

LETS: A community development



LETS: A community development



OpenLearn | Free learning from
The Open University

About this free course

This free course provides a sample of Level 2 study in Health and Social Care:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/find/health-and-social-care>.

This version of the content may include video, images and interactive content that may not be optimised for your device.

You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University -

www.open.edu/openlearn/health-sports-psychology/social-care/lets-community-development/content-section-0.

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA

Copyright © 2016 The Open University

Intellectual property

Unless otherwise stated, this resource is released under the terms of the Creative Commons Licence v4.0 http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en_GB. Within that The Open University interprets this licence in the following way:

www.open.edu/openlearn/about-openlearn/frequently-asked-questions-on-openlearn. Copyright and rights falling outside the terms of the Creative Commons Licence are retained or controlled by The Open University. Please read the full text before using any of the content.

We believe the primary barrier to accessing high-quality educational experiences is cost, which is why we aim to publish as much free content as possible under an open licence. If it proves difficult to release content under our preferred Creative Commons licence (e.g. because we can't afford or gain the clearances or find suitable alternatives), we will still release the materials for free under a personal end-user licence.

This is because the learning experience will always be the same high quality offering and that should always be seen as positive – even if at times the licensing is different to Creative Commons.

When using the content you must attribute us (The Open University) (the OU) and any identified author in accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Licence.

The Acknowledgements section is used to list, amongst other things, third party (Proprietary), licensed content which is not subject to Creative Commons licensing. Proprietary content must be used (retained) intact and in context to the content at all times.

The Acknowledgements section is also used to bring to your attention any other Special Restrictions which may apply to the content. For example there may be times when the Creative Commons Non-Commercial Sharealike licence does not apply to any of the content even if owned by us (The Open University). In these instances, unless stated otherwise, the content may be used for personal and non-commercial use.

We have also identified as Proprietary other material included in the content which is not subject to Creative Commons Licence. These are OU logos, trading names and may extend to certain photographic and video images and sound recordings and any other material as may be brought to your attention.

Unauthorised use of any of the content may constitute a breach of the terms and conditions and/or intellectual property laws.

We reserve the right to alter, amend or bring to an end any terms and conditions provided here without notice.

All rights falling outside the terms of the Creative Commons licence are retained or controlled by The Open University.

Head of Intellectual Property, The Open University

Designed and edited by The Open University

Contents

Introduction	5
Learning Outcomes	6
1 LETS: A community development	7
2 Liz Shepherd and Jan Hurst	8
3 Peter, Roger, Rachel, Jenny and Veera	9
4 Audio activity	10
5 Comment on the audio clips	11
6 Limitations of LETS	12
8 Perspectives	13
Conclusion	14
Keep on learning	15
References	15
Acknowledgements	16

Introduction

Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) expanded rapidly in the UK after the first scheme was set up in Norfolk in 1985. By 1996 LETSLINK UK, the coordinating body, reckoned that there were about 450 LETS in the UK, with 40,000 members. LETS exist in most western European countries – in Australia and New Zealand, the US, Canada and Japan. Their origins lie in Canadian attempts to revive local traditions of skills exchange and barter outside commercial and international labour markets and currency systems.

LETS are associations of people who make offers of goods and services to and from each other. What is on offer, and the requests people make, are listed in local directories. Currencies have local names. You'll hear people mentioning 'Squares' and 'Keys' on the audio clips. Each member has a cheque book of currency vouchers, with which they pay for work or goods. Cheques are then sent to a central accounting office where one individual account is credited and one is debited. A typical system values units of currency at one hour's work. Sometimes cash is involved, if materials are needed or a phone bill mounts up.

LETS vary around the world, with some systems maintaining parity with the national currency and being organised by one person as administrator. In the UK, the model is more flexible and democratic, with participation and collective control more in evidence.

The audio clips were recorded in 2000.

Participants in the audio clips:

- **Liz Shepherd** is the national co-ordinator of LETSLINK UK;
- **Jan Hurst** is Development Officer for the London Borough of Greenwich Social Exclusion and Justice Division's Anti-Poverty Team;
- **Peter Jones, Roger Bunker, Rachel Bunker, Jenny Hurst and Veera Usher Muller** are all members of two LETS in the Greenwich area.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 2 study in [Health and Social Care](#).

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- give examples of how Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) work as a community development.

1 LETS: A community development

You will shortly be listening to a sequence of audio clips, which focus on the use of LETS as a community development tool. Should LETS come 'from above' or 'from the grassroots'?

Principles of self-help and co-operation work well in neighbourhoods and communities where there are resources and supportive networks. However, even in strongly cohesive communities, some people may find it difficult to join in, for reasons of disability, age or marginal status. In communities that are facing multiple forms of deprivation, there may also be a lack of trust or interest in the idea of self-help.

At the time of recording, the London Borough of Greenwich was supporting LETS schemes through the work of its Anti-Poverty Team. In some ways this went against the original idea of LETS as being self-sufficient and independent of state support. Liz Shepherd, a founder of LETS in the UK, acknowledges this, but agrees that in some situations local funding may be necessary to get schemes off the ground with the aim of identifying and building individual and community capacity.

Read through the information on each of the participants, which will provide you with some background information. Then listen to the clips in Section 4.

2 Liz Shepherd and Jan Hurst



Liz Shepherd

Liz Shepherd

At the time of recording, Liz Shepherd was the national co-ordinator of [LETS LINK UK](#). In the first clip, she talks about her reasons for being attracted to LETS and mentions phrases such as 'self-help', 'co-operative' and 'extended family'. She saw LETS as making a contribution to developing and sustaining social networks. When she was interviewed, she described a typical scheme as having about 12 people in a management group, to make sure it was running smoothly and there was plenty of user involvement. Some schemes grew out of Green issues, some were purely locality- or street-based, some had a health focus. Often people got involved without knowing what they could offer, and all sorts of creative exchanges emerged. She mentioned a housebound person who had a dog that needed walking and a large collection of CDs, and cross-cultural exchanges of food involving people from Asian backgrounds.

Jan Hurst

In 2000, Jan Hurst was a Development Officer for the London Borough of Greenwich Social Exclusion and Justice Division's Anti-Poverty Team. In the audio clips, she talks about using the LETS model, with support from the council, on deprived estates and with disabled people. She had worked for 15 years in community-based jobs, including work in a day centre for disabled people, where she was a day care officer. It is perhaps for this reason that she helped to set up LETS Get Together in Greenwich, a scheme for disabled and non-disabled people. Her concern was that LETS could operate in an exclusive way, particularly if a scheme emerged from a particular political concern or interest. Some people may have been excluded from sharing their skills and making a contribution if they were defined as different, or felt marginalised.

She says that borough departments had been supportive of LETS, though the initiative for LETS development came from local people at a conference discussing results of a borough-wide survey about poverty levels. LETS were considered useful to develop self-help strategies and provide people on a low income with more spending power. Greenwich provided financial resources for setting-up costs, including a computer, a telephone line, an answer phone, a laminating machine, a Polaroid camera, furniture and publicity leaflets.

3 Peter, Roger, Rachel, Jenny and Veera



From left to right: Roger Bunker, Rachel Bunker and Jenny Hurst

Peter Jones, Roger Bunker, Rachel Bunker, Jenny Hurst and Veera Usher Muller

When they were interviewed, all these people were members of two LETS, started with help from Jan Hurst (no relation of Jenny) in the Greenwich area.

Peter Jones was a member of a scheme on the Ferrier estate, an area with high levels of poverty and deprivation, and many lone parents. The area was perceived to be crime-ridden and challenging to work and live in. In the audio clip, he describes how he came to be involved, and the trades he'd made since joining. Peter built up a large number of 'Squares' (the scheme's currency) by fixing washing machines and doing other electrical repairs and assembling flat-pack furniture. He and his wife had their kitchen redecorated for 40 Squares, plus the cost of the paint.

Roger Bunker and **Rachel Bunker** are both registered partially sighted. Roger worked for Remploy and Rachel was an unemployed nursery nurse. They, Jenny and Veera belonged to 'LETS Get Together' in Greenwich. They had all traded in various ways, or helped out in the LETS office. Rachel emphasised the importance of being local for disabled people:

They tend to know more people in their local area, rather than people that are outside their local area, so they feel more comfortable and more safer trading with the local community.

While the recordings were being made, the issue of social security benefits and LETS came up. At the time, the LETS and Benefits Campaign was lobbying the government to amend the benefits regulations so that LETS currency units earned would not affect benefit entitlement.

The campaign was a partial success in that the rules were changed to enable people to trade up to the 'disregard level' of £5 per transaction, for a single person, and £15 for a couple, amalgamated to the end of a year to the equivalent of £260, or 260 LETS tokens. Pressure was continuing to get the government to recognise the value of LETS in the community, helping people to discover or develop skills, and build confidence with a view to empowerment in all aspects of their lives, and as a route to employment. The extent to which benefits rules were acting as a deterrent to the very people who might gain from membership was also a matter of concern for the campaigners.

4 Audio activity

Now listen to the audio clips. As you listen, make notes in your Learning Journal on:

- what you think are the benefits and disadvantages of LETS schemes for their members;
- to what extent these schemes fit with a community development approach;
- what might be some longer-term outcomes for the schemes and their members.

Clip 1: LETS and community development

Audio content is not available in this format.

Clip 1

Clip 2: LETS Get Together Groups

Audio content is not available in this format.

Clip 2

Clip 3: LETS in communities

Audio content is not available in this format.

Clip 3

5 Comment on the audio clips

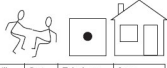
The benefits mentioned in the clips included a skills outlet, developing organising and networking skills, improvements to the members' self-esteem, and better social contact than before. There were also practical benefits in terms of getting help with household, gardening and computing problems. Any disadvantages were hard to identify. People were enthusiastic about their experiences. Through involving someone like Jan Hurst, the disadvantages of self-help with its tendency towards rather closed and similar types of membership had been avoided. However, Roger and Rachel found that LETS Get Together members couldn't offer them what they wanted for their wedding plans. One way round this was the development, in Greenwich and elsewhere, of exchanges between different LETS schemes.

Jan Hurst stated that the council wanted to do something to encourage community development across the whole local population that it was responsible for, but it was clear that people living in particular localities were seen to need more support. By helping to set up LETS Get Together, whose members included disabled and non-disabled people, she acknowledged that an intervention may have been necessary if barriers to participation were to be overcome for some people. She had a slightly different view from that of the members. She referred to the social and economic regeneration aspect of LETS, but none of the members did. Perhaps this was because she was taking a broader view, seeing LETS as 'non-directive' community development: a means to more fundamental changes. You might have thought that 'the sky's the limit' once people begin to take control of meeting their own needs. In other parts of the UK, LETS schemes have been used in quite distinctive ways. For example, some LETS schemes have been developed with the needs of users of mental health services in mind, others offer complementary therapies generally; the range of possible offers is unlimited. In Greenwich, the LETS scheme has been used to support basic education, with a college offering computing, numeracy and literacy to members and allowing them to pay using LETS tokens. However, from what you heard on the audio, it's clear that LETS may be a means to further change, rather than a solution on its own.

6 Limitations of LETS

LETS Get Together Directory

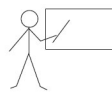
Help In The Home Offered



ID	Name	Description	Skill	Cost	Telephone	Area
16	David Hight	House Sitting			0208 900 0000	Perthshire
4	O. P. G. Goff	General Help	Pro		0208 900 0000	Woodstock
8	Wynne G.	General Domestic Help			0208 900 0000	Charlton
14	Wynne G.	House Sitting			0208 900 0000	Charlton
14	Paula James	House Sitting	Qualified	3 hourly	07788 900 000	Charlton
17	David	Childminding			0208 900 0000	Abbeywood
17	David	Wardrobe Cleaning			0208 900 0000	Abbeywood
17	David	Cleaning			0208 900 0000	Abbeywood
17	John Butler	Ironing		4 hourly	0208 900 0000	Gravelly Hill
17	John Butler	Ironing		3 hourly	0208 900 0000	Gravelly Hill
19	Amy De Caux	Cleaning			0208 900 0000	Charlton
19	Amy De Caux	House Sitting			0208 900 0000	Charlton
19	Amy De Caux	Washing			0208 900 0000	Charlton
42	R. Fletcher	House Sitting			0208 900 0000	Perthshire
42	AJ	Help in the Home Shopping			0208 900 0000	Woodstock
44	J. John Philip	Helping out			0208 900 0000	Woodstock

LETS Get Together Directory

Education and Tuition Wanted



ID	Name	Description	Telephone	Area
17	Michael	Swimming Lessons	0208 900 0000	Abbeywood
17	John	Computer Tutor	0208 900 0000	Charlton
17	John	Computer Skills Tutor	0208 900 0000	Abbeywood
17	John	High Tutor	0208 900 0000	Charlton

Pages from the LETS Get Together directory (all the names have been changed to protect privacy)

Significant claims have been made about the benefits of LETS. For example, it is argued that LETS, by removing some goods and services from the cash economy, reduce the leakage of resources from poor localities (Thake, 1995; Williams, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). However, others argue that LETS schemes have limitations (Stott and Hodges, 1996):

- Membership is not large. There were only 40,000 members in the UK in 1996. In 2004 LETSLINKUK was trying to update national membership figures, but had insufficient funds to undertake the necessary research.
- The success of LETS depends on the level of activity of the members. It has been estimated that the average LETS member takes part in activities with a cash value of about £70 annually.
- LETS tend to offer 'quality of life' services, rather than addressing basic needs. Consequently, LETS members are often perceived to be making a 'lifestyle statement'. It has been estimated that the majority (70 per cent) of LETS members are already in employment and a similar proportion are committed to environmental issues.
- In many cases, an informal economy already operates, albeit on an informal or even illegal basis, in many deprived communities.
- LETS could be said to undermine the boundary between lay and professional expertise if people offer services such as computing support, childminding, electrical work and hairdressing, that others might charge for; and because appropriate skills and knowledge for some trades are important, it may be that certain goods and services will remain part of the mainstream cash economy.

8 Perspectives

The [LETSLINK UK](#) website provides information and news about LETS initiatives in the UK.

The American sociologist Robert Putnam has argued powerfully for the importance of social capital – something which is built up collectively through the voluntary activities of individuals participating in community organisations and other community activity – leading to a bonding of the members of society. The ‘positive consequences of social capital [are] mutual support, cooperation, trust and institutional effectiveness’ (2000, p. 22). These are qualities which, he argues, make communities healthy and sustainable.

However, Marilyn Taylor, who starts from a UK perspective, takes a more critical view of the whole discourse about changing communities, and about terms such as social capital. She points out that the assumption that social capital and civil society are automatically good for all citizens is a contested one. She suggests that communities and networks can as easily create exclusion, rather than inclusion, particularly for groups who are already oppressed (Taylor, 2003, p. 62–3).

There are, therefore, different perspectives about the value and effectiveness of intervening in communities. It is important to be aware of these contrasting points of view. As with other approaches to improving the lives of both individuals and neighbourhoods, community development has a number of recognised methods of working.

Conclusion

This free course provided an introduction to studying Health and Social Care. It took you through a series of exercises designed to develop your approach to study and learning at a distance and helped to improve your confidence as an independent learner.

Keep on learning



Study another free course

There are more than **800 courses on OpenLearn** for you to choose from on a range of subjects.

Find out more about all our [free courses](#).

Take your studies further

Find out more about studying with The Open University by [visiting our online prospectus](#).

If you are new to university study, you may be interested in our [Access Courses](#) or [Certificates](#).

What's new from OpenLearn?

[Sign up to our newsletter](#) or view a sample.

For reference, full URLs to pages listed above:

OpenLearn – www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses

Visiting our online prospectus – www.open.ac.uk/courses

Access Courses – www.open.ac.uk/courses/do-it/access

Certificates – www.open.ac.uk/courses/certificates-he

Newsletter –

www.open.edu/openlearn/about-openlearn/subscribe-the-openlearn-newsletter

References

Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, New York, Simon Schuster.

Stott, M. and Hodges, J. (1996) 'Local exchange and trading systems, never knowingly understood', *Local Economy*, November, pp. 266–8.

Taylor, M. (2003) *Public Policy in the Community*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Thake, S. (1995) *Staying the Course: The role and structures of community regeneration organisations*, Bristol, Policy Press.

Williams, C. (1996a) 'An appraisal of local exchange and trading systems in the United Kingdom', *Local Economy*, November.

Williams, C. (1996b) 'Local exchange and trading systems: A new form of work and credit for the poor and unemployed?', *Environment and Planning A*, Vol. 10, No. 2.

Williams, C. (1996c) 'The new barter economy: an appraisal of local exchange and trading systems', *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 16, No. 1.

Acknowledgements

The content acknowledged below is Proprietary (see [terms and conditions](#)) and is used under [licence](#).

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources for permission to reproduce material in this course:

Couse image: [Kristin](#) in Flickr made available under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 Licence](#).

The content acknowledged below is Proprietary and is used under licence.

This extract is taken from K202 © 2000 The Open University.

Section 2 Courtesy Liz Shepherd;

Section 3 Courtesy of Vaughan Melzer;

Section 6 LETS Get Together Directory, Christchurch Forum of Greenwich.

Don't miss out:

If reading this text has inspired you to learn more, you may be interested in joining the millions of people who discover our free learning resources and qualifications by visiting The Open University - www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses