



# Final report on activities

January 2009 to April 2011

Healthier Communities  
 **FUND**



■ Fifteen voluntary and community groups delivered projects costing up to £100,000 to agreed outcomes on time and to budget.

■ Outcomes were exceeded by more than a third (141 per cent). Only two projects fell below target (90 per cent), and some achieved over 200 per cent.

■ Voluntary and community groups have recognised the connection between their work and the agendas of statutory agencies.

**FUNDED ORGANISATIONS**

Age Concern Wakefield District	Re-Connect
Arthritis Care	SESKU Academy
Batley Road Playgroup	St George's Lupset Ltd
Carers Wakefield & District	St Mary's Community Centre
DIVA	Wakefield Wildcats Community Trust
Informal Learning	Wakefield District Sight Aid (formerly known as West Riding Blind Association)
MHA Pontefract Live at Home Scheme	
Portobello Community Forum	Youth Work Company

**ACCESSIBILITY**

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# Introduction



*I am delighted to be able to write a few words of introduction to this important report. In many ways the Healthier Communities Fund was ahead of its time. Its aim when it was launched three years ago was to build capacity within the voluntary and community sector to be able to work with public sector commissioners to*

*deliver local services. This is the very approach now being promoted through the Big Society agenda.*

*The focus of the work has been around support for people with long-term health conditions and helping people achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Both of these issues remain high priorities for health and social care commissioners in Wakefield District. The experience gained through these projects will serve both commissioners and providers of services well into the future.*

*Some fantastic work has been delivered by the projects. There have been great examples of community members shaping the services they want to see delivered. I am grateful to all those who have contributed to making it a success. I especially want to thank Voluntary Action Wakefield District (VAWD) for their management support and the community empowerment network, VOX, for publicity for this work.*

**Dr Andrew Furber**

Executive Director of Public Health  
 NHS Wakefield District/Wakefield Council

*“The most valuable lesson learnt was to trust the voluntary sector to respond and deliver projects that impact positively upon local identified needs.*

*The project also demonstrated the importance of partnership working and this increased the number of positive outcomes achieved.”*

**Adam Redfearn,**  
 SESKU Academy

## Background

In April 2008 the Healthier Communities Fund was created through a £1m investment from Wakefield District Primary Care Trust (PCT). It aimed to give grants to local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to run activities which would impact on either long-term conditions or childhood obesity.

It was also expected that the capacity of organisations delivering the work would be improved over the life of the project. This would improve the chances of the organisation being commission ready at the end of the process. Emphasis during the project would be on demonstrating impact of activities, through an outcome measurement system.

The money was split between Voluntary Action Wakefield District (VAWD) and the community empowerment network VOX. VAWD was responsible for setting up and managing the programme and its processes, and VOX was responsible for publicising the fund and its associated projects.

The board managing the fund comprised Chief Executive Officers from VAWD and VOX, and senior managers from the PCT. This included the Director of Public Health. A delivery group comprising representatives from the partner agencies also met regularly.

The programme focussed on supporting existing projects and building the knowledge base resulting from the work. It also established dialogue with commissioners to ensure they are aware of the programme, whilst ensuring that groups understand the commissioning process.

## Funding allocation and outcome measurement

A panel comprising representatives from partner agencies assessed 38 applications in October 2008. It allocated funding to 15 organisations in December 2008 to run two-year projects. Grant sizes ranged from £18,000 to £99,000. It allocated £1,078,000 in total.

Each organisation attended two training days on outcome measurement, and had a set of outcomes for their project agreed by a panel from the PCT. Projects started between January and June 2009, and finished by April 2011.

## Outcomes

Being able to demonstrate the impact of work done is crucial in today's climate, and an area previously not always emphasised by bodies making grants to the VCS. It was a key requirement from the PCT that projects were able to demonstrate the impact of their work, and that support would be provided throughout the fund to achieve this.

All projects worked to an agreed set of outcomes which demonstrate change, eg '300 children will have increased levels of physical activity by the end of the project'. These were proposed by the project, discussed with relevant PCT staff, and then endorsed by the Management Board.

Two training days were arranged for successful applicants, using the Charities Evaluation Service (CES) model delivered by VAWD's Operations Director, who is an Outcome Champion for CES. The sessions explored the links between organisational mission, aims and objectives and the relationship with outputs and outcomes. The final session explored how to identify and use outcome indicators as the basis of the monitoring system.

Groups received support from the Healthier Communities Co-ordinator, employed by VAWD. This enabled groups to establish systems to collect monitoring information, and provided ongoing support to maintain the monitoring process.

Several VCS organisations have fine tuned their processes in light of the experience, eg clients with lower capabilities requiring a more streamlined questionnaire. All worked towards a mixed portfolio of evidence, eg client surveys, tutor observations and case studies.

## Support

VAWD's Healthier Communities Co-ordinator visited projects regularly to check progress, and discuss issues, eg how to measure fitness levels, ways of increasing attendance at less popular activities, or how to adjust feedback forms to collect outcome measures from less able or literate participants. The Co-ordinator kept in close contact with PCT colleagues to answer specific health questions. The contact with groups was important to ensure smooth running and good end product from the projects. It was also crucial to ensure systems were in place from the start of a project, to ensure change could be effectively measured.

The Co-ordinator convened network meetings for the projects, to share progress and raise issues of common concern. Input on commissioning has been a key element. At one meeting the formation of a consortium was suggested. This mirrored thinking within the PCT.

### GROWTH

*Over the life of the fund, SESKU went from an unincorporated organisation with a single worker to a company limited by guarantee with an office base, premises for activities, and a team of workers.*

Preparing groups for commissioning has been a key element to the support offered. Groups have used VAWD's organisational healthcheck to look at their policies, governance, and procedures. The PCT's Head of Commissioning provided input at a meeting of the funded VCS

***“I believe that health agencies will now realise that small local charities are professional organisations who deliver first class services to the more vulnerable in our society and that we are needed in order to help deliver preventative services needed within our communities.”***

***Helen Smith,  
Re-Connect***

organisations. VAWD also arranged and chaired meetings for commissioners from the specific health areas to talk to the relevant groups. This was a key starting point to build relationships to show commissioners what activities were happening, and allow VCS organisations to understand the commissioning process.

## Capacity Building

The PCT was keen to see that groups developed as a result of the funding, and were more commission ready by the end of the scheme. This was assessed in three ways:

### ■ ORGANISATIONAL HEALTHCHECK

A checklist of policies, procedures, and governance arrangements was completed with each group at the start of the project and any issues were identified. This process was repeated at the end of the project. Nine out of 15 groups said their capacity had increased as a result of this process.

### ■ ATTRACTING OTHER FUNDS

10 groups said that Healthier Communities Funding had enabled them to attract other funds. These funds either complemented activities or sustained the organisations' operations.

### ■ INCREASED KNOWLEDGE OF COMMISSIONING

10 groups reported that their knowledge of the commissioning process had increased as a result of their involvement with the fund.

## Partnership working

The whole process of the fund was based on a partnership between the statutory and voluntary sector, with strong buy-in from the PCT. Specialist staff working together advised on outcomes, assessed applications, and were part of the development group overseeing the practical delivery of the fund. Many groups formed productive partnerships in their own right, eg SESKU Academy worked with the local 5-A-Day team to support its work and St Mary's Community Centre worked with the health trainers.

## Social Return on Investment (SROI)

All projects were encouraged to attend training from the Social Enterprise Support Centre about SROI. This enables them to say what an outcome delivers in terms of money as well as social benefit, eg helping a child become physically active can save the health service money over time.



VCS organisations developed skills in assessing how their work related to the wider society, and the influence they could have on people compared to external factors. Several groups completed the 'impact map' showing the financial benefit of their work, varying between 111 per cent and 143 per cent return on the funding invested in the work.

**EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

*At a meeting of the projects, it was felt that a consortium would provide a very good model for attracting contracts from statutory agencies. At the same time, PCT managers were offering seed funding to help develop one. The Wakefield District Wellbeing Consortium was formed. This Consortium has just attracted £120,000 investment to develop its business.*



## Project outcomes and learning

### Childhood obesity projects

*“Over the two-year process we have strived through constant evaluation and consultation to improve, amend and adapt all sessions to ensure that targets are met and aims are achieved.”*  
**Informal Learning**

YOUTH WORK COMPANY		£99,920
<p><b>Project</b>                      The Youth Work Company tackled childhood obesity in four of Wakefield's communities. Its approach was rooted in youth work, ie it was dependent on the relationship with youth workers; inclusive; community based; gave young people participation the opportunity to be involved; and was empowering. The three key elements to this project were healthier, more active lifestyles, healthier eating and building the confidence to make good decisions.</p>	<p><b>Achievements</b>                      210 children and young people aged 8 to 19 were involved in this project. Of these, 160 gave a firm commitment to the project and achieved outcomes in respect of their willingness and ability to become more active, understand healthier eating messages and/or their confidence and self-esteem. Physical activity was easily introduced as part of activities. However, healthy eating was far more difficult with older children, who often had no influence over their families' eating habits.</p>	
<b>OUTCOMES ACHIEVED</b>	2yr target	Achieved
Children and young people will have a healthier diet.	50	61
Children and young people will have a healthier lifestyle in terms of taking regular exercise.	50	104
Children and young people will have increased confidence to make good decisions about their lifestyle.	50	62
		<b>151% Total</b>

WAKEFIELD WILDCATS COMMUNITY TRUST		£50,000	
<p><b>Project</b> This project ran a programme of healthy school assemblies to encourage children to join in sports and dance activities at the club. Advice on healthy lifestyles formed part of the programme.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b> Children took more exercise, and increased their fitness levels. The school assembly programme provided children and young people from across the district with information on healthy lifestyles and healthy eating. It successfully provided positive community role models (Wildcats players and cheerleaders) to deliver messages to encourage children and young people to make small positive changes in their daily routines.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
Young people involved in increased physical activity.	5000	11263	
Young people are physically fitter.	400	251	
Young people to become new members of Junior Wildcats/Dance Academy Activity Club.	400	251	
		<b>125% Total</b>	

*“I like fitness club because we played different activities and I learned new skills. Now I have more confidence to do new activities when I go to clubs outside the school.”*

**Young boy who has taken part in the Informal Learning project**

INFORMAL LEARNING		£20,252	
<p><b>Project</b> Informal Learning delivered a varied programme of activities for young people within the Agbrigg and Belle Vue areas. Activities included girls and boys self defence, mixed fun fitness sessions, and boys and girls get active clubs. The project designed the sessions to improve the uptake of physical activity, increase knowledge of healthy living and encourage parental involvement.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b> The project successfully provided health-focused informal learning to a predominately Asian community and encouraged full participation. For example, running sessions in school hours increases the involvement of more girls who are encouraged to go home straight after school. This project also demonstrated the value of having projects and their workers based locally and embedded within a small scale geographical area to develop trust and strong relationships.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
Increase uptake of physical activity.	100	325	
Improve nutritional intake and diet.	100	115	
Increase confidence and self esteem.	100	90	
Increase parental involvement in their child's health and wellbeing.	50	140	
		<b>208% Total</b>	



SESKU ACADEMY		£91,637	
<p><b>Project</b>                      The Fun Fitness &amp; Nutrition Project delivered a rolling 12-week fitness and health education programme in primary schools throughout the South East district of Wakefield. It reached 3795 children from 17 of the 20 primary schools in the area. It linked with other SESKU projects and partners, such as the 5-A-Day team. The organisation developed several schemes during the 2 years and has grown considerably as an organisation.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b>                      The project reached a high number of children across the South East Wakefield district. This led to further engagement and lifestyle changes for many children who are above a healthy weight. As a local organisation, SESKU was able to increase the involvement of children in other community activities, such as sports or dance. This improved the long-term benefits to children's health beyond the life of the project. This project reported large numbers of children taking part in more exercise and eating a healthier diet, as demonstrated below.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
Children will become more physically active.	300	305	
Children will have increased knowledge of good diet and nutrition.	300	423	
Children will have a more positive attitude to healthy lifestyles, eg healthy diet and exercise.	200	427	
Children will be eating more fresh fruit and vegetables.	100	425	
Children will join community activity groups, eg football, dancing, table tennis and muay thai boxing.	50	97	
		<b>177% Total</b>	

ST GEORGE'S LUPSET		£95,625	
<p><b>Project</b>                      This project provided activities focused on food, nutrition and exercise. It also provided a newsletter and helpline to encourage family involvement, and signposting to other activities at the centre. Successful activities include sports, dance, exercise and cooking healthy meals.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b>                      Evaluation demonstrated an increased number of physically active children, greater self esteem and an increased knowledge of healthy eating. A wide variety of activities ensured good participation in the project, eg girls came to streetdance sessions, boys to breakdancing. Involving parents directly proved difficult, but the enthusiasm of the children for new tastes and activities has the potential to positively impact on some family lifestyles.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
Children will be more physically active.	200	325	
Families will have a better understanding of nutrition and healthy diet.	50	115	
More children will have an understanding of healthy food choices.	35	90	
More children will have raised confidence and self esteem.	75	103	
		<b>176% Total</b>	

BATLEY ROAD PLAYGROUP		£18,265	
<p><b>Project</b> This project aimed to help tackle childhood obesity by delivering exercise classes for children under eight to encourage them to be active and have fun. It talked to parents about the benefits of being active and eating healthily. The playgroup also started a community garden where all the different users of the Phoenix Centre contributed to the setting up and maintaining of the small garden.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b> Children involved in this project took more exercise and improved their diet. The project also demonstrated that early age is the perfect time to focus on tackling childhood obesity. Developing good habits and healthy lifestyles at this stage is vital if health problems later in life are to be prevented. Older children helped in the community garden. Adults offered advice and plants for the garden. Unfortunately building issues prevented a full 2-year programme.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
Children will be more physically active.	200	325	
Children will be more enthusiastic about being active.	50	115	
Children and their families will be more physically active and eventually have the satisfaction of home grown produce to encourage healthy eating.	250	90	
Children will gain knowledge about healthy choices in food.	50	140	
Families will learn about the financial benefits of home grown food, and gain confidence and self esteem.	250	48	
Parents with young toddlers and babies will gain knowledge and ideas about encouraging very young children to become active.	50	75	
		<b>90% Total</b>	

### Long-term conditions

AGE CONCERN WAKEFIELD DISTRICT		£92,400	
<p><b>Project</b> The Evergreen project aimed to set up activities in sheltered housing schemes and residential care homes. It promoted and maintained health and wellbeing. It also provided advocacy support to vulnerable elders to access services and support at times of personal crisis.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b> Over 1000 people have joined activities in sheltered or residential housing which has boosted their confidence, and improved their wellbeing. This reduces reliance on GP services for depression and symptoms of physical deterioration. Activities provided residents with opportunities to improve their social lives, develop new skills and increase their mental and physical activity.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
Residents of sheltered or residential housing schemes will have an improved sense of community and experience a decrease in social isolation.	18 schemes	18 schemes	
Individuals will have an increased level of confidence, self worth, mental and physical wellbeing.	500 people	1142 people	
Opportunities extended by developing new group activities.	50 sessions	78 sessions	
Clients through advocacy support will exercise increased control and bring about change within their life circumstances.	54 people	65 people	
		<b>209% Total</b>	



DIVA		£81,181	
<p><b>Project</b></p> <p>This project developed and implemented a wide range of innovative arts projects. It used music and creative arts to gain positive outcomes for people with long-term conditions (LTC). It aimed to help people to understand their condition and build their confidence. Examples of activities included drumming, rag rugging, mosaics, jewellery, banners and clay modelling.</p>	<p><b>Achievements</b></p> <p>This project's wide-range of activities and sessions increased people's confidence, skills and social contacts. Participants benefitted through informal support from the group, by improving their skills (to keep physically and mentally active), and having their attention diverted away from painful conditions. A large impact event attended by over 450 people offered a range of taster sessions from the project.</p>		
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
People with LTC will increase their social activity per annum.	120	212	
People with LTC will have increased their knowledge and skills within the arts.	140	1433	
People with LTC will report that the project is positively contributing towards rebuilding their confidence and self-esteem.	100	724	
People with LTC will report a reduction in their levels of stress and anxiety.	100	645	
People (participants, carers, family, wider local community) will become more aware of LTC.	500	956	
		<b>414% Total</b>	

PORTOBELLO COMMUNITY FORUM		£33,401	
<p><b>Project</b></p> <p>This project developed and supported community activities in the Portobello area. This was through activities at the Rainbow Café, community centre and outreach work. The project focused on healthy eating, removing social isolation and increasing physical activities. The project reports that there is much more work to be done to address the 30 years of deprivation that this community has suffered.</p>	<p><b>Achievements</b></p> <p>The Portobello Healthy Living initiative has had wide beneficial results within this deprived area. It has improved people's confidence and social contact, and increased exercise and skills levels. It has given a boost to the Portobello Community Forum and the people of the area, which also kick-started other supportive work in this community. Many activities are now virtually self-running.</p>		
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved	
People with long-term conditions (LTC) improving cooking skills through courses and opportunities for regular social contact. They will eat more fresh food by the end of year 2.	60	50	
People with LTC meeting weekly increasing social contact.	25	80	
People with LTC increasing their self-confidence.	30	50	
People engaging in gentle exercise for body, mind and spirit, increasing physical activity levels, and improving wellbeing and contentedness through regular social contact.	60	30	
People engaging in a therapeutic group activity increasing skill levels and self-confidence by creating craft works and learning from each other.	20	32	
		<b>124% Total</b>	

ARTHRITIS CARE		£66,345	
<p><b>Project</b></p> <p>The project aimed to deliver 24 pain management courses to community members living with long-term pain in the Wakefield District and to establish a self-help support group for 20 people with arthritis or chronic pain. Participants would gain a better understanding of their condition and self management techniques. It was anticipated that attendees would also show increased confidence.</p>	<p><b>Achievements</b></p> <p>91% of people attending the courses reported they felt generally more confident and 80% felt better able to manage their pain. 100% said the course had been useful, 92% would recommend it to others and 91.4% think it should be routinely prescribed by healthcare professionals. National research has shown that participants require fewer GP and hospital appointments following the course. A self-help support group and a Fibromyalgia support group were developed.</p>		
<b>OUTCOMES ACHIEVED</b>		2yr target	Achieved
384 people will attend pain management courses of which 60% will consider their ability to manage their pain has improved with a better understanding of their condition and self management techniques.		230	195
Course participants will have increased confidence.		230	219
People with arthritis/chronic pain will become active in creating a self-help support group(s) in Wakefield District.		20	29
			<b>91% Total</b>

PONTEFRACT LIVE AT HOME SCHEME		£88,216	
<p><b>Project</b></p> <p>This project ran a range of activities for people with long-term conditions (LTC) in the Pontefract area related to exercise, healthy diet and social interaction. These activities could provide a platform for other agencies to talk to people in an informal setting. Staff and volunteers also provided befriending and social contact to people with LTC in various ways. Befriending included one-to-one befriending and a Telebuddy scheme which involved a worker phoning isolated people each day to check they were okay, and to deal with any problems.</p>	<p><b>Achievements</b></p> <p>The project demonstrated increased healthy eating and good food options for people with LTC. It provided increased awareness of healthier eating; lunches; free food distribution and escorted shopping. The project motivated people to participate in physical exercise, enabling them to feel fitter and more active. It also facilitated social interaction. The project held information sessions and supported access to other services. It also improved and increased its befriending options for people living with LTC.</p>		
<b>OUTCOMES ACHIEVED</b>		2yr target	Achieved
People with LTC are motivated to eat a more appropriate diet.		50	100
People with LTC are motivated to take part in more social activities.		200	243
People with LTC are motivated to increase their physical exercise.		30	52
People with LTC have a better understanding of health, safety and falls prevention.		100	120
People with LTC miss fewer NHS appointments.		25	25
People with LTC benefit from participation in one-to-one or telephone befriending through increased confidence.		50	50
			<b>130% Total</b>

ST MARY'S COMMUNITY PROJECT		£74,376	
<p><b>Project</b>                      This project worked with Wakefield District Primary Care Trust health trainers in Pontefract's Chequerfield estate to tackle health inequalities. It aimed to support and empower individuals to manage long-term conditions (LTC) such as diabetes and heart conditions by working with individuals and developing community activities.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b>                      The project improved people's wellbeing, and confidence in managing their conditions. The activities proved very popular, with a lunch club, yoga, gentle exercise, bocca (indoor bowls) and safety awareness. Healthy eating was encouraged through swapping and displaying recipes, and involvement of the community food and health worker. Several stop smoking sessions ran at the centre, and were supported by the project.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED		2yr target	Achieved
People with LTC will feel that they have made improvement in physical wellbeing.		90	97
People with LTC will feel more confident in managing conditions.		120	145
			<b>114% Total</b>

*“Client A has worsening mental health problems, and will admit she was close to suicide when she made the initial call to the project. Over the months she became a volunteer with the project, her confidence and self worth has increased, and her mental health and wellbeing have improved.”*

**Re-Connect**

RE-CONNECT		£92,293	
<p><b>Project</b>                      This befriending service for older people aimed to relieve social isolation and exclusion with low and medium level support at home and in communities. This work was carried out by one paid staff member and volunteers. The project established coffee clubs, shopping trips and a befriending service in different parts of the city.</p>		<p><b>Achievements</b>                      The new lunch and coffee clubs set up during this period are now all independent. The project recruited, trained and supported 35 volunteers to help people increase their contact with others, become fitter and improve their diet. An extra 800 people have used the organisation's transport services. Re-Connect has successfully worked with older people with long-term conditions (LTC) and helped them to benefit from ICT, access computers and the Internet.</p>	
OUTCOMES ACHIEVED		2yr target	Achieved
75 people with LTC participating in more social activities.		150	178
People with LTC are physically fitter.		100	130
People with LTC eating a better diet.		100	112
People with LTC benefiting from befriending visits.		50	80
People with LTC better informed about their conditions.		200	200
			<b>117% Total</b>

**WAKEFIELD DISTRICT SIGHT AID** **£77,970**

**Project**

Paid staff and volunteers aimed to provide three demonstration events per month at three venues across Wakefield District, (Outwood, Castleford and South Kirkby). They brought specialist equipment, information and support to visually impaired (VI) people, their carers and professionals, enabling them to access other services and benefits more easily. The project produced a booklet on safety issues for VI people and another booklet to encourage better eye care.

**Achievements**

This project improved visually impaired people's ability to manage their condition, and improved support from other workers or carers. The project found that sight problems associated with other long-term conditions (LTC) demand stronger integrated working to be effective. Early intervention with information and support when sight is first affected is essential in enabling a person to cope with the sight loss in the future. This work is continuing.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved
VI people will have improved their ability to manage their condition.	500	663
300 carers and 200 workers will have improved their ability to provide support for VI people.	300 200	239 49
VI people will feel safer through better hazard awareness.	500	400
		<b>90% Total</b>

**CARERS WAKEFIELD AND DISTRICT** **£96,774**

**Project**

The needs of carers were addressed through workers within integrated network teams in the more deprived parts of Wakefield District. The workers promoted health and wellbeing by identifying and supporting a significant number of previously unknown informal carers.

**Achievements**

The project developed positive relationships with many of the GP surgeries in the district to develop carer friendly practices and a referral scheme to Carers Wakefield and District. This has helped the project to improve carers' lifestyles through better health knowledge. The success of the bid to the Healthier Communities Fund programme also helped the organisation to secure further funding from the local authority to employ additional staff and extend the locality based project to 13 carer support workers across the district.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED	2yr target	Achieved
Carers will be better informed about their rights and support available in their caring role.	1500	1461
Carers will be more aware of their health and social needs as a result of a health and wellbeing review.	1000	844 home visits 1944 additional enquiries
Carers will report an improvement of health and wellbeing as a result of involvement.	900	1315
		<b>106% Total</b>



## Key project learning

Fifteen VCS groups delivered projects to agreed outcomes costing up to £100,000 on time and to budget. The majority of these agreed outcomes were exceeded. Here are some lessons learned from these projects, to support future planning and delivery:

### Long-term conditions

- The importance of socialising in improving both mental and physical health is being increasingly recognised. This is an area where VCS groups are particularly effective because they are locally based and trusted by their communities. These social activities also create access to hard-to-reach groups for additional activity, such as input around fall prevention or exercise.

- Several groups developed by projects have become independent. The sector has the skills to help groups to become self-sustaining, and to access volunteers and local funding. The cost of a group providing weekly social activities and exercise is minimal.

### Childhood obesity

- VCS groups used a variety of creative hooks to interest children in their activities. This generally stopped children's resistance to exercise and healthy eating.

- VCS groups linked children with other community activities they were interested in, such as a local rugby team or class. This magnified the benefits of children's involvement in time-limited courses.

- The community perceives VCS groups in a different way to health agencies. There is less worry about the officialdom or stigma through attending sessions which are not labelled as 'good for you'. They are seen by the children as fun while the health benefits are just as real.

- The age of children seems to affect their openness to change, particularly relating to diet. All projects working with nursery and primary school age children found it easy to introduce new foods. The one project working with older children found greater resistance to lifestyle changes, particularly diet.

### Group impacts

- Before their involvement in this programme, some groups did not make the connection between their after-school club and preventing childhood obesity, or a befriending scheme and improving the management of long-term conditions. VCS groups now recognise how their activities relate to external agencies' agendas. It is vital for groups to look creatively at how their work might meet the needs of statutory agencies in the current limited funding environment.

- VCS knowledge of the commissioning process has increased. Contacts have been established between commissioners and groups who have not previously looked at this area of funding.

Visit [www.wakefieldvcs.org](http://www.wakefieldvcs.org) for more information about Wakefield District's voluntary and community sector and group development.



# Healthier Communities **FUND**

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