



**CLARION  
FUTURES**

# **Clarion Futures – Community Assets InterAct Programme**

## **Evaluation report**

### **January 2018**



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## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Evaluation findings</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Achievements and Challenges</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Clarion, partner and others' responsibilities</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Learning</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>19</b>



## 1 Introduction:

In January 2018, Clarion Housing Group launched a new community engagement programme called InterAct, managed by Clarion Futures Community Assets team. InterAct responded to a survey of Clarion partners that said they most wanted financial support for projects and engagement, and a chance for training and peer-support as some partners felt less confident in community engagement. It aimed to support community organisations that had taken on the management of Clarion's community centres through:

- a small grants scheme (up to £5,000 for community engagement and consultation costs)
- two shared learning conferences (January 2018, Leeds; January 2019, London)
- flexible one-to-one support to help create and enable vibrant, financially sustainable hubs. Primarily, the support was provided from Wendy Sugarman and Mandy Wilson, from Community Works (up to two days per group)
- Staff support from Clarion Futures' Communities team and links with specialist teams such as digital inclusion and employment advisors.

### InterAct Partners

Colebrook SW Ltd, Plymouth  
Community Hertsmere, Borehamwood, Herts  
Enable-U2-do-it CIC, Bolton  
Ferndale Community and Tenants Group, Plymouth  
Hilda Lane, Community Association, Bromley  
Mancunian Way, Salford  
CAVCA, Hull  
Play Place Innov8 CIC, Bromley  
REAP Community CIC, Lewisham  
Riverside Community Centre  
Sutton Estate Community Organisation, Middlesbrough  
William Sutton Estate TRA, Bethnal Green

Community Works was contracted to evaluate the programme, focusing on:

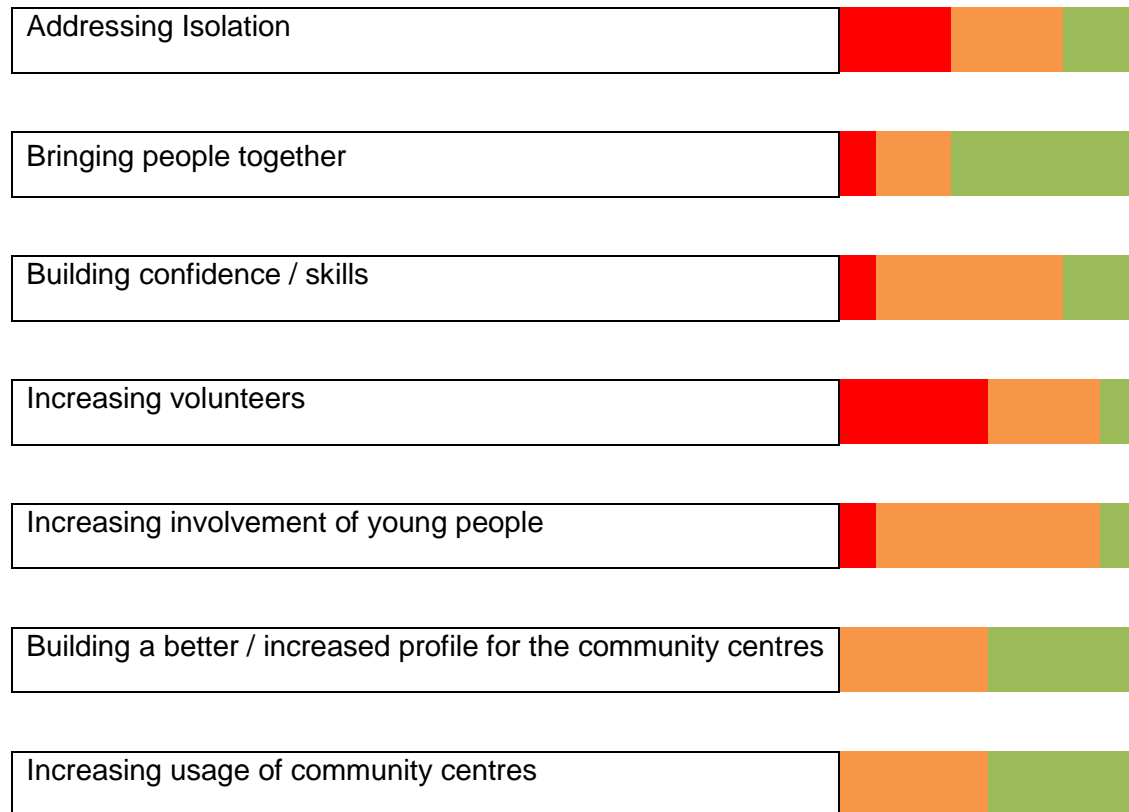
- The context community organisations operate in
- Successes and lessons for community organisations looking to engage people in their community centre or other facility.
- Lessons for Clarion Housing Group or other organisations looking to support community organisations in similar contexts.



Issues to address	What will make change happen/ what is needed?	Plans to make change happen in the next 6 months?	The results you want to see
<p>People are isolated</p> <p>Community engagement – need to bring people together</p>	<p>Understand and tap into people's motivations</p> <p>Need more / new opportunities to attract people</p> <p>Communications strategy or plan</p>	<p>Recognize and build on people's skills</p> <p>Social media, door knocking, gazebo, open days, banners, fliers, positive press attention</p>	<p>Increased activities which reflect needs of local people</p> <p>Residents actively engaged</p> <p>Increased community cohesion and neighbourliness</p>
<p>Lack of confidence and skills in bringing about change</p> <p>Need more / a broader base of volunteers</p>	<p>Outreach work – identify potential volunteers</p> <p>Support / training / encouragement to be active</p>	<p>Create core group of volunteers</p>	<p>Community confidence, capacity and social capital</p> <p>More active residents / volunteers</p>
<p>Community centre profile, ownership and use</p>	<p>Raise the profile of the community centre</p>	<p>Host small gatherings – e.g. street based lunches</p> <p>Consultation about local needs and wishes</p> <p>Use partners to advertise the centre</p>	<p>Thriving community centre which meets people needs and wishes</p> <p>Residents plan and organise activities</p> <p>Sustainability plan</p>
<p>Need more involvement of young people</p>	<p>Changed perceptions of young people</p> <p>Different ages interacting</p> <p>Youth engagement/youth voice</p> <p>Work in partnership with others</p>	<p>Consultation with young people</p> <p>Support young people to run an event</p>	<p>Young people active and engaged in community life</p> <p>Fun and successful experiences for young people</p>

## 2.1 Patterns of success

Whilst not completely scientific, this illustrates where partners felt they were successful in contributing to the common issues - red, a little; orange, to some extent; green, a lot.



## 2.2 Addressing isolation

Results were fairly evenly distributed from partners feeling they done a little to a lot. Partners think they can do more to reduce isolation of residents but there are a number of examples of what has been successful:

- Hilda Lane has organised three events that have made a difference – a Big Lunch, a tea party and a movie night. This has led to increased confidence to see what else is going on locally.
- REAP has worked with a group of over 50's and helped them to share concerns in their lives and they have reported feeling more connected and forming new friendships.
- Ferndale has contributed to social wellbeing through running coach trips for older residents from across Plymouth (3 areas). People sat around a table with others, having cream teas etc, which has enabled people to get on with each other whichever area they were from and helped Ferndale to develop its understanding about people's issues.
- Play Place has identified social isolation as a key issue in the area around the BALC Centre and brought people together in the lead up to BALC being refurbished and opened for the community. The community want something local where people don't have to travel.

- Community Hertsmere gave an example of someone wanting to set up a group for socially isolated single mums; the group meets once a week for a chat and they now have children's activities too so that they can bring their children.
- William Sutton Estate TRA felt that a few more vulnerable or isolated people have got involved with activities even if just popping in for something to eat and a chat at an event



### 2.3 Bringing people together

The majority of partners were positive that they have made a difference. For example:

- Ferndale estimate that at least 170 people have been engaged in their activities over the year through activities such as a fun day which attracted over 70 residents and involved the youth ambassadors.
- Community Hertsmere is planning some days with a Wellness Clinic – a local charity. They plan drop-ins for massage and talks on wellness etc.
- Mancunian Way has ensured that its centre in Salford is open every day. Some of the activities which they directly run such as the children and young people's drama, dance and disco sessions draw in many of the local children, and therefore their parents. The centre is also hired out to local groups enabling groups such as those with caring responsibilities to meet together on a weekly basis.

- Enable-U2-do-it provided a café space for parents whilst their children were at the cubs and beavers groups, and some have now become friends as a result. Some of the local parents describe the Sutton Centre as *'like a family, I love coming here'; it's given everyone a boost'*.
- Colebrook attracted to lots of people to its Easter event and the parent and toddler group – Stumbers and Tumblers – is now busier than ever with 17 families attending.
- Middlesbrough's Sutton Estate group held a special Easter event which people attended and, whilst enjoying being together for the event, didn't commit to getting more involved. They have also been running a separate children's club in addition to InterAct.

## 2.4 Building confidence and skills

- The backing of, and involvement in, the Scouts movement has provided a lot of opportunities for volunteers in Bolton to learn new skills and develop confidence in running not only the cubs and beavers groups but also to take children out of the centre. Following the first camping trip, they organised a second ones themselves. Two of the residents describe themselves as much more confident in decision making about the centre and its activities.
- Children participating in activities at the centre managed by Mancunian Way have described how they are now more proud of themselves, more talkative, more outgoing and confident.
- Residents of William Sutton estate in Bethnal Green have been involved in a sewing club now reaching 10 people regularly and building their confidence and skills.
- Use of the Marfleet Community Centre in Hull has enabled one resident to test the water for a childminding business. The business is now going from strength to strength and employs three people.



## 2.5 Increasing the number of volunteers

Partners have found this difficult with more feeling they have achieved a little rather than a lot. The point was made by more than one partner that they think they have

attracted volunteers but it proves hard to keep them. Examples where partners have seen some success include:

- REAP have four or five volunteers who are very active. Residents led on a MacMillan coffee morning and a Halloween event. They also successfully engaged young people to manage the play areas at its fun day.
- Riverside have identified a small group of five people through the consultation that they had not previously engaged with. Whilst they aren't agreeing to be formal volunteers they have all said they will help give things out and support community events.
- Ferndale has used some of its grant to provide training to volunteers which has helped people to find their role as a volunteer
- Hilda Lane held a very successful community dinner event where around 16 people attended and shared their ideas for the centre and vision for the community. They prioritized activities based on consultation and then discussed how to make them happen with different people volunteering to work on different ideas.
- Mancunian Way has built a relationship with a local resident who helps to run a number of activities at the centre.

## 2.6 Increasing involvement of young people

There are lots of examples of how this is changing.

- Play Place reports that the Talented Futures project is going well in terms of increasing young people's use of the Mountfield Centre. There is less youth engagement in Turpington Lane Centre but some of the external hirers are appealing to local young people.
- REAP held special events for young people – they had picnics every week in different parks during the consultation and engagement phase of InterAct.
- Hilda Lane had a couple of young people amongst those that attended the community dinner event who volunteered to get involved and help run activities. This was a true inter-generational event bringing people together.
- William Sutton Bethnal Green commissioned Play Association Tower Hamlets to undertake some activities and a consultation with young people on the estate helping the Tenants and Residents Association (TRA) think about future activities for young people. This is ongoing but they have already run a three day craft scheme for young people in the October half term and are trying to get a regular activity underway.
- Mancunian Way host 'every single one' of the children over eight years from the estate in their centre on a weekly basis.

## 2.7 Building a better / increased profile for the community centres

All the partners reported more awareness of their centres though a few feel they need more time to consult with the community and make people aware of the centre and how it might be useful to them.

- Although Play Place is not able to use the BALC centre as yet, development work and initial contacts has been really good e.g. they have held community surgeries which have been really successful with over 30 residents coming

along, 4 of whom were young people. They have found that residents are keen to get involved and to see the community centre up and running. A coffee and mince pies event before Christmas is planned to maintain involvement.

- Ferndale deliver a quarterly newsletter through every door on the estate
- Community Hertsmere found that talking to people a lot more about Windsor Hall, holding two open days and a survey has helped a lot. They also spoke to people at coffee mornings and engaged with people at the Community Shop.
- Colebrook have a very successful parent and toddler group with over 17 families attending regularly. They have used this group for consultation around the InterAct programme.
- Mancunian Way has done a lot of outreach work, including in the evenings and at weekends which has made a big difference and the centre manager is now known by everyone. At the same time, they have run more activities and hosted services which they say has increased awareness 'ten out of ten'.
- The Sutton Centre in Bolton is in an isolated spot in the middle of a small housing estate. Enable-U2-do-it got off to a great start when they attracted 150 people (adults and children) to an open day about their new Scouts project. Although not all of these people remained actively involved, they are all now aware that the centre, exists and the opportunities it presents.

## 2.8 Increasing usage of community centres

This is very positive:

- Although numbers are still small, Marfleet Community Centre has a wide range of activities that people can drop into; from a 'pip to tree' gardening project, to a performing arts group, to a local history group, to a parent and toddler group.
- At Hilda Lane, two women have engaged 8 new people in different activities.
- Play Place has people attending events who hadn't engaged before
- Several centres have more residents hiring the centres for parties etc and more organisations hiring the space for regular activities such as the Mountfield Centre which has four new hirers. One partner noted however that this seems to go in peaks and troughs.
- Community Hertsmere has increased use of Windsor Hall through partnership with other agencies e.g. council, fire department. They recognize there is still a lot to do to increase use of the centre though.
- Mancunian Way recognise that it will take a long time to turn the centre around - a year ago, people only came into the centre to play bingo. Its children's discos are very well attended and so they now insist that under 8's can only come if with a parent with the result that they are getting around twelve parents coming in. Hiring the centre out has also helped - over the course of a week now there are several dozen residents are coming in through the Carers group, jobs club, a men's club, and a church based self reliance group.

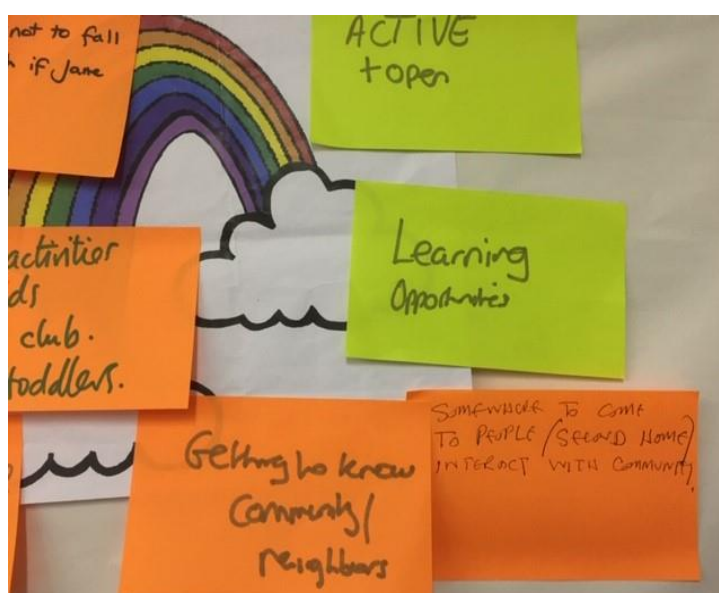
## 2.9 The significance of local context and specific ambitions

The individual partners in their programme also had their own specific theory of change, as appropriate to their local context. These were used to plan and assess progress towards defined local outcomes.

There were some areas of overlap of ambition, such as around **changing people's perceptions of the centres**. CAVCA has been dealing with the issue that people who don't live in the Clarion houses don't think they are allowed to use the centre, and likewise REAP has been trying to overcome perceptions about who can use the centre because of its location on the Lewisham and Greenwich border. REAP has tried to reinforce that anyone can use centre when door knocking and hosting events and trips and are aiming to create a homely feel to the centre where people can see themselves on the walls and feel it is theirs. Similarly, in Salford, the issue was a local resident who thought it was her centre, and others thought that too. Mancunian Way has tried to break this down and feels it is being successful – more people are using the centre and the resident is still able to run her bingo night.

Equally, many of the partners have spent time trying to get **a better sense of what residents want and need**, in order to ensure that the centres are locally relevant. CAVCA feels it has a better understanding of the challenges of the estate through its three 'Totally Socially' community engagement days. Hilda Lane feels that the doorknocking and street interviews they have carried out have helped raise awareness amongst the group and the residents – their follow up community dinner event where activities were prioritised has created a clear mandate from the community and also contributed to increased community cohesion. Community Hertsmere report that they now have a better idea what the community want and have a few women interested in particular projects. Riverside have, through consulting 86 people got a list of six things people want with the top two being outings and a film night.

Some of the issues that partners were trying to address were very specific e.g. Ferndale wanted to improve its **use of technology** – they have found a better internet provider, its website and Facebook page are now up to date, and they have digitized their accounts and had training around this, making them more efficient. Community Hertsmere had a specific aim around **increased activities for people on low incomes** and has set up a 'Meet and Eat' group where a hot meal is provided.



## 3 Achievements and Challenges

### 3.1 Benefits of involvement in InterAct

Some of the partners report new opportunities and new groups forming as a direct result of InterAct. These have resulted from the grant available, the launch conference in January and the support provided:

- The grant has helped Ferndale to reward its volunteers and cover expenses
- The Colebrook supported parent and toddler group held an Easter event and consultation where local people illustrated that they wanted more themed events - they have just delivered a Halloween event for example, as well as other things that residents asked for such as coffee mornings at the two centres.
- REAP found that door knocking was a really powerful contribution to finding out what people wanted. They also gleaned lots of information about people's perceptions of the centre and the area through a range of activities - interactive sticker boards and a survey in a supermarket. One of REAP's aims was to involve a wider range of residents, whatever their age and were really pleased that they have been able to increase the number of over 50's using the centre and have now successfully bid for funding to further develop their over 50s project and secure it for two years. This work has been enhanced through networking opportunities provided by Clarion e.g. the Ferndale experience of a 50's trip to a surprise place.
- Play Place valued having someone on hand to help them reflect on their strategy which has enabled them to be positive and learn. They have realised that one size doesn't fit all and they need a different approach for each of their three centres. Resulting activities have led to an observed breakdown of barriers between people such as in the over 50's group. Play Place has a close ally in the parent run nursery at one of its centres, and is now running a Talented Future project – trying to get the community to think about the building not just as a nursery but a broader community centre.
- Hilda Lane now has a forward action plan formed from a community event which gives a clear direction of travel and a mandate around activities.
- Some partners used their grant to pay a worker. Play Place have been creative and agreed a deal with their engagement worker - she gives 10 hours a week to support the centres in exchange for office space for her emerging social enterprise.
- Mancunian Way has been able to pay a centre manager which ensures the centre is open for longer hours, more days a week, and for a variety of purposes.
- Enable-U2-do-it has been able to launch its cubs and beavers groups which brought a lot of new people into contact with the centre.

Even where the realization of aspirations and ambitions haven't been as smooth as anticipated, partners can identify the value of the InterAct grant. For example, the 'Totally Socially' engagement days around the Marfleet Centre in Hull drew attention to the centre which is located down a snicket and hidden from general view, and enthused some local residents.

## 3.2 Challenges identified through the programme

### 3.2.1 Capacity

Many of the centres anticipate that maintaining involvement from residents is an ongoing challenge. Responses to this challenge will vary depending upon whether the community centre is a local venue for people to access services or whether the centre is intended to be more actively shaped and used and 'owned' by residents themselves. The purpose of the centre has implications for how it is profiled in the local community, and for the effort that needs to be put in to support residents and local community groups to not only take on responsibility but also to negotiate with each other and work together (as for example centre based steering groups).

There is a difference in terms of capacity between organisations with paid staff and those that are entirely resident led. Resident led groups bring passion and commitment to creating neighbourliness and improving local facilities, but they are often dependent upon one or two people who are working on a voluntary basis. It can be hard to manage the building infrastructure as well as activities, and broad based community engagement tests most partners but particularly those without paid staff. One partner talked about how sorting out physical repairs can be draining and distract from community development plans. Another spoke about the level of expectation on volunteers and how this can feel unmanageable. In Middlesbrough, the residents committee comprises people over 80 years old and whilst they could manage to keep the centre open, they tried but struggled with outreach work and enabling greater community engagement.

On the other hand, paid staff from 'outside' organisations aren't always seen to be 'in touch' with residents and may have many other work demands on their time.

### 3.2.2 Understanding 'the local'

The transition of centre management has not always been straightforward. Residents who had been running the centre in one area are unhappy that someone else has been brought in to manage the centre and they are now being charged to hire space. It has been a challenge to win people over. In a few areas where residents have a less than happy relationship with Clarion as their landlord (e.g. regarding housing issues, the state of the neighbourhood etc) there can be difficulties in engaging people in a Clarion owned community centre.

Additionally, although Clarion Futures has been relatively 'light touch' with regard to grant monitoring and management, compliance with the InterAct programme conditions (e.g. establishing a percentage of beneficiaries that are Clarion residents), has created mistrust in some communities. A separate set of challenges comes from the residents who may not want, or be able, to pay for activities; those who bring their children along but don't themselves engage - seeing the centre as free childcare; and from residents who can't commit to a regular weekly activity because of shift work or the amount going on their lives. One partner said they have found it difficult to identify what people need and still don't know the answer to the question of how to deliver. Another said that they feel better now that they have an

understanding of what is needed and what people want but feel overwhelmed as it is hard to get people involved and to understand what is needed.

### 3.2.3 Centre use and income generation

The InterAct grant has been credited with enabling partners to keep things going. But it has been suggested that this is harder than Clarion realise and most need bigger sustainable grants. One of the reasons Clarion Futures instigated this programme was to help build an evidence base and fundraising experience to enable other grant applications, and REAP have been successful in getting a £20,000 grant from People's Health Trust: Active Communities.

The picture across the centres is variable: some centres are breaking even and believe they are on target to make the centre pay for itself whereas several partners can't see how centres can be self-financing - residents won't pay for activities and they don't feel they should charge the real costs of centre hire to local groups. Some partners are worried about having to take on more of the running costs over time and struggle to see how their time will be paid for. Some of the centres are trying to balance opening up the centre for use by local residents with other demands on space in the centre – either use by Clarion for example a job club, or by others to bring in income; *'earning the money to pay the centre bills is difficult – Clarion is tapering its funding support – 85% this year, only 70% next year'*.

This is an issue for Ferndale and is compounded by having such a small space and therefore looking to activities which are not centre based, and therefore often cost more. For example they have increased time and costs incurred through the need for risk analysis and insurances whilst having little income generation from space rental. They feel they are constantly managing logistics with people. It is also worth noting that even where centres do have potential income through hall hire, they are sometimes in competition with other local centres and facilities.

## 4 Clarion, partner and others' responsibilities

The range of responsibilities of different providers can be complex and get in the way of partners' plans. For example, one centre planned to run coffee mornings with access to IT facilities but is still waiting for BT to sort out the internet connection; another centre had some of its aims thwarted when it was let down by another organisation contracted to provide support complementary to the InterAct plan. Another partner had to cancel a fun day because there were issues between Clarion and the subcontractor responsible for cutting the grass, and the seemingly simple task of putting up a centre banner was complicated by the involvement of the Clarion marketing department.

Play Place which has three centres of which one, Mountfield, was only opened in June; it was closed January to April for refurbishment. Great activities and engagement are going on but the challenge now is to convert this engagement to resident influence and responsibility through a joint resident and Play Place steering group. Setting the direction of all three centres through a steering group has been a challenge in other centres too and Play Place plan to continue to address this and build the steering groups.

### 4.1 Partners reflections

Partners have identified the learning they have gained, and more that they would like to glean.

One partner suggested that they could reflect on the learning they have acquired and create some sort of toolbox of learning that could be added to. Some have said that they have learnt more about their own strengths and now have the motivation to address weaknesses and improve. And there is clearly a greater awareness of the need to ask residents what they would like rather than to assume what they want e.g. one suggests that they would now incorporate door knocking as method to find things out even if there isn't any funding on the table because it is best practice in engaging people. The main thing is to ensure that the relationship with the community is honest and if something can't be done this is explained as feedback is important.

Community Hertsmere found that planning different consultation and engagement activities for open days helped them to find out more about the area, enabled them to better signpost residents to where services are and what is going on, and helped to build longer term partnerships that can contribute to building change. Similarly, CAVCA ran three community engagement days to raise awareness of the centre and encourage residents to be more involved. Despite lowish numbers, there was some initial interest and positives but then things 'divebombed'. Analysis of what happened highlighted a lack of cohesion on the estate and the significance of interpersonal relationships in the area and the stigmatization of some families and groups of residents. This has provided learning about fundamental issues in the area and the need for social development work, preferably by local support agencies.

There is an appetite for sharing learning across the partners managing centres – and a proposal for case studies which can be shared. On the other hand, there is also a plea for recognition of difference – there is not a one size fits all and this needs to be thought about when partners are grouped together i.e. geographical groupings might not be appropriate.

#### 4.1.1 Partners and Clarion staff

Close contact with Clarion staff is seen to be important though for some the different roles of Clarion staff can be confusing. The respective roles of the Community Assets Team and the Neighbourhood Investment Officers sometimes appear to partners as either a duplication or cut across each other, especially as each has pots of money to distribute. One partner wondered why Clarion staff time couldn't be better coordinated and organised in a more coherent way. One partner described Clarion's involvement in the centres as like working with an extra tier of management. Clarion Futures staff also believe that the contact with community centre managers could be better organised and are exploring possibilities for a buddying arrangement between the Community Assets team and Neighbourhood Investment Officers, where there would be one clear lead contact person.

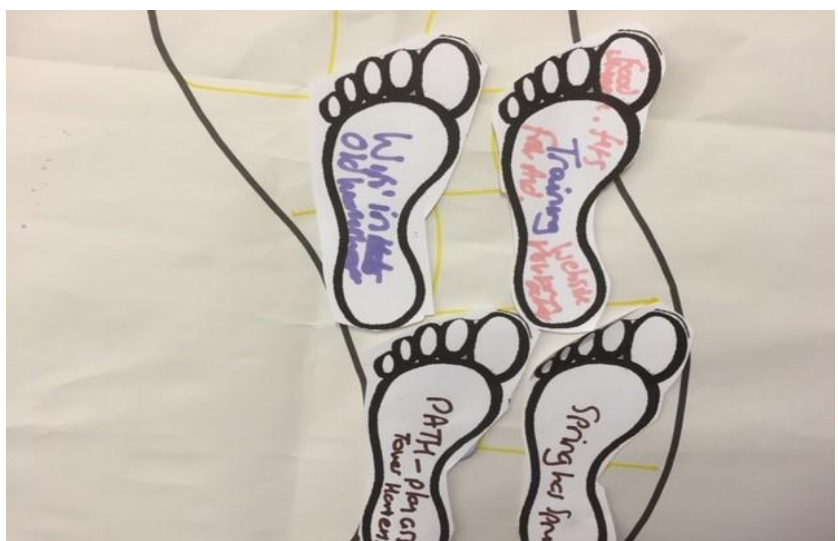
#### 4.1.2 Partners and consultancy support

Use of this has been more valuable to some partners than others. Some partners felt that having support available 'as and when' was useful and have used the time to help generate ideas for community involvement, some for reflecting on how things are going, some have valued the space to be listened to. There are a few instances though, where partners were not proactive in taking up support, felt that they didn't need additional support or that the support was inappropriate.

The two partners that were engaged in the film making, REAP and Mancunian Way, were both very appreciative of this opportunity.

#### 4.1.3 Partner meet-ups

Face to face meet ups are seen to be really valuable but there is recognition that it is not always practical to do that. Events at the start and end of the InterAct programme are appreciated though one partner felt a lull in the middle and would have liked some way for us to come together and touch



base, either as a whole group or in regions. It was suggested that this might have helped to stay focused and motivated, to check in and get more inspiration.

## 5 Learning

The **timeline** of the programme was the most common message – that longer is needed. The timeframe of six months was in most cases not long enough. Partners felt that a longer timeframe would have enabled better engagement and relationship building. One partner suggested that ideally this would be 12 to 18 months to allow for the time to more meaningfully engage people and support them to set up and sustain the groups rather than a quick exercise. Further, given that most of the partners ended up extending the delivery time to December (and some have requested beyond) one person stated that if they had known they had a year at the beginning this would have enabled a better planning process around more realistic timescale.

Whilst some partners felt that the programme was clear about being creative and felt it was useful not to have to pin down a specific way of working at the start, there have been some **misunderstandings** about the programme. For example, one partner felt that it had been mis-sold and wasn't what they expected – they just wanted to use the money to keep low level drop in activities going, not start doing major consultation; another was disappointed to have only realised late in the programme that they could have applied for money to pay a worker; others hadn't been clear that the grant had to be spent by the end of September.

Within a spirit of well meaning, different Clarion staff encouraged organisations to apply to the InterAct programme and perhaps this is where some misunderstandings about the programme arose. One partner talked about Clarion's approach as 'scattergun'. Partner organisations need as much **clarity** as possible and direct central communications i.e. exactly the same messaging to all from all.

There are mixed messages around **reporting** requirements - some partners have found this manageable and easy, whilst there are also comments that it can get in the way. For example evidencing who is using the centres through signing in sheets, photographs and other means can be off-putting to residents and cause some people to disengage. The time to build trust and relationship needs to be taken into account. There are also some comments about whose **agenda** the programme was meeting. More than one partner has questioned whether the programme was about meeting Clarion's targets, rather than the partners' or the communities. From Clarion Futures perspective, they endeavoured to keep the agenda open, and monitoring light touch, but as a charity they need to evidence how the investment is used and the impact this has for its communities, and gather information to assist in everyone's future fundraising.

Learning points to the **complexity of the transfer of asset management** when a diverse range of partners are involved, in very different local contexts. In addition, Clarion Housing Group is a large organisation and many of the partners are small, light of foot groups that pride themselves on flexibility and local relevance. In such circumstances, there can be a mismatch in terms of shared understanding of what needs to happen, the desirable and actual speed with which things happen, and the time needed to make things happen. Small groups can also find it hard to navigate around Clarion and know who to contact about different issues.

This complexity is compounded by the landlord relationship that Clarion has with the residents. There are several instances where partners have suggested that community engagement in the centres is made more difficult by residents perceptions of their landlord.

The **type of the partner organisations** is very varied, some have paid staff, some are trying to earn an income from the centre, and some are volunteers. For some of the more established organisations the InterAct programme has worked well – the additional grant to help make things happen was enough and the *'icing on the cake'*. For some of the smaller partner groups though the programme didn't provide enough **financial resource** over a long enough time period. One partner organisation commented that Clarion forgets they are volunteers and expects a full time contribution to building management in order to be there when there is a buildings inspection, opening up and promoting the Clarion services that run from the building, completing monthly health and safety reports, keeping a budget and reporting on all running costs etc as well as promoting hall hire to generate income and all the real work of resident support and community engagement.

Opportunities for **face to face contact** between 'like' groups is important. The vast majority of partners found the launch conference valuable and enjoyable, and the contacts made there have been followed up at other events and through self organised visits. Some of the people with responsibility for centre management are quite isolated and more might have benefited from such exchanges and learning visits.



## 6 Conclusions

The programme was hugely beneficial for some but of less benefit to a few others. There were, and not unusually, tensions brought about by a national body trying to support bottom up development. Getting the balance of a programme such as InterAct is difficult. On the one hand, Clarion wants to support its partners who manage centres in as responsive and light touch a way as possible – partners could apply to use the grant in a wide variety of ways, they could draw on support from Community Works as and when they needed it, they could renegotiate the use of the grant. However, the application process perhaps invited partners to ‘over-sell’ what they could achieve in a short space of time; some partners didn’t really know what they could expect from the support element, how to use it or when to request it; and inevitably, the programme included reporting requirements which some partners found intrusive and burdensome.

On reflection, perhaps greater lead in time would have been useful with more support offered prior to organisations deciding whether to apply to be part of a programme such as this, more informed and worked up ideas from the partners, and more clarity from Clarion about its expectations for each individual partner and its centre. This though is learning from hindsight and overall the InterAct programme has contributed to all the issues and themes that Clarion and its partners wished to address.

As one partner reflected:

***Really good, support  
been amazing.  
Opened up doors to  
interact more  
creatively with  
neighbours in the  
community. More help  
to target funders. ...  
Getting nice new  
ideas from other  
Clarion partners for  
example to do  
something different.***

