

# Getting people involved in Big Local Clarksfield, Greenacres and Littlemoor

*What makes you proud about where you live?* This is one of the questions put to residents by the planning group of the Clarksfield, Greenacres and Littlemoor Big Local area in Oldham. Steph Gill explains how Doctor Who-themed events and community songs get people exchanging ideas.

## Who?

My name is Steph Gill and I am the centre manager (job share) at the Greenacres Community Centre. I also run Oldham Play Action Group. I believe that all the things we do with the community should be fun and interactive.

I am part of the planning group for our Big Local area which covers a series of interconnected suburbs of east Oldham: Clarksfield, Greenacres and Littlemoor. We're about two miles from the town centre. It's a deprived area characterised by parallel streets of traditional terraces and two large estates which were originally council housing and which are now run by a housing association with quite a few owner occupiers. Our community has recently become a more diverse place in which to live, with the attendant challenges and benefits.

Along with other members of our planning group, we value the community connections that already exist, but we want to support and develop a sense of social cohesion and greater neighbourliness.

## Why?

We're currently focusing on reaching as many community members as possible so they can be part of producing our Big Local vision and Big Local plan for our neighbourhood. Our aim is to raise community spirit and make people feel proud about where they live.

Our 30-strong Connecting Communities partnership includes local residents and local workers, police community support officers and local councillors. This partnership helped us approach Big Local in a different way. It has been really great to build on what is already working positively in the area.

In the past we were always looking for money, chasing funding and wondering where the next grant might come from. When we had previously consulted with local people about the problems in the area we found that we got bogged down with the things people didn't like about living here. This time we started to look at things differently.



We didn't ask people how we should spend £1m Big Local money, instead we asked, 'What makes local people proud and happy?' This new approach got us thinking about our strengths. It helped us focus on what already exists locally, and how to build on and celebrate them to make this area an even better place to live. We've been inspired by the Jessie J song Price tag, because the lyrics strike a chord with us: 'It's not about the money, money, money / We just want to make the world dance.'

## What and how?

We ran a programme of inexpensive, fun and creative activities that got everyone talking about Big Local. Where possible we've been getting funds to pay for these activities from elsewhere and piggybacking on existing activities and events.

The events and activities included:

- a sketch book for residents to draw how they see the area
- helping children produce 'TV broadcasts' of what the area could be like in the future
- asking people if they are a 'glass half full person', and if so what things helped them to maintain that attitude
- asking people to enter a competition speed stacking glasses
- asking local people 'What would it take to make a "Quality Street"?'

- working with residents to create badges with words and images to show what they think will make the area an even better place to live
- working with Oldham Theatre workshop and Cafe Libretto to open a temporary café where the waiters acted as community researchers, talking to customers about the local area
- working with local people to write a community song where some words were missing: by 'filling in the gaps', local people were invited to describe ways of making the area a better place to live in
- running a St George and the dragon day – while making dragons, mock swords and armour, we asked local people to tell us about their own local, unsung heroes. Responses included 'my kind neighbour' and 'the Brownies leader'
- learning how to do 'visual minuting' to record the outcomes of meetings and conversations in pictures and sketches - instead of boring, lengthy text
- holding a Doctor Who-themed event, complete with TARDIS, to ask people what they want their local area to look like in 2022. We chose this theme after looking at the residents we might have missed so far, and what we might do to reach them. We thought the Doctor Who theme might encourage dads to attend with their children. And we auctioned the Dalek at the end!





- Daisy has lived in Oldham all her life and says that the events she has been to have been great:

‘The play day was brilliant, we had really good fun and there was an awful lot of creativity going on’.

She’s only just got involved but really likes it and wants to do more. It’s opening her eyes as she’s never done anything like this before – it’s the first time that she realised that St Barnabas church hall was in her area. She’d like to see something like a cinema club starting locally as there are no cinemas this side of Manchester, and better play areas for children.

## What’s next?

We still have more to do in order to find out what everyone in the area wants. For example, Iain Isacsson, one of the members of our local Men Behaving Dadly group has asked us to hold another Doctor Who-themed consultation and we are going to use a local barber’s shop and offer to pay for people’s haircuts while they answer questions about their local area.

We believe that:

‘Given the right circumstances, from no more than dreams, determination, and the liberty to try, quite ordinary people consistently do extraordinary things.’ Dee Hock

We are going to use an approach called appreciative inquiry because it starts from what is working well already and how we can build on that to achieve something greater. It needs involvement from the widest group possible and results in creative solutions that everyone can feel part of. We want people to come away from a meeting feeling that they have been able to have their say and that it has been fun.

When we have produced our Big Local vision, profile and plan, and formed our partnership we will know what the key activities need to be and how we want to do things. For example, in the conversations we’ve had so far people have said they want to feel safer locally. In the past, people might have thought that the solution was to install more CCTV, but we’ve found that introducing an individual to six of their neighbours is the thing that actually makes them feel safer.





## The future

We are excited about the future. In ten years we see ourselves living in this area that we've worked together to make an even better place to live.

We already think it's got some good things going on, and we know there are so many more things we can do to make it even better.

Our first goal is to increase the level of neighbourliness, conversations, and community engagement, and out of that things will happen, although we don't know what they are going to be yet – and that's an exciting part of it.

We want children and young people to be part of our planning process. We are working with The Young Advisors scheme (see [www.youngadvisors.org.uk](http://www.youngadvisors.org.uk)) to train some of our young people in ways of obtaining other young peoples' views.

They will then be equipped to get work for themselves after the training.

We have a new academy in our area and we want to make sure that all these young people can have a say in Big Local. Our vision includes all sorts of different people taking part in making this area a better place to live.

We want to also contribute to the area's wealth and sustainability, so whenever possible we want to include training for local people and provide information about support for businesses and social enterprises. We want to use the £1m to attract more money and resources into the area, so that there is a long term legacy.



Steph with Audra, Laura and Donna from OPAG (Oldham Play Action Group), in front of their artistic summary of all the things that go on at Greenacres. Photo: OPAG

Suzanne Quinney is the Big Local rep for Oldham and works closely with the community group to support their appreciative approach.