

Public health outcomes of complex community interventions: volunteering and Time Credits in Wisbech

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Structure

- The research
- Findings
- The conceptual framework
- Challenges
- Conclusions

Community approach to public health

- One approach to reducing health inequalities is through **improving social capital and reducing isolation**.
- Solid evidence that increased levels of community engagement and social participation have a **positive impact on health behaviours**, physical and emotional health, and self-confidence, especially among disadvantaged populations (Public Health England, 2015).
- These benefits are so widely acknowledged that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance endorses **community engagement** as a strategy for health improvement.

The research

- National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).
- School for Public Health Research (SPHR) Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES).
- Evaluation collaboration with Spice, Cambridgeshire County Council and CHS Group.
- Research collaboration between the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) and the Cambridge Institute for Public Health (CIPH).

Time Credits in Wisbech

- Wisbech, England - area with above average levels of deprivation and a range of challenging social issues.
- Market town – agriculture and food processing – immigration.



Time Credits in Wisbech

- 17 local organisations where people can earn Time Credits.
- Include schools, homeless hostels, children's centres, adventure playground, project supporting people into employment.
- Activities include reading with children, after school clubs, gardening, office work, working in a café and kitchen, litter picking.
- Spend activities include cinema, gym, swimming, beauty treatments, social events, theatre tickets.

Key objectives of the evaluation

Key aim

To evaluate the outcomes of the Time Credit project in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, with a focus on health outcomes.

The primary objective

To analyse the potential of Time Credits to address public health issues by:

1. Reducing loneliness and social exclusion
2. Improving wellbeing
3. Increasing community cohesion and social capital

Methods overview

- Mixed methods research design using both quantitative and qualitative methodological tools.
- Incorporating co-production in the evaluation methodology.
 - Interviews with key stakeholders
 - Literature review, systematic review of Time Credits and health outcomes
 - Secondary data analysis
 - Developing a theory of change
 - Longitudinal survey with individual new Time Credit members
 - Face to face interviews with individual Time Credit members
 - Survey and face to face interviews with partner organisations
 - Ethnographic methods including visual ethnographies and participant observation

How Time Credits can lead to positive health outcomes

- Assume positive health outcomes emerge through a causal process - range of 'lower level' outcomes (or 'waypoints') affect health and wellbeing, potentially across the life-course.
- Outcomes may be direct or indirect and benefits may accrue to individuals, to the wider community, or to both.
- Pathways to health outcomes can be complex.
- Some activities impact health directly - spend Time Credits to go swimming or to the gym - health benefit immediate and directly linked to the activity.
- Also indirectly - using Time Credits to access health and leisure facilities - expand social networks and reduce loneliness, leading to better mental health.

HOW EARNING AND SPENDING TIME CREDITS CAN LEAD TO POSITIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES



▲ Indicates strongest evidence of positive outcomes

Case study – ‘Alice’

- Career working with children, poor health kept Alice from working for nearly a decade.
- Time Credits made it possible to return to working with children at the Orchards School - something she loves doing.
- School gave her a formal paid job.
- Volunteering has given her an opportunity to share her skills and to make use of her previous experience and training. Most importantly, she become a valued member of a community:
 - “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 alright³”.

Case study – ‘Peter’

- Lives in a Ferry hostel halfway house and volunteers in the Ferry project kitchen – came from prison.
- Now volunteers most days and treats it like a job.
- Learnt new skills, found a new passion.
- Feels like he’s giving something back, enjoys it, sense of achievement – hopefully route into employment.
- Spending Time Credits – rebuild relationship with wife and daughter:
 - “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.”

Outcomes for volunteers

- Earning Time Credits can have both direct and indirect health benefits for individuals.
- Improvements in 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.”
- Improvements in mental health.
 - “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.”
- Reduced loneliness and social exclusion.
 - “I was getting lonely. I thought what am I going to do with myself?...I come out and I feel like ‘wow’, I’ve got my energy back.”

Outcomes for volunteers

- Making a positive contribution.
 - “It has made me feel that I’m a person again. I feel appreciated. I’m not just a person at home doing housework.”
- Improved self-confidence, skills development, work experience, 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....Some volunteers are now employed....I hope they are financially better off but the greater thing is that they feel better about themselves.”
- Strengthened family and wider relationships.
 - “One lady, her kids never left the house but she will use Time Credits to take them out in the holidays.”
- Resources to access activities and services that they would not otherwise be able to afford or would not have tried.

Outcomes for organisations and community

- Enabled to recruit more volunteers and increase capacity.
- But it has also challenged stereotypes and brought diverse people together in a way that makes the local community more cohesive.
 - “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... Understandings have changed.”
- Recognition of skills that exist in the community and desire to nurture and support people into 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.”
- Develop a more reciprocal relationship with volunteers – co-production.

Conclusions

- Ongoing research.
- Simple concept – but a complex intervention.
- Challenges and opportunities of evidencing public health outcomes.
- Beneficial outcomes - improved health, wellbeing, skills and confidence, loneliness and social exclusion.
- 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 help shape own community.
- Tool for engaging people to develop more inclusive and cohesive communities.

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