



People's Health Trust - Active Communities Case Study



Mossblown Regeneration Group - Mossblown Community Comes Together

Introduction

People's Health Trust believes in a world without health inequalities. The Trust funds small and local projects in neighbourhoods that are most affected by health inequalities with funding generated through The Health Lottery. Active Communities is one of its funding programmes and grants aim to support people to create or shape local projects that will help their community or neighbourhood to become even better, and require local people to design and run these projects. Typically lasting up to two years, the grants are between £5,000 and £50,000 for each project. The programme's main intended outcomes are:

- **Collective Control:** Ideas designed and led by local people. Regular participation of residents, who are empowered to lead and take ownership of the project design, delivery and development.
- **Social links and ties:** Stronger connections between people. Decreased social isolation and loneliness, and improved connection, friendships and collective support networks among participants.

As part of the 2016-18 Active Communities evaluation, this case study explores how local people got involved with, and helped to shape, the delivery of Mossblown Community Comes Together, after a successful funding bid to People's Health Trust. Drawing on telephone interviews with project staff and volunteers, the case study explains how people came together and participated, and what they learnt and achieved along the way.

Key facts

HealthEngage South Ayrshire Health Community Interest Company (CIC) area

£38,730 of People's Health Trust funding

Main activities

The project offers a wide range of activities including a tea club, lunch club, exercise class for older people, craft and art class, youth club, breakfast club and toddlers group

Key outcomes

- Improved social links and ties
- Collective action and control
- Increased confidence, knowledge and skills



About the project

Mossblown Community Comes Together is a project that aims to provide a social focus in the village and improve access to clubs and activities in a recently re-opened hall that forms part of the Mossblown Community Centre. Mossblown Community Centre was built in the early 20th century by a local housing estate, but in the 1970s, the local authority took over the management of the building and operated the halls to provide activities for the local community. The centre hosted a wide range of community events and activities, from youth clubs and arts and crafts activities, to weddings and theatre productions.

However, in 2006, due to funding cuts, South Ayrshire Council closed the hall, and without appropriate maintenance, the building became decrepit and eventually unsafe to operate. There were no other suitable community assets in Mossblown so many of the activities were discontinued and no alternative community provision was developed. In 2014, after residents starting asking for a public meeting space, Mossblown and St Quivox Community Council started to raise funds and work with local residents to re-open the smaller hall in the centre. As the hall had been out of use for so many years, many of the community groups that had previously used it had ended and there was a need to re-engage the community. Therefore, the purpose of the Active Communities project has been to build up community involvement – and use of – the Community centre, through delivering a range of activities for all types of people in Mossblown, from youth clubs and parent and toddler groups to lunch clubs and yoga sessions.

How are local people shaping and leading the project?

The project is mainly run by volunteers, in the form of a committee (comprised of a group of three local councillors and several other trustees from the Community Council) that manages the project, alongside other volunteers from the community. There is a project lead, whose role is to liaise with People's Health Trust, deal with the financial aspects of the project and oversee the development and delivery of the activities, while the other committee members support on consulting with the community and developing the activities. A paid Community Centre Co-ordinator supports the group, by developing the activities and co-ordinating the timetable. Volunteers also provide support in delivering the project, for example, by running events and activities, being key holders, and by gathering feedback about the project.

Throughout the course of the project, there have been a number of processes in place to enable local people to make decisions about the project. During the planning stage, the project staff undertook consultations with the local community to identify what types of activities they would like to see. All the interviewees emphasised the importance of involving local people in the development of the project to ensure ongoing engagement:

“It’s really important [to involve local people in the decision-making] – there’s no point in putting something on that just we, the group [the community committee] wants putting on; we need to put something that the community wants, because it’s for them.” (Delivery staff)

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(Delivery staff)



“I think that it’s very important to [involve local people in group decisions], because if you don’t involve them, if you don’t ask what they want to have in the hall, then obviously they are not going to come. So we need to involve them and we need to make sure that what we are doing is what they are looking for, so that we can continue to provide it.” (Volunteer)

As the project has progressed and different activities have launched, participants have been encouraged to share their views about the provision to inform the ongoing delivery of the project. People can leave comments on the activity sign-in sheets, on the group’s Facebook page, or they are encouraged to speak directly to a member of staff or activity facilitator to talk about what is working well or less well with an activity. The feedback is discussed in the weekly committee meetings, and is used to make changes to the project where appropriate.



What has the project achieved?

Improved social links and ties

By taking part in the activities on offer, people have **increased their social connectedness** with other people in the community. Interviewees highlighted that the lunch clubs, youth club, coffee mornings and bingo sessions have been particularly successful in terms of encouraging **new friendships** to develop and **reducing social isolation** amongst local residents. As one volunteer highlighted:

“For the people who come to the coffee mornings, the lunches and the bingo, I think that it’s a nice social event for them. A lot of them probably wouldn’t go out much otherwise because there isn’t a lot to do in the village. I think that they find it’s quite good because they don’t have to go very far; they’ve got the social interaction. It gives them somewhere to go, to meet [other people] and they just enjoy being out and mixing with other people.” (Volunteer)

In some cases, having an activity that enables people to meet and socialise with others, has helped people to **increase their sense of belonging in the community**. For example, some of the beneficiaries have started to meet up in their own time after being introduced to each other through the lunch club. Staff highlighted that generally the project has brought people closer together:

“All these people seem to be coming together [as a result of the project]. I mean I feel more part of it now... after fifteen years I am able to walk down to the shop and speak to people that I didn’t know before coming to the coffee mornings... It’s been good to get everybody together.” (Delivery staff)

For members of the committee and volunteers, participation in designing and delivering the project has increased people’s **recognition of a shared interest**, in terms of revitalising local community activities. One volunteer emphasised that all of the local community members that are involved in managing, designing or delivery the project have the same interest and motivation to improve local activities:

“We’ve all got the same interest at heart, which is to make a success of giving the community a space to use for activities.” (Volunteer)



“I think [one of the main project successes] is getting people together, getting them talking and having a shared interest about the community centre.”

(Delivery staff)

This interest has also trickled down to participants, who are now more aware of the community centre and are more interested in how it gets used.

“I think [one of the main project successes] is getting people together, getting them talking and having a shared interest about the community centre.” (Delivery staff)

Some of the activities held in the hall have provided the opportunity for **increased partnership working between local providers**. The committee regularly invites local providers to facilitate awareness raising sessions for the parent and toddler group, to teach the group about the importance of dental hygiene and healthy eating, for example.

Additionally, the committee have started receiving interest from other local activity leaders about potentially running their groups from the hall.

Collective action and control

Weekly meetings for the committee and volunteers enable a wide range of people to provide their input into the project, which has led to individuals feeling **more empowered to take ownership of the project**. As interviewees highlighted, the decision-making process has been collaborative:

“We have a meeting once a week, where we discuss everything that’s happening, or is going to happen, and everybody gets a say as to what they think is working well, or what is not working well.” (Volunteer)

“We’ve all been able to say – or lay things out on the table – and make decisions together. The group get on very well which has made it easier to work together.” (Volunteer)

In addition, as part of their role, some of the volunteers are key-holders for the venue, so they are integral for ensuring that the hall is opened up for the local community to access activities. The project lead highlighted that having the additional responsibility for opening up the centre empowered volunteers to have a **greater level of control over the project**.

According to the interviews, one of the greatest successes of the project is that the community came together to open the hall, and continues to manage the ongoing design and delivery of the activities that operate out of it. The efforts of the committee and local volunteers have demonstrated that there is a **sense of community ownership over the project**.

Additionally, ongoing input from the participants about activities highlights that the interests of the community have been central to the design of the project and that the **project reflects local needs**, demonstrated further by the hall being used to its maximum capacity. Project staff have highlighted that there is a clear need for the restoration of the larger hall in the community centre so that they can open it up and offer a wider range of activities to a greater audience than they are currently providing for.

Increased confidence, knowledge and skills

According to project monitoring data, all of the local people involved in designing and developing Mossblown Community Comes Together have reported being motivated to deliver regular activities for the community, which has led to **increased self-confidence** in leading the project.

“We’ve all been able to say – or lay things out on the table – and make decisions together. The group get on very well which has made it easier to work together.”

(Volunteer)



A delivery staff member observed that many participants **have gained knowledge** through some of the activity sessions. For example, one example provided by parents of toddlers was that they now know much more about the importance of healthy eating and nutrition, and a weekly NHS smoking cessation project has improved participants' knowledge of the dangers of smoking.

The opening of the hall has provided Mossblown with a new community asset and the project has **increased access to a wide range of activities and resources** for people in the village. The project lead highlighted that there are now so many activities held in the hall that timetabling is a challenge. This highlights that there is a demand in the community for the continuation – and potentially upscaling - of activities.

Longer-term outcomes

There was some evidence of emerging longer-term outcomes. As the community centre had been closed down for many years and there were few other community assets in Mossblown, the project has made a big difference to the level of participation in community activity in the village, **contributing to a more empowered community able to take action**.

The awareness raising activities, alongside others such as yoga and the walking group, have helped to contribute to a short-term improvement in people's fitness and health, which could in time help to achieve **improved wellbeing**:

“With the yoga, people are getting fitter so they are experiencing the health benefits too.” (Delivery staff)

What has worked well?

- **Volunteers taking on additional responsibilities:** Enabling volunteers to take on additional responsibilities, such as being key holders, or by running events, has been pivotal to ensuring an overall sense of community ownership over the project
- **Having a committee:** Having a committee that oversees the management and delivery of the project has been beneficial for maintaining seamless provision. This is because it means that people are always available to cover shifts or take over a workload due to illness, without there being any major impact felt by the project participants.

What are the lessons?

- **Having a longer run-in time:** As the community centre had been out of use for nearly a decade, there was very little activity going on in the community, and the project lead found that it was slower to mobilise than originally anticipated. Ensuring an adequate run-in time will help to maximise levels of engagement before the delivery of activities begins.



“With the yoga, people are getting fitter so they are experiencing the health benefits too.”

(Delivery staff)

- **Not over-promising on the extent of provision:** Mossblown Community Comes Together is only able to use the smaller hall in the community centre as the larger hall is unfit for purpose. Therefore, they have been limited in the numbers of people that can attend sessions, the types of activities on offer and as the project has progressed, when they can timetable activities to avoid clashes. The project has demonstrated that there is a demand for community space and it has highlighted the need for restoration work to commence in the larger hall, to enable more local people to engage in a greater number – and type – of activities.
- **Ensuring the provision reflects local needs:** it has been important to continually gain feedback from the participants about the activities to make sure that provision reflects people's needs. Taster sessions have been beneficial for identifying what works and what does not work and they have helped to inform the ongoing refinement of activities.



The future

The committee intend that Mossblown Community Centre will be used on an ongoing basis for the activities that are already on offer, making use of the connections and skills participants have developed to extend the project's reach. As highlighted, the committee has received interest from other local activity leaders, such as a local dance teacher, who would like to move their group into the community centre. Having external interest in the use of the centre will enable the committee to charge rental costs and create a more sustainable income stream. In addition, another project is starting, which will build cycle paths between Mossblown and other nearby villages. The project manager will be based out of the Mossblown Community Centre, which will not only help to raise awareness of the centre with other villages and potentially increase social connections across communities, but it will also bring in additional rental revenue. In the longer term, the committee hope that they can raise enough funds to restore the larger hall in the community centre so they will be able to host a greater number and type of activities for local people.

