

Definitions of community

The origin of the word community comes from the Latin *munus*, which means 'the gift', and *cum*, which means 'together' or 'among each other'.

Therefore 'community' literally means 'to give among each other'.

Anthony P. Cohen, a sociologist who writes about community, suggests that understanding 'community' involves two related ideas:-

- that the members of a group have something in common with each other;
- and that the thing held in common distinguishes them from others.

Community therefore can be taken to mean - having some sort of 'common life' that is different from the experiences of others.

In practice the word COMMUNITY is commonly used to refer to a wide range of different groups of people:-

the local community the gay community the deaf community a mining community

the global community the business community the European Community

the Chinese community a community of women the scientific community

the farming community the Muslim community a cyber-community

These different uses can be grouped in 2 main ways:-

Communities of place - which refers to geographic communities based around where people live.

Communities of place or location can range from a few streets to the local neighbourhood, suburb, village, town or city, region, nation or even the planet as a whole.

Communities of interest – which refers to groups of people who have common interests / understandings or common experiences of life or who are viewed as forming a distinct segment of society.

In *interest* communities people are linked together by factors such as beliefs, sexual orientation, gender, occupation, language, activities, ethnic origin or other characteristics used to define their identity.

Unfortunately, however, for people working in, with and for communities, the reality is rarely that simple.

- Just because people live close to one another - does this necessarily mean that they have much to do with each other or think the same way?
- Just because someone might be gay, or deaf, or black, or a woman, does this automatically mean they have any sort of 'a common life'?

