

**Cambridge** Centre  
for Housing &  
Planning Research

# Evaluating the Public Health Outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits Project

## Interim Report

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## **The evaluation**

The Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES) enables people who are introducing innovative public health initiatives to work in partnership with the National Institute for Health Research School for Public Health Research (NIHR SPHR) to conduct rigorous evaluations of their effectiveness. This scheme is particularly focused on local initiatives.

The aim of the evaluation of the public health outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits project in Wisbech is to determine its potential to tackle social exclusion, loneliness and deprivation and to assess the extent to which it can reduce health inequalities. The Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) is carrying out this research in collaboration with Spice, the Cambridgeshire County Council Community Engagement Team, Cambridge Housing Society, and the Cambridge Institute of Public Health (CIPH).

The research uses a mixed methods approach that engages service users, practitioners and policy makers through interviews, surveys, focus groups and ethnographic research methods. One of the key research objectives is to analyse how this type of project can best secure positive health outcomes and how it could be sustainably established in other localities, should these benefits be demonstrated.

For more information about the evaluation please contact Dr Gemma Burgess on [glb36@cam.ac.uk](mailto:glb36@cam.ac.uk) or 01223 764547.

This study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research's School for Public Health Research (NIHR SPHR): [sphr.nihr.ac.uk](http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk).

## **Introduction**

This report presents interim findings from the evaluation of the public health outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits project in Wisbech. It reflects on the progress of the research and the successes and challenges of the methodology used to capture data on outcomes. The report summarises the outputs from the evaluation to date. It presents conceptual developments so far and draws on research with stakeholders, partner organisations and volunteers to discuss emerging findings on public health outcomes.

# 1 Research context and aims

## 1.1 Time Credits

Spice Time Credits are a tool for building stronger communities and for delivering co-produced services<sup>1</sup>. The Spice model is driven by a vision of wellbeing and social cohesion, and uses Time Credits as a way of recognising and celebrating the time people spend volunteering with a local organisation, community group, volunteer group or a statutory sector service provider.

In exchange for their contribution, the volunteers 'earn' a Time Credit note, one for every hour they give. These can be 'spent' on a range of leisure and other opportunities, typically donated by organisations, local businesses and corporations to allow the community members to take advantage of their spare capacity. They can also be spent on activities run by other community members, on activities at the organisation they were earned with, and to trade time and skills with other individuals.

## 1.2 Time Credits in Wisbech

Wisbech is in the East of England. It is an area with above average levels of deprivation and a range of challenging social issues. Wisbech is a market town with employment concentrated in agriculture and food processing, with inward migration from the EU to service these industries.

There are 16 currently active local organisations where people can earn Time Credits. These include schools, homeless hostels, children's centres, an adventure playground and a project supporting people into employment. Activities that volunteers can do to earn Time Credits include reading with children, running after school clubs, gardening, office work, adult learning opportunities, working in a café and kitchen and litter picking. Activities that volunteers can do to spend Time Credits include going to the gym, swimming, going to the cinema, having beauty and hair treatments, attending social events and going to the theatre.

Each partner submits basic monitoring data every quarter. Over all quarters (April 2014 to end of March 2016) 952 people signed up for Time Credits, of which 526 joined Wisbech based organisations and 426 signed up with organisations in other parts of Cambridgeshire.

In total across Cambridgeshire 11381.5 hours were earned, of which 9211.5 were earned with Wisbech partner organisations, reflecting the longer time they have been offering Time Credits relative to organisations in other parts of Cambridgeshire. In total across Cambridgeshire there were 989 earning activities in total, of which 802 activities occurred at Wisbech partner organisations. This suggests that people earned an average of 11.5 hours per earning activity in Wisbech.

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<sup>1</sup>This section draws on the first working paper: Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) Introduction to time banking and Time Credits. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

Interviews with the earn organisations in Wisbech show that there is a difference between the notional number of members each organisation has and the currently active members. Most organisations have a small core of a few very active regular volunteers and a larger group of people who volunteer occasionally. Some volunteers are drawn on because they have particular skills, but cannot volunteer frequently. Some organisations could not cope with more active volunteers than they already have.

### **1.3 Co-production<sup>2</sup>**

This research is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Public Health Research (SPHR) Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES). The evaluation is a collaboration with Spice, Cambridgeshire County Council and CHS Group, the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) and the Cambridge Institute for Public Health (CIPH). Spice is a social enterprise and developed the Time Credits model as a tool for building stronger communities and co-produced services where people are active and equal participants.

This research is taking a co-productive approach. Co-productive research is a collaborative and interactive process involving academic and non-academic participants in the production of knowledge. It builds on the belief that the best research practice lies in a synthesis of academic research, practitioner knowledge and research participant 'expertise by experience'.

### **1.4 Research aims**

The aim of the research is to evaluate the outcomes of the Time Credit project in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, with a focus on health outcomes.

The objective is to analyse the potential of Time Credits to address public health issues by:

- Reducing loneliness and social exclusion
- Improving wellbeing
- Increasing community cohesion and social capital.

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<sup>2</sup> This section draws on the second working paper: Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2016) Introduction to co-production in research: summary report. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

## **2 Methodology**

The evaluation has a mixed methods research design using both quantitative and qualitative methodological tools.

### **2.1 Methods overview and progress**

This section presents a summary of the methods proposed for this evaluation. They are not necessarily in a chronological order and are at varying stages of implementation.

#### **2.1.1 Interviews with key stakeholders**

Individuals and representatives of organisations that were involved in the setting up of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits scheme, are involved in its running at the time of the evaluation, or represent organisations that may have benefitted / could benefit from the scheme, such as local health and care service providers were invited to take part in an in depth face to face semi-structured interview. The interviews explored the rationale for the project, successes and challenges to date and any evidence of positive outcomes. The first round of stakeholder interviews has been completed. Follow up interviews will be conducted later in the project to reflect on research findings and progress of the Time Credits project.

#### **2.1.2 Literature review**

Academic, policy and other grey literature is being reviewed to inform the study. In particular, literature on time banking and Time Credits, on co-production in research and in public service provision, and on health and volunteering was reviewed to inform the four working papers published to date. A further two working papers are planned to publish additional parts of the literature review. One will present contextual information about Wisbech, the other will analyse the potential for using ethnographic research methods.

#### **2.1.3 Developing a theory of change**

A conceptual model of how Time Credits may lead to positive health outcomes is being developed as part of the research. The processes and pathways described in this model have been informed by a combination of our knowledge of how the Time Credits model works and existing evidence of the ways in which health and wellbeing are influenced by circumstances, social relationships, and the environment. As such, this is a conceptual model of how Time Credits may potentially generate, or contribute to, positive health outcomes. A working paper has been published that presents the model, which is discussed in Section 4 of the interim report. The intention is to develop the model as the research progresses.

#### **2.1.4 Scoping visits and informal interviews**

Scoping interviews will be carried out with all willing Time Credits partner organisations in Wisbech. These involve visiting the organisation to discuss what they do and how they use Time Credits. They allow the organisation to gain an understanding of the research. As new partners join the Wisbech network, further scoping visits will be carried out.

### **2.1.5 Longitudinal survey with new Time Credit members**

This survey was aimed at new participants who join the Wisbech Time Credits scheme. The proposal was to survey people when they join the scheme to collect baseline data about their health and circumstances, and then to survey them again after six months to capture any change as a result of volunteering with Time Credits. An online survey was developed in Qualtrics, survey software subscribed to by the University of Cambridge. The survey uses questions from national surveys to allow for comparison.

The EQ-5D is a standardised instrument for use as a measure of health outcomes. It is a questionnaire designed to assess peoples' quality of life. The survey uses the EQ-5D-5L Web version. The EQ-5D contains a descriptive system (5 questions) as well as a visual-analogue-scale. This instrument is well validated, covers a number of domains related to wellbeing including physical, social, mental functioning, and can be used in cost-utility analyses (converting the total scores into quality adjusted life years).

The partner organisations in Wisbech were introduced to the survey and asked to include it in the induction of new members. Flyers were made to explain the survey and to encourage members to participate. Volunteers were offered Time Credits for completing the survey and a prize draw was offered to incentivise people to participate. The first wave of the survey ran from November 2015 to end of April 2016. The intention was to repeat the survey after six months. However, as discussed in the Conclusions, responses have been low because of a relatively small number of new volunteers joining the Time Credits project in the Wisbech area over the survey timeframe.

### **2.1.6 Face to face interviews with Time Credit members**

Interviews are being conducted with Time Credit members. Volunteers receive a Time Credit for participating. Introductions are made through the partner organisations. Interviews are semi-structured and carried out face to face.

### **2.1.7 Survey of Time Credit members**

The aim of the survey is to collect existing participants' perceptions and views of how their circumstances, health and wellbeing have changed during their engagement with the Time Credits scheme. It is a two-page paper survey with easy to complete tick box responses. The survey is being distributed by the partner organisations.

### **2.1.8 Survey and face to face interviews with partner organisations**

Interviews are being conducted with Time Credit partner organisations in Wisbech. The interviews explore what the partner organisations do, who they work with and how they have incorporated Time Credits, as well as discussing the impact on volunteers and organisations. Interviews are semi-structured and carried out face to face.

### **2.1.9 Face to face interviews with local people not part of the project**

The aim of these interviews is to talk to local people to find out more about the area and factors that impact on health. The interviews will help us to understand barriers to involvement in projects such as Time Credits. These interviews are planned for the Autumn 2016.

### **2.1.10 Ethnographic methods and participant observation**

Participant observation is ongoing throughout the fieldwork period. It involves attending events, managed earning opportunities and relevant meetings. It allows us to gain insight into the interactions that take place between volunteers and organisations. The research is exploring the use of ethnographic methods that will enable members of the community to be engaged in the research and to co-produce research data and knowledge. Two groups of Time Credits volunteers are making a scrapbook to show the impact they feel Time Credits has had for them as individuals and for their community. The proposal is to also develop the use of photography and film as a research method.

### **2.1.11 National survey time exchange projects**

A survey will be conducted of time exchange projects to collect information on activities, members, aims and outcomes of different schemes. The aim is to map the sector with a particular focus on what engagement there is with users of health and social care services, which may be incidental rather than an explicit focus of some projects. We will be using Qualtrics, a web based survey package subscribed to by the University of Cambridge. It allows easily tailored questions, sending of reminders, and outputs all responses in Excel or SPSS.

### **2.1.12 Secondary data analysis**

Secondary data about the local area (e.g. of incomes, health, demographic profile) will be analysed to provide a context for the study and to be able to compare Wisbech with other areas and the national averages. This will inform one of the forthcoming working papers.

### **2.1.13 Systematic review**

A systematic review of the grey and scientific literature of the use and potential of Time Credits and time banks in improving public health will be undertaken July to November 2016. The review has been registered on PROSPERO.

## **2.2 Co-productive approach to research**

In line with Spice's strong commitment to co-production, the values and approach associated with the co-production of knowledge have been incorporated into the overall research design and strategy of this evaluation wherever possible. Table 1 summarises the co-productive elements of the methodology.

**Table 1 Co-productive elements in research methodology**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Co-productive elements</b>
Literature review / background context/ secondary data analysis	Cross-disciplinary discussions with public health, discussions with regional and local stakeholders and local service providers.
Interviews with regional and local stakeholders	Information sharing. Co-produced knowledge instrumental in helping to develop the analytical framework and the content of the new members' survey.
'New members' Survey (Waves 1 and 2)	Survey content co-designed with relevant stakeholders and public health experts.



New participants who join the Wisbech Time Credits scheme	Knowledge co-produced with respondents.
Scoping visits	Co-production of knowledge through dialogue and development of interpersonal relationships. Trust, which is essential to co-productive working relationship, is built by getting to know each other.
Informal field visits	Active participation of local partner organisations and volunteers to co-design a programme for ethnographic fieldwork with the researcher to ensure selected approaches will be desirable and meaningful to participants.
Participant observation	Researcher participation in working together with the other volunteers and local partner organisations to co-produce events, services and outcomes.
Steering group	Co-designing topic guides. Co-designing the ethnographic fieldwork plan, including considering different options for co-producing knowledge using ethnographic research methods.
Existing members' Survey Paper survey	Active participation of existing Time Credit volunteers in co-producing knowledge by taking the survey.
Interviews with existing members	Active participation of existing Time Credit volunteers in co-producing knowledge by sharing their stories with the researcher. Possibility of peer interviewing if there is interest.
Ethnographic option: Visual ethnographies / scrap books (group / individual) A selection of interested Time Credits scheme participants	Active involvement of individual volunteers to co-produce knowledge and meaning via the production of scrap-books, visual diaries or photographs.
Ethnographic option: Film	Active involvement of individual volunteers to co-design the film outline (possible a focus group activity with interested parties). The decisions what to film, who to film and where to film to be made in collaboration with the local participants. Active involvement of individual volunteers to co-produce knowledge and meaning by using their own words and frames of reference.
Additional ethnographic options (as suggested by partners and members)	Active involvement of individual volunteers in co-designing the research approaches and co-producing knowledge and meaning via the production of concrete or abstract outputs of their own choosing (such as art work, short video clips, written or spoken diaries, recordings etc.).
Interviews with project partners (earn and spend) Semi-structured interviews	Steering group involvement in co-designing the topic guide for these interviews. Earn and spend partners sharing their perceptions, views and experiences, participating in the co-production of knowledge.

National survey of Time Credit networks and time banks On-line (Qualtrics)	Active participation of people who are active in time-based currency research or involved with time-based currency initiatives in developing the content of the survey, potentially via consultations and workshops.
Interviews with relevant organisations and policy makers – national level	Active participation of relevant project leaders and stakeholders in co-production of knowledge.
Systematic review	Co-produced with researchers at the Cambridge Institute of Public Health.
Interviews / focus group with local residents not involved in the Time Credit scheme	Active participation of local non-members and representatives of organisations who have heard about the Time Credits but decided to not participate to co-produce knowledge of factors informing decisions to not participate.

## 2.3 Methodological challenges

We are using an online survey which was intended to be longitudinal. Despite offering incentives, publicising the survey through a range of mediums, encouraging partners to ask volunteers to complete it, we have had few responses. On investigating this we found that the number of new volunteers in the Wisbech area in this quarter has been relatively low, so we have a good response rate but from a small sample. A slower rate of new member growth may also be expected given that the Wisbech network has been established for some time. Unless there is a considerable increase in the number of people joining the Time Credits initiative our survey sample will not be large enough to analyse. We will have to balance this with qualitative data. This is discussed further in the Conclusions.

One issue is that we envisaged there would be a Time Credits co-ordinator who would act as gatekeeper to volunteers. The Time Credits Project Manager liaises directly with the 16 partner organisation in the Wisbech network and provided our access point to the Time Credits network. These different organisations then act as individual gatekeepers.

## 2.4 Next steps

A draft protocol has been written for the systematic review. Interviews with Time Credits members and earn and spend partners are ongoing. The survey with existing Time Credits members will continue. Volunteers are underway with ethnographic methods such as scrapbooks but we will also explore the option of using photography and film. Work will begin on the national survey of time exchange projects. Two further working papers (one on the Wisbech context, and one on using ethnographic research methods) are planned.

### **3 Outputs**

The research has led to several publications to date. The interim report draws on these publications and on further emerging research findings. All of the outputs from the evaluation can be can be downloaded from the CCHPR website at:

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2015/Evaluating-Public-Health-Outcomes-Cambridgeshire-Time-Credits-Project>

#### **3.1 Working papers**

Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2016) The potential for Time Credits to generate public health outcomes – a conceptual model. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) Introduction to co-production in research: summary report. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) Introduction to co-production in services: summary report. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) Introduction to time banking and Time Credits. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

#### **3.2 Conference presentations**

Burgess, G. (2016). Health outcomes of place based approaches to building community cohesion: Time Credits in England. Presented at Association of American Geographers and International Society of Urban Health Conference April 2016.

Burgess, G. and Lafortune, L. (2016) Evaluating the Public Health Outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits Project – Presented at SPHR Conference March 2016.

#### **3.3 Emerging findings papers**

Burgess, G. (forthcoming) Wisbech Time Credits – partner organisation case studies. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

Burgess, G. and Markkanen, S. (2016) Wisbech Time Credits – individual member case studies. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

#### **3.4 Blogs**

<http://www.justaddspice.org/blog/evaluating-public-health-outcomes-cambridgeshire-time-credits-wisbech>

<http://www.justaddspice.org/blog/cambridge-centre-housing-planning-research-launch-reports>

## 4 Emerging findings

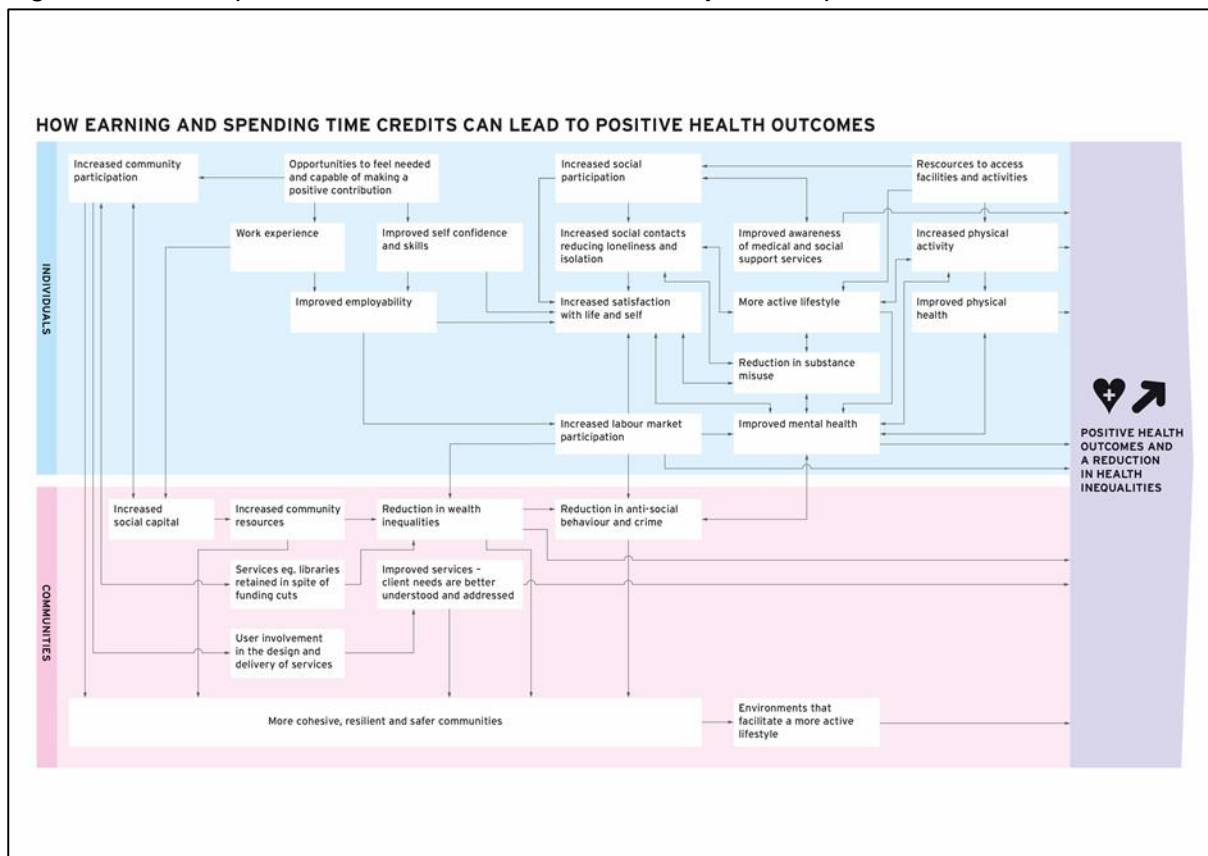
This section presents some emerging findings from the evaluation. The research is ongoing and these preliminary findings will be revisited as further data are collected.

### 4.1 Conceptual development<sup>3</sup>

The key objective of the fourth working paper was to outline how we expect the different activities associated with earning and spending Time Credits to generate public health outcomes and reduce health inequalities.

Figure 1 provides a visual illustration of the conceptual model for how Time Credits might generate positive health outcomes. As this figure shows, we assume positive health outcomes to emerge through a causal process, where a range of ‘lower level’ outcomes (or ‘waypoints’) associated with Time Credits earn and spend activity affect health and wellbeing, potentially across the life-course.

Figure 1: A conceptual model of how Time Credits may lead to positive health outcomes



<sup>3</sup> This section draws on the fourth working paper: Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2016) The potential for Time Credits to generate public health outcomes – a conceptual model. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

The model shows that both earning and spending Time Credits can lead to positive health outcomes and a reduction in health inequalities. The outcomes may be direct or indirect and benefits may accrue to individuals, to the wider community, or to both individuals and communities.

The pathways to positive change can involve different stages. For example, earning Time Credits may increase social participation, which reduces loneliness, increases life satisfaction and therefore improves mental health. Increased social participation can also lead to a more active lifestyle, which increases physical activity and therefore improves physical health.

The relationship between activities related to Time Credits and health outcomes can be either direct or indirect. Some activities impact health very directly. For example, a volunteer may spend their Time Credits to go swimming or to the gym, in which case the health benefit is immediate and directly linked to the activity.

Activities with direct health benefits may also contribute to other positive health outcomes indirectly. For example, using Time Credits to access health and leisure facilities may offer opportunities to expand social networks and reduce loneliness, leading to better mental health.

Activities that are not linked explicitly to health can also have a positive impact. For example, volunteering in a meaningful activity which also provides work experience can lead to improved employability, greater life satisfaction and therefore an improvement in mental health.

Sometimes the pathways to health outcomes can be quite complex, and may involve more than one 'waypoint', for example, when the emotional and psychological rewards from helping others improve mental well-being, which then lead a reduction in depression and substance misuse.

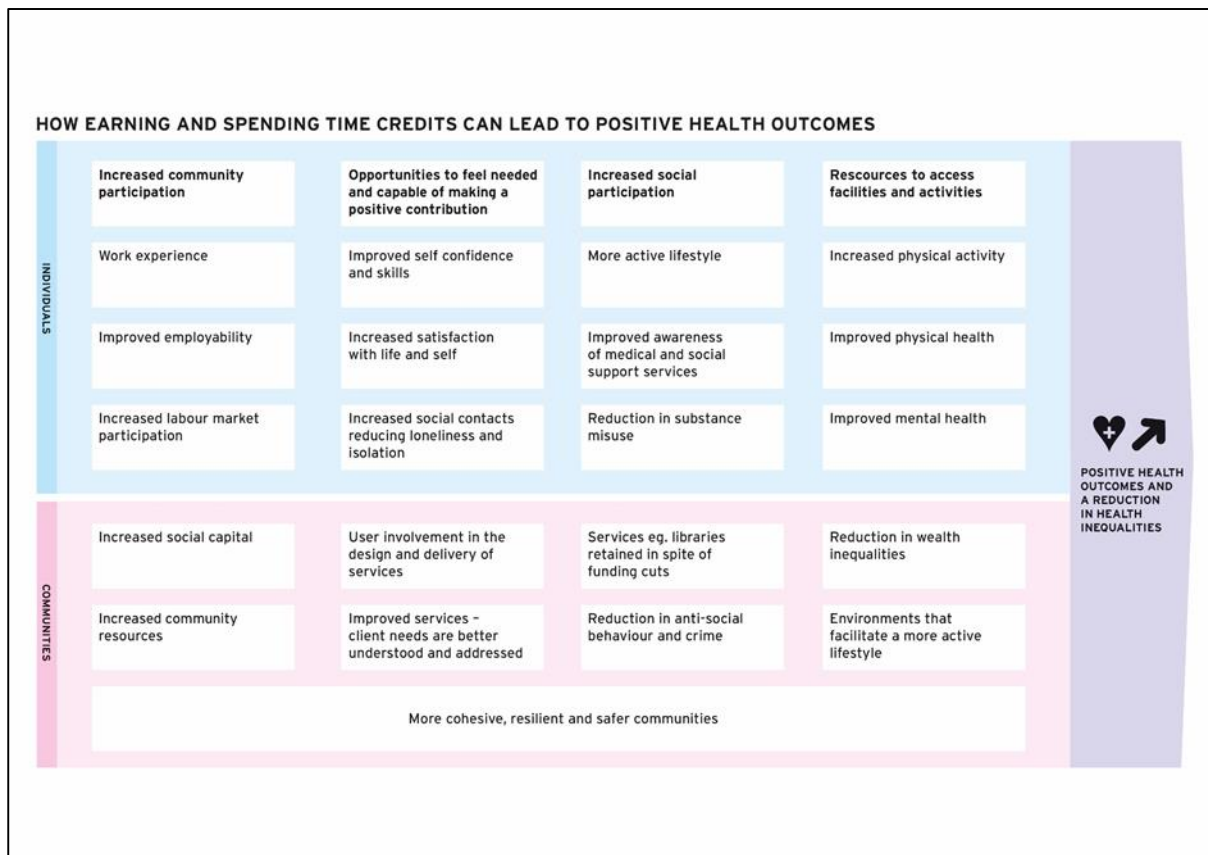
The benefits arising from volunteering and social participation may also reinforce each other. For example, earning and spending Time Credits enables people to engage in a meaningful activity, to learn new skills and to meet new people. This can increase activity levels, strengthen one's social networks and boost self-confidence. Over time, each of these changes can have a positive impact on both mental and physical health.

In some instances, the positive health outcomes relate exclusively to the individual who earns or spends the Time Credits, for example, spending Time Credits to go the gym or the cinema. In other instances, the benefits may be more widespread, supporting positive outcomes across a group or community and can extend to those who are not actively involved in the Time Credit networks. This may be the case, for example, when Time Credit earning activities make additional or extended services available to community members more broadly.

This is a conceptual model of how Time Credits may potentially generate, or contribute to, positive health outcomes. The empirical evidence to support this model is still being collected and the model will be developed in line with findings. One refinement made is the

removal of the pathway arrows, see Figure 2. This makes the diagram easier to read but also reflects our initial findings that the pathways are complex, multi-directional and that it is possible that all of the 'waypoints' are interrelated.

Figure 2: A simplified conceptual model of how Time Credits may lead to positive health outcomes



## 4.2 Stakeholders<sup>4</sup>

The Cambridgeshire Time Credits programme is jointly funded by Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge Housing Society (CHS). It was set up in collaboration with Spice in July 2014, following a successful completion of a nine-month pilot in Wisbech. The idea to support the development of multiple Time Credits networks across the county emerged as a response to the budget cuts that forced the County Council to identify new tangible ways to engage local communities, to build up community resilience, and to reduce and prevent the escalation of need. The County Council was particularly keen on models that could be built up and, after being supported during the initial set-up period, be able to run with less ongoing financial support from the Council.

In the summer 2013, time banks were already in operation in Cambridge and other parts of the county, but the County Council was concerned that the time banking model may not take off in the more deprived areas where activities to engage the community were needed. The

<sup>4</sup>This section draws on the first working paper: Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) Introduction to time banking and Time Credits. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

purpose of the Time Credits programme was to help bring the time banking model to new areas in a way that would enable organisations alongside individuals to act as the driving force to generate momentum for the movement, and that would enable larger numbers of people to get involved. A Spice Time Credits network was already running in neighbouring West Norfolk, with several corporate spend partners in Cambridgeshire. Wisbech's location bordering West Norfolk, together with its size and socioeconomic profile characterised by high levels of need and deprivation, were among the key factors leading to Wisbech being selected for the Time Credits pilot in 2013/2014.

The Wisbech pilot was set up with little financial input and a view of wanting to find out if the Time Credit approach would work in an area like Wisbech, and what outcomes could potentially be achieved. Three local organisations were invited to join at the pilot stage as earn partners, and a few local services signed up as spend partners. Further spend opportunities were available via the West Norfolk Spice Time Credits scheme. All earn partners were also encouraged to develop 'community spend' opportunities for their volunteers, potentially in collaboration with each other. The benchmark targets for the pilot were basic, including the numbers of people engaged, and the number of Time Credits earned and spent. Apart from these, the success of the project was largely measured in terms of the individual experience, i.e. what motivated the earn partners and individual members to get engaged, and what they got out of it.

Positive feedback from the pilot partners encouraged the Community Engagement team to seek further funding to commission Spice to expand the Time Credits programme to include other parts of Cambridgeshire, with an ultimate objective of developing a county-wide network of local Time Credit projects. The model's focus on developing stronger and more resilient communities resonated well with the Building Community Capacity project set up in 2009 to support the transformation of adult social care services in the UK, and attracted the attention of the Children, Families and Adults Directorate (CFA) at the County Council. Its focus on co-production and active community involvement also fitted well with the CFA's new 'Transforming Lives' model, designed to help people and communities to help themselves, to reduce the need for more intense, longer-term support and high-level service dependence among those who could potentially be supported to remain more independent. In 2014, the Cambridgeshire Time Credit programme was allocated a total budget of £251,000 over three years, of which £10,000 per annum comes from CHS and the rest from CFA.

In order to maximise the benefits from the funding, a degree of clarity regarding the target populations was required to develop meaningful benchmarks against which the performance of the scheme would be measured. In collaboration with contributors from the Community Engagement team, Public Health, CFA, CHS and Spice, the following priority areas were agreed upon:

1. Strengthening families
2. Skills and employment
3. Older people

The decision-making process was guided by financial considerations and the working group members' existing knowledge of the potential benefits of volunteering and community

involvement for different population sub-groups. The decision to focus on the high-need groups was born out of the necessity to devise new ways of delivering adult social care to meet the new 2015 Care Act obligations whilst reducing spending as a result of severe budget cuts. However, consideration was also given to who would potentially benefit the most from participation in the Time Credits initiative. The processes through which stakeholders believe Time Credits could help to achieve positive outcomes for each target group are described below:

*Strengthening families* - This objective, the working group believed, could be met through both earn and spend activities. One of the local earn partners was keen to engage parents by encouraging them to volunteer at their children's school and, by volunteering at the school, become more comfortable around the school environment and in helping their children with their studies. Having earned the Time Credits, families could then spend them together to try new things and to undertake activities they may not otherwise be able to afford. During the pilot, it became evident that many of the active participants were from the lower end of the income scale, making the latter consideration particularly relevant.

*Skills and employment* - This objective was inspired by the poor employment figures in parts of Cambridgeshire and existing evidence of time banks' ability to successfully engage unemployed and economically inactive people. Preliminary findings from the Wisbech pilot project suggested that Time Credits incentivised people to engage with activities that enabled them to acquire new skills and work experience, which then helped them to improve their CVs and employability. People's volunteering pathways also seemed to develop over time, and many who started volunteering in jobs that require very basic skills eventually 'moved on' to more demanding tasks as their confidence increased. In addition to the benefits acquired from the earning activities, Time Credits could be spent to access additional training. The potential of Time Credits to help individuals and communities to enhance their social capital was regarded as a worthwhile goal for social as well as economic reasons, and an important step towards developing stronger, more resilient communities.

*Older people* - Organisations supporting older people or providing volunteering opportunities specifically for older people were not part of the Wisbech pilot project. However, Time Credits were thought to be a potentially useful tool for enabling and encouraging older people to support their communities, to facilitate greater levels of social activity among older individuals, and to keep newly retired people active for longer. Spice were able to draw on their experience of engaging older people through targeted prevention programmes in other national Spice projects. Focus on reducing loneliness, social isolation and low activity levels was motivated by health and wellbeing concerns as well as the financial implications of health and social care needs. In particular, the funders were keen for Time Credits to be used to generate intergenerational activity to help build more integrated and cohesive communities.



## **4.3 Partner organisations**

This section draws on interviews with members of local earn organisations that are part of the Wisbech Time Credits network to reflect on emerging findings about the impact of offering Time Credits.

### **4.3.1 Unexpected benefits**

The initial aims of the organisation when deciding to offer Time Credits may not be the only benefits they see as volunteering develops. There have been wider, unexpected benefits. For example, they may have decided to offer Time Credits in order to engage with the community, but have gone on to see the greatest benefit of offering Time Credits being the route it offers some local people into paid employment.

“But what I am most proud of is getting people into jobs. These people would not apply for jobs and now they have paid jobs.”

### **4.3.2 Increasing capacity**

The research suggests that being able to offer Time Credits has enabled organisations to increase the number of volunteers.

As the organisations have increased the number of volunteers, it has also increased the organisation’s capacity and in some cases the services they can make available.

“Some do reading with children which is invaluable. It is one of the most important things. Parents don’t read with their children. TAs are too busy these days and the teachers have no time to sit and read.”

“He has been a god send when we have been short staffed and he is so keen....It has helped us as an organisation when we have been short staffed. The volunteers have helped with a staffing need. The regular customers are used to the volunteers. It helps to build a whole picture of who we help and why. The customers are all for it.”

This increase in capacity and what organisations are able to offer has a positive knock on effect on the wider community. For example, with more volunteers at a school who are able to offer one-to-one reading sessions, children from the local community benefit.

“For the children they just don’t read at home and it has furthered their experience of reading. But also about life, for example, many of the EAL (English as an Additional Language) children don’t know what things like a BBQ are and it opens up their life experiences.”

### **4.3.3 Bringing diverse communities together**

For some organisations, engaging with different people from the local community has led to new ways of perceiving people and has challenged stereotypes.

“It has also changed staff attitudes. Some staff thought that ‘these people’ volunteering would be a hindrance not a help. Then they realised that they have

skills. The staff started to see them in a different way. It has opened up views of some families. In terms of life experiences it has been a big thing. It has been a success in engaging diverse groups. Now we get the EAL (English as an Additional Language) families. They did not think they would be welcome but now they feel they can participate. Understandings have changed.”

It has been effective in bringing diverse people and communities together, breaking down barriers, and allowing people whose lives are quite different to share knowledge and skills, creating more cohesive communities.

#### **4.3.4 Skills awareness**

There has been an increase in the awareness of the skills that people possess.

“There is a volunteer at the moment and she’s the next one I’ve got my eye on for getting into a job. You have to identify their skills and steer them. It is all informal. There is no filling in forms. You have to build up relationships and get to know them. Trust is so important in this area. People have to trust you.”

This has both been a realisation on the part of staff within organisations, that local people have skills to offer, and also on the part of the volunteers themselves who only became aware of their own skills and potential through volunteering and the encouragement of the organisation.

“Getting Time Credits as a reward can help people to broaden their horizons and discover things they might enjoy doing or are good at. Getting a reward makes them more likely to try something they are not sure about without risking losing anything.... This may also help them broaden their horizons in terms of the kinds of jobs they might look for and hence improve their employment prospects”.

“I consider what skills people can offer to us or what we can offer to them – it’s important to look at things from the both sides”.

#### **4.3.5 Routes into employment**

Volunteering has led to the identifying, developing and strengthening of skills. This has a positive impact on volunteers, boosting their confidence and helping to improve their employability.

“Volunteering keeps her skills. [Time Credits volunteer] has applied for jobs and is actively looking for a job. It increases their prospects, especially if it is a job in an area where they volunteer. The process shows they want to go to work, shows willing, that they can keep to a routine. Employers take them more seriously.”

This provides new opportunities on both sides, volunteers gain skills and improved employability, but organisations can also identify suitable employees.

“[Time Credits volunteer] now also has a job here. I really had to persuade her to apply as she was worried her English wasn’t good enough. People often have skills they didn’t know they could use. It makes them feel valued as a person”.

#### **4.3.6 Co-production and reciprocity**

Using Time Credits has led to new ways of working for organisations. Whilst no organisations used or necessarily understood the actual term 'co-production', for some organisations the research suggests that new co-productive relationships are developing and becoming embedded within organisations.

Being able to offer Time Credits where an organisation already had active volunteers has enabled the development of a more reciprocal relationship and organisations are pleased to be able to "give something back" to volunteers.

"It makes the volunteers feel rewarded. They already know we appreciate them but it is nice to be able to give them something. It makes them feel valued and it is good to feel we are giving them something."

"When people have nothing it's nice to be able to offer them something in return for their efforts."

The organisations have quite different client groups and the purpose of working with volunteers varies. Equally what volunteers gain from participation is different depending on their individual circumstances. Some volunteers in the Wisbech network have actively shaped the growth of the network. Examples include designing community spend initiatives and engagement in asset mapping activities together with partner organisations.

#### **4.3.7 Pride and satisfaction**

Organisations are pleased to be able to offer these opportunities.

"Some people wouldn't have been given a chance somewhere else. It puts barriers up. They have nothing to worry about here. It gives people the chance they need. That's what people appreciate."

Those managing Time Credits feel a sense of pride in what has been achieved.

"When I walk past and see they are enjoying it; it is worth it. I feel like I have mothered them all, they are like my children. They need nurturing too."

Offering Time Credits creates a sense of reciprocity and equality.

"It feels more rewarding. Instead of someone volunteering and just saying thank you, you can give them something in return. I try to get them talking about spending and they enjoy it.... They know they will get something at the end and feel more appreciated as they get something back for it."

#### **4.3.8 Challenges in developing internal spend opportunities**

One of the key challenges identified by organisations in working with Time Credits has been developing spend opportunities that are internal or community based. Most are reliant on volunteers spending their Time Credits on external activities, most frequently, the cinema, swimming and the gym. Organisations face a number of constraints in developing their own spend options. One is staff time and resources available. Some staff are already over-

stretched and trying to offer spend opportunities outside of their working hours, or the opening hours of their organisation, is too difficult.

A further challenge is the recognition that volunteers place a clear value on the time they have spent volunteering and want to see this value reflected in the spend activities. Volunteers do not necessarily want to spend their Time Credits on low cost activities, such as after school clubs that cost £1 or discos and events with a £2 entry fee, when they can spend them on higher cost activities such as the cinema which might otherwise be prohibitively expensive.

“We can’t charge two Time Credits and only £2 as that is two hours of time for people who have earned them.”

Some organisations have offered spend opportunities, which take time and resources to organise, and had no volunteers want to participate. In some cases, this has been because volunteers felt they could get ‘better value’ on other spend opportunities.

“They are always thinking about getting their value. Value is a big thing. And being able to go together. People understand value. They don’t want to spend their Credits if it is not good value. Some will say “it is below minimum wage if I work for an hour and spend it on that”. When we did bingo, no one took it up because it was only £2. After school clubs are only £1. When [two Time Credits volunteers] took their kids to the cinema they walked a mile and a half to the cinema and made it into a whole day out, they went to McDonalds afterwards. It was the only thing their children did in the holidays.”

Sometimes there has been no take up because people are nervous about doing things that feel out of their usual comfort zone and immediate circle of acquaintances.

“We tried day trips to the sea and joined with [Time Credits organisation] but no one came as they did not want to go on the bus with other people they did not know”.

Organisations also said that people prefer to spend Time Credits on something they can do as a family, often also with other families, and will not spend on more individualised activities.

One challenge for organisations has been negotiating how to offer Time Credits when they also use volunteers for fundraising activities. Some organisations have taken the view that their staff have always volunteered for certain fundraising activities, that too many Credits would be accrued, and that it is not appropriate when relatively large amounts of money are being raised. This has created some tension within organisations.

“We won’t pay Time Credits for an event earning over £500. And if the staff are happy doing things anyway, like the disco, they don’t need to earn Time Credits. It was very difficult. Some people did not speak to me for a while.”

Other organisations have also not offered certain activities as spend opportunities as they charge for these as part of the organisation’s fundraising and need the income.

“Spending opportunities are hard and budgets are so tight. We would like to say use the Time Credits for the school disco but it is money making for fundraising so it would take funds away from the school. We have a summer fair but it is for fundraising. We don’t rent out rooms much but we need what we get and can’t rent them out for free”.

Some felt that they could not charge Time Credits for certain activities as they would have to charge actual cash to other organisation members and thought this would create tension and was against their ethos.

“We could offer something here but if we charge Time Credits we would have to charge money to other people and they would complain. They already pay rent so people would see it as a problem if we charged them for things here.”

Organisations are aware of the rationale to develop internal and community spend opportunities, and of the expectation to deliver a community spend offer with the support of the Time Credits Project Manager, but felt they were doing what they could within the constraints they face.

“We can’t come up with it given the circumstances. I am only paid 9 to 3 in term time and I have my own pressures outside of work and my own family. But if I thought it would work I would give up the time. We offered it and no one took it up. No one took up the after school clubs. They don’t think it is good value.”

“Every organisation has a different ethos. You have to make it work for you and it has to be managed by you. It is a fine line. You couldn’t tell another organisation how to make it work for you.”

Community spend is a vital part of the Time Credits model, and is a way to measure how well it is working as a tool for co-production and community and user-led transformation. In Wisbech, community spend aims to provide local and accessible activities so people don’t have to travel to find ways to spend their Time Credits. Spice support partner organisations to innovate their community spend offer within their existing resource, making best use of the assets in the local community.

#### **4.3.9 Lack of local spend opportunities**

Organisations felt that there was a lack of local spend opportunities in the area, partly because Wisbech is relatively isolated and because many volunteers cannot afford transport.

“Spend is limited because of our geographical area.”

“But it is hard to spend them here as none of the volunteers can afford transport. It would be ideal if they could spend them on transport, like get on the bus. But you can’t spend them on things like that. So spend is difficult. That’s the trouble, there are lots of rules.... So there are only two main options to spend them on. There is not much else in Wisbech. And none have transport. There just isn’t much local spend.”

Spice are constantly working to grow and diversify the corporate spend offer within local and national networks. Network days and targeted training aim to facilitate member organisations to access the wider spend network through spend trips in order to encourage spend outside the Wisbech area and negate the challenge of poor rural transport infrastructure.

#### **4.3.10 Pressures on staff**

Generally, managing Time Credits within an organisation does take up staff time, most said that it took up more time than they had expected, but that it was not unmanageable.

“I am so short of time. It is overwhelming sometimes. Things like the data input spreadsheet could easily slip so as soon as I get half an hour I start.”

“What is challenging is me having the time. It takes up a lot of time, more than I thought it would.”

Monitoring and data input is time consuming but people manage, although they stressed that they could not cope with any more than the existing monitoring.

“The admin part is ok if you keep on top of it. It is more time consuming than I expected but it is manageable. I wouldn't want it to be any more.”

Some organisations have found that offering Time Credits can incur organisational costs, for example, when paid staff have to oversee earning opportunities and so other paid staff are needed to cover their normal duties. However, it is worth recognising that these additional costs are offset by a reduction in the cost of garden maintenance, for example.

“One of the difficulties with Time Credits is that although they can be earned through activities such as tending to the garden, it often requires a paid staff member to also be there, overseeing the earning activity. As a result, enabling the residents to earn Time Credits comes at a cost as more paid staff are required to cover the time other paid members of staff are spending supervising the Time Credit earners.”

Spice encourages organisations to build on the skills of their volunteers to support the administration and delivery of Time Credit initiatives. This upskilling also supports a key priority of Cambridgeshire Time Credits. Basic monitoring data is essential to monitor the growth and progress of the Time Credits network, and to ensure Spice are engaging a wide range of people in Wisbech.

#### **4.3.11 The network**

Wisbech has a fairly well developed partner network and they come together quarterly at the network meeting. Those who attend find the meetings useful in part, mainly because they like to hear what others are doing and check that they are doing ok. However, communication between partners is limited to the meetings and the same people tend to go to the meetings every time. Some staff said that they do not have time to attend.

“The network meetings could be improved. It is always the same people. Sometimes I feel picked on and come away feeling why did I go? Spice wanted us to organise the meetings and take notes but we don't have time. The meetings are helpful for

checking that what you are doing is ok. I enjoy hearing about the others. It gives you ideas. It is not a waste of time. I understand why we are being asked on things like spend. The meeting is a whole afternoon. I get all the [organisation service users] asking where I have been.”

“We don’t have much contact with the other Wisbech partners except at the network meetings. They are sometimes useful but it is often the same issues mentioned and the same people who go.”

Organisations are encouraged to identify how network meetings will best serve the development of their Time Credits initiative, to take a lead in shaping future meetings and to suggest and deliver content.

#### **4.3.12 Challenges in offering Time Credits**

There have been internal problems at some organisations unrelated to Time Credits that have made maintaining a volunteering system difficult. There are also a small number of organisations that are keen to join the Time Credits network but have struggled to find the best way to offer Time Credits. This is the case for a couple of organisations that already have volunteer schemes in place, and so have been trying to think of a slightly different way for people to volunteer and earn Time Credits. There can also be an issue of equity, where it is deemed inequitable to offer Time Credits to the volunteers in one local organisation when there is another branch of the organisation whose volunteers would not be able to earn Time Credits because they are out of the project catchment area.

#### **4.3.13 Positive impacts on volunteers**

Organisations highlighted a range of positive impacts on volunteers. They reported seeing an increase in the confidence of volunteers, a new sense of achievement, and a growth in their personal self-belief. Volunteering enables people to develop skills, but it has also given them a routine and improved their employability.

For some people, volunteering is a way to learn the culture of working, which they are not used to, and helps them to get ready for paid employment.

“They have to learn about work patterns, that you have to start on time, not take cigarette breaks whenever you like. They found this very difficult. Even what to wear is hard to learn. These are skills we take for granted. They would turn up for gardening in a boob tube with love bites. I have to coach them discretely. I want it to be positive. It is a challenge for me to have to talk to people about these things.”

Organisations said that some volunteers treat it as a job.

“[Time Credits volunteers] treat it more like a job. It is what works for them. Sometimes [Time Credits volunteer] comes in and says that someone stopped to chat to her on the way and she tells them “I’ve got to go to work”. She comes in from across town now. It is like a work routine. She sets an alarm and gets up, gets a shower and dressed and comes to work. She does Tuesday to Thursday 10.30 to 3.30. Sometimes she comes in on her day off and will ask if we need a hand. She enjoys it.”

“He treats it like a job. He is in most days for a full day. We have to cap the Time Credits, so they can volunteer as much as they like but can’t earn too many. There is no point, they would never be able to spend that many. We have to encourage them to have days off to spend them.”

Organisations see clear benefits for the volunteers who enter paid employment.

“Some volunteers are now employed. They have never been taught the etiquette of working. I hope they are financially better off but the greater thing is that they feel better about themselves and thank you for the opportunity. Most can’t believe they are in.”

Organisations have seen volunteers develop a more active lifestyle. This is in part through the volunteering activities and in part through access to new activities by spending Time Credits.

“We have one volunteer who uses his Time Credits to go swimming with his son and that has made him a lot fitter, and another volunteer who uses her Time Credits to go to the gym, which she would not otherwise be able to afford.”

Organisations see benefits to volunteers in spending their Time Credits. Families do activities together and for some children spending Time Credits is the only time they do anything outside the house as a family.

“They do it as a family, they don’t want to spend individually. These are things they would not do otherwise. It is especially important when the kids don’t go out otherwise, some families will not even go up town together, they only do things with Time Credits... One lady, her kids never left the house but she will use Time Credits to take them out in the holidays.”

Time Credits enable volunteers to do activities that they would otherwise not be able to afford.

“It is valuable to parents because things are so expensive.”

These spend opportunities have positive impacts on their health and activity levels.

“People have very little money and Time Credits spending gives them access to things that help their health and wellbeing such as going to the gym or swimming. It is a motivation to get out and about and not to just hang about in their room or communal areas.”

These changes can have a positive impact on the mental health of volunteers.

“She is always in a happy mood when she is here, she always has a smile on her face. It doesn’t faze her when we are busy. She enjoys what she is doing.”



“It gets them up and moving. It is a bonus for some people just to get up. It is good to be on their feet all day. [Time Credits volunteer] said that she is too busy when she is here to go out for a fag except on her break and so she has really cut down a lot on smoking. She is more confident. People at the beginning say “I won’t be able to take order, I can’t talk to customers, I’m too shy”. Then after a while they start saying “I’ll do that”. But they decide to take these next steps. [Time Credits volunteer] now answers the phone and has no problem talking to the public. You see a lot of change when people volunteer.”

## **4.4 Time Credit volunteers**

This section draws on interviews with Time Credits volunteers to reflect on emerging findings about the impact of earning and spending Time Credits. Whilst this section is divided into separate headings, in reality these issues are inter-related and multi-directional.

### **4.4.1 Improvements in physical health**

Volunteers have seen some improvements in their physical health through earning Time Credits. Some of the health benefits come from lifestyle changes, for example, being busy through volunteering can help to reduce smoking and weight gain.

“I was told that I need to keep my weight down. So I thought, if I come here, it’s better for me. If I’m on my feet all day that’ll help me keep my weight down instead of sitting next door in my room all day, moping all the time, and succumbing to depression.”

Earning and spending Time Credits can boost the activity levels of volunteers.

“Going to the college to get my hair done helps me out in here, ‘cause you need to look smart. The cinema helps me chill out and unwind. The swimming helps with my scar.”

### **4.4.2 Improvements in mental health**

The combined effect of the benefits resulting from earning and spending Time Credits can be an improvement in mental health.

“I wanted to get myself back into something I enjoy. I see the children and the progress they make in reading and I love it. It is refreshing. I come out and I feel like ‘wow’, I’ve got my energy back.”

“Since I’ve been working here, my depression has been a lot better and I’ve got a lot more confidence to talk to people... I’m more confident and upbeat, and I get up at a reasonable time.”

“It gives me something to do instead of sitting in the flat all day. I’m more chilled when I’m here... I feel more happier with myself cause I always have a smile on my face. And I feel more aware about everything around me... And me and my partner can have some time apart so we are not in each other’s necks all the time - he goes off to do his own thing, and I come here.”

#### **4.4.3 Reduced loneliness and social exclusion**

Earning Time Credits can help people to feel less lonely, which is a known key determinant of poor health.

“I was getting lonely. I thought what am I going to do with myself? I was feeling better in myself so I approached the school and asked what can I do? I had never heard of Time Credits. They got me straight in. I love it”.

People can suffer from social exclusion and earning Time Credits is a way to get engaged with the local community and meet people.

“There are other days if I want to pop over if I get bored. Even just to get out of the house is nice.”

Earning Time Credits has helped some people to develop new social networks which make them feel more positive.

“When I went to the first Time Credit meeting, at that point, I never ever had anybody come visit me... the only people I spoke to were my neighbours. I always worried, because I am diabetic, if I’m ill that nobody would find me. Now, I go to that school every day, I may go in sad but I come out with a smile on my face... I finally got somebody, who, if I don’t turn up at school they will come looking to see if I’m alright.”

#### **4.4.4 Improved self-confidence**

Earning Time Credits has boosted some volunteers’ confidence with knock on effects on improving their mental health.

“I feel more confident in myself...I feel more aware about everything around me, which I never used to be... With my depression I never used to work out how to remember things that well. But now, I don’t need to be asked to do things, I just get on with it. I’ve got myself into a routine and I don’t need people all the time telling me to do this and that... I keep going and keep on top of things.”

Volunteering gives people a routine and a purpose.

“Before Time Credits, it was mostly TV and computer games. But now it’s more work, work, work, work. I’m more out of the house, I do something I like doing now. It’s made me happier that I can come out and do something for someone else.”

“I get up at 8am and don’t see my bed until 11 o’clock at night for three days. Before that, I used to sleep until the afternoon, but now I have a reason to get out of bed”.

Earning Time Credits has had a beneficial impact on the way in which some volunteers view themselves.

“It has made me feel that I’m a person again. I feel appreciated. I’m not just a person at home doing housework.”

#### **4.4.5 Making a positive contribution**

Volunteering has given some people a sense of achievement.

“It’s brought me to life. Since September, I feel like I’m useful again. I feel that I am doing something to help somebody, and that’s what I enjoy doing... It’s a big achievement for me.”

“I need a job. It’s not for the money. It’s for my self-belief. And it’s a role model for my kids. I don’t want my kids to think that ‘oh mommy just sits at home all day’. I don’t feel that’s a good role model for them.”

Earning Time Credits can make volunteers feeling needed and appreciated.

“I love it. It’s like being a mum again. Mine are all grown up and working”.

It leads to people feeling useful and that they are making a contribution to their community.

“It is a nice feeling, like ‘yes we have helped here’, and it’s nice to do. I enjoy being with the younger children. It fits around my children. I am a stay at home mum. And I hope it makes a difference to the school”.

“I think it’s wonderful. I enjoy it. It’s something that I love doing, and I am putting something into the community.”

#### **4.4.6 Skills development**

Earning Time Credits has helped some people to develop their skills and learning.

“It is easy to lose touch. It gives me the confidence to do something, getting me out to do something. It makes me get up in the mornings. I’m only 54. No one wants to employ disabled people. I’m learning myself about what I can do.”

“Experience, lots of experience. More experience than I hoped to get. More knowledge. Satisfaction that I can do something well. And I enjoy doing it.”

#### **4.4.7 Strengthened family and wider relationships**

Spending Time Credits has had a positive impact on families and children. It gives families the opportunity and impetus to do activities together.

“Now I’m doing it mostly for her.... Before this we couldn’t really go to the cinema, it’s so expensive, but now it’s just two hours of my time.”

“I’m still spending on movies, but not so much. I’m earning more Time Credits, a lot of it goes now to my little girl to spend on movies, trips. My wife goes to the college to get her hair done. I’m using the Time Credits more for them than it is for me.”

Doing these activities together as a family can strengthen the family unit.

“Because we go out more, we are more close as a family.”

Some volunteers share Time Credits to use with other people, helping to benefit others but also maintaining social networks.

“When it comes to spending I save them up. I have some friend’s children come to stay. There are two girls, 6 and 9. One has Down’s Syndrome.... They come up in the holidays. They are like my extended grandchildren. We go swimming in Whittlesey and to the pictures at the Light cinema in Wisbech”.

#### **4.4.8 Access to activities**

Time Credits give people access to activities that they might not otherwise be able to afford or would not have tried.

“It does really help as with so many children we wouldn’t do it otherwise as you have to pay and with four kids it would be expensive. We would probably not do it without Time Credits as it’s too expensive”.

“But there are some things that I couldn’t justify spending money on, but now I can go cause I’m earning it.”

Being able to access activities that are otherwise too expensive helps to keep people active.

“I don’t get a lot of money. And these days, the cost of cinema tickets and swimming are really high... With Time Credits, it doesn’t interfere with your benefits, it’s not money but it’s credit, so you can use it whenever you wanna use it... we find stuff to do during the day when we are not working, it’s like, on my day off, I can go to the cinema instead of sitting in the flat all day”.

#### **4.4.9 Hoarding Time Credits**

Some people do hoard their Credits rather than spend them which means they are missing out on the benefits that comes from spending Time Credits.

“I save them. I have a huge ‘wadge’ at the moment. I didn’t use them at first. Now I have realised you can use them at the cinema”.

Gifting Time Credits is encouraged within the model and Spice networks allow their members to donate unused Time Credits to a friend, neighbour or a family member. Some of the volunteers interviewed have given Time Credits to family or friends.

#### **4.4.10 Lack of spend activities**

It is apparent from the interviews to date that volunteers in Wisbech only use a small range of spend activities. At the moment, most volunteers spend their Time Credits on going to the cinema, going swimming, going to the gym, the cinema and on hair and beauty treatments. These are very valued. Several people mentioned that they would find it helpful if Time Credits could be spent at a local children’s soft play. Some mentioned that the lack of local spend opportunities that can be accessed without transport limits where they can spend their Credits.

The scale and diversity of the spend network across the county is continually developing and Spice work to build the capacity of community partners to organise and participate in spend trips, improving access to the wider spend network.

#### **4.4.11 Outcomes for priority areas**

The Time Credits project has a range of target outcomes. Although the focus in the evaluation is on health, the research so far suggests that there has been more progress in the priority areas of strengthening families and skills and employment than on engaging or having an impact on older people, particularly the 'older old'. The Cambridgeshire Time Credits Strategic Group has been actively engaged in supporting targeted activities to boost engagement with the older people priority.

### **4.5 Co-production**

#### **4.5.1 Research collaboration**

The research is a collaboration between different stakeholders with a common goal. The Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) is carrying out the evaluation in collaboration with Spice, the Cambridgeshire County Council Community Engagement Team, Cambridge Housing Society, and the Cambridge Institute of Public Health (CIPH). This type of collaborative, or co-productive, way of conducting research is leading to both opportunities and challenges.

We meet on a monthly basis and quarterly with a steering group. We liaise by phone and email in between meetings. Spice/CCC comment on all draft field work tools and outputs and we agree them before finalising them. Spice raise awareness of the research in their monthly newsletter, in their blog and through social media. This is all very useful but does slow down the speed at which we can agree field work tools and outputs for publication. Co-production is not a term that is very common in the research world and there has been a process of mutual learning that has been of benefit to the research team.

#### **4.5.2 Organisations and volunteers**

Co-production is not a term that any of the research participants so far are familiar with. However, there is emerging evidence of the core principles of equality and reciprocity in the relationships between organisations and volunteers and this is an area for further exploration.

## **5 Conclusions**

### **5.1 Methodological challenges**

One of the key challenges posed in the evaluation is moving beyond qualitative evidence. The use of the validated health scales in the longitudinal survey was intended to collect data that had the potential to be used in cost-utility analyses (converting the total scores into quality adjusted life years). However, the sample of new volunteers joining the Time Credits project in Wisbech in the survey timeframe was not large enough to collect meaningful data, even for the first wave of baseline data collection. This precludes the use of a follow up survey after six months volunteering to assess any change in health, health behaviours or circumstances.

The study is collecting data through surveys that do not use a validated health scale and through qualitative interviews and more ethnographic methods. These data provide evidence of the outcomes of earning and spending Time Credits and have impact as ways of demonstrating the outcomes. However, it has not been possible to collect data that can be translated into the quality of life indicators that are often used in the public health world to compare the benefits of investing in different health interventions. Without such data it is not possible to explore a financial return on investment.

The Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES) is intended to be experimental and innovative and a means to test the feasibility of different methodologies for collecting evidence. The research suggests that a longitudinal survey using a validated health questionnaire needs a larger sample to gain sufficient responses to be meaningful. Studies that have used similar surveys have been published with sample sizes as small as twenty people in the second phase. A larger number of respondents would be needed in the first wave of surveys to account for an unavoidable attrition rate. The number of participants in these published studies is not particularly high. It is likely that such a survey would gain a sufficient number of respondents if conducted using a larger sample, for example, new members joining Time Credits projects across a number of areas.

### **5.2 Emerging evidence of positive outcomes for organisations**

The interviews so far show that offering Time Credits has enabled organisations to recruit more volunteers and increase their capacity. It has also challenged stereotypes and brought diverse people together in a way that makes the local community more cohesive. There has been a recognition of skills that exist in the community and a desire to nurture these and support people into employment. Offering Time Credits has allowed organisations to develop a more reciprocal relationship with volunteers.

### **5.3 Emerging evidence of positive outcomes for volunteers**

The interviews show that earning Time Credits can have both direct and indirect health benefits for individuals. People gained a sense of purpose and felt that they were making a positive contribution which increased their life satisfaction and improved their mental health. They became more physically active and more socially connected. There is also evidence of increased confidence and development of skills and work experience to support moving into paid employment. Spending Time Credits gave members resources to access activities and services that they would not otherwise be able to afford. Time Credits were spent on

activities which lead to a more active lifestyle, such as swimming, with direct health benefits. They were also spent on family activities which lead indirectly to positive health outcomes by improving social capital, social participation and overall wellbeing. One issue to explore further in the research is that such benefits may only be experienced by the most active members.

#### **5.4 Going forward**

Time Credits provide the opportunity to be active citizens, to share experiences and skills and make positive contributions that foster a sense of inclusiveness and enable people to help shape their own community. The research suggests that they are an efficient tool for engaging people to develop more inclusive, cohesive and resilient communities.

Time Credits are a relatively simple concept, but they are a complex community intervention with numerous interconnected outcomes and multiple pathways to positive change. The research so far shows that there are both challenges and opportunities in evidencing the public health outcomes of an intervention such as Time Credits. It suggests that there are benefits for individuals relating to improved health, wellbeing, skills and self-confidence. There are also benefits to organisations and to the wider community. This is ongoing research and further data will be collected to evidence the pathways to positive health outcomes.