



Mani Thapa,
Community Development Officer
with Refugee Action

Please explain your job as simply as possible

I work with about 30 refugee community organisations (RCOs) in Leeds.

A typical week

Refugee community groups have particular needs, and working with them takes time. Things can't happen overnight. Most of the groups are very new and rely on people giving their free time; they don't have staff or office space. It's quite hard for the groups to survive, especially as funding streams get tighter and tighter.

Refugees are also often traumatised when they come here. They also have to learn about what's expected from community groups in this country, and the social and cultural expectations. For example, I support the groups with making sure the process of setting up is transparent, and the constitution is OK.

I also work with them to ensure they understand issues like women's rights and children's rights, because that situation might be very different in their home country. Maybe it's easier to hear that sort of thing from someone like me rather than someone from the council. I came here as a refugee myself, so I understand some of the issues they face.

One of the things I've done is help set up a Refugee Forum. The RCOs now come together in a group and talk about their issues, what action they want to take and how to make a strong voice.

For example, many of the issues that the RCOs face involve government policies or council policies. If you go as individuals or an individual group, you can get lost in the system and be dismissed more easily. But if we come as a body that comprises nearly 30 groups then the council or whoever will take a lot more notice. You can make things happen through collective working.

In the past the RCOs were working alone. But now the Forum is acting like a magnet – it's bringing resources and ideas together to help solve problems and improve services.

What would you most like people to understand about community development?

Community development can be quite an invisible job, but the relationship you build with groups over the months or years is vital. By getting to know different groups, you can identify the issues they face and where they can work together.

We have strategic bodies at one level, and the communities and grassroots activity at another level, and community development work is somewhere in the middle. If you take that out, the structures will collapse; the issues which need to be addressed by the policy makers just won't reach them.

Want to find out more?

Community Development Exchange

0114 241 2760
www.cdx.org.uk

Federation for Community Development Learning

0114 253 6770
www.fcdl.org.uk

Community Development Foundation

020 7833 1772
www.cdf.org.uk



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Community development in action



Sandy Coyle,
Active Communities Manager,
Dacorum Borough Council

Please explain your job as simply as possible

I help people to identify things, good and bad, that affect their lives. Then I help them come up with ideas and activities to help them hang on to the good things or lessen the problems. I try to do this in an enjoyable way that brings people together. I help put people in touch with others who could help them.

A typical week

I manage a team of community development workers, known as 'Active Communities Officers'. As a team we're working on 61 projects in

Community development is an occupation, both paid and unpaid, which aims to build active and influential communities based on justice, equality and mutual respect.

Community development practitioners work in a range of settings and sectors. The profiles in this information sheet give a flavour of the diverse contexts in which community development workers use their knowledge and skills to help build strong and sustainable communities.

total. I'm currently working on ten local projects and three international ones – it's quite a lot to juggle!

As well as individual projects, I keep an eye on funding opportunities and emerging social policy issues and keep others up to date. I do the necessarily organisational admin, answer too many e-mails and attend too many meetings. I support my manager with work around performance management, the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreements.

I make sure I 'escape' the office at least three times a week to talk with local community activists, or visit schools. This provides opportunities to encourage networking and sharing information. I also attend at least one community meeting per week in the evening.

I talk to each member of the team at least once a week, either face to face or on the phone as they're often out in the community rather than in the office.

At the weekend I do voluntary work,

with a local social enterprise involved in family learning activities.

Please describe what you feel makes your work specifically 'community development'

All my work is based on the values and principles of community development. Although it often fits in with local and national government priorities, the work is driven by local people in local communities. It's important that my involvement as a community development worker can be flexible and responsive to community issues and their changing priorities, rather than having to address the agendas of employers or funders.

What would you most like people to understand about community development?

Empowering others does not diminish your power - it just brings everyone up a notch. It's very cost effective - investing in one community development worker will pay dividends by increasing communities' resources.



Keith Levy, Small Groups Advisor at Voluntary Action Sheffield

Please explain your job as simply as possible

I work with people to organise activities or services that will benefit themselves or others.

A typical day

I arrive at VAS late morning and check emails, open post and respond to any answer-machine messages. These tasks are interspersed with chat with colleagues about funders, football and fudge cake! I have three meetings on this

particular day. The first is a meeting with a member of a Women's Group who has asked for advice on how to approach an interview she is going to have with a funder. She has never been interviewed before. I ask her some 'mock interview' questions and feed back on how she did.

Next, I go to meet with the Chair of a young people's group to discuss a series of issues affecting how the group operates. We draw up a list of priorities which will be put to the group's full committee for endorsement and action. Then it's back to VAS to write up the visits and log any significant work done in the day by either phone or email.

My final meeting is in the early evening with a group of migrant workers who have formed a community association. We discuss their action plan, written in response to research carried out into the needs

of members. I provide information on committee training, finding premises and sources of funding to help the association achieve the objectives of the action plan.

Returning to the office I write up notes on my last meeting, check for any new emails or phone messages and head off home.

Please describe what you feel makes your work specifically 'community development'.

It is the commitment to enabling people 'to do for themselves' which makes what I do community development.

What would you most like people to understand about community development?

Working together, ordinary people can make positive changes that increase opportunities and improve material conditions for themselves and their communities.

Key points

- Community development work is all about empowerment and sustainability. It involves helping people learn how to 'do it for themselves', so that skills and structures can outlive the end of a particular initiative or project.
- Community development work is driven by communities themselves. The outcomes of community development work often contribute to broader policy objectives, such as safer or greener communities, but the work always starts with issues that communities themselves identify as important and meaningful.
- Community development work is about building foundations. Inclusive and effective community involvement – in local decision-making, asset ownership or campaigning – relies on the skills, groups and networks that community development work helps to build.

Key roles and skills for community development workers have been identified in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Community Development Work. You can find out more about the NOS at www.lluk.org or from the Federation for Community Development Learning: 0114 273 9391.



Amanda Buckenham, Community Volunteer on the Oxmoor in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire

Please explain your job as simply as possible

Think of the area you live in (community) as a garden. My job (community development worker) is like a gardener. I give the garden the help and care it needs to grow and be a happy place for everyone to come to, have fun and feel safe.

A typical week

Monday: Run a parents support group. We build up parents' trust and confidence and help them move on to other groups in the area. Sometimes we do a home visit, or arrange to meet up with a parent before the group, so they have a friendly face to go with.

Tuesday: Attend community action group meetings. In the evening I am at college doing a 'train the trainer' course so that I can teach bite size courses in 'having your say, making a difference and getting involved'.

Wednesday: Attend my local resident association meeting. Once a month I also attend a meeting at my local hospital, where I am a lay member on two committees.

Thursday: I run a monthly support group.

Saturday: I run a juice bar and homework club for 8-12 year olds.

In between all this I am finishing my portfolio for the *Developing Healthier Communities* course, and fitting in voluntary work for the PCT such as carrying out questionnaires with local parents.

Please describe what you feel makes your work specifically 'community development'.

All the projects I am involved in have been identified by the community themselves as needed in the area. The community has taken an active role in setting up and running the projects, and once the projects are up and running the paid workers have been able to step back and allow the community to run things for themselves. People in the community have gained skills, knowledge and experience that they have been able to pass on to others. Community groups have been developed and the community has been helped to support itself.

What would you most like people to understand about community development?

Community development is about recognising that the heart of every community is the people who live there. With the right support, they can make a difference.

After several years working as a volunteer, Amanda has now secured a paid job as a Community Development Worker



Carol Osgerby, Community Health Development Worker for West Hull Primary Care Trust.

Please explain your job as simply as possible

When people want their community to get more healthy and prevent illness, I help them to set up groups and keep them going, by encouraging them and helping sort out problems.

A typical week

Monday: Work on an evaluation of the health impact of community groups. Later, I join a local walking group to talk to them about raising funds and developing the group.

Tuesday: Prepare display materials for Thursday's event. Attend a committee meeting of a local Community Orchard. Discuss insurance, tenancy agreement and annual budget. Agree to work with the Secretary to draft a funding application and help them make contacts with other similar groups so they can share information.

Wednesday: Catch up with paperwork and emails. Team meeting in the afternoon. We are a team of four Community Health Development Workers, trying to

cover a city of 250,000 people.

Thursday: More paperwork, and reading the latest on the reorganisation of Public Health in Hull. Later I attend a health event at a community centre where I run a quiz about food labelling and offer tasters of fruit smoothies. Get into discussion with many of the residents and workers there about nutrition, exercise, slimming, and assorted queries about healthcare and illness. My real aim is to publicise community groups, and maybe make some links that could lead to new projects. In the evening I attend a Neighbourhood Management meeting. Good turnout of residents, as well as Council staff, Community Empowerment Network, youth

workers etc. I help to get residents' ideas onto paper.

Friday: Meet with the Community Orchard secretary to help draft a budget and fill in grant application form. We discuss how we can encourage local residents to get involved in winter, when there is less physical work to do. Later, I work on our community groups newsletter.

Please describe what you feel makes your work specifically 'community development'.

CD develops and leaves behind structures that were not there before, and those structures are managed by members of the community. A vital part of community development is to support individuals to develop skills

which they can use to develop community groups, organisations and networks.

When I'm asked to take on a new piece of work, I ask myself "Is there potential to produce a project which is truly led by the community it's meant to serve?" If not, to me it's not community development. You have to respect the ability of the communities you work with to make their own decisions.

What would you most like people to understand about community development?

That it produces change which is not predictable, and can't be totally controlled from outside.