

# Transforming your space: evaluation update

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## TYS - evaluation update

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## Introduction

**This document outlines some of the overall findings and themes from the evaluation of our Transforming Your Space (TYS) programme, which involved communities across the UK in improving their local environments.**

**This update also highlights and signposts reports, resources and other information available to you if you are interested in this area of work.**

**This update is the Big Lottery Fund's interpretation of information from the evaluation reports.**

## Main findings from the evaluation

- ▶ The most notable feature of the programme was how well it engaged local communities, even where projects did not appear to emerge from the grassroots. This added to projects' success and would later provide the enthusiasm, wider support and links needed to carry on work after our funding ended.
- ▶ Working with the evaluators, participants identified a wide range of social, environmental and community benefits from projects. There have also been economic benefits and there are likely to be longer-term health benefits, but these are harder to measure. The range and combination of benefits adds to the success of individual projects and so the programme as a whole.
- ▶ Each country delivered the programme in different ways, and each had strengths and weaknesses. This was a response to the way that community and environmental policies have developed in each country. Working with the grain of policy in this way meant that projects could fit into the local context during and after our funding.
- ▶ In many cases, local authorities stepped in to manage and maintain improvements after our funding ended. Elsewhere, projects have tried to raise income, but their success has varied and some projects have had to reduce their operations. The evaluators suggest that there is often a key post in the project, and if that post is funded there is a better chance that the project will be able to sustain its success.
- ▶ Many projects found monitoring and reporting to be something of a challenge, but the evaluators note the importance of these processes in helping both projects and BIG to record and promote success and learning.

## How Transforming Your Space worked

TYS was an environmental programme that operated in all four countries of the UK. It aimed to involve communities in projects that would:

- enhance the quality of life in local communities,
- improve the appearance and amenities of local environments, and/or
- develop community assets.

In England, the programme operated in 51 areas that are part of our wider Fair Share initiative. Local authorities nominated a set of projects in their area and retained overall responsibility for them. In Wales, the 22 Community Strategic Partnerships each nominated a project, and there was a particular focus on putting principles of sustainable development into practice. In Scotland, our award partner, Fresh Futures, received applications from across the country, while applicants in Northern Ireland applied directly to the Big Lottery Fund.

General information about Transforming Your Space and Fair Share is available on our website, [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)



## The evaluation

We were keen to learn from our own experience of running Transforming Your Space and to support groups running projects. So in spring 2004 we commissioned SQW Consulting to undertake a three-year evaluation of the programme.

As TYS worked closely with local communities, we wanted to find out what local residents knew and thought about work that we supported. So we asked the evaluators to focus on the perspectives of people who took part in and benefited from projects. To do this, SQW chose a range of case-study projects in each country. They also chose ten case-study areas for more in-depth work. This enabled them to find out more about such questions as how much the wider community knew about the project, and what they thought it had achieved. It has given us particularly rich and detailed information about the perspectives of people involved.

We believe that this focus reflects the priority we gave in Transforming Your Space to involving communities in projects – and we were pleasantly surprised at how positive the findings have been.

### Publications

We have produced a range of publications from this evaluation and about Transforming Your Space. All are available on our website or by contacting us.

- ▶ The Transforming Your Space evaluation page on our website includes all reports, case-study annexes and annual summaries and updates.
- ▶ You can also find a link there to 'Thinking about community outcomes', which gives some examples of how TYS projects have identified their potential benefits and ways of measuring them.
- ▶ The TYS England programme page includes a link to 'TYS England: what we have supported'.

## Themes in the evaluation

### What benefits did Transforming Your Space bring about?

Our evaluation looked at the range of benefits and outcomes that funded projects offered communities. The evaluators worked with case studies to identify these, how their activities might help to achieve them, and how projects would know that they had got there. There were four broad categories of benefits:

- environmental: both 'greener' changes, such as protecting and promoting biodiversity, and more general improvements to living environments and conditions, such as providing play areas and increasing security
- social and community: including improving links within and between communities, enabling volunteering, and developing individual skills and confidence

- economic: including providing jobs and training, new services and viability – and in some cases, increasing local house prices
- health: including providing more opportunities for exercise and recreation, and contributing to wider and longer factors for better health.

Of course, many benefits can come under more than one of these headings: improving environments can involve or lead to a range of other positive changes. In many ways it is the very combination of benefits that makes programmes like Transforming Your Space so successful. Pages 8 and 9 show out how a typical project is achieving this.

## Tain Wildlife Pond: one benefit leads to another

Tain Initiative Group wanted to improve a former boating pond in grassland along the seashore in Dornoch Firth, north of Inverness. Since the pond had closed in 1975, the area had degenerated to a littered and vandalised 'smelly eyesore'. Earlier surveys had identified the importance to the community of doing something to deal with the problem.

The project that TYS supported brought together a range of partners and funders. It cleaned up the site, developing it as an environmental and educational resource within the surrounding Tain Links grassland, which has an important recreational role for Tain. The proposal to create a

'wild' rather than an ornamental pond disappointed some residents, but there has ultimately been solid support for the project across the community. The environmental focus that BIG and other partners brought to the project has helped to widen the range of observed and potential benefits, as set out below.

### **Environmental:**

- ▶ An eyesore has been transformed into an unpolluted site that protects and can attract wider biodiversity.

### **Social and educational:**

- ▶ Vandalism has decreased dramatically.
- ▶ Groups and residents worked together to design the project, and they continue to do so to maintain the pond.
- ▶ Schools visit the site to support lessons in science and the environment. Pupils can learn directly through pond-dipping and planting.
- ▶ Residents express pride in what they have been able to achieve for the area.

### **Economic:**

- ▶ The project gave contracts for improvement work to local companies.
- ▶ The improvements may help to attract more visitors and tourists to Tain.

### **Health:**

- ▶ The pond has improved the Tain Links recreational grassland area, which attracts walkers and cyclists.
- ▶ Community clean-up days offer a different type of outdoor activity and attract a range of volunteers.

The project that TYS supported brought together a range of partners and funders. It cleaned up the site, developing it as an environmental and educational resource within the surrounding Tain Links grassland.

Projects also tend to involve a wide range of stakeholders – that is, people and organisations who might affect or be affected by the project. In addition to intended ‘direct beneficiaries’, the evaluators identified a wider range of people who benefited from different types of projects. These included staff of other services, local authorities (who often learned new ways of working with community groups) and in some cases, local businesses – not only construction and maintenance companies involved in improvements, but also hoteliers and other small businesses that benefited from increased visitor numbers and trade.

The second-year evaluation report and summary and ‘Thinking about community outcomes’ discuss benefits and stakeholders in more detail.

We believe that it is useful for projects to think about the whole range of possible benefits and stakeholders because it may help you to identify other people and agencies who can work with or support you.

## Different ways of delivering the programme

Each country ran the programme slightly differently. This is because we wanted to make sure that the programme complemented other policies. While this helped projects to work more effectively with other agencies during and beyond the life of our funding, the differing approaches have had varying wider effects, as summarised below.

### England

In England, local authorities had a high level of involvement – but also took on a high level of responsibility. Communities were as actively engaged as elsewhere and it is likely that many projects benefited from the experience and support that the local authority could offer. Local authorities assumed responsibility for the continuing costs and management of many of the projects when our funding ended. Sometimes, though, projects and local authorities became frustrated with each other and had to learn productive ways of working together. In many cases, this has led to better communication between local authorities and the communities they serve.

### Scotland

In Scotland, TYS generally provided only part of the funding for each project. The evaluators believe that this helped projects to attract funding from other sources rather than simply topping up existing plans. Some projects were frustrated by the extra efforts this required and in reporting to different funders. Sometimes this delayed their early progress. Ultimately, though, having a wider range of funders may make it easier to cope when one funding stream ends.

## Local authorities and communities working in partnership

### Wales

Projects in Wales enthusiastically highlighted sustainable development approaches, in line with the particular emphasis of the programme. Both voluntary groups and local authorities led on projects. This led to new and stronger partnership working between sectors, as well as improved relations between local authorities and residents.

### Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland had an open-application process and funded a range of projects, many led by communities and the voluntary sector. Because TYS offered up to 100 per cent funding, it was more important for projects to think about alternative funding at an earlier stage than elsewhere. Some projects were over-optimistic and had difficulty raising revenue, but most have since found a way forward, often entering into agreements in which local authorities take on responsibility for future maintenance. On the other hand, full-funding arrangements meant that projects got going more quickly than elsewhere.



A strong feature of TYS, particularly in England and Wales, was the way that it helped to develop new and closer working relationships between local authorities, residents and community groups. This type of partnership working is becoming increasingly important as governments in all countries promote community empowerment. Here are some examples:

- ▶ North Sirhowy Country Ranger project, Caerphilly: This project established a country ranger post, which is similar to a park ranger but also covers a number of villages in the area. Residents had often had a poor impression of the council, but by working with them on the project this slowly changed. Residents met and recognised staff, and the new post eventually 'brought the council into the community', offering new possibilities for dialogue.

- ▶ Projects in Swindon: The council worked with residents from the outset, beginning with a long period of negotiation about what to fund. Residents learned about the processes that public authorities have to comply with – and so why instant results are impossible – while council staff learned to work with rather than for the community.
- ▶ Austin Park Neighbourhood Base, Derby: TYS funding developed the city's first multi-agency, one-stop shop. This provides a centre for services provided by voluntary and community agencies, but over time it has signed up the housing department, neighbourhood wardens, the police and a housing association, among others. Those agencies not only deliver services from the neighbourhood base, but also use it as a place to share information and to gather feedback from the community.

## Widening involvement to sustain benefits

Perhaps the greatest achievement of TYS was the way that it tapped into the real willingness and enthusiasm of communities to get involved and make changes that benefited them – individually and collectively. Many projects brought together people with little experience of this type of work. TYS gave them an opportunity to learn and succeed – through consultation, negotiation, planning and management.

This does not mean that the process is simple. Some projects faced major challenges and delays; others have not met the goals that they had set themselves. Getting to grips with project planning, bringing groups together, working with other bodies, seeking funding and running a service are demanding, and all projects will face delays and a degree of frustration.

But those experiences are a valuable part of the learning that has been a further benefit for participants. Many communities and projects are building on what they have learnt through the process – for instance by identifying and developing follow-up projects.

A familiar issue in project funding of all types is what happens when initial support ends. The evaluators found differing trends in the four countries, reflecting the way that the programme ran. The emphasis on partnerships in England and Wales tended to lead to a willingness for the local authority to take on responsibility afterwards.

The evaluators note that there is often a key post in smaller projects, and that ensuring that that post is funded will help to maintain continuity and contacts. The post varies with the nature of the project – it may be an overall project manager or someone who provides services directly, but the person who fills it will have good knowledge of the project and the people with an interest in it. Their experience often helps to secure new funding.

A common theme in the evaluation is the importance of getting other people and agencies involved. Many TYS projects, for instance, built and maintained strong links with local primary schools. Taking part in TYS gardening projects allowed pupils direct experience of parts of the curriculum, but many pupils also

## Full or part funding?

Many projects understandably feel that it is better to get all funding from one source, but the reality is not quite that simple, as the following comparison shows.

Scotland generally offered less than half of the project costs, while Northern Ireland funded up to 100 per cent.

Some community groups in Scotland complained about the efforts needed to report to different funders, but it is important to remember that a wider range of funding sources is likely to increase buy-in and to minimise the effects of the loss of any one funding source.

The end of full funding in Northern Ireland certainly added to the challenges that projects faced, and some have had to reduce their level of operations. On the other hand, projects had often made more detailed plans about how to make money because it was always clear that a large source of their funding would end at a specific point.

reported an increased sense of pride in and ownership of what they had achieved.

Across the UK, TYS projects have faced and responded imaginatively to challenges of developing and running projects – and maintaining the benefits after our funding ended. We believe that support and knowledge are vital to helping projects to do this more smoothly.

In this update we can only set out some of the main themes that TYS projects have faced. We are working with community groups and advisers who support them to identify areas where we can provide or co-ordinate wider guidance. We welcome any ideas that you may have. Feel free to contact your country or regional office to discuss this, or to email us at [e&r@biglotteryfund.org.uk](mailto:e&r@biglotteryfund.org.uk)



## **Special thanks**

The Big Lottery Fund would like to thank everyone involved in projects funded by Transforming Your Space, and in particular staff, volunteers and communities associated with the case-study projects, who offered their experience so thoroughly and honestly throughout the evaluation.