

The Centre for Human Ecology’s Learning Report – A contribution to Govan Together’s Final Report to the Climate Challenge Fund.

“For a spell I thought the Govan of my youth was lost. I sense that taking part in the Tuesday evening events makes it come back again. It’s taken me a long time to find this”.

A participant in the Tuesday dinner nights and Govan Conversations.

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Introduction

The transformative learning strand of the Govan Together project, delivered by the Centre for Human Ecology, took the form of 1. The **Govan Conversations**, a series of community events beginning in November 2011 based around Tuesday dinner nights provided by LEGUP and included a learning series of guest speakers and 'soapbox' have your say events, 2. The **Collaborating for Change** workshops for individuals and organisations based in Govan and 3. **Organisational Development sessions offered to LegUp** and delivered in partnership with Luci Ransome, Glasgow Transition Support Worker.

Because of the richness of this learning strand, the CHE undertook to write a separate report so as to expand and reflect on the journey taken to deliver these outcomes. Considering the challenges we experienced as a partnership working together and the inevitable difficulty to encompass varying perspectives in the final report, it also felt important to write our own story of the project. Reflecting independently from other partners gave us scope for a level of depth, details and critical analysis that the final report didn't have enough space for. Also, considering that responsiveness to feedback constitutes a key to a system's resilience, it felt important to the CHE team to embody the practice of reflexivity as part of giving closure to this project.

The section on collaboration towards the end of the report is of particular importance with regards to learning from challenges (another key quality to navigate change effectively). Supporting the collaborative process was an integral part of the CHE remit in the partnership and we wanted to specifically reflect on what we had learnt on these issues. We also understood from meetings with our KSB project officer that the CCF team would value a detailed and honest story on this aspect of our project, arguably because collaboration is known to be difficult and much could be learnt from our experience.

1. The Govan Conversations and Tuesday dinner nights

The evenings had a foundation of a shared vegetarian meal provided by a core team of LEGUP volunteers, supported by volunteers from other partner organisations and the wider community. The events were hosted in the café of the Pearce Institute, a partner in the Govan Together project and a historical resource and facility in the community. Some of the early meals contained food grown locally in LEGUP's community garden although the fact that the events mostly happened during the 'hungry gap' between growing

seasons meant most of the food was purchased or donated. LEGUP's intention was to demonstrate that vegetarian food can be delicious, varied and easy to prepare, and to promote healthy eating in an area with a poor health record and limited access to healthy food.

The convivial atmosphere created by breaking bread around the dinner table increased community cohesion and 'broke the ice' with participants getting to know each other over the months the project ran. A frequent comment was that people now recognised others in the area. Whilst they would previously have passed in the street, they now greet and talk with each other. This 'rekindling of community' deepened as the project developed.

In addition to the meals, CHE planned and facilitated a series of activities using transformative learning theory, defined as educational practices that foster deep engagement with and reflection on our ways of viewing the world, resulting in fundamental shifts towards social, environmental and psychological change. These activities usually took place concurrently with the shared meals, both before and after the food.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The focus of the learning series was to quick start a conversation on themes and issues that mattered to people in the community and increase awareness about what strengthens resourcefulness, rather than to promote direct behaviour change or awareness of carbon emissions and climate change. The reasons for this were both present in the initial planning of the project, and in response to feedback given during the first few weeks of the Govan Conversations. Govan is a relatively low-carbon community, for reasons more to do with poverty and social inequality than environmental awareness: this meant that there was very little 'low hanging fruit' to be gained in terms of community carbon reduction. Secondly, feedback was given early in the project in response to a presentation given by a locally-based academic containing scientific data on climate change. Participants stated that this way of presenting information 'went over people's heads' and was difficult for them to relate to their own lives and experiences, as well as disrupting the social atmosphere of the shared meal. Many people mentioned that they were already living low-carbon lives and didn't find that focusing on climate change would have an impact on personal and community wellbeing. Additionally, feedback was given that the message of behavioural change for carbon reduction was being perceived as being asked to 'stay poor' and was

not appropriate for an area of relative deprivation. Many participants even voiced scepticism of anthropogenic climate change. This mixed response from the community to our initial ways of communicating the resilience concept verifies the findings of WWF's Tom Crompton on 'identity campaigning' and the importance of values and frames in communicating for change (interestingly, an area also touched on by one of our guest speakers, Tim Kasser). For this reason, a stronger emphasis emerged on promoting resilience and resourcefulness, with a vision for Govan to 'leapfrog' past the stage of materialist consumerism directly to a high-wellbeing, low-carbon community based on shared values. This framing resonated much more strongly with participants although was undoubtedly an overly ambitious vision for a one year project: it should be seen in this context as an experimental pilot.

The learning activity was delivered using participatory action research, meaning that the process used an ongoing cycle of planning, action and reflection. This meant that the learning series underwent a series of iterative changes as the project unfolded: for example, it was found that a traditional 'keynote speaker' format did not engage the community, was inaccessible, and created tensions in the partnership due to large numbers of attendees being attracted from outside the community which strained the capacity of volunteers to prepare and serve enough food. Reflection on this resulted in a modification to the speaker series, with shorter presentations from speakers followed by facilitated discussion and group inquiry into the ideas presented and questions and answers with the speakers: this format was much more popular and engaging.

PLANNING AND DELIVERY

The learning series was delivered by two CCF-funded staff and a number of volunteers forming a 'hosting group'. Emerging from an earlier collaborative inquiry, the hosting group met fortnightly to inquire into methods of transformative learning to quick start a conversation about community resilience and resourcefulness in Govan. Members were invited to share reflections on their experiences and to shape the topics of discussion. Towards the end of the project, the emphasis moved away from the hosting group as a dynamic energy emerged amongst regular participants of the Govan Conversations, with many participants stepping forward to help deliver the events on a nightly ad-hoc basis. This made the role of the hosting group less central and the group began to meet less frequently before it in effect dissolved. Some participants of the hosting group expressed

frustration and lack of clarity at the function and purpose of the group.

Reflecting on this, it was due to the many challenges experienced in the process of developing the Govan Conversations. First of all, building a safe learning environment for regular participants in these events took time. It required flexibility and quick thinking as plans were often changed in response to action inquiry. And it required in-depth facilitation skills to create a space for people to feel heard and able to express their opinions. Another challenge concerned the actual collaboration between CHE and LEGUP to create conviviality, togetherness and learning on these nights. As explained in the section on collaboration (below), it's only by the end of January that a joint vision truly emerged, enabling Fablevision to host its cultural events as well. Creating a hosting group at the onset of this process was with hindsight too ambitious. The Govan Conversations are now established. Regular attendees have expressed a strong desire to continue them by contributing to food preparation and the learning element. There is the intention for a renewed hosting group, with further participation from the wider community. Planning has already begun for this. Our challenge, as CHE based in Govan, will be to support the voluntary efforts of a community committed to this space of conviviality, friendship and transformation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Many participants expressed that they found the sharing of opinions, experiences and ideas the most fulfilling part of the series. In response to this, a strand of the learning activity was developed called 'the Govan Soapbox'- a 'have your say' space where any member of the community could put themselves forward for 5 minutes and share what was important to them. Their input was followed by feedback and discussion. This proved successful, with 20 short presentations over four sessions.

Participants in the Govan Conversations reported an increased sense of empowerment and an improved sense of community. One of them commented: "The Tuesday nights have started something very positive in the community – hopefully there will be more unity as a result." Another one said "Having a good conversation with everyone is so fulfilling!"

Participants came from a cross section of the community including asylum seekers and refugees and included a wide spectrum of physical and mental ability. This created a

responsibility to ensure accessibility for all participants, which was broadly achieved.

Many participants began volunteering to help the delivery of the conversations, and many links were forged with community organisations, the voluntary sector and groups, activists and movements working locally towards increased resilience and social justice such as 'Occupy' and Time Banking. One of the most unexpected outcomes was the life and vibrancy brought to the Pearce Institute as a result of these evenings. Liz McCaffrey reported that PI staff had tried for years to bring tenants and users together and build community. All their attempts failed. As a result of Govan Together, a solid group of people now recognises the building as a major resource for Govan and cares for it.

At the final few Govan Conversations officially held under the banner of Govan Together, facilitated evaluation and visioning sessions were conducted on the theme of 'what do we need to learn to be a resilient community?' Responses included how to build reasons for hope, take an active part in democracy, rebuild solidarity, identify and communicate about common themes – what we lost and why, accept and handle disagreements, what our assets are and how to care for them, make decisions that work for all, define our vision and identity, communicate across differences and speak truth, assert our sovereignty, build power to relate to and be heard by people in power, believe in ourselves – being together, take action, engage with organisations that make decisions on our behalf.

As a result of the empowerment process which took place on the nights, three participants held a workshop at the 31st March event. A facilitated popular education series hosted by a student volunteer with CHE took place between 3rd April and 15th May.

THE GOVAN CONVERSATIONS IN NUMBERS

Govan Conversations and shared meals: 20

Invited speakers on resilience and resourcefulness: 5

Govan Soapbox 'have your say' contributions: 20 over 4 nights

Collaborating for Change workshops: 5

Average number of Govan Conversations participants per night (estimate): 30 (more people took part in the meal only approximately 40-50)

2. The Collaborating for Change workshops

RATIONALE

It's widely acknowledged in the literature on community resilience that the strength of social capital in an area will determine the collective and individual capacity to bounce back in times of crises. In *exploring community resilience in times of rapid change*, a report published by Carnegie UK Trust in July 2011, 'social capital' is described as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them". In the same report, Nigel Lowthrop from Hillholt Wood is quoted saying that "... in the most advanced technological largest economy in the world, America... thousands of people were moved out of New Orleans for their own safety and have never gone back... [whereas] Northern Indonesia was hit by that big wave and it recovered remarkably quickly in part due to the fact that it did have social capital...'

Through the big events, Govan Conversations and workshops on Collaboration, Govan Together aimed to strengthen all three types of social capital: bonding capital (close ties between people in similar situations – such as family and close friends), bridging capital (loose friendships, colleagues etc) and linking capital (people with different levels of power and status meeting and learning from one another). Our conversations with 'grasstops', meaning people who hold some power of influence in Govan due to their role and profession, and the Collaborating for Change workshops were explicitly about strengthening bridging and linking capital.

Most of the 'grasstops' we met confirmed our observation that few organisations in Govan actively work together. Many described Govan as an area that is particularly prone to conflict and dynamics of territoriality. Tensions within organisations were also mentioned with having negative impact on staff's morale and effectiveness (similarly to what we experienced within Govan Together).

A seminar held by SURF (Scottish Urban Regeneration Forum) to explore issues of community resilience was attended by a number of Govan organisations on 10th Feb 2012 at the PI. All confirmed that linkages between the voluntary, public and business sectors were weak in Govan. Andy Milne, Director of SURF argued that similarly to natural systems whose resilience depends on the diversity and interconnectedness of species, human communities can only be strong if the different parts of the system are well

connected and interdependent. Although we didn't explore the reasons why Govan was particularly prone to dynamics of conflict and poor collaboration, we can speculate that historical factors and shortage of resources (both inner and external) might be contributing factors. Whatever the reasons, it could be argued in this context that fostering a culture of dialogue and collaboration is a key strategy towards strengthening social capital and building community resilience.

HOW WERE THE WORKSHOPS PROMOTED AND PRESENTED?

Fliers were sent via our networks by email and delivered by hand to a majority of Govan voluntary organisations (with one to one conversations occurring in the process). The workshops were also promoted during our conversations with 'grasstops' in January and February. Generally, people recognised the importance of such training due to the prevalence of difficult interpersonal dynamics in their organisation and in the community as a whole. Many expressed a strong interest in attending. Organisations from outwith Govan also got in touch and asked if similar training could be delivered in house or in their area.

The flier read as follows:

**Collaborating for Change:
Communicating Across Differences to Unleash Energy & Resourcefulness**

A series of training workshops for individuals and organisations based in Govan.
Organised by Govan Together with support from Climate Challenge Fund.

Introduction sessions: Fri 27th Jan or Fri 10th Feb, 9.30-12.00
followed by a series of three full-day workshops:
Friday 24th Feb, 30th March, 27th April 2012
9.30-4.00
at the Pearce Institute 840 Govan Road

All workshops are free but limited to 20 people. Attendance to the full day on 24th Feb is required to attend the following two.

Registration and more info: www.govanfolkuniversity.org
email: info@che.ac.uk phone: 0796 385 2424

GOVAN TOGETHER | It's our future natural Scotland | Centre for Human Ecology

Back page:

In times of shrinking resources, our efforts to make Govan a resourceful and vibrant place requires we work more effectively together, foster a culture of dialogue, and achieve things at the same time as get on with people we work with.

This series of workshops will equip you with tools to use in challenging conversations. You will:

- *Learn to speak your trust and still stay in connection;*
- *Transform challenges into opportunities for collaboration;*
- *Be better equipped to know what to say in difficult conversations;*
- *Facilitate meetings more skilfully;*
- *Give and receive feedback without criticism;*
- *Be more able to foster trust, willingness and creativity among teams;*
- *Less often leave things unsaid and therefore feel re-energised in life and at work.*

WHAT CAME OUT OF THE WORKSHOPS?

About 33 people enrolled for one or several of the sessions although not all of them made it at the end. Organisations that actually took part include Carers Scotland, Ad-Action, the Glasgow Boys Brigade, GalGael, LegUp, CHE, Family Addiction Support Service, the Glasgow Allotments Association, Govan and Craigton Integration Network and the Women's Muslim Centre. Organisations that expressed a strong interest but couldn't take part for various reasons include Elderpark Housing Association, Govan Health Practice, JobCentre Plus and Central Govan Action Plan.

In each session, we worked with a balance of theory (inputs on models or discussion of relevant articles) and practice of skills.

A challenge we identified was how to balance the experience of people with management responsibility with that of volunteers with less experience of collaboration. Another challenge was how to create a learning environment where more 'grasstops' felt able and safe to join. One of the blocks to participation was undoubtedly time pressure. Shorter monthly sessions might have attracted more people. Another one, not explicitly expressed but implicit in some comments, was the perception that talking about these issues with others in Govan would put participants in a situation of vulnerability (especially if there are tensions and mistrust between organisations). This work is so valuable in the context of harnessing a community's resourcefulness to face and adapt to climate change and other disruptive events that we want to explore how organisations can be encouraged to endorse such trainings and create time for their staff to attend.

Our experience strongly suggests that fostering a culture of dialogue at all levels of the community like Govan is a critical step towards living low carbon and fulfilling lifestyles. Would CCF staff be interested in a conversation on how to take this work beyond Govan?

3. Organisational development sessions with LegUp

This section was written collaboratively by V r ne Nicolas and Luci Ransome. LegUp members were invited to feedback. This is a detailed report on this work as we thought that the themes, structure and tools we used in these sessions might be of interest to other volunteer-led projects within the CCF network.

SETTING THE SCENE

Within a few months of working together, a shared awareness emerged that LegUp, a young organisation, would welcome some support in organisational issues. Challenges expressed by the group ranged from managing and attracting volunteers, facilitating effective meetings and inclusive decision making, running the garden as a model for other groups in the community and dealing with people displaying challenging behaviours. We recognised that the work undertaken with LegUp was about strengthening resourcefulness within the Govan Together partnership and introducing tools and frameworks that could be useful in other contexts: when one organisation strengthens its capacity to deliver its mission, it has reverberation in the community as a whole. Luci Ransome, Glasgow Transition Support Worker, worked with V r ne Nicolas from CHE to hold this process. We started in the autumn 2011 with one to one conversations with 6 key members of LegUp. From this, a document was compiled and comprised a list of challenges and opportunities voiced by these members as well as skills and structures/processes that we thought could help tackle the challenges and support the opportunities. We also pointed to training opportunities to develop certain skills (development sessions, workshops held under the banner of Govan Together or by Luci in her Glasgow Transition Support Worker role, external trainings such as the permaculture course offered by Urban Roots or CASP sessions).

A three hour-long session took place on Dec 5th with all interviewed members. Together we identified LegUp's main development needs:

- Vision: clarity of vision for LegUp so that you are all working from the same script;
- Organisation and Planning: clarity of who is responsible for what, where, when, whom and why so you can work better together;
- Participation: increasing participation in the project so that more people are sharing in the development of LegUp;

- Affirmation: increasing the appreciation for and recognition of people's contribution to LegUp, no matter what they do so that nurturing each other becomes integral to what you do;

We outlined a strategy by which these development needs could be met:

1. Development 'MonDays'...

We offered to facilitate three Monday Development Days [Jan – Mar] to help members explore and develop understanding and skills for all 4 of the above identified issues. We offered to use Dragon Dreaming and other proven empowerment approaches to meet as many of their needs as possible in these sessions. Throughout all of this we offered to weave in ways to help them 'nurture' and support each other. We communicated how important it was for all key LegUp members to attend all 3 sessions. We thought this would create a common goal, an opportunity to understand each other and build stronger links to weather future challenges and rise to ongoing opportunities, cooperatively.



2. Complimentary Support...

Outside of the Development MonDays additional skills could be gained via:

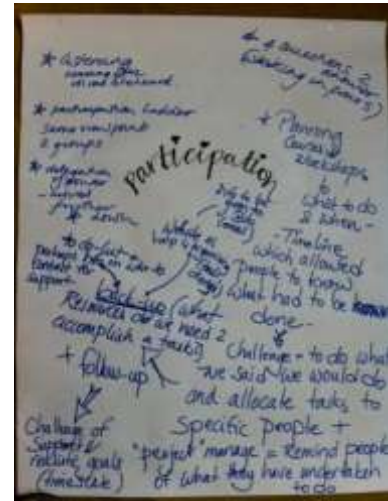
- 3 full day workshops on 'Collaborating for Change' delivered by Vèrène under the banner of Govan Together;
- Support for developing skills in group cooperation, collaboration and resourcefulness through Luci as part of the 'Common WEALTH Games Day' – a free community event that took place on Jan 21st in Milton.
- Other skills/development needs to be explored via CASP and other organisations. Discussion on this was to take place in the development sessions.

From this we formulated some changes within LegUp we hoped to facilitate:

- a more coherent and commonly owned vision
- a greater clarity of roles and responsibilities within the project
- a basic plan as to how to work with the garden and volunteers
- a greater awareness of the factors that support good participation

SESSION 1 (30TH JANUARY) – 8 MEMBERS ATTENDED

The focus of this session was on participation as we recognised that some community building was needed in the group before launching into the visioning and organising process. Outcomes for the day included: Members will feel more enthusiasm to work together; they will be more aware of assumptions they hold about each other and will have greater understanding of when and where they feel more empowered/disempowered and why.



Exercises we used included “Open Sentences” (inspired by Joanna Macy’s Despair and Empowerment work) and the ladder of participation to trigger discussion on keys concepts of and factors enabling participation. Participation in LegUp was explored. Specific areas such as communication, meetings, planning, volunteers’ involvement were identified as requiring particular attention.

Part of the day was also devoted to planning: Fiona’s ‘Grow Your Own Food’ course and Richard’s Solar Panels building workshops as they required preparation and active input from the group.

SESSION 2 (13TH FEBRUARY) – 6 MEMBERS ATTENDED

From session 1 it was apparent that day-to-day organisation for upcoming events needed urgent facilitation. However, in the run-up to session 2, we were made aware of considerable tensions in the group leading to the resignation of one core member. We re-evaluated our session 2 plan and created space for the expression of views and emotions that we expected to come up. It meant that the planned Organisation and Planning day, centred on Dragon Dreaming - a tool to help shift blocks in working effectively – had to be shortened. Half the day was devoted to giving space to members’ concerns as regards to events that had just happened and their implication for the future of LegUp. The second half focused on the initial plan with an introduction to the Dragon Dreaming process, including an enactment of the Visioning, Planning, Doing and Celebrating aspects by LegUp members.

SESSION 3 (1ST MARCH) – 6 MEMBERS ATTENDED

The review and planning process led Luci to focus this session on planning and organising processes. We had originally planned to devote this session to visioning. However, as time devoted to group dynamics and support with planning had taken priority, this aspect of the process couldn't be fitted into the timescale any more. This session was devoted to strengthening the group's awareness of immediate 'tasks' at hand and how to tackle them with resources present in the group.

ADDITIONAL SESSION 4 (12TH MARCH) – 8 MEMBERS ATTENDED

Originally unplanned, this session emerged from the need to create more space for dialogue after one key member's resignation (mentioned above). Many concerns were voiced: ensuring LegUp's sustainability, enabling all to have a voice, taking responsibility for existing structures and establishing new ones to improve decision making, allowing time for dialogue when difficult issues arise and establishing space for critical feedback and honesty. Key principles of effective collaborative working were highlighted such as clear and fair ways to earn power, mechanisms for critical feedback, standards of behaviours and ways to hold people accountable and structures for conflict resolution and effective decision-making. We agreed to meet again as it was felt that more dialogue was needed to bring about mutual understanding, re-establish trust and start working on structures to improve group functioning. However, a request for breathing space was formulated by one member shortly after the session and the process stopped there.

Consequently, we voiced our ongoing commitment to LegUp, including willingness to support dialogue and organisational development if and when needed in the future.

REFLECTION ON OUTCOMES WITH MEMBERS FEEDBACK

In terms of the **changes** within LegUp we had hoped to facilitate [quotes from members are weaved in]:

- **A more coherent and commonly owned Vision** – we didn't have time for this to be addressed. We feel sad about it considering the pivotal role that a common vision provides to any organisation; Tensions within the group meant that we needed to take a slower route than we had initially planned. We also had a sense that the visioning process should include more LegUp volunteers than those who took part in the development sessions. We suggested to the group that their next AGM would

provide the most fruitful and inclusive context to hold this process. We believe that without a clear and coherent vision, LegUp might encounter ongoing difficulty to sustain its activities and energy.

- **A greater clarity of roles and responsibilities within the project** - an increased awareness occurred of the need for this. As other structures such as effective decision making and conflict resolution have, in our understanding, not been put in place, defining and holding clear roles might present ongoing challenges.
- **A basic plan as to how to work with the garden and volunteers** - movement towards this occurred over the sessions. One member commented that *“Planning was really useful as the gardening course was coming up. We were in danger of the course not happening....”* The longing for effective planning was expressed strongly by members during our sessions. Giving the group new tools to facilitate this process was appreciated. *“Dragon Dreaming was a really good tool for identifying what we are not doing, even for micro things. If we have an open day and there’s only 1 person to do the doing we can use the tool to help organize the day, help Stewart tidy up etc as well as assessing how the group works together. There’s not enough celebrating and that affects our morale. We will definitely use it.”*
- **A greater awareness of the factors that support participation, inclusion and effectiveness** – an increased awareness and some greater ability to put this into practice too - *“We saw people having different skills ... we got to know people better and made decision making better”*. *“The growing thing we talked about at the last session - what we grow and how we decide – last Saturday we discussed that. We asked what people want to grow, when and how? We are asking people to take responsibility for that”*. Again, more work in this area would deepen LegUp members’ skills in all these areas. *“Decision making is important and we are finding it difficult to do together. We need cohesion about how we do stuff.”*

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THIS WORK?

Supporting LegUp presented many challenges and opportunities for growth for the two of us. Here we present our individual reflections on what we learnt from supporting a volunteer-led group with organisational and conflict issues, as well as from our collaborative process.

Luci's reflections:

Verene and I were trying our best to help LegUp with our range of skills and experience in people and project support but the newness of the collaboration meant we hadn't had enough time to develop trust and understanding of each others approaches and needs. In hindsight it may have been clearer for me to have supported LegUp with the main development sessions and Verene to bring in her considerable people support skills when required. This would have freed up Verene to allocate more time to coordinating Govan Together and her other considerable commitments to the project

I have learnt that creating a process that sets the scene for ongoing reflective process within a new collaboration in a way that is as attentive as the support of a new group and its process is vital to the health of a collaborative practice.

Taking on a role of facilitation while also involved in the main project can be a tight rope to walk - there was tension here for me regarding Verène's roles. More reflection is needed to explore what might have helped/ hindered the work.

It became clear that LegUp members had very different needs for the development session space that had not been apparent at the planning stage of the process – to have difficult conversations that would be held by an “outsider”, to discuss day to day issues that they couldn't otherwise coordinate, to have facilitated support to plan immediate projects that had complex logistics to overcome as well as learning skills to plan and organise their project. Allowing more time to visit the project initially as well as throughout the process to see more of the issues at first hand would have brought more of this to light for the planning process

As Verene and I have different approaches and skills to group facilitation, the tension between allowing people to off load their concerns and jeopardise the planned process of support while being flexible enough to accommodate changing needs was an ongoing issue that was difficult to hold and talk about. Both parts were needed – with the group having very little structure itself to hold different needs within the project it was partly our role as I saw it to help them with this by keeping firm boundaries so that the group could learn where and when it was appropriate to bring concerns for discussion, focus on

planning or learning something new. This member's comment confirms that our holding of the process didn't meet all their needs: *"It can be good to be responsive but there is a danger by throwing open things we don't get to the nub of the issues, time is taken up."*

I didn't fully appreciate the strength of people's hope that this process would solve all their immense and seemingly intractable challenges. There was a lot of emotion and desperation that came from the process and I wonder if more time to reflect on and be clear about how much we could realistically help needed to be addressed at the beginning of the process. Finally, supporting a group over such a short period of time – less than a year – can be problematic in that the concerns and support to change aren't there after the initial hard work to look deeply has been started. In my experience this is actually when the group need to know there is ongoing support, like a teenager, to go off and try their own thing, knowing a deeply committed person / people are there to fall back on as things go awry

Vèrène's reflections

I echo Luci's concern that delivering organisational development training and group dynamics support with LegUp conflicted with my involvement in Govan Together and active coordination of activities on behalf of the partnership. Wearing different hats, especially when the group was going through a 'storming' phase meant that it was difficult to hold a truly neutral and safe space for group members. Working with Luci to create the framework and structure of the sessions, as well as debrief/plan as sessions unfolded but let her facilitate them might have been more effective to facilitate change in LegUp. I am still uncertain how we could have better supported the group to handle their tensions. In particular, I have questions as to whether I was the best person to hold the space for dialogue and reconciliation, despite the skills I hold in this area. What's clearer however is that tensions emerged in LegUp as a result of the lack of clear vision and organisational structures (including decision-making and feedback giving/receiving). Both processes were therefore interconnected. On the whole, members of LegUp acknowledged that this process had been important despite the challenges we encountered along the way. One member said: *"It would have been good to have been through this process before. Subconsciously people are talking about other things and staying away from the issues"*

Overall I am left with questions as to why a volunteer-led group like LegUp has had such difficulty establishing a shared vision and solid organisational structures. In an area like Govan, many people wrestle to a certain degree with difficulties to hold life together. An ‘anarchist’ ethos (as voiced by LegUp members) might also get in the way of willingly creating structures of management, accountability and decision making. The challenge for people like me and Luci is to have enough time in our hands and appropriate legitimacy to journey with the group, build trust, hold meaningful and supportive conversations with individuals, facilitate meetings when invited and slowly demonstrate the importance and relevance of organisational structures. A resource I discovered in the course of this work is Starhawk’s *Empowerment Manual – A Guide for Collaborative Groups*. In it, the author highlights a clear journey to navigate the challenges of collaboration, including holding a visioning process, establishing structures for learning, sharing roles and responsibility and handling conflict and ‘difficult people’. As a result we’ll be better equipped for future work with LegUp and other volunteer-led groups.

Other useful resources we used / came across:

Dragon Dreaming – How to make outrageously successful projects happen – Gaia Foundation - <http://www.dragondreaming.de/download/>

From Conflict to Co-operation - A handy illustrated guide for community enterprises – Cooperatives UK - <http://www.uk.coop/resources/documents/conflict-co-operation>

4. What have we learnt about partnership working?

This section reflects CHE’s views on the Govan Together collaboration process. Other partners might differ in their interpretation of our journey together. We nevertheless hope this will be a valuable contribution to understanding the challenges of collaboration within projects funded by CCF and how partnership working could be supported in the future.

SETTING THE SCENE

As far as we know, Govan Together was the only round [8?] CCF-funded project involving 5 organisations working in partnership. And it was one of perhaps few projects that focused on tackling community resilience as a precursor to addressing carbon reduction or unfolding sustainable and meaningful lifestyles. This brought a high level of complexity to the project, numerous tensions between and within partners as well as invaluable learning and some real achievements.

Govan Together emerged from the Govan Folk University (GFU), a then loose partnership between the Pearce Institute, the Centre for Human Ecology (CHE), the GalGael Trust, Fablevision and Govan and Linthouse Parish Church. When the Govan Together application was submitted, Govan and Linthouse Parish Church chose to support but not directly participate in the project, whilst LegUp, although not part of GFU, joined the project. Members of GalGael, Fablevision and CHE played a key part in drawing the application. Due to the speed at which this process took place, and whilst the overall goals and objectives were clearly laid out in the application, budget allocation and clarity around roles and responsibilities hadn't been agreed between partners by the time the project got funding. Added to this, the complexity mentioned above made the first few months of the project bumpy, stressful and slow in delivering on some of the outcomes.

ZOOMING IN ON THE DIFFICULTIES WE ENCOUNTERED:

First of all and due to the fact that in a low income area like Govan, climate change is more an issue of resilience than carbon reduction, we were dealing with the unfamiliar and complex field of inquiry of how to facilitate conversations and experimental activities towards building community resilience and resourcefulness.

Moreover, the 5 partners forming 'Govan Together' had never worked together in this combination, did not all know each other well (or at all in some instances). It took us the length of the project, many tense conversations (face to face and via emails), bi-weekly management and project meetings and a whole year of joined up activities to truly get to know each other and start achieving a certain degree of flow.

As a result of this complexity as well as the imperative to deliver our outcomes within a year, pressure was put onto the group forming process and the final agreement on budget & roles allocation didn't take place until mid-September. Activities such as organising the first big event, food growing in the garden and initiating the collaborative inquiry into issues of resilience and resourcefulness happened, as planned, within the first months of the project. Fablevision Studios also engaged in a number of activities pertaining to the creative evaluation (filming, social media, graphic design, volunteers training and broadsheet development). It is fair to say, however, that a lot of our energy was mobilised into wrestling with tensions, investing considerable efforts to create and maintain space for dialogue, and drawing successive proposals to clarify roles and budget allocation.

The remaining six months saw a clear acceleration on the delivery front especially in the areas of creating togetherness and learning for resourcefulness. During this second half of the project, tensions between us continued but did not prevent each organisation, in the whole, from undertaking the work they had committed to. Lack of time, complexity of the issues at hand, as well as tensions experienced within some organisations, were perhaps as much of a barrier to delivery than differences in worldviews, management practices and cultures across organisations.

WHAT MADE OR WOULD HAVE MADE IT WORK?

In a nutshell, effective collaboration is an accomplishment rather than a given. It requires ongoing efforts, specific skills, and collectively agreed structures to facilitate accountability, learning and delivery.

- **Funding and commitment to Govan**

It might seem obvious but is still worth mentioning that being granted funding from CCF played a major role in making the partnership work. Without funding we probably wouldn't have had the impetus to draw this combination of partners together; in particular as LegUp wasn't part of the work that GFU had initiated in the year preceding the application process, they might not have had the motivation to join Govan Together. Individuals within each organisation were also able to commit significant time to this project whilst previous GFU initiatives had been voluntary. Linked to the funding, the obligation to deliver a set of objectives within a year gave us the motivation to keep going under difficult circumstances. And, possibly more importantly, our commitment to making a difference in Govan and the opportunity given by this project to do something truly innovative and exciting encouraged us time and time again to face and work at our challenges.

- **INDIVIDUALLY LED PROJECTS VERSUS COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES**

In the course of the project, a balance naturally emerged between individually led projects (such as the Collaborating for Change workshops for CHE, film and broadsheet for Fablevision, food growing course for LegUp etc) and collectively owned projects (Tuesday evening and big events). This allowed autonomy and control over some project outcomes by each organisation. Collaborative activities added considerable value to the project as they broadened access to beneficiaries, created mutually beneficial conditions for each

partner's contribution and stretched partners to find ways of working together that reflected everyone's vision.

Tuesday evening events were a good example of this. The meal provided by LegUp was pivotal in creating a space of conviviality. This in turn allowed CHE to progressively establish a space for learning as well and for Fablevision to offer its cultural events.

Similarly to the project as a whole, establishing a sense of flow, coherence and real partnership working took time and a few challenging conversations. Our visions and ways of working initially diverged and created tensions, particularly for LegUp. As explained in the section on the Govan Conversations, CHE's first events, rooted in our previous incarnation as an academic entity, attracted people from outwith Govan (in one occasion in large numbers). We were unaware of the drain this was to put on LegUp's workload (food making and dish washing) and of course on their willingness to support our events when they didn't contribute to their vision. A conversation between LegUp and CHE before Christmas clarified what was important to us all as regards to the Tuesday nights, namely:

- Increasing the garden's capacity by raising awareness of its existence and enrolling Govan-based volunteers;
- Creating enough time on the night for both a relaxed meal and spacious learning events;
- Ensuring a certain coherence and continuity every week by making sure that hosting group members are there each night;
- Creating a safe space for people to feel held;
- Enabling people to take ownership of what happens on the night;
- Developing a vision of what Govan wants to learn to build resourcefulness.

After this conversation, CHE decided to experiment with a new format for the evening - the talks would happen in the café before the meal and the after meal discussion (for those who wanted it) would happen in an adjacent space so as not to disturb the atmosphere of conviviality for those wanting to stay and chat at the tables.

In practice, the latter didn't happen as there wasn't another suitable space available in the PI on Tuesday night. It meant that some adjustment was needed – people wanting to chat needed to keep the volume down and removed themselves into the kitchen (due to the

café's acoustics) whilst CHE made its talks and discussions more attractive & participatory, drawing most of the people present at the meal into a learning space that worked for them.

Similarly, after the Burns Night event that attracted 120 people and considerably stretched LegUp's capacity, Fablevision held a debrief session with a few core members. It was agreed that consequent events would be organised in such a way that kept numbers to a manageable level.

The 3 big events present another example where true collaboration emerged over time. Whilst the first event was coordinated by the Chair of LegUp with considerable help from Fablevision, all partners apart from CHE played a part on the day. Whilst the day itself was successful in attracting people (thanks to the brilliant idea of organising bus trips to link the different resources in the community) and in inquiring into resources valued by people in Govan (thanks to a mapping process, collective writing of poetry and collection of 'kitchen stories'), its organisation was stressful due to lack of clarity & communication. Consequently, the coordination of the following 2 events was allocated to Fablevision.

Reclaiming Christmas was organised through a series of weekly production meetings outwith the regular bi-weekly meetings. Whilst publicity and organising the various elements of the day was professionally handled and whilst many elements of the event undoubtedly fulfilled our aims of creating togetherness and forging a new story for Govan, lack of trust and tiredness due to ongoing tensions meant that the day didn't reflect the diversity of the partnership. Some partners' attention was also fully focused on delivering other parts of the project and it was difficult to fit another weekly meeting in an already busy schedule.

By contrast, "Seeds for the Future" on 31st March saw each partner contributing to the full. We had made a point of discussing the event at each project group meeting in February and March. Partners also attended Fablevision's production meetings and we took responsibility for different parts of the day and activities. Although attendance was lower than at the previous 2 events, the event was the most meaningful and successful of all our events from the point of view of partnership working.

- **Flow of communication**

Collaboration would have been less stressful if all members of partner organisations had been well informed of the goals and objectives of Govan Together as well as decisions made by the various GT structures (hosting group, management group, project group and Basecamp software). Better knowledge of each organisation's history and culture as well as of individual personalities would also have helped.

The speed at which the application process happened, difficulties encountered in the first months and the fact we didn't go through a visioning process with all partners at the start, meant that many LegUp volunteers who weren't part of the project group felt disconnected from Govan Together.

Added to this, our structures didn't empower everyone involved in the project to relay information and opinions effectively. A lack of safety at our meetings prevented less experienced and quieter individuals to express their voice and feel heard. Some people are also of the opinion that operational and management issues were given priority over process. Having at least one representative per partner on the management and project groups was clearly not enough to establish an effective flow of information and dialogue between and within organisations.

As a result of this, frustration, hurt and misunderstanding grew amongst LegUp, CHE and Fablevision volunteers and staff involved in the delivery of key parts of the project (dinner nights, small and big events, and filming activities). Recognition of the considerable efforts that all teams put in this project didn't happen enough in the course of the year.

Paying more attention to effective structures of communication and checking that all people involved were sufficiently informed would have avoided many tensions.

- **MANAGING THE PROJECT**

On the practical issue of management, it was felt that managing the project via bi-weekly management and project group meetings worked well, especially once we reached clarity as to who was doing what and with which budget. These regular meetings allowed some communication and collaboration to take place. The introduction in September of

Basecamp, a project management software service, enabled focused communication over different aspects of the project.

Although no-one held the post of project coordinator, each partner held a clearly defined coordinating role: LegUp coordinated all activities related to food growing and preparing, Fablevision coordinated 2 big events, creative evaluation and reporting activities, CHE coordinated a range of transformative learning activities as well as capacity building and ‘space holding’ within the partnership, the Pearce Institute provided venue space and GalGael chaired the project and management groups.

- **RESOURCES THAT MAKE COLLABORATION WORK AND WHERE WE ARE AT THE END OF IT**

What facilitates harmonious and effective work across differences, in our understanding, boils down to resources: *external resources* on the one hand such as time, appropriate structures, funding to pay external facilitator/mediator when necessary etc, and *inner resources* on the other, including specific skills (in particular communication and dialogue) and certain qualities (self awareness, resilience, capacity for self-reflexivity and openness to feedback, authenticity and courage to speak one’s truth to name only a few).

Appropriate training, establishment of more structures, effective communication between Govan Together and members of partner organisations as well as time to get to know each other at the beginning would have gone a long way towards establishing flow.

Developing an ethos of reflexivity within the partnership by learning together the skills of feedback giving/receiving might also have lifted many of the blocks to trust building and effective collaboration.

At the end and despite much commitment to resolving tensions, a lot of time and effort invested in facilitating dialogue, real passion for our work and commitment to Govan, notwithstanding some skills in mediation and communication within the partnership, neither trust nor flow fully emerged. Coming to the end of our year together, it’s unlikely that this particular combination of partners will come together formally to hold a follow-up project to Govan Together (although only time will say of course). Activities initiated this past year such as the dinner nights and the Govan Conversations will hopefully continue on a self-organising basis considering their potential to foster a movement towards community resilience in Govan. Individual organisations might also choose to work together in the future, especially as despite our challenges we still talk to and respect each other. A last

debrief session, planned for end of May or early June, will give closure to the project and give us space to explore the legacy left by Govan Together and follow-up actions emerging in the community as a result of our work.

WHAT WILL WE DO DIFFERENTLY WHEN COLLABORATING IN THE FUTURE?

We know that circumstances (and the funding environment in particular) rarely give time to establish solid foundations for partnership working. However, we will endeavour to pay attention to the following steps when launching into a similar initiative in the future:

1. **Build rapport and relationships with potential partners** before formally agreeing to work together – practically it would involve conversations with organisations we identify as potential partners and exchanging information (websites, project reports etc). We would explore each other's values, practices and frames of reference, ensuring that each partner clearly understands the definitions and concepts the others are working from.

Underpinning this would be the question as to whether we can work together. What can we bring to the partnership to complement each other? What challenges can we expect and what might we need to put in place (structures, processes, training etc) to minimise conflict?

2. Carry out a **visioning process** attended by all partners. This will clarify what we have in common and how to draw on each other's strength. It will reveal partners' values & frameworks and create a standard against which decisions will be made.

3. Draw a **partnership agreement** with budget allocation and clear roles & responsibilities before funds are granted. Ideally, we would also agree, as early as possible in the project, on the monitoring & evaluation framework ensuring that participatory action research is an integral part of the process. Agree on structures of decision making, resource allocation, conflict management and accountability at an early stage of the project. Also agree how each organisation will support their staff in dealing with tensions arising from the partnership and will ensure effective flow of communication between staff/volunteers and project management structures.

5. Organise an externally facilitated session at the start of the project to **explore issues of capacity**, constraints, strengths and fragilities of each partner organisation. This will reveal

potential areas of tensions and enable mutual understanding. This process might also reveal where mentoring of particular individuals needs to be put in place (if they've not had previous experience of partnership working).

6. **Training on collaboration** and communication skills as well as how to develop a collective **learning** ethos would add huge strength to our partnership. Both areas are key aspects of the resilience agenda. A collaborative inquiry into how to navigate the challenges of collaboration could constitute one of the most important project outcomes.

7. When finalising the work plan, pay attention to **balancing individually-owned projects and collective** ones where potential synergies are identified and encouraged;

8. Because of the complexity of the subject matter (e.g. community resilience and behaviour change), an **externally facilitated session to engage intellectually in the issues and frameworks at stake** would have been welcome at an early stage. It took us a long time to get our heads around these notions. Some orientation in this field would have been invaluable. Dr Kate Driscoll, then based at Glasgow University's Geography department, played this role informally when she joined the collaborative inquiry group in July. She introduced us to the importance of mapping resources and played an important role in the July 30th event. Unfortunately, she left in August to take up a new post in the States. The workshop that she led on March 17th when she returned to Glasgow for a research visit, brought back the richness of bridging academic and applied knowledge. This workshop was one of the highlights of our year together - something to reflect on for future collaborative projects.

9. And finally, trust that **time, commitment** to the community and its place, and **joined up activities** will reveal, often in unexpected ways, the magic of collaboration.

Conclusion – What have we learnt about building community resilience as a precursor to low carbon and fulfilling lifestyles in an area like Govan?

In an area like Govan, which features high up on the Scottish Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, issues such as climate change and carbon reduction are not considered a high priority. The scope of the project in terms of behaviour change was therefore modest. By instead framing these issues in terms of resilience and resourcefulness, the project attempted to create the conditions for the emergence of a space in which the community could experience, learn about and own these ideas in their own way, and to identify and map the resources available locally.

In our eyes, the project could be said to have two major achievements. The first was that of the building of meaningful, enthusiastic and friendly relationships between a group of individuals living and working in Govan thanks to the creation of a convivial, weekly community space and three larger events. The fact that the Tuesday evening events have continued uninterrupted since the end of the project strongly suggests that a community is emerging around this vision, together with a willingness to creatively contribute to developing it.

The second achievement was the creation of a map of all projects in Govan (inserted in the broadsheet), paralleling the building of relationships with and between organisations as a result of our various activities. By beginning to form an integrated view of the resources, assets, organisations and individuals working for change in the area, the project has made a major first step towards building resilience in Govan. Solid foundations are now in place for this vision to gather momentum.

Future work building on the Govan Together project will need to move from the initial stage of building a space for community to emerge (which has been achieved) towards organising for a cohesive vision of the future. For instance, we can envisage a long term vision focusing on the key areas of the "Compass of Resilience" (see broadsheet)ⁱ. Efforts could focus on supporting local people take ownership and unleash the potential of community assets (like the Pearce Institute, 'stalled' green spaces along the Clyde, or the Govan Cross car park to only name three examples), establishing a development trust to bring together assets owning organisations (such as businesses and housing associations), developing a culture of learning and dialogue across and within

organisations, increasing carbon reducing activities (growing food, composting, eating together, recycling etc) or promoting creative, diverse cultural events.

This vision poses the question of leadership: who has the legitimacy in the community to galvanise energy and build the relationships underpinning such a vision? Our experience of 5 organisations working in partnership highlighted major blocks to creating a common vision for this work and posed the challenge of how to include other organisations in the community.

Additionally, wider structural barriers exist: despite recent regeneration work, Govan is still experiencing the after-effects of industrial decline and its associated problems. While a positive vision of a low-carbon, high-wellbeing community can be a key part of Govan's future, it will take some time to achieve and would require willingness from funders and policy-makers in addition to community groups.

Six weeks after the completion of the project, observing the ongoing dynamic creation of friendship, learning and community organising on Tuesday nights, a thought has emerged: could it be that a group of Govan residents, detached from any organisational ties, will want to come together and initiate a bottom-up project, starting with creating their vision of a resilient, low carbon Govan? Could it be that the most important achievement of Govan Together has been to plant the seed of a movement towards community resilience led by a group of 'unusual suspects' and truly grassroots individuals? And could it be that similarly to other initiatives towards community resilience emerging in low income communities in the UK and beyond, we are witnessing the birth of a very exciting model of mobilization and 'transition'. Only time will say of course but we are fully committed to supporting and taking part in it.

We would like to thank all the people who have given us their trust and support and have contributed to making this project a fascinating, engaging and often enjoyable experience.

Vérène Nicolas and Luke Devlin

On behalf of the Centre for Human Ecology

ⁱ Exploring community resilience in times of rapid changes – published by Fiery Spirit Community of Practice, supported by Carnegie UK Trust. July 2011