

RECOGNISING AND REDUCING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

ABOUT US

We are a small, local volunteer group supporting farmers and their families in the rural community where we live and work. We all know each other well, sometimes we agree, sometimes we don't, but we share the idea of fairness for all who live in our community. We heard of the Elevate programme through a community newsletter and thought it would be good to get involved.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & HEALTH INEQUALITIES

A couple of us went along to an Elevate training workshop. Other community groups were there along with a member of the Elevate team. It was a great workshop, we had time to talk and listen to each other. As we shared our different experiences, we could see that **inequality had different faces** in each community. It was useful to think about what our role could be in helping reduce it.

In the workshop, we did an exercise called 'Maria's Story' and it was very interesting to see how we all viewed this person's life and how we thought she could be supported. We all knew a Maria in our community and the exercise helped us think about how important it is to understand the **root causes of inequality**. We learned too that we were already using community development values in our work like social justice and empowerment. Our farming community has been affected by a number of challenges in recent times that have resulted in inequalities.

We shared experiences about:

- More suicides in our community from young people in their teens to people in their seventies
- Poor housing issues for some people who live in old buildings with no heating and modern facilities
- Job losses and not many opportunities for work locally, meaning less money in pockets for many
- A community top heavy with older people and a lot of younger people moving away
- Hard to get to services because of transport problems, people having no one to go with them and the stigma around asking for help or talking about your mental health

The training helped us understand that the inequalities were unfair and avoidable caused through isolation in our rural area, changes in family circumstances. They were avoidable if we had access to support and the opportunity to have our voices heard.

We knew that people were struggling financially, physically and mentally but we were not sure what to do as we wanted to respect people's privacy but also break down the barriers. We liked the idea of starting small. Through the Elevate workshop, we were given the space to think and talk about how to do that.

REDUCING THE INEQUALITIES

We started to look at the connections we had across our community through the church, post office, chemist and other groups and how we could join things up. The training showed us how all the **connections played a role** in helping to reduce health inequalities.

We really wanted to involve people and understand their experiences so we made calls and visits and asked people to share their ideas through a suggestion box in the church.

Our mentoring organisation gave us great support and helped us think about how best to bring people together or have something to offer those who were not able or did not want to 'join' something.

SHARING THE LEARNING

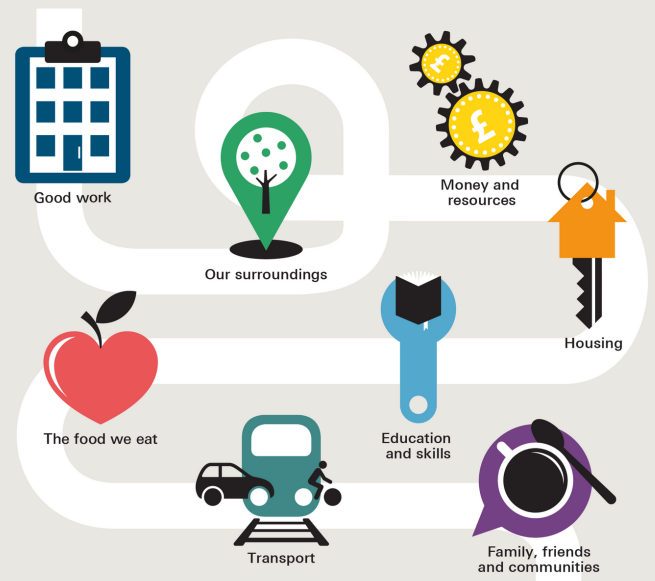
In the workshop we learned about moving from **individual (me) action to collective (we) action** and we had built our confidence and skills over the time of the Elevate programme. We had listened, shared, talked and planned with everyone involved.

All of this work helped our community to see what was good about it, the strengths we have and the things we share. It also helped us to raise awareness about the importance of supporting each other, talking about our health and being more informed about our rights and getting advice. We have made great connections with other groups. Our GP, chemist and community definitely feels more connected and positive. We have built this approach on respect and trust and we know that inequality can be tackled but there is some work behind that and it is better to do it together.

What makes us healthy?

Good health matters, to individuals and to society. But we don't all have the same opportunities to live healthy lives.

To understand why, we need to look at the bigger picture:



The healthy life expectancy gap between the most and least deprived areas in England is over **18** YEARS

Find out more: [health.org.uk/what-makes-us-healthy](https://www.health.org.uk/what-makes-us-healthy)



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We put up posters asking people what they thought was needed in our community, encouraging them to use the suggestion boxes in the church, shop, pharmacy and GP surgery.

We organised an information evening with different speakers from the suggestions that the community had made.

We organised a weekly time for farmers to come along together and use their skills to mend machinery, make new tools and enjoy social time with a cup of tea.

We developed our committee to include new people and share the skills we had learned including ideas for funding, future events and keeping the connections going.



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