Community coaching:
building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

Summary

In addressing the housing crisis, there are significant hopes and expectations that communities, particularly those who are underserved, can take the lead in developing the housing and neighbourhoods they want and need.

In meeting these aims, there is an important gap in the system that we've identified. Charitable funders and government bodies frequently provide technical support and capital funds to address housing development and regeneration. However, very little is spent on providing communities with the critical team-building skills and group cultures required to be successful and resilient. Whilst coaching is seen as a must-have for individuals and teams in leading businesses and sports professionals to improve performance, it is rarely available to ordinary people regenerating and building their local communities. This needs to change. This report explores how we can democratise access to coaching skills. Existing coaching practitioners can be engaged to enhance the efforts of local groups whilst at the same time those with lived experience can use coaching methods to broaden their impact.

This report evidences the case for the adoption of coaching as a practice to support community groups to form effective teams to address their housing needs. Based upon three years of research with residents, facilitators and activists across the UK, we outline the case for the development of community coaching as a practice by and for local communities supported by funders, investors, developers and local authorities. We outline the need, the methods and a plan for a pilot programme we believe is the first step on the road to building a national network of practitioners.

Legacy West Midlands (LWM) is a community engagement specialist contracted to work with low-income communities living in areas facing significant deprivation across Birmingham. LWM are in partnership with Housing 21, a large housing association who are offering communities the chance to set up cohousing schemes in which residents will have a significant say over their design and ongoing management.

This is very new for everyone involved. LWM are using a range of facilitation and coaching skills to support people to understand the opportunity and form a potential resident group to engage with Housing 21 as the developer ultimately be responsible for delivering the project. However, LWM's staff do not have peer support and Housing 21 does not have benchmarks from which to assess the quality of their work.

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

COMMUNITY-LED HOMES AND PLACES

Community-led housing (CLH) is a burgeoning movement in the UK and a much-needed engine of innovation in housing and place-making internationally. CLH is pioneering alternatives to dysfunctional mainstream approaches to house-building and regeneration. This includes more inclusive models of ownership and governance, championing modern methods of construction or bringing back neglected buildings and land into community use.

There is now substantial evidence from the UK and international contexts that CLH projects create higher quality and more sustainable buildings and places. They also provide benefits for residents in terms of lower costs, improved health, enhanced feelings of safety, security and belonging, more extended social networks, lower crime rates and many other advantages (see, for example, Hudson et al. 2021, Carrere et al. 2020, Pulampu et al. 2020).

Despite a nationwide network of CLH hubs now offering practical advice and support for grassroots CLH projects, barriers to further growth remain. These include long-standing issues of restricted access to land and finance but also the availability of support around organisational development and group cohesion. The UK Cohousing Network has carried out an in-depth research and co-design project over the last two years, involving 70 individuals and organisations active in the movement. It reveals that community coaching could make a vital contribution to enabling grassroots CLH initiatives. It shows the potential for a national network of community coaches to democratize access to community coaching skills and peer learning within the CLH movement. Using a co-produced, peer learning programme, a new approach to coaching could accelerate new CLH projects. It could also boost their inclusivity and support more communities to create more affordable homes in well-designed places.

Community-led housing **is pioneering alternatives** to dysfunctional mainstream approaches to **house-building** and **regeneration**.

THE CURRENT CLH ECOSYSTEM

CLH projects bring ordinary people together to develop new communities, often motivated by shared ambitions to reduce energy use and carbon footprints, combat loneliness, live as better neighbours, protect natural spaces, or create public assets for leisure, business or community support.

Cohousing, community land trusts and housing co-operatives are three of the leading approaches to CLH in the UK. Each has its own national organisation, with over 1000 member groups between them, with around 27,000 completed homes and another 22,000 in the pipeline over the next 3-5 years.

At the same time, organisations working with marginalised or vulnerable people are turning to community-led housing (known as self-help housing in this context) as a means to offer secure accommodation and support to those they work with. These projects offer new ways to address the chronic shortfall of affordable, high-quality homes in the UK and diversify a housing market that is widely recognized as fundamentally flawed. They also place the human need for connection and a sense of belonging at the heart of their aspirations to make better places to live.

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

THE CHALLENGE

Since 2017, the movement has put in place a network of CLH hubs and trained advisors that are supporting hundreds of emerging groups and communities to co-design, build and manage their own homes. The hub and advisor network offers advice and support on practical matters, including access to land and finance, legal structures and governance models. It has significantly increased the number of successful projects and created a groundswell of grassroots public interest in community-led housing.

But there remains a crucial gap in support. Put simply, people creating new places to *live* together need to discover how to *work* together to realise their aspirations. CLH projects pose an array of practical challenges and make demands on their participants in unique ways. They raise questions about shared values, how to realise fully inclusive projects, and more. Confronting these challenges is part of what makes these ventures so rewarding.

However, there are essential capacities and skills that groups need that are neither innate nor available 'off the peg' by simply following a set of written policies. These include building shared values and vision, making effective decisions in non-hierarchical settings, dealing with conflict or working constructively with differences.

- Our research has shown that CLH groups are as much in need of support to build healthy cultures of working together as they are around practical issues, such as land acquisition, planning permission and finance. This is especially the case where organisations seek to provide homes for vulnerable people, such as former rough sleepers, refugees and young people leaving the care system, for whom more collective decision-making may be very new.

- Providing this kind of support is vital if we are to create more inclusive forms of CLH. Well-meaning but unreflective forms of group culture and organisational development are a major barrier to participation, especially from vulnerable or marginalised people.

- In our research, both grassroots CLH practitioners and professionals expressed a widely felt need both for formal programmes and informal networks through which they can engage with each other. They want to do this over longer timescales in communities of learning, rather than as recipients of short bursts of individual training.

7

THE SOLUTION

Coaching is a method that is well-established in the corporate, sports and development sectors to deal with these challenges. As well as supporting work groups and teams to achieve shared goals, it is also used to help improve performance and protect investments. With roots in the civil rights movement in the USA, community coaching is the adaptation of a coaching model to the much more informal and non-hierarchical settings that are common in community development contexts. We discuss the nature of community coaching in more detail below.

Our research demonstrates that establishing the role of community coach and creating peer-led learning communities of CLH practitioners and professionals could have a powerful impact on the inclusivity and completion rate of projects. In doing so, it may help secure increased investment of charitable, public and private funds. In short, community coaching can make a valuable contribution to the growth and resilience of the sector in the face of an uncertain national policy environment that constrains the reach of the existing CLH hub and advisor network.

There is an existing training offer in community organising, mediation and conflict resolution available through a variety of organisations and individuals in the UK. However, our research participants were clear that an effective community coach for a CLH project needs to have direct experience with the sector, either as a member of a CLH group or as someone with experience of working with groups in a professional capacity.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

- To establish the role of community coach through a pilot peer-learning programme, share successful methods and demonstrate impact.

- To start to build a national network of community coaches to support the CLH movement and other community initiatives focused on place-making that will increase the number, sustainability and resilience of their projects, leading to stronger, healthier and more resilient communities, increased return on social value and greater alignment with sustainable development goals.

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

PROGRESS TO DATE

Funded by Power to Change and the National Lottery Community Fund, we've carried out three phases of research and testing during 2020–2023 to develop a solution. Drawing insights from a literature review, three surveys, seven workshops, a three-month co-design process with 12 experienced community development and collaborative housing professionals, and over 50 interviews, we've:

- Identified community coaching as the solution.

- Set out the skills and experience necessary for the coaching role.

- Explored the existing coaching offer in the community development sector and had conversations with those leading and evaluating some of its largest programmes.

- Consulted with co-production professionals, specialist coaches with housing experience, learning consultancies and potential partners to determine the best way to design and deliver the programme to maximise the benefits to participating communities and groups.

- Assessed demand and identified a range of potential participants.

- Proposed an outline curriculum and a mode of delivery.

These aspects of the project are set out in detail on the following pages.

OUR APPROACH IN PRACTICE

We will **design and deliver** a year-long, co-produced pilot programme for community coaching that will combine in-person and online group sessions to test the model within the CLH sector.

Based on the principles of co-production, we will recruit and remunerate 12–15 participants on a pilot programme. Our research to date has canvassed a range of grassroots collaborative housing organisations and professionals supporting them and found a high level of interest in taking part.

Future versions of the programme will curate participant cohorts around communities of interest in the wider asset-based community development sector.

PARTNERSHIP

UKCN proposes to deliver the pilot project in partnership with:

- The National Community Land Trust Network, a core member of the Community-Led Homes network (programme administration).

- Koreo, a leading learning consultancy, who have worked on some of the largest community leadership programmes in the UK (curriculum co-design and delivery; online platform design and delivery).

- An experienced action learning evaluation partner who will be recruited during the initial design phase.

BUILDING DEMAND

The pilot will involve four methods for building demand for community coaching:

1. Involving experienced 'early adopters' experienced in coaching and facilitation roles with active projects as initial participants.

2. Taking a co-production approach; we will 'build' the expertise and methods together.

3. Fostering movement through post-programme activities, events and online fora.

4. Expanding future programmes to take in less experienced practitioners, both adding to and benefitting from the knowledge generated by the first cohorts.

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

REACH

The pilot will recruit from across the CLH sector, via its set of national organisations and their wider networks.

Between them, these organisations represent over 1000 CLH communities who are engaging with a wide range of formal and informal support networks and professionals. As outlined above, subsequent iterations of the programme will curate multiple cohorts based around communities of interest in the wider community development sector, which will maximise the benefits to participating individuals and groups.

We will also reach projects through Power to Change, Locality, the National Lottery Fund, and Local Trust networks.

LONGER-TERM VISION

- To establish a national network of community coaching through a platform for programme graduates and others to share knowledge, address professional challenges, and participate in online events and workshops, as well as regional/local in-person meetups.

- Deliver multiple programme cycles in any one year, with iterations dedicated to specific communities of interest (e.g. existing CLH hub advisors, members of emerging cohousing groups).

- Take 250 people through its programmes in the first 5 years, who will take back their learning to their local contexts, impacting hundreds of groups and organizations and thousands of their members. Assuming each group has an impact on at least 30 people per year this would benefit 7500 each year.

Coaching for Community-led Housing

WHAT IS COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING?

Community-led or collaborative housing (CLH) initiatives can be understood as citizen-led, co-produced forms of place-making. They deliver measurable financial, health, environmental and business impacts both for their residents and the wider communities within which they are located. Once embedded into neighbourhoods as part of place-based partnerships, CLH housing initiatives can act as catalysts for further investment and confidence within larger regeneration initiatives (Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network, 2018).

CLH takes four main forms within the UK:

1. Cohousing
2. Community land trusts
3. Housing co-operatives
4. Self-help housing

While each model differs in terms of legal structures, finance and partnerships, they share a common ambition for people to work together to create their own homes, protect and enhance public assets. Increasingly, they also share ambitions for reducing energy use and carbon footprints, combatting loneliness, increasing neighbourliness, improving the environment and opening up buildings and outdoor spaces for leisure, business or community support.

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

- **Cohousing** seeks to build healthy places for intentional communities (i.e. people who have purposely decided to live in a more collective way). As well as individual homes, cohousing projects typically include shared facilities such as gardens, allotments, laundries and workshops, as well as social activities, such as community meals, celebrations and public-facing events. The approach is well established in other countries such as Denmark, Germany, the USA, Canada and the Netherlands and adoption in the UK has accelerated in recent years. Since emerging as a new model in the UK in the 1990s, there are now 19 established projects – several of which have won various forms of architectural and community development awards – and over 60 in the process of taking shape. Cohousing has been recognized as particularly appropriate for older people, evidenced by the recent decision by Housing 21, the largest UK housing association working with the over-55s, to create up to 10 new cohousing communities over the next decade. The UK Cohousing Network is the national organization for cohousing.

- **Community land trusts** (CLTs) are democratic, non-profit organisations that own and develop land for the benefit of local communities. They typically provide affordable homes, create community gardens, reanimate civic buildings, pubs and shops, or develop shared workspace, energy schemes and conservation landscapes. There are currently nearly 600 active CLT projects in the UK, with more than 7000 homes currently in the pipeline. The National Community Land Trust Network is the UK membership organization for CLTs.

- The UK has a proud history of **housing co-operatives** with memberships from under 10 to hundreds of residents which offer affordable and secure housing to people within the overarching ethos of the cooperative movement. With over 900 housing co-ops in the UK, they form an integral part of the national housing ecosystem, with renewed interest from 'generation rent' that increasingly finds itself ineligible for social housing but priced out of the private rental sector. The Confederation of Co-operative Housing is the membership organisation for housing co-operatives in the UK.

- **Self-help housing initiatives** involve volunteers undertaking some of the work to bring back empty properties into use, often involving training in construction. These projects are often aimed at people in insecure, short-term accommodation, including migrants, the long-term unemployed, survivors of domestic abuse and those leaving the criminal justice system. Organizations representing this approach include Giroscope in Hull and Canopy in Leeds. More recent initiatives that address these constituencies include clusters of modular micro-homes to accommodate those experiencing homelessness (Allia) and the Church of England's national initiative to bring underused land and buildings into use as residential accommodation for those in housing need.

All these approaches diverge significantly from commercial and social housing development processes and, as with any innovation, roles, structures and systems need to be developed to support their flourishing.

GROWING THE MOVEMENT: CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

After an initial investment through the first phase of the Community Housing Fund (to 2020), the national organizations mentioned above came together with Locality to form the Community-Led Homes partnership, which subsequently set up the network of CLH hubs across the UK, maintains a website of CLH projects and resources and continues to train hub advisors, with over 100 people completing the programme to date.

Community-Led Homes hub advisors provide technical advice on a range of issues, including governance, land acquisition, working with local authorities and housing associations, building design and finance. This source of support is enabling more groups to overcome the many hurdles of agreeing legal and governance structures, securing sites, gaining planning permission and finding development partners.

However, there remains a gap: whilst there is support available for practical matters, many groups experience issues with managing non-hierarchical forms of organising, group dynamics, inclusivity and communicating with external partners and statutory bodies.

This is especially important for people in disadvantaged and underserved communities in challenging conventional power relationships with housing professionals and public service providers as they negotiate for new types of resident-led housing (Moore & Mullins 2013). In addition, many residents may struggle to acquire the necessary time, finance, and networks, often more available to middle-class professionals.

Resolving these issues is essential in the creation of healthy organisational cultures, particularly in non-hierarchical settings common to community development projects. Decisions around CLH are high stakes. They carry significant risk to public assets involved which may end up being developed purely for private profit. Robust community-led proposals and convincing organisational structures are essential for their realisation.

Currently, it is difficult for CLH groups to access affordable support for these so-called 'softer' aspects of organizational development. For example, 100% of cohousing groups surveyed as part of our research stated they had "never been recommended or offered community development support through UKCN or the regional hubs".

The average response for cohousing groups when asked about *preparedness for managing social and democratic disputes* was 5.9/10 and 66% of groups surveyed highlighted that "someone had left the group or the project had been severely delayed due to internal conflict".

The need is clear. Many CLH groups find their own solutions through external mediators or project managers. They in turn are stretching their skill sets in attempting to support groups with these issues.

In addition, major grant schemes that supported the creation of the CLH hub infrastructure ended in 2021. CLH hub staff and advisors told us that a) they were not in a financial position to offer this type of extended support to groups and b) the skillset it requires is not included in the existing CLH advisor training.

66% of groups surveyed highlighted that "someone had left the group or the project had been severely delayed due to internal conflict".

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

FROM 'MIDDLE-AGENT' TO COMMUNITY COACH

Research has also highlighted the importance of 'middle-agents' in the CLH movement. These are experienced individuals who offer advice and support to other groups, typically on an informal or ad hoc basis through varying types of contractual arrangements – or often none at all. They are often members of established CLH communities with both lived experience and training or professional experience in other areas of housing, community development or education. Whilst the compact nature of the emerging movement's networks over the last decade has supported much pro bono work of this type, its ability to scale up will depend on the formalization of this role and its integration into community development projects:

What is needed are institutional support systems, to enable freelance individuals who already have to deal with their own economic uncertainty and that of working with groups, to pursue such opportunities, should they wish to do so…Their investment as professionals, even if this is a principal source of income, is not always self-interested but embedded in a broader ethics of cooperation or in an interest in moving the sector as a whole forward. Without an appropriate financial and network support system, their efforts can be short-lived and their ability to push the boundaries of the mainstream curtailed. **As such, we recommend that the training and capacity-building of middle-agents… receives further support.**

Arrigoitia & Tummers 2019

This is an important finding for our project and one echoed in many of our conversations with existing CLH residents, advisors and other professionals who had experienced 'mission creep' into coaching-like activity for which they did not feel qualified. Accordingly, we seek neither to build a fully professionalized identity for community coaching (that might come later), nor to repeat previous initiatives in upskilling 'lay' organizers for hyperlocal projects. Instead, we aim to build a network of community coaches who can take on this middle-agent role – reflecting the hybrid career paths, vocations and motivations common in the CLH sector.

As such, we recommend that the **training and capacity-building** of middle-agents… receives further support.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES: COACHING AS COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Funded by Power to Change and the National Lottery Community Fund, the UK Cohousing Network commissioned three phases of research to explore the challenges facing CLH groups and to scope out the viability of solutions. Through a literature review, three surveys, seven workshops, over 50 interviews and a three-month role/curriculum co-design project with 14 experienced CLH and community development professionals, our evidence is that many CLH projects experience challenges with group dynamics and inclusivity and that diversity remains an under-addressed issue.

Building on the success of the Community Led Homes Accredited Enabler Course with over 100 accredited advisors, our proposed pilot aims to develop a self-sustaining model based on a similar approach. The opportunity to test out the model will build the skills, frameworks, and content for a curriculum and set the groundwork for a viable future business model.

Community businesses that do not act in an entrepreneurial way, with clear and shared goals and values and a culture of experimentation, cannot be 'saved' even by a combination of collective leadership, a strong business model and strong networks...When properly aligned with personal values, drives, and needs, such an aligned entrepreneurial culture can unleash tremendous amounts of energy toward a shared purpose and foster an organisation's capacity to thrive.

Kleinhans et al. 2020

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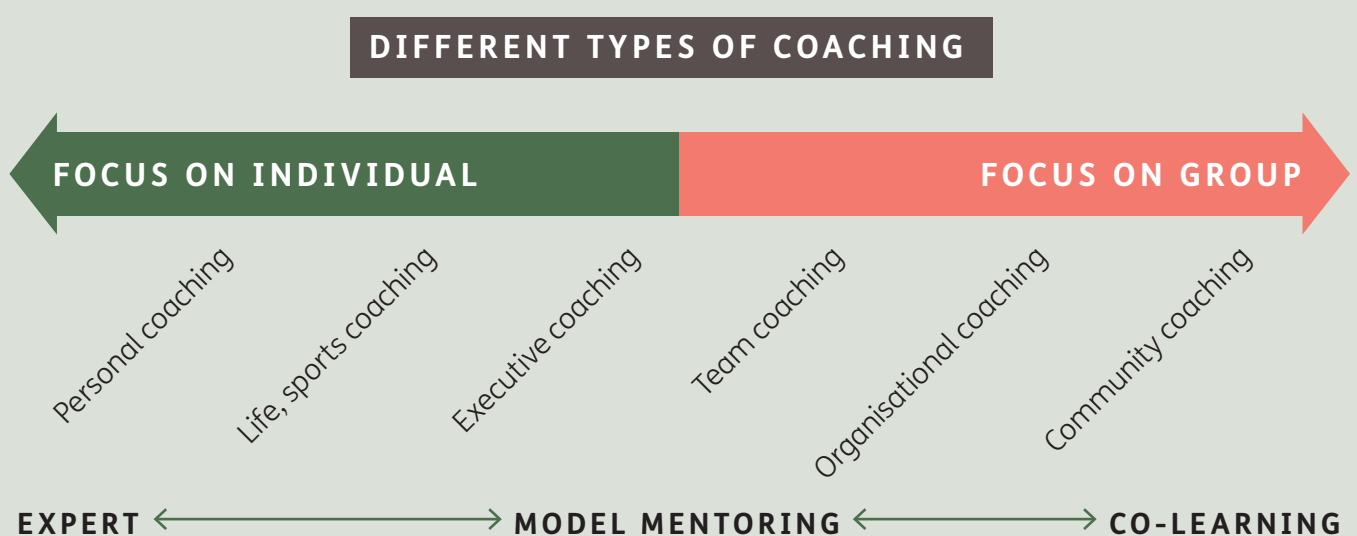
WHAT IS COMMUNITY COACHING? THE 'GUIDE ON THE SIDE'

Coaching is most familiar in business contexts, where organisations seek to motivate employees and try to innovate, often while simultaneously streamlining or shrinking. A coach is frequently an external resource that supports internal procedures or guides individuals through pathways for personal development. In other cases, the coach is a leader within an organisation who employs its methods as powerful tools for building teams, establishing goals and fostering creativity. Within commercial contexts, there is now strong evidence for the efficacy of coaching on individual and team performance – and the significant return on investment that it can yield. Team-based coaching is particularly prevalent in the US tech, cultural and creative industries, with organisations such as Pixar employing coaches to regularly participate in team meetings rather than simply as a means to resolve temporary difficulties.

Community coaching has evolved down a different path, with origins in the US civil rights movement, which was picked up during the 1980s by the emerging community development sector. When compared with executive coaching, community coaching is a practice that can sometimes be better explained by defining what it is not, rather than trying to pin down an exact definition.

The community coach should not be confused with a facilitator, counsellor, teacher, or technical advisor, although a coach may take on one of these identities if necessary. These roles are typically based on the expert model, whereas coaching operates from a perspective of co-learning, co-creating and generative collaboration.

Community coaches often refer to themselves as 'the guide on the side', indicating a supportive and empowering role. The primary focus of a coach is not to take over tasks for the community but to learn alongside its members, helping them develop their capacity to effectively achieve their goals. The figure below illustrates a progression from the expert coaching model common in business and sports to the co-learning approach necessary for effective community capacity building.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF COACHING

FOCUS ON INDIVIDUAL · FOCUS ON GROUP

Personal coaching · Life, sports coaching · Executive coaching · Team coaching · Organisational coaching · Community coaching

EXPERT ← → MODEL MENTORING ← → CO-LEARNING

Group Figure 1. The coaching continuum (adapted from A Field Guide to Community Coaching)

EXISTING COACHING PROVISION FOR COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES

Despite the efficacy of this approach, the use of coaching to proactively support community-led initiatives in the UK is still emerging. To inform our project design, we have investigated the current provision of similar programmes that support individuals and groups to mobilize communities and create strong organizational cultures.

These fall into 3 broad categories:

1. Community leadership development
2. Mediation and conflict resolution
3. Bespoke approaches to group dynamics and non-hierarchical organization.

Community leadership

Two recent and prominent examples in the UK are:

- The Community Leadership Academy (2020-2024) offered as part of the 10-year Big Local initiative (concluding in 2026) that operates in 150 areas across the UK and took around 160 people through a year-long programme, delivered mostly online with some residential, in-person components.

- Community Organizers, established in 2015, offers short training programmes (7-30 hours of contact time) via regional 'social hubs' on a range of topics related to community organizing, as well as formal level 2/3 award and certificate programmes in community organizing which are currently being transitioned to online provision.

Although they share some common values and principles, these projects understand community organizing in different ways. They intentionally appeal to a very broad range of constituencies and issues, from combatting food poverty to protecting green spaces. Typically, these initiatives aim to upskill individuals to take on leadership or facilitatory roles within their own communities (whether based on place, interests or identities) and often seek to address power imbalances and challenge established public policy and authority.

They are fundamentally about supporting individuals to mobilize others to fight for change, with a focus on listening, connecting, organizing, strategizing, leading and taking action. Evaluations of these projects suggest the sheer diversity of contexts, structures and issues that participants are involved with can make it more difficult for them to find common ground and engage in in-depth mutual learning.

Mediation and conflict resolution

'On-demand' coaching in mediation and dealing with group conflict is offered by a variety of smaller organisations and individuals. Potential contexts for mediation are very diverse and include disputes between neighbours or communities seeking to address anti-social behaviour. People we spoke to within the CLH movement who had experience with this type of provision often mentioned that practitioners lacked a familiarity with the housing development and place-making contexts to be fully effective. Uptake of these services also depends on groups actively seeking support and being able to agree to make a financial commitment to do so, at a point when reaching agreement may already have become an issue.

Bespoke approaches to group dynamics and organisational cultures

Similarly, a range of organisations and individuals also offer bespoke training in specific approaches to teamwork and group dynamics, such as non-violent communication, sociocracy or consensus-based decision-making. Our research showed that while some CLH groups have made use of these approaches on a one-off or ad hoc basis, many have never encountered them or been offered them through existing support structures. As with mediation and conflict resolution, trainers in these approaches are unlikely to be familiar with the specific issues and dynamics of CLH groups.

COACHING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING

Building on these insights, our pilot programme will develop a community coaching methodology suitable for newly formed CLH groups and existing communities.

Our research has demonstrated that those directly engaged in CLH projects and the professionals that support them agree that coaching can enable them to thrive – building shared values, creating psychological safety, increasing inclusivity and sustaining engagement within their organisations.

They were also unambiguous that coaches need to be independent of the groups they work with for a variety of reasons – the need here differs from community organising, where training is generally for individuals to bring their learning back to mobilise communities to which they already belong. Where charitable and public funds are invested, community coaching can ensure that CLH projects are given the best chance at success and demonstrate a clear social value return on investment.

Community coaching is a method with wide application and potential across other community-led projects such as cooperatives, social enterprises, businesses and issue-based campaigns. Using this pilot to develop the role within the CLH sector, we will then explore the potential to scale up this model for this broader sector.

Strong democratic processes are key to addressing barriers and challenges along the road…. groups need to consider how engagement can be retained, how decision-making structures and processes should best function, and how to manage the ebbs and flows of involvement over several years of planning and development.

Arbell et al. 2022

Strong **democratic** processes are key to addressing barriers and challenges along the road….

COLIVING AND COMMUNITY COACHING: LEARNING FROM COMMERCIAL HOUSING INNOVATION

Interestingly, it is the newest entrant to the for-profit housing market that has placed the greatest value on the role of community coaching: coliving. Aimed at younger professionals often arriving in urban centres for work, coliving developments accommodate between 80–200 individuals in rented micro-apartments. They have a range of shared facilities, including fully equipped kitchens, rooftop gardens, gyms, cinemas, co-working and event spaces. Many offer programmes of social activities, professional networking opportunities or connect residents with local voluntary and community projects. Yet coliving is at best a temporary solution for most of its residents – the average tenancy is between 12–18 months. Many schemes have been invested in by local authority pension funds such as Folk at Sunday Mills in London.

Coliving has proved controversial in some quarters in terms of (un)affordability, rapid tenancy 'churn', space standards and density. However, coliving developers have been quick to see the significance of community coaching in securing the value of their offer to prospective tenants. Many have developed their own training for the role, entirely separate from building management. Specialist coliving employees take specific responsibility for developing group culture. This can include 'onboarding' new tenants, programming and facilitating social events. Employees also work with residents to resolve disagreements and connect them with local social enterprises and voluntary organisations.

The growth of coliving schemes globally is a clear indicator of the unmet need for more communal forms of living. It also shows that living this way involves a learning process that requires professional support and facilitation – a community coach. Given that unhappy residents can simply leave at short notice, creating a successful community experience is essential for profitability. In contrast, within the CLH sector, where residents are less transient, it can easily be assumed that 'community' is something that 'we' all already know how to do, since it is by definition at the heart of our projects.

Talking with both coliving developers and CLH practitioners and professionals during our research has confirmed our sense that building intentional communities in the context of contemporary, digitally-connected social networks and very diverse households is something that has to be consciously pursued and maintained – it does not just look after itself.

Whilst recognizing its profound and principled differences from commercial coliving developments, we believe that the CLH movement can learn from the coliving experience to create a coaching model that matches its own values and aspirations.

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

COMMUNITY COACH: THE ROLE

Based on our research and testing, the preferred solution is to build a national network of community coaches for the CLH sector and beyond. People we spoke with preferred 'coach' over other terms, such as 'facilitator', 'social enabler' or 'organiser'.

The key attributes, knowledge and skill set of a community coach are shown in Figure 1 overleaf, as developed in the first phase of our research.

A coach is independent of the groups they serve but builds strong, long-term relationships with them.

A coach is independent of the groups they serve but **builds strong, long-term relationships** with them.

Their role is to support a group to:

- Select and use appropriate governance models and decision-making procedures.
- Choose inclusive communication channels and platforms.
- Develop shared values and ground rules for behaviour.
- Set realistic milestones and objectives, including for coaching input.
- Cultivate psychological safety for all members.
- Work *with* difference and diversity as a means to create cohesion.
- Articulate and sustain a clear sense of tasks, roles and responsibilities.
- Make and implement better decisions.
- Discover effective ways to resolve conflict.
- Sustain engagement.
- Discover what counts as meaningful participation for its members.
- Understand when to draw on other sources of expertise or specialist advice.
- Communicate effectively with other organisations and professionals.
- Maintain a reflective perspective on its working methods and hold itself to account.

Extensive research across a range of disciplines has shown that not only are these the key dimensions of flourishing for successful groups and teams, but also that they require continual reinforcement through guided practice (i.e. coaching), rather than existing simply as a set of written principles and ambitions.

KEY ATTRIBUTES

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?

An emotionally intelligent, encouraging person who holds space for everyone, but is tough enough to bear conflict, can move things along when needed, and say things the group may not want to hear.

KEY QUALITIES

- Good listener
- Empathetic
- Inclusive
- Patient
- Adaptable
- Resilient
- Fair and impartial
- Positive mindset
- Good sense of humour
- Strong communications skills
- Interested in people and communities
- Understanding of (and sensitive toward) different spiritual practices

DESIGNED FOR IMPACT

This role will help groups be more inclusive by setting power boundaries, bringing out less-heard voices and implementing fair and inclusive communication, decision-making and conflict-resolutions structures.

Armed with these self-chosen structures and processes, groups will be more likely to survive conflicts, find compromise and address power or workload imbalances in a healthy way.
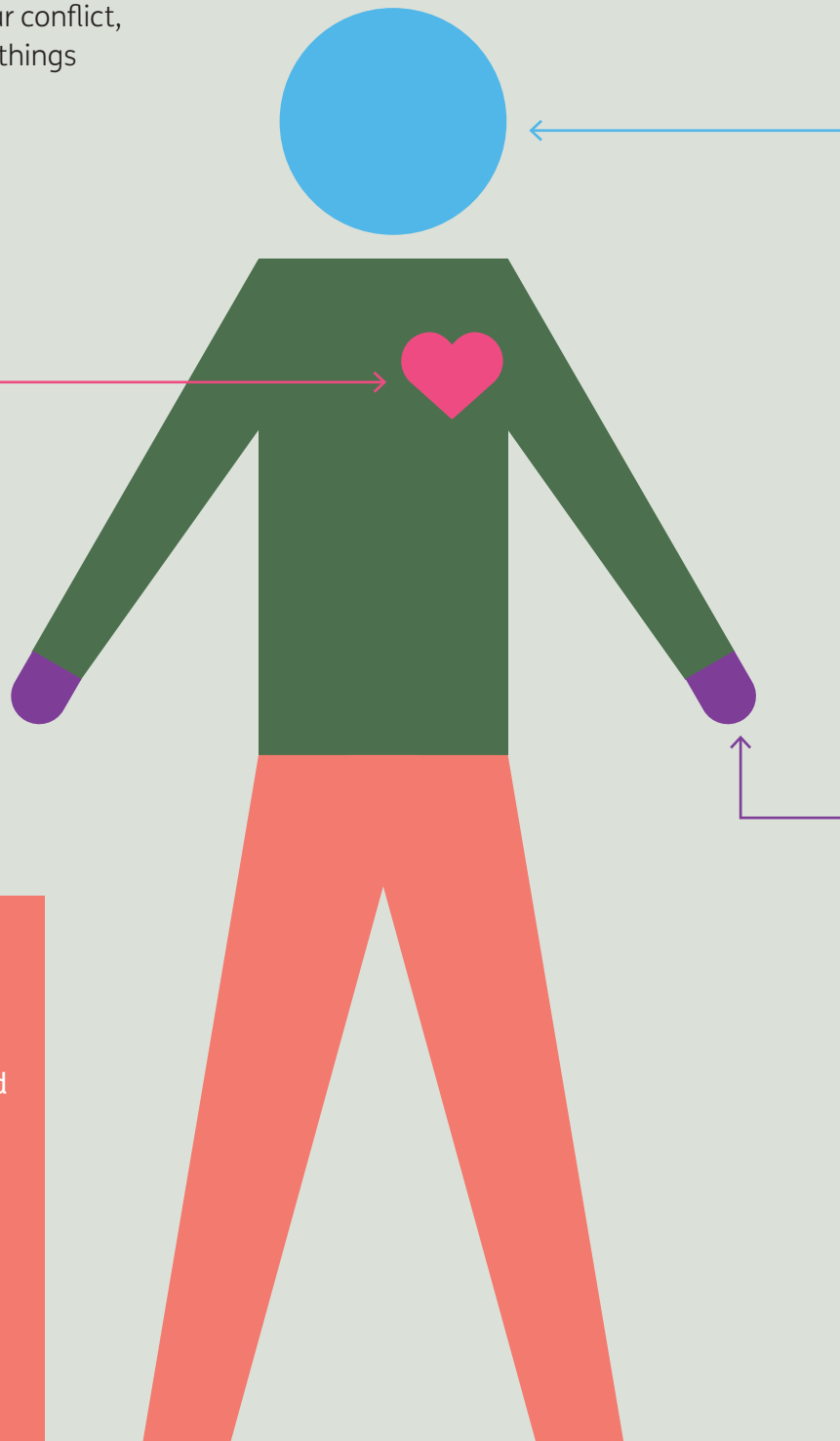
Figure 2: The Community Coach: the role (adapted from 'Community Coaches: A Strategic Recommendation', p.12).

Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

WHAT DO THEY KNOW?

Knowledgable about community-led housing (ideally including some lived experience), as well as local cultural and financial contexts, so that they can better empathise and understand the emotional impact of the project.

KEY KNOWLEDGE

- Ideas, practicalities, and processes behind community-led housing

- Local knowledge: social, political, cultural and housing contexts that may affect the group and their project

- Broader issues around social justice, inclusion and safeguarding

- Understanding of UK housing (rents, benefits system) overall

WHAT CAN THEY DO?

Professionally skilled in community development practices and theories (such as non-violent communication, sociocracy and the 'Technology of Participation') and can impart these processes and structures to the group.

Key Skills

- Team building
- Community development
- Facilitation
- Mediation
- Conflict resolution techniques
- Help the group to choose and put in place the best governance and decision-making processes

PRINCIPLES

The principles for coaching and approach will be developed by the pilot group and refined as they learn about what is valuable. Suggested principles to guide the pilot are outlined below based on the insights from our previous research and design phases.

1. Group first

The coach is accountable to the group.
The recruitment and scope of work that the coach will support will be shaped and led by the group. The coach will support the group to grow their confidence to engage with external organisations so their ambitions are heard.

2. Learning and exploring

Coaches will be open to failure and exploratory in the development of the new model: testing out ideas, gathering inspiration and engaging with a wide number of stakeholders.

3. Independent

Coaches need to be independent and have permission to challenge groups in situations where a group is moving away from its mission or where members are not committed.

4. Empowering

Coaches will empower groups through sharing methods and modelling relational skills to enable groups to thrive once coaching has concluded.

5. Centring minority voices

Coaches will support groups to be welcoming and inclusive and ensure that minority voices are listened to.

BUILDING DEMAND FOR COMMUNITY COACHING

Community coaching is a relatively recent innovation in the UK. To create a self-sustaining proposition, we will need to raise awareness of the new model and its benefits for community-led projects focused on the built environment, such as CLH. The proposed pilot applies four proven methods of supporting the uptake of innovations:

- Involving early adopters.
- Taking a co-production approach.
- Allying itself with a wider movement.
- Changing the conditions in the system to pave the way for the new model.

1. Involving early adopters in the design and development of the pilot

Involving participants with lived experience and developed networks in CLH will serve to broaden the reach of our pilot coaching programme, promote recruitment to subsequent iterations, and support the acceptance and utility of the coaching model across the sector. As the pilot progresses, a wide range of stakeholders, including the extensive networks of the Community-Led Homes partnership, will be invited to insight-sharing events as part of our regular Cohousing Cafe sessions, featuring those participating in the pilot group.

2. Taking a co-production approach

Since its uptake in health and social care settings, co-production is an emerging practice within community development, as evidenced in a recent report by the National Lottery Community Development Fund. Rather than simply consulting or informing people about a service, it entails involving end-users in its design, delivery, governance and evaluation from the outset and, importantly, valuing that input through reciprocal benefit, including financial remuneration.

We've consulted with co-production specialists as part of our research for the pilot and see the benefits of co-production as creating a more credible, authentic and responsive programme, a greater sense of ownership among participants and increased interest beyond the pilot cohort due to the network effects of taking a more participatory approach.

Co-producing the first iteration of our programme with early adopters will allow us to compound the advantages mentioned above, ensuring that it grows out of the knowledge and experience of those best placed both to inform its design and delivery and stimulate wider interest.

We understand that co-production takes time and resources – hence the year-long schedule for our pilot and remuneration paid to participants. But we also know that the CLH movement has been working with many of the principles and practices of co-production long before the term gained more widespread traction in the last decade – going by many other names, it's essentially at the heart of the movement's values and ways of working.

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3. Building a movement

The programme aims to support a wide network of groups to strengthen their organisational cultures, promote inclusivity and build positive group dynamics by growing a movement around community development.
These activities include:

- An online community coaching forum, actively managed by a paid Community Engagement Officer, will build interest in the value of the coaching model. UKCN already offers a Slack forum for the discussion of a range of collaborative housing topics and we aim to trial other approaches to building a peer-led online learning community, including the use of asynchronous discussion platforms, such as Braided Spaces, which will enable people to participate in text-based discussions at their own pace.

- Co-producing a theory of change (ToC). A ToC is a powerful means for new groups to determine their vision and pathways to success – by contributing to a ToC for the broader movement, pilot participants will gain firsthand experience of how they might use this tool to support groups they work with in the future.

- Peer support: once the pilot has finished, participants will be supported to come together as a learning community to input into subsequent iterations of the programme and build their leadership skills to drive a movement in the sector. We envisage that some will return to facilitate elements of further iterations, allowing us to increase the number of places available and to offer opportunities to join cohorts based in particular regions or working in other types of asset-based community development.

4. Ensuring the 'enabling conditions' are in place

Creating the groundwork for community coaching will aid its integration into the collaborative housing ecosystem and enable others to adopt the model more easily. The time invested in developing our proposals this far – largely due to the pandemic – has had the beneficial effect of allowing us to sow the seeds for its emergence widely and gather a diverse range of perspectives. The more widely the value of community coaching is understood by funders, developers and local authorities, the easier it will be it is to grow the movement.

In developing our proposals this far, as well as members of emerging and existing CLH communities, we've consulted widely with CLH professionals, including Community-Led Homes hub advisors, independent consultants, academics, community developers, CLH-friendly for-profit property developers, housing associations and co-ops, coliving and co-production experts, coaches in conflict resolution and non-violent communication. We feel confident that we are creating a coaching model that supports existing structures and roles rather than replicating or competing with them.

The programme itself will explore the interactions coaches are likely to have with other professionals, such as project managers, architects, consultants or Community-Led Homes hub advisors. This will ensure that learning can be effectively applied within the complex interlocking elements of housing development and will help clarify how coaching can offer the most value and remain complementary to existing roles.

LEARNING AND TESTING

The pilot provides the opportunity to extend the research questions identified through our previous design phase - embedding a culture of continuous enquiry into the initiative as it progresses. The aim here is not to prove the efficacy of the innovation but to understand what elements are important for building inclusivity and group cohesion, and what needs to be refined within the initial programme iteration. Areas of exploration that have been identified through the design phase and will be considered during the pilot include:

- What are the key principles that define the community coaching approach?

- What leadership and governance structures best support collaborative housing groups?

- How does a community coaching role inform the theory of change for collaborative housing?

- How does community coaching compare to similar practices such as executive coaching and community development?

- Does a community coach need both lived experience of collaborative housing and coaching skills?

- How can groups overcome challenges associated with variable time commitments?

- What are the potential forms of contract between a coach and a group?

- Which organisations and individuals are key partners for groups?

- What are appropriate funding models for coaching?

- What is the scope of work for the coach and when do they need to refer to other organisations and individuals?

- How can coaches honour the intention of groups to be self-led and autonomous whilst providing external facilitation?

- What model would best support groups in integrating coaching skills into their own ways of working?

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(i) Stakeholder Advisory Group

This group will consist of representatives from UKCN and other organisations and individuals that have been active in the CLH sector, such as the Confederation of Co-operative Housing, Power to Change, Locality, and Community-led Homes advisors. It will meet once before, once during and once after the project to provide a broad, sector-wide perspective and a longer-range view of the project, as well as enable the executive group to make use of its expertise in concentrated doses.

The lead coach will have considerable latitude in the initial design of the programme curriculum

(ii) The pilot programme will be led by an executive group

Consisting of:

- A lead facilitator selected for the pilot (see below).
- Administrative staff from UKCN.
- A representative from our delivery partner, the National Community Land Trust Network (NCLTN).
- A project lead from our learning and digital partner, Koreo.
- A representative from our learning and evaluation partner, who will be recruited to the project during the initial design phase.

This group would report to the board of the primary budget holder – UKCN / NCLTN.

Roles:
Lead Coach/Facilitator/Designer

This role will be advertised and contracted. Selection criteria will include:

- Professional experience of working with groups through community development projects with outcomes.
- Previous group coaching experience.
- Relevant qualifications and training.
- Lived experience or professional support role in one or more CLH projects.

The lead coach will have considerable latitude in the initial design of the programme curriculum, working primarily alongside the other learning partners. The expectation is for participants in the pilot to input into the content and format of the programme as it unfolds. The lead coach will be expected to build that learning into subsequent iterations of the programme, for which additional coaches will be recruited.

Programme Design & Delivery

In response to feedback gathered during our research phases, our programme delivery is designed to be as inclusive as possible. Based on consultation with co-production specialists, we have budgeted for remuneration for participants in the pilot programme at a level that recognizes the extent of the commitment required.
This recognizes the value of their contribution, establishes the principle of reciprocity and makes it clear the project as a whole is engaged in supporting the wider CLH movement, rather than providing training to individuals.

Our co-design group strongly recommended a synchronous, cohort-based, hybrid format, with in-person events spread across a year, supplemented with regular online group meetings and a series of 1:1 online mentoring sessions. A cohort-based approach will enable the depth of learning and integration the coaching role requires; establish the habits and skills of co-mentorship that will enable future participation in a community of practice; and provide a necessary context for the transmission of the embodied and relational skills that community coaching requires.

All of our interviewees agreed that some in-person sessions were essential for generating mutual understanding, trust and a positive learning experience. Evaluations from other community leadership initiatives we examined indicated that 1:1 mentoring was particularly appreciated by participants taking up a leadership role for the first time. Once our pilot cohort has been recruited, we will be in a better position to assess what level of 1:1 support is required.

• By offering remuneration and travel expenses to all participants, we aim to minimise the barriers to participation at in-person events.

• In-person sessions will be hosted in established collaborative housing settings across the UK, many of which have publicly-accessible workspaces that are suitable for educational purposes. This will enrich the learning by enabling participants to directly experience some aspects of everyday life within different types and sizes of CLH communities. While selection for the programme will require participants to commit to attending in-person sessions, a video conferencing link will be available where unforeseen circumstances prevent this.

• Learning design for hybrid delivery is a complex undertaking and best practice is evolving rapidly in formal and informal education contexts as the ramifications of online-only delivery during the pandemic are fully digested. Accordingly, UKCN will partner with Koreo, a specialist learning consultancy with extensive experience in the design and delivery of similar hybrid community development learning initiatives, including Big Local's Community Leadership Academy (2019-23). We are currently exploring a range of potential approaches to joint delivery, with UKCN recruiting a specific individual with strong collaborative housing and coaching background to lead the core design and delivery team, supported by Koreo staff.

• Koreo has experience with a range of online learning platforms, from the more corporate/instructional (e.g. Docebo) to more informal use of familiar apps, such as Google Docs and Whatsapp. The choices here are highly dependent on the needs and learning styles of target participants and we are adopting a flexible approach in how content delivery and communications are handled with the pilot cohort, rather than seeking to impose a predetermined solution from the outset.

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Outline curriculum, learning objectives and outcomes

At this stage, we are proposing an outline curriculum that will be subsequently fleshed out by the programme delivery team and then tested with pilot participants. Produced by our co-design group over three months, it reflects perspectives from across the CLH and community development sector. The training curriculum is structured in a way that conveys the essential knowledge base and skill set described above, with the addition of a unit on role, contracting, and ethics, and an action learning unit. It is divided into four knowledge base modules, and two skills modules, as follows:

- Knowledge Base Module 1:
  Community Empowerment

- Knowledge Base Module 2:
  Group Dynamics

- Knowledge Base Module 3:
  Group Systems

- Knowledge Base Module 4:
  Role, Contracting and Ethics

- Skills Module 1:
  Coaching and Facilitation Skills

- Skills Module 2:
  Action Learning

Further details of module content and learning outcomes can be found in Appendix A.

The action learning unit is a key element in the programme, as the space in which participants reflect on a community-led initiative or project with which they are currently involved, bringing their experiences to action learning sets (small groups) within the cohort and taking their learning back out. We fully expect participants to contribute their own perspectives, experiences and learning resources to the programme as it unfolds, which will inform subsequent iterations.

Recruitment and Selection

The opportunity to take part in the pilot programme will be promoted through the extensive CLH partnership networks and the wider community development sector. Conversations with over 50 key representatives from across the CLH movement and beyond have demonstrated a high degree of interest and we expect the co-production approach and accompanying remuneration and expenses package on offer to attract a large number of suitable applicants.

Applicants to the programme will be asked to complete a detailed questionnaire to self-assess their fluency in each of the core content areas, taking into consideration both formal training as well as lived experience. This will orient applicants to the programme's structure; enhance accessibility by taking into account lived experience as well as prior training; enable programme coordinators to create cohorts with similar learning needs.

Applicants will also be asked to identify a community-led initiative they are (or can become) involved in throughout their participation in the programme, to enable their action learning, along with a sponsor – someone external to the programme they can be accountable to in their learning such as an employer, group member, funder, fellow coach or facilitator.

Participants will explore the potential for accreditation or certification of the programme as part of the design of a sustainable business model for community coaching.

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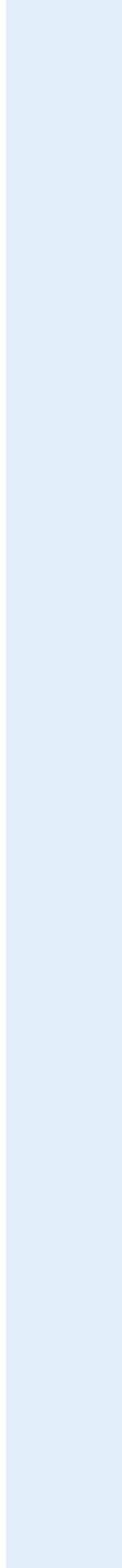
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Knowledge Base Module 1:
Community Empowerment

Participants are introduced to the practice of Community Development and related fields, and become versed in their fundamental values, principles, and intentions. The opportunities and challenges faced by community-lead initiatives are reviewed, along with the main features of their socio-political, environmental, and economic contexts, as well as the common opportunities for and barriers to group inclusion. They understand the role of a group's shared vision in creating a mutually-empowered internal culture, and the importance of returning to it as a foundation stone throughout the group's journey. Participants become familiar with the project journey of 3 types of community-led initiatives: community-led businesses, community-controlled assets, and community-led housing. Participants explore the role of a group's shared vision in creating a mutually- empowered internal culture.

Knowledge Base Module 2:
Group Dynamics

Participants learn core developmental and relational models and frameworks to understand the dynamics and patterns that are common in groups. They explore the function of emotions, needs, and self-expression in a group's process, along with the often unexplored phenomenon of power. They deepen their understanding of the relational factors that impact inclusion, participation and engagement, and explore the role of relationship in creating a mutually-empowered internal culture.

Knowledge Base Module 3:
Group Systems

Participants explore 6 key systemic elements of culture: Governance, Communication, Conflict, Feedback/Learning, Economics, and Celebration. They learn the choices a group can make about how to engage with each system, weigh the impacts of those choices, and understand how they might enable or disable a culture of mutual empowerment within a community-led context.

Knowledge Base Module 4:
Role, Contracting and Ethics

Participants review the parameters of the CC role, ensuring clarity in regards to its scope of practice, its relationship to the groups it supports, as well as how it relates to other roles. Processes and procedures for contracting, funding, planning, initiating and concluding programmes of support are reviewed. Participants learn the ethical guidelines and expectations for the CC role, including recommendations for ongoing training, development and supervision. 'Special cases' are considered, in which the CC might be asked to play a particular role in an initiative (such as guiding the formation of a cohousing group), and the ethical, contractual, and role impacts are explored.

Skills Module 1:
Coaching and Facilitation Skills
This module happens alongside other modules, to enable participants to develop their coaching and facilitation skills in relation to the Knowledge Base content. Participants learn and practice core skills for coaching and facilitation, and hold an ongoing, reflective inquiry into how these skills – and any intervention they might make in a group's process – will enable a culture of mutual empowerment within a community-led context.
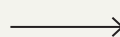
Skills Module 2:
Action Learning
This module happens alongside other modules, to enable participants to actively experiment with their developing knowledge base and skillset, to receive ongoing feedback from their peers, and to integrate their learning at a deeper level. Participants are assigned to Action Learning Groups at the outset of the programme.

These smaller groups (approx. 5-7 people in size) provide a confidential, reflective, sensemaking space, created from the main programme cohort. They are facilitated by a programme mentor, and follow the Action-Reflection-Planning cycle. These groups support participants to be engaged in a community-led initiative throughout the programme, allowing them to root the course content in a real-life context. They are also a place where participants can ongoingly share and be held collectively accountable to their professional development plans, and where they are supported to design and carry out a final, integrative assignment at the conclusion of the programme.

Timeline of one cohousing group's development path ⟶	GROUP	SITE PLAN BUILD	LIVE
Up-skilling groups in key soft skills	●	●	●
Ensure all voices are heard (inc. bringing in new members)	●	●	●
Help the group choose and implement decision-making processes	●	●	
Help the group choose and implement conflict resolution processes	●	●	
Mediate/facilitate often to embed good practice	●	●	
Mediate difficult conflicts (once the group has tried and failed)		●	●
Help the group reevaluate their chosen processes and principles			●

The community coach sits outside the group, but will ideally be local to the group, as this means they'll have local cultural context and the ability to visit as frequently as needed.

Knowledge Base Module 1:
Community Empowerment

This module will enable participants to:

- Describe the fundamental values, principles, and intentions of Community Development and related fields.

- Understand the phenomenon of mutual empowerment and its relevance to the community-led movement.

- Understand the opportunities and challenges faced by community-led initiatives.

- Understand the socio-political, environmental, and economic dynamics that impact on these initiatives.

- Understand the common opportunities and barriers for group inclusion in this context.

- Describe the project journey of 3 types of community-led initiatives: community- led businesses, community-controlled assets, and community-led housing, along with the challenges and opportunities of each phase.

- Understand the role of a group's shared vision in enabling its internal culture.

- Describe the impact of each of these elements on a group's ability to cultivate a culture of mutual empowerment.

Knowledge Base Module 2:
Group Dynamics

This module will enable participants to:

- Understand core developmental and relational models and frameworks.

- Describe the dynamics and relational patterns that are common in groups.

- Understand the function of emotions, needs, and self-expression in a group's process.

- Be fluent in the phenomenon of power in a group.

- Understand the relational factors that impact inclusion, participation and engagement.

- Understand the role of relationship in creating a mutually-empowered internal culture.

Understand the role of a group's **shared vision...**

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Knowledge Base Module 3:
Group Systems
This module will enable participants to:

- Define and describe the 6 key systemic elements of group culture:
  - Governance
  - Communication
  - Conflict
  - Feedback/Learning
  - Economics
  - Celebration

- Describe the choices a group can make in regards to each system and the potential impacts of each choice on enabling or disabling a culture of mutual empowerment;

- Understand the limits of their own knowledge and experience in regards to each systemic element, as well as when and how to refer a group to a more specialised practitioner;

- Be familiar with the network of existing specialists to whom groups can be referred.

Knowledge Base Module 4:
Role, Contracting and Ethics
This module will enable participants to:

- Describe and fully understand the parameters of the CC role: its scope of practice, its relationship to the groups it supports, and how it relates to other related roles;

- Be fluent in the appropriate processes and procedures for contracting, planning, initiating and concluding programmes of support;

- Understand and adhere to the ethical guidelines and expectations for the CC role;

- Be familiar with potential 'special cases' in which the CC might be asked to play a particular role in an initiative (such as guiding the formation of a cohousing group contracted by a developer or local authority), as well as the unique ethical, contractual, and role considerations of each case.

Skills Module 1:
Coaching and Facilitation Skills
This module will enable participants to:

- Embody and express the following
  coaching skills:
    - Maintaining a coaching mindset;
    - Maintaining presence;
    - Using embodied practices for self-and co-regulation; Co-creating the relationship;
    - Cultivating trust and safety;
    - Communicating effectively;
    - Cultivating learning and growth.

- Embody and express the following
  facilitation skills:
    - Clarifying and enabling group intentions; session/project design and management; utilising tools and platforms;
    - Enabling participation;
    - Enabling constructive conflict and diversity of views; enabling creativity;
    - Enabling group self-awareness;
    - Enabling divergence and convergence.

- Understand the impact of their coaching and facilitation interventions on enabling a mutually-empowered internal culture.

Skills Module 2:
Action Learning
This module will enable participants to:

- Have direct experience of applying their skills and knowledge within a community- led context;

- Understand the Action-Reflection planning cycle and have direct experience of applying it to enable learning within a project;

- Have direct experience of offering and receiving feedback on their development as a CC from peers and mentors;

- Clarify their personal strengths and weaknesses as a CC, and ongoingly identify their own learning edges;

- Use their personal experience going through the CC programme to inform their understanding of their future clients' experience.

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Community Coaching: building skills for better homes and places in underserved neighbourhoods

The growth of coliving schemes globally is a clear indicator of the unmet need for more communal forms of living. It also shows that living this way involves a learning process that requires professional support and facilitation – **a community coach.**

HOW TO REFERENCE THIS REPORT

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This is a report on two years of research by the UK Cohousing Network into the need for and potential delivery of a peer-led, community coaching programme for growing a more inclusive and resilient community-led housing (CLH) movement in the UK. It first explores the evolution of the current support infrastructures available to new CLH groups, gaps in that provision and the challenges faced by people in creating cohesive, citizen-led organizations that seek to build better homes and places. It then sets out concrete proposals for how a community coaching programme to address these challenges could work in practice and the benefits it can yield for the wider CLH movement.

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