Positive conversations, meaningful change: learning from Animating Assets

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Animating Assets

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Glossary of terms

Term	Explanation
Action research	Action research is an overarching term for a range of research practices that focus on knowledge creation involving researchers working alongside local people or practitioners to try out, develop and learn from different ways of doing things. It thus explicitly sets out to bring about change.
Appreciative inquiry	Appreciative inquiry (AI) is based on theory where the 'research' or inquiry is treated as an intervention in itself that starts to create change. It is a relationship-based practice, with new knowledge created through the process. It is also about undertaking inquiry collectively; building on the best of what is.
Community member	A community member is an individual or representative of a local organisation who lives, works or has an interest in a particular geographical area or interest group.
	In Animating Assets this included local community development associations, local churches, community food initiatives, youth centre projects and agencies. Throughout the report quotes used include statements from community members.
Conversation café	The conversation café approach makes use of an informal setting for participants to explore an issue through discussion in small groups around tables. The underpinning assumption is that people feel more comfortable and creative in less formal environments and this technique recreates a café environment to stimulate more relaxed and open conversations to take place.
Co-production	Co-production can be defined as a relationship where professionals and citizens share power to design, plan and deliver support together.
Open space	Open space is a method based upon evidence that meeting in a circle is the most productive way to encourage honest, frank and equal discussion, the 'open space' referring to the centre of the circle. Open space methods create conversations held together by mutual enthusiasm for interest in a topic.
Participatory appraisal	Participatory appraisal (PA) creates a cycle of research, information collection, reflection, learning and collective action. It is a broad empowerment approach that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages collective community action.

Practitioner	A practitioner is a person who practises a profession or occupation.
	In Animating Assets this included people from the Health Improvement Teams of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Edinburgh City Council Children and Families Team, addiction workers, school nurses, Community Learning and Development Practitioners and staff from educational establishments. Throughout the report quotes used include statements from practitioners.
Stakeholder	A stakeholder is a person, group or organisation that has an interest or concern and who can affect or are affected by an organisation, strategy or project.
	In Animating Assets this included people from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Lothian, Edinburgh City Council, housing organisations, General Practitioners (GPs), Police Scotland and Community Safety. Throughout the report quotes used include statements from stakeholders.
Storytelling	Storytelling is an informal and appreciative way of collecting information about people's own experiences of successful projects or activities, their own skills and achievements and what they hope for. Stories are accessible to a wide range of participants and are often collective and participative.

1 Introducing Animating Assets

'Animating Assets' was a collaborative action research and learning programme facilitated by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH).

The programme ran for 18 months from March 2014 to September 2015.

Animating Assets supported the initiation and development of asset-based approaches to a range of health and social wellbeing issues as identified by local communities or partnership groups in Scotland. This was achieved through a process of engagement, facilitation, co-creation and learning. The programme also investigated whether existing services and systems could change to effect tangible and sustainable improvement and outcomes through alternative approaches. Furthermore, the programme sought to generate fresh ways of thinking about assets in real time and in the context of real local issues, and to co-create asset-based approaches to health and social wellbeing. The programme supported work in a number of areas of Scotland within community settings and across agency-led partnerships.

This report tells the stories of the research sites in which Animating Assets worked, presents findings and themes from across these sites, and highlights the aspirations and next steps for the local sites as they plan and develop their future directions. The report also highlights the collective learning emerging from Animating Assets, and our experiences of asset-based working in community settings, and within and across services (as perceived by the Animating Assets research team). Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of the enabling conditions required for asset-based approaches to take root, and the barriers that may hinder or inhibit this different way of working.

This report builds on the emerging findings and initial learning presented in the Animating Assets Insight Report[1]. Digital stories of two of the research sites have also been developed that further illuminate and describe the journey taken as part of Animating Assets from a number of local perspectives. The digital stories demonstrate the value to individuals and organisations of being involved in the process, and are intended to complement this report.

This report and the wider findings from the Animating Assets research and learning programme are aimed at a wide audience including community-based services and organisations, policy makers, practitioners and researchers, as well as those who engaged in the Animating Assets process. It is hoped that the learning from Animating Assets will support new thinking and action to improve health and reduce inequalities by recognising and building on the skills, assets and resources of people and strengthening local capacity for collective action.

1.1   Why Animating Assets?

The value of building and enhancing the skills, strengths and successes of individuals and communities is widely recognised in Scotland[2,3]. Animating Assets focused on having positive conversations about aspects of community life that statistics and research data often miss, and supported local people and organisations to work together and gather evidence of the difference it makes to work in this way.

Animating Assets was based in geographical areas with local interest in maximising capacity for communities and local partnerships. It was hoped that Animating Assets would support greater reach into communities with the opportunity to re-energise existing activity and increase collective impact, while building on existing infrastructures. There was a specific focus in some areas on capacity building for locality-based organisations and improving communication between community and voluntary sector and statutory agencies.

The approach taken by Animating Assets was firmly rooted in the applied theories of asset-based approaches, appreciative inquiry and action research (see Sections 3 and 4) with a core value base that prioritised pre-existing work and interactions. The programme was intrinsically flexible and adaptive to local circumstances and relationships.

1 Introducing Animating Assets

Adopting an action research approach, which starts with learning from experience as it unfolds, Animating Assets sought to explore the following questions:

- What are the skills, attitudes, values and capacities that support asset-based approaches amongst staff and communities and how can they be developed?
- What are the organisational strategic, operational and cultural conditions that enable approaches to thrive or which hinder them?
- Can asset-based approaches be understood and deployed as a preventative and early intervention strategy?
- What are the likely health and social outcomes of asset-based approaches? How does building on assets achieve positive health and social outcomes? Does it alter the desired outcomes?
- How do asset-based approaches work to reduce negative health and social behaviours and outcomes?
- In the longer term, where might the benefits of improved social outcomes be noticed?
- How can asset-based working best be measured and evaluated?
- What supports embedding the implications and outcomes of initiatives into strategic and financial planning, operational decision making and external positioning for the agencies involved?
- What funding and resource provision arrangements enable the sustainability of asset-based approaches?

The extent that we were able to address these questions is discussed in Section 11.

Overall, we had a strong interest in developing live, tested understandings of the relationship between asset-based working and mainstream services by supporting learning from real-life situations. In particular, Animating Assets was interested in exploring:

- how adopting and embedding the characteristics of asset-based working can be taken on more fully by services and systems
- how existing systems might need to change to effect tangible and sustainable improvement through alternative approaches.

Animating Assets aimed to take a 'whole systems' approach. There are a number of well documented examples of asset-based approaches to working with individuals in community-based projects and at locality level. These include a series of case studies presented in the report 'Assets in Action'[4], the Inspiring Scotland Link Up programme evaluation[5] and the Big Lottery Scotland Our Place programme learning report[6]. Little is known, however, about the impact these approaches are having on health and wellbeing. This is partially because of the small scale nature of some projects or programmes being in the relatively early stages, as well as difficulties in evaluating and measuring the outcomes and impacts of asset-based approaches on health. Similarly, even less is known about what difference this way of working makes when tackling health inequalities that require co-ordinated work from a range of partners, across a whole community. We were also interested in the feasibility of moving towards an approach that means changing the way systems and structures currently work. Animating Assets worked with communities and across multiple agencies and partners to provide evidence of the difference this makes.

Animating Assets was a partnership action research programme undertaken by SCDC and GCPH, with each organisation bringing differing but complementary skills and expertise. The partnership was established against a background of calls for more evidence on the impact of asset-based approaches and a need to consider how to create and support whole systems change if the health of the population is to be improved. While there was interest in the programme from across Scotland, particularly in the approach and locally tailored nature of the programme, the delay in being awarded national funding meant that local priorities changed over time, key people moved on, budget cuts started to be realised and some momentum was lost. Nonetheless, the programme was successful in attracting funding from two health improvement teams from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and from Edinburgh City Council, as described throughout this report. Funding was also secured from NHS Health Scotland to support the inclusion of a community planning partnership area within the programme, and from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health to support the inclusion of associate site areas.

2 Research sites

In this section we present an overview of the four Animating Assets research sites. Detailed case studies of these areas (Case studies 1 to 4) are presented throughout this report. These highlight who was involved in each of the research sites, what happened over the duration of the Animating Assets programme, and the plans and local hopes for the future.

Milton (and Lambhill) is a neighbourhood in the North West (NW) of Glasgow with a population of 13,481[a]. It was recognised by the NHS in Glasgow as being an area of limited investment and an area with significant health inequalities. Animating Assets was invited and funded by the NW Health Improvement Team of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHS GGC) to support and facilitate partnership working between local services and the voluntary and community sector and to build on the local enthusiasm for working differently for better health outcomes recognising the richness and resourcefulness of the community.

At the start of Animating Assets, there were a number of long-standing local community organisations, but limited awareness of each other, and local services were not strongly linked in to the community.

Case study 1 provides the full story of the Animating Assets experience in Milton (see page 20).

Edinburgh South
Animating Assets was invited by Edinburgh City Council to support a partnership approach to investigating and reducing risk-taking behaviour amongst young people in the **Liberton/Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partnership Area.**

Image: With permission from Liberton/ Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partnership.

The key contact in Edinburgh South was a neighbourhood worker based in the Children and Families team, who had strong links with local voluntary and statutory sector partners and was well-integrated into the community planning process. Statutory and voluntary agencies in Edinburgh South have been working together for several years to develop asset-based approaches for working with young people on a whole range of issues. The work was supported and funded by NHS Health Scotland which was interested in exploring an approach aiming to tackle inequalities at a community level through a community planning process.

Case study 2 provides the full story of the Animating Assets experience in Edinburgh South (see page 25).

[a]See Understanding Glasgow: http://www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles/3_nw_sector/5_lambhill_and_milton

Barmulloch and **Balornock** is a neighbourhood in the North East (NE) of Glasgow with a population of 7,235[b]. It also was recognised by the NHS in Glasgow as being an area of limited investment and with significant health inequalities. Animating Assets was invited and funded by the NE Health Improvement Team of NHS GGC to support and facilitate partnership working between local services and the voluntary and community sector and to build on the local enthusiasm for working differently for better health outcomes recognising the richness and resourcefulness of the community.

Prior to Animating Assets, there had been efforts to create a community network, but this had encountered difficulties. Community organisations and services were keen to forge stronger local links and partnerships.

Case study 3 provides the full story of the Animating Assets experience in Barmulloch and Balornock (see page 42).

Edinburgh South West

Animating Assets was invited and funded by Edinburgh City Drugs and Alcohol Partnership at Edinburgh City Council to support a partnership approach to reducing risk-taking behaviour in relation to substance misuse in the communities of **Wester Hailes, Oxgangs, Currie** and **Balerno.**

Image: Wikipedia Creative Commons.

Some concerns had been raised by schools and the drugs and alcohol worker in the area about the extent of alcohol use, and the partnership was keen to understand more about these, and to see whether more support needed to be put in place. The key contact in the South West research site, was based in the local authority and had good links with statutory services and local voluntary sector organisations, however difficulties engaging with local schools was an ongoing concern. It was clear at the outset that support was available to young people, but much of it was focused in the Wester Hailes areas, and it was not targeted around issues of alcohol and substance misuse.

Case study 4 provides the full story of the Animating Assets experience in Edinburgh South West (see page 47).

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[b]See Understanding Glasgow: http://www.understandingglasgow.com/profiles/1_ne_sector/8_balornock_and_barmulloch

3 Why asset-based approaches?

3.1   Policy drivers for asset-based approaches

Animating Assets was set against a backdrop of growing interest in asset-based approaches for improved individual and community health and wellbeing and for tackling health and social inequalities. The programme also relates strongly to a call for further evidence on the impact of using asset-based approaches to work differently with individuals and within communities.

At a national level, the term 'asset-based approaches' is now permeating and influencing the work and function of the Scottish Government[7]. The language of asset-based approaches has become widespread in the literature on health and health inequalities and has a strong presence in a number of Scottish policies and strategies for health and social care. Asset-based principles are also influencing wider debates on justice, employability and welfare reform.

This movement builds on the vision and recommendations of the Christie Commission Report[8] and on the ambitions and aspirations of the Community Empowerment Action Plan[9], NHS Scotland Healthcare Quality Strategy[10] and Scotland's Healthcare: 2020 Vision[11]. Going beyond the recognition that health improvement efforts in Scotland over the last few decades have produced steady improvements in health and that public health policy has, to date, focused on addressing community needs and problems, the shift towards asset-based approaches in Scotland is hoped to challenge the shortcomings of deficit-based approaches. Working in this way will place an emphasis on discovering and mobilising what is working in a person's life and what people care about for improved outcomes. An asset-based way of working emphasises the value of social relationships and the efficacy of communities. It is about building community assets and strengths through creating the conditions to engage with, and empower, citizen-led action and participation.

At a local policy level, asset-based approaches are an explicit part of the Glasgow Community Planning Partnership's strategy for the next ten years[12]. In the strategy, place-based work will focus on nine 'Thriving Places', which are neighbourhoods within the city that have been included due to persistent poverty and inequalities.

Asset-based approaches are not a new concept and already exist in various contexts and settings across Scotland and the UK[4,13]. This way of working has, however, become more significant as we seek to maximize the positive social determinants of health and embrace new ways of working to tackle persistent inequalities, particularly in challenging economic times.

Asset-based approaches do not 'just happen' and there are important roles for the NHS, local government and the community and voluntary sector in creating safe, supportive places that enable individuals and communities to take more control of their lives and health.

Asset-based approaches are an integral part of community development and community-led health interventions. Both community development and asset-based approaches are concerned with bringing people and communities together to achieve positive change using their own knowledge, skills and lived experience around the issues they encounter in their own lives[14].The process of community development brings all the assets that lie within communities together to create a force and a vehicle for social change, informed by a clear understanding of the approach and a realistic recognition of its challenges and limitations. Asset-based approaches recognise that sustained positive health and social outcomes will only occur when people and communities have opportunities and the facilities to control and manage their own futures.

Empowering individuals and mobilising the expertise of local communities are central to public service reform. This means community members working alongside public services and community and voluntary sector agencies to co-design and deliver services, improve outcomes and achieve meaningful social change. Asset-based working is not just another public health 'intervention', it is underpinned by a set of values and principles that focus on nurturing engagement and relationship building to enable strengths, capacities and abilities to be identified and developed for positive outcomes (see the Animating Assets principles in Section 3.4 and Figure 2). Asset-based working also involves a paradigm shift in thinking about the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.

3.2 What's the theory?

Asset-based approaches for health aim to *"nurture, sustain, protect and build the health assets in every individual, family and community in order to improve people's life chances and enhance positive health and wellbeing"* [13: p13]. They aim to promote and strengthen the factors that support good health and wellbeing, protect against poor health and build and foster communities and networks that sustain health.

Asset-based approaches draw on a number of perspectives to make sense of the causes and mechanisms of inequities in health and to offer up potential solutions. The theory of 'salutogenesis' (literally the 'origins of health') is a key focus and driver of asset-based approaches. The term describes a focus on factors that support health and wellbeing, rather than on factors that cause disease. A salutogenic approach values the skills and resources that positively impact on people's health and wellbeing, and helps them to manage and cope with difficult situations and challenges throughout their life[15].

Essentially, asset-based approaches are about recognising and making the most of people's strengths. To do so requires a shift in focus from defining people in terms of what they do not have (their needs) to what they do (their assets). This way of working is also about acknowledging that communities and individuals often labelled deprived may be rich in relationships, resourcefulness and social and personal assets[16]. Working in an asset-based

way enables people to become better connected with each other and encourages a spirit of co-operation, mutual support and caring for one another so that people can be in control of their lives. As confidence and self-esteem grow in individuals and neighbours, trust, support and community cohesion are built.

3.3 Assets – different things to different people?

Assets are realised, expressed, mobilised and sustained through people's actions, connections and participation[13]. They are found at both an individual and at a community level and also at the level of the agency and organisation as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Operational level of assets[17]
Adapted from Morgan and Ziglio, 2007.

Individual level assets

Resilience, self-esteem, sense of purpose, sense of contribution, positive values, commitment to learning

Community level assets

Family and friendship (supportive) networks, intergenerational solidarity, community cohesion and harmony, affinity groups

Organisation / agency level assets

Environmental resources which enhance physical, mental and social health; employment opportunities and security; opportunity for voluntary service; safe and pleasant housing; agencies working together effectively; political democracy and social justice

Organisations, public bodies and services also have assets that can be used to improve wellbeing – including buildings, land, money, green spaces, employment opportunities, skills, power and voice. The defining themes of asset-based ways of working are that they are place-based, relationship-based, citizen-led and they promote social justice and equality[18].

3.4   The principles of asset-based approaches

Fundamentally, assets-based approaches stem from a set of values and principles and a way of thinking about the world (Figure 2). Proponents argue that a *"glass-half full"* [18] mindset, along with recognising that everybody has something to contribute regardless of their role or 'label', can transform thinking and action.

These principles actively guided Animating Assets and played an important role in maintaining the research team's focus on assets and strengths, as opposed to needs and problems, within the research sites.

Figure 2: Principles of asset-based approaches[18]
Adapted from Foot and Hopkins, 2010.

Instead of starting with the problems, start with what is working and what people care about

Working with people – "doing with", rather than "doing to"

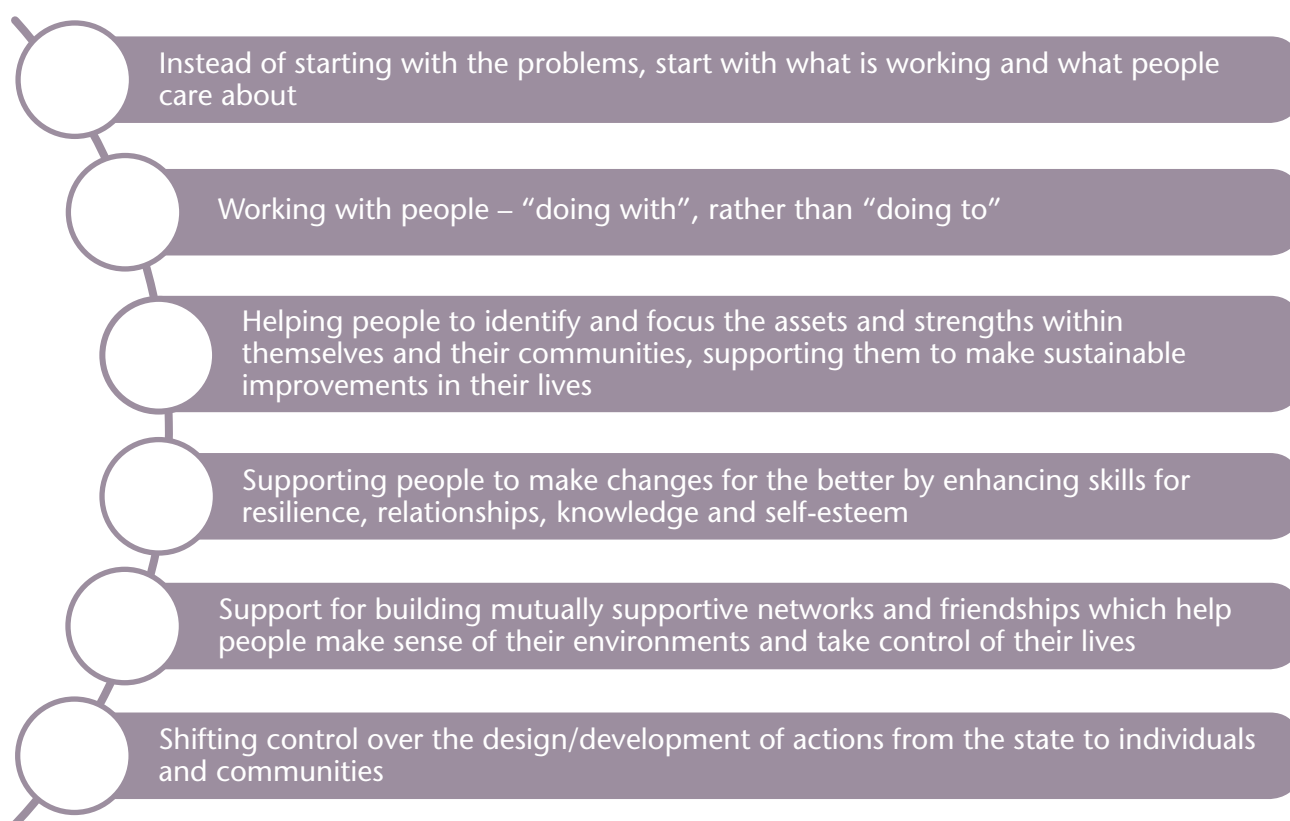Helping people to identify and focus the assets and strengths within themselves and their communities, supporting them to make sustainable improvements in their lives

Supporting people to make changes for the better by enhancing skills for resilience, relationships, knowledge and self-esteem

Support for building mutually supportive networks and friendships which help people make sense of their environments and take control of their lives

Shifting control over the design/development of actions from the state to individuals and communities

To further support this endeavour, a practical, visual infographic of shortened asset-based principles was developed for use in Animating Assets meetings and in wider conversations (Figure 3) (and a larger version in Appendix 1). The principles used in this resource were derived from the literature, are based on the available evidence and are commonly agreed by practitioners working in this area. This resource allowed us to consider and view our

3 Why asset-based approaches?

conversations through an 'assets lens' and discuss an alternative narrative that articulates and values the positive aspects of individuals and communities. Indeed, by recognising the value and contribution that individual people have to offer, these principles can be applied in any setting.

Figure 3: Visual infographic: an asset-based way of thinking and doing

In the two Edinburgh research sites, the infographic was a useful prompt when explaining the approach and the underpinning principles, as well as emphasising the aspects of an asset-based approach that are particularly relevant to the local work being undertaken: namely, putting young people at the centre; mobilising the assets and strengths existing with the local communities (e.g. football clubs or faith communities); and recognising the agencies and partnerships already working well together in the area as an existing asset to be mobilised further.
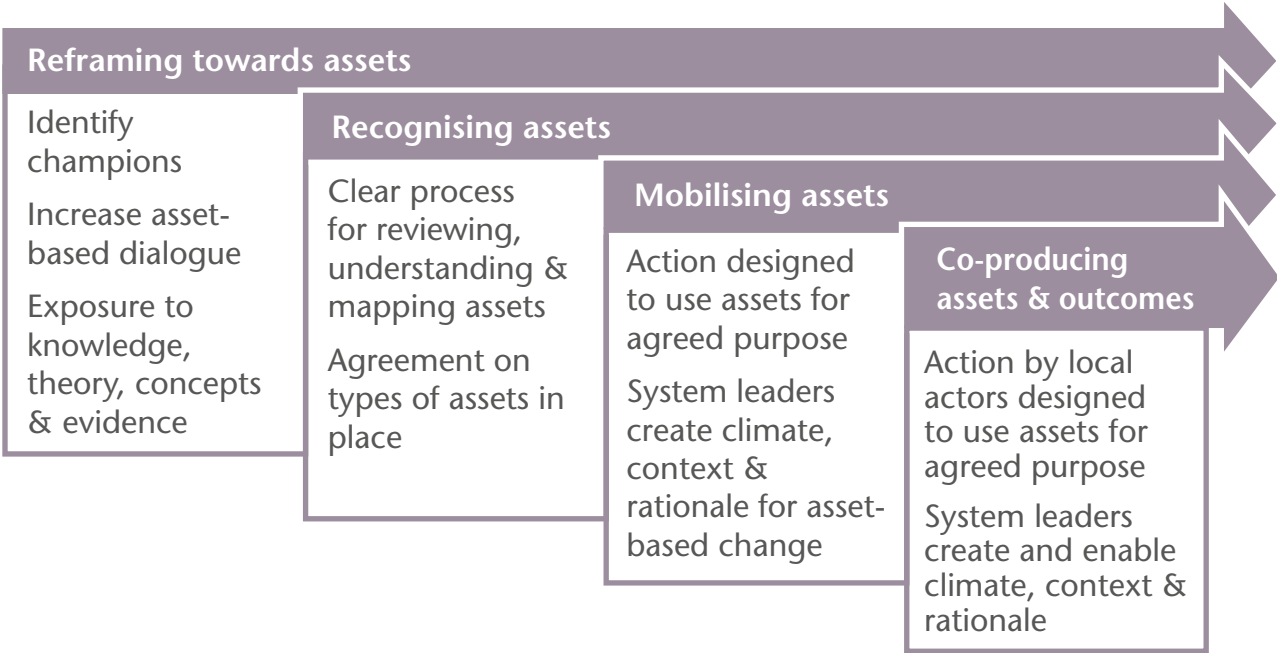
Subsequently, the two Glasgow sites created their own set of asset-based values or *'releasing assets statements'* which were developed with the 'collective' in mind. These statements are about the ways in which local community organisations wish to work together in the future (further described in Sections 5.2, 8.3.1 and Figure 6).

3.5   A theory of change for asset-based approaches

Clearly, much of the above has to underpin any initiative that sets out to work with communities in applying asset-based approaches to bring about change. Hopkins and Rippon[13] have taken this on board in reviewing what steps might be part of the process of change. They proposed a theory of change for asset-based working that includes four elements: reframing towards assets, recognising assets, mobilising assets and co-producing assets and outcomes. They also suggest that there is a timeframe of action and activity in relation to these elements, each leading on to the next, over the short to long-term. An adapted version of Hopkins and Rippon's[13] theory of change with the elements overlapping and potentially occurring in parallel, rather than leading on from each other, is shown in Figure 4.

In Section 8, we reflect on our learning from Animating Assets in relation to this theory of change and in Section 10.4 propose a community-focused theory of change or model for action, which is more in line with our commitment to working from the ground up to make connections and thereby mobilise assets and collective capacity for action.

Figure 4: Theory of change for asset-based working[13: p22]
Adapted from Hopkins and Rippon, 2015.

Reframing towards assets

Identify champions

Increase asset-based dialogue

Exposure to knowledge, theory, concepts & evidence

Recognising assets

Clear process for reviewing, understanding & mapping assets

Agreement on types of assets in place

Mobilising assets

Action designed to use assets for agreed purpose

System leaders create climate, context & rationale for asset-based change

Co-producing assets & outcomes

Action by local actors designed to use assets for agreed purpose

System leaders create and enable climate, context & rationale

Case study 1. Milton

Where? The community of **Milton** in the north west of Glasgow.

Who was involved? Animating Assets worked with the NW Health Improvement Team from NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Love Milton, North Glasgow Community Food Initiative, LifeLink, Just Like Us Milton, Milton Parish Church, Milton Talks, North Glasgow Healthy Living Centre, Glasgow Club Milton, and North United Communities.

What happened? Animating Assets facilitated two local events in April and May 2014, which attracted a good cross-section of people connected to organisations in Milton or those that work in the area. With an emphasis on storytelling, the events focused on the opportunities to build on what is happening already and encouraging future collaboration to make sure more positive things happen. The work coalesced as *'Connecting Milton'*; an informal forum open to all those that live or work in the area to share what's

happening and to build professional connections and awareness of each other's work.

"Building connections between people and fostering a caring environment in the area is what Connecting Milton is about." (Community member)

This group met monthly from Autumn 2014 and collective action saw the development and circulation of the first edition of a community newsletter *'Milton's Voice'*, with further editions planned.

A community Twitter hashtag #CelebrateMilton was set up, a *map of the land use* in Milton was prepared to stimulate discussion and local collective action, and a link established between Connecting Milton and Milton Talks, a pre-existing community-led resident survey. In early 2015 the group took an asset-focused *community walkabout*

instead of a formal meeting. This proved to be a valuable activity that enabled people to talk to each other more informally, gain a better sense of the local community and helped people to get to know what was going on more effectively than hearing about it in a meeting.

"Seeing what and who we are talking about is important."
(Stakeholder)

"Felt there was a lack of a real centre to the community, lack of places to interact, connect, socialise and shop."
(Community member)

In March 2015, a *conversation café event* with over 50 people (see Section 5.2) was an opportunity to showcase

local activity, build and enhance local connections and enable discussion around common issues/topic areas. More recently the group developed a set of *'releasing asset statements'* (see Sections 5.2 and 8.3.1, Figure 6) to encapsulate the group's shared ways of working for the future. A *digital story* has been prepared documenting through stories, images and quotes from local people the Animating Assets Milton journey (see Section 4.2 and Appendix 4).

What next? Supported by the North West Health Improvement Team, *community breakfasts* will now take place on a monthly basis in Milton providing an opportunity for local people to meet others in the area and for local organisations to network, followed by a Connecting Milton business meeting.

4 Action research and appreciative inquiry: the theory

There is a strong similarity between the values and principles that underpin asset-based approaches and action research. Action research is an overarching term for a 'family of practices' that focus on knowledge creation arising from:

"A context of practice [that] requires researchers to work with practitioners. Unlike conventional social science, its purpose is not primarily or solely to understand social arrangements, but also to effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge and empowering stakeholders." [19: p93]

It thus involves researchers working alongside local people and professionals so that everyone can try out, develop and learn from different ways of doing things. There are many similarities with practices outside the action research 'family' including similarities to co-production, a key component of asset-based change[13,20].

Action research can also be appreciative in that it recognises strengths and assets as a starting point for inquiry. It helps to build resilience and capacity through the process of research itself. Animating Assets used appreciative inquiry methods as they *"advocate collective inquiry into the best of what is, in order to imagine what could be, followed by collective design of a desired future state"* [21: p41].

Appreciative inquiry is based on theory that is quite different to the thinking behind more traditional forms of research. The 'research' or inquiry is treated as an intervention in itself that starts to create change. It is a relationship-based practice, with new knowledge created through the process. This collective discovery of what gives life to a community, organisation or system (rather than an expert diagnosis of its problems) will produce both shared knowledge and motivation for innovation. Appreciative inquiry claims to *"unleash a positive revolution of conversation and changes in organisations by unseating existing reified patterns of discourse, creating space for new voices and new discoveries, and expanding circles of dialogue to provide a community of support for innovative action"* [22: p189].

The core principles of appreciative inquiry share much common ground with the theory of asset-based approaches. The primary principles are that appreciative inquiry[23]:

- begins with appreciation and with what is working well
- is relevant to the system in which the inquiry takes place, and confirmed through testing in action
- should be challenging and create new knowledge that is of interest to the system members
- is collaborative, in that system members must be part of the design and implementation of the inquiry.

This is more than 'the power of positive thinking'; it is a change methodology that seeks to generate new forms of thinking and acting through the use of a four Ds structure of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (or Deliver) as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: The appreciative inquiry model
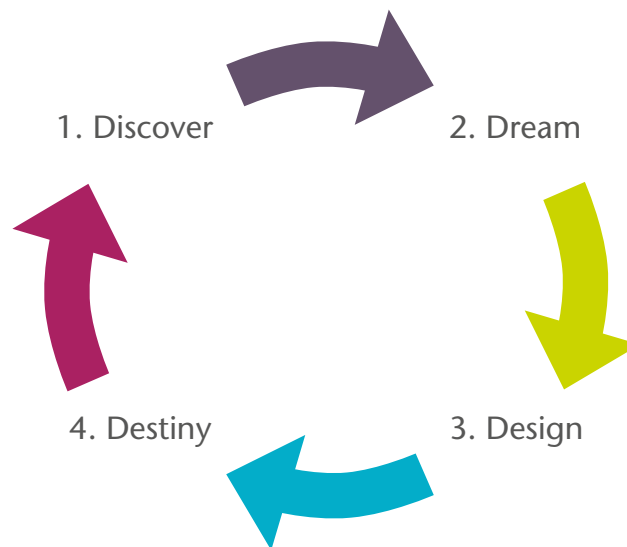
Appreciative inquiry can be transformational where it focuses on changing *how people think* instead of what they do. It can also support self-organising (improvised) change processes that flow from new ideas[23].

4.1 The power of stories

The collection and analysis of stories is an important focus of appreciative inquiry practice[23]. Stories are descriptive accounts of something that has happened that bring things to life and compel people to ask questions. Stories involve relationships, events, notions of cause and effect and priorities. They may be complex, yet memorable and stimulate action: *"When people can locate themselves in the story, their sense of commitment and involvement is enhanced"* [24: p41].

Within organisations and communities stories are usually told informally. When people talk with each other in this way about high points or challenges, they naturally build empathy, mutual respect and trust; in other words, they build high quality relationships. Stories seem to matter to people in 'making sense' of the world. They can surprise and challenge perceptions and assumptions, especially those of which we are unaware. In this way, they can provide new insights and help to shape deeper understanding of other peoples' experience. Sharing stories and making links between them often allows new meaning to emerge.

4 Action research and appreciative inquiry: the theory

Playfulness is another important element of group behaviour that serves to build trust and relationships as well as being a form of sense-making. The use of imagery, metaphor and stories help to deepen inquiry and enables people to say things that they may otherwise find intuitive, sensitive or awkward, or helps them to say something not previously 'reportable' in the sense of people having the facility to say what it is that they know.

4.2 Capturing experience through digital stories

The digital stories produced as part of Animating Assets provide an illustration of this process in action (see Section 1 and Appendix 4)[c].

Digital Stories are short, personal, multimedia narratives or stories. They could be called 'mini-movies', although they usually involve still photographs rather than video. The Digital Story has three elements:

- a narration track – different people talking about their experience.
- a photo stream – a series of still photos that are displayed alongside the narration.
- a music track – quiet unobtrusive music in the background.

In the Glasgow research sites, digital stories captured participants' experiences of what is different about working in an asset-based way and how this developed in their local areas, as well as the wider Animating Assets journey. This approach facilitated self-reflection for those engaged with Animating Assets and has supported an empowering collective dialogue.

The digital stories have been developed as a resource for multiple audiences:

- The community itself, who may use their digital story to demonstrate how they are using an assets-based approach, the journey they have taken and perhaps as part of submissions for future funding bids.
- To inform local organisations and agencies as they develop community-led plans.
- As a resource to demonstrate asset-based working in action.

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[c]The digital stories will be available on the GCPH website: http://www.gcph.co.uk/work_themes/theme_4_assets_and_resilience/health_improvement_asset_based_approaches/animating_assets

Case study 2. Edinburgh South

Where? Edinburgh South, including the communities of **Liberton, Gilmerton, Burdiehouse and Oxgangs**, within the Liberton/Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partnership area.

With whom? Edinburgh City Council (South Neighbourhood Team, Children and Families Team, Children's Practice, Community Safety, Community Learning and Development, Partnership and Information, Services for Communities) Gracemount and Liberton High Schools, Health Opportunities Team, NHS Lothian Public Health Department, Healthy Respect, Police Scotland, Moredun Library, Liberton Kirk, Inchpark Community Sports Club, School Nursing, Children 1st. Close links have also been established with the Youth Talk Action Group.

What happened? The group first met under the Animating Assets banner in May 2014, although many individuals had worked in partnership previously. Their focus was on *reducing risk-taking behaviour in young people* and they began by discussing the issue and *mapping the assets* of relevant resources and organisations (Section 5.3). It became clear that not only was partnership working strong in the area but that the views of young people had already been sought through the Youth Talk Action Group. However this had not specifically addressed the question of risk-taking behaviour.

A local voluntary organisation and the Community Learning and Development team agreed to *work with young people to get their views* using four questions which were adapted by the young people themselves. The responses were discussed and collated in an accessible visual format (Section 5.3 Box 6).

"There was some really good feedback that came from the young people themselves basically saying, they do take risks and then a whole exploration of what was perceived as good risk, bad risk."
(Stakeholder)

Further consultation with other young people took place in schools through a *Life Skills programme*. Their views were fed back to the Youth Talks Action Group in June 2015.

Next steps? The views and priorities of young people will continue to be fed into the *community planning process* through the Youth Talk Action Group

"It's not something that's going to be done and dusted in the year that Animating Assets have been coming in."
(Stakeholder)

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

Across Animating Assets research sites, action research and appreciative inquiry theory and approaches were employed in different ways depending on the context, setting and focus of the inquiry. As described in the following sections, the programme focused on working within existing organisational and community infrastructures, from across different sectors.

Various public sector organisations supported and funded the individual sites, with the local NHS Health Improvement Teams supporting the programme in Glasgow, and local government departments supporting the work in Edinburgh. Distinct differences are notable in the focus of the research sites as identified and led by the local areas, which saw Edinburgh sites organise around (perceived) local issues for young people and Glasgow sites around locality-based issues.

Throughout this section (and Sections 8 to 10) quotes have been used to illustrate points of evidence, learning and insight and to provide further context. The quotes were captured at meetings in the four main research sites, and are statements made by community members, representatives of voluntary organisations and groups, or practitioners from local agencies. Quotes have also been drawn from interviews with stakeholders and focus groups with community members. The quotes are not personally attributed but provide an indication of the person's personal or professional background to support the perspective that is being represented.

5.1   Being appreciative

The Animating Assets process aimed to take a consistent and explicitly appreciative and collaborative approach. The approach to facilitation in each site was therefore an emergent and negotiated process; it was responsive to what the local participants wanted and involved judgements (sometimes in the moment) about what was appropriate at each stage. There is no blueprint for asset-based practice and this section of the report provides a flavour of the approaches used and the facilitation process, alongside some reflections of what worked well.

Working with the principles of appreciative inquiry, and using a variety of methods and approaches, we aimed to encourage locally-focused, appreciative dialogue:

"That is, dialogue in the sense of enabling us to talk to each other about what we aspire to do, and appreciative in the sense of supporting people to engage in meaningful conversations that help them analyse and articulate what works well and when. This raises these positive practices to consciousness and motivates practitioners to make this way of behaving happen more often." [25: p2]

Across the Animating Assets research sites, a range of creative engagement techniques were used as part of this developing asset-based practice, and these are described

throughout this report. These techniques were as much a part of creating positive ways of working together as a way to reveal and gather evidence and learning to feed into the research process. They were also intended to build the capabilities of participants at the same time.

5.2 Using 'appreciative' approaches to build community capacity in Glasgow

The Animating Assets programme supported monthly meetings in the Glasgow research sites. These always began with a purposeful and energising ice-breaker that would provide new information and help to build relationships in the process. Those at the meeting were asked to share what was important to them or something they were pleased about and there was often surprise at the new insights that this process brought. It facilitated new connections as people realised that they shared goals and values, and enabled trust to be built.

"Ice-breakers at the start of the meetings, I get a real lift from them."
(Community member)

The welcoming and appreciative nature of these ice-breakers and the introductions at meeting is illustrated in Box 11 in Section 8.1.1.

While there was a pattern in the approach, it was not repetitive. It also proved to be valuable in both Glasgow locations that the meeting venues moved around the community so that people had the opportunity to visit each other's premises and *"share ownership of the process"* (Community member).

Groups usually met over lunchtime or finished with lunch. Eating together played an important part in nurturing the group and provided a chance for more informal interactions. It created a welcoming and caring environment and a space where people felt safe to share views and concerns, and allowed new relationships and connections to develop.

"Good links, good relationships, finding solutions in an amicable way."
(Stakeholder)

"Connected through relationships."
(Community member)

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

All activities were designed to encourage conversations that identified the positive elements ('assets') in any situation as a basis for dialogue about what people would like to do to enhance those assets.

"Recognition of the value of using a range of group work techniques to help people look at the world differently."
(Community member)

There was emphasis placed on encouraging sharing of insights and information and the facilitators sought to pay attention to group dynamics and to encourage the fullest possible participation in meetings and events, as illustrated in Box 1.

Box 1. Designing the future using the appreciative inquiry model in Barmulloch and Balornock

In Barmulloch and Balornock, the first large group meeting in December 2014 was based on the '4Ds approach' to appreciative inquiry. Starting with *'Discovery'* participants devised appreciative questions and interviewed each other, before moving on to *'Dreaming'* about their preferred future in a year's time. Conversation moved on to thinking about *'Design'* and starting to turn ideas into concrete plans and actions. This latter stage initially took place in small groups. The subsequent exchange of ideas was a power demonstration of how the participants shared many values and goals.

1. Discover
2. Dream
3. Design
4. Destiny
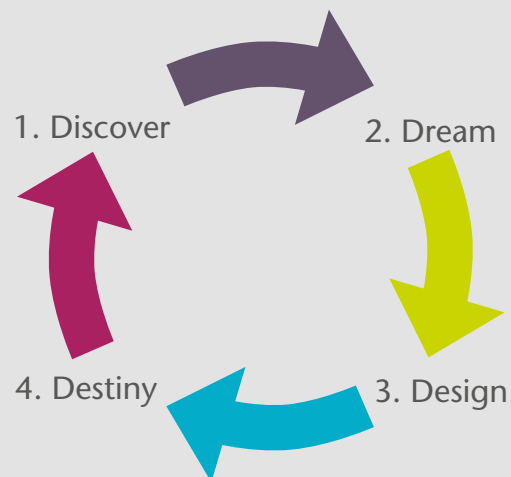
These ideas included developing a community hub and a Christmas lights event in December 2015. Both of these emerging ideas were taken forward through the organisation of the remainder of the Animating Assets work in the area (the final D being '*destiny or delivery'*) based on a mutual agreement about the forward schedule of meetings to make these *'Dreams'* come to life.

Examples of paying attention to group dynamics and working in inclusive ways included asking participants to speak to one or two others initially and then to share and extend the conversations in larger groups. There was often standing up and moving around as well as an opportunity to meet new people. This seemed to help stimulate creativity
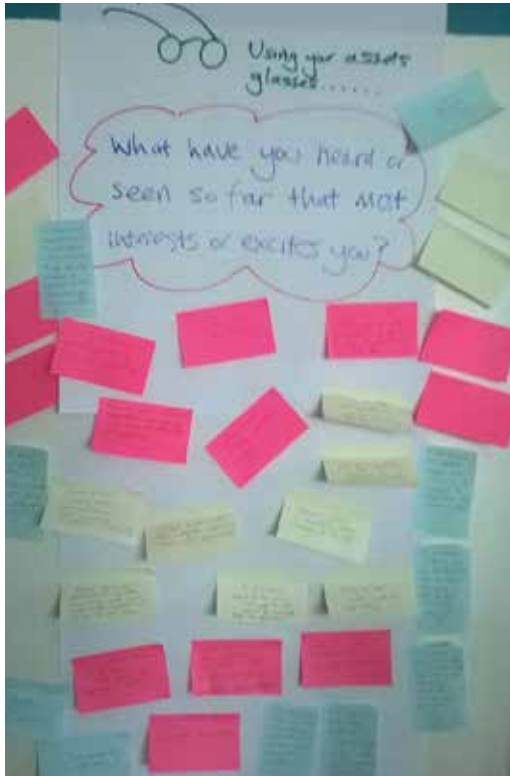
and more open thinking. At times the facilitators experimented with 'visualisation' of different kinds, including using images as part of re-energising exercises, as well as developing the idea of using 'assets glasses' to help people stay 'appreciative'. A powerful and engaging way of demonstrating and further building connections included creating a virtual community hub of the existing local connections, as presented in Box 2.

"There's now an appetite for action…it feels like there's a bit of energy, that people are now ready to do stuff."
(Stakeholder)

A further approach focused on demonstrating visually the importance of relationships by mapping them through the use of the participatory appraisal technique of 'chapatti mapping'. This exercise uses concentric circles to identify levels of connection, and helped participants to consider who they felt a close relationship to and those who were more distant. The exercise asked participants, individually and in small groups, to consider how they could bring the more distant connections inwards towards the centre and who else they would like to build a relationship with.

Box 2. Example of community hub string activity in Barmulloch and Balornock

At one monthly meeting in Barmulloch and Balornock string was used to demonstrate and explore the existing connections among organisations and individuals. This helped participants to realise the connections that were being taken for granted in a new light, as well as helping to identify opportunities for

strengthening relationships and forging new ones.

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

This type of group activity helped to create a more explicit and shared focus on the connections that existed and helped to instil an appreciation of the role, expertise and focus of each organisation present.

"There is an energy in the group for working together and creating change."
(Community member)

"A good positive vibe and a desire to make things happen."
(Community member)

In other areas, there was less emphasis on using an explicit appreciative inquiry methodology and a greater emphasis on story sharing, with an 'appreciative' or 'assets lens' in thinking about the 'successes, strengths and skills' of local people and organisations, as highlighted in the Box 3.

Box 3. Creating shared stories in Milton

The facilitators of a May 2014 event adopted a story dialogue approach that enabled the participants to share and analyse their own stories about the strengths, skills and successes of the people of Milton with the aim of producing ideas for collective action. The stories highlighted the importance of community spirit, the existing social and physical assets available in the area, the need for stronger connections and better partnerships, the need to raise aspirations and expectations and to create more opportunities for local people.

At the Milton conversation café event in March 2015 a story sharing approach was again adopted and the use of an open space approach was used to allow participants to nominate topics important to them for a series of simultaneous small group discussions. Conversations were about poverty, sharing resources, health and wellbeing, hope and helping others to see how things can be better, ways to communicate, understanding addictions, opportunities for young people and community empowerment legislation.

The vision and good intentions expressed in the open space discussions described above were translated into reality and routine practices through the creation of a set of locally owned 'releasing assets statements' (Box 4). These are affirmative statements about the ideal ways in which the local community organisations hope to work together, rooted in experience of what already works well. These statements describe the desired future of the group and it is hoped they will help people to stay on track underpinned by a set of common values serving as a touchstone for the way the group works together in the future (see Section 8.3.1 and Figure 6).

Box 4. The development of 'releasing asset statements' in Milton
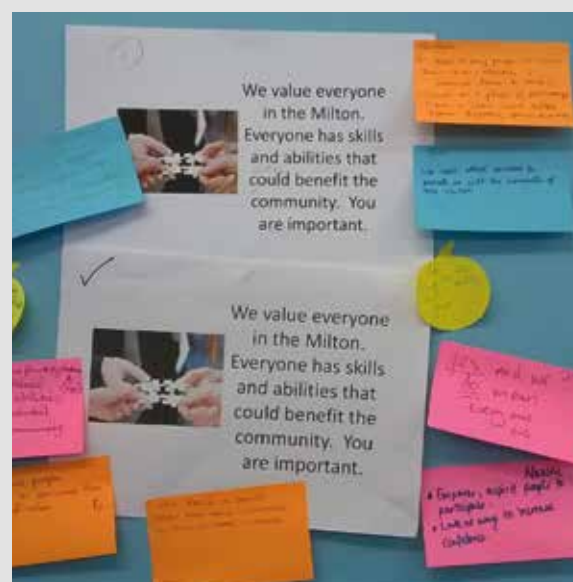
The use of these kinds of large group processes partially reflected the desire of local participants to engage with as wide a number of people as possible. A highly consultative and exploratory approach was well suited to the mix of professional and local people involved, the history of the areas and the need to develop genuine engagement and sustained support.

It was difficult at times to maintain an appreciative focus. An important realisation for the group was that it is possible to turnaround a conversation about deficits. For example, the 'assets lens' visual infographic (Section 3.4 and Appendix 1) was used to support a discussion about local housing evictions and mental health issues. It helped to give the group a *'fresh perspective'* and a *'different focus'* and encouraged the group to view the issue through the eyes of those involved (local residents and neighbours, housing officers, health professionals etc.). The conversation took account of a wider range of perspectives, recognised shortfalls, but also actively appreciated the skills and assets that are available to address or seek to resolve this particular issue.

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

These types of small and large group processes are well known by facilitators, action researchers and community development practitioners and were important in enabling greater and deeper engagement in Animating Assets. They are not, however, necessarily the way that business amongst community and partner organisations is usually done and they have been a constructive 'disruption' to established ways of working.

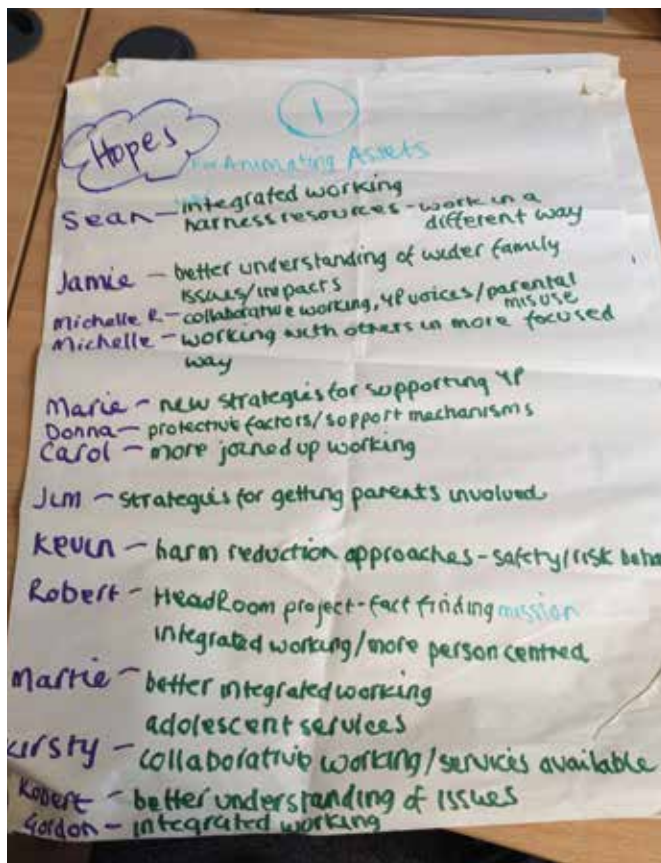## 5.3 Engaging with young people in a meaningful way in Edinburgh

"What was originally an idea but it's actually become a way of working with us now, which is about engagement with young people in a meaningful way."
(Practitioner)

The two Animating Assets research sites in Edinburgh (Edinburgh South and Edinburgh South West), placed energy and focus on engaging with young people in a meaningful way and bringing their voices into service planning and delivery systems. The focus of the appreciative inquiry in both sites was on supporting a partnership approach to reducing risk-taking behaviour amongst young people. Both research sites wished to understand more about the nature of the issues in these areas, and to assess whether more support was needed. In essence, it was about *"Putting young people at the centre, using community resources and our individual strengths better together"* (Stakeholder).

The work in the Edinburgh sites was thus about supporting and developing existing collaborations, both to strengthen the voice of young people, and to build the combined impact of agencies working together effectively. Both sites were dependent on the capacity of an individual key worker who acted as the conduit to the rest of the system. The Animating Assets facilitator worked alongside the key worker, acting as a 'nudge' to existing systems and structures. In practice, this meant providing encouragement, supporting planning, clarifying the asset-based approach and analysing feedback. Sometimes the Animating Assets facilitator also accompanied the key worker to other meetings e.g. with the Youth Forum or Neighbourhood Partnership in an attempt to boost the partnership working in the area or to support putting young people at the centre.

'Nudging' also took more concrete forms, as Animating Assets was able to access small amounts of money as a way of supporting two voluntary sector organisations to engage further with young people.

Both sites took a similar starting point to introducing and adopting asset-based approaches, operating on the assumption that there was strong local partnership working already in place (*"people here get partnership working"*) and that local agencies already had strong connections with young people. This assumption was tested at early Animating Assets meetings, and local cross-sector agencies were encouraged to build on asset-

based approaches they were already developing in other areas of work and extend it into this new area of focus.

Initial meetings gained good attendance from a wide range of agencies including: school guidance teachers, police and community safety workers, GPs, school nurses, and representatives from Community Learning and Development, local voluntary sector organisations, community-based projects and clubs, Substance Misuse Teams and the Public Health Department of NHS Lothian.

"Various people from across the area came together, where we spent some time discussing what the issues were, but also what the assets were in the area and what we were collectively and individually doing."
(Stakeholder)

At these meetings, asset mapping exercises were undertaken to identify the assets already in the area that might support young people in relation to risk taking (Box 5). Although there was a general sense that partnership working was well established, many people learnt about additional support, resources and opportunities that were available for young people.

"We have a lot of positives in the area, and [need] to build on them…young people being assets in terms of their community."
(Practitioner)

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

Box 5. Asset mapping in Edinburgh South and Edinburgh South West

Assets of Edinburgh South

Assets of Edinburgh SW
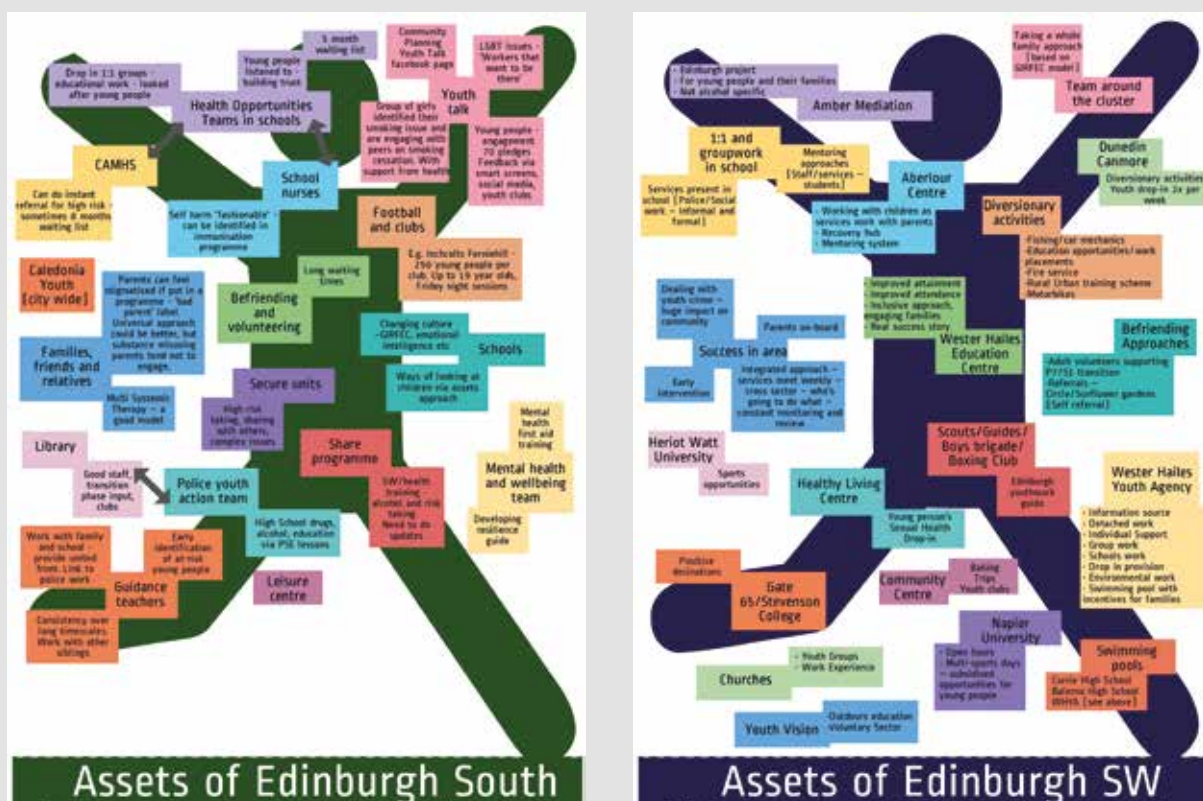
Even though this mapping demonstrated that *"there is a lot of good things going on"* (Stakeholder), it was also evident that young people themselves were not influencing the nature of that support, despite having a voice within individual services in some areas.

"Young people are discussed and their issues are addressed – but they aren't represented or present."
(Stakeholder)

Engaging with young people around the issues of risk-taking behaviour (in Edinburgh South) and alcohol and substance misuse (in Edinburgh South West) was clearly a priority. Collectively it was agreed to take an appreciative approach – building on and extending what worked rather than starting something new, while acknowledging that it *"takes time and capacity to involve young people"* (Stakeholder). The agencies that were already working with young people (e.g. schools and voluntary sector agencies) were therefore

asked to undertake further engagement. This included asking young people:

- What do you think about risk-taking behaviour?
- What are your concerns?
- What could other people do to help you?
- Do you want to get involved in an active way in doing something about it for yourselves and for other young people?

In both areas, young people's responses were collated and analysed. They showed a whole range of views. In Edinburgh South, some young people were quite concerned about risk-taking behaviours, while others did not regard it an as issue. In Edinburgh South West, young people did not see alcohol and substance misuse as a major issue for themselves.

The responses in both areas were developed into a series of conversation cards (see Boxes 6 and 7), which could be used as an accessible engagement resource to extend the conversation about these issues with other young people.

Box 6. Conversation cards developed from the consultation responses from young people in Edinburgh South in relation to risk-taking behaviour
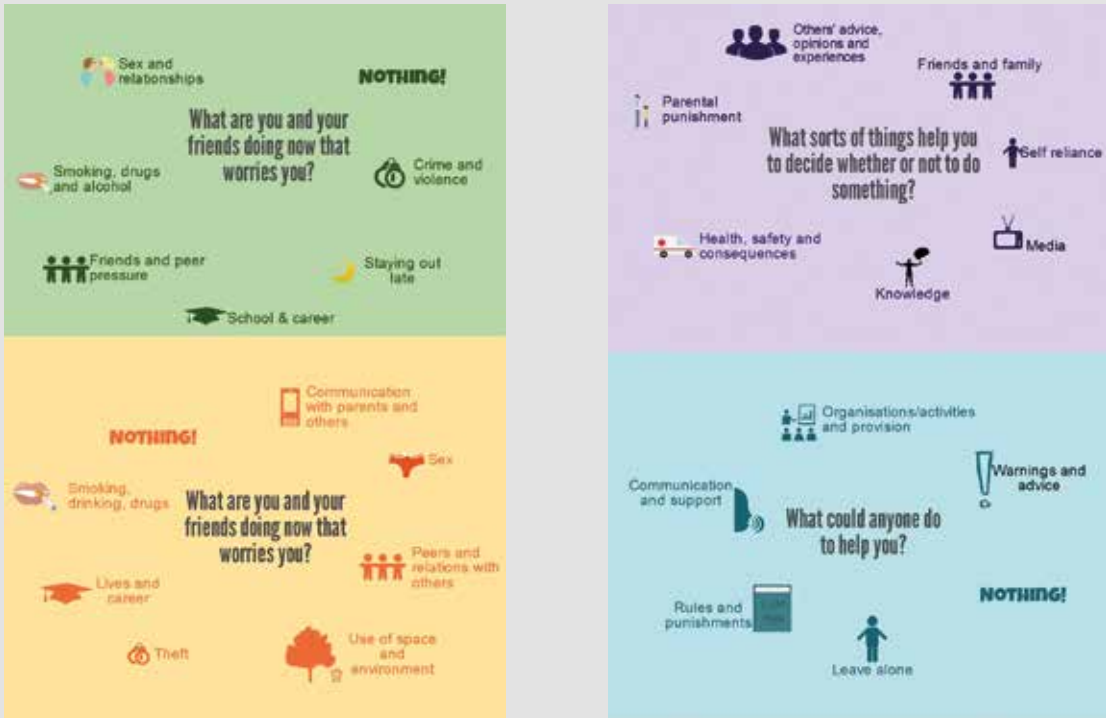
5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

Box 7. Conversation cards developed from the consultation responses from young people in Edinburgh South West in relation to alcohol and substance misuse
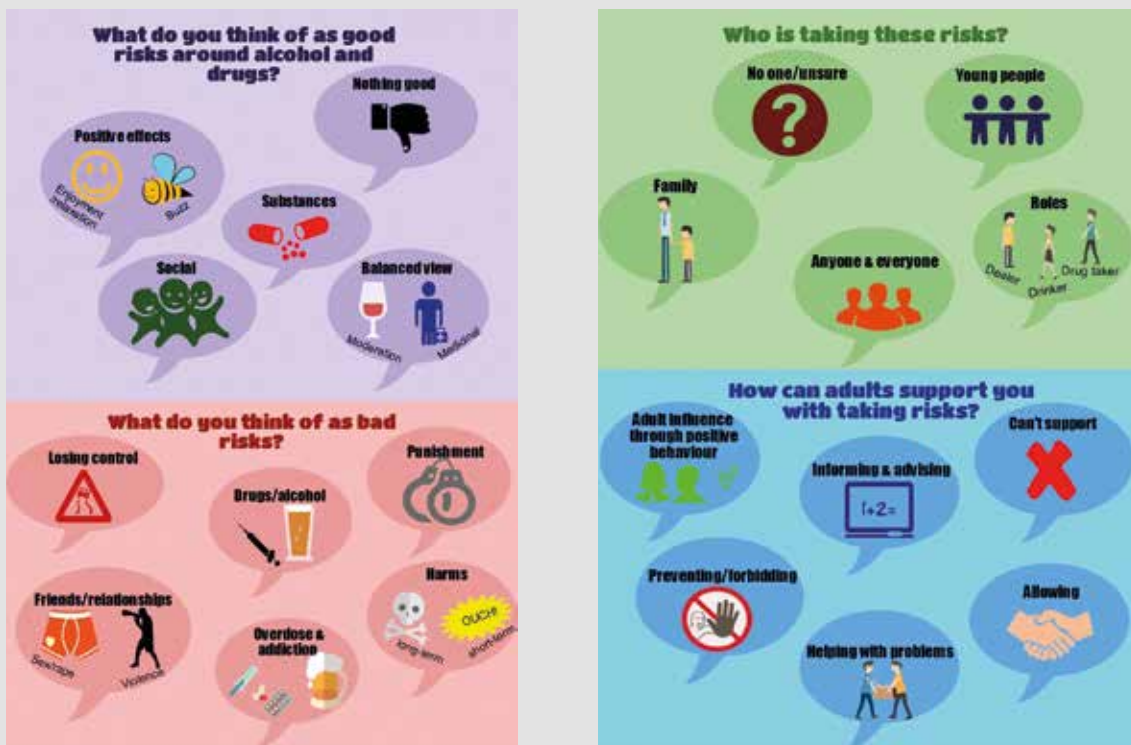
In **Edinburgh South**, young people were engaged and involved through both voluntary and statutory sector agencies including the Health Opportunities Team (HOT), the library and Community Learning and Development. Further discussion about the issues raised in the engagement with young people about risk-taking was progressed through the schools by contributing to their Life Skills initiative, part of their Meaningful May programme, a range of activities organised for pupils who were not taking exams but were too young to leave school. One of the activities, run by HOT, was a discussion of risk-taking behaviour, supported by a small grant from Animating Assets. Again, as in Edinburgh South, there was no sense from young people that they had real concerns about their own or others risk-taking behaviour. They did however come up with ideas about what support was most helpful.

At this point, the risk-taking initiative facilitated by Animating Assets was adopted by the Youth Talk Action Group, part of the Liberton/Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partnership, which involves a range of local practitioners and members of the local community.

The Youth Talk initiative has been active in the area for several years and is an inspiring example of an asset-based approach.

It started with a consultation with young people on what they thought of local services and support. The Neighbourhood Partnership responded to the consultation by taking action on a number of the areas identified by young people (e.g. young people said they wanted youth workers in the centres who really wanted to be there). Community Learning and Development is now looking into involving young people in recruiting youth workers. A lack of opportunities for 16-24 year olds in the area was also identified and a new service, Positive Realities, has been commissioned by the One City Trust and the Edinburgh Community Health Partnership. This service will effectively be directed by local young people. Actions were publicised through a 'You said ... we did' feedback campaign in which young people were asked to design posters detailing the changes that had taken place.

Subsequently Youth Talk has hosted the Youth Talk awards, where young people honoured their peers.

"…had a really big event which was really well attended , it was one of the most dynamic things I've ever been involved in with young people because they put it together, they came up with the categories, a number of young people were rewarded or groups of young people."
(Stakeholder)

It has also initiated a participatory budgeting scheme in which young people have £10,000 to award to local agencies addressing their concerns.

The Youth Talk initiative has led to the development of a plan focused on young people and which forms part of the wider Neighbourhood Plan. The plan addresses not only services for young people but the methods by which they will be seen as an asset and meaningfully engaged in the planning process. The Animating Assets risk-taking research was collated and submitted to the Youth Talk Action Group to be considered in the Youth Talk Action Plan. Local practitioners have said that they want all their work to be planned and delivered using an asset-based approach.

In **Edinburgh South West** following the engagement with young people and further smaller Animating Assets meetings, it was concluded that there were still challenges with engaging key partners and in particular local schools. Young people were not identifying alcohol abuse as a major issue and there was no real sense from the agencies involved that it was either, but legal highs were a growing concern linked to anti-social behaviour. It was clear also that young people's views were not being fed into or informing service planning in a consistent manner.

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

At that point it was decided to suspend further meetings with the wider group until more evidence was gathered from young people about how they understood the issues and what supports they required. The Animating Assets facilitator and the local worker held a series of meetings with local agencies to enlist their support in bringing young people's voice to the fore in service planning. This included the Youth Forum and Wester Hailes Youth Agency (WYA), although this did not result in any sustained involvement. Animating Assets did, however, provide a small grant to facilitate CREW, an organisation that provides specialist drugs and substance use advice, to engage with young people in West Hailes about legal highs.

Going forward, several young people have taken part in the Edinburgh City Council Better Outcomes Leaner Delivery (BOLD) approach in Wester Hailes, entitled Living Well, using this as an opportunity to identify issues important to them, including legal highs. Small groups have also been formed to progress the discussion and any actions required, so that young people can inform neighbourhood planning processes in future.

5.3.1 'Nudging' the system to work differently

Although the starting point for both of our Edinburgh research sites was similar, the journeys taken and outcomes achieved differ markedly. Animating Assets attempted to work within existing systems that were regarded to be already working well. The work involved 'nudging' the statutory sector, in a variety of ways and at different levels, to work more effectively and in partnership with the voluntary sector and with young people in adopting an asset-based approach that utilises, values and mobilises the available strengths and resources from all involved.

In **Edinburgh South**, the Liberton/Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partnership is a clear example of how the statutory sector was able embrace an asset-based approach on a wide range of issues which are important to young people. It has been recognised both locally and nationally, and is being replicated in other areas of Edinburgh.

The factors which have made the Neighbourhood Partnership approach successful include: commitment over time; strong input from the local schools who supported the initiative and understood its relevance, a positive relationship between the voluntary and statutory sector locally with a commitment to continue to collaborate, and effective leadership from different parts of the local authority to drive forward this way of working as a normal part of the way services are delivered. The Partnership has a realistic but positive approach to change, and clear structures that are receptive to addressing the issues raised by young people through the community planning process. It is committed to continuously improving and extending the assets approach.

"Together we can make it happen, we can listen and we can do something with that that hopefully makes a difference or builds on what's already good."
(Stakeholder)

The Animating Assets initiative added a new dimension to Youth Talk, in that it focused on risk-taking behaviour. It also highlighted and supported the good practice which was being undertaken, affirming the work as strong example of 'mainstreaming' asset-based practice for the benefit of young people.

In the **Edinburgh South West** research site the learning has at times been a more frustrating experience. The focus on alcohol was identified to be more of a concern to local agencies than to young people themselves. Their engagement through WYA showed their concerns were not major, and that they knew how to access help if they needed it. However, the programme was never able to engage with young people in a sustained enough way to be convinced that we had really heard their voices in relation to alcohol and substance misuse. It was evident that the assets of young people in the area were not being taken into account and their voices were not being heard or informing the local planning processes. There are a number of reasons for this, including: key voluntary sector partners not feeling that their funding situation permits them to attend meetings that would enable them to work more productively in partnership; existing statutory structures for young people not currently being able to facilitate meaningful engagement; and no consistent engagement from schools.

The original commissioner of Animating Assets in the area was Edinburgh Drugs and Alcohol Partnership. However due to structural changes the local sponsor of the programme changed position with no replacement appointed, which in turn caused difficulties for the local worker in terms of lines of accountability in relation to this piece of work and its sustainability.

There is a possibility of change, however, with the start of the Living Well Wester Hailes initiative. This provides a convenient place to continue the Animating Assets development. Living Well started in April 2015 with an Open space event at which people from the community were invited to bring their thoughts and concerns focused around a safer community, a more cohesive community and a community that could tackle the problem of legal highs. The ideas generated are being responded to by local agencies, which are also actively seeking to engage community councils in tackling the issues. The initiative was introduced by Edinburgh City Council and voluntary sector partners, and currently sits alongside existing community planning processes. At this stage it is not clear how this initiative will impact on them or influence them. It is however significant that this new approach began with direct community involvement, rather than working through local agencies.

5 How Animating Assets practised asset-based working

Across both of the Animating Assets research sites in Edinburgh it was clear that there is excellent work going on with young people delivered by local agencies, and a real willingness on the part of many agencies to work in partnership. In Edinburgh South, the asset-based approach is becoming embedded in the Neighbourhood Planning structures. In Edinburgh South West, early signs of adoption are emerging, but it is recognised that much work remains to be done before asset-based approaches become a normal part of the way the Neighbourhood Planning structures work.

5.4   The role of external facilitation

It is possible that adopting such appreciative and engaging approaches, as outlined in the previous sections, in a consistent and systematic way has been easier for 'outsiders' to do.

"Animating Assets is using a bottom-up organic approach, rather than being led by sector organisations."
(Community member)

"I think you need somebody that's external and a good mediator in there, because what we've got is a sea of organisations who have their own agendas."
(Community member)

Given the elements of the approaches used and group dynamics described earlier, the role the Animating Assets external facilitators adopted is quite different to that of a more traditional external consultancy or research role. It was a role that shifted *"from being about authority and control to one which enables thoughtful sharing of insights and the generation of the group's own aesthetic of play as it addresses the questions that have brought it together"*[26: p29].

"Importance of neutral person coming in, pulling it all together, enabling rather than directing what's happening."
(Community member)

"People are often too busy doing what they do to actually stop, sit down, and reflect, and share information with each other….I think when somebody comes along and makes it happen, and when that starts to happen in any field then we start to see progress."
(Stakeholder)

It was valuable to enable people to talk to each other about how they wanted to work together as well as what they wanted to achieve. The range of group work techniques used helped people to look at the world differently and enabled people to move forward together with a positive spirit. Whilst most group facilitation techniques can be adapted to be appreciative, it does seem that adopting an appreciative approach as a *distinct*

methodology – as an approach to learning together, rather than the ad hoc use of different methods – will promote a different kind of culture of collaborative inquiry, reflection and learning.

"Facilitation of the meetings has enabled outlying organisations to start to feel part of the process...getting them along and participating has been really good to see, to see them contributing to the discussions and getting their point across but not feeling isolated."
(Stakeholder)

Case study 3. Barmulloch and Balornock

Where? The communities of **Barmulloch** and **Balornock** in the north east of Glasgow.

Who was involved? Animating Assets is working with the NE Health Improvement Team from NHS GGC, North Glasgow Healthy Living Centre, Glasgow Housing Association, Cali Thistle, LifeLink, Glasgow Kelvin College, Barmulloch Community Development Company (BCDC), Tron St Mary's, Tron St Mary's Climate Change Project, Brunswick Youth Centre, James McLean Project, Beatroute Arts project, North Glasgow Community Food Initiative.

"Collectively we pack a punch."
(Community member)

What happened? Following local one to one meetings during the Autumn of 2014 interest in Animating Assets was generated and a successful meeting took place in January 2015 with a number of local organisations active in Barmulloch and Balornock present. Using the appreciative inquiry model and building on the identification of community assets and existing resources, a number of *areas for collective community action* were identified, including the creation of a *community hub*. A local *map of land use* in Barmulloch and Balornock was produced to stimulate discussion and local areas for collective action.

"Creating a space to bring local organisations together, raising awareness of what everyone is doing."
(Community member)

A *community breakfast* took place for the first time in January 2015. This brought together local people, groups and organisations to encourage information sharing and networking, and was so successful that they are now taking place every two months. A small number of local organisations are now working together to plan for Christmas lights and a community torchlight procession in Barmulloch Park

along with a Carol concert. The group continued to meet every six weeks as a useful forum for coordinating (and so animating) the assets of the area. A *digital story* has also been created documenting the Animating Assets Barmulloch and Balornock journey through stories, images and quotes from local people and organisations (see Section 4.2). More recently the group have worked together to explore their common purpose, the role of the community hub and their *shared values and ways of working*.

"It's about collaboration not competition."
(Community member)

Next steps? Going forward the communities of Barmulloch and Balornock, through the existing Animating Assets group will receive support from *Supporting Communities*, a Scottish Government funded initiative delivered by the Scottish Community Development Centre. It is hoped that this programme will further strengthen the foundation laid by Animating assets. Support though this programme will run until March 2016. The local *community breakfasts* will also continue to take place through the support of the North East Health Improvement Team.
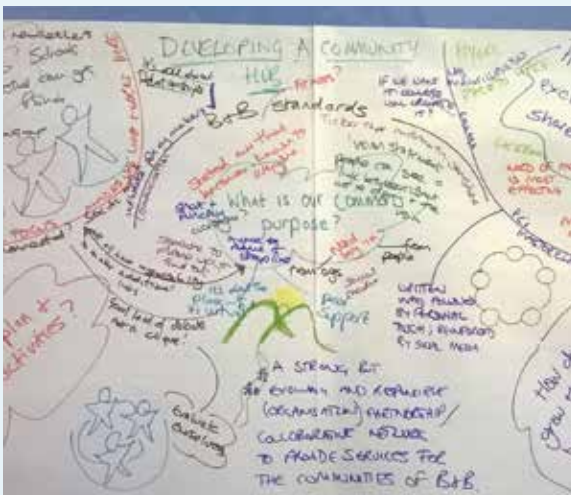
"Look to the future and choose a direction."
(Community member)

6 How Animating Assets has captured learning along the way

Animating Assets was a research and learning programme in which the 'researchers' were active, participant observers. The programme therefore aimed to carry out research and observe, capture, analyse, learn and record evidence from local activity that sought to effect change and sustainable improvements through working differently and using alternative approaches in each research site, but also across all sites collectively.

The participants in each of the research sites documented, adapted, responded and reviewed their practice in response to local progress and circumstances. The local outcomes achieved in each sites, as highlighted throughout this report, varied according to the nature of the responsive inquiry and the activities carried out to support local engagement, priorities and learning.

In addition, throughout this report we illustrate and highlight a number of broader programme outputs achieved by Animating Assets, including:

- case study and collective evidence of the implementation requirements, strengths, barriers and successes and (initial) impacts of asset-based approaches
- learning and insights captured through tested models and the use of creative participatory engagement techniques
- new collaborations, new connections and new networks at local levels
- learning on the potential of asset-based approaches within local communities and services and systems, within and across relevant policy areas.

Within the research sites, innovative ways of working, as part of a new approach to an identified local priority or concern, was undertaken with the active participation of local people and the local community, and the staff and volunteers from across different third sector organisations and projects and statutory services. The research team facilitated independent support for real time learning from real life situations, at both local and national levels, co-ordinated across multiple streams of inquiry. Embedded within an action research approach (discussed in Section 4 and Appendix 2), various forms of input, advice and facilitation were provided at different points in time as the work developed locally.

In order to synthesise the learning from Animating Assets, from each site specifically as well as across the whole programme, evidence was gathered about the processes, outcomes and impacts identified. The overall aim was to gather evidence on how asset-based working and the underpinning principles, can be taken on more fully by individuals, communities and local services that are collaborating on achieving a shared vision or goal.

While the programme has developed over time and been responsive to local circumstances and areas of interest of groups and organisations, the overarching aims of the programme, outlined below, continued to reflect the overall purpose of the work.

To aid the evidence-gathering processes, the programme's aims were broadly translated into three key dimensions that we wished to explore and understand:

Insights	Understanding the nature of asset-based approaches
Actions	Adopting and embedding asset-based working
Impacts	Making a difference by taking an asset-based approach

These aims and individual observations of these dimensions were captured and an observation framework was developed (Appendix 2). The framework was used in Animating Assets meetings and events as a means of recording views and insights, and encouraged participants at meetings to reflect on the challenges and pertinent issues, actions, activities and behaviours that support or challenge/limit asset-based working locally, as well as the difference and impact that working or thinking from an assets perspective makes to their practice.

Alongside the usage of the observation framework at Animating Assets meetings, a full record of each meeting was taken to aid reflection on the discussion for those who attended, to ensure inclusivity for those who were unable to make the meeting, to highlight the actions required to progress the work at a local level and to share details of the next meeting and contact details of the group members to promote connections and information sharing.

As a research and learning programme Animating Assets also brought together those taking part in the programme along with those interested in asset-based or related community-led work at a learning event in March 2014[d]. This event presented an opportunity to hear, share and discuss the background, context, learning and hopes for the research programme and how it can support work in relation to asset-based practice and action at local and national levels.

An interim Animating Assets Insights Report[1] was published in April 2015 to share emergent findings about asset-based working in both community settings and within existing systems. This was based on learning gleaned from the first nine months of the programme. The current report builds on the Insights Report and further extends and

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[d]The report from the learning event can be accessed at: http://www.gcph.co.uk/work_themes/theme_4_assets_and_resilience/health_improvement_asset_based_approaches/animating_assets

6 How Animating Assets has captured learning along the way

considers how this learning can support work in relation to asset-based practice and action at local and national levels.

Finally, to aid the evidence gathering process, a series of in-depth interviews were undertaken with key stakeholders across research sites to investigate the wider impact of Animating Assets (Appendix 3a and 3b). The interviews explored why particular individuals chose to become involved in Animating Assets, the reasons for choosing the specific research sites, whether multi-agency working in these areas has changed, the perceived impact on how services are delivered locally, as well as the overall journey of Animating Assets in the area.

Where? Edinburgh South West, including the communities of **Wester Hailes**, **Currie** and **Balerno**.

With whom? Edinburgh City Council (Community Learning and Development, Children and Families Team, Young People's Substance Misuse Service), Dunedin Canmore Youth Projects, Aberlour, Wester Hailes Youth Agency, Police Scotland, local GPs.

"We are often blinkered, but there are other ways of doing things."
(Stakeholder)

What happened? The group first met under the Animating Assets banner in May 2014, although many individuals had worked in partnership previously. Their focus was on *reducing the impact of substance misuse on young people* (Section 5.3). They began by discussing the issue and *mapping the existing assets of relevant resources and organisations*. It became clear that although there are a lot of services in the area for young people and good partnership working, outlying areas are not always well served. Furthermore, there was limited knowledge about the support young people thought they needed in relation to alcohol and substance misuse, and around risk taking.

"People's willingness to work together I think is absolutely key."
(Stakeholder)

Voluntary organisations and the Community Learning and Development team were asked to seek the views of young people, using an initial four questions, which were then adapted following feedback from the young people themselves. Responses were discussed and collated in an accessible visual format (Section 5.3 Box 7). The infographics are now being used by young people to consult with other young people. Young people did not identify alcohol abuse as a major issue, but *legal highs were a growing concern*. It became clear also that young people's views were not being fed into or informing service planning in a consistent manner. CREW, an organisation that provides specialist drugs and substance use information, advice and support in Scotland, offered to engage with the young people about legal highs, finding out what they knew about them, providing them with information about the effects and consulting them about what support they required. Animating Assets provided a small grant to facilitate this process.

Next steps? Edinburgh City Council is piloting a Better Outcomes Leaner Delivery (BOLD) approach in Wester Hailes, entitled *Living Well*, which started with a large community gathering in April 2015. Several young people attended and identified issues important to them, including legal highs. Small groups have been formed to progress the discussion and action required related to these issues, so that they can inform subsequent neighbourhood planning processes.

7 The stories of our associate sites

Animating Assets also aimed to support a small number of other areas, our 'associate' sites, with a lighter touch of input and facilitation. These areas were selected on the basis that they were already using a cross-sector asset-based approach to address an issue of health inequality in a local context.

Support was planned to take the form of a series of review sessions with teams of practitioners from across sectors, alongside community members. These review sessions aimed to reflect on learning about asset-based approaches, in particular what asset-based approaches are, how they are different to traditional approaches and what impact they are making, as well as how to extend the approach on the basis of learning and reflection from the associate sites.

A brief overview of our associate sites is provided in Boxes 8 to 10.

Box 8. Craigneuk, Lanarkshire

The regeneration initiative in Craigneuk aims to put the community firmly at the heart of revitalising the area. Animating Assets was asked to support this process.

The Animating Assets team met with council and health officers a small number of times during the programme where several ideas were put forward for supporting the Craigneuk Estates Team and the Community Participation Group. However, due to competing priorities, capacity and additional support from other organisations (e.g. Improvement Service) this work did not progress.

Box 9. Girvan, South Ayrshire

Animating Assets was invited to support a new cross-sector approach to locality planning in Girvan.

The People Powered Health and Wellbeing Initiative was already supporting asset mapping activities and local communities to have a voice in Girvan. Building on a history of strong partnership working in the area it was hoped that Animating Assets would be able to work to support the assets of local communities and organisations, and integrating the voice of local people into local planning structures alongside the People Powered Health and Wellbeing Initiative. This work did unfortunately not progress within the Animating Assets timeframe.

Box 10. Total Neighbourhood East, Edinburgh

Total Neighbourhood East aimed in one work stream to explore how collaboration can be both an asset as a way of working and as a way of developing further assets in the form of personal connections, information and recognising and building on local resources. It was hoped that Animating Assets would help to develop a fuller understanding of what asset-based-approaches can involve and provide an opportunity to reflect on and develop current practice.

A community cafe photography project has been established by the Health Improvement team in NHS Lothian, in partnership with Edinburgh Community Food Initiative. This project brought together the 46 Community Cafes in Edinburgh (map below) with a group of final year B.A. Honours photography students at Edinburgh College focusing on collaboration. The students were involved in taking photographs at the cafes as a coursework assignment. The photographs were used to raise the profile of the cafes in the city and in particular in the recovery networks. The work was based on the premise that the cafes are already a significant resource that can make people's day to day lives better. The aim of the project was to bring the cafes 'to life' through photography which would enable more people to be able to realise those assets for themselves.

Animating Assets shadowed the collaborative photographic approach being undertaken by the students and with the support of the Health Improvement lead. Students were encouraged to provide reflective feedback on the process

7 The stories of our associate sites

and supported to gather stories from staff, volunteers and café users. The students gained learning about the process of collaboration and negotiation. However, it was not always possible for them to gain access; circumstances or staffing changes meant that they were not able to proceed as they had hoped. High quality photographs of different types depending on the wishes of each café have been produced[e]; portraits of staff, volunteers and customers, images of food, the café environment and activities. Feedback suggests that whilst the cafes are all different, they do play an important role in people's daily lives. Some are clearly directed at supporting vulnerable people where staff seek to engage people in conversation, others are just cafes 'in a community'. Many are run by volunteers. Examples of activities hosted in community cafes include a weekly meet up venue for a group of bus drivers, some of whom are now retired; a place to go for people living on their own; over-60s lunch club; Tumble Tots; a knitting group; bread making and other classes.

"Whilst each cafe is very individual and distinctive in their own right, the stories remain the same. People seemed to use them to feel like they are members of their local community and want to support that feeling of togetherness. Many people I spoke to were complimentary of the quality of food and the prices. Many more, I think saw that as an added bonus and saw them as a resource to meet new people, a local that you can just pop in and meet people you know. Any of these emotions and feelings are surely an asset to local communities as a whole."
(Student)

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of paying attention to the micro-level interaction; the details of people's lives that helps them to overcome fear, become more comfortable and so be able to 'realise assets' and natural supports and networks that enhance resilience:

"This is the way in which we realise the 'macro' – our high level intentions. Talking about the small things in our meetings can be easily dismissed as too much detail, but we can gain a lot of information from it that can help us to instigate change. This can help us to what Christie has asked us to do: to reduce 'avoidable demand'."
(Stakeholder)

Further information on these associate sites including the partnerships who were involved is presented in the Animating Assets Insight Report[1].

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[e]The photographs are not reproduced here due to copyright and consent issues.

One of the key motivators behind the inclusion of 'associate sites' within the wider Animating Assets programme was the opportunity to work with and further explore asset-based practice in services and across systems and sectors that were already practising this way of working. We hoped that this strand of the programme would complement and further strengthen the emerging evidence and learning from the research sites (who were at the start of their 'asset-based approaches' journey) with further evidence and insight about the difference that working in an asset-based way makes to the health and wellbeing of local people and communities.

However, the reality of this proposition and offer of support, despite input and facilitation being funded via the programme, proved challenging due to a number of factors. The timing of the support being offered did not fit due to involvement in other initiatives, and local structural and organisational factors and processes. Furthermore, despite genuine interest in the programme, many of the associate sites had competing priorities and demands on their staff, which prevented sustained engagement with the programme. Asset-based working was also found not to be attached or linked to any local targets or plans, which also prevented buy in to the process.

8 What we have learned about the nature of asset-based approaches

In this section, we reflect on our learning from Animating Assets within the frame of Hopkins and Rippon's[13] theory of change for asset-based working (see Figure 4). In Section 10.4 we offer our own model for action when seeking to apply asset-based approaches to community change initiatives, particularly when working across and within services.

8.1   Reframing towards a fresh perspective

Reframing towards assets was very much part of the process within Animating Assets. We would go further, however, in that there was also a 'reframing of thinking' amongst practitioners and community members, almost a reframing towards a fresh perspective. For one stakeholder this meant that *"while we have a structured approach in terms of some of the work, there's also something about taking our staff on a personal journey to reframe their thinking."* (Stakeholder)[f].

In the community setting, ensuring that conversations, often about challenging issues, needs or local priorities, were viewed through an 'assets lens' was found to bring a *"fresh perspective"* (Practitioner) and provided an *"opportunity to have a similar conversation but with a different focus"* (Community member).

> *"It's a new way of thinking. We're all on the same hymn sheet from day one; that has really impressed me, because you don't see that that often. Everybody is just wanting the same things, they want a better place, wanting to be able to access what they need when they need it, without any stigma or anything. This project has actually highlighted that."*
> (Community member)

On the basis of learning and experience from Animating Assets, we would suggest that reframing thinking needs to be a focus from the start of any community change initiative that plans to use asset-based approaches.

8.1.1   Use a positive approach

Part of the process of reframing thinking was also about using a positive approach, and Animating Assets was very much intended to be appreciative in nature.

This involved *"focusing on relationship building and communication, as opposed to outputs and being too ambitious … [and] focusing on values and the ways in which we would like to build a foundation for going forward"* (Stakeholder).

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[f]As described in Section 5, quotes were captured at research sites meetings from interviews with stakeholders and during focus groups with community members. The quotes are not personally attributed but provide an indication of the person's background.

"I was slightly surprised at how quickly and actually how willing people were to take up the concept of 'Let's think about the positives' ... a lot of the conversations have been about 'What brings a balance to peoples' lives?' Amongst all the hardships, what are the good things that bring balance and comfort to people, and allow them to actually keep going."
(Practitioner)

Box 11. A typical welcome and introductions session at a Connecting Milton meeting

Everyone was asked to share something they were pleased about that had happened in Milton over the last month.

A number of people spoke of how they were pleased to *"see so many new faces at the conversation café"* that the open space discussions had real *"meat"* to them, and also that it had clearly done the job well as there were lots of people here at the next Connecting Milton meeting. *"Seeing people at the conversation café and here today gives me hope."* Since the event there was also an increase in the number of community members actively asking for information about what is going on in Milton. There was a real sense of *"people coming together"* and a *"sense of community not felt in a long time"*.

One community member was pleased that Milton Church is being renovated, and noted they wanted to source funding to extend the youth drop-in service. He was keen to do that *"with other organisations, and the Animating Assets group helps with that"*. A local practitioner who had been involved from the start of Animating Assets/Connecting Milton spoke of how it *"had initially been a slow process, but it really has a pace to it now"*. Another community member was pleased that *"Animating Assets is using a bottom-up organic approach, rather than being led by sector organisations"*.

The meeting was hosted at a local community facility, and the host of the meeting was happy to see the group in the facility, but also delighted to see how much the facility is now being used by the community throughout the week.

8 What we have learned about the nature of asset-based approaches

This approach was adopted from the start. One stakeholder described this as *"going with an appreciative approach. You are telling people what you are doing is really good, let's do more of it. That immediately gets people to have a positive approach to you"*, rather than the tendency to start by trying to 'fix things'. Appreciative inquiry was also built into the very dialogue of meetings. For example, it became routine to start meetings with an icebreaker, usually an appreciative one, such as asking people to share something they were pleased about in the community (see Box 11). By starting with a focus on what we all appreciated, it became easier to think about assets, and *"about how we build upon what was already there"* (Stakeholder).

8.1.2   Demonstrate that change is possible

To be able to take on a fresh mindset or perspective, can also mean actively acknowledging historical difficulties and long-term inequalities, demonstrating it is possible to change and move on. This was especially pertinent to the communities in the two Glasgow research sites, but it also applies at the level of individuals be they practitioners, young people or individuals living or working in a community. Although the Glasgow research sites are different communities facing their own challenges, each felt that they were communities that were often *'forgotten about'* due to their geographical locations on the outskirts of the city and the lack of investment by statutory services, which (may) now be changing. Indeed, this was part of why the Glasgow sites were chosen:

> *"There was quite a deliberate think through various areas in the north of the city and we recognised that… there were areas where it looked very much as though there wasn't a lot of significant partner activity or investment…not having been part of things like social inclusion partnerships, or big regeneration efforts. So it was about saying, let's try and get a foothold, but also build some positivity within that area."*
> (Stakeholder)

For practitioners on the ground there was also recognition that *"people in areas like [area] often, whether it's real or perceived, feel that they are completely on the edge, completely ignored...there's no point in them taking part because nothing ever changes."* This practitioner hoped that *"by going there and showing we will be responsive... [people can see that] taking part does make a difference. It can actually achieve change"*.

Within Animating Assets, changing the narrative towards the things that local people value was found to be empowering for people and helped uncover untapped potential within individuals, groups and organisations *'to work a little bit differently'*. The language used by practitioners to describe young people was appreciative and focused on their assets and strengths. Young people were seen as able to support themselves and one another, and to have the capacity to say what is needed in their local areas to support them. There

was also activity to highlight the efforts and value of those young people who had not previously been (publicly) recognised.

"There's celebrations and things that the school put on for young people in terms of awards... But there was never young people having their say on who they thought were making a difference. Again, that came from Youth Talk and we've just had a really big event which was really well attended, but it was probably one of the most dynamic things I've ever been involved in with young people because they put it together."
(Practitioner)

8.2   Developing a common agenda

8.2.1   Start from the ground up without a set agenda

"The Animating Assets team are here to listen and help us as organisations in [area] troubleshoot the issues that we have, which was brilliant ... You didn't have a pre-set timetable or a mandate – you came here and you said 'Right, we're here to help you help yourselves', which was brilliant."
(Community member)

In the Glasgow sites, there was a real sense of using Animating Assets as an opportunity to work from the ground up. This was enabled by an approach that was *"much more freer, [with] less bureaucracy, we were able to let it go in whatever direction it wanted to go without feeling that wasn't what should be happening"* (Practitioner). This was possible because the stakeholders backing the project were prepared to let the sites work in this way and to support their staff *"to go in there without an overt agenda, without saying, we must get you to do this…we must change this. And really just saying, we've got time to talk to people to explore what their hopes and aspirations are"* (Practitioner).

This was also reflected in how community members came to view Animating Assets, in that *"there was absolute clarity that this was about what the community wanted and we had to involve the community and it wasn't about any one person or organisation, it was about developing a common agenda"* (Practitioner).

The absence of a pre-set agenda sat alongside an approach that sought and valued contributions from all, thus *"people led it, as opposed to it being talked down, it maybe was a more bottom-up approach, and I think people came to have a sense of equality as opposed to being told"* (Community member). This was clearly valued by community members, who recognised that they had grown in confidence in terms of contributing their views in meetings.

8 What we have learned about the nature of asset-based approaches

"I was actually quite amazed at the amount of people who came, and who interacted with one another, they all got up and managed to speak to each other, and without me getting embarrassed … I felt quite comfortable and was amazed that that could happen with so many people in the room, actually going to speak to them. I've never done that before."
(Community member)

8.2.2 Appreciate what people want from an asset-based approach

For community members, practitioners and strategic stakeholders there were a range of reasons for taking part in Animating Assets, however, fundamentally it came down to being involved in something that took *"a positive view and approach to local communities … particularly thinking about the health outcomes within the area that we serve in Glasgow and the levels of deprivation and resulting inequalities, and it often feels that areas are stigmatised"* (Stakeholder).

There was clear recognition that communities *"shouldn't be left on the edge"* (Practitioner) but should be involved, included and supported. This sense of social isolation and the need to grow community participation and resilience also came from community members themselves *"a sense of pride needs to be grown by those living in [area]"* and *"it's just the bad things that get highlighted"* (Community Members).

The shared hope was that:

"Over time we begin to see an increase in the level of participation in community activities... more locally driven developments...people become more formally involved...perhaps become involved in the organisation of things. Hopefully that translates to the voluntary organisations in the area becoming strengthened, through perhaps more people being involved in their governance, their boards, and so forth."
(Stakeholder)

This in turn could enable local organisations to be *"a portal to help local people make positive changes in their lives"* (Milton meeting notes). Thus, while it was acknowledged in the Glasgow sites that local services did not have strong links in to the community, there was a shared appreciation of this shortfall and a shared understanding of what needed to happen from within the community. Over time, it was felt that adopting an asset-based approach to working with communities would *"contribute to people's own sense of health and wellbeing … feeling that they can influence and shape and change for the better things that happen in their area"* (Stakeholder).

In Edinburgh, it became clear that participation was also an issue. Assumptions had been made about the concerns of young people in terms of the misuse of drugs and alcohol, but young people themselves were not actively engaged in informing the development

of services. This became a key driver for Animating Assets in Edinburgh, indeed for one strategic stakeholder *"the most important thing … was about how to take that forward in terms of engaging with young people in the community in seeking their views, and trying to make sure what people were doing and trying to do was actually addressing the need"*.

8.3   Recognising assets

8.3.1   Build an understanding of assets together

At the start of Animating Assets, we found that asset-based approaches were not always clearly understood by those on the ground and could be hard to describe. Indeed, the way that assets are spoken about in local communities and within services demonstrates that the language of assets encompasses many elements and *"means different things to different people"* (Practitioner). It can thus be appropriate to interpret asset-based working in a range of ways, often depending on the setting. Nonetheless, for our research sites there was a need to develop a locally recognised and mutually accepted understanding (as presented in Figure 6).

The need to develop local understandings in this way is reflected in the words of one practitioner who described the approach as *"really helpful and vitally important at this time as quite frankly we lack the tools and vocabulary to engage in such strength-based approaches"* (Practitioner). Another practitioner, who took an active part in community meetings, described how the process started with uncertainty (and an implied willingness to accept this) but over time understanding and relationships developed. *"What I saw at first was people being unsure and not really quite getting the concept, me included. As we gradually worked through it together...it helped create and build the relationships"* (Practitioner).

In terms of 'assets' themselves, in the past there has been a view that they are physical resources, and activity has sometimes focused on identifying and mapping these assets. By the end of Animating Assets, however, the research sites had developed a shared understanding of assets that was very much focused on people, their relationships, their knowledge and their lived experience.

"People are a bit clearer on why we are focusing on the assets of the area rather than the deficits. ... people know, always have known, that people are the difference. They're the things that make things different, make a change. So using an asset-based approach to really encourage people to look at their skills and to match their skills to our skills to try and develop things has worked a treat."
(Practitioner)

8 What we have learned about the nature of asset-based approaches

Figure 6: Releasing asset statements developed in Milton[g].

Everyone brings something to the table. No matter who you are or what age you are there's something for you.

In the Milton you know best. We listen and do what we each can to make things happen.

Our ambitions for the Milton are big. We've come a long way already. Small and steady steps get us closer to where we want to be.

Through word of mouth, we make it our job to tell others about what's happening.

We listen so that people can share the experiences they want to. We make it a safe environment for everyone.

We talk about our recovery skills, the process of change and how we can measure our progress. It helps other people, professionals and services to develop understanding, new skills and identify needs and gives us all hope for the future.

We guarantee that we offer a place where people can learn new skills and ideas.

We value everyone in the Milton. Everyone has skills and abilities that can benefit the community. You are important.

[g]Images used with kind permission of NHS Education for Scotland

8.4 Making connections to mobilise assets

8.4.1 Build relationships and make connections

Developing a shared understanding and getting to the stage where *"we are all on the same page and talking about the same thing"* (Community member) was also part of the relationship building process. Indeed, across all Animating Assets research sites, the importance of building and valuing relationships cannot be underestimated; in essence, this was the work of Animating Assets. These mutual, effective relationships do, however, take time to develop and need to be nurtured. From the practitioner perspective, it is important to get to know the community in different ways and over time – establishing who the key players are and where any tensions might lie. This could start by:

> *"Finding that good anchor community organisation … somebody who has been there for a long time, who has a good history in the area and is well respected. You go to them and you speak to them ... and just start from there and work out [from there]."*
> (Practitioner)

For Animating Assets, effort was put in to connecting with individuals and individual organisations, but there was also an emphasis on the collective and building relationships collectively. It was seen as crucial that people be they *"third sector, … statutory, or whether they are people in the community, come together, get to know each other, share information, build relationships … [have] debates and discussions"*, so that any forward plans are *"aligned to the community"* (Stakeholder).

Some practitioners had doubts about whether working together made a difference, and asked *"are we greater than the sum of our parts?"* (Edinburgh South meeting notes). Hence, it was important to *"show that we're doing a lot more things together then we believe"* (Practitioner).By the end of Animating Assets, where collective meetings had worked well, there was a general feeling that *"we've got a certain level of understanding, of familiarity with each other, and I think respect for each other that is there from going to these meetings and talking, listening to what's going on"* (Practitioner).

Another important element was that whilst it may be assumed, not all community organisations actually know each other and what each do, and that making local connections was also part of the process for community members.

> *"[area] like many other areas is quite fragmented ... you can't assume because something's happening in one part of [area], or if there's an organisation, that actually it serves the whole of the area. So that bit about just connecting people up was really, really important."*
> (Strategic stakeholder)

8 What we have learned about the nature of asset-based approaches

In Edinburgh, there was an emphasis on collaborative working and building stronger connections within and across agencies. This included proactively engaging with new people and organisations, to actively involve them in the development of asset-based ways of working. The importance of this was borne out in one site, where the strength of relationships was such that connections were sustained in spite of a background of organisational changes and individuals moving on.

Early on in Edinburgh, through the process of building cross agency connections *"it became apparent from us all coming together, school staff, youth groups, police, social work, ...that [drug and alcohol misuse] wasn't something that we have a major issue with in the community"* (Stakeholder). What was evident, however, was that *"here was a room full of professionals talking about their views on young people taking risks and things. The thing that was missing … was young people"* (Practitioner). Thus, assumptions were overturned, and building stronger connections with young people became the main focus for the Edinburgh sites.

This recognition and acknowledgement of who is and is not in the room was a feature of all four research sites. This included recognising that there needs to be openness to all, including *"people who totally agree [and] people who disagree"* (Practitioner). It was also about working to include the:

> *"Thoughts and feelings and concerns of all the community, even if they don't come to the meeting. I think it is about involving as many people as you possibly can so you get the views. But actually thinking beyond the people who are in the room … we need to think how does it feel to them? How do we include them in this?"*
> (Practitioner)

For one practitioner, there was also a realisation that there is *"a whole network out there … that has made me think in terms of the role that I've got, about who is out there and who is working with young people and families locally and bringing all of them together"* (Practitioner).

8.5   Allow time

Despite being widely cited in policy, working in an asset-based way is still seen as an extra part of the 'day job' rather than a core function. This suggests that the time required to work in an asset-based way is not being acknowledged. During Animating Assets, it was clear that across all sites and for practitioners, community members and young people, time is a precious commodity. Furthermore, those from the voluntary and community sector in particular found that time and resources were a significant barrier to being active participants.

Animating Assets found that working in an asset-based way required time to:

- reflect on how people currently work
- consider what difference working in an asset-based way may make
- build relationships, make connections and have conversations
- actively shift the focus from a deficit approach to one using an 'assets lens'.

In addition, practitioners acknowledged that when setting out to work in this way, *"what you need in the process is to have enough time set aside in your head"* (Practitioner). In essence, there is a need to actively recognise the time required for establishing this way of working but also for those involved to reframe their own thinking. *"It did take us a long while to get going and I thought that was down to getting organised and getting our heads around how we were going to do it"* (Practitioner). The benefit of a longer timeframe is that it enables a wider range of people to become involved along the way, and means the process itself can build momentum or *"have a pace to it"* (Community member).

Overall though, other programmes should take note of the advice from one community member to "*take time and have good reflection about what's happened, whose involved, and listen to each other*".

9 How well have the asset-based principles reflected the reality in our research sites?

The asset-based principles, as drawn from the evidence base and presented in full in Section 3.4, guided our thinking and action in local research site meetings, and helped ensure a focus on appreciative, participatory community-led responses in defining and developing local solutions to local problems. But do the principles hold true in real life settings? Do they capture the richness of exploring lived experiences?

These principles form the basis of good engagement and relationship building sewn into what asset-based practitioners do on a daily basis. In Animating Assets these principles were used to inform conversations and ways of working rather than to determine them.

To illuminate the relevance and applicability of each of the principles related to the lived realities of Animating Assets, we have considered each principle in turn and illustrated its significance using quotes drawn from research site meetings and events. Having reflected on the reality of what worked well in the course of the programme, Figure 7 provides some guidance about the conditions and practices that enabled us to adhere to these principles during the work of the programme.

Although it is helpful to consider each principle in turn, it is also important to highlight that it is artificial to consider them separately since an asset-based approach involves all of these values and principles being brought to bear on a particular issue.

Figure 7: Asset-based principles as applied to the learning and experience from the Animating Assets programme.

"Recognising skills in [area] fills you with much hope"
"Collective knowledge and ability to move forward together"

- Bring parties together from across all sectors.
- Recognise that everyone brings something to the table, regardless of roles or labels.
- Deliberately seek out people's skills and strengths and use them.

Sees people as having something valuable to contribute

"This area has lots of assets of many different types"
"Made links and now using local resources in a different way"

- Discover what's going on as fully as possible.
- Get out and about and visit each other's 'patch'.
- Talk about successes.
- Celebrate success, skills and strengths.

Starts with the assets and resources in a community

"The best assets we've got are the people themselves"
"Lived experience is our biggest asset"
"Everything is relational if it is to last"

- Create a safe environment where people can develop trust and share.
- Don't work alone even where (you think) you can.
- Work ethically, with sensitivity towards yourself and others.

Sees people as the answer

"We need to work together and support each other"

- Remain appreciative and hopeful, particularly in the light of the slow pace of change.
- Accept inevitable set-backs and negativity look beyond these and learn from them.
- Engage people in the creation and application of 'solutions'.

Supports people to develop their potential

"We need to find a way to work together without stepping on each other toes"
"Change isn't always a bad thing; we need to look at the opportunities it offers"

- Be prepared to try something new, take chances, maybe 'fail', and try again.
- Nurture the conditions that support new ways of thinking and doing things.
- Notice your progress and celebrate successes, however small.

Identifies opportunities and strengths

"Leaving the past in the past and moving forward together"
"It's not about people taking over but saying
"We can do this. Can you do this? I'll do that"

- Create a welcoming and hospitable atmosphere, provide food & refreshments.
- Create a culture of inclusivity.
- Treat each other with dignity and respect.
- Use a range of (creative) methods that enable participation.

Invests in people as active participants

"You don't need to depend on the council when you've got a network of committed people and organisations"

- Always seek to build capacities – for individuals and groups.
- Be an enabler, facilitator, connector and/or 'signposter'.
- Recognise the emotional commitment and content of what people are being asked to do.

Helps people take control of their lives

"Doing the best we can for local residents"
"Shouldn't lose sight [of the fact] it is about local people"

- See yourself as a connector and challenge your own thinking.
- Have big ambitions but don't expect to get there overnight.
- Look out for impact (intended and unintended) and be open to being surprised.
- Always remember the ultimate aim of what you are all involved in.

Focuses on communities, neighbourhoods and the common good

10 The practical reality of adopting asset-based approaches

A debate about the benefits, appropriateness and limitations of asset-based approaches is taking place in Scotland. Health improvement, tackling social inequalities, citizen involvement, community empowerment and public services reform are areas in which this debate is prevalent. Recent Scottish policies that relate to these areas demonstrate some commonality in describing the potential benefits of asset-based approaches (as highlighted in Section 3). However, the practical reality of working in an asset-based way remains somewhat distant from the policy commitment and imperative for change.

In adopting and embedding asset-based approaches in practice there are important roles for the NHS, local government and the local community and voluntary sector and their partners. To do so requires creating the conditions to enable individuals and communities to take more control of their health and lives. Services must also be re-orientated to support people to be co-producers of health and wellbeing rather than consumers of services.

10.1 Supports and challenges to asset-based approaches

Asset-based approaches are being taken in many different contexts and settings in Scotland and across the UK, as highlighted earlier (Section 3.1). However, they do not just happen. Asset-based approaches require planned and co-ordinated action, investment and commitment.

The term 'asset-based approaches' is reflective of a spectrum of activity. The ultimate aim is to build and nurture health-promoting assets within communities and across services. Various enablers and constraints contribute to the current gap between the policy aspiration and the reality of implementation of asset-based approaches.

From the practice-based experience and collective insights gained from Animating Assets, Table 1 presents a number of the enabling conditions and foundations that support asset-based practice, alongside a number of challenges that prevent or limit the reach of working in this way. These factors were evident from programme observation, engagement and learning. The conditions, both enabling and supportive and challenging and critical, were identified at a number of layers including at the level of structures and systems, the community and the individual practitioner. These factors provide an indication of some of the interrelated factors and conditions identified from Animating Assets which may help explain the limited progress, in some areas, in moving the approach into the mainstream.

Creating an enabling and receptive environment for change that puts individuals and communities at the heart of decision-making is challenging. The importance of the right 'culture' and of shared values and beliefs was clear in conversations at Animating Assets meetings and events. A culture of positivity that allowed new and alternative ways of working and thinking about issues, and was supportive of the collaborative efforts to design, influence and deliver services.

Table1. Creating the conditions – enablers and constraints to asset-based approaches.

Enablers to asset-based working	Constraints to asset-based working
Asset focus	**Deficit focus**
Willingness to learn, being emergent, acceptance of uncertainty	Lack of language/ability/interest to talk about strengths and what is working well
Creating the conditions for different kinds of conversations	An attachment to the way we have always done things (deficit focus)
A focus on relationships	Implements policy/programmes as solution/answer
A collective shared vision and common good	
Sees people as solution/answer	
Policy landscape	
Receptive and conducive landscape	Policy translation required for practice
National and local policy commitment	Asset-based approaches as a response to austerity, efficiency savings
	Perception about shifting responsibility onto individuals and communities
Structural and system level	
Locally sensitive frameworks and targets	Process and target driven, reactive
No pre-determined expectations / outcomes from commissioners	Sector regulations
Long-term investment and funding	Lack of support from commissioners / senior managers
Power sharing between individuals and professionals, focus on relationships	Financial imperative to deliver
Strong working partnerships between statutory and community and voluntary sector	Emphasis on professional knowledge
Space and freedom to try new ways of working	Staff and organisational change
	Structural change dominates and paralyses innovation
Community level	
Valuing what people care about	Competition between community and voluntary sector organisations
Collective energy that comes from an active 'community'	No sense of an active community
Shared ownership and capacity building	Historical relationships and tensions between individuals / organisations
Human and financial investment, commitment and capacity	
Frontline delivery/practitioner level	
Community connectors and coordination	Stretched capacity, increasing work load
Individuals have positive attitude, are well-known locally, respected, trusted and credible, good local relationships	Not seen as core part of role
	Community interests obscured by personal / professional fear of change
External factors and influences	
Independent facilitation and support	External funding environment
Growing evidence base	Lack of evaluation data and evidence of impact
Collaboration and partnership working	
External investment and support	
Time	

10 The practical reality of adopting asset-based approaches

"I guess where it's perhaps seen as more of an alternative way of working, or potentially a risky way of working, would be when it came to the systems that we generally adhere to around performance monitoring."
(Strategic stakeholder)

"It's about giving people the freedom to look at how things are working, or not working."
(Practitioner)

This environment supported strong relationships at every level, encouraged openness, trust and permission to try new approaches and ways of working tailored to local circumstances.

"I would like to see something quite organic where fairly quickly... we start to see some of what might be small change so there is capacity supported, or created... lots of little things popping up and developing and connecting in as well as looking at how as more statutory organisations we can re-shift resource and refocus... there's a bit of a collective freedom that just allows things to emerge... there is enough space to try things, fail possibly."
(Strategic stakeholder)

Although asset-based approaches clearly align with national policy and the values of community development (as discussed in Section 3), working in an asset-based way is not always supported by the structures, systems and cultures in which staff operate. Animating Assets demonstrated that this way of working can be inhibited by organisational change. Senior staff and commissioners do not always understand and support different ways of working within existing systems and services. Furthermore process-driven cultures, targets and bureaucracy can also limit creativity and innovation and inhibit new ways of working from taking root. Although there is encouragement for staff to adopt asset-based practice from a policy perspective, the barriers and challenges existing within systems can combine to limit practitioner capacity to be able to work more flexibly and responsively in communities and across systems and services.

As highlighted throughout this report, relationships and personal attributes were crucial in all settings in building and sustaining effective working relations and establishing networks of allies and contacts. The impact of local history and existing tensions, both in relation to individuals and organisations, must be acknowledged and, where possible, resolved. It was clearly recognised and reinforced in Animating Assets that relationships, interactions, dialogue and connecting[13] are all central features of asset-based practice. Linking to the importance of a positive culture, experience and insights from research sites reinforced the importance of positive and supportive relationships. This instilled a sense of confidence, optimism and hope for the future, which can lead to positive outcomes for the individuals and organisations engaged, wider community activity and for the way services are influenced, developed and delivered.

Partnerships were crucial across all levels, within and between organisations, and between the statutory sector and communities and individuals. In many of the research sites local complex social issues identified were not the responsibility of a single organisation or sector. Instead there was discussion and shared responsibility for trying to address these issues by recognising the skills and knowledge of the range of agencies present. This is clearly not always easy and takes time, capacity and commitment. It can take many months (or years) to build trust and to bring together communities, services and systems with the capacity to work in a different way with a common purpose and shared interest.

"One of the barriers is trust as organisations have abandoned [area] after a short time."
(Stakeholder)

Asset-based approaches within services and community-based settings do not happen *"on good will and fresh air"* (Animating Assets team member). Achieving the shift towards asset-based approaches requires financial and human resources (e.g. capacity, time) and long-term investment is a crucial factor in enabling practice in a sustained way. However, it may take many years for savings and improved outcomes to be realised.

"We have made a resource commitment… there are [number] members of staff now within the [team] with different skills and attributes and things that they can bring to it and that has been beneficial for us to help us work in that area."
(Stakeholder)

Animating Assets secured funding from a number of partners to allow the programme to proceed. Funding enabled the expertise of external facilitators to work in the research sites in response to local priorities. They were able to adopt a model of appreciative inquiry, supported by organisations that were open to working differently. This enabled a localised response to local issues, as highlighted further in the quote below:

"…thinking about how we might use some little bits of money and where we might put some of that investment that would act as enablers for little things to happen that might make quite a big difference."
(Stakeholder)

10 The practical reality of adopting asset-based approaches

10.2 Signs of change

"Being smart in terms of who do you need to get buy in, to enable you to be able to do things differently."
(Stakeholder)

The Animating Assets programme was in operation for 18 months. The early stages focused on securing funding, and identifying and gaining local commitment from research sites, while the latter stages concentrated on reviewing and analysing learning, and preparing the final report and digital stories. This meant that approximately 12 months were dedicated to developing asset-based approaches in the research sites. Given this timeframe, it would be unrealistic to expect significant change in the health and social wellbeing issues that local groups had identified, or indeed in wider indicators of the same. Yet, taking a broad view there are indicators of change in terms of social outcomes. As highlighted in earlier sections, there are examples of impact on the personal capabilities of those directly involved in Animating Assets, both community members and practitioners. Furthermore, the positive impacts on local relationships and networks have all helped to reduce isolation and grow resilience. As noted at one of the Milton meetings, there was a recognition that *"you don't need to depend on the council when you've got a network of committed people and organisations"* (Milton meeting notes).

The focus on relationship building also influenced people's views on the potential scope of their networks, such that *"we were able to attract other partners that maybe we hadn't thought about"* (Practitioner). As well as challenging practitioners to think more broadly, there was also awareness that communities were:

"…supported [and] to another extent challenged on the dynamics within the area, and how they do or don't work together. …in a timeframe of about a year, to have moved from a position where it felt [that] silo ways of working were the norm, to now it seems that the flow of the meetings… and the products of those… it feels very much that there's been quite a shift."
(Stakeholder)

Ultimately, this led to a clear sense of enabling people to work together collectively, as they had achieved a shared view that *"is about the good of the area, rather than their own individual organisational perspective"*, and that this collective approach included a shared value base, which was *"quite a lot of progress in not that long a timeframe"* (Stakeholder). Thus, as well as being effective in getting people and organisations together and supporting them *"to think collectively about how can they both add value to what is going in their local area and to work in partnership"* (Practitioner), there was also recognition that this approach meant people were *"trying to move forward and not trying to look backwards and the only way we can do that is to collectively think about each other's abilities and responsibilities"* (Practitioner).

Where trusting relationships were established, the potential of this was realised in that *"across the agencies people [can] come in and they feel that they are able to share"* (Practitioner). This in turn made it easier to bring people together to have conversations about difficult issues: *"working together along with Social Work very quickly to talk about 'how are we going to tackle this issue, who is going to do what?' And, what Animating Assets have done is to enable some of that"* (Practitioner). As well as cross-agency working, there was also an increase in the extent and range of local people working with agencies, and with each other, to identify and tackle issues.

"We could certainly point at some of the organisations and some of the people who have been coming to the meetings and saying they wouldn't be coming, they wouldn't be in this room together, they wouldn't be talking about sharing resources and moving forward together."
(Practitioner)

Animating Assets thus enabled agencies to gain a foothold in areas, to be more locally informed, such that *"we know the partners, we know some of the issues, we better know now the geography and just the physical assets within the area"* and this was seen as crucial to providing *"that good basis for a dialogue [and] being able to introduce other people from the team"* (Stakeholder).

The work in Edinburgh also demonstrated how young people's views on risk taking and substance misuse can be sought and used as the basis for developing services and support. Indeed, for one practitioner this was a real highlight *"I've just seen really positive engagement with young people themselves and that for me is what it's all about ... Together we can make it happen, we can listen and … build on what's already good"* (Practitioner).

For the local people involved in Animating Assets, the difference in working in this way was about putting the community first.

"Through Connecting Milton, all the organisations here are putting the community first, and looking at how people can benefit from their project, rather than how their project can benefit them. They're looking at the community and saying 'what can the community get out of this project?'."
(Community member)

Yet, more than building networks, there was also a sense that Animating Assets had helped to build a sense of hope. This was evidenced by seeing how *"people are enthusiastic, and are being caught up in a degree of excitement around collectively achieving something in the area. That hasn't happened for a long time"* (Stakeholder). Furthermore, it was a demonstration of the value gained by recognising people's lived experience and skills: *"The fact that we've been recognised by you – that makes us hopeful and keeps us going"* (Community member).

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Finally, one of the overall aims of Animating Assets was to contribute to evidence on asset-based approaches and thereby inform practice. Those involved highlighted that this had been achieved *"now we've got some really good evidence in one area, we've made little tweaks but have made quite significant impact. It gives us further justification to do it elsewhere and with different things"* (Stakeholder). This was both in terms of the practical ideas as *"we have already used some of the stuff that we have done within Animating Assets to replicate across our Thriving Places"* (Practitioner), but also as testimony for applying the approach elsewhere as *"the evidence is that it gets everyone around the table, gets everybody talking and gets added value"* (Practitioner).

10.3 Levers for change

One of the key questions Animating Assets sought to investigate was whether it is possible to work in an asset-based way from within existing public systems and the statutory sector, as opposed to from within or in partnership with the community and voluntary sector.

A number of the asset-based approaches initiatives and programmes which are currently underway in Scotland started from a working position outside existing statutory structures. These initiatives were based on the initial assumption, that it is difficult to take an asset-based approach from within the statutory sector, and that a real shift in practice and ways of working can only be initiated from the outside. The constraining factors, many of which are highlighted in Table 1 and further described below, include individual and organisational differences and expectations about what can be achieved and how quickly, changing organisational cultures and, the need for accountability and governance in spending public money.

Animating Assets found that it is certainly challenging to make changes from within the 'system'. Firstly, many practitioners assume that they are already working in an asset-based way. Although Animating Assets found evidence of this on an individual and project basis, there was very little evidence to suggest that, for instance Community Planning Partnerships or Health and Social Care Partnerships, were taking an asset-based approach, or adopting asset-based principles, as part of their work with specific client groups or communities as a whole.

It was evident from the programme that to do this requires strong skills in collaboration, negotiation and partnership, as well as the ability to think across the whole system rather than in parts. The facility to keep people at the heart of what is being planned and delivered and see developing relationships as a core part of an asset-focused leadership practice were also crucial.

Changing organisational structures, increasing budgetary constraint, the rising expectations and priorities of communities, and the whole variety of agencies which are dedicated to supporting them, mean that it is easy to lose a focus on assets and strengths and revert back to 'fixing' problems. Agencies often struggle to work together effectively to provide truly integrated support. The assets and support available within individuals and communities is often overlooked due to their nature which is often fluid and transient and therefore hard for services to plan around on an ongoing basis. Working together with communities of place or interest with a focus on their strengths (rather than their problems) is often initiated on a one-off basis and can be hard to sustain in the longer-term.

Despite this, learning from Animating Assets demonstrates that there is a genuine desire to work in this way within the statutory sector and a real willingness on the part of senior managers and practitioners (once they understand what is being asked of them), to re-consider and change their practice and their approach to working with individuals, groups and communities for better health, wellbeing and social outcomes.

Introducing asset-based approaches from the 'outside' runs the risk of them being seen as peripheral or additional, with limited impact or influence how mainstream services undertake planning and delivery. (This perception of asset-based approaches as being 'marginal' within the public sector became apparent when Animating Assets sought to support the associate sites (Section 7).) The experience of Animating Assets in Edinburgh South (Case study 2, Section 5.3) did, however, show that over time the conditions can be created inside the system where asset-based approaches become part of mainstream delivery. A number of factors made the Neighbourhood Partnership approach successful (as detailed in Section 5.3.1) including, in brief: ongoing commitment; strong input from local schools; and a positive relationship between the voluntary and statutory sector locally. Crucially, it has been sustained by effective leadership from different parts of the local authority to drive forward this way of working as a normal part of the way services (for young people in this example) are delivered, embracing a realistic but positive approach to change.

10.4 Animating Assets model for action

In this final section of the report before concluding, we offer our own model for action when seeking to apply asset-based approaches to community change initiatives, particularly when working across and within services. This builds on Hopkins and Rippon's[13] theory of change presented in Figure 4.
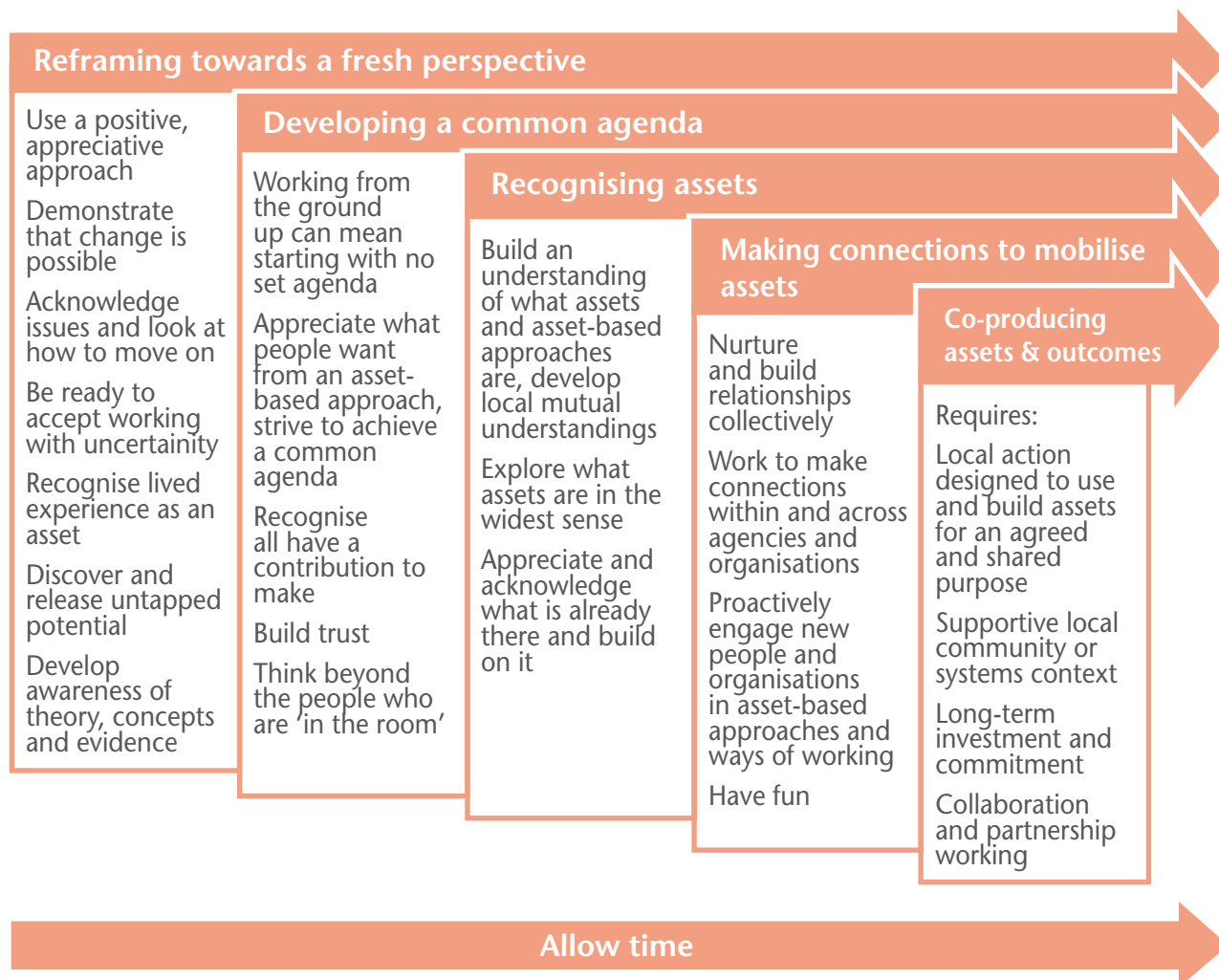
The model is based on our practice-based insights, experiences and observations, notes of meetings and interviews, and the synthesised findings from across Animating Assets (as presented in Section 8).

10 The practical reality of adopting asset-based approaches

Our model has five key stages and is intended to be illustrative of our learning about asset-based approaches in community settings and across service and systems gained over the duration of the programme. The stages are not linear and are intended to complement and build on each other. The stages in the model do not detail the intended or planned outcomes for each stage. This could, however, be developed for particular contexts through the use of 'logic models' to identify and illustrate the key processes, resources and activities that might be necessary for a given initiative[13].

The model also links to and further highlights the enabling conditions presented in Table 1.

Figure 8: Animating Assets model for action in relation to asset-based community change initiatives.

Reframing towards a fresh perspective

Use a positive, appreciative approach

Demonstrate that change is possible

Acknowledge issues and look at how to move on

Be ready to accept working with uncertainity

Recognise lived experience as an asset

Discover and release untapped potential

Develop awareness of theory, concepts and evidence

Developing a common agenda

Working from the ground up can mean starting with no set agenda

Appreciate what people want from an asset-based approach, strive to achieve a common agenda

Recognise all have a contribution to make

Build trust

Think beyond the people who are 'in the room'

Recognising assets

Build an understanding of what assets and asset-based approaches are, develop local mutual understandings

Explore what assets are in the widest sense

Appreciate and acknowledge what is already there and build on it

Making connections to mobilise assets

Nurture and build relationships collectively

Work to make connections within and across agencies and organisations

Proactively engage new people and organisations in asset-based approaches and ways of working

Have fun

Co-producing assets & outcomes

Requires:

Local action designed to use and build assets for an agreed and shared purpose

Supportive local community or systems context

Long-term investment and commitment

Collaboration and partnership working

Allow time

"It's not about doing different things, but about doing things differently"
(Animating Assets team member)

Animating Assets has demonstrated that across Scotland the significance of building trust, relationships and engagement for positive outcomes is now being recognised across agencies. There is also a focus on different kinds of conversations with individuals, communities and organisations, with an emphasis on skills, strengths and successes, and building capacity for collective action.

Throughout this report we have sought to bring to life the Animating Assets localised approach and process. We have presented, discussed and generated new ways of thinking about the development and nature of asset-based approaches in community and systems settings. We have outlined the creative and innovative approaches taken by the team, how we captured and recorded knowledge and evidence along the way, the importance of external facilitation in guiding, not controlling, the process and direction of travel, and what we learned from our research sites individually and collectively. We have also reflected on the values and principles underpinning asset-based approaches and asked do they reflect the reality of this way of working in our sites? We have identified from our experience what supports asset-based approaches and what constrains them, and we have proposed our own early iterative model for action when seeking to apply asset-based approaches to change initiatives. Furthermore, to bring the work of our research sites to life we have presented a series of case studies to share the process, progress and practice of the areas that engaged with the programme. Finally, we have also endeavoured to contribute to the evolving evidence for asset-based approaches and to extend the conversation about how to create the conditions which enable asset-based working to grow and flourish within communities and systems.

The approach taken aimed to support real-time learning from real-time situations in the context of local issues, identified collectively by local people, practitioners and organisations. Through adopting a dynamic, fluid and responsive action research approach, the programme sought to work alongside people to identify local areas for action and to try out, develop and learn from different ways of doing things to achieve a common goal. The approach focused on identifying what was already working well and recognised existing strengths and assets as a starting point for inquiry.

Storytelling played an important role in Animating Assets. This approach allowed people to share experiences, times of challenge, and hopes and dreams for the future, and to build empathy, respect and trust, while making connections and friendships. Stories were seen to help individuals make sense of and understand their local community and the world around them and to challenge the perceptions and assumptions that were in the room. Storytelling was a positive way of engaging people in a creative sense-making process where everyone had something to contribute.

11 Discussion and reflections

Although there were parallels and differences across and between our research sites, analysis of knowledge, evidence and local intelligence identified a number of common themes of interest (Section 8). We propose these are important factors when introducing and embedding asset-based approaches in practice. This includes a reframing towards a new perspective based on strengths and skills rather than needs and problems, on what is working well, and what we can do rather than what we cannot. This view was regarded as 'fresh thinking' and brought a new dimension to conversations, but was also challenging at times. The usage of our infographic (Appendix 1) was a useful resource for supporting different kinds of conversations to take place with a focus on assets. We also feel it is important to create a shared understanding of asset-based terminology, and crucially a mutual agreement about the values and principles which underpin this way of working. Truly working from the 'ground up' in an asset-based way often means starting with a set of values, theories (Section 4) and techniques (Section 5) but with no pre-set plan and allowing the priorities and concerns of the community or service to emerge through discussion. These conversations then can lead to the agreement of a common goal and vision for the future. Animating Assets also sought to work within the existing infrastructure of communities and services and to value and build what was already available. Building relationships and connections are intrinsic to all activities, and allowing time for this to happen is vital.

As outlined in Section 1, Animating Assets set out to explore a number of questions over the duration of the programme. These ranged from the skills, attitudes and values of staff required to adopt asset-based approaches, the strategic and operational conditions required, the likely health and social outcomes which could be achieved, and the funding and resource provision required. These questions proved to be ambitious and challenging, and throughout this report we have responded to many of them. The need for individuals and agencies who are open and responsive to change, able to accept uncertainty, place a focus on collaboration, partnership working and power sharing is clear, alongside the enabling and constraining factors and conditions (Section 10.1). As discussed in Section 10.2, early short-term outcomes were identified but evidencing medium and longer-term outcomes was not possible due to the duration of the programme. It is also clear that long-term investment and commitment to asset-based approaches is needed by cross-sector agencies for collective ownership and that funding is required to enable actions to be taken forward. A number of questions do, however, remain unanswered and will require further consideration, research and action. These include how asset-based work can best be measured and evaluated, whether or not they can be employed as preventative and early intervention strategies and how projects, initiatives and programmes taking place on the 'outside' of services and systems (further discussed in Section 10.3) can influence mainstream planning and delivery.

To adopt an asset-based approach is to build on strengths and hopefulness. Although there is policy commitment to asset-based approaches, setting the imperative for change

in Scotland, at present there is a significant disconnect between the ambitions of Scottish Government and the reality of practice. In supporting this shift towards more consistent asset-based practice in services and when working in community settings, and based on our experiences and observations, we offer a number of stages of action (as illustrated in Figure 8) for practitioners and communities wishing to work in an asset-based way:

- Use a positive approach based on what is already working well, acknowledging issues and demonstrating that change is possible, while reframing from filling the gaps and 'fixing' to enabling.
- Appreciate the assets and resources already present and build on these.
- Appreciate what people want from working in an asset-based way, why this is appropriate, and review whether there is agreement or mismatch in expectations among stakeholders, and work to develop a common agenda.
- Acknowledge that working from the ground-up can mean starting out with no set agenda.
- Allow time to build an understanding of what assets and asset-based approaches are, and use this as an opportunity to develop relationships and mutual understandings.
- Explore what assets are in the widest possible sense, going beyond physical assets and asset mapping.
- Nurture and build relationships collectively.
- Work to make connections within and across agencies and organisations, have a focus on effective collaboration and partnership working.
- Proactively engage with new people and organisations, thinking beyond the people who are 'in the room'.

Animating Assets represented an attempt to take a 'whole systems approach' to viewing the applicability, relevance and potential of asset-based approaches to effect positive change when co-ordinated work across a range of partners, across a whole community is required. However, the fieldwork duration of the programme limited the outcomes that could be observed and our work in four main research sites limited the scale and reach of the programme, but hopefully not its relevance to other areas. Our attempt to include lighter touch associate sites to extend involvement and learning from other areas proved unsuccessful in the main due to factors outwith the control of the programme. However, while recognising these limitations, the breadth and depth of the facilitation and approaches used, the data collected and the collective engagement of individuals across the community and voluntary sector, private sector, local government, local NHS Boards, educational establishments and housing providers make it a valuable resource. The learning from Animating Assets is thus part of the wider efforts to build an understanding of the potential and value of asset-based approaches in improving health and wellbeing and achieving improved social outcomes and life chances.

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The challenge, however, is that (some) systems have a huge inertia and cultural and historic baggage that means even when people are well intentioned their behaviours and roles do not equip them to set in train the actions that will allow asset-based approaches to flourish. So the risk is that these asset-based approaches will stay in the project or local community work box. The challenges in doing more of this therefore lies in changing organisational cultures and systems behaviours; enabling professional freedom and new working practices to develop; and in understanding local priorities, areas of concern and interest.

Throughout this report we maintain that creating the conditions to ensure a focus on assets and strengths does not negate the value and need to address the structural circumstances that lead to poverty and inequality[16]. Rather, we feel that the principles of the approach and the potential and benefits of working in an asset-based way brings into sharper focus the need to redress the balance between meeting the needs of people and nurturing and enhancing the knowledge, experience, skills and resources of people and places.

A move towards asset-based working reflects a commitment to work and operate in a different way: to involve people, to take risks, to share power, to facilitate and enable rather than provide, and to unlock the potential of people, places and organisations to work together more effectively for the common good.

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