



Insights from Small Steps Big Changes:

Community Based Commissioning

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About Small Steps Big Changes

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) is one of five A Better Start Partnerships. The **A Better Start Programme** is a ten-year (2015-2025), £215 million programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and takes a test-and-learn approach to strengthening support and services for families, so that children can have the best start in life.

SSBC, hosted by Nottingham CityCare Partnership, operates in Nottingham City, with four ethnically diverse city wards as its target areas. Working with parents, SSBC has developed and is delivering a programme of support and activities for families with children up to age four to promote good early childhood development.

The key child outcome areas of the SSBC programme are diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication. In addition, SSBC focuses on systems change and aims to improve the ways that local health, public services and the voluntary and community sector work together with families to achieve improved child outcomes.

The work of the SSBC programme is grounded in scientific evidence and research, with the aim of furthering the evidence base for effective early childhood interventions. In line with the programme's test-and learn approach, SSBC

benefits from nine years of evidence and evaluation. As SSBC nears the end of its ten-year programme, the focus is on legacy building and telling the SSBC story with the goal of disseminating the learning from the approaches and principles that have contributed to the programme's success and inspiring system change.



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1 Introduction



1.1 From Ambition to Legacy: Community Based Commissioning the SSBC Way

Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC), funded by The National Lottery Community Fund's 'A Better Start' programme (2015-2025), aims to improve developmental outcomes for children up to age four in diverse wards within Nottingham. As a test-and-learn initiative, SSBC builds evidence on effective early childhood services and shares findings to drive system change.

A key ambition is to support local community assets and organisations working with children and families, building on coproduction principles to ensure they place **'Children at the heart, parents leading the way, supported and guided by experts'**.¹ This involves two main commitments: placing families at the centre of services and empowering parent and community-led services.² SSBC's Community Based Commissioning approach applies these

commitments to strengthen the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector, enhancing skills, capacity, and funding delivery that meet the needs of children and parents.

SSBC's commitment to Community Based Commissioning, outlined in the 2014 bid for ABS funding, has been integral throughout the programme's governance and delivery. This report highlights SSBC's successful approach and key learnings over the past decade, demonstrating a positive local impact for children, parents and community organisations.

1.2 The Policy Drive for Public Sector Commissioning

Commissioning of services within the public sector has evolved and grown over the past 30 years, driven by government policy. The NHS and Community Care Act 1990 marked the start of commissioning in the NHS and local authorities, creating an internal market and decentralising health and social care services.³

In the early 2000s strategic commissioning emerged, focusing on greater integration and joint commissioning of services based on population-level assessments of need. The Every Child Matters (2003)⁴ and Children's Act (2004)⁵ integrated different services within local authorities, promoting greater partnership working, and joint planning and commissioning. The Commissioning Framework for Health and Wellbeing (2007)⁶ emphasised understanding population needs and outcomes, introducing Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and pooled budgets.

In the 2010s, the government introduced new local commissioning structures and transferred more responsibility to local groups. The Health

and Social Care Act (2012)⁷ transferred NHS public health functions to local authorities, including the Healthy Child Programme, Health Visitors and School Nurses.⁸

By the 2020s, government policy aimed for new Integrated Care Systems (ICS), with the NHS Long Term Plan⁹ further integrating health and social care and setting a vision for “the biggest national move to integrated care of any major western country”. The Health and Care Act (2022)¹⁰ established these statutory ICS arrangements, focusing on health across larger areas of the population. The new ICS structures recognised the potential to distance their commissioning from local community needs and smaller community organisations, so to address this challenge, ICSs operate through Health and Wellbeing Boards, Place-based Partnerships, and Primary Care Networks.¹¹

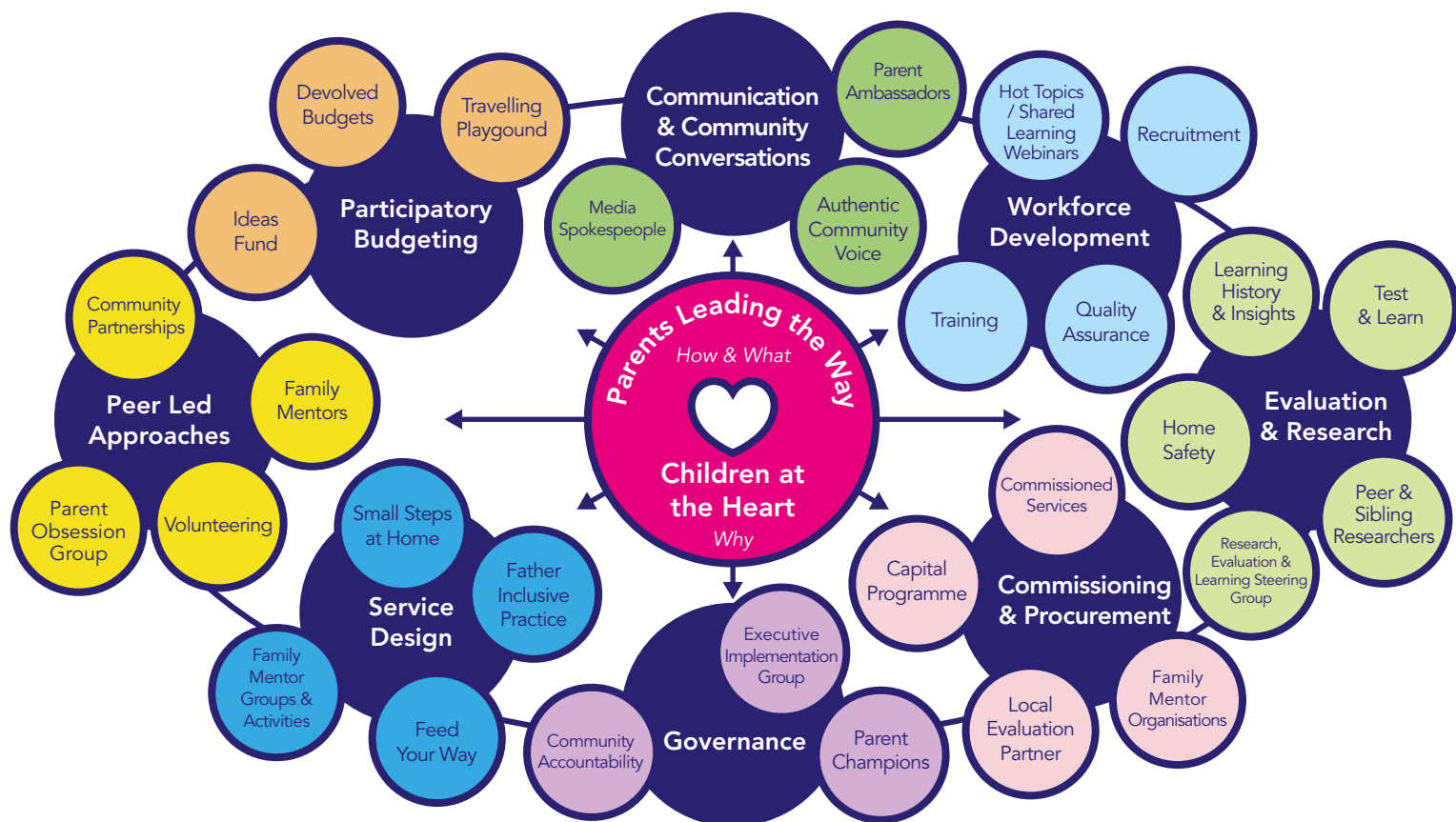
Throughout the last 30 years, Government commissioning policy has emphasised moves towards strategic commissioning, integration of services, partnership working, and understanding population-level needs.

1.3 Policy and Guidance Drivers for Community Based Commissioning

Community and asset-based principles have long existed within public sector services, but their systematic use within commissioning to improve health and wellbeing is relatively new. Community Based Commissioning approaches have been developed over the last 15 years to amplify local voices within strategic commissioning frameworks and ensure they consider local needs.

The Marmot Review’s ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’ (2010)¹² was a significant early driver for Community Based Commissioning (CBC). This report stressed that improving the population’s health and reducing inequalities requires action across society, not just within the health sector. The review emphasised “giving every child the best start in life...our highest priority recommendation” and empowering communities through participatory decision-making.¹³





SSBC's Approach to Community Based Commissioning

The Improvement and Development Agency 'A Glass Half-full' report¹⁴ advocated for asset-based approaches and that focusing on community assets rather than deficits increases community efficacy and capacity. Key principles included sharing power with communities, supporting long-term community-led initiatives, and embedding these ideas in public services.

The NHS Five Year Forward View (2014)¹⁵ called for a new relationship with patients and communities; it emphasised prevention, patient empowerment, and community engagement. It significantly recognised the vital role of the voluntary sector in reaching underserved groups and providing essential services.

Public Health England and NHS England's 'A guide to community-centred approaches for health and wellbeing' (2015)¹⁶ promoted the use of community settings, mobilising community assets, and increasing people's control over their health and lives. It introduced a 'Family of community-centred approaches' that included using volunteer and peer roles, community engagement in planning, coproducing projects, and Community Based Commissioning.

Bournemouth University's 'Asset-based commissioning: Better outcomes, better value' report (2017)¹⁷ defined asset-based commissioning as **"Enabling people and communities, together with organisations, to become equal co-commissioners and co-producers, and also via self-help, make best complementary use of all assets to improve whole life and community outcomes."** This definition was adopted by SSBC when developing its Community Based Commissioning approach.

Recent guidance has highlighted how Community Based Commissioning approaches should continue and be used to support local decision-making and commissioning alongside the new ICS structures. The 2024 report 'The Challenges and Opportunities for Local VCSE Organisations'¹⁸ highlights considerations for the new Integrated Care Systems (ICS) to support local Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations and implement Community Based Commissioning approaches. Recommendations included flexible commissioning, contracts supporting

growth, proportionate data and governance, representation, and collective VCSE action.

A companion report outlined six principles for 'How Integrated Care Systems can unlock the power of community'¹⁹, these principles are: thinking about the whole system, coordinating services at the neighbourhood level, increasing local spending in the local economy, focusing on prevention, supporting local organisations, and commissioning services collaboratively so they are 'local by default'.

1.4 The Importance of Community Based Commissioning to the SSBC Programme

Nottingham CityCare, the lead organisation for SSBC, is a VCSE Community Interest Company and a major health service provider within Nottingham. Nottingham CityCare's VCSE status elevated the importance of SSBC implementing a Community Based Commissioning approach and supporting the local VCSE sector. The SSBC programme aimed to commission a significant part of programme delivery to local community organisations.

A national driver for SSBC's Community Based Commissioning came from The National Lottery Community Fund and the 'A Better Start' (ABS) programme, which implement place-based approaches to support people and communities to thrive. One of the ABS programme outcomes is to: **"Bring about 'systems change'; that is to change, for the better, the way local health, public services and the voluntary community sector work together with parents to improve outcomes for children."**

SSBC has adopted Community Based Commissioning approaches that emphasise leveraging community strengths and assets, empowering local community participation and decision-making, and investing in local services within the local economy to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. These approaches have shaped the development and implementation of the Small Steps Big Changes (SSBC) programme.

This report outlines how Community Based Commissioning has been embedded and implemented throughout SSBC's delivery; it uses examples from SSBC projects to highlight some key approaches, themes, and learnings which may be relevant to other organisations, commissioners and policymakers when developing their own CBC practices.



2 Embedding Community Based Commissioning in the SSBC Programme

2.1 Nottingham's Bid for 'A Better Start' Funding

The significance of Community Based Commissioning within the SSBC programme has been evident from the bid development and subsequent project plan submitted to The National Lottery for 'A Better Start' funding.

During this bid development phase, direct conversations occurred with over 1,500 parents and children within four Nottingham delivery wards (Aspley, Bulwell, Arboretum and St. Ann's). Conversations were held within local communities through events, fun days, street surveys, focus groups and one-to-one questionnaires.



Two Strategy Days were held with 19 parents joining 20 senior representatives from local statutory and voluntary sector agencies, including the Leader of Nottingham City Council, the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, and the Director of Public Health. One parent at the Strategy Days described this approach as 'injecting parents into the system – to change its DNA', which resonated so strongly with participants that it was articulated in the final bid submission's Executive Summary:

"Our ambition for system change is to 'turn the system on its head' by 'injecting' parents and communities into the system and involving them in all planning, decision-making and commissioning processes for children and young people's services in the City. We will develop a new model of 'community connection' to embed this process in the forward development of SSBC and City services."

During this bid development phase, a scoping exercise mapped the assets and capacity of the local VCSE sector to deliver key aspects of the SSBC programme. This identified over 100 VCSE providers interested in supporting SSBC and delivering services – ranging from large 'nationals' to small community-led organisations. SSBC's bid submission outlined the ambition to procure and commission 'Delivery Partners' to provide a significant part of programme activities and interventions. The aim was to **"contract with local VCSE organisations predominantly....This approach is consistent with our strategy to provide local jobs and opportunities for local people."** To facilitate this, SSBC committed to **"work with local VCSE agencies in particular to help them develop the capacity and resources to bid for and secure delivery contracts."** The bid submission stated that:

"Strategic change will be delivered through: Building the capacity of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and supporting and commissioning VCSE organisations to deliver services."

2.2 Embedding Community Based Commissioning in SSBC Governance and Decision Making

Throughout the SSBC programme's Vision and Aims are the concepts of 'coproduction', a 'strengths and asset-based' approach, and 'building the capacity of the VCSE sector'. These concepts combined during programme implementation to form SSBC's Community Based Commissioning approach, with local parents and the community as primary features of the programme's governance, decision-making, and 'Community Connection' model. This includes :



SSBC Partnership Board

- The Board comprises parent representatives from across the four delivery wards and communities. Parent Champions hold a 40% share of voting rights and sit alongside senior representatives from voluntary and community organisations, health services, the local authority, and early education.
- Parent Champions have acted as both Chairs and Vice Chairs of the SSBC Partnership Board.

Community Partnerships

From 2015 - 2024 Bi-monthly community partnership meetings were held in each of the four SSBC delivery wards. Parent Champions, wider members of the local community, and members of the children's workforce (e.g. health visitors, nursery staff, VCSE sector) were involved in designing new activities and improving existing delivery.

Parent Champions

Local parents based in each of the four SSBC delivery wards. They are involved in shaping and contributing to almost every aspect of SSBC strategy and delivery. Supported by the SSBC team and working with other local parents, they act to represent their community and work with a range of professionals to help understand what local families want and need and make their voices heard.

Coproduction is embedded throughout the SSBC programme as evidenced by their key principle 'Children at the heart, parents leading the way, supported and guided by experts'. The local community is involved in all aspects of programme governance, decision-making, and shaping delivery.

Parent Champions and local community representatives sit on all SSBC commissioning panels, scoring funding bids and making decisions

on programme spending. They work alongside SSBC staff, the partnership workforce, and the VCSE sector to implement programme delivery and strategy.

SSBC's Community Based Commissioning approach integrates these local community decision-making processes alongside the aim of building capacity in the local VCSE sector and community organisations.

2.3 Community Based Commissioning within the SSBC Programme

SSBC's Community Based Commissioning is evident in three significant workstreams of the programme. SSBC developed and commissioned these three areas alongside local communities and prioritised local VCSE organisations as delivery providers:

Capital Investment Project

Investing in local community buildings as directed by parents in each community. Parents were consulted on the suitability of a range of community buildings including location, accessibility, and the type of work needed at each to better meet their needs.



Ideas Fund

'Grant' funding available to local VCSE sector organisations through an open application process. Funding applications are evaluated by panels of parents and community members, alongside professionals from health, the local authority, and VCSE organisations. Project funding ranged from small one-off grants of £2k to grants up to £30k over 3 years. The Ideas Fund has awarded more than £1 million to over 90 local projects and organisations between 2016 and 2025.

Family Mentors

A paid peer workforce of parents with lived experience, employed from within their communities and delivered by local VCSE organisations. Recruited for their qualities rather than qualifications, Family Mentors are people who can work alongside parents to deliver a programme of home-visiting activities aimed at improving early child development.



The following chapter uses project examples and case studies within these three programme areas to share learning and themes from SSBC's Community Based Commissioning over the last ten years.

3 SSBC Community Based Commissioning Themes and Examples

All SSBC programme delivery activity has to meet the Lottery's 'A Better Start' grant funding requirements. These are:

- Direct beneficiaries are expectant parents and children aged 0-4 years.
- Delivery to impact one or more of the three child development outcomes:
 - Communication & Language.
 - Nutrition.
 - Social & Emotional Development.
- Bring about 'systems change' in the way that local health, public services and the voluntary and community sector work together and with parents to improve outcomes for children.
- Deliver to community residents within four Nottingham wards:
 - Aspley.
 - Bulwell.
 - Hyson Green & Arboretum.
 - St. Ann's.

All projects and activities commissioned and delivered by SSBC meet these requirements. Outlined below are some of the broader themes SSBC implemented within its Community Based Commissioning, each theme utilises examples from a variety of funded projects to highlight the learning.

3.1 Utilising Community Assets

SSBC has taken an asset-based approach throughout programme delivery to ensure that community assets are utilised to support and strengthen existing community infrastructure. SSBC has invested in existing community buildings and assets and funded project delivery that takes place at these venues. Many organisations that have received SSBC funding have used this investment and leveraged additional funds to support these assets further and improve their future sustainability.

3.1.1 Capital Investment Project

SSBC's commitment to local parents was to provide programme delivery within 'pram pushing' or 'toddler tolerance' distance from where they lived, in locations that were accessible, known by them and used by them. SSBC programme activity was planned to take place in trusted local community buildings from the outset, which would also help sustain these vital assets and support the organisations managing them.

An independent external company undertook community engagement in the four SSBC delivery wards, engaging families in street surveys and various community settings. This work identified from local families:

- The community buildings they already accessed.
- Potential new sites that could be accessed.
- What an ideal delivery venue looked like for families.
- What facilities they needed.
- What types of spaces they wanted.



Once this engagement with local families was complete and the results analysed, an architect was commissioned to survey the community buildings in each ward against the ideal model that the local families had identified. The aim was to ensure all delivery locations were fit for purpose, clean, comfortable and welcoming, and they offered disabled access and appropriate spaces for parents and children, including activity rooms, meeting rooms, and safe play areas.

Sixteen sites across the four delivery wards were chosen for SSBC programme delivery, with six sites identified as needing capital investment to get them up to spec and ensure they met families' requirements.

Engagement and coproduction with local communities and the management committees of each venue continued throughout the design and building phases. They were involved in all decision-making, including choosing colour schemes, carpets, playground designs, brickwork, and cladding.

An additional, and unexpected, benefit of the project is that it acted as a catalyst for some management committees and organisations to deliver further improvements to these community assets, including:

- Investment of additional funds in their buildings alongside SSBC funded work - reducing their costs by integrating with existing SSBC contracts.
- Successful applications for further Lottery grants – used to purchase a range of items, including equipment for children, an oven in the kitchen, a sound system, and creating a sensory room.

SSBC's approach of developing existing community assets alongside the local community has ensured that:

- Community assets better meet the needs of the local community.
- The community assets have seen increased use and improved long-term sustainability.
- SSBC programme delivery has successfully reached large numbers of families through utilising these community assets.

3.1.2 Twigglets – The Toy Library

Twigglets is an Ideas Fund project that utilises Barkers Wood, a community woodland in Bulwell, and is delivered by The Toy Library. Twigglets sessions are a combination of forest school and play principles, delivering regular outdoor sessions for young children using a Forest School approach with a qualified Forest School practitioner.

The Twigglets project has had a positive impact on the children and their parents and has also benefitted the community woodland. It has increased The Toy Library's use of Barker's Wood for delivering a range of activities, increased the number of people accessing the woodland, and has led to improved maintenance of the woodland. The SSBC Ideas Fund and the Twigglets project have increased the usage and value placed on this local community asset.



The Toy Library says:

"This project has had a noticeable impact on our wider community work as it has enabled us to make use of the woods on a regular basis, and therefore the need for ongoing maintenance and improvement has been met as a natural outcome of this. This has had a knock-on effect of more families and local people accessing the wood, both through our own community events such as Halloween and Christmas, and on their own."

We now also use the woodland more for other projects at The Toy Library. We have increased the number of Holiday Activity fund sessions that we deliver in the woodland and also now run a group on Saturday mornings for older children.

Our volunteering in the woods has increased and we now have a team from Adventure Services attending regularly. They combine their activities with some voluntary woodland improvement work.

We have trialled running woodland birthday parties in the activity area, which is part of our income generation strategy.

This project has helped us attract additional funding, to run a year long project in the woods for families with older children."





3.1.3 New Shoots - STAA

New Shoots is an Ideas Fund project developed by STAA, a small charity established in 1997 to protect the St. Ann's allotment site from redevelopment. STAA run community projects at the allotments, which are a grade 2 listed heritage site.

The New Shoots project takes place in the St. Ann's Community Orchard, at the heart of the allotments. Made up of 13 plots, the Community Orchard has one hundred fruit trees, ponds, a stream, a vegetable garden and a large straw-bale building. There is a campfire circled with benches for people to congregate, eat together and talk.

New Shoots was developed through consultation with local parents after the COVID-19 pandemic who said they wanted to access safe outdoor spaces where their young children could connect with the natural environment and each other. At the end of each session, parents and children can come together around the fire, share some healthy seasonal snacks, and sing songs; this has proved to be an important part of the sessions where parents can connect and reduce any sense of isolation.

New Shoots has worked with local professionals from health and community providers, connecting with partners to ensure they are reaching families. This outreach work has seen greater use of the Community Orchard by local families, with beneficiaries from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnicities, reflecting the local St. Ann's community which can be quite mobile.

The STAA says:

"STAA has raised its profile in so many ways in this community and our engagement with local people continues to rise."

"We have noticed at the end of the New Shoots session when the families come together, they don't want to leave. These connections are really important. All families benefit from having access to the space, but their needs are different to those on low incomes, it is important that all families feel welcome and that the space continues to be an inclusive non-judgmental space...parents and children really appreciate having the space to gently explore and an opportunity to relax and enjoy being together outside."

3.2 Strengthening Community Decision-Making and Commissioning Processes

The SSBC Coproduction Insight Report²⁰, lays out in more detail the involvement of local parents and communities in coproducing and shaping the SSBC programme.

SSBC built upon this coproduction to support local parents and communities to become decision-makers and commissioners of services. Local communities became equal partners in SSBC commissioning processes, and the ongoing development of projects once funded. Local parents sit on all commissioning panels where they score applications and interview shortlisted providers alongside local VCSE organisations, health, and local authority representatives, including for:

- The Ideas Fund.
- Family Mentor Service.
- COVID and Cost of Living funds.
- SSBC Programme Evaluation Partners.

SSBCs commitment to community decision-making has had wider benefits for those involved, with local parents and volunteers subsequently taking on other governance and decision-making roles within their communities. Many parents have taken the skills they have learned through their engagement with SSBC decision-making and applied them elsewhere, sitting on Boards in the VCSE and childcare sectors, and becoming school governors.

Two examples of community decision-making within SSBC commissioning processes are:

3.2.1 Ideas Fund Evaluation Panel

SSBC developed the Ideas Fund to support new ideas and innovations from the local community and allocate funds to them through an open application process. It aims to provide funding for local community organisations to test new projects that meet a need within the local community and contribute to SSBC outcomes. Over the Ideas Fund's ten years the average grant per project has been c.£9,000, but projects can be funded for up to 3 years and £10,000 per year.

Authority for scrutinising all Ideas Fund applications and awarding the grant is delegated from the SSBC Board to the Ideas Fund Evaluation Panel. The Evaluation Panel has a mix of backgrounds and experiences from across local communities; this gives it knowledge of the needs within those communities and an understanding of existing local services to avoid unintentional duplication.

The Evaluation Panel consists of:

- Parent Champions from each of the four SSBC delivery wards.
- Nominated representatives from health and the local authority.
- SSBC Procurement, Commissioning & Business Manager.
- VCSE organisation representatives.



The Evaluation Panel is a significant undertaking for parents, and partners, given the time requirements to read applications in advance and attend Panel meetings. A creche facility is offered to make Panel attendance easier for parents, and local organisations allow their representatives time to attend within their core duties. SSBC has a process for dealing with any conflicts of interest that may arise for local organisations and representatives when participating in the evaluation panels.

Parent Champions are supported in their roles on the Ideas Fund Evaluation Panel through specific training, role descriptions, and briefings. Despite this, some Parent Champions indicated that early on in their involvement they felt 'out of their depth', but as they continue to participate their confidence grows.²¹ Parent Champions have expressed how they value the experience of the Evaluation Panel, appreciate the opportunity to make a difference in their communities by funding new projects, and have gained valuable skills from their involvement. They have contributed as equal partners in the assessment and commissioning of applications throughout the ten years of Ideas Fund delivery.

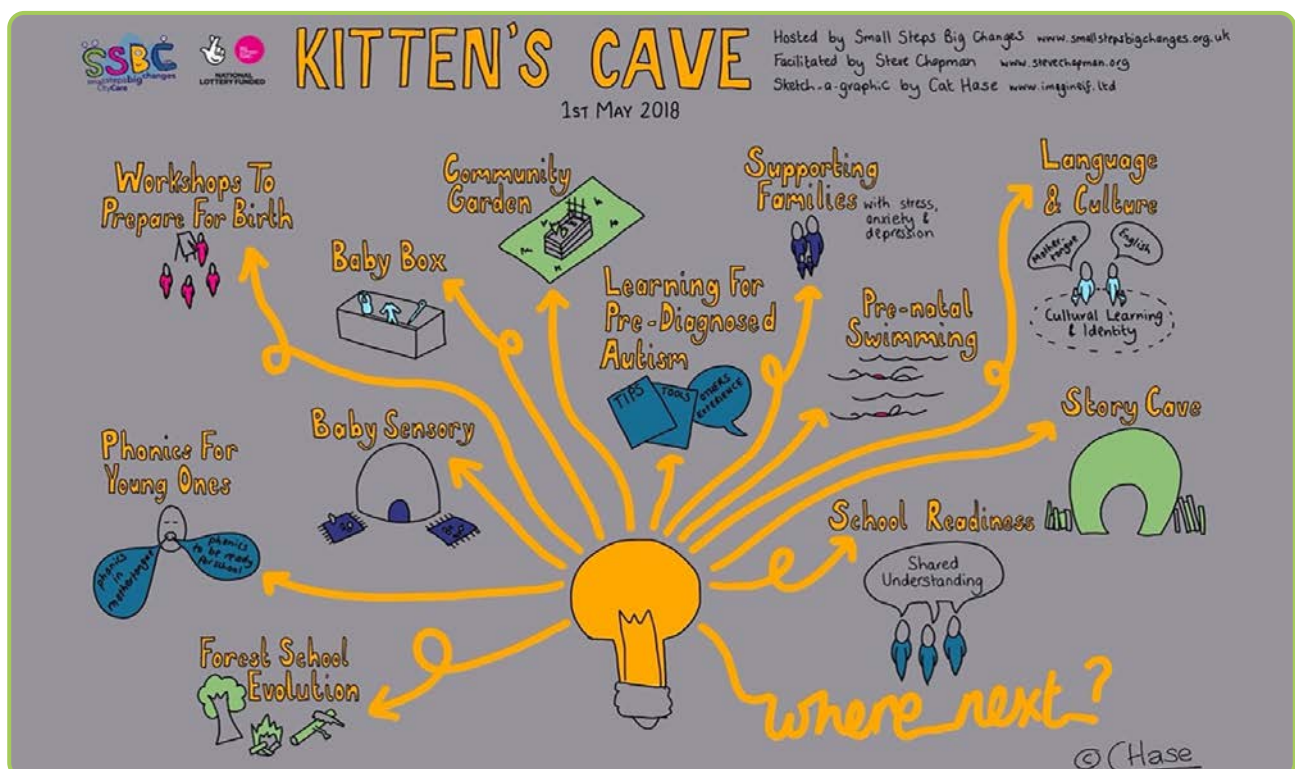
The recent Ideas Fund independent evaluation found that on top of putting "funding directly into the heart of communities", it also:

- **Gave Families a Voice:** The Ideas Fund approach demonstrated that families themselves can be central to a process, such as through the involvement of the Parent Champions.
- **Identified a Model for Change:** the approach adopted by the Ideas Fund has proven what works locally, and this can be replicated in other areas in Nottingham or further afield should funding become available.

The Ideas Fund Evaluation Panel has awarded more than £1 million to over 90 local projects and community organisations throughout the lifetime of the SSBC programme.

3.2.2 Kitten's Cave

Kitten's Cave brought partners from across the local VCSE and statutory sectors together with community parents for a creative planning and strategy workshop. The workshop aimed to replicate a 'Dragon's Den' session and sought to collectively identify and plan potential future project developments within the Ideas Fund, and act as a pre-application information session.



The independent facilitator allowed mixed groups of parents and partners to think about any perceived gaps in existing provision and then generate a range of ideas to meet these. The open and creative facilitation of the workshop meant that there were no wrong ideas, and participants from all backgrounds felt comfortable voicing their thoughts. The Kitten's Cave methodology allowed exploration of ideas and concepts that could be developed in future Ideas Funds application rounds and prioritised when making funding decisions.

Kitten's Cave proved a success; many of the ideas generated within the workshop were developed by local organisations and subsequently delivered through the SSBC Ideas Fund.

3.3 Local Jobs for Local People

SSBC is committed to supporting the local economy and building community knowledge of positive child development practices. By commissioning and funding projects that employed local people, SSBC fostered greater learning and skills development and improved the economic outlook of local families and communities. The largest of SSBC's projects was the Family Mentor Service:

3.3.1 Family Mentor Service

Engagement, collaboration and coproduction with local communities and parents throughout the development of SSBC's Lottery bid led to the concept of Family Mentors.

This Family Mentor concept was developed to create a brand new paid peer workforce, recruited from within the communities, and who had 'lived experience' of raising children and the issues faced by local parents. Family Mentors would work closely with existing professionals and build positive relationships with new parents; providing support from someone 'like them', who parents could trust and feel confident that they were receiving good quality guidance and advice about raising their children.

This new Family Mentor workforce was commissioned to local VCSE organisations to recruit, manage, and operate. It was believed that this would enable Family Mentors to take advantage of the trust that local VCSE organisations had established within communities, and their flexibility, local knowledge, and connections. This would enable them to get alongside new parents, to support them and their children in a way that the professional health and local authority workforces were not always able to.





The recruitment of Family Mentors was directed at the populations within local communities, with an emphasis placed on a person's approach, attitude, and qualities rather than their previous work experience or qualifications. SSBC worked with local families and parents to identify the desired profile and qualities of Family Mentors, and the local VCSE provider organisations assessed for these during their recruitment.

When successfully recruited, Family Mentors receive a range of training, which includes child development, safeguarding, health and safety, and lone working. Family Mentors also receive an extensive ongoing development programme, including work experience and an NVQ Level 2 Accreditation. This has proven to be a pathway into other employment opportunities with many Family Mentors supported to move into new, higher-paid jobs within the wider childcare sector.

SSBC won the AIM Qualifications and Assessment Group award for Bespoke Accreditation Centre/Employer of the Year 2024. This national award recognised the Level 2 Accreditation: Family Peer Support in the Early Years,²² SSBC's innovative bespoke training programme it developed for Family Mentors.

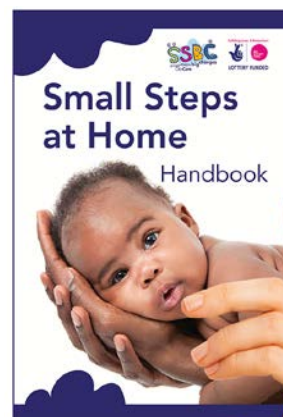
Nearly ten years on, the Family Mentor Service has a proven track record of success:

- It has supported over 6,000 individual children and their parents and conducted over 100,000 home visits.
- Children supported by Family Mentors show improvements in developmental outcomes compared to children without Family Mentor support - at both the age of two and when they get to school.
- Parents are extremely positive about the service, highlighting their increased confidence in raising their children, and how much they have valued the support of Family Mentors.

The Family Mentor programme has created wider social and economic value through creating 'local jobs for local people'. For example:

- 67 Family Mentors are employed at any one time.
- 116 Family Mentors have been employed throughout the programme's life.
- 94% of Family Mentors are parents local to Nottingham, with nearly half living in an SSBC ward.
- 41% of Family Mentors did not have anyone else in their household earning an income before being recruited, meaning additional money was put into the local community economy.

An ambition for the Family Mentor workforce is that it would be an aspiration for other local parents who could see themselves employed in these roles. This aim has become a reality, and local parents who received Family Mentor support have become one themselves. Many volunteers with the Family Mentor Service have become Family Mentors, with 22 of the current Family Mentor workforce previously volunteering with the service.



Below are examples of two Family Mentor's employment journeys with the service:



Stacey's Family Mentor journey

- No formal qualifications before starting as a Family Mentor.
- **2016** recruited as a Family Mentor.
- **2017** promoted to Family Mentor Supervisor.
- **2019** promoted to Family Mentor Assistant Manager.
- **2022** Promoted to Family Mentor Service Manager.
- Now qualified as Level 5 Chartered Manager.
- Delivers coaching and training for host VCSE organisation.

Hayley's Family Mentor journey

- Mum of 2 children in an SSBC ward.
- Supported by a Family Mentor and home visits.
- Applied to become a Family Mentor herself, supported by her own Family Mentor.
- Worked as a Family Mentor for 7 years supporting other parents and children.
- **2023** Became a Family Support Worker for the local authority





The success and impact of the Family Mentor Service have been widely recognised, both in terms of supporting families and in strengthening local community knowledge, skills, and economy. The Family Mentor Service has won:

- The Social Value Award - Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Health and Care Awards in 2023.²³
- The Early Intervention and Prevention Award - Health Service Journal Awards 2024.²⁴

3.4 Building Community Organisations' Capacity and Sustainability

The SSBC's Ideas Fund aims to support local VCSE organisations in building their capacity and longer-term sustainability. Two examples used by the Ideas Fund to promote this aim are the Learning and Development offer and the Capacity Building Fund:

3.4.1 Learning and Development Offer

SSBC offers a variety of Learning and Development support to organisations and projects funded via the Ideas Fund. This support includes:

- Service Design Workshops - to help shape emerging applications.
- An SSBC Ideas Fund Senior Project Officer - a dedicated single point of contact providing advice, support, oversight, and consistency for funded projects.
- Learning and Networking Events – enabling themed learning, support and collaboration, ideas sharing, and troubleshooting common challenges.
- Ad hoc support from SSBC's multidisciplinary team - functions include marketing and comms, data and performance, and community engagement.

The range of Learning and Development support has proved successful, and funded projects report that the knowledge and skills their teams have gained will be sustained within their organisations and applied to future delivery. Examples of applying this learning to support future sustainability include:

- Three recently funded projects have successfully sourced alternative funding to continue delivery once SSBC ends in 2025.
- One project has secured significant investment to expand delivery over the next five years.
- Two projects have submitted successful funding bids to The National Lottery for their wider organisations.

3.4.2 Capacity Building Fund

SSBC used the Ideas Fund to consider the ongoing sustainability of projects and organisations from 2025 onwards, following the end of the SSBC programme. Organisations identified a variety of individual areas requiring development, and the Capacity Building Fund was developed and offered to all funded Ideas Fund organisations via a streamlined application process.

The Capacity Building Fund allows a greater level of individualisation through which each organisation can spend a small amount of money (£3,000) to target the areas they identified as requiring development. The funds are intended for use in areas such as organisational capacity building, insight, capability, training, and resilience.

The Capacity Building Fund has proved a success, with a small amount of money making a big difference to organisations that struggle to allocate resources towards infrastructure and development. Some areas funded include:

- Promotional materials.
- Bid writing training to support funding applications.
- Improving data management IT infrastructure.
- Developing marketing materials and outreach campaigns.

- Leadership programme to enhance planning and decision-making.
- External consultancy to develop a 3-year plan.

Organisations are grateful for the Capacity Building Fund and the opportunity to spend on their development and sustainability, and feel it will have a positive impact on future delivery:

"A bit of time to develop it and put it on its feet in terms of sustainability is very welcome indeed"

"To be granted the sustainability funding also is very exciting."

"We are deeply grateful for the support for our sustainability and capacity building plans. We are committed to making the most of this additional funding to further benefit our community and the families we serve."

"The additional capacity-building funding will be invaluable in helping us to sustain and grow our efforts."



3.5 Flexibility and Adaptability

SSBC recognises the need for flexibility and adaptability within Community Based Commissioning approaches. The ongoing collaboration with local VCSE providers enables an understanding of the issues faced by these community organisations when delivering services. SSBC's test-and-learn approach enables the programme to improve and adapt provision to changing local and national circumstances, for example, in response to the impacts of increasing austerity, a national pandemic, and the cost of living crisis.

3.5.1 Around Again

Around Again is a baby bank that started in September 2020 following consultation with local communities and SSBC. It is a Family Mentor project designed to address rising inequality and deprivation in the local communities alongside the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 had on some families.



Family Mentor staff, alongside local community volunteers, administer the free Around Again scheme. It allows parents to request essential items for babies and children that they need, but if there is still some use left in the items afterwards, they are asked to donate them back so that they can go 'Around Again'. Feedback has shown that this 'Around Again' concept reduces people's negative feelings about having to receive donations in the first place. Community members using the scheme feel less like they are receiving charity, and it has been positively welcomed.



Around Again grew significantly over the first few months, demonstrating the level of need for the service within the community. It has since collaborated with a range of local public sector partners and community organisations such as midwives, health visitors, Salvation Army and homeless shelters, Himmah, and Hope Church. The scheme is one of the local supermarkets named charities and has a reciprocal referral arrangement with the local charity Sharewear Clothing Scheme.

The ability of the Family Mentor service to divert staff and financial resources towards this additional project has proven beneficial to local families. The Around Again project has proven a great opportunity for Family Mentors to enhance their engagement with existing families and build relationships with new families they may otherwise have struggled to engage with.

3.5.2 Room To Play

Room to Play²⁵ is an innovation developed as an extension of the Bulwell Family Mentor Service and in partnership with The Toy Library. Based in the commercial centre of Bulwell in a disused shop, Room to Play has been created to overcome one of the Family Mentor Service's most significant challenges, engaging families who are eligible to use the service (and other local child and family services), but don't know about or are suspicious of them. The concept of a 'shop front' project was developed alongside the local community and SSBC to create a 'home from home' and a warm, safe, and cosy space with lots of fun things to do.

Room to Play opened in October 2022 delivering a 'drop-in' style provision, it acts as a 'front door' to the Family Mentors and other local partner services to attract families who may reject a more conventional form of service delivery. Open 6 days a week it has proven a great success supporting the local community.

Room To Play allows Family Mentors to use the space to deliver group activities such as Baby Massage and Story & Rhyme Time and also engage on a one-to-one level with individual families through an open-door drop-in policy.

The Room to Play Evaluation has found a positive local impact, with parents saying:

"Before this there was nothing around here for young children, I had seen this on Facebook and then came the days after."

"I don't really know of any other playgroups, I've seen some in Mapperley and in the Gedling area but that's too far out and this is free and close to home."

"It's been really good; it was nice to meet other people, this is a good way of making friends especially for parents."

The Room To Play evaluation survey found the project delivered benefits to both parents and children who attended:

- **Benefits to parents and caregivers:**

- 70% reduced isolation.
- 66% improved wellbeing.
- 67% reported having more ideas of activities to do at home to support child development.

- **Benefits to babies and children:**

- 92% benefited from play opportunities.
- 80% benefited from opportunities to socialise with other children.
- 73% reported their child has grown in confidence.



The addition of Room to Play to the Family Mentor Service has proven a success within the Bulwell community, with the project evaluation finding:

"Room to Play raises parental aspirations and supports parenting. It complements the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme by providing a large, safe space for children to play and for families to realise their potential and thrive."

3.5.3 COVID-19 Response Fund and Cost of Living Fund

The COVID-19 Response Fund and the Cost of Living Fund enabled SSBC to adapt and provide additional support for families using existing Ideas Fund commissioning processes. Local organisations and community groups could apply for small grants to support families in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost of living crisis.



The COVID Response Fund offered awards between £1-6k and relaxed the SSBC programme's core requirements related to beneficiary residence and age. These adaptations enabled projects to change their delivery and engagement methods, the type of activity they offered, and who they engaged. It enabled delivery to respond flexibly to the challenges of a pandemic, including lockdowns and social

The Cost of Living Fund was developed in response to the cost of living crisis post-COVID, where high inflation increased the financial pressures on local families, many of whom were already living below the poverty line. The Cost of Living Fund allowed provider organisations greater flexibility by offering up to £3k to spend on services providing food and essentials, warmth, reducing social isolation and preserving activity that will support children's development. The Cost of Living Fund also aims to support community groups and organisations that saw an increase in demand and had to reduce their offer, or were struggling financially due to increased costs and inflation-related issues.

The COVID-19 and Cost of Living Funds supported local VCSE organisations as they navigated exceptional challenges and supported local communities during difficult times. Working collaboratively has allowed SSBC to fund projects to quickly pivot and adapt delivery to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis.

3.6 Taking Risks to Reap Rewards

The SSBC Ideas Fund remit includes developing brand-new services and supporting the development of local community organisations. This involves taking and managing risks by funding small and new organisations that may have little infrastructure, few staff, and no previous delivery experience with young children and parents.

SSBC has supported Ideas Fund projects to mitigate the risks and challenges they have faced. SSBC's strong relationships with project staff and volunteers, coupled with providers' determination to positively impact lives, have enabled projects to succeed.

3.6.1 Nurturing Fatherhood - Shifting Your Mindset

Shifting Your Mindset was a newly formed organisation with no track record of previous delivery when it submitted a project application to the Ideas Fund. The organisation applied for 3 years of funding at £10,000 per year to develop their Nurturing Fatherhood project to support positive father-child relationships. The project proposed a variety of activities aimed at fathers ranging from group sessions, mentorship, podcasts, and structured relationship-building sessions.

All Ideas Fund applications are subject to a due diligence check undertaken by Nottinghamshire Community Foundation, which administers the funds on SSBC's behalf. The due diligence for Shifting Your Mindset flagged risks related to being a brand-new organisation, including risks around a lack of financial details and accounts, experience, and volunteer-based delivery.

The Ideas Fund Evaluation Panel approved funding for Shifting Your Mindset, reasoning that the lack of father-focused support within communities meant the potential benefits outweighed the risks. The Nurturing Fatherhood project that Shifting Your Mindset subsequently delivered has exceeded expectations during the three years of Ideas Fund support. It is engaging with over 300 fathers and their children each year through different activities, including:

- Young Fathers and Families Programme.
- Father's Talk Drop-in Sessions.
- Dad's Garden.
- Community Kitchen and free hot meals.
- Barbershop network sessions.

There has been an ever-increasing demand for this range of father-focused activities and the organisation has received continual media interest from local TV, radio, and newspapers.^{26,27}

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Shifting Your Mindset has also been able to recruit project staff to strengthen organisational capacity and improve efficiency and coordination, and they have won multiple awards, including:

- **'Outstanding Parent'** and **'Most Transformed Life'** at the Black Achievers Awards.
- **'Best Health and Wellbeing Project'** and **'Best Green Initiative'** at the Nottingham Housing Heroes Awards.
- **'Community Support Award'** at the national Nursery World Awards 2024.

Shifting Your Mindset has used SSBC support and Ideas Funding as a catalyst to develop stronger partnerships and collaborations with other organisations to support their own capacity and delivery. They view the Ideas Fund as a stepping stone on the way to further funding sources and longer-term sustainability, saying:

"The support provided by SSBC has been instrumental in catalysing the positive growth and expansion of our services within the project. The financial backing and resources offered by the SSBC Ideas Fund have not only enabled us to maintain the project's core activities but have also empowered us to explore new avenues and extend our reach. This support has facilitated the implementation of impactful initiatives, such as the expansion of barbershop sessions and the establishment of a fathers' network. The SSBC fund has played a pivotal role in our ability to respond dynamically to community needs, fostering a more extensive and lasting impact on the communities we serve."

The initial risk SSBC and the Evaluation Panel took in approving the Nurturing Fatherhood project application has had a positive impact on local fathers and families, and has allowed Shifting Your Mindset to put organisational foundations in place, facilitating their growth, and supporting their sustainability beyond the lifespan of the Ideas Fund.

3.6.2 Curious Tots - Ignite!

Ignite! is a charity that, after a decade of nurturing older children's creativity, successfully applied to the Ideas Fund to expand their delivery to those under four years of age. The Curious Tots project aimed to improve young children's language and communication skills.

Upon securing funding, they collaborated with small groups of parents and practitioners already working with under four's to adapt their support towards younger children. Ignite! used this collaborative work to coproduce and develop new resources to deliver the Curious Tots project. They also used ongoing feedback from children, parents and early years practitioners to further test and develop the project's delivery resources.

The developmental journey of the Curious Tots project was not, however, a straightforward one, and they worked closely with SSBC to overcome many risks and obstacles.

Originally funded in 2018, the project started by delivering sessions in local community centres and libraries. COVID-19 interrupted the project's face-to-face delivery, and they had to alter the approach, sending out activity boxes and ideas booklets for families to undertake within the home.

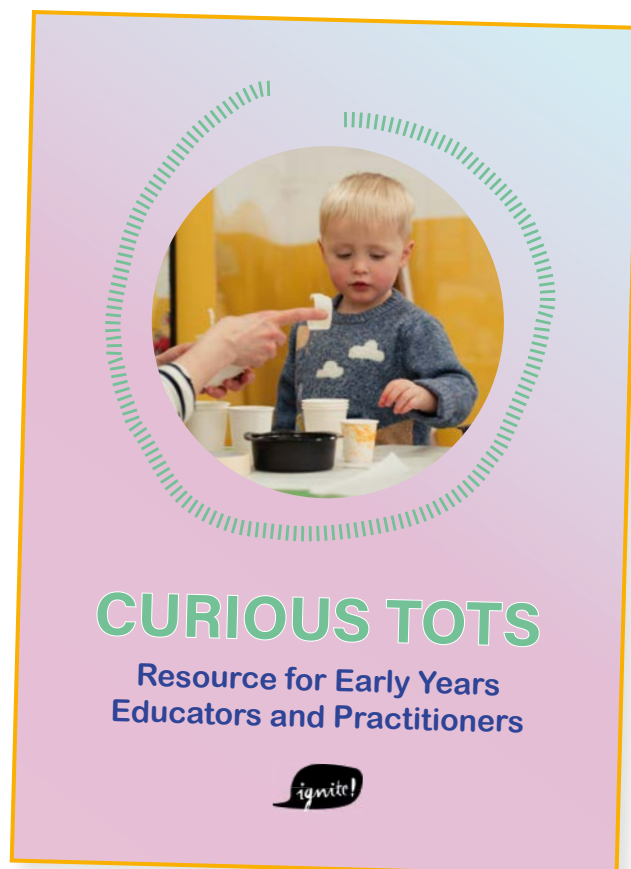
After COVID-19, the project reapplied for an Ideas Fund grant but sought to alter project delivery and proposed for it to take place in a nursery setting. This would enable the project to **"work in partnership with early years practitioners in schools, embed our approach in that setting, and so we could spend more time focusing on delivering high-quality sessions rather than on recruiting families to attend public settings."**

This new Curious Tots project saw significant delays due to staffing and engagement issues, which meant core delivery activity did not start until halfway through the first year and resulted in a third of the project budget going unspent. SSBC worked closely with them to understand the issues and develop how the project could

move forward. A plan was agreed outlining how the project would use the year one underspend to enhance their year two delivery; this flexibility enabled them to overcome the risks and issues they faced.

Curious Tots has subsequently gone on to be a successful Ideas Fund project despite these early challenges. The project has become an integral part of the nursery where they deliver weekly sessions, and the project's creative practitioner works closely with nursery staff to encourage creativity and curiosity in children. It has delivered training for other nurseries, early years practitioners, and college students, and also delivered sessions in the community and events such as Bulwell Arts Festival.

The project's ongoing delivery in the nursery has had a direct positive impact on children's communication outcomes and led to improvements in their Early Years Foundation Stage results. The success of the Curious Tots project has enabled Ignite! to secure an additional £140k from another funder to sustain and expand the project longer-term, after the Ideas Funding expires.



Ignite! say:

"We've hugely appreciated the support and flexibility of the SSBC team over the past few years. The Ideas Fund has opened up a huge opportunity for us at Ignite! - in 2018 we had only just begun our work with early years and over the past seven years support from SSBC has enabled us to learn from different iterations of the project and shape it into what we now have as a three-year £140,000 funded programme. This would not have been possible without the SSBC Ideas Fund."

"It's been great to be able to change our minds from the initial project plan, and the staff team have always respected us, listened to us, and recognised that we knew our programme best. The team have been useful sounding boards for ideas, they've asked questions and probed us where needed, let us know our strengths and areas for work/growth, and this relationship has helped us to iterate the project to where it is now."

3.7 Increasing Access and Collaboration in Diverse Communities

The SSBC delivery wards encompass communities and families who have traditionally been underserved, underrepresented, or seldom heard by mainstream services. SSBC believes that funding projects relevant to the needs of these diverse communities and delivering them in appropriate settings increases positive engagement, access, and outcomes. There are many successful examples of Ideas Fund projects that have developed and targeted their delivery towards SSBC's diverse communities:

3.7.1 Let's Talk - Berridge Primary and Nursery School

The Let's Talk project was developed to support Berridge School's nursery children who had no, or very little, English. Berridge Primary and Nursery School is located in an ethnically diverse area of Nottingham, and has over 80% of its pupils whose first language is not English.

The Ideas Fund money enabled the school's Early Years Lead to develop the Let's Talk project and purchase a range of resources that would encourage children to talk whilst playing with adults and other children. The project ensured it sourced resources to use with 3-year-old children that are real and not abstract, as real objects help nursery staff encourage more talking, the resources included play items, shelters, and other accessories.

The project is a daily programme delivered within the school's nursery that supports children to accumulate vocabulary, in particular, the first 100 words that children need to know and vocabulary from chosen curriculum themes. The Let's Talk project is a success and the school reports that:

"The Nursery staff have seen a big increase in the amount of English language being used by children who had little English or were not speaking English when they started our Nursery."

The school collects pupil data in the 17 Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum areas each term and has found that the Let's Talk project "has had a big impact on our Nursery children and their Communication and Language outcomes". The percentage of children achieving the required age-related scores has improved from the previous year (in each area of Listening and Attention, Understanding, and Speaking).

3.7.2 Learning to Love Books - Literacy Volunteers

Learning to Love Books is a project designed and delivered by Literacy Volunteers, a small Nottingham charity formed in 1996. Funded through the Ideas Fund to deliver sessions in local community settings, the project supports the development of the 'home learning environment' and models how books and activities can be used to have fun and develop good language skills.

As Literacy Volunteers developed the project, they began delivery within the ethnically diverse SSBC wards of Hyson Green & Arboretum and St. Ann's. Attendance grew rapidly, and around 75% of families attending sessions had English as an Additional Language. The project has had to work hard to ensure the stories are pitched at the right level for all attendees, and that a range of books from diverse authors are used which include diverse characters. They have coproduced sessions with communities and collaborated with partners such as the National Literacy Trust, local libraries, and early years practitioners.



The project has worked with partners such as Family Support Workers, Family Mentors, The Refugee Forum, and local community centres. The collaborative work with organisations enables project staff to learn about families' needs and signpost to appropriate services such as speech and language services, midwives and health visitors.

The impact of Learning to Love Book's work with diverse communities is valued by other organisations, with a local school leader saying:

"I recognise the importance of community engagement groups to support some of our most vulnerable young families. I need to once again say a massive thank you.... for the excellent outreach work you are doing in the community - the children (and parents) are clearly thriving from it!"

The local library manager said:

"Hyson Green is one of the most deprived areas of Nottingham and there are very few organisations providing free services for children. Many of the attendees have English as their second language, this session helps to develop their language skills which in turn helps with the child's early years development and preparing them for nursery."



3.7.3 Arab Babies Fun and Play - Empowerment for Heya

Arab Babies Fun and Play is an Ideas Fund project delivered by Empowerment for Heya, a local organisation supporting Arab women who have recently arrived in the UK, refugees and asylum seekers. Many of the women the project supports have come by themselves to the UK, are isolated and struggle to access services.

The Arab Babies Fun and Play project has created a safe, welcoming space with refreshments to provide essential nutrition during the rising cost of living. Children aged 0-3 years and their mothers can engage in structured play activities that promote social, emotional, and physical development. For mothers and expectant parents, the sessions have provided a valuable opportunity to access health and well-being information. Guest speakers from local healthcare services deliver talks on child development, breastfeeding, and postnatal support. The sessions have allowed mothers to share their experiences, learn from each other, build a stronger community support network, and reduce feelings of isolation and stress.

One parent said that:

"These sessions have made such a difference for my child and me. It's the only place where my child gets to play with others, and I've seen such an improvement in confidence and communication."

Empowerment For Heya's Director says:

"The support we received throughout this process was amazing. The funding was essential and crucial for the success of our project as it was the first of its kind. It not only enabled us to run impactful sessions but also provided the resources needed to effectively engage with the community."

The success of Empowerment For Heya's work has been recognised locally and they won the Together Award at the BBC Radio Nottingham 'Make A Difference' awards in 2023.



4 Challenges of Successful SSBC Community Based Commissioning

Successful Community Based Commissioning requires understanding the issues and barriers provider organisations face when developing and delivering projects, as well as those faced by local community members when participating in the commissioning and decision-making processes. SSBC recognised that Community Based Commissioning presents challenges for both providers and the community, and the programme has adapted its processes over the last ten years to support them to engage fully.

This section of the report outlines some examples from SSBC's approach to highlight challenges that others may face when implementing Community Based Commissioning.

4.1 Proportionality of Administration and Resource Requirements

Many organisations funded through the Ideas Fund are small, new, or primarily volunteer-led; meaning they often lack back-office infrastructure or staff capacity outside of direct project delivery. This presents challenges to individual projects, which fall into three broad areas: service design and project planning, data collection and monitoring, and capacity for learning and collaboration.

4.1.1 Service Design and Project Planning

'Implementation Science' and 'Service Design' processes have been key aspects of building a better evidence base during the SSBC programme, with the Lottery supporting this by engaging national partners and experts within these fields.

SSBC sought to share service design methodology with the local VCSE providers via the Ideas Fund. The funded organisations attended a service design workshop to plan the new project's delivery and increase staff knowledge and skills of designing and implementing new services. The service design workshops are designed to support the Ideas Fund's 'Test and Learn' approach and benefit future project delivery, ensuring:

- Project outcomes aligned to SSBC's.
- Robust planning, data collection, and impact measurement within projects.
- Building local knowledge of service design and implementation science.

These workshops allow SSBC and funded organisations to discuss project proposals, identify risks and issues, and produce a simple project overview and implementation plan.

Feedback from some VCSE organisations has been mixed on the benefits to them of SSBC's service design approach. Some participants found the two-page template difficult to complete, and others report they have had to adapt projects away from the service design during delivery to overcome unforeseen challenges.

However, even with these challenges, the Ideas Fund evaluation found the service design approach allowed:

- Local organisations to try new things without fear of failure and provided the unique ability to understand what would work in a community, how, and why.
- Local providers to think more broadly about their own impact (as opposed to focussing purely on quantitative levels of attendance) and the difference they make locally.



4.1.2 Data Collection and Monitoring

Community organisations funded through the Ideas Fund are asked to collect data on their beneficiaries, as per Lottery grant and SSBC programme evaluation requirements. This requires recording information on individual children, including age, postcode, ethnicity, and attendance at projects. For some providers, this presents little problem as they already have systems and processes in place to collect, store, and report such information. For others, this was a significant challenge as they do not have this infrastructure and have little experience collecting this type of data.

These challenges with systems and processes have led to data on beneficiaries being collected inconsistently across Ideas Fund projects. Those grantees without existing systems in place felt the amount of monitoring and data capture required was disproportionate and that they had to devote excessive time to it, taking them away from delivery activity.

SSBC has found that supporting grantees in this area successfully requires:

- An understanding of project capacity and capability for data monitoring and evaluation.
- Explaining the importance for projects to be able to evidence the impact of their work.
- Focusing projects' attention on essential and manageable data requirements.

4.1.3 Learning and Collaboration Capacity

Ideas Fund organisations value the Learning and Development Offer they receive from SSBC, including Service Design Workshops, Learning and Networking Events, and Conferences. This support strengthens local delivery and encourages collaboration and partnerships between local providers.

However, although welcome, the staff and volunteer capacity needed to participate in all these activities can prove challenging for community organisations. Attendance at an event or conference can be difficult for volunteers and staff who have a 'day job', and it may mean they need to take time out of project delivery or as annual leave from their paid work.

SSBC has found that smaller community organisations struggle to cover their core delivery if staff and volunteers are engaged in other activities. Some organisations may need support to fully engage in events and workshops, so they have the time to collaborate with partners and share their learning. Commissioners may have to find creative ways of delivering events to enable staff and volunteers to attend, including online delivery or offering financial support covering the costs of time off work or travel expenses.

4.2 Community Engagement and Support

Successful Community Based Commissioning requires a high level of ongoing engagement with local communities. This engagement requires time and resources to support local people to participate effectively in the commissioning process, make decisions on behalf of their whole community, and coproduce services.

SSBC designed its programme governance structure to promote and support effective community engagement, coproduction, and decision-making. This includes:

- SSBC Partnership Board with 40% parents voting rights.
- SSBC Community Engagement Officers.
- Parent Champions within each local community.
- Role descriptions and regular 1-1 and group support for Parent Champions.
- Regular Community Partnership meetings in each local area.



Public sector commissioners may face challenges in replicating the level of community engagement support offered within the SSBC programme, given the resources required to deliver it effectively. However, it may be possible for commissioners to collaborate through mechanisms such as Integrated Care Systems to bring together existing forums across their partnerships and share resources to ensure effective community engagement in their commissioning processes.





4.3 Differing Public Sector and VCSE Sector Approaches

Early in SSBC's development, a decision was taken to commission as much delivery as possible to the local Voluntary Community Social Enterprise Sector and aim to bring a VCSE approach to SSBC delivery that is rooted within local communities. SSBC has successfully achieved this aim but has also faced some challenges related to the differing styles and approaches between the public sector and VCSE organisations, including the different:

- Ways of working and relationships with families.
- Language used by practitioners.
- Risk tolerances.
- Levels of data recorded about beneficiaries.
- Organisational infrastructure - IT systems, administration, policies and procedures.

These challenges are not insurmountable, but commissioners may need to foster greater understanding so that statutory and VCSE organisations collaborate effectively, are valued as equal partners, and their services are not delivered in silos.

4.4 Organisational and Project Sustainability

Local community organisations highlight their sustainability and continued funding as a significant challenge to continuing delivery past the end of the SSBC programme. The Ideas Fund and Family Mentor Service has encouraged brand-new community projects and ideas, allowing them to develop a track record of delivery and evidence of their impact. SSBC's learning offer has built the capacity and knowledge of these providers, supporting many to secure additional funds to sustain and expand their delivery past the life of SSBC funding.

However, VCSE organisations recognise they will continue to face funding challenges within the context of stretched public sector budgets, higher demand for services, and transitions to larger Integrated Care Systems. Community Based Commissioning approaches can be used to support VCSE capacity and sustainability, evidence the significant positive impact of local community organisations, and increase their ability to secure longer-term funding from other sources.

5 Reflections

SSBC has been a significant local commissioner of early years services and the VCSE sector over the last ten years. Community Based Commissioning is an approach used to support the programme's aim of giving children the best start in life, it has facilitated the development of services that meet local families' needs and are rooted in the communities where they live.

SSBC has implemented its Community Based Commissioning approach based on the broad principles highlighted in chapter 3:

- Utilising community assets.
- Strengthening community decision-making and commissioning processes.
- Local jobs for local people.
- Building community organisations' capacity and sustainability.
- Flexibility and adaptability.
- Taking risks to reap rewards.
- Increasing access and collaboration in diverse communities.

5.1 Impact and Legacy

Over the last 10 years, SSBC's Community Based Commissioning has:

- Delivered a range of projects and services to over 10,000 individual children, with over 5,000 children supported by a Family Mentor.
- Connected communities and enabled them to make funding decisions on the services delivered in their areas.
- Allocated funding to a variety of local community assets and organisations, increasing their capacity and sustainability.
- Strengthened the local economy by raising aspirations and skills and supporting community members into employment.

SSBC's Community Based Commissioning legacy is far-reaching and has positively impacted local children, families, communities, organisations, workforces, and commissioners. It has contributed significantly towards delivering the 'A Better Start' programme outcome to:

Bring about 'systems change'; that is to change, for the better, the way local health, public services and the voluntary community sector work together with parents to improve outcomes for children.

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