

Ansuz Update . . .

September 2020



Welcome to the second edition of the Ansuz Action newsletter. Firstly, check out our great value action learning set offer, and treat yourself to some personal development for the Autumn...

Are you looking for support to face major challenges, to map out ways to deal with new situations, or simply wanting a practical but reflective learning space? If so, then Ansuz is offering free/low price action learning sets if you sign up before the end of September. See our [website](http://www.ansuzaction.org.uk) for further details and to find out more about action learning. Email info@ansuzaction.org.uk to sign up.

It is incredible to think that we have been experiencing the impact of the global pandemic for 6 months now, but much has changed since our first newsletter. As more and more restrictions have been lifted, we have asked ourselves, "what 5 things have I done during 'unlockdown'... this is what we came up with:

Ruth

Road tripped to my beloved North - Yorkshires West and North, Cumbria, Northumberland and Cheshire. I feel revitalised.

Confirmed a snow-shoe mountain trek holiday in Romania for January 2021. Includes bonus trips to Dracula's castle and a bat cave. What could possibly go wrong?

Taken a train - only to Cardiff, but it's a start.

Started planning for autumn/winter and Christmas. When I say 'plan' I mean I've bought 10 pairs of tights.

Bought my spring bulbs, something bright to look forward to.

Helen

Hosted a socially distanced 10th and 23rd birthday garden party for family. The weather was amazing and it was great to have the energy of a few children to lift the spirits.

Also confirmed snow-shoe mountain trek in Romania in January... something to look forward to and motivation to get back to the fitness routine.

Have bought a Bivvy Loo (google it), a 'port-a-shower' and a pop up privacy tent for total camper van independence.

Planning a camper van weekends for September to include lots of walking and going off grid - just can't decide where!

A lovely beach walk with a friend - 2m apart of course... but great to have a good old gossip with a coffee stop in the middle.

Email us on info@ansuzaction.org.uk to tell us what your 'unlockdown' looks like.



Ansuz Announcement . . .

We are pleased to tell you about our newly launched subscription membership service.

The Organising for Power Circle is a professional development membership network for experienced (2+ years in the field) community organisers, community leaders and movement builders.

Benefits for you

- A low cost, high value way to develop and improve your practice
- Connect and learn with like-minded comrades
- Guidance and support from advanced practitioners
- Develop strategic networks and initiatives around common issues
- Co-create the development and evolution of the circle
- Access to a range of additional offers and opportunities

Membership includes:

- One monthly 90 min Zoom drop-in
 - 30 minutes per month one-to-one mentoring
 - Quarterly online panel discussions/Q&A
 - Access to a treasure trove of resources – reading, events, podcasts, ideas, case studies, offers
 - Discounts on other Ansuz Action products – action learning sets, workshops, online resource packs
- + an annual one day pay-for get together

Cost:

Early bird offer £120 (single payment) **ends 16th October 2020.**

£150 per year (can be spread over 10 months)

To for more information and to join contact helen@ansuzaction.org.uk



Things to read and watch and think about...

Kicking off this month with a couple of personal development network recommendations.

First off this month, a lovely 50 minute radio programme on Long Term Thinking and becoming Good Ancestors <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/our-futurecestors-deserve-a-voice-in-today-s-decisions-says-author-1.5710902>

Here's a very readable piece on Open Democracy's website about replacing independence with interdependence by fundamentally rethinking how we understand ourselves, our institutions and our ideas of freedom <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/abandoning-myth-independence/>

Nef's online briefings are taking a break, but the entire back catalogue is here: <https://neweconomics.org/section/events>. Guaranteed spirited discussion and inspirational organising going on. And we are familiar with community pubs and community gyms, but here's a community fish quay in Eastbourne! <https://neweconomics.org/2020/08/light-on-the-horizon-the-story-of-the-eastbourne-fishing-quay>

The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has announced the date of its 2020 Community Wealth Building Summit – sign up here <https://cles.org.uk/events/owning-the-economy-community-wealth-building-summit-2020/> for the free Nov 5th event. CLES has also announced its partnership with Liverpool City Region to form England's first Community Land Commission to review the availability of public land for community wealth building <https://cles.org.uk/blog/englands-first-land-commission-focused-on-community-wealth-building/>

Hopefully you caught up with Stir to Action's three day online festival at the beginning of September if not, buy a catch-up ticket here <https://www.stirtoaction.com/festival> plus they have a full programme of Autumn workshops lined up too <https://www.stirtoaction.com/workshops>.

Also check out Rosa Luxemburg Shifting's Strike School with Jane MacAlevey 24/9-13/10 <https://janemcalevey.com/speaking-engagement/organizing-for-power-strike-school/>.

Land in our Names (LION) is a Black-led, grassroots collective committed to reparative justice in Britain by securing land for BPOC (Black people and People of Colour) communities. Find out more on their website <https://landinournames.community/> and Instagram @landinournames.

A couple of personal development recommendations. Amazing If <https://www.amazingif.com/> offers affordable, down to earth, very actionable 'authentic' career advice and tips. They also host the Squiggly Careers podcast, well worth a listen. Equally useful is the Is This Working? podcast <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/is-this-working/id1473508626>. Is This Working has also been running some very good value masterclass webinars on podcasts and newsletters, packed with advice and experience.

Finally, if you are interested in cohousing initiatives, and want to enhance your life by living Up North (and who doesn't?) here are a **couple of good prospects in York** <https://yospace.org/> and **Newcastle** <https://cohousingupontyne.org.uk/>.



And our survey said...

We asked a few more friends about life and work in lockdown. Here's what they told us...

Paulette Singer

Paulette is one of the founding directors of Clitterhouse Farm Project based in Barnet North West London. Her organisation aims to build community resilience through reclaiming and bringing back to life the historic Clitterhouse Farm buildings for community use.

Q: How has your working day changed since Covid 19 lockdown?

A. I don't think lockdown has made my working day change much, I have always been quite computer based. Mainly it has added the challenge of working from home with my four year old needing attention too.

Q: How has the work of your organisation changed since Covid 19 lockdown?

A. I focussed my energy on setting up an emergency food hub and connecting with local Mutual Aid groups to establish it. Despite years of networking in Barnet the crisis meant that I connected with dozens of new people within weeks. At the farm we ramped up our gardening services, providing a nursery for people who had turned to gardening, a wild area for people to enjoy during their lockdown exercise walks and where necessary delivering packs to people shielding so they could still grow from home.

Q: What transformation do you want to bring about as a result of 'all this'?

A. All our work is about bringing about increased connection in our community. We believe that if people are connected

they can self support and co-create the kind of community they hope to live in.

This crisis related work was no different, it was about doing what was needed, bringing new people together through the process and hopefully building those connections.

Q: How are you keeping motivated and optimistic?

A. The wave of new people hoping to get involved in community work has boosted my optimism around the importance and value of the work that we do. I remind myself as often as possible the journey we have been on as an organisation and how much we have achieved with so few resources. It helps me know that these things are possible and that we can fulfil this mission and get these buildings funded and renovated!

Q: Tell us one thing you've learned about yourself during lockdown?

A. That my focus will always be outward rather than inward. That the health and happiness of my family whilst important will not satisfy me if I don't feel that we can also contribute to the health and happiness of our community.



Graham Weston

Graham is the Community Action Manager at High Trees Community Development Trust, in Tulse Hill, South West London. He works with groups of local people who live on the large estates immediately surrounding the development trust building. They call these organising groups and they support them to develop their community organising practise, to organise around issues that are important to them and they deliver training in community organising. As an organisation, High Trees also delivers a broad range of services from Children, Young People and Family Services to Adult Education training to Employability Support. We also work within the organisation to support beneficiaries to consider how they may be able to move beyond service provision to organisation. Pretty much all of our work is face to face.

Q: How has your working day changed since Covid 19 lockdown?

A: As Covid-19 hit and we had to go into the initial social distancing phase, all face to face delivery at High Trees stopped and we started to work from home. Our facilities staff were put on furlough. The working day changed drastically from that point on and so it was a case of trying to adapt a space at home to be able to work and try to maintain connections and relationships to keep moving things forward. We had to find ways to continue to support people whilst not being physically in the locality. This was one of the key challenges as the central tools an organiser needs to function has seen a drastic shift and a shift that is possibly going to remain for months to come.

Q: How has the work of your organisation changed since Covid 19 lockdown?

A: So instead of continuing the face to face door knocking, we shifted our emphasis to listening to the beneficiaries who have accessed services at High Trees over the previous financial year, around 800 people. We started by calling them and conducting a listening campaign to establish what issues people are facing, what things had come up, what support people were able to access and where gaps remained. We also listen to local partners, the councillors, schools and other organisations that were responding, like community groups, to establish they were doing in response and how we might be able to work collaboratively and collectively to help

support and address some of those issues. Through those conversations, we ended up identifying that there was a need for a wellbeing service which would provide a regular check in and guidance to people to help them access essential information required to overcome the challenges. What was really highlighted were issues around digital exclusion and isolation, which were around before but now took the spotlight due to Covid-19 and lockdown. We worked with a partnership of local organisations and launched a Crowdfunder which raised over £18000 to purchase and distribute digital equipment to people most in need and came up with a referral process and all of the resources required for local organisations to refer into the services. We've come up with sophisticated means of enabling people to access a myriad of support. Our learning from this is that digital exclusion is a human rights issue that impacts the most vulnerable people in society.

Q: What transformation do you want to bring about as a result of all this?

A: Through this project and through connecting with local partners, it's clear that in the past, a significant amount of energy and effort has gone into looking into Community Wi-Fi solutions but they haven't worked. It seems firstly this is because of the limitations of the technology at the time these Wi-Fi solutions were implemented and secondly, the lack of community expertise in terms of organising and rooting that project so that it's owned by local people from the start.

I believe that we have now got all of the conditions in place for Community Wi-Fi to happen. So, my vision would be to create a blueprint for Community Owned Wi-Fi. I think that one of the key arguments for enabling access to the Internet across the country for people that can't afford it is that, without it there isn't true democracy. Political discourse and information are lacking for those that do not have the privilege to access the online world and community and I don't think that is something that can be underestimated since there's a myriad of reasons why access the Internet is a fundamental essential of society today. There is evidence that shows that there has been a limit to the proliferation of broadband across the world where poor folks are still marginalised and excluded. Lockdown really put the spotlight on that isolation, that lack of access to the web. So, the transformation would be to create free-to-access community owned wifi to overcome some of the democratic isolation as well as the social isolation that people have experienced.

Q: How are you keeping motivated and optimistic?

A: Being able to connect with people like Helen and others has helped significantly in

terms of motivation and in terms of being able to take a look at what is happening outside of Tulse Hill. I think I have been fortunate enough to have an employer who has managed to keep me employed and in work during the pandemic. Having tasks and responsibilities has given me structure, routine and purpose. I have been concerns for folks who have found themselves in the situation of having lost their jobs and not having the ability to go and seek new employment. Also knowing that there are bigger issues out there has helped to keep some of my own challenges in perspective.

Q: Tell us one thing that you've learned about yourself during lockdown

A: This is a really deep questions - I am reminded of my own resilience. Also, I think I have reminded myself or at least I have learnt in a new way that work isn't everything and that how home life and caring for those around you is so important.

