

How is collective control developing among residents involved in the Big Local programme?

Overview

The amount of control that people have over their lives is increasingly recognised to be important for health.

At the collective level, empowerment refers to situations in which members of communities – defined by shared interests or shared location – have control over things that affect them. This includes the extent that residents can influence the decisions taken about local services and amenities in their neighbourhood.

Existing research has considered the impacts for health of individual or personal control. Yet less is known about this at the collective level. While one marker of collective control might be increasing numbers of residents reporting they feel able to influence decisions, the development of control may be evident in other ways. For example, the emergence of new community groups and networks with shared interests could be another indicator of control developing in neighbourhood settings.

Under the place based programme Big Local, residents of 150 areas in England decide how at least one million pounds should be used to make a positive difference to their area.

As part of the Communities in Control study, researchers carried out fieldwork in Big Local areas exploring how control was developing and experienced among groups of residents involved in local decision making.

Communities in Control study Research summary #1

Key findings from Phase 1

- As local resident led partnerships became established and achieved early successes, confidence in their ability to affect change has grown. There were numerous examples where residents involved were developing or pooling skills and knowledge to address local issues.
- Increasingly residents felt more able to work with other organisations to take action. This has included developing new connections or building upon existing links with other organisations.
- The research found tangible changes arising from resident led action, for example communities 'claiming back' land that was due to be sold to a developer, taking over buildings to use as community hubs and venues, or negotiating to use these spaces at discounted rates.
- The process of arriving at consensus in groups was often described as challenging and has sometimes made existing tensions in communities worse.
- The research highlighted how experiences of control fluctuated and changed over periods of time. For example, running a successful event could build up confidence, but unsuccessful events or stagnation and conflict could lead to frustration or stress.
- Sometimes, these experiences meant that some residents lost confidence in the programme and disengaged from the process temporarily or permanently.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The Communities in Control study

The independent research is investigating the health and social impacts of Big Local and aims to draw out lessons for the development of future community initiatives.

Two preliminary phases (2014/17) were funded by NIHR School for Public Health Research and gathered evidence on the early implementation of Big Local and early health and social impacts of the programme.

Phase 3 is funded by the NIHR Public Health Research Programme. It builds on these earlier stages, to investigate longer-term health and social outcomes for individuals and local populations living in Big Local areas.

About Big Local

Big Local is a Lottery funded place based programme rolled out in 150 areas in England over at least ten years, managed by Local Trust (www.locatrust.org.uk)

In each area, residents have control over decision making about how funding is used to address neighbourhood priorities, whether this relates to the environment, the economy, social relationships or area reputation. Big Local could improve health and wellbeing by empowering people to have more control over their lives and by improving the local determinants of health in these areas.

This is one in a series of summaries reporting findings from the research

1. How collective control is developing
2. The role of money
3. Social contexts
4. Spaces for participation
5. Improving area reputations
6. Newspaper coverage and Big Local

Graphic narratives of health inequalities and local action



Read this online booklet by the illustrator Joe Decie, inspired by residents in Big Local areas.

Visit the new website

Browse, watch and download further resources from the study

www.communitiesincontrol.uk

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