Oatlands Community Group – written evidence (CCE0116)

Background

The House of Lords has set up a committee to explore the issues of citizenship and civic engagement in the twenty-first century. The committee is keen to hear from a wide range of individuals, groups and organisations in order to understand the nature of the citizenship challenge for different parts of society; the aim being to identify new ways of building bridges within and between communities, and to support civic engagement. How to think about citizenship and civic engagement in a more vibrant, positive and integrated manner is of particular interest to the committee.

Key questions of interest to the committee

The committee is seeking to gather evidence in answer to 12 questions about citizenship and civic engagement. Oatlands Community Group is submitting evidence in response to questions 9 and 12 in particular. These questions are:

- Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?
- Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?

About Oatlands Community Group

Oatlands Community Group (OCG) is a secular community group in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. It has no fixed community base. The group was set up in March 2016 in response to a perceived need in the local area for events to tackle social isolation. The group officially became a legal entity and not-for-profit organisation in July 2016, and is currently working towards becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The group is run entirely by volunteers and has received donations of money, equipment and time from a local foundation, companies and individuals.

OCG has developed a calendar of events in the local area which are free to attend and which aim to gather the community together for fun. These events are detailed below. As part of its calendar of events, OCG often fundraises for other charities and in its first year it had raised some £3,300 for other charities.
The experience of Oatlands Community Group

In answer to Q9: 9. Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?

OCG faced a number of barriers to becoming established and operating successfully. These barriers and the ways in which OCG overcame them are detailed in the table below. Note that we would be very happy to share model and resources (website) with other communities but have no vehicle to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>How the barrier was overcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Securing funds</td>
<td>In the process of changing our status from unincorporated charity to registered charitable incorporated organization (CIO)</td>
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<td>Difficulty in securing funds due to not being a registered charity: most grant funders want a registered charity number to award to</td>
<td>We identified a number of small grants available to unincorporated charities to help fund our first year of events. Once we are a CIO we will be able to apply for a wider range of funds. Some items we funded personally.</td>
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<td>Constraints in our ability to grow as a charity: the public want our services but we lack funds (and volunteers) to support our work</td>
<td>We found volunteers with experience of applying for funding, and also attended a course on applying for grants</td>
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<td>Securing grants takes time and experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Going through the process of becoming a CIO</td>
<td>Engaged with professionals offering support and guidance for newly established groups (cost for this was funded by us personally)</td>
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<td>Guidance was needed to steer the group through a myriad of legal and statutory requirements, preparing a submission to the Charity Commission and writing policies and procedures to support the group’s work</td>
<td>Identified a volunteer with experience of policy writing</td>
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<td>Motivating the community to become engaged</td>
<td>Engaging with community individuals effectively by raising awareness of OCG, its aims and its events, and letting people know how they can get involved. Putting out requests for support via social media (see below). Encouraging young people in particular to volunteer by offering a scheme to help mentor and develop their skills and document this for their CVs</td>
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### Energetic and enthusiastic leadership is needed to bring those individuals together as one and harness their skills effectively

Our founding members have a strong commitment to the local community and a clear vision of OCG’s goals. Without this, the group would probably be much less successful.

### Raising awareness of OCG and its activities via online presence and marketing

Create ‘brand’, market effectively using website, Facebook, blogging, vlogging, Instagram, Twitter.

### Reaching those in the community who may not access information online, and associated costs of doing this

Signpost visually through banners & flyers, word of mouth, feedback surveys & testimonials. Funding for this was obtained from local businesses and small grant providers.

- Created a partnership working with other community groups (e.g. Oatlands Community Centre, St Mark’s Church)

### Including hard-to-reach groups in our activities

- Reaching cross-generationally: some young people may never have come across volunteering / limited community opportunities for very young volunteers possibly through lack of information & opportunities / limited volunteering opportunities for elderly (who may have a lot of experience) due to H&S Risk Assessments regarding frailty or exclusion based on age (both young and old).

  - Inclusion – ‘community’ isn't just based on where you live it’s also based on things like heritage, ethnicity, faith, culture, environment, leisure activities – people in the community may identify in multiple communities – how to find out about them, how to engage with them

- OCG has established a volunteer scheme for young volunteers (aged under 18) whereby we train them and also document the hours they put in so that they can put these on their CVs at a later date. While we do not specifically target older volunteers, our opportunities are open to everyone.

  - By using a variety of locations (e.g. community centre, church, playing fields), we aim to reach a broad range of people within the community

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**In answer to Q12: Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?**
OCG has established various events over the past year that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship. These are detailed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Ways in which it promotes a positive vision of British Citizenship</th>
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| ‘Tuki’ Community Café – runs once a month between 11am-2pm, hosted by a local church, serving light lunches and cakes. Monies raised go to other charities. More than £2,500 has been raised since September 2016 | • Brings people of all generations together: many customers are pensioners, and the volunteers who run the café are either adults aged c. 30-50 or children aged 8-18 who wait on the customers.  
• Encourages respect for people across generations.  
• This ‘community melting pot’ offers insight and appreciation of different skill sets in different age groups  
• Broadens general knowledge  
• Offers all the opportunity to contribute positively to the lives of those living a working in the same community  
• Offers an environment of mutual tolerance and harmony |
| MESSI – Mobile Email Smart Phone Social Media Information service (runs at the same time as the Community Café every month). Our youth volunteers give up their time to help older people learn how to use devices such as mobile phones | Our younger volunteers share their digital skills with older members of the community – helping to upskill across the generations and reduce social isolation by teaching older people how to use mobile phones, computers and social media |
| Knitting group (runs at the same time as the Community Café every month). People with knitting skills (generally older people) are on hand to teach younger people how to knit. The group knits squares to be made up into blankets by ‘Knit-a-Square’, a charity which sends blankets to orphaned children in South Africa | Offers the older generations the opportunity to share skills with younger people and keep skills alive |
| Community Coffee Mornings: In November 2016 OCG teamed up with Dementia Forward to host a ‘memories’ event. This was held at a local community centre venue – where participants could come together to share ‘memories’. The local Pre-school children who use rooms behind the | As has been demonstrated in the recent Channel 4 programme ‘Old people’s home for 4 year olds’, getting old and young people together has a huge positive impact on health, well-being and even life expectancy! Everyone very much enjoyed the event. |
Community Centre were invited to attend.

‘Wonderful Windows’: we encouraged local residents and businesses to put up displays in their windows and light them up for two evenings in March 2016 and also 2017, creating a (free) trail of interesting and imaginative displays for people to follow

This free event had more than 80 participants in the first year and resulted in people of all generations getting outside on a dark winter evening, chatting and enjoying the displays together

‘Oaticulture’ plant and seed swap, and seed bank: held twice a year and hosted by a local church

This event encourages people to try growing plants and seeds they may not otherwise grow, raising awareness of gardening and reducing waste by ensuring that unwanted plants and seeds are used by others in the community

Feedback from members of our community about our events has been overwhelmingly positive. We detail in the table below some of the feedback we have received.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Comment received</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuki Café (August 2017) – money raised on behalf of charity Open Arms Malawi</td>
<td>On behalf of everyone at Open Arms Malawi I would like to thank the Oatlands Community Group for putting on a fantastic event, which raised over £350 to help some of the most vulnerable children in Malawi. The event was very well run, with tonnes of support and adults and children all rolling their sleeves up, working hard, having fun and getting involved. Each and every volunteer made sure that we got the most out of the day. We met a host of local community groups and regular visitors to St Mark’s too, who were all interested and supportive of our work. It was a pleasure to get to know you all and see the enthusiasm of everyone who came together to support us. You should all be very proud of what the group have achieved and we look forward to working with you all again soon. Claire Collins, Open Arms Malawi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuki Café (July 2017) – money raised on behalf of charity Caring for Life</td>
<td>On behalf of Caring For Life, and the Harrogate Support Group in particular, I would like to thank you very much indeed, especially Victoria and the brilliant team, for the wonderful Tuki Cafe yesterday. This was a first experience for me personally, and won’t be the last! As a community-enriching event it was great: a lovely happy atmosphere around the room and I believe a good time was had by all. We were really impressed by the organisation and efficient friendliness of the event. We would like to</td>
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particularly praise the young helpers who went about their potentially difficult tasks with great professionalism. As for our own charity, the funds raised were far more than we had expected, and we really valued the opportunity to present the work of CFL to the local community in this way. We very much hope we might be able to repeat the cafe next year. Thank you all so much! David Young Caring for Life

Tuki Café – feedback from customers

“Just keep up the good work”
“Very good service”
“Really enjoyed the live singing today- made it extra special”
“Great – will recommend to my friends”
“Lovely warm and friendly atmosphere & music. Lovely food and Drinks. Wonderful”
“The young volunteers serving us at this community café truly sparkle”
“I love the knitting table - there are lots of people to help me”

Wonderful Windows 2016

“This was a fab event and it was so nice to see so many groups of people (and people in cars) going around the area. So many people had spent time and effort in creating such a wide range of window displays…
As a community we should feel proud that we came together to pull this event off, and the organisers who did all the hard work getting it off the ground deserve a huge pat on the back for your vision and efforts. Thank you.”
“Lots of people getting involved. Getting our and about with the children. A sense of common purpose meeting people in the street who were also wandering.”
“Whole experience from making our display with the children at Pre-school to enjoying the other displays with my son. It felt magical and such a different experience to anything I’ve seen before.”
“Loved the creativity and range of people who participated.”
“Lovely simple open ended idea, could be enjoyed by young and old alike.”
“The creativity of the participants and hearing how excited the kids were wandering around. It was good fun making the window display. It’s new and different for Harrogate - or even Yorkshire. Once it’s had a few years of running it may become very
popular.”
“Really nice to see something happening in the community, reminded me of my childhood where you knew all your neighbours and doing a street party for something like the royal wedding was normal and everyone took part”

7 September 2017