
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Nurturing Resilient and Compassionate Communities in Scotland

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Introduction

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of solidarity and community resilience based on values of compassion and kindness. Compassionate Communities are citizen led social movements that aim to transform attitudes and behaviours around loneliness, isolation and loss. Informed by our evaluation of Compassionate Inverclyde, IFIC Scotland partners established an innovative Active Learning Programme (CCALP) to support adoption of the approach in other communities. Volunteers, community leaders, and health and care practitioners and managers co-designed a collaborative online programme based on Active Learning principles. An end of programme evaluation was undertaken by academic partners and by an independent consultant.

Aims Objectives Theory or Methods

Ten themed sessions were supported by a facilitator, peer coaches and subject experts. Learning Outcomes were to

- explore the personal attributes and conditions to re-imagine place and create compassionate communities
- understand the key elements required to work with different communities and their assets
- explore and adapt tools that can be used to support engaging and influencing people and communities
- enhance skills to value, empower, support and sustain volunteering, place making and compassionate communities.

Appreciative inquiry methods were used to prompt feedback and ideas for improvement through an online questionnaire for all participants and facilitators, and in-depth interviews with five participants.

Highlights or Results or Key Findings

78 participants represented 39 rural and urban communities, including some with high levels of socio-economic deprivation. Their background experiences, contexts and expectations differed. A median of 12 people attended the monthly online sessions designed as small group discussions to build relationships, offer safe space for reflection and enable authentic sharing of experiences.

Monthly Flash Reports enabled additional self- directed learning and sharing of useful tools and resources.

Connecting virtually was not perceived as a barrier. Feedback was universally positive. Participants particularly valued the appreciative facilitation style; inspiring and honest guest speakers; meeting others with a shared perspective; sense of purpose in group discussions; and wholehearted caring for self and others. Sessions on leadership and community development helped participants understand concepts of social capital and public value. Most participants reported perceived personal growth, greater local influence and several people shared stories of impactful local changes.

Conclusions

The CCALP is already making a tangible contribution to our collective endeavour to build a fairer and more equal Scotland where people and communities live our values of kindness. Participants suggested ideas for improving the CCALP and several have offered to support and mentor a second cohort.

Implications for applicability/transferability sustainability and limitations

To recover from the health and economic shocks of COVID-19, we need to sustain more community led support for wellbeing. The CCALP is a promising way to build more resilient communities in Scotland. We are keen to co-design an international CCALP in partnership with IFICs Special Interest Groups and communities.