

Growing Confidence Interim Report

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Impact Consultancy & Research



The evaluation was conducted by Impact Consultancy & Research

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1 Introduction

This is the interim evaluation report of the Growing Confidence programme. This report evaluates the programmes successes to date in meeting its stated outcomes and outputs, highlights emerging findings and makes recommendations as to how it may need to refocus during the remaining time in order to meet its aims.

2 Background to Growing Confidence

Growing Confidence is a £898,190 five year programme funded through the Big Lottery Fund's, 'Our Environment Our Future' programme. It began in January 2016 and delivery will continue until December 2020. The programmes overarching aim is to grow the confidence of young people aged 11-25 to engage with their local environment, progressing their knowledge and skills to a level that meets their aspirations and abilities.

The programme is managed by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and originally had four partner organisations each of whom brought an area of specialism to the delivery:

Shropshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) is dedicated to conserving and promoting the wildlife and wild places of Shropshire. SWT acts as the programme lead and is the accountable body. Within Growing Confidence it delivers alternative curriculum activity, volunteering opportunities via work parties, a youth club and ad hoc holiday activity such as trips and taster days.

Fordhall Community Land Initiative is England's first community owned farm. It focuses on reconnecting people to food, farming and the environment via social enterprise. Within Growing Confidence it delivers alternative curriculum activity working with young people on the brink of exclusion from school.

Field Studies Council (FSC) is the leading provider of out-of-classroom environmental education. There are 19 centres nationwide providing facilities for day and residential training courses. Within Growing Confidence the FSC delivers specialist training courses (day and residential) for young people with an existing passion and interest in the environment.

The Plunkett Foundation helps communities to take control of their issues and overcome them together. In particular, it seeks change through social enterprise to enrich community life. Within Growing Confidence the focus of their delivery was social enterprise support and mentoring. In year 2 of the programme the Plunkett Foundation made a decision to withdraw as a delivery partner due to capacity issues. Their part of the programme, which was primarily targeted at the 18+ age group, has subsequently been picked up by SWT and has been refocused to provide more tailored advice and guidance to support young people into employment as opposed to helping them to set up their own social enterprises as originally envisaged.

3 Aims, objectives and outcomes of Growing Confidence

The overarching aim of the Growing Confidence programme is to grow the confidence of young people aged 11-25 to engage with their local environment. It aims to achieve this through providing a wide range of environmental vocational based activities that cater for a broad range of interests and levels of knowledge and experience.

The programme has four primary outcomes under which sit a number of key performance indicators.

Outcome 1. Young people will feel more connected to the local environment and will be more environmentally aware.

KPI By the end of the programme the programme will have engaged over 1000 young people. All will be more environmentally aware and some will have enhanced knowledge, some better skills and some enhanced self-esteem measured via our evaluation.

Outcome 2. Young people will know how to take practical action which will have a positive impact on the environment.

KPI By the end of the programme 250 young people will have engaged in practical conservation of the natural environment on sites local to them.

Outcome 3. Young people will have gained skills, knowledge and confidence which increases their employment opportunities.

KPI's

3a. By the end of the programme we will have engaged with over 1000 young people. All will be more environmentally aware; some will have enhanced knowledge, some better skills and some enhanced self-esteem measured via our evaluation.

3b. By the end of the programme 20 participants will have moved into employment.

3c. By the end of the programme 10 participants will have received support to start a business.

3d. By the end of the programme 300 young people will have received tutored training on a range of environmental issues and opportunities.

Outcome 4. Partner organisations feel better skilled and informed about working with young people.

KPI By the end of the programme 4 partner organisations will be better skilled and informed in working with young people of all abilities.

Underpinning the outcomes and KPI's are a range of outputs that reflect the range of activities and target audiences for the programme:

- 1 Offering training places to 100 young people under threat of exclusion from school, (April 2016 - Oct 18).
- 2 Offering John Muir introductory sessions to 1000 young people, (1048 young people engaged April 2016 - Oct 18).
- 3 Offering full John Muir Awards to 160 young people, (73 achieved April 2016 - Oct 18).
- 4 Offering opportunities to 10 teachers to work alongside programme staff and/or attend targeted training courses to learn how to integrate the environment into the curriculum and in after school clubs, (7 engaged April 2016 - Oct 18).
- 5 Running 35 day-courses and 15 residential courses to study aspects of the environment in greater depth, (32 day-courses and 12 residential delivered April 2016 - Oct 18).
- 6 Offering 30 young people volunteering work placements of a minimum of 5 days duration with either Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Fordhall Farm or FSC to experience the range of job opportunities in the environmental sector, (65 delivered April 2016 - Oct 18).

4 Growing Confidence Delivery and Management

At the start of the programme SWT employed a part time Programme Coordinator to over-see programme delivery, grant claims, reporting and liaison with the programme steering group. As a result of staff changes this role has subsequently been redefined and a number of changes have been implemented which have improved the efficiency of the programme. These changes include clearer lines of management and accountability, disbanding the programme steering group meetings and replacing them with less frequent staff meetings. These changes have enabled staff members to free up time to manage the administrative aspect of the programme e.g. monitoring and data collection.

The programme also employs 2 full time Youth Workers one hosted by SWT and the other by Fordhall Farm, in addition to a part time Training Course organiser based at the FSC. The Plunkett Foundation's withdrawal from the programme left a gap in relation to the delivery of activity aimed at the older participants which has recently been filled through the appointment of an additional part time youth worker based at SWT. This post is focusing on work with 18+ age group to provide mentoring support and career advice, support and guidance.

Although there have been a number of staff changes during the first half of the programme this does not appear to have significantly impacted upon delivery.

5 Methodology

This is a formative evaluation which means that the evaluators were involved in the development of the monitoring and data collection framework and used evidence and data (collected to date) to review progress as activity was being delivered.

Feedback and data was collected from a number of sources in the process of conducting the interim evaluation:

- Analysis of participant survey responses completed throughout the duration of the programme.
- Analysis of the results of the interim on-line participant survey.¹
- Review of end of year monitoring reports provided to BIG Lottery.
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews with key staff from each of the delivery partner organisations.

6 Evaluation findings

To date Growing Confidence has engaged a total of 3,193 young people far exceeding its original target of 1000. Of these a significant majority (2,908) have been one-off engagements lasting a day or less and the remainder have been short term (162) or long-term engagements (123). The programme has already met or exceeded many of its targets which is a significant achievement given that the programme still has another 2 years to run.

If the partnership continues to deliver the range and quality of activities delivered in the first half of the programme and develops targeted workstreams to help older participants move into employment it is very likely that it will achieve or exceed all of its stated targets. The only exception to this relates to output 3c which relates to young people being supported to set up their own businesses. This target was aligned to the involvement of The Plunkett Foundation who specialise in social enterprise development and support. Given that they are no longer delivery partners it would be opportune to review this output and to explore with partners how this element of the programme may be achieved or whether it needs to be refocused in order to maximise the existing skills and expertise within the partnership.

Results from both the interim and on-going participant surveys highlight that the programme is delivering high quality, engaging activity that is meeting participant needs and delivering against its outcomes. 61% of those completing the training feedback form rated the activity as excellent and 37% said it was either very good or good.

When participants are asked how the programme could be improved the majority of responses can be categorised under 'no-improvement required'. Where respondents did specify an improvement the most common one identified was 'more time', specifically the desire to have longer or more frequent sessions.

¹ 38 participants responded to the interim survey. 55% of whom were aged between 11-15, which is the youngest age group participating in the programme. Just under a quarter were 16-18 and the remainder were split across the two remaining age brackets (19-21 and 22-25). Taking part in a Shropshire Wildlife Trust work party was the most common activity the participants had taken part in, followed by courses run by the FSC (both day courses and residentials) and alternative curriculum activity delivered by SWT.

7 Performance against outcomes

This evaluation focuses specifically on the four key outcomes of the Growing Confidence programme:

Outcome One – Young people will feel more connected to the local environment and be more environmentally aware.

A primary focus of the programme was to deliver activity that connected young people to their local environment and resulted in them becoming more environmentally aware. 73% of the interim survey respondents stated that they had increased their awareness about the environment quite a lot or significantly since participating in the programme. This is further supported by feedback gathered from participants throughout the course of the programme.

A key indicator of how connected young people feel about the environment is their desire to want to do more to help the environment. Results of the participant survey show that 42% of respondents stated that their involvement in the programme had strongly increased their desire to do more and 44% said it had increased a bit. It is too early in the programme to draw any correlation between the duration of activity and the impact on outcomes for the individual. Whilst it would be logical to assume that the longer an individual engages with the subject matter or programme the more they get out of the experience this is an assumption that the evaluation will explore in its secondary phase.

Outcome Two – Young people will know how to take practical action, which will have a positive impact on the environment

One of the key elements of the Growing Confidence programme is that in addition to raising awareness and informing young people about protecting their local environment they also know what action they can take that will have a positive impact on the environment. This outcome is measured not only through demonstrating that young people have been involved in taking practical action as part of programme but also that they have been inspired to engage in environmental activity outside of the programme. Interestingly 42% of the young people surveyed said they were already taking action which may indicate that the programme is attracting a significant number of young people who already have an interest in the environment. Of the remaining participants 56% said they were quite or very likely to take action in the future which demonstrates the programmes ability to also act as a catalyst for individual action.

It is worth noting here, specifically in relation to the alternative curriculum aspect of the programme, that the environment is not considered to be the key driver for engagement for these young people and is in many cases their first experience of environmental activity. However there is some evidence that even for those young people that do not have an initial connection with the local environment that once they are exposed to environmental activity they develop a strong and on-going relationship with it.

“We have had young people that have been forced to go there but then they come back willingly to help with events. One of the young people has been coming for about 18 months and is now totally engaged with the programme.” Delivery partner.

Further evidence of practical action and engagement outside of the programme activity was highlighted by the delivery partners. These included programme participants:

- Taking up roles on the national Our Bright Futures Youth Forum and participating in anti-plastic campaigning work.
- Getting involved in volunteering with other environmental organisations.
- Independently undertaking checks on wildlife reserves locally and reporting back incidents, e.g. of fly tipping.
- Using iRecord to record wildlife observations.
- Acting as Programme Champions.

Outcome Three – Young people will have gained skills, knowledge and confidence, which increases their employment opportunities

“Pretty much every single one of the jobs I did was something new for me to learn. Socialising with others isn’t something I do all too regularly either so I suppose I built skills in that too.”

Programme participant.

It is evident from feedback gathered through participant surveys and the perceptions of staff delivering the programme that the programme is successfully providing young people with new skills, increased knowledge relating to the environment and in some cases increased confidence.

Through their participation in the programme young people have been able to develop a wide range of skills many of which they are learning for the first time. These include a mixture of physical and more academic skills such as coppicing, species identification and bird ringing. The practical conservation skills provided through the programme introduce young people to as many different aspects of natural conservation as possible. This provides them with an opportunity to decide what aspects of conservation they are interested in and also gives them an insight into potential environmental careers. This breadth of activities is one of the key strengths of the programme and caters for a wide range of abilities, interests and needs. As a result it provides participants with a range of entry points into environmental activism depending on what their starting point is.

Participants most commonly identified that the best part about participating in the programme was the opportunity to learn either through the acquisition of new skills or learning about habitats and wildlife. 82% of the interim survey respondents stated they had learnt quite a lot or a lot of new practical skills. Specific practical skills were most commonly identified when people were asked what was the most useful thing they had got from going on the course. Other comments commonly referred to enjoying undertaking outdoor activities, meeting like-minded young people and the practical nature of the programme.

In addition to providing participants with hard skills the programme is also delivering in its ambition to build the confidence of many of the young people it engages with. Results from the interim survey show that 39% of respondents had significantly changed the way they felt about themselves in a positive way as a result of their participation in the programme.

Whilst there are specific examples of increased confidence from across the programme this is particularly evident through the alternative curriculum activity. This activity is targeted at young people who find participation in mainstream curriculum more challenging as a result of behavioural issues or lower levels of academic capability. Activity delivered through the programme provides a safe, supportive yet challenging alternative to the classroom environment. Through engaging them in hands on physical outdoor activity where they can clearly see the results and impact of their efforts the young people start to believe in their own abilities which in turn builds their confidence.

“Soft skills is something we work on a lot. “I didn’t think I could do this and now here I am doing it”, we hear this a lot. They are often told they can’t do things within the education system but this gives them the opportunity to do things that they can do.” Delivery partner.

This aspect of the programme also enables the young people to develop positive relationships with adults outside of a school or family setting, which in many cases are challenging environments for these young people.

“It may be the first time that an adult has listened to them in a positive way and responded to them and valued their contribution.” Delivery partner.

In addition to building confidence the programme facilitates the development of a wider range of soft skills. 63% of interim survey respondents stated they had improved their social skills as a result of their engagement. Activities like the construction of the straw bale building provide them with opportunities to work with others to achieve a common goal which develops their team working skills and gives them a sense of purpose and achievement. Activity often requires the participants to follow instructions which improves their active listening skills and much of the activity encourages the participants to manage their own risk e.g. the use of tools or lighting fires. All of these skills play an important role in preparing young people for employment, as does the social learning derived from participation.

Providing participants with a sense of purpose and placing value on the work they undertake extends into much of the activity delivered through the programme and is perceived to be a key element in the successful engagement of the young people.

The outdoor nature of the activities is perceived to be a key factor in the positive impact on the health and wellbeing of some of the participants. This therapeutic aspect of the programme is an avenue that SWT are currently exploring in conjunction with the local authorities in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin. Whilst these discussions are still in their early phases being able to evidence the contribution that hands-on environmental activity has towards sustaining and improving the wellbeing of the programme participants would be of real value and could potentially unlock resources to sustain activity in the future.

All of the delivery partners also highlighted the value of the programme being free from the constraints of formal education and curriculum-based activity and the flexibility this brought to the programme.

“This connects them with real work, follows their interests, covers real issues and exposes them to professionals working in the field.” Delivery partner.

This has enabled the programme to take a much more responsive approach to young people's needs and interests and has enabled activity in some instances to be tailored for specific groups of young people such as FSC's work with Harper Adams University and Reaseheath College students. It has also enabled the programme to offer one-to-one support to a number of individuals through the provision of mentoring sessions, career advice and the provision of references supporting FE and job applications.

There is a small core of longer-term participants that have engaged with the programme in a more sustained way and as a result some of these individuals have subsequently gone on to take up placements within SWT, have secured jobs or are now undertaking environmentally focused higher education courses. This demonstrates the programme's ability to act as a stepping-stone on to further learning or career opportunities. It was also recognised that the programme plays an important role in inspiring young people to make a difference.

"It's not just about building your career or adding to your CV but it's about inspiring people."

Delivery partner.

Outcome Four – Partner organisations feel better skilled and informed about working with young people

For each of the delivery partners their engagement in the programme has enabled them to either expand into a new type of activity or to access a new audience. Growing Confidence has provided them with a vehicle through which to access a new audience of young people from 11-25. Previously work undertaken with young people focused on primary school aged children and family-based activity. Through the variety of courses and activities offered by the programme they have significantly extended their reach and now provide a much greater continuum of environmental opportunities for young people. The programme has also helped SWT to develop closer working relationships with a number of local organisations such as Shropshire Youth Association and Caring for God's Acre.

"Growing Confidence has enabled us to engage with a much younger audience which bridges the gap between our work with primary schools and our existing volunteer base which tends to be an older demographic." Delivery partner.

Moving into this new area has challenged SWT to think differently and more creatively about their offer and to set up a number of new activities and work streams e.g. Wild Roots youth club, careers advice and placements. This has encouraged them to trial new approaches and to learn from their failures and build on their successes. Targeting a new age range has also enabled them to open up existing activities, such as the weekend work parties, to a much younger demographic.

For The Field Studies Centre the programme has enabled them to work with individual young people with an existing interest in field studies as opposed to school or college groups, leading to a different approach in residentials as they are not restricted by the requirements of the formal curriculum. The activity delivered through Growing Confidence has also tied in with aspects of existing FSC activity and has bridged the gap between other programmes such as Young Darwin and Duke of Edinburgh Awards. This has enabled FSC to offer a continuum of opportunities to young people.

For Fordhall Farm the programme has enabled them to sustain and build on their existing experience of inclusion work with young people and continue to develop their expertise in this growing area of work.

8 Challenges

Whilst in the main working for with these new audiences has been a positive experience for the delivery partners it has also resulted in a number of challenges:

Recruitment – The recruitment of individual young people, as opposed to groups, onto the programme has been difficult particularly given the lack of dedicated resources to support marketing and recruitment to the programme. As a result it has required partners to think differently about how they have promoted the programme. As an age group 11-25 year olds are hard to reach outside of the formal networks such as educational institutions. In addition young people are busy with many competing demands on their time and from 16+ they become increasingly transient, difficult to engage and to retain contact with. In order to overcome this the programme has made good use of social media to connect with young people to promote the opportunities it has available. It has also found word of mouth to be an effective way of recruiting young people and has promoted the programme through local colleges and universities this way.

Recruitment onto FSC residential remains a challenge despite the heavily subsidised cost. Opening the criteria out to non-Shropshire residents has helped however securing sufficient numbers still remains a challenge in part linked to insufficient capacity to invest in promotion. Going forward the programme may wish to consider reviewing the FSC offer and focusing more on working with existing groups of older FE students. It may also want to consider a range of alternative delivery options. These could include offering more intensive one-to-one support to 16+ who are considering a career in the environmental sector, running shorter half-day or after school field study sessions for 11-16 year olds, developing short on-line courses. Re-focusing some capacity on the 16+ age group may also help the programme to achieve its employment related targets.

Lack of resources to support intensive one-to-one support – Whilst the programme has demonstrated its ability to successfully work with young people that exhibit more challenging behaviour the resources needed to effectively support young people with extreme emotional and behavioural issues are not currently deemed to be sufficient. One-to-one, and in some cases two-to-one, support is required and if the programme is going to be able to safely accommodate and support these individuals and those they are working alongside, then additional resources would be required. Alternatively the programme may need to develop inclusion guidelines in order to ensure that any young person that participants in the programme meets a specified threshold of support needed.

9 Additional findings

Partnership approach

There was a sense amongst the partners that delivering the programme through a partnership model has added value in a number of ways. Firstly in terms of the spectrum of activity offered through the programme they are able to deliver a range of opportunities in terms of time commitment, level of interest, existing knowledge and experience. The model provides both entry-level opportunities through activities such as the alternative curriculum programme and taster sessions and progression routes for those that wish to develop their knowledge or skills.

In addition two of the partners have worked together to deliver joint events and have shared equipment and other resources. This collaborative approach is an aspect of the programme that could potentially be further developed both on a delivery level and a more strategic level where the opportunities arise and the capacity of the partners allows. At an operational level this may result in increased cross-fertilisation of participants, cost-savings and the co-production of future services. Strategically it may be beneficial in terms of developing a shared evidence base and securing on-going resources to support the programme through joint tendering for commissioned services.

10 Emerging findings

The following are key points emerging from the interim evaluation:

- The programme is successfully providing young people with new practical environmental skills and an increased knowledge of the environment.
- Through their engagement with the programme many participants are developing a range of broader life-skills and have increased their confidence and self-esteem.
- The programme has demonstrated its ability to act as a catalyst for individuals to take positive environmental action.
- The breadth of the activity delivered through the programme enables it to engage a wide spectrum of young people and provides a range of different entry points for young people to connect and build a relationship with their local environment.
- Delivery partners have developed their experience of working with a wide range of young people and have either created new services to cater for the younger demographic or have broadened out or enhanced their existing offer.
- Whilst the engagement of young people across the programme has been a challenge, the 'residential' offer delivered through FSC has been particularly difficult to recruit to.
- Whilst the programme has undertaken work with the 18-25 age group this aspect of the programme is less well developed and further targeted work is needed in this area in order to reach the programmes employment related targets.

11 Recommendations

The following recommendations should be considered in light of the interim evaluation findings:

- 1 If capacity allows delivery partners should consider whether there are additional opportunities to strengthen the collaborative nature of the partnership both in terms of on the ground delivery and strategic developments.
- 2 Delivery partners should start to explore how the activities delivered through the programme can be sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme.
- 3 Explore how stronger links can be made between the programme and the health and well-being agenda.
- 4 Review output 3c and explore how this element of the programme may be achieved or whether it needs to be refocused in order to maximise the existing skills and expertise within the partnership.
- 5 Review the use of residentials as the primary delivery vehicle for FSC and explore alternative streams of activity that may open up opportunities to a wider audience.
- 6 Review the issues relating to ratios of support when undertaking inclusion work and explore developing inclusion guidelines.

12 Conclusion

It is evident at this interim stage that Growing Confidence is achieving its aim to grow the confidence of young people to engage with their local environment and that it is increasing their knowledge and skills to enable them to meet their aspirations and abilities. There is also evidence to show that the programme has acted as a catalyst for many of the young people it has engaged with to take independent action to support the environment. It has also provided an alternative, supportive environment for young people to build their own confidence, gain a sense of achievement and see the value of their engagement.

It has achieved this to date through delivering a broad range of high quality activities that enable young people to connect with their local environment in a range of different ways. The breadth of activities is one of the key strengths of the programme allowing people a range of entry points into environmental activism depending on their existing levels of interest, knowledge or experience.

Each of the partners delivering elements of Growing Confidence has a clear remit and brings their own skills and specialisms to the programme. This has enabled the programme to provide distinct offers to a wide spectrum of young people providing some young people with their first environmental experience whilst helping others to build on an existing passion for the natural world or move into environmentally focused further education or careers. Simultaneously the programme has enabled the partners to enhance or expand their services and reach new audiences.

Moving into the final two years of the programme delivery partners need to focus on how programme funded activity can be sustained beyond December 2020 to ensure that opportunities for young people to positively engage with their local environment are on-going.

