity building, lifelong learning or helping people into employment. However, the way in these services were delivered had a direct effect on the morale and health and well being of residents and therefore, were key players in empowering them. These included the local health services, police, local authority and various voluntary sector agencies. The third group fulfilled essential roles as they

provided leadership and strategic direction to community regeneration or lifelong learning over a wider geographical area. This group included the local authority, ELWa, Career Service Wales, Basic Skills Agency and the Welsh Assembly Government itself.

Capacity building, learning and job search organisations

The community development trust fulfilled an important role as it led the regeneration process and was responsible for identifying residents' needs, involving residents in various activities and projects, recruiting and supporting volunteers and ensuring that the capacity building needs of residents were met. It was also responsible for coordinating the activities of all service providers and ensuring that these were focused on enabling residents to escape social exclusion.

As the organisation leading the regeneration process it was important that its managers and staff both accepted and understood the economic imperative for regeneration. Some inroads into education and training had been made and earlier attempts to devise an education strategy for the area led to the development of an "across the infants and primary schools" early years development programme funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. There was some understanding of the concept of progression but in reality this was confined to providing a signposting service and encouragement to enable residents to seek information and advice from the relevant specialist agencies. Evidence of their priorities came when the experienced community development team of four staff was invited to produce a wish-list of ideas to regenerate the community for inclusion in the Communities First Community Action Plan. Impressively, 12 pages of ideas were produced but none related to promoting or supporting participation in lifelong learning or economic activity. An even clearer indication of the lack of both understanding of employability and the priority afforded to this by the community development trust and its equivalent organisations in neighbouring communities arose on two occasions.

What was then the Employment Service, announced a new initiative to encourage lone parents out of touch with the labour market to register with a New Deal for Lone Parents Adviser at the Jobcentre. The programme was aimed at encouraging

community regeneration organisations to participate. The contract provided for participating organisations to receive a substantial management fee as well as a registration fee for each lone parent encouraged to join the caseload. A further bonus payment was payable if the participant was in employment or still registered with the programme 13 weeks after registration. The contract was due to run for two years with an expectation of 100 referrals per year producing a potential income of approximately £50,000. A successful proposal enabled the development trust and its neighbouring community regeneration projects to collaborate in the delivery of the contract. Despite the high incidence of lone parents in both communities, not one referral was made and the contract was eventually terminated.

Another indication of the level and depth of understanding of labour market issues arose when a workshop was organised with Jobcentre Plus. Its purpose was to raise awareness among community development staff of the barriers that prevented residents from finding work and the new range of support available to overcome them. Whereas staff from eight Communities First programmes across the local authority area were invited to attend only four were represented.

One exercise required participants to examine a case study where the personal and financial circumstances of three registered unemployed or economically inactive people were considered against three current and real job vacancies. The purpose of the exercise was to identify the perceived barriers that might prevent each jobseeker from applying successfully for the job and the help available to enable each jobseeker to secure and retain one of the jobs on offer. The range of barriers identified also provided further indication of the challenges faced by socially excluded residents. The complete list recorded on flipcharts is shown in Fig: 12. It will be seen that dispositional barriers feature prominently. The range of help available for each jobseeker is shown in Fig: 13.

It was noticeable during this exercise that the vast majority of ideas for inclusion on the chart emanated from either Jobcentre Plus staff or the representative of the Employment Action Team. The Communities First staff were quite surprised and impressed at the range of help available and how easily accessible this was. They also

commented upon how much more approachable and supportive Jobcentre staff were than was perceived before they met them for the first time at the workshop.

Fig: 12 Barriers to employment identified at Jobcentre Plus workshop

Personal	**Physical**
- Unrealistic expectations - Mindset – Personal and social skills – Confidence – Behaviour at work (ignorance of) – Motivation – 70% are unfocused - Lack of work experience - Fear of loss/disruption of benefits (Needs to be easier to get in and out of the system) - Comfort zone issue - Managing money/Wages available/transition from benefit - Perception of the nature/type of work (employers reputation, etc.). - Own mindset – perception of "non-employability" - Black economy issue - Health problems/learning difficulties (Managing incapacity/back pain) "Incapacity is turning people into cripples" - GPs attitude/need educating too - Engagement of residents issue - Lack of information/communication [agencies/community regeneration staff]	- References - Wages/In-work benefits - No Bank account - Clothing/tools - Transport/travel - Car insurance issue (19 year old with motoring offence = £1000 plus!) - Childcare [Lack of] - Employers attitude to recruitment and their reputation locally - Lack of understanding of skill held and how transferable these are

Fig: 13 Help available to jobseekers identified at Jobcentre Plus workshop

Case study 1 [19 year old man who has spent time in prison for motoring offences and has limited work experience].	**Case study 2** [Lone parent aged 31with 2 children, rented accommodation]	**Case study 3** [Man claiming Incapacity Benefit, living in rented accommodation with his wife and 2 children].
- New Deal 18-24 (including confidence building programmes, etc.) - Working Links (transport, etc.) - Advisory interview before leaving prison - Community development link (checklist/toolkit – need checklist of help available) - Careers Wales and other agency support services (outreach) - Volunteering opportunities/experience	- In work benefit calculation - Transitional financial support - Working links and other support - Tax Credits - Child care	- Specialist help on incapacity benefits - New Deal for Disabled support - Brokers - Jobcentre Disability Adviser - Remploy (including financial support package)

Interestingly, the Communities First staff all stated that they would be able to use this information in their day-to-day contact with residents. On a more negative note, although they asked for and were promised some form of "toolkit" containing all the relevant information, Jobcentre Plus never produced this.

However when they tried to put what they had learned into practice staff were disappointed. The local jobcentre invited the development trust to organise transport and encourage residents to attend an open day at the jobcentre to raise awareness of job opportunities at the local hospital. Unfortunately it proved impossible to persuade anyone to attend. The development trust later distributed a leaflet to all households explaining the help available to economically inactive residents aged 16 to 65 through the New Deal for Disabled People programme. The leaflet was designed to capitalise on the fact that staff employed by the development trust were known to and trusted by residents and help would be available on site. However, not a single enquiry was received.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the semi-structured interviews with residents were used to obtain an indication of the effectiveness of the development trust in ensuring that volunteers enhanced their employability. Views were sought on how their participation in the project had helped in four important aspects of employability: knowledge of the local labour market; improved prospects of finding employment; understanding of employers recruitment needs and support available for job-search. Most did not consider that their involvement with the project had raised awareness of the local employment situation at all. It was clear from the responses received that volunteering on community projects was not designed to equip participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to ensure their employability. Whereas some enhancement took place, this happened by accident and not because of any organised attempt to improve the employment prospects of participants. The development trust staff that had helped establish the projects also confirmed this. Similar findings are reported by Hirst (2000) who suggests that the usefulness of participation in volunteering and claims of its beneficial effects on employability might be overstated. For residents to benefit fully from volunteering it is important that effective support structures are in place to ensure that they receive adequate training and supervision to carry out the tasks involved. It is also essential that adequate information, guidance and support are readily available to enable progression from soft entry learning, implicit within volunteering, to more formal learning leading to employability and independence.

Empowering residents also proved problematic. Engaging and enabling sufficient numbers to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to lead the regeneration process was a permanent and uphill struggle and the number of residents actively involved was disappointingly low. Those who accepted leadership positions found the experience most onerous and stressful. The community development trust, three residents' boards and the Communities First partnership board all relied upon the active involvement and commitment a small number of residents as unpaid board members. Eight residents were directors of the community development trust, four females and four males and there was a total of a further 18 residents, 13 females and five males serving on the three tenants' and residents' associations. Most also attended the Communities First partnership board. Therefore, these 26 residents were the *bone fide* leaders of their respective communities serving a total population of over 10,000 residents.

The efforts of this small group was supported by an even smaller number of volunteers who assisted the community development trust in implementing community activities such as a cinema club for children. Throughout the study the same small band of community leaders and fellow activists soldiered on valiantly. They freely admitted that they did so despite constant complaints from their neighbours dissatisfied with whatever they did for them. By persevering in the face of their own personal difficulties, lack of practical support from the wider community and persistent carping by their fellow residents, these people demonstrated incredible depths of perseverance, stamina and resilience. A most surprising and powerful force inhibiting progress towards empowerment was the behaviour of the residents themselves.

A particularly ugly vendetta developed between two opposing camps in one community and this spilled over into verbal and physical abuse resulting in a police investigation. A group of female activists set up an environmental project that became rather too successful and gave rise to jealousy and rivalry from other sections of the community. The situation was aggravated by some historic family discord and both parties were subject to verbal and emotional abuse as well as physical damage to personal property. This included claims of nuisance telephone calls to the homes of the main protagonists in the early hours of the morning and both sides alleged that

their opponents had threatened their children. Surprisingly, people from both camps continued to remain active in the community and often attended meetings involving members from each side of the divide.

Interestingly two residents who participated in the semi-structured interviews commented upon the negative effects of this division:

> "There is too much bickering and back-chat" (Female volunteer aged 35).

> "I have learned from other people that I have been too open. Now I have learned to how to use people like they use others. It's a power thing, that's what it's about" (Male volunteer aged 58).

The fact that it had not been possible to attract more males and young people in particular to engage in the regeneration process was cause for concern. This inevitably meant that the needs of certain sections of the community predominated and the same groups monopolised ideas for improving the quality of life of the community. The Assembly Member for the area highlighted the inherent danger in this when attending a local event:

> "When devising local plans for the regeneration of the community we need to ensure that young people have a proper voice. One community action plan submitted recently was very well researched but as the younger generation had not been involved in the process, what we had was a marvellous plan for a community to retire to."

An interesting point in relation to empowerment came to light. The good intentions of staff were proving to be counterproductive as there was a noticeable tendency for residents to expect staff to "do things for" them when organising events such as social evenings and outings and staff needed to be more adept at transferring ownership of these activities to residents. Failure to enable residents to do things for themselves resulted in lost opportunities to empower them.

The understanding of soft skills issues was quite limited. An examination of key documents provided a reliable indication of the strategic and operational priorities of the development trust. For example, whereas there were job descriptions for all staff, none listed any duties relating to promoting, encouraging or delivering capacity

building, learning of any kind or any reference to enabling residents to become employable or economically active. The Board of Directors met monthly, however, the issue of lifelong learning, employability or economic activity did not feature in any of the earlier meetings and only began to appear towards the end of the study period as the writer began to focus attention on these issues as part of his management role. Neither the Annual Report presented to the Annual General Meeting nor any of the presentations at this meeting made any reference to lifelong learning, employability or economic activity.

The team leader and the two experienced community development workers were invited to provide a written response to a series of questions relating to their roles and responsibilities, posed by the writer. These confirmed that there was an excellent understanding of the social aspects of social exclusion and an interest and a willingness to address the dispositional barriers to participation through capacity building. However, it was also clear that there was no capacity within the development trust to achieve this. None of the staff had any prior experience of the issues involved and no training had been received to equip them with the expertise they required to even begin to instil soft skills. There were no processes in place to identify the personal development or learning needs of community leaders or volunteers. However, there was common agreement on what these barriers were. These were almost exclusively dispositional barriers: "low confidence, being fearful, mistrust, low self esteem, negative attitude, poor motivation, no will power, no determination, apathy, basic skills deficiencies, communication difficulties and lack of information." Despite this, there was no common understanding of the concept of soft skills and no mechanisms in place to identify, assess or address the soft skills needs of residents. When asked to identify six soft skills from a list of 12 skills, one officer failed to identify any, another identified only three out of six and the third correctly identified the six soft skills but also added another in error. The following explanations of soft skills were offered:

> "To me this means that someone is able to read, write and have process basic numeracy skills."

> "Soft skills are the skills that you learn, develop, pick up and acquire during your working and learning time."

> "Soft skills, to me means people's ability to interact and communicate with others and the development of individuals' personalities and characters."

This lack of understanding of soft skills meant that their effectiveness in ensuring that residents acquired them was reduced considerably. The regeneration strategy had succeeded in drawing down over £4 million in grants aid to regenerate the area and this had included some funding for the capacity building of residents. However, this had been used to provide a series of *ad hoc* courses and events such as visioning days for leaders of the development trust, functional management skills such as chairing meetings, committee skills and social events to encourage attendance at Annual General Meetings. There is no doubt that these programmes were useful in enabling a small number of residents to function more effectively as representatives on various community groups. However, there was little evidence to indicate that this had achieved any real impact beyond this small group of individuals. Leadership skills remained undeveloped, residents remained reluctant to participate in volunteering or learning and an almost palpable collective lack of self-belief and confidence prevailed. The visioning days were confined to agreeing a new name for the organisation and discussing ideas for future projects as opposed to enabling leaders to develop tools and techniques to enhance their leadership skills, for example, in strategic thinking.

A most interesting picture emerged from the semi-structured interviews with residents who were not engaged in leading the community but nonetheless played important supporting roles as volunteers on various projects. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the community development trust was achieving success in enhancing their soft skills through the projects it organised. A significant point emerged when considering the relevance of the training received with the skills that volunteers themselves thought were necessary to operate as volunteers. All of the skills they listed were soft skills and it was encouraging to find a number of these skills were addressed through the training they received. However, it should be noted that only one person had received any structured training in confidence building and the rest was developed "on the job." There was no evidence of any strategy or planned programme of complementary courses to ensure that soft skills were addressed

properly as part of a planned programme of capacity building. There was no additional support available such as individual assessment of barriers to learning, identification of personal learning needs, availability of information, advice and guidance or access to an adequate range of progression routes. Given the profound nature of the issues involved, the quality of soft skills learning was inadequate.

Three examples of the absence of effective planning for progression emerged from the semi-structured interviews. Volunteers explained how three "taster" soft-entry learning programmes had been arranged on site: sign language, basic computers and an introduction to child psychology. However, when they expressed interest to progress to the next stage they were disappointed to learn that this was not possible as there was insufficient demand to warrant running a course in the community. A minimum number of ten was required to make this a cost effective proposition for the provider. Needless to say, this was a crushing blow to people who find it difficult to pluck up the courage to participate in any form of learning.

It was obvious that, whereas the manager and community development staff employed by the development trust had an excellent understanding of the social aspects of community regeneration, this did not encompass the learning or economic imperative for community regeneration. There was a strong emphasis that bordered upon an obsession with the "bottom-up" process through community consultation and this skewed projects towards social events, credit union and activities for children. There was no evidence of any strategy to develop capacity building, soft skills, lifelong learning or to promote and support employability through any of these projects. There was no real understanding of the concept of soft skills or of how these might be addressed. The need to engage residents in lifelong learning or of how to tackle the dispositional, situational or institutional barriers they faced simply did not feature in the thinking of community development staff.

As far as community based learning was concerned, something akin to the low skills trap existed. It was clear that the small number of residents involved in volunteering were benefiting from their participation. However, there was very little structure to the learning they experienced and volunteering was seen by many as a social event as opposed to a means of learning new skills that could enable them to progress to

economic activity. Engagement in projects was the end result as opposed to the first step in a progression route to active citizenship and/or employability. The main impetus for new learning was simply to enable volunteers to undertake the tasks required to deliver each project. This should not be interpreted as criticism of the development trust or its staff. They all worked tirelessly to balance the onerous and wide-ranging demands of their duties with offering what support they could to community leaders and volunteers alike. This extended to befriending residents and offering practical advice and informal support in the course of their day-to-day contacts with them. Whereas there undoubtedly was a general cynicism of the economic imperative for community regeneration this was as much due to a genuine commitment to the "bottom-up" process as it was to any philosophical bias. This raised an important point concerning coping with change and highlighted the need for a carefully worked out programme to achieve sustainable cultural change.

It is much more than a matter of semantics to explain that the "bottom-up" process resulted in introducing activities based on what residents considered that they wanted as opposed to what they actually needed. The nature and the scale of residents' learning needs were such that most were not even aware that they had any additional needs. For example, those who had lost touch with the labour market, or had not made contact in the first place, had little understanding of the skills they needed to secure a "proper job." This is even more problematic when the deficiencies relate to soft skills issues such as self-reliance, making things happen for oneself, co-responsibility and resilience. This required that community regenerators first enabled residents to understand their new responsibilities, raised their aspirations to set more ambitious goals and then built their capacity to achieve their latent potential. This demanded a much more sophisticated understanding of soft skills, particularly how to enable a demoralised population to cope with the fearful prospect of change on this scale. Rebuilding a positive disposition towards learning as well as the capacity to benefit from learning to be able to apply what has been learned to become co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizens was an essential pre-requirement. Clearly, this onerous responsibility also applied equally to learning providers, labour market agencies as well as strategic agencies.

Three main learning providers were working in the community. Reliable statistical data on adult participation in community based learning were difficult to obtain. However, as far as could be determined, these three organisations had only managed to fill 144 places from a population of over 10,000 residents during the 2003 planning year. Some of these places were filled by the same residents attending more than one course.

The local authority community education service was responsible for delivering courses for adults throughout the local authority area. Soft entry as well as accredited provision in arts and crafts, ICT, Car Maintenance and Swimming was offered. These courses were available at various locations within the community. In the planning year 12 courses were delivered offering a total of 165 places. 108 people attended (65% occupancy), 93 completed the course (86%), 36 achieved accreditation (33.3%) and 59 progressed to further learning (54.6%), usually within the same subject or at the associated FE college. Further accreditation should be achieved as participation continued. There was no record of any progression to further training or employment. This provider also planned to develop a community school within the area. However, despite the fact that the service has a long track record in the design and delivery of community learning, its thinking as far as widening participation was concerned was particularly naïve. The vision for the development of a community school included:

> "The lead role being school based, perhaps a deputy head or someone of that level ... the need for informal entry, crafts as many of these young people would not pass GCSEs ... [Engaging] senior citizens, perhaps benches for them to sit on, picnics, etc."

The infrastructure for the proposed model consisted of "A Community Education Officer, Youth Worker, Adult Education Coordinator, Community Worker and a Secretary." When considering the likely effectiveness of these proposals it is worth reflecting on the sheer scale of the challenge in overcoming the institutional, situational and dispositional barriers preventing a population of over 10,000 of the most socially and economically deprived residents in Wales from participating effectively in learning.

A national voluntary sector agency specialising in encouraging adult participation in learning from disadvantaged groups had recently secured funding from the European Social Fund for "tackling social exclusion and improving access to Higher Education." This organisation had only recently begun to offer soft entry "tasters" as well as accredited provision in art and crafts and sign language classes at two locations within the community. In the period between November 2002 and July 2003 six courses were delivered offering a total of 34 places. 28 people attended (82.4% occupancy), 23 completed the course (82.1%), 2 achieved accreditation (7.1%) and 24 progressed to further learning (85.7%). It should be noted that these courses proved particularly attractive to older residents and a small core of eight people attended all of the courses by progressing to further stages within each course. Further accreditation should be achieved as participation continued. There was no record of any progression to further training or employment and many of the participants were over retirement age.

This organisation also attempted to develop an innovative programme to encourage people who had successfully completed a course of community based learning to be trained as "Community Learning Reps." These people would act as community learning champions and mentors to encourage and support more people from the community to participate in learning. Unfortunately this initiative was abandoned as it only proved possible to attract three people throughout the local authority area. There were none from this community.

The local authority also operated a community workshop on site and this was in the process of being converted to a Neighbourhood Learning Centre following a successful European Social Fund bid. This centre was mainly concerned with delivering New Deal programmes, including the New Deal for Disabled People Programme (NDDP). No accredited training was provided, as the intention was to get participants into work as quickly as possible. The emphasis was on short job-focused training courses, supplemented by intensive job-search support. The programme had been in place for just over two years. In that time eight residents from the community had been recruited. One had been placed in employment and was still employed six months later. Three dropped out of the programme and there were four on the current

case-load. The 8 New Deal participants included in the semi-structured interviews were not involved in this particular programme.

Semi-structured interviews with the three line managers and four course tutors from these three organisations were conducted to explore their views and understanding of relevant issues. Apart from the community workshop, which was part of the regeneration partnership, there was no real understanding of the aims and objectives of the regeneration strategy for the area and no attempt had been made to co-ordinate provision with these wider objectives.

It was expected that learning providers contracted to help residents prepare for employment would accept the economic imperative for learning and this was generally the case. One person employed by the community education service raised concerns that ELWa did not understand or value community learning and was only interested in the economic aspects of community based learning:

> "I think one of the main issues is the funding for informal learning. I think that it is something we have got to keep pushing. I still think that ELWa are very economically orientated and they think that people can be just got back into jobs straightaway. Also the fact that we are going to be increasing people's employment ability, are there going to be sufficient jobs there that will support the amount of people? ... My remit is lifelong learning as opposed to jobs ... Courses are also aimed at quality of life as well as health and well being of residents and this is particularly relevant to elderly and retired residents."

Evidence of a reluctance to accept the new focus was also observed in discussions with the manager of one voluntary sector agency providing volunteering opportunities and with a community capacity building consultant. Both issues concerned their scepticism about the value of providing learning or progression routes for what they regarded as poor or non-existent employment opportunities.

In relation to their understanding of soft skills, among all those interviewed there was a general view that a community culture prevailed that did not value learning and "lack of confidence" was a major barrier to participation in the programmes offered:

> "Fear of failure is a big factor ... If people don't value learning they don't see the point in coming."

> "Its just lack of confidence. They think that they have not got the ability to do whatever education there is, probably from previous experience, perhaps they did not enjoy school or any learning they did previously and they feel as though it is not enjoyable."

> "So you try and address all these practical issues that might be barriers but nevertheless at the end of it all, I think somehow ... it is about how people perceive the relevance of education, to me that is the biggest barrier."

There was little understanding of soft skills or the dispositional barriers to participation and there were no effective strategies in place to address these issues. For example, only one interviewee identified correctly the six soft skills included in a list of 12 skills. One person identified correctly all six but included a technical skill in error. Two people identified correctly five. Another identified three correctly and two persons identified correctly only two. Some interesting explanations of soft skills were provided:

> "Personal development, confidence building, core skills basically. Basic literacy and numeracy type skills and just general self-development. People gaining enough confidence just to walk through the door."

> "I suppose I would think of it as all the extras that you gain from learning apart from what was intended ... All the extra bits that you gain, confidence as well as communication."

When asked what priority was afforded to enhancing the soft skills of residents the reply received from one manager was quite revealing:

> "Philosophically it is a priority, in practice maybe it is not."

One tutor highlighted a novel situational and institutional barrier to participation. He was concerned about the reputation of the area and how this prevented both residents and staff from attending courses on dark winter nights. This issue was mentioned in the context of lack of public transport after 6 pm and the fear of damage to cars.

Whereas the local further education college was not directly involved in delivering courses in the community an experienced member of its staff delivered a half-day

"Basic Skills Awareness" workshop in the community. This was aimed at community development staff and residents from the community who were active as volunteers on community projects. This also provided an opportunity to ascertain how well college staff understood soft skills. The workshop was designed to provide an understanding of the issues faced by those with deficiencies in Basic Skills and to explain what help and training was available to them.

Only one resident attended and this led to an embarrassing situation because the tutor had not anticipated that a participant might also suffer deficiencies in Basic Skills. This person experienced difficulty in coping with some of the reading and writing and the tutor, albeit inadvertently, regularly lapsed into unhelpful and judgemental comments such as "slow readers" and denigrated the low level of literacy and numeracy in this community. An exercise led by the tutor to identify the causes of basic skills deficiencies made no reference to soft skills and difficulty in recruiting people to attend Basic Skills courses was attributed to the fact that "these people can't read the leaflets." There was no mention let alone understanding of dispositional barriers. When eventually considering the barriers that prevent people from participating in the courses available, apart from "stigma, low esteem and fear of failure" the tutor was only able to provide a list of the usual situational and institutional barriers. The tutor's comments on fear of failure were quite revealing:

> "Previously they could blame the teacher. Now after 30 plus [years of age] they will know its me that can't cope, they can't blame anyone else."

Comments on the long term unemployed were equally simplistic and uncompromising:

> "They think, "Why should I work?" It has no relevance or value to them. They think, "My father never worked, why should I?"

Apart from the insensitive nature of these and other comments and a general lack of understanding of dispositional barriers to participation in learning, the workshop was quite useful. The tutor was able to provide a good understanding of the issues from the perspective of a person with literacy and numeracy difficulties and the range and means of accessing support available.

An interesting example of a lack of understanding of soft skills occurred when a voluntary sector organisation held a workshop for staff of the development trust. The purpose was to provide staff with an insight into a training programme being developed to enable them to undertake community consultations more effectively. The content of the workshop was most encouraging as it addresses issues such as:

> "Preconceived ideas based on their own experiences and beliefs ... Perception and Beliefs ... Conditioning ... The Truth as we see it ... Thought Process ... Comfort Zones ... Motivation ... Participation ... Teamwork ... Self Esteem of the Individual and the Community."

Staff attending found the workshop interesting and thought that it could help them in their work. However, it was rather surprising to learn that the full training programme to explain these profound issues as well as a number of other elements included in the training programme was due to be completed in only two days.

A discussion with a senior manager from the same organisation concerning their understanding of the concept of progression from their volunteering programmes was equally alarming. The explanation provided had no relevance to enhancing capacity to learn or enabling participants to move on to further learning, employability and economic activity. There was a rather vague reference to individuals progressing to more ambitious projects within the remit of the organisation and involving the media in success stories to change the image of the area. There was no evidence of any understanding of the concept of progression or any evidence of a strategy to achieve this.

Whereas the three main learning providers were making genuine attempts to make courses attractive to residents, it was obvious that programmes were driven by a need to fill courses in order to meet the requirements of individual contracts or sources of funding and soft skills development was neglected. There was no evidence of any collaboration or cooperation between providers and in fact the opposite applied with fierce competition to secure "bums on seats" resulting in programmes being offered to residents as separate options. There was a very limited choice of progression routes and this usually meant the same participants moving from one level of learning to the

next within the same course. The concept of progression from soft entry through capacity building, lifelong learning, employability to economic inactivity and active citizenship simply did not exist. No effective links had been formed with the Careers Service nor was there any evidence that this organisation was proactive in the community. It was also noticeable and perhaps surprising, given the scale of the problem, that none of the providers gave any priority to systematically identifying or addressing basic skills deficiencies. Similarly, none of the providers gave any priority to encouraging enterprise or entrepreneurship. This was almost certainly due to the fact that none of the individual contracts provided for these important issues to be addressed. Community based learning as it applied to volunteering was particularly poorly planned. Learning providers first secured funding to deliver an introductory or "taster" course and then sought to fill this through "marketing" the opportunity as best they could. There was little understanding of the need for devising and implementing strategies to overcome the dispositional barriers to engagement and no processes were in place to provide for any assessment of personal development or training needs or individual action planning.

Apart from the community workshop where New Deal contracts had led to the introduction of basic assessment and individual action planning processes, staff had not been trained in soft skills issues. There were no processes for assessment of soft skills needs, action planning or any monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of any learning strategies to enhance the soft skills of participants. When recruiting new staff, no value was placed on prior experience of or competence in designing and delivering learning strategies to address the soft skills needs of participants. Some staff had received training in counselling or the assessment and delivery of Basic Skills and Key Skills, however, the main method of addressing issues such as lack of confidence was a reliance on informal action by tutors such as befriending and offering "moral support and encouragement."

An interesting example of ineffectiveness in instilling soft skills occurred in relation to attempts to enable community leaders to develop leadership skills. An experienced capacity building consultant from the voluntary sector had previously been commissioned specifically to equip community leaders with the skills needed to enable them to develop their plans through the first year or so of the initial planning

stage of the community and schools joint sports project. Her views on their capacity building needs provided a clear indication of why the programme had failed. Because this consultant had succeeded in winning the confidence of the community leaders with whom she had worked, she was invited to design and deliver a personal development programme to enhance their leadership skills. However, the proposal made no attempt to address the soft skills aspects involved. Instead she again focused on functional issues such as, reviewing the aims and objectives and the constitution of the sports association, procedures to be followed and roles and responsibilities of individual members. Attempts to convince her that there was now a need to focus on enhancing cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills failed and it was obvious that she neither understood nor valued these. It also became obvious that this consultant held strong views on the purpose of capacity building and was quite hostile to the notion of capacity building to enable progress to economic inactivity.

The launch of a special initiative by the NHS trust to recruit economically inactive people from the community provides an interesting case study illustrating the degree of understanding of soft skills among labour market agencies and their effectiveness in addressing them. The personnel manager reported that, for the first time in the nine years that she had been in post, the hospital was unable to recruit people to fill unskilled but well paid jobs. The NHS trust joined forces with a nationally recognised organisation specialising in rehabilitating people with disabilities to develop this initiative. The programme was launched by the Welsh Assembly Government Health Minister, as a flagship initiative for the NHS in Wales. Attending the planning meetings for this initiative provided a unique insight into the level of understanding of soft skills issues by the agencies concerned. A delivery partnership was formed and this included all of the private, public and voluntary sector local labour market agencies concerned with tackling economic inactivity. Experienced and senior staff from eleven different agencies were involved including, Jobcentre Plus and the Employment Action Team but sadly ELWa and the Careers Service were conspicuous by their absence.

Priority was to be given to engaging, "those furthest from the labour market." As these people were incapacitated they were not in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance and therefore, were outside of any "compulsory" referral system. This meant that the

partnership would need to recruit participants as well as prepare them properly to compete for the jobs available. The NHS trust played its part by identifying a range of vacancies and agreed a customised recruitment package that made it possible for potential applicants to succeed at interview. Support would also be made available in the early months of employment to ensure that recruits settled in and had the best possible chance of retaining the job. An important incentive was that a further package of support was also available to ensure that all employees would have the opportunity to progress to better jobs within the hospital service. Four posts were identified for participants on the first programme:

- Auxiliary Nurse. £10,050 p.a. rising by 6 annual increments to £12,220.
- Driver/Porter. £179.88 to £186.11 per week.
- Domestic Assistant. £179.88 to £186.11 per week.
- Catering Assistant. £179.88 to £186.11 per week.

In planning the programme it became obvious that apart from the Employment Action Team, no one from the partnership had any real idea of what residents' needs were, how to attract them to join the programme or how to meet their needs as part of the programme. There was no understanding of the concept of dispositional barriers and consequently the emphasis was on producing publicity leaflets, provision of childcare and free meals. One person even suggested that information on in-work benefits should be withheld, as this would "put them off." It was eventually agreed to deliver a two-week course at the Neighbourhood Learning Centre. However, there was no provision for either assessing or addressing the soft skills needs of participants and the content was exclusively focused on job awareness and training for immediate tasks. As a result, although 15 people agreed to join the programme only six actually did so. None was successful in getting a job. Apart from the failure to address properly the dispositional barriers to engagement, the content of the course was heavily focused on functional aspects such as health and safety and personal hygiene. Soft skills only featured in two short sessions on "team-working" and "customer care."

Perhaps we should not be too surprised that Job Centre Plus staff informed the planning group that a dropout rate of 50% was commonplace on programmes

delivered by them. Incredibly, this meant that the recruitment and retention rate for job preparation and support programmes funded through Jobcentre Plus has not improved over the last twenty years. Something approaching 50% of the most disadvantaged economically inactive people still find that the "help" available to them through Jobcentre Plus fails to meet their needs. A cure for "scheme sickness" remains to be found. This has profound implications for strategies to address social exclusion as community regenerators seek to enable the hardest to reach to meet their side of the rights and responsibilities bargain. It also does little to convert those who are philosophically opposed to an economic imperative for community regeneration.

Ancillary agencies

As residents came into contact with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations providing services for them, these ancillary agencies had a key role in promoting and supporting empowerment. The Welsh Assembly Government has expectations that these organisations will be responsive to the views of residents in both the design and delivery of services. We have learned how the success of the Communities First programme is now dependent upon the capacity of residents to effect programme bending. This degree of empowerment simply did not exist and there were no signs for optimism that service providers either knew how to empower residents or wished to do so. In many cases the opposite was true.

A dedicated Communities First police team had been established on site. However, there was little contact between its commanding officer and community representatives and operational aims and objectives were never discussed or shared in advance with community leaders. The police concept of community consultation was quite naïve and based upon a peculiar interpretation of community choice. Their reaction to residents' opposition to a police proposal to site a skateboard park provided a typical example. Opposition was based upon a prior negative experience of similar facility in a nearby community where youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour eventually forced the removal of the facility. The response of the police was that residents could not have it both ways. Either they had the skateboard park that attracted young people to one focal point of nuisance or they should continue to put up with a larger number of pockets of nuisance throughout the area.

Contacts with the local health services were equally disempowering. The NHS trust embarked upon what they originally referred to as a "community consultation exercise" after plans for the redevelopment of the hospital had been finalised internally. This included a contentious proposal for the establishment of an acute mental health unit on site. This caused alarm because houses surrounded the hospital on three sides and a nursery, family-centre, an infant's and a junior school were located within a few hundred yards. A meeting was arranged between the directors of the community development trust and senior officers of the NHS trust to discuss community concerns. Whereas, at the meeting the officers of the NHS trust appeared to welcome the interest and input from the directors of the development trust, they did not grasp the point that the community wished to be consulted before decisions were made.

Another example occurred when a proposal was submitted by the Local Health Board to the Welsh Assembly Government for a health promotion worker without any consultation with the community. This also jeopardised similar proposals from individual Communities First partnerships and prevented the community from taking responsibility for health and well being. On another occasion the Health Promotion Department decided unilaterally to transfer responsibility for a project to the community development trust because of a funding crisis. Insult was added to injury when the decision was reversed summarily without any further communication when additional funding materialised.

Strategic agencies

The local authority played a strategic role through its county borough wide responsibilities encompassing economic development, community regeneration, housing, social services and education, including community education and youth services. Theirs was a pivotal role in leading the economic and community revival of the county borough in partnership with a range of specialist partner agencies such as the police and the local health services.

The need for an understanding or acceptance of an economic imperative for regeneration did not feature prominently in the thinking of the unit responsible for implementing the Communities First programme. Whereas the unit organised bi-monthly meetings of all Communities First Co-ordinators from the local authority area, the capacity building of residents, lifelong learning, employability or economic activity rarely featured in any of these meetings. The expertise, time and energy of its staff were taken up with the day-to-day administration of the programme.

Opportunities to empower residents were overlooked with monotonous regularity. The local authority's response to the introduction of the Communities First initiative was to set up a management team to coordinate the implementation the delivery of the programme throughout the county borough. A full-time coordinator was employed and a small support team established. One reason for this was to accelerate the process of establishing the Communities First programme in the electoral wards that had no infrastructure to support community regeneration and therefore, no mechanism existed to employ staff. In these wards the local authority employed the Communities First Co-ordinator and the support staff. This situation was seen as a temporary solution that would continue until a formally constituted community based organisation was established. Examples were observed where "co-ordination" was interpreted as "control" and opportunities to encourage innovation and community entrepreneurship were missed as the local authority imposed its own working practices, rules and regulations upon what were supposedly autonomous projects. The justification for this was the fact that Communities First funds continued to be drawn down from the Welsh Assembly Government through the local authority.

A typical example occurred when a windfall grant of £160,000 was made available by the Welsh Assembly Government to *Communities First* projects on condition that the Council administered it. Whereas individual partnership boards were able decide what to spend this money on, the council insisted that its procurement rules and procedures should apply and that council staff should be used to carry out the work. This venture ran into serious difficulty as the council simply did not have the manpower to cope with the work within the tight deadlines set by the Welsh Assembly Government. The response of local authority staff was to complain about the tight deadlines instead of examining their own decision to elect to follow outdated procedures. This blind

insistence on following existing rules did little to encourage innovation or community entrepreneurship. Some community leaders were convinced that the windfall had been used by the local authority as an opportunity to supplement its funds. Part of the grant was eventually used to refurbish bus-shelters and fence-off a council owned playing field. They took the view that officers and elected members had engineered this by planting ideas in the minds of residents in a way that suggested that these ideas had in fact originated from "the community."

Another example of how the council failed to understand what is meant by empowerment actually resulted in the downfall of a support network initiated and led by the community. Some time before the introduction of the Communities First programme a number of local regeneration strategies had formed their own support network operating independently of the local authority. However, despite the fact that these community groups had demonstrated initiative and entrepreneurship in establishing a genuinely community led support mechanism, the local authority established its own Communities First support network causing the existing association to eventually collapse. Further damage was caused when senior managers of the local authority subsequently used the existence of the new support network to justify their decision not to attend the local Communities First partnership board and senior managers of other agencies soon followed the local authority lead. This weakened considerably the capacity of the partnership board to involve and influence the decision makers. Community leaders recognised that this was a retrograde step as the new partnership board had less influence than when the original regeneration strategy was formed some ten years earlier.

Another example occurred when, despite the fact that each Communities First partnership board was required to produce its own Capacity Building Plan, the local authority commissioned a study to develop a county borough wide capacity building training programme. Whilst there was clearly merit in avoiding unnecessary duplication to achieve economies of scale, another opportunity to empower communities to do things for themselves was lost.

A particularly disturbing example of a lack of understanding of soft skills issues arose with the collapse of the local Youth Inclusion Programme. Despite the fact that this

programme was aimed at diverting the most troubled and troublesome 11 to 16 year olds from a life of crime it did little more than entertain participants. The ratio of staff to young people (1:25) was completely inadequate to ensure that the emotional and personal development needs of these young people were either assessed or met. There was no action planning and the small number of staff delivering the programme had not been trained in the assessment of Basic Skills, Key Skills or soft skills or in the design or delivery of learning strategies to enhance these skills. It was hardly surprising that the Home Office terminated the programme. The most worrying feature of this whole sorry episode was that the programme was operated by the local community education service. However, there were some mitigating circumstances concerned with the absence of key personnel and changes at managerial level within the organisation. Nonetheless, the programme failed completely to meet the personal and social development needs of a particularly vulnerable group within the community. The response of the senior manager when the programme finally closed its doors summed up his knowledge, understanding and commitment to meeting the needs of these young people. When asked what the community development trust could do to help (meaning to ensure that there was continuity of support available to the young people), his response was to request that the electricity meter was disconnected promptly to avoid his organisation incurring unnecessary costs.

The Basic Skills Agency leads the strategy to improve Basic Skills across Wales. An example of the lack of priority or joined up thinking between this agency and the local authority Community Regeneration Unit provided an indication of how strategy was translated into practice. The National Support Project for Basic Skills in the Community and Voluntary Sector (NSPBSCVS) was established by the Basic Skills Agency to promote and support the provision of Basic Skills within the community and voluntary sector. The writer was given less than three hours notice by the local authority to prepare a proposal on its behalf to bid for £7,000 earmarked to address Basic Skills within the local authority area. Interestingly no other Communities First area were interested in developing a Basic Skills project. Because of this (as well as the fact that only £7,000 was available) a proposal was submitted to provide for the funds to be spent on (a) developing a strategy for raising awareness of the importance of Basic Skills among Communities First staff throughout the local authority area and (b) creating an infrastructure to deliver Basic Skills across all Communities First

areas. The response from NSPBSCVS was that the funds could only be spent on Basic Skills activities as opposed to strategies. As an alternative to losing the funding a new proposal was submitted and subsequently accepted, to enhance the delivery of Basic Skills training to New Deal participants locally.

Mission accomplished? NSPBSCVS were satisfied, as they were able to tick the "activities supported" box. The New Deal contractor was happy as it received a windfall of £7,000, despite the fact that support for Basic Skills provision is readily available from a variety of other sources. However, none of the Communities First projects were any further forward in understanding, let alone meeting the Basic Skills needs of residents. Meanwhile, deficiencies in Basic Skills remains a major issue throughout the local authority area. The New Year brought a new twist. In early January Communities First coordinators were informed that the Welsh Assembly Government had awarded a windfall of £80,000 for each of the nine Communities First electoral wards. However, this could be spent only on "outdoor sport and recreation or access to transport." Compare and contrast £7,000 for Basic Skills *via* a bidding process with £720,000 handed on a plate for recreation.

Special mention must be made of ELWa's role, or more accurately, its lack of any role in promoting and supporting community based learning in this community. The internal problems being experienced by the company during the study period severely weakened its capacity to support community regeneration through lifelong learning. Efforts to interest ELWa in enabling Communities First staff to understand the lifelong learning agenda (through the design and delivery of a workshop along the lines of that delivered by Job Centre Plus mentioned earlier) failed. This was despite the fact that the content and format was drawn up for them when they originally agreed to deliver the workshop. Efforts to interest them in designing and delivering soft skills training for staff as well as learner centred learning for participants also failed. The explanation for this was that budget reductions caused a diversion of resources away from community or soft skills learning to task specific work based learning. Attempts to involve senior ELWa staff in the development of a community focused school met with only half-hearted and transient support.

Sadly, the only activity organised in the community by ELWa proved counterproductive. Without any prior consultations it was announced that ELWa was collaborating with the Basic Skills Agency in targeting the community in a "special drive" to address Basic Skills deficiencies. No attempt was made to either inform or enlist the support of any of the agencies already working in the community and the initiative simply fizzled out. The "special drive" consisted of placing leaflets in local shops to publicise generic Basic Skills provision. So much for the hopes and aspirations expressed by the chairman of the WDA:

> "Henceforth the National Assembly's economic strategy for Wales will be powered by two motors - the Welsh Development Agency promoting economic development, and the new Council for Education and Training taking responsibility for human resources" (Jones-Evans and Brooksbank 2000 p.3).

Careers Service Wales was also mainly absent from any strategic or operational contribution to the regeneration strategy. Apart from their attendance at some of the Communities First partnership board meetings their services continued to be delivered from a central base in the town centre and there was no apparent interest in developing their role in the regeneration process. This was particularly disappointing given the potential role for careers information, advice and guidance among the adult population.

Clearly the Welsh Assembly Government has a critical role in ensuring that those concerned with tackling social exclusion in Wales understand fully the issues to be addressed. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that it provides leadership and direction through its Communities First programme. Ensuring an economic imperative for regeneration. Demonstrating its commitment to empowerment. Promoting and supporting soft skills development as well as role modelling joined up thinking.

The guidance issued to Communities First Co-ordinators (Welsh Assembly Government 2002d) is meant to fulfil this function. An economic imperative for the programme is provided through the Vision Framework referred to in Chapter 7. In order to ensure that Communities First partnership boards understand how the

capacity building needs of residents are met the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned the Communities First Support Network to publish guidance on this subject. The writer attended one of the four seminars organised by the Communities First Support Network to launch the guidance document (Welsh Assembly Government 2003c). It should be noted that the Communities First Support Network is made up of eight voluntary sector agencies regarded by the Welsh Assembly Government as experts in the field of community regeneration in Wales. The guidance produced represents their current understanding of best practice in capacity building. Participants at the seminar were informed that its purpose was:

> "To enable participants to gain a relevant understanding of capacity building and why it is important ... to introduce the capacity building guidance and give participants the tools to develop capacity building plans and activities ... to explain what skills, knowledge and tools are needed for community regeneration ... the process of developing a plan ... who should be involved and what the Welsh Assembly Government will be look for in the plan."

This seminar and the guidelines document it launched remains the only guidance on capacity building issued on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government and as such is the definitive guide to the subject. At the seminar it became clear that the guidelines were rather vague and focused on building the organisational capacity to support the regeneration of a community as opposed to meeting the learning and personal development needs of residents. This was confirmed by the information contained in the guidelines and a case study was used to enable participants to address the capacity building needs of residents. However, there was little specific or practical information on how to engage residents in the process, how to help them overcome the barriers to their participation, provide soft entry learning opportunities or to ensure progression from capacity building to co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizenship. References were made to the need to enhance the confidence of residents, but this was also couched in rather vague and aspirational terms. The following extracts from the guidance document provide an indication of its inherent weaknesses in promoting understanding of these issues:

> "Capacity building is the continual process of **learning by doing** that everyone does, often without realising it, to develop their ability to undertake new tasks and challenges" (Welsh Assembly Government 2003 Section 1.1 (page numbers are not used). Emphasis by bold is that of the authors).

> "Capacity building is about getting involved, raising self-esteem and confidence and learning by taking part in projects. It is building on the knowledge, skills and experiences you already have to find new ways of working on an equal basis and creating a climate where everything is possible" (Welsh Assembly Government 2003 Section 1.1).

Barriers to community regeneration were identified:

> "**Personal:** These are things that people have some personal control over, issues like how you feel about yourself and others and how issues such as confidence can often prevent you achieving a goal. It also relates to personal experiences of education, training, health choices etc.
>
> **Social:** This relates to how people get on together and whether there is a feeling of community togetherness. The ideas, beliefs and feelings residents have about the local community – for example whether we are proud of our community, whether the area is felt to be in a good or poor state of repair and in turn what people outside Cwm Anywhere [Case study] think of the community and of local residents.
>
> **Structural:** In referring to structural issues we mean things we have little immediate control over such as the state of the local job market, the education system, the benefits system, the services provided by the Council, the Police, and our local Doctor for example. Although we can have limited control over these things they have a very real impact on daily life in Cwm Anywhere" (Welsh Assembly Government 2003 Section 2.3) Emphasis by bold is that of the authors).

From this it will be seen that the guidance is simplistic. This does not enable community regenerators to gain an understanding of the profound issues that will ensure their capacity to devise and implement effective learning and support strategies to enable residents of our most disadvantaged communities to help themselves and their community to escape social exclusion. This guidance remains in force in 2006.

Significantly, towards the end of the field study the Welsh Assembly Government made it clear to Communities First Coordinators that residents' ideas to address local problems should be incorporated into the spending plans of the various agencies, including the local authority. However, this proved problematic. Approaches to statutory agencies were either ignored or met with the response that local planning structures were already in place on a local authority area basis and therefore programme bending to meet specific needs at a more local community level was not

possible. In effect the Welsh Assembly Government has managed to engineer a situation where its laudable ambitions for achieving community led service provision by empowering residents were thwarted by the structures it has established to improve governance at local authority level.

This has come about due to its insistence on "partnership" and the three-thirds principle where equal memberships from the voluntary, statutory and business sector are represented. For example, the *Crime and Community Safety Partnership* and *Children and Young People's Partnership* are given authority over important aspects of service delivery. Whereas these partnerships indeed exercise considerable influence over service delivery, there is no resident representation and insufficient time is devoted to developing a mutual understanding of the needs of disadvantaged communities or how to address these in a joined up way. Human nature (self preservation) dictates that these partnerships usually consist of a collection of representatives of various organisations that focus first on securing resources to sustain their individual organisation. This is not conducive to achieving a mutual understanding of the bigger picture and how the service provided by each partner should change to meet the needs of the individual as opposed to delivering this or that programme to them. Meeting the profound and complex needs of residents requires a multi-disciplinary team of professionals working together with them to meet their needs in a joined up way. However, this simply did not happen.

Another weakness with this partnership model of governance is its lack of personal accountability. No single individual or organisation is responsible for driving the cultural change that is needed if all agencies are to develop joined up programmes and services. The worrying effect of this state of affairs is that unless the Welsh Assembly Government can be persuaded to allocate additional funds to supplement the Communities First budget its flagship programme for tackling poverty and ensuring social justice will in itself become disempowered.

Implications for this study

We have learned of the nature and scale of the challenges facing community regenerators as they strived to come to terms with enabling residents to become co-

responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizens. The list of these challenges begins to resemble a directory of professional specialisms. Residents' poor state of morale and low qualifications and skills base. The formidable portfolio of skills they needed to develop. The fearsome range of barriers that conspired to weaken their disposition and motivation to fulfil their side of the rights and responsibilities bargain. The incongruity inherent in policies to achieve capacity building. The emergence of psychosocial factors and the existence of a lack of a learner as well as a work identity. The increasing importance of soft skills and their esoteric and complex nature. The "double doubt" concerning the new economic imperative for community regeneration: are some community regenerators philosophically opposed to this and are there enough suitable jobs to go round? The lack of any national strategy to ensure their competence in undertaking their important and onerous duties. This formidable list of challenges, together with the fact that so much is known about the causes of previous failures to regenerate our most disadvantaged communities, would lead us to expect that carefully worked out strategies and plans were in place to address the issues involved. This was not the case.

The guidance produced by the Welsh Assembly Government to provide leadership and direction to its flagship programme for tackling poverty and ensuring social justice suggests that these issues are not understood sufficiently at the very top. This inability to provide strategic direction resulted in a number of important weaknesses in the drive to tackle social exclusion in this community. Key statutory service providers such as ELWa, Jobcentre Plus, Basic Skills Agency, Police and the NHS trust operated independently and in ignorance of the purpose of the Communities First programme. Others such as the local authority operated in a way that did not promote or support its aims. As a result the various agencies providing services to residents did so in a way that weakened their confidence and reinforced feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. At community level staff did the best that they could in accordance with their interpretation of residents needs. As a result and because of an over-emphasis on the "bottom-up" process, the identification of residents' needs were superficial and efforts to engage them in capacity building largely ineffective.

There was no doubt that a considerable amount of activity was taking place and this was resulting in some residents benefiting positively from capacity building. However, this was happening incidentally as opposed to being planned or focused in such a way as to ensure that their personal development needs were identified or met in relation to the Welsh Assembly Government's aspirations for empowered socially and economically active citizenship. Community regenerators did not understand soft skills and consequently they were not effective in enabling residents to acquire these skills. There was no effective strategy to ensure that capacity building either took full account of the learning and personal development needs of residents or that appropriate learning and support programmes were in place to meet these needs. This resulted in a something akin to a low-expectations, low-aspirations equilibrium. Residents' morale was low and their experience of service delivery was negative. They learned to expect nothing better and therefore their aspirations were low. Service providers failed to interest or involve residents in the design or quality assurance of service provision and interpreted this as apathy. This caused them to have low expectations of them failed to satisfy other than their superficial needs. This low-expectations, low aspirations equilibrium is the price society pays for allowing a cycle of deprivation to degenerate into a cycle of despair.

Residents of our most disadvantaged communities undoubtedly pay a high price for their exclusion from society. Unless and until effective strategies are introduced to ensure that those responsible for enabling them to escape social exclusion are themselves equipped properly to understand and meet their needs this price will continue to increase.

The conclusions drawn from the findings from the fieldwork are discussed in the next chapter and recommendations for further action presented.

Chapter 9

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Social exclusion policy and practice

Both the United Kingdom Government and the Welsh Assembly Government afford high priority to tackling social exclusion. A variety of terms are in use to describe the process of ensuring social inclusion and this is encompassed within civil renewal, community development, community regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, ensuring social justice and meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities. Whereas unemployment is undoubtedly a primary cause of social exclusion the underlying issue is one of worklessness and economic inactivity gravitating to some communities when residents of neighbouring communities suffer much less disadvantage. This is explained in terms of the polarisation of opportunities where residents of disadvantaged communities are unable to benefit from the new jobs arising from improvements in the local economy. This is because either the skills that they possess have become obsolete or they have been unable to acquire the qualifications, skills and attitudes now required to secure and sustain themselves in employment in the new labour market. Their plight is worsened by a welfare benefit system that has failed to keep pace with changes in work patterns characterised by a reduction in full-time, permanent and well paid employment and an increase in part-time, low paid and temporary jobs. These communities also suffer multiple deprivation including ill-health, high levels of crime and the fear of crime, lack of transport, poor quality service provision and a neglected physical and built environment. Feelings of isolation or even alienation are commonplace, morale is low and a sense of helplessness and dependency prevails.

Strategies for achieving community regeneration have moved away from an emphasis on improving the physical and built environment led by local authorities to one of empowering residents. This requires a cultural change where residents are no longer

dependent on government action but are co-responsible for equipping themselves with the skills, attitudes and behaviours now required to become socially as well as economically active citizens. This also embraces the requirement that they must also become co-responsible for their own health and well being. This places a strong emphasis on capacity building and in particular that residents are able to develop the cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills (identity capital) to ensure their commitment and capacity to engage in and benefit from learning. This in turn places lifelong learning at the heart of strategies to ensure social inclusion where employment for life has been replaced by the need to be employable for life. Whereas the new emphasis on empowerment, co-responsibility and community led regeneration is to be welcomed as it recognises the need to involve the residents of our most disadvantaged communities in devising local solutions to meet needs that they are best placed to identify, this is problematic.

Concerns about the policy and practice in Wales

The causes of social exclusion are complex and have defied the best-laid plans of successive governments throughout the second half of the 20th Century. Whereas the new approach adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government has many positive features, its prospects of success are weakened by a fault line running from macro policy level through to operational delivery in our most disadvantaged communities. Residents of these communities experience two quite different and contradictory capacity building methodologies. A "rights and responsibilities" (human capital) approach through *Welfare to Work*, which is integral to the United Kingdom Government's strategy to address social exclusion and a more traditional community development capacity building (social capital) approach through the Communities First programme. The "rights and responsibilities" model is seriously flawed due to its over-reliance on supply side measures and the inability to balance this by ensuring that there are sufficient suitable jobs available. There are particular difficulties in the south Wales Valleys. The topography of the area has inhibited inward investment, a low skills equilibrium prevails and residents must be equipped properly to escape the negative effects of the low skills trap. In fact *Welfare to Work* is in itself fuelling the low skills trap in the local labour market. There is also a lack of coordination between the United Kingdom Government and the Welsh Assembly Government concerning

measures to address economic inactivity and there is an urgent need for the Welsh Assembly Government to develop its own capacity to understand economic inactivity and ensure effective alignment between its economic development, lifelong learning, health and community regeneration strategies. The community development model through the Communities First programme is also seriously flawed through its over reliance on the "bottom-up" process and empowering residents as the means of funding regeneration activities through programme bending. The "bottom-up" process favoured by the Welsh Assembly Government fails to inspire and boost residents' aspirations resulting in the underlying causes of social exclusion being neglected in favour of palliative measures that address only its more obvious and immediate effects. This also causes some community regenerators to doubt the economic imperative for community regeneration. The process of empowering residents to lead the regeneration process has assumed a new significance since it became clear that the Communities First programme has effectively been spread too thinly in Wales. It has been introduced in over 140 communities but does not have a dedicated budget for regeneration. Instead it has pinned its faith on empowering residents to be able to command the range of services they now need to meet their profound and complex needs. This is fraught with difficulties.

Concerns about the strategies adopted in the community

Whereas a great deal had been achieved by the local regeneration strategy over the ten years or so of its existence and substantial progress had been made, the community remains a long way from a state of empowerment or from leading or owning the process of regeneration. This was due to a lack of capacity on both sides. The laudable aims of the Welsh Assembly Government in wishing to empower residents were thwarted by a lack of understanding of how to achieve this effectively and too many of those to be empowered lacked the necessary skills and attitudes required to either negotiate or accept a successful transfer of responsibility. Although tokenism, manipulation and top-down planning persisted at least a structure had been created in the form of the community development trust to provide the means of community leadership and ownership of the process. This was beginning to enable the community to have a stronger voice and stake in its own affairs as well as the means of ensuring its share of resources. The community development trust was actually leading the

Communities First programme and had assumed responsibility for managing the entire process and this was a most positive and encouraging demonstration of commitment to empowerment from both the Welsh Assembly Government and the leaders of the community.

Dependency was not just a state of mind among residents, it had become institutionalised. The Welsh Assembly Government has itself introduced a system of local governance that effectively excludes residents from its high-power partnerships. Service providers delivered services and behaved in a way that actually disempowered residents. Community regenerators tended to do things "for" instead of "with" residents and the prevailing macho culture caused residents to effectively disempower themselves through their hostile behaviour to each other. The obsession with the "bottom-up" process that permeated national as well as local community regeneration thinking was, in some ways, a contributory factor. This resulted in the publication of ineffective capacity building guidance and an over-reliance on waiting until residents came forward with their own capacity building needs. Modern cultural change strategies realise the importance of enabling individuals to first raise their aspirations and expectations so that they set themselves much higher goals than they ever thought themselves capable of attaining. Because this was not happening residents could only identify very base needs and this was the underlying cause of them focusing mainly upon the effects of social exclusion. This was not due to apathy on their part. This stemmed from the fact that residents considered that this was all that they were able to exercise any influence over. This unintentional effect of the "bottom-up" process also diverted attention from the learning and employment aspects of regeneration and helped fuel the philosophical divide among those who did not wish to accept an economic imperative for regeneration.

It had not been possible to engage sufficient numbers of residents to become actively involved in the process of regeneration. Those who were engaged found the experience to be personally demanding. Whereas some capacity building took place, this was mainly task specific and did not equip them with the soft skills required to become co-responsible, empowered and socially active as well as economically active citizens. Community leaders in particular were under severe pressure and were not always equipped properly with the knowledge, skills and general wherewithal to

enable them fulfil the ambitions that the Welsh Assembly Government has for them. There was no strategy in place or joined up approach to identify or meet the capacity building needs or residents. The capacity building needs of residents were only partially understood and met or were not met at all by some agencies. There were no effective programmes in place to enable residents to overcome the dispositional barriers that prevented them from engaging in learning or the wider regeneration process. The assessment of individual capacity building needs, including Basic Skills and soft skills more generally did not take place. There were no effective individual action planning processes or support programmes in place to enhance capacity to learn or to ensure that residents benefit fully from soft entry learning, capacity building or activities such as volunteering. There was little understanding of the concept of progression, learning was not supported by adequate information, advice and guidance and the absence of such planned and supported progression meant that very little progression took place. Learning programmes were mainly driven by the requirements of the provider's contract and not by the needs of the learner. There was little collaboration, effective networking or partnership working amongst organisations to pool resources and expertise or develop cohesive progression routes to enable residents to obtain the comprehensive range of support they required. The capacity building guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government was too simplistic and therefore unlikely to lead to the underlying capacity building needs of residents being met. Furthermore, there was no national strategy for ensuring that the training needs of community regenerators were either identified or met.

It is important to recognise that in the time between the completion of the fieldwork study and the submission of this thesis a number of improvements have been made by the regeneration strategy and in particular by the community development trust, police, local authority housing department, job-search and voluntary sector agencies. This has resulted in a considerable improvement in the quality of life of residents and some inroads are beginning to be made into the lifelong learning aspects of regeneration.

Recommendations

Considering residents' needs within a cognitive framework enables an understanding of how self-efficacy, locus of control, intrinsic motivation and resilience are of fundamental importance in: enabling disposition and motivation to learn; how high learners set their aspirations and ambitions; whether residents engage in learning; whether they benefit fully from the learning experience; whether they apply what they learn effectively; whether they persevere in the face of adversity and whether they achieve their true potential. These underpinning soft skills are the four pillars of empowerment. This also helps us to understand why, no matter how chaotic life is in our most disadvantaged communities, only a minority, albeit a significant minority, succumb to the pressures and fail to develop the formidable portfolio of skills that enable them to cope and avoid social exclusion. A negative but often erroneous self-evaluation of an inability to learn is a significant cause of this underachievement and not necessarily the fact of being of low socio-economic status or living in a disadvantaged community. This belief results from the cumulative effects of a negative prior experience of learning, the stresses and strains of daily life in a disadvantaged community, the influences of inter-generational unemployment and prolonged economic inactivity. Dispositional barriers to participation in lifelong learning are of paramount importance, not only because these are powerful influencers of individual behaviour, but also because of their profound affect on non-learners who are often considering, what for many, are life-change choices and decisions. A negative disposition towards learning is difficult to overturn as it is rooted in bitter experience of prior learning and self-evaluations concerning ability to cope. A negative experience of prior learning is the most significant single barrier to adult participation in learning.

Soft skills have increased in significance as enablers of effective participation in learning and socially as well as economically active citizenship. This study found that soft skills are of significant importance in enabling residents to develop the disposition, motivation and perseverance to take responsibility for helping themselves and their community to escape social exclusion. However, these skills were neither understood sufficiently nor addressed effectively. Evidence of the existence of both a negative learner identity and a negative work identity among residents requires that

priority must be given to enhancing soft skills. To rebuild their disposition, motivation and capacity to first engage in learning, learn new skills and then deploy their new skills effectively in pursuit of co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizenship. This will not be possible until policy makers, funding agencies, community regenerators, learning providers and those who provide services to residents of our most disadvantaged communities understand the underlying issues that prevent people from engaging in learning. Interestingly the United Kingdom Government commissioned its first study into the demand for soft skills in 1996 (Anderson and Marshall 1996) but it has taken the Department for Work and Pensions ten years to realise their significance for the unemployed and economically inactive through its new approach to welfare reform.

Ultimately, all those concerned with tackling social exclusion face two immense challenges. Ensuring that residents of disadvantaged communities receive the range of capacity building and support they require to accept responsibility for their own lives as well as ensuring that the life experiences of the children of today are such that they do not grow up to be the excluded of tomorrow. For this to happen all those concerned with the design and delivery of programmes and services to residents of disadvantaged areas, from the corridors of Whitehall and Cardiff Bay to the receptionist in the local health centre or housing office, must understand how to use their power "over" residents in a way that builds positive self-belief in their ability to cope in all domains of their lives. An understanding of soft skills as well as the capacity to enable residents to acquire these is essential if they are to become co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizens.

In order to target finite resources to maximum effect it is essential to distinguish between the causes and the effects of social exclusion. At a macro economic level the causes of social exclusion are well documented. These stem from economic decline brought about by a rapid and catastrophic loss of traditional employment opportunities, radical changes in the nature of new employment opportunities, an outdated benefits system and a loss of respect for traditional community values. However, at a more local level the distinction was less obvious and this study found that whereas there is a general consensus that worklessness and economic inactivity are primary causes of social exclusion this is too simplistic. The underlying causes

stem from a combination of insufficient well paid and secure jobs being available and a mismatch between the jobs that are available and the qualifications, skills, attitudes, behaviours and the income requirements of those who are without work. The ability to engage effectively in lifelong learning is now essential to ensure social inclusion.

Therefore, as well as ensuring that there are sufficient suitable job opportunities, there are three key aims that must be addressed if the causes of social exclusion are to be overcome and the cycles of deprivation and despair broken by enabling residents to learn their way out of social exclusion. Firstly, existing non-learners must be enabled to overcome their aversion to learning so that they become self-reliant, self-directed lifelong learners. Secondly, enabling residents to cope more effectively with change and uncertainty and inoculating them against the traumas they experience in their day-to-day lives so that worklessness, crime and the fear of crime and lack of family support does not fuel a belief that learning and employment is of little or no relevance to them or their families. Finally, ensuring that all experiences of learning, particularly during the formative school years, are positive and that they promote and support a belief that one has the innate ability to learn to the extent that a genuine and unquenchable thirst for learning becomes the norm. If this is to happen the low expectations, low aspirations equilibrium must be eradicated.

It is clear from the nature and the scale of the challenges faced by residents of this community that the causes of their continued exclusion cannot be solved by economic recovery alone. Improving the effectiveness of a wide range of statutory services will undoubtedly help alleviate some of the stresses and strains. However, if residents are to escape social exclusion key changes must come from within themselves. They must develop the disposition and the capacity to engage effectively in learning so that they acquire the necessary skills, attitudes and behaviours that will enable them to become co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active and healthy citizens. For this to happen it is essential that an effective strategy be devised to replace the negative cycles of deprivation and despair with a virtuous circle of inclusion through lifelong learning.

Specific recommendations

The primary recommendation is that a comprehensive strategy be devised in each disadvantaged community to ensure that residents are enabled to learn their way out of social exclusion. This strategy must encompass:

(i) Enabling all residents to engage in and benefit from learning and this must include developing effective strategies to enable residents to overcome the dispositional barriers as well as the institutional and situational barriers that prevent their participation in learning.

(ii) Developing effective assessment processes to ensure that the underlying personal development and learning needs of residents are identified. This also requires that residents both understand how these needs inhibit their progress and accept ownership of the remedial actions required

(iii) Developing effective learning strategies and support programmes to ensure that these underlying personal development and learning needs are met. This must include building individual capacity to learn, enhancing Basic Skills and enabling progression from soft entry learning to more structured and accredited provision.

(iv) Addressing the wider personal development and learning needs in relation to the low level of qualifications and skills of residents highlighted in Table 4. These must include enhancing the technical skills required to become and remain socially and economically active.

(v) Addressing the soft skills that determine disposition, motivation and the ability to both engage in and benefit from learning and these must include personal self-efficacy, locus of control, intrinsic motivation and resilience as highlighted in Fig: 2 and Fig: 3.

Given its emphasis on empowering residents it is perhaps ironic that the only organisation with the power to implement the changes considered necessary to improve existing strategies for tackling social exclusion is the Welsh Assembly Government itself. If a real difference is to be achieved this will require action at national political as well as official level.

It is also recommended that the Welsh Assembly Government should:

Ensure that its strategy to tackle social exclusion is aligned more closely with both its own strategies for economic development, health, crime and community safety and lifelong learning and the United Kingdom led *Welfare to Work* agenda. The establishment of the new Directorate for Lifelong Learning Education and Skills (DELLS) provides the opportunity to abandon the contract or programmes driven learning that has failed to widen attainment or raise attainment levels in disadvantaged communities and replace this with learner centred programmes customised to meet the diverse and complex needs of socially excluded people. This should be considered as part of a wider review of how existing funding and support arrangements for community based learning might be refocused to ensure a commonality of purpose for community based learning. It is suggested that there should be a new focus on three inter-related themes: learning for health and well being; learning for socially active citizenship and learning for economically active citizenship.

Ensure that economic inactivity is addressed from a wider social inclusion perspective as opposed to a simplistic labour market measure. It is important to ensure that the numbers currently economically inactive does not become the test of the effectiveness of current performance, as this will provide a false evaluation. Given the age profile of former miners and steelworkers it is inevitable that there will be a significant reduction as large numbers are due to reach retirement age over the next few years. An effective strategy would include a number of key elements. Tackling the low skills, poverty and benefits traps. Increasing the supply of jobs that socially excluded people would consider suitable for them. Ensuring that the opportunity of further EU funding is used to restructure the local economy. More locally it is important that efforts to tackle economic inactivity, including programmes currently funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus be brought under local control within the new Heads of the Valley Strategy and integrated fully with the social exclusion agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government.

There is an urgent need for a national strategy to ensure that community regeneration staff receive the quality of training and support required to enable them to meet the profound needs of socially excluded people. There is also a need for a much more

comprehensive capacity building guidance that recognises the formidable range of skills that both residents and capacity builders now need to ensure social inclusion through co-responsible, empowered socially as well as economically active citizenship. It is also necessary to ensure that this strategy includes relevant programmes to enable staff to understand the significance of soft skills as well as vocational "employability" skills and how these should be addressed through community based capacity building strategies. Priority should be given to addressing leadership skills. The Indicative Portfolio of Skills model (Fig: 2) and the Gently sloping learning ramp (Fig: 3) could be used to guide this process. It is suggested that defining soft skills more clearly along the lines suggested in Chapter 3 will assist the process.

Review, or at least monitor closely, its over-dependence on capacity building and empowerment as the sole means of achieving programme bending. In addition to the need for carefully planned capacity building for both residents and the personnel of regeneration agencies this also requires action at a national political as well as official level to achieve the necessary cultural change among service providers. Action should continue at a local community level to enable service providers to know how to engage residents properly in the process of designing and quality assuring the services they provide for them. Community regenerators have an important part to play in this as the conduit between residents and service providers. It is important that the personnel of these regeneration agencies develop the necessary understanding of how to promote and support cultural change among service providers as well as residents.

It is also suggested that further programmes of research would help to inform future policy and improve the lives of those who suffer social exclusion. The following areas might prove particularly fruitful:

How the benefit system might be reformed to support lifelong learning for employability as opposed to transition from job to job. The existing system is focused narrowly on compensating people for being out of work. It would be particularly interesting to establish the effects of refocusing the benefits system to encourage and support learning for career progression as opposed to inactivity.

There is a particular and urgent need to examine ways of addressing the low skills trap currently affecting the south Wales Valleys. The new Heads of the Valleys Strategy and the forthcoming EU Convergence Funding Arrangements present unique, but time limited opportunities to restructure the local economy.

The impact of experience in compulsory education, particularly in relation to parity of esteem between academic and vocational attainment, on future social exclusion has a double impact on social exclusion. The relationship between low-socio-economic status and pupil attainment as well as the growing scourge of youth annoyance and anti-social behaviour could both benefit from rigorous scrutiny.

The significance of soft skills and psychosocial factors as causes of social exclusion have only begun to emerge comparatively recently and we need to understand more about what these factors are, how they relate to social exclusion and their effects on individuals and how these might be alleviated.

Two more practical, but nonetheless important aspects of community regeneration policy and practice require further understanding. These relate to improving rate of dropout from current job focused training and support programmes and the effectiveness of local partnerships in meeting the needs of socially excluded people. Apart from the functional aspects involved, there are interesting issues concerning empowerment inherent in both.

This study set out to develop three main arguments. Firstly, that engagement in lifelong learning is now central to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by cognitive, conative and interpersonal skills. These are more widely known as soft skills. Secondly that these soft skills remain little understood, particularly among managers and staff of community based regeneration agencies. Finally, this lack of understanding results in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion.

We have learned how engagement in lifelong learning is now essential to ensuring social inclusion and disposition and motivation to learn, as well as the capacity to benefit fully from the learning experience are influenced significantly by soft skills. However these soft skills were little understood by those concerned with community regeneration in this community and this lack of understanding resulted in inadequate community based provision to ensure that residents develop the necessary disposition, motivation and resilience to enable them to learn their way out of social exclusion. If, as is likely, this situation prevails elsewhere and is allowed to continue the consequences for policies to ensure social inclusion and more importantly the residents of our most disadvantaged communities are profound. The United Kingdom and Welsh Assembly Governments' will fail to achieve their laudable objectives for reducing social exclusion, eradicating poverty and ensuring social justice and yet again those who have suffered years of marginalisation and live miserable lives will be condemned to suffer indefinitely.

Hopefully, if these recommendations are accepted and acted upon, the study will make a modest contribution to improving the lives of the people who live in our most disadvantaged communities.

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Appendix 1

***Aide Memoir* for analysing Business Plan and other relevant documentation**

Name of Project.....

Date of examination .....

Type of document (e.g. Business Plan, Community Plan, Evaluation Report)
.....

1. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically the need to enable residents to become lifelong learners, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
2. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically the capacity building needs of residents, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
3. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically the dispositional barriers that prevent residents from engaging in learning/capacity building, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
4. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically the soft skills needs of residents, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
5. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically the Basic Skills needs of residents, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
6. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically the employability needs of residents, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
7. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to address strategically "progression" within learning strategies for residents, e.g. in "Vision" or "Mission" Statements, Aims, Values, Priorities, Operational objectives of the organisation?
8. What evidence exists of the need to ensure that all staff employed to engage residents in community based activities enhance their: soft skills; Basic Skills; capacity to contribute to the regeneration of their own community; employability and capacity to become lifelong learners, have the necessary skills and experience to discharge their responsibilities?

Appendix 2

Introductory Brief used for all Interviews

A. My study is concerned with:

Understanding more about how well community based organisations are able to help residents develop the skills and attitudes that are necessary to enable them to play an active part in enabling themselves and their community to escape social exclusion.

B. I should tell you that:

- I am not required to report my findings to anyone other than the university where I am registered as a research student – Cardiff University.
- I shall report my findings as a university dissertation.
- No reference in any of my writing will be made to individuals or specific places.
- My research does not form part of any official contract monitoring or evaluation process.

C. What precisely I am trying to do is to:

- Establish how well community based organisations understand "soft skills" and how effective they are in developing strategies to enable residents gain the soft skills that they need if they are to be able to first engage in learning and then progress to helping themselves and their community out of social exclusion.
- Establish the extent to which community based organisations are effective in devising strategies to first engage residents in capacity building activities and then enabling residents to progress to employability through lifelong learning.

D. To help me I have prepared a short list of questions for you.

I wonder if you have any objection to me using a tape-recorder? (Not used for interviews with residents).

Form 3

Interview Schedule for interviews with managers and staff of organisations working within the community delivering learning, capacity building, employability focused training and/or related support activities to residents

(These questions were devised to provide a structure for the interview and the range of questions used depended upon the exact nature of the responsibilities, duties and relevant experience of the member of staff concerned)

A. CORE QUESTIONS

Statistical data:

- Details of organisations aims and priorities.
- Historical information on organisation concerned. (Length of time in existence, etc.)
- Details of experience of community regeneration.
- Length of time in current post.
- Details of relevant experience in designing/delivering soft skills learning.
- Details of training received in soft skills.
- Number and type of learning programmes delivered in the community.
- Number of residents attending/attended learning programmes.
- Number completing programmes.
- Number obtaining accreditation.
- Number achieving positive outcomes.
- Usual progression routes.

1. How familiar are you with the aims and objectives of the community regeneration strategy?

2. What do you consider to be the main causes of social exclusion of the residents of this community?

3. What community based learning [related service] is provided by your organisation?

4. What is the purpose of these learning programmes?

   Prompts Economic? Social? Widening participation?

5. How successful are your programmes in engaging residents?

6. How successful are your programmes in retaining residents?

7. What do you consider are the main barriers that prevent residents from engaging with your project?
   Prompts:
   How significant are factors such as lack of confidence or lack of motivation?

8. What strategies does your project have in place to help residents overcome these barriers?
   Prompt:

Have any surveys been undertaken to ascertain the learning needs of residents? (In relation to capacity building or learning more generally)
What arrangements do you have in place to facilitate "soft entry" to learning for residents?
Is anything being done to enable residents to "learn how to learn" or enhance their capacity to learn more generally?

9. How successful are these strategies?
Prompts:
What targets have been set for the number of residents to be engaged?
How many residents have actually been engaged?
How many have completed the course?
What % of residents has actually been engaged?
Increased numbers being engaged in this programme?
Any success stories?
How do you encourage residents participating in your programme to engage in the process of regenerating their own community?

10. There is an increasing emphasis on "soft skills" within the context of engaging residents in capacity building as well as the employability of residents of communities such as this one. What does the term "soft skills" mean to you?
Prompts:
Had you heard the term used before today?
How important are soft skills within the context of regenerating this community?

11. Please take a few minutes to read and complete this card for me:

Issue Card (Appendix 4)

12. What priority is afforded by your project to enhancing the soft skills of residents?
Prompts:
What strategies are in place?
Are any confidence building programmes in operation?
What is their content?

13. What objective processes to assess or measure such soft skills does your project have in place?
Prompts:
Are there any mechanisms in place to assess systematically or measure the level of confidence, self-esteem or motivation of residents?
Any testing such as RICKTER scale etc.

14. How successful has your project been in enhancing the soft skills of residents?
Prompts:
How is success measured?
Any measurement of "distance travelled?"
What difference has this made to the process of regeneration?
Any success stories?

15. In what way does your project help equip residents with the skills and attitudes and general wherewithal that they will need to escape social exclusion?
Prompt:

What strategies are in place to enable residents themselves to change the way they think and/or behave so that they are better equipped to contribute towards helping themselves and their community out of social exclusion?

16. Please explain to me how your project helps residents to become employable?
Prompts:
Do you have any specific objectives concerning helping residents to take up work related learning, training or jobsearch activities?
What employment related learning or training is provided?
What information, advice and guidance are provided on employment related matters?

17. Within the context of learning, training and employability, what does the term "progression" mean to you?
Prompts:
Do you consciously arrange for residents to progress from initial engagement, to capacity building, to further learning/training to gain the necessary skills and attitudes that they now need to ensure their employability?

18. Please explain what progression routes are in place through your project to enable residents to move on to further learning, training and employability?

19.Please describe to me what counselling, advice, guidance and/or other support is available to residents through your project to encourage and support their progression to employability.
Prompts:
Is any form of labour market awareness training available?
Is any form of specialist counselling available, e.g. debt counselling, information on in-work benefits, child-care provision, mentoring, etc.

B. SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

20.What experience have you had of designing and/or delivering soft skills training for residents?

21.What training have you received in designing/delivering soft skills training?

22.As far as staff who are employed to engage residents in learning/capacity building/employability focused training or related support or staff who deliver this sort of training/support for residents are concerned, what emphasis do you place on such staff needing to have sufficient knowledge, understanding or expertise in devising and/or delivering soft skills training?
Prompts:
What sort of soft skills training or experience in working with soft skills is you looking for?
What training do you provide for existing staff to enable them to develop a reasonable knowledge, understanding or expertise in devising and/or delivering soft skills training?
When recruiting staff, how much emphasis do you place on the need for applicants to demonstrate a reasonable knowledge, understanding or expertise in devising and/or delivering soft skills training?

23.How does your project arrange for residents to take responsibility for their own lives?
Prompts:
How is this achieved?

24.What does the term Basic Skills mean to you?

Prompts:
Functional literacy and numeracy ICT skills.

25.What mechanisms does your project have in place to identify Basic Skills deficiencies among residents?
Prompts:
Any formal or informal screening?
Any formal testing?

26.What action is taken within your project to help residents to enhance their Basic Skills?
Prompts:
Are literacy and numeracy course in place or planned?

27.What does the term lifelong learning mean to you?

28.What strategies does your project have in place to enable residents to become lifelong learners?

29.What action is taken by your project to encourage Enterprise/entrepreneurship among residents?

30.What specific personal learning needs have you identified for yourself our your colleagues that would enable you/them to be more effective in first engaging residents and then enhancing their capacity to help themselves and their community to escape social exclusion?
Prompts:
Anything specifically to do with soft skills issues?

31. Do you have any other comments, points, issues that you would like to add that might help inform my research?

Appendix 4

Card used for interactive exercise with managers and staff of organisations working within the community delivering learning, capacity building, employability focused training and/or related support activities to residents

Some of the skills or characteristics listed on this card are commonly described as "Soft skills."

Please place a √ alongside the ones that you consider to be "soft skills."

READING		**ASSERTIVENESS**	
LETTER WRITING		**NUMERACY**	
PERSISTENCE		**PROBLEM SOLVING**	
PUBLIC SPEAKING		**DRIVING (Vehicle)**	
SELF-RELIANCE		**RESILIENCE**	
TEAM-WORKING		**PAINTING**	

Appendix 5

Interview Schedule for interviews with residents

These questions were devised to provide a structure for the interview and the range of questions used depended upon the exact nature of the responses

Statistical data:

- Age
- Gender
- Occupation/Employment status
- Length of time unemployed/economically inactive
- Academic Qualifications held
- Accredited Skills held
- Age left school
- Length of time since last participated in learning/training
- Likelihood of future participation in learning
- Obstacles to participation in future learning.

1. How long have you been actively involved with this project? (*Alternative* How long have you been coming to these types of classes/workshops?)

2. How useful has this been for you?
   Prompts:
   In what way has it been useful – what have you got out of it?
   How will this encourage you to do more for your community/get involved/more involved with the regeneration of your community?
   How has this been useful in helping you to become more prepared for or to think about finding employment?
   How has this helped improve your self-confidence?
   How has this helped you to feel more optimistic about the future?

3. What does the term "skills" mean to you?

4. What skills do you think are needed to operate as a community representative/volunteer – on this project?

5. What skills have you developed through your time on this project?

6. How were these skills learned/developed?

   Prompts:
   What training was available?
   How did you feel about taking up this training?
   What support did you get?
   How have you benefited from this?

7. What training have you received as part of your work/involvement with the project?
Prompts:
Any confidence building?
What progression?

8. How useful did you find this training?
Prompts:
In what way has this given you more confidence?
What are you doing differently since you attended the course?

9. How has your involvement with this project helped you to learn new skills?
Prompts:
What new skills have you learned on this project?
Gave you more confidence to learn?
Provided practical help and support to enable you to learn?
Helped you to know how to go about going further with your learning/training?
Provided help with reading and writing?
Provided help with learning computers?

10. What does the term "soft skills" mean to you?
Prompts – Confidence, motivation, attitude

11. What does the term lifelong learning mean to you?
Prompts:
How has your involvement in this project encouraged you to become more involved in learning in the future?
What other learning opportunities are now available to you?
What information, advice, guidance or support available on this project that will help you move on to learn other things?
What are you planning to learn next?
Take up training?
Look for a job?

12. How do you feel about going on to do more learning or training – for example to help you to get a job?

13.What are the things that encourage you to think about taking up employment?

14. What are the things that discourage you from thinking about taking up employment?

15. What are the things that hold you back from getting what you want out of your life?

16. How has your involvement with this project helped you to know more about the employment situation locally?
Prompts:
In what way?
Availability of jobs?
Type of jobs on offer?

What skills employers are looking for?
What attitudes and behaviours employers are looking for?

17. What do you know about the sort of things you need to do to make yourself more attractive to employers?
Prompts:
Learn new skills?
Demonstrate new attitudes/behaviours?

18. What help is available from this project to help you to find employment?
Prompts:
What help is available through the ... (name of regeneration project)?
How will they help you gain the necessary skills, qualifications, attitudes, experience etc. to help you have a better chance of finding employment?

19. How has your involvement with this project helped you to improve your prospects of finding employment?
Prompt:
Given you more confidence?
Helped you to learn more about what jobs are around?
Helped you to understand more about what employers are looking for?
Helped you to understand what action you need to take to find employment?

20. Why do you suppose that more people from this community do not get involved in the same way as yourself?
Prompts:
What do you think stops them from getting involved?
Time? Fear of leaving the house? Cost? Lack of interest? Lack of confidence?

21. What do you suppose would be the one biggest thing that needs to happen to get more people from this community involved in the same way as yourself?

22. What do you think about starting your own job through becoming self-employed?
Prompts:
Do you have any ideas for starting your own business?
Do you have any special skills or knowledge that could help you start a new business?
How confident do you feel about starting your own business?

***Aide Memoir* used for the observation of community based capacity building activities**

Project .....
DATE.....

Event/Activity
.....

During the session observed, how effectively are the following aspects dealt with:

1. Tutor/leader establishes/reinforces rapport with residents (Credibility/self disclosure).

2. Tutor/leader provides mastery experiences (opportunities for residents to succeed in accomplishing tasks and overcoming challenges and setbacks).

3. Residents are allowed to see "similar others" succeed in accomplishing tasks and/or overcome setbacks and challenges and the tutor/leader uses these opportunities to enable residents to enhance their own self-efficacy, particularly in learning.

4. Tutor/leader demonstrates effective appraisal and provides appropriate and task related feedback to residents.

5. Tutor/leader enables residents to deal positively with their emotional responses when they are unable to accomplish tasks or overcome challenges and setbacks.

6. Tutor/leader enables residents to understand that any failure to accomplish tasks or overcome setbacks and challenges is not due to any underlying lack of ability on their part.

7. Tutor/leader is adept at transferring locus of control to residents and enabling them to accept responsibility.

8. Tutor/leader is adept at encouraging motivation within residents, e.g. by enabling them to understand and set realistic goals.

9. Tutor/leader is adept at inoculating residents against setbacks and enhancing their resilience.

10. Tutor/leader is adept at enhancing other soft skills of residents.

11. What evidence of any strategy to overcome other barriers that prevents residents from engaging in learning/capacity building activities?

(How is soft entry to learning facilitated?)

12. Tutor/leader is adept at assessing and/or addressing the Basic Skills needs of residents.

13. Any evidence of objective assessment or measurement of Basic Skills?

14. Any evidence of objective assessment or measurement of soft skills?

15. Tutor/leader is adept at addressing the capacity building needs of residents.

16. What evidence exists of any recognition of the need to ensure that all learning opportunities are organised and are delivered at a pace and at a level that ensures that residents gain the maximum benefit from the learning experience and the soft skills of residents are reinforced?

17. Tutor/leader is adept at addressing the employability needs of residents.

18. What evidence exists of any strategy to provide for and ensure that residents are encouraged to benefit from cohesive and supported "progression" within the learning strategies being delivered?

19. What evidence exists of any strategy to ensure that residents understand the need for and are encouraged to become lifelong learners?

20. What evidence of tutor understanding of linkage between capacity building, employability and lifelong learning?