Evaluating the Public Health Outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits Project

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Background & Rationale

- Spice is a social enterprise that developed the Time Credits model and runs programmes across the UK with local councils, community development organisations, housing associations, health and social care providers and schools.
- Established in 2014, Cambridgeshire Time Credits is funded by Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge Housing Society.
- Spice Time Credit systems support people in giving their time to strengthen communities and to design and deliver better services.
- Time Credits recognise that everybody has something to give that can make a difference in the place they live and are an effective tool for encouraging people who may be new to volunteering.
- In exchange for their contribution, they ‘earn’ printed Time Credit notes, one for every hour they give, which they can then ‘spend’ on a range of leisure and other opportunities in a network of Spice partners across the UK.

Benefits of time-based currencies - Existing research has associated participation with numerous beneficial outcomes, including:

- Improved health, wellbeing, skills and confidence
- An efficient tool for engaging people often excluded from mainstream economy
- Help to develop more inclusive, cohesive and resilient communities

Much of this evidence, however, is drawn from small-scale, qualitative studies or surveys using a self-recall method.

Aims & Objectives

- To address this knowledge gap by rigorous, independent evaluation to enable more accurate estimates of the extent of benefits arising from time-based currencies.
- To analyse the potential of time credits to address public health issues by:
  - Reducing loneliness and social exclusion
  - Improving wellbeing for participants
  - Increasing community cohesion and social capital

Conceptual Underpinning

- Health benefits accrue in various ways through different pathways, largely through opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. Typically cited positive outcomes associated with participation in time-based currencies include:
  - enhanced self-esteem, confidence and skills
  - expansion of social networks and friendships, and increased community involvement
  - social integration and community self-efficacy, social inclusion
  - improved health, wellbeing and quality of life (2-7)

- Many of the benefits are believed to arise from the reciprocal nature of time-based currencies and its guiding principle of co-production.

- Time Credits are inclusive and provide everybody in society the opportunity to be active citizens and share their experience and skills to make positive contributions that foster a sense of inclusiveness and help shape their own community.

Methodology

- Mixed methods research design using both quantitative and qualitative tools
- Incorporating co-production in the evaluation methodology
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Literature review, including scoping review of time credits and health outcomes
- Secondary data analysis
- Developing a programme theory of change
- National survey of time exchange projects
- Longitudinal survey with individual new time credit members using EQ-SD
- Face to face interviews with individual time credit members (20-25)
- Survey and face to face interviews with partner organisations (15-20)
- Face to face interviews with local people not part of the project
- Ethnographic methods including visual ethnographies and participant observation
- Focus groups (2-3)

Public Involvement

- Collaboration with the Cambridgeshire County Council Community Engagement Team, Spice, and the Cambridge Institute of Public Health
- Steering group with Time Credits partner organisations and members who volunteer and earn Time Credits

Outputs / Dissemination & Knowledge Transfer

- Five Working Papers, each of which focuses on a separate aspect of the research
- Findings report 1: national level survey of time currency schemes
- Findings report 2: ethnographic research
- Findings disseminated in a range of accessible formats, e.g. a film, photography
- User guide aimed at local authorities, those commissioning and delivering health and social care services and those involved in establishing time credit projects
- Peer reviewed journal articles
- Evaluation Facebook page

References