

Building Resilient Communities



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Introduction

Since its formation in 2017, the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce has been unwavering in its commitment to collaborate with the region's diverse faith and community groups to eradicate homelessness in all its forms.

The WMCA Positive Pathway Approach provides a versatile framework for developing strategic initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness. Recognising that homelessness is a complex and non-linear experience, this approach ensures comprehensive support across all areas of need. Consequently, the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce works in partnership with various stakeholders to develop and implement support mechanisms throughout the entire pathway. This collective effort contributes to our overarching goal of eliminating homelessness across the region.

In collaboration with faith and community groups across the WMCA, we have explored the development of a Universal Prevention approach. This approach leverages the unique societal position of faith groups to support individuals before they reach a crisis point. Universal Prevention encompasses activities, infrastructure, and support that, while not primarily focused on homelessness, ensure the creation, nurturing, and maintenance of protective factors that prevent homelessness. These factors include access to affordable housing, income, education, and health services. Effective Universal Prevention

fosters knowledge, resilience, options, and opportunities, thereby ensuring homelessness is avoided.

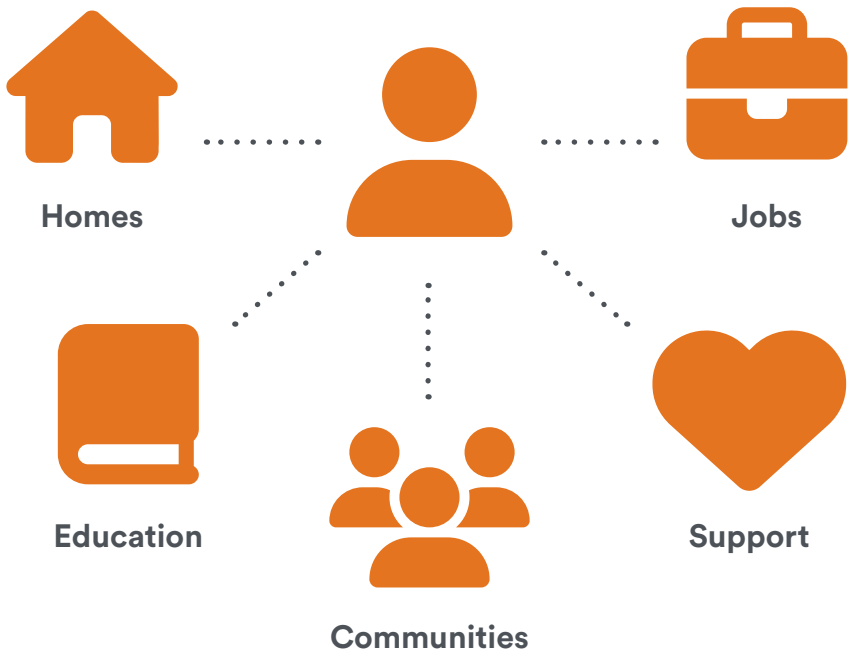
This booklet outlines a framework for these groups to work together with local communities to build resilience and strengthen homelessness prevention efforts. This booklet invites faith and community groups to collaborate with the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce to work towards our overall aim to Design Out Homelessness across the region.

Positive Pathway Model



Resilient Communities

Resilient communities possess the capacity to withstand, adapt to, and recover from various challenges and disruptions. These communities are characterised by robust social networks that foster mutual support and cooperation among members. Faith and community groups play a crucial role in developing resilient communities through providing social support by leveraging their strong networks to offer emotional and practical assistance to community members. Also, by fostering unity, faith and community groups help build a sense of community and shared purpose, which is vital for collective resilience.



Community Organising

Community organising involves bringing people together to address common issues and advocate for change. Faith and community groups can use their influence to unite community members, raise awareness about homelessness, and advocate for policies that promote affordable housing and social services. Through organised efforts, they can engage volunteers, host educational workshops, and create platforms for dialogue, ensuring that the voices of those affected by homelessness are heard and addressed.

Community Organising teaches individuals how to create long-term change, not just short-term solutions. It has roots in various social movements and traditions campaigning to win change from civil rights to workers' rights.

Key figures like Saul Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in the United States further shaped the practice, developing effective tools for taking action to win, alongside a curriculum for teaching the craft - now followed in many different countries across the world.

Ultimately, community organising aims to build power and agency within communities to address societal issues and create positive change. To achieve this, we need a strong civil society with its institutions connected to their roots & mission and relevant to people today.

By making our schools, places of worship, community groups:

- a.** more outward looking (what's going on our doorstep not just in our buildings) rather than inward looking,
- b.** focused on securing change on things that are putting pressure on our people rather than just delivering services; and most importantly by
- c.** nurturing leaders to be able to do the above

the strength and relevance of institutions are built, enhancing the collective power to win campaigns when we come together.

5 Steps of Community Organising

Organise



Faith and community groups can unite diverse segments of the community to build relational power. By forming alliances, they can work collectively towards the common good, leveraging their combined strengths to address homelessness. These groups can create networks of support that provide resources and advocacy for those in need. Additionally, by fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose, they can mobilise community members to participate in initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness.

Listen



The listening phase of community organising, is where faith and community groups engage with community members to understand their concerns, needs, and aspirations. This process builds trust and identifies common issues, forming the foundation for tailored solutions. By facilitating listening sessions, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations, faith groups gather insights directly from those affected by or at risk of homelessness. This empathetic approach helps identify service gaps and advocate for necessary changes, empowering individuals and fostering collaboration for effective social change.

Plan



Developing strategic responses involves thorough research and careful planning. Faith and community groups can collaborate to identify effective solutions, create detailed action plans, and allocate resources efficiently to address the issues identified during the listening phase. This collaborative approach ensures that all perspectives are considered, leading to more comprehensive and inclusive strategies. Additionally, by setting clear goals and timelines, these groups can monitor progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure the effectiveness of their initiatives.

Act



Implementing the planned actions is essential to create tangible change. This could involve organising community events, providing direct support to those in need, advocating for policy changes, or launching awareness campaigns to highlight the issue of homelessness. By actively engaging the community, these actions can raise awareness and foster a sense of collective responsibility. Additionally, consistent and visible efforts can inspire others to join the cause, amplifying the impact of the initiatives.

Negotiate



Engaging with power-holders, such as local government officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders, is vital. Faith and community groups can hold these individuals accountable, ensuring that they take concrete steps to address homelessness and support the community's efforts. By fostering open dialogue and collaboration, these groups can influence policy decisions and secure commitments for long-term solutions. Additionally, continuous advocacy and monitoring can ensure that promises are kept and progress is made towards reducing homelessness.

Together, these components enable faith and community groups to address homelessness proactively, ensuring that individuals receive the support they need before reaching a crisis point.



Case study

Fair Housing for Winson Green

In November 2021, while Ash Barker (United Reformed Church minister at Lodge Road Community Church in Winson Green, Birmingham) was at home, a local newspaper reporter called to ask his thoughts on the upcoming Council approval for new tower blocks. These blocks, mostly one-bedroom flats, were to be built right across the road from where he lived. Ash and his community had been lobbying for secure and affordable family housing for years, facing numerous dead ends and growing desperate as local families were being forced to move away.

The local newspaper report called on the Monday, Ash learned the Council decision was due on the Thursday, and it appeared to be a forgone conclusion. A developer had bought the five acres of land, which needed significant work to be made safe. Covid restrictions prevented Council members from visiting them, and the only notice was a piece of paper stapled to a lamp post that no one could find. By Tuesday, he and his community had

alerted and networked with 14 local groups, including schools, football clubs, churches, and resident associations creating a broad-based coalition. On Wednesday, they launched the 'Fair Housing for Winson Green' campaign with a letter to the Council and a press statement, which the Birmingham Mail covered. Thursday was Council decision day. Ash and his community listened online due to Covid restrictions and lost 9-4. Despite this, they vowed to keep fighting for better housing and sought direct talks with the developer. On Friday, the developer Ron Whitehead called. After presenting their case, he agreed to meet 'Fair Housing for Winson Green'. Ron's father had lived in Winson Green, leading him to promise a reconsideration of the plans. Within weeks, new plans emerged, featuring more family homes, lower-rise apartments, and community spaces. Ron and Ash became friends, and Ron engaged with various local groups to refine the plans to be an affordable housing scheme and aim to foster belonging and connections for new residents. The new development will include a supermarket, coffee shop, public square, medical centre, 30 apartments for low-income earners and 100 apartments are to be bought by the Church of England. The development got planning permission in June 2024.



Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a powerful strategy that faith and community groups can use to prevent homelessness by focusing on the strengths and resources within their communities.

Unlike traditional approaches that often emphasise deficiencies, ABCD leverages the existing assets of individuals, associations, and institutions to create sustainable solutions.

Faith and community groups are uniquely positioned to implement ABCD due to their deep-rooted connections and trust within communities. By identifying and mobilising local assets, such as skills, talents, and networks, faith and community groups can build a robust support system that addresses the underlying causes of homelessness. For example, they can tap into the expertise of community members to provide job training, financial literacy workshops, and educational programs, which enhance individuals' stability and self-sufficiency.

Moreover, faith and community groups can foster partnerships with local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies to expand their reach and impact. These collaborations can lead to the development of affordable housing projects, access to healthcare services, and other critical resources that prevent homelessness.

ABCD also promotes a sense of ownership and empowerment among community members. By involving them in the decision-making process and recognising their contributions, faith and community groups can strengthen community bonds and resilience. This collective effort ensures that support systems are not only effective but also sustainable, reducing the risk of homelessness in the long term. Through ABCD, faith and community groups can create a proactive and inclusive approach to preventing homelessness, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Case study

Firs and Bromford, Birmingham

In the Firs and Bromford community, a local church, a faith-based youth work provider, and a group of people of faith have come together to intentionally live in what is often labelled a 'deprived community.' Their aim was to shift from doing things 'to' and 'for' people to doing things 'with' and enabling actions to be done 'by' the community members themselves. They sought to uncover the hidden treasures within the community and make the invisible visible, fostering networks of participation, care, and support.

To achieve this, they adopted an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach. A key principle of ABCD is discovery before delivery. They began with discovery walks, where small groups went out to talk to people, locate community assets, and get a general feel for the community. They found that while there was a real lack of connecting or bumping spaces, there was a strong sense of community spirit, with people often looking out for each other. This insight led to the establishment of the Hub as a community space and the hosting of the Unsung Heroes event to highlight the community's strengths, such as its spirit. The Hodge Hill Unsung Heroes event celebrated the contributions people were already making to each other's lives.

By asking strength-based, participatory questions like, "If there was one thing you could do with two or three others to make life better here, what would you like to do?" they encouraged community members to participate, contribute, and sometimes lead activities that promote neighbourliness,

turning neighbours into friends. This effort was supported by a small team of youth and community workers who took a long-term approach to accompany, facilitate, support, coordinate, and create community spaces and conversations, while also growing resources.

The outcome of these efforts was a transformation from a community where people felt disconnected and reliant on outside support agencies, often focused on one aspect of their lives, to a community where people built social capital. They formed friendships within the neighbourhood, created safe and welcoming spaces, and experienced compassion and support. It became a place where everyone's gifts, skills, interests, and passions were welcomed, using what's strong to fix what's wrong.



Co-production

Co-production offers a powerful approach for faith and community groups to tackle homelessness by fostering collaboration and shared responsibility. By engaging those with lived experiences of homelessness or being at risk of homelessness, in the planning and decision-making processes, these groups can develop more effective and compassionate solutions. Co-production encourages the pooling of resources, knowledge, and skills from diverse stakeholders, ensuring that interventions are holistic and tailored to the unique needs of the community. This inclusive strategy not only empowers individuals but also strengthens community bonds, creating a supportive network that can prevent homelessness and promote long-term stability. Together, faith and community groups can transform challenges into opportunities for growth and resilience.



Case study

Sifa Fireside, Birmingham

One of Sifa Fireside's key priorities is addressing the systemic causes of homelessness, and amplifying the voice of lived experience is an essential part of this. Sifa Fireside embrace co-production theory by actively involving clients in the design and delivery of their services. They provide space for clients to share their insights into the systems and environments that cause people to fall into or become trapped in homelessness situations. By working in a trauma-informed manner across their services and spaces, they ensure clients are safe and comfortable to share their experiences and participate in shaping the direction of their strategic aims as an organisation.

Sifa Fireside's current strategic priorities around tackling systemic causes of homelessness and addressing recurring patterns of homelessness have been driven by clients' experiences of the local housing sector. Through co-production, clients have directly influenced Sifa Fireside's focus areas, resulting in them identifying two main areas for their systemic work: the supported exempt accommodation sector and housing options for clients without recourse to public funds. This collaborative approach ensures that their strategies are grounded in the real-life experiences and needs of those they serve, fostering a more effective and inclusive response to homelessness.

Case study

Good Shepherd, Wolverhampton

Good Shepherd, in collaboration with One Wolverhampton and other partner services, are currently co-producing a model for mental health peer support in Wolverhampton. The support will be provided by peers with experience, to enhance engagement with mental health services and support the wellbeing of individuals experiencing homelessness.

People who have been affected by mental health issues and homelessness played a central role in the co-production of the future model. Experts by experience, along with staff from the voluntary sector, facilitated this co-production process. They have explored several key areas, including mapping mental health services and available support, identifying barriers to accessing support, utilising lived experience to engage complex needs service users, determining support needs and solutions for improving the peer-led model, and defining what “good” looked like.

Through co-production Good Shepherd and partners have gained insights into potential barriers to accessing relevant support, understood strategies to overcome these obstacles, and determined how best to utilise and support individuals with lived experience in accessing available support. As a result, a focused strategy will be implemented to ensure individuals experiencing homelessness receive accessible and equitable services that acknowledge and reduce existing barriers.

Together, these approaches enable faith and community groups to create resilient communities where individuals are supported before reaching a crisis point. By fostering a sense of belonging and mutual aid, faith and community groups can significantly contribute to the prevention of homelessness, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive. In essence, by nurturing a culture of care and cooperation, faith and community groups lay the foundation for a community where homelessness is less likely to occur, and where everyone has the support, they need to lead stable, fulfilling lives.

Thank you to Saeed Haque from Citizens UK, Tim Evans, Reverend Ash Barker from Lodge Road United Reform Church, Chris Cole from Good Shepherd and Gareth Webber from Sifa Fireside for their input into the writing of this leaflet. You can find links to their work here:

[Citizens UK](https://citizensuk.org) - citizensuk.org

[Sifa Fireside](https://sifafireside.co.uk) - sifafireside.co.uk

[Lodge Road United Reform Church](https://lodgeroad.church) - lodgeroad.church

[Good Shepherd](https://gsmwolverhampton.org.uk) - gsmwolverhampton.org.uk

[Firs and Bromford](https://firsandbromford.co.uk) - firsandbromford.co.uk



