

Community Development with Older People in Greater Fishponds

Evaluation of The Care Forum's Bristol Ageing Better project

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Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) funded a series of 10 projects focused on Community Development for Older People (CDOP). **This document contains the executive summary for the evaluation of the CDOP project in Greater Fishponds, delivered by The Care Forum.**

This evaluation was conducted by UWE Bristol and a team of Community Researchers. The full evaluation report will be available in Spring 2021 on the BAB website.

Background to the project

Greater Fishponds is a large area of Bristol that incorporates the three wards of Hillfields, Frome Vale and Eastville, an area with a **culturally diverse population and wide-ranging socioeconomic needs**. Previous community development initiatives in the area have been patchy to date with **minimal prior investment** from either Bristol City Council or local charitable organisations, therefore qualifying it as an **'area of exceptional need'** within the Community Development for Older People (CDOP) part of the Bristol Ageing Better (BAB) programme.

The BAB CDOP projects were established with the aim of **tackling the issues of loneliness and social isolation within specific communities** within the City of Bristol, using various approaches to community development depending on local need and existing services. Before community development work in the Greater Fishponds area commenced, a small group of BAB Community Researchers (CRs) were tasked with conducting an **initial asset mapping exercise in the area**, which highlighted a number of local assets on which to build, as well as some gaps in local provision. Unlike some other areas of the city, Greater Fishponds was found to have a number of significant assets, with 70 identified by the CRs during this process.

Different providers were subsequently invited to tender for the CDOP work in each area, using a 'test and learn' approach tailored to the local community receiving the intervention. Following this bidding process, the well-established local voluntary and community sector organisation **The Care Forum took on the task of delivering the project in Greater Fishponds.**

Executive Summary

During the bidding process The Care Forum proposed an ambitious plan which laid out ideas to create **'community signposter' roles** within the community, as well as to establish a **steering group** for older people and to make links with the local Carers Support Centre.

Despite the shear breadth of the project area and the many challenges it presents, **good progress was made towards these goals** in the

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first year of operation, with some popular intergenerational activities becoming established in that first year, along with the **successful 'Considerate Friends' initiative. Door knocking and early pop up activities made good early progress too**, and the support and training provided to local volunteers was well received and popular. As a result a number of events sprang up, including a Coffee Social and a Food Share and Eid Celebration.

However, the project also faced a number of challenges throughout the funded period. **Recruiting volunteers for example proved challenging** in some parts of Greater Fishponds, indicating that perhaps early scoping activities had not successfully gauged the local appetite for engagement in such activities. This somewhat **hindered any early aspirations the project had to establish a network of community signposters**, and adaptations were soon required to be made to the project plan as a result. Equally the determination to establish a steering group, whilst well intentioned, ultimately didn't work and the project **struggled to instigate any meaningful consultation activities with older local people**. This was by no means an issue that was unique to this CDOP project however, and is an indication of the **need to find flexible solutions that take into consideration the level of engagement local older people want to have in strategic level activity**.

There were also a number of significant **staff changes** in year 3 of the project which led to **gaps in provision and a significant slowdown in progress**. Again, this was not unique to the Greater Fishponds CDOP and staff vacating posts is often unavoidable for any employer. However, given that consistency of delivery was impacted as a result it does highlight a lack of **contingency planning** for such activities. Future commissioners may therefore wish to incorporate provider contingency plans into their list of requirements during the bidding process.

Another staff-related issue was the number of contracted hours and working patterns of community development workers employed by the project. The evaluation team found that **for an area as large as Greater Fishponds there was insufficient contracted time or flexibility in hours to successfully deliver some of the goals of the project**, particularly given that community development activities can happen day or night across the week and into weekends.

There were also some problems in evaluating the project successfully due to **inconsistencies in record keeping and reporting**, which affected the evaluators ability to judge whether the project had been successful in meeting some of its goals. Again, this indicates that projects need to have **stringent reporting procedures** in place so that funders and evaluation teams can fairly assess project outcomes in an evidence-based way. As a result this evaluation has been compiled as a chronological account of the project and its milestones.

Towards the end of the project the team were using terminology that implied the project was reaching a conclusion, and whilst this may have referred to the funding period coming to an end, the evaluators were **not convinced that sustainability had been considered well enough**. It was also unclear which activities were still running at this stage, and there is clearly a need for community projects to **adopt an attitude that provision of local activities will outlive the life of the funded project** (as was the case in other CDOP areas where sustainability was 'built in from the start').

Overall, whilst good progress was made by a number of very dedicated and skilled community development workers - particularly at the start of the project – there is much to learn from this CDOP project about the value that should be placed on the **more procedural elements within organisations providing such activities**, as it is clear that insufficient consideration of such issues can significantly hinder progress.

Recommendations

Reports & Record Keeping

To fairly evaluate a 'test and learn' project it is essential that both project staff (based with the delivery provider) and monitoring staff (based with the funding organisation) keep **detailed records and reports of all their activities**. This need was amply demonstrated by this project when, following a significant turnover of staff at the delivery provider, there was not a single person left with any direct experience or knowledge of the activities and participants involved in the first two years.

If the sustainability of those early ventures is to be evidenced, it is essential for **regular contact** to be maintained between the Project Officer and the activity by means of **reports/visits** to provide an accurate chronological picture.

Steering group

For a steering group to successfully provide support and guidance to a local community project it needs to have members who can contribute the following:

- ▶ Bring **practical experience** of the activities to be undertaken.
- ▶ Be **representative of the community** where the project is based and/or potential participants.
- ▶ Have **established links/relationships with potentially supportive key organisations within the community** e.g. local authority, parish council, funders, networking or umbrella organisations.

These individuals need to be approached by the delivery provider at the **very start of the project**, before even paid staff have been employed, so **relationships and the broad approach of the project can be established between staff and steering group members at the outset**. This information and timeline should be provided by the donor in the initial project protocol.

Further BAB learning resources including the full CDOP Greater Fishponds evaluation report (available Spring 2021) can be found at:

<http://bristolageingbetter.org.uk/learning-and-evaluation-hub/>

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