

Effective communities benefit from the engagement of the many, not the few. They nurture a commitment to one another sharing the opportunities, the experience and the knowledge we need to shape the decisions that affect our lives, to fulfil potential individually and to live and work effectively together.

These are timeless values but particularly significant today: Recession could drive division and exclusion or it could unite us, extracting greater value from all that we have, embracing new ideas and working together on common goals.

Social and economic renewal are interdependent. New thinking on citizen engagement and on enhanced support for communities at this time is not about the producer interests of the third sector. It is about a practical response to unemployment and about invigorating local markets, about developing new models for supporting and sustaining business and for supporting one another, and about emerging from recession as not only a stronger economy but also a stronger society.

The Labour Force Survey shows that more than a quarter of successful job seekers find work through word of mouth and more than half through non statutory or informal channels. Successful personal networks increase knowledge about new possibilities, build confidence and open doors. They generate resources, and contacts helping individuals to gain more control over their own lives. As the New Opportunities White paper noted social mobility is dependant on the effective distribution of this kind of social capital.

Volunteering projects build cohesion, offering the platform for people from different backgrounds to work together increasing understanding and appreciation of one another. Just as economically depressed areas get sucked into a spiral of decline, increasingly effective communities follow a virtuous circle. Active citizens learn new skills, encounter new ideas and meet new people. They become more capable and more confident, more likely to know about and pursue training or paid work through which they become better able to contribute to our common goals, to the economy and to associational life, so creating more openings and more connections for those who follow.

Recent work on happiness and wellbeing exposes the deceit of excessive earning and owning as proxies for the good society. By strengthening our communities whilst working also for the return to full employment we can forge a long term shift in how we live and work together and emerge from recession more thoughtful and more engaged, more generous, more curious, more creative, more committed and more confident . This is a once in a generation opportunity to redefine success.

The CoSA proposition

- **Common Goals** - a new programme deploying and developing the skills of those with reduced working hours or no paid work and focusing this national resource on the sustainable legacy of stronger, healthier, more engaged and more supportive communities.
- A new **National Talent Bank** to manage the wholesale brokerage of work related volunteering.
- New opportunities for engagement that don't reinvent but that do adapt for current purposes – entry level and mid career **Community Internships** for instance, Community First for new graduates, an “expert citizen “ development from the expert patient model and Community Allowance for long term unemployed.
- An organising framework that directs effort into three streams each responding to the particular problems caused by recession: **Common Knowledge** - supporting training in social and community building skills; **Common Ground** - developing and sustaining the meeting places; and **Common Interest** - expanding specific programmes of local activity.
- Support for the **third sector** to embrace the potential of this programme particularly focusing on the development of new funding models and on strategies for successful replication.
- Support for **business** to engage including a high level peer mentoring programme and fiscal incentives.
- Support for **public sector staff** to embrace volunteering and a wider programme of development opportunities and to collaborate on the development and delivery of local projects.
- Because collaboration builds from trust, a **Common Good** clause to be inserted in the bank bail out arrangements. We cannot move forward together without government expecting, and the banks asserting, a public commitment to shared values.
- **The leadership** of the Prime Minister and the National Economic Council and a communications strategy that weaves the campaign into every story about the recession until it becomes, in popular perception, as much a part of the UK's recovery plan as bailouts and loan guarantees setting a new aspiration for the country – not only a revitalised economy but also stronger, happier, healthier communities.

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