



THE  
JUBILEE CENTRE  
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# GOOD NEIGHBOURS IN A GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD?

AN EXPLORATION OF GRATITUDE  
IN A LOCAL COMMUNITY

PROGRAMME REPORT

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# Good Neighbours in a Good Neighbourhood?

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in a local community

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# Foreword

Perhaps the greatest insight people of faith share – and I write this from Birmingham, a city proud of its many faiths – is that all life is a gift. As the Jewish and Christian Scriptures put it, ‘everything in heaven and on earth is yours, Lord; all things come from you, and of your own do we give you.’ When people of faith offer their gratitude to the Giver, we acknowledge both the preciousness and the fragility of the gifts we are given – but we also experience the ‘enlarging of our hearts’, as we notice more and more gifts around us, and as we find ourselves more free to give generously of what we have been given.

The work described in this report – the patient work of building relationships and growing community, and the attentive work of researching gratitude in a local neighbourhood – is encouraging in many ways, not least because it offers, as the writers suggest, a counter-narrative to those more dominant stories of our cities’ outer estates. Rather than focusing on ‘deprivation’, or on what some in politics and the media label an ‘entitlement culture’, this report tells a story of the residents of one estate discovering the gifts they have, and demonstrating deep

gratitude and generosity – often across differences of age, ethnic background, and faith commitment – and building bridges of friendship and trust through such sharing. Many of these ‘good neighbours’ are working together to change their community for the better, and to challenge injustice and inequality where it leaves its mark.

Here you will find descriptions of simple, accessible methods and resources for exploring gratitude among all ages – from community ‘bring and share’ lunches to ‘thank you jars’; insights into the many different kinds of things that people are thankful for; and an encouragement that an intentional effort to provoke and invite expressions of gratitude can help nurture good neighbours and good neighbourhoods. There is much for all of us to learn here.

**Rt. Revd David Urquhart**  
Bishop of Birmingham



# Executive Summary

This report details the work of a partnership of local, faith-based organisations on an outer estate in East Birmingham, seeking to discover and nurture a 'culture of gratitude' within their neighbourhood. The project was carried out by Worth Unlimited and Hodge Hill Church, in partnership with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues.

The project spanned three distinct 'strands' of work: Primary-Secondary Transition programme; a Community Leaders training course; and a regular, open-invitation Community Lunch.

Participants across these three strands were asked what they were thankful for, across different gratitude domains: 'Me'; 'People', 'Stuff', and; 'Places'. Responses highlighted:

- that people and relationships infused almost everything people were thankful for (even in the 'stuff' and 'places' domains); and
- that people tended to be more readily thankful for things that were more immediate in time and space.

The report also details a variety of creative 'interventions' with groups of different ages, to encourage and further explore gratitude. Evaluations of these activities from both participants and practitioners within the wider community highlighted:

- that organisations and agencies seeking to engage in 'community regeneration' do well to listen attentively to the things local people are thankful for, as well as what they might see as 'problems' (this might be articulated as an 'asset-based community development' approach);
- that generous time and intentional encouragement is often needed to help people express what they are thankful for, beyond the immediate: things from the past, things further away from 'home', gifts buried 'deep within';
- that asking 'the gratitude question' regularly, without too much formality, can move beyond initial strangeness to help people towards a noticeable positive difference in their outlook, often worked out in practical actions; and
- that creating inclusive environments that invite regular giving and receiving, such as a community lunch where people feel able to bring-and-share, can make a noticeable positive difference within a neighbourhood, a 'hub of community', going beyond the impact on individual participants.

# 1 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to highlight the research and development work undertaken in the *Good Neighbours in a Good Neighbourhood?* project. The project was undertaken between June 2012 and October 2014, and primarily involved the creation and implementation of a series of interventions related to gratitude on the Firs and Bromford estate in Birmingham's Hodge Hill constituency. From the outset however it was also seen as an opportunity to undertake a programme of research that would explore how gratitude is conceived and contextualised in a local neighbourhood, as well as evaluate the impact of the interventions.

On this basis the research project sought to address three 'big questions':

- How can the people of a neighbourhood, grow a 'culture of gratitude'?
- How can the power of gratitude transform and shape the future of a neighbourhood?
- How can character, values and virtues be fostered in and through processes of informal education, community empowerment and community regeneration?

Accompanying these 'big questions' were a number of working assumptions: that gratitude was already present in the neighbourhood; that it could be nurtured and encouraged in individuals and groups; and that this would

have a positive impact on wider perceptions of 'culture change' within the neighbourhood. The focal question for this project quite simply, became:

- What are people thankful for in this neighbourhood?

To help prompt people's reflections, and to attempt to spread the concept of gratitude across the entirety of people's life experience, this question was broken down into five different domains:

- Me: gifts of head, heart and hands;
- Me: my story, my health, my personality;
- People: family, friends, other people;
- Stuff: possessions / belongings, money, treasures; and
- Places: the neighbourhood, the city, the world.

Spreading the research project across the three distinct strands (Primary-Secondary Transition programme; Community Leaders course; and Community Lunches) allowed us to catch glimpses, at least, of a wide cross-section of local people – from primary school age to post-retirement – and some of the connections between them which both bond people together and have a mutually transformative effect on their lives. This report provides an overview of the project itself as well as the findings from the accompanying research.



## 2 Background

*Good Neighbours in a Good Neighbourhood?* (GNiGN) was a two and a half year research project based, not in an institution, but in a well-defined local neighbourhood in East Birmingham, the Firs and Bromford estate, bounded by the M6 (to the North), Birmingham's outer ring-road (West), and the Birmingham/Solihull local authority border (East). An historically white working-class outer estate built in the 1950s and 1960s, the estate is rapidly changing, its population becoming increasingly ethnically diverse and fluid (with growing Somali, Nigerian and Eastern European communities particularly). An area often characterised as 'deprived' (ranked in the top 10% on the national Indices of Multiple Deprivation), it nevertheless includes many gifted local people and a small but growing number of locally-rooted 'anchor' organisations, passionately committed to working together to build on the strengths of their neighbourhood.

The research project was a partnership between the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues and two of these key locally-rooted organisations: Hodge Hill Church and Worth Unlimited (East Birmingham and North Solihull). Worth Unlimited has had a shop-front building on the estate, 'The Hub', since 2009, which functions primarily as a youth work venue, but has become increasingly a 'hub' for a wide variety of community gatherings and activities. Hodge Hill Church, a local ecumenical partnership between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church, became a united congregation after the Church of England building was demolished

in 2008. Looking for new ways to be present in and engaged with its local neighbourhoods, the church began working with Worth Unlimited, through 'The Hub', to grow relationships and activities on the Firs and Bromford estate. Both Worth Unlimited and Hodge Hill Church have engaged actively with the estate's primary schools and other local agencies, including 'Big Local', the Big Lottery funded investment in local community regeneration, which arrived on the estate in 2010.

In 2012, Hodge Hill Church organised *Hodge Hill Unsung Heroes*, an event to unearth and celebrate some of the many local people who make a significant, but often quiet, contribution to their neighbourhoods. Local people were asked to nominate neighbours, and local workers, who demonstrated 'compassion, generosity, trust, friendship or hope' in their daily lives – and 97 people were nominated, over half of whom came from the Firs and Bromford estate. For the local community, this was a striking 'counter-narrative' to the oft-repeated mantra of politicians and media that outer estates like the Firs and Bromford are 'broken ghettos' with a 'culture of dependency' or 'entitlement' <sup>1</sup>. *Unsung Heroes* was also the spur for both Hodge Hill Church and Worth Unlimited to take, more intentionally, an asset-based approach to community-led development (ABCD) – founded on the key principles: 'that every single individual, regardless of where they live or how much they earn, has something to offer others'; 'that flourishing communities cannot be built from the top down, or the

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/conservative/3536626/Britains-council-estates-have-become-broken-ghettos-Duncan-Smith-group-warns.html>  
<http://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2009/02/stephen-greenha-2.html>

outside in, but only from the 'inside out'; and 'that relationships are absolutely key to making change happen'<sup>2</sup> – and using tools drawn from similar fields such as 'Appreciative Inquiry'<sup>3</sup>. Working with the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues on a research

project around gratitude, therefore, felt like a perfect fit with our developing approach to community-led development.

The project consisted of three inter-related strands which are explained below.

**Figure 1: Inter-related Strands of the Project**



### PRIMARY-SECONDARY TRANSITION PROGRAMME

The first strand of work, the Primary-Secondary Transition (the Transition) programme, began running in January 2012. Working in two local primary schools – Firs Primary School and Tame Valley Academy - with relatively small groups of Year 6 children, the programme offered a safe, friendly and fun environment, at the end of the school day, to help pupils (which the schools have identified as particularly benefitting from extra support) develop confidence and resilience (both individual and social) as they went through the challenges and changes presented by the move to secondary school. The programme, taking a strongly relational approach, using informal education methods and drawing on a wide variety of resource materials, already had a strong focus on

character development<sup>4</sup>. The introduction of the research element introduced a more explicit and ongoing focus on gratitude, and developed a number of new resources and activities. Transition groups were mostly run weekly for two terms (spring and summer), with follow-up meetings in secondary schools in the autumn term following pupils' moves. During the research project, we have run four groups (two in each school) of between 10 and 16 children, with a total of 103 pupils going through the programme.

*Initially it was a bit weird, a bit abstract, it wasn't a conversation you'd normally have. But doing it regularly, focusing on it regularly, it became a habit: asking that question, wanting to know what you're thankful for.*  
(Paul Wright, Transition lead worker)

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. [www.cuf.org.uk/ABCD](http://www.cuf.org.uk/ABCD)

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Inspired by the work of Professor James Arthur, as published in *Character in Transition: Consistency in Values: The Transition from Primary to Secondary School*, available at [http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/previousresearch/previous-research/Character-in-Transition\\_FULL.pdf](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/previousresearch/previous-research/Character-in-Transition_FULL.pdf)



*It built my confidence, it made me want to interact with people more... when I came to secondary school I made friends quickly.*  
(Transition participant)

## COMMUNITY LEADERS COURSE

The Community Leaders programme, which was developed in various forms from 2010, had at its heart, an accredited youth work course titled 'Thrive' (for more details see [www.worthunlimited.co.uk/thrive.html](http://www.worthunlimited.co.uk/thrive.html)). This course enabled participants to achieve a qualification whilst also gaining the practical experience of delivering youth work. But there was more to the Community Leaders programme than equipping people to run youth programmes; it was an holistic approach which enabled local people to see out their dreams and visions for their communities.

The course was aimed at people who live within the community and who were passionate about seeing young people reach their potential. This inevitably brought with it a lot of diversity. Some participants joined the course with no previous experience in youth work, while others had years of experience of working with young people. Some people were very keen to gain the qualification while others were more interested in the practical side of delivery. We had unemployed 19 year old and 55 year old graduates with full-time jobs do the course.

*As we did it week on week, and as we reflected on it towards the end, more and more people saw the value of it... It's made them more reflective, and more thankful for the good things they have in their lives.*  
(Steve Hirst, Community Leaders lead worker)

The 'Thrive' course ran over six months and had two key dimensions: training in core principles and practices of youth work; and planning activities to help young people bring about positive change in their local neighbourhood. The course included a mix of classroom-based learning working towards the ABC Level 2 Award in Working with Young People ([www.abcawards.co.uk/archive-qualifications/1633/](http://www.abcawards.co.uk/archive-qualifications/1633/)) and hands-on experience of locally-based youth and community work. As with the Transition work, the research element as part of the GNiaGN project introduced a more explicit and ongoing gratitude focus into sessions that were already focusing on the participants' values and character, and the 'assets' and 'issues' of the local neighbourhood. In the first year of the research project, eight participants successfully passed through the Community Leaders programme.

*I've learnt a lot about myself.*  
(Community Leaders participant)

Due to local changes in both funding and staffing this strand of work evolved within the research project, to include a new programme part-funded through the government's Youth Social Action (YSA) Fund and the Step Up To Serve campaign to double the number of young people actively involved in social action. This YSA programme involved members of Worth Unlimited working with Year 6 pupils in two of the local primary schools, and with Year 7 and Year 10 pupils in a local secondary school – the focus however was on the pupils' local neighbourhood. Over five weeks, groups of pupils identified, planned and carried out a project within the neighbourhood, often working alongside adults of different ages, and concluding with some kind of 'celebration

event', usually with an open invitation to neighbours. Examples include working on a community garden next to some sheltered accommodation, with some local pensioners; and a 'celebrating grandparents' event in school. The twin moves of 'giving thanks' and 'giving back' were at the core of the Community Leaders programme locally, which worked with a total of 160 local young people.

### COMMUNITY LUNCHES

The final strand of the project was the introduction of a regular Community Lunch, based at 'The Hub', as a space for local residents (largely adults, but including adults with pre-school children) to meet, make new friends, and enjoy eating and talking together. One of the immensely positive developments with Community Lunches was the gradual emergence of a bring-and-share ethos, as regular attendees offered to bring something, cook something, or contribute in some way.

After hosting monthly lunches for the first year of the research project (September 2012 – July 2013), with relatively low and fluctuating attendance, the research team decided to make the lunches weekly over the 2013 summer holiday, and from the September following. Numbers steadily grew - ranging from 6-10 attendees, up to 25-30. While more will be said in the analysis section later on, the weekly Community Lunch became a focal point for making connections, friendships, practical support and the planning of activities and events within the community. Its continuation after the research project concluded is as a locally-recognised key hub of community life.

*If you ask someone 'where community happens' on the Firs and Bromford, as likely as not they'll mention 'community lunch'. It's become the place where people come to get things done, to share ideas of things to start locally, to meet up with old friends and to make new ones.*

(Al Barrett, Programme Leader)



# 3 The Gratitude Interventions

## 3.1 BACKGROUND

Six gratitude interventions were carried out as part of the project, and woven into the three strands outlined in the previous section. Each is described in more detail below.

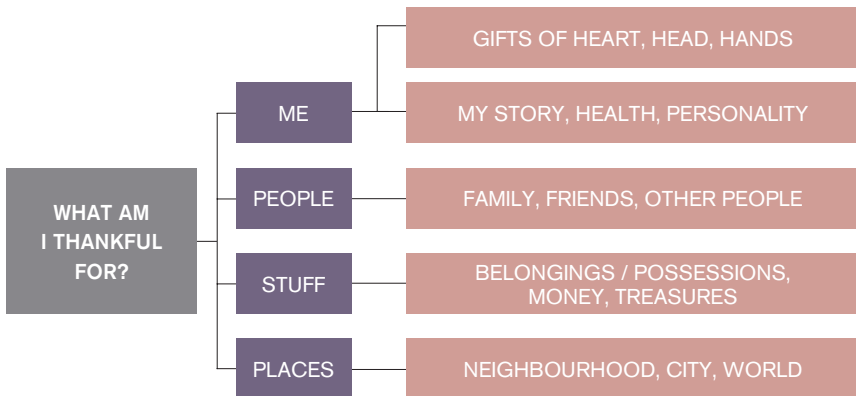
Some general observations about the research project are necessary to begin with, however.

Across all three strands of the project we conducted an initial baseline questionnaire, spread over 4-5 sessions, covering five key domains of gratitude. Following the baseline questionnaire, each strand featured regular 'gratitude slots', with interventions of different kinds encouraging participants to think of and record things that they were thankful for. Each strand included an end-of-project evaluation,

some via a questionnaire and some through 'vox pop' video interviews. In the Community Lunches strand, we returned to the original baseline questionnaire to assess development over the course of the project, alongside participants' own self-evaluations.

In the baseline questionnaire we wanted to find out what participants were thankful for. From background research and preliminary informal conversations locally, we identified five key domains within which we asked the question: 'what are you thankful for?' We also expected participants to find it easier to identify things that were more experientially immediate, so we made sure we included prompts towards things that might be more distant, in both spatial and temporal terms.

**Figure 1: Inter-related Strands of the Project**



We were also keen to encourage participants to reflect a little bit more about why they were grateful for particular things, and perhaps less grateful for other things. We invited them to choose one or two statements which they felt applied to each of the top four from their first

list. We started out by offering participants the various statements on cut-out strips of paper, to glue next to each of their top 4 (partly to save people having to do extra writing), but this proved practically cumbersome. In the revised questionnaire (used for the end-of-

programme review of the Community Lunches), we instead assigned a letter to each statement, inviting participants to choose one or two letters to write next to each of their top four.

On the revised forms, when participants identified the things they were thankful for, we invited them to label each one to indicate whether they were more thankful (↑), less thankful (↓) or the same (=) compared to two years ago (i.e. the beginning of the research project). This turned out to be more difficult for participants than we had imagined: many participants had not been involved at the start of the project (and so did not have a 'mental baseline' with which to compare themselves in the present); for others, perhaps quantifying thankfulness in 'more or less' terms was either meaningless or more complex than a simple symbol would allow.

### 3.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was important, across the three strands of the research project, that the research dimension was as 'low key' as possible so that, in line with youth work and community development principles, the work of building relationships of trust, confidence and friendship remained the paramount priority, and gratitude-focused interventions arose naturally and organically within those environments, rather than feeling alien or forced. It was also important to bear in mind that for many participants, both children and adults, anything that involved extensive reading and/or writing might present significant barriers due to accessibility issues, for example low literacy levels.

All data was treated in confidence and anonymised. All participants (including parents of school children) were informed about the research and given the opportunity to opt out (with adult participants actively opting in). Members of staff at the schools acted as

ethical 'gatekeepers' for the research dimension of this work.

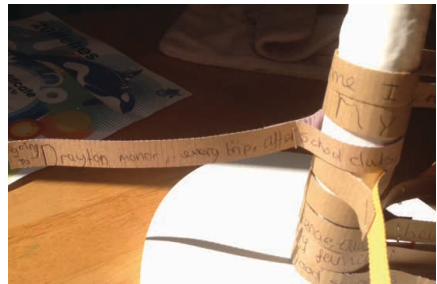
## 3.3 THE SIX INTERVENTIONS

### 3.3.1 Transition tree

The 'transition trees' were used with Year 6 pupils in the Transition programme. The aim was to enable pupils to reflect on their time in primary school and what they are grateful for, and also to reflect on how they can use and develop the skills and gifts they have as they move into secondary school. The transition trees themselves were about 1m tall and were purchased ready-made. The pupils were invited to add things to the tree, with each part representing a different facet of their lives (past, present and future):

- Tree trunk (paper straps attached to trunk) – *Memories I am grateful for*
- Birds (in branches) – *My hopes for secondary school*
- Leaves (on branches) – *Skills and gifts I am grateful for*
- Owls (in branches) – *Wisdom I will take with me*
- Fruit (on branches) – *The things that will grow as I move on.*

With appropriate prompting and explanations, this proved a very effective exercise, and members of school staff were also very grateful to have a visual and expressive piece of artwork. One of the two primary schools involved placed one of their transition trees in the school foyer, as an attractive visual expression of the school's vision, values and achievements.



### 3.3.2 Gratitude dice game

The 'gratitude dice game' was used in Transition sessions, as an 'icebreaker', as well as to structure the substantive part of a session. It involved two dice (to begin with giant foam dice were used, but were replaced with smaller ones for practical reasons), and a 'key' sheet. The number on one die identified the 'theme' (the domains mentioned elsewhere in this report), and the number on the other die identified a question within that theme. The dice were passed around the group and each person would answer the question they were given. The game can also be used for a set theme, with just one die (see the accompanying resource pack for the full set of questions available at [www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/goodneighbours](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/goodneighbours)).

### 3.3.3 Thank you jars

The 'thank you jars' intervention was inspired by the research team, and was used with girl groups (10-11 and 12-16) run locally by Worth Unlimited. During each weekly session the girls were invited to write down on a piece of paper something that they were thankful for, with their name, and then to fold up the piece of paper and put it in the 'thank you jar'. At the end of each school term, the girls emptied the jar together and read what they had written. This has proved a very effective way of both helping the girls reflect back on the sessions and their wider lives over the previous term, and enabling them – with the safer distance of time – to share with each other some of the things they treasure.

### 3.3.4 'World cafe' conversations and baseline questionnaires

The plan was initially for monthly Community Lunches to include a regular 'facilitated conversation' using the 'World Cafe' method <sup>5</sup>, where people sit at tables discussing an open question, writing ideas down on the tablecloth, and then move on to a different table (each table's 'host' remaining where they were), to discuss a follow-on question. The first question would be around 'what are you thankful for?' (within the different domains outlined above), and the second question would invite people to consider what they would go away and 'do' or 'try' before the next month's Community Lunch. The idea was to create an ongoing action-reflection cycle that focused on growing habits of gratitude and generous action within the neighbourhood.

As the Community Lunches turned out to be a smaller, more fragile and more fluid occasion than we imagined, (with fewer attendees for some and many people preferring to come and go, leaving only a handful present at any one time), the idea of a regular 'facilitated conversation' was deemed to be unrealistic. Reluctantly, we resorted to the paper-based baseline questionnaire (see above), inviting people to fill them in during their time at the lunch. Even then, research team members felt a certain discomfort at interrupting people's conversations, stopping the flow of often tentative new friendships or one-to-one sharing of a more sensitive nature. The final review exercise was conducted on a more ad hoc, one-to-one basis, and did, in the process, pick up on uneasiness from some participants (see Appendix 1) similar to that felt by the research team.

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Paul Born, *Community Conversations: mobilizing the ideas, skills and passion of community organizations, governments, businesses, and people*, Toronto: BPS, 2008





I am thankful for the love and support that friends offer.

I am thankful to be blessed with two amazing boys who make me proud everyday!



### 3.3.5 Tablecloths

The tablecloth intervention was very simple. On tables at the Community Lunches – or at various celebration events in the YSA programme – paper tablecloths were spread, with a handful of coloured pens available, and a prompt (both written and spoken) for people to write down what they are thankful for. At one-off events (like the YSA celebrations, and Community Lunches), this proved a very effective way to prompt and gather people's reflections (with many people reading the reflections of others and then adding their own). As a regular part of Community Lunches, we found enthusiasm and engagement with the tablecloths fluctuated significantly, with some weeks picking up no responses at all.

### 3.3.6 Gratitude cubes

We were keen to create some physical, visual 'installations' as prompts for reflection on gratitude, both in the Community Lunch context and for use in other areas of our work. The idea, partly emerging from the limitations of the tablecloth intervention, was to create something 'unmissable' – large and colourful enough to be eye-catching – with which people could engage (either independently or when invited to do so), to prompt their own reflections, enlarge their imaginations to the possibilities of gratitude, and also to create a space to capture some of the things that people were thankful for.

The four 'gratitude cubes' (one for each of the domains, except 'head, heart, hands', for reasons detailed below) were covered in words and images taken from, or inspired by, the findings of the initial baseline questionnaire. They made up a nest of hard-wearing plastic boxes, which could be transported to different

venues. Each cube had one side with the domain title and lots of blank space, therefore people could add post-it notes from their own reflections, or instead spend time looking at the cubes and then go away and record their responses in a different format (as we did with the Community Lunch end-of-programme review questionnaire).





# 4 Findings

This section reports on general findings about gratitude, drawn from all six of the gratitude interventions detailed previously.

## 4.1 ME: HEAD, HEART AND HANDS

Of the five domains, participants found the first – gifts of head ('what do you know?'), heart ('what do you care about?'), and hands ('what practical skills have you got?') – the most difficult to make sense of. Although we have regularly used a similar exercise in other work we have done (our Open Door drop-in, for example, where it offers a way in for those who come in to identify their passions, knowledge and skills beyond the conventional CV categories of 'educational qualifications' and 'employment history'), we have learnt over the past couple of years that, for many people, it often takes a fair amount of time, and purposeful one-to-one conversation, to draw out an awareness of these kind of gifts. This is symptomatic, we would suggest, not just of the difficulty of going beyond the usual categories, but of a common experience among the Firs and Bromford community of being unaccustomed to seeing themselves as 'gifted' at all. We made the decision, quite early on, to drop this first domain from the research project, while continuing to use it as a valuable tool in much of the more 'patient' one-to-one work carried out.

Nevertheless, within a limited sample of Transition participants, recognised school subjects dominated the gifts of the head (technology, maths, literacy), but they also included imaginative ideas. Gifts of the heart were mostly about family and friends – but also included education and food. Finally, gifts of the hands included technology and/or gaming, football, cooking, reading and writing, and arts and craft.

Among the (adult) Community Leaders group, head knowledge was understandably more 'grown-up', including customer skills, computer skills, different cultures and languages. For a group training in youth and community work, it is perhaps unsurprising that their passions focused on working with children and helping people – but family and friends again came out strongly. Other passions ranged from sport and music, travel and history, to cleanliness, being nonjudgmental, empowerment and peace. Among the practical skills they identified, cooking came out top (six of eight participants), ahead of cleaning, ICT, DIY, driving, gardening, and childcare, among others.

## 4.2 ME: MY STORY, MY HEALTH AND MY PERSONALITY

Our second 'me' domain seemed much more accessible for all participants, perhaps because it was rather less abstract. Significant moments in a person's life story obviously increase as they grow up, so it is perhaps not surprising that being born was the only common factor for gratitude among the Transition participants. For adults, getting or having a job was most significant, closely followed by family of origin and upbringing, having children, being part of various friendship groups, and finding a partner. Most people across most age groups were thankful for being in generally good health, and a smaller proportion were thankful for their fitness and ability to do sport or exercise. For children, personality was often defined by what they liked doing (football, with team allegiances; and playing computer games); but for all ages a good sense of humour came out strongly. Among the adults, being caring, positive, laid back or reflective were all valued by a number of people, while individuals mentioned being hard working and trustworthy. A small number of participants explicitly acknowledged the link between their

own personalities and people who had shaped them.

*It [gratitude] makes you appreciate things – makes you more independent, rather than being overruled by people.*

(Community Lunches participant)

*It [gratitude] makes me feel happy and not down and depressed – it feels like I have changed.*

(Transition participant)

### 4.3 PEOPLE: FAMILY, FRIENDS AND OTHERS

This was the most difficult domain to analyse, as many participants wrote down lots of names which, without detailed additional conversations with each participant, were impossible to place within a participant's web of relationships. Nevertheless, with a bit of steering, we were able in most cases to identify key significant relationships among each strand of the research.

For Transition pupils, parents were most important, followed closely by siblings and friends (on equal footing). Aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins also featured in many cases. About a quarter of participants named teachers and/or youth workers as significant, and there was also a wide spectrum of celebrities, from sports people and singers to Prince Harry and Anne Frank.

Among the Community Leaders course students (mostly young adults), parents and siblings were still the most commonly mentioned, but with children rivalling friends for third place. Friends now included college friends, colleagues, and friends through church. Teachers and others who look after children remained significant, but here it was for the role they played with participants' own children. Shopkeepers, counsellors and medical professionals were also named.

*It [gratitude] makes them a better person, I feel, because if they're thankful for something, they can see the good in everything, rather than the bad, and that in itself shines out, and it makes other people aware of it, and makes them thankful too – they start to see through somebody else's eyes.*

(Community Lunches participant)

The Community Lunches group, which had the largest age spectrum, placed partners above parents (reflecting, perhaps, a distancing from parents as participants moved further into adulthood), but work colleagues were now the most significant group, alongside the church community (for many participants with a faith commitment) or other kinds of associational life. As well as children, godchildren and nieces and nephews were mentioned, and other families who were close friends were named a number of times. Local neighbours were valued by many, as were people who showed some kind of neighbourly care: 'love'; 'kindness'; 'respect'; or 'support' were words used – in addition to police, postmen, bus drivers, and those professionals already mentioned above.

### 4.4 STUFF: POSSESSIONS, MONEY AND TREASURES

The 'stuff' domain produced perhaps the most predictable, and yet the most surprising, results. Unsurprisingly, at least half the Transition participants valued their games console (XBox, PlayStation, DS, Wii, etc), and many also mentioned a phone, a laptop, tablet or PC and a TV among the possessions they were thankful for. At the same time, it was notable that family crept into the answers for possessions and money, as well as coming out strongest for treasures. The fact that some children aged 10 or 11 mentioned electricity, bills and mortgage suggests an awareness of domestic financial matters that may surprise some. Under the 'money' heading, as many children mentioned

food as they did their games consoles – this domain was by no means all about toys.

While Transition participants sometimes had a more sentimental item that they were thankful for (an old teddy, a fossil, a diary), among the adult participants treasures were very often associated with significant relationships: photos or videos, cards and letters, gifts (or items inherited) from family members, and wedding or engagement rings. For adults too, those real relationships also leaked into the space where we were expecting object answers: friends, family, children and grandchildren were all named as treasures. There were also significant practical responses, with many people talking about 'enough money to live off', a house, a phone or a PC/laptop (again, deeply relational items), and a means of transport (bike or car). There was scattered mention of other essentials (clothes, heating, white goods, furniture), a few luxuries (e.g. holidays), and some things which enabled participants to do sports or hobbies (e.g. musical instrument).

#### 4.5 PLACES: NEIGHBOURHOOD, CITY AND THE WORLD

The 'places' domain offered participants a series of three concentric circles: neighbourhood, city, and world. Most responses occurred in the neighbourhood circle: good neighbours and then shops and friends were the highest scorers among Transition pupils, with friends and nearby family coming out strongest among Community Lunch participants. The latter also talked a lot about a sense of community, active people, pride, creativity, and activities and opportunities to get involved – reflecting the number of lunch attendees who are themselves active people within the neighbourhood, shaping local groups and activities. Among the Community Leaders group, 'neighbourhood' mostly meant 'home', and they were thankful for a place that felt trouble free and safe – something reflected in a few responses from Transition pupils. Green spaces, fields, plants and trees were mentioned across

all strands, but not as a prominent feature. Adults cited the proximity of schools, doctors, and 'The Hub' (where most of the activities took place).

*People have started to realise people are doing things for them, and they're willing to give back.*

(Local practitioner)

Responses then steadily thinned out and became more abstract as the circles expanded. Within the city, shops were prominent (top for children, second for adults), food and restaurants (second for both children and Community Leaders), and culture and entertainment (pupils mentioned Aston Villa football ground, Star City entertainment complex and the Hippodrome; Community Leaders mentioned the cinema, the theatre and the museum). For Community Lunch participants, the different cultures and faiths of the city came out strongest, while several Community Leaders students mentioned health service-related institutions. The 'closeness' of the city, and transport links, cropped up across all strands of our research.

The 'world' heading prompted, from adults, some global perspectives around the diversity of people/cultures (both adult strands), good people and the beauty and diversity of nature (Community Lunches), alongside more personal experiences of sun, beaches and holidays (Community Leaders). For the children, the question 'what are you most thankful for in the world?' seemed often to be heard simply as 'what are you most thankful for?': top answers were family (again); life; friends; and school. A broad sense of connectedness to some more distant people and places offered a wide array of other mentions: the Eiffel Tower; Stamford Bridge (the home of Chelsea FC); the Queen; and Somalia (some children's country of origin). One Community Leaders student mentioned Mecca, reminding us that travel can be for pilgrimage as well as for tourism.

#### 4.6 WIDER PERCEPTIONS OF 'CULTURE CHANGE'

Towards the end of the project, we asked a cross-section of local practitioners (in schools, the Children's Centre, the City Council Housing department and the Neighbourhood Policing team) about the changes in their perceptions of the Firs and Bromford estate over the last two years. When asked if they could see more (+5) or less (-5) 'assets and potential' on the estate, compared with two years ago, all of those interviewed were very positive (average score +3.25). Everyone cited our work in and around 'The Hub' (with one person saying 'there is much more, and you guys have provided that') and related activities (the Gear-up bike shop and the interfaith Women's Group), alongside other funding/regeneration programmes (Big Local, Near Neighbours, and City Council investment in the local park), activities (e.g. the police-run 'Safe Haven' youth club), and an increasing 'openness' and engagement among the local primary schools. Tellingly, one practitioner observed that part of the positive change was in the visibility of people's gifts – 'the passion people have got, it comes to the front more' – something an attitude of gratitude is able to discover.

None of these practitioners were under illusions that there are not serious issues facing people locally – citing 'issues around housing' and the tower blocks, 'antisocial behaviour', 'English language problems', 'more apparent poverty in some families', a general 'lack of trust' and a sense that the area is 'very socially deprived and needs more and more investment' – but at the same time, every practitioner interviewed felt they had noticed more generosity (average score +3). As one interviewee noted, 'there are some extremely generous people, and there's been more opportunities to demonstrate that generosity'. Staff from both schools involved in the project cited parents responding to such opportunities, giving shoes and clothes, food at

harvest time, and time to support various activities in school. Some of this, they suggested, was a response to need – 'people were a lot more giving: 'we know people need that, they realise everyone's in a bit of a pickle' – but it was also, for many, a response that emerged from gratitude: 'people have started to realise people are doing things for them, and they're willing to give back'. Only two of the six practitioners interviewed said they had noticed more thankfulness (the others giving a 0 score), but those who did were emphatic (4 and 4.5): 'Definitely more thankful', said one, 'the more that's on offer, the more parents have access to activities, the more thankful they are', citing sources of advice and support, and emergency food provision. One of the school-based practitioners, mentioned 'some parents sending really nice text messages – people appreciate action more than words'.

#### 4.7 OVERALL FINDINGS

It is possible only to make some very broad observations across the domains and strands of the research. One is that people and relationships infused almost everything participants were thankful for: for Transition pupils, 'family' seemed to leak into their responses to most questions; in the 'stuff' and 'places' domains, both adults and children often valued inanimate objects for the people and relationships they symbolised, mediated, or enabled. A second observation is that the prominence of things people were thankful for seemed to be quite closely correlated with the immediacy of those things, in time and space: so, for most adults, their partner was more significant than their parents; for children, their parents were of most significance; and the further away from home you asked people to imagine, the more difficult they found it to come up with responses, particularly concrete ones.

## 5 Recommendations

Despite the interventions taking place in a local community, which makes some of the findings geographically-specific, some recommendations for wider practice might be drawn from the project. The report therefore concludes with some recommendations for people interested in undertaking similar ventures in their own neighbourhoods and communities:

- organisations and agencies seeking to engage in 'community regeneration' do well to listen attentively to the things local people are thankful for, as well as what they might see as 'problems' (this might be articulated as an 'asset-based community development' approach);
- generous time and intentional encouragement is often needed to help people express what they are thankful for, beyond the immediate: things from the past, things further away from 'home', gifts buried 'deep within';
- asking 'the gratitude question' regularly, without too much formality, can move beyond initial strangeness to help people towards a noticeable positive difference in their outlook, often worked out in practical actions; and
- creating inclusive environments that invite regular giving and receiving, such as a community lunch where people feel able to bring-and-share, can make a noticeable positive difference within a neighbourhood, a 'hub of community', going beyond the impact on individual participants.



# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1: FEEDBACK FROM THE INTERVENTIONS

### i) Primary-Secondary Transition Programme

'We focused on gratitude initially by working on the task sheets. After we'd done that, for the second round of the programme, we very much integrated gratitude into the programme itself – parts of the programme which are around the young people's skills, what they are passionate about, their hopes and dreams – and incorporating gratitude into these. What difference has it made? Initially it was a bit weird, a bit abstract, it wasn't a conversation you'd normally have. But doing it regularly, focusing on it regularly, it became a habit: asking that question, wanting to know what you're thankful for. When we moved into it being more integrated into the programme, it felt a much more natural question to ask, helping young people to understand what was important in their life, what they were grateful for and what difference it made.'

Paul Wright

The participants said:

- 'it built my confidence, it made me want to interact with people more... when I came to secondary school I made friends quickly'

Why being thankful makes a difference...

- 'it makes me feel happy – you know there are people in different countries who don't have a good life'
- 'you can trust people that you didn't really trust before'
- 'so you can help people'
- 'it makes me work harder when I'm in school, and at home doing other stuff'
- 'you're happier with what you're given, instead of asking for more and more'
- 'it makes me feel happy and not down and depressed – it feels like I have changed'

- 'people respect you because you're grateful for what you get – if you weren't it's like you're spoilt'

### ii) Community Leaders Course

'I think some of the participants found it a bit strange, a bit unusual, something they'd never really been asked... and maybe at first people didn't understand how it fitted into the course, and why we were doing it. But as we did it week on week, and as we reflected on it towards the end, more and more people saw the value of it, and have become more thankful people, people that are able to reflect far deeper on what's good in their lives, what they're happy about, what they should be thankful for. It's made them more reflective, and more thankful for the good things they have in their lives.'

Steve Hirst

What participants were thankful for about the course:

- 'learning new things about youth work'; 'before I did this, I didn't think it was something I wanted to do, but now it's made me realise this is very much a passion for me'
- 'I wouldn't have been able to afford it if it hadn't been free'
- 'I've learnt a lot about myself'; 'it's made me look at myself more, just take that split second to think about situations which otherwise I would react instantly about and probably in the wrong way – and just made me learn stuff about myself, what my strengths are and my weaknesses, and how I can improve on my weaknesses'
- 'I've met some great people'; 'I've made friends and we've got along'
- 'in my personal life, living in this country, and not knowing everything about people from different cultures, kind of makes sense now'
- 'it's taught me not to judge someone by how they look and how they behave'

- 'it's introduced me to more of the people who live in my community'
- 'it's improved my job prospects'; 'it's given me the chance to further my career'

### iii) Community Lunches

'Our Community Lunches started out as an idea to get local people together every month to talk about gratitude. Over the last two years they've turned into one of the principal 'hubs of community' in our neighbourhood. If you ask someone 'where community happens' on the Firs and Bromford, as likely as not they'll mention 'community lunch'. It's become the place where people come to get things done, to share ideas of things to start locally, to meet up with old friends and to make new ones. It's also, wonderfully, turned from a place where people come to eat food 'provided' for them, to a place where people come bringing food to share – sharing something of themselves and their favourite recipes, and investing their time and money in the sharing. It's become a place where gratitude is 'in the air' – we don't need to prompt people to talk about it any more, it comes naturally!'

**Rev Al Barrett**

What people are thankful for, about Community Lunches generally:

- 'I meet people from different countries, people are friendly, I'm happy to come here; if I have a problem, I come here straight away'
- 'you meet all sorts of types, you learn so much from them, you can improve yourself – you realise you're not alone in your community, if you need help you can ask for it'
- 'being able to interact with different people, sharing things'
- 'you can come here and talk to people when you're on your own'
- 'people get free food that possibly wouldn't be eating lunch otherwise; it also brings people together, and those living alone know that they've got somewhere to go, where they can mingle with other people and make friends'

When we asked people if they were more thankful (+5) or less thankful (-5) since coming to community lunches, everyone said they were more thankful (average score +3.8). When we asked people if they had noticed the focus on gratitude (a lot = +5), people gave an average score of +3.7.

What difference has the focus on gratitude made to you?

- 'it's made me happier'
- 'it's made me feel worthwhile and given me confidence'
- 'it makes me think more about the things I own, and the things I do'
- 'it's helped me to realise that I have somewhere to come where I'm not intruding'
- 'it makes you appreciate things – makes you more independent, rather than being overruled by people'
- 'it's being able to give back, and that matters a lot'
- 'if you're thankful, people come half-way to you – they think, that's a really nice person, they appreciate me and what I'm doing, and that makes me a better person'
- 'it makes them a better person, I feel, because if they're thankful for something, they can see the good in everything, rather than the bad, and that in itself shines out, and it makes other people aware of it, and makes them thankful too – they start to see through somebody else's eyes.'



# Research Team

## Hodge Hill Church

### REVD AL BARRETT, RECTOR AND RESEARCH TEAM LEADER

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Al has been Anglican priest in Hodge Hill since 2010, is doing a part-time PhD in urban theology with VU University of Amsterdam, and is a Faculty Member of ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) Europe. Out of his work in Hodge Hill he is also involved in writing, training and support more widely around ABCD approaches to community-building, with the Church Urban Fund ([www.cuf.org.uk/ABCD](http://www.cuf.org.uk/ABCD)) and others.  
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### SARAH MAXFIELD, COMMUNITY WORKER

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Sarah has been Community Worker for Hodge Hill Church since 2012, employed first through Near Neighbours and then locally. She co-ordinates Hodge Hill Church's community work through Open Door Community Foundation, overseeing the Open Door drop-in 'place of welcome', the Opening Doors 'social prescribing' programme, and an inter-faith women's group, among other activities locally. Sarah has written reports for the Church Urban Fund on Know Your Church - Know Your Neighbourhood and ListenUp! (<http://cuf.org.uk/research/listen>), two programmes we have piloted locally in Hodge Hill.

**Worth Unlimited** (East Birmingham and North Solihull)

### PAUL WRIGHT, BRANCH DIRECTOR

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Paul has lived on the Bromford estate since 2007, working for Worth Unlimited first as a detached youth worker, and then developing 'The Hub' as a place for youth and community work activities. He is now Branch Director for Worth Unlimited across East Birmingham and North Solihull, leading a growing team, and is heavily involved in local community development work alongside his youth-focused role.

### STEVE HIRST, DEVELOPMENT WORKER

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Steve led the Community Leaders and Youth Social Action strands of Worth EBNS' work, from 2012 to 2014. He is now running his own charity, based around sports, RISE Community Sports ([risecommunitysports.org](http://risecommunitysports.org)), which continues to work on the Firs and Bromford as well as other neighbourhoods in Birmingham.

### JANEY BARRETT, DEVELOPMENT WORKER AND DIRECTOR, LITTLE BIRD COMMUNITY ARTS CIC

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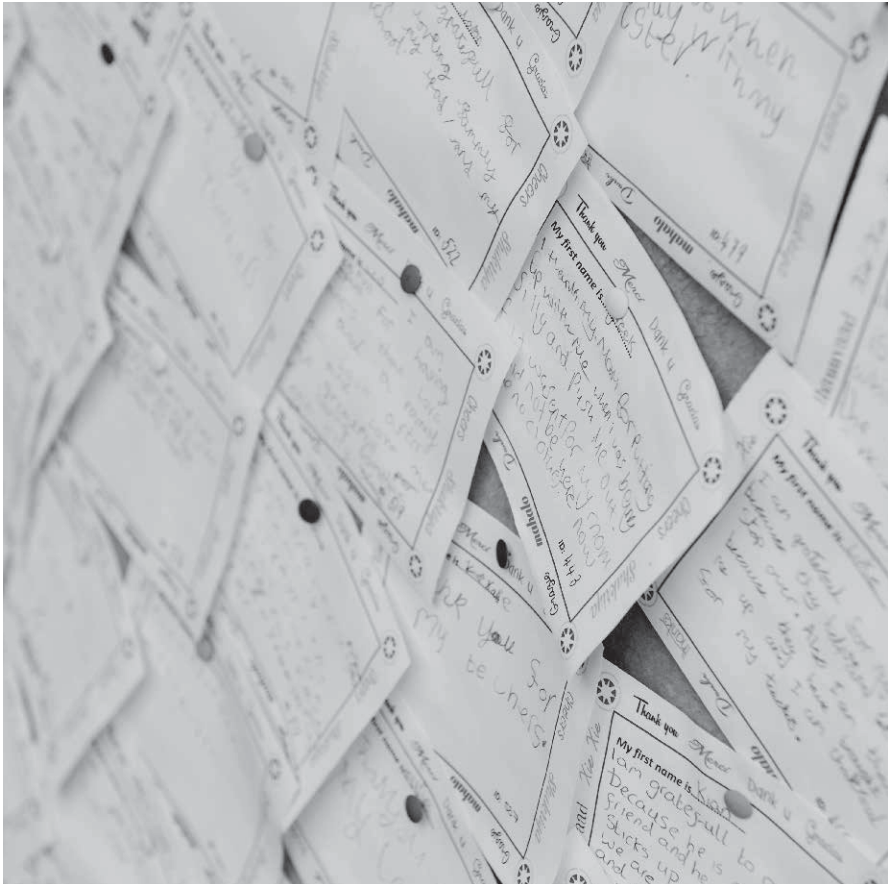
Janey works for Worth EBNS, particularly with girls, encouraging to develop their passions and skills towards small-scale social enterprises. She also runs Little Bird Community Arts CIC ([littlebirdarts.co.uk](http://littlebirdarts.co.uk)), a social enterprise helping children, young people and families to 'get stuck in' to art and craft, developing participants' confidence and self-esteem in the process.



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- the people, too numerous to name, whose generous gifts, through chance encounters and lifetimes shared, have nurtured gratitude in each of us.





Gratitude



## Hodge Hill Church

Hodge Hill Church is a local ecumenical partnership between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church in Hodge Hill, East Birmingham. Committed to 'Growing Loving Community, in the love of God, with all our neighbours, across Hodge Hill', it works closely with partner organisations and local people across a wide range of initiatives, celebrating and nurturing compassion, generosity, trust, friendship and hope in the neighbourhoods of Hodge Hill. Through Open Door Community Foundation, Hodge Hill Church takes an intentionally 'asset-based' approach to community-led development (ABCD) through a number of ongoing projects, including *Hodge Hill Unsung Heroes*, *Open Door* (drop-in 'Place of Welcome'), Community Lunches and its *Opening Doors* 'social prescribing' programme.

## Worth Unlimited

Worth Unlimited (East Birmingham and North Solihull) (Worth EBNS) is a local branch (covering Hodge Hill, Yardley and North Solihull) of the national Christian youth work organisation Worth Unlimited, which is committed to 'Building Hope, Unlocking Potential, and Realising Worth' among some of the UK's most marginalised young people. In Hodge Hill, Worth EBNS' work is centred around 'The Hub' shop-front building on the Firs and Bromford estate, facilitating youth and community projects with a holistic vision of community regeneration within the local neighbourhood.

JOHN TEMPLETON  
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