

Contents

Title		Pages
Introduction and How to Use This Workbook		3-4
Session 1	The Foundations of Community Development	5-13
Session 2	Getting to Know your Community	14-23
Session 3	Asset Based Community Development and Participatory Action Research	24-37
Session 4	Building Relationships	38-47
Session 5	Teambuilding and Working Collaboratively	48-58
Session 6	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion	59-70

Introduction

Community development begins with a simple belief: every community holds a wealth of knowledge, experience and potential. When people are invited to participate meaningfully, and when their voices are genuinely heard, communities can shape their own priorities, challenge inequalities and take collective action that leads to lasting change.

Community involvement benefits both individuals and the wider group. For individuals, participation can support mental and physical wellbeing, increase confidence and self-esteem, build skills and experience, and strengthen a sense of belonging and purpose. At a community level, engagement fosters social cohesion, improves decision-making, enhances resilience during periods of challenge, and helps ensure resources are used fairly and effectively.

Getting to know a community takes time. It involves gathering information, listening deeply, and being willing to question assumptions or stereotypes that may have shaped traditional decision-making. Community development requires curiosity, openness and a commitment to understanding the lived experiences of local people.

Effective communication is central to this work. Building relationships, developing community networks, fostering teamwork and collaboration, and upholding the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion all contribute to positive community engagement. Reflective practice also plays an essential role, helping practitioners adapt, learn and respond to feedback in ways that strengthen trust and connection.

Participating in this short course will introduce you to practical skills and approaches that support meaningful community engagement. Being willing to reach out to a diverse range of community members offers the best opportunity to bring about positive change. The insights, perspectives and practical knowledge you gain can help shape future services, strengthen community voice, and improve outcomes for local people. This workbook aims to help you recognise ways of working that support best practice in service development, delivery and advocacy.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is designed to be accessible, supportive and easy to navigate. You can work through it individually, with a partner, or as part of a group. Move at a pace that feels comfortable, and pause whenever you need time to think, reflect or process new ideas.

Each session includes:

- **A clear purpose:** outlining what the session covers and why it matters.
- **Key concepts and practical guidance:** explained in warm, accessible language.
- **Activities:** designed to help you apply ideas to real community situations.
- **Reflective questions:** to support deeper thinking, emotional awareness and personal insight.
- **Key takeaways:** summarising the most important learning points.

How to approach the activities

Activities are invitations, not tests. There are no right or wrong answers. Use them to explore your own experiences, notice your responses, and consider how the ideas in each session relate to your community context.

If you are working in a group, you may want to agree simple ground rules such as listening respectfully, allowing everyone time to speak, and pausing if discussions feel emotionally activating.

Supporting your learning

You may find it helpful to:

- keep a notebook or journal for reflections
- revisit activities after gaining new insights
- discuss ideas with colleagues or peers
- take breaks when needed
- notice how different topics make you feel

This workbook is here to support your confidence, curiosity and growth. You don't need to have all the answers, just a willingness to learn, reflect and engage with your community in an open and thoughtful way.

Session One: The Foundations of Community Development

Understanding Values, Voice and Collective Action

Purpose of the Session

This session introduces the core principles that underpin community development. You will explore the values that guide good practice, the importance of social justice and equality, and the role of empowerment, collective action and shared learning. You will also begin to reflect on the different types of communities you may work with and how relationships, power and lived experience shape community engagement.

This session sets the foundation for the rest of the workbook. It invites you to think about your own values, notice assumptions, and begin developing a reflective, strengths-based approach to community work.

Community Development as a Catalyst for Change

Community development begins with the belief that communities hold a wealth of knowledge, experience and potential. When people are invited to participate meaningfully — and when their voices are genuinely heard — communities can shape their own priorities, challenge inequalities and take collective action that leads to lasting change.

Community development can act as a catalyst for change by sharing information, experience and practice through open meetings, networks, websites, newsletters and research. Underpinning this work is a commitment to addressing the needs of the powerless and confronting discriminatory or oppressive attitudes and practices. Developing personal awareness of how these attitudes may manifest in a community is essential for working towards overcoming them.

Values and Principles of Community Work

Community development is grounded in a set of shared values. These values guide decisions, shape relationships and help practitioners work ethically and inclusively.

The five key values that underpin all community development practice are:

Social Justice and Equality

Working for a more just and equal society by celebrating the strengths, skills and assets within communities. This includes acknowledging and challenging

inequalities, injustice and imbalances of power, and promoting human and civil rights.

Anti-Discrimination

Respecting, valuing and celebrating diversity while rejecting and challenging oppression, discrimination and exclusion. Discrimination operates at individual, community, organisational and societal levels. Good practice involves developing anti-oppressive approaches that actively support and value diversity.

Community Empowerment

Supporting communities to develop confidence, capacity, skills and relationships that enable collective action. Empowerment involves recognising existing strengths, promoting the right of communities to define their own priorities, and creating space for critical, creative and active participation.

Collective Action

Encouraging people to work together using the power of a collective voice. Collective action recognises the creative and positive resources within communities and supports diverse groups to agree and act on shared concerns while respecting the rights of others.

Working and Learning Together

Creating opportunities for shared learning through action and reflection. This includes learning from collaboration, understanding experiences within wider social and economic contexts, and encouraging critical reflection on values, beliefs and practice.

(Adapted from [Community Development National Occupational Standards | Birmingham Voluntary Service Council](#) extracted 15/09/2025)

Different Kinds of Community

Communities can be formed around geography, identity, shared interests or lived experience. They may be small and local or large and global. The internet has also created new communities based on shared interests, campaigns or friendships.

Communities are often grouped into three broad categories:

- 1. Community of interest**
- 2. Community of identity**
- 3. Locality-based community**

Understanding these distinctions helps practitioners recognise diversity, complexity and the different ways people connect.

Activity: Mapping Communities You Know

Take a moment to think about the different communities you are part of or familiar with. Write them down in the spaces below.

Then assign each community to one of the three headings:

Community of interest

Community of identity

Locality-based community

If working in a group, compare responses and notice similarities or differences.

Communities Are Diverse and Complex

Community development practitioners engage with a wide range of individuals and organisations. This requires awareness of present and historical relationships, structural inequalities and lived experiences. Practitioners often need to adapt their approach depending on the community, its needs and its context.

The Benefits of Community Involvement

Community involvement offers significant benefits for individuals and for the wider community.

For individuals

Improved health and wellbeing: Participation in community activities can reduce stress, anxiety, and the risk of depression, boosting overall life satisfaction.

Enhanced self-esteem: Engaging in the community can increase confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Skill development: Individuals can gain new skills and develop existing ones, which can be valuable in both personal and professional contexts.

Increased purpose and meaning: Giving back to the community can foster a sense of purpose and meaning, contributing to a more positive outlook on life.

Stronger social networks: Community involvement creates and strengthens social connections, reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness.

For communities

Stronger social cohesion: Engaging with others fosters trust, understanding, and a shared sense of ownership, leading to more cohesive communities.

Improved decision-making: Community involvement provides valuable insights and perspectives, leading to more effective and inclusive decisions that benefit a wider range of people.

Enhanced resilience: Engaged communities are better able to organise resources and support each other during times of crisis.

More effective governance: Community members can hold leaders accountable, and their participation ensures a fairer allocation of resources.

Greater inclusivity: Involvement encourages the sharing and understanding of different cultures, fostering a more inclusive and equitable community.