

“VALUE BEYOND MEASURE?”

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR SERVICE PROVISION TO THE PEOPLE OF WEST EDINBURGH

A REPORT TO THE WEST EDINBURGH VOLUNTARY SECTOR FORUM

STUDY SUPPORTED BY:



THE PENTLANDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

SOUTH WEST EDINBURGH LOCAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS STUDY

To the Voluntary Sector	To Funders
Share current good practice so as to learn from each other's strengths and experiences	Engage with the sector to communicate your strategies
Work together to better quantify "soft" outcomes	Review the opportunities for longer term funding commitments
Consider the sustainability of your "business model"	Recognise the voluntary sector's need to spread core costs across projects
Engage with funders to understand their needs and strategies	Consider timing of decision-making to allow organisations more time to plan activities and address employment issues
Engage with key champions in statutory organisation to encourage a mixed economy of service provision	Retain flexibility for new ideas to be developed and funded, whilst recognising the value of what already works

BACKGROUND

This document summarises the outcomes of research conducted by IBP Strategy and Research with a selection of voluntary sector organisations in West Edinburgh. The research aimed to provide a picture of voluntary sector activity in the area and to assess the added value of this activity. At the centre of the research has been a programme of case studies with six voluntary sector service providers:

- The Broomhouse Centre
- Community Help and Advice Initiative (CHAI)
- Wester Hailes Health Agency
- The Community Empowerment Project
- Smile Childcare
- WHALE Arts

These case studies were complemented by written submissions from 38 voluntary organisations operating in the area.

THE SCOPE OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR ACTIVITY IN WEST EDINBURGH

Participants in this study are involved in a range of activities, covering:

- Community engagement, participation and campaigning
- Mutual support activities
- Service provision in areas as diverse as community development, training and employment, health, childcare, community facilities and advice and information.

The analysis of the service delivery organisations on their own suggests that there is little duplication of activity within the sector. The 38 organisations who responded have 200 full-time equivalent employees. The extent of volunteer support which they regularly call on is equivalent to 82 full-time jobs.

RESOURCES AND FUNDING

The case study organisations have an average turnover per employee of £30,000. Amongst Scottish Local Authorities, the comparable figure is over £50,000. These case study organisations therefore require less funding in order to put an employee “on the ground”.

However, these organisations share real concerns over their longer-term funding structure, with particular concerns evident over the sources of necessary core funding. The situation is exacerbated by the fragmented and short-term nature of project funding. The result of this is that some organisations have very limited reserves, leading to a genuine concern as to whether they will be able to sustain their current activities.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND STRATEGIC FIT

The case study organisations are all able to show examples of partnership working, both with other voluntary organisations and with statutory service providers in West Edinburgh.

The Broomhouse Centre is able to list an impressive 36 organisations that are involved in the delivery of services within the Centre.

“We view them as a positive partner organisation”

The ethos of partnership working was evident in the feedback received from partners as part of the study.

The organisations also show a very strong fit to a range of national and local strategies, particularly in relation to regeneration priorities.

OUTPUTS

By “outputs” we are referring to the direct quantified outputs of an organisation’s activities (most commonly quantified in terms of numbers of beneficiaries). The case study organisations were well disciplined in capturing the quantified outputs of their work and some examples are tabulated below:

“Light touch” Outputs	“Medium touch” Outputs	Intensive Outputs
6,000 visits to WHALE Arts	20 weekly places for Young Carers at the Broomhouse Centre	115 people in reduced-cost childcare places through Smile Childcare
1,000 or more people attending community events that the Community Empowerment Project helps to administer	230 clients receiving complementary therapies at Wester Hailes Health Agency	180 CHAI clients with individual support contracts under Supporting People
13,200 “light touch assists” can be identified	2,670 “medium touch assists” can be identified	676 “intensive assists” can be identified

OUTCOMES

By “outcomes” we mean the actual impact on the community of activities carried out. These can either be “hard” outcomes (e.g. employment) or “soft” outcomes (e.g. impact on individuals’ self-confidence). A number of the projects are able to quantify hard outcomes.

Hard Outcomes
30 people at the Broomhouse Centre Café Project gaining a certificate.
110 families accessing employment as a result of Smile Childcare’s support.
76% of WHALE Arts “Access” students progressing onto college and 13% to employment.

“It gives me freedom for a day”

“Since being part of CHAI as a client, I feel very sure about myself”

“They helped me to stop drinking”

“On a bad day you can come and it brings you out of yourself”

“It builds confidence especially for young people”

However, more commonly the outcomes are softer, but no less valuable. Many examples of these were captured in the primary research with service users that IBP undertook as part of this study. However, the voluntary organisations have not always had systematic approaches to capturing and measuring these outcomes, meaning that, in practice, the value of them has often been “beyond measure”.

THE DISTINCTIVE ADVANTAGES OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

We have already noted the value of volunteer support that these organisations lever in, as well as their highly cost-effective culture, but there are additional factors that distinguish the sector and allow it to add value.

They are usually of a scale that is big enough to provide a range of services but not so big that inefficiencies of scale set in. They are also typically well recognised in the community.

In the West Edinburgh Household Survey, the case study organisations secured between 50% and 80% awareness levels.

“It is something different from the usual lunch club”

“A relaxing atmosphere where you can be yourself”

The organisations are often seen as more “accessible” than broadly comparable statutory service providers, not just in a physical sense but in terms of their welcoming ethos.

Were these organisations not around to deliver their services, then this would have a significant impact. As well as the “lost benefits” to the community in relation to issues such as health, well-being and employment, there would be the potential for a significant rise in the demands placed on a range of public service agencies.

Examples of Potential Impacts on Other Public Service Agencies

Up to 6,000 CHAI clients would need to seek advice elsewhere.

Over 100 Smile Childcare clients would need to seek alternative childcare.

Over 200 Wester Hailes Health Agency clients would have to be reliant on medical-only support.

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

The organisations studied face the challenge of putting in place a financial and operational structure, including a satisfactory reserve base, to allow them to continue to deliver the benefits that they have to the community. At present, the approach is often a “hand to mouth” one where significant time is taken up seeking funding for existing activities. Some organisations are also seeking sustainability through geographical expansion of services or development of trading income (these are not realistic options for many voluntary organisations).

The organisations face significant barriers in that they are not usually well equipped to undertake necessary business development activities, and funders are sometimes reluctant to fund “core costs”, including the necessary costs of business development. Despite this, a “market-led” approach, where voluntary organisations seek common ground between their own capabilities, the needs of communities and the strategies of funders is the situation for which all parties should aim.

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Community Empowerment Project

