

# Building Resilient Communities



**West Midlands**  
Combined Authority

# Introduction

Since its formation in 2017, the [WMCA Homelessness Taskforce](#) has remained steadfast in its commitment to working collaboratively with the region's diverse faith and community groups to design out homelessness in all its forms.

Our partnerships across the WMCA region have highlighted the unique and influential role that faith and community groups play within local communities. Their close connections and trusted presence position them to make a vital contribution to preventing homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

The [Positive Pathway Model](#), adapted for use by the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce, offers a flexible framework to support the development of new, prevention-focused interventions to help as many people as possible to avoid homelessness in the first place. Our core aim is to shift the focus away from Crisis and towards Universal Prevention responses that ensure timely, proactive support.

Rooted in our shared commitment, values and collective expertise, this booklet showcases a range of practical and inspiring approaches that leverage the unique position and strengths of faith and community groups.

We believe the region’s faith and community groups are key partners to advancing Universal Prevention approaches - working alongside local communities to build, protect, and strengthen the foundations people need to thrive: affordable homes, secure incomes, accessible healthcare and supportive social networks.

### Positive Pathway Model



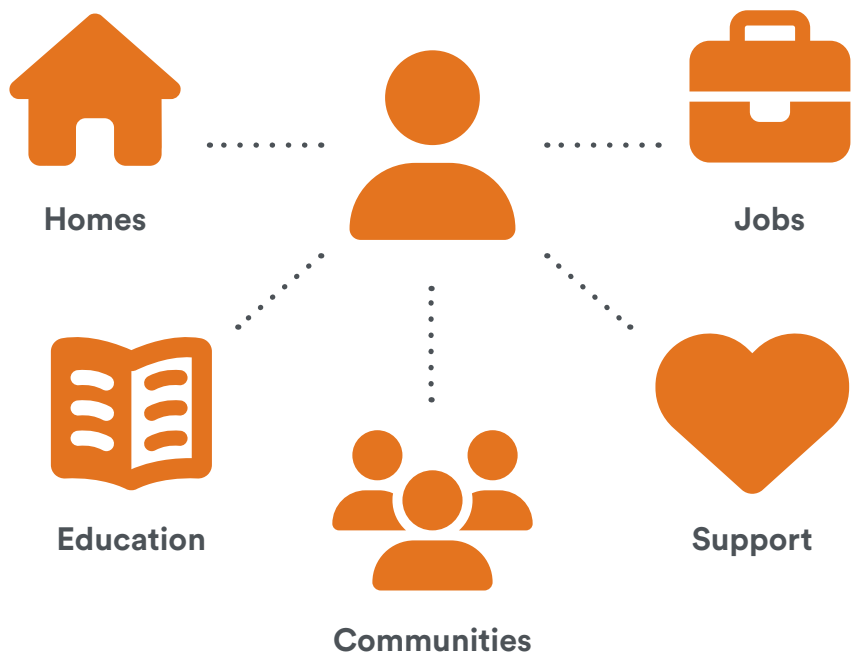
# Resilient Communities

Resilient communities uplift, support and nurture one another across all phases of life. They are typically characterised by well-developed social networks that foster enduring collaboration, trust and mutual assistance among their members.



By their very nature they have the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from various personal and systemic challenges including economic hardship, social isolation and housing instability. As such, resilient communities have an instrumental role in mitigating the risk of homelessness by offering protective social structures, facilitating early intervention and promoting inclusive support systems.

Faith and community groups play a pivotal role in developing resilient communities. Their trusted networks act as catalysts for collective wellbeing and can be called upon to offer emotional and practical assistance to community members. Beyond this, faith and community groups contribute significantly to building a sense of community identity and shared purpose. By creating inclusive spaces for reflection, dialogue, celebration and collaboration, they help strengthen social bonds across diverse populations. Their regular gatherings, whether in places of worship, community centres or homes, offer opportunities for connection, mutual learning and the reinforcement of common values that actively help individuals and families to participate in shaping communities that are more cohesive, compassionate and resilient.



# Community Organising

Community Organising seeks to create long-term change and has roots in various social movements from campaigning for 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 action, alongside a curriculum for teaching the craft, now followed in many different countries across the world.

Community Organising involves bringing community members together to address common social challenges and create positive 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 good quality support services. Through organised efforts, they can engage volunteers, host educational workshops and create platforms for dialogue, ensuring that the voices of those at risk of homelessness are heard and addressed.

Ultimately, Community Organising aims to build power and agency within communities so that they have the ability to be:

- a. **more outward looking** (what's happening on our doorstep and beyond) rather than inward looking;
- b. **focused on securing change** to alleviate pressures that community members are experiencing, rather than on just delivering services; and most importantly by
- c. **nurturing leaders** to be able to do the above.

# 5 Steps of Community Organising

## Organise



Faith and community groups can unite different parts of the community to build relational power. By forming alliances, they can work collectively towards common good, leveraging their combined strengths to prevent 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 enhancing protective factors that mitigate the risk of experiencing 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 can 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 promoting collaboration for effective social change.

## Plan



Developing strategic responses often involves thorough research and careful planning. Faith and community groups can collaborate with community members 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, members can monitor progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure the effectiveness of their initiatives.

## Act



Implementation of planned actions is essential to creating 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 risks associated with homelessness. By actively engaging the community, these actions can improve 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 people ‘in power’, 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 support the community’s efforts. Through open dialogue and collaboration, policy decisions can be influenced and commitments secured to enable long-term solutions. Additionally, continuous advocacy and monitoring can ensure that promises are kept, and progress is made.

Together, these components enable faith and community groups to develop Universal Prevention approaches aimed at keeping people IN their homes.



# Case study

## Fair Housing for Winson Green



In November 2021, Ash Barker (United Reformed Church minister at Lodge Road Community Church in Winson Green, Birmingham) was contacted by a local newspaper to share 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 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, Ash 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 with members of the Fair Housing for Winson Green campaign. 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 engaged with various local groups to refine the plans to deliver an affordable housing scheme, championing 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 are often deficit-based, ABCD leverages the existing assets of individuals, associations and institutions to create sustainable solutions.

Faith and community groups are uniquely positioned to implement ABCD approaches 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 strong support systems that address 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 programmes that enhance stability and self-sufficiency.

Moreover, faith and community groups can foster partnerships with the public sector, other voluntary sector organisations and local businesses 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 keep people INcluded in mainstream systems, avoiding the ultimate exclusion that is 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 approaches, 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 - to shift from doing things 'to' and 'for' people to doing things 'with' and enabling actions to be done 'by' the community members themselves.

To achieve this, they adopted an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. Using a discovery before delivery method, they began by going out in small groups to talk to local people, locate community assets and get a general feel for the community. They found that while there was a real lack of connecting 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. 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 and coordinate community members, as well as creating community spaces for 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 their 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 a 'what's strong to fix what's wrong' approach.



# Co-production

Co-production offers a meaningful way for faith and community groups to prevent homelessness by fostering collaboration and shared responsibility. Involving individuals with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity in planning and decision-making leads to more effective, empathetic, and impactful 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. 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 spaces 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, 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 the 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, harnessing 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 ill health 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 explored several key areas, including mapping mental health services and available support, identifying barriers to accessing support, utilising lived experience to engage those experiencing complex or multiple challenges, determining gaps and solutions for improving the peer-led model, and defining what “good” looks like.

Through co-production activity, Good Shepherd and its partners have gained insights into potential barriers to accessing relevant and appropriate support, gained insight about 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.

# Designing out Homelessness

Together, these different approaches enable faith and community groups to think creatively about their role in local communities and homelessness prevention. By fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support, faith and community groups can significantly enhance their contribution to designing out homelessness in all its forms. In essence, by nurturing a culture of care and cooperation, faith and community groups lay the foundation for local communities that are resilient and where homelessness is less likely to occur because everyone has the support, when they need it, to lead stable, fulfilling lives.

Thank you to Saeed Haque from Citizens UK, Tim Evans from Firs and Bromford, Reverend Ash Barker from Lodge Road United Reformed Church, Chris Cole from Good Shepherd and Gareth Webber from Sifa Fireside for helping to develop this booklet. You can find links to their work here:

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

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

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

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

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



