



# Connecting with your Community

Understanding the views and experiences of people with  
lived experience about accessing their local community.

Looking at the good life, the benefits and the barriers  
of community

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This report was facilitated and produced by the Wiltshire CIL User Engagement Team, under a contract with Wiltshire Council, to provide a Wiltshire Engagement Service.

The User Engagement Team works alongside people with lived experience of health and social care services to support, encourage and facilitate them to have their say, ensuring that their voices are heard and that they are able to contribute and influence how services are shaped and developed in Wiltshire.

The User Engagement Team uses creative and interactive ways of engaging with people, co-producing each piece of work uniquely, to value the authentic voice of all service users.

## Connecting with your Community

### 3 Key messages

'Community' is represented by the relationships people have and the connections they make with others, not by a physical place.



Relationships and social connections are the most important elements that make up a good life for people.



To be part of their community people need support that is delivered in a relational way. They also need communities to be accessible and accepting.



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# 1. Introduction

This report analyses the results of an online survey (Google Forms) that gathered the views of people with lived experience about accessing their local community.

This piece of work focuses on people's views and experiences of their community including what is important to people and how this relates to community access and what support people would benefit from to enable them to be part of their community.

The participants for the survey were sourced through Richmond Fellowship and wider promotion throughout Wiltshire via social media and Wiltshire CIL contacts.

This enabled us to get a broad range of participation and engagement to help Wiltshire Council formulate recommendations and conclusions for future services.

This work was carried out at the request of Wiltshire Council to support the review of the Wiltshire Recovery & Social Inclusion service delivered by Richmond Fellowship.

Aim – the purpose of this work was to understand what community means to people, why people engage with their community, the benefits of doing so and to identify any barriers people experience when accessing their community.

## 2. Methodology

At the time of carrying out this piece of work the United Kingdom as well as the rest of the world is experiencing the effects of the Covid-19 Virus.

Due to the social distancing measures that are currently in place we have, like many other organisations, had to adapt how we work to the circumstances that we are in.

For this piece of work, we used an online survey (Google Forms) over a period of 2 weeks from 2<sup>nd</sup> June to 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

The survey consisted of 8 questions. There were a variety of types of questions including ratings, multiple choice and open-ended questions as each individual's experience is unique.

The survey was designed to be short; it took between 5-10 minutes to complete.

Richmond Fellowship and Wiltshire CIL staff supported those that do not have access to the internet to complete the survey over the telephone.

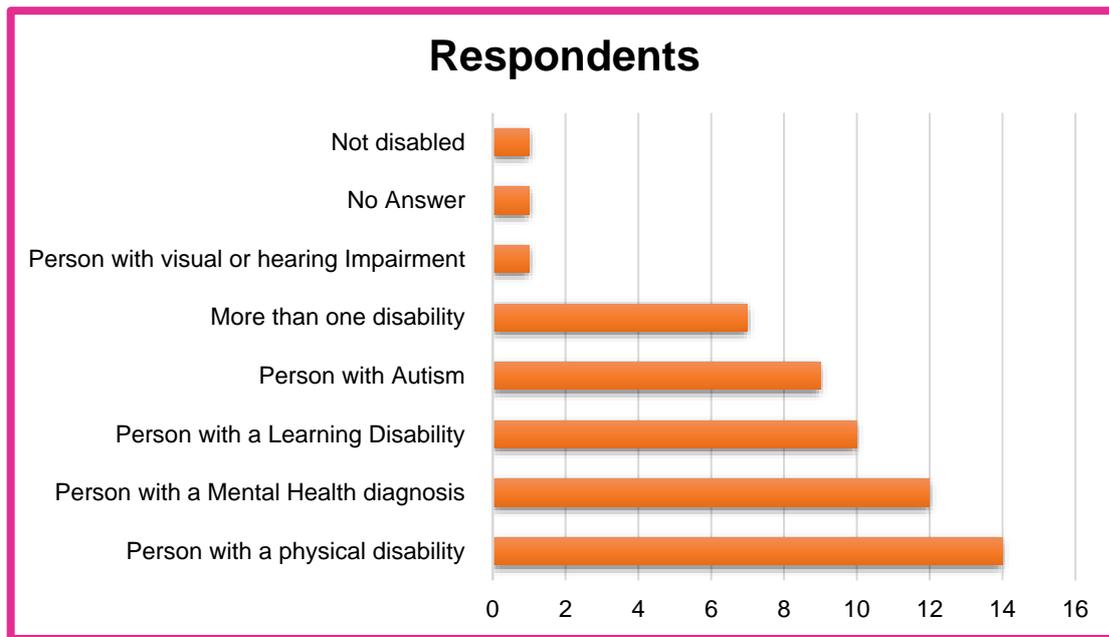
The screenshot shows a Google Form titled "Engaging with your Local Community". The form is from the Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living and asks for views on accessing the local community. It includes a demographic question with radio button options for physical, mental health, learning, autism, and visual/hearing impairments, plus an "Other" field. There are two open-ended questions about "good life" and "community" meanings. The final question is a Likert scale about the importance of being able to access the local community, with five options: Not at all important, Slightly important, Important, Fairly important, and Very important.

### Appendix A: Full list of questions

### 3. Respondents

A total of 55 responses were received to the survey.

The survey respondents were asked how they would describe themselves in terms of their disability:



The largest group of people completing the survey were those who identified themselves as a person with a physical disability (14) closely followed by those with a Mental Health diagnosis (12).

10 of those who completed the survey described themselves as a person with a learning disability and 9 as a person with Autism.

There were 7 people who selected 'other' to describe themselves as they had more than one disability, for example one respondent described themselves as **a person with Autism, Learning Disabilities and mental health** and another described themselves as a person **having childhood Autism, PTSD, SPD, depression, anxiety, stress, as well as other issues, plus other mental/physical health problems.**

One respondent described themselves as a person with a visual or hearing impairment. There was one person who did not answer this question and one person who described themselves as **not disabled.**



Having something to do and being active also contributed to the 'good life', this might be a physical activity and **football, dancing or singing** were all given as an example, as well as social activities in the community such as going to the **pub, shopping, and gigs**. **A job and having work** were also cited as contributors to a good life, especially as they also provided financial independence, having a **busy mind** and **feeling fulfilled**.

It is worth noting that the types of activities people liked to be involved in also strengthen their relationships and provided extended social networks and connections.

Being aware of and taking notice of your health and wellbeing contributed towards a good life. Being **healthy, pain free, having no anxiety** and **stress free** were all important. People also recognised how their attitude and lifestyle played a role in having a good life and found that being **positive** and having a **non-complicated life** helped but that this can be **challenging**.

To support positive wellbeing people needed to be in environments that weren't stressful, this included living in a **safe, secure, and good home** having a **garden** and a **clean house** and for some, being where there were **no loud noises** and **no crowds**.



**shared goal**, a place where people **give (their) time**. and **help each other** out and a place where there is a sense of **togetherness**.

The qualities of the community all related to how people interacted with each other; and one of the most used terms for what people wanted from other community members was '**friendly**', other attitudes such as being **caring/kind**, **accepting/welcoming**, **respectful**, **polite** and **inclusive** were also important. These values and attitudes gave people a sense of **belonging** to their community, of **equality**, **empowerment**, and **opportunity**.

### Geography

For a handful of people community was purely about geography, it is not necessarily what is in someone's community that is important to them it is more about where their community is that is important.

Community for some was about their **local area**, their **nearest location** or the **small village** within which they lived.

For one person, their community was being **outside of (their) home** for another it was about **knowing their area** and for someone else it was about being **able to get around**.

### No Community

The way that the majority of people described what community meant to them was very positive, they had a good outlook on what their community meant to them.

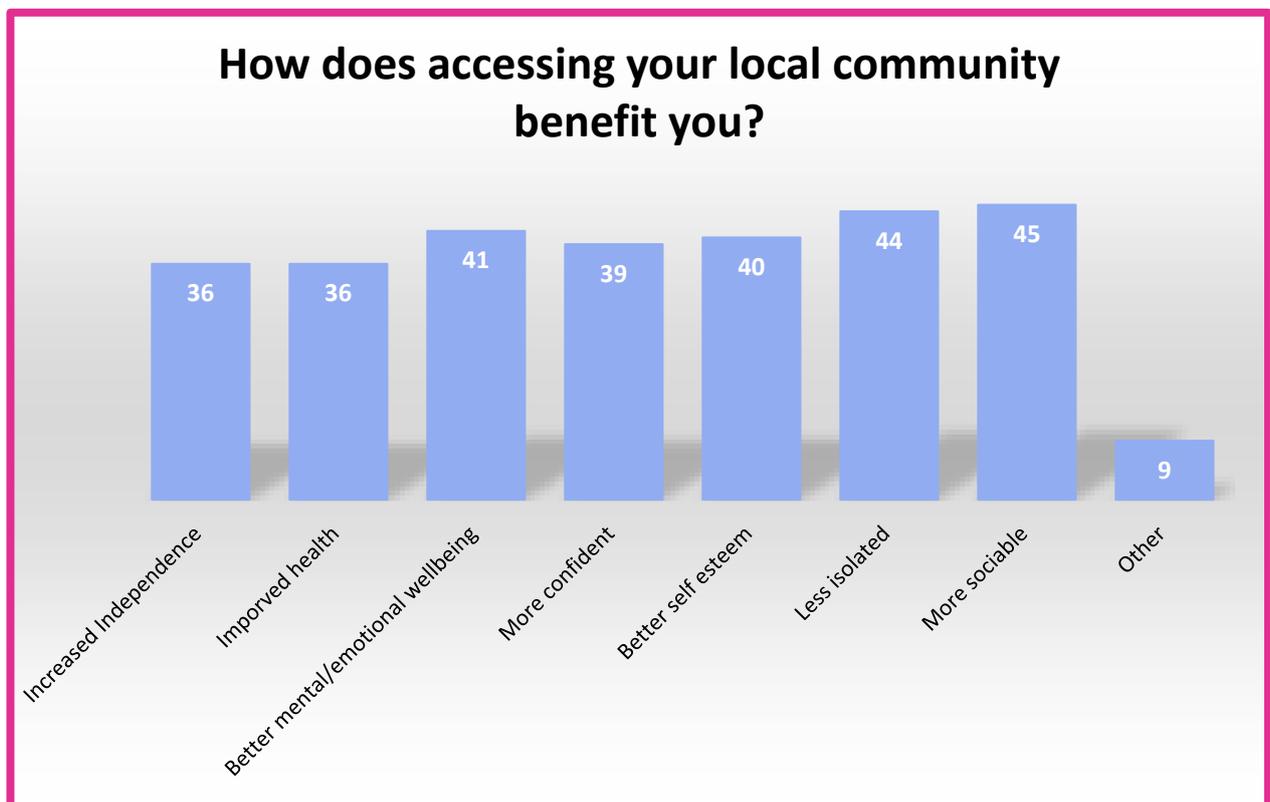
There are, however, a group of people for whom community does not represent good, positive experiences. For 1 in 10 people who completed the survey community had negative connotations for them.

Some felt that there was **not any (community) in Wiltshire** or that there was **nothing anymore** in terms of a community.

For some their community represented a **scary**, **ugly**, **lonely** place that is **sometimes unhelpful**. One person also described how their community is **sleepy**.

## 6. Why is the community important?

When asked why being able to access the community was important to people the biggest benefits related to relationships with others, e.g. being **more sociable**; 82%. The positive external affects that community relationships had on people is linked to their internal feelings and wellbeing; with 75% of people feeling that they experienced **better mental/emotional wellbeing** and 73% of people saying how accessing their community gave them **better self-esteem**. Accessing the community also gave people a direction, another key element of the 'good life' **I would just like to have a life, like other people, and a sense of purpose**.



People were also asked to respond to a number of statements rating the value they placed on being part of their community (Appendix B). The responses to these statements show the importance people place on being an active and valued participant in community life:

- Half of the respondents (27/53) placed significant importance on having support to access their community

- 43 of the 52 respondents rated being part of their community as either **very important**, **fairly important** or **important** to them
- Over half of the respondents (28/53) rated the importance of being valued by their local community as **very important**.
- One in two people rated being accepted by their community as **very important** (27/53).

Those that placed very minimal importance on being part of their local community were those that tended to have a negative outlook on what community meant to them. They viewed their community as **small, too busy, scary, ugly, lonely** and for some of them community did **not exist** at all for them.



- Lack of Opportunity

There were two people out of the 53 who answered this question who felt that they did not experience any barriers to accessing their community.

### Physical Barriers

Physical barriers accounted for 19 out of the 71 answers given by respondents. The types of physical barriers that people experienced centred around general **access** to the community.

**Rough, bumpy uneven ground for wheelchair(s)** caused problems for some.

Another described how the **fact I am in a wheelchair** is their biggest barrier to accessing their community. Access to suitable **toilet** facilities caused issues and prevented people from being able to access their community.

For some people, it was their **physical health** or **mobility** that was their biggest barrier to being able to access their community. For others it was their disability that became a barrier for them accessing the community, one person described how **a short 15-minute trip outside causes 3 days of severe illness** for them.

People experienced barriers with communication and found **not being able to communicate** or **visual and hearing aspects** being a barrier for them.

Physical barriers around **travelling** caused problems for some. Specifically, one person described how **able-body people parking in the disabled parking space** was a particular barrier for them.

The **environment and sounds** caused barriers for some when accessing the community. One person highlighted **needing plenty of space** and how not being able to have this due to the physical restrictions of the environment created a barrier to them accessing the community.

### Psychological Barriers

There were many psychological barriers described by the survey respondents; they accounted for 26 out of the 71 answers given.

Many of these barriers were around peoples own psychological state. **Anxiety and lack of confidence** featured most highly as barriers.

The attitudes and behaviours of others acted as a barrier to some people accessing their community as their sense of self-worth was affected. Some described **the hate** and the **ignorance** of others as a barrier. Experiences such as **‘people treat(ing) the disabled people like a baby’** and the feelings of **‘other people staring at me’** all had a negative impact.

### Lack of Resources

11 out of the 71 of answers given about barriers to accessing the community were about the lack of resources people felt they had.

The biggest barrier was having **no support** to enable and facilitate people being able to access their local community. This led to people feeling that they were then **having to rely on others all the time**.

Resources such as **finances** played a role as a barrier for some as did not being able to **find the right information**.

Professional practices were noted by some as a barrier to them accessing the community, such as the feelings and experience of having to overcome **red tape** which is restrictive or negotiating and navigating **moving goal posts**.

### Lack of Opportunities

Almost 1 in 5 of people’s answers around barriers to accessing the community centred around lack of opportunities that people felt they had in their community.

For a third of these people (5/14) the lack of opportunities they were experiencing were due to the **Covid-19** pandemic and the lockdown.

In general people were finding that there was a lack of things for them to do in their community, respondents described how there is **no places for me to go**, there are **no planned activities** and that they felt like there is **nothing for my age group**.

There was a suggestion again from some about there not being a sense of community in Wiltshire for them to be part of - **Trowbridge has very little sense of community**.

There was also an observation from one person about how **services shutting** decreases opportunities in their community and is their barrier to being able to be part of their local community.



## People

People play a huge and important role in supporting people to access their community. Almost a third of the answers about what good support to access the local community looked like involved people (22/74)

The single biggest example that the respondents gave about what constitutes good support was around having a **support worker / people to support** them. Many of the respondents talked about support from a support worker or a Personal Assistant in a broad sense such as **having someone to support me** or having **people who support me**.

There were a variety of other people whom the respondents identified as playing a role in providing good support to access their community, these included **friends** or **a buddy**. There was a feeling that generally **meeting people** and **people getting together** played a role in shaping what good support looked like. The benefits of having someone with you to access the community were highlighted by some, such as **not having to go to places alone, being able to get out and about**. This supports the definition of community as relationships and connections, and the important role that it plays in enabling a person to live their good life.

Having a visible presence of **Police** and **uniformed support in public** offered reassurance to some. One person also highlighted the important role their local shop keeper had in providing good support for them in their local community - **getting information from shopkeepers**.

## Relational support

People defined good support as support that is delivered in a relational way; by this we mean that the person providing the support needed to do more than just fulfil the practical elements of the role; they needed to connect with the person on a personal level and develop a good relationship with the person.

Key qualities that support workers needed were to be **'friendly'** and **understanding**. **Someone that understands that I am me and may not ever change, respectful, considerate** and **trustworthy**. **Good people I can trust that are in my life, someone you have confidence in, good communication** and **non-judgemental**.

It was highlighted by some that having support from someone who they can relate to and can relate to them was very important. One person said that they **would love to have support from a young male**

**support worker rather than having to rely on my lovely, but "uncool" mum.** Having support from someone **who likes me** was important as was being supported by **someone who I can call a friend.**

For some having the right support had a huge impact on their lives, it gave them hope as it enabled them to feel that **there was a possibility I might fit** or of **other people accepting me.**

To support this relational way of working people wanted **continuity; knowing I would have the same person** and flexibility: **having help when needed** and a **PA/carer flexible times for things.**

Having support from people who were informed and well organised also contributed to what good support looked like. Having **3 months planned dates of meetings and activities**, having local knowledge; **knowing about local events, identifying where I could become involved** and **someone to help me go to the groups.**

People talked about having specific support to learn new skills that would help them be part of the community. Examples including travel training – **learn how to catch a bus by myself, easier to understand timetables** and support **to cross over the road** and how to interact with others; one person described how having support **with my vision and hearing when meeting new people**, whilst another felt that support around **copng with rejection and not being accepted** would be of most help to them.

## Community

There was a recognition amongst the respondents that their local community played a role in making support good for people.

Of particular importance was the community being accessible. Being **'accessible without a fuss... drop curbs and benches'** had an impact.

What was on offer in local communities also impacted on good support, people needed **affordable events** to go to and **a choice of groups** and things to do in their community. Having information and updates on the

## Relational support:

Friendly

Understanding

Respectful

Supportive

Good communication

Trust

Continuity and flexibility

**latest news, updates on what is new and improved** in your area would be helpful. Having **local knowledge** or **having someone let me know face to face, over the phone or via e-mail what is available** or a **local community leaflet or brochure** would be most helpful for some.

It was also recognised that the community plays a role in the safety of its residents and having **safe places to go to when in trouble** was of particular importance to some.

There was a message from some of the respondents about utilising what we have in the community already and that what is available is providing good support. There was a sense that people felt that we should **support clubs we have** in our communities.

### **My Resources**

As well as the support that is provided by other people and communities individuals also hold many tools and resources themselves that contribute towards what good support looks like for them.

People wanted to retain control over what they do, who supports them and directing how they are supported, one person recognised that **having the right support but with me being in control of that** was the most important thing that defined what good support looked like to them.

Some recognised how their own personal attitude and approach impacted on what good support looked like for them. They found **being proactive** helped as did **checking on each other**.

It was identified by some that they held practical items that facilitated good support for them such as having a **bus pass**, or a **passport**. One person reflected about how having access to a recognised national support system was beneficial to them but that it also had limitations – **'Sunflower Lanyard helps when shopping, but a lot of people don't recognise it'**.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this work was to understand what community means to people, and how best to support them to be part of their communities. The findings are based on the responses of 55 people taking part in an online survey.

The findings show that 'community' is where relationships are formed and sustained and that relationships are key to people's idea of a good life.

People strongly valued being able to be part of their community, and it was of high importance to them. They faced both physical and psychological barriers to accessing their community that need to be addressed.

### **Recommendations:**

- 'Community' to be defined by the relationships and connections people have
- Service design and strategy needs to recognise that being meaningfully connected to a community is essential to a person's well being
- Communities need to be fully accessible and safe for people who face physical and psychological barriers
- If support is needed to help a person to be part of their community then this support needs to be delivered in a relational way, and led by the person being supported
- There needs to be purpose and value to peoples' experiences of community.

# Appendix A

## Survey Questions –

1. I would describe myself as (multiple choice)
  - Person with a physical disability
  - Person with a mental health diagnosis/condition
  - Person with a learning disability
  - Person with autism
  - Person with a visual or hearing impairment
  - Other (please specify)
2. What word(s) would you use to describe what a 'good life' looks like to you?
3. What word(s) would you use to describe what 'community' means to you?
4. How important would you rate the following statements:
  - Being able to access my local community
  - Having support to access my local community
  - Feeling part of my local community
  - Being accepted by my local community
  - Being valued by my local community

(Scale – not at all important, slightly important, important, fairly important, very important)
5. What is your biggest barrier to accessing your local community?
6. What does good support to access your local community look like for you?
7. What would be the one thing that you would find most helpful when being supported to access your local community?
8. How does accessing your local community benefit you? tick all that apply
  - Increased independence
  - Improved health
  - Better mental / emotional wellbeing
  - More confident
  - Better self-esteem
  - Less isolated
  - More sociable
  - Other (please specify)

## Appendix B

Responses to Q4. How important would you rate the following statements:

