

Cambridge Centre
for Housing &
Planning Research

Evaluating the Public Health Outcomes of the Cambridgeshire Time Credits Project

Emerging findings paper 1

Wisbech Time Credits – individual member case studies

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Contents

The evaluation	3
Introduction	4
Case study 1: Jo	5
Case study 2: Alice	7
Case study 3: Peter	8
Case study 4: Sally	10
Conclusions	11

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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 projects.

This short report presents some emerging findings in the form of individual Time Credit member case studies.

For more information about the evaluation please contact Dr Gemma Burgess on gib36@cam.ac.uk or 01223 764547.

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Introduction

Spice Time Credits are intended to be a tool for building stronger communities and for delivering co-produced services. 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 (Apteligen 2015; Weaver et al, 2015), as well as on activities at the organisation earned with and to trade time and skills with other individuals¹.

This short report is the first of a series of papers on emerging findings from the evaluation. It draws on in depth face to face interviews with Time Credit members. Research participants were asked about their life and general wellbeing and circumstances. They described in their own words how they heard about Time Credits, how and why they got involved, and the difference it had made to their lives. The case studies in this report summarise the stories of four Time Credit members.

¹ Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) Introduction to time banking and Time Credits. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

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

Case study 1: Jo

Jo² is a Time Credit member and volunteers at the Orchards School, a Church of England primary and nursery school located on the Waterlees estate of Wisbech.

Jo moved to Wisbech three years ago with her husband and two young sons. She didn't know anybody in the area when they moved, and has found it difficult to make friends and get to know people.

When she first heard about Time Credits, Jo had been looking for work that would fit around school hours, but with little success. She is keen to work with young children, but found that most jobs in this field require either specific qualifications or experience. Time Credits offered her an opportunity to gain some experience of working with children and to boost her CV after four years at home.

Before she started volunteering at the Orchards School, Jo had few opportunities for socialising with other adults and said that she was beginning to feel lonely, depressed and obsolete. She described the feelings of depression and the impact earning Time Credits has had:

“Before, I think I was going into depression, I felt like I was dead. I was like, I can't use my brain anymore, I'm just a mom... Although I was doing things for my children, that wasn't enough anymore. I needed something else. And I feel this has given me that.”

Since she started volunteering at the school library and reading with children four days a week, Jo's life has turned around. She feels that it has benefited her health and given her 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... it's probably doing more benefit for me than it's doing for the school, personally health-wise.”

The experience has boosted Jo's self-confidence and enabled her to learn new skills. She hopes that the work experience she is gaining at the Orchards School will help her to eventually move into paid employment:

“It's given me an opportunity to work in a school. And maybe my dream [of working with children] will come true, you never know. I do think it's a fantastic idea and I hope it does continue, and helps more people.”

By volunteering at the school, Jo feels that she is setting a good role model for her two young sons and that she is capable of making a positive contribution:

² Research participant names have been changed.

“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.”

Jo likes to spend her Time Credits on family activities such as shows and going to the cinema. These are activities she enjoys but without Time Credits, she is restricted in how often she can take her family:

“I love shows. Every year as a treat we go with my son to one show. But there are some things that I couldn’t justify spending money on, but now I can go cause I’m earning it.”

Case study 2: Alice

Alice is a Time Credit member and also volunteers at the Orchards School.

Having had a long career working with children, poor health had prevented Alice from working for nearly a decade. Participating in Time Credits has made it possible for her to return to working with children at the Orchards School near her house - something she loves doing. She described the sense of satisfaction this has given her:

“I’ll never forget the first year! I was interacting with the children. I was helping them and they were learning... Oh the fun I had with them!”

Over the past two and a half years, Alice has become involved with the school in various ways and is known for ‘having a real knack for talking to the kids’. In addition to reading with the children she has knitted clothes for the classroom dolls and reception year teddy-bears, overseen a library lunch club, and helped to run an after-school club for families with special needs. She has also participated in numerous Spice Time Credits promotional campaigns.

When the Job Centre told Alice that she should ask the school for paid work, she was able to start a job as a reception year dinner lady. She now also works as a teaching assistant, running conversation skills training for Year 2 children. Volunteering and earning Time Credits gave her the work experience, confidence and opportunity to move back into paid employment. She feels it is of benefit for people who are unemployed:

“For me it was a good thing. It’s a good thing for people who are a long-term unemployed to do something like this.”

For Alice, Time Credits have been a real life changer. Volunteering at the school has given her an opportunity to share her skills and to make use of her previous experience and training. Most importantly, she feels that she has become a valued member of the community. She explained how volunteering has increased her social network and reduced her health worries:

“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.”

Over the years, Alice has given away a lot of her Time Credits to neighbours and extended family, in addition to spending them on health and beauty treatments and going to the cinema.

With her paid job, Alice now has less time to earn Time Credits, but she still manages to fit in a few hours here and there, most recently helping out with sewing lessons. In the spring, she is hoping to start running an after school sewing club - primarily to share her skills and for the satisfaction of working with children rather than to earn more Time Credits.

Case study 3: Peter

Peter is a Time Credit member and volunteers at the Ferry project. The Ferry project is a 24-room hostel for single people aged 18-65. The site also has a café, rental facilities for events, and a night shelter with 12 beds.

Peter lives in a Ferry hostel halfway house and volunteers in the Ferry project kitchen. He first heard about Spice Time Credits at a residents' meeting shortly after moving to the Ferry hostel accommodation following his release from prison. He was immediately keen to participate. Time Credits have provided him with help and support at a difficult time, but they have also helped him to feel that he is giving something back to his community:

"I needed to change my life in some way, I needed to do something. Since I've lived here I've got so much help and support from the staff here, I wanted to try to put something back into the community."

Initially Peter volunteered for an hour or two at a time, then an afternoon. Soon, however, he found himself spending more and more time in the kitchen. Peter now volunteers on four days a week, up to 16 hours per week. He described how he has developed his skills and experience:

"One of our chefs, he took me under his wing, gave me food tips and things to do... When he left, the other chef, she took me under her wing and taught me how to do all the different things, got me into making cakes, soups, salads..."

Thanks to his positive experience and support from the professional chefs, Peter quickly developed a passion for cooking. Volunteering has helped him to learn and to develop a new passion and focus:

"I've got really into it ... you know when chefs say that you need to put loving into it, I never really realised what they mean, but now I understand that if you put your heart and soul into it, it comes out better."

Having already completed a basic level health and safety and cooking qualification in prison, Peter is now looking forward to accessing more training and finding a part-time job as a chef. Earning Time Credits has given him a passion for something that will hopefully also lead to paid employment. Before starting to volunteer in the kitchen, Peter had work experience as a farm labourer, but had been out of work for several years. For the first time he now feels that moving back into paid employment is a realistic option:

"Years ago I had an accident at work, I did my back in and I didn't think I'd ever go back to doing any work at all, I didn't know if there was anything I could do out there. But being here, doing the volunteering, it has strengthened my back and it's made me happy to know that I can go out there and do this."

In addition to learning new skills and gaining experience, Peter is getting a lot of satisfaction from his work. Positive feedback from clients has helped him to build his confidence and encourages him to keep going when faced with challenges:

“I enjoy it. It’s something that I love doing. And the feedback I’m given by some of the customers; the food is nice, the cakes are nice, something specific about a particular dish, it just gives me a smile at the end of the day.”

The Time Credits Peter earns have helped him financially. They have enabled him to start rebuilding his relationship with his wife and daughter. He is able to take his daughter to activities he would not otherwise be able to afford and has the satisfaction of becoming closer to his family:

“We are on benefits and the money only stretches so far ... using the Time Credits, it gives me enjoyment to take my little girl to the movies with what I have earned. If it wasn’t for the Time Credits, we wouldn’t be doing that many things with her. And because we go out more, we are closer as a family.”

Peter feels that everyone can benefit from earning and spending Time Credits, particularly people who are unemployed and have low incomes. It gives people access to activities and facilities that they would not usually be able to afford but which can improve their wellbeing:

“Would I recommend it to anybody else? I would. I would recommend doing the Time Credits because a lot of people who do volunteer are on the job seekers or the ESA, on benefits, and who do not get a lot of money to go to the cinema. I’d say you can go and earn some Time Credits, and treat yourself to the cinema or treat yourself to swimming, or if you’re a female, treat yourself to a manicure at the college, or get your hair done. You’ll always be better off”.

Case study 4: Sally

Sally is a Time Credit member and also volunteers at the Ferry project. Sally got involved in Time Credits when staying at the Ferry night shelter and needed something to occupy herself during the daytime. Initially Sally was earning Time Credits by working in the Queen Mary Centre gardens. A couple of weeks after getting a room in the Ferry hostel accommodation, she started as a Time Credit volunteer in the Octavia Café.

Working in the café has helped Sally to become more active and to develop a routine to her days. She has lost some weight and said that she is getting some of her confidence back. She described how becoming more active and being around people has improved her mental and physical health:

“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.”

In particular, Sally said that earning Time Credits has improved her depression and transformed her daily routine:

“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.”

At the moment, ongoing health problems place some restrictions on Sally’s range of movement and she doesn’t feel fit enough to take on a job with fixed hours. Volunteering with Time Credits enables her to be active without straining herself too much. Even though Sally has now moved on to live in a halfway house, she still volunteers three days a week and is enjoying it. She described the impact it has had on improving her happiness and wellbeing:

“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.”

Sally and her partner, who is also a Time Credit volunteer, use their Time Credits to pay for going to the cinema, to go swimming, and to get their hair cut at the West Anglia College. These are activities that they would otherwise not be able to afford. Sally said that spending Time Credits also keeps her active on the days when she is not volunteering:

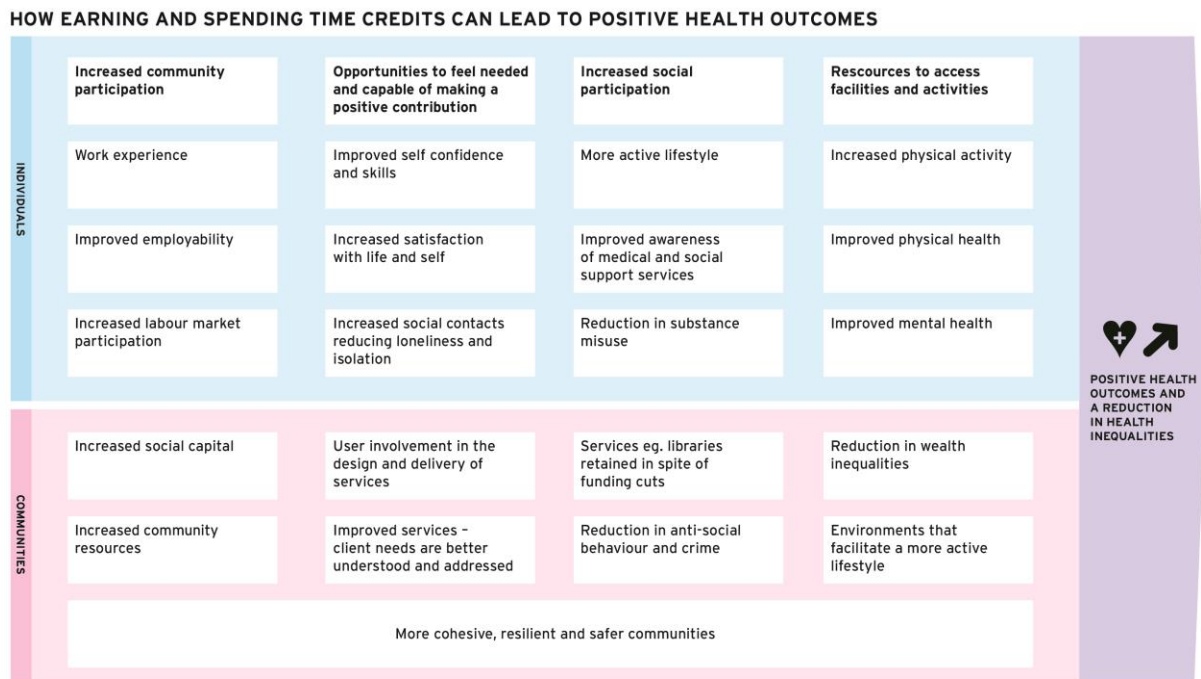
“I don’t get a lot of money. And these days, the cost of cinema tickets and swimming are really high... With Time Credits, it doesn’t interfere with your benefits, it’s not money but it’s credit, so you can use it whenever you wanna use it... we find stuff to do during the day when we are not working,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

Conclusions

As part of the research, a conceptual model of how we expect the different activities associated with earning and spending Time Credits to generate public health outcomes and reduce health inequalities was developed (Figure 1)³. The interviews provide data to help evidence these pathways to positive health outcomes.

The case studies 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.

Figure 1



³ Markkanen, S. and Burgess, G. (2015) The potential for Time Credits to generate public health outcomes – a conceptual model. Cambridge: Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research.

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