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A CAN-DO COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

Townstal key residents
and service providers talk about

Townstal Community Partnership

Steve Griffiths

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

Townstal is an outlying neighbourhood of Dartmouth in Devon, which overlooks the town from a hill. Most of its housing is rented from two housing associations, Tor Homes and Guinness Hermitage. It has been perceived as isolated, and morale has certainly been low, as this report makes clear. The Index of Multiple Deprivation found Townstal to be in the poorest tenth of neighbourhoods in England in terms of education; just outside the poorest tenth in terms of employment; and in the poorest fifth for health, income, and overall deprivation.¹

The Townstal Community Partnership (TCP) was formed during 2009, with the aim of promoting a better quality of life through greater community activity and close and active collaboration with services working in the area.

This is a report of a series of focus groups and interviews carried out in February 2012 with a small number of key residents who are active in TCP, and people who work for some of the agencies that have contributed to the Partnership.

The idea has been to capture people's experience of the development of the partnership in their own words - how things were before TCP started, how it started, what it has meant to individuals and the Townstal community they are part of. Changes in the experience of working in Townstal also emerge as a significant theme of this partnership. Residents and staff talk about what they think the key ingredients for success have been; and the challenges and opportunities the community now faces.

The questions for the focus groups were neutral: but what comes out is a sense of pride in achievement. This was not mindless optimism: there are thoughtful observations, and there is an awareness that although there is a very high level of participation in the TCP's activities, it still has the potential to be strengthened. There is an awareness that this community, like many across the country, faces challenges in terms of creating an environment in which all generations flourish, in tough economic circumstances where public investment may be sparse and will need to be intelligent and well-directed. Like any community organisation, TCP will need to be regularly renewed and refreshed to keep up the commitment and energy of local people and local agencies. A message that pervades this report is that there has been a remarkable amount, and quality, of positive activity, and it appears from this testimony to have done quite a lot of people a lot of good.

Background

In 2010 the Department of Health commissioned the Health Empowerment Leverage Project (HELP) to carry out a pilot project working in three areas, to show how community development can improve the health and wellbeing of small communities - and to test the case that neighbourhood activity, in groups small and large, is good for people. Townstal Community Partnership (TCP) was one of the pilot sites.

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government, (2011), *The English Indices of Deprivation 2010*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government;
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1870718.pdf>
Data at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/indices2010>

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HELP have produced a report for the Department of Health about how these pilot partnerships have worked.² Community Partnerships need to keep growing, learning and working better, or they will stagnate and die. This report aims to give a flavour of how TCP has worked: to begin to answer questions about whether vibrant communities are healthier, and how such communities come about and develop, in the voices of those who are living the experience. It supplements, and tries to present in human terms, a lot of research and statistical work in other reports by HELP and other organisations on the same subject. See the 'Evidence' page on our website for more.

It is vital to listen to, and learn from, how people have experienced these partnerships, what they think is best about them, what they think works, and what could work better.

Townstal: How the Partnership got going

The work in Townstal began in 2009, through contact with a police inspector who had seen the effects of the Connecting Communities (C2) Beacon project in Falmouth and believed that local problems of crime and anti-social behaviour could be alleviated by a similar multi-agency approach here. HELP later made the health connection, and NHS Devon became a major partner.

The process began with scoping visits to meetings of the town council and local PACT (Police and Communities Together). A small group of residents were identified who were enthusiastic for change, and further scoping visits were made using their local knowledge. HELP facilitators attended community groups to talk with residents and listen to their lived experience and to find out what service provision was available and what other work was happening in the area that could be built on.

Most of the people whom the HELP facilitators met on their walkabouts were very negative about the status of Townstal and its relationship with affluent Dartmouth town. They felt that they were forgotten about at the top of the hill whilst being unfairly stigmatised as the source of all the anti-social behaviour in the area.

Although Townstal is part of Dartmouth the residents felt there was a huge divide, with shops that they could never afford to shop in and all the major services sited in the main town, including the nearest GP surgery. Townstal had very little - not even somewhere for the young mums to meet for a coffee or a decent play park they could take their toddlers to.

Some residents attributed shortcomings of the estate to a few 'problem' families that had been brought into the estate from other towns, whom they blamed for drug dealing and anti-social behaviour. There was a feeling that the services did not care or were unable to do anything about local issues. This perceived lack of responsiveness from the services also applied to smaller issues like litter, fly tipping and dog mess. There was cynicism about the ability of housing, police and the council to deliver good quality service.

Further contacts were made until a good array of front line workers from different services had been gathered to try to establish a steering group for the new project. A key catalyst was the local Police Inspector, who through his PACT meetings was seeing lots of problems being brought to the police that were multi agency in nature. During the first meetings he

² Health Empowerment Leverage Project, 2011, *Empowering Communities for Health: Business Case and Practice Framework*, HELP: <http://www.healthempowerment.co.uk>

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took the lead on behalf of the agencies and led the way in multi agency problem solving, taking it beyond the tokenistic.

Visits to the Cornish C2 sites were organised at an early point as it was felt that this would embed the vision of what a neighbourhood partnership could look like and achieve, as the concept appeared to be poorly understood by residents and agencies alike. The visits proved to be a real eye-opener to residents and professionals alike, provoking the comment 'If they can do it, so can we!'

Facilitated by Hazel Stuteley (C2/HELP) and Dr Katrina Wyatt (Peninsula Medical School) the first workshop was held in February 2009. It was attended by councillors, other residents, representatives from education, police, housing, health trainers, Devon PCT, South Hams District Council, and the Children's Centre. It attracted favourable comment in the local paper, the first of many positive articles.

The workshop brought commitment both from agencies and key residents to work together, starting with planning a 'Listening to Townstal' event. Residents and service workers distributed the invitations throughout the estate, having doorstep conversations wherever possible. Local shops, supermarkets and businesses provided donations for entertainment, refreshments and a raffle.

Fifty residents and 18 services staff attended the event. The staff acted as hosts, speaking with and helping residents, serving drinks for them and breaking down the 'them and us' division. The top priorities which emerged were:

- Local access to NHS dentist and doctor
- Issues around binge drinking and drugs
- Anti-social behaviour
- Parking and transport
- Young people's issues
- Policing
- Litter and amenities

The Listening Event opened up a dialogue which continued through further public meetings, walkabouts on the estate and negotiations with services. The agencies soon showed that they had got the C2 message that quick action on practical issues would build trust and guide community energy into positive channels. When it snowed early in 2010, Highways was contacted and it was quickly agreed that Townstal would receive more grit bins.

An angry group of residents brought up issues over litter accumulating in certain areas. The council representative fed this back and within weeks an additional road sweeper was allocated to the problem areas. (The following year however cutbacks would make this an issue again).

On other walkarounds, residents were able to raise further issues, such as maintenance, taking away abandoned white goods, and parking allocations, all of which were resolved over a few weeks by one of the housing associations. Once they saw changes, even on small issues like litter, and residents knew they had a forum to make changes happen, resident support for TCP started to grow.

Further background about the development of the Partnership can be found in the HELP report referred to above.

PART TWO: REPORT OF THE TOWNSTAL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP FOCUS GROUPS

This account of the discussions is organised into eight key themes. Real names of participants are used where consent was obtained.

1. Partnership

Before the focus groups, the expectation was that the partnership between residents and agencies would be an important theme; but not to the degree reflected here, as a central theme, which people described with some passion as life-changing. To set this in context, participants spoke about where they had started out from, a set of relationships characterised by barriers and frustration, not just on the part of residents:

Before, the housing associations were not talking to people, and not talking to each other. People were fed up with them, you just got palmed off, nobody ever got back, over antisocial behaviour, problems with repairs. They wouldn't come out to have a look at it, and there was continuous pressure on them and the residents were getting really annoyed with the fact that no-one was listening.

Cllr. Steve Smith

Getting up and running

Alice Potter of Tor Homes described the first meeting that led to the Listening Event as a key transformative moment, with key contributions from the Police and from Hazel Stutely, the former health visitor who had initiated the Beacon partnership in Falmouth:

Inspector Paul Morgan was very much involved, and at the end of that day Hazel said, right, agencies, put your hands up and say you'll join in, and I'm pleased to say everyone said they'd get involved, and from that we held a working group to set up this Listening Event, and from that, a list of the top ten concerns was brought out with the post-it notes and things like that, we had target areas which was fantastic, and we chose some quick wins.

Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

Transformation

Opening up the channels of communication between the agencies and residents seems to have been crucial. Here Alice Potter describes the movement out of negativity, low expectations and frustration:

We all have good relationships that have built up. It was very much that we'd been disappointed in the past, residents were very much frustrated, and it got to the point of 'what's the point, we tell and tell and tell and tell, and nothing happens', and from the agency point of view we had the same frustrations as residents really, it's hard to speak to South Hams Council, and Police, the local schools, we have the same problem, I used to phone up South Hams Council and get passed from pillar to post to try and sort things out, and I think it's the same thing that's happened between agencies as has happened between residents and agencies, and it's been absolutely brilliant to be honest.

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(Resident: 'I never thought that you had difficulties in getting in touch too')

Yes, because at the end of the day it doesn't matter, we're just another customer to them, we still get stuck on hold, we still get passed to the wrong person, so it's ideal that we have the same contact with the other agencies.

Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

Cllr. Steve Smith described how this opening up meant that people were happier to come to work in Townstal, a theme we will hear more of below:

Guinness Trust had an office in Archway Close, and they closed that down. In the old days staff would be sent here; but nowadays they actually want to come, that's the difference. In the early days when this started, housing staff would turn up because it was good PR, but you could tell that some of them didn't really want to be here, but as they saw the importance of how things were changing, the people that now turn up want to be here.

Cllr. Steve Smith

So what made a difference?

All being sat in one room made a huge difference, and we could get everything sorted, and because it wasn't an agency leading the Listening Event, that was the key difference as to how it started, to be honest, because if I'd popped down as Tor Homes and said 'Come on everyone, I'm going to listen to what you're going to say' - I would have had eyes rolling at me, saying, 'oh god, not this again', and I wouldn't have had anyone through the door. And I'm sure if Guinness Hermitage or the Police or anyone went it alone, they would probably have found the same. This was a group of people with a very proven past in other areas (Beacon Project - see above), I think people thought, OK, we'll give them a go, they've tried it and they've done a good job, and I think that in terms of the longevity of the group, if you've got residents leading the group, you feel they're more approachable, they understand where you're coming from, they live on the same estate as you.

Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

There was acknowledgement that the partnership had started from a very low base, and that this is a long process; and a strong consensus that the inclusive approach was the right one:

People say that the people round here are apathetic. They do care, but they've been promised so many things that haven't happened that they get negative about it. They feel no-one's listening to them, and for me, I felt I wanted to be involved in a group like this, because people deserve to have a voice. It has done that. And the most important thing that TCP did, before it tried to get involved with people, it got all the agencies you could think of to come on board and come to a meeting and talk about what we were going to try and do, that's the best part of it, because before that people might contact, say Tor Homes, who wouldn't give them a satisfactory answer, and now with the Partnership, we can put people in touch directly with whoever it is they want to be connected to.

Resident A

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The emergence of leaders

As Alice said, the emergence of residents prepared to take the lead was crucial. Daniel Tagg described what happened - another transformative moment:

I joined at the postcard stage, when the postcards went out on the estate, I came to the Listening Event. I just remember sitting and chatting, talking about the council, I knew a lot of people there because I'm from a big Townstal family. It was announced at that meeting that there was going to be a public meeting, which I then went to, and Hazel and Iris were talking about people stepping forward, and I remember giving this speech about Townstal (laughs) and the next thing I knew, when they said, 'Do we have nominations for chairman?' I sat back down, and Steve stood up and said let's nominate you, it was like I really didn't expect that. I talked about how much I believe in this estate, how passionate I am, this is where I was born, I didn't go to school here unfortunately, but off and on I've been here all my life, my mum, my grandparents, and my great grandparents, have been here since day one, and I've got real pride and passion in the estate. I never liked what people thought about it. There's less of it now, but there was that great divide between down there and up here - a lot of perceptions about Townstal, real negative ones, I really hated that because I always considered Townstal to be actually where the locals were. A lot of the people who live downtown had moved to Dartmouth or are second homeowners. I just have a lot of pride hearing about the Townstal people. I don't know about helping people, but I've always liked doing community events and such, and I always get involved in them, and I thought this was really a chance to do something for where I live. I was happy to accept the nomination, and I got voted for, and became Chairman, and I was really happy.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

The full partnership

By 2012, from a start in 2009, there had been what residents described as a profound shift:

Things have changed: people are more confident in the agencies, and services, people can come up and talk to them and know that they're here, rather than go through five different phone numbers to find the right person. The result is instant, which makes them happier. It's about making things better here, it brings the confidence back in the residents.

Julie Deane, resident, Co-ordinator

Daniel Tagg, Chair of the Community Partnership, thought that there were three key relationships with agencies that have built up. Some key factors and events in this growth, as well as new relationships, are discussed below.

One of our closest relationships is with the housing associations, because the majority of housing is with them - then police, and aspects of the NHS, are at the forefront of people's minds. We're slowly making inroads into other areas, for instance the surgery down in town has a patients participation group, which we're on.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

Police Community Support Officer Alex Daprano is a relatively recent arrival, but has quickly become a prominent and key member of the community partnership. He described how the active partnership had contributed to his first experience of working in Townstal:

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I started here new, and within one meeting I met everyone I needed to, in an hour, it set me off with all my contacts. As far as what it's meant to me, it's a great organisation, it's made my job easier, because not only is it an easier way to relate to people, it's just a better way of working: multi-agency is the way forward and the best way to problem-solve. There was a great link with all the agencies in the area, housing agencies, benefits, police, health, and we saw this great sort of localised hub, and we could access all these different agencies. A lot of calls that we got at the police weren't really police matters, they were to do with housing, or the council, so it was a good way of saying, well look, there's an agency here on the estate that's here to help you in these matters, get in contact with them. It makes my job easier, but also more enjoyable.

PCSO Alex Daprano

Julie Deane gave an example of how the existence of this hub meant that the wheels of community and agency relationships could be oiled:

It's the little links with the NHS. I had an email asking the TCP if we could advertise childhood immunisation for them. We have the flu clinic up here which used to be in town, which makes it more accessible; and the blood bank, to run four blood donor sessions.

Julie Deane, resident, Co-ordinator

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal of Dartmouth Academy, spoke of the importance of the Partnership in meeting educational objectives, and of a wider aim of establishing the Academy as part of the community it serves, ensuring that young people feel part of both home and school communities.

It's about how we can share and provide an understanding, and it's also about how I can answer questions at the Partnership meetings, around things that the community might have concerns about, about what's happening at the Academy, or they might have questions about the new building development coming up..... It's a good partnership and we've got good relationships with all the people involved in the Townstal committee, and it's a partnership that will strengthen. I'm very much behind it, because it's about giving everyone the best opportunity.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal of Dartmouth Academy

Nick spoke of a day-to-day, problem-solving and proactive relationship with Julie. A sense of partnership was integral to the school's image - but also, the self-image of both pupils and staff:

I feel confident that I can ring in tomorrow and say, will you be able to push this, have you got anybody interested in that, or Julie will ring me and say look, we've got this dads' opportunity, could you put it in the newsletter and push it for us? And listening to the police and talking with the PCSOs, we know that we can work together to make sure that we provide a variety of things that help out those people that have sometimes got entrenched in a life where they don't know any different. It's that dripfeed, it's about that teamwork and passion about your area. That's why I feel passionate about our students here, I want them to be successful, but I also want to walk around myself and say, I'm from Dartmouth Academy, and people go, that's a really good school.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal of Dartmouth Academy

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The partnership extends to working together on small but important community issues that contribute to a sense of empowerment:

We work closely with Steve Smith the councillor, who represents Townstal, things like the crossing, where Devon County Council took away the lollipop lady, she retired, and they weren't going to replace her, but working with the TCP, the local council and ourselves, we put enough pressure on to make sure that happened. And when there was a visit concerned with speeding on the road, I went along with Steve to represent the Academy, he represented Townstal, to speak with Devon County officials with the police there. So wherever we can support each other, we do. It has been a crucial change.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

Nick expressed the view that mutual support and promotion, and a shared sense of pride, are important:

(...on feeling old because he taught some of the community partners he now works with:) It's those connections, and being able to work together; and celebrating that success; when TCP got the award from the police,³ we reported it in our newsletter, and we're very proud of what they've done, to say actually, we can make that difference, we can achieve that together, and well done to them for the effort and attitude that they've got, for making a difference with their community.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

2. A wider sense of achievement

Several people described the Listening Event as key to establishing a positive outlook. Frank Mann was in at the beginning. Indeed, he established the youth club that preceded the Community Partnership:

We started the youth club, and that actually made a difference. And then we started the TCP, and the first meeting was a free cake job. And that's why I came (laughs). Surprisingly it was well attended. We made lists of what we would like to see done, what we didn't like about the area, and they were pinned up on the wall, and a number of those things were acted upon, and it's surprising how many things we've been successful with, that have affected people's lives. For some strange reason the bingo pops into my mind, I never go to it, but about 40-50 people do regularly turn out for it. This is good because the community go away and talk about this, they meet one another which they might not otherwise do. We had a questionnaire at one stage which asked, do you know ten people on the estate, and I thought, crumbs, I must know at least a hundred. You know, I think people are really beginning to integrate more. When I'm out and about on my scooter, I say good morning to people; originally, I'd get a strange look and a grunt, but now people respond.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

Resident A agreed that the 'free cake job' was crucial, and looked forward to another one. The sense of achievement is palpable:

³ Winners of the 2010 Devon & Cornwall Community Watch Awards for rural areas.

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The list that we were given at the listening event, of what people wanted, at the top was a NHS dentist, well, we got one, a bit of luck as well, and we've been down through the list, we've more or less cleared it, we'll have to do another one now, to see what we want now, to start again.

Resident A

Several people talked about development of a 'can-do' spirit, and how that had affected people's sense of the place and what they could do in it:

The quality of life's got better up here, there's a lot more resident involvement, community spirit is a lot better, people aren't so reluctant to do things, they're more willing to come forward and join in events that we run, rather than sit in their houses and go, oh, I'm not going to that.

Julie Deane, resident, Co-ordinator

There was a strong sense of generally improved behaviour:

Both anti-social behaviour and environmental mess have been more or less taken care of. Up this end we never see any anti-social behaviour, very very little. People have got a bit more feelings for other people, more consideration, it's been a consequence of TCP. It's an important thing that, it's things like the way they park, playing of loud music, allowing dogs into the playpark: that's something that has stopped.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

Alice Potter felt that a lot of this had to do with ownership - clearly closely related to empowerment:

Children, or anyone, that take ownership of something, it makes a huge difference. Like the bus-stop got smashed. Once upon a time it would have been left like it for quite a while, and it gives the estate quite a bad outlook, but now it's solved straight away, it stops that happening in the first place, it looks like a nice estate, so you don't attract that behaviour. The group's done so well, and achieved so much in such a short period of time, they really do have a we-can-do-it attitude, rather than saying to the agencies, you do everything, it really is a partnership. I can't really think of any negatives that stand out, that oh, we shouldn't have done that.

Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

Nick Bowles felt that the positives spilled into his area of education:

People say now, there's a lot going on there, isn't there, we can hear the change and feel the change, so that's nice, and if students have a sense that they're in it as well, it'll be fantastic.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

Resident A expressed this feel-good factor with some brevity: 'Most people take a pride in where they live now'. Julie Deane put it in terms of her own family's sense of well-being:

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I was offered a house here, I really didn't want to move here nine years ago, because it was so cut off, there wasn't anything here for the kids, but actually I wouldn't move now. I love it here.

Julie Deane, resident, Co-ordinator

But it was Daniel Tagg who spoke most passionately about a shared sense of achievement:

Over these last, nearly three years, the things we've achieved I can't quite believe, I've said 'I can't believe this is actually happening'. I see things twofold, firstly the individual items, like finally getting the children's park built, with the help of local children, with local residents having to bid for the money and such - and also when we do things like the housing benefit surgery, the bingo: things are happening, I love it. And the other side of it is the whole atmosphere on the estate is really, really beginning to change, I really do believe that, because I work in Sainsburys, I'm in Townstal still, I think people are just happier now, I really do, because we've talked many times about perceptions of Townstal, and when you look at the figures, you see it wasn't that bad, things like crime. But if people believe things are bad, think there's crime, that's how they're going to feel, if they think they're living in a rundown place, that's how they're going to be, and I'm really happy with the whole atmosphere changing, and that's why when we get the bingo we get a huge turnout and the hall is filled, we run the youth club and we get a lot of teenagers coming. When we do the social events, well, the whole estate's practically here, I feel such pride, many times when I sit back and look at it, I feel such pride, we've done it!

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

3. Health

There is not a high content of perceived health-specific activity generated by TCP; but then when you think about the activities in terms of physical movement and interaction, a health spin-off would be expected. This was a question that members of the focus groups had not given much thought to, but they warmed to it. Four participants of varying ages saw a connection between an improved level of community activity, an improved environment, reduced frustration, access to services, and health and well-being:

Health, it's people's attitudes isn't it, if people feel positive about things, their whole outlook is outgoing, and if you're happy, there's a knock-on effect, everyone helps each other, it affects your health, definitely your mental health, it's a feelgood thing, and that's connected to what we're saying about how the estate looks, if you get up, you look out of your window, it's depressing and you see rubbish; but if you wake up and everywhere's clean and tidy, then that makes a difference to everything.

Resident B

Because we've got the housing associations up here, and we've got the Work Club and so on, to help get people back into work, because we've got the services here, they're not so stressed, I think stress levels have dropped in a lot of people, because they don't have to go through that whole lengthy process of going 13 miles on the bus to get to see somebody.

Julie Deane, resident, Co-ordinator

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I think we can see a lot of preventative stuff, if you're living in a poor run-down house that has a lot of environmental issues, you were worried previously before TCP came along, and had to go without it, you can now get these things sorted, before it becomes an issue. It's a lot about improving the environment that leads to better health in the future

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

Really and truly, the community activity must affect people's health. Because if someone's got a problem, they're out perhaps walking up to the shop, and they're worrying about it, and then they meet someone else, and pass the time of day, and they go away feeling better, that's just a small example. If they know more people, they've got more people to share their problems with, and I think problems seem less significant when they're shared.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

Unsurprisingly, more community activity means more physical activity. Frank Mann was impressed by 'free running':

For the youngsters there's 'free running', this arrangement like in the streets, you run up walls, and jump over benches and things like that, we do it here under a controlled environment, indoors, a chappie comes along, he sets up all the props, we get some of them from the Academy. It's immensely popular, it's got young people letting off steam in an organised way.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

Daniel Tagg confirmed this, and explained the outcome of the Partnership's consultation with children attending the Youth Club about new resources:

A lot of children are keen on the physical activity side. We've received some funding for the youth club and we went and said to the children, what do you want, we didn't presume it, and what they asked for were sporting things. A lot of children are looking forward to when it gets lighter and they can go and play football in the carpark.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

Nick Bowles saw a connection between activities offered by the Academy and those in the community. Indeed, he had passed on links to dance resources picked up at TCP which the Academy were now following up, as well as street running. As we will see in the next section, there is considerable cross-fertilisation between the Academy and TCP in terms of sport and physical activity:

We've invested heavily into physical activity here (at the Academy), with sports activities. I'm an ex-head of PE so it was close to my heart, I wasn't seeing enough activity happening here, so we've got lots going on now.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

For adults, dance classes were popular:

In the hall there are dance classes, they're not part of the TCP, they're part of the Hall organisation. TCP and the Hall are coming closer and closer together, you will see that at some stage in the future, they will integrate.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

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Links with the Leisure Centre were less developed and there was some criticism:

The Leisure Centre is somewhat controversial at times, and it's very expensive, and as a result that puts a lot of people off. Sometimes they don't engage a lot with the community, as much as you would assume they would want to, they're very business minded. There's an issue of whether the indoor swimming pool will be built, it'd be a great benefit.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

The other dimension of health brought up by residents was access to health services. As in other areas of discussion, there was a sense of services having been inaccessible to Townstal residents, but that discussion and interaction was bringing the sense of isolation to an end:

We're all hoping we're going to get a surgery in Townstal, because the surgery is down in town, it has absolutely no parking. I can't ride on the bus. It's too bouncy. I can get onto the bus, but I can't ride it because it bumps about so much. I have to rely on my wife to take me. She works as a nurse. The surgery is intent on moving to Townstal, what they had hoped was to have a surgery where the school now is, because the school was going to move, but that has fallen through, so they're looking at other options. They may keep a satellite surgery in town. In town, a lot of the houses are holiday lets.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

The first achievement had been the dentist: a doctor's surgery is certainly in residents' sights.

The plus side with the dentist, that was a really good positive thing healthwise, because the people wouldn't go to the dentist, couldn't afford to, that's not going to make them feel happy is it? I think it would be really wonderful to campaign to get the doctors' surgery up here. Or a clinic.

Resident A

There had already been some important improvements in patient access to the surgery, affecting patients unable to attend during normal working hours:

I'm vice chair of the patients' participation group at the local surgery, We've just managed to get the GPs to introduce a change in the appointments system, which is a late-in-the-day 5 minute appointment for emergencies, and also a Saturday morning appointment, and that's been very popular as well, it's been fully booked. The late one is if something has come up during the day, and you haven't been able to get to the surgery, you can just check into that one, that's been pretty popular.

Frank Mann, resident, ex-Treasurer

4. Some crucial factors

As Alice Potter put it about the Community Partnership:

'Quick wins at the beginning led to its success, it hit the ground running'.
Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

Here we look at some of those 'quick wins'.

Quick wins and housing

Alice Potter described early, decisive intervention on Jubilee Close.

One of the areas that had needs was Jubilee Close, which is flats, it was looking pretty run down and it was always a dumping ground. We had graffiti, we had door entry systems but they were constantly being vandalised, hallways were being used for drug abuse, so we targeted the area because it's the worst looking patch on the estate, and I think we spent about £12,000, asked residents to pick what colour they wanted the blocks to be, put in new door entry systems, worked with South Hams to sort the bin areas because it was an absolute mess, and I think because the residents became proud of where they lived, it looked nice, and the ones that weren't causing the problems were liking where they lived more - I think people also having faith in the TCP - people were actually reporting to us who was doing the damage. In terms of crime rates people have faith now, and there's more reporting, and we say tell us when things are going wrong and we can actually sort them out, and we've had a couple of families evicted through people collecting evidence for us, whereas before we always knew what was going on, but residents had taken the view that 'if you're not going to do anything I'll shut my door and forget about it'. But they started reporting antisocial behaviour, so we had evidence and we could get evictions and it's made a big improvement. And I know that this is the first time we've put a door entry system in that hasn't been immediately vandalised and broken, and that's a really good sign in itself, and because we've got a secure entry system we're not having the problems with graffiti and drug abuse.
Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

Resident A concurred. There was a strong emphasis on keeping the area clean and looking well cared for.

Resident A: It certainly improved so much, and the great thing was getting those waste bins, there used to be cookers and what not dumped outside, that made a huge difference when those bins went in.

Alice: And Tor Homes now has a caretaker who visits the estate once a week, people know it's being monitored and they are more careful, we're not finding the odd sofa or carpet being dumped.

The change in appearance led to change in reputation. Understanding and confidence between tenants and landlord made a step change which in turn made changes in allocation possible.

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Because of the reputation of the flats, it was always young single men living there, and they would cause problems, then the only kind of people that would move in were those kinds of people - it was a vicious circle. Now the area's really improved, I know now that families are actually accepting properties and wanting to come on the estate. The Partnership has helped with residents' understanding, they almost thought the housing associations were doing it on purpose, and using Townstal as a dumping ground for these kinds of people, but once they learned how the allocations worked, that we weren't doing it on purpose, it kind of builds understanding that we're not dumping on you. I definitely know now that we don't have trouble renting out here any more.

Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

This brought about a sea change in the area:

Now the area is improving, people want to come in rather than get out. People want properties in Townstal.

Julie Deane, resident, Co-ordinator

The playpark

Participants agreed that resident ownership of developments was crucial. That went not only for adults, but for children too:

Some money was achieved for a playpark for the children. They got the schoolchildren to design the park. Every step of the way, they were involved in it. And touch wood, after two years in March, it's still pristine. It's unbelievable when you think about the vandalism that goes on on estates. They were involved in this right from the start.

Resident B

Crime and antisocial behaviour

This is a thread that has run through discussions about the success of the partnership. Cllr. Steve Smith had no doubt about its importance, and of how improving the feel of the estate stemmed from the interrelation of positive initiatives, through the housing associations and the hands-on presence of the police in particular - in two words, active partnership:

The crucial factor was antisocial behaviour, and there was a lot of that. In the early days, there was quite a bit of ASB and drug use going on. Since the Partnership came along, we've seen ASB minimised, only because we were successful in getting the housing groups together, under one roof, talking with each other. The community policing side has been fantastic, and because of that, the younger members of the estate, the parish, not just Townstal, see more of the police through the community activity than through the old fear of the boys in blue, that's not there any more, they're more approachable. It's been a prayer answered.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

Nick Bowles was clear that Dartmouth Academy was an important part of this partnership as a presence in the local community:

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We use TCP facilities as a sort of common ground that everybody can meet on, rather than being in the Academy here, so we can challenge the behaviour of that student in that family. We've pushed back hard on poor behaviour from a set of families that are there, we've started to send out the message clearly about things like Facebook, putting comments on there that are not acceptable. We work hard with the local Police Community Support Officer, so yesterday a family that live in Townstal, where we know a couple of other students have gone and lived, where there's issues, through working with our social team, we have been able to get the PCSO for Townstal to go and visit and provide support for the parent.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

Substance abuse is an issue that has to be dealt with both in the community and at school, so that a shared approach - partnership again - makes sense:

(Just before Christmas) we got very positive feedback that we'd dealt with (drug use by students) and would not tolerate that in the school. But we were also able to impact in the local community, we were able to identify some of the key players, and places where it was happening as well, so that was another way of being able to link across and use that partnership.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

Alex Daprano was very clear about a link between crime and antisocial behaviour, and overall quality of life:

We want to help residents improve the area they live in. At the end of the day, that'll drive crime down, and just make it a better place to live for everyone.

PCSO Alex Daprano

Fun

Below, we talk about ways in which the whole community has been involved in the partnership, how commitment has spread and deepened. Much of that has been fun for residents. Participants in the focus groups were clear that fun events were in themselves a crucial factor in the development of a robust community organisation.

Resident A: I think fun's important. We've had Christmas parties, Easter parties, open days, Tor Homes and other agencies have joined in with doing things, litter picking has turned into a fun event - I think that's a really important one.

Alice: From a value for money point of view for an agency, Tor Homes loves putting on things like Easter parties, we pair up with Guinness Hermitage, and it's halved the cost, we can do these sorts of things more frequently.

Resident B: The litter picking, that's got the children joining in, and it's helping them to be aware of environmental things.

A feature of this report is how much credit is given by one partner to another - and to the essential decency, and potential, of those who live in Townstal:

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Just take the example of the Guinness and Tor reps, they have gone out of their way to do so much, when we had the kids' outing to Plymouth, Guinness Trust helped with that, and Tor, with the Dream Scheme.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

Alice: Dream scheme, they did baking for one sheltered housing scheme, and they put plants in little pots and gave them to another sheltered housing scheme down in the bottom of town, and they painted the benches, did some hanging baskets, and car washing, and I think they enjoyed the work day just as much as the treat, they were a really enthusiastic bunch of kids, and they knew that if you misbehave, you don't go on the treat day, which was to a play place in Plymouth.

Resident B: *They deserved it.*

Alice: My car had never been so clean. It's great publicity for the area too. Townstal used to have a kind of a stigma, as being the poorer part of Dartmouth, which was such a shame because it's such a lovely community up here, and because the Chronicle was doing stories that the kids have been doing this, and they've got an award for that, I think it was like, oh, maybe they're not so bad up there.

The Youth Club

The youth club is mentioned at a number of points in this report, and is clearly a key focus for the Partnership. There are two well-attended Saturday evening sessions, the earlier one for the 7-11 age band. Townstal has a high proportion of children with special needs, and it is a safe environment for them.

The community policeman turns up as well, they all interact, which is a good thing. It's friendly faces that are running it, we're not scary, and we have set rules.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

5. All on board - getting and keeping the community involved

There was a sense of a collective journey towards a more positive outlook, with a conscious emphasis on the need to involve all residents.

With the exception of the youth club, because of its very nature, everything we do is universal. The Halloween party is especially popular with young families, but everyone on the estate gets invited, the two housing associations mail out for us to every house. And all our events are free anyway, so no-one's excluded. We spoke about it a lot in the early days, we've always made a conscious effort to include everybody.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

A Can-Do Community Partnership

Cllr. Steve Smith recalled the negativity they had had to overcome:

At the early stages, people were very wary because for a long time they had been brainwashed in this area, things would start off and they'd die, so they'd given up on anybody doing anything for them. But once they'd seen that there were well known local people, getting on board with this and doing it voluntarily, that's a big thing, they thought at last we've got a serious organisation that's doing something for us, they started coming out of their houses, but you will always get a small proportion of people that won't come out, because they're quite happy with the way they are. But we're seeing more people now, there are more people coming out and getting involved with us.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

Resident A also acknowledged that not all residents wanted to be active in the Partnership. But the important thing was that they knew where to go for answers in what had become a more positive climate:

I have to say that, we know that Tor Homes listen, which is great, and it's not just them, it's other agencies as well, and that for me was the most successful start. I won't say people come to every meeting, they don't, but if they've got issues, they know where to come, and they know that they'll get a response.

Resident A

Frank Mann too thought that people would get involved if there were issues, and reflected the views of others when he said that wide involvement in social events was a key link in the sense of identification with the Partnership; but also, that perhaps there was still more that could be achieved in terms of active resident involvement, which already represents a considerable achievement:

There are more people active in the community, there are a lot more that would like to, but just don't quite have the nerve to take that step. We get them along for things like the monthly bingo, we have parties like the Halloween party, the Christmas party, the forthcoming Diamond Jubilee party, they'll come out in their droves, so they are interested, and also, if there's an issue, like litter, or street lighting, or drug-taking (that occurred a long time ago) then they'll turn out, and sometimes the whole street will turn out to one of our public meetings. But as soon as the problem is resolved, and they do seem to get resolved, they don't come again! So while there's an issue to be sorted, they'll come. It must mean that things are going along quite nicely on the estate. I think it'll take a little bit longer to set up public trust. It's there, it's growing, but it's a long way off being universal.

Frank Mann, resident, former Treasurer

Daniel agreed with Steve that the process of involving residents was still moving in the right direction:

We hear from new residents all the time who've heard about us, and they want to get involved because of the popularity of the things we do, the weekly events, the bingo, the hall is filled to capacity when people come in for parties.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

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Interestingly, there was frequent mention of the bingo sessions as an activity that brought together a significant proportion of the community, with a significance that went well beyond the game of bingo:

resident B: *There's the bingo session, it sounds a bit frivolous, but it brings a lot of people together in the hall, if they've got issues or anything, we can listen to them. If it wasn't there, they wouldn't bother to come and tell us about things.*

Alice (Tor Homes): *Yes, they'll go to bingo, and they'll think there's someone there I can chat to, and they'll approach me.*

Overall, Alice was struck by the particularly high level of positive awareness of TCP in Townstal:

I know from knocking on doors and talking to residents, even if they don't attend bingo, they know all about the group, and I think that's a key thing. You don't get that on some estates, we do have residents' associations on other housing estates, and you could knock on a door, and the association could have been going for a couple of years, but residents won't know about it, so I think that's a really good sign here. It's very well respected.

Alice Potter, former Resident Involvement Officer, Tor Homes

Resident B thought the representativeness of the active group was important, and the way people got on:

It's a really good group, we might disagree but we do listen to each other, and at the end of the day, you know very well, it's not all down to you. And we've got a good range of ages too, we've got young, and then we've got middle, and then we've got us!

Resident B

Nick Bowles praised the way the Partnership had involved his students:

Last year we had four of our students meet all the different organisations, and there was also a Town Youth Council. We've got a meeting tomorrow with the Council about how we link them up, and how we support getting the students involved. I know Dan and Julie at the Partnership do a lot of good work listening to the students, and to the whole Townstal community, so they have a very good knowledge.

Nick Bowles, Vice Principal, Dartmouth Academy

Alice wondered if the sense of shared achievement pointed to a need to reassess what the future held:

Alice: *It'll be great to see from another Listening Day if residents' priorities have changed. Our perception is that we've had all these improvements and we're doing brilliantly, but if we hold another Listening Day, and some of those things are still on the list, we might not have hit the mark in places, so it's a group health check.*

Resident A: *It's all right for us to sit about in meetings and say what's got to happen, that's not what it's about. We listen, Listening Event is exactly the right terminology, we listen to residents.*

6. A school that's part of a community

An important part of this consultative process was an individual interview with Nick Bowles, Deputy Head of Dartmouth Academy, who had been unable to get to either of the focus groups. Nick has a powerful vision of the Academy as an active part of the community it belongs to, and this section is devoted to what he had to say. Extracts are presented as recorded.

“We have always been very clear about having links with the community, that it's a school for the community, and the facilities are for the community. One of the key roles I take is linking with community organisations: how do we provide support for each other in moving our students through the process of education, providing them with the best opportunities for life chances when they leave us?

“I attend meetings every month at the Townstal Community Hall. Along with other organisations such as the police, Fire Service, Tor Homes, Guinness Homes, we look at how we can support and help each other, so anything the TCP committee want advertised, they can give to us and we'll put into our weekly newsletter, such as the free running - and we used the same trainer to offer the same opportunities for some of our pupils who live outside the Townstal area.

“The outcomes for students coming from Townstal will be much stronger this year than they were last year: this year there's a definite feel that the place is different. We're challenging perceptions of lack of aspiration within Townstal. Just because it's perceived as a large estate, it doesn't mean that children coming from there can't have great life chances. We will do everything in our remit to make sure that's happening”.

Creating and supporting aspirations

“It's about how we work with the local community, with parents. It's about making it very clear to everybody that this is a place of achievement. The children that you would meet here, even the ones that might play up from time to time, are not bad children. They might have their moments, but I could go and get a couple of our more difficult students who would take you around the school and they would be absolutely cracking ambassadors for us. So it's about how we develop aspirations.

“We don't have a curriculum on the tenth day of each fortnight, we have themed activities. We've had people coming in to talk to the Sixth Form: there's a variety of people coming in and talking about things they've done, like a young man talking about how he set up his own company, and a lady who lived in Plymouth who said she was never going to leave the city, but is now heavily involved in the London Fashion Week: so it's about, how do we portray somebody who comes from that background, not having university parents, who can make that next leap? And for some of our students, they just don't see a world outside of Dartmouth. It's finding those pathways”.

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Shared resources for the whole community

As part of preparation for our new build, we're in talks with Millwood (the developers) and with South Hams Council: do we have the all-weather pitch here on site that can become a community base?

"We are also looking at all our facilities, the key to this is how do we create this to be accessible for parents, and adults during the day to come in and maybe use the restaurant , the library. Everything's down in town: if the Townstal community can come across here - well, at the moment we've got the possibility of the school over there being redeveloped into a doctor's surgery; there's the swimming pool, we're quite happy to have it here and help run it. What we're hoping is that in two years' time, this is never closed, so you've got 24 hours, seven days a week. It sounds a lovely idea, but we want to make it a realistic prospect.

"For some of those parents, they didn't have very good schooling here, and then they think that's all that schooling could ever be, and so it's trying to break those barriers down, so they can come up at any time, and enjoy what's around them rather than think, I hate school. It's a really great vision, and with 400 homes being built around here, the question is 'How do we mould that, how do we make the best of that, move forward and break down those stereotypical views?'

"All of those things are going on at the moment, and we're trying to bring that together so that if somebody comes up and drops their child off, they can go in to the restaurant and have a cup of tea, they can maybe use the computer facilities, or they can go and get a book, there's a whole lot of things, rather than just drop your child off and go".

A curriculum for community

"Two or three times a week we have the senior citizens Silver Surfers, third generation ICT (Information and Communications Technology) classes, so how do you keep those things going, and what do people want us to offer? It seems silly to me that you have a school that has great facilities that are closed.

"At Christmas, Dartmouth Caring brought a lot of senior citizens up and they had a Xmas lunch cooked by our GCSE food technology class. It's that breaking down, so everybody realises actually it doesn't matter where you come from, it's how you behave, it's how you deal with people and talk to people".

Skills and employment opportunity

"We're working with Mitch Tonks, who's one of the renowned restaurant owners in Dartmouth, he's going to be looking at setting up the restaurant in a way that we can also train apprenticeships for cheffing, which is obviously a big need for the area. So how do we support jobs in the area?"

7. What are the challenges for Townstal?

The 2010 Index of Deprivation tells us that Townstal as an area is relatively deprived in most of the core indicators: in or around the poorest tenth of small areas in England in education and employment, and in the poorest fifth in income and health. But how do residents view the needs of their own community?

As we have noted, it sits above Dartmouth town, which is characterised by a degree of affluence, as a retirement destination, a centre for restaurants and yachting, with a large number of holiday homes. As Cllr. Steve Smith put it:

You've got the perception that Dartmouth is a millionaire's playground. It is if you go down by the river. People believe that Dartmouth's all the same, we're not. There's a wide range of unemployed, people on benefits, people that just can't work because of disability, there's a high number living on the estate who are in need, even today. We're going to start a food bank.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

Townstal is not alone in establishing a food bank. Oxfam South West has reported an increase in demand on its food banks, with some reporting a 100% increase on the previous year's total of applications for help.⁴ Daniel believed that the cost of living was of real immediate concern to residents:

The economics are the biggest issue, the cost of petrol, the cost of transport, water, gas, and things like that.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

The level of bus fares were mentioned as a particular problem: taxis could be cheaper for families on the estate.

But the participants were most concerned about the core issues of jobs and housing. A major 'West Dartmouth' residential building project is in the offing, comprising 400 new homes by 2020, 30% of them 'affordable'. This represents an opportunity on both fronts. There was a view that community representatives should be lobbying:

That's where TCP can take a lead, with the town council, over the employment issues, because with this house building that's going to happen, we will have an input to what sort of employment we need. Since 1974 when it ceased to be a borough, the Town Council has lost powers, it can't carry things through. So we need as local councillors to be lobbying with the District Council all the time. With this house-build, the government says, and we've known it all along, we need more social housing, we've got 630 on the waiting list in Dartmouth alone, it's a high proportion. It's in the plan that at least 30% of these new homes will be affordable. The big question is, what price do you call affordable? Dartmouth is a high market value area, so are you going to say to somebody who's on a very low wage, are you going to buy a house that's going to cost you £300,000? We know for a fact that it's not going to be affordable, though they say it is. We've got to have shared ownership schemes. Whoever takes on responsibility, whether it's Tor Homes or Guinness

⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120123/debtext/120123-0002.htm#12012330000868>

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Trust, they've got to take on some financial obligation with the tenant so that as time goes on they can buy back a share and gradually increase it. That's the only way you're going to get onto the property ladder.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

Resident A too saw the issues of jobs and housing as closely linked, and a role for TCP:

With the increased amount of housing planned here, the biggest issue is going to be employment. I know so many families with youngsters who've left school, and they just have to leave the town. Because they can't get a job. And if they can get a job, it's absolutely awful money. I don't know what TCP could do. They need to lure the jobs here before they build the houses. There was light industry, but it's all gone because they can do it cheaper elsewhere. TCP can encourage and cajole for the right way forward.

Steve argued for what amounted to an economic strategy for the area:

Jobs, you've got to have them, you can't have heavy industry because of the road networks, so you're looking at light industry, cottage industries coming here, you're looking at computer-based industries. Then we've got broadband - it's looking good. We need business funding from whoever to kick us off. There's a lot of shops closed down in the town. The building jobs will be offered first to local people, secondly, the affordable housing will be offered to local people first, rather than the whole network they do it in at present, the whole region.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

Having achieved a great deal, it was time to look to the future, and Steve voiced a sense of responsibility:

TCP has helped make it a desirable area, at one time you couldn't wait to get out. I'm looking at the kids that come up here on Saturday night, what's it going to be like for them in 20 years time? It's up to us now to do something about it, because unfortunately, not us personally, but our generation have cocked it up for them.

Cllr. Steve Smith, resident

In terms of crime, we have strong narrative evidence here that Townstal has become a safer place to live in, and this is backed up by the figures. One concern that is emerging from several sources, however, is a high level of domestic violence, which tends not to be discussed openly.

8. What made a difference?

The question was asked, what made a difference in Townstal to get the Partnership moving? Daniel talked about a cumulative process:

It's a domino effect: the county councillor going to Steve, we went to the Academy and I did assemblies for all the students, they heard about the TCP, people on the estate saw the success of the play park, then they saw the TCP could do something, so when we had our first party people were intrigued and came along, that's the social side, and on the other side whenever we have our monthly meeting, Guinness and Tor are talking to each other, they did a walk around the estate, therefore things could be done instantly, so people in Townstal, in Dartmouth, in South Hams, in the County Council, actually see that things can be done.

Daniel Tagg, resident, Chair of the Community Partnership

But most of the answers were about people that got things done in a group:

Julie: Us working together, and having a strong group of residents that are passionate. It's a strong group of doers, not just talkers

Steve: It's worker bees.