

Place-based Working

What is place-based working?

For Essex LDP, place-based working aims to understand context, connect local systems together, leverage resources, facilitate partnership working amongst stakeholders and work in collaboration to hardwire physical activity into local system settings, programmes, policy and deliverables. Key to this approach is to listen and understand the strengths, aspirations and needs of people in a community by working together using local resources and collaborating to gain local knowledge and insight. By working collaboratively with local people and communities, it aims to understand the system from a local perspective, taking an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach to emphasise and build on the existing strengths, capacity and knowledge in the community.

Place-based working in Essex

Asset Based Community Development training

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) challenges the traditional deficit-based approach that has historically tried to solve urban and rural development problems. It proposes that local assets (people and physical assets like local parks) are key to ensuring sustainable community development. Since 2019, the Essex LDP has taken a proactive approach to understand ABCD, with an aim to using it to underpin our work. So far, we have trained over 300 practitioners and system leaders across Essex and have seen a number of positive outcomes including changes to how the LDP team and other system leaders work.

Future plans for our ABCD work include:

- inviting the 150 people trained by the LDP in ABCD to join an Essex-wide network to share and develop their work in community building.
- providing new training in 'Discover ABCD' to the wider LDP network early in March 2023 for those who have not yet undertaken this training.
- Nurture Development will oversee a succession and legacy plan to enable the Active Essex Foundation to become the main agency for ABCD in Essex. Nurture Development will train

15 carefully selected people to become ABCD Guides who will provide ABCD training and services led by the Active Essex Foundation, and the Guides will also be the main catalyst for ABCD work in their organisation and place.

Local implementation groups

Each of the three LDP areas have formed a local implementation group to suit the local context:

Basildon recently reviewed their implementation group and have now formed the 'Find Your Active Basildon Strategic Leadership Group'. This group is made up of strategic leaders working and operating within the borough across a range of system settings. Its role is to enable the Basildon LDP to review and prioritise its available resources, ensuring effective collaboration and the maximisation of opportunities. The Strategic Leadership Group will be supported by an Operational Delivery Group having the same system setting coverage, but at a more appropriate community-facing level. This group is responsible for delivering the ambitions of the Strategic Leadership Group.

For Colchester there is an LDP Operational Group who meet bi-weekly to discuss actions relating to the LDP and a monthly Strategic group meeting, both include Colchester Borough Council colleagues, Active Essex and Community 360. There is a Colchester LDP Investment Panel which meets ad-hoc when new proposals need to be discussed; this group has a Terms of Reference and includes members that are representative of the 3 main target audiences for LDP. The One Colchester partnership also operates as a group where the LDP is embedded and connection to community and voluntary groups is made. It has a wide membership with over 40 people in attendance each meeting and LDP is a standing agenda item.

In Tendring, the implementation group for LDP work and investment is made up of 30 organisations ranging from large public sector organisations to smaller community-based organisations. The group play an active role in promoting and assessing micro-grants and are engaged with the larger requests for LDP investment. The group meets in person twice a year to discuss progress, discuss priority issues, and horizon scan about future opportunities and hardwiring the long-term sustainability of the work of the LDP in Tendring.

Microgrants Programme

The LDP microgrants programme is a fund for local people who have a great idea to get their local community more active. It has primarily been used as a medium for our LDP Coordinators to increase community building and action if money is required. The grants are between £50 – £2,500.

A key principle of the LDP is to put local people in the driving seat, recognising them as important assets in any community. The microgrants programme enables us to invest in local passionate people who want to use physical activity to make a positive difference in their neighbourhood.

Since the programme launched in 2019, we have invested almost £230,000 in 113 local projects.

Basildon Community Involvement Network (CIN)

The CIN is a network for community development workers in Basildon which is funded by the Essex LDP and run by Swan Housing. The network aims to provide a space for community development workers to come together to spread news of what's happening in Basildon, share good practice as well as inspiring people and giving them motivation to continue with community development work. The network has held 7 events in total (some face-to-face and some virtual), engaging around 150 organisations. To ensure 'line of sight' to physical activity, each agenda includes a talk related to physical activity or from a project delivering a physical activity intervention. The network also allows the local LDP coordinator for Basildon to make connections with community groups and organisations with the aim of identifying potential LDP investments and microgrants.

The LDP funding for this work is coming to an end in 2023 and there has been a commitment made by Peabody, Clarion Housing and Swan Housing (all the major housing associations in Basildon) to continue the network beyond this time.

What are our assumptions and beliefs around place-based working?

We are working to test and refine the following assumptions & beliefs around place-based working:

- I. We know that even the most deprived and disadvantaged communities contain a range of assets (i.e. people ...). If we can build trust and relationships within communities and encourage local community members and groups to connect to each other. As a result, we will be able to build community resilience by empowering the community to identify and make better use of local assets because they will have an understanding of what their community already has.
- II. Top-down approaches have not been successful in encouraging PA in local communities. Consequently, if we can distribute leadership to the local community, then they will take responsibility for and ownership of creating opportunities to reduce physical inactivity. This is because they have local experience, meaning they understand the needs and wants of their local community.
- III. Communities already possess a wealth of assets and knowledge that can help tackle physical activity in their local place. If we can support, guide and fund local individuals and/or groups to galvanise and realise their own ideas, then we will catalyse small scale community projects which respond to the individual needs of that place. This will create more opportunities to be physically active because we will be helping to remove current barriers to these types of initiatives (funding, knowledge gap, capacity).

N.B. There is an intention to add an additional assumption & belief statement relating to Active Essex's work with the systems and structures within each of the LDP areas as it has been recognised that this is an important element of our place-based work.

What have we done to understand place-based working?

- **Secondary Research**

A literature review has been conducted to understand more about some of the concepts included in our assumptions and beliefs about place-based working such as trust, community resilience, top-down and bottom-up approaches and distributed leadership.

- **Staff Reflections**

We ran a workshop with the three LDP coordinators for Basildon, Tendring and Colchester, presenting our assumptions and beliefs and asking if they correctly explain what is happening in LDP areas. We also conducted a workshop at an Active Essex Away Day where we discussed the findings from the literature review and whether these reflected what staff are seeing in their daily work.

- **Project Data**

We have project data and provider reflections from the LDP microgrants programme. We have also identified projects that appear to be good examples of place-based working, such as the Basildon CIN, and have taken opportunities to observe and ask questions of those involved.

What have we learned about hardwiring?

'Joint effort' might be more appropriate than top-down or bottom-up approaches

Previously we assumed that a bottom-up approach was the “gold standard” of community development work, however, research suggests that a joint effort or “convergence” approach may be more appropriate to make best use of “expert” knowledge and assets alongside local knowledge and assets. This idea was also brought up by coordinators in their workshop and the team at the AE awayday when they were presented with the second assumption & belief. The literature notes the importance of “translators” within this approach as a means of communicating information from “top to bottom” and vice versa. The concept of translators in the LDP has been explored further, with local coordinators being highlighted as a good example of this.

Bringing people together increases joint working

Through both our local implementation groups and the Basildon CIN, we have seen that bringing people together and identifying a common purpose increases joint working (and reduces silo working).

In the case of our implementation groups, systems partners have been brought together to align around the common purpose of reducing inactivity. For CIN attendees, they are encouraged during the networking session to identify shared agendas and joint working opportunities, something which many reported had happened in their end of event feedback form.

If you can convince system leaders of a way of working (like ABCD), this will influence policy and practice

Colchester Borough Council has recently introduced a new way of working labelled 'Communities Can'. This has been a key development for Colchester which local stakeholders have attributed to their learnings from the ABCD training that has been taking place over the past couple of years. The ABCD way of thinking has been driven down through the organisation by a senior leader who is a strong advocate for ABCD following the training she attended.

We are currently working with Hartpury University to understand more about how and why ABCD works.

What have we learned about impact?

A microgrants programme can be used to get people active in novel ways

Through the microgrants programme, we have seen many novel ideas come to life and getting people active, including a drumming circle, forest school sessions and aerial hoop skills. We have learned that community groups have some great ideas, however in many cases, the local coordinator role has been needed to help groups fully form their ideas and ensure that there is a clear line of sight to physical activity.

Further work on the learnings from the LDP microgrants programme is currently underway.

Bringing community groups together enables them to gather information for the benefit of the communities they work with

Speaking to attendees of a Basildon CIN event highlighted that the main purpose of attending was to find out about things happening locally so that they were better able to signpost. It was also evident that people were interested in issues and information relevant to Basildon as opposed to other areas.