Lessons from Across the Pond

An investigation into how community development and regeneration organisations in the eastern United States involve local people in their regeneration activities.

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Executive Summary

The purpose of my research visit was to investigate how community development and regeneration organisations in the eastern United States involve local people in their regeneration activities. It was hoped that I would be able to glean gems of good practice and find examples of innovative and forward thinking processes to involve local people in the regeneration of their local communities. I was fortunate in meeting some truly dedicated people; passionate about their work and committed to the communities they served. Unfortunately, I was also saddened and disturbed by some of the behaviour I came across during my visit. It is from this stance that I regard my research visit as being a success.

I would encourage you, the reader to explore this report further to gain a greater insight into the work of community organisation in the United States.
Planning my trip

My research trip was originally planned for the summer of 2008 however, owing to unforeseen redundancy; my visit was postponed until July and August 2009. Looking back, I don’t think my new employer really understood the nature of my visit or the purpose of my research which did not help when asking for the time to carry out the research. So, after renegotiating the visit with the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, I re-planned my research to fit into a three week schedule.

During this time, I intended to meet with nine community development organisations in the eastern United States. Through a mix of meetings with practitioners and visits to projects I planned to explore the barriers they face when trying to engage with local residents and community members and the strategies they use to overcome these barriers. I also wanted to investigate the methods they employ to empower the local community and the capacity building programmes they utilise to equip local people to take a leading role in bettering their own communities.

Community development, by its very nature, is an educative process and one that is self perpetuating from generation to generation. Local people will teach, encourage and support others within their own communities for the betterment of the community as a whole. Often this learning goes unnoticed and unrecorded. Indeed, it could be considered as learning by stealth. For a large proportion of those engaged in the process, formal education and training would be far from the best approach as a classroom based learning environment may appear intimidating and may also stir unhappy memories of time spent in the formal education system.

The Plan

When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people.

Chinese Proverb

DAY 1 I will fly from Bristol International Airport on Continental Airlines to New York Liberty Airport on Sunday 26 July. On landing, I will collect a hire car and begin the first leg of my journey to Buffalo in northwest New York State. The journey time from New York City to Buffalo is 8-10 hours I will break my journey at a suitable place and time to stop for the night. The following morning, I will continue my journey and arrive in Buffalo sometime in the mid morning. I will make a confirmatory phone call to Harrison Watkins of Push Buffalo and Coffee of South Buffalo Alive to say that I have arrived and the reconfirm the times of our respective meetings

DAY 2. I will meet with Push Buffalo during the morning and South Buffalo Alive. There will also be visits to local projects to meet local residents involved in community development
activities. I anticipate that I will leave Buffalo late in the afternoon and make a start on the journey to my next destination.

**DAY 3.** After a night in a roadside inn, I will restart my journey and head towards Cleveland, Ohio. The distance is 177 miles according to internet sources and should take in the region of 5 hours to complete. I will then locate a roadside in near the area I will be visiting and after contacting my next host I will rest for the night.

**DAY 4.** Today, I will be meeting with John Enlow and some of his colleagues at the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organisation. Our meeting will be followed by a visit to some of the projects the organisation is working on. Following my visit with Mr Enlow, I will make a start on the long drive to my next host organisation. I will find an appropriate roadside inn en route.

**DAY 5.** This will be a long day and will be spent on the road. The journey time from Cleveland Ohio to Berea in Kentucky is in the region of 10 hours. On arrival at Berea, I will contact my host Jason Bailey of The Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) to confirm the following day’s meeting, before resting for the night.

**DAY 6.** My meeting with Jason does not have a fixed time or agenda as yet, but I anticipate we will address the research questions I wish to ask before visiting examples of local residents involved in community regeneration activities. Following this, I will make a start to my next location – Logan County in Western Virginia. I will overnight at an appropriate roadside inn.

**DAY 7.** I will make an early start as the journey time is scheduled to only take 4 hours and I will have already made some headway into that time. I intend to arrive in Logan at a reasonably early time to explore the area and find suitable accommodation. My host in Logan is Reggie Jones of Pride in Logan. I will contact Reggie to confirm my arrival and our meeting.

**DAY 8.** Today is Sunday. This will be a rest day and I hope to visit local attractions and generally chill.

**DAY 9.** I will meet with Reggie Jones of Pride in Logan. Time and agenda for the day has yet to be set. Having spoken to Reggie on the phone, he is excited by my visit and wants to promote the good work his organisation is doing in the field of community development and “neighbourhood revitalisation”. Again, following our meeting, I will make a start on the next leg of my journey through eastern United States.

**DAY 10.** This is probably the longest and most tiring day of my visit. The journey time from Logan to my next halt is 12 hours and is in the region of 400 miles. I’ll be making my way through West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland to Delaware and ending this leg in the city of Newark. I’ll contact my next hosts before retiring for the night in a roadside inn.
DAY 11. Today I am meeting representatives from 2 organisations. During the day, I’m meeting Charles Madden of Wilmington HOPE Commission at 10.00 am and during the evening (after 5pm) I’m meeting with the Jackie Cousin of Pencader Hundred Community Centre. Jackie has asked that we meet after 5pm as most of her active community members will be working during the day before becoming involved in their community development roles in the evening. Both organisations contribute significantly to community empowerment in their areas and have contrasting stories to tell. At the end of the evening, I’ll retire to spend the night in the same inn as the previous night.

DAY 12. Today’s journey is quite short compared to yesterday: Only 45 miles and an estimated time of 2 hours. I will be crossing through Maryland again and then into Pennsylvania. I’ll be making my way to Lancaster County. This area of Pennsylvania is predominantly rural and is home to many Amish farming communities. After booking into overnight accommodation, I will set about exploring the area. Before retiring, I will contact my next host, Mark Esterbrook of Lancaster County Community Action Programme.

DAY 13. I am meeting with Bill Fontana, CEO of PA Downtown. PA Downtown works across the state of Pennsylvania and is committed to improving the living standards of residents in social housing. I will be exploring the strategies PA Downtown employs in its work with residents. Timings to follow.

DAY 14 and 15. These two days are weekend and I will be taking them as rest days. The area surrounding me is the cradle of the American Civil War and I anticipate I will be visiting a few of the sites I have heard about through film, TV and literature. This area is also renowned for its covered bridges (just like Madison County) so I might spend a few hours taking snaps to add to my portfolio.

DAY 16. Back on the road again. A short journey this time, just 35 miles to Harrisburg, state capital of Pennsylvania. It’s a large city and the community development work going on here contrasts strikingly with that of Lancaster County. I’ll find a roadside inn and make contact with my final host for the visit before exploring the city.

DAY 17. Today I will have my last meeting with a community development organisation in the US. Mark has expressed a lively interest in meeting with me to discuss our perspectives on community development from opposite sides of the Atlantic. He is in conversation with colleagues leading various projects and will confirm the times and agenda for the day over the next few days.

DAY 18. This will be the final leg of my journey. I will be driving to New York City and staying at my final hotel of the visit.

DAY 19 and 20. Rest days – I’ll be unashamedly doing the tourist trail and visiting sites such as the Statue of Liberty and Battery Point, Ellis Island, (some of my ancestors came here before me!) The Flat iron Building, Macey’s, The Empire State building and Time Square. I
also want to pay my respects at Ground Zero as the events of 9/11 had a profound effect on me.

**Day 22.** Check out of my hotel and make my way to New York Liberty Airport for my flight back to Bristol. – Job Done

“Always plan ahead. It wasn’t raining when Noah built the ark”.

**Richard C. Cushing**
Putting the plan into action – making the damn thing work

“If your plan doesn’t work, look for the part that you didn’t think was important”

*Arthur Blosche*

We arrived at Bristol airport as planned. I say we because I was threatened with perpetual damnation if I didn’t agree to pay for my wife to accompany me. In retrospect this was a good move because she helped to type up the notes from my meetings and she’s a far quicker typist than me. Our flight was on time and we arrived in Liberty airport in New Jersey looking groggy and dishevelled eight hours later.

We waited in the queue to pass through homeland security and this was where the journey veered from the original itinerary. We didn’t know precisely where we were going to spend our first night in the US yet the young lady on the desk was adamant that we provide an address or she would not let us into the country. We explained that we would call into a roadside inn along the route but she still insisted on an address. Angie, my wife then had a brainwave and produced the WCMT card that asks agencies to assist the fellow to carry out his research. The front of the card bears the portrait of Sir Winston Churchill. The young lady looked and it then looked at me and asks “Is this a picture of you?”

After seeing Angie crease with laughter and a brief explanation of who Sir Winston actually was, she let us through.
Following the fun at the homeland security counter, Angie and me trekked through the airport and boarded a mono rail to the car rental depot where we encountered more fun and games. Firstly, having recently moved, the paper part of my driving licence had not been returned after being sent away for the change of address. This almost meant that we could not have the car we had arranged to hire for the trip. I managed to convince the rental manager that I was who I was and that I was a responsible driver and we eventually picked up the vehicle. We had been upgraded to a Dodge Charger, in white, which if you didn’t know, is quite a muscle car. I booted up the sat nav that I had brought with us, complete with the downloaded map of North America only to find “Map cannot be found”......After much gnashing of teeth, I had to concede and hire a sat nav at the cost of $14 a day. At this point, I had been up for seventeen hours and my nerves were beginning to wear thin. What better time to hit the freeway in New Jersey, at 3.45 in the afternoon. We were, at last on our way to our first appointment.

The journey from New Jersey to Buffalo in upper New York State is very pretty, but repetitive. After you’ve seen a dozen magnificent rolling hills, one after another, the awe factor wears off. This could also be because I was tired and the three hundred miles I had to cover were creeping by at 55 miles per hour with the occasional burst of 65, when overtaking. It was a long, long day, but we eventually carried on all the way to Buffalo NY and arrived at 10.15pm, having been on the go for not far short of twenty four hours. I was really looking forward to a beer, glass of wine or a G & T when I got into the hotel room but there was not a drink in sight – for miles...
Monday 27 July 2009, Buffalo, Upper New York State

PUSH Buffalo

People United for Sustainable Housing

After a complimentary continental breakfast, Angie and I drove into downtown Buffalo to meet with the people from PUSH Buffalo. PUSH is situated and works in the Westside, the part of the city that borders Lake Erie. On our arrival, we met with Aaron Bartley the Executive Director, Harrison Watkins and Aminah Jonson who were both community outreach workers.

Buffalo is in the heart of the United States’ “Rust Belt” The region is known as the rust belt because it was formally the steel belt and was home to much of the United States heavy industry. At its’ peak there were 240,000 industrial jobs in the county, there are now only 70,000 and the area is littered with derelict industrial buildings, warehouses and mills. The area has a high level of teenage pregnancies and a 60% child poverty rate. Some years ago Buffalo had segregated schools for Black and White residents. Then to aid diversity children were bussed across the city to create mixed schools. It didn’t work. The whites moved to other suburbs where children could attend all white schools. This effectively destroyed what social fabric existed in the areas.

PUSH was founded in 2005 and works to empower local residents in the “rehabilitation” of local vacant properties, community development and diversity. By rehabilitation, we mean the process of turning them from run down derelict buildings into usable and attractive
homes. It also supports the conversion of derelict lots into green spaces where local residents can grow their own food. The area PUSH works in borders Lake Erie and is known as the Westside. Their aim is to acquire vacant properties and create a healthy neighbourhood plan through collaborative community processes.

In previous generations the area was home to mainly German and Italian families who owned the properties they lived in. Over the years they moved out of the area and now there is a real ethnic mix in the Westside with the largest nationality being Burmese.

At the time of writing, this part of the US has 20,000 homes in 12,000 structures. 7000 of these are owned by the City of Buffalo. The City has yet to come up with a real plan to address this situation. The vacant properties host a variety of problems, particularly the use of drugs and vandalism. They also become the playgrounds of children and young people. The city’s primary plan was demolition but through the efforts of PUSH, many of the empty properties have now been renewed and made habitable again. PUSH began engaging with local residents to ensure they became part of the organisation and they became integral to the planning process. It was the residents who made the decisions on what to do with the empty properties. Recently the residents helped board up a vacant decaying property and posted large images of the governor to emphasise his lack of action.

This resulted in his de-selection and there is now a new governor who has a better understanding of the issues.

PUSH knocks on doors to involve people and is the only organisation that puts the community in touch with councillors. They do this through developing people and assisting them with policy. They also organise events with strong American national networks that are keen to develop communities by small achievements.

One of the biggest issues facing the area is the road network. As the area has developed, people have become dispersed, with neighbourhoods being scattered. Very few of the suburbs are walkable, meaning residents need a vehicle to get anywhere. This also means a car is essential if residents are to find work. The rate of unemployment in the Westside is 40%. The largest employer in the area is the local pizza shop
The barriers local people face include, language, education, unemployment and re-entry from the prison system. They have also become alienated – people get used to dealing with poor social conditions. It’s become the norm. For many, life has become a game of basic survival! They have been let down through misinformation and false promises in the past, why should they believe anyone would do anything for the community?

PUSH is continuing to make inroads into the problems within the Westside of Buffalo. Successes to date include the PUSH youth build programme, aimed at 16-24 year olds. It specifically targets high school drop outs. Offering them vocational training opportunities. The programme also pays them a small salary.

PUSH has also created a housing co-op on a micro scale with the rehab of 6 properties. This has brought together 6 families from differing ethnic backgrounds who, would not have come together in any other way. The organisations impact on the area continues with the establishment of a food coop offering affordable vegetables and the creation of street corner allotments and micro farms. From what I saw on my visit, there was no evidence of vandalism to these areas. I doubt if this would be the case in the UK.

Having said goodbye to our hosts in Buffalo’s Westside, we proceeded south to our next appointment to meet up with Michelle, Marge, Dana and Cathy, the ladies who are the driving force behind “South Buffalo Alive”.

South Buffalo Alive

Michelle, Cathy, Dana and Marge are the driving force behind South Buffalo Alive. I met with them in Caz’s Cafe in a very pleasant, leafy suburb of South Buffalo. The area is well groomed and is typical of what we in the UK might assume all of the United States is like. It is a fairly modern community and is representative of the urban sprawl that is blighting older communities in the US. From what I saw, I would say that the area is reasonably affluent and middle class, which is in stark contrast to Buffalo’s Westside, which we had seen earlier that day.

South Buffalo Alive work within South Buffalo on community projects that engage residents in the improvement of the local area, by creating green spaces, the rehabilitation of local vacant properties which promotes community cohesion and development. It was created in 1999 and is funded through volunteer donations, the State and a number of charitable foundations that fund housing rehabilitation projects. The work it undertakes is 100% voluntary and they try to tap into the skills and knowledge of local craftsmen and women when undertaking their projects. They also encourage younger people to become involved with the volunteering to help develop wider learning and hands-on experience.

The organisation was founded owing to the apathy of local politicians and an identified need to improve the waterfront area where the residents live. They raise community awareness
and recruit members through leaflet distribution. New members are asked to make a $10 donation when signing up. South Buffalo Alive is involved in a number of projects including

- Carving for a cause – storm damaged trees carved into sculptures
- Garden walks (August) volunteers select gardens within the community and include them in a garden walk tour
- Parades down the parkway – to see the circles. To be honest, when I first heard about this I didn’t really understand what the project was about. What South Buffalo Alive has done is to take over the maintenance and beautification of the roundabouts within their area. Before they did this, they were just unsightly patches of barren earth and did little to enhance the community
- Securing the donation of flower seed from plant catalogue distributors
- Adopt a pot – large plant scheme
- A ‘sweat equity’ grant – This a project where volunteers help to turn overgrown lots into gardens.

Whenever South Buffalo Alive are on the streets working on their volunteering projects they make sure the community knows what they are doing by having a sign on the pavement where they are working. It shows that they are volunteers making a difference in their local community. It also helps to curb vandalism.

The ladies were honest and candid during my meeting with them and openly admitted that there had been tough times in the past and that members had been stretched. Some members of the community could not see the value of the work being done and complained that they were taking away peoples jobs by doing the work as volunteers. They had also encountered apathy, the “I’m too busy” response and what they called a “jealousy of energy”. These are far outweighed by the positive impact of their work. Block clubs have now been formed, which meet once a month. They discuss issues such as drugs in the area, garbage, run down properties and grass roots ownership of the problems. The ladies admitted that only a handful of people attend but it’s a start. They also have block parties, nights out, street sales, clean up the street days and they invite speakers to their meetings. These include the new local head teacher and local community police officers. The most successful initiatives to date have been the circles project and the creation of a new local park. When asked if they had three wishes, they said they’d like more dedicated volunteers, more local employment and younger people stepping up to the plate rather than destroying the community they live in.
With our meeting over, Angie and me bid farewell to the ladies of South Buffalo Alive and headed for Canada. We drove across the border and spent the evening admiring Niagara Falls by floodlight before driving back to our hotel.

Our time in Buffalo had come to an end all too soon and we had been fortunate to be witness to two radically different examples of community development and regeneration. With Push Buffalo we had seen the tougher side of this game. On the drive out we drove past two instances of the police searching young men on street corners, the boarded up properties and the sense of hopelessness that some of the residents had in their eyes. At the other end of the spectrum we met with a group of ladies with a passion and drive that equalled what we had seen in the Westside yet was applied in different ways. What binds these two organisations together is their commitment to bring the people of communities in which they work together to benefit their own environments and increase the quality of life for themselves and their children.
Wednesday 29 July 2009, Cleveland Ohio

Detroit Shoreway

Angie and I rose early the next morning and drove southwest along Lake Erie towards Cleveland in the state of Ohio. Our next meeting was with the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organisation (DSCDO). When we arrived, we were given a very warm welcome from, Director John Enlow, Michael Chauperon, Director for Community Involvement, Nancy who works as a community organiser and Lilah who works as director of their Eco Village project.

Cleveland has had a huge exodus of at least 10,000 of its population over the past few years, and DSCDO are trying to attract people back. DSCDO mission is to improve life for community members (17,000), through bottom up methodology. 6516 Detroit Avenue is where DSCDO have their community premises. It hosts an array of services for the community, including a well equipment basement community room, plus 62 units of affordable housing for low income earners.
Most properties in the Detroit Shoreway area are owned by occupiers. Those that are run down tend to be owned by absentee landlords, and a small percentage of tenants rent these properties.

“It’s the slum absentee landlords that cause most of the communities’ issues” we are told. There isn’t much in the way of public housing.

DSCDO own 10 lower income affordable housing buildings which are offered to low income families. Mike oversees the demolition of vacant properties. The city is shrinking and the density of housing that was required in the past is no longer needed. Vacant lots become problems: As in Buffalo, they quickly become magnets for drugs, prostitution, playgrounds, squatters etc. Those vacant lots that are rehabilitated are marketed to higher earners. There is another local affordable housing scheme being run by the local catholic diocese. 85% of properties owner occupied.

Lilah’s work is funded through a private foundation. Cleveland Eco Village is now 10 years old and it was the first of its kind in the USA. All projects within the village have to have triple line consequences: environment, social and economic. Planning within the eco village includes: green building housing, transport, green space local food, community and society.

10 years ago environmentalists within the area got together to look at issues. They looked at new projects to create the eco village as a vehicle to retain and capture those learning in the city. It is located centrally in Detroit Shoreline, next to a mainline station. Streets are more pedestrian friendly and the community itself is organising and creating an interdependent
Lessons from Across the Pond – Ferenc Bliszko, Churchill Fellow 2008

neighbourhood with park, gardening, and agriculture. Anything green falls into Lilah’s lap. The Green Energy – agenda in Cleveland is looking at making wind work. Studies show they could do it as a region, putting wind turbines offshore in Lake Erie. Lilah tells us that solar energy is proving to be cost prohibitive. The area has many steel mills sitting empty and there are moves to introduce the manufacture of high impact energy components into these facilities. Sadly, these are being met with nimbyism which is stalling their start-up.

Nancy a member of the community and former block club leader is now DSCDO’s community organiser. She has lived in the community since 1974, part of her role organising block clubs has been hugely successful. All concerns are the same: safety. Nancy has a good rapport with residents and is well respected. The block clubs discuss priorities within their immediate community. It is micro community development on a street corner scale.

Nancy manages a 5 year Federal Funding project valued at 300 million dollars that provides residents with grants to fix up their homes. Unfortunately, it comes to an end this year. The funding has been used for external housing repairs. Residents arranged the work and DSCDO reimbursed them with a grant to cover costs. Each house also received 500$ to landscape the front of their property.

“Keeping people involved is easy with home owners, renters are difficult to engage with unless they have a particular issue they wish to address”.

The ethnicity within the area is quite mixed. 40% of the population is white. The biggest rise in population has come through an influx of Puerto Ricans. 20% of the population are African American. There are a large number of Vietnamese moving into the area and until
recently there was also Inuit peoples living within the community. Barriers exist within the community. The languages spoken include English, Hispanic, Chinese, French and German. “It’s not so much interaction between different cultures, its language that causes barriers.”

Community events tend to have predominantly white attendance who are homeowners. Occasionally they have members of the Hispanic community engaging. As for the African American population “a few get involved; it depends on what we are doing”.

John is a key link between the community, the police, the sheriff’s office, CMHA and the Federal Police. If a crime is committed they call the police, but call John as well. He assists residents, hand holding them through any situations involving the law. Anything regarding safety also comes to John. His post is funded via the city and is strictly community development. He organises a safety committee which meets once a month. He also assists with setting up different programmes designed to reduce crime, focussing on schools. One of these is Operation Focus – DSCDO’s joint effort to engage with lads with leadership potential (trouble makers), teach them different skills, provide mentoring (this isn’t’ the way of life etc), in an effort to steer them in the right direction. This also has the intention of turning others who follow the leader to switch to the right path.

Several other programmes used to ‘weed the bad and sow the good’. Weeds are ‘turned’ not thrown out! Most crimes are opportunist so there is a need to reduce idol hands and take away the “devils playground”.

‘Peace murals’ on boarded up housing.
Art in the Park programmes are taking place throughout the summer.

Involvement of local people is pretty good. “We beg a lot, encourage, and ask opinions. Block club attendance goes in cycles (up and down). We produce flyers, send reminders, organise social events and then bring up the issues. All projects have to have community involvement. We have a public meeting today to discuss vacant lots being demolished and a public plaza being created. We are discussing a Streetscape project!

One of the successful initiatives that I encountered in the area was the Homes for Humanity project. This is a housing rehabilitation scheme that uses 100% volunteer labour to refurbish dilapidated housing. The “sweat dollars” contributed by the volunteers is transformed into equity and becomes the down payment on the property. I think this is an excellent scheme.

If Detroit Shoreway could change their world they’d have more input from tenants, not just homeowners. They’d also invent a translation device so that all members of the community would be able to communicate and participate together.

To say I was impressed with the ways DSCDO work and their commitment to their area would be an understatement. There is a comprehensive approach to engaging with residents and community members which dovetails with all aspects of the community. The development of community members into key roles has worked extremely well and has, no doubt opened many doors that might have otherwise remained firmly shut through, fear,
mistrust or lack of understanding. Operation Focus to prevent young men from entering a life of crime and the Homes for Humanity use of sweat equity to empower and give local people a stake in their community, appear to be innovative in their approach and from what I’ve heard, make real differences to people’s lives. I may have a Masters degree in Community Regeneration but left DSCDO knowing far more than I did when I arrived.

On a different note, one of the areas we visited was called Battery Park. Being a dyed in the wool Artilleryman with thirty five years service, I assumed the link had some connection with the American War of Independence and perhaps had seen action during the Battle of Lake Erie. My romanticism was quashed when I was told it was called Battery Park because it was the site of an Ever Ready Battery plant........

Life has the uncanny knack of bringing you down to earth with a bump, sometimes.

Following our time in Cleveland we drove south through the agricultural heartland of Ohio, through its’ capital, Columbus and onward into Kentucky. We had arranged to spend a few days in the State and booked into our hotel in Lexington, Racehorse capital of the world.
Friday 31 July 2009, Berea, Kentucky

The Mountain Association for Community Economic Development.

I had arranged a meeting with Jason Bailey of the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED). MACED are situated an hours’ drive south of Lexington in the town of Berea. From what we saw, Berea is a town that depends on tourism for much of its income. Sadly, many of its antique shops and arty based businesses had closed and I felt that the town had the anticipation of it getting worse before things would improve. The weather was uncomfortably hot and the sun was like a furnace burning brightly in the sky. God bless the gent who invented air conditioning for cars. We met with Jason and Carol Lamm, one of his colleagues.

They made us welcome and we settled down to a candid discussion about how life was in MACED’s area and the problems they encountered, if any, when trying to encourage people to become involved in the regeneration of their communities. At that time, I had no idea of the situation that would be revealed to me.

MACED support economic development in Western Kentucky. They are a non profit making community development organisation and their work is divided into 3 strands.
• Development of enterprise and business – utilising federal government and other funds from banks (low interest business loans), private foundations etc. MACED train entrepreneurs, helping them create new businesses.

• Demonstration programmes - this is a pilot idea which is focused on a skill build initiative, for example, forestry – helping private landowners develop the sustainability and management of forest land. Poorly managed forestry doesn’t help as a resource alternative to coal. Advising on energy efficiency for homes, saving on power costs etc.

• Policy and advocacy – MACED assist with changing policy at all levels from Federal to local. They lobby and advocate members to ensure policy is changed with the times.

MACED provide demonstration around energy and provide support for those that want to develop energy related businesses.

MACED are an intermediary between partners and people at grass roots on the ground, entrepreneurs – classes for people who have an idea and want to start something, and also
for those that want to expand. They support mainly micro enterprises with no more than 10 employees. They changed the name of their Business development programme to Enterprise development programme. Focussing attention on high potential entrepreneurs, they do more than light touch support not just management skills but also focusing on leadership.

People have many entry routes to the services of MACED including being referred for micro business loans. MACED advertise their forestry programme in the press and this leads to its 6000 members get to know about what is available to them, and ultimately, word spreads. Others are signposted to MACED from external agencies.

There are many similarities relating to the reduction in the coal mining industry between the Appalachian mountain regions of Kentucky and South Wales. Although in Kentucky 2% of the workforce is engaged in the mining industry. There are mixed views about the coal industry, some feel it should be phased out to ensure an environmentally friendly source of energy ‘wind farms’ replace coal. Others are steadfastly against the development of green options and consider the coal industry as the backbone of the nation’s industrial might.

The area is one of high unemployment. Most jobs are within the education and school system. Sadly the situation has deteriorated to a point where it’s not what you know but who you know which decides if you will find a job. This has resulted in the standard of teaching declining in recent years as more experienced and better qualified teachers are overlooked in favour of the nepotistic choice.

I was told of the barriers that those in community development and regeneration face in this area. There is a great suspicion of those who are not indigenous to the area. Accent and familiarity with certain named families will decide how successful a practitioner will be able to engage. A problematic long term issue has been the history of local people being tricked by outsiders. Missionaries came into the area to bring spiritual upliftment to the local mountain people but alongside them came those who did their utmost to exploit them. There is a feeling amongst many who live in the mountains that the land is being raped of its treasures and they can do nothing to help themselves. It is the companies who descend on the area that create the wealth and then take it with them when they leave the area. The people who live in the mountains do not get to share in this wealth and poverty has become endemic. Mountain people live everyday with the tension of those who are making money through stripping their forests and the threat of homes being damaged by falling rocks from mining activities. There is a real feeling of “outsiders don’t care”. This has led to a fair number of the population becoming hardy survivors.

Many years ago a lot of mountain people had their mineral rights taken from them. They were hoodwinked into signing their mineral rights away by unscrupulous agency people who exploited the fact that many of those who lived in the mountain region were illiterate. Fifty years later the introduction of surface mining allowed coal companies to come onto
their land and destroy it, levelling mountain tops and changing the landscape forever. A major 20 year campaign to get it changed required an amendment to constitution and 82% of Kentuckians voted to support the cause; it was one of the strongest forms of locals gaining a powerful victory in the history of the United States.

One of the initiatives that MACED is leading is the New Opportunities for Women at Berea College. To be eligible to attend the course, women have to be thirty years old or older or have graduated from high school and going through a transition in life such as divorce, domestic abuse, etc. They arrive at Berea College and stay for three weeks without going home. This takes them away from the distractions of “family life”. While at the college, they study Appalachian literature, and complete exercises to establish their strengths and weaknesses. They are introduced to political processes, and posed the question, “What do you want to do with your life?”. They are then offered career counselling and shown what is on offer to them. At the end of the 3 weeks the women leave with a higher degree of hope and aspiration.

There’s a lot of inertia about jobs and how important coal is to the economy. Money is being taken out of Kentucky at an alarming rate and there is no inward investment in return. Much of the Land is now owned by companies who are based elsewhere. Strip mining is a big issue for the local communities and this is currently being looked into by the Judge Executive. Strip mining companies say “if coal mining is taken away from the area the communities shrivel and die”. There is a need for a different future – a changed mindset with a sense of hope to make a break with the past.

The train in this picture was laden with coal. It took fifteen minutes to pass us.
The average wage of a coal miner is $60,000. Public services and retail wages are around $14,000. Teachers are paid from $30,000 - $50,000

MACED don’t invest in coal related companies.

The work MACED does to empower and lift the aspirations of local people is very admirable. While it differs from traditional community development as we in the UK might know it, the entrepreneurial model is one that has a successful track record. The United States as we know it today was built on the business acumen of its early settlers. These people were willing to take risks to better themselves and create better life opportunities. MACED helps to support this tradition through the provision of training, education and support, enabling would-be entrepreneurs to turn their aspirations into reality.

We returned to Lexington following our meeting and spent the weekend exploring the area around the city. I found it to be a place of great poverty rubbing shoulders with extreme affluence – often within the same half mile of road. I was also disturbed by the evidence of blatant racial discrimination. I left the area with the distinct impression that life could be sweet in this part of Kentucky as long as you were white, rich and had the right connections.
Monday 3 August 2009, Logan County, West Virginia

PRIDE in Logan

We left Lexington in Kentucky early the following morning and headed east into the state of West Virginia.

Following an overnight stop in Charleston, the State Capital we turned south into the heart of the Appalachian Mountains and headed for the small town of Logan. It was here that we were to meet up with Reggie Jones, CEO of PRIDE in Logan. Angie and I arrived twenty minutes early for our appointment so we took a stroll through the local streets. This was shortly after Barack Obama had been elected as the first black president of the United States. As we parked our car, which had Kentucky number plates fitted, a family who were sat on their porch hailed us and asked what part of Kentucky we were from. We told them we were from Wales and started the type of polite conversation that strangers have when meeting for the first time. As I approached, I noticed a garden sign proudly proclaiming them all to be supporters of John McCain the Republican candidate for the presidency. I asked how life in the US was under the new president. They quickly affirmed that they were all republicans and supported McCain. At this point, one of the older female members of the family said she had heard a joke about the Obama’s and their move into the White House. She said,

“I hear the White House has got a new dog. Yep, it’s a black bitch”. The lady was seventy five years old if she was a day. The rest of the family erupted into laughter and rocked back and fore in their white rocking chairs.

Fortunately for us, our time was up and we had to keep our appointment with Reggie.

Reggie Jones is a big man with an even bigger character. He is an African American and a graduate of the organisation he is presently leading. Living proof that the
Lessons from Across the Pond – Ferenc Bliszko, Churchill Fellow 2008

organisation he leads delivers what it promises. I admit to asking him if there was any Welsh connection with his surname being Jones and we had a little fun discussing the possibilities. We were joined by Boyd who was an older gentleman who held a place on PRIDE’s executive board.

Pride was formed in 1957 in response to President Lyndon Johnson’s priority for greater community services.

Logan County is very rural and economically depressed. The decline in coal mining is meeting opposition from many groups in the area. The economic recession of the nation as a whole is also having a significant impact on the state. PRIDE has been supporting a lot of clients who would traditionally have been self sufficient.

PRIDE works in three main programme areas:

- **Senior Services** – Pride has 3 sites and they bus senior citizens in for lunch and what they refer to as enrichment activities, tours, trips, visits etc. Home delivered meals are prepared and delivered on a daily basis from the PRIDE centre. They also manage in-home services for Senior Citizens who need help (home help). Funding is provided from Federal, State and West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services.
- **Head Start** is the largest grant they receive. It supports children aged 3-11 yrs of age. Grant funding supports 11 classrooms across the county, with a shared curriculum, helping some 250 children. Some classrooms solely Head Start, some are county run classrooms.
- **Weatherisation Programme** – homes of moderate and low income earners benefit from support to help with energy efficiency to reduce heating costs. Trends tell that lower income earners have high energy costs. Their insulation project started in the 1970’s and has grown rapidly, now looking at renewable energy sources.
market is a profit making opportunity. PRIDE now has a lot more money to help the community.

A recent community needs assessment highlighted the lack of skills of local people – these included household budgeting, credit, food stamps from government, better health, how to shop and budget well, how to prepare a nutritious meal and plan meals for the week on a budget, CV/resume, writing, interview techniques and how to conduct yourself in work and the workplace – true life skills training.

Reggie went on to tell us that in the immediate area there is a cycle of poverty. Individuals plan on receiving government subsidies. You don’t need to work when you can receive government support. Pride’s services are good for those who want help to get out of this cycle. However he said “it’s hard to get people motivated and involved”. As an agency PRIDE are looking at almost a mandatory assessment of individual need/skills, for example, financial literacy: positive credit rating, how to use credit cards properly and how to manage your own assets. For many in Logan County poverty goes beyond financial considerations. It extends to poverty of opportunity and aspiration.

Boyd represents low income residents on the board of PRIDE. As in Kentucky, locals are wary of outsiders. This makes it difficult to provide services such as transportation. Many people refuse to leave the comfort and security of their own areas. Ironically, these are the ones that need it most. “They think outsiders will interfere with their lives”, said Boyd. I don’t’ come with horns”.

PRIDE’s Board has a lot of voluntary input from local people. The funding requires a three thirds basis

- Low income
- Private
- Elected officials
They are chosen from local community members. Board of Directors set the tone and pace – all give up their time on a voluntary basis. The low income sector needs to have true representation enabling community to have a voice. There are three major towns in the county: Logan, Chapmanville and Mann, however many isolated pockets don’t get involved owing to transportation being an issue in some of the more remote “Hollers” (Hollows).

Boyd says “Doors open easier for the man on the ground. – you can judge the mood of the people”. Folks are more receptive to Boyd, rather than Reggie. He dresses casually because they will shy away from people in a suit. Boyd went on to say the communities are so close knit it is just a matter of minutes before the whole hollow knows you are in the area.

Geography and transportation are PRIDE’s biggest barriers. It’s hard to engage with low income families. They might be working or don’t have child care facilities. Other life issues could mean they cannot attend. “Some folks can’t afford newspapers or access to the internet. We offer the community a voice but unfortunately not all are able to take advantage”.

PRIDE has a long and positive history. Following a few issues with a previous Executive Director, PRIDE are now considered to be a ‘no risk’ organisation and are in a situation where they know where their finances are - working hard to rebuild and remove the tarnish previously created within the community.

There aren’t a high percentage of absentee landlords as there are very few rental properties. The highest rate of home ownership is of poor quality housing. There is also a high degree of mobile home/trailer ownership. I was also told of several government subsidised apartments with poor landlords who do not keep properties in a good state of repair.

Logan is considered one of the highest ranking areas of poor health: This is largely heart disease and obesity. I have been told that much of this is related to the traditional
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Appalachian diet—less healthier cuts of meat, high fat content, pinto beans, cornbread, cooked with fat, with fried potato. It has an increasing level of drug abuse primarily related to prescription drugs. There is also an increase in reports of prostitution, both male and female.

When asked what three things would most make a difference, Reggie said

More money with fewer stipulations, greater interest from officials and people who could benefit from what PRIDE has to offer and a greater level of support from local politicians.

The welcome we received from Reggie, Boyd and the staff at PRIDE was very heartwarming. They are trying very hard to do a difficult job in difficult circumstances. Sadly not everyone can see the benefit of what PRIDE is trying to achieve. I was also dismayed by the attitude of some of the local people we met, whom, it appears, still think they are living in the days of the Confederacy.

Logan county was as far south as we were to go. Now began the long drive north and our journey to the first state – Delaware.
Lessons from Across the Pond – Ferenc Blizszo, Churchill Fellow 2008

Wednesday 5 August 2009, Wilmington, Delaware

The HOPE Commission

Our meeting was with Charles Madden of the Hope Commission in Wilmington

HOPE Commission is located in the centre of Wilmington, Delaware. Unlike our last organisation, the Hope Commission works in an urban area with pockets of different ethnicities. It has a population of 73,000 and the geographical area is small for the population size. It stretches 5x6 sq miles, so it’s quite densely packed.

Within a block you can be in either, North, South, East or West Wilmington which is all divided by rivers. It’s a very old area and the population is made up of African American and Hispanic peoples. On the northern outskirts you find Caucasian and other ethnicities.

Wilmington has a high homicide rate which has increased over past years. Wilmington is the epicentre of business in Delaware, and is the credit card capital of the world owing to its tax laws. This has created a situation that really highlights the difference between the “Haves” and the “Have nots”.

“People making money in Wilmington don’t live here. Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania can be reached easily from Wilmington. The cushion between high and low value housing is small and they can change within a block away”.

Mayor Baker created the Wilmington Plan to bring to bear the economic and social resources to improve life quality for local residents. He made a call to all the different agencies that provided services from the cradle to the grave to work together in a seamless manor. He created the HOPE Commission in an attempt to bring people together.

The Hope Commission identified a few areas where they thought they could make a real impact.
South Wilmington – South Bridge Hope Zone: An area of 1800-2000 residents in a 1x2 sq mile in size, mainly of Irish decent. There is a large degree of public housing, and it is an area of low income, and high crime. A number of committed residents wanted to work together to pick the area up and raise the quality of life for its people. Many residents have lived in the area/same house for over 50 years. You have to cross bridges to get in and out of South Bridge, so you know when you enter and leave the area.

HOPE went into South Bridge with other pillar agencies such as health centres, the fire department, schools and a number of religious organisations. Together, they worked with all entities to provide seamless service. This helped the area to create a new neighbourhood identity.

Charles went on to tell me about the lack of support for young men leaving prison on returning to the area. “More than 100 young men a month move back to communities with no support system, without the support needed they commit more crime and the cycle beings again”. His goal is the creation of a one stop home to meet all their needs and providing the support for them to progress back into community life. The services will consist of legal needs such as probation officers and other to ensure they keep their freedom. They also have a legal obligation to the system and the city. Other areas where they need support are housing, substance misuse and help finding work.

Charles lives in the local area and actively engages residents in the organisation of litter picking, creation of after school clubs etc. They have block clubs, some area clubs meet regularly – individuals have ownership and you can see where successful clubs are as it is reflected in the community.

There will always be those who do not engage – “a lot of residents in rented property have an attitude of ‘I don’t own it so I don’t have any interest in looking after the property’ Some see it as being overwhelming to have ownership of looking after their community, so HOPE just says ‘look after your own property or block’”.

Charles is currently working on breaking the crime cycle and sees re-entry into society as the key point. “An intact family structure is one we are not good at”. Alarmingly, over 60% of African American males in Wilmington are either in jail or on probation at any one time. This means they can’t participate in main stream home life. Many do not return when freed and go elsewhere. Hope believes that if they can reconnect these men with their families it will improve communities. “We need to reduce the 60% and get fathers back home to ensure consistent contact with their kids”. “Men need to take responsibility. If we can do it via the re-engagement programme, then more engaged and more intact families will be developed”. Dads and lads clubs are already in existence in some parts of Wilmington.
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offering opportunities for fathers and sons to reconnect in social activities. This is supported through churches in the area.

One successful regeneration initiative worked with and engaged with 15 youths of which half had issues with the law. They put together an employment programme and hired them out to do work in the community during the summer time. At the end of the project they painted a mural, which depicts how they see their neighbourhood. This gave them an opportunity to express themselves. The effect was one of transformation and over time they became ambassadors for their community.

When asked if anything has not gone well, Charles said “Nothing”. “However, there are things we can improve on”.

Sign posting: “We invested time and money on the streets talking to people afflicted. It was labour intensive, but not a failure. A guy who has been an addict can identify a current heroin addict”.

When asked for three wishes to make his world a better place Charles said:

- Be able to make individuals really want to help. Want people to be engaged – we need to figure out how best to do it?
- I’d like the Government to be more sensitive to the issues and how government decisions affect people at local and community level.
- I wish social service agencies would be less territorial and more willing to work together without competition. Ten clinics in this area work with people with heroin addiction; if they worked together it would really improve services. They are too protective of the services they provide.

Charles Madden and his staff have a tough job on their hands in Wilmington. As well as being the credit card capital of the world it is also the homicide capital of the United States. His work engaging with young men re-entering society after incarceration will be challenging but the rewards more than justify the effort and financial costs. If money is to be the prime measure of this approach, consider the cost of not engaging with these young men when they come back into society.

Just a few short miles away are the next of our host organisations. We have an appointment with Jackie Cousin and the people from Pencader Hundred.
Wednesday 5 August 2009 Pencader Hundred, Delaware

Pencader Hundred Community Centre

We arrived at the Pencader Hundred Community centre and drove straight past it. When we asked a group of white ladies chatting in the street they assured us that we must be lost because there was no community centre anywhere in the neighbourhood. Ironically, we were only a hundred metres past the building.

When we eventually arrived at the centre we were warmly greeted and offered food and beverages while we got to know the director and a contingent of residents. Jacquie Cousin is the director and the residents were husband and wife, Lavonya and Mark, Ivory, Angie and Harold.

The organisation created in 2004 by 5 residents who are members of the local Presbyterian Church, in response to need. “It’s the residents that make things happen”.

Mark & Lavonya are a husband and wife team who create activities for children and young people as there is nothing for them in the local area. They have formed a basketball team with weekly competitions and fishing trips are being organised throughout the summer months.
Lavonya became involved because she wanted something for her children to do. Mark loves fishing – he was usually the only person fishing. An opportunity came to apply for a grant to engage with young people so he applied. He wanted to show there is more to life than celebrity culture.

Harold moved into Sparrow Run 19 years ago. He was involved in the civic association before Pencader was created. At that time, the community was controlled by property investors rather than residents. The meetings went nowhere. A core of residents came together and tried to get the community involved. Lavonya took the role of Chair with Harold as Co Chair. They could see things that needed to change. “It’s an uphill battle. There’s lots of housing for rent over past 6 months. Normally they are snapped up”. Landlords were robbing residents.

Angie has lived in the area for just over a year. One day she noticed a sign asking people to come and see what’s going on and signed up to the resident council there and then. Her neighbours have 4 families living in one house – all Latinos. It’s thought a high percentage of Latinos in the area who are illegal immigrants. These are easily exploited by unscrupulous landlords.

Angie sought funding to deliver a peer mentoring programme, linked to a homework club. This would help some of the young people who for whatever reason were unable to complete homework at home. Many of these youngsters had no positive male role model in the home, so the peer mentoring programme has begun to play a significant role in their development.

Ivory attends Christiana School. Christiana School is not the best in the area, and has been placed on academic probation level. He had to achieve 2 grades higher to meet national
standard, so he had to work hard at his studies. This has paid off - Ivory was interviewed and successful in becoming a paid peer mentor.

During the period September 08 to May 09, 827 children attended the homework club 827 times; averaging 8-12 children and young people a day. There are celebrations for those who attend regularly and they receive awards too. The only link with schools is through school reports. These show the difference the homework club has made.

Another activity the centre provides is the Adult Healthy Living programme. This covers, eating on a shoestring, Medicare, Eating healthy, The Walking Club – every Tuesday 2 x around the circle, English as a 2nd language (This is a government grant funded programme) A Latino community organiser also works from the centre. These are some of the ways in which adults find out what is going on or needed in the community.

Pencader Hundred has a ‘tip line’ directly to the police, where anonymous calls can be to report issues and incidents. The local Latinos carry cash as they don’t have bank accounts so they are an easy target. They get a lot of hassle from other residents.

They are currently going through a phase with not many residents engaging. At the time of writing only 10 families engaged on a regular basis. Others come for activities but won’t come to resident council meetings.

The developer who built the community left a trail of bad workmanship. He disappeared and shortly afterwards an investor dropped in and provided money to renovate homes. Not having a strong resident focus group, the investor started to dictate what was going on. Eventually he decided he was going to tear them down. They were built in 1974 and were originally 80% home owners, now 84% of the tenants are renters.

Mark explained some of the problems he has to contend with. “I see the same faces. Hear the same complaints, trying to get them to come to meetings. Next time Lavonya is going to put up a sign saying ‘do you have trouble paying your electric bill’? A mention of free money, grants and they attend. When they find out they have to do the work they don’t want to know”.

“They say we are all busy, but you have to make time”.

Mark organises family fishing trips – a child has to be with a parent. “Parents are doing anything but looking after their kids.
They talk a big game and have a small watch”

Pencader recently tried to establish a neighbourhood watch scheme. They needed ten residents to be involved before the Police would consider the training. Sadly, they can’t get enough people interested. The renters view is “I’m only here for a year – so what”

The site has a high transient population. They are renters and don’t have an attachment to the area. The economy has big input. A lot of Mexican workers are involved in the housing industry, construction and landscaping. The nature of their work means they don’t stay around for long enough to become part of the community.

Pencader Hundred is a tough area to live in if you rent your property and don’t have the money to pay. If you can’t make a payment when the landlord comes for the money you can be assured you will be in court and evicted the next day.

When asked what three things they would do to change their world, the people of Pencader Hundred said

- “Get affordable housing – and get the absentee landlords out.

- Bring in better education for children and get rid of big box stores such as Wal-Mart and Kmart. They don’t care about the community and sponsor nothing, with the exception of baseball. There are 20 sponsored baseball clubs! The money goes nowhere. Where’s the economic multiplier? They’ve slowly but sure got rid of anything grass roots. They’ve killed the town.

- Transport - improvement is a real issue, there are no buses on Sunday to get to church, or to work for youth working at weekends”.

The work done by the director and volunteers at Pencader Hundred deserves far more recognition than it receives. The people who give up their time to be involved are the social glue that holds this community together. I admire their passion and commitment, in what is often a thankless task and commends them on their tenacity to keep this community alive.
Lessons from Across the Pond – Ferenc Bliszko, Churchill Fellow 2008

For reasons that will become clear, I will refrain from identifying the next organisation we met with and the CEO, who kindly gave us his time but left us in no illusion as to his organisations aims and objectives. The organisation was in Maryland, just an hour or so drive from Delaware.

The organisation was created in late 60’s when there was a lot of turmoil in American cities, with civil disturbances that caught the media’s eye. Reflective of underlying issues, lots of changes. In Maryland the political structure was dominated by political democratic clubs, built on patronages. People were rewarded with jobs and in return, politicians got their vote. A lot if civic and religious leaders put their support behind neighbourhood and civic organisations. They included Catholics, Presbyterians and Episcopal etc.

Immigration grew primarily around Catholic parishes, with a predominantly Irish, German and Italian community, now it’s mainly Greek or Europeans. The 60’s gave rise to community organisations; these were mainly catholic.

The organisation in question is funded through federal funds, private foundations and corporate means. They are fortunate in that they have affluent areas that attract professional potential board members. They come without expectation and determine their own priorities. They have no membership or systematic attempts to raise money from the community. The CEO states that his organisation is financially stable with strong management.

The organisation runs projects to help its residents. These include workshops on financial management, housing and counselling for clients on low to moderate incomes. “We train them so they can buy properties and be financially sustainable. A lot of work is keeping people in homes – loss of work etc”.

When asked about the involvement of the local community, he said “We are not about equity, we are about development” The number of volunteers comes and goes. We parachute in with a funder and help the volunteers prioritise the things they don’t like to do. Older people complain a lot, the younger generation are more motivated and get up and go”

He went on to say...

“This organisation acquires properties, does the rehab and offers them at preferential rates to people who want to work in the area, whose kids go to school and who regularly attend church. People are referred to us by bankers, hotlines and solicitors”.

“People come from all over, not just this neighbourhood. We have Spanish speaking staff. They come...I’d like to think it’s because we’re good.”
“There are lots of good ideas – getting it done is the hard part. Getting it done means the organisation dies. A good idea is a dangerous thing; you can be out of a job in no time”.

Meeting with this organisation left me feeling quite bitter. The day before we had been speaking with a group of committed and passionate community residents who struggled to get the money to keep their little centre open. This organisation has millions of dollars at its disposal and from what I can see is in the business of community cleansing – removing the unwanted and unattractive, which do not fit the community and personal profile required by his funding organisations

“We are not about equity, we are about development”.......I will remember this statement for a very long time.
The final organisation I was scheduled to meet was the Lancaster County Community Action Programme, in Pennsylvania. We met with Mark Esterbrook, CEO and Jeff Wibberly who manages special projects. Jeff joined the organisation in 1972 and was supposed to do himself out of a job!

Like many community based organisations here and in the US, LCCAP is 10% smaller than a year ago – but serves more people.

LCCAP are the second largest organisation in Lancaster County next to the government. LCCAP is a non profit making organisation that provides services to 30,000 people. They receive $50 million a year in grant funding 70% of which is state or federal funding. They have 21 board members. Religiously there is a Christian ethos that can contravene what they try to do. Lancaster County is in the bible belt of Pennsylvania with a lot of Christian values – you work, you eat!

They no longer use the term ‘anti poverty’ they prefer the term ‘self sufficiency’ – context is very important. It’s quite a wealthy county but they still have 15%-17% of people living below the poverty line.
An average family of 4 with income lower than $21,000 is considered to be living below the poverty line. This isn’t a true reflection: the real income a family requires to live in Lancaster County for a family of 4 is $49,000 - to survive. The reality is far different to government figures. Average family income is $55,000- $60,000. A huge number of families do not earn these salaries.

The culture is changing – enormous numbers of people want to move into the county. Some large shopping malls are killing off local provision.

The economics of the city have improved over the past 20 years. But there are pockets of poverty. In the SE the community is mainly African American and Hispanic. Unemployment is high at around 10% especially within the 18-30 age group. The minimum wage here is $7.50 per hour.

LCCAP’s main programmes include housing, childcare, weatherisation, Head Start and a host of others. In Marks words, “you name it we have it!”

There are over 1800 Non Profit Organisations (NPO) in Lancaster County. “A generous population”. A lot of NPO’s are faith based.

Mark would recommend that we revisit in the future and focus on one area – i.e. Lancaster to get collective approach to community development. Our approach is to engage with local people and encourage them to tell those who need help. The local churches offer support in donations of food for poor people within the congregation.

“Are we treating symptoms, not the causes? We try to treat the symptoms; nobody wants to get to the root cause because it is too hard, gets very personal and political”.
Home ownership – “The colleges and universities want staff to live in the area so they reduce cost of housing. They buy in their own police systems to ensure residents are not pestered by Black Africans, Hispanics and the down and outs etc”.

Regular sustainable income – One of our aims is to get people into reasonably paid jobs. However a lot of jobs are not available unless you have high to advanced degrees.

LCCAP have a few volunteers, generally, staff are in paid positions. For volunteers they take great care to ensure they develop the right skills and approach; they have to go through 40 hours of training. Our contact centre has 65 people who man phones; they have loose linkage to some issues such as, suicide, homeless, and other issues.

PNC Bank – This organisation supports employees in the community programme. They donate 40 hours of company time to a NPO, and they cut them a cheque. They are an organisation who takes the corporate social responsibility approach seriously.

Construction – “Every year we have to have a public meeting to discuss construction and development in the area. $650,000 comes from the state. Nobody turns up! Zero attendance! People just don’t show up, we advertise with flyers, press, but nobody comes. There is a fair amount of disengagement and apathy from this area”.

Poverty simulation – “This was designed to raise community awareness of what it’s like to be poor. Not have a car – buy local, healthy food – not unhealthy, the programme is
Lessons from Across the Pond – Ferenc Bliszko, Churchill Fellow 2008

designed to start a dialogue and community awareness. We sent out invitations but only 15 responded so the event was cancelled. It was not viable to run. As soon as you say ‘poverty’ it becomes a dirty word”.

“Locals don’t like going into the great unknown. They are happy to give $10 to the church every Sunday. When faced with poverty they will write out a cheque”.

“Community Development Corporations see the distribution of poverty as being ‘what they see’ not as it really is. Our mission is to transform from poverty to sustainability. At this moment in time 2-5% of population are benefitting from this move. Poverty will always be around. We want to enable those that want to better their lives”.

One of the schemes LCCAP deliver is the Progression Programme. It is a low $ circle programme. “Here’s the crux: take a family, bring them in, give them training, financial, class, social – then align them with allies in social networks on a personal and social base etc. They work shadow and have access to a whole other network of people and learn through new experiences”. This low cost intervention has worked extremely well in other areas across the US. Through shared respect and interactions the community see what is on the outside of their world. For the beneficiaries the average salary can go up from 40% - 500% in a year. Families meet once a week for a year and a half programme.

Mark is retired from the Air Force, when he moved to Lancaster it was a social network that got him the job. Again, who you know?

Affordable housing is difficult to come by and it becomes a strain for the developer. Jeff says “a house given to the organisation cost $110,000 to refurbish, it sells for $89,000. We switched the conversation to the cost of housing and the cost of new build: After you buy the land, pay impact fees, road system, sewer lines, maintain green space, the cost is around $40,000 per unit before you start building. Astronomical costs – the new price for modest housing starts at $193,000. The smallest house will cost you $160,000-$180,000.

We asked Mark and Jeff what three things would shake their world the most:

- Real community revitalisation – concentrate more on the human beings rather than buildings. There has to be a balance between human, capital and physical assets.
- Reasonable guaranteed access to childcare for everyone. Healthcare for children. Financially viable access to dental treatment and doctors - parents can’t afford this.
- The county not having to close door to people who are unattractive – the undeserving poor! This attitude won’t go away we have to live with it. It will mean more expenditure.
- An engaged community - putting Lancaster County first.
Lessons from Across the Pond – Ferenc Bliszko, Churchill Fellow 2008

- More value added jobs with corresponding training.
- More than a 2 party political system.

Both Mark and Jeff agreed to disagree on a number of issues during this conversation. This acknowledgement and acceptance of other views, which carry an equal amount of weight, is one of the traits of an open and transparent organisation. It adopts a participative approach to decision making, ensuring all options are considered and valued.
Summary

This research trip to the United States has been a true journey of discovery. Meeting the practitioners, volunteers and community members has opened my eyes to so many examples of good practice that we in the UK could adopt and trial in our own areas. Poverty and the need for inclusive and participative communities are global issues. It may be true that ideas that work in one area will fail dismally in another, but we won’t know until we try. Imagine a world where every nation shared its best practice with every other nation. The world would be a much happier, healthier and wealthier place.

Throughout my visit, I have tried to act as an ambassador for my country and the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. I believe I have laid the foundations for bridges to be built between organisations and communities here in the UK and like minded groups in the US. Since my return, my employer has expressed interest in beginning a relationship with the Community Action Programme of Lancaster County. Hopefully, this will form the basis of a twinning arrangement and exchange visits in the future where we can learn from each other’s work.

On a personal level, if I could find the funding, I would invite Mark and Lavonya from Pencader Hundred to Wales to show them how we tackle our community development and regeneration agendas. Their down to earth approach is refreshing and inspiring in the same breath.

It is unlikely that I will ever have the chance to follow up a visit such as this in the future, but if I could find funding for a return trip, the research would look much deeper into specific areas. In one glance our American cousins are far removed from us yet in the next, there is no difference between us at all.

I would like to thank The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for supporting me in this adventure. I would also like to show my gratitude to my employer for allowing me extra annual leave, once they heard of the nature of my visit. I must not forget to mention the organisations in the US who went out of their way to help me in this research visit. Above all, I would like to thank my wife Angela for supporting me throughout this adventure. She is my diamond and the one who brings out the best in me – thanks Angie.