



Transforming Your Space: findings from the second year of the evaluation



Transforming Your Space: second year summary

Stock code BIG-TYS2
ISSN 1744-4756 (Print)
ISSN 1744-4764 (Online)
Print T
Photography Martin Jenkinson, Jim Hodson, Brian Morrison
Written by Steve Browning
Further copies available from:
Email enquiries@biglotteryfund.org.uk
Phone 0845 4 10 20 30
Textphone 0845 6 02 16 59
Our website www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

Accessibility

Also available upon request in other formats including large print.

Our equality principles

Promoting accessibility; valuing cultural diversity; promoting participation; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting inclusive communities; reducing disadvantage and exclusion. Please visit our website for more information.

We care about the environment

The Big Lottery Fund seeks to minimise its negative environmental impact and only uses proper sustainable resources

Our mission

We are committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need.

Our values

We have identified seven values that underpin our work: fairness; accessibility; strategic focus; involving people; innovation; enabling; additional to government.

The Big Lottery Fund is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity, both as a grantmaker and employer. The Big Lottery Fund will aim to adopt an inclusive approach to ensure grant applicants and recipients, stakeholders, job applicants and employees are treated fairly.

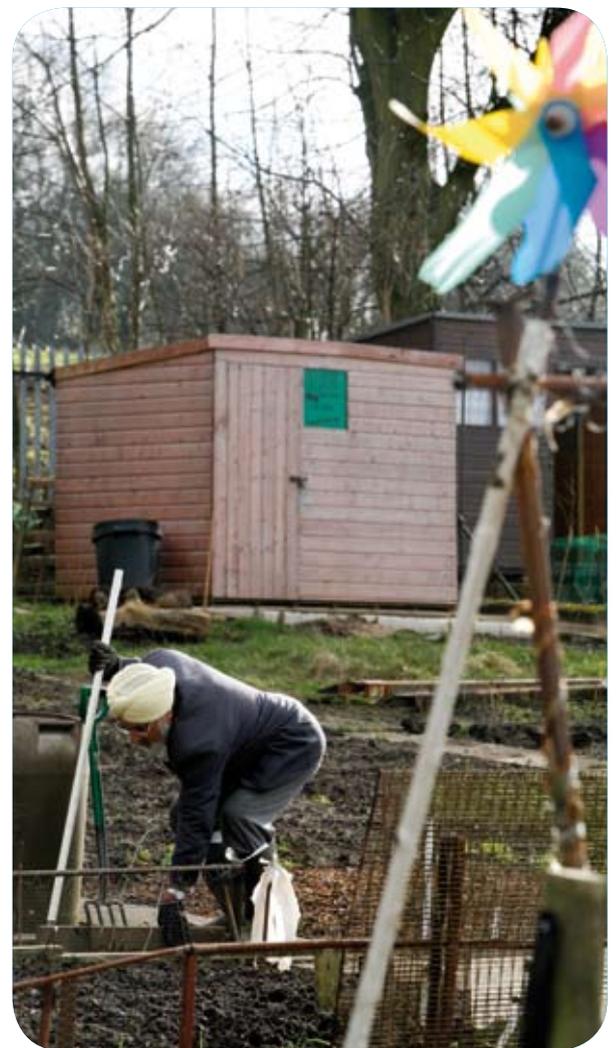
© Big Lottery Fund, February 2007

Findings from the second year of the evaluation

In spring 2004, we appointed SQW Ltd to evaluate our Transforming Your Space (TYS) initiative. This document reports on the main findings across the first two years of the initiative.

Main findings

- ▶ The projects in the evaluation are meeting the initiative's main aims of improving the involvement and engaging local communities in the process. They are also achieving other objectives – and wider positive health and economic effects are now starting to emerge.
- ▶ Most projects have received funding from a range of sources. While this means that it is often difficult to determine how far our support led to benefits, it also reflects the success of wider partnership involvement in the projects that we funded. A wider range of funding sources may well help projects to carry on their work after our support has ended.
- ▶ More generally, there are differing approaches to ensure that projects and benefits are sustained. In many cases, local authorities have agreed to take on maintenance costs. In others, projects are investigating possibilities for generating income.
- ▶ While approaches to involving communities have varied, the evaluators report that local communities are generally very enthusiastic about the work that is being done and that they identify a variety of positive benefits. Some projects have continued to involve local communities and other stakeholders, notably through



setting up or making links with friends' groups or involving children from local primary schools.

The evaluation has been undertaken by Richard Hindle, Charlotte Clarke, Sheila Sim and Nick Gardner. This is the Big Lottery Fund's interpretation of the evaluators' findings and was compiled by Steve Browning.

About the evaluation



Transforming Your Space

Transforming Your Space is an initiative that operates in all four countries of the UK. It aims to involve local communities in projects that will:

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

In England, the programme operates in 51 areas that are part of our wider Fair Share initiative. Local authorities have nominated projects in their areas. In Wales, the Community Strategy Partnerships also nominated local projects. 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.

More details of Transforming Your Space are available on our website.

The evaluation

The evaluation has been designed to focus on:

- how far the initiative has succeeded in meeting its overall aims
- how successful projects have been at meeting their own aims
- good practice in running and developing projects and programmes.

SQW Ltd began the evaluation in autumn 2004 and will complete it in 2007. Their approach has included interviews with those involved in setting up and delivering the

programme, but focuses more directly on how selected projects are operating, what they hope to achieve, how they are going about doing that, and what projects, local communities and other stakeholders think about what has been delivered.

In order to investigate those questions, the evaluators have identified and visited a selection of case-study projects and areas. They chose these to cover differing approaches, types of projects and localities. This allows them to consider how the initiative is working in different countries and contexts.

In the first year, the evaluators visited:

- seven local authority areas in England, involving at least two projects each (out of a total of 51 local authority areas)
- three projects (out of 14) in Northern Ireland
- four projects (out of 102) in Scotland
- three projects (out of 22) in Wales.

The evaluators returned to these projects in the second year, as well as adding a similar number of new case studies.

While this approach has offered rich detail about a wide variety of projects, the evaluators have gone further, by identifying ten projects for even more in-depth work with a range of beneficiaries – both direct (those who set out to make use of the project's benefits) and indirect (those whose quality of life may have been increased by the project, perhaps through lower local levels of crime or a neater and more attractive environment). This allows the

Case study

North Ayr Community Gardens Initiative, South Ayrshire

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) received £70,000 from TYS towards an original budget of £170,000. Our contribution was part of a wide range of funding that enabled them to set up this project, which responded to residents' and the Council's concerns about unsafe gardens and open space.

At first, the project aimed to develop the local community's environmental skills and knowledge, to respond to safety concerns and to encourage local pride, a sense of ownership of open space, and to develop community spirit.

The project set up a steering committee to involve residents in a volunteer programme of environmental improvement. More localised street committees spread word about the programme and encouraged residents to volunteer. Youth groups and skills have also been involved, an approach that has helped to promote the educational aims of the project. At the same time, the project co-ordinator worked closely with local councillors.

Taster events offered people an introduction to the wider programme, giving them the chance to help clean up the area or helping residents to maintain gardens or to improve communal spaces. A particularly successful aspect has been the distribution of bulbs and compost bins.

The project has proved very popular and has sparked a wide range of further activities, including a literacy and numeracy project, a ladies' gardening club (which is already winning awards) and a support for learning project, which is teaching young people about salmon and beekeeping.

The project became a model for similar initiatives in other parts of Scotland. As well as receiving positive press coverage, it was a joint category winner in the Sustainable Communities Awards 2006.

evaluators to investigate more fully such questions as how successful projects have been at creating real community benefits, as well as what the community thinks or knows about the project, and how far communities have been involved.

How are the funded projects meeting the programme aims?

In both years, the evaluators report a close fit between the work that projects are doing and BIG's priorities for the initiative. As we might expect, there is a very strong environmental focus, either for 'green' work dealing with the maintenance, protection and improvement of natural environments, or 'brown' work that improves people's immediate living environments, particularly in urban areas. Most of the 'brown' work in turn aims at bringing about social benefits – such as better community facilities, improved community capacity, or health benefits – such as opportunities for exercise and healthy living.

The case-study research highlights some differences between countries on the types of projects funded, with more 'green work' in Scotland and Northern Ireland, compared with more 'brown' work in England, where there has been a strong fit between many projects and (particularly urban) regeneration initiatives. This may reflect the different funding arrangements in place, with open application processes in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and portfolios of projects submitted by local authorities in England. In Wales, projects met the specific focus on demonstrating the principles of sustainable development.

How are projects involving communities and how successful have they been at doing this?

Community involvement is fundamental to the success of TYS. It was also a

consideration in the way that we chose which projects to fund throughout the UK, ensuring that local communities would be involved in shaping, running and using projects. This has been particularly important in England, given the link to Fair Share.

The evaluation has found strong community involvement in programmes, but with an interesting variation in the timing of and approach to that involvement.

The earliest stage is consultation with communities when developing ideas for projects – and the application. The evaluators found that this had been strongest in Northern Ireland. This may well reflect the way that we allocated funding in different countries. For instance, the programme in Northern Ireland responded to applications submitted directly and centrally by groups wanting to undertake projects. In England and Wales, on the other hand, we had already allocated funding to particular areas, so the level of 'competition' was less pronounced. (There was also an open application process in Scotland, but the evidence was not as clear-cut.) In general, though, few of the case-study project ideas anywhere in the UK had appeared to arise directly from 'the community', but rather from local authorities or voluntary organisations.

But that is not the only approach to involving communities. Some local authorities in England, for example, identified a range of possible projects to support, and then surveyed the community to prioritise which ones would be taken forward.

Case study

Shakespeare Street play area, Derby

Local residents, the Derby Homes and the Parks Department identified the existing play area for improvement. Although children still used it, it was run down and dangerous. The area also suffered from negative press reporting.

TYS provided £182,000 of £190,000 for the project, which tried to overcome these and some wider local problems. The local housing manager had worked with a steering group to develop the plans and to consult the local community. The steering group included local residents, schools and the youth service, councillors, the Parks Department and police.

As well as open days, public meetings, school assemblies and a 'wishing wall' where children could leave their hopes for the play area, the project made special efforts to update the community on progress. This included writing to local residents, putting notices up on the site, and organising colouring competitions to promote safety issues relating to the project. The housing manager also took local children and parents to choose the equipment for the play area.

The initial project has now come to an end. The new play area is very popular, and stakeholders believe that the improvements and the process of community involvement are showing wider benefits. For instance, negative reporting about the area has ended, and from an initial position of empty houses and calls to demolish part of the estate, there are now no empty properties and indeed strong interest in any properties that come up. Anti-social activity and crime are reported to have fallen, and residents report that young people now have somewhere to go. The police are running sports activities aimed at girls.

People involved in the project are now working together to promote further improvements and have already found funding for street lighting. Stakeholders believe that working together on the play area has promoted community cohesion and confidence to turn the area around.

Devenish Integrated Environment Project (DIEP), Enniskillen

DIEP was part of a wider series of projects that set out to make improvements to quarry paths and the shores of Lough Erne in Enniskillen. The Devenish project focused on an area that included four council estates with negative images. It received £178,000 from TYS towards a total project budget of £239,115.

The project cleared and made improvements to paths and the shore of the lough. It has also built a jetty, developed allotments and arranged clean-ups of litter in the area. It is now trying to get the Loughshore area designated as a reserve.

The process of improvement and maintenance has involved local residents from the outset. Some are involved in the managing the project and its environmental sub-group, while local schools and community groups are involved in gardening, litter picks and other projects. In addition, the project has offered training places for local unemployed people through its participation in the New Deal initiative.

Stakeholders have praised the effects that the project and its improvements have had on the community. Residents feel that the project has brought the four estates together and changed wider perceptions of the area. The police have developed new and positive working relations with residents, especially young people. This has been a dramatic change in what have traditionally been nationalist estates.

Children from local schools are learning how to care for plants, while the allotments have given residents without gardens an opportunity to grow food, and a focus for building links with current and former residents.

Findings

More important has been community involvement in running the projects themselves. Case-study projects tended to have management committees that typically included local residents or at least local groups, as well as representatives from the local authority and perhaps other funders. While the degree of more 'local' involvement sometimes varied, such groups as residents' associations often take an active role in helping to direct projects and in communicating with local people. For instance, in one project in Thanet, the local residents' association has organised open days and used newsletters to let people know more about the project, while encouraging feedback that has helped to direct project progress.

While it may seem that most projects do not appear to have originated or indeed to be run from the grass roots, that was not a primary requirement of any of the programmes. Indeed, there is some evidence that such an approach might have slowed progress down or prevented projects from moving ahead at all.

The evaluators have reported several instances of this. In one project in Northern Ireland, young people were clearly not involved at the early stages, but this seems to have been because they were cynical about the approach at that point. A project in Scotland had simply begun work on the project because they felt that the local community had reached a point of 'consultation fatigue' – despite many consultations that had previously identified improvements to the local park as a priority,



no work had followed through. The project in question believes that by getting on with the job they will ultimately inspire the confidence and involvement of local people.

None of this should be taken to suggest that consultation or grassroots approaches are ineffective, but rather that differing strategies can succeed in different ways and circumstances.

What benefits are funded projects bringing?

It is not surprising that most of the projects funded by Transforming Your Space focus on direct environmental improvements. But by providing those improvements, projects are also bringing about wider changes and benefits, which the evaluators have classified under four broad headings as set out below:

► Environmental

Projects are making wider environmental changes by responding to identified problems or needs. For instance, one TYS project set out to improve Parc Taff Bargoed in Merthyr Valley. In doing so, the project has improved perceptions of the area, so much so that estate agents are now highlighting properties nearby as close to the park – and local house prices have risen. Improvements to the Shakespeare Street play area in Derby (see box) have co-incided with and probably at least partly led to a total decline in vandalism and fly-tipping in the vicinity. Many of the 'greener' projects already have plans in place to monitor improvements to biodiversity over time, although in general such changes will take



some time to become evident.

Many of these projects are also successfully making links with schools and community groups to promote environmental education. While school groups often visit reserves and parklands, many schools have also been actively involved in planting bulbs and trees, for instance. More generally, all projects in Wales are required to explore and make use of principles of sustainable development so that the outputs from the programme can demonstrate the possibilities of putting policies into action, and so contribute further to environmental education and awareness.

► **Social and community**

Social and community benefits could be taken to include such changes as a reduction in vandalism and anti-social behaviour, but for the purposes of this study the evaluators classify those changes as 'environmental'. Instead, they look for such changes as increased volunteering, opportunities for people to work together, training and improving the capacity of communities to actively work for their mutual benefit. So, for instance, the Green Gym in Dumfries has enabled people who were often previously isolated to volunteer on the project, but also to meet and mix with other people. The Devenish Integrated Environmental Project in Enniskillen (see page eight) has not only improved outside perceptions of the area, but has brought residents of two estates together and promoted

positive communication and links between residents and the police.

Projects across the UK have enabled local groups and individuals to get actively involved in improving their neighbourhood, in becoming experienced in community development and more confident at carrying those benefits forward.

► **Economic**

Many of those changes have led to wider economic benefits. As noted above, environmental improvements sometimes appear to have increased local house prices or to have increased the demand for tenancies on particular estates. Projects throughout the UK have directly created jobs in managing services, while building, maintenance and related activities have often helped to stimulate local economies – at least while the improvements continue.

In other cases, providing community facilities has given business or other revenue-generating activities a chance to set up or sustain themselves. This is perhaps most pronounced in rural communities, where a new or improved community building can often provide a venue for community health services or even postal services, such as at Abergynolwyn (see page 11). Similarly, environmental improvements in rural (and some urban) areas can help to promote tourism and visits to the community. More generally, new facilities have sometimes quickly become part of the fabric of the local economy. For instance, Solaris in

Abergynolwyn Village Hall

Abergynolwyn is a village about 25 miles from Aberystwyth. The existing village hall had been built in 1948 and was no longer suitable to meet local needs – for instance, the poor state of the electrics meant that musical performances could not be held there.

The hall committee felt that the best solution was an entirely new building, and in a consultation exercise, 93 per cent of local residents agreed. TYS contributed £122,000 of the £630,000 project cost. The committee later secured further funding for a hall manager.

Consultation with the local community led to some specific changes to initial plans. The committee had originally proposed a log-cabin style of building, but residents felt that that did not look permanent enough. They also highlighted a desire to allow the Post Office to operate in the new hall – there had been no such service in the village for ten years.

TYS in Wales has a particular emphasis on sustainable development, and the new hall has breathable walls, recycled newspaper insulation, underfloor heating, low-energy lighting and a timber frame, with preparation for a biomass heating system.

The new hall includes a cafeteria with a Post Office booth that operates two days a week. The community hopes to run doctors' surgeries and a day centre for older people. It offers a space for music and theatre, and performances help to raise money to run the hall. A range of local groups are using the hall.

Those involved feel that the project has given the community a goal to rally around, and the new facility gives a new focus for village life.

While TYS funding was not crucial to the eventual completion of the project, it provided a strong boost and in particular helped the committee to secure further funding from other sources.

Solaris (The Solarium), Blackpool

This project has preserved and transformed a Blackpool landmark into a multi-purpose, 'zero-energy' building that at once showcases alternative energy features in its design and contents and offers meeting spaces, a café and office space for environmental businesses. TYS provided £175,000 of the total budget of £1,749,410.

From early in the evaluation, the new centre was already a success with visitors to Blackpool, as well as being a source of pride for many local residents. About 60,000 people visit Solaris a year. As it is a focus for seminars and meetings, local hotel owners and other businesses were also said to be benefiting from Solaris.

The building has since won various awards and encouraged the formation of and housed a number of new community groups, notably environmental ones.

The café is very popular, especially with older residents. The six businesses located in the building have added 28 new posts to the existing 39.

If anything, stakeholders had wondered whether Solaris could cope with its evident high levels of success. But so far, services have been able to expand successfully, and Solaris has been declared a model of regeneration and a fitting symbol of a resurgent Blackpool.

Findings

Blackpool (see page 12) has saved a historic building by converting it into a centre for environmental education and a support for environmental businesses. As well as offering office space to emerging businesses, the centre offers meeting spaces that in turn help to provide a stimulus to the local hotel industry.

► Health

Finally, many projects offer at least potential health benefits. Improved play and recreation areas, as well as improved parks and open spaces, complete with paths for visitors, offer opportunities for play and exercise – with consequent improvements in fitness for those who make use of them. Some projects, such as Green Gyms, explicitly set out to combine environmental improvement with opportunities for exercise. In general, health benefits from TYS projects were not a priority and by their nature will be hard to measure during the lifetime of the evaluation. But the very possibilities that TYS has helped to put into place demonstrate how one type of benefit can lead to others.

What will projects do after our funding comes to an end?

Sustaining the benefits of our funding is always an important issue for projects, as well as for us.

While many case-study projects were still some way from the end of their funding, some were already starting to think about this. Many were already developing and implementing plans to ensure that the

project or benefits would continue. This will certainly be a bigger focus in our final report, but we can make some general observations:

- In many if not most cases, TYS was one among several funders. Although this can often increase the administrative burden on grant-holders, it suggests that projects may be of interest to a wider range of potential funders, and that ending one funding stream may not be fatal to the project.
- Some projects that focused on physical and environmental improvements have come to an end, and in many cases the local authority has agreed to pick up the cost of future maintenance.
- Many projects are now beginning to generate income from such activities as selling produce, visitor charges (such as equipment hire in country parks) or room hire. This is often in addition to the general economic benefits outlined earlier.
- Often one staff post is crucial to helping to maintain momentum and to co-ordinate future fundraising.
- Another key underlying issue is that of maintaining community involvement. The evaluation shows some impressive and sustained examples of how the initiative had achieved this in developing and implementing projects. Many projects have developed links with groups of direct or indirect beneficiaries – notably primary schools and Friends' Groups – to help maintain that level of involvement.

What happens next?

At the time of writing, the evaluators were returning to the case-study projects for the last time. They will investigate further progress and in particular will consider prospects for sustaining the benefits that projects have achieved, how far they continue to involve local communities and what local residents and other stakeholders think of the projects.

We believe that the findings from the evaluation will help us to consider the most effective ways that BIG and the groups that we fund can help local communities to be involved in decisions that affect them, and how we can support sustainable projects that respond to real local need.

