

# Evaluation of Asset Based Working in Coventry: Capturing the Learning

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Learning Innovation Research Group

# Final Evaluation Report

**Evaluation of  
Asset Based Working in Coventry:  
Capturing the Learning  
Funded by Coventry City Council**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction and overview

This evaluation set out to examine the learning from Asset Based Working approaches being piloted in Coventry, by the City Council, since 2011. The City Council viewed Asset Based Working as a means of enabling communities across the city to; build in confidence, take increased control of decisions to improve their lives, and to develop people's capabilities and potential through actions that are sustainable.

Two key approaches to Asset Based Working used have been:

- Asset Mapping in Bell Green, an approach using the '10 Ways to Feeling Good and Doing Well in Coventry', engaging with residents in conversations about what is good about where they live, building on and linking to assets that are discovered .
- C2 Connecting Communities in Foleshill, an approach built upon the NHS Institute, Healthy Places, Healthy Lives, which initially sought to adopt appreciative inquiry, has focused on working with residents on their priorities for their neighbourhood, with the aim of setting up an equal decision making partnership between local residents, agencies and services.

In addition, the Council set up the Wellbeing Fund, a £500 start up fund that local people with ideas for 'Feeling Good and Doing Well', through (group) action. In practice community groups could apply for to help turn ideas on improving their health and wellbeing, into action. The fund was piloted in the two wards, Bell Green and Foleshill, supplementing the pilots' outlined above, with 15 + successful bids to date<sup>1</sup>.

## Audience

The intended audience for this evaluation report is Coventry City Council to inform the Council's future approach and roll out of Asset Based Working and the Wellbeing Fund across the city. The report will also be of potential interest to the groups identified within the report, and other organisations considering adopting Asset Based Working.

We acknowledge that those involved in the evaluation (participants) have helped shape the evaluation and sincere thanks go to all the participants who shared their perspectives.

## Evaluation question

An evaluation question was agreed between Coventry City Council and Coventry University:

'What has the impact of Asset Based Working approaches been on people and services engaged in the pilots and the Wellbeing Fund'

## Two stages to the evaluation

### Stage 1: Desk based analysis of documents used to promote and implement Asset Based Working and the Wellbeing Fund

Following a desk based analysis of documents mapping local Asset Based Working events (for example, photographs, forms, presentations, and minutes from meetings) question areas for interviews and focus groups were developed:

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<sup>1</sup> Not all applications to the Wellbeing Fund were successful; however, we only were able to access those who had received funding.

- What has been the impact of the Wellbeing Fund in supporting people's ideas to turn into action?
- How did groups experience and navigate the process of applying for the Wellbeing Fund?
- What makes groups thrive?
- What was the short term and long term impact of the activities?
- What made for good group leadership?
- Who was involved in the activities and what were their roles and status in the project?
- Who were the beneficiaries?
- Did the beneficiaries benefit and if so how?
- What was the impact of the project on the health and well being of the community?

## **Stage 2: Gathering data from people and groups involved in the pilots**

Ethical approval to gather data from people and groups involved in the pilots was granted from Coventry University Research Ethics on 15th September 2013.

### **Access**

The City Council provided details of three groups who were willing to be approached and questioned about the impact of the Wellbeing Fund as part of Asset Based Working. Each of the three groups had received Wellbeing Funding. Two of the groups had received the funding at least 12 months previously and were well established (Silver Surfers, Etk-Knitting), with the third group having only recently received funding (Friday Fit Day). It should be noted that it was not possible to talk with applicants from groups who had been unsuccessful.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews were conducted with three group leaders, three focus groups facilitated with group members and an interview with a Coventry City Council Community Engagement Officer. All the interview and focus group data was recorded, with participant consent. The data were then analysed using Thematic Analysis (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013<sup>2</sup>).

### **Findings**

Three cross case study themes were revealed during analysis of the data, namely;

- Group leadership and action
- Ingredients of a successful group
- Recognising assets

Each theme will be presented in relation to the three groups accessed.

### **Silver Surfers**

The Silver Surfers group meet at Bell Green and were one of the first groups to receive the Wellbeing Fund in 2011. The group currently comprises 12+ members and meets weekly on a Thursday morning.

### **Leadership and action**

The Silver Surfers have a core team of founding members, including one member who we would identify as their group leader, a modest gentleman, who had a vision, ambition, energy, commitment and desire to persist and set up the Silver Surfers. Without such leadership and action from the core team, the group would not exist or be sustained. Whilst the founding

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<sup>2</sup> Savin-Baden, M. & Major, C. (2013) [\*Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice\*](#). London: Routledge

members of the group were keen to develop their ICT skills, what was more apparent was their drive in ensuring that the older residents in Bell Green continued to receive ICT skills support when previous training and resources at the local library were curtailed. The founding members are therefore considered as key assets to the group. These colleagues mobilised their ideas and capabilities, leading to a space being found at the Bell Green Community Centre. Initial funding from Age Concern was accessed and a leaflet designed and circulated to promote the 'Silver Surfers' group. The core team formed as a constituted group, with positions of chair, treasurer and secretary.

The group leader applied for Wellbeing Funding with support from a Coventry City Council Community Connections Officer. It was evident that the group leader found such assistance invaluable, mainly due to his (then) lack of experience in submitting grant applications and understanding how best to map the '10 Ways to Feeling Good and Doing Well in Coventry' required in the application process. However, it is of note that since applying for the Wellbeing Fund, the group leader has gone on to successfully apply for Big Lottery funding. Indeed, the group leader continues to research (the web) for funding opportunities and other means of accessing resources which keep the group ICT resources well equipped (laptops, tablets, as well as PCs and printers) and general group finances buoyant.

In terms of group facilitation the Wellbeing Fund was used to help fund the time and expertise of an ICT instructor, who still works with the group now, due to the enjoyment and satisfaction she gains from her contact with the group.

Finally, in terms of how the group functions there is a 'light touch' of leadership in weekly group sessions. However, the founding group members and group leader have sound external business acumen, evident through the networking and negotiation skills which have secured funding and enabled ongoing group ideas to come to fruition.

Due to the success of the Silvers Surfers, and there being a waiting list for new members, the group leader has been encouraged by the Council's Community Connections Officer to consider 'Silver Surfers 2'. Whilst not currently viewed as feasible by the group leader, what has been recognised is that the group is able to offer more than a routine, safe and enjoyable space for current group members to improve their ICT skills. Rather, benefits can be seen beyond the immediate group towards a greater sense of social responsibility, and shift in social awareness. New members are therefore welcomed from the waiting list should a group member miss more than an agreed number of sessions.

### **Ingredients for a successful group**

It was evident from observing a group session in action and speaking with group participants, who ranged in age from 50 - 80+ that the Silvers Surfers is a thriving predominantly white, group, although open to anyone aged 50+ living in Bell Green. Since our initial meeting with the group we have learnt that one Asian gentleman has joined and is settling in well.

Data revealed that the success of the group is due to its ethos and key ingredients, which include;

- The establishment of supportive relationships and social interactions established amongst people are important
- A welcoming approach
- The use of humour for teaching, learning and support
- A good instructor to guide and help develop group members ICT skills

- Flexible learning pathways to suit individual needs and no assessment (internet skills, office skills, Skype, email and so forth.)
- A democratic organization with group members ideas and voices heard
- Refreshments (tea, coffee, biscuits as well as individual homemade donations)
- Weekly fees are minimal
- Weekly attendance is not essential, but desirable
- Leadership and group structure exists but feels 'light touch' in its approach

### **Recognising assets**

In the interviews group members were asked about what they gained from the group and their perspectives about Asset Based Working. Participants were also asked whether the experience of the group enabled them to recognise personal capabilities and resources, including how this might motivate individuals to use such assets not only in the group but also beyond. What became apparent was that the skills and assets that individuals gain tend to be shared with those in the Silver Surfers group itself. It was difficult to elicit how the skills learnt were shared with those outside of the group, beyond how group members were able to now pay bills and buy holidays on the internet. However, one member spoke about how she is now able to Skype relatives, another member mentioned how he is now able to communicate better with his brother, who does not attend the group, but shares an interest in on-line games.

Whilst it was more challenging for individuals to identify personal assets attributed to being involved in the group, it was clear that the Silver Surfer *group* itself was viewed as an asset. This was seen in the way the group fulfilled a number of needs:

- Combat loneliness, namely those living alone, with little to no other contact or social interaction
- Keeping the mind active through learning ICT skills and interacting with others
- Increased confidence with ICT use, leading to the purchase of personal ICT items
- Exercise and physical activity through travelling to and from the venue
- The relaxed nature of the group with no predefined learning aims rigidly enforced
- The flexibility of the learning allowed users to learn skills at their own pace and also to learn just the skills they required. Comparisons were made with other providers of ICT training within the community. For example, other provision (located in Riley square) was not viewed as fit for purpose (by those in the Silver Surfers group).
- Maintaining some homogeneity within the group, for example, age, so that there was a safe place where users could learn skills without feeling they were intimidated or slow to learn in comparison with ICT uptake in the younger generations
- Ensuring the group was democratic
- Increased sense of personal pride and satisfaction in being able to keep up with ICT skills and not feel like they were being left behind through a lack of ICT knowledge.
- A means of staying connected (socially) within Bell Green and beyond

### **The Etko-Knitting group**

The group meet on Thursdays at Foleshill library. The group received Wellbeing Funding in March 2013 and is open to all women in the Foleshill area. It currently comprises approximately 30 members.

### **Leadership and action**

The Etka-Knitting group has a core team of group leaders, approximately nine, who have been, and remain, very motivated to keep the group buoyant. This core group, all Asian women, includes a retired Community Development Officer and OBE recipient, a retired Council Manager, a GP and others, with valuable skills (assets) in professional life who volunteer to support the ongoing financing and grant application processes and facilitation of the group. Interestingly the group leaders are not themselves 'knitters', but clearly are focused on ensuring the group continues to serve the community of women who gain so much value from attending.

As with the leadership and action of founding members of the Silver Surfers, the founders of the Etka Knitting group, and those that take up a support role in the group, are key to this group's longevity and success. A number of the group founders clearly want to 'give back' to the community, and importantly to harness their professional knowledge for the benefit of others. In this sense they identified themselves as assets and ensured that they made use of their skills for the betterment of the community to which they belong. The founders give of their time freely as does an instructor, the only non-Asian, (white) woman who consistently attends the group (see below). No one receives reimbursement for expenses related to the group, yet there is very little bitterness from either the founders or the volunteers about the financial issues. Rather, it seems that the enthusiasm, positive energy and belief in the importance of the group sustain it.

It was noted the Wellbeing Fund had partially helped to stem the impact of the initial cuts in funding which had resulted in loss of access to a previous venue and associated resources. Some key issues were highlighted relating to start up capital and funding as the founders felt that the initial £500 would not have been enough to get a *newly formed group* started. They suggest that for such groups, more realistic (financial) support and commitment needs to be in place, otherwise these kinds of groups will not form, or thus survive. Despite the Etka-knitting group not being a new venture requiring start up funds, the founders have consistently needed to secure further funding to be sustainable. Due to a lack of funds the only promotion available to them is through word of mouth. As there are many physical and mental health benefits to attending the knitting group, not all GPs are aware of the group (which suggest more needs to be done to promote this fact, but finances restrict this). Despite this the group has a very healthy membership of between 20 to 30 women at each session.

### ***Instructor***

The only white woman<sup>3</sup> noted in the group (also the instructor), has a background of working within the Asian Community and teaches voluntarily; being keen to work with older Asian women. In terms of her approach she sees the teaching as a reciprocal process; teaching skills and learning new skills from others in the group and passing those new skills on.

Main points of reflection from the tutor:

1. The group is a place to make friends and socialise
2. Expenses incurred as part of teaching (e.g. travel costs and time) were of concern, but she believed the benefit of attending outweighed the small financial penalty
3. She identified her knitting skills and work as a teacher and instructor with Asian women as an asset
4. The instructor volunteers in many other locations and is keen to help broaden the kinds of knitting that can be supported thereby increasing the appeal of the group

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<sup>3</sup> Whilst the group is predominantly Asian, all women in Foleshill are welcomed to attend.



### **The ingredients for a successful group**

The Etka Knitting group have a large membership. The group seem very vibrant with a keen sense of community and family. All members of the community are made to feel welcome and this was mentioned explicitly by all members. The group are predominantly composed of Asian women. The group also as a whole are keen to develop through expansion, not wanting to let the group stagnate and falter through lack of vision or will (both will and vision are in plentiful supply!). Group participants are positive about their experiences within the knitting group and there were no negative comments about any experience related to the group or the activity. Many of the group members were active members of other activity groups within the community including those held locally at St Pauls Church (up to 200 members). All those spoken to indicated that the group provided a means to help combat both physical and mental deterioration through the following:

- Opportunity for social contact and dialogue
- Refreshments (weekly home-cooked foods, always shared)
- Exercise for the body (travel to and from the club, some women would catch 2 buses to get to the group)
- Improvement of symptoms related to muscular aches, tensions and arthritis
- Opportunity to find out about related activities that are going on locally
- Keeping the mind active through learning knitting as well as learning numeracy and English (through conversing with other club members)
- Learning to knit as well as sharing of own skills and assets
- Realising potential to knit and enjoyment it offers
- Increased social networks
- Reduced isolation
- Support with problems and concerns
- Stimulation - physical, social, cognitive
- Pain relief – ‘stops my hands shaking’
- Charitable work and raising funds for others and for the group
- The group knit for themselves, family members, and for one another.
- Taking on projects the group alerted to such as knitting for charitable needs through raising money

### **Recognising assets**

Many group participants were in one of the following groups:

- Living alone
- Older aged and a pensioner
- Physical or mental impairment (namely, joint problems, loneliness, depression and so forth.)
- There were one or two young parents there with youngsters, with grandparents, therefore three generations possibly in attendance

The group leaders and participants shared the key benefits of the group in terms of assets:

- Numeracy and literacy skills (developed through pattern reading and talking)
- Communication skills (sharing skills)
- Sense of social and community integration (engaging and participating in the group)
- Improved health (knitting, travelling and forming friendships)
- Inter-generational barriers broken (as younger members of the community, daughters and grandchildren also take part)

Many of the community who use the knitting group are already skilled knitters, while others are novices. Thus it is evident that the group members are keen to share assets amongst one another, for the benefit of one another. For example, instructor to group participant; group participant to group participant, and beyond. However, individuals made it clear that learning to knit was not the only benefit of becoming involved in the knitting group. The group itself is an asset which has enabled the following:

- Identification of the knitting skills (assets) each individual had
- Identification of skills deficits (namely, being able to knit but not knowing how to read or write a knitting pattern)
- Sharing specific skills with others

Of significance was how one group member had been specifically directed to the knitting group by her GP (which we suggest is a very positive step for health practices, and one which acknowledges the benefits and asset of the group).

The knitting group also serves as a means to disseminate information about activities that are going on in the community. One woman described her positive experiences of the group and wished she knew about similar activities going on at other times in the week, therefore demonstrating the impact the group was having on broadening group members' horizons. Indeed, the library itself can be viewed as an asset to the success of the group as the group members, who were keen to engage with a wide variety of activities, were able to borrow books, use the ICT resources, and find out about other local events. The library therefore also acted as a social hub, yet a neutral space, and both the group participants and group founders spoke of the library staff as always helpful and welcoming. Ideas to further use the library resources to learn languages and ICT skills were mentioned by the group founders.

Overall the impact of the knitting group transcended just learning skills as it has helped improve individuals' sense of self, interaction and communication skills, physical, cognitive and behavioural skills and as a consequence contributed to participants' general well-being. A number of users have also been prompted to take part in other activities outside of the group. However, it was not always clear whether some participants were already taking part in some of these activities prior to the group being set up.

## **Friday Fit Day**

This group meet weekly on a Friday, either in the day or in the evening depending upon the activity. The group has only recently received Wellbeing Funding, although Friday Fit Day is not a newly formed group as Valley House had been offering a similar provision to young people in the area. The Wellbeing Fund has however enabled the group to have a more formal profile and enabled access to a wider range of activities. A weekly group comprises approximately 10 - 15 members.

## **Leadership and action**

Friday Fit Day has a core membership of two leaders experienced in applying for funding and in understanding how the benefits of Friday Fit Day could address an holistic approach to wellbeing and connect young people with the wider community through activity. Whilst the Friday Fit Day group was running prior to receiving funding, a lack of funding had restricted what the group was able to do and who it could support. Individuals attending Valley House are usually those most often excluded from mainstream provision and have complex needs. The group leaders' focus was thus on enabling young people to recognise and build upon

their strengths, and to achieve sustainable and independent healthy lives as active citizens in their communities.

The group leaders did not mention experiencing difficulties in the process of applying for the Wellbeing Fund, which they felt was straightforward. They also spoke of receiving good support from the council's Community Engagement Officer, whom they have regular contact with. Funds have allowed them to offer sub-sidized events and as such increase the accessibility to certain activities that would be prohibited due to financial constraints of the group users. The founders of the group wish to obtain more funding in addition to the Wellbeing Fund so as to widen the range of activities on offer and also allow instructors to be hired for private sessions with individuals.

### **The ingredients for a successful group**

The group runs every week and offers a wide variety of activities including swimming, skating, bowling, Zumba, local walks (for example, Combe Abbey Park). Participants are not expected to go along to every session. For some young people their attendance may be just once. For individuals who make use of the activity, it is a chance for personal development and to help integration into the wider community. However, the founders are keen to emphasise there is no expectation or burden placed on any individual to continue with an activity. Rather it is a chance to 'have a go', to try things out, with the support of others.

The general feeling of the individuals attending Friday Fit Day was that the group was run well, the activities are fun and there was not anything they wished to change (although we acknowledge some potential bias in participants' responses due to the speaking in the presence of one of the founders).

From the individuals perspective the experience of engaging with the sessions is varied and unique to each individual and includes:

- Opportunity to experience or try activities that have not been tried before (either due to financial constraints, lacking confidence or other issues)
- Ability to try activities together with a *familiar* group of people from Valley House.
- Perceived safety and less chance of feeling vulnerable
- Opportunity *to provide moral support to others* within the group (encouragement when swimming or trying new activities)
- Creation of a support network where none has previously existed (helping deal with personal fears or concerns).
- Motivation to become more active mentally, socially and physically through the consistency of attending the Fitness group.

### **Recognising assets**

Engaging within the Friday Fit Day provided an opportunity for individuals to develop assets as individuals and learn skills to help them function more effectively on a day to day basis, including:

- Identification of their own strengths (for example, learning to swim or skate)
- Recognising that these strengths are valuable and worth celebrating (being able to help others in the group)
- Improved health through regular engagement and taking action
- Increased self esteem with confidence in talking to others
  - Engaging with others outside of the group at events such as swimming

- Feeling increased levels of self worth
- Believing that their ideas matter (democratic process for selecting new events which involves individuals in the selection process)

It was not possible to gauge the level of impact outside of the group in terms of sharing and dissemination of the skills acquired in the short term. However, it is clear that the individuals are keen to engage and value the opportunities that have been made possible as a result of the group and funding received. The main areas of impact here are through the changes within the individuals themselves. However, over time, these changes will likely impact on the local community by helping improve the lives of the individuals accessing Valley House and those who they interact with.

### **Summary**

A vital component in the development and sustainability of the groups was the leadership and action of key individuals (either putting themselves forwards or identifying the organisational strengths in others). This core group of altruistic people clearly had a vision, ambition, energy, commitment and desire to persist and see their ideas through for the benefit of others. As well as their hard working nature and philanthropic attitude, the group leaders were seen to be principled individuals who shared a strong ideology that resources should be sought so that the groups of individuals they represented (older people needing support with digital literacy, young people with complex needs, isolated Asian women) could have their social, physical, cognitive and affective needs met and thereby experience the importance of 'doing' as part of community interaction and learning.

### **The Wellbeing Fund**

The application process for the Wellbeing Fund is intended to provide a positive engagement tool for those seeking start-up funding to develop ideas for community action. The concept of wellbeing is mapped into 10 areas, 'five ways to wellbeing' (being active, taking notice and so forth, drawing on 'Foresight', 2008 <http://www.bis.gov.uk/foresight/our-work/projects/published-projects/mental-capital-and-wellbeing>) and 'five more ways for Coventry' (having rewarding work, sleeping well, and so forth). Together the '10 ways' present a holistic focus and are intended to prompt applicants to think about how their specific group can develop participant confidence and be a (sustainable) community asset. The fund is small, £500, and it is recognised by the Council that groups would need to access on-going funding, for example, via a Community First grant (£2k).

The founders of Etka Knitting and Friday Fit Day found the application process to the Wellbeing Fund straightforward, while the group leaders of Silver Surfer's experienced more difficulty in articulating their ideas and mapping (at least 6) of the '10 ways to feel good and do well in Coventry'. Although Wellbeing Fund Seed Criteria have been developed to help guide applicants, it was the support of the (then) Council Community Engagement Officer that the Silver Surfer group leader most appreciated:

'She made herself available, helped with the application, helped translate the language of the form, making it clear and accessible'.

### **Council Community Engagement Officer**

The Council Community Engagement Officer's role is to provide an interface between the council, services and people and groups across the community. Importantly the officers are there to help build community members' confidence in developing and shaping their ideas

and how they might go about putting ideas into action. In addition, as well as supporting applications to the Wellbeing Fund, the officers maintain on-going contact, offering ideas and details of how to access other follow-on funding such as the Community First grant.

## **Measuring outcomes**

The City Council identified a number of ways to measure outcomes from Asset Based Working: For example; the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale (WEMWBS) (a health outcomes framework tool, recommended by the NHS Confederation (2011), requiring pre and post test self report to gain statistical data when used to measure progress on well-being (with no ceiling effects in population samples) (Stewart-Brown & Janmohamed, 2008<sup>4</sup>), the '10 ways evaluation questions'; the Wellbeing Seed Fund evaluation; a request for group members to present the group impact to the council's 'Scrutiny Panel'; and by capturing narratives (for example, through the local press).

No WEMWBS data was received. It is therefore difficult to ascertain how valid this tool has been as an outcome measure for Asset Based Work in the pilot. However, perspectives accessed would suggest that small community projects do not have the experience of using a tool such as WEMWBS and whilst administrative procedures can be worked through (pre and post test self-ratings) the tool may feel 'too heavy handed' and not suitable for capturing the impact of attending one or two sessions of, for example, Friday Fit. Further, while sustainability is a focus for the Council for funded groups, it was noted that even those groups whose ideas do not translate into sustainable action may have benefited from the opportunity to 'have a go'. Therefore, though a group may not survive, the experience may have led to community asset building for the people involved beyond the immediate confines of the group. However, it is acknowledged tracking such outcomes is complex.

It is of note that the Silver Surfers and Etko-Knitting group were clearly successful groups, who had been interviewed on several occasions by the local press as well as being frequently used by Coventry City Council to promote Asset Based Working. Neither group mentioned completing WEMWBS, although there was evidence (not dated) that the Silver Surfers had completed the 10 ways evaluation questions 'Wellbeing Seed Fund' questionnaire. Both the Silver Surfers and Etko-Knitting group had presented to the Scrutiny Panel. Friday Fit are early on in their plans, having only recently received funding, but had not, to date, been provided with any specific evaluation tools to measure group impact. Indeed, the founders mentioned the very subjective nature of evaluating the impact and effectiveness of Friday Fit not least because the young people may not regularly attend, yet, the impact of limited attendance may be of significance.

## **Key findings**

The findings to date from the piloting of Asset Based Work through the Wellbeing Fund in Coventry appear to indicate a number of important features:

1. Engaging in the different group activities provided forms of social encounters that were valued by group participants. Examples included the development of new sets of relationships which encompassed peer to peer, individual and facilitator, individual and family as well as individual and the wider community. It was less easy to judge how social interactions amongst participants extended beyond the group process and influenced the roles, relationships and routines of participants' everyday lives.

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<sup>4</sup> WEMWBS user guide, Professor Sarah Stewart-Brown & Dr Janmohamed, Warwick Medical School <http://www.cppconsortium.nhs.uk/admin/files/1343987601WEMWBS%20User%20Guide%20Version%201%20June%202008.pdf>

2. Participants' skills and confidence improved through new learning things, for example in trying new activities (ice skating, knitting pattern reading; using Skype), and generally doing things that previously individuals did not think they could do, or had opportunity to do. Such learning was fulfilling and rewarding.
3. Participants expressed that being involved in the respective group processes provided an opportunity to address and influence a range of physical and psychosocial issues, for example, achieving personal goals, improved levels of confidence, reducing pain, and enabling participation despite disability.
4. Participants felt a sense of agency, voice and presence in their respective groups. This occurred through having informed choice and having their suggestions for group activities and the creative process heard.
5. The skill set of the founding members was key to the success and longevity of the groups. Participants valued the generous, considerate, encouraging, nature of these philanthropic group leaders, whose energy, expertise and business acumen enabled the group to thrive, and who demonstrated the ability to encourage and value participants' ideas and contributions.
6. The connection with the Council Community Engagement Officer provided a supportive interface between the council and its resources, and people and their active citizenship.
7. The contribution of the Wellbeing Fund by the council, including follow-on Community First grants, provided a helpful means of supporting local people to engage in their ideas for community projects.
8. Participant gains were evident from both an immediate and medium term perspective; however, due to the short time frame of the evaluation it was not possible to give clear indications of possible long term benefits.
9. The findings suggest that there is a need to examine how groups who were unsuccessful but showed potential and good ideas could be supported in refining their applications and vision so that they too could be successful. Future work should examine more closely what makes groups successful and how that learning can be passed on to assist with development and sustainability for all groups.
10. It would be useful to compare the groups already evaluated, and that have already been identified as having assets, for example, in the form of visionaries/leaders, and how the skills and expertise of such assets can be recognised for sharing with other groups who are interested in development and learning.

### **Future issues that need to be considered**

Whether the focus for future funding of projects is to be focussed on projects directed towards

- 1) Asset-based work that is community-led
- 2) Asset-based work that is needs-led
- 3) Asset-based work that supports and sustains new as well as existing groups
- 4) Asset-based work that is focussed on what makes groups successful and how that learning can be shared to assist with development and sustainability for all groups.
- 5) Asset based work that is focussed on health and well-being
- 6) Asset-based work which is a catalyst for change

### **Future issues that need to be clarified**

- 1) Clear delineation of what count as assets, and where the boundaries extend
- 2) Clarification of whether projects will be funded that sit at the boundaries of Asset Based Work and other community-led projects seeking funding
- 3) Whether groups who have already received Wellbeing Funding should apply for follow-on Wellbeing Funding. The City Council wish to support a diverse range of project groups, but may not provide repeat funding for groups once established (for example, the Etko-Knitting were disappointed to not receive follow-on funding in a recent application).
- 4) The evidence that groups who showed potential and had good ideas were supported in refining their application and vision so that they too could be funded
- 5) Clarity about if and how assets can be mapped in the immediate, medium and long term
- 6) A clear evaluation methodology to support evaluation work that captures both the process and impact of evaluation (we recommend Illuminative Inquiry - see p. 14)
- 7) Whether communities can be provided with criterion referenced objectives against which they will be assessed and to which to refer to in writing the bids
- 8) Whether it is possible to map sustained groups success criteria to disseminate to other groups and potential bidders to the fund
- 9) The extent to which the term asset-based working is a valuable and useful concept

### **Underpinning values**

1. Evaluation should be designed so as to provide insights into asset-based practice
2. Evaluation should be a means by which both those engaged in the formation of policy and the professional groups responsible for policy implementation meet their aims and objectives
3. Evaluation should also consider the value and benefits of evaluation for the community groups/projects being evaluated
4. Evaluation should make explicit the criteria for judging the merit, worth or significance of a project.
5. Evaluation should open up values and capture complexity
6. Evaluation should be aware of direct and indirect effects of projects
7. Evaluation should contribute to change across as well as within projects

### **Questions that should be asked by the organisation before the evaluation commences:**

What is the evaluation for?	GOALS?
What means should be used?	METHOD?
What resources will be available?	FINANCE?
Why is it being undertaken?	FOCUS?
When is it to be undertaken?	TIME FRAME?
How do we judge?	CRITERIA?
Where will the information be used?	APPLICATION?
Who undertakes it?	ORGANISATION?
To whom will it be available?	DISSEMINATION?

### **Questions for the evaluation team**

- Who is the evaluation for?
- Whose needs does the evaluation serve?
- Who has access to the data?
- Who owns the data?
- Who controls the release of data?
- What stays open and what remains hidden (and who decides)
- To whom is the researcher responsible (participants, sponsors, both)?
- How is confidentiality managed?



## Guide to undertaking an illuminative evaluation

### An illuminative inquiry would examine a project and look in depth at:

- a) How it is conducted
- b) The way in which the context affects the ways it is implemented
- c) What those involved see as its advantages and disadvantages
- d) The way participants experience innovation and change
- e) Participating in the process of innovation.

### Data collection should include:

- Observation: the evaluator creates a portfolio of events which might at first appear to be on the edge of the study such as meetings, social events and seminars
- Interviewing: the focus is to explore and examine the interviewee's perceptions from a clearly personal and storied perspective
- Focus groups: because they enable researchers to understand people's opinions and views more explicitly
- Collection of artefacts: as these facilitate reflection and reflexivity, as well as providing visual data for the final report.
- Validated tools or measures: *appropriately matched to the project aims and intentions*, capturing statistical user data at the start, during and end of the project to complement the qualitative data.

### The final report should include:

*Feedback* about the way projects, changes and new practices are working that can help improve practice further

*Improvement*, by helping to point out where changes need to be made to develop practice and also to improve innovations further

*Facilitation of change*, Suggestions of new options to guide decision making and be inclusive of those involved in the change process

*Emphasis on positive as well as poor practice*, to pin point areas of good practice that can be developed in other areas of an organisation

*Transparency*, in terms of ensuring that values, morals and judgements within the organisations and practice are explicit

*Opportunity for voices to be heard*, by those involved in the evaluation. Good evaluation should take the form of a consultation with stakeholders so that ideas can be exchanged and ways forward can be discussed.

### **Top tips for collating evaluation findings**

Recognise the importance of the creative process in helping to facilitate understanding of an issue by engaging with the whole person.

Realise that the values implicit in these kinds of evaluations become explicit through the creative process.

Acknowledge that those involved in the study (participants) will help to shape the evaluation.

Ensure evaluation then connects with participants as well as shaping the design throughout the life of the evaluation.

Recognise that data are both documented and represented through creative expression.

Appreciate that peoples' experiences is realised through the creative process and specific activities undertaken.

Understand that interpretation is a creative process: evaluation analyses examines patterns, feelings and emotions with/in data in order to interpret them.

In practice some options include:

1. Comparing different people, such as their views, situations, actions, accounts and experiences
  - a. What is going on?
  - b. What are people doing?
  - c. What is the person saying?
  
2. Comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time
  - a. What was taken for granted
  - b. What is the same and different?
  
3. Comparing activity with activity
  - a. How do structures and context support, maintain, impede or change these?