

GoWell is a collaborative partnership between the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, and Urban Studies and the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow, sponsored by Glasgow Housing Association, the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

**The GoWell Panel:
exploring the practical
application of the GoWell
community engagement
and empowerment model**

June 2021

GoWell is a planned ten-year research and learning programme that aims to investigate the impact of investment in housing, regeneration and neighbourhood renewal on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. It commenced in February 2006 and has several research components. This paper is part of a series of Briefing Papers which the GoWell team has developed in order to summarise key findings and policy and practice recommendations from the research. Further information on the GoWell Programme and the full series of Briefing Papers is available from the GoWell website at: www.gowellonline.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a growing recognition that engaging communities in the planning and implementation of regeneration can increase the potential for building thriving places and improving wellbeing. Likewise, engaging communities in decisions about local services (including healthcare) and political processes has been promoted as an empowering route to improving health and reducing inequalities^{1,2,3,4}. Supporting communities to engage in and shape the research that informs these decisions has also been a growing area of interest for policy-makers, regeneration practitioners, public health and communities themselves^{2,5,6,7}.

Community engagement has been a component of GoWell in two ways: researching the role of community engagement and empowerment in regeneration¹ and exploring its practical application.

Firstly, as part of our research we developed two models; one focused on the processes and outcomes for community empowerment and one described the factors that influence it. As part of this we looked across four GoWell studies of community empowerment in the context of transformational regeneration and local housing management in Glasgow (2006 to 2009). We concluded that community empowerment is desirable as a means to share power more equally and in line with a number of national policy priorities for regeneration. We also concluded that community empowerment is associated with improved mental wellbeing and is therefore also desirable as part of collective efforts to reduce health inequalities. However we highlighted that more work is required to understand how to 'get it right' for realising potential benefits for health and communities in the context of regeneration.

Identifying a need to understand more about community empowerment in practice led to the second part of GoWell's community engagement. Specifically, we aimed to create research and learning activities with communities across the GoWell study areas in ways which were empowering and which would add to the evidence base for community engagement and empowerment.

Guidance on good community engagement practice has been published^{2,12}, as have debates about evidence of its effectiveness and impact^{1,8,9}. However, less attention has been paid to how community engagement can be successful within the real communities of place, interest and identity to which people belong.

This briefing paper describes how we co-designed a community engagement approach with community organisations and stakeholders, how this contributed to the empowerment of the citizens involved, and what has been learned about community engagement and empowerment as a result.

Community engagement

Community engagement has been defined in Scotland as a "purposeful process which develops a working relationship between communities, community organisations and public and private bodies to help them to identify and act on community needs and ambitions". Communities are increasingly defined by policy-makers and community engagement practitioners as diverse groups of people with a place, interest or identity in common¹⁴. People can belong to more than one type of community at the same time and throughout their lives.

Community empowerment

Community empowerment has been described in Scotland as “a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them”. Community empowerment has become an increasingly important part of policy in Scotland in recent years as part of the Scottish Government’s response to complex economic, financial and population challenges.

Community empowerment has grown in policy terms over the last ten years for three main reasons. Firstly, community empowerment has been encouraged as a way to ‘unlock creative potential’¹³ and skills in communities, especially those experiencing inequalities, so that they can lead on solutions on the ground. In turn, this renewal of community capacity and action is seen as part of efforts to sustain economic growth¹³. Secondly, community empowerment has been promoted as a means of redistributing power to citizens and reshaping their relationship with the state so that they have more authority to lead changes locally¹³. Thirdly, such change in the citizen-state relationship is part of a vision of structural change to wrap public services around people and communities. In doing so, the aim is that people and communities will inform the design and delivery of services to become more effective, especially among those hit hardest by inequalities¹⁵.

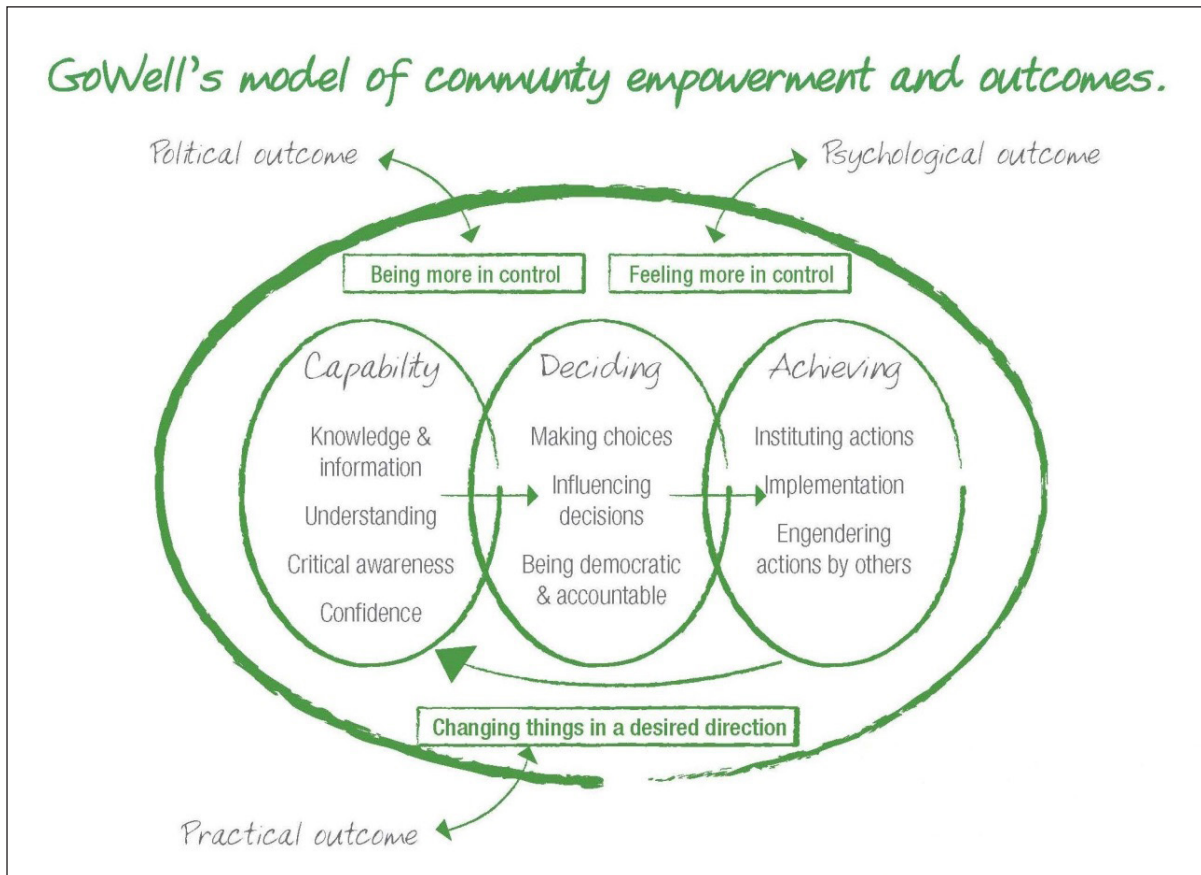
The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is an important piece of legislation because it aims to increase action on these three aspects of community empowerment in central and local government and in communities. In broad terms, the Act aims to increase communities’ participation in, and influence on, decisions about public services and increase their power to own or manage assets and land¹⁴. Achieving these aims could have positive impacts on reducing inequalities, including health inequalities.

Within the GoWell programme we have defined community empowerment as the “capacity to make effective choices, and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”⁹. We have developed a model⁹ to explain the processes and outcomes of community empowerment in the context of regeneration (see Figure 1).

The model has three inter-linked elements:

1. The need for communities to build on their **capability**.
2. Capability can help communities to make and influence **decisions**, given the opportunity.
3. Communities **achieve** change, through their own efforts or by influencing others.

Figure 1: GoWell model of community empowerment.



Together, these three elements can result in positive empowerment outcomes:

- Communities gain **more political control**.
- Communities benefit **psychologically** from feeling in control.
- There is concrete evidence of things **changing** in the direction desired by communities.

We also developed a second model that identifies three key factors that can influence the extent to which community empowerment is achieved: the neighbourhood/community context; the organisational context and approaches to community engagement; and, in some instances, the regeneration vision and strategy. In short, the model suggests that favourable conditions and appropriate support are required if community empowerment is to be successful.

We used these two GoWell models of community empowerment as the framework for developing our approach to community engagement in the GoWell study areas.



2. AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Our community engagement aim was to form an empowering knowledge exchange between the GoWell programme and citizens from community organisations in GoWell study areas. Our purpose was to use GoWell as a vehicle to build capability within these communities. By 'building capability', we mean working with communities to build upon existing knowledge and understanding to influence and inform local decisions and change. We anticipated that this exchange would strengthen our mutual understandings of community empowerment in practice and how research can contribute to community empowerment.

A full-time Community Engagement Manager worked with the GoWell team and community organisations in the 15 study areas to find out how the knowledge exchange might work and what it could explore. This was done using a rapid assessment technique – for more information about this process, see our learning snapshots https://www.gowellonline.com/about/components/community_engagement/snapshots that describe methods that we used, explain how we applied them and the learning we gained. This process helped us understand the activities and priorities of community organisations, helping us see where our research and learning might be mutually beneficial. In response, we developed the following objectives:

- Recruit a Panel of citizens from community organisations in GoWell study areas to build a knowledge exchange.
- Facilitate the Panel to identify what they wanted to get out of their time with us, as individuals and as a group.
- Facilitate GoWell and the Panel to jointly design the format and content of the knowledge exchange.
- Share the Panel's learning with local organisations.
- Support the Panel to apply their learning with their local organisations.

3. METHODS

Our methods were developed using information that community organisations in the 15 GoWell study areas shared with us about their priorities, ways of working and activities (see our [learning snapshots](#)). We counted 466 community organisations across the 15 GoWell study areas, including: housing associations; third sector organisations; and voluntary sector organisations. Conversations took place with 110 members of these organisations.

3.1 GoWell Panel

Many of the priorities and activities of the community organisations in the 15 GoWell study areas mirrored the key GoWell findings on social and physical regeneration (see our [learning snapshots](#)). The research team decided to establish a Panel of citizens from among these organisations to explore some of these topics in greater detail.

Panels can be effective in building dialogue with people around common topics because this approach invites individuals to express diverse views which can be considered and explored in depth by the group as part of a longer term process. We expected that recruiting a Panel would build engagement and empowerment in two ways:

- **Individuals and community:** by recruiting individual Panel members from community organisations and supporting them to learn and then to put learning into practice within these groups, they would build their organisational knowledge of regeneration and strengthen their capacity in the long term.
- **City:** by enabling citizens to share their experiences of regeneration, this would broaden their knowledge, understanding and relationships with community organisations in other parts of the city. We also expected that their insights about regeneration and interpretation of our research would add to our evidence base.

3.2 Panel recruitment

Our intention was to recruit citizens who were likely to gain the most from participating in the Panel. To this end, we aimed to complement ongoing initiatives to engage citizens in GoWell study areas who can be seldom heard or easily ignored.

We invited citizens to be involved by approaching community organisations, including housing associations, third sector, voluntary and local public services. We used a range of methods to recruit individuals, which we describe in our [learning snapshots](#).

Individuals who accepted our invitation to join the Panel accepted our criteria of being curious and open to learning from each other. Individuals were asked to contribute their individual experiences of living or working in an area undergoing regeneration, rather than being asked to represent their communities. Details about these criteria are given in our [learning snapshots](#).

In total, 19 citizens were recruited. They either lived or worked in neighbourhoods that represented the five types of regeneration that GoWell was investigating^a. Of the 19 citizens who were recruited, 14 participated regularly in the Panel.

We used the National Standards for Community Engagement¹² to plan and guide our work. These standards emphasise the importance of supporting participation and removing any barriers that might prevent people being included. To ensure the Panel was accessible, a budget was made available for resources that supported participation, including interpreters, personal assistants and accessible venues (see our [learning snapshots](#)).

3.3 Panel design

The GoWell Community empowerment model (Figure 1) was used as a framework for structuring our work with the Panel. Our vision for the Panel was a dynamic and friendly exchange of knowledge with the GoWell research team. This exchange took two phases.

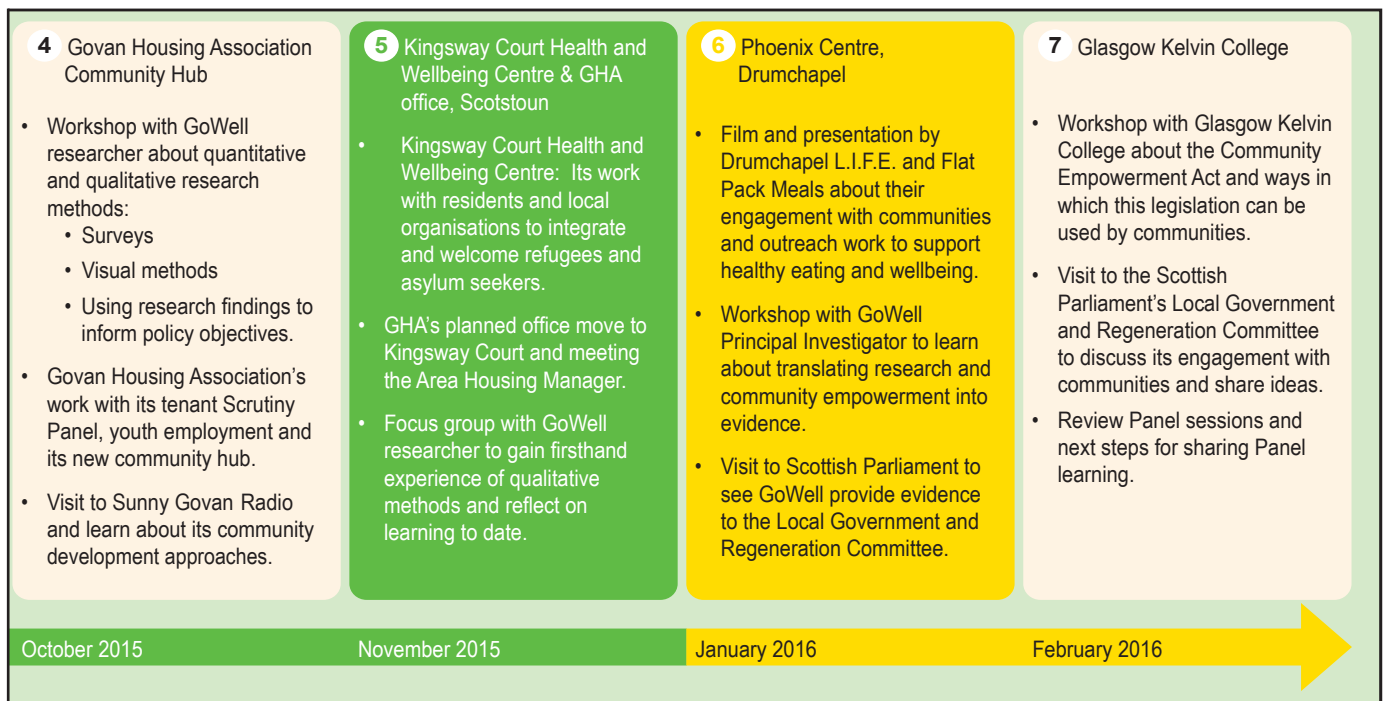
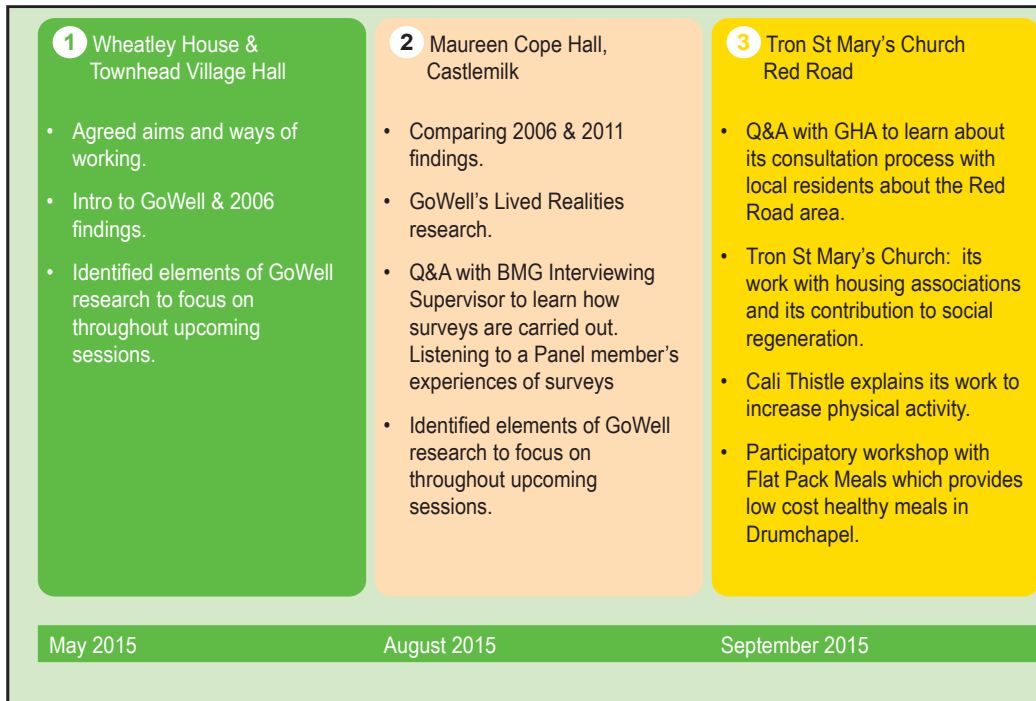
3.3.1 Panel phase one: Panel workshops

GoWell researchers, housing associations and community organisations contributed their skills and knowledge according to workshop topics chosen by the Panel (see Figure 2).

^a The 15 GoWell study areas are categorised into five types of regeneration: Transformational Regeneration Areas (TRAs); Local Regeneration Areas (LRAs); Wider Surrounding Areas (WSAs); Housing Improvement Areas (HIAs); and Peripheral Estates (PEs).

Figure 2: GoWell Panel workshops.

Panel Sessions and activities



Panel Sessions and Activities

Our practical application of the community empowerment model was developed with the Panel as the sessions progressed. The way we incorporated the model into our approach is described below:

Capability

Capability is defined in our model of community empowerment as knowledge, understanding and critical awareness⁹. This includes the capacity to reflect on one's views, to consider and challenge people's viewpoints and appraise sources of information⁹. We approached capability with the Panel in the following ways:

- **Experiential learning:**

We adopted experiential learning, or *learning by doing*, because our rapid assessments identified that this was often used by community organisations. We expected that establishing this approach as a common practice between GoWell and the Panel would help build our relationship. We also reasoned that designing hands-on activities with the Panel would help us develop a knowledge exchange that showed what we were learning from each other in practice.

- **Pragmatic opportunism:**

According to our model, opportunities are ways for communities to hone their capability, choices and influence over decisions⁹. We worked with the Panel to increase the likelihood of encountering opportunities by applying pragmatic opportunism. Pragmatism, or being sensible and practical in achieving things, is seen as a core capability in our model of empowerment⁹. Pragmatic opportunism is a term we use to describe how we looked proactively for empowering opportunities for the Panel to develop their skills, knowledge and critical awareness. Panel workshops featured participation from a range of community groups and stakeholders with the intention of providing opportunities that would help the Panel to apply their learning in practical ways (see our [learning snapshots](#)).

Deciding

Deciding is defined in our community empowerment model as making effective or informed choices⁹. This requires information as well as having the opportunities to make decisions⁹. To put this part of the model into practice, we used co-production and facilitation in our work with the Panel to create an environment that fostered curiosity and enquiry as stepping stones towards decision-making.

- **Co-production and community settings:**

Co-production can be defined as communities and professionals pooling knowledge and solutions, shifting power dynamics to build more equal relationships with each other along the way. Panel workshops were hosted in several GoWell study areas chosen by the group in the expectation that this would:

- encourage participation and empowerment by co-designing a new, enjoyable and useful opportunity with the Panel – bringing a group of citizens and researchers together to explore different kinds of regeneration, choosing which neighbourhoods to visit and which topics to investigate;

- help make the research relevant and useful. For researchers this meant meeting some of the communities living through regeneration to discuss their research findings. For the Panel this meant visiting each other's neighbourhoods and exploring how their experiences of regeneration were captured by the research findings;
- contribute to the local economy in GoWell study areas by hiring local venues and caterers.

- **Supportive and empowering facilitation:**

Facilitation was used as a technique to support and empower the Panel and GoWell researchers to work together and learn from each other. We expected that it would enhance learning because facilitation supports a group of people to identify and progress a shared agenda^b. The first session was planned and led by our Community Engagement Manager and Administrator. They aimed to lay the foundations for the Panel to take up facilitation roles as the sessions progressed.

The GoWell community empowerment model distinguishes decision-making by the types of democratic or accountable processes that are used. In this way we anticipated that individuals might make two types of decisions:

- Panel members would **make choices for themselves** or their community groups that would either be different to previous decisions or that build on their previous choices.
- Panel members would **influence others** around them to make informed choices at an organisational or community level.

Achieving

Achieving is defined in our community empowerment model as taking or influencing action that results in a practical change⁹. We used two approaches that, combined with the capability and achieving parts of our framework, supported and recognised these types of achievements:

- **Celebrating achievement:**

We built this element of empowerment into the Panel by adopting a learning framework that supported individuals to identify achievements they wanted to work towards and celebrating success when it was achieved.

The learning framework we chose was the Community Achievement Awards, administered and supported by Glasgow Kelvin College. These awards accredit work undertaken by individuals within their communities and support a range of roles from participating alongside community members to co-producing new activities. This framework reflected the collaborative, co-production process intended for the Panel and accommodated diverse literacy levels among them. It promoted a positive experience of learning for all individuals, which we reasoned was especially important for those who reported having past negative experiences of learning.

^b International Association of Facilitators. Statement of values and code of ethics. <https://www.iaf-world.org/site/professional/iaf-code-of-ethics>. The statement of values explains how facilitation can support a group by making the best use of each person's contributions to achieve results that the group finds useful.

- **Self-evaluation:**

We used self-evaluation to understand the difference our knowledge exchange was making to the Panel members and to our research. For this reason, self-evaluation has been included in this achieving section because it describes the method we used to check if we were accomplishing our aims of applying the GoWell community empowerment model, and to enable Panel members to reflect on their own development. We self-evaluated as the Panel sessions progressed with the intention of using the insights to inform our approach throughout phase one.

We varied the ways we gathered data from the Panel to accommodate diverse literacy levels and to build Panel members' individual capacities to give feedback by using formal and informal methods. These consisted of:

- Feedback forms completed by Panel members to provide formal feedback about their workshops with GoWell researchers.
- Transcriptions of a focus group in which a GoWell researcher asked the Panel about their experiences on the Panel.
- Notes from one-to-one meetings with Panel members between sessions.
- Materials written by the Panel, such as exercises, blogs and post-it notes.
- Panel members' completed community achievement award booklets.

Self-evaluation data gathered from the Panel was included, regardless of the number of sessions that individuals attended. This is because we took the view that all the Panel members made valuable contributions and benefited in different ways.

3.3.2 Panel phase two: from learning to action

In our earlier research we identified the need for community empowerment to be undertaken on a sustainable basis⁹. Reflecting this, we built in a second phase of work to support Panel members to identify, and work towards achievements, projects or next steps that would take place after the Panel's first phase. Phase two was designed as an opportunity for the Panel, if they wished, to embed their learning from the first phase within their local community groups. This phase consisted of two approaches:

1. *Learning workshops*: we worked with the Panel to organise learning workshops in two study areas to share learning with their local community groups.
2. *Projects*: we supported Panel members to pursue projects with their community groups to embed learning within their local practices.

In this way, we intended to support the Panel members and their groups to use their learning locally to the benefit of their local community and to facilitate ongoing empowerment beyond the Panel.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Panel engagement

“I was nervous, but five minutes in, we were chatting.”

(Female Panel member, focus group with GoWell)

The work of the Panel consisted of two phases. In the first phase, we started out with 19: 6 men and 13 women participated from 14 community organisations and housing associations in GoWell study areas. All individuals had first-hand experiences of regeneration, gained from living, volunteering and working in these areas. One individual was claiming asylum and one reported experiences of the criminal justice system. Of these 19 individuals, 14 remained involved for all the sessions in phase one. Two of these individuals were men.

We set out to recruit individuals who were seldom heard or easily ignored. Our findings were complex and mixed. Broadly speaking, all Panel members reported a range of experiences of being heard. One individual had previously won a national award for their community achievements, and yet they also reported struggling to make their views on local regeneration matters heard by decision-makers. Some were on tenants' committees and had constructive experiences of representation in these groups but reported general struggles in influencing other aspects regeneration initiatives, such as consultation processes or community safety.

Four individuals might be identified as 'seldom heard' because of the extent of their influence locally. Their local organisations had nominated them for the Panel because they anticipated that participating in an empowering knowledge exchange with GoWell would build their capabilities and achievements so that they could strengthen their roles in the groups. These individuals held a range of assets and also managed a range of complex health, wellbeing (including confidence and mental wellbeing), housing, financial, employment and family circumstances.

Ten individuals maintained their involvement during phase two, including three of those who might be identified as 'seldom heard'.

4.2 Phase one: Panel workshops

“This is the first I've met and listened to people from other areas of Glasgow.”

(Female Panel member, focus group with GoWell)

The first phase ran from May 2015 to February 2016. During this time we co-designed seven community workshops with the Panel, held roughly once a month. The format and content of these workshops is described in Figure 2. Each workshop was hosted in a different GoWell study area and focused on an element of our research chosen by the Panel.

Two of the Panel chose to make these workshops count towards their Community Achievement Awards in phase one.

4.3 Phase two: from learning to action

The second phase ran from Spring 2016 to September 2017.

During this phase, ten of the Panel members co-designed the learning workshops with us in two study areas. The aim of the first workshop was to demonstrate to their local groups what approaches they had adopted and the learning they had achieved through their involvement in the Panel. Feedback from this event was used to shape the format of the second workshop, which focused on the Panel's use of best practice, including the National Standards for Community Engagement. The learning reports in our online [learning snapshots](#) describe how these workshops were planned and what they achieved.

A total of eight members of the Panel chose to apply their new knowledge and skills to projects with their local groups. Inspired by the two Panel members who completed Community Achievement Awards in the first phase, these eight members chose to use this awards framework as a structure for planning, undertaking and evaluating their projects. Projects undertaken by the Panel with their groups comprised a range of activities and events which demonstrated their ability, and further strengthened their capacity to mobilise action on an individual and organisational level.

4.4 Applying the Community Empowerment Framework

4.4.1 Building capability

“It has developed my communication skills: by learning from others I have gained more topics that I can speak about and this has even helped in my relationship with my partner as I may bring up a topic and we will discuss subject[s] or even Google it.”

(Male Panel member, Community Achievement Award coursework)

We had anticipated that experiential learning would act as a bridge to bring the Panel and GoWell researchers together. In practice, we found that applying this approach helped to build relationships among Panel members and the GoWell team that led to two types of learning outcomes. The first outcome was learning from each other in positive and supportive ways as Panel members and the GoWell team co-designed and undertook each workshop. The Panel members' range of regeneration experiences in addition to their diverse skills, confidence levels and capabilities meant that the learning that was shared between them and with GoWell was rich and insightful. This led to the second outcome, which was the knowledge and insights generated collectively by the Panel and GoWell (see our [learning snapshots](#)).

“It was like a fix – to look forward so much to meeting up with people, it was like we had all known each other before.”

(GoWell learning event, Panel member)

The knowledge and skills that the Panel took back to their communities centred on promoting learning, research and mobilising action. This in turn, we observed, enabled the Panel members to make decisions and pursue projects with their local groups.

Pragmatic opportunism was an approach we included to help the Panel pursue empowering opportunities. In practice, it turned out to be an important part of our approach. The Panel defined opportunities as empowering if they met three conditions:

- *Being able to make an informed choice about whether to take up an opportunity.*
This included having the right information, having any questions answered and meeting the people involved to gauge if the opportunity was ‘for them’.
- *Being able to negotiate the terms of participation and what Panel members stood to gain from the opportunity as a result.*
This was often empowering for the Panel members in itself because they had not previously realised that negotiation was a possibility.
- *Influencing the way external organisations related to the Panel.*
The Panel often fed back that organisations who reciprocated their values of kindness and trust (and fun, where appropriate) made them feel that they had established an authentic relationship and that positive outcomes might arise.

4.4.2 Deciding

In practice, we found that using co-production and facilitation supported the Panel to take control of their learning. Facilitation processes actively fostered curiosity to enable the Panel to be open to exploring and learning from their own contributions as well as from other members of the group. Again, we noticed that exploring the range of experiences in decision-making among the group supported individuals of all confidence levels in reflecting on what choices they might make in the future as a result. As a result, we noticed that the Panel made decisions that led to outcomes we could not have envisaged achieving otherwise. For example, the first decision made by the Panel was to increase the frequency of our sessions together. This decision enabled us to explore more topics and provided the Panel with monthly milestones that they felt helped mark their personal growth.

After the first Panel visit (to Townhead) to explore regeneration first hand, the group said they wanted to see more GoWell areas and many wanted to help host the Panel in their own area. As a result, we gained particular insight into diverse approaches to regeneration across Glasgow.

For most of the Panel members, the design, format and content of the sessions represented a new way of working that they enjoyed, especially the way the workshops were co-designed and facilitated. The Panel commented that they all participated equally and that it felt a safe and friendly space.

Panel members took turns to host the Panel sessions when it came to their area. They helped with logistics, such as finding a suitable venue and catering, sharing their knowledge and expertise about their neighbourhood, and showing examples of crafts they had made as part of social regeneration efforts. They also valued the opportunity to visit the GoWell study areas and understand local contexts for the research, and to be able to show and share experiences from their own area.

“[facilitation]... it’s what makes you want to come back.”

(interim evaluation: focus group)

“It’s half the battle if you are made welcome... means people come back.”

GoWell Panel review of their workshops

We had anticipated that Panel members would make, or influence, new decisions and that they would make, or influence, decisions that built on previous choices they had made. In practice we found examples of both of these – details of these are given in section 4.4.4. We think that these results happened because of the ways that the Panel were supported to recognise and build on their capabilities and achievements throughout both phases. Experiencing, or seeing this growth and range of successes in themselves and each other, seemed to encourage Panel members to make new decisions or become more ambitious about building on previous choices or interests.

4.4.3 Achieving

Community Achievement Awards were optional for the Panel members. These qualifications provided a framework for individuals to identify goals for personal growth and skills. Panel members could choose from four different levels, depending on the scale and complexity of community work they wanted to achieve. The levels ranged from participating in activities to co-producing activities with a community. Awards were examined and accredited by Glasgow Kelvin College. When awards were achieved, celebrations were held locally with individuals and their local groups, attended by college staff.

Formal qualifications held by Panel members varied. One individual had a degree, several had school qualifications and some individuals reported that they had few, or no, qualifications. One Panel member had previously completed a Community Achievement Award and subsequently pursued an award at a higher level as a result of participating in the Panel. Seven others chose to complete Community Achievement Awards in phase two after seeing two of their peers gain skills, personal growth and enjoyment from completing them in phase one. These awards were accessible for the range of literacy skills among the Panel because there was not a specific level of spelling and grammar required. Instead, individuals had to evidence their capacity to carry out and reflect on community activities and visual evidence, as well as textual evidence, was accepted and encouraged.

4.4.4 Illustrative examples of empowerment outcomes

Example 1: A housing association staff member commented that the Panel's application of learning from their work with GoWell (**capability**), in combination with their work towards the awards (**deciding** and **achieving**), acted as a catalyst for personal growth for five individuals who attended a local gardening group. The staff member specifically mentioned that this positive change occurred at a quicker pace than she would normally anticipate with her local group. She also observed that they did this in combination with increased interpersonal skills and confidence: Panel members were applying co-production to work with the gardening group in ways that valued everyone's contributions by praising and reflecting on individual's skills and achievements. At the same time, they also supported the gardening group to do things that they found challenging, such as writing up their Community Achievement Award booklets (**achieving**).

Example 2: One Panel member completed a Community Achievement Award during the first phase of the Panel to boost her confidence and to gain a qualification. As a result of **achieving** this award (**capability**) and, encouraged by the positive feedback from other Panel members whom she helped to use a computer for the first time, she **decided** (building on her previous choice to complete the award) to help members of her community organisation to work towards the award. She did this by presenting a persuasive and credible proposal (**capability**) to volunteers and staff, who agreed (**deciding** – new decision) to let her mentor them to complete the qualifications as part of their regular workshops.

Example 3: As a result of seeing and understanding more about the contribution of community organisations to social justice and making their communities more inclusive (**capability**), two Panel members **decided** (new decision) they wanted to arrange a local screening of the film *I, Daniel Blake*. They used their new skills to undertake the required research, planning and negotiation with their housing association to make this happen (**achievement**).

Example 4: One of the aims of the knowledge exchange between GoWell and the Panel was to help bring some lived experience and depth to the statistics and data gathered as part of the research. The Panel accepted the opportunity (**deciding** – new decision) to review GoWell's evidence submission to the Scottish Parliament's Committee for Local Government and Regeneration. As a result of an engaging and informative session (**capability**) with one of the GoWell Principal Investigators, in which they compared GoWell's evidence with their lived experiences, the Panel **decided** (building on the decision to review the evidence) to observe the evidence being presented and discussed at the Scottish Parliament. As a result of their visit to Parliament, the Clerk to the Committee visited the Panel to discuss how the Committee could improve its community engagement (**achieving**). This exchange provided the basis of a formal response to the Commission on Parliamentary Reform. It also resulted in an increased interest in politics (**deciding** – new decision) for some of the Panel who requested a seminar about the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act after hearing this legislation being discussed.

Example 4 cont: Glasgow Kelvin College responded by designing a seminar about the Community Empowerment Act's powers and opportunities. For many members of the Panel it was their first visit to a college and they reported on the seminar being a positive experience (**capability, achieving**): one individual said what they particularly liked was that the college lecturer "put across all her points without you feeling inferior to her" and "she made you want to listen"^c.

Following the visit to the Scottish Parliament, several members wrote a blog – their first one – about their experience. One of the group helped two Panel members to use a computer for the first time (**deciding**) to write their entries.

^c Panel member's feedback on the Glasgow Kelvin College seminar about the Community Empowerment Act.

Example 5: One Panel member developed an idea for a school uniform bank with her local school. She put co-production into practice (**capability, deciding**) by working with parents, staff and the parent council of her children's local primary school to design and launch a school uniform recycling bank (**achieving**). The success of this project led to her enquiring about support with local housing associations, third sector and social enterprise agencies to start up a new organisation to continue the uniform recycling bank on a sustainable basis. This was a challenging process which required her to meet several organisations and weigh up the range of advice she was given following the early results from her project. At the time of writing this briefing paper, the Panel member reported that she had, on her own initiative, gained some 'seedcorn funding' (**achieving**) to develop her organisational model.

4.5 Summary of learning:

- Working with community organisations across GoWell areas to understand their priorities alongside our research aims helped us co-design community engagement that was of mutual benefit.
- Community organisations which supported the idea of a Panel did so because they had helped design it in such a way that it benefited individual community members and the capacity of their organisations.
- The power to co-design the learning and logistics for Panel workshops transformed how many Panel members felt about their own capabilities, including learning and knowledge. Learning, for many, became something that was personal, social and useful for their community work.
- In co-designing the Panel, it was a space for Panel members to try ways of working and to explore new opportunities before undertaking local projects.

- Learning from each other generated participation, knowledge and informed the types of actions that Panel members mobilised within their organisations. Recruiting individuals with ranges of confidence, power and influence appeared to ensure that shared learning was relevant, insightful and that it encouraged Panel members to reflect on their next steps.
- We can see that having a process that was flexible and adjustable to time needs was important in two ways. Firstly, flexibility to choose our ways of working, the regeneration topics, study areas to visit and activities was essential to creating an empowering knowledge exchange that was of mutual benefit to the Panel and GoWell. Secondly, the ability to negotiate the duration of both phases, the frequency of workshops in the first phase and support in the second phase, enabled Panel members to move at their own pace while increasing the likelihood of subsequent successful outcomes. For example, two Panel members completed Community Achievement Awards in the first phase and eight completed them in the second phase.
- We began with the end in mind and we negotiated a gradual reduction of our support to the Panel. This was an empowering process because as the gaps between support were gradually increased, they became an opportunity for Panel members to work autonomously on their local projects with the security of planned support sessions to reflect on how these periods of independent activity were progressing.
- Having a framework for structuring community empowerment and GoWell Panel members' achievements helped us identify where we were having an impact and helped the Panel identify their successes.
- Celebrating achievements was as important for the community organisations that the Panel members were originally recruited from, as it was for the Panel collectively. We noticed that local celebrations were occasions that linked individual successes of the Panel members with wider community activities (each Community Achievement Award focused on a community activity).
- Our findings indicate that the first phase of the Panel – bringing individuals together to co-design learning workshops with GoWell – provided a useful foundation for Panel members to pursue local projects that were beneficial to their communities. This result appears to stem from the Panel's exploration of regeneration research and practice with GoWell, individual empowerment journeys that affirmed capacity to influence wider change locally and the pragmatic support given by local groups to individuals.



5. WHAT THIS ADDS TO GOWELL'S UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

Findings from our work with the GoWell Panel demonstrate that this approach enabled increased capability, more informed decision-making and new achievements by the Panel members as individuals and as part of their community organisations.

It therefore appears that the Panel became more empowered as the workshops progressed. Ten months into the engagement, the Panel reported a number of approaches which they found empowering: members reported that the co-production, facilitation and experiential learning approaches that we used enabled them to learn from each other, collectively build their knowledge, and get to know and support each other.

The findings in the two years following the establishment of the Panel reflect the three types of empowerment identified in the GoWell model of community empowerment: an increased ability to influence decisions on an individual and community level; an increased feeling of being in control; and changes as a result of their actions⁹.

As a result of these approaches to knowledge exchange, combined with the values of kindness, trust and having fun, empowerment outcomes that were observed included: positive relationships with each other and strengthened relationships with their local groups; increased confidence and curiosity to meet new people and learn new things in ways they had not previously encountered; engagement in, and enjoyment of, learning; opportunities taken up more readily; and development of new skills and knowledge.

Achieving these group outcomes often led to individual signs of empowerment which included voting in a UK general election for the first time, using a computer for the first time and accessing further education. These outcomes tended to manifest as 'events' or 'achievements' because they appeared as single moments in time but each one was part of a wider empowerment journey (see Figure 3).

The spirit of our approach to community engagement appeared to be an important part of the process and a reason why so many Panel members remained involved throughout both phases. Specifically, the "belief and passion" of all the GoWell team came across strongly to the Panel and was cited by them as an important reason for their continued participation.

There was an element of trust and a 'leap of faith' by individuals to engage initially in the Panel. To overcome this, the Community Engagement Manager met individuals (where this was feasible and desired) before and during their participation in the Panel. As part of these meetings GoWell's research topic and aims were explained to prospective Panel members, but the breadth and depth of the research programme meant that it was impossible for the Panel to have a clear idea of all the things they stood to learn in advance of their participation. Importantly, however, was the description of *how* the GoWell team wished to work with them which the Panel reported as being an important factor in their decision to participate.

This work has also shown the benefit of focusing on the sustainability of empowerment after the period of community engagement. The Panel members who continued into phase two worked with their local community groups to undertake a range of projects that were appropriate to their own communities.

A number of challenges emerged in both phases of our work with the Panel. The format of the Panel was intended to include a diverse range of people from communities of place, interest and identity in GoWell study areas. This intended mix appeared to be in itself a barrier for some: one organisation wished to nominate a member for the Panel but reported that the mixed gender format of the Panel was itself a barrier and another group reported that they did not wish to risk one of their members being the only one on the Panel from their particular community of interest and identity. While we did not have the resources to develop another Panel, we developed a spin-off workshop with one of these groups which was successful. This experience highlighted that organisations planning longer-term community engagement might find that developing spin-off groups with an identity or interest in common could potentially enable participation from groups of citizens who might not join a city-wide group.

In phase two, one of the Panel reported being sanctioned by the Department for Work and Pensions and consequently lost access to all their benefits. Despite achieving considerable personal growth and empowerment from working with GoWell, losing their access to benefits had a disempowering effect, although the individual's immediate reaction to the sanctions did seem to reflect an increased capability to access the most helpful forms of information and support.

One individual reported that a family member found it hard to adapt to her new-found assertiveness which was a result of her increased self-esteem. While the Panel member was glad to have increased self-esteem, this highlights a possible unintended impact of empowerment on relationships.

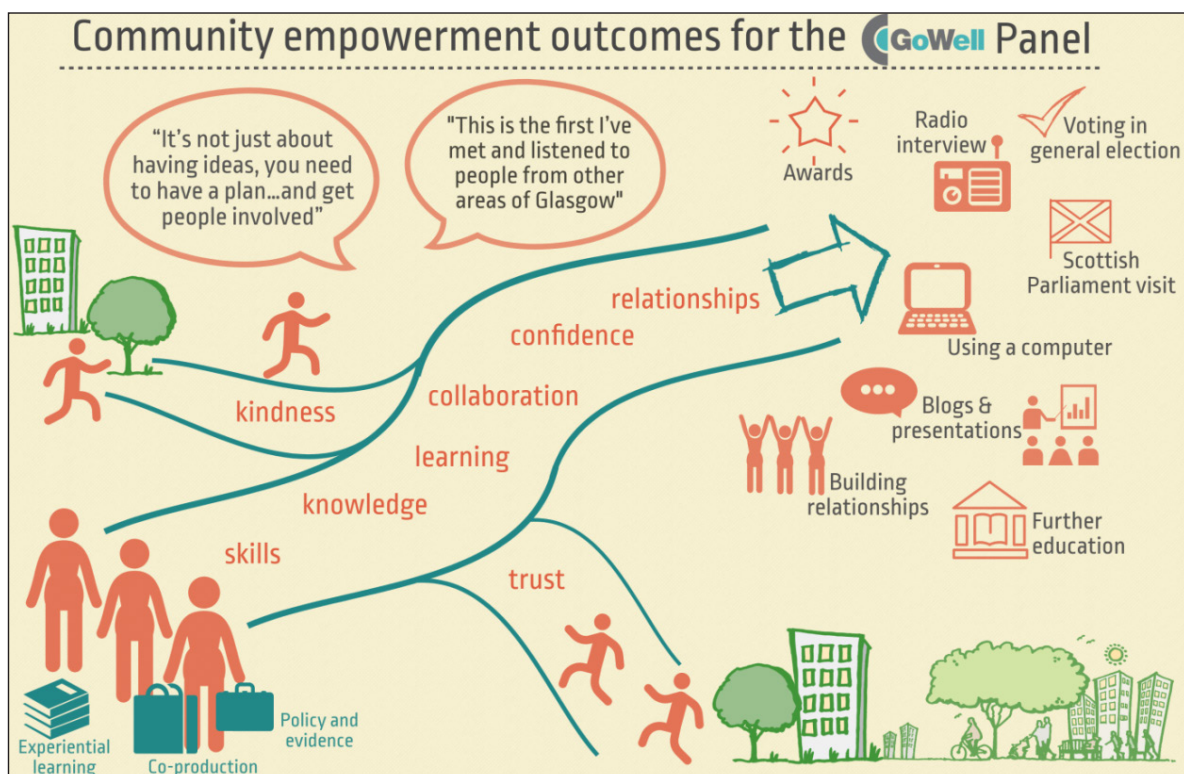
In summary, this work with the Panel has given us three main areas of learning about community engagement and empowerment:

1. We found that being clear about how we wished to work with communities and Panel members was as important as developing goals for what we wanted to achieve together. Citizens and their groups made decisions to volunteer their time with GoWell based on our working practices just as much as what they stood to gain. This required time, understanding local priorities, learning from local practices and negotiating ways of working during the initial stages of a community engagement process.
2. The power to design how and what we learned together was described by the Panel as empowering for their personal growth, increasing their confidence, self-esteem and individual skills. Going on to achieve good results as a Panel and with their community organisations was empowering because of the changes they achieved together.
3. Successes and challenges reaffirmed the contextual emphasis of GoWell's community empowerment model: that individuals and groups of people must have favourable circumstances to influence change⁹. These circumstances include social, economic, political or organisational factors. In this light, empowerment is an ongoing

journey, waxing and waning in multiple ways. Empowerment needs to be considered in terms of the interactions between individuals, communities and factors influencing the circumstances in which they live.

We set out to use the GoWell research and learning programme as a vehicle to build an empowering knowledge exchange with the Panel and their local groups. In doing so, we anticipated that we would strengthen our understanding of community engagement and how community empowerment can be achieved in practice. This section concludes seven key learning points from this process.

Figure 3: Empowerment outcomes.



CONCLUSION AND KEY LEARNING

1. Community empowerment and achievement frameworks

We found that having a model to help inform a framework for working with the Panel, in this case the two GoWell community empowerment models, helped us co-design a clear structure and process for our activities. It also helped us to identify how our work was leading to empowerment. In practice, using the model gave us clear guiding principles – capability, deciding and achieving. These principles helped us to design how we worked with the Panel, while it was flexible enough for the Panel to determine what empowerment meant to them and their communities.

Understanding what individuals perceived as empowerment meant that we could support them to realise their own goals. Having a framework for this work, in this case Glasgow Kelvin College's Community Achievement Award, helped individuals record, recognise and celebrate their progress with GoWell and their local groups.

2. Capability, deciding and achieving

We found that building upon Panel members' existing capabilities and taking into account the range of individual interests and strengths was a useful foundation for working together to support their decisions and achievements. In practice we found that repeating this process resulted in the group choosing to pursue decisions and achievements that were increasingly ambitious.

3. Individual and collective achievement

Panel members' individual decisions and achievements had a positive influence on each other and the group as a whole. We found that the projects chosen by Panel members in phase two were vital ways for their communities to interpret, and apply, their learning gained from the knowledge exchange with GoWell. This often led to results built on the achievements of the first phase of the Panel, adding value. For example, the individuals who pursued projects in phase two were able to demonstrate local change in ways that GoWell could not have achieved. Examples included projects that recruited men and children and developing a school uniform bank to reduce waste and support local families.

4. A person-centred approach to community empowerment

In the second phase of our work with the Panel, it became clear that having worked in a person-centred way to foster curiosity and supportive group dynamics, these individuals were able to support empowerment locally in their communities. Some individuals became catalysts for the development of their local group members, some increased their role in sustaining local activities and one individual developed a project from scratch.

5. Planning sustainable community engagement

The planning and design of our community engagement involved working closely with community organisations throughout both phases. This included understanding their priorities, recruiting individuals to the Panel and supporting Panel members to pursue local projects. Building in time to support individual Panel members to pursue 'next steps' when the Panel sessions ended was a vital way for them to discover what

empowerment meant for them in their daily lives. This helps illustrate the importance of having focus on the sustainability of empowerment after the period of community engagement.

6. Applying a research lens to community empowerment

We had anticipated that working with the Panel would help us understand how research can contribute to community empowerment. In practice we identified two broad contributions. Firstly, we applied elements of research methods – for example, rapid assessments – to help us understand community groups’ priorities and ways of working. This gave us insights to understand *what* parts of the GoWell research might be of interest and *how* we could go about working with each other. This research lens afforded us the flexibility to co-create working practices with the Panel – a process that the Panel reported was as useful to their empowerment as other outcomes. Research therefore appears to have been useful in providing information as well as informing the design of the Panel in a way that supported empowerment.

In addition to design, research and learning was used for the content of our work with the Panel. We found that working with GoWell researchers, who reflected their values of kindness and trust, in and of itself helped the Panel to be more confident and demystified research. It also allowed the researchers to reflect on the ways in which research is relevant to their communities.

7. Re-defining learning

Combining the GoWell research with experiential learning and facilitation processes that encouraged curiosity resulted in the Panel re-defining what learning meant for them, including that it can be social, fun and community-based. Some individuals reported that this was empowering in and of itself. Research and learning have been useful in fostering the Panel’s empowerment by enabling them and their communities to open up ways of learning that led to knowledge that was either new or built upon their existing knowledge base.

In conclusion, this practical application of our community empowerment model in combination with a focus on research and learning has given us valuable insights into how empowerment can be achieved locally as part of regeneration in ways that have enabled individual and community growth. More work is required to understand how empowerment can be achieved and sustained in the longer term in regenerated neighbourhoods in ways that benefit communities of place, interest and identity.

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