

# Why Community Foundations?

## Developing and researching local knowledge

**Community foundations have deep, strong and lasting connections within their local communities. A wide range of formal and informal relationships with local people and organisations creates essential ‘grass-roots knowledge’. This sets community foundations apart from other grant-makers and ensures that donations are accurately targeted to achieve the greatest impact.**

### How do community foundations develop and use local knowledge?

An acute understanding of local issues is the secret to effective local grant-making. This knowledge is developed in a variety of ways:

- ◆ All community foundations seek guidance from people who know their area well, so that all funding decisions are informed by local knowledge.
- ◆ Many community foundations produce literature and make presentations to donors to explain their findings on local needs, such as the information sheets produced in Leeds.
- ◆ Some community foundations set up special ‘themed funds’ to respond to needs identified in their local area, such as the men’s health fund in Tyne & Wear.

### Local knowledge enables a greater reach

In 2006, community foundations gave grants to 18,000 voluntary and community organisations across the country. An even larger number of organisations will be known to community foundations, including many that have received grants in previous years or will apply in future years. This demonstrates the enormous reach that community foundations have into every corner of the country, and the ability to support efforts being made by public spirited people in every community.

*“Community foundations play a vital role in stimulating giving. They have in-depth knowledge of local charities and serve as a welcoming umbrella for donors who want to partner with those organisations. Their work is nothing short of inspiring.”*

Dr Salvatore LaSpada, Chief Executive, Institute for Philanthropy

### Local knowledge enables proactive grant-making

With their finger on the pulse of local communities, community foundations are ready to respond to new and emerging needs. While some grant-makers wait passively for applications to alert them to a problem, community foundations are often already leading the response.

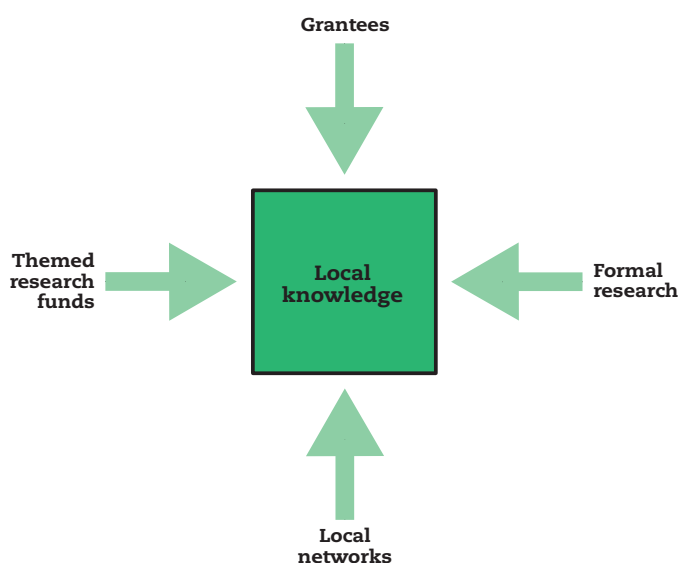
*“Essex Community Foundation has a network of grassroot recipients at its fingertips, which are not easily accessible to large organisations and which dig down to the grassroots of community activity.”*

John Devall, Essex & Suffolk Water

### CASE STUDY

#### Quartet Community Foundation

Local knowledge is considered the heart of the work of Quartet Community Foundation. Official sources of knowledge, such as strategy documents, statistics and census data, local press reports and newsletters, provide some insight into local needs. But the most important source is the foundation’s constant contact with local people who are experts in their field, who live in disadvantaged communities and who work in other organisations. Like other community foundations, Quartet is also acutely aware of emerging needs because they are immediately reflected in applications for funding. Community foundations are often the only place that people can seek help when new needs arise. The cumulative result of all these sources of knowledge is an unrivalled degree of informed, independent insight into grass-roots needs that helps to guide the giving of local donors.



### Local knowledge is based on sound research

Credible research means decisions are based on evidence rather than assumptions. At any given time, a majority of community foundations are engaged in researching current local issues<sup>1</sup>. This research takes three forms:

- 1 Mapping of general local needs.
- 2 Research into the needs of specific sections of the community such as children, older people and isolated rural communities
- 3 Research into the nature of specific areas such as health, education, the environment and sports provision.

Future research plans include studies of the impact of changing demographics, strategies for community cohesion and benefits of supporting social enterprise.

*Finding out just what is going on in the lives of the more disadvantaged groups in our communities is a springboard for providing the right help and support and is an important part of the community foundation's work."*

Devon Community Foundation

### CASE STUDY

#### The Birmingham Foundation

Like all community foundations, The Birmingham Foundation uses in-depth local knowledge to support the diverse communities that it serves. This knowledge has enabled targeted funding of groups such as play sessions for special needs children predominantly from the Pakistani community, a mentoring project for young people of African-Caribbean descent and therapeutic horticulture for people living in deprived areas with no gardens or local green spaces.

### How does local knowledge affect the daily work of community foundations?

Community foundations have close relationships with key people and organisations in their local voluntary sector and meet regularly with a vast array of local partners. They also have many ongoing relationships with representatives from the communities that they serve. These relationships ensure an intimate knowledge of what is happening locally and, most importantly, insight into what needs are not being met.



Community  
Foundation  
Network

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[www.communityfoundations.org.uk](http://www.communityfoundations.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> 56% of community foundations completing the network survey described their current research