

# Time banking:

## A briefing from the Centre for Participation

### *What are time banks and why do we need them?*

**T**ime banks are a tool for building community. This is a crucial but often difficult aspect of regeneration. By encouraging local people to help each other – and get their time recognised – time banks create ways to tighten the fragmented bonds of communities through schools, health centres and housing estates. Time banks generate social energy – the willingness and ability of people to act in the common interest – by developing skills, confidence, trust and shared values.

Time banks involve people on the basis of what they enjoy and can do. They provide the missing ingredient in public services – people's participation – by encouraging time givers of all ages and abilities to deposit their time and get that time back when they want some help themselves. Everyone is a giver as well as a receiver, and this can help break down barriers between professionals and their clients, by drawing in ordinary people as equal partners in the business of regeneration.

Time banks enable local people to create their own self help network, but they can also provide the impetus for much, much more: DIY clubs, gardening teams, transport schemes, food co-ops, exercise clubs, healthy eating, support groups, children's time bank, befriending circle, arts & crafts and community-based training... and so on.

There are around forty time banks around the UK in different stages of development.

Time banks are in every corner of the UK – from Aberdeen to Portsmouth and from Ipswich to Omagh. Those already open for business have traded close to ten thousand hours of time.

**No more throw away people**



The time bank is operated by a broker who recruits members, finds out how they would like to make 'deposits' and 'withdrawals' and gets them giving and receiving. The free TimeKeeper software helps keep records and sends out time statements.

Time banks aren't about public services on the cheap. They ARE about enlisting the skills and time of people who have a lot to give but whose assets are currently wasted – old people and young people, people with disabilities and health problems who are seen as a burden on over-stretched services. These 'throwaway' people are vital to the creation of healthy, vibrant neighbourhoods and time banks are one way of measuring and encouraging their participation.

#### *Core values of time banking*

- CAN DO – Everyone has something of value to give and we need their contribution
- EQUALITY – Everyone's time is worth the same
- RECIPROCITY – Everyone is a giver and a receiver

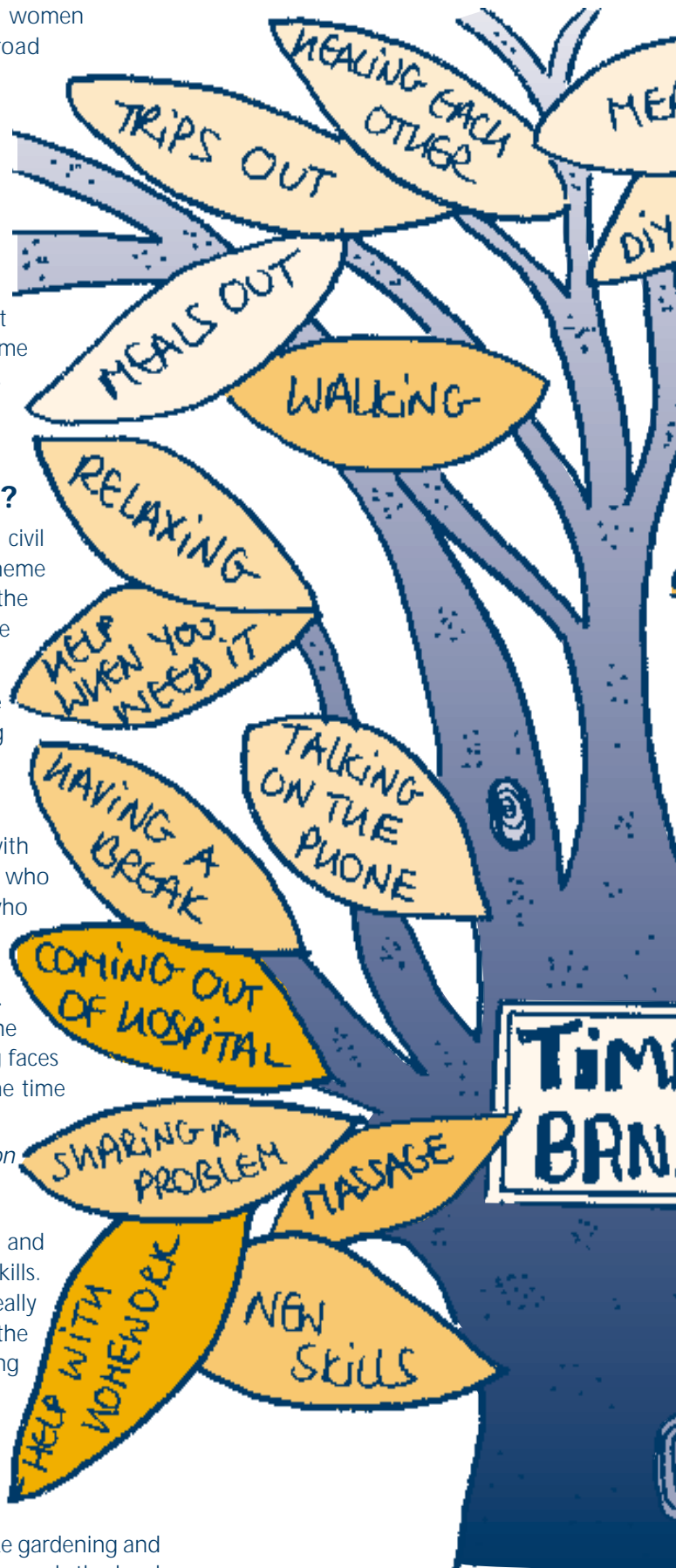
#### *What's happening?*

- Also popular in the US and Japan, time banks are now springing up across the UK, backed by local community groups, regeneration partnerships, health and local authorities.
- The government's Active Community Unit is supporting the development of 120 time banks by 2003. The government has also announced that time credits earned through a time bank will not affect people's benefit entitlement.
- Time Banks UK, the national network of time bankers gives support and advice on how to set up your own time bank.



Hyacinth Thomas at Rushey Green Time Bank (Guardian 21/5/00)

Time bank member Hyacinth Thomas says: "I built up several hours of credit visiting an elderly blind women who lives across the road from me. I used the time I'd got from chatting to the old lady to get my shed fixed. The time bank is a very, very good idea... I used to sit at home, just wake up and watch TV all day. The time bank is what brought me out and got me meeting my neighbours and making friends."



### What difference do time banks make?

Time banks originated in the USA in the mid-80s, when civil rights lawyer Edgar Cahn piloted the first Time Dollars scheme ([www.timedollar.org](http://www.timedollar.org)). There are now over 250 schemes in the USA involving thousands of people of all ages across a wide range of communities.

Time banks in the UK are rapidly developing. They are contributing to better health and education and getting things done in communities. Here are some examples:

#### In health centres

"The idea is to put together what assets people have with their needs. The time bank has great benefits for patients who would otherwise simply be given a course of drugs or who might even be forgotten. It has led to a lot of patients being taken off anti-depressants – too often in the past doctors would prescribe drugs when patients felt lonely or anxious. Now we have this new method – prescribing time, and the results I have seen have been remarkable. I've seen smiling faces on people who were very depressed before they joined the time bank."

*Dr Richard Byng, Rushey Green time bank, South East London*

#### In schools and colleges

"Time bank members help the children with their reading, and the kids help the older members with learning computer skills. The one to one support they give to the children are really invaluable. The children are really happy to pay some of the time back by helping clean up the local park or giving a helping hand when the older people need something themselves."

*Teacher, Benwell time bank, Newcastle*

#### In neighbourhoods

"We've got around 180 people involved in the group with all kinds of services on offer. The most popular are things like gardening and giving lifts. We've linked up four estates in Cheltenham through the local neighbourhood scheme and got people giving and receiving time in all kinds of ways. Not only has Fair Shares brought the estates together but it has also brought the skills and talents of local people to the fore."

*Martin Simon, Director, Fair Shares, time bank pioneers, Gloucester*

## In organisations

Groundwork [the sustainable development charity] were involved in a pilot scheme that would track down the areas of expertise and levels of competence within their federation of Trusts and exchange them using a currency of 'hours'. These commodities might include short pieces on 'Good ways to recruit volunteers,' 'What you need to know about applying for European Social Fund grants,' or whatever.

"The system has vastly improved communication lines between the eight pilot Trusts. It has increased the sharing of good practice, generated an archive of good ideas and made Trusts more aware of the skills and specialisms of other Trusts. More than 700 hours were traded in just 6 months during 1999 – worth an estimated £25,000 to Groundwork."

*Perry Walker, New Economics Foundation, London*

## Demonstrating impact

The New Economics Foundation (see page 4) is initiating evaluation of the impact of time banks on individuals, neighbourhoods and public services. At the Rushey Green time bank, members are designing the evaluation together with health professionals. Researchers based at the University of East Anglia will evaluate time banks across the country. These evaluations will enable us to demonstrate and enhance the impact of time banks. Initial findings will be available from April 2001, from the **Time Banks UK** website (see page 4).

## Complementing other local initiatives

Time banks fit well alongside:

### Volunteering initiatives – like the BBC national TimeBank campaign

- By reaching out to people who don't realise what a wealth of skills they have to share...
- And encouraging them to get involved in their communities as local experts!
- Providing the help and support they might need to get involved locally – through the time bank.
- Building confidence – so that people are more likely to get involved in other kinds of community initiatives next time.



*Young members of the Rushey Green Time Bank.*

### Other kinds of complementary 'money', like Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETs)

- By using a broker to reach out to more vulnerable people and linking them up with other members and services.
- Operating out of community services, like health centres and schools – where people's participation is vital to the creation of successful services.

### 'Real' money initiatives crucial to invigorating local communities

- Credit unions, micro-finance initiatives and community banks
- London Re-building Society.  
This new mutual finance institution lends to viable social enterprises putting something back into poorer communities.

### Time banks and the New Economics Foundation (NEF)

NEF works to construct a new economy centred on people and the environment. Founded in 1986, NEF is an independent think tank, combining research, policy, training and practical action.

NEF's work on time banks has been based on partnerships e.g. with pioneers such as *Fair Shares* in Gloucestershire. Other aspects of NEF's work include a variety of approaches to creating a participative democracy. These include:

- visioning techniques, used in communities, local authorities and business
- participative ways of strengthening the local economy
- indicators and evaluation to *prove and improve* quality of life and effectiveness in communities, public and private organisations.

NEF also has vibrant programmes with cutting edge work that cover: the global economy, community finance and economics, and corporate accountability.

For more information on NEF please visit our website at: [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

### What next?

NEF's future work on time banks centre on developing innovative approaches to time banking. This involves work with:

- local authorities and health authorities to use time banks in the drive for health and quality of life
- public services to enhance their effectiveness drawing on time bank's principle of co-production
- organisations to get more value out of the knowledge, experience and expertise held across their network.

If you would like to work with us on any of these ideas please contact Sarah Burns or Karen Smith at NEF: 020 7407 7447 extensions 259 or 249.

For more information about time banking in the UK please visit the following websites:

[www.neweconomics.org/timemoney](http://www.neweconomics.org/timemoney) for the latest on NEF's innovative time bank activities.

Or photocopy and return the form below.

[www.timebanks.co.uk](http://www.timebanks.co.uk) for **Time Banks UK**, the national network of time bankers that gives support and advice on how to set up your own time bank. You can also telephone 0870 702 7428 or email: [sarah.burns@timebanks.co.uk](mailto:sarah.burns@timebanks.co.uk)

Name

Organisation (if applicable)

Address

Tel:  Fax:

Email:

Specific interests/requests/commitments:

- Please include me on your time bank mailing list
- I am interested in setting up a time bank
- Please send me a 'tools for participation' folder with info on other participatory methods
- Please send me details on joining the New Economics Foundation

Please return to NEF, (TB) Cinnamon House, 6-8 Cole Street, London SE1 4YH. Or fax 020 7407 6473