



What are Community Psychologists?

Community psychology is new to the UK, and it is likely that those who have studied community psychology will end up working in a number of different fields. This leaflet summarises the values, underlying principles, knowledge and skills that can be expected of community psychology practitioners who have graduated in community psychology from Manchester Metropolitan University. It also summarises the roles that community psychology graduates might be able to occupy.

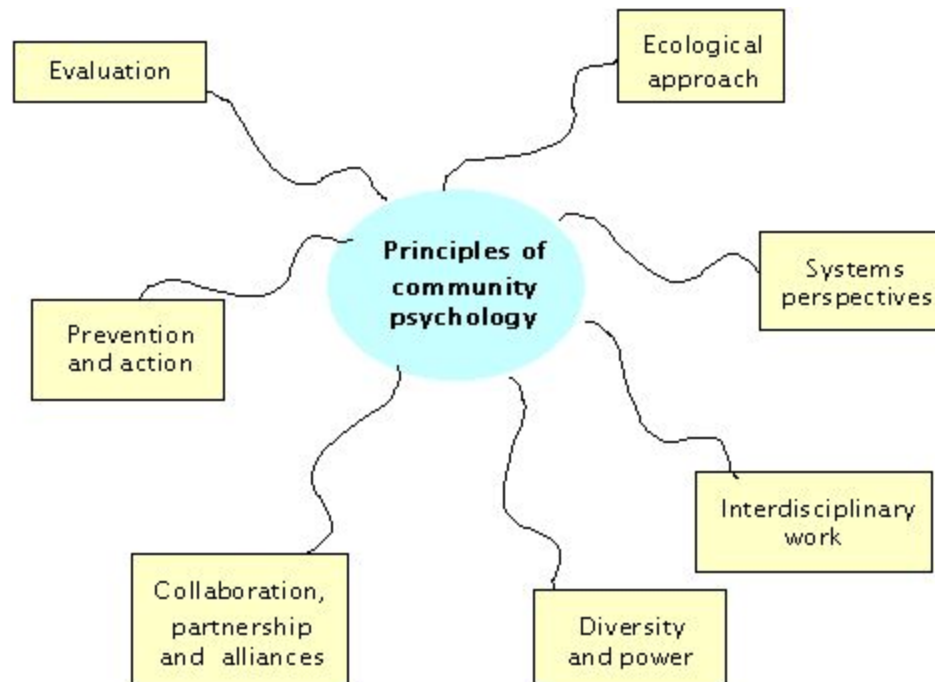
Values of Community Psychology

Values are a way of stating, measuring or assessing the worth of something - in this case community psychological knowledge and practice. They are key to defining a community psychology approach, irrespective of the particular settings in which a practitioner works. We believe it is important to make explicit the values underpinning community psychology.

<p>Justice</p> <p>A concern for justice, in particular social justice underpins a number of human rights, which in turn underpin community psychological work. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right to have a more equal and equitable distribution of resources Right to live in peace and in freedom from constraints Right to equality and fair treatment Right to self determination <p>This means we: work with people who are disadvantaged or marginalised by the social system; have empowerment as a key principle; work to enhance the possibility that people can more actively control their own lives. We are concerned with personal control or agency as well as with social influence, political power and legal rights. We might, for example, highlight inequities in how human services operate, work with people to secure access to the necessary supports, or work with services on a change agenda so that they work in a more inclusive and non-discriminatory way.</p>	<p>Stewardship</p> <p>A concern for stewardship contributes to a number of duties and responsibilities which characterise the work of community psychologists. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duty to look after our world and the people in it Duty to enable people to make a contribution and gain a sense of belonging Duty not to waste things, people's lives, or time Duty to think long-term, make things last longer than us and to do things as right as we can. <p>This means we work as efficiently as we can, maximising both human and material resources. We involve other people as fully as possible, emphasising their strengths and potential with a focus on the context of their lives. We endeavour to work in ways that will lead to long lasting change and not just short term fixes. We work as facilitators of others. We are open to learning from others. We are committed to innovation, and to the harnessing of people's creativity, whilst recognising that some existing ways of working with people are at best ineffective and at worst make things worse for them.</p>	<p>Community</p> <p>A concern for community as a value reflects different hopes and desires that people have, and that lie at the heart of community psychology. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hope for companionship, love, acceptance and tolerance Hope to be included and for diversity to be welcomed and celebrated Hope that our individual and collective flaws will not hide out potential, and that we will be accepted for who we are. <p>This means we attempt to strengthen people's sense of belonging and commitment to each other. We value diversity and recognise and respect differences, based on, for example, class, beliefs, culture, gender, sexual orientation and ability. We work to understand anti-discriminatory practice, and are able to mediate in conflict situations. We have a commitment to continual learning from their practice, and we appreciate it is never possible to know everything, but that it is possible to be open to learning and sharing with others so that they too can learn. Our practice is reflective and we emphasise evaluation of our work and of the projects with which we are connected.</p>
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Principles of Community Psychology

The community psychological principles help define the perspectives of community psychology, as well as its priorities.



An ecological approach

An ecological approach recognises the importance of the historical, environmental and situational context of people's lives. This context might be linked to the roles that other people play, the actual physical environment, the legislation and policies framing a particular issue or the discourses and representations of people or problems in society at large. Understanding the impact of context will often lead to strategies for intervention that extend beyond working with individual people. An ecological approach also enables community psychologists to anticipate the impact of change more widely.

Systems Perspectives

By taking an ecological approach, community psychologists are adopting a systems perspective in their work. Knowledge about how the social system operates, helps community psychologists understand the multiple causes of social problems, at different levels, from global to individual levels. This inevitably means community psychologists are interested in the perspectives of different stakeholders, and in analysing and using power in all its manifestations at different points in the social system.

Diversity and power

Community psychologist positively encourage diversity and seek to enable people to become empowered through inclusive individual, group and collective action. In their work, community psychologists explore the nature of oppression, in partnership with people marginalised by the social system. Thus they may draw attention to ways in which people are excluded from full social life or are treated unfairly by professionals and others. They try to ensure that their work includes people irrespective of class, race, ethnicity, culture, age and disability. Their ways of working encourage others, too, to welcome diversity.

Prevention and social action

Community psychologists will often work with individuals and groups, not just on individual interventions for immediate problems, but rather in ways that divert resources towards prevention

at any or all of the different levels of the social system. So, they may be working with individuals developing self-help strategies, or in terms of changing some aspect of the immediate environment that contributes to the problem. Alternatively, they may work at policy levels, be these local or national. Throughout their work, they endeavour to work in ways that are more likely to promote well-being, lead to the empowerment of groups or individuals, and wider scale social change, as well as to prevent problems occurring. The types of work they may do include helping people develop information campaigns, supporting self-help organisations or training for professionals so that institutional practices change. Working with the explicit value base outlined above, community psychologists may also support individuals or groups and lend both their expertise and their time to working alongside marginalised people in direct social action

Interdisciplinary work

Community psychologists recognise the artificial boundaries between different professional and academic disciplines. Thus they bring to their work a commitment to understand problems in different ways and to work with others for better understanding and better use of resources at a local level. They will sometimes get involved in ways of helping those from different backgrounds come to a shared understanding of a problem and work together for effective solutions. Wherever possible they will look for strategies of working that maximise the joint resources different professionals or interest groups can bring to a problem.

Collaboration, partnership and alliances

Relationships with community groups and organisations are viewed as partnerships, where each partner makes important contributions. Community psychologists listen to local people about their concerns and viewpoints, and together negotiate a way of working towards shared goals. The work that community psychologists do is not neutral. They work with those members of communities who share a commitment to greater social justice and the values of justice, stewardship and community. They work with others to help develop just such a commitment.

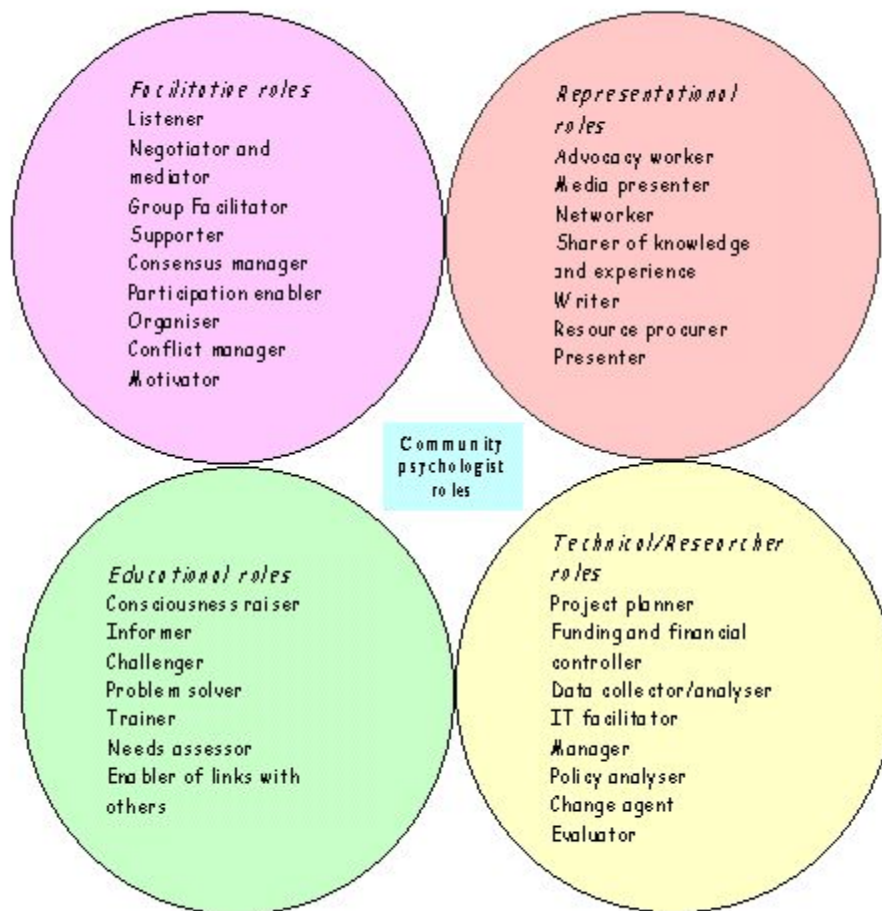
Where possible, community psychologists will involve their community partners in the work itself, which may require support and training, as well as resources to support their participation. Whatever the personal benefits community psychologists might gain from a piece of work, they would usually consider the work only worth doing if people who are marginalised are likely to gain as a result. This perspective extends to reporting the information gained from practice. Knowledge does not reside with the community psychology practitioner or researcher. It is seen as jointly produced and owned by the workers and local people, and efforts are made to arrive at joint decisions about publication and reporting of the work.

Evaluation

Evaluation is seen as an essential element of social change and social innovation. It can identify positive and negative aspects of change and contribute important information for both project improvement and for the most efficient use of resources. Community psychologists possess skills in both statistical and non-statistical research, and are able to undertake evaluations themselves if required. Most importantly though, they are able to support local people in carrying out creative evaluations that are robust and provide projects (and funders or commissioners) with important information for the future and celebration of achievements to date. Sometimes additional training and support for local people in carrying out evaluations will be required, and this is a key component of community psychological work. Evaluation is frequently linked to funding applications, and community psychologists are able to help local people access and obtain relevant funding.

Roles of Community Psychologists

Whilst there are very few 'community psychologists' employed as such, there are a number of roles that community psychologists are able to fulfil. Not all community psychologists undertake all of these roles, and the roles themselves are not unique to community psychologists. However, they do provide some idea of the range of activities that those who have had a training in community psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University should be able to undertake.

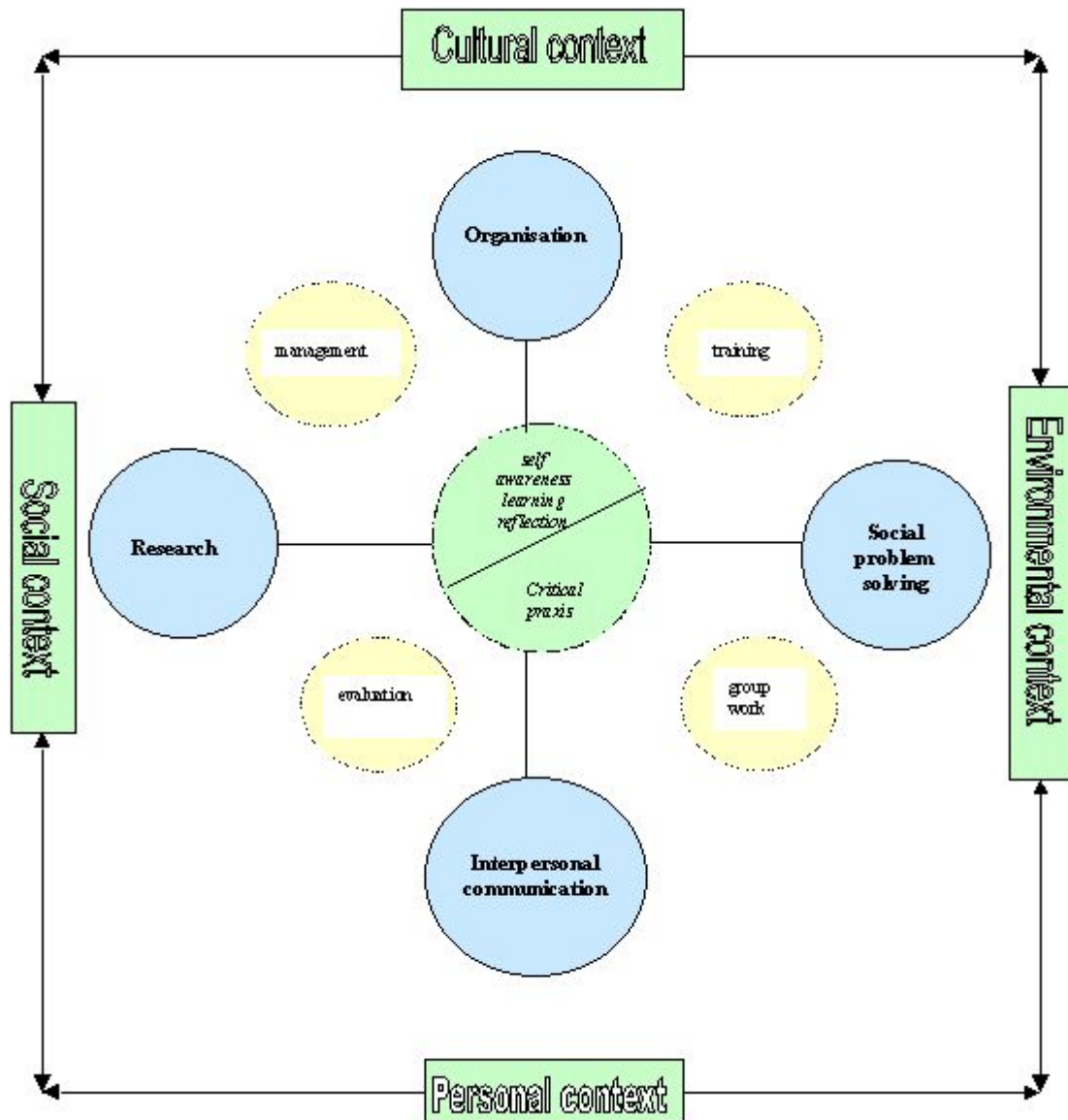


Whatever the role being undertaken, community psychologists will endeavour to follow the principles outlined above, and work according to the central values of community psychology.

In their work, community psychologists engage in a constant cycle of doing, learning and critical reflection, and they try to encourage others to adopt a similar approach to change. Thus, doing, without understanding or reflection is not enough. As community psychologists we strive to make sense and learn from what it is that we do, and we strive to follow our understanding and knowledge with action. The three components of activity are inseparable and can be summed up as a *critical praxis*.

Skills of Community Psychology

Given the emphasis on learning and change, it makes more sense to talk of community psychologist *developing* skills, rather than attaining them in the sense of their being competencies that are either held or not. At Manchester Metropolitan University we have produced a model which outlines a developmental and flexible approach to skills, with self-awareness at the heart of the activity. Thus the major skill domains are interpersonal communication, social problem solving, organisation skills and research; and linking these are the activities of group work, management, evaluation and training. Community psychology is able to draw on a body of psychological knowledge underpinning each of these skill domains.



Interpersonal communication skills

This group of skills ranges from personal communication, to one-to-one and group listening skills to group and individual conflict resolution skills. It includes motivating and activating others, supporting, enabling participation, basic counselling skills and developing rapport and relationships with a wide range of people. It also includes challenging, persuading, informing and both representing and advocating for others. An understanding of group dynamics underpins working with groups, from formation to long term work. Group work includes consciousness raising, working with co-operation and collaboration and network development and support.

Social problem solving skills

Social problem solving includes skills of resource procurement, planning, observing and understanding influences on people's behaviour, strategic decision making, and creative thinking about methods of working and for enabling participation. It also includes skills of multi-level systems analyses, identifying relevant stakeholders in a community as well as ways of maximising resources (human, social and material) locally.

Organisation skills

This group of skills includes all those necessary for managing projects (including the supervision of workers as appropriate). It includes office administration, financial management, use of computers and new technology, managing pressure and multi-task work loads. It also includes inter-agency working, building of relationships with other professionals and the forming of inter-agency alliances.

Research skills

Research skills enable choices to be made regarding both the purpose and execution of monitoring and evaluation of project work, and understanding of the limitations of different styles of work. Skills of designing relevant projects, collecting different kinds of information and analysing the information collected are all included in research skills. Furthermore, skills of spreading information, writing different kinds of reports, giving oral, visual and written presentations are included. The use of statistical information and methods will form a part of this group of skills. Research skills include those of facilitating participation by people from marginalised groups in any or all of the stages of research, and of sharing information with others.

Community psychologists graduating from Manchester Metropolitan University will have had opportunities to develop their skills in the different domains, and to have applied them to participative working with groups, management, evaluation and to training. Most importantly, though, they will have developed skills of critical self awareness, learning from others, reflection and thus of critical praxis

For further information about collaborating with community psychologists, or about undertaking courses or research in Community Psychology at Manchester Metropolitan University see www.compsy.org.uk or contact:

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