

Our Theory of Change: Stronger communities – an evidence-based approach

What is the change we want to see, and why?

We want to see strong, sustainable, inclusive community life in Brighton and Hove. We want to see this because evidence shows that strong communities make the people who live in them happier and healthier.

See On the importance of strong communities, page 4

What is necessary for this change to happen?

We believe a necessary component of a strong community is a vibrant ecosystem of small self-directed community groups. This belief contains an assumption – that bottom up change is more effective than top down developments – that is now so clearly true that it hardly needs evidencing.

See On the importance of small groups, page 4

How does our work support this change?

All of our work is focused on making small groups more able to do what their members want. We work directly and practically with these groups to strengthen them by providing equipment that they tell us they need and information that has proved valuable to them over time. Our advice work is centred on helping groups overcome problems as they encounter them. We offer a collective solution to problems which groups encounter individually. In particular we work with groups which have less access to support: those in areas of social housing or composed of BME or disabled activists. These groups in particular benefit from our practical face-to-face approach.

See On a practical and face-to-face approach, page 4

What is the evidence that our work is effective?

The heavy use of our services is the first and clearest indicator that groups find our help effective: Over 800 groups use us around 3,000 times in the average year. This is underlined by user feedback: in our most recent survey (July 2018) 82% of users said we were the only place they could get the equipment they need and two thirds (68%) reported we were the only support organisation they used. Almost all groups rated our services as excellent.

What are the factors that make us effective?

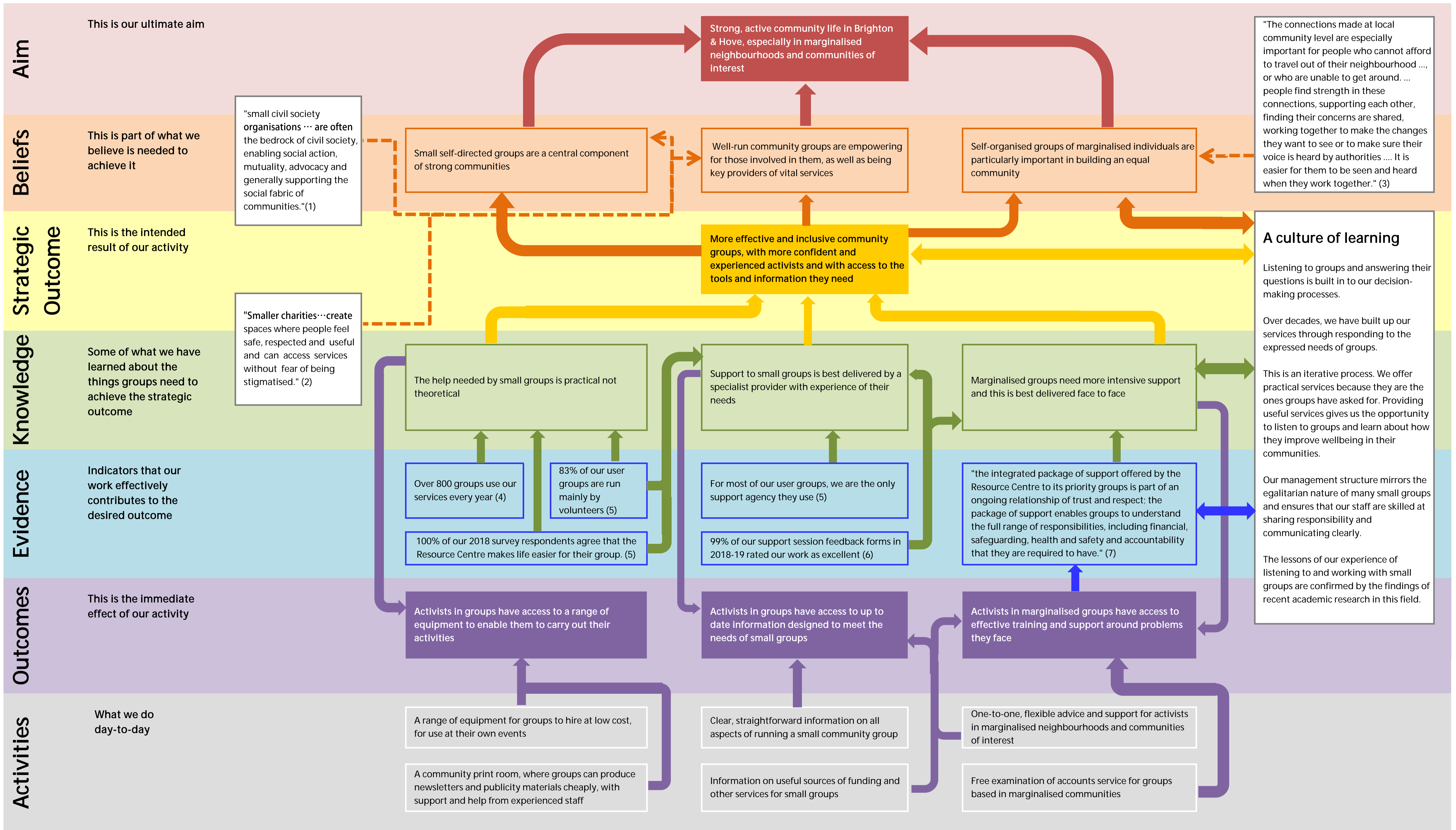
There are three key factors underpinning our effectiveness:

- We have a close and long-lasting relationship with user groups. This is particularly strong with marginalised groups in the city who make up our membership and elect our management committee. This keeps us tightly focused on the needs of small groups.
- We are a listening organisation with a culture of learning from user groups while supporting them. This means we are constantly monitoring our effectiveness and building on what works.
- We have an experienced, stable and committed staff team with the range of skills groups need.

Taken together these mean we have the focus and ability to learn what small groups need to be effective and the skills and confidence to provide it in a form that is useful to them.

Resource Centre Theory of Change

August 2019



Notes

1. http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/taken-for-granted_VCOs_Jan2013_10085.pdf?noredirect=1, p23
2. <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cesr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/value-of-small-summary-final.pdf>
3. <https://www.ivar.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/The-Future-For-Communities-Perspectives-on-power.pdf>
4. <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/about-us/our-achievements/>

5. <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/about-us/what-our-users-think/#SurveyHead>
6. <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/about-us/what-our-users-think/#PriorityHead>
7. <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/MiM-Final-Evaluation-Report-2014.pdf>

Context and research evidence

We work in a lively and diverse city. We also work in a divided city. While the surface image of Brighton and Hove is of an affluent and bustling place, beneath this surface there are many communities – both of place and interest – with members who face multiple problems.

The Resource Centre is led by voluntary group activists from marginalised communities across the city, and has a clear focus on meeting the needs of groups active in these communities.

On the importance of strong communities

'The positive effects of people belonging to social networks can include: low crime rates, less grime, better educational achievement, and better health. A number of these affect whole communities, not just those involved in the networks or groups – everyone benefits from less graffiti and safer places for children to play.'

The Local Wellbeing Project, 2008:

Neighbourliness + Empowerment = Wellbeing, p40
(<http://bit.ly/localwellbeing>)

On a practical and face to face approach

'How frontline groups like to be helped: As with information, the way in which other help is provided is critical. Groups often referred to this, identifying characteristics of the most useful help in the following terms:

- One-to-one work and regular follow up visits.
- Help which points to the pitfalls and guides you and helps you develop.
- Someone to check on your progress.
- Hands on, flexible, tailored and adaptable help.
- A guardian from the outset.
- Someone to help us dream dreams and hold on to the vision and values.
- Help provided locally, to save the time, trouble and cost of travel.
- Free, rather than paid, help.'

Trust for London, 2007: 'Building Blocks - developing second tier support for frontline groups'
(<https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/publications/building-blocks-developing-second-tier-support/>)

On the importance of small groups

'The research findings show that smaller local charities combine three distinctive features in how they support people and communities, which sets them apart from both public-sector providers or larger charities:

Who smaller charities serve and what they do: through plugging gaps left by other organisations; being the 'first responders' to people in crisis, and for creating safe, familiar spaces where people can receive practical support or be quickly linked to other local services because of the charity's local networks.

Examples in the research included the experiences of homeless people and refugees who were not being helped by public services but got the support they needed from small and local charities.

How smaller charities work: building person-centred relationships with clients for longer; being known for their 'open door approach' and understanding of local issues, and for being quick to make decisions because of flatter management structures. and reflecting more closely the diversity of their local communities through their staff and volunteers. Examples in the research included charities providing mental health services that were more welcoming and engaging for people who were turned away from public services because the issues they were facing were too complex or didn't fit those organisations' missions.

The role smaller charities play in their communities: using their well-established and far-reaching networks to act as the 'glue' that holds communities together. Examples in the research include charities helping communities cope better with funding cuts and service fragmentation.'

Lloyds Bank Foundation, June 2018: New research finds 'Size does matter' when addressing complex social issues
(<https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/ourimpact/news/2018/06/18/value-of-small/>)