



Our Place

Learning Report on 'Our Place' funding in Scotland



This paper has been prepared by The National Lottery Community Fund to summarise learning from our place-based funding programme, Our Place.

Keyword reference: place-based working, funding, place, relationships, learning, Our Place, thriving communities, people in the lead, microgrants

Contact: Georgios Pappas

scotlandknowledgelearningteam@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

January 2020

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Learning from the programme’s features	8
Learning about the change Our Place has contributed to	13
Learning from the programme’s challenges	18
What could have improved Our Place?.....	22
Recommendations	25
Bringing the people and learning together.....	29

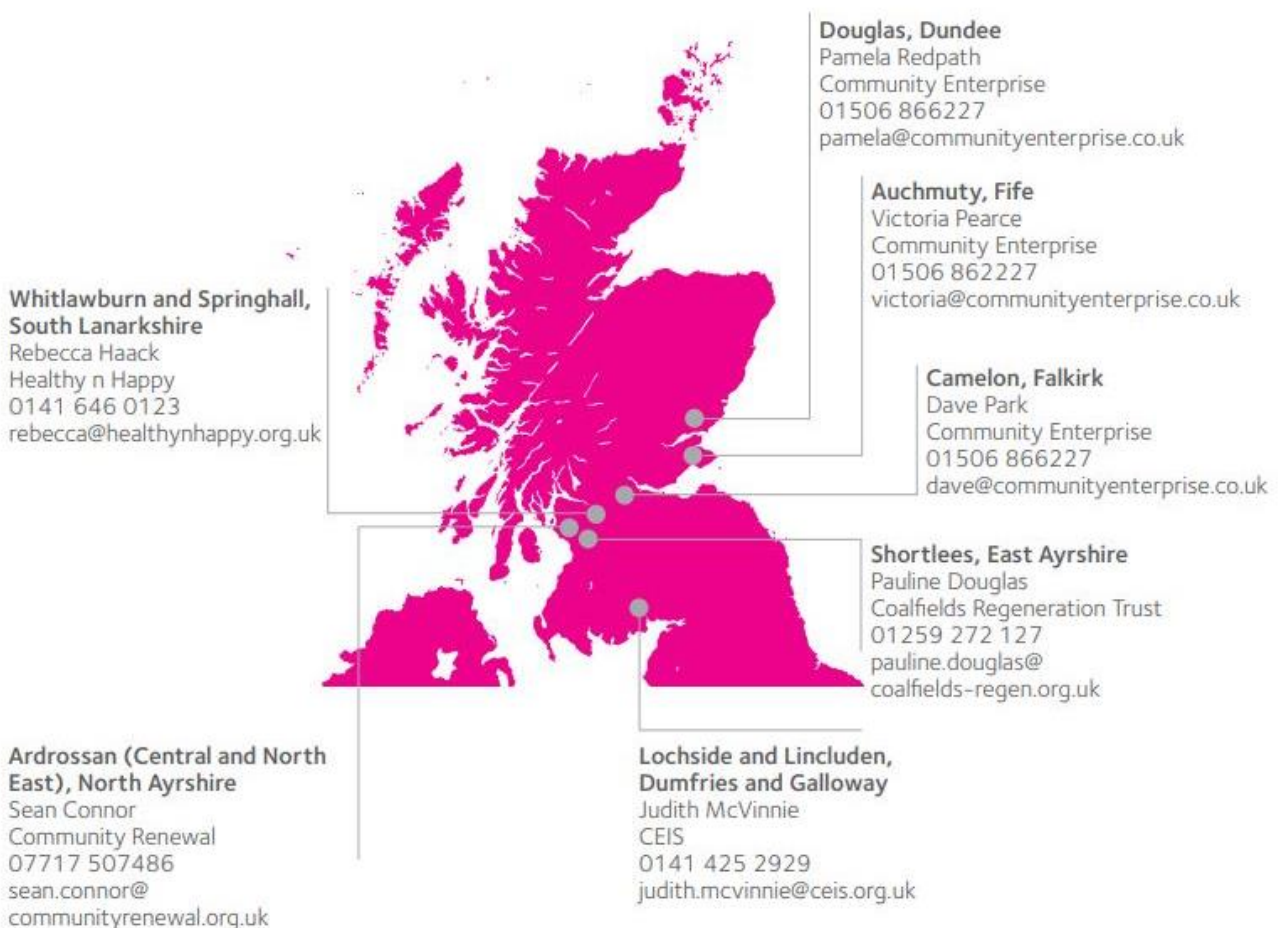
Introduction

About the Learning Review

The Knowledge and Learning Team at The National Lottery Community Fund Scotland undertook an informal review of the Our Place programme. The review collated learning from various stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the programme.

Snippets of learning will be shared across our social media channels and blogs so we would encourage you to follow us on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/tnlcomfundscot>, on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/TNLCommunityFundScotland/>, and subscribe to our blog here: <https://bigblogscotland.org.uk/>. Our designated hashtag for our learning products is #LearningAsWeGo.

Introducing Our Place



Our Place Areas

Our Place is a National Lottery Community Fund initiative that began working with five communities in Scotland in 2010. It aims to enable local people and groups to determine where National Lottery funding is spent in their community. As part of the process, local steering groups would be formed to develop and oversee the proposed projects to ensure they align with the local community's vision. Our Place

communities are typically around 5-10,000 people and based in areas that traditionally have not had what we would consider to be their fair share of National Lottery funding.

During the first Our Place initiative from 2010-2013, £11million was awarded to 25 projects that have worked to set up new Trusts, develop community spaces, improve community transport, encourage better community health, deliver services for older people and young people, strengthen family support, and more. Significant investment was also made in building the capability of the local community.

Our Place launched in a further seven communities across Scotland in 2014 and our learning from the first five years heavily influenced the way that we are working with the current communities. The emerging dialogue with other funders and practitioners around asset-based community development at that time also influenced the development of the second iteration of the programme. Our Place was designed as a 10-year funding programme with five years of community development support and was assigned a £12m budget to achieve the following three outcomes:

- 1 Communities have more influence on decisions taken locally
- 2 Communities have more sustainable services and facilities that reflect their local priorities
- 3 People say their community is a better place to live

Seven community development support contracts were procured and awarded to five community development organisations. These partners are referred to in this paper as community builders. Their remit included working with the community in their area to map its various assets, form a five-year vision, provide capacity building support to local people and grantholders, and promote the involvement of as many people in the community as possible.



There are five key stages in the programme:

Programme design

- Work with stakeholders to identify geographic areas and boundaries
- Set out community engagement plans and how to track progress.



Community building starts

- Work with stakeholders to identify geographic areas and boundaries
- Set out community engagement plans and how to track progress.



Asset mapping and visioning

- Identifying the strengths and resources: buildings and environment, networks, services, skills, groups
- Consultation to establish a five-year community vision
- Work with people known as community connectors who would act as links between the communities and the programme.



Design, funding and delivery of projects

- Individual or networks of grant holders design projects that can help deliver the community vision
- The Fund assesses applications and decides whether or not to fund. In practice, all projects have been awarded money.

Beyond the main funding investment, we've introduced a Community Chest - a pot of funding for up to **£2,000**, enabling people to test ideas or support smaller-scale projects in each area.



Ongoing support

- During the five-year community building period, community builders take the lead on supporting the community
- After that period lapses, our Funding Officers continue supporting the grant holders as with any programme.

Our Place approached the end of year five in August 2019. 77 grants (totalling approximately £9.m of National Lottery funding)¹ have been awarded through the programme alongside over 350 awards of grants up to £2,000 through the Community Chest. The average grant size is £129,000 but we have awarded grants of amounts

¹ As of January 2020.

anywhere between £10,000 and £1m. The awards cover a range of community activities; from refurbishing community assets to youth work.

Methodology

Given the abundance of information on place-based approaches that is available, we decided to examine some of the existing knowledge within the sector and identify any opportunities to contribute with learning from Our Place.

We found a plethora of toolkits on designing and delivering place-based initiatives by local authorities, public bodies and other funders alike. Agencies are also sharing good practice models that they are either implementing or funding, as well as their overall experiences of place-based approaches. However, we perceived a lack of focus on the challenges faced at the various layers of place-based working - such as community building, funding, delivering services, etc. Additionally, much of the existing learning is aimed primarily at funders and community development organisations while learning for grassroots delivery organisations is not particularly featured. As a result, we decided to focus our review on unpicking some of those challenges and facilitating safe spaces for people to share their experiences as honestly as they wished. We also looked at whether the funding and community building had a positive impact on the seven areas and their communities.

The review was conducted in five major phases:



Planning: a skeleton of the learning review was developed outlining the aim, audiences, steps, timeline and people involved. Workshops were held with staff from the Fund to formulate learning questions.



Data gathering: through a combination of semi-structured one-to-one in-person or telephone interviews, interactive workshops and email correspondence. Quantitative data was gathered from our internal grant management system.



Data analysis: coding of qualitative data, extraction of quotes and cross-referencing data across areas and themes. Quantitative data was manipulated on Excel and Tableau to produce graphs to illustrate trends.



Content production: learning was initially collated in this learning report in collaboration with the Fund's evaluation and communication teams. Other learning products will follow from this report and are likely to include social media posts and blogs.



Learning exchange gathering: a one-day event held in Glasgow where people from Our Place and stakeholders from other place-based initiatives were invited to hear about the findings from the learning review and discuss their experiences on thematic work.

Limitations

It is important to recognise that the findings of this report are limited in some ways and care should be taken before they are used to draw conclusions or apply elsewhere.

Limited quantitative data

The learning review was designed towards the end of year four of Our Place and took place throughout year five. Even though a range of quantitative data was collected from year one, it was not done so with a learning review in mind which caused inconsistencies in how and what type of data was recorded. Some of the quantitative findings are therefore approximate rather than absolute.

Additionally, we did not process quantitative data using statistical software and are therefore only able to offer high level insights such as totals, averages and basic trends. We intentionally aimed to use quantitative data to complement the stories and narrative of people involved in Our Place rather than numbers dominating the pages of this report.

Power dynamics between researcher and participants

We planned this learning adventure with stories at its core. We wanted to avoid exhausting people by exposing them to a whole range of input methods, so we felt that talking directly to them was the best option. We considered various measures to ensure that people felt comfortable to be as honest as they wished about their experiences:

- **Anonymising all conversations:** People were assured they would remain anonymous and any indicators that could potentially identify people would be excluded from the final products
- **Meeting at a neutral space:** We endeavoured to meet people at a space they'd be comfortable in such as their offices or a community venue
- **Consultation carried out by a team not related to funding:** People were assured that any information they shared would not be disclosed with their funding officers and would not have any impact on their grant application or management.

However, we need to acknowledge that even with these measures in place, people were interacting with a representative of an organisation they rely on as an income source or have a good working relationship with. As a result, people may have been more cautious about what information they shared and how. We are confident that most people felt comfortable to be honest about the information they are sharing which is reflected on the constructive feedback received on various aspects of the programme.

Limited project equalities identifiers

We did not collect any equalities data of project users or those involved in local decision-making. On reflection and given the nature of the communities Our Place has been serving, an analysis of the diversity of the people impacted by the programme would have been beneficial. Due to the lack of data, we are unable to make comparisons with official data sets or draw conclusions about whether the diversity of projects and community groups reflect the diversity of the community.

Learning from the programme's features

Programme planning and design

The 2014 - 2019 cycle of the programme was its second iteration. Learning from the first round of the programme informed some of the processes of this iteration.² The following features were implemented:

- **Geographical boundaries are defined by the community:** we were advised to avoid defining a community without consulting them first as their geographical boundaries often differ to the official. However, we have found that certain communities still felt that their geographic boundaries incorporated multiple neighbourhoods which caused some territorial frictions. We would advise that spending more time alongside communities before defining the geographical boundaries can help unpick some of those local nuances and dynamics which can help in determining which neighbourhoods ought to be involved in the end product.
- **Longer community consultation:** the first year of community building support was dedicated to engaging with the community on a long-term basis. This encouraged wider participation in community activities, reaching out to individuals who may have struggled to engage with them in the past, and developing the forums to enable greater involvement in steering the direction of the programme in each area. Many grantholders reported that the consultation period felt slow and long and would prefer that some of that time was added to year three when project development was kicking off. However, some community builders argued that the consultation phase was adequately timed and allowed them to embed themselves in the community before providing support. Even though the effect of a longer consultation period may frustrate some community members, it is important to work alongside community builders to reach a compromise and determine what a realistic timeline looks like to all relevant parties. Finally, it is worth exploring which and in what way communication channels can be used to alleviate this frustration while the consultation phase is progressing. People expressed that they weren't necessarily frustrated with the outputs of discussions but by the fact they didn't feel updated about the progress. Social media and community events were pointed out as good communication channels to do that.
- **Asset-Based Community Development:**³ this community building approach was embedded in Our Place's core practices and was praised by a lot of the people involved in this process. Our community builders are experts in delivering asset-based community development. People in the seven communities fed back that despite the challenges in the journey, they felt that the process made good use of their skills and emphasized their capacity to deliver positive change rather than focusing on what people perceived as

² The learning report from the first round can be found on our blog and is accessible via this link:

<https://bigblogscotland.org.uk/2015/09/17/our-place-learning-report/>

³ For more on Asset-Based Community Development (often referred to as ABCD), please visit the relevant section on the Scottish Community Development Centre's website on <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/assets-scotland>

deficits in their communities.

- **Baseline reports:** community builders prepared baseline reports for each area in year one which assisted with tracking the progress throughout the community support period. A learning framework was prepared by The National Lottery Community Fund which was populated by community builders as part of their annual reporting. Both elements proved useful in evaluating and extracting learning from Our Place. However, in an attempt to accommodate the specific context of each area, the learning framework was rather loosely defined which caused some inconsistencies when we looked at learning at the programme level rather than area level. It would be appropriate to develop a framework that is universal for all areas and separate individual ones that are modified to account for local context.
- **Flexible timescale:** we appreciate that community building is not a linear process so rigid application deadlines would be counterproductive in this process. Indicative milestones were set in place to help us stay on track, but people have fed back that they found our approach flexible and felt comfortable to discuss timescales without fears of repercussions. However, this sometimes caused frustrations from our end. If you are a funder, you need to determine whether your processes can actually be flexible, and if so, to what extent, while considering what the impact would be on your staff and the relationships they are developing with clients.
- **Longer community support contracts:** it was felt that the three-year support in the first round of Our Place was not enough for the scale of ambition that the programme had created in the communities. As a result, the support contracts were extended to five years. During the review, we received mixed feedback about the length of the contracts which we can anecdotally link to the maturity of the local third sector. Community builders that worked in areas with a younger third sector felt that the timelines were appropriate, whereas those in areas with a more advanced third sector argued that the contract felt too long. Similarly, some communities argued that the first two years could have been condensed into one.
- **Community Chest:** a readily available small pot of money (£20k per area) to pay for small scale projects with a community benefit in line with the vision that was decided by the community. Funds could be requested by community groups or people. The application form was a simple one-pager which was submitted to the community builders for decision. The community chest is explored in greater detail below.

These renewed aspects of the programme enabled us to spend more time in communities and avoiding parachuting into areas without a good understanding of who they are, what are their assets and what they need. Through Our Place, people forged strong relationships with each other, their community builders, local authorities and their funding officers at The National Lottery Community Fund.

Local delivery organisations and stakeholders appreciated the close working relationship with us. Likewise, our staff felt better equipped to support these communities but pointed out that because of the scale and nature of the programme, they often felt that they were getting too involved. Nevertheless, many funding officers mentioned that having the community builders on the ground enabled a safe distance between us and the communities we serve without compromising trust and good working relationships. People have felt comfortable to

approach us and we have felt impartial yet embedded enough in their communities to support them.

Community building

When we asked people if they thought that Our Place was different to other funding programmes, a lot of people mentioned their community builder. In many of the communities we supported, people have said that they wouldn't be in the position they are now had they not developed a close working relationship with their community builder.

People highlighted that the community building aspect of Our Place was important in levelling the playing field and allowing the community to come together to define its vision for the future. This varied in each community but in general, community builders reached out to people beyond the 'usual suspects' and attempted to establish forums in which everyone would have an equal say. The first year of Our Place was dedicated to spending time on the ground building relationships, getting to know people and enhancing the active role they have in their communities, revitalizing the community spirit and encouraging the community's ambitions, and figuring out what skills and strengths are available in the community to drive positive change. Primarily, this entailed establishing visibility within - and promoting their service offer to - the community by attending community events, spending time at community venues, having informal conversations and arranging meetings with stakeholders in the sector and beyond.

People from the communities highlighted two features that aided this process:

1. **Having an external community builder** with no previous ties to the community but with strong local presence - ideally, a physical base in the office where the community builder works from a few times a week.
2. The community builder is **welcoming and easily accessible**.

Some people mentioned that they were initially sceptical of working alongside someone who is not from the community. Their concern was that decisions would be made for rather than by them and the person would not be able to understand the nuances of the area and the relationships among people. However, others argued that a community builder without prior connections to the local area was in fact an appropriate choice since they could remain impartial and offer independent advice without making decisions based on relationships or passion projects. Additionally, people found that this type of community building offered a more honest and realistic picture of the various scenarios without compromising the community's ambitions.

A successful engagement tool was the presence of community builder hubs. A good example of how this was done can be found in Ardrossan. The Our Place hub on Glasgow Street is home to the local community builder and their team. The window front of the hub is used creatively as an innovative noticeboard with things that are going on in the community. The interior of the hub has a couple of work desks for the community-building team and a small lounge to the side of it where visitors and the community can hang out. On the walls, the community-building team collected and displayed various photographs of Ardrossan over the years.



Speaking to the community builder and people in the community, we found that the hub has done a lot for raising the profile of Our Place and facilitating connections. People highlighted the importance of knowing they can pop into the hub and ask for the community builder’s advice and help anytime. Some said that ideas and partnerships were often initiated as a result of informal conversations which took place over a cup of tea in the hub. A local resident told us how much Our Place meant to her because through the community chest she eventually managed to develop and maintain a garden path and grow vegetables which are used by neighbours and people in the community.

Local people as decision-makers and connectors

People that expressed a desire to help spread the word and reach out to their communities to involve them in Our Place were encouraged to take up the role of Community Connector (even though it wasn’t branded as such in every community). The rationale behind Community Connectors was to enable people in the community, regardless of whether they were grantholders or stakeholders, to remain involved with the progress of Our Place and act as links between the community builders and the community by keeping the latter up to date and feeding its views to the former.

Through the review, we found that the role of the Community Connectors was most successful when they were given a clear remit by their community builders and the scale of involvement was manageable and logistically viable. Since Community Connectors came from various backgrounds (retirement, parenthood, employment, etc.), meetings and workload had to be proportionate and manageable.

People reported that having measures such as the below in place to allow for

meaningful engagement was paramount:

1. Having meetings outside the 9-5 working schedule
2. Rotating meeting locations
3. Clear remit but with flexible levels of commitment
4. Clear communication channels to enable engagement, ideally meetings and social media

Communication was raised by some people as a concern as they felt that it became difficult to keep up with the fast pace of developments and the amount of information that had to be processed and disseminated during some stages. Some people argued that at times, it felt like “if you’ve missed a meeting, it’s as if you’ve never been to one” which caused frustrations. Communication channels that would allow people to participate and remain involved in their own time are recommended.

Learning from the Community Chest

Over 500 small awards were made through the community chest across all seven Our Place areas. As evidenced in the annual reports and through our conversations with people, it would be fair to infer that the community chest was one of the most successful aspects of Our Place. A quote from one of our community builders sums up the importance of micro grants:

“What has struck us the most over the last 2 years of the community chest has been the amount that can be achieved with a small amount of funding. A lot of the things that local people want to see [...] don’t cost a lot of money. A lot of people will come to us with ideas that they would like to see in the community and things they would like to apply for funding for. Once you go into the details, people realise that they don’t need a lot of funding to achieve their outcome.”

These small awards often played an important part in the development of larger projects. Many community groups, especially those newly constituted, applied for community chest money which enabled them to ease into the process. These groups were then encouraged to apply for larger pots of money (for example, our National Lottery Awards for All programme which grants up to £10,000 to community groups). In some cases, these projects were scaled up or entered into partnerships with other organisations to deliver larger projects.

The community chest also helped maintain momentum and secure “quick-wins” while larger projects were in development. Given the easy application and award process, the community was able to see ideas and wishes turn into reality quickly, and financial investment paying off in activities, improvements or assets. This helped lift the community spirit and form a trusting relationship with the community builders.

Learning about the change Our Place has contributed to

Kickstarting or maintaining engagement in local decision-making and activities

Communities we worked with generally reported an increase in the people getting involved with local activities and decision-making locally. Even though not universal across all Our Place areas, we saw a willingness from people beyond “the usual suspects” to participate in steering groups, forums and other local decision-making collectives. We can infer that this was in part due to community builders encouraging community members and those who sought funding through the community chest to get more involved with delivering the overall vision. Some people claimed that they have always been passionate about their communities but were unable to access the right platform that would allow them to utilise their skills.

The longer community engagement process at the start allowed the community builders to embed in the community and start forming relationships with people. Building trust and good working relationships has been a time-consuming effort. In some cases, community building had to take the form of repeatedly having door-to-door conversations or hanging out in the community to talk to people until buy-in was achieved. However, this paid off over time, with a wider range of voices represented in local decision-making forums.

Despite this, the number of people participating in local decision-making forums has decreased over the five years often due to:

- The capacity of individuals, especially those managing a full-time job and family responsibilities
- Unclear remit and expectations
- Fluctuations in maintaining momentum

Nevertheless, people across the seven areas claim that Our Place felt different to prior investment from other partners in the communities in the sense that it constantly encouraged community members to remain involved.

People feeling their communities are a better place to live

We were surprised that across the communities we visited, people used the same sentence to talk about Our Place:

“It has created a buzz in the community!”

The starting point of each of the seven areas was often very different. In some cases, people felt that the community spirit was tired, disappointed or apathetic. However, Our Place managed to rejuvenate that by enabling more groups to come into existence, more community activity provision and one-off events that celebrate the community’s culture and highlights over the year. This was achieved in part through the community chest and the development of larger projects such as architecture

plans for a community centre refurbishment.

In most cases, the annual surveys conducted by the community builders evidenced an increase in people feeling good about and wanting to stay in their communities. Additionally, communities have told us that they are more ambitious about the future, their confidence has improved, and they feel like their communities deserve better.

What communities across the seven areas said they need in terms of activities is largely similar. We identified six key themes of projects that encompass most of the projects funded through Our Place:

- Health and wellbeing
- Parks and greenspace
- Community centres and facilities
- Youth work
- Heritage
- Creative arts

Improving community buildings, landscape and physical environment

In almost all Our Place areas, there was an asset or bit of landscape that had significant meaning to the community, e.g. a park that was up for redevelopment but hadn't been actualised or a community centre in need of capital improvements. The local assets and environment, in contrast with service provision, are easily visible to all residents of a community so their development is rather more straightforward to keep track of.

The Our Place investment in assets reignited the community spirit and encouraged local people to become actively involved with the projects. Even though not every capital project has been delivered to date, we have found that communicating and involving the communities throughout the various milestones in the journey is just as important to maintain enthusiasm and buy-in. For example, hosting open evenings at the local centre to showcase the development masterplans to the community, providing an opportunity to meet the architect and ask questions, or voting on a preferred option are all great ideas to keep the community motivated.



Local people celebrating the opening of Tamfourhill Park
Photo obtained from TTRA

Improving the skills and capacity of local people and delivery organisations

At the start of Our Place, each community had a distinct third sector. Some sectors were more mature whereas in some communities, the sector was embryotic. The financial investment and accompanying community development support has encouraged the development of new projects delivered by existing groups and organisations or new groups altogether.

We have noticed that the existing organisations, particularly those with a national presence, have been more likely to point out the frustrations of Our Place, whereas newer or smaller community groups were more likely to report an increase in confidence and skills. Organisations with experience of delivering large projects and managing large sums of funding felt that the Our Place grant making process was too slow, and caused delays in starting their project delivery. However, smaller groups were not frustrated by the timescale as they were able to pace the development of their projects to match the development of their skills and confidence to deliver.

We found that people were more likely to mention an increase in confidence or skills when they were supported by a community builder who managed to push people out of their comfort zone while supporting them without hand-holding. Initially, a lot of Our Place grantholders found the idea and scale of their project intimidating, especially when it involved managing an asset. By taking up training opportunities and being more ambitious with their projects, local people have managed to develop new skills such as liaising with local authorities to co-run or transfer assets, or becoming a constituted group or charity. People also fed back that they found study visits to groups on a similar journey or with similar experiences particularly

beneficial.

Making connections and encouraging partnership working

Although not without its challenges, partnership working has been important in many of the Our Place areas. We were told that prior to Our Place, people and groups had been unable to create or take up opportunities to connect with each other, especially in the areas with less experienced/developed third sectors. With Our Place, groups either had to join forces to deliver larger projects such as managing a community asset or redeveloping a park or came together by interacting at informal events. For example, in Lochside and Lincluden, members from various community groups, volunteers and Dumfries and Galloway Council formed a steering group to oversee the redevelopment of the parks. In Ardrossan, people often mentioned the monthly “chitchat events” where community members, community connectors, and members of local organisations and local government meet to network, discuss project ideas and share updates. We saw a fruitful partnership forming after two creative arts groups discussed a project idea and decided to coordinate their individual resources to work collaboratively so that they avoid duplication of services.

Partnership working between local authorities and community groups has been an interesting journey in most areas. Initially, it was felt that Our Place projects should align with the grassroots ethos of the programme and so should be designed and delivered by the communities themselves. However, it became evident that more often than not, people in local authorities have a wealth of experience and knowledge that is instrumental in delivering a successful and sustainable project. We have found that partnerships with local authorities are more productive when the relationship shifts from “parent - child” to equal partners. At the start, some groups felt that their local authorities were sceptical about their capacity to deliver their community vision, especially where an asset was involved. By increasing their confidence and skills, as well as through the support of community builders, community groups were able to secure a seat in discussions as equal partners rather than disjointed collectives without clear delivery plans. Similarly, community members had to battle their own scepticism and embrace the support - material, logistic, strategic or otherwise - their local authority was ready to provide. It is worth mentioning that partnership working did not blossom in every area due to challenges explored in further detail in the next section.

Raising the community's profile within the local government landscape



Celebration of the first social housing built in Lincluden 80 years ago
Photo obtained from CEIS

Some people felt that their communities had been under the radar for a long time; their needs were not reflected in local government strategy, and the nuances of the local community were not understood by decision-makers, and they were not receiving their fair share of investment or support. People from the communities and local authorities have claimed that the financial investment enabled by Our Place and the development of assets and services have raised the profile of the areas, particularly in local government and its Community Learning and Development teams. Additionally, the communities and their respective local authorities have developed closer working relationships as a result of the projects funded through Our Place. Community builders have been instrumental in this process as they have proactively and continuously involved a range of key stakeholders from local authorities in Our Place meetings.

Learning from the programme's challenges

Communities suffering from chronic consultation fatigue

A lot of people we've spoken to told us that prior to Our Place, they were tired of being consulted without seeing any improvements or follow-up from their contributions. The community builders also discussed the difficulties in some cases of motivating the community to get involved. We were also aware that we didn't want to start the project application process before the community builders felt they had adequate time to work with the community to produce a representative vision. As a result, community buy-in was trickier to secure at the start of the programme.

People told us that prior to Our Place, they were tired of being consulted without seeing any improvements or follow-up

Community connectors who had the capacity and networks to speak to people managed to open many doors for the community builders. However, those who were unclear about their remit or the programme found it more challenging to involve other community members.

Both community builders and members highlighted the importance of social media (Facebook, in particular) in building and maintaining momentum. The majority of Our Place areas had active Facebook pages managed by the community builders. The pages host a range of content; from promoting local events and activities relevant to Our Place to news about the local area. People interacted with the content posted by the page administrators or by other community members.

Managing larger and complex projects with limited delivery capacity

Supporting local people to improve their skills to deliver the desired community projects was the rationale for a longer community development support offer in the second round of Our Place. However, the following complicated the communities' journey:

- The complexities of community development: In some cases, the nuances of the local context meant that the indicative milestones set by the Fund for Our Place delivery had to be shifted which obscured the delivery timeline. These complexities ranged from passionate community activists scrutinizing the process, to fragile relationships between community builders and local authorities.
- The community development support timeline: The refreshed support offer in the second round of Our Place allowed for a longer consultation period at the start of the programme, however, grantholders told us that they would prefer to receive the support at the later end of the contract once the projects are designed and delivery is kicked off. This way, there would be more opportunity to develop hands-on

Some grantholders would prefer to receive more support once project delivery had begun, especially for larger projects such as assets

project delivery skill, especially in the case of larger projects such as assets which for many grantholders involved processes and bureaucracy they had no previous experience of.

As a result, some grantholders or networks of grantholders felt uncertain about their capacity to deliver their projects without the support of their community builder. However, in most cases, this gap was filled by support from the relevant departments in the local authority.

Ensuring a plurality of voices is represented in local planning and decision-making

The National Lottery Community Fund is not an expert in community development, so the support contracts meant that we relinquished some control over delivery to the builders. That, in combination with the £1.5million indicative investment for each community posed some interesting challenges. In some cases, staff, grantholders and community members remarked that Our Place felt disassociated with The National Lottery Community Fund and instead came across as the

In some communities, staff and community connectors questioned whether the projects that were developed in fact reflected what the community wanted

community builder's project. In some communities, staff and community connectors questioned whether the projects that were developed in fact reflected what the community wanted or were the community builders' "passion project". Even if developed with the community's best interest at heart, creating artificial needs and desires in the community would be against the grassroots ethos of Our Place.

Community representation in decision-making has been expanded as a result of Our Place, however, people in some communities are concerned about the plurality and diversity of voices in decision-making. Community builders worked relentlessly to ensure that people in all parts of the community have opportunities to become involved in decisions, either by being part of a local forum or by contributing their views, but the reality is that many people in those communities face multiple barriers that hinder them. Barriers can include caring responsibilities, financial difficulties, work commitments, language, and many others. Due to the lack of quantitative data, we are unable to cross-reference anecdotal assumptions and evidence, but it is fair to say that that people know their communities best and their scepticisms about representation certainly have validity to them.

Boundaries and territorialism

The geographical boundaries of the programme areas were co-defined by multiple local agencies including the local authority. However, it became evident that we should have sought more community input prior to the launch of Our Place. The territorial issues often drilled down to the neighbourhood, if not street, level. The issues have been rectified in a lot of cases through relationship management delivered by the community builders. However, some parts of the

Territorialism caused complications when people from a neighbourhood were reluctant to use available services or assets in an adjacent area

communities have feelings of resentment and unfairness because they believe their neighbourhoods or assets have not received the level of support or investment that is proportionate to them.

Territorialism caused complications when people from a neighbourhood were reluctant to use the available services or assets in an adjacent area, which led to concerns about service duplication. Most importantly, it raises concerns about whether the community vision truly reflected each Our Place area and its nuances.

Periods of “nothingness” between planning and delivering services

Some people felt that there were prolonged periods of “nothingness” between agreeing the community vision and seeing the impact of investment

In many of the areas we worked in, some community members and grantholders felt that the programme went through prolonged periods of “nothingness”, usually between agreeing the community vision (year one) and the design and delivery of projects (year two - five), when the impact of the investment wasn't visible and not much was changing in the community. On the flip side, we are aware that community builders and groups were working closely

together to fine-tune their projects and develop good relationships with stakeholders to enable efficient partnership working. Building the skills and confidence of community groups is a time-consuming and unpredictable journey which can be complicated by liaising with external authorities with their own systems and processes.

More streamlined and transparent communications between the Fund, grantholders, stakeholders and communities would have allowed all partners to remain equally involved in the process.

Clashing personalities that lead to puzzled partnership working

The extent of impact that personalities can have on the development and delivery of community activity was an interesting bit of learning from the programme. The grassroots ethos of Our Place meant that relationships would be paramount. By talking to grantholders, community builders and people in the communities, we found that tense relationships often had a disproportionate impact on delivery timelines and reaching consensus.

Tense relationships often had a disproportionate impact on delivery timelines and reaching consensus.

Personalities and relationships at all layers, i.e. between the same group of stakeholders or among different ones, influenced Our Place heavily. In areas where stakeholders got on well with each other, people reported that disagreements were resolved more easily, and projects progressed more quickly. However, in areas where there was friction between the different stakeholders, project design and delivery was stalled and more pressure was put on the community builders to carefully

manage relationships. In some cases, people made the decision to disassociate themselves from Our Place, either as community connectors or grantholders, because they felt unwelcome or unappreciated.

Power dynamics also posed a challenge on relationship building and management. Local community members on some occasions felt that the people sitting on their community forums represented interests extending beyond the community benefit. Even though there isn't, and arguably shouldn't be, a "screening" process in terms of who gets to join a local community forum, it is important to acknowledge the power dynamics that people bring to the table. For example, grantholders, elected officials, local workers who are residents of elsewhere, and local community members can sit on the same table but measures should be in place so that each voice enjoys the same volume in the discussion.

Achieving project sustainability after the programme finishes

Some grantholders have raised concerns about how sustainable their projects will be when their current grants lapse. In some areas, succession planning has taken place with existing or newly formed development trusts stepping in to assist with the projects that Our Place has launched. Additionally, many local authorities are heavily involved with the programme and have offered practical and strategic support to the grantholders.

Some people are concerned that they are currently not equipped with the skills to deliver larger projects in the absence of support from the community builder.

However, people are still concerned that in the absence of support from the community builder they are currently not equipped with the necessary skills to deliver larger projects that are still in design or have recently kicked off. Some are also concerned that their projects and service users may restrict the amount of income that can be generated through the service offer. Given that the Our Place areas face relatively high levels of deprivation, grantholders are wary of burdening their service users with fees which could potentially deter them from accessing the activities. This is also complicated by the fact that the communities are small and the grantholders often know many of the community members personally.

What could have improved Our Place?

Investing incrementally with capacity building support and larger community chest

On most occasions, the aspirations and vision of the communities included larger projects that required high levels of investment. The programme's aim was to turn the vision of the community into reality, but this was proved a challenging task when large amounts of investment were thrown into the mix.

The passion and drive of the people in the community has been unparalleled but the capacity of local groups to deliver such large-scale projects has arguably not reached a very confident level. Many larger projects are still in design or about to kick off which in the absence of community building support could burden many grantholders. Some local people have told us that they don't feel confident or equipped enough to deliver the vision laid out by the community.

A larger pot of community chest money could allow more grassroots projects to emerge and more community members to try running activities for the community.

In conversations with community builders, it became apparent that confidence levels and skills in the community can vary greatly. When asked about what could have been done differently to avoid this, some community builders argued that a smaller financial investment in each area within the same time frame would have allowed more focus on capacity building. This could eventually lead to more confident grantholders that could deliver larger projects. A community builder suggested that the majority of awards should be around the £10,000 level with the larger awards capped at £150,000.

Given how much the community chest was praised by Our Place stakeholders and the levels of activity that small amounts of money have generated, community builders and connectors have suggested that a larger pot of community chest money would allow more grassroots projects to emerge and more community members to take a shot at running activities for the community.



Carefully selecting and providing additional support for capital projects

Capital projects have arguably posed the most challenges to grantholders. Beyond the complexities of managing the large grant that is required to deliver a capital projects, community assets bring with them another set of complexities such as:

- They are expensive to run and maintain
- They are easily visible and tangible within the community
- The policies and regulations involved in owning and running an asset.

Capital asset projects should include long-term capacity building with a stable group of people, in partnership with organisations such as the local authority.

It was felt that there wasn't enough time allowed for grantholders to develop the necessary knowledge and technical skills (legal, reading capital and architectural plans, commissioning feasibility studies and business planning, etc.) to navigate the process. The community builders played an important role in supporting local people and grantholders to develop those relevant skills, but the timelines of projects sometimes didn't accommodate that process.

The capital projects also raised additional concerns in terms of sustainability as capital projects are in most cases expensive to run and some of them are not income-generating (e.g. parks). Local authorities have been involved in the conversations and in some cases have become a partner delivery organisations of large capital asset projects since they have the capacity, knowledge and skills that can facilitate them.

Beyond the amount of financial investment that is required to deliver successful capital asset projects, the level of capacity building that is also required make them resource-intensive and often emotionally taxing to the delivery organisations. As a result, capital asset projects should be considered carefully, especially in areas where the skills that are required to deliver them are scarce. That is not to say that capital asset projects shouldn't receive attention or investment, but it should be done in a way that involves long-term capacity building with a stable group of people and in partnership with organisations such as the local authority.

Co-producing the programme with all relevant stakeholders

Our Place was designed in close consultation with stakeholders in the sector in order to accommodate the delivery partners and ensure the communities create ownership of their projects. Most people we consulted told us that Our Place felt flexible and our team was willing to accommodate and support them throughout their journey. Even though the day-to-day running of the programme was praised for its flexibility, it was felt that the overall framework was at times restrictive. For example, some communities would

Co-production of the programme might not have led to a different output, but would have made stakeholders feel more closely involved, and helped them tackle issues earlier

have liked to allocate their community building support time differently, i.e. shorter consultation period and longer capacity building.

Co-producing the programme with community builders, local authorities, potential grantholders and community connectors would not necessarily lead to an output significantly different to what Our Place looks like now. However, it would ensure that everyone would have an equal say in designing the framework and stakeholders would feel more closely involved in the final programme. Additionally, it would encourage more learning, skill building and partnerships before the delivery of the programme kicked off which would allow partners to identify and tackle issues earlier on and more collaboratively.



Lincluden Community Centre and Lincluden Primary School children celebrate successful Popeye's Park Our Place funding application (Photo obtained from CEIS)

Recommendations

This section translates the learning above into action-focused recommendations. They are based on what people have told us other stakeholders on a similar journey would find useful, and our own learning as a funder embarking on our first place-based journey of this scale.

For grantholders or local groups

Cross your territories, and work with partners in other areas:

- If you operate in an area where people feel a close connection to their neighbourhoods and find it difficult to engage with other communities in the area, it's worth partnering with groups in other areas to run events or activities together. Sometimes, even alternating the venue between two communities can encourage people to cross the boundary and may decrease territorialism.

Participate in local networks, share learning and experiences:

- One of the highlights for Our Place groups was the opportunity to engage with similar local organisations in their area and beyond, share experiences and find ways to work better together.
- Look out for opportunities to learn from projects in the programme or in other areas that have been or are on a similar journey to you. Investing in study visits is a great idea to learn how other groups overcome their challenges and what success looks like in their area.

Be persistent and push back when necessary:

- Firstly, you shouldn't feel the pressure to deliver a project that is beyond your capacity. There's a fine line between leaving your comfort zone and taking on too much. Ensure that you have the right support in place, such as funding, relationships, skills or volunteers to deliver a larger project.
- Remember, social media is a great way to engage with the wider community!
- Lastly, it's important that your projects reflect the community's vision. Keep the community involved in the development, establish feedback routes and learn about how the community wants to use your services.

For funders

Co-produce the programme with stakeholders:

- Communities know what is best of them, they just need the support to explore and achieve it. To make sure your programme gives them the best chance to do so, involve all relevant stakeholders at the design stage: communities, local authorities, community builders, other statutory and third sector partners, local businesses, etc. Each group of stakeholders can then be given the opportunity to make an input, raise any concerns and highlight any knowledge that sits with them.
- This should encourage partnership working from the get-go and minimise

conflict as long as everyone is honest about their expectations and commitment.

- This also allows the communities and stakeholders to determine what “community” means to them, especially when it comes to geographic boundaries.

Be realistic about how flexible you can be:

- Flexibility tends to be a common term these days, but funding programmes show how inflexible they are when they come under pressure. It would be beneficial to consider how flexible your processes can be and the potential impact on organisation resources (such as out of hours working, shifting budgets and timeframes)

Include some form of micro-funding:

- Small amounts of money (up to £2,000) can be a great way to test new ideas before they develop further.
- Additionally, sometimes communities only need a small amount to cover costs for essentials. Not every project in the community needs to scale!
- Finally, microgrants can be timed well enough to mitigate the “periods of nothingness” between larger project design and delivery. Try to make this process straightforward and paperwork-light!

Provide capacity building support:

Local communities have the passion and ideas to drive their work forward. It’s important to provide adequate and long-term capacity building support, before and after awarding money. When commissioning a capacity / community building support contract:

- Be realistic about how much work you’re procuring - community building can take a lot longer than what’s on paper.
- Ensure that the people working on the contract are consistent - it takes a lot of effort to build honest relationships, local knowledge and trust, and these are hard to replace when people move on.
- Ensure the community builder maintains a presence and visibility within the community - hot-desking in a community venue is a great cost-effective solution.

Invest gradually:

- There’s no need to go with a bang! Be honest about the level of investment that could be available without setting unrealistic expectations. Start work on the ground via the community builders, release small amounts of money, and once the capacity, knowledge and skills are there, consider if and how you may want to invest larger grants.

Carefully select capital projects:

- Ensure that the local community feels ready in terms of skills and capacity to take such complex projects on and sustainability plans are in place to help cover the ongoing costs.
- Ensure that you involve the local authority in these conversations from early

on. They have a wealth of experienced and passionate people who are keen to help.

Collect and analyse data throughout:

- A combination of quantitative and qualitative data is important to keep track of how the development of the programme and the local projects is going. Tracking numbers can have a lot value, especially when looking at levels of investment, how many people are engaging, levels of volunteering, etc.
- Since a lot of community building work relies on personal relationships and narrative, collecting anecdotal evidence and stories can help you bring those numbers to life and demonstrate what contribution the programme is making.
- Finally, since place-based projects tend to be open to everyone, it can be beneficial to use indicators which can help build a demographic picture of who's using the services, what type of service the projects offer, and how these projects are geographically spread in the area.

For local authorities

Work in true partnership with communities and groups:

- Local groups want to have their opinions and ideas valued by peers and stakeholders. Be honest about how much you can invest in your relationship with them and what your expectations are.
- It may also be worth exploring alternative forms of collaboration, especially when the community is looking to gain ownership of an asset. Sometimes, a compromise between owning and running an asset may be the best way forward.

Provide capacity support and resources when available:

- You know your processes better than anyone so helping community groups navigate them can save them resources and allows them to build their skills and knowledge in the meantime.
- You may also want to think how you can help them with resources, especially since many of them are just starting up. Local groups often appreciate the smallest things, from office equipment to helping out with signposting.

For community builders

Encourage plurality of voices and manage power dynamics:

- Reach out to the people that usually find it difficult to engage with community activities. It's not an easy journey and it can require persistent effort to get people on board, but the outcomes will be far more reflective of the community's needs and aspirations.
- Think more proactively about how you can engage with people in the community. Instead of expecting them to reach out, (literally!) knock on their door, introduce yourselves, what the programme is all about, and how their perspective is valuable.

- Think carefully about how the interactions between different members of the community will play out. Many things come into play: class, employment, language, etc. Make sure that policies and practices are in place to give everyone an equal opportunity to contribute. These could be giving each person a dedicated time to speak per meeting, rotating the chair of the meeting, secret voting, etc.

Facilitate local networks with an exit plan in mind:

- If local networks don't exist in the community, start one as soon as possible. This will put people on the same starting line and relationships will be more organic.
- Take an active role in running the local network at the start but make sure it's passed into the community's hands when they feel ready. Help the community put together a code of conduct and relevant policies that could help the networks run smoothly.
- Tasks that might seem minor can be brand new to people with little previous experience of community activities. Offer additional support and upskill people when appropriate, e.g. with taking minutes, organising agendas, booking venues, etc.

Maintain local presence:

- Coming into the area as an independent community builder comes with benefits and drawbacks. Scepticism can be a common issue at the start so embedding yourself in the community can help you build trust and relationships more quickly.
- A physical space at a central location in the community will allow you to be more visible and accessible to everyone. You don't need to be there every day but a few times a week is a good idea.

Build capacity without handholding

- Inevitably, you'll have to step away from the community so doing things for them may not be the most productive way forward. Think about how you can work with people and community groups longer-term to build their capacity to a level where they can deliver their projects without your assistance.

Bringing the people and learning together

Learning Exchange Gathering

During our conversations with people in the Our Place areas, it became evident that people often feel alone or misunderstood on a journey that seems unique to their own experience. However, people across all communities shared very similar experiences to each other and so it felt appropriate to bring together the various Our Place stakeholders in the same room to share their stories, learning and to make connections. The invite was extended to some other organisations which share a place-based ethos: Corra Foundation, SURF, Inspiring Scotland, Creative Scotland, and Scottish Community Development Centre.

Approximately 50 people joined us at our Glasgow offices for a full-day event, ranging from community members to local authority representatives. The Knowledge and Learning Team fed back some of the findings of the review and then we hosted a panel discussion with representatives from the aforementioned organisations. The remainder of the day was spent on six thematic learning exchange sessions. These were:

- Parks and Greenspace
- Health and Wellbeing
- Heritage
- Youth Work
- Community Centres and Facilities
- Creative Arts

During the learning exchange sessions, we heard from local people and grantholders in local communities about their experience of Our Place and some of the highlights of their thematic work. Then, people discussed their own experiences and highlights at their table.

Our team recorded highlight notes from the table conversations. Here are some of the things that came up:

- Social isolation and loneliness are prevalent in most communities and it can be tricky to get people out their homes. Sometimes, you should think outside the box and come up with “hooks” that will entice your audiences (e.g. a knitting group). Other times, you need to reach folk in their homes to make them aware of what’s on and to persuade them to come out. Finally, wellbeing activities don’t need to be branded as such to be successful.
- Reaching out to local businesses can save a lot of money and provide resources. Many are willing to donate items or money to a local cause they are passionate about. The most difficult step is overcoming the fear of asking.
- Youth work is facing significant cuts in investment which can make it a difficult field. Young people are interested in engaging but if the resources aren’t there, the activities are not as fun which can cut numbers down. We are also missing out on training the next generation of youth workers since community classes are not as common anymore.

- Engaging with young people as equals is very important to ensuring their buy-in. Young people want to feel heard and that their opinion actually matters.
- Local social enterprises face issues with sustainability if left without funding. Since many are working with people with limited financial resources, it can be very difficult to generate income high enough to sustain their businesses. It can also feel strange to charge customers when they are local groups or organisations because of personal relationships. This seems to be the case irrespective of their thematic area.
- Local heritage can help stimulate local enterprising ideas. For example, in Langholm, local history has helped inform creative start-ups which use traditional skills and industries with modern technologies. People buy into that because it's their local heritage.
- Mixed models of asset transfer are important as they allow the community to have greater control over their local community assets and the activities that run from them, while allowing the local authority to remain involved and assist with building capacity and sharing skills.
- Even though parks may not seem as important assets to many people, they are actually a place of escape for many. They are a free to use community asset which can act as connectors of various neighbourhoods and areas. A guest noted that “swing parks are more than swing parks for a lot of children - they are important life spaces to develop social skills, take risks, socialise, and spend time away from home and school”.