



Knowledge and Learning

Strengthening communities:

Strategies for supporting places
that have missed out on funding

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For information on how we have increased access to our funding, please refer to the case studies on **Torbay**, **Dudley**, **Gosport** and **Fair Share Trust**.

For information on how we have addressed local priorities, please refer to the case studies on **Powys**, **Clackmannanshire** and **Northumberland**.

For information on we have strengthened local capacity and capability, please refer to the case studies on **Barking and Dagenham**, **West Armagh** and **Southend-on-Sea**.

Foreword

As the largest funder of community activity in the UK, The National Lottery Community Fund supports the people and projects that are the lifeblood of civil society and communities.

Between 2017 and 2022, we awarded £2.9 billion through over 72,000 grants to almost 46,000 charities and not-for-profit organisations, many of whom work with the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities across the UK. In addition to National Lottery funding, we lead on the distribution of dormant assets and other community programmes with governmental, corporate and philanthropic partners.

We have spent the last three decades learning from our work with and for communities to achieve long-term outcomes, particularly where existing social infrastructure, capacity, or decision-making support may have held communities back. Whether specific barriers like access to physical spaces or deeper challenges like the lack of established local community groups or charities, there are practical lessons from our work.

Key lessons from our experience are:

- To listen, deeply, to what communities themselves want, and tailor approaches to their unique circumstances.
- To build and fund the capability and capacity of local organisations and networks, helping people to access funding opportunities.
- To have a clear while simple theory and approach, and to measure and learn from what works (and doesn't).
- To target and work locally, putting local people at the heart of decision-making.
- To fund for the long term, and often we'll do this for five, 10 or more years.
- To focus on need and inequality reduction while building community cohesion and integration.

This report summarises evidence and learning from 10 approaches we have taken to provide solutions to complex, place-specific issues across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Many of these places are designated as priority one in the Government's Levelling Up Fund index, so we hope policymakers at both the national and local level will find this particularly useful.

For me, the research shows there are common learnings but no 'one size fits all' solution to supporting communities in need. Whether it is in Dudley, where our funding has supported the building of community relationships through activities, volunteering opportunities and targeted support services to gradually grow trust in the community, or in Clackmannanshire, where diversified funding and targeted development support has allowed for community assets to become self-sufficient, we hope that these case studies offer a toolkit of potential approaches for those looking to work with a more local focus, ensuring that funding, support and opportunities are available fairly to all.

The report is not intended to be an exact guide on how to solve complex, multifaceted issues. However, some of the communities we discuss have seen increased levels of investment, others have seen residents empowered to directly address their priorities, and some have equipped people to use their creativity to meet long-term challenges.

This work and learning is also timely given the [recent announcement](#) that community wealth funds – which would see money distributed to communities empowered to decide how to use it – will become an additional beneficiary of the Dormant Assets Scheme in England. As the distributor of dormant assets, The National Lottery Community Fund sees first-hand the life changing difference this funding makes and will be drawing on the lessons from the last three decades to help shape how this funding boost is best used.

Finally, a thank you to all those who contributed ideas and experience to this report: strengthening community is a shared mission – we are here for you, now and for the future.

David Knott

Chief Executive, The National Lottery Community Fund

Introduction

What is the most effective way to get funding and support to the communities that need it but have little pre-existing social infrastructure to receive or use it? This is a question The National Lottery Community Fund has grappled with for almost thirty years.

We know that resources, infrastructure and social capital are vital components of a thriving community, and that these are especially needed in communities that have disproportionately faced deprivation and decline. We also know that the communities most in need of investment often have the fewest established charities and community groups to make use of these resources.

In the context of levelling up, the question of how to distribute money equitably and in ways that create lasting, positive change, is a dilemma for any funder or decision maker wishing to use funding to tackle persistent deprivation.

Large regeneration or physical infrastructure investments are important, yet are often time bound, high-cost, one-off endeavours. There is a pressing need for funding over a sustained period that nurtures and strengthens social capital, and the places and spaces that communities depend on.

Time and again we hear that short-term or top-down investments that don't build, strengthen and sustain communities for the long term leave residents feeling frustrated and disappointed. And we see that funders that offer more than just money can be especially valued and effective.

They build connections and opportunities, bringing charities, infrastructure organisations and local authorities together to find creative and cost-effective solutions. They provide opportunities and practical support that helps to foster and strengthen local capacity and skills. And they enable organisations that are not bound by short-term imperatives to do deeply rooted work – person-centred, networked, cross-community – that few other service providers are equipped to offer.

In this report, which is designed to be read alongside our 2018 report – [Putting good ingredients in the mix](#) – we offer exemplars of this type of work. These show a range of approaches The National Lottery Community Fund has taken to tackling the challenge of fragile local infrastructure and filling funding gaps. The extended case studies focus on places across the UK, many designated priority one in the Government's Levelling Up Fund index.

While these don't offer a universal 'how to' guide, they do offer a window into ways that different approaches to funding can complement and support investment through local authorities and statutory agencies, and they show the value of community and voluntary sector-led approaches. Crucially, they explore ways we've invested to build local capacity and give voice and agency to communities across the UK.

Some have resulted in increased investment, showing how place-based working can leverage new funding from other sources. Others have complemented public money with small but targeted investments that put resources directly into the hands of residents to spend on their local priorities. Several are medium to long-term initiatives that have enabled creativity, removed risks, and inspired and equipped local people to test affordable and sustainable responses to embedded long-term challenges.

They focus on the particular context of each place, often with an eye to building local people's capacity and confidence. They show the importance of local knowledge, connections and trust, the value of linking and connecting groups, and the significance of building partnerships and networks that give all parts of the community voice and agency on top of money and resources.

Torbay:

Strengthening local capability, confidence and collaboration

In 2014, we identified that small organisations doing positive work in Torbay in Devon lacked the resources to scale up. Larger, national organisations needed better local knowledge and networks to plug into resident-led ideas and priorities that sat at the heart of our approach to funding.

To tackle this, we set up three strands of support:



Our Communities Can initiative, in partnership with the Young Foundation, which linked community groups with specialist local support to strengthen their skills and capacity.



A Pitch Your Project event in Torquay, where local people voted on which community projects would receive a share of £70,000.



Partnership building between local grassroots groups and large national organisations, led by Torbay Community Development Trust.

This support built a cohort of community organisations with bank accounts, established governance, community aims, and a sense of the impact they wanted to create, putting more local groups in a stronger position to apply for funding and grow independently.



- Between April 2020 and December 2022, 21 larger grants from The National Lottery Community Fund of over £10,000, with a combined value of £2.4 million, went into Torbay.
- Six of these are large awards (over £100,000) worth £1.56 million in total, including work with children and young adults, disabled people, and socially isolated residents of one deprived ward.

We learned that capacity building for smaller organisations must be given time to bed in – typically a few years from receiving support to developing a longer-term strategy or being ready to apply for funding.

Situation

Torbay is made up of the seaside towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, and is known to generations of holidaymakers as the English Riviera. However, it has also been identified as a priority one area in the UK Government's Levelling Up Fund index, with 27% of local people living in areas that are among the 20% most deprived in England.¹

In 2014, we identified that most funding applications from Torbay organisations were for small grants of less than £10,000, for up to a year. Applications for larger grants to support longer-term, sustainable projects were less common and had a lower success rate.

Despite this, positive work was being done through small local organisations and individuals, but most lacked the resources and experience to scale up their projects or attract more funding. Larger regional and national organisations did not have the on-the-ground networks to help them connect with the resident-led ideas and priorities that are at the heart of our approach to funding.

Solution

We established three strands of support for residents and groups with drive, connections and knowledge that could be better used to support the people of Torbay.

Capacity building

Our Communities Can partnership with [The Young Foundation](#) ran from 2015 to 2017, and offered capacity building support to Torbay, Blackpool, Barking and Dagenham, Peterborough and Sunderland.

The programme was open to individuals or small groups with a turnover of less than £10,000. They self-assessed against four key areas: governance, volunteering, fundraising and impact, and received vouchers worth up to £2,500 for support from local expert providers.

In Torbay, 87 packages worth £123,726 were delivered, totalling 409 hours of support. Providers included [Devon Voluntary Action](#), [Torbay Community Development Trust](#), [Torbay Social Enterprise Network](#), and [VOYC Devon](#). On average, beneficiaries rated the help they received as 4.6 out of five.²

Pitch Your Project

In 2017 we involved Torbay residents in deciding which local initiatives should be funded from a dedicated pot of over £70,000. We invited applications through a short expression of interest, after hearing that our application forms could be a barrier for informal community groups. This led to 30 requests for funding.

Working with Torbay Community Development Trust we held [Pitch Your Project](#), a Dragon's Den style event in Torquay. This gave 14 shortlisted groups a platform to present their work to around 40 local people, who then voted for the projects to be funded.

Nine groups received grants of between £3,000 and £10,000, including the Friends of [Fort Apache Adventure Playground](#), which had been forced to close due to antisocial behaviour. Our funding meant the group could reopen to children after making repairs and adding a new log cabin, swing and firepit.³

This was the first time that The National Lottery Community Fund had run a participatory grant making event in England, and for Torbay Community Development Trust the approach brought several positives. It increased public understanding of the work of local community groups, and how National Lottery funding can support them.⁴ It also enabled small groups that might be intimidated by more formal funding processes to access our grants, with minimal administration and paperwork, in an informal, fun way.⁵

We offered ongoing support to unsuccessful groups and gave £24,805 to four projects through National Lottery Awards for All.⁶

Strengthening partnerships

We also connected national organisations with Torbay Community Development Trust to introduce services in Torbay:

- As part of our £78 million [Ageing Better initiative](#), we gave £6 million to [Ageing Well Torbay](#), to reduce loneliness among some of the area's 6,000 socially isolated people aged over 50.



- We also gave £500,000 to [Imagine This](#), a partnership with [Action for Children](#) and 43 local charities, so they could collaborate more effectively and improve the health and wellbeing of children, teenagers and young people. At the time, Torbay Children's Services was in special measures, while charities were not well networked and often competing for funding.

Impact

Capacity building

This work helped build a cohort of community organisations with bank accounts, established governance, community aims, and a sense of the impact they wanted to create – all vital building blocks for grassroots organisations to secure funding and scale up to deliver impactful work.

This took time – many of the participating organisations took two or three years to show signs of growth, but the support had a real impact on those who participated.

Sound Communities in Paignton scaled up significantly after taking part. We had previously given the group five small, one-year grants, and in 2019 we awarded £184,000 for Sound Communities to develop a youth-led community radio station, **Ocean Youth Radio**, to connect and support disadvantaged young people.

In the two years to 2021, the group supported 1,350 young people and ran outreach sessions that reached teenagers in some of the most deprived parts of Torbay. This was important for participants' wellbeing during the pandemic, with 98% of young people reporting that they felt more included, 70% that they felt less anxious, and 62% that they felt happier.⁷

Overall, 88% of participants said that Sound Communities' work had helped to develop their confidence, 70% that it had helped them to feel part of a community, and 82% that they felt better in themselves.

In 2022 we awarded a further £175,000 to continue strengthening the organisation by helping it become more financially sustainable and expand and refurbish its premises to accommodate more young people. Demand for services is twice what it can currently support.

The project now employs five young people on the living wage and has nine volunteers, with aims to train up more young people with the skills and experience to become local social entrepreneurs.



A really exciting development for Sound Communities is we've been in discussion with our young people about how they can start to take a more active role in actually owning and selling the products that they produce. For example, we've got a group of young people who have just organically set up their own label recently. We've got young people who are bringing in funding for producing podcasts.

What we want to do with them – what they want to do too – is to actually start managing those budgets themselves, so they're getting experience of running social enterprises. The impact that this is having on the young people already is really tangible; it's like they are even more driven and motivated to achieve.⁸



Partnerships

Through the lifetime of Ageing Well Torbay, 27 delivery partners engaged 15,549 people aged over 50 and involved 2,270 volunteers in 350 resident-led projects and 66 Good Neighbour networks.⁹ By March 2021:



Participants' loneliness decreased and their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood increased from 59% to 70%



Over 50s volunteered more than 34,500 hours of time, improving their feelings of being valued and having purpose.

A cost benefit analysis, based on activity between April 2015 and March 2020, suggested that for every £1 spent, £1.62 in social value was created.¹⁰

Since National Lottery funding ended, 90% of Ageing Well activity, which included community builders, wellbeing coordinators and peer support, is now being funded from within Torbay, in part because “collaborative and trusting relationships between organisations across Torbay [led] to an acknowledgement of the value of asset-based community development and more integrated services for people and communities.”¹¹

Torbay Community Development Trust and other charities also play a more significant role in Torbay, for example through the Torbay Health and Wellbeing Network and by contributing to the Health and Wellbeing Board. Ageing Well's subscription bus service is now subsidised by the council.¹²

The Imagine This partnership began with 19 members in 2019 and has more than doubled in size. The partnership consulted over 530 children, young people and families and agreed three priority areas: safe spaces to hang out, mental health and wellbeing, and protecting the environment.

- 13 new projects reached over 6,800 participants, who reported making new friends, learning new skills, improving their confidence, and reducing anxiety.¹³
- Partnership members have benefited by sharing learning and skills, improving their reach to disadvantaged families, increasing access to qualified practitioners, and achieving better integration with statutory services.
- The partnership has secured additional support for Torbay to co-produce and design statutory services for young people at risk of entering the care system. This is via [LocalMotion](#), a place-based initiative that is jointly funded by Lloyds Bank Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Lankelly Chase Foundation, Tudor Trust, and City Bridge Trust.

Overall

This combination of place-based support has strengthened community organisations and partnerships across Paignton, Brixham and Torquay. Importantly, relationships and collaborations have developed and deepened, with many of the key players we have supported coming together to coordinate their own solutions and not waiting for the local authority or larger agencies to take charge.

In 2020, in the early days of the pandemic, [Citizens Advice Torbay](#) and a group of small, specialist advice organisations approached us for support. They wanted to enhance their online platform, which people were using to post requests for help, with an emergency helpline to better coordinate support from different agencies as part of the local response. Our grant of £99,979 ensured they could use their specialist knowledge and react quickly, at a time of great challenge.

By July 2021, the [Torbay Community Helpline](#) had answered 25,000 calls, and volunteer call handlers had supported 6,500 vulnerable local people to access practical support, including help with mental health and domestic abuse.

The helpline is now run by staff, volunteers, associates and partners of Torbay Community Development Trust, and continues to adapt to meet changing local needs. A pilot project, Front Door, supported Adult Social Care (ASC) clients' wellbeing. Of 656 referrals, the helpline successfully resolved 81%, with 11% receiving joint support from the helpline and ASC. Just 6% were referred back to ASC.¹⁴

In May 2022, Torbay Council awarded £228,000 to Age UK Torbay and Torbay Community Development Trust to continue the helpline, which continues to play a crucial role in linking people to services in the borough, supporting residents with the cost of living crisis including signposting to [Warm Spaces](#), the [Torbay Food Alliance](#) and the Torbay Good Neighbour scheme.

Our investments to support community and capacity building in Torbay have helped contribute to a stronger voluntary and community sector. Early indications are that organisations feel more confident to apply for larger amounts of funding and are better able to manage bigger, longer or more significant community-based projects.

Between April 2020 and December 2022ⁱ, we distributed 21 grants of over £10,000, with a combined value of £2.4 million. While it's normal for the pattern of funding to vary over time,ⁱⁱ this is a significant increase on the six grants made in the three financial years up to 2020.

- Six of the 21 are large awards worth £1.56 million in total, including work with children and young people, disabled people, and socially isolated people in Ellacombe ward, where around two-thirds of residents live in areas ranked amongst the 20% most deprived in England.
- 22% (4) of these organisations had not received funding from us in at least the previous 10 years.
- 44% (8) of the organisations that received over £10,000 had not previously received a grant of this size from us.
- 71% (15) of the grants had a value of between £10,000 and £100,000; compared to no awards of this size in the previous three financial years.

Learning

- Ensure that, as well as supporting specific projects, funding enables grant holders to build capacity, core skills and infrastructure. Capacity building is an ongoing process that enables groups to evolve as the local environment develops. This helps to create more sustainable social infrastructure, addressing one of the key barriers to investing effectively in the places that could most benefit from an injection of resources.
- Capacity building for smaller organisations must be given time to bed in. It is normal for groups to take a few years from receiving support to get to the point of developing a longer-term strategy or being ready to apply for funding.
- Working through existing local groups is a great way for large national partners to avoid the perception of 'helicoptering in' to impose top-down solutions. This can help projects to gain trust more easily, as well as giving them access to vital local knowledge.
- LocalMotion suggests that key enablers for place-based partnerships include existing infrastructure and collaboration, as well as committed political leadership. The leader of Torbay council, for example, is active in the LocalMotion core group.¹⁵

i 01 April 2020 to 31 December 2022.

ii 11 (52%) of these grants were made through the Coronavirus Community Support Fund, on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which helped Torbay cope with the impact of COVID-19.

Dudley:

Building trust through community strengths and relationships

The Wren's Nest housing estate in Dudley is a close-knit community, but has been negatively labelled because of the socioeconomic challenges it faces. Despite significant investment into regeneration since the 1990s, residents remain dissatisfied with the lack of lasting change.

To address this, YMCA Black Country Group sought to involve the community and local partners in plans to apply for funding from The National Lottery Community Fund. The organisation established a working group and spent 18 months engaging with the community to gain local support and to understand the issues people were facing.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, in its first year the project:



- Provided one-to-one support to 89 people, and delivered 64 activity and group support sessions, attracting an average of 40 participants per week.

Attendees have reported feeling:



- An increased sense of belonging, better mental and physical health, improved confidence, and a greater sense of optimism.
- Young people reported feeling safer, having more self-esteem, better focus, and improved skills.

People living in deprived areas and dealing with the realities of poverty may instinctively be wary of outsiders and professionals, so finding ways to build rapport and break down mistrust are vital. Perseverance, time and dialogue are key to ongoing success.



Situation

Wren's Nest is a large housing estate in Dudley. The area has a close-knit community, but has been negatively labelled because of the socioeconomic challenges it faces, which include crime, antisocial behaviour, unemployment, low educational attainment, and a lack of skills.

Significant regeneration funding went into the estate from the 1990s onwards¹⁶ which helped tackle challenges for a time. However, residents have expressed dissatisfaction with one-off initiatives that have failed to secure a longer-term legacy or implement lasting change.

With no local community groups or organisations, and parts of the community suspicious of 'officials', it had become difficult for local agencies to engage families in positive activities, and to divert young people away from antisocial behaviour and crime, including gang activity.

Solution

In 2019, [YMCA Black Country Group](#) (YMCA BCG) applied for funding to send family support workers into Wren's Nest to help local households build resilience, skills and stability. Given the local context, we advised that the group should refocus its plans on building the community up from within and harnessing its strengths.

In response, YMCA BCG set up a Wren's Nest working group, which brought together residents, schools and partner organisations. These included the council, housing providers, churches, the local Youth Offending Team, and Police Community Support Officers.

Partners worked closely with the community for 18 months to gain their buy-in and support through face-to-face interviews that explored the issues residents were facing, and what would engage and support families.

In 2021 we awarded almost £645,000 for the [Wren's Nest Navigator](#) project, which aims to combat entrenched unemployment, reduce crime and antisocial behaviour, and raise community-wide skills and aspirations.

The project's approach is to start by getting to know families well, with staff spending time in the neighbourhood to build rapport. This helps to ensure that project activities are tailored to people's needs and work with the community's strengths, while also tackling barriers and challenges.

Volunteer navigators, supported by staff, work with individuals and families to create a personal action plan and provide tailored support. This is delivered through a combination of mentoring, in-person and online activities, and support meetings. Involving local people in supporting others is a key part of the project, helping to ensure that the community becomes more resilient from within.

Initial uptake of volunteering opportunities was low, with those approached doubting they had the confidence or skills to help others. Project staff had to build trust and help potential volunteers feel they had something to offer. They approached this in a light-touch way, talking to people during other sessions and explaining what was involved, and the education and support that was available.

Training, delivered by a dedicated volunteer coordinator, covers safeguarding, health and safety, and role-specific skills. Volunteers also get a YMCA email address, and access to a range of online training courses and secure platforms that allow them to communicate with their mentees without sharing their personal contact details.

Staff found that a significant proportion of volunteers were dropping out just before being allocated roles, as they were required to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. To stop this safeguarding requirement putting people off, staff asked for personal details at the start of the training process, so that DBS checks were completed by the time training was finished and volunteers were ready to be mobilised.

All volunteers are supervised and supported, both one-to-one and through group meetings, which also build and strengthen their social connections.

Trained volunteers are matched with individuals who they support for up to six months. They meet to identify achievable life goals, and signpost to relevant activities, services and workshops. To further support their personal development, volunteers help with administrative tasks which helps to build employability skills for the future.

Impact

The project has seen success in its first year. It provided one-to-one support to 89 people and delivered 64 activity and group support sessions, including cooking and eating workshops, employability skills and more. These attracted an average of 40 participants per week.

Attendees have reported improvements in mental and physical health, increased feelings of belonging, and a greater sense of optimism. Additionally, young people have reported feeling safer, with more self-esteem, better focus, and improved skills.

While the project is still in its early stages, YMCA BCG has observed that when evening sessions for young people were reduced, instances of antisocial behaviour increased, suggesting that providing a safe and secure environment for young people can have a positive impact on the estate.

The project's work with schools has also had an effect. Staff have worked with Wren's Nest Primary School and Priory Park Community School to support young people during the transition from primary to secondary school, providing structure at a life stage when

increasing independence can put young people at risk of being drawn into antisocial behaviour. Priory Park is now seeking funding for a recreation space for young people with social, emotional and mental health needs.

Learning

- Communities can be left frustrated when projects do good work but then disappear, so to tackle mistrust or scepticism it's important to build strong connections before introducing new projects.
 - Goals should include enabling and resourcing the community to support itself, and creating an integrated partnership that could underpin a long-term, sustainable flow of funding to the area, avoiding perceptions of outsiders parachuting in and out.
 - Recruiting local volunteers and building the strength of the community may help independent groups to eventually form and take on longer-term ownership and responsibility.
- Taking time to build trust is vital, because many groups will be working with individuals that have had difficult experiences of engaging with local services like the council or police.
 - To break down barriers, perseverance is key. An important first step is helping people to access resources, learn basic skills, and get hold of essentials. This can help to build trust and improves the possibility of more engagement and impact down the line.
 - To address concerns that staff may report issues to the police or social services, YMCA BCG built a close working relationship with West Midlands Police and involved Police Community Support Officers in activity sessions, helping to build rapport and break down suspicion.
 - Workshops with young people created safe spaces to discuss difficult issues like alcohol and drug use, sexism and racism. Many teenagers said they had never had these conversations before. This openness enabled conversations that helped participants learn more about different cultures and religions, and the consequences of discriminatory behaviour.
 - Engaging young people in discussing why antisocial acts happen opened up dialogue about personal and social consequences. This can help to move the conversation away from blame and towards education and understanding.
 - Working with older teenagers aged 15-18 was more challenging, with ongoing hostility and abuse. To address this, the project increased the number of staff in sessions with this age group and gave a greater focus to prevention and diversion activities with younger teenagers to get them off the pathway to similar behaviours.¹⁷

Gosport:

Local partnerships to help ensure that smaller towns don't miss out to larger neighbours

In Gosport, a small town in Hampshire, the voluntary and community sector has struggled to attract a proportionate share of funding, compared to its bigger neighbour, Portsmouth.

To address this, we raised awareness of National Lottery funding through local funding fairs and targeted investments into partnerships between larger Portsmouth-based charities and smaller organisations in Gosport.

Two partnerships, Close Encounters, a partnership between Age UK Portsmouth and Gosport Voluntary Action and The Lighthouse, a partnership between Havant and East Hants Mind and local young people's mental health charity Motiv8, were established to support older people facing loneliness and young people with mental health issues.

Close Encounters helped 86% of participants achieve their goals related to health and care, security, finances, and social interaction, with 73% reporting a decrease in feelings of loneliness. The Lighthouse worked with 69 young people through group sessions and 37 through one-to-one support, improving their confidence and self-care skills.



From 2017/18 to 2018/19, we awarded grants worth £103,000 in Gosport. This rose to £1.3m in the next two years, including support for the community during the pandemic.

The funding of local partnerships offers an effective way to increase resources and support local networks, leading to a more established community sector.

Situation

Gosport lies on a peninsula to the west of Portsmouth. Its bigger neighbour has 15 areas in the 10% most deprived in England¹⁸ and a more developed voluntary and community sector than Gosport. Portsmouth-based projects often cover Gosport by default, but many find it difficult to make an impact in a town that is culturally distinct from their own.

In 2018, we spoke to local MPs and sector leaders and reviewed our funding to Gosport. A low number of applications meant fewer grants were going into the town than into similar parts of Hampshire.

Solution

We worked with the MP and [Gosport Voluntary Action \(GVA\)](#) to run a series of funding surgeries for micro and small organisations, to remove barriers to accessing our funding. An event for potential applicants in Gosport in mid-2021 resulted in four applications for medium and large grants.

We also made targeted awards to connect large Portsmouth-based organisations to smaller groups with a more dedicated focus on Gosport. This helped pool resources and share expertise while addressing the issue of Portsmouth-based funding not reaching the town.

For example, we gave £670,000 to Close Encounters, a partnership between [Age UK Portsmouth](#) and GVA to enhance the quality of life of lonely and isolated older people. Individually, both organisations had a positive track record, with Age UK Portsmouth having helped reduce 999 calls and hospital attendances, and GVA effectively supporting people with complex needs referred by adult social care services.

Working in partnership enabled the two groups to develop and improve their services, through a shared customer records management system, cross referrals, and sharing learning. The project also extended its geographical reach into Havant, Hayling and Fareham. Information provision was sub-contracted to [Age Concern Gosport](#), bringing another Gosport organisation into the partnership and adding new skills and experience.

The partnership built strong working relationships with local authorities and health services, particularly to support social prescribing locally. Referrals from GP based social prescribers were common during the COVID-19 lockdowns, with one prescriber describing Close Encounters as “pretty much the only route for support for some of our patients.”¹⁹ The partnership also delivered training to third year paramedic students, raising the profile of social prescribing with a new generation of healthcare professionals.

The partnership’s steering committee and public forums involve service users in planning, delivering and developing services. The partners quickly found that a single forum covering both Gosport and Portsmouth was alienating some people, with most lacking knowledge of the other location or of the services available from the two different councils. Quarterly public forums are now held in both Gosport and Portsmouth, with at least one delegate from each town attending the steering committee, so that each place has equal representation.

A grant of over £500,000 to local young people's mental health charity [Motiv8](#) meant the group could offer free programmes to young people in Gosport and Fareham. These combine one-to-one and group support, and offer activity groups that include wellbeing sessions, sexual health advice, support for parents and carers, and skills training. This has provided a valuable service to the Gosport community, and this grant, plus additional emergency funding during the pandemic, gave the charity the security to grow and develop its capacity.

This meant Motiv8 was well positioned to partner with [Havant and East Hants Mind](#) on a new young people's project – the Lighthouse – which we supported in 2021 with a grant of almost £475,000. It offers drop-in sessions, signposting and family support, and focuses specifically on providing early intervention support for young people's mental health.

Both partners have found the experience to be positive. Staff have valued working together and sharing experience that helps them make decisions about complex cases. Other practical advantages include being able to support one another to cover sickness absence and learning from the challenges of combining an open culture (Motiv8) with a more structured service (Mind).

Impact

Close Encounters worked with people to set and work towards a range of goals covering five key areas: health and care, safety and security at home, financial security, big life changes, and social interaction. Overall, 86% (1,550) of all recorded goals were successfully achieved.

Participants' loneliness typically improved from baseline to three months, and overall, 73% noted a decrease in their feelings of loneliness. The project also saw a decline in the proportion of participants feeling dissatisfied with their relationships and friendships.

Close Encounters also helped older people apply for and obtain over £1.26 million in benefits they were eligible for, but missing out on. Most commonly, this was Attendance Allowance for people over the State Pension age who need help with care because of illness or disability.²⁰

Partners recognised that a key strength in the collaboration was each partner's local expertise, and a history of being respected and well connected within their respective communities. Interviews with participants highlighted the personalised nature of the service as a key driver of its success.

Since launching in 2020, Motiv8's hub has seen over a thousand young people and almost 250 parents, virtually and face-to-face, through a range of weekly drop-in sessions and bookable appointments.²¹ Attendees have noted making friends, being able to speak openly to staff, and access to outdoor space as highlights. Parents have also praised the service for helping their children to be themselves, socialise, and talk to people about their feelings.

The Lighthouse is relatively new, having started in mid-2021 during the challenges of COVID-19. However, it has already found that young people are presenting with very complex home situations. In its first full year it worked with 69 individual young people through group sessions, which are targeted at different ages, with support for years six to eight most popular. 37 young people also took up regular one-to-one support sessions with Motiv8 or a Mind Wellbeing Practitioner, and early indications are that this combination of support is helping them improve their confidence, make friends, and learn new skills for self-care.²²

One participant was signposted to the service by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and initially only attended “to shut them up!”. He quickly found the Lighthouse to be a safe space to start to tackle his social anxiety. “Social anxiety is something that I’ve always really suffered with, especially with people my own age – I find them quite scary [...] but by coming here, it’s starting to make me see that the outside world is a safe place. The more I come, the more I feel comfortable going out anywhere else.”

Overall, 100% of attendees say that their mental health and wellbeing has improved since accessing the service.

Support from The National Lottery Community Fund

Since funding these large partnership projects, we have also increased other investments into Gosport. In the two financial years prior to this work (2017/18 and 2018/19) we awarded 11 grants worth a combined £103,000 in the town. In the following two financial years this rose to 17 grants worth £1.3 million, including more than £118,000 to support the community to respond to the pandemic.

This increased funding included money for Elson Community Library, which was closed along with seven other libraries in 2020. Our grant enabled local people to reopen the library as a community hub, offering support groups, an office space for local organisations, training courses, social events, and a café. It aims to become self-sufficient through renting out space and offering paid memberships.

While our increased funding continues, there’s more to be done to expand the number of organisations in the town that are eligible for funding or substantial enough to apply for larger grants. Since 2017/18, over 80% of our awards in Gosport have been through small grants of £10,000 or less.

As in many parts of the UK, the pandemic left the charities and community groups in Gosport under pressure. We continue to support GVA to strengthen the sector and build capacity and capability.

GVA’s Bringing Gosport Together bi-monthly networking event brings together members, businesses, public services and community champions to work together on local initiatives. It’s also a vehicle to share learning and gain practical peer support, including on how groups can market their work more effectively, helping people across Gosport be better aware of the range of services and activities available in the town.

Targeted work on volunteering means that GVA now offers around 90 volunteer roles per month on behalf of local groups, filling an average of 20 vacancies a month. To help meet demand, GVA runs a supported volunteering project that works with local people who don't fit the usual volunteer profile, helping them to gain confidence and progress to volunteering independently. This includes Afghan and Ukrainian refugee residents, people who have been unemployed for significant periods and ex-offenders.

Learning

- Smaller towns and communities located close to major cities may miss out on funding as a better-developed voluntary sector can pull funding into larger urban areas. Local partners offer area knowledge and insight and can be a familiar and trusted link into the community, sharing learning about how work can be adapted to better meet the needs of different localities.
 - Funding Community Voluntary Service organisations or other infrastructure providers offers a way to get money and staff into communities to strengthen local networks and connections. This can help create the conditions for a more established set of community groups to grow.
 - Over time, smaller groups can be supported to learn about funding opportunities and how to access them, in situations where people don't know about funding or don't see grants as being for them.

Powys:

Community land ownership as a lever for ongoing investment

In 2018, an opportunity arose for the community of Newtown in Powys to become more involved in the management of the town's open spaces, which the county council could no longer afford to maintain to the standards residents expected.

Through our Community Asset Transfer programme we funded a newly formed organisation, Open Newtown, to take over ownership of 130 acres of green space. Land was transferred to the group under a 99-year lease in one of the largest transfers of ownership to the community ever made in Wales.

This has transformed 'acres of mown desert' into a thriving, vibrant set of outdoor community assets including 4,500 new trees, a town-centre play park, a cycle storage hub, and a BMX track.



- A new community venue built through this funding, Hafan yr Afon, has created 10 new jobs through a private catering franchise.
- Funding has encouraged an additional £2 million of investment into the town, including grants from the Welsh Government.

Projects of this scale, led by local people and properly supported by funders, can act as a catalyst for new funding, income generation, and spin-off activities that further benefit the community.

Strong working relationships and honest communication help mitigate the inevitable challenges of large asset transfers.



Situation

In 2018, Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn Town Council put out a call to the community to look for new and sustainable ways to manage the open spaces of Newtown in Powys. This was linked with the imperative to give people reasons to visit the area – a new bypass was being built that risked reducing footfall into the town centre. At the same time, “Powys County Council was putting out the message that it could not afford to maintain green spaces to the standards people were used to.”²³

These factors served as a call to action, increasing local support for a town-wide revitalisation project, led by local volunteers, community enterprises and organisations. People from across the town came together as Going Green for a Living Community Land Trust to respond and made an application to us for funding.

Solution

Our £13 million **Community Asset Transfer** programme was jointly financed with the Welsh Government. It supported the transfer of physical assets from individual, public or private sector ownership to the community. Grants were usually awarded for buildings rather than land – so an application to transfer 130 acres of outdoor space into community ownership was unusual. However, we believed it was worth supporting, given how engaged the community was.

We awarded the newly formed group, trading as **Open Newtown**, a £1.1 million grant and supported it closely throughout the early stages of the award. Working with a new organisation, on a major project, took time and effort, as the community built the project from the ground up.



We helped Open Newtown to put in place governance procedures and processes, and encouraged it to increase its diversity, bringing in more women and young people. The group held consultation events, surveys, school visits and pop-up shows to find out what local people wanted. This led to a community action plan that focused on the value of green spaces for physical and mental wellbeing.

In 2019, the land was transferred from the county council, via the town council, to Open Newtown under a 99-year lease. This was one of the largest ever transfers of land into community ownership in Wales.

The council’s Cabinet Member for Property praised the transfer as “an imaginative and innovative approach to managing property and land,” arguing that community organisations might be in a stronger position than local authorities to turn local ‘liabilities’ into assets.²⁴ Open Newtown highlighted that “the flexibility that The National Lottery Community Fund gave us through the process was paramount.”²⁵

Impact

This work has transformed what Open Newtown described as 130 acres of “mown desert” into a thriving, vibrant set of outdoor community assets.

- 4,500 trees, 30 acres of urban hay meadows, an accessible wildlife pond, a town-centre play park, orchards, an edible growing trail, a cycle storage hub, a BMX track, and an urban mountain biking track have been planted or installed.
- A new, sustainable venue, [Hafan yr Afon](#), offers a gateway to the green space and houses tourist information, a small shop selling local handmade crafts, exhibition spaces, a café, a function room, a licensed bar, fully accessible toilets, and an adult changing space.
 - 10 full and part-time jobs have been created, through awarding a private catering franchise with a focus on local, seasonal produce.
 - Over time, the venue aims to increase footfall and spending in the town, as well as offering training opportunities, space and support to new and emerging local businesses.
- Our funding helped Open Newtown establish its name and reputation and, as a result, it has secured an additional £2 million of investment for the town, including grants from the Welsh Government for work to support wellbeing, resilient businesses and sustainable farming.^{26 27}

Learning

Funding one large asset transfer may feel riskier than supporting a range of smaller projects, but backing local organisations with the money, freedom and skills to act in the community’s interest can go a long way to building engagement, trust and pride in a community.

Nevertheless, this approach requires more intensive ongoing support to equip funded organisations to handle the scale of the investment and be representative of the whole community.^{28 29}

- Strong working relationships and honest communication between all parties helps mitigate the inevitable challenges of large asset transfers.
 - COVID-19, plus volatility in the economy and supply chain, led to cost rises and delays at a scale that could not have been planned for. Communicating early and honestly helped find solutions and, in this case, The National Lottery Community Fund, Welsh Government and Powys County Council were able to cover the shortfall.
- Money at this scale can act as a catalyst for new funding, income and spin-off activities.
 - It gave Open Newtown enough additional capacity to support, lead and partner with others on projects including a low-carbon transport initiative, funded through the Rural Development Plan for Wales.
 - The group’s specialist staff keep the accounts for several local charities, which generates a small monthly income and means local groups benefit from skills they can’t afford to employ in-house.

- With land secured for the future, the organisation is increasing its focus on climate change and environmental issues like biodiversity loss. It has contributed to Powys' strategy for de-carbonisation and is part of community action to lower Newtown's carbon footprint.
- Taking over community assets might mean inheriting problems like anti-social behaviour, vandalism and littering. Left unchecked, these can have a negative impact on residents' perceptions of a project. To combat this, it is important to plan for them and engage with the community.
 - Running dialogue events, consultations and open days can help overcome opposition and involve those who are at risk of misusing open spaces.
 - Open Newtown worked with the town council, police and Police Community Support Officers to find solutions, including CCTV. The group also partnered with community bike workshop, Bike to the Future, to mentor and support at-risk young people to tackle litter.
 - Positively engaging with the community can also encourage volunteering, with people coming forward to care for the green spaces through activities like planting trees and ponds, maintaining paths and hedges, and disposing of litter.
- A planned and proactive approach to communication keeps the community informed and excited.
 - When taking over ownership of assets, messaging is key. Locals need to see that work led by the voluntary sector is for the benefit of everyone, and not in competition with, or less important than, council-run services.
 - It's important to actively moderate social media channels, and respond promptly and professionally to feedback, particularly if it's critical.
 - Open Newtown found that feedback via social media is a useful barometer of what matters to residents, and helped the group adapt and develop its plans.
- A plan for recruiting, inducting and retaining staff and board members is essential.
 - Building staff capability, skills and experience can inadvertently contribute to staff turnover. When one of Open Newtown's key employees moved on, he was invited to become a board member, ensuring his knowledge and contacts weren't lost.
 - A diverse board with a wide range of skills can strengthen the practical support available to the staff team. Partnering with other organisations can help where grassroots groups lack resource, capacity or skills, or where specialist knowledge is needed.

Fair Share Trust:

Long-term investment to tackle over 80 funding cold spots

In 2002 we endowed £50 million to establish the Fair Share Trust (FST), to address why some parts of the UK were finding it harder than others to access National Lottery funding.

The trust provided money and capacity building support to build the confidence, skills and experience of communities to design, lead or become involved in local initiatives.

FST ran from 2003 to 2013 and funded over 1,100 projects that benefited more than 250,000 people.

96%

96% of local agents said FST's support created new local networks.

94%

94% said it improved the skills and abilities of people to be active changemakers in their community.

91%

91% agreed it bolstered community spirit.

£

Funded organisations secured over **£25 million** in additional funding.

The length of the initiative was crucial because long-term funding allowed more strategic thinking and the flexibility to adapt to changes in the external economic landscape.

Building capacity for new groups to become sustainable can take years; most additional funding was obtained after at least five years.

Situation

At the turn of the millennium, some parts of the UK were felt to be missing out on National Lottery funding. Our predecessor organisation, the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), made an endowment of £50 million to establish the Fair Share Trust to put money and capacity building support into over 80 of these cold spots. Responsibility passed to The Big Lottery Fund after NOF merged with the Community Fund in 2004.

The trust ran for 10 years, so it could take time to build and strengthen connections, skills and knowledge. Funding was awarded over 10 years (2003 to 2013) in England and Wales, eight years in Northern Ireland, and seven years in Scotland.

Solution

The Community Foundation Network, now [UK Community Foundations \(UKCF\)](#), managed the endowment, and appointed 28 local and partner agents to roll out funding and support. In England, these were community foundations, local infrastructure organisations, or councils for voluntary service. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, country wide UKCF members acted as agents.

Overall, 56 local authority areas across England, Wales and Scotland, and 49 wards in Northern Ireland, were targeted, based on past levels of National Lottery funding, levels of deprivation, and discussions with the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales.

In England and Scotland, this was then narrowed further to neighbourhood level, targeting 48 neighbourhoods in 45 local authorities in England, and 13 in Scotland's six local authorities. These varied in size, with populations ranging from 3,000 to 135,000.

Local agents set up panels of residents and representatives from charities, businesses and public sector bodies. These set the programme's priorities, provided local insight, and made recommendations about what should be funded.

The approach successfully linked residents and organisations to think strategically about what to fund, though this took time. The intention was for local panels to start soliciting projects they wanted to see on the back of an agreed strategy, but some panels initially limited themselves to approving or rejecting applications as they came in.

Towards the end of the programme, Community Foundation Scotland (CFS) (now [Foundation Scotland](#)) found that local panels were shifting their focus away from assessing applications and making recommendations. Rather than letting them lose their sense of purpose, CFS began to give panels a role in project monitoring and evaluation. This gave them a sense of ongoing ownership of the work they funded and helped to strengthen their strategic thinking.

The programme also helped to develop community capacity and sustainability through encouraging and building partnerships. For areas that have struggled to access funding, this can be vital in developing networks that produce joined-up plans so they can present a more strategic, long-term case to funders.

Impact

Fair Share was successful in getting over £50 million into areas that had previously struggled to access National Lottery funding. This directly benefitted over 250,000 people, through the work of over 1,100 projects.

This support strengthened and gave credibility to funded organisations, helping them become a more attractive proposition to funders through their demonstrable experience of successful project delivery. Many grew and become more financially stable, which in turn built their confidence to apply for and manage further grants.

For every £1 put into the endowment, an additional 50p was raised, totalling £25 million of new income. £5.4 million (22%) was in grants from The National Lottery Community Fund, alongside awards from an array of other sources, including the Arts Council, BBC Children in Need, Comic Relief, Community First, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the European Social Fund, the Lloyds TSB Foundation, and local authorities.

The majority of this happened from the midway point of the programme onwards, demonstrating the value of a longer-term, sustained approach to building capacity and growing a coherent voluntary, community and social enterprise sector that is well-networked and working to a shared strategic goal.

While it is not easy to track the legacy of this investment in the decade since the trust closed, it set solid foundations for community-led initiatives that have made a positive, enduring difference.

In May 2022, Foundation Scotland reflected that “the [Fair Share Trust] work done in Linwood helped pave the way for further funding and support for the area [...] Today, there’s a flourishing development trust, owning assets, delivering services, and helping ensure that Linwood residents are more connected with, and served by, activity and services supporting them to flourish.”³⁰

In Caerphilly, [Disability Can Do](#) was funded to form a new charity supporting people with disabilities. The group recognised that it needed to work with organisations that had existing networks in the area, so built strong links with the local Citizens Advice branch, which led to the two organisations moving into shared premises. This not only increased their reach, impact and knowledge, but also saved them money. The charity still operates in 2022, and The National Lottery Community Fund alone has awarded it over £1.8 million in grants.

“Before the Fair Share Trust programme there was literally nothing to support local people who are disabled, or their carers. Without the funding and support we could never have created a local, user-led charity to advocate for people with disabilities and to campaign for better local services...even the local buses are better as a result...We have managed to achieve so much and to change the lives of so many people in Caerphilly.”³¹

In Glasgow, Toryglen Gardening Club was founded in 2004 by three residents who wanted to improve their local area. The FST local panel wanted to support the club's work but knew that the small volunteer-led group lacked the time, resources, and capacity to manage a grant, and so funded a development officer to work with them.

Within two years the club had made huge progress, linking with schools and housing associations, and getting many more people doing things outdoors. By 2009, it had trained and recruited 70 volunteers and created six new community gardens.

The club became a registered charity and changed its name to [Urban Roots](#). It went from strength to strength, providing employment opportunities and involving at least 300 local people in making the area more environmentally sustainable.

Crucially, the group successfully applied for over £150,000 from the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund. Since then, The National Lottery Community Fund has awarded Urban Roots over £375,000, supporting its ongoing contribution to the social and environmental renewal of Toryglen.

Fair Share Trust created positive outcomes for residents, making people feel more able to make a difference and enabling groups to cooperate to make positive change happen in their neighbourhood. This led to new relationships and trust between people with different backgrounds and interests, and 91% of local agents surveyed said work had bolstered community spirit.

Almost all agreed that the work had generated new local networks (96%) and helped enhance people's skills and abilities to make change happen locally (94%).³²

Learning

- Deciding which areas and neighbourhoods to focus on should be done in conjunction with local people and stakeholders:
 - Most communities and local authorities don't want to be given a negative label by outsiders.
 - Selecting specific wards or estates over others may be controversial. You can help manage differences of opinion by having a clear rationale for choices, giving people opportunities to contribute, and agreeing who will have final say if there are differences of opinion.
- The most successful local panels happened when:
 - The group was tailored to fit the local context and was diverse and representative of the community.
 - Members had time and support to develop their skills and knowledge.
 - Residents felt that their contributions were as valued as those of professionals, and that local agents followed the panel's recommendations.

- Members were actively involved in projects, by visiting them, volunteering, or giving advice.
- They were strategic and took a long-term view.
- Relationships between panel members were positive and trusting.
- A neutral third party was available to help resolve disagreements.
- They were realistic about how much time people would be willing to commit and offered a variety of easy ways to get involved.
- There was honesty about the scale and kinds of changes local people would and would not be able to influence or change.
- They were engaged in the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of projects to build a learning-based culture.
- The length of this initiative was crucial because:
 - Setting up a programme and creating a trust deed (the legal arrangement for UKCF to manage the programme) both take time.
 - Building capacity for new groups to become sustainable can take years. Most additional funding was obtained after at least five years.
 - Long-term funding can be more strategic and allows for flexibility to adapt to changes in the external economic landscape.

Clackmannanshire:

Maintaining community assets through diversified funding

In 2018, five community halls in Clackmannanshire were facing closure. Each community approached us for around £150,000 each. This risked the facilities transferring reliance from one single source of funding (the local council) to another.

We proposed a sustainable solution, a £50,000 grant to pay a development worker to help the groups secure asset transfers or long-term, low-cost leases, and to diversify their funding through alternative grants.

Two groups purchased their hall outright through funding from the Scottish Land Fund. One group secured a long-term lease from the council, and another is in the process of negotiating a similar arrangement.



- Groups went on to secure additional support from The National Lottery Community Fund, including small grants for physical improvements, environmental work, and support for youth activities.
- Two groups secured £130,000 from other funders.

Professional support to help community organisations be better organised, more informed about funding opportunities, and clearer about their long-term strategy can help long-term sustainability and avoid overreliance on a single source of funding.

Situation

In 2018, Clackmannanshire Council announced plans to cut funding to community centres and village halls in the towns of Alva, Clackmannan, Dollar, Menstrie and Tullibody. At a funders' fair in 2018, we were approached for [Community Led](#) funding to keep the five halls open, at a cost of around £150,000 each.



This raised concerns that our grants were being sought to replace local authority funding. We identified that a more sustainable, long-term solution would be to support the halls to move to a blended model, with self-generated income, long-term leases, and grants from a range of funders.

Solution

We brokered a meeting between representatives of the five communities, Clackmannanshire Council, and [Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface \(CTSI\)](#). In response to the issues raised, we proposed funding a community development worker. They would work with all five groups and help them secure other funding, reach agreements with the council, or steer them through the community asset transfer process to keep these important local amenities open.

We awarded CTSI £50,000 to fund the role. The development worker liaised with the council's legal team, providing a single point of contact to make communication more efficient and joined up. They also held quarterly network meetings to share progress, knowledge and best practice.

This led to two main solutions for the ongoing running of the facilities: outright purchase through external funding, and long-term leases with no rental costs. Both solutions meant the groups would not need to spend energy and income on raising money to purchase the facilities themselves, and the council would be free of the ongoing running costs.

Impact

- **Tullibody Community Development Trust** purchased the former Tullibody Civic Centre through a negotiated sale from Clackmannanshire Council. By demonstrating the benefits this would bring to the community, the group agreed a 50% discount with the council, paying just under £250,000,³³ predominantly using funding from the Scottish Government via the **Scottish Land Fund**.³⁴
 - This protected activities and services for residents, including sports and recreation facilities, as well as the Heritage Centre that houses local archives and tells the story of the village and surrounding area.
 - In its first year of ownership, the trust generated a profit from room hire and a café. It also secured a £91,000 grant from The National Lottery Community Fund to hire a facilities coordinator and install a CCTV system, and in 2021 brought in almost £40,000 from other funders.
- **Dollar Community Development Trust** initially took over running the Hive, which allowed the group to gather evidence of its benefits to the community. In early 2022 the trust completed a 20% discounted purchase through a community asset transfer, which was also funded by the Scottish Land Fund (£284,800).³⁵
 - The Hive is now a focal point for the community through its busy weekly schedule of events and activities. It also houses a community library, which is entirely staffed by volunteers, and was made possible by a donation of 4,000 books from the council and ongoing contributions from users.
 - The group secured small grants from The National Lottery Community Fund to hire its own development officer and to create a community garden. A £10,000 environmental grant is helping it become more sustainable. The group also secured around £90,000 from other funders in 2020 and 2021.
- **Alva Development Trust** negotiated a long-term care and repair lease for Cochrane Hall from the council which meant the group could take control of day-to-day running.
 - During the pandemic, the group ran a foodbank from the hall, providing essentials to vulnerable people. This helped around 430 families a month³⁶ and, by the end of June 2020, had reached 1,329 families across wider Clackmannanshire.³⁷
 - The group has successfully applied for additional grants to support the longer-term goal of keeping the building open. Our small grants are improving IT equipment and helping to reopen toilets and a kiosk after four years of closure, as well as refurbishing the hall's floor.
 - The group has also moved towards self-sufficiency by hiring the hall out for events, including weddings.
- **Menstrie Community Action Group** is now running Our Dumyat Centre under a licence to occupy from the council, as the group awaits the finalisation of a 25-year lease. The group secured a small grant from The National Lottery Community Fund for redecoration, and a £20,000 grant to run a youth activities hub.

- The fifth venue, Clackmannan Town Hall, needed extensive roof repair work and other improvements. In partnership with [Clackmannan Town Hall Trust](#) the council is providing over £1 million for this work, which also includes repairs and cleaning of the stonework.³⁸

The original development worker has been employed permanently by CTSI, and a new member of staff has been hired to continue working with the groups. We have awarded an additional £20,000 to keep the role going, as it has expanded to include support for several other smaller local organisations who manage community assets, and who are in negotiations with the council about long-term lease arrangements.

Learning

- Professional support to become better organised, more informed about funding opportunities, and clearer about long-term strategy can help community groups develop long-term sustainability and avoid becoming dependent on a single source of funding.
- ‘Care and repair’ lease arrangements can offer the best of both worlds in cases where a local authority can’t afford to keep running a community centre, and community groups lack the capacity to fundraise to buy the facility outright.
 - Seeking advice on leases and establishing who holds overall responsibility for repairs and maintenance is important. Some leases may legally bind groups to repair and maintain premises, while others restrict access to parts of a building, making essential work impossible.³⁹
- Community asset transfer is a time-consuming process and requires effort and resilience from all parties. Key success factors in Clackmannanshire included:
 - Being clear with the council about the skills, knowledge and experience of volunteers to establish their credibility to take over an asset.
 - Actively seeking out people with skills and experience and not assuming that they would already be community activists. Both the Menstrie and Dollar groups ended up with fresh blood, and the group in Alva found that existing volunteers learned from new people who came forward to be involved as the trust successfully raised its profile.⁴⁰
 - Building a compelling case that demonstrates the venue’s value and contribution to the local community.
 - Visiting other sites and groups that had gone through the same process to gain practical tips and honest advice.
 - Not being afraid to ask for support, especially when going through the process for the first time. The Development Trust Association Scotland’s [Community Ownership Support Service](#) was “a great support all the way through.”⁴¹
 - Sourcing copies of maintenance records or, where necessary, working with consultants, engineers and electricians to document the layout of the building to help avoid problems in the future.
 - Budgeting for running and repair costs, including energy bills. Some funding or income will always be essential to keep a venue viable.

Northumberland:

Money and power to communities to address local priorities

Our £217 million endowment to establish the Big Local programme empowered 150 areas across England by giving them £1.1 million of funding from The National Lottery Community Fund to spend as they wished.

CELL Big Local in Northumberland, made up of the villages of Cresswell, Ellington, Linton and Lynemouth, was the first of these areas to distribute all its funds.

The initial investment of £1.16 million from The National Lottery Community Fund grew into a final total of around £3.2 million through match funding and support in kind.



90%

- Overall, 90% of partnership members felt that the investment made into their area had made a positive difference to the quality of residents' lives.



- All projects funded through the investment agreed that residents had come together to build a stronger sense of community, and 75% agreed that residents had increased their skills and confidence to identify and respond to future needs.



- The percentage of residents who were satisfied with their quality of life rose from 73% to 85% and the proportion describing their area in positive terms rose from 58% in 2013 to 70% in 2020.

Communities took great care of the money entrusted to them and prided themselves on seeking out low or no-cost options to maximise the overall value of the investment.

Situation

Our endowment of £217 million to [Local Trust](#) to run [Big Local](#) was the largest ever investment, outside of government funding, into place-based, resident-led change.

The programme began in 2012 and gave 150 areas in England that have historically received below-average amounts of investment at least £1.1 million each to spend over a period of 10 to 15 years. Residents set their own plans and priorities, and then allocate funding for work to be delivered at a pace they are comfortable with.

The programme ends in 2026, and [CELL Big Local](#) – a partnership across the villages of Cresswell, Ellington, Linton and Lynemouth in Northumberland – is the first to have distributed its entire £1.1 million. While this is a large sum overall, the approach taken by CELL has been to use local knowledge and insight to target relatively small amounts of funding in areas where it would have high impact.

Solution

Our usual approach to funding is to be responsive to community needs by funding a diverse array of individual projects. Through Big Local, we experimented with a more joined up, whole place approach.

The CELL partnership showed how place-based funding can help residents feel more positive about their area and improve how they rate their quality of life. It also added to the activities and amenities available locally through more than 40 initiatives, including support for housing and public transport, and small loans to two local businesses. In some cases, small amounts of money went on to influence more significant change.

When the CELL partnership was established, [Cresswell Pele Tower](#) – a 14th century defensive structure – was in disrepair and listed in Historic England's Heritage at Risk register. The partnership provided an initial £5,000 to fund a feasibility study into restoring the tower, which sparked a volunteer movement that drew in significant local interest.

On the back of this, the local community raised £800,000 in funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and other sources, with CELL Big Local also providing an extra £20,000 to help fully restore this piece of local history. The tower opened to the public in July 2021 and welcomed around 4,000 visitors at 20 open days that year.⁴²

The successful restoration has also ignited a local passion for heritage; noting this, the partnership recently provided another £4,000 for a feasibility study into the restoration of the Victorian walled garden next to the tower. This has again helped local people to take the initiative, with fundraising underway to complete the work.

In Lynemouth, residents were concerned about waste on the beach, so the partnership provided £500 to Northumberland Rivers Trust to host a clean-up event. At the event, people became aware of the extent of damage caused to the coastline by spoil tipping at the old colliery site on a nearby cliff. As the cliff eroded, it left the beach covered in rubbish and old machinery, making residents concerned that there was a potentially dangerous amount of still-buried waste in the area.

Local focus on this problem encouraged the council to carry out investigations, using boreholes to understand the extent of the problem. Following this, the council put plans in place to excavate more than 200,000 tonnes of cliff material, to remove the waste. This grew into a £7.5 million project, which started through the efforts of residents who just wanted to make their beach a cleaner place that they could take pride in.

Impact

Overall, 90% of those guiding the partnership's work felt that CELL Big Local made a positive difference to the quality of local peoples' lives. Every funded project agreed that residents had come together to build a stronger sense of community.

- 75% agreed that residents had increased their skills and confidence, enabling them to continue to identify and respond to future needs.⁴³
- The percentage of CELL residents expressing satisfaction with their quality of life rose from 73% to 85% and the percentage of those very dissatisfied halved to 4% in 2020.
- The proportion of residents describing their area in positive terms rose from 58% in 2013 to 70% in 2020.⁴⁴

As well as these positive benefits for local people, the initial £1.16 million investment made by The National Lottery Community Fund grew into a final total of £3.23 million through match funding and support in kind, significantly increasing what could be supported across four small communities.

Heather Wallace, vice chair of CELL Big Local reflected: "Residents used to feel this was a 'forgotten area' that lacked investment. Now there's a real sense of collaboration and community spirit. It made a huge difference that we, as residents, decided where the money was needed and what mattered to the people who live here. Our confidence has grown so much and there are some real improvements in the area. We're much stronger now, and we're determined to carry on."⁴⁵

Learning

- Resident-led decision making at this scale might feel risky to funders. However, Big Local found that residents take great care of money entrusted to them.
 - People pride themselves on seeking out low or no-cost options that can maximise the overall value of the investment.⁴⁶
 - They may be cautious about spending too quickly, but confidence builds with support, highlighting the value of matching longer-term investment with capacity building.
 - Evidencing how local solutions are well received and make a positive impact leads to additional funding being secured.
 - Giving people a direct say builds the community's overall sense of ownership and control.
- It's important to plan for and mitigate common risks.
 - CELL residents did not necessarily consider the four villages as one area. Working with local stakeholders to set geographical boundaries that make sense, and taking time to explain and promote initiatives and decisions clearly, are important to get buy-in and participation.⁴⁷
 - Invest in residents' skills and give them opportunities to gain experience. CELL villages found that visiting other communities and meeting new people gave residents ideas and inspiration for how to invest in their areas.
 - Set out and agree decision-making processes and the appropriate level of information needed to support choices. Find ways to ensure that dominant voices don't frustrate or crowd out others and put in place strategies to manage disagreements.
 - Areas are better equipped to be successful and spend their money when more than six residents are actively involved. Access to a locally trusted organisation also plays a significant role in supporting residents to spend.⁴⁸
 - Residents also need help to think and plan strategically. Without this, there is more risk of delivering unconnected initiatives that may not combine to meet broader ambitions or achieve sustainable impact.⁴⁹
- Good communications and marketing that share the initiative's overall aims, and advertise outputs like community events and activities, are essential.
 - Don't limit communication to social media channels. Not all residents have the devices, digital skills and confidence to navigate a host of platforms they may not understand or trust.⁵⁰
 - Print can be an effective way to reach people, but factor in the cost of producing newsletters and the time it takes to distribute copies to people's homes, especially in rural areas or high-density housing estates.

Barking and Dagenham:

Empowering local people to design and deliver community activities

Residents of Barking and Dagenham had many ideas for activities and events they wanted to see in the borough, but were unable to get them off the ground without setting up as a charity and looking for individual project funding.

Alongside five other funders, we supported Participatory City Foundation's £7.2 million Every One Every Day pilot initiative, which works to remove the three key risks that inhibit resident-led work: fear of failure, financial worries and safety concerns.

Grants from The National Lottery Community Fund have helped Participatory City establish the infrastructure – five high street shops and a large public 'Makerspace' – and a support system to help anyone living in the borough set up a new activity.

By the project's fifth birthday in 2022, over 300 neighbourhood projects had given more than 5,000 residents opportunities to set up or try out new things. Participants are positive about:



- The opportunities this has given them to experience friendship, social connection and happiness, as well as creativity, learning and increased confidence.



- How the project has made Barking and Dagenham a more attractive place to live and improved the community's ability to respond to social, economic or environmental problems.



- Support for local enterprise and income generation. It has involved over 500 residents in testing new business ideas and, after two years, 80 people had sold nearly 2,000 products, raising £11,000 in revenue.

Removing the key risks that can inhibit resident-led activity can empower local people to explore and test new ideas and approaches. This requires a robust approach from the lead organisation, including specialist knowledge of critical issues like health and safety, safeguarding and first aid, a clear focus on staff and volunteer wellbeing, and a strong relationship with the local authority.

Situation

In 2017 [Participatory City Foundation](#) conducted research in the London Borough of Lambeth and found that community activities are a powerful tool for bringing people together, reducing isolation, and improving mental and physical health. However, starting something new takes time, energy, connections and money, and consequently most activities are provided by the voluntary and community sector rather than individual residents with great ideas.

To tackle this, Participatory City worked with a range of funders – the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, City Bridge Trust, the City of London Corporation’s charitable funder, Barking and Dagenham Council and the Mayor of London – to launch [Every One Every Day](#) in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.



The five-year pilot uses funding, including two grants from The National Lottery Community Fund worth almost £2 million, to provide the infrastructure and support system for anyone to start a community initiative, with all the practical and technical challenges taken care of.

Solution

Participatory City has five high street shops across the borough and a large ‘Makerspace’. Any resident with an idea can go to one of these locations and discuss their suggestion. The team then works with people to bring those ideas to fruition, providing resources, training, physical space, staff, and anything else that’s needed.

Story Box started with a resident who wanted to participate in community activities as a way out of her severe agoraphobia. She spoke to staff about her idea for a session, where stories would be read out and followed with related discussion and craft activities. The team provided a space, event promotion, and staff to run the sessions.

“Given this resident’s circumstances,” Participatory City explained, “she wouldn’t have wanted to set up a charity, and there was no clear business model to fund.”

Despite this, the project was a success: over two years, there have been 42 Story Box sessions, with 575 attendees spending almost 60 hours of time together.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the activities supported through Every One Every Day were paused. Programme staff used the time to look into other areas where providing a supportive system and resources might offer an advantage over traditional approaches. Enterprise emerged as a key focus, as many of the projects had the potential to spin out as community businesses.

The team observed that existing business development opportunities set a high bar to entry, with applicants required to produce business plans and make loan or grant applications. Most residents working with Every One Every Day were not able to meet those requirements, so the team established a range of business programmes to support them.

The Coffee:Works programme supported the setup of a new coffee shop from scratch. It worked with 12 interested residents, with no previous experience, and trained them in how to run the business, from sourcing ingredients to managing their finances.

Every One Every Day took care of practicalities like planning permission, insurance and the physical space, so that the participants could focus on putting their training into practice. Programme staff were on hand to support the participants with any issues, offering advice and practical support whenever needed.

After an initial 10-month phase, the team helped them to put together a business plan to apply to the venue owner for another year of funding. The coffee shop – Grounded – now runs six days a week from the beautiful surroundings of the Wilds, a community ecology and events space in Barking Riverside.

A new intake of residents to the Coffee:Works business programme began in January 2023, training more residents as baristas to be part of creating a new community café at Dagenham Library. Food:Works, a similar programme aiming to create a resident-run catering collective, trained up its first group of locals in late 2022.

Impact

As an ambitious five-year pilot, Every One Every Day has built a stronger, more active grassroots movement. By its fifth birthday:

- Over 300 neighbourhood projects had given more than 5,000 residents opportunities to set up or try out new things.
- Locals had spent over 60,000 hours together building, making, sharing and connecting.⁵¹
- It had created 15 new collaborative businesses with 80 local people being part of test trading, selling almost 2,000 products and raising £11,000 in revenue.

The initiative has been successful in empowering residents to drive improvements in their community. Participants have reported high levels of satisfaction, with an average score of eight out of 10 for the ease of creating new projects and for an increased sense of confidence as a result of taking part in activities.

Additionally, it has had a positive impact on residents' perception of the area, with an average score of eight out of 10 for the increased attractiveness and vibrancy of the borough as a place to live.

The work has led to greater cohesion and capacity within the community. Participants scored eight out of 10 for the increase in capacity to make collective decisions as a community, and seven out of 10 for the community's ability to respond together to social, economic and environmental problems.

The many new activities the community has designed and delivered have also led to a range of benefits for residents' wellbeing and social connectedness. On average people gave scores of nine out of 10 for their experiences of friendship and social connection, their sense of community, and their enjoyment and happiness from taking part in sessions.⁵²

As the pilot enters the final funded phase of activities, the impact it has achieved and the key learning captured offer valuable evidence to inform discussions with residents and partners about its future scale and direction.

Learning

- Removing fear of failure, financial risk, and safety concerns can empower residents to explore and test new ideas and approaches. However, a robust approach from the lead organisation is necessary.
 - This includes specialist knowledge of critical issues such as health and safety, safeguarding, and first aid. Centralising support, training and equipment across multiple projects may also help unlock economies of scale, meaning funding can go further.
 - Lead organisations must be prepared to adapt as they learn about the community's ambitions and capabilities, which requires adequate numbers of staff and volunteers. The Every One Every Day team grew from three staff members in August 2017 to 26 by December 2022.
 - Staff and volunteers need to be well supported to manage roles that can be demanding, with many competing calls on their time and mental agility, so a strong focus on staff and volunteer wellbeing is essential.
- A strong partnership with the local authority is important, as the council is often a crucial facilitator, enabler and problem solver.
 - Participatory City say that it's important to engage across all political perspectives, both to preserve independence and to project an inclusive and non-partisan image to residents.
 - Nevertheless, the group learned that the most fertile conditions for its participatory approach to grow were found in the political centre ground.
 - Regular, informal meetings with key council employees strengthened relationships and opened opportunities to collaborate.
 - Building both strategic and operational connections identified new initiatives that could be delivered collaboratively, helping new staff learn and develop in the process.

- Removing barriers to participation is not only about the logistics, but also about making sure that everyone, including marginalised groups, feels welcome and valued. The project balances a universal approach with testing ways to reach those at risk of missing out:
 - The five high street shops are in locations that people pass as they go about their daily lives, with large windows and visible activities to lure them in.
 - Newsletters are posted through the letterboxes of all residents within a 20-minute walk and events are scheduled to fit around real lives, including work, children and caring responsibilities.
 - Working with connectors – people who accompany residents to activities – is a promising approach to outreach. It was found that it may take three to four accompanied visits before some people feel confident enough to attend alone.
 - Other options tested included running activities and co-design sessions in service locations like temporary accommodation, or bringing services into Every One Every Day locations.
- The Every One Every Day approach has the potential for replication in other communities. However, as the programme was designed to work in a dense urban area, where a huge volume of participatory interactions happen, testing is required to see how it may need to be adapted for less densely populated or non-urban areas.
 - A partner programme is in development in Halifax in Canada, and the approach is under consideration in Paisley in Scotland. Both have the potential to offer further insights into how the approach could work in different environments.

West Armagh:

Engaging residents and unlocking investment through a local coordinating body

West Armagh includes some of the most deprived wards in Northern Ireland. West Armagh Consortium (WAC) involves residents of these neighbourhoods in making decisions about their area. It offers training and resources to develop existing initiatives and create and deliver new activities that meet the wishes of the community.

With support from The National Lottery Community Fund, WAC engaged over 400 local people as participants, volunteers and organisers, and delivered an extensive and diverse range of activities, including coordinating the local response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included:



Delivering **500** hours of mentoring and support.



Engaging **525** volunteers.



Creating personalised health plans for **180** people.



Providing free one-to-one counselling for **100** people.



Raising an additional **£248,950** funding for the community over three years.

WAC's key position as a local coordinating organisation and partner in wider work with the council and statutory bodies has enabled local groups to focus their skills and experience into service delivery. The group "relieves pressure across voluntary organisations and ensures the community receives a wraparound service that the volunteers and voluntary organisations cannot offer independently."

Situation

In Northern Ireland, housing estate residents often form community groups, with the aim of improving local services, liaising with statutory agencies and local authorities, and applying for funding to support their area. These groups can be the main way, and in some cases the only way, for government agencies and police to communicate with residents.

However, due to their informal nature, these groups may miss out on, or not be eligible for, funding that could make a positive difference in their community. In some areas, this is compounded by high levels of deprivation and limited presence from larger charities, which can all contribute to or exacerbate long-term underfunding.

In 2018, [West Armagh Consortium \(WAC\)](#), an umbrella body including eight of these groups, approached us for funding to facilitate a programme of community activity that would target people living in the most deprived parts of Armagh City and surrounding areas.

Solution

The Community Support and Development Programme (CSDP) aimed to involve residents in making decisions about their neighbourhoods by providing training and resources to develop existing initiatives and to create new activities.

The programme aimed to serve the whole community across five key workstreams that were also designed to meet the specific needs of groups that might not usually participate. These included older people, young people, and people from minority backgrounds such as the Polish and Bulgarian communities. The programme also focused on health and wellbeing, and supported the growth and development of new activities.

Training was designed to equip local groups with the skills to strengthen their community development work. It also created opportunities for locals to work with other organisations on activities that would increase pride in the area, help people maximise their potential, improve sports and recreation opportunities, and enhance participants' overall quality of life.

The community support stream engaged over 400 people as participants, volunteers and organisers. The health and wellbeing, young people's and older people's work streams saw WAC deliver an extensive and diverse range of activities including automatic defibrillation device training; counselling sessions; positive thinking sessions for people with anxiety; an Irish language youth club; and a programme of IT skills training. Some projects aimed at older people were delivered by young adults, building intergenerational bonds.

Work with minority groups included seasonal events delivered with the Polish and Bulgarian communities, a cross community series of talks on history from different perspectives, and Irish language classes for children. A St Patrick's Day celebration committee was put together to organise the annual parade. This group went on to develop plans and source funding for the redevelopment of a disused local building into a community resource centre.

WAC also delivered nine community events, including a Christmas lights parade and the West Armagh Community Festival, a week-long celebration of sport and culture. Seven residents' groups within the consortium received support that helped them organise discussion forums and plan locally focused projects.

This stream also saw WAC set up a men's shed group, giving men with physical and mental health issues the opportunity and space to come together and support one another through craft activities. The project set up a steering group of local participants which now runs the shed independently.

Running from 2018 to 2021, the project was heavily affected by the pandemic, but secure funding meant that the community was able to play an important role in the local response.

Impact

WAC works to give community and voluntary organisations a platform to have their voices heard in Armagh. The group works with the local council and other statutory agencies to address issues including participatory budgeting and to help residents contribute to the future direction of the city.

Local stakeholders recognise the community benefits of WAC's engagement in a range of local initiatives, which include:

- The Armagh Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership, which aims to reduce social and economic inequalities and address the underlying causes of poverty.⁵³
- The Community Voluntary Sector Panel, which works with the local council to implement its community plan. This gives local people opportunities to engage in community life, shape decisions, make positive lifestyle choices, and create a safe, respectful and peaceful borough.⁵⁴
- The Healthy Living Centre Alliance, which delivers health and wellbeing services, including chronic pain and mental health programmes, as well as a social prescribing service that links people to local support for their social, emotional and practical needs.⁵⁵
 - WAC is a partner in the [Bogside and Brandywell Health Forum's](#) Northern Ireland-wide social prescribing project, which we also fund. This supports health services and the voluntary and community sector to work together to improve mental and physical health outcomes.
- Links with Boston International Summer School involve West Armagh in Boston University's Annual International Peace and Education Resource programme. This sees students visit Armagh as part of the Masters in Conflict Resolution qualification.

WAC has revitalised key elements of local community infrastructure by recruiting and training new volunteers and strengthening the role of charities across the area. The consortium is valued locally for the way it “plugs the gap between government agencies” and its role in setting up, supporting and growing community activities and initiatives, many of which “would not exist without WAC.”⁵⁶

Through the Community Support and Development Programme, WAC delivered 500 hours of mentoring and support, engaged 525 volunteers, created bespoke health plans for 180 people, and provided free one-to-one counselling for 100 people.

WAC also played a significant role in the local COVID-19 response by connecting community groups and engaging local people. This provided over 1,300 help packages for 300 local families; more than 100,000 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) for local hospitals, care homes and schools; and £22,085 worth of digital support for children during lockdowns.

Overall, WAC has succeeded in bringing significant additional funding into West Armagh, raising an additional £248,950. This includes £19,000 from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to spin out WAC's affordable handyman service as a social enterprise, and £100,000 to expand the men's shed.

Learning

- A local coordinating organisation can help small, informal community groups be more than the sum of their parts. Logistical support frees others up to focus their skills and experience into frontline delivery.
 - During the COVID-19 response, WAC took care of marketing; arranged virtual meetings and software; set up a referral system for people needing help; registered new volunteers; procured PPE and donations through contacts with local entrepreneurs; and provided translation services for groups working with minority communities.
 - Consultation with 19 local stakeholders found that WAC's support "relieves pressure across voluntary organisations and ensures the community receives a wraparound service that the volunteers and voluntary organisations cannot offer independently."⁵⁷
- Being people-led enables organisations to flex and adapt to what the community wants. As a result, WAC developed new services that would not have otherwise been available and that were not central to the group's approach at the start of the project.
- WAC found that having a cohesive set of activities, and communication that emphasises messages about improving social connections, wellbeing and activity levels, builds people's understanding of what's going on and why, and maintains their interest over time.
 - Trying out new ideas for community events, rather than focusing on tried and tested options, may catch people's imagination and increase reach.
 - Effective communication is crucial, particularly with communities less likely to participate. WAC found that engaging beyond Catholic and Protestant groups, encouraging men to get involved, and tapping into the growing importance of the environment for local people could have encouraged more ongoing participation and widened reach.
 - Ensuring enough good quality equipment is available for sport and physical activity projects is important to keep people turning up.
 - A volunteer database makes it easier to include and involve a wider range of people. It can also help to ensure that everyone who has expressed interest is offered a chance to help. This could be key in building an initial wave of enthusiasm into sustained community involvement.

Southend-on-Sea:

Sustained, strategic investment into the early years

A Better Start Southend is a partnership of statutory, community and voluntary organisations and parent representatives that is supported by over £36 million from The National Lottery Community Fund. It's part of our wider £215 million programme that builds place-based partnerships to improve the life chances of babies and young children.

It works in six wards of Southend that are among the 10% most deprived in England and aims to improve children's diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication.



- Before the project began, babies in these areas were less likely to be breastfed than those in other wards, but the percentage rose from 58% to 74% in 2021, and at eight weeks stood at 56.1% compared to 47.6% across England as a whole.



- Support for speech and language development helped increase the proportion of children achieving at least the expected level of development in speaking by the age of four, exceeding the national average of 85.2% in just three years.

We have learned that making it easier for people to access support through a single 'front door' brings value to parents and can make services more accessible. Harnessing local knowledge helps to tailor work appropriately, and can extend reach into different communities, making it easier for people to find out about and take part in services.



A Better Start

Situation

In 2010, the Marmot Review⁵⁸ looked at effective evidence-based strategies to reduce health inequalities in England. It found that providing a strong foundation for children during their early years is crucial for improving long-term outcomes in areas such as obesity, heart disease, mental health, education, and economic status.

In response we established [A Better Start \(ABS\)](#), a ten year, £215 million programme that focus on improving local systems in five areas: Blackpool, Bradford, Southend-on-Sea, Lambeth and Nottingham, to support the early years.

It aims to improve outcomes by:

- Moving resources from fixing problems to prevention.
- Upskilling the workforce and sharing learning beyond the project.
- Integrating work across key sectors to create joined-up pathways of services.
- Putting families at the heart of design and delivery of services so they better meet their needs.
- Testing community-led approaches that support babies and toddlers' social and emotional development, communication and language development, and nutrition.

Solution

[A Better Start Southend \(ABSS\)](#) is led by the [Early Years Alliance](#), working with a range of strategic collaborators and families. It aims to improve local working practices and shift spending towards prevention.⁵⁹ Members include Southend-on-Sea City Council, two NHS foundation trusts, Southend Clinical Commissioning Group, the University of Essex, local police, the Southend Association of Voluntary Services and local parents.

ABSS focuses on delivering science-based initiatives within six wards in Southend that are among the most deprived 10% in England: Kursaal, Milton, Shoeburyness, Victoria, Westborough and West Shoebury.

Parent champions are key to the approach, with a network of over 65 trained champions and over 40 more in training. A co-production champion, jointly funded with the council, works to embed co-production at a more strategic level, ensuring that senior public health officials hear directly about the challenges that people and communities are facing.⁶⁰

Improving take up of breastfeeding

Breastfeeding support is offered from early in pregnancy, and the NHS actively promotes one-to-one support when women book their eight-to-12-week antenatal appointment. Personalised help is available at home for the first six weeks after giving birth.

Following initial guidance from trained staff, mothers are offered up to a year of support from breastfeeding groups, provided by local charity partners. Long-term support for first-time mums is also available to boost their overall wellbeing, alongside a team of health visitors specialising in perinatal mental health.

The team works with the council and local businesses to normalise breastfeeding in public. This includes the Southend Supports Breastfeeding awareness campaign, delivered through shops, cafés, museums and public transport.



Speech and language development

ABSS also recognises the importance of speech and language development in children. Communication difficulties can have long-lasting negative effects on educational attainment, behaviour and wellbeing.⁶¹

To raise awareness with parents, information is shared at antenatal appointments and at children's 'under one' statutory visit from health visitors. Let's Talk, provided by the Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust, offers a range of free courses for both parents and children. It also has strong links with family nurse partnerships and the local health visiting team.

Specialist ABSS teachers work in 90% of early years settings and guide providers in how to better support and communicate with children and create a positive learning environment. They have also trained practitioners to use the Wellcomm⁶² screening tool to identify children with delayed communication skills.

Impact

By August 2022, ABSS had reached over 5,000 pregnant women and families with babies and children aged under four.⁶³

Results from surveys of parents, staff and volunteers suggest that ABSS has improved outcomes for children in the city's most deprived wards across a range of measures.⁶⁴

- Staff reported that they had improved parents' confidence, helped them support their children's growth and development (94%), and improved their outcomes (90%).

- Most parent respondents said that, since taking part in ABSS, they were more able to access support to help their children interact with others (82% compared to 56% before ABS), express themselves (77% compared to 53%) and understand their feelings and behaviours (72% compared to 47%).
- A high proportion of parents also said they knew more about the benefits of breastfeeding (89% compared to 52% before), and activities they could do to help their children learn to talk (78% compared to 41% before) and express themselves (74% compared to 31% before).
- 80% of respondents to parent and community surveys said that there was more community involvement in the design of local early years services because of the ABSS approach.

ABSS has also helped increase and sustain breastfeeding rates and contributed to an increase in the share of children achieving at least the expected level of development in speaking by the age of four, exceeding the national average in just three years.⁶⁵

- In target wards, the percentage of mothers starting breastfeeding rose from 58% in March 2018, to 74% in August 2021. The percentage still breastfeeding at six to eight weeks increased from 39.1% to 56.1%, outpacing the England national average, which increased from 46.2% to 47.6% in the same period.
- 1,770 children received speech and language support in the programme's first five years. The proportion achieving at least the expected level of development in speaking by the age of four rose to 85.6% (just above the national average) in 2018/19, from 77.9% three years earlier.
- The proportion achieving expected listening skills also increased, rising from 80.2% to 86.4%, exceeding the national average of 85.8%.
- ABSS has also seen an improvement in children's ability to manage their feelings, leading to improved behaviour (89.3%), which also now exceeds the national average of 87.3%.

ABSS is planning for the future, with National Lottery funding set to end in 2025. [The City Family Community Interest Company](#) has recently been incorporated to become self-sustaining and secure new funders and investors. The group plans to continue the legacy of ABSS while also introducing new initiatives such as [YourFamily](#), which offers peer support and access to expert teams to support parents.

The Mid and South Essex Integrated Care System has also worked with ABSS to explore future partnership options and discuss how key collaborators can continue to shape and support children and young people's services.⁶⁶

Learning

- A connected, joined up, system-wide approach makes sense to residents.
 - Integrating charities and families as key delivery partners alongside local authority and healthcare services brings value by allowing people to access support through a single 'front door'.
 - It can make services more accessible, by harnessing local knowledge to tailor work appropriately, and extends reach into different communities, making it easier for people to find out about and take part in activities.
- Fund in a way that enables all parts of the system to work towards overarching aims. Pragmatic delivery targets, rather than rigid rules for each funded organisation, can increase the chance of a partnership working smoothly, but some areas do benefit from clarity from the outset.
 - Agree who is responsible for what and how service providers will work together, including with those who are not part of the programme.
 - Agree referral or signposting mechanisms and resourcing in advance. Direct referrals between providers might be easier with partners that are used to working in this way, however many charity partners will need money and help to manage increasing demand.

Conclusion

From brokering partnerships between local and national organisations to hiring development workers, and from facilitating asset transfers to building trust within disadvantaged communities, the case studies presented here cover a range of ways of working.

They serve as examples of the diverse ways support from The National Lottery Community Fund has: helped to improve the capability and capacity of local charities and networks; empowered communities to identify and address their priorities; and directed funding into places that had previously found it hard to access.

What unites them is the understanding that getting resource to the communities that need it the most takes more than just funding. It also demands patience, a willingness to let communities take risks and learn to take the lead, and an appetite to experiment and test. Investing time to be more locally connected and knowledgeable means funders and decision-makers can also evolve and become better able to identify when and where targeted support can help to remove barriers and unleash local potential.

It's important to be transparent; not all of these approaches have resulted in sustained, long-term improvements. Tracking the long-term impact of our biggest investments, while meeting the demand for funding to address the immediate pressures on charities – enabling them to deliver in the here and now – is a difficult balancing act. We hope these examples offer inspiration and thoughts on how to creatively target funding into areas where standard models of top-down investment have struggled to address longstanding challenges.

This report is intended to be read alongside [our 2018 report on place-based working and funding](#), which provides practical advice and learning to help funders, local authorities and statutory agencies work with a local focus. Together, the two papers provide a toolkit of potential approaches and considerations for anyone searching for better, more sustainable ways to invest in place.



For more information on the impact and learning that our funding has generated, please visit the [Insights section of our website](#).

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