

CABLES WYND HOUSE CASE STUDY

INSPIRING SCOTLAND

Introduction

Inspiring Leith (IL) has provided essential support to over 4,000 local people since 2012. Initially part of Inspiring Scotland's national Link Up programme but managed locally by Bethany Christian Trust since April 2023, IL seeks to tackle poverty and disadvantage by enabling local people to help themselves, each other and their community.

This case study shows how IL's careful and deliberate integration of asset-based and human rights approaches are contributing to transformational changes that will improve the lives of almost 600 people living in Cables Wynd House (CWH) and Links View. Focusing on CWH, the study demonstrates the foundational role personal relationships and community play in catalysing change at an individual, community and structural level.

Cables Wynd House

CWH, better known as the 'Banana Flats' because of its curved shape, is a nine-storey local authority housing block in Leith. It comprises 214 flats housing 392 people. The building is 'A' listed, being cited as one of the best examples of 'brutalist' architecture in Scotland. Despite this designation, residents face a variety of issues and barriers related both to the upkeep and repair of the building, and the wider effects of poverty and inequality.

CWH sits within the most deprived place in Edinburgh and 12th most deprived in Scotland (SIMD, 2020) with high levels of income deprivation and child poverty (60.2% in 2021/22, Scot Gov), low attainment and levels of depression almost three times the national average. Despite this, many residents take pride in where they live: proud 'Leithers' that have lived there since the block opened, and a community of 'new Scots' that value being part of an established and diverse community where everyone shares talents and skills for their community's benefit.

Building community through an asset-based approach

Employing an asset-based approach, IL established a predictable and familiar presence in CWH from late 2018, something it sustained through COVID lockdowns. This enabled it to surface residents' energy, interests, knowledge and skills, and harness these to establish activities like gardening, crafts, Zumba, weekly stalls in the garden area distributing books, toys and seeds. This built trust, giving workers deep insights to residents' lives, and community members said that it also helped to *"foster a sense of community and approachability"*.

By sharing time and skills together, residents built supportive relationships, confidence and self-esteem. And in turn, these contributed to improvements – many self-managed - in health and wellbeing especially reduced loneliness and/or isolation and improved mental health including reduced stress, anxiety, and depression.

These increasing levels of community participation and social bonding also nurtured a stronger sense of community belonging and sparked active citizenship. Collectively, these elements are establishing the foundations for a more inclusive, resilient and healthy community. And in late 2021, the emerging active citizenship also provided a point of reflection, a trigger for deeper structural change. One resident put it succinctly: *"what's the point of gardening when the stairwells stink of urine and I'm too ashamed to have anyone over"*.

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Addressing issues using a rights-based approach

This reflection would not have been possible without Link Up's relational asset-based approach and the increasing trust developed - residents even shared that this *"improved wellbeing by giving me a better sense of agency and a trust that there are channels that will listen and act"*. This also enabled residents to voice their anger and frustrations about significant and long-standing issues with their living conditions: dampness and mould; leaks; poor fabric of CWH; slow repairs; broken lifts; lack of disabled access; poor/broken lighting; pest infestations; and, poor cleaning of communal areas.

These were compounded by stairwells and corridors being used as toilets and for drug dealing and taking. Antisocial behaviour, crime and the threat of violence are prevalent.

"I've never been scared to live somewhere but this place scares me. Many residents are addicts of various substances and I have seen so many people dozed out in staircases either doing their substances or dealing with others. Also, youth violence is something real and terrible and I've been a victim of crime from residents."

This environment is highly damaging to health and wellbeing, especially vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with disabilities, families with young children, and ethnic minorities. Dampness poses respiratory risks, whilst broken lifts and inadequate lighting cause social isolation and/or loneliness. Consequently, residents experience elevated stress, anxiety, and depression due to their living environment.

Additionally, a sense of not being listened to and/or able to influence Council decision-making, made residents feel powerless. However, IL's work was the spark for a small group of residents to explore the potential of a human rights-based approach to tackling these challenges.

Looking at the issues through this lens helped residents see that their living conditions were in contravention of the UN Right both to health and adequate housing. This galvanised them to adopt a human rights approach based on PANEL principles (Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Empowerment and Legality) and initiate a process of 'speaking truth to power' in three ways:



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Initial engagement (December 2021) – IL supported residents to host a visit by a local councillor, allowing them to raise their concerns and highlight people's living conditions. This resulted in issues being formally recorded into the Council's Repairs and Improvements Plan as well as action to repair hazardous ceiling panels and install a dropped kerb to support access in/out of the building for wheelchair users.

Creation of Cables Wynd Community Forum (CWCF; May 2022) – the absence of a group to represent the interests of residents had long been recognised as a barrier to giving them a voice in decision-making. Therefore, a resident initiated the creation of CWCF in May 2022. With emotional and practical support from IL, this fledgling group created a space to invite others into and build an agreement on its purpose and ethos - emphasising that residents are not paid to participate, that CWH is their home, and that their voices should be valued.

The group then invited council officials, local charity workers, police and political representatives to work with them. This broad church built on the way the forum was structured to create greater accountability, and was supported by advice and specialist guidance from organisations such as Shelter and Making Rights Real (<https://makingrightsreal.org.uk/>).

These steps were complemented by a residents' focus group who in June 2022 surveyed CWH tenants on their living conditions. The results were conclusive:

- 37.5% reported damp conditions.
- 37.5% reported being majorly inconvenienced by lift problems.
- 100% felt repairs were not adequately dealt with.
- 51.9% felt repairs they were waiting for were having a 'Big Impact' on their lives.
- 68% didn't feel informed about building related matters.
- 64.6% reported a pest problem.

Holding the Council to account (from late 2022) - To strengthen the work already being delivered by the IL team, Shelter and Making Rights Real contributed a range of resources and training to help build resident's understanding of human rights. This was pivotal in encouraging residents to name and claim their rights; the latter through a range of performance improvement targets (see campaign poster on page 4) communicated to the council that residents have asked to be addressed by Autumn 2023.

This sustained action contributed to the Council announcing in August 2022 that they would undertake a full retrofit of CWH and a neighbouring block (Links View) by end 2025. The work will improve 320 flats making them warmer, dryer, more energy efficient, cleaner and safer.

These changes will improve the lives of an estimated 600 residents; most through improved health and wellbeing, but many financially, through lower energy costs. And for some, improved living standards will support reduced illness and better mental health, contributing to enhanced educational attainment as well as access to and stability in employment.

More immediately, the Council initiated an action group to tackle dampness and mould and employed more staff and new machinery to tackle cleaning in the communal areas.

CABLES WYND HOUSING CAMPAIGN

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

We shared our findings, along with comments and pictures, with the Council, Police, local MP and other groups at the **Cables Wynd Community Forum**. In August 2022 the Council said they had decided to **renovate the building**.

People can make a difference by getting together and taking action!!!



HUMAN RIGHTS

We looked at the survey results and identified the most important themes that needed to improve. We realised some of the issues went against the UN Right to Adequate Housing.

MONITORING IMPROVEMENTS

We set some targets for how much things should improve within 6 months and a year. We will be doing another survey in September 2023 to see what has changed.



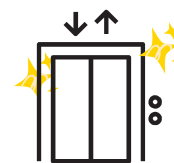
REPAIRS

Our target for September 2023 is that no one should wait longer than 2 months for a repair, and no one's repair should have more than a small impact on their day to day life.

MOULD

By September 2023 we want no more than 5% of people to have mould that concerns them in their home.

LIFTS



By September 2023 we want nobody to experience moderate or major disruption from the lifts breaking, and absolutely no-one should be housebound due to the lifts.

PESTS

By September 2023 we would like to see less than 15% of people having a problem with pests.



COMMUNICATION

By September 2023 we want 90% of residents to be able to say they feel informed about building related matters.

Contact us at cableswyndhousetenants@gmail.com

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Conclusions

- IL's asset-based approach established the conditions in which individuals and families were enabled to self-manage significant improvements to their health and wellbeing. This is vital in a time of diminishing resources and shrinking public service provision.
- IL's asset-based approach was essential in catalysing the active citizenship that made tackling the structural issues possible. It is questionable if the structural changes could have happened without the foundational role played by this strongly relational approach. This was felt by residents as well, who expressed: *"I don't think any of the positive outcomes would've happened without the support and empowerment from both of you [the IL team]"*.
- The adoption of a human rights-based approach brought clarity of purpose to the efforts and approach taken by residents. Without it, the structural changes that are now in-train would not be happening; changes that bring scale and longevity to the improvements.
- Place-based collaboration, though initially slow, brought collective knowledge, experience and influence to bear in a hyper-local way. It also helped residents and the IL team navigate the systems and structures required to affect change at this scale.
- This experience underscores the need for a developmental process that progresses from individual-led change to collective action to collaborative, place-based work. However, strong social networks are necessary to create the foundations for this process to be initiated and sustained. IL's work in CWH showcases the transformative impact of such a process, one that will dramatically improve the health and everyday lives of hundreds of residents.

