

Evaluation of Fair Share Trust in Wansbeck (East Ashington)

This is a summary of the evaluation of the East Ashington 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. We also look at the local decision making process, the Panel, and see how that has functioned as the mechanism to implement the programme. This evaluation shows that the local programme has been a success. It has left the local organisations and communities involved, stronger, more diverse and more organised. It has also been a valuable learning experience both for those organisations who have been funded and the local Fair Share Panel members. There have also been considerable benefits to local communities.

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 individual 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 Fair Share Trust investment in East Ashington was made to add value to existing services for children and young people: a total of 77 percent of total funds (£677,122) was invested to meet this priority. The single biggest investment was in Groundwork North East who received a total of £211,933 to develop and build a skate park. The other significant recipients were Ashington Community Development Trust receiving £188,780 for a range of activities aimed at young people and for capacity development, Wansbeck CVS receiving £173,559 for a community capacity development programme and Hirst Welfare receiving £165,594 for a young persons programme.

There was an attempt made by the Panel to take a strategic position in relation to commissioning and in certain cases this was achieved, most notably in the initiatives delivered by Hirst Welfare and the Paddock Wood skate park work. The remaining funding was invested in a range of discrete, time limited projects, ranging from youth outreach to exchange visits.

Evaluation findings

The evaluation makes the following key findings.

1. Positive impact on young people

Children and young people was the first local Fair Share Trust priority and the evidence indicates that there has been a significant impact on young people in the locality across a range of thematic areas.

These impacts include: more activities for young people both during the time of Fair Share, through commissioned projects, and projected activities after the end of the programme; increased locally owned young people's resources; and increased skills and organisational capacity. These impacts are presented below.

Increased activities: more young people have been involved in a wider range of activities. This has been as a result of projects such as:

- Trinity Youth who worked with high numbers of young people on an outreach basis, engaging them in activities and events.
- Be Inspired who trained a core of young people who then ran a series of events for young people.
- Hirst Welfare young people's programme engaged high numbers of 0 to 13 year olds in a summer events programme, sports activities and play groups. It also enabled the Parkhurst Powersports Club to be run for five nights a week and a Boxing Club to be available four nights a week. Fair Share Trust funding allowed prices to be subsidised to enable people who had less money to be able to participate.
- Paddock Wood skate park has attracted and continues to attract multitudes of young people. It is a very well used resource: sometimes it is too well used, with one occasion when it was reported there were 400 young people at the park. It is used by all age groups: by young scooter riders between four and 10; skate boarders between eight and 20; BMX riders between eight and 40.
- There has been an increase in access to play resources for children with disabilities in the Paddock Wood development. Groundwork North East as part of their feasibility study and consultation with the local community installed play resources for children with disabilities. The resources are now well used by local children and play trips are enjoyed by the Josephine Butler School, a local Special Educational Needs school.

Increased locally owned resources: this refers both to physical and organisational resources.

The work in Paddock Wood was a young person led development and they now have an important sustainable resource, providing a focus for social and sports activities that they police, regulate and manage. The young people have taken a high degree of responsibility making sure that the area is clean and that it does not become a focus of anti-social behaviour. The work of Parkhead Powersports has also had a high degree of local ownership, with young members taking responsibility for organising competitions and events, even on an international level. Local ownership is a key factor in sustainability and an important outcome of the Fair Share Trust.

The ownership of local resources has created a pride felt by young people about their local resources. For example, for several years, the young people of North Seaton have wanted a skate park, for BMX, skate boarders and young scooter riders and all three groups have travelled across Ashington and as far afield as Whitley Bay and Guidepost. Now, young people from across the Northumberland and Tyne and Wear come to visit them, to take advantage of the park's 'bowl' shape.

Increased skills and organisational capacity: there is a diversity of evidence which demonstrates this impact, from the capacity generated in the Be Inspired trainees, to the organisational skills developed through the Ashington/Remscheid exchange visit, to the increase in presentation and public speaking skills developed when local young people from North Seaton proposed the skate park development to the Fair Share Trust Panel.

The exchange visit built skills of the group of 20 young people who were involved. They had to organise additional fund raising, transport, accommodation and a timetable of activities. There was a degree of sustainability to the activity as although some of the older participants left Ashington High School (where the group were based) and moved on, the younger ones were keen to maintain the group, invite new members and organise future activities and events.

These skills have resulted in a number of young people finding employment. For example, a total of 18 young people from Parkhead Powersports found jobs which were attributed in part to participation in the club and the skills learnt there, including increased confidence and self esteem, coaching qualifications gained and organisational skills learnt. In addition, three of the young people who were part of the Be Inspired group have gone on to secure employment.

2. Increased capacity

This was a key objective of Fair Share Trust and was the second objective of the local programme. Again there has been a variety of ways in which this has been achieved, including: contributing to the growth and development of local organisations; strengthening their organisational ability; and supporting them in the development of their programmes. This has occurred both through direct and indirect investment, i.e. through Fair Share Trust funding specific organisations and funding organisations enabling them to support others.

The impact of this increased capacity has been both stronger local organisations in their own right and stronger organisations that are able to deliver sustainable programmes that benefit young people. Thus the local Fair Share Trust's second priority has both fulfilled itself (i.e. capacity development) and their first priority, young people.

Fair Share Trust has achieved this impact through: funding core costs; funding activities and allowing programme development; providing organisational support; and strengthening links between organisations.

3. Sustainable development

There have been high levels of sustainability to many funded initiatives and considerable evidence of legacy. The most prominent example is the legacy of the work of Paddock Wood; this resource in both its physical and social form (i.e. the people that use it and organise themselves around it) will last for a very long time.

There is also the legacy that comes from investing in local organisations, the most notable example being Hirst Welfare and its young people's programme. As the Ashington Town Mayor said "it will have a lasting benefit ... [to] the Hirst Welfare, Paddock Wood". Indeed, the commissioning of Hirst Welfare represented a wise investment decision as the organisation has gone from "strength to strength" (as commented by one interviewee, reflecting the sentiments of many).

4. Increased services

In addition to the activities and services specifically benefitting young people in East Ashington, Fair Share Trust has resulted in more services available to the local community in general. For example, the portfolio of activities delivered by Groundwork North East has meant the local community of East Ashington have had more access to outdoor-related activities. This not only has direct impact for the



participants in relation to enjoyment and health but it also increases community participation in the North Seaton Colliery locality. New services also include the activities of the Wansbeck Disability Forum who, in partnership with Ashington Citizens Advice Bureau, have provided support and advice for people with disabilities. They are also planning to develop new services for returning servicemen who have lost limbs.

5. A critical Panel

It is evident that there are differences of opinion amongst past and present Panel members about the effectiveness of Fair Share. There are those who feel that the process of the Panel was often laboured and difficult, others felt that they never struck the right strategic balance and others felt the entire process had been unclear and lacking in direction. There was a general agreement that some projects had been more successful than others. There was also self criticism about the Panel's seeming lack of clarity between its role as a grant making body and strategic commissioner.

What is clear from the research is that Panel members have been self critical and on examination of the impact of the projects, this was largely unfounded. Indeed, the Panel has got much to be congratulated about and even the less successful projects have provided valuable lessons to the recipient organisations.

6. Positive community reactions

Although there have been different reactions from the local community about the Fair Share Trust, the majority have felt it has been a positive experience. This is difficult to gauge because of an absence of community surveys but we have consulted with community representatives and leaders. Community representatives reported generally positive feedback, with some feeling it had been a great success and others feeling success had been more limited. However, most agreed that the Fair Share Trust had been a "good thing".

A particular focus of praise was the Paddock Wood skate park development, with community representatives all agreeing it had been a great success in a variety of different ways: from reducing local crime and disorder to improving relations between older and younger residents.

Conclusion

The Fair Share Trust has been different to other models of development or regeneration experienced in Ashington. It has been geographically defined (in the locality of East Ashington) and it has been led by local people. There have been no employees of Fair Share, only support and guidance from the Community Foundation. However, the individuals who made up the group of people who constructed the programme, the Panel, were all experts: community development specialists, community leaders, voluntary sector managers.

As it was a new model of development and working, there was no previous experience to base the work upon. The Community Foundation similarly lacked experience of this way of working. Both parties therefore found their way together. The major difference between Fair Share Trust and other funding programmes was the strategic approach taken; it was not a programme that funded a selection of discrete projects but was meant to start a sustainable development process that benefitted young people and local community organisations.

The experience was not without problems or mistakes. It took some time to “get going” as one interviewee said. There was also some difficulties in constructing a purely strategic programme and sometimes it looked more like a grants programme.

This learning process was framed by a specified time scale and budget. It was also framed by a deprived area which had seen limited investment in the past: in short there was considerable need. This was amplified towards the latter stages of the Fair Share Trust as the recession hit. As the Town Mayor said “we are the first to feel the chill [of a recession] and the last to feel the benefit [of regeneration]”. It was also noted that “there are more demands on the voluntary sector [because of the recession]”.

When we have examined the impact of the programme in the light of the locally agreed objectives, we have found a very successful programme with some considerable wins. There has been learning from mistakes and these have arguably been worth the investment. We think that the Panel should be congratulated for a programme well run, if a little challenging at times. Indeed

if we revisit the aims of the programme around building local capacity and social capital, enhancing liveability and improving sustainability, we see that all have been achieved.

In terms of learning, we can take a number of things from the East Ashington Fair Share. We have learnt that a well conceived project that came from a bottom up process led by young people has achieved significant impacts for both young people and the local community.

The Panel members have learnt how to construct a strategic commissioning programme, to which they will be better equipped to run if the opportunity arises in the future. We also learn that in an area with such entrenched deprivation, a 10 year capacity development programme will not solve all ills. Indeed, as the Mayor commented: “There needs to be another Fair Share”. The evaluation would concur.

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).

Contact information

Fair Share Trust
www.fairsharetrust.org

Community Foundation serving
Tyne & Wear and Northumberland
156 Pilgrim Street
Newcastle upon Tyne
Tyne and Wear
NE1 6SU
T: 0191 222 0945
Email: general@communityfoundation.org.uk
www.communityfoundation.org.uk

The Community Foundation Serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland is a registered charity (number 700510) and a limited company (number 2273708).

UK Community Foundations
12 Angel Gate
320-326 City Road
London
EC1V 2PT
T: 020 77139326
Email: network@ukcommunityfoundations.org
www.ukcommunityfoundations.org

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