

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: around 900 groups use us more than 3,000 times in the average year.

This is underlined by user feedback: in our most recent survey (July 2016) 86% of users said we were the only place they could get the equipment they need and more than half (56%) 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?

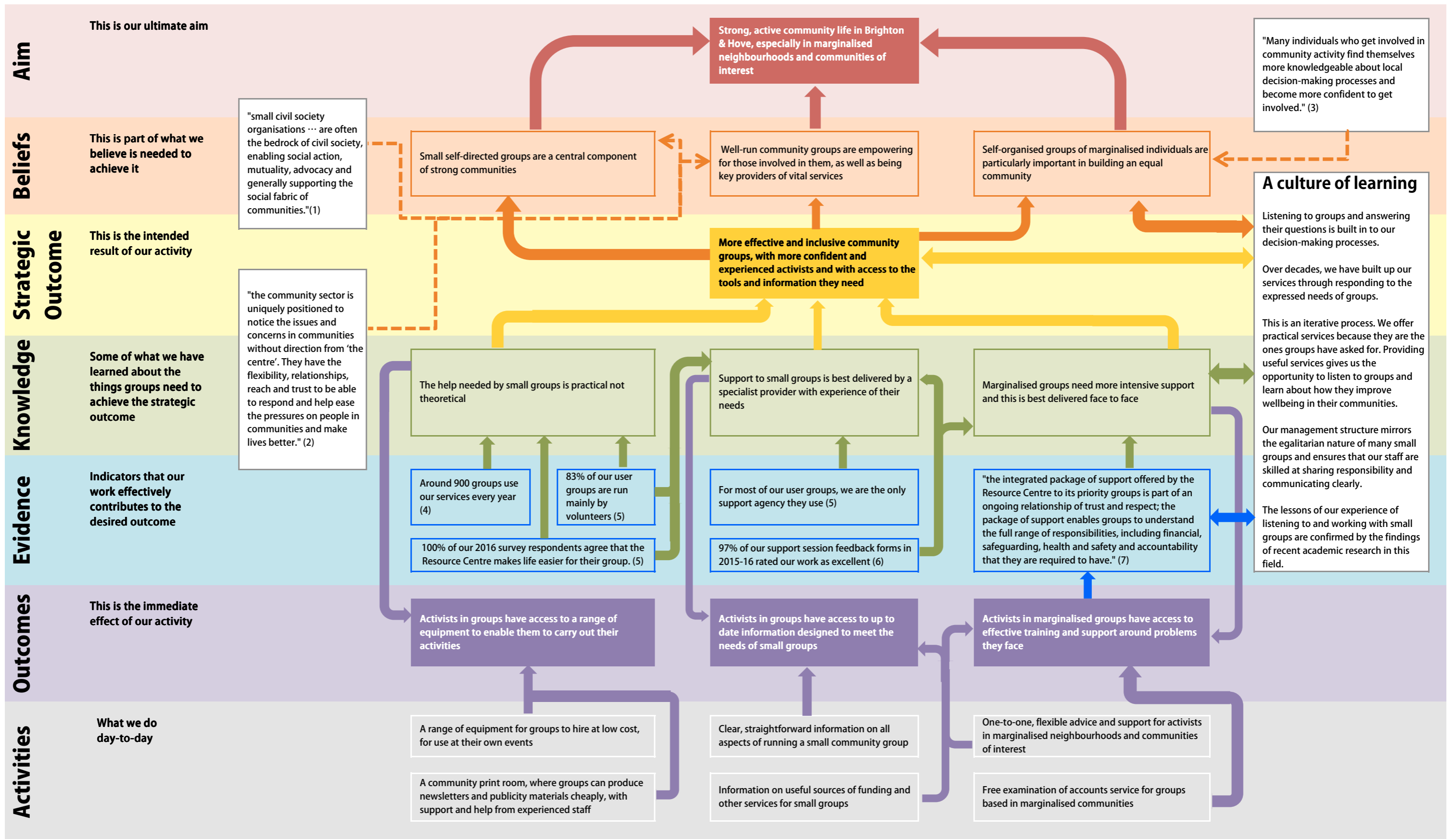
There are three key factors underpinning our effectiveness:

- 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

November 2016



Notes

- http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/taken-for-granted_VCOs_Jan2013_10085.pdf?noredirect=1, p23
- <https://tinyurl.com/tailor-made-cdf>
- <https://tinyurl.com/trust-democracy-cdf>
- <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/about-us/our-achievements-2015-16/detailed-usage-figures-2015-16/>

- <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/survey-report-2016.pdf>
- <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/about-us/what-our-users-think/>
- <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.

This is reflected in the 2010 Index of Deprivation, where Brighton and Hove ranks 66th out of 326 authorities and 12% of the city's areas were within the 10% most deprived in England.

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 the importance of small groups

'Interviewees identified three levels of impact for below the radar groups and activities:

Individual: overcoming social isolation and promoting the health and mental well-being of members.

Group/community: delivering small scale services at the local level, sustaining cultural identities, breaking down barriers to social cohesion and acting as advocates for marginalised communities.

Societal: individually the impact of below the radar groups was seen as limited. However, at a wider societal level, that impact was seen as cumulative. Community based activity was therefore vital to a vibrant democracy, ensuring that (where possible) policy and services responded to 'actual community needs' and were reported as 'the bedrock' of an active, healthy and diverse civil society.'

Third Sector Research Centre, 2010:

Understanding the distinctiveness of small scale, third sector activity: the role of local knowledge and networks in shaping below the radar actions, page 3

(<http://bit.ly/tsrc-33>)

On a practical and face to face approach

'Where support is needed, the greatest need for smaller voluntary organisations and groups is face-to-face support, often one-to-one and often out of hours – in particular to suit volunteers. Many BME organisations find it particularly difficult to communicate their needs and get useful information, especially (but not solely) where no member speaks/reads/writes fluent English. Again, local and face-to-face support is most helpful here. This came through strongly in both the primary and secondary research.'

NACVA, 2016:

Commission on the Future of Local Infrastructure, p25
(<http://bit.ly/navca-infra>)

'Seeing and doing for most groups was a physical activity whereby they visited a person or a group who could teach them what they needed to know. ... It is interesting to note that in developing and using those networks the focus tended to be upon the person helping them, rather than their employing organisation.'

Third Sector Research Centre, 2012:

Seeing and doing: learning, resources and social networks below the radar, p11-12

(<http://bit.ly/tsrc-91>)

More about the Resource Centre

We provide five key services:

- Community print room
- Equipment hire
- Information on funding and running groups
- Advice and support for our member groups
- Accounts examinations and help with managing money for member groups

See www.resourcecentre.org.uk for full details