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Our Place background and scope of research

Our Place is a place-based initiative that aims to empower local people and organisations to bring about change in their neighbourhood. This report presents a summary of the results from research undertaken by the Big Lottery Fund to look at the impact of this initiative in five communities across Scotland.

The findings also offer learning to help new Our Place areas and wider stakeholders understand both the positive and the challenging aspects of this kind of community-led work.

The first Our Place initiative launched in five areas in 2010 and set out to achieve the following long-term outcomes:

- local areas better identify their needs and have a shared vision for the future
- local organisations have increased capacity to develop and run projects which make a difference
- local people have services and facilities that meet their needs and matter to them.

The initiative invested approximately £12 million across 25 projects. Contractor support was provided to local people and groups to identify priorities for their community, produce a shared neighbourhood vision statement and apply for Lottery funding to deliver projects that would help realise that vision.

This research took place between January and March 2015, with people from each Our Place project being invited to take part in a face to face interview. In total, 32 people participated – and they are referred to as participants, groups and grantholders interchangeably in this report. Whilst the participant numbers are small, the feedback provided offers valuable learning for the Fund and others. It is also important to note that whilst this is not an independent piece of research, it has been carried out to highlight both positive and negative feedback from participants.

The organisations and projects funded through Our Place are diverse; they do not make up a homogeneous group. The research focuses on individual experiences rather than trying to measure the success of the whole initiative. The report provides information on each project funded through Our Place, presents the full results from the qualitative research, and organises some key challenges and common experiences that the groups are facing or have faced.

A full research report is available at biglotteryfund.org/scotland, or get in touch with Helen from the Our Place team via helen.curry@biglotteryfund.org.uk

Chit Chat
Greenock Central and East
Our Place areas

Bellmyre, West Dunbartonshire
Five projects: two capital and three revenue
Support contractor: Community Renewal

Four projects in Bellmyre are now managed by the Bellmyre Development Trust (BDT), including one revenue project for the set-up and strengthening of the Trust itself, as well as one to run activities for people in the local area. A third revenue project is managed by Alternatives West Dunbartonshire who have employed a family addiction support worker to address substance misuse in Bellmyre. BDT has been responsible for the construction of the new Cutty Sark Centre, completed in early 2014. They have also taken over a project from West Dunbartonshire Environment Trust that includes the creation of a mountain bike trail, a ‘pump n jump’ track, environmental gateways and landscaping around the Cutty Sark Centre.

Greenock Central and East, Inverclyde
Seven projects: two capital, four revenue, and one capacity building
Support contractor: CEIS

CVS Inverclyde has been funded to help local groups develop their organisational capacity. Financial Fitness delivers financial advice for families, whilst Phoenix Community Health Project is providing holistic support for disadvantaged families suffering from psychological and emotional issues. I Youth Zone run by Inverclyde Council is providing activities for young people and training on health and substance misuse issues. Inverclyde Development Trust’s project works to increase the social inclusion of older people. River Clyde Homes has been leading on a project to develop Belville Community Garden, which aims to provide training and leisure opportunities to local people. Inverclyde Council are also working closely with a local residents’ group to develop a safe play area for children.

Newmains, North Lanarkshire
One capital project
Support contractors: Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Community Enterprise and EKOS

Newmains Community Trust was a newly formed organisation when it was awarded a £2.3 million Our Place grant to construct the Newmains Community Hub. The hub will house a community cafe, library, housing office, office for the Trust as well as training and leisure facilities that can be used by community groups.
Many of the main findings covered in this report align with learning gathered from an earlier internal process evaluation of the initial stages of Our Place in 2012.

Early learning from the initiative indicated changes that would make the process more effective.

The following learning points in particular helped to inform the development of the Our Place approach being taken in seven additional neighbourhoods:

- natural boundaries should be defined by the community
- allow for a longer period of community consultation
- promote an asset-based approach to work with strengths and assets of local community
- develop baseline reports to help communities build on current assets and measure progress
- offer a more flexible timescale for groups to submit applications to the Fund
- provide further support for communities through longer support contracts
- create a community chest to make small amounts of money available to run events etc during the early stages of the initiative.

Some of the issues identified by participants and stakeholders continue to impact on project delivery in the five Our Place areas. The learning reinforces the importance of the changes the Fund has already made to the Our Place approach being taken in seven new neighbourhoods.

### Existing Our Place learning

#### Royston, Glasgow

**Seven projects: one capital and six revenue**  
**Support contractor: CEIS**

Rosemount Lifelong Learning received funding to create a community hub which will be available for training, meetings, workshops and community events. Rosemount Workspace Ltd delivered an employability project for young people. North Glasgow Community Food Initiative delivered healthy cooking and eating sessions as well as training and nutritional advice. St Roch’s Childcare run a parent and toddler group, informative play classes, one-to-one sessions and respite care services for families, while North Area Transport Initiative provides safe, accessible, and affordable community transport options in the area to allow people to access other group’s activities. Royston Youth Action has been working in partnership with other groups in the area to run activities for older people, as well as providing training and learning opportunities for young people.

#### Renfrew West, Renfrewshire

**Five projects: two capital, two revenue and one capacity building**  
**Support contractor: CEIS**

Renfrewshire Council Education and Leisure Services deliver a youth project which improves people’s confidence, raises their aspirations, and increases their community involvement. Our Place Our Families received funding to run a drop-in service for adults and families, provide employment support, and run family events and outdoor activities. Williamsburgh Housing Association has been working with the newly established Renfrew Association of Gardeners and Growers (RAGG) to construct a community garden. Renfrewshire Council Environmental Services has been working with a new group, Friends of Knockhill Park, to develop the park and create opportunities for the community to enjoy outdoor activities. Engage Renfrewshire received funding to deliver a programme of engagement and capacity building for groups in Renfrew West, including those involved in Our Place.
Community involvement

We have already learnt that some issues in the community consultation and visioning process limited community engagement in the early stages of the initiative. This has meant that some groups have found wide scale community involvement challenging and that many of the funded projects have been developed and delivered by well established groups rather than emerging directly from the community. However, the establishment of new development trusts that have gone on to lead projects in several of the areas is a positive example of increased community involvement due to Our Place. Grant-holders have been working hard to engage local people through various means including open days, employing local people, encouraging more volunteering and acquiring a shop front to hold events.

Capital projects

Capital projects have proven challenging for even well-established organisations. They have recognised that a different skill set is required to deliver a capital project and to deal with unforeseen issues. They also feel that the experience has been a steep learning curve, which will continue as groups take over management of their community asset and ensure that it is sustainable and meeting community needs. Some groups felt that the most difficult thing was getting the project started and finding a way to balance the aspirations of the community against what was achievable with the funding. Due to the long-term nature of the projects, many feel that their impact is still to be fully realised, but that this will happen over time for a long-term impact.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a key concern for many of the Our Place organisations. Keeping a project running after funding ends is often a struggle, but this should be weighed against the benefits that the projects have achieved in terms of meeting the needs of the community. Many are keen to continue or expand their projects and are seeking different ways of financing them. Groups feel that it is important to start thinking about sustainability at an early stage of the project and, where possible, to seek innovative ways of funding work. As Our Place is a place based initiative, it is also important for the Fund to consider how groups are connected and can affect each other's sustainability.

Working together

Increased partnership working was identified as one of the impacts of Our Place. This has brought benefits in some areas and for some projects, but it has also proved difficult for some participants – for example, between local authorities and community groups. These participants have emphasised the importance of good communication and of establishing the parameters of a working relationship early on in the process. The experiences of organisations working in partnership through Our Place has provided important lessons for the Fund and for people involved in the new Our Place neighbourhoods.

New organisations

Several new organisations were created as a result of Our Place and are delivering a range of projects either by themselves or in partnership with other organisations. Some have faced
capacity issues and found it challenging to learn to work together, but they have been encouraged or put themselves forward to undertake training and personal development to remedy this and increase their capacity. These participants also feel that the most important things to do when starting a new organisation are to establish the governance and structure of the group early on and to ensure that the group’s board have a variety of skills to help in the delivery of projects.

Conclusion and learning

Whilst the impact of Our Place may have been restricted by the limited amount of community involvement at the start of the process, participants in this research have identified multiple ways in which Our Place has had an impact on and benefitted their organisation and their community. This ranges from establishing new community organisations to forming new working partnerships, from building community centres and gardens to delivering a wide range of projects to benefit young people, older people and many others.

Grantholders also experienced numerous challenges; some are specific to Our Place and others, such as addressing sustainability and managing capital projects, are faced by many of the Fund’s large grantholders in other programmes. This research and the previous internal evaluation have highlighted the importance of gathering, implementing and sharing learning to address these challenges and maximise the impact of place based funding across communities.
Our advice

Advice for contractors

Participants were asked what advice they would give to the support contractors working with the seven new Our Place neighbourhoods.

- Build the capacity of the community itself, improve communications through a newsletter, and leave a legacy
- Know your audience and area by taking time to find out about the neighbourhood from the start
- Identify the level of capacity of a group early on; work on the fundamentals with group members to identify skills and knowledge gaps
- Devise a strategy to ensure maximum community engagement; use different ways of connecting with people rather than just through existing organisations
- Don’t have a blank sheet - provide people with examples of projects to spark ideas
- Use the community vision process to focus on the strengths of the community
- Make the consultation inclusive from the outset and determine what is viable and deliverable

Advice for future applicants and grantholders

Participants were also asked what their top two tips would be for community led projects and organisations involved in the new Our Place areas.

- Don’t be afraid to change something that isn’t working
- Be open and honest and don’t try to do everything by yourself
- Challenge the governance of your organisation and make changes in your board
- Make sure that the community backs up the project that is on their doorstep
- Talk to the Big Lottery Fund – not everything will run smoothly. Discussing problems is not an admission of defeat
- Use the facilities that are already available in your area; learn from and work with each other
- Visit projects that have been successful and seek help unless you have knowledge of the process or have done it before

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Use the facilities that are already available in your area; learn from and work with each other

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Our Place launched in seven new areas in 2014, as shown above. Community engagement work began in September 2014 and communities will be delivering their vision statements from early summer 2015.