

Self Help—Communities Meeting Local Needs Through Collective Action

This leaflet looks at communities meeting local needs through collective action to help themselves.

Although there have always been community activists who have set up organisations and groups to support other individuals/causes without any benefit to themselves or their families (for example, many animal, environment and human rights organisations), many groups, organisations and movements have their basis in self interest or “Self Help”. Self help groups are those that consist of people who have similar problems or circumstances, for example, in the same industry, the same health problem or the same need for childcare, etc.

Trade Guilds and Friendly Societies

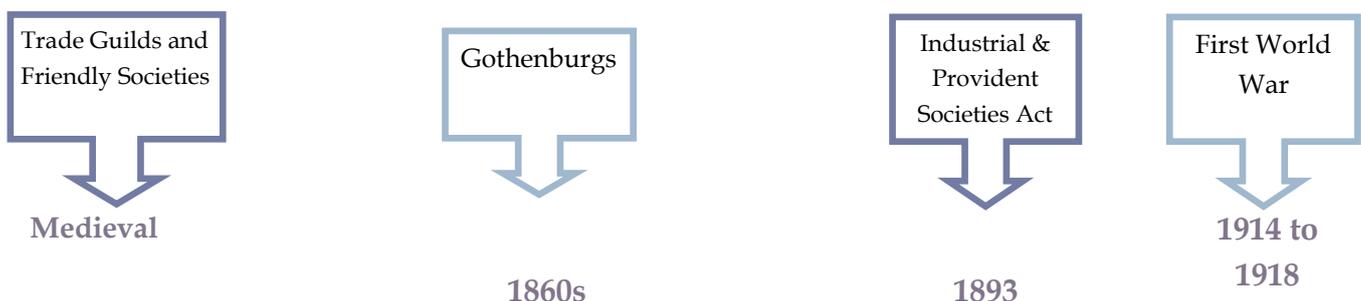
Some of the earliest recorded community activism was when working men set up trade guilds and mutual benefit societies or “friendly societies” to support themselves and protect their interests. Friendly societies were formed from the late 18th Century. Members paid a weekly subscription and in turn received

financial benefit in times of need, for example, illness and death. Such societies in Midlothian included ones set up for shepherds, masons, weavers, hammermen, butchers, colliers, carters, engine keepers, brick workers, and more. These societies were vitally important in the absence of welfare benefits and the National Health Service. Of all these societies, the only one still surviving in Midlothian is the Freemasons. The lodge in Dalkeith is the oldest in Midlothian dating from at least 1724 (but probably 17th century).

Some of the trade guilds and benefit societies were set up to support employers and self-employed tradesmen. Other societies were set up by employed workers. The modern equivalent of many are trade unions.

Trade Unions

Trade unions started to be established in the 19th century and usually offered similar types of benefits to friendly societies. Trade unions are made up of groups of workers who have joined together to negotiate on wages and/or conditions with their employers as a group rather than as individuals.



Gothenburgs

The Trust Public House movement started in the 1860s in Sweden, as an attempt to control the drinking of alcohol and also provide benefits for the community. They became known popularly as “Gothenburgs” after the place they started, often shortened to “Goths”. In Scotland they were favoured by some Temperance campaigners though others thought they would lead to increased drunkenness. They became popular in coal mining communities and were often set up by local coal companies but with miners usually holding representation. In Midlothian the Black Bull Inn in Dalkeith and the Dean Tavern were both set up on Gothenburg principles but only the Dean Tavern (which was established in Newtongrange in 1899) still follows Gothenburg principles, being run by a trust for the benefit of the local communities. Over the years the Dean gave substantial grants towards a number of facilities, including a Picture House and shops; the Star Park and Pavilion; Newbattle Bowling Club; the Newbattle Institute; and the Newtongrange Scout Hall. In 2014 they are continuing to give grants to a large number of local groups.

Co-operative Societies

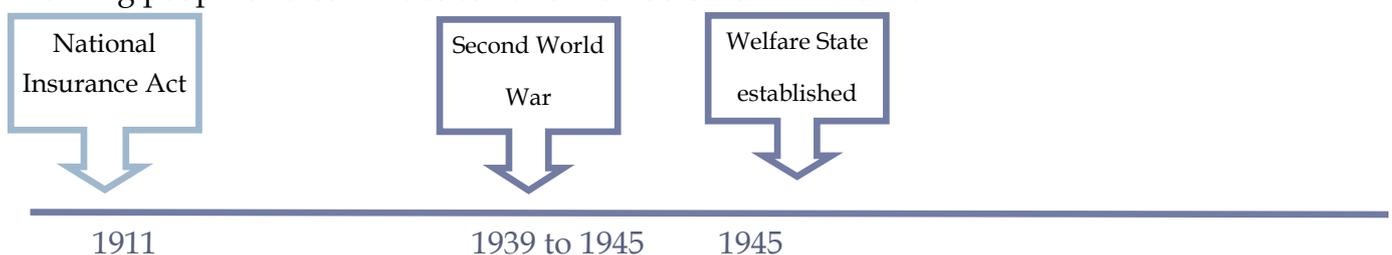
The first Co-operative Societies in Midlothian were set up in the 1860s to provide members with affordable good quality food and other goods. Many also gave a cash dividend based on the value of goods bought. In the late 19th century women wanted more involvement and began to form Co-operative Women’s Guilds. The UK-wide organisation campaigned successfully for maternity benefits to be included in the 1911 National Insurance Act and for infant welfare facilities.

Working Class Libraries

Many early libraries were “subscription libraries”. Members had to pay for a share in the library and an annual subscription. This meant that only well off people could use them. In response to this, working class libraries were set up with lower fees and often help by contributions from more affluent people. There were libraries set up in some of the Miners’ (or Working Men’s) Institutes including in Cousland Institute; the Cowan Institute; the Dalkeith Working Men’s Club and Institute; and the Arniston Lending Library.

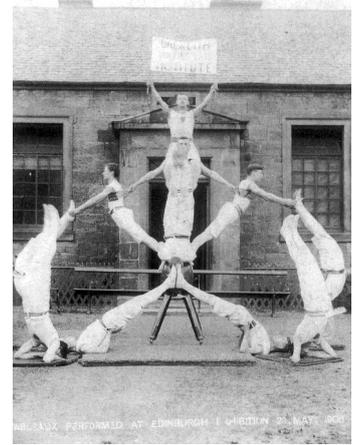
WEA

The Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) was formed in 1903 to open up education for working people and continues to have members from Midlothian.



Working Men's Institutes and Miners' Welfares

Working men's clubs started in the mid 19th century to provide working men with social and educational opportunities and to promote "mutual helpfulness". The earliest in Midlothian was the Dalkeith Working-Men's Club and Institute which was formed in 1867. Also, from 1867 there was also a Dalkeith Workers Lads Institute, the members of which later (c 1925) became known as the "Maoris" and undertook gymnastic displays etc. Clubs were funded by a variety of methods including donations from wealthy benefactors and subscriptions. For example, more clubs opened in the 1920s, mainly thanks to grants from the District Miners' Welfare Fund. Clubs were set up throughout Midlothian including the Cowan Institute in Penicuik, Newbyres Hall in Gorebridge and a number of Miners' Welfares Institutes.



The "Maoris" between WW1 and WW2

@Dalkeith History Society

Modern Day

Many organisations and community groups existing today in Midlothian would originally have started as "Self Helps" - meeting local needs through collective action to help themselves.

Changes in society and attitudes have fortunately been seeing moves away from organisations being set up by the "great and the good" for the benefit of others which gave the beneficiaries no say in what help they received. For example, many early disability organisations were set up (with the best of intentions) to provide for people with learning disabilities or physical disabilities. However, often people were shut away in institutions and had no influence. Fortunately this has been changing (although slowly), partly through legislation, partly through changes in society, and partly (and probably most importantly) by campaigning work by people who have a disability themselves. Examples in Midlothian include People First (Scotland) run by people with learning disabilities and Forward Mid which aims to raise the awareness of challenges and opportunities which exist for disabled people both locally and nationally.

Fiona Wallace, People First Scotland, said *"We want people with learning difficulties to have the same freedom, choices, dignity and control as everybody else at home, at work and in the community. We believe we have a right to the support we need to take part in society and live an ordinary life as anyone else does."*



There are a wide range of groups run for and by people with a range of health conditions and disabilities, e.g. Stroke Groups. The Breathe Easy support group network provides support and information for people living with a lung condition, and for those who look after them. The Horizons Recovery Café which meets in Dalkeith is run and operated by people in recovery or affected by addiction.

Playgroups and after school clubs could be called self help groups as they are usually set up and run by (mostly) mothers with children at the clubs. Other self groups in Midlothian include Grandparent and Kinship Care groups; Bright Sparks (a centre run by parents of children with complex additional needs); and Dalkeith Older Peoples Welfare.

Many interest groups could be described as self help e.g. art, photography, sports, walking etc – as they provide a chance for people with similar interests to meet like-minded people and take part in activities and pass on learning.



(c) Dalkeith Old Peoples Welfare Committee

References

- Dalkeith History Society – <http://www.dalkeithhistorysociety.org/>
- SCRAN website – <http://www.scran.ac.uk/> (through Midlothian Libraries)
- History Shelf – <http://www.historyshelf.org/>
- Penicuik Papermaking website – www.penicuikpapermaking.org
- National Mining Museum website – <http://www.nationalminingmuseum.com/>
- Wikipedia – www.wikipedia.org
- BBC History – www.bbc.co.uk/history
- Penicuik Co-op website – www.kosmoid.net/penicuik/coop
- Dalkeith Old Peoples Welfare Committee

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Funding for this project was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

It is proposed that when the project is complete, all the materials are donated to the new Dalkeith Museum located in the Corn Exchange.

