

Evaluation of Fair Share Trust in Blyth Valley (Seaton Valley)

This is a summary of the evaluation of the Seaton Valley Fair Share Trust which ran from 2003 to 2013. The objectives of the evaluation are to look at what has been achieved, whether or not the programme was a success and if the money was well spent. Specifically we wanted to know what the impact has been on the local community and the social fabric of the area; we wanted to know whether the programme had resulted in good community development.

This evaluation shows that the local programme has been a success. More than this, it has been a remarkable success and we think it is a model of best practice. The community associations and the local community have benefited greatly from Fair Share Trust and there has been considerable 'distance travelled' over the last 10 years. The experience has been a true embodiment of participatory development; local development led by local people on their terms. This has meant good and sustainable local community development.

Fair Share Trust

Fair Share Trust puts change in the hands of communities. In 2003, Big Lottery Fund (BIG) noticed that certain parts of the UK were not receiving equal amounts of their funding because they lacked the resources or experience to put together successful funding applications. So, Fair Share Trust was created when BIG put £50m into a trust. The funds were to be spent across the 80+ areas in the UK over 10 years. UK Community Foundations is the sole Trustee and delivers Fair Share Trust by working with its members and other local partners, called Local Agents, who use their local giving expertise to make sure funding is distributed based on what communities want.

The main programme aims were to:

- Build capacity: the confidence, skills and experience of individuals and communities
- Enhance social capital: the networks, relationships and contacts of individuals and organisations

- Improve liveability: the look and feel of the neighbourhood
- Create sustainability: a positive lasting legacy.

Fair Share Trust was not an open grants programme to which funding applications could be made. Moreover, as the Fair Share Trust states, it was about process rather than projects and 'only in this way can the importance of learning from unsuccessful projects be retained'.

Activities

The majority of the local Fair Share Trust investment has been in community development; a total of 86 percent of total funds (£760,614) was invested under this heading. The single biggest investment was in Community and Voluntary Action Blyth Valley (CVA Blyth Valley) who received a total of £587,449. The remaining 14 percent (£100,563) was invested in health activities, with the biggest single investment being Doxford Youth Project (£65,177).

The majority of the funded elements were of a strategic nature and contributed to the objectives of the Fair Share Trust. At the same time, they also contributed to the longer term goals of the Fair Share Trust Panel as representatives of the local community. There were other smaller projects which did not contribute to such strategic aims and appeared to be more one-off in nature, such as Watbus and the Food Chain projects. However, this is not to say that they did not have positive outcomes and they did contribute to spreading the impact of Fair Share Trust across all elements of the community, ensuring that residents of local care homes for example had their fair share of Fair Share Trust.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation makes the following key findings.

1. High quality community development

The community capacity development programme delivered by CVA Blyth Valley has been of the highest quality and has had significant impact. There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to the Fair Share Trust from the local community and the professionals working there. The community associations which have been recipients of both Fair Share Trust funding and from the support provided by the capacity building programme implemented by CVA Blyth Valley, have all reported significant benefits. There was high praise for all the Community Development Workers (CDWs) from CVA Blyth Valley. Indeed, many of the impacts of the work were attributed to the quality and approach of these Workers.

2. Built capacity of the local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)

This was a key objective of the Fair Share Trust - to increase the capacity of local VCS organisations by enabling local communities to organise themselves, verbalise their needs and lead their own development. There is evidence to indicate that this has happened on a number of different levels to a number of different types of voluntary and community sector organisations, from established professional organisations, to community associations focused around a community centre, to single focus organisations such as Scouts or singing groups. We have found that Fair Share Trust, through the capacity development work implemented by CVA Blyth Valley and through funded projects, has resulted in the following impacts.

- Creating new VCS organisations: through

the support provided by CVA Blyth Valley, local people have been helped to create new organisations.

- Helping existing VCS organisations grow, develop and expand: one of the impacts in this area has been an increase in the number of beneficiaries.
- Increased the numbers of volunteers: through encouraging and supporting events, including consultation events and volunteer fairs, Fair Share Trust has led to an increase in the numbers of community members who contribute to their time to community organisations.
- Improved the physical infrastructure of community resources: through direct funding and levering in additional funding, Fair Share Trust has improved physical resources. This has led to increased use, a greater choice of activities for local communities and improved finances.
- Improved the financial sustainability of community organisations: this has been made possible through the provision of financial management training in the community, the organisation of local funding fairs and increasing the number of activities that run from the Community Associations and thus their rental income.
- Rejuvenated community resources and improved community spirit: the capacity development work that has been carried out has refreshed and given new energy and drive to existing community associations, and by implication to local communities themselves.
- Created links between community organisations and funders: funding is key to the survival and sustainability of community organisations. The CDW not only identified suitable funders but also created relationships between funders and local organisations.

3. Strengthened civil society

Fair Share Trust has increased the number and diversity of organised groups in the local community; new groups have been formed because of Fair Share, new funds have been accessed by the new organisations and membership and useage has increased.

4. Increased use of community resources

Fair Share Trust has increased the number of local people who use the community centres. By improving the physical condition of buildings, increasing the numbers of activities and the profile of the centres, the community development work has increased useage.

5. Improved local services

Fair Share Trust has resulted in an improved range of services on offer to local people and an increased number have used these services, including more people using the community centres.

6. Levered in substantial funds for local organisations

The community development work of CVA Blyth Valley has supported local organisations in successfully applying for over £600,000. Examples of beneficiary organisations include community venues, toddler groups, youth groups, sports groups, residents associations, scouts, guides and brownies, dance groups and Parent Teacher Associations.

7. Increased services and activities

As a result of Fair Share Trust, activities and events have increased in a number of areas, both inside and outside of the community centres. Activities have increased for all members of the local community and have included a diverse range of subject areas including community cinema, youth activities, walking, cooking and theatre.

8. Increased organisational diversity

The activities of CVA Blyth Valley have attracted a number of new organisations and services which otherwise would not have been present. Seaton Valley now has more organisations delivering more activities because of Fair Share Trust.

9. Improved community safety and reduced risk

Through working with community groups and providing training (either directly or through organising others to provide training), the community development work has made communities safer places. This includes increasing the number of people receiving Child Protection Training and an increase in risk assessments undertaken of community venues to significantly lower fire risk.

10. Improved public health

As a result of the community development work and the investment in health activities, a number of positive public health impacts have been noted. This includes more health related activities (for example, keep fit, yoga, walking clubs) and more people participating.



11. Sustainable development

Generally, there was a consensus amongst the community centre representatives interviewed that they are significantly stronger now compared to before the Fair Share Trust. There was also a recognition that they could now carry on as community associations, whereas before their futures were uncertain.

Conclusion

The Fair Share Trust in Seaton Valley has been a considerable success and a model of how good community development can happen: in our opinion it has been a model of best practice. The local community, with support from an infrastructure organisation and a fund manager, has led their own development process with significant impacts on both community organisations and local populations. There are more things for local people to do, better facilities and more community spirit because of Fair Share. Those benefits accrue to all sections of society.

We see that the local community is in much better shape than it was 10 years ago, with the area now having improved social and physical capital. There has also been a high degree of sustainability to initiatives with communities now forging their own development route and having their own ambitions.

The Seaton Valley Partnership is key to this sustainability and the four major community centres in the area have been enthusiastic signatories. The Partnership recognises the value of a CDW to continually support their development plans and processes and they are keen to continue this. Similarly, they have recognised the value of a Youth Worker and are currently looking for funds to continue the work started by the Fair Share Trust. An important conclusion can be made from this: that local communities and organisations recognise the value of external, professional support

and although the community organisations are led by volunteers, they lack the capacity (time and sector expertise) to support and administer their own development process to an optimum level. In short, community development is better if it is supported by a professional community development worker. The quality of the worker is also important and CVA Blyth Valley has supplied workers of the highest quality.

There has been other significant learning in the 10 years since Fair Share Trust started. Because of the experience, we know:

- The Community Foundation now has considerable expertise in administering a geographically focused, community development programme.
- The model of community capacity development created and delivered by CVA Blyth Valley is effective at stimulating a sustainable community development process. Adopting this community capacity development approach has resulted in an almost 100 percent matched funding, representing considerable value for public money.
- There was significant advantage in the community capacity development work being neutral, particularly during a period of upheaval associated with local government reorganisation.
- Individual professional performance is key to the development process with the CDWs demonstrating their dedication, commitment, empathy and technical ability.
- There are considerable advantages of working with a 'preferred provider': CVA Blyth Valley has almost acted as a lead provider and as one interviewee commented "when you have one lead provider, things are quite straightforward".
- The community organisations across Holywell, New Hartley, Seaton Delaval, Seaton Sluice and Seghill have demonstrated themselves to be dedicated, energetic, trustworthy and worthy of investment, representing well the local communities which they serve.

During the evaluation, there was much discussion about what would have happened to those community associations if Fair Share Trust had not existed. We received comments of "if it wasn't here, the Gala would have gone, the older people's party would have gone ... the Centre would have closed". Another comment was "I'd hate to think what would have happened".

Finally, to end with two comments from community leaders:

"It's been a really positive experience"

"It's been a pleasure working with Fair Share".

Finally, there is a film which captures the impact of the programme, made by Meerkat Films (www.meerkatfilms.co.uk). The film and a copy of the full evaluation report can be downloaded from the Fair Share Trust website (www.fairsharetrust.org).

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