




The
visible
difference



"We are in a culture which increasingly moves people away from community values. What you end up with is lonely people, violence, danger, fear... communities have a much better chance of negotiating those problems in life than individuals."

Member of Bonnington Centre Community Association, London

"A house is just a house... but a community is where you can rely on other people to look out for you."

Member of Royds Community Association, Bradford

"For those of us who were born outside the West Indies, the value of this community association is to keep certain traditions alive, to integrate with others and to teach them about our community."

Member of Derby West Indian Community Association

The vibrant, modern role of community associations

Community associations are multi-purpose organisations, which are firmly rooted within their community and give people more control over their lives.

They are managed by local people who come together through a shared interest such as children and play, housing, the local environment, health, young people's development, older people's needs, local economic development, the needs of minority groups or sports, art and leisure activities.



Many associations also manage a building, which hosts a wide and varied timetable of different activities for every section of the community.

Each community association is different because they reflect local issues and priorities, yet they all share key strengths and principles which help to bring about their greatest achievement: a more cohesive community with a sense of pride in itself.

Many associations began several decades ago and over the years they have quietly carried on their work, weathering the changes in priority and cuts in funding of successive Governments, to emerge as a strong network and a stable, mature force for change in the 21st century.



Sense of community

"More and more the community association sees itself as being able to facilitate things for the community. If there are issues or problems at a Government level or an individual level, it provides a forum for people to come together and deal with the problems in their lives"

Member of Bonnington Centre
Community Association, London



"Community to me means everyone – no exclusions of age, gender, race or culture".

Member of North East Mitcham
Community Association, London



"The community association provides a forum for people to come together and deal with the problems in their lives"

Member of Bonnington Centre
Community Association, London



"We set up this community association to invigorate the community."

Member of Hundleton Community Association, Pembrokeshire.

There are over 4,000 community associations in England and Wales with more than 50,000 volunteers. They're most evident in areas of general deprivation where they work to address issues of disadvantage and exclusion in their locality.

Community associations:

- harness the ideas, skills and commitment of local people to improve the quality of life in their communities
- provide valuable services
- make a vital contribution to personal development and local democracy
- are one of the most representative and responsive forms of democracy in Britain today.



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Voice

They provide a **voice** for local concerns and for people whose views may not always be heard

Independent

They are **independent** and politically neutral organisations with a powerful commitment to democratic principles.

Service

They are a provider of **services** for local people.

Initiator

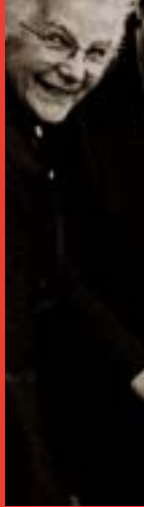
They are an **initiator** of projects that respond to local needs.

These seven principles spell out the community association vision:



Builder

They are a **builder** of partnerships with other local organisations and groups.



Local

They provide a strong **local** network of people and organisations working together and supporting each other



Engage

They provide ways of **engaging** and encouraging people to become active in their communities.



to make communities and the people in them **VISIBLE**.

A dynamic vision for the 21st century

"Britain is ready to rebuild a sense of community, common purpose and shared promise, to give new energy to the traditions of self help and mutual aid." Prime Minister Tony Blair in his speech 'The Active Community' 21 January 1999.

The importance of active community involvement

Britain's deprived communities are now the focus of a major Government regeneration programme which aims to reduce unemployment and crime levels and improve education, public health and housing to transform neighbourhoods across the country.

Its success will lie in local people being able to play an active and effective role in shaping government decisions and in planning and delivering local services.



With community involvement, projects will accurately target local needs and be more acceptable to the local community, because they are likely to feel a greater sense of ownership.

Governments, both locally and nationally, should recognise the unique contribution community associations can make in forging ahead with this new era in social policy.



How community associations can play a vital role

- With at least one community association in 85 of England's 88 Neighbourhood Renewal areas, they are ideally placed to play a vital role in this new initiative.
- Most have experience of working in partnership and are committed to democratically representing the views of local people.
- Their multi-purpose nature will help to produce a more joined-up response to the diverse strands of modern neighbourhood regeneration programmes and their flexible constitution allows plenty of scope to respond.
- Their members also have first class local knowledge and because they live in the area they'll have a strong personal stake in the outcome of any programmes.
- Community associations managing a community building are particularly suited to develop their role as providers of community education. They should be encouraged to participate in the Government's Learning Centres and UK Online programmes, which aim to attract new learners from deprived and disconnected community groups.
- If community associations are to play a full part in the new plans to regenerate our communities it must be remembered that they are mostly run by volunteers and shouldn't have to bear heavy administrative or regulatory burdens.
- Community Capacity Building measures should also be put in place to empower associations to play a full role in partnership groups such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), where many decisions about priorities and funding will be taken.

The way forward

With their unrivalled expertise in providing effective solutions for their communities, community associations can and must play a powerful role in delivering the new policy initiatives at a local level.

Now is the time to tap into their experience, energy and expertise. It is in the interests of all of us to make the new vision of community associations a reality. By maximising community involvement everyone wins.

Let's work together to make it happen.



For more information about the VISIBLE model
for community associations, please contact:

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Community Matters is the nationwide federation for community associations and similar organisations, with over 1,000 member organisations across the UK. Originally established in 1945, Community Matters plays a key role in promoting and supporting action by ordinary people in response to social, educational and recreational needs in their communities.

Our vision is for healthy, sustainable communities in which everyone can play their full part.

Our aims are to listen to, support and guide community organisations and promote and represent them at national level.



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