

Tailor-made

Tailor-made: How community groups improve people's lives

October 2014
Papers 1-7

Tailor-made

Foreword

Through my role at CDF and my personal experiences of running many projects in my local community, I am a strong believer in the role small community groups play and how important their activities are for our society. So I am pleased that our latest research shows that these small groups are making a vital contribution to both our society and the economy. Yet sometimes this contribution can be overlooked, with these groups often viewed as ‘nice-to-have’ and public debate focusing on the delivery of core public services. We can now demonstrate that nothing could be further than the truth – these groups, and the work they do, are essential to many people, in most neighbourhoods.

‘Tailor-made: how community groups are improving people’s lives’ centres around small community groups - many of which are running on income of less than £2,000 a year - which sit under the radar. It looks at the tailored services that they provide to their community and the support they need to work well.

We decided to call this research ‘Tailor-made’ because that’s exactly what community groups are; they evolve out of community needs and are led by local people serving those on their doorsteps. Often these activities complement statutory services because community groups have the flexibility to meet specific needs and they can work holistically with groups of people or whole communities. Community groups move in to fill the gaps which others would struggle to reach – they trade on trust, build their activities from first-hand experiences and maximise the local knowledge and connections available at their fingertips.

Our research shows that small grants are a catalyst for this social action, encouraging people to take the first steps to become active in their communities, helping them to develop their activities and sometimes inspiring them to grow their groups further.

So we’re calling for the government and other funders to preserve these vital funding streams which are a lifeline to small community groups. Without this, many community projects would never get off the ground and the value of the services these groups provide, the volunteers that they attract and the impact in the community would be lost.

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And we have been proactive too, by including a *Tailor-made* toolkit for funders on how to best support these groups, particularly those who may not be funding-ready but would benefit from other types of support.

We want to celebrate the incredible work of community groups up and down the country; where people come together to make their area better, to make the lives of other people better and, ultimately, make a better society for us all. I do hope you find our research both insightful and inspiring.

Alison Seabrooke

Chief Executive
Community Development Foundation (CDF)



This report contains the seven papers that make up the Tailor-made series:

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For further information please visit tailor-made.cdf.org.uk.

What makes community groups special?



PAPER 1:

October 2014

The value of the community sector

Summary

This paper is part of the Tailor-made series and provides an overview of the valuable contribution the community sector makes to people's lives and society as a whole. We have called this series 'Tailor-made' because that's exactly what community groups are; they evolve out of community needs, are led by local people and serve the people on their doorsteps. As a result, they provide services and activities that are a perfect fit for their communities.

Key points:

We define the community sector as micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. This is a part of the wider voluntary and community sector, which also includes larger organisations and national charities.

The community sector works with all parts of the community and specific groups that benefit include older people, young people, families, minority ethnic groups, faith groups, ex-offenders and low-income groups.

The community sector is distinct because of a combination of traits common to community groups. They can flex to the needs of the community, provide a holistic service that meets the multiple-needs of people, build trusting relationships, connect to 'hidden' groups, harness first-hand experience leading to valuable expertise, provide low-cost services and attract people that are highly committed to their cause.

What makes community groups special?



The community sector makes a valuable contribution to people's lives and society by building safer communities, improving the physical environment, enhancing health and wellbeing and supporting local economies. Although there is not a clear picture of the economic contribution of the community sector, the value can be seen in the number of volunteer hours it attracts, savings to the public purse, 'new' money attracted into communities and social return on investment.

This paper is part of the Tailor-made series, which brings together evidence and stories of the community sector's contribution to people's lives and society as a whole. In this paper we provide an overview of the value the sector. Further detail about the impact of the community sector can be found in papers 3-6 of this series which look at health, crime, the environment and local economies.

About the community sector

Throughout this research, we refer to 'community groups' and the 'community sector'. For us, these terms represent micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. They represent a significant part of the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS) yet it is difficult to put an exact figure on the number of groups it comprises. So what do we know about the community sector?

- The best estimates suggest that between 600,000 and 900,000 'under the radar' groups exist in the UK.¹ This is likely to be an underestimate as the sector is like an iceberg with many more groups hidden below the surface.²
- Although many groups are well established, some pop-up in response to a need and disband when they have done their job. Others grow and shrink depending on demand and resource. This results in an agile sector that responds to its environment but is difficult to measure.
- Community groups are not reliant on significant financial investment in order to be able to deliver their activities.³
- 95% of community-based organisations have an annual income of less than £2,000⁴ and 51% of registered charities are described as 'micros', having an annual income of less than £10,000.⁵

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- Community groups typically get funding from a range of sources. Figures from registered micro-groups suggest that community groups receive the largest portion of their funding from individual donations (65%). Other sources include investment (17%), other voluntary sector organisations (12%), government (4%) and the private sector (2%).⁶

Why do we need the community sector?

Not everything a community needs or wants can be provided by the public or private sector and voluntary-led activity is a key source of provision in communities. These are not only 'nice to have' but also essential 'must have' services and support. People in many communities are struggling to stay in control of their finances and often have very small amounts of disposable income remaining at the end of the month.⁷ The evidence of increased demand for services provided by the community sector⁸ is one indication of the valuable role they play in communities under stress.

Of course, the community sector is not only focused on fixing problems. Community groups also build on positive aspects of society. This includes, for example, putting on community events, making the most of community assets, creating arts projects and running sports clubs.

What do community groups do?

Although community groups vary widely in what they do and how they do it, there are some common themes. Using data from the Community First Programme - a government-funded programme run by Community Development Foundation (CDF) that provides small grants to fund community projects in some of the most deprived areas of England - and information gathered through the Tailor-made research, we have identified the following approaches to their work:

- **providing activities:** groups offer a wide and varied range of activities responding to the interests and needs of their members. These include arts and creative activities, sports and exercise, leisure and social activities and activities for special interest groups.^{9 10 11}
- **providing advice and support:** groups provide advice and support on topics including debt and personal finance, help for new entrants to the country, parenting and employment.

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- **providing training and skills development:** groups also provide training and skills development. This is sometimes as part of services commissioned by Local Authorities but, more commonly, groups support people to develop their skills through volunteering and learning alongside more experienced volunteers or staff.
- **providing advocacy and campaigning:** some community groups represent local people in campaigns and contribute to local planning of services.^{12 13} Groups also provide advocacy for people who are less able to represent themselves.

Community groups work with a range of people from across communities, often without any distinction. Some, however, target or work with specific groups. Analysis of Community First and Grassroots Grants¹⁴ programme data indicates the following main beneficiary groups:

- children, parents and families;
- lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people;
- low income groups;
- new migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees;
- offenders and ex-offenders;
- older people;
- people from minority ethnic backgrounds;
- people of particular faiths;
- people who are unemployed;
- people with health issues, including mental health;
- people with learning difficulties or disabilities; and
- young people.

What is the value of the community sector?

The social value of the sector

The activities of the community sector outlined above contribute to a range of outcomes. We have identified the following main outcomes, each of which is the focus of a separate paper in this series:

- enhancing health and wellbeing;
- building safer communities;
- improving the physical environment; and

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- supporting local economies.

Through these reports, the Tailor-made series demonstrates that community groups make people's lives better. These groups '*play a particularly important role in enriching the social and cultural fabric of society, and in some – often indirect – ways the economy too*'.¹⁵

The economic value of the sector

There are a number of ways to view the economic value of the community sector:

- **volunteer time** – The work of the community sector is underpinned by volunteers giving their time for free. It is estimated that around 15.2 million people volunteer each month in the UK and even more (23.1 million) volunteer once a year.¹⁶ Estimates of the value of the time given by volunteers in two regions indicate that:
 - During 2012/13 in Greater Manchester 334,200 volunteers gave an estimated 1.1 million hours of their time per week. This equates to an estimated £656.3 million worth of gross value added to the economy per year.⁹
 - During 2010 in East Sussex 60,130 volunteers gave 133,889 hours per week equating to over £80 million per year.¹⁷

While there are no national figures on the amount of volunteer time given in the community sector, as defined in this report, the Community First programme provides some insights. Between 2011 and 2014, nearly 3 million hours of volunteer time were given to over 11,000 projects in 600 wards in England¹⁸ (8% of all wards in England¹⁹). This is worth approximately £33 million.

- **savings to the public purse** – community groups can produce cost-savings for statutory organisations in a number of ways, including preventative work, which can save money further down the line. For example, Rotherham Age Concern provide support to older people being discharged from hospital who do not qualify for homecare but need support to regain their independence. Clients who have benefitted from this service are less likely to be readmitted to hospital or make further use of other primary care services than those who did not receive this support. This is estimated to save the public sector at least £235,000 per year.²⁰

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- **‘new’ money raised** – community groups bring additional money into communities through applying for grants, attracting match-funding and fundraising. For example, nearly £17million of **Community First** funding attracted almost £60million in matched contributions from projects, of which just under £10million was in cash.¹⁸
- **social return on investment (SROI)** – SROI analysis is used in the VCS to illustrate the wider social, economic and environmental value these organisations provide. These analyses assess the inputs and outcomes of an activity or programme, taking into account factors such as ‘deadweight’, which is a measure of the outcome that would have happened even if the activity had not taken place.²¹ By assigning a financial value to the outcomes, SROI produces a cost-benefit ratio, which is translated into a financial return for every £1 invested. While there are critiques of this analytical technique, it provides a transparent method for assessing the complexity of the return-on-investment and a guide as to the value added by community groups. Where such analyses have been conducted for different outcomes (e.g. health), examples are provided in the relevant paper in this series. It is rare for community groups to conduct SROI analyses of their work, so in some instances we have identified examples from larger voluntary and community sector organisation to indicate the range of reported financial returns.

The evidence of the community sector’s contribution to the national economy is unclear and the lack of economic analysis of the value of the sector is recognised. The above ways of viewing the economic contribution, however, provide an insight and this is explored further in reports 3-6 of this series.

What makes the community sector special?

Research into the community sector’s role in society highlights some common features that are distinctive characteristics of the sector. Case study examples of what this means in practice are provided in papers 3-6 of this series. In summary, the community sector is unique because it is:

Flexible: The community sector mainly has to answer to its beneficiaries, meaning it is not held back by red-tape and rules. Community groups can make quick decisions and adapt to the changing needs of the community. As a result they are able to innovate¹ and take risks. They can also respond quickly to changing demographics in their area, picking up on this through their everyday interactions. They can be flexible about where and when they deliver services and activities; for example, they are not

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confined to the usual 9-5 working hours, so they are available whenever they are needed. Community groups often provide flexible resources in the community in the form of community-run assets, such as village halls and community centres.

Needs-based: Community groups are often formed to meet a specific need that is evident in their community. Their closeness to the communities they serve means they are in a good position to identify and meet emerging needs.^{2 13} They can focus on local needs as a priority rather than being distracted by other centrally identified priorities. New groups spring up, such as support groups for people with a common illness or neighbourhood watch groups aiming to make their communities safer. 'Friends of' groups arise out of communities' desire to improve and look after green spaces and assets in their neighbourhoods. These are all examples of people seeing a need and responding to it.

Holistic: People don't segment their issues or needs into categories like 'housing', 'employment' or 'health' – these are all related. Community groups are well positioned to support the whole person¹² and co-ordinate care across different providers. For example, offenders and ex-offenders often have complex needs. These could include being homeless on release from prison, substance abuse issues, difficulty in finding work or relationship problems. Research has shown that taking a holistic approach is more likely to lead to a reduction in reoffending than when needs are addressed separately.²²

Trusted: Community groups can be trusted to be there day-in-day-out and are often run by local people giving their time for free to help others. This trust means they can support people with sensitive issues that may otherwise remain behind closed doors. Examples of this include young people seeking sexual health advice or a person looking for support related to illegal activity such as drug use or prostitution. These people may be fearful of perceived 'authority figures'. Money can also be a sensitive topic for people, particularly if they feel they are not able to provide for their families. This can make it difficult to ask for help when they are struggling financially.

Connected: The community sector offers unique reach into communities – finding people who are less visible to the statutory or private sector. As well as working directly with communities, they can provide connections to other service providers.¹² The community sector is embedded within neighbourhoods, and projects are often more successful when they are 'grassroots' rather than 'top down'. A report into green spaces and sustainable communities found environmental projects that involved the community in the design and implementation gave a sense of ownership. In contrast,

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projects where there was less involvement meant the community felt a lack of ownership and little commitment to care for the green space.²³

Expert: It is often the case that volunteers or staff working for community groups are people with first-hand experience of the issues facing their beneficiaries. This could include having been through an illness, experiencing substance abuse or being a carer for someone with health-related issues. For example, women who had experienced oppression were keen to help others in similar situations.² This enables the volunteers or staff to have credibility and build trust with beneficiaries because they often have a unique insight. For example, recruiting ex-offenders as volunteers to support offenders in or leaving prison is an effective and widely-used approach.

Value for money: Groups in the community sector are characterised by their ability to do a lot with a little. This is partly as a result of being volunteer-run but also because of low management cost and overheads.²⁰ Their ability to work across the multiple needs of individuals also provides a cost-effective way of working. In the hands of community projects, small grants can have an impact on the big issues facing communities; for example, 44% of small grants funded by the Big Lottery Fund lead to improvements in health and wellbeing.²⁴

Committed: The community sector is known for its ability to attract people who will work tirelessly around the clock to support their cause. Of course, this is also true for many professions, but it is a hallmark of the community sector. Staff and volunteers often have a personal connection to the beneficiaries they are working with, or the issues they face, feeding their strong motivation to make a difference. People in communities feel they can rely on community groups because they are accessible, passionate and committed.

While the prevailing view in the research literature is that these are positive and helpful characteristics, some observe that there are limitations in the role of the community sector. In summary, these are:

‘Cold spots’: There is less community activity in some areas²⁵ and this is more likely to be the case in deprived areas where people have greater need for support.²⁶ In a period of austerity, people in these communities are facing greater pressures on their time and capacity - they are *‘focusing on just getting by day-to-day with no time or energy to connect with others or take local action’*.²⁷

Lack of influence: One effect of the local focus that community groups have is that they can sometimes operate in isolation.² This, coupled with a lack of collective voice, can limit the extent to which their deep understanding of the issues facing communities can have wider influence. For example, they can be disconnected from people who have the power to make more systemic changes

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in society, such as local and national politicians, and service providers. Support organisations can, however, help community groups to have a national voice.

Accountability: Where community groups are operating largely in isolation, there is a risk that they can become exclusive and unaccountable² to local people. Where this is the case, rather than serving the whole community, the group can represent only the needs of a specific group of people within that community.

Even with these constraints, the distinctive qualities mean the community sector is uniquely positioned to notice the issues and concerns in communities without direction from ‘the centre’. They have the flexibility, relationships, reach and trust to be able to respond and help ease the pressures on people in communities and make lives better.

The impact of these distinctive qualities of the community sector is explored further in the following Tailor-made reports:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of communities
- Building safer communities
- Improving the physical environment
- Improving local economies

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² Phillimore, J., & McCabe, A. (2010) *Understanding the distinctiveness of small scale, third sector activity: the role of local knowledge and networks in shaping below the radar actions*. TSRC Working Paper 33. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre. Available at: http://epapers.bham.ac.uk/792/1/WP33_Understanding_the_distinctiveness_of_small_scale_TS_activity_-_Phillimore%2C_McCabe_May_10.pdf

³ CLES (2014) *A civil economy for Manchester. A new vision of an economic framework for the city*. Manchester: Centre for Local Economic Strategies. Available at: [https://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/sites/manchestercommunitycentral.co.uk/files/A%20Civil%20Economy%20for%20Manchester%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://www.manchestercommunitycentral.org/sites/manchestercommunitycentral.co.uk/files/A%20Civil%20Economy%20for%20Manchester%20(FINAL).pdf)

⁴ McCabe, A., & Phillimore, J. (2009) *Exploring below the radar: issues of theme and focus*. TSRC Working Paper 8. Birmingham: Third Sector Research Centre. Available at: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/working-papers/working-paper-8.pdf>

⁵ NCVO (2014) *How big is a typical voluntary organisation?* [online] Available at: <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac/4/how-big-is-a-typical-voluntary-organisation-3/>

⁶ NCVO (2014) *How is the voluntary sector’s income distributed?* [online] Available at: <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac/4/how-is-the-voluntary-sectors-income-distributed-3/>

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- ¹¹ ACRE (2011) *The changing use of rural community buildings*. Gloucestershire: ACRE. Available at: <<http://www.acre.org.uk/cms/resources/res-downloads/acreuseofrcbs.pdf>>
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PAPER 2:

October 2014

About the research

Summary

At the Community Development Foundation (CDF) we have been working with the community sector for over 45 years. Together with our research partners, we see in our everyday interactions the huge value that these groups bring to society.

Despite there being plenty of evidence from individual groups and funders, there is no overall picture of this invaluable contribution. With this in mind, our aim for this research is to bring together evidence and stories of the contribution that the community sector makes to people's lives and society as a whole.

About Tailor-made

Why Tailor-made?

We have called this research 'Tailor-made' because that's exactly what community groups are; they evolve out of community needs, are led by local people and serve the people on their doorsteps. As a result, they provide services and activities that are a perfect fit for their communities.

Who is this research for?

The Tailor-made series is for anyone who wants to know more about the value of community groups. It brings together research from across the UK to provide a single source of evidence that aims to be of value to:

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- **policy makers** – to show the difference that community groups make to people's lives in providing essential and supplementary support in communities across the UK. By doing this we aim to inform future policy and support to enable these groups to continue their work.
- **funders** – to give evidence to guide their decisions on providing funding and support to the community sector.
- **supporting agencies and organisations** – to demonstrate the essential role their support provides in enabling the community sector to achieve their outcomes.
- **the community sector** – to help community groups demonstrate their value to funders, prospective donors, potential volunteers and the communities they support. Additionally, we hope to support community groups to influence at a local and national level.

What is the 'community sector'?

Throughout the research we refer to 'community groups' and the 'community sector'. For us, these terms represent micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. Although definitions vary, the NCVO Almanac defines micro organisations as those with an annual income of less than £10,000 and small organisations as those with an annual income of less than £100,000.¹

Who is involved?

This is a partnership project led by CDF and supported by:

- Asda Foundation
- Trust for London
- ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England)
- CDFA (Community Development Finance Association)
- Community Matters
- NAVCA (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action)

The research arose from a meeting between CDF, CDFA, NAVCA, Community Matters and ACRE all of whom have reach and relationships with communities across the country and with 1000s of formal and informal community organisations.

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How is the research funded?

We would like to thank the ASDA Foundation and Trust for London for generously supporting this work. The research is also part-funded by CDF.

About the research

Research aims

The following specific aims were identified for the Tailor-made research:

- to review the evidence on how community groups across the UK contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of their communities;
- to identify what support is available, and what, if anything, is needed in the future, to enable the community sector to continue to contribute to communities and society as a whole.

Research approach

During September 2013 - July 2014, CDF led a group of partners who were interested in demonstrating the value of the groups they support. There were three main elements to the research approach:

1. **Partner expertise:** the seven partner organisations participated in a research interview to provide insights into the research questions outlined above or shared relevant literature via email.
2. **Literature research:** to supplement the evidence provided by the partners, the CDF research team conducted a review of the wider evidence base relating to the research questions. This included:
 - Searching relevant organisations' publications, for example those published by Third Sector Research Centre, Big Lottery Fund, NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) and IVAR (Institute for Voluntary Action Research).
 - A keyword search to identify relevant literature and reports predominantly from the past 10 years.

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- An email 'call for evidence' to academics working in related fields.

A one-page review summary was produced for each piece of identified literature. The literature review resulted in 151 review summaries of which 127 were deemed eligible for the research, based on the aims outlined above. Further literature was identified as the research progressed.

3. **Review and feedback:** outputs from stages 1 and 2 were shared with partner organisations and community development experts within CDF for review.

Limitations of the research

One of the central themes in the literature is the lack of robust evidence of the impact of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and community groups in particular.

The main reasons for this lack of high quality evidence are:

- **lack of resources** – community groups tend to be small, with small budgets, and do not have the resources to demonstrate their impact.² They also typically want to direct as much of their resources as possible to benefitting those that use their group.
- **varied activities and outcomes** – community groups respond to local need and address a wide range of issues. This means there are few common measures across groups that can be collated to provide an overview of impact.
- **lack of benchmark** – community groups are often working with multiple needs and it is, therefore, challenging to establish a baseline for all of the different ways in which an individual may benefit from participating in a group. To assess change you need to know the starting point.³
- **community-led approach** – to be truly responsive to the needs of their communities, groups often have to make changes to their activities and services as they develop, which compromises the quality of data they can collect. Moreover, some feel that the nature of the work they do with beneficiaries does not lend itself to data collection which may be regarded as 'intrusive' and 'could destroy trust and rapport'.²
- **lack of comparison groups** – even where impact can be measured it is still difficult to know if the changes would have happened anyway, without the group's intervention. One approach to addressing this is to identify a comparison or 'control' group who are

What makes community groups special?



similar but did not receive support. However, finding comparison groups for the informal work of community groups has traditionally proved challenging.

- **indistinct outcomes** – the many and varied differences that community groups make to people’s lives may not be seen in the short term or may not be clearly associated with the community group.
- **numbers and change of beneficiaries** – community groups tend to have a small number of beneficiaries – in the tens rather than the hundreds. For example, the average number of beneficiaries of groups funded by the Grassroots Grants programme was 52.⁴ Consequently, the sample size for undertaking any quantitative study of impact is often too small to be meaningful. In addition, to assess the difference that is made by a group, ideally data is gathered from the same people over time. This is a challenge in many community-led activities because engagement with an activity or service is fluid.

In light of these challenges, the evidence of the impact of community groups tends to be qualitative and individual ‘case studies’ prevail. While these provide detailed insights into the difference made to an individual, or in a specific area, it is difficult to make an overall assessment of the impact of the sector as a whole. Nevertheless, this is not to say that no evidence exists – there is some and we have aimed to draw it together in this series to enhance the accessibility of the evidence and enable conclusions to be drawn from the overall weight of evidence.

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How do community groups make life better?



PAPER 3:

October 2014

Improving the health & wellbeing of communities

Summary

This paper is part of the 'Tailor-made' series, which aims to demonstrate the valuable contribution that the community sector* makes to people's lives and society as a whole. Specifically, this paper explores the significant role that community groups play in improving the health and wellbeing of communities.

Key points:

The community sector is well placed to support wellness, rather than just treat illness through connecting organisations and supporting people with wider factors that affect health, including poverty, education and social isolation.

The community sector has unique qualities that allow it to provide tailor-made support. They are trusted and understand the needs of their community. This means they can reach people that find it hard to access traditional support. They take a person-centred approach meaning they can support people's multiple-needs.

The community sector contributes significant social and economic value by improving physical and mental health, improving quality of life and reducing health inequalities.

How do community groups make life better?



Introduction

This paper is part of the 'Tailor-made' series, which aims to share evidence about the difference the community sector* makes to our lives. Specifically, this information sheet looks at the impact of the community sector on the health and wellbeing of people in communities.

Issues associated with poor health and wellbeing are on the increase, for example:

- the rising number of people with long-term health conditions means there is a 'growing need for self-management support and health promotion.'¹
- in 2013, it was reported that there would be 'a near doubling in the number of over-80s' in the following 25 years and a 10-15% rise in the number of people with physical or learning disabilities who may need care.'²
- in England, obesity increased between 1993 and 2012 from 13.2%-24.4% in men and 16.4%-25.1% in women.'³
- one in four people will experience a mental health related problem in the course of a year.'⁴
- there is a 'growing mismatch between the money available to fund community care services and increasing levels of need in an ageing society.'⁵

The community sector is well placed to address these issues; it has a long history of providing and supporting the health and wellbeing of people in communities. 'Just under a quarter (39,340) of England's 171,000 voluntary and community organisations are involved in the provision of adult health and/or social care and support services'¹ and recent policy emphasis on localism and volunteerism means that the sector can potentially play an even bigger role in the future.'¹ Data from CDF's 'Community First' programme also illustrates the role that small community groups can play in improving health; as much as 75% of projects cite 'health, wellbeing and personal/social development' as a main focus of their work.

* We define the community sector as micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. This is a part of the wider Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), which also includes larger organisations and national charities.

How do community groups make life better?



What role does the community sector play in improving health and wellbeing?

The work of the community sector in health and wellbeing falls into four categories: provision of services; advice to commissioners, planners and funders; medical research; and policy and campaigns.¹ Small community groups are likely to be providing services directly to people in their community.

In particular, the community sector plays a key role in tackling the ‘wider determinants’ of health and wellbeing.¹ These factors include, for example, poverty, education, housing, employment, isolation, crime and pollution.⁶

The community sector has a long history of working with public services to deliver health and social care. There is a growing focus in the NHS on supporting wellness rather than treating illness¹ and this preventative approach is well served by the community sector.

What makes the community sector different?

Community groups are able to make a unique contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities across the UK because of their distinctive qualities, as set out in [paper 1](#) of this series. The specific impact of these qualities on health and wellbeing is outlined below:

Flexible: The community sector is a provider of varied services that affect health and wellbeing. It has a reputation for being flexible, which means it can react quickly to the changing needs of communities. Natural fluctuations in the birth rate or increased migration could change the demographics of an area, increasing the number of children and families, for example, therefore changing the types of services that are needed locally.

Needs-based: Community sector groups are often formed to meet a specific need that is evident in their community.¹ For example, a group may form to provide support to those in the community whose needs are not fully met by the statutory services, such as support groups for specific illnesses or those who are full- or part-time carers.

Holistic: The user-centred approach taken by the community sector means they are able to focus on ‘the whole person’ and the multiple needs they may have. Some of these needs may be physical but others may be social issues, such as homelessness. The community sector can also help to reduce

How do community groups make life better?



health inequalities by working with other determinants of health, such as education, employment or social isolation. Community sector organisations are well positioned to support these multiple needs and to co-ordinate care across different providers.¹

Example 1: Active at 60

Social isolation has been linked to poorer physical and mental health. A study of a group of people over 52 found that being isolated from family and friends was linked with a 26% higher death risk over 7 years.⁷ Furthermore, *'lacking social connections is a comparable risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is worse for us than well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity'*.⁸

The groups involved in Active at 60, a programme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, provide a good illustration of how community groups are working to improve social inclusion. The programme supported small community groups to use volunteer 'Community Agents' to recruit new people to their groups. Research by CDF found that, on average, the groups involved recruited 10 new members, often older people living on their own (74%). Groups believed that the programme benefited older people by giving them a greater opportunity to make friends and socialise (94%), the opportunity to get out of the house (89%) and improved self-esteem and confidence (76%).⁹

Trusted and Connected to their community: The community sector can reach people that the statutory sector finds it more difficult to access.¹ Some people prefer to access services provided by the community sector rather than statutory services, for instance, young people seeking sexual health advice.¹ This may be because they trust community groups more than statutory services. For example, if someone is looking for support related to illegal activity such as drug taking or prostitution they may be fearful of perceived 'authority figures'. Alternatively, someone may have had a bad experience with statutory services in the past. This connection to the community also enables community empowerment, so groups help people to help themselves. This increased 'control' over health has been linked to improvement in health and reduced health inequalities.¹⁰

Some communities have less access to health and wellbeing support because, for example, they live in a remote part of the country or in an area with limited public transport connections. Additionally, communities with a relatively high percentage of non-English speakers may struggle to communicate with the authorities and therefore not access the services they need. This may be exacerbated if

How do community groups make life better?



these latter communities are facing particular issues; for example, incidents of diabetes mellitus is higher in Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian and Black Caribbean people.¹¹ Community groups can provide a bridge between these groups and the services they need.

Expert: It is often the case that volunteers or staff working in community groups are people with first-hand experience of the issues or challenges that beneficiaries are encountering. This may include having been through or going through an illness such as cancer, experiencing drug or alcohol abuse or being a carer for someone with health-related issues. This enables them to have a detailed insight into the issues, have credibility with beneficiaries and build trust.

Example 2: The Hope Programme, Middlesbrough¹²

The Hope Programme¹² aimed to tackle homelessness in prison leavers with addiction issues. Problems relating to alcohol and drugs cost the NHS an estimated £607 million per year.¹³ The majority of employees working at Hope North East (HNE), who ran the programme, were in recovery from addiction. This meant that staff members were able to better understand the problems faced by their clients and could also share their experiences to show how they had transformed their lives. Clients were able to identify with staff, which enabled them to build the trusting relationships that are crucial to recovery, as well as providing them with positive role models. For example, six years ago the Volunteer Coordinator for HNE was living on the streets and a crack cocaine addict. She went through residential rehabilitation and began volunteering for HNE, which led to a permanent job.

Value for money: Small community groups are often able to do impactful work with only small amounts of money.¹⁴ For example, 44% of small grants funded by Big Lottery led to improvements in health and wellbeing¹⁴ and 52% of projects funded by Community First encouraged people to be active and healthy.¹⁵ The person-centred approach that is common in the community sector means that community sector organisations work across organisational boundaries. This reduces the chance of duplication, which can lead to poor patient outcomes and inefficiencies.¹ A small number of studies have attempted to demonstrate the economic value of work that is happening in the sector:

- the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS) attracts additional funding to support the health sector - over half of the health-related funding attracted by the community

How do community groups make life better?



sector is from non-statutory sources including individual donations, private sector contributions, National Lottery grants and internally generated income.¹

- a study found that a typical befriending service would cost about £80 per person producing £300 worth of value per person per year when taking into account the reduced need for treatment and quality of life as a result of better mental health.¹⁶

Example 3: Awards for All

A group that received £3,850 from the Big Lottery Fund's Awards for All programme offered a programme of exercise and relaxation therapy including Pilates and stress management to women experiencing post-natal depression. Participants benefitted through improved mental and physical health, whilst the project as a whole helped to increase awareness of post-natal depression within the wider community,¹⁴ demonstrating how small amounts of money can have a big impact.

What impact do community groups have on health and wellbeing?

The qualities of the community sector described above mean that the sector can impact on health and wellbeing in the following ways:

Improved mental and physical health

Community groups directly meet the health needs of the communities they serve to improve overall physical health whilst tackling the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. For example, Age UK reports that '*falls represent the most frequent and serious type of accident in people aged 65 and over. Furthermore, falls are the main cause of disability and the leading cause of death from injury among people over 75 in the UK*'. Costs incurred as a result of falls are estimated at £6million per day or £2.3billion per year.¹⁷ Age UK describe a '*mass of evidence*' showing that exercise programmes designed to improve strength and balance can reduce falls.¹⁷ Many community groups provide this type of support; for example, a Community First funded project turned a room in a Bradford sports hall into a wellbeing room for older people. They purchased exercise equipment to enable older people to participate in light exercise to promote good physical and mental health.

How do community groups make life better?



Improved quality of life and wellbeing

The holistic and connected nature of community groups means their services improve people's lives beyond their health. Among the best evidence of the social impact of small community groups on the nation's health and wellbeing is the National Well-being Evaluation. This found that the community groups funded by Big Lottery's Well-being programme increased life satisfaction, social wellbeing, healthy eating, physical activity, self-esteem and optimism, and also decreased risk of depression.¹⁸

Reduced health inequalities

Disadvantaged groups are likely to experience more ill health and have a shorter life expectancy than those who are better off because factors that affect health and wellbeing tend to be concentrated among more deprived communities.¹⁹ The community sector 'has a wealth of information and knowledge' that can help to tackle these inequalities.¹ A study by Voluntary Action Westminster found that the community sector helped to reduce health inequalities in two main ways:¹⁹

- promoting healthy living to groups of people who may not use mainstream services; for example, by organising women-only exercise classes as an alternative to mixed classes at a public leisure centre more women may have the confidence and freedom to take part;
- supporting people to use mainstream services; for example, people may be more likely to attend hospital clinics when they are accompanied by volunteers.

Community sector organisations in this study also gave improved access to education and employment for a wide range of people, which may further contribute to improved health and wellbeing amongst these groups.

To find out more about how the community sector improves people lives please visit
tailor-made.cdf.org.uk

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How do community groups make life better?



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How do community groups make life better?



PAPER 4:

October 2014

Building safer communities

Summary

This paper is part of the 'Tailor-made' series, which aims to demonstrate the valuable contribution that the community sector* makes to people's lives and society as a whole. This paper specifically examines the multiple ways in which community groups make communities safer.

Key Points:

Community groups build safer communities by preventing crime from occurring in the first place, supporting the victims of crime and by helping ex-offenders with the practical and emotional support that they need to resettle into the community.

The community sector has unique qualities which allow it to provide tailor-made support. The sector can be flexible to meet the specific needs of the community and build trust with ex-offenders by offering holistic support from people with first-hand experience of their situation.

The impact of the community sector is reduced crime, reduced reoffending and improved community life.

How do community groups make life better?



Introduction

This paper is part of the ‘Tailor-made’ series, which aims to share evidence about the difference the community sector* makes to our lives. The focus of this paper specifically is on the role of community groups in helping to build safer communities.

Fear of crime is a reality within many communities across the UK. Despite figures suggesting that the overall crime rate is actually in decline,¹ as much as 58% of the population think that criminal activity has stayed the same or even increased in recent years.² The public believes that anti-social behaviour is disrupting community life and around half believe that it should be a top priority for the police in their local area.³ 17% of the public also perceive vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property as a big problem in their neighbourhood.⁴

Reducing rates of reoffending has also been identified as a significant priority for the government, given that around half of all crime is committed by people who have already been through the criminal justice system.⁵ Almost half of offenders released from prison go on to reoffend within 12 months of their release and the cost of this to the taxpayer is estimated to be between £9.5 and £13 billion per year.⁵

What role does the community sector play in building safer communities?

Overall, the work of these community sector groups to reduce criminal activity and build safer communities falls into three main categories:

Crime prevention and reducing the risk of people getting involved in crime. The sector acts as a diversionary measure to stop potential criminals from becoming involved with crime in the first place; this includes groups that boost young adults’ educational and employment prospects and those which provide recreational activities as an alternative to petty crime. Community safety projects may also prevent crime by boosting residents’ awareness of suspicious activity in their local area. The ‘Neighbourhood Watch’ programme, which was picked up from the USA in the 1980s by concerned community members, exemplifies this community-led approach to crime prevention.^{6,7}

* We define the community sector as micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. This is a part of the wider Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), which also includes larger organisations and national charities.

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Support to victims of crime. By working with the victims and witnesses of crime, the community sector is able to help communities recover from problems it has faced in the past. Restorative Justice programmes, for example, allow victims to meet with those who committed crime against them. This not only reduces reoffending by showing criminals the true consequences of their actions, but also gives a real sense of empowerment and control back to victims.⁸

Support to ex-offenders. The sector can provide those convicted of crime with opportunities to turn their lives around. Community groups offer a variety of custody-related services, including practical and emotional support upon release from prison and skill-based training sessions.^{9 10}

What makes the community sector different?

Community groups are able to make a unique contribution to the safety of communities across the UK because of their distinctive qualities, as set out in [paper 1](#) of this series. The specific impact of these qualities on building safer communities is outlined below:

Flexible and needs based: As they are not part of a larger bureaucracy, groups in the community sector can be flexible in working with offenders or victims of crime. Community groups are able to run services that are not provided by the public sector, such as restorative justice programmes and through the gate services for people leaving prison.¹⁰ The ‘practical and emotional support’ offered by community groups to ex-offenders, for example, fills a gap in the service provision given by the state.¹⁰ The community sector’s flexibility also allows groups to take risks and innovate; for example, drug treatment programmes for offenders in England, now a main part of public sector provision, were first piloted by community sector organisations.¹⁰

Example 1: Nilaari Project, Bristol¹¹

Nilaari is a community-led service for people who misuse drugs and alcohol. The service was started because people in the community found that the existing services did not meet the needs of those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities who were misusing substances. Nilaari was therefore set up to provide counselling and support that would be culturally sensitive. This meant that alcohol and drug misuse could be minimised, thus lowering the levels of anti-social and criminal behaviour related to such problems. The value that the group provides in meeting this need is reflected in its long-term expansion from just the Easton and St Paul’s districts of Bristol in the 1990s to its now city-wide programme.

How do community groups make life better?



Holistic: The community sector aims to work with the multiple, complex needs of victims of crime, offenders and ex-offenders. This holistic approach is more likely to lead to a reduction in reoffending than when needs are addressed separately.¹² For example, by connecting with ex-offenders and helping them address their basic immediate needs of housing and finance, the community sector helps them navigate the outside world better, thus reducing their likelihood of reoffending.¹³

Example 2: The Evolve Project, Calderdale & Kirklees¹⁴

The Evolve project works holistically with women who are ex-offenders or at risk of offending by recognising the range of issues and needs they have. This includes providing support relating to their finances, such as debt and benefits advice; health support for those with mental and physical health difficulties; practical and emotional support around subjects such as domestic violence; and training and guidance to acquire new skills. By helping service users in this holistic way, they are able to achieve greater independence more quickly.

Trusted: The ability of community groups to focus purely on the needs of the offender or ex-offender rather than, for example, maintaining discipline, means they are able to build trust in a way that public services may find more difficult to do.¹⁰

Connected to the community: Because volunteer-led organisations are rooted in their communities, they can support offenders to reconnect with the communities that they come from while they are in prison and on their release.¹⁰

Example 3: The Shires Project, Hull¹⁵

The Shires project brought ex-offenders and the community together in an 'alley-gating' initiative. They set about improving the local area and reducing anti-social behaviour by clearing alleyways between houses and putting in lockable gates to which only residents had keys. Because the community group brought ex-offenders and members of the community together, working to make the area better, the ex-offenders 'lost the "offender" label' in the eyes of the community.

How do community groups make life better?



Value for money: There is evidence that the costs of some community-based provision for offenders are lower than the costs of custody. Recent figures from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), for example, put the cost of a prison place at £49,000 per woman per year, whereas evidence shows that the cost of holistic community-based services averages at just £1,300 per woman.¹⁶ Additionally, a cost-benefit analysis of the Through the Gates service provided by St Giles Trust revealed that the reoffending rate was 9 percentage points lower for those who had used the service compared with the national average and that for every £1 spent on the project a ‘conservative estimate’ is that £10 is saved.¹³ Overall, this equates to an estimated annual saving of between £10.4 million and £34.5 million.¹⁷

Expert and committed: Using ex-offenders as volunteers to support offenders in or leaving prison is a widely used approach. These volunteers bring their personal experience to their work and have greater credibility with the offenders they are supporting as a result.¹⁰

Example 4: The Restore Network, Dorset¹⁸

The Restore Network was set up in 1996 by an ex-offender to support older people leaving prison. As part of the community sector, the network has the flexibility to use older reformed offenders to offer this help and support, allowing for a greater understanding and identification between prison-leavers and their ‘buddies’. The network, which operates in the Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole area, has had extremely positive effects on resettlement, reducing the likelihood of reoffending dramatically; as one service-user suggests, “*knowing that Restore is still there for me helps me from knocking on the prison door and saying let me back in.*”

What is the value of the community sector’s contribution to building safer communities?

As a result of being uniquely placed to prevent crime, support ex-offenders and support victims of crime, the community sector achieves the following outcomes:

Reduced crime

Through preventative and diversionary measures, community groups make communities safer. For example the Big Lottery’s ‘Young People’s Fund’ found that 18% of young people who took part in their programme got into trouble with the police less than they had previously, thereby saving the police service time and money.¹⁹ The community approach to reducing and preventing crime is

How do community groups make life better?



exemplified by the Neighbourhood Watch scheme, of which a 2009 review found that, although the way Neighbourhood Watch was implemented varied across areas in the UK, overall it was 'effective in reducing crime in 79%' of schemes.²⁰ Evidence of the community sector's ability to reduce crime is also provided through research conducted by CDF into the outcomes of projects funded by the Community Action Against Crime: Innovation Fund. A project in Nuneaton and Bedworth, for example, empowered young people to influence their own safety by creating Community Safety managers who they could talk to at weekly drop-in centres; this led to a reduction in anti-social behaviour in the local area and helped to develop a sense of responsibility in young people, thereby helping to stop crime before it happens.²¹

Reduced reoffending

By building trusting relationships and providing rounded support, the community sector offers a lifeline to people struggling to break the cycle of criminal behaviour and prison. The Ministry of Justice's data lab has reported on the effectiveness of services from the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and found that '11 of the 19 statistically significant reductions in re-offending measured through the service have come from VCS organisations'.²² Data from the wider voluntary and community sector illustrates the power of community-based interventions in tackling reoffending. For example, the St Giles Trust WIRE programme, which supports vulnerable female prison-leavers returning to London,²³ found that the reconviction rates among women they worked with were 42%, compared with a national average of 51%. They also found that in instances where women had reoffended, they had committed half the number of offences after engaging with WIRE than they had in the 12 months previously.¹³ Catch 22's service for prison leavers found that in 2011/12, the reoffending rates of participants were 3.2% lower than was the case in 2009. In contrast, nationally reoffending rates rose by 0.8% in the same time period.²⁴

Improved community life

The work done by groups in the community sector can make a significant contribution to the cohesion of local communities. For example, research conducted by CDF into the Community Action Against Crime: Innovation Fund found that community groups helped lower anti-social behaviour in their local area and build connections between different parts of the community.²⁵ The sector can also help to build better relationships between ex-offenders and their communities. The 'Moving On Renfrewshire' Project, for example, found high levels of voluntary engagement, with 81% of the young people who were referred to the project engaging with it in prison and 75% continuing to engage

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with it post-release. The project was found to contribute towards reductions in reoffending rates, improved physical and mental wellbeing and improved personal relationships.²⁶

To find out more about how the community sector improves people's lives please visit
tailor-made.cdf.org.uk

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How do community groups make life better?



PAPER 5:

October 2014

Improving the physical environment

Summary

This paper is part of the Tailor-made series, which aims to demonstrate the valuable contribution that the community sector* makes to people's lives and society as a whole. This paper specifically examines the multiple ways in which community groups improve the local physical environment and the hugely significant value that this adds to society.

Key points:

The community sector does a huge amount to help improve the physical environment of local neighbourhoods across the UK. Volunteer-led groups are set-up with the goal of improving the local environment and managing or maintaining facilities for their community.

Community groups are uniquely placed to improve their physical environment. Projects that are run by local people are more successful than 'top down' projects administered by statutory organisations.

Community-based environmental projects are good value for money with every £1 invested in environmental volunteering resulting in up to £4 worth of value.

Their impact extends into multiple aspects of society, so not only does the sector visibly change the landscape of a neighbourhood and its natural environment, it can also affect the health of local people, their sense of community cohesion and local crime rates. This means that environmental projects within the community sector have huge social and economic value.

How do community groups make life better?



Introduction

This paper is part of the ‘Tailor-made’ series, which aims to share evidence about the difference the community sector* makes to our lives. Specifically, this report looks at the role that volunteer-led, community organisations can play in improving the local physical environment.

The surroundings in which people live have a significant impact upon multiple aspects of their lives including residents’ health,^{1 2} risk of suffering crime³ and sense of community cohesion.⁴ Access to green spaces is significantly worse in deprived areas, and people often avoid using them due to concerns about crime and safety.⁵

What role does the community sector play in improving local environments?

The community sector does a huge amount to improve local physical environments. This is exemplified by the Big Lottery Fund’s ‘Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities’ programme, which funded 3,425 environmental projects across the UK, 25% of which were small community-based projects.^{6 7} An evaluation of the programme found that it was actually these grassroots groups, and not local authorities or other providers, who were most likely to deliver successful projects.⁷

Improving the physical environment is not simply about green spaces but also includes physical assets and facilities. Volunteer-led groups are very good at providing facilities to be used by the rest of the community; for example, 73% of the 10,000 village halls across the UK are run by community groups⁸ and around 40% of Community Matters member organisations provide those in the local area with spaces to use, doing so for an average of 62.5 hours per week.⁹ This demonstrates the enormous contribution of the sector towards improving the physical assets of neighbourhoods throughout the country.

In summary, the community sector undertakes a wide range of different activities that help maintain and improve the physical environment including developing and managing:^{4 7 9 10}

- local parks
- community centres and buildings
- community gardens, allotments or orchards

* We define the community sector as micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. This is a part of the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS), which also includes larger organisations and national charities.

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- flower displays
- conservation areas
- play areas
- other green spaces where people can go for leisure, relaxation, exercise, to play and to meet people

What makes the community sector different?

Community groups are able to make a unique contribution to the physical environment of communities across the UK because of their distinctive qualities, as set out in [paper 1](#) of this series. The specific impact of these qualities on local environments is outlined below:

Flexible: The community sector is able to provide resources, such as village halls and community centres, that can be used flexibly by communities. This is evident from the wide range of activities that village halls are used for, including: activities that help the health and wellbeing of the community (73%), arts activities (80%), education and youth group activities (61%) and occasional commercial activities (32%).¹¹

Needs-based: People living in communities see their environment every day and know what would best improve it. The spaces they develop and enhance are therefore ‘*created by local communities, for local communities*’.⁴ This is very empowering for local residents and can be particularly important in more deprived communities, where the spaces available may be more limited; by identifying what they need the most, these communities can make the best possible use of their surroundings.

Holistic: While improving the physical environment may be the main goal of a group, the effects can be far wider for those who volunteer or take part in the project. The outcomes may include an improved environment but projects often, intentionally or unintentionally, tackle wider social issues, such as improving health, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, and enhancing community cohesion and neighbourliness.⁷

Example 1: Longley Four Greens Doorstep Green⁷

A community-led project to improve four areas of land on an estate started with an environmental focus, but resulted in much more widespread effects. Having developed the four spaces, residents found that fly tipping stopped and they began to feel far more confident about addressing other issues, such as dog fouling and alcohol misuse in the area. This increased

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confidence was in large part because the experience of developing the green space meant that people got to know each other, which enhanced neighbourliness and community cohesion. By helping out with the project residents also developed their skills and gained significant work experience. This shows that *'environmental improvements can be an important catalyst in helping local neighbourhoods, affected by all sorts of disadvantage, to be active in making changes which "snowball" into a much wider range of linked benefits'*.⁷

Connected to their community: Projects to enhance the physical environment are usually more successful when the community is fully involved in the whole process. *'Grassroots community projects'*, those run by local people for local people, achieve much higher success rates than *'top down'* projects, those which are administered from above by statutory organisations.⁷ Because community-led projects are rooted in their communities, they often reach groups in the community that other services find harder to reach. The community-led approach of the Big Lottery Fund's *'Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities'* programme, for example, was found to be far more successful in reaching *'people from disadvantaged communities'* and engaging them in improving their environment than *'traditional environmental organisations'*.⁷

Example 2: Surtees Doorstep Green, Ferryhill Station⁷

The Residents' Association, working with the town council and Doorstep Green committee, led the redevelopment of a local field to turn it into a community park for the village. Local residents of all ages were involved in the design, planning and delivery of the park, which has really helped to bring the community together, across the generations, with a common purpose. Because local young people were so involved in the project, they were able to take greater responsibility and ownership of the park; this significantly reduced the risk of damage, vandalism or graffiti. By involving the community, the project therefore became a much bigger success.

Expert: The community sector is able to draw upon volunteers who have wide-ranging knowledge, expertise and experience. The community can therefore get high-quality results for a fraction of its usual cost. By allowing local experts to directly apply their skills, through the creation of flower displays, community gardens or food growing projects, for example, the physical environment can be

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cost-effectively, but very professionally, improved. Others in the community can also learn significant amounts from these experts by volunteering alongside them.

Value for money: The community sector can achieve great results at minimum cost through the use of volunteers, as outlined above. Estimates can be produced to display the value of volunteer time put into environmental projects; in one year (2007-2008) those volunteering for the Conservation Volunteers (previously known as BTCV) gave 540,178 workdays of time, equivalent to over £27m if each day is valued at £50.⁴ Community centres, village halls and other community-run buildings are also a very cost-effective way of providing local residents with space in which to achieve their aims. Analysis of village halls by ACRE found that they are 'very economical to run'; 75% have running costs of less than £10,000 per year and around half (51%) have annual costs of less than £5,000.¹² These low running costs are due to the subsidising effect of fundraising efforts as well as the large amount of time given by volunteers; on average they contribute 18.5 hours a week to the running of each hall, equivalent to approximately £6,734 annually.¹² Community groups also provide value for money in the following ways:

- Friends groups raise approximately £30 million annually for parks¹³
- Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis suggests that every £1 invested in environmental volunteering can give a return of up to £4, representing a very worthwhile investment.⁴

Committed: The community sector is run by individuals and groups who are truly dedicated to the cause. Those who delivered environmental projects funded by the 'Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities' programme, for example, were willing to go the 'extra mile' to achieve the best that they could and it was often an effective approach when statutory services worked alongside these committed community members to maintain green space.⁷ Involving members of the community in the design and implementation of environmental projects gives them a much greater sense of ownership, ensuring that a real commitment exists to care for the new space.

Example 3: Mapesbury Dell Trust⁷

The Community Trust and the local authority share responsibility for the maintenance of a new garden that residents have developed. While the authority maintains the gravel surfaces, grass, leaves and rubbish bins, residents do the gardening 'frills', such as planting, pruning and weeding. By using regular and frequent visits to 'keep on top of routine maintenance tasks' together with

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scheduled gardening days, on which participants are given a clear plan of the tasks required and advice about completing these duties, the commitment of residents ensures that the space is well maintained.

What is the value of the community sector's contribution to improving the physical environment?

The unique qualities of the community sector described above allow it to make an enormous difference to the local physical environments of neighbourhoods across the UK. As previously mentioned, grassroots organisations in this sector achieve significantly higher success rates on environmental projects than many other providers⁷ and are a very frequent provider of buildings and facilities to be used by the local community.^{8 9} The sector, therefore, is a widespread provider of valuable physical resources within communities.

An improved physical environment may be the main impact of groups' efforts, but local people are able to enjoy much wider benefits that go beyond the visible changes to the neighbourhood. Reviews have identified a wealth of evidence linking improvements in multiple aspects of people's lives to increased access to green spaces and community facilities. The local community can benefit from:

Improved health

Residents are able to live healthier lifestyles simply because green spaces provide them with somewhere to meet, exercise or even just relax. For example, those with good access to green space are 24% more likely to be physically active,¹⁴ thus reducing the risk of obesity and a range of other health problems, including strokes, heart attacks, cancer and Alzeihmers.⁴ There are significant costs to the public purse from poor health resulting from lack of exercise and unhealthy lifestyles. Physical inactivity is estimated to cost the English economy over £8 billion each year because of work absence, costs to the NHS and early mortality,¹⁵ and so the value of increasing people's activity levels, which access to green spaces has been shown to do, is considerable. Indeed, it is suggested that a permanent reduction of 1% in the UK sedentary population (from 23% to 22%) could deliver a social benefit of up to £1.44 billion per year.⁴ There are also significant benefits to local people's mental health from undertaking activities in green spaces; for example, 94% of those who participated in green exercise activities with local Mind groups felt that the combination of nature and exercise had benefited their mental health.¹⁶

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Increased community cohesion

Parks and green spaces are widely perceived to be good for the community because they ‘give a sense of community’ and provide a location where people can meet together.⁴ It also helps if the community has worked together to improve the space in which they live, as the process brings individuals together with a common purpose to benefit them all; this improves community cohesion, ‘social capital’ and feelings of neighbourliness.^{4 7} This is especially beneficial when it brings people from different backgrounds together, helping to break down barriers between those of different ethnicities and cultures or those with health issues, learning difficulties or disabilities.⁴

Reduced crime

There is evidence from the ‘Broken Windows’ theory that improving the visible appearance of a neighbourhood reduces the risk of low level vandalism and anti-social behaviour; by mending broken windows as soon as they occur it is less likely that more windows will get broken.¹⁷ If the community sector can improve the attractiveness of the neighbourhood then these kinds of crime will be reduced.

Greater bio-diversity

The work of people in communities to improve green spaces promotes bio-diversity within the local natural environment. Not only is this a good thing in itself, but the greater range of plants and animals also helps to improve air quality, maintain temperature and even reduce the risk of flooding.⁴

A localisation of food

In an increasingly globalised world there has been an increasing desire from many to understand where food comes from and significantly reduce the distance that food travels from producer to consumer.¹⁸ Community-led gardens, allotments and orchards all help to re-connect local people with where their food is produced.¹⁹

It is clear that the impact of the community sector’s work to improve local environments extends far beyond visibly changing the physical landscape of communities.

To find out more about how the community sector improves people lives please visit

tailor-made.cdf.org.uk

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How do community groups make life better?



PAPER 6:

October 2014

Improving local economies

Summary

This paper is part of the 'Tailor-Made' series, which aims to demonstrate the valuable contribution that the community sector* makes to people's lives and society as a whole. Specifically, this paper explores the significant role that community groups play in improving local economies and helping people into meaningful employment.

Key Points:

Many people are struggling to cope as economic uncertainties and government cutbacks continue to bite. A situation has been created in which significant parts of the population are forced to depend on payday loans and foodbanks just to meet their day-to-day needs.

The community sector can help to meet, and prevent, these difficulties. Community groups can provide accessible, trusted advice and support relating to finance and employment. They are able to use their connections to the community to find creative ways to save people money, such as bulk purchasing.

The sector contributes significant social and economic value to both individuals and society. Community groups reduce the burden on statutory services, reduce unemployment, make areas more attractive to businesses and improve people's quality of life through financial education and access to fair finance.

How do community groups make life better?



Introduction

This information sheet is part of the 'Tailor-Made' series, which aims to share evidence about the difference the community sector* makes to our lives. Specifically, this information sheet looks at the role of the sector in improving local economies, with reference to the multitude of ways in which community groups can impact on both poverty and unemployment.

The economic disturbances of recent years have created a situation in which large sections of the population are in significant need of help; by 2011, 22.7% of the UK population were considered to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹ and around 4.5 million British adults had just £10 left per month after paying their essential bills.² Though the Government has been the primary source of support for those in need in the past, cutbacks mean that this help is declining in real terms and the poorest places are those being hardest hit.³ Many people experiencing financial distress are therefore being forced to turn to alternatives for the help they require. The widespread use of payday loans, for example, represents just this; in the three years following the recession this industry grew by a staggering £1.3 billion, with over 8 million payday loans taken out in 2011/12.⁴ In the past year alone the number struggling with payday loans has increased by as much as 42%.⁵ The huge demand for help is also evident from the fact that nearly 1 million people in the UK have been fed by foodbanks in the past year, requiring two new banks to be launched every week.⁶ There are clearly large numbers in acute need.

What role does the community sector play in improving local economies?

The community sector is working to improve local economies and the financial situation of people within communities. The main routes to achieving this are:

- supporting people into work;
- helping people to more successfully manage their finances;
- helping people out of debt;
- connecting people to fair finance;
- supporting local businesses.

* We define the community sector as micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. This is a part of the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS), which also includes larger organisations and national charities.

How do community groups make life better?



What makes the community sector different?

Community groups are able to make a unique contribution to improving local economies across the UK because of their distinctive qualities, as set out in the [paper 1](#) of this series. The specific impact of these qualities on local economies is outlined below:

Flexible: Community groups can provide a service outside of normal 9-5 working hours. This means that support is much more accessible to those with other commitments during the day, such as those providing care or in full-time employment. The community sector also has the flexibility to provide services in more local settings than might be possible for local authority services, such as JobCentre. Those with limited time or resources to travel can therefore still benefit from similar, good-quality advice and guidance.

Example 1: Community First Job Club

The Job Club was set up as a friendly, community-based facility where unemployed people of all ages could network with each other, meet employers, find out about job vacancies, and receive advice on a range of topics, such as CV writing and interview technique. Jobseekers benefit from group support and professional advice from a qualified employment adviser. This raises confidence, boosts self-esteem and ultimately helps people to secure employment. The Job Club is held in areas where unemployment is high in order to meet local demand and tends to be run from venues that are easily accessible to those that need them, thus encouraging as many people as possible to attend and benefit from their support.

Needs-based: Because community groups are set up from within the communities they serve, they are extremely well-placed to understand and identify the real issues facing the local area. They can adapt to meet specific needs, such as the financial difficulties or employment barriers that are particular to their community.

Example 2: Allen Valleys Oil Buying Co-operative⁷

This group, located in the south of Northumberland, realised that the skyrocketing price of oil was putting many local people at risk of fuel poverty. Having identified this specific need they were able to set up an oil buying co-operative which purchases kerosene and diesel for over 100 local residents, businesses and organisations. Because they order in such large quantities

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they are able to obtain significant discounts; these are then passed onto the group's members, helping them to minimise the risk of falling into fuel poverty.

Holistic: People facing financial difficulties often face a number of related issues. For example, they may be struggling to find work, building up rent arrears or interest on loans whilst suffering from health issues. Community groups are well-placed to offer an integrated service that meets these varied needs.

Trusted and Connected to their community: Money can be a sensitive topic, particularly when people feel they are not able to provide for their families. This can make it difficult for people to ask for help when they are struggling. However, by providing support in comfortable, familiar surroundings, community groups can make this process a lot easier. Additionally, credit unions, co-operatives, associations, mutuals, foundations and social enterprises mainly operate at the local level, relying on (and contributing to) the development of formal and informal networks of people, knowledge and resources. They are embedded in the social economy of their local community, meaning they are best placed to tackle social and economic exclusion.⁸

Expert and committed: Most people have never received any real training about how to manage their finances and so many subsequently struggle to do so. This can lead to poverty and spiralling debt. Community groups can help to avoid such circumstances by employing the use of experts to advise local residents on how best to manage their money. This kind of advice might not otherwise be available or would be expensive if not provided by the community sector.

Example 3: Community First Money Management Project

This group trained a number of local people as experts in financial management, so that they could go out into the wider community and teach others how best to manage their money. Participants were taught a proven system for managing their money which helps them to budget more effectively.

Value for money: Community sector groups can offer expert services for little or no cost. Through collective-buying or the use of volunteers, they may also enable individuals to purchase goods and services at a much lower cost than otherwise available on the open market.

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Example 4: Parents' Committee Nursery Project

This community group set up a local nursery to provide indoor and outdoor activities for children aged between 2 – 3 years old, which they aimed to make as cost effective as possible. Not only has the project created new jobs for local people, it also minimises the costs for working parents. Research in 2012 suggested that the high cost of childcare meant that some families were just £4 better off per week with two earners rather than one.⁹

What value does the community sector contribute to local economies?

Because of the particular strengths of the community sector outlined above, groups are able to make a valuable contribution to the local economy. The sector's significant value comes from its ability to:

Reduce the burden on statutory services

Poverty leads to a range of further problems for individuals and communities, including crime, poor health and educational disadvantage. This puts stress on already stretched statutory services, such as the police, NHS and schools. When community groups support people to move out of poverty, then the burden on these services is reduced. Fuel poverty, for example, is related to higher mortality rates and a greater likelihood of children suffering from respiratory and mental health problems, and is consequently estimated to cost the NHS £859 million each year.^{10 11} Community group initiatives such as the Allen Valley's fuel buying cooperative⁷ are helping to tackle these issues.

Reduce unemployment

By providing advice, training and other employment services the community sector helps a significant number of jobseekers find work. Though data for the community sector itself is limited, indications can be gleaned from studies of the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS); one such study, for example, estimated that in North Yorkshire & York alone the VCS helps over 5,000 people into employment annually.¹² Further to this, those who volunteer with groups are likely to boost their job prospects because of the new skills that they learn, along with the greater experience and confidence they gain from helping projects.^{13 14}

The aforementioned study, for example, found that around 2,000 people in the region found work after volunteering, highlighting the importance of the community sector to those who take part.¹²

How do community groups make life better?



Contribute directly to the economy

Community sector groups are significant economic actors in their own right as they buy and sell numerous goods and services locally, thus contributing to overall local demand and job creation. Groups belonging to the wider voluntary and community sector (VCS) in East Sussex alone were found to have an annual income of around £476 million¹⁵ and the VCS contributes between 1.5–3% of GDP in North Yorkshire and York.¹⁶ This begins to build a picture about just how much the sector is capable of spending locally. The number and value of volunteer hours produced by the sector is also a reflection of its local economic contribution, as time spent by volunteers on community work might be considered as more economically productive than many other ways of spending that time. The value of volunteer time in North Yorkshire & York's VCS, for example, is estimated at £116 million per year.¹² Because of its use of volunteers the community sector is able to add significant value; in fact, in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA) the overall VCS would be 16th out of 29 UK business sectors.¹⁷ While there are no national figures on the amount of volunteer time given in the community sector, as defined in this report, the Community First programme provides some insights. Between 2011 and 2014, nearly 3million hours of volunteer time were given to over 11,000 projects in 600 wards in England¹⁸ (8% of all wards in England¹⁹). This is worth approximately £33million. There is also a growing recognition of the important links between social capital and economic prosperity, together with an acceptance that a successful economy is not simply concerned with physical and financial capital, but also human and social capital.¹⁷ Community groups can build these social networks and boost social capital to tackle social exclusion and improve the local economy.

Attract and retain businesses

The community sector makes areas more attractive to businesses. They do this by helping to enhance the physical environment of a neighbourhood, by improving the skills, confidence and health of potential workers, or even by reducing the local crime rate. Community groups connect the social and economic; businesses benefit from strong, stable communities, allowing them to embed their operations and draw from a local pool of talent and potential clients.¹⁷ The community sector may also provide useful services to local entrepreneurs to help them start up various enterprises. A number of Community First projects have done this, for example, by promoting entrepreneurial thinking among local school students or by encouraging residents to set up stalls at the local market.

How do community groups make life better?



Improve people's standard of living

By encouraging economic growth within a local economy in all of the above ways the community sector can really help to improve local residents' standard of living. Community groups can also achieve this by supporting individuals and families to manage their finances more efficiently, or access fair community finance, thus allowing them to spend less on interest repayments and more on goods that will improve their quality of life.

It is clear from the above that community groups already play a hugely significant role in improving local economies and have the potential to do even more given the right support.

To find out more about how the community sector improves people lives please visit
tailor-made.cdf.org.uk

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How do community groups make life better?



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What do they need to achieve their work?



PAPER 7:

October 2014

Supporting the community sector

Summary

This paper is part of the 'Tailor-made' series, which provides an overview of the valuable contribution the community sector* makes to people's lives and society as a whole. We have called this series 'Tailor-made' because that's exactly what community groups are; they evolve out of community needs, are led by local people and serve the people on their doorsteps. As a result, they provide services and activities that are a perfect fit for their communities. This paper specifically examines what community groups need in order to successfully achieve their goals.

Key points:

Community groups need the following support in order to fulfil their potential:

Funding – although community groups raise much of their funding through personal donations, small grants can be crucial to enable risk taking and innovation.

Managing and finding facilities – community centres provide low cost venues for communities to run services. Organisations such as Asda are using their facilities in creative ways to provide new community facilities.

Guidance and advice on running a group – groups need support to legally, safely and effectively run a group.

Developing people – investing in capacity-building of people in the community sector is

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essential, leading to more effective and efficient groups.

Understanding impact – demonstrating outcomes is still a challenge for the sector but some key initiatives such as Inspiring Impact are providing support.

Partnerships – groups that build relationships and partnerships benefit in multiple ways including access to commissioners of services, the ability to co-produce bids and learning from other groups.

What support do community groups need to achieve their aims?

Throughout the Tailor-made series we present evidence and stories demonstrating the difference that the community sector* makes to people's lives and societies. We also outline the distinctive qualities of the sector that mean it is uniquely placed to make this contribution. However, it is also evident that community groups achieve this with the support of a wider 'infrastructure' of local, regional and national organisations, providing practical support in the form of advice and resources. This paper summarises the main support that groups need, which includes:

- attracting funding;
- finding or managing facilities;
- running a group;
- developing people;
- measuring impact;
- making connections.

Each of these is discussed in more detail throughout this report.

* We define the community sector as micro and small volunteer-led groups that provide support and services to people in their local area. This is a part of the wider voluntary and community sector, which also includes larger organisations and national charities.

What do they need to achieve their work?



Attracting funding

Community sector organisations are able to provide low-cost services, often because they are supported by volunteers giving their time for free. However, many activities still require funding so generating this income remains a widespread concern¹ and an ‘enduring need’ for groups.² As outlined in [paper 1](#) of this series, these groups appear to raise the majority of their funds through individual donations but other sources include grants, commissioning and social investment. There is some evidence that state funding is a larger component of the ‘funding mix’ for groups in more deprived areas and these groups are therefore more vulnerable to reductions in state spending.³

Grants

The community sector does not achieve the majority of its funds through grants, however, this type of funding is still critical for many groups. Grant funding allows groups to take risks,⁴ leading to flexibility and innovation. Grant funding can also support groups in balancing innovation with ‘maintaining stable and successful organisations’. This support for sustaining organisations is acknowledged in the approaches of some funders, such as BIG, who recognise the need to provide funding for 3 to 5 years for groups to have some stability.⁵

Small grants in particular are valued by community groups. These grants, as their name suggests, are relatively modest in size, with the majority of funders defining them as grants of less than £10,000.⁶ Grassroots Grants, a successful £80 million Small Grants programme which ran until 2011, offered approximately 19,000 groups small grants which ranged from £250 to £5,000 with an average of £3,124.⁷ The current Community First programme meanwhile defines small grants as those between £250 and £2,500. Up until the summer of 2014 the average-sized grant offered by Community First was just under £1,500.⁸

Despite their small size, these grants can have a massive impact. The final evaluation report of the Grassroots Grants programme, for example, identified five key benefits of the small grants:⁷

- **reaching ‘under the radar’ groups** - the majority of groups funded (59%) had an annual turnover of less than £5,000. Groups of this size are at risk of being missed by larger funding programmes, but can prove very cost-effective at delivering positive social outcomes.⁹

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- **significant increase in volunteering** - on average five more volunteers joined each group which received the funding.
- **sustained and expanded grassroots activity** – 93% of groups indicated that they would continue into the future beyond their grant funding.
- **benefit to Civil Society** - a significant number of groups were set up to meet a community need (74%) or fill a gap in service provision (41%).
- **benefit to individuals and the wider local area** – 60% of those involved said that the project improved their personal wellbeing or happiness and 92% believed that the project had a positive effect on their local area.

Without small grants, benefits such as these would be far less likely to occur. Indeed, three quarters of Community First projects say that, “without the Community First funding, their activity would have taken longer, would have been on a smaller scale, or would have been of a lower standard”.¹⁰

As Alison Seabrooke of the Community Development Foundation concludes:

“Small grants are the oxygen to the heartbeat of communities, and small community and voluntary groups can make a significant difference to the health of community life. Continued funding, through government-funded grant programmes and philanthropic investment, should not become a casualty of the public spending squeeze.”¹¹

Commissioning

While grants have been a traditional approach to providing funding to the community sector there has been a growth in the expectation that the sector should bid for commissioned services to fund their activity. There is some debate around this approach for community groups with perceived challenges including:

- their lack of experience, skills and time to write a bid;¹²
- the bureaucracy of the commissioning and tendering processes;¹²
- the legal technicalities, such as employment law, and the community sector’s lack of in-house expertise compared with the private sector;¹²
- the lack of evidence of outcomes that they can present in support of a bid¹³, including where they provide preventative services which are more difficult to commission due

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to the challenge of measuring outcomes where you are preventing something from happening.¹⁴

Support initiatives such as BIG's building capabilities programme aim to support the sector to bid for services and evidence their impact. Another approach has been for community sector organisations to be sub-contractors to 'prime contractors' who are the main public service contract holders and lead the bid and delivery. Nevertheless, it is worth considering that there is also a view that there is little 'desire' among some community sector organisations to take on commissioned services¹³ and, moreover, in some cases it may not be appropriate because *'there are some activities that operate outside of the market, making it highly improbable, if not impossible, that they can be traded'*.³

Using commissioning as a source of funding may be appropriate for community sector organisations as part of a 'funding mix', however, it is apparent that organisations need to be in a position to critically appraise the opportunity and 'make an honest assessment' of whether or not it is appropriate for them.¹⁵ Small community groups are less likely to be in a position to bid for commissioned services; however, their knowledge and expertise can prove useful to those developing and commissioning new services.

Social investment

Another source of income that is becoming more widely discussed is social investment. There are reported challenges with the 'investment readiness' of the community sector and this will take time, and some capacity-building, to emerge.¹⁶ Managing a loan, in comparison to a grant, is a new experience for many community sector groups and can put pressure on them.¹⁷ Nevertheless, their capacity to do so successfully is supported by evidence of low default and bad debt levels from lending by Charity Bank North, for example.¹⁶

As with commissioned services, social investment may not be appropriate for all groups or all circumstances but there is some indication that awareness of it as an option can lead groups to think differently about their sustainability and the options available.¹⁶ The evidence to date suggests that for social investment to be successful, groups need:

- support that is varied and reflects the diversity of the sector;¹⁶
- support that includes a blend of guidance, revenue support and different sizes of loan funding as part of one package;¹⁶
- support with financial and business planning;¹⁸

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Where groups choose to adopt this more ‘business-like’ approach, some observers caution that this needs to be balanced with ‘retaining the enthusiasm and passion that made people want to get involved in the first place’.¹⁹

Finding and managing facilities

In order to achieve their objectives, community groups typically need places to meet or somewhere to run their activities. Community buildings, often run by the community, offer low cost accessible places that can be used for these purposes. Because they are often volunteer-run, and supported by fundraising, the costs can be kept to a minimum enabling groups to offer activities or services free or at very low cost to beneficiaries.²⁰ This is of particular value in areas which are more deprived and where beneficiaries have little disposable income. They are also particularly valuable in areas where public sector spending cuts have reduced the availability of low cost places to meet.¹³

In some communities, businesses are providing creative support to help groups find spaces to meet. For example, through their Community Life programme Asda are making the most of their position at the centre of communities to provide a new type of community centre utilising their facilities. Asda’s foyers, training rooms, cafés and car parks have been used for community activity in over 500 stores.²¹ As a winner of the Business in the Community ‘Building Stronger Communities’ award, 2013, Asda described how,

“Community Life’ is about making the communities around our stores and depots better places to live, work and grow up for our colleagues and customers. We want every store and depot to be at the heart of our local communities.”²²

Guidance and advice on running a group

As well as the very tangible support discussed so far, the community sector needs guidance and advice on how to legally, safely and effectively run a group. This can come from a range of sources including at a local level from Local Authorities and Councils for Voluntary Services (CVSs) and at a national level from infrastructure organisations,²³ such as the Community Development Foundation (CDF), Community Matters, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). Examples of the support needed and accessed by groups include:

- advice in plain English about changes in regulations and technical advice;²⁴

What do they need to achieve their work?



- advice to help understand the commissioning process and how it could work for the group;¹⁵
- advice on fundraising and how to access small grants;²⁵
- advice on legal, governance and insurance issues²⁶
- advice on future and succession planning;²⁷
- advice on developments in the wider context they exist in that may impact on them, including policy developments and funding changes.²⁸

Just Act,[†] created and managed by CDF, consolidates much of this information into ten steps for running community projects.

Developing people

While in many cases, advice and guidance is all that is needed, in other instances, people in communities need more sustained capacity-building and capability-building support that helps to develop people's skills, knowledge and confidence. The benefits of ensuring that community groups can access support to build their capabilities to 'maximise the impact' that their funding would have in communities is recognised by Big Lottery Fund in their Building Capabilities consultation.²⁹

A wide range of support³⁰ is requested by community groups including:

- governance and management;²⁴
- asset transfer;¹⁸
- leadership;¹⁸
- advocacy;²⁴
- exit strategies and business planning;³¹
- specific subjects such as planning, energy, asset transfer.^{18 30 32}

Among small organisations in particular, there is a preference for this support to be provided in person and tailored to the needs of the individual organisation.³²

There are barriers to groups accessing support to build their capacity which include:³³

- time;

[†] Available at www.justact.org.uk

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- resources;
- being able to identify appropriate support that meets their needs;
- having the 'buy-in' of the organisation.

Nevertheless, where groups are able to overcome these barriers, there is some evidence that providing capability building support can be beneficial for groups. For example:

- groups that received support had become more resilient and accessed additional grant funding;³¹
- improvements in skills, communications and networks were more noticeable among new or less experienced groups;³⁴
- rural groups that were supported were more sustainable and more able to access funding from BIG;²⁷
- groups who had been supported with funding, training and legal advice were managed more effectively and were more efficient subsequently;³⁵
- higher quality funding applications are submitted to funders where the group applying has received some tailored support.²⁹

An additional benefit of capacity-building support can be either having the space and time to reflect on your community organisation away from the day to day delivery, or having someone else give an objective view of your group.³³ For capacity-building support to be effective and sustainable, it needs to be organisation-wide rather than focused on any individual.³²

Understanding impact

The challenge for the community sector to demonstrate the outcomes of what they do is widely recognised. The Building Capabilities consultation²⁹ found that one of the areas where voluntary and community sector groups wanted support was with demonstrating their impact, in particular to potential future funders. Similarly, the Inspiring Impact programme³⁶ was developed to address the need for support for voluntary and community sector organisations to be better able to assess their outcomes and impact. The need for this support is on-going as the Supporting Change and Impact evaluation found that voluntary and community sector organisations need to be encouraged to plan monitoring and evaluation into their work 'as a matter of course' and to use 'industry standard' impact measurement tools such as those identified through *Inspiring Impact*.³¹

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Partnerships

A further factor that helps community groups to achieve their aims is relationships with other organisations, particularly those with common objectives. These can:

- develop as a result of a groups' own contacts and networks;
- evolve as part of a programme – such as the Fair Share Trust projects which built links and networks as a result of the programme;³⁴
- be facilitated and brought about by support organisations.¹²

The time required to network and build partnerships is not inconsiderable and can be a barrier to groups doing this.¹ However, there is clear value in doing so. Partnerships can support groups to:

- gain access to policy makers and decision makers to inform their decisions;
- gain access to commissioners of services;¹⁵
- learn from other voluntary and community sector groups;²⁹
- develop co-produced or consortium bids;¹²
- provide integrated and cost-effective services to communities.

The Tailor-made toolkit

As outlined throughout this report, community groups need support in order to fulfil their potential. Further information about how funders can help groups access support can be found in the Tailor-made **toolkit**.

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What do they need to achieve their work?



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