

**Cambridge** Centre  
for Housing &  
Planning Research

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

Working paper 5

Time Credits in Wisbech

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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 the Cambridgeshire County Council Community Engagement Team, Spice, 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.

The main outputs will consist of an interim and final report with research findings detailing project outcomes for individuals, organisations and the wider community, disseminated in a range of accessible formats, e.g. a film, and a user guide aimed at local authorities, those commissioning and delivering health and social care services and those involved in establishing Time Credit programmes.

This short report presents some of the background to Wisbech, some specific socio-economic and health issues and why Time Credits were piloted in the town. It describes the earn and spend partners and concludes with some emerging findings about the impact of earning and spending Time Credits.

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

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## **Introduction**

This paper is one of a series of Working Papers, each of which focuses on a separate aspect of the research. The purpose of this paper is to describe the context in which the Time Credits programme operates. The first section provides an introduction to Wisbech, a little of the area's history and a description of what the town is like today. The second section profiles key demographic and socio-economic factors in Wisbech followed by a section on the specific health issues in the area. This sets the background to the Time Credits programme and the specific issues Time Credits were intended to address.

This paper draws on desk-based research of existing literature on Wisbech and the health profile of the town and surrounding areas. It also makes use of data collected through qualitative interviews with partner organisations in Wisbech (known as earn partners), face to face interviews with Time Credit members and key stakeholders from Spice and Cambridgeshire County Council.

# 1 Wisbech

Wisbech is a historic inland port on the river Nene to the north of Cambridgeshire. It is the largest town in Fenland District, however, parts of its eastern edge are within Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough. The town has benefited from its location within an agricultural region and following the draining of the fens, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries Wisbech became a prosperous port. Local brewery Elgoods, in continuous use for over 200 years, reflects the changing economy of the Fens. Its location on the site of a former tannery marks the point at which the local economy shifted from sheep-rearing to agriculture (Thurman, 1998). The Georgian architecture, particularly along the banks of the Nene (the North and South Brinks), 'the Crescent' in the town centre and the National Trust property, Peckover House and gardens, are all reflections of this former prosperity. The Fenland town was also the birthplace of two notable social reformers, the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, son of the Headmaster of Wisbech Grammar School, whose monument sits in the town centre, and the housing campaigner and one of the founders of the National Trust Octavia Hill whose birthplace on South Brinks is now a museum (ibid).

There is still a functioning port and agriculture and food production are still the mainstays of the town's economy. Wisbech is seen as having the potential to grow and provide more retail and housing although this growth is constrained by poor transport links (Fenland DC, 2014). Improving transport infrastructure is seen as critical to the town's future economic prosperity. The proximity to Cambridge, a major driver of the UK economy, and the comparatively low property prices in Wisbech are seen as a major opportunity for the town if the rail connection can be re-opened (Wisbech 2020, 2014; Wisbech Rail; 2016). In terms of the town's retail offer it is defined as a 'town centre' larger than 'district centres' such as March and Chatteris but smaller than regional centres such as Peterborough (Fenland DC, 2014).

Agriculture and food (agri-food) production are central to the town's economy. Furthermore, this is a sector with potential for further expansion in the future (Burgess et al, 2014). The dominance of agri-food businesses (manufacturing is the largest sector in the local economy and within this food manufacturing is by far the largest sub-category) is both a strength and a weakness for Wisbech. On the positive side this is a stable and growing sector of the local economy with the potential for further growth (ibid). The downside of this is the nature of the employment created which is often unattractive to young people (ibid), seasonal, erratic and insecure. It is an industry that has to respond both to agricultural growing seasons and rapidly shifting consumer demands, for example, flowers for Mothering Sunday, strawberries and BBQ food when the sun shines and ready-meals when it does not. This leads to considerable peaks and troughs in the demand for labour. The current town vision 'Wisbech 2020' has achieved some success in creating the potential to raise skill levels in the local economy through the opening of a new Technology Centre at the College of West Anglia's Isle Campus in Wisbech in 2014. This offers opportunities for training in engineering as well as vocational training in hairdressing and beauty therapy.

## 2 Demographic and socio-economic profile

Measures of the population of Wisbech vary from around 23,000 (Cambridgeshire Insight, 2013) for the town itself to around 40,000 if the surrounding areas are included (Wisbech 2020, 2014). Whilst Cambridgeshire is an affluent county, Wisbech is at the centre of a cluster of wards with high levels of deprivation and contains the two most deprived wards in the county, with some seeing the highest proportion of benefits claimants in Fenland. In the town itself the population tends to be younger than in the surrounding areas with the largest age group being 25-29 year olds. This may well be a reflection of the nature of the local economy which is heavily oriented towards the low skilled, often insecure manual labour required by the agri-food sector. Measures of the travel to work area (an approximate reflection of where the majority of the workforce live and work) suggest overall levels of unemployment that are slightly below the national average (for men employment levels are slightly below average whereas for women they are above). However, they are considerably lower than other towns and cities in East Anglia, in particular Kings Lynn in West Norfolk which shares a similar geography to Wisbech. The workforce itself is consistent with this focus of the local economy on the agri-food business. The proportion of people working in processing and machine operating roles is much higher than national or local averages. This is also true of people working in the leisure industry and caring professions which, likewise, tend to be lower wage occupations. These are not matched by potentially higher earning roles with very few people in professional occupations or in senior and managerial roles.

One particular consequence of the growth of the agri-food sector is that it has attracted a large influx of migrants, most recently from Eastern Europe (the A8 Accession countries that joined the EU during its 2004 enlargement). There is evidence that so far the migrant population has been relatively transient with a high rate of 'churn' (people constantly arriving and leaving) and early waves of migration from Hungary and Portugal giving way to migrants from rural parts of Poland and Latvia (Haffenden et al., 2015). The figure of one third of the population now being Eastern European migrants is often quoted. Certainly Fenland District as a whole has seen the largest proportional increase in the East of England (211%) in the non-UK born population between the 2001 and the 2011 census (Krausova and Vargas-Silva, 2013), supporting the picture of a large influx of migrants into a relatively small town.

One consequence of this rapid population influx has been the impact on community cohesion. It is hard to be certain of the extent of the problems this has posed as the specific issues faced by Wisbech have often been picked up by the national press as emblematic of wider debates about immigration, and particularly EU migration from the A8 countries. The national press tends to focus on the increase in shops in the town centre catering for Eastern Europeans and articles will often contain comments from local people on the perception of segregation and an apparent decline in law and order. Some specific issues such as overcrowding do generate problems for those unfortunate enough to live in the vicinity of badly maintained and poorly run HMOs (Houses of Multiple Occupation). However, it is also the case that Eastern European foodstores have brought life to the town centre at a time when high street retailers are struggling. May 2013 saw anti-EU anti-migrant protests in the town but also responses from groups supporting the migrant community with the Mayor and local MP speaking out about the benefits migration has brought as well as the difficulties. There is evidence that, at least within the town, initial tensions have reduced over time

(Rutter, 2015). Politically, whilst the area is represented by UKIP Councillors on the County Council, Fenland District Council is almost completely dominated by Conservatives, with two independent councillors representing Waterlees ward in Wisbech.

Migration has also thrown up a number of specific issues, particularly around housing. Affordability is problematic across Cambridgeshire yet even in Fenland, a relatively affordable area, prices are 4.7 times average incomes (Cambridgeshire JSNA 2014/15). The high cost of housing has been one factor in the exploitation of migrants by gangmasters and, in particular, overcrowding. Both have seen a response from multiple agencies with the recent high profile conviction of two Latvian gangmasters (Lawrence, 2016) and also a more coordinated response to the problem of overcrowding and HMOs. The latter has been addressed by Operation Pheasant, a coordinated approach by Fenland District Council, the Police, Home Office, Fire and Rescue Services, HMRC and the Gangmaster Licensing Authority. This has tackled the multiple and related issues of exploitation, fraud and the safety as well as overcrowding of HMOs and as migrants begin to bring their families these problems affect children as well as adult workers.

### 3 Health profile

There may be some specific health issues associated with the type of migration experienced by Wisbech and Fenland, however, these are in addition to existing health problems associated with deprivation. There are some indications that certain lifestyle behaviours such as smoking and excessive use of alcohol may be more prevalent amongst the migrant population in Fenland who are more often young and either unskilled or working in unskilled occupations (Haffenden, 2015). Other issues that are related to the levels of migration are access to services such as schools and in particular, GP services. This may lead to under-reporting of health problems amongst this group and is an issue that migrants themselves have raised as a problem in the UK (Haffenden et al., 2015). Work is currently underway on an updated Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) on Eastern European Economic Migrants in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. This is an update on the 2009 JSNA and may identify further issues or current problems in more detail.

Whilst many indicators point to Fenland as similar to the UK average this has to be set against the fact that in Cambridgeshire as a whole many areas are above average. This can be seen in life expectancy which is 6.8 years lower for men and 5.0 years lower for women in the most deprived area of Cambridgeshire, Waterlees in Wisbech, than in the least deprived (Cambridgeshire JSNA 2014/15). Other indicators where public health outcomes in Fenland are significantly worse than the average for England are excess weight and obesity amongst adults and physical activity below the recommended levels (ibid). Levels of smoking are generally higher as is fuel poverty and mental health referrals for both adults and children (ibid). Children in Fenland experience some of the highest levels of various 'vulnerability factors' that relate to health, family or their environment leading to relatively poor outcomes in later life. These include poor educational performance for both children and parents, low levels of breastfeeding and high levels of teenage pregnancy and young mothers, the overcrowding that is a specific issue in Fenland as well as above average levels of hospital admission and self-harm.

Whilst the strategic assessments cited identify the type of health inequalities faced by people in Fenland and Wisbech, the ethnographic methodology adopted in this evaluation adds a further layer of meaning to the statistics. Visiting Wisbech, and speaking with both the earn partners and the people they work with, allows us to identify the health problems people face in more detail. These relate to the social determinants of health discussed in a previous working paper (Markkanen and Burgess, 2016). It may be the case that these are not perceived as health problems given that issues such as social isolation or low self-esteem are quite rightly perceived as negative in their own right. As a result, many of the earn partners may see tackling low self-esteem as important because of the way it inhibits employment opportunities. Likewise, social isolation may be perceived as a problem due to its negative impact on community cohesion. Nevertheless, these are all known to have a negative impact on health behaviours and outcomes. The specific issues that have been observed so far indicate that unemployment, and the associated limited access to leisure facilities, including opportunities for exercise, is a problem for many Time Credits members. On top of this there are some members who have or have had problems of low self-esteem and also social isolation. Some individuals isolate themselves and do not engage with their immediate community, family, friends and neighbours. There are also additional problems of

community isolation meaning that some individuals are unlikely to venture outside of their own community and geographical area. This further reduces opportunities to access leisure facilities and to interact with a wider group of people.

## 4 Why Time Credits are being offered in Wisbech

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 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.

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 socio-economic 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 in 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 programme. 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:

- Strengthening families
- Skills and employment
- Older people

## **5 Time Credit earn partners**

This section provides an overview of the organisations in Wisbech where people can volunteer and earn Time Credits.

### **5.1 Community House**

Founded in 2002 Wisbech Community House is located in the Waterlees ward. It aims to provide advice and guidance to people living in Wisbech and the surrounding areas. The building itself is owned by the housing association Circle Housing Roddons whilst staffing is provided by Fenland District Council with funding secured, at least for the current financial year, from the Department of Work and Pensions. In the past staffing levels have been higher with up to six staff, a mix of full and part time workers. The project now runs with a manager and one full time Community House Officer, based in the House, who is also the Time Credits Coordinator.

People are referred to the Community House by Wisbech Job Centre but unlike some other work preparation programmes attendance is voluntary meaning people do not face sanctions and loss of benefits if they fail to attend. It is open from nine to five, Monday to Friday and people can arrange meetings to improve their IT skills, develop their CV and to work on building confidence and managing anxiety about returning to work. There are also two drop-in sessions on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. There is a large Community Garden attached to the House and on Tuesday mornings a group meets to work in the garden and the recently added vegetable patch. On Thursday mornings there is a social group intended to build social skills through sharing experiences with like-minded people.

The Community House was one of the earlier earn partners signing up to the project in July 2014. Since then they have signed up 81 members who between them have earned a total of 345 Time Credits and participated in 65 different earning opportunities. These opportunities include participation in the garden group, supporting the Community House Officer with administrative work and helping to deliver IT training for people attending the Community House. There have also been opportunities for members to earn Time Credits by carrying out one-off tasks to publicise the work of the Community House such as delivering leaflets in the local area.

### **5.2 The Ferry Project**

The Luminus Ferry Project is a charity and social enterprise established in 1998 to help homeless people in Fenland. They run a 24-room hostel for single people aged 18-65 located in Octavia House, an historic building in Wisbech's South Brink opposite Octavia Hill's birthplace. They also provide move-on accommodation in Wisbech. The South Brinks site also has a café, rental facilities for events, and a night shelter with 12 beds. The Queen Mary Centre, which is part owned by Luminus (the housing charity of which the Ferry is a part) and run by The Ferry Project is also nearby. Residents at the hostel must take some responsibility for keeping their surroundings and the facilities clean, and there is a rota system for a range of household tasks, primarily cleaning. There are also opportunities to work dealing with deliveries at the second-hand furniture store run by The Ferry Project in March. The voluntary work of residents is essential to the way in which they are able to operate with minimal staffing.

Like the Community House the Ferry Project also joined in July 2014. They have used Time Credits extensively generating 12 earning opportunities and signing up 37 members who, between them, have earned a total of 1758 Time Credits. They are used to encourage the residents to engage in meaningful activity, to acquire work experience, and to teach them skills and responsibility. All residents are encouraged to earn Time Credits, although not all take up the opportunity. The range of activities carried out by Time Credit volunteers includes maintenance and gardening work under the supervision of the maintenance team. Given that most residents are expected to do some voluntary work the amount of Time Credits any individual can earn is capped at ten per week. For many of the members the opportunity to earn Time Credits has been part of the process of gaining, or regaining the skills and confidence to get back into paid employment.

### **5.3 Oasis**

The Oasis Community Centre is another earn partner in the Waterlees ward located next to Orchards School. It is owned and run by a charity, The Wisbech Development Trust, with one full-time manager and six other part-time workers who cover reception, finance, building maintenance and cleaning. They are part of a network of projects in Waterlees that work closely with each other. Half of the building is leased to Cambridgeshire County Council and operates as a nursery and Children's Centre. The centre supports itself through the hire of rooms and conference facilities also offering a licensed bar and kitchen that allows them to hire out the building for social events. Other events and programmes such as confidence building, adult literacy training and Family Fun days are funded through local grants.

There are 70 members signed up with the Oasis Centre and between them they have earned a total of 188 Time Credits through the 16 earn events that have been organised since they joined in July 2014. Family Fun days are one activity where there are opportunities for members to earn through helping out and there are other opportunities such as litter picking as part of the Waterlees in Bloom event which is also organised by the Centre Manager. There are around ten active volunteers who get involved in activities such as garden maintenance both at the Oasis Centre and The Spinney, a nearby adventure playground.

### **5.4 The Spinney**

The Spinney or Wisbech Adventure Playground provides a free, open access play area aimed at children between the ages of eight and thirteen, although there are opportunities for all age groups to use the playground. Their mission is to make "a positive difference to the children and young people of Waterlees, and the wider community, through adventure and play" (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2013). Whilst the playground itself is open all the time, there are staffed sessions available after school and during the school holidays. The playground is also available for school groups during the week. The Spinney provides toilets, a tuck shop, first aid facilities and indoor play and craft areas in two 'barge buildings' (designed to look like river barges).

Located on 'Waterlees Field' an area of County Council owned green space off of Waterlees Road known locally as 'The Spinney' and established in 2010, the adventure playground is owned and managed by Cambridgeshire County Council's Children, Families and Adults

Services with an advisory board made up of key stakeholders. There is also a Friends Of group that raises funding through local grants and cake sales, BBQs and seasonal events such as Halloween Nights. Time Credits provide an opportunity to sustain this Friends Of group. They have helped build local partnerships through joint working with projects such as the Community House with volunteer hours providing a useful measure of community cohesion (ibid). One of the first organisations to join the project, The Spinney began giving volunteers the opportunity to earn Time Credits in 2014. Since then 35 have become members, there have been a total of 87 earn events and 1459 Time Credits have been earned.

## **5.5 Coates Primary School**

Located between Wisbech and Peterborough in a rural farming community, Coates School has places for just under 170 pupils. Whilst still predominantly white British the intake is becoming more diverse. The school does not have the same problems as the earn partners located in the more deprived wards of Wisbech, most parents are in employment, there are few children that are 'looked after' and the uptake of free school meals is low at between 10-15%. The area is, however, quite remote, something that creates difficulties with transport.

The motivation behind becoming involved in the Time Credits scheme was to be able to recognise the work of the School's volunteers and to retain them. Coates School did not join the project until July 2015. Since then they have generated 16 earn opportunities and members have earned a total of 357 Time Credits. They have signed up 16 members and there is a group of around ten active enthusiastic volunteers that they can rely upon to perform a range of tasks the school staff would struggle to deliver with the resources they have. The members earn Time Credits providing additional support and reading with children. They have also had the chance to earn them helping on a project funded by Froglife, a charity that works to preserve habitats for reptile and amphibian species, and also helping with afterschool clubs.

## **5.6 Orchards Church of England School**

As with a number of the earn partners Orchards School is located in Waterlees ward next to the Oasis Community Centre. The school reflects the diversity of the local community with 50% of the students speaking English as an additional language. As a result, the school employs a number of bi-lingual Teaching Assistants who are fluent in the various languages spoken by students and their families. These include, Polish, Lithuanian (the largest language group), Latvian, Russian and Portuguese. Given the levels of deprivation in the area the school employs a wellbeing team to deal with a range of issues such as speech and language difficulties and problems with behaviour as well as working with social services. In a school of just over 500 pupils the team deals with around 70 a day.

One of the first organisations to sign up as a spend partner there have so far been 924 Time Credits earned by members at Orchards School through a total of 194 earn opportunities. By February 2016 there were 128 Time Credits members signed up and around 25 of these are active. This gives the school a pool of skills to draw upon but it has also helped the school engage more with the local community and parents. They advertise the opportunity to earn Time Credits through volunteering with the school on their website. This has allowed them to draw on the skills of their volunteers to produce costumes for Christmas plays, read with

children and carry out small clerical and administrative tasks. Time Credits are also used to reward staff volunteers for running afterschool clubs for which there is no funding. As with many of the partner organisations it has also proved beneficial to the members allowing them to develop the skills and confidence necessary for them to get back into work.

### **5.7 Wisbech St Mary CoE school**

Wisbech St Mary Church of England Primary School serves a small village of the same name, just outside of Wisbech. They provide places for nearly 160 pupils from the ages of four to eleven. The motivation for involvement in the Time Credits Project was to increase levels of volunteering. There is a group of about ten volunteers of whom six are quite active with the others participating less frequently. So far all the volunteers have been the parents of children at the school. As with the other schools a DBS check is part of the process of becoming a member. The school is one of the more recent participants in the Time Credits project having joined in July 2015. So far they have signed up 26 members and generated 16 earn opportunities where a total of 116 Time Credits have been earned.

Time Credits have allowed the school to provide a number of additional services and facilities such as a morning toddlers group for young children and their parents and the play house constructed by one of the fathers. One volunteer worked to revitalise the school garden earning 21 Time Credits which were exchanged for a school trip, something she would otherwise have been unable to afford. Another volunteer, a fluent French speaker, earns Time Credits through helping the children with their French conversation and pronunciation. As with the other schools help with administration and reading with children have also proved to be valuable ways in which Time Credits have allowed Wisbech St Mary School to take some of the pressure off of the paid staff.

### **5.8 The Staithe**

The Staithe is a project for young single homeless people aged between 16 and 25 all of whom have support needs, run by Cambridge Housing Society. There are two full-time staff who are available during the day and evenings who can offer support with various issues such as developing independent living skills, finance and budgeting, accessing training and education, dealing with difficult family relations and substance misuse problems. The Staithe began giving their residents the opportunity to earn Time Credits in July 2014. Since then they have signed up 41 members who between them have participated in 17 earning events and earned a total of 333 Time Credits. Time Credits have been used to give the residents productive activities such as gardening that can help to build their confidence. There have been a few opportunities for young people living at The Staithe to earn Time Credits working with other organisations such as painting the fence at Orchards School although more of these opportunities would be welcome.

One issue they have is that many of the earning opportunities require staff supervision so they do come at a cost to the organisation. However, in the cases where they have been used they have had a clear benefit in that they give the young people activities, such as gardening, that they can take pride in. In one case in particular the opportunity to have some form of constructive activity and gain a sense of achievement has been part of a rapid transformation for one young person who had previously been dealing with serious depression.

## **5.9 The Children's Centre**

Wisbech has three Children's Centres run by Cambridgeshire County Council, one at the Oasis Centre, another to the North and the other to the South of the town. They provide additional support and assistance to local families with children under the age of five. Referrals can be from social services whilst others find out about the centres from health workers and midwives. Whilst attendance is strictly voluntary, in some cases it may be an important part of enabling parents at risk of having their children taken into care to maintain custody. The centres run a range of groups focusing on play, cooking and healthy eating and meeting and socialising with other parents. Many of the groups are run with the help of volunteers who often provide an important bridge between parents and the professional staff.

The Children's Centres were another early adopter of Time Credits joining at the outset in April 2014. Since then they have signed up 49 members who between them have participated in 145 earn events. Members earn Time Credits through supporting the group activities run by the Children's Centres and so far they have earned a total of 1133 Time Credits.

## **5.10 Wisbech Flood Wardens**

Flood Wardens are a group of volunteers who receive direct flood warnings from the Environment Agency and pass these on to their neighbours, and assist (especially vulnerable) community members when flooding occurs. They also promote the Environment Agency's Flood Alert system and sign people up to receive automated warnings when they are at risk of flooding, and advice about what action to take. The Wisbech Flood Wardens were set up in the summer 2014, following expressions of concern from Waterlees residents during heavy rains in December 2013. The need for a local Flood Wardens group was highlighted by two local independent councillors, who then set up the group with initial assistance from Fenland District Council, the Environment Agency and Wisbech Town Council. The group is entirely run by volunteers, with very limited financial assistance apart from a small grant from the Town Council to enable the volunteers to purchase jackets, boots and torches.

At the moment, the Flood Wardens have six active volunteers and have so far signed up some 640 local residents to the Environment Agency's alerts system. However, they face some challenges due to fluid population, and the fact that a significant number of new incomers are of Eastern European origin and, in some instances, language barriers and cultural differences stand in the way of effective communication of the group's activities and purpose. All of the current volunteers were already volunteering before Time Credits were made available in the spring 2015. Three of them have decided to sign up to earn Time Credits, and are earning them by participating in the flood warden meetings, training and public events where they promote both the work of the Flood Wardens and encourage people to sign up to the Environment Agency alerts. This has so far generated five earning opportunities where a total of 44 Time Credits have been earned.

## **5.11 Wisbech in Bloom**

Wisbech in Bloom is a charity that works to improve the town's environment, to give it a more floral 'feel', to make the town more attractive for tourists and local residents. They have been running for twenty years and enter in the annual Anglia in Bloom competition receiving awards in the past eight years running. The organisation is run entirely by volunteers with some support from staff at Fenland District Council and Wisbech Town Council. Its work is funded by a small grant from the Wisbech Town Council, and donations from local business and residents, local businesses can sponsor hanging flower baskets in the summertime and one local plant grower, Delamore, makes a large donation of plants and flowers every year. The group also refurbish run down parts of the town, improve biodiversity and support other community groups such as The Staithe and Community House on their own gardening projects.

Seven existing volunteers have signed up as Time Credits members and have earned Time Credits for helping with photography and compiling the brochure that is required for Wisbech's entry into the Anglia in Bloom competition. They also earn Time Credits by hanging and then taking down the floral displays and for helping out with the IT for the project. This has generated seven earn opportunities and members have earned a total of 54 Time Credits between them. Since they have begun using Time Credits they have also attracted a new volunteer, a resident of The Ferry Project. They also hope to use Time Credits to build on a developing partnership with Meadowgate School for children with special educational needs in order to involve some of the students there in volunteering with Wisbech in Bloom. One of the benefits the organisation has identified is that it strengthens the relationship they have with their volunteers as they feel that "it's easier to ask people to go that extra mile" when they can offer them something in return.

## **5.12 Rainbow Savers Credit Union**

Rainbow Savers Credit Union operates across East Anglia to provide accessible loans and other financial services. In Wisbech they operate from both the Rosmini Centre and Oasis Community Centre. In Wisbech many of their members (there are over a hundred in Wisbech) are people who lack bank accounts, permanent addresses or have poor credit ratings and so are particularly vulnerable to loan sharks who are known to target some of the more deprived areas. It was hoped that Time Credits would help the Credit Union to attract more volunteers as this has been a particular problem lately. There are also other, unconnected, issues they are struggling with such as difficulty in attracting new members and the introduction of an annual customer fee which is particularly hard for many of the members in the more deprived areas of Wisbech to afford.

The Credit Unions began using Time Credits in January 2015 in an attempt to attract volunteers. They have signed up 13 existing members six who volunteered at the Oasis Centre and seven at the Rosmini Centre. This has generated 11 earning opportunities and the majority of which (ten) were at the Rosmini Centre with just one earn opportunity at the Oasis Centre. In total 24 Time Credits have been earned at the Oasis Centre and 308 have been earned by members at the Rosmini Centre where members have earned Time Credits by helping out with language issues.

### **5.13 Other earn partners**

A number of other organisations have participated briefly in the Time Credits programme or signed up recently. For example, Peckover House awarded its first Time Credits in July 2016 and Making Money Count, a project providing independent, free confidential advice on personal finances to people living in Fenland joined in late 2015. They have already generated six earning opportunities and signed up four members who between them have earned 51 Time Credits. Wisbech Youth Services began signing up members in April 2015 and in the first quarter signed up one member who earned a total of 32 Time Credits through a single earning opportunity. There are a number of organisations such as Peckover Primary School, Sustrans, Richmond Fellowship and Trinity Church that have recently joined the project but are not yet fully active.

## 6 Time Credit spend partners

There are three main spend partners in use by members in Wisbech. Eight opportunities exist and members have the option to spend their Time Credits on activities such as a tour of the local Elgood's Brewery Gardens, a visit to Fens Falconry in Wisbech St Mary or to Angles Theatre, however, there has been little uptake with partners and volunteers identifying poor rural transport infrastructure as a challenge to experiencing the wider spend network. There are also new opportunities with Peckover House accepting Time Credits for visits to the house and gardens in an effort to encourage more local people to visit. What has proved most popular has been the Light Cinema. The eight screen cinema in Wisbech is part of a small local chain with its branch in Cambridge also offering Time Credit members the chance to see films off-peak. It has proved to be by far the most popular spend location in Wisbech with 1584 Time Credits spent there since April 2014. The next most popular spend partner is New Vision Fitness with members spending 893 Time Credits there. Also known as the Hudson Centre, it is a leisure centre offering a gym, pool and soft play and sensory areas. Members can exchange Time Credits for an hour swim, sauna, access to the fitness studio or attendance at one of the fitness classes. Members have also spent 40 Time Credits at the College of West Anglia where they can use the training salons run by students on the Hair, Beauty and Nails courses. There are a wide range of options from a facial or pedicure which can be exchanged for one Time Credit to a full Pamper Day Experience for five Time Credits.

Whilst opportunities to spend Time Credits in Wisbech are more limited some members do spend them further afield. A number of interviewees have mentioned spending Time Credits in Kings Lynn which is slightly larger with more facilities and as a longer running Time Credits project has a more developed network of spend partners. Also interviewees have mentioned spending Time Credits in Hunstanton, a nearby coastal town and holiday destination where Time Credits can be spent on crazy golf, a pottery studio or access to the Oasis Centre where members can use the pool, the Fun Castle as well as taking part in bowls and roller skating.

## 7 Emerging findings

In terms of the original aims of the Time Credits programme, and the priority areas it was intended to address, there is strong evidence of the role of Time Credits in strengthening families in and around Wisbech. There are clear benefits to being able to access leisure facilities and to enjoy opportunities that are often not available to the families on low incomes. There are a number of examples of members gifting their Time Credits within families, often from the older generation to the younger generation. Whilst the cinema is very popular there is also evidence that Time Credits have enabled leisure activities such as swimming with children which also promotes a more active lifestyle.

Cambridgeshire Time Credits also emphasises skills and employment as a priority focus. There is evidence that the Time Credits project is also addressing this priority area. In a number of cases members have described their volunteering, and earning Time Credits, as part of a return to work or as fitting with their aims of improving skills and gaining experience to move into a more rewarding career. There is also some evidence that volunteering and earning Time Credits have benefited community cohesion through creating opportunities for members of Wisbech's recent migrant community to contribute to local services. There have been a number of cases where the language skills of migrants have been valuable and Time Credits have provided a means of reflecting that value. The emerging research evidence also shows that there are, in many cases, clear benefits to the earn partner organisations. In an environment where resources are tight and staffing is an issue, Time Credits provide a way of increasing organisational capacity both to maintain the level of service and to run additional activities.

It is apparent from the interviews to date that volunteers in Wisbech only use a small range of spend activities. Many mentioned the lack of local spend opportunities that can be accessed without transport, which 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.

It is also the case that in some cases the members themselves are less mobile and so travelling further afield to access spend opportunities is more difficult. This is something all partners have been working to address by seeking out and developing new 'community' spend opportunities. It may also be that the addition of new hybrid spend and earn partners such as the National Trust property Peckover House may begin to provide additional access points to engage with the Wisbech network. Opportunities such as this could also potentially address the problem of people isolating themselves within their communities by giving members the chance to visit attractions and parts of Wisbech they would not otherwise consider.

Finally, there is already strong evidence that Time Credits are helping to address and improve some of the social determinants of health in and around Wisbech. Where the evidence for this is the strongest is in the role of Time Credits in addressing the specific problems of isolation and the loss of confidence and low self-esteem that often accompanies isolation. There is a cluster of projects in the Waterlees ward (one of the most deprived

wards in Cambridgeshire, characterised by a number of the health inequalities discussed in section three) that create opportunities to earn Time Credits, something that both encourages people to volunteer and also strengthens families, as described above. The two other projects where members are very active (The Ferry Project and The Staithe) also work with people from across Fenland who are at risk of isolation and the poor mental health that may accompany it. As the case studies (Burgess and Markkanen, 2016) show earning Time Credits has helped members to avoid isolation and also depression. In many cases people describe their volunteering, particularly after a period of illness or unemployment, as a means of regaining confidence and meeting people. 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 (Burgess, 2016). The research suggests that they are an efficient tool for engaging people to develop more inclusive, cohesive and resilient communities (ibid).

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 and that there are also benefits to organisations and to the wider community.

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