

Strengthening Local Communities Programme Evaluation: Cinderford Health and Wellbeing Project

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Mat Jones, Michele Biddle and Amy Beardmore

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. The project model, its origins and host agency	1
3. Profile of the project area	2
4. Main activities and project developments	4
4.1 Overview	4
4.2 Community asset mapping, leafleting and door knocking	7
4.3 Developing a community hub: Café 31	8
4.4 Crafty Club	10
4.5 Heritage society	11
4.6 Gardening club	11
4.7 Memory cafe	11
4.8 Rollercoaster Peer Mental Health Support	12
4.9 Community sports	12
5. Community engagement with the project: summary	12
6. Financial, resource, and social value aspects of the project	13
7. Engagement with the SLC programme Action Learning Set	14
8. Sustainability and future development of project activities	14
9. Discussion of strengths and main areas of project success	14
10. Discussion of challenges arising for the project	15
11. Conclusions	15
12. Sources of data	16

This report is part of a series of evaluation reports on the Strengthening Local Communities Programme, and should be read in conjunction with the Summary and Synthesis Report.

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Further information

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Cinderford Health and Wellbeing Project

1. Introduction

This section sets out the final evaluation report on the Cinderford Health and Wellbeing Project, delivered as the Forest of Dean's District Council project for the Strengthening Local Communities programme. It documents the development of the project model and the delivery of key project activities with attention to the context, rationale, perceived benefits, challenges and learning. The final section summarises progress to date and identifies themes that distinguish the project.

2. The project model, its origins and host agency

The District Council considered a number of options before deciding on Cinderford as the focus for the project. While this selection process took more time in comparison to the other SLC projects, once the basic plan was in place, it rapidly took shape in the autumn of 2017¹. In July 2017, Forest of Dean Council awarded the contract to deliver the project to Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF). Since forming in the early 1990's, FVAF has developed a reputation for encouraging, embracing and enhancing community action throughout the Forest of Dean. A central approach for FVAF is that through "community-led approaches we enable citizens to develop the skills, resiliency and social capital to live more cohesively with one another. The result of which leads to greater empowerment both individually and collectively in meeting health, well-being and social needs."²

FVAF has a strong history of social activism and has challenged cuts to public sector funding, as well as the 'failed model' of top-down and professionally directed services³. A notable concern of FVAF has been a social shift away from "interdependence and solidarity in the direction of individualism and consumption"⁴. FVAF's trustees have considerable knowledge and experience of radical social work and community development in the traditions of leading thinkers such as Bob Holman and John McKnight.⁵ They have advocated on the need for a shift in social policy towards greater 'personalisation, self-direction, and individualised funding.'⁶ One consequence has been that this SLC project started with a well-defined theoretical basis.

The SLC project offered FVAF an opportunity to demonstrate "that for change to occur, it is necessary to find ways to connect citizens within...communities, to build social cohesion and, through helping folk to come together to assert more control and influence over those things that truly matter to them...people, as individuals and in association, will get better at coping."

The role of the lead Community Development Worker (CDW) was:

1. To build relationships with those identified as 'struggling' within [the project] areas and provide them with the skills, confidence and trust to lead better connected and healthier lives.
2. To identify and assist individuals, families and groups who need help will involve building strong relationships with the spectrum of local voluntary/community/housing organisations and with services and initiatives within the healthcare⁷.

¹ July17 Steering Group notes

² Sept17 SLC FVAF Community Development Worker Job Advert

³ Jan18 Interview

⁴ Sept17 Project logic model

⁵ Holman, B., (1987) Research from the underside. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 17(6), pp.669-683.

Kretzmann, J. and McKnight, J.P., (1996) Assets-based community development. *National Civic Review*, 85(4), pp.23-29.

⁶ Rhodes, B., (2010) *Much More to Life than Services*. FastPrint Services. Peterborough.

⁷ Sept17 CDW Job Description

This vision was to be achieved through community-based outreach, one-to-one and group based interventions that lead to citizens taking part in meaningful community activity. According to FVAF, “local community assets will only be ‘used’ if people feel they have ownership of them”⁸. At the outset of the SLC project, FVAF identified a potential tension with the local authority/Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) funders. FVAF’s experience had been these institutions tended to take a directive approach, rather than to facilitate community-instigated change.⁹

The appointment of the lead CDW brought additional skills and experience from the field of community learning and adult education, notably with regard to Gerald Egan’s model of ‘the skilled helper’¹⁰, and the role of trust and relational work. Alongside expertise in community development principles, FVAF have a strong track-record in project management skills, successful collaborative funding awards, and a strategic approach to voluntary action in the Forest of Dean.

In the original plan¹¹, the goals of the project were set out as follows:

Intended Outcomes

- 1. Stronger, more confident, assertive and socially connected citizens*
- 2. Increased community cohesion evidenced through increased community activities*
- 3. Evidence of increased neighbourliness, care and interdependence*
- 4. Improved individual wellbeing*
- 5. More relevant, respectful and productive interactions between citizens and helping agencies*

Intended Impacts

- 1. Improved planning and delivery of public/health services in the localities – improved understanding of the core economy*
- 2. Sustained improvements in the health and well-being of individuals living within these neighbourhoods*
- 3. Reduction in the frequency, duration, and intensity of mental ill-health episodes experienced within the target population and evidence of improved mental health*
- 4. Vibrant, resilient and proud neighbourhoods with a positive identity (this takes much longer than 2 years!)*
- 5. A ‘healthy’ and collaborative relationship between the citizenry and local service agencies*
- 6. Effective use of health services.*

However, in line with the bottom-up approach of the project, the staff recognised that these original goals were likely to change through subsequent engagement with residents.

3. Profile of the project area

The focus neighbourhoods for the project are Denecroft and Hilldean, which are the two most deprived areas of Cinderford, and also two out of the five most deprived areas in the Forest of Dean. FVAF noted that the neighbourhoods are “judged to be areas of significant socio-economic deprivation with poor physical and little community/relationship/social capital-based infrastructure, and concomitant high incidence of chronic physical and mental ill-health (morbidity).”¹²

⁸ Apr18 Interview

⁹ Apr18 Interview

¹⁰ Egan, G., (1990) *The Skilled Helper: A systematic approach to effective helping*. Thomson Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

¹¹ Project logic model. Sept17

¹² Project logic model. Sep17

Each area has a somewhat different demographic make-up. Denecroft has an elderly population, with a lot of supported housing, bungalows and a day care centre. Hilldean has more single-parent and young families, and is over 60% social housing.

Figure 1: Housing in the areas of Denecroft and Hilldean¹³



The profiles nearby GP practices show a higher reported prevalence for a majority, but not all, conditions. Records for the wider area show that there is a higher than average use of A&E, and high prescriptions of pain killers [check].

¹³ Source: Zoopla property listings. Jul19. Fair Use

Table 1: Reported prevalence of conditions at nearby GP practices, 2015/16¹⁴

	Dockham Road Surgery	Forest Health Care	Gloucestershire
Mental Health Prevalence (all ages)	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Depression Prevalence (aged 18+)	11.1%	11.5%	7.7%
Dementia Prevalence (all ages)	0.7%	0.7%	0.9%
Coronary Heart Disease Prevalence (all ages)	4.6%	3.9%	3.2%
Hypertension Prevalence (all ages)	12.5%	16.2%	14.0%
COPD Prevalence (all ages)	1.7%	2.8%	1.7%
Asthma Prevalence (all ages)	7.2%	8.7%	6.5%
Obesity Prevalence (aged 18+)	14.4%	16.9%	9.4%
Cancer Prevalence (all ages)	3.0%	3.3%	2.8%
Chronic Kidney Disease Prevalence (aged 18+)	5.8%	9.1%	6.6%
Diabetes Prevalence (aged 17+)	8.0%	7.9%	6.4%

One issue with the local data for this project has been that the SLC Project Health Profile does not directly correspond to the two areas of Denecroft and Hildean: the profile covers the whole area of Cinderford, not the two estates. This limited their usefulness to help prioritise actions for the project.

4. Main activities and project developments

4.1 Overview

This section sets out the main elements of the project. At the point of the interim report, the project is set to run for a further 3 months, with a 5-month extension. Table 2 provides a summary timeline of key events for the project.

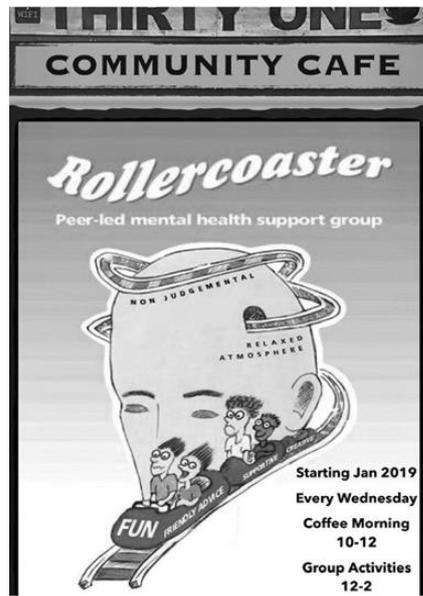
Table 2: Summary timeline of project events

Project timeline		
2017	July	Forest of Dean (FoD) District Council commissions FVAF to deliver the project
	August	
	September	FVAF produce the project plan, logic model, and CDW job advert
	October	
	November	
	December	Appointment of the project lead CDW
2018	January	Lead CDW starts work on the project with neighbourhood meetings and meetings with local agency staff Asset mapping and distribution of project leaflets to all households in project area
	February	Presentation of project plans to statutory bodies including the Town and District Councils. First responses to leafleting, setting up of social media, meeting with established groups and charitable organisations.
	March	Door knocking and identification of potential community activities and need for community focused public space.

¹⁴ GP Practice Profiles

		Start of project support for Gardening Club with Cinderford Town Council and dialogue with Two Rivers Housing association around use of communal space. Successful bid to Tudor Trust for the development of a community hub. Additional staffing and resource budget awarded.
	April	Start of project work with Cinderford Heritage Society Community Hub plans developed in partnership with Cinderford Area Neighbourhood Development Initiative (CANDI)
	May	Support to run community sports activities from Freedom Leisure: Walking Rugby, Netball & Football, Racket Sports Club, Walking Group.
	June	Café 31 Community Hub plan agreed: additional staff employed and CANDI building leased for 2 years.
	July	Café 31 refurbishment starts with £10k budget.
	August	Refurb undertaken with input from National Citizenship Award and FVAF volunteers. Café launched at CindyFest music event by Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire.
	September	Opening of Café 31 Project team hosts the ALS meeting Support for Heritage Open Day in Cinderford: Town tours undertaken from Café 31.
	October	Start of support for a range of voluntary activities through Café 31 Feasibility work for an additional community hub at Splinters youth club at Forest High/Freedom Leisure site.
	November	Start of regular support session offered by charitable organisations.
	December	Crafty club starts Xmas day community buffet
2019	January	Consolidation and growth of community activities through Café 31 Average Weekly surplus tops £100 for the first time.
	February	Opening hours extended to Saturdays so now at maximum 40hr capacity.
	March	International Women's Day generates highest daily footfall to date (65) and raises £105 for Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS).
	April	Gardening Club adopts CANDI garden as it's home garden.
	May	Preparations to extend project work beyond the SLC funding period FoD Rocks join Weekly craft event on Fridays – daily average footfall tops 20 for the first time.
	June	CANDI Garden Refurb restarts – supported by donations from local businesses. FoD Men's Shed Project support the garden in building beds and bins.
	July	Café 31 hosts the first LGBTQ+ Pride Event in the Forest in partnership with Gloucestershire Pride and Cinderford Rugby Club: 60 participants in total.
	August	CindyFest and Garden opening generates highest daily footfall to date. (105) Outreach program attends community events publicising C31, FVAF & volunteering.
	September	Planned start of C31 Study Club Mondays offering a free meal.
	October	Planned start of C31 Pride Support Group Tuesdays 6-9pm.
	November	
	December	Original end month for the SLC project: Funding secured for 5month extension.
2020	January	
	February	
	March	

Figure 2: Photos of the cafe refurbishment and community events



4.2 Community asset mapping, leafleting and door knocking

While Cinderford has suffered from disinvestment over the last decade, FVAF identified a range of community assets that offered opportunities through which to develop the SLC project. As long-term local residents and employees of FVAF, the project team were able to draw upon a range of personal and work-based connections. These links helped the project team understand the specific features of assets within the project area. An initial stage for the lead CDW involved attending or organising meetings with representatives of community groups and local agencies. These had mixed success, with an estimated “30% failure rate” for meetings, some of which were time consuming to set up¹⁵.

Box 1: Community assets relevant to the project

Two Rivers Housing Association green space. The leading housing association in the project neighbourhoods responsible for managing a number of publicly accessible green spaces.

CANDI. An established youth project with a venue situated mid distance between the two project neighbourhoods. Attendance has dropped in recent years and the venue was in urgent need of refurbishment.

Cinderford’s heritage. A less tangible community asset, but the town’s rich industrial history is a source of pride for local residents. The earlier, pre-industrial history is also of interest, but less well recognised. The **Town Museum** is a focal point and there is an annual Forest of Dean heritage week.

Forest of Dean green space. Much of the surrounding countryside is open access and offers a variety of opportunities for community activities. Transport and accessibility can be a problem.

Local councillors actively support a range of community and voluntary sector initiatives.

Local shops, cafes and pubs. While these are important meeting places, as commercial environments they are less accessible for residents on a low income.

Splinters youth club. A good, although underused, venue. At the time of the project, the venue was being used for a youth disability monthly meeting. Splinters is adjacent to **Forest High** school and **Freedom Leisure**.

Cinderford Football Club is an active community group that run a lunch club. The group tend to be quite self-contained. **Cinderford Rugby Club** is similarly active and has tended to be more outward facing than the Football Club.

Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Men’s Shed is an active group throughout the District, although its base is located 8 miles from the project area near Lydney.

Cinderford Summer School and **adult learning courses** are available through Gloucestershire College’s Cinderford Campus, two miles from the project neighbourhoods.

Dockham Road GP practice and **Forest Health Centre.** Two GP practices well located for access from the two project neighbourhoods.

Dilke Memorial Hospital two miles from the project neighbourhoods. In the early stage of the project there was uncertainty about the future of the hospital. In August 2018, Gloucestershire CCG and Gloucestershire Care Services decided on Cinderford as the favoured site for the new hospital in the Forest of Dean.

There is a wide range of **other local services and activities** including those linked to social care, policing and community safety, education and housing.

Covering all households in the project area, the CDW delivered approximately 1,500 leaflets introducing the project, and invited people to get involved and contribute ideas about what they would like to happen in the community. The leafleting was accompanied by selective door knocking at about 150 residences¹⁶. Initially the CDW used a personal recording system for the area. A colour

¹⁵ Jul18 Interview

¹⁶ ALS2 Jun18

coded map of the project area captured an impression of the potential for engagement with the SLC project: green for “high engagement”; amber for “friendliness/openness, but hesitant to engage or low engagement”; red for “resistance/no engagement”.

This work led to five responses from people who were very keen to get involved and who all suggested activities. At this stage, FVAF also met some questions about the ethical foundations of the project. There were challenges openly in-person and on social media, about whether the FVAF project was facilitating the reduction in health and social care services by attempting to demonstrate that volunteers could substitute for professionally led services. Consequently, a few residents said that did want to get involved in the project. This came at a time of local concern about the future of the local community hospital.

Work during the first months of the project, helped FVAF confirm and revise the team’s understanding of issues for the project. Some of the key themes were:

- Residents often expressed a local identity that was strongly linked to Cinderford town, the Forest of Dean and, to a lesser extent, the project neighbourhoods.
- Many local people appeared isolated, but also unsure about how they might act locally to change this.
- There were few ‘bumping spots’ in the project neighbourhoods where residents could meet informally.
- While there were a number of existing community groups, these were at capacity or well-established, and not currently looking to make new neighbourhood connections.
- Residents were concerned about the loss of local services, which in turn led to some feeling sceptical about efforts to develop community-led activities.

Based upon this stage of the project, the team worked with their key resident contacts on ideas for community gardening, local heritage, and community sport. The team took a pro-active approach in making specific suggestions to residents, mindful that it is difficult to test out options in a vacuum. These ‘shell ideas’ helped the project move forward promptly in the short time available.

“We wanted to develop pre-packaged – quite vague- ideas that residents could buy in to, without making them feel like they had to start from nothing.” [CDW#2Apr18]

The team also followed up the initial project leaflet with ongoing updates, in the form of newsletters, posters and social media, to generate momentum:

“Part of my strategy... is to drip feed information all the time, so people know that there are things happening even if they can’t see it. You need to constantly generate that sense that things are happening.” [CDW#1 Jul18]

4.3 Developing a community hub: Café 31

Reflecting on the initial stage of the project, the lead CDW said “the biggest thing that jumped out was: Where do people meet?” Residents lacked a good space where they could come together, which in turn, inhibited opportunities for informal dialogue about local issues and opportunities. The SLC project coincided very well with a successful grant application by FVAF to the Tudor Trust to develop a local community hub. FVAF explain their rationale for the community hub as follows:

“Recent decades have witnessed the disappearance of public spaces. Opportunities for communities to socialise without pressure to spend money have dwindled increasing social isolation and fragmentation. The ‘community hub’ model is an opportunity to challenge and reverse this decline.”¹⁷

The hub pilot is based at the CANDI (Cinderford Area Neighbourhood Development Initiative) Youth Club building, a former shop equidistant between the two SLC project neighbourhoods. CANDI has a long history of youth work and has owned the building since 1998. CANDI had experienced the loss of grant funding, decline in provision, and difficulty maintaining the fabric of the building. The Tudor Trust award of £70K comprised £10K for the refurbishment of the building and £60K towards the running costs of the community hub pilot from mid-2018.

The ground floor area was refurbished in mid-2018 with the support of FVAF staff, volunteers and community members. ‘Café 31’ presents as a ‘shabby chic’ space that can accommodate 20 seated visitors, and offers barista coffee and simple meals at low cost. The space is intended to be versatile for a range of uses and has a fully accessible toilet. FVAF have an agreement to use Café 31 within fixed hours. Meanwhile CANDI have re-established their youth work provision on Monday and Wednesday evenings at the venue.

Since its opening in September 2018, the FVAF team have used the space as a primary point from which to convene and organise SLC project activities. There is a timetable of regular activities, which people can dip in and dip out of, and where volunteering - or more subtle forms of contribution- are encouraged. Initial activities included:

- Memory Café with FoD Dementia Action Alliance
- Barnwood Grants Drop-In
- Gloucestershire Carers Drop-In
- Great Oaks Hospice Drop-In
- Independence Trust Drop-In
- Community Concern Café with local PCSOs.
- Universal Credit Advice & Support
- Rollercoaster Peer Mental Health Support
- CindiShed – Men’s Shed Branch
- Adult Education IT support
- Café Crooners singing group
- Intro to IT with Two Rivers Housing
- Crafty Club
- Cinderford Gardening Club

A range of professionals use the café as a meeting place with clients, including the social prescribing team, the complex care at home team, the neighbourhood social work team, and local councillors. However, one aim has been to maintain a very informal atmosphere “in which the boundaries between ‘providers and clients’ are erased” [Tudor Trust report May19]

“I’ve been encouraging staff to take off their name badges. Badges sort of command attention like “I’m here! You need to speak to me.” [CDW#1 Apr19]

Part of the success of the hub is defined in terms of the diverse forms of collaborative partnerships fostered between individuals and organisations. The round-the-year accessibility the space is intended

¹⁷ Report to Tudor Trust report May19

to foster social connections that might otherwise falter or stall, for example, during the late winter slowdown in community activities.

The café has been raising funds through its operation. Between September '18 and May '19, the café generated a surplus of £1715, which FVAF will use to extend the life of the hub pilot. The ethical trading principles of the café mean that the menu is FairTrade certified, where practical, and the prices are kept to a minimum. However, it has been a challenge to balance the goals of social justice and financial viability, particularly for the lunch menu profit margin. In contrast, the barista coffee and homemade cake are a significantly more profitable offer.

Café 31 was open on the Christmas Day offering a free buffet and free donated presents. There are local community support officers, who do community engagement projects, talking to young people about their attitudes, aspirations for the town. A total of 23 local residents participated in the event.

The garden area at Café 31 has been cleared and has been renovated with the support of the gardening club volunteers, the FoD Men's Shed, and donations of plants and garden materials. Access from the café to the rear garden is not straightforward, which may limit the potential to connect community hub activities between the two spaces.

It is difficult to meaningfully separate the Tudor Trust and SLC funded activities. In practice, the two areas of funded work are almost entirely complementary. From the perspective of SLC, the Tudor Trust funding has substantially enhanced the programme activities. A possible downside has been 'pinch points' where, for example, Tudor Trust funded Café 31 renovation work during the summer of 2018 took priority over developing SLC activities¹⁸.

4.4 Crafty Club

"I have anxiety, depression, PTSD, chronic fatigue, and fibromyalgia. I often spend much of the week in bed. I find I don't go out very much...But I'm really passionate about craft and making things. I like to do things in a space with other people. I used to go and sit in Wetherspoons, but I was there just by myself and it was not good for me at all. Also, everywhere else [apart from Café 31] you have to pay a lot just to hire a space and buy their drinks." [#4]

Crafty Club was established by a young woman who had multiple health issues, was unable to work, and was becoming isolated at home¹⁹. On the advice of a social worker, she contacted the project team with an idea to start craft group. The team made a weekly booking at Café 31 and helped publicise the group. They also offered light touch advice and support to the young woman and the others to run the group in the way that they feel most comfortable. Refreshments and food is available through the café at a low cost. A significant amount of crafting resources were donated by participants to the group to the value of approximately £1,000. Attendees are asked to make a small weekly donation to run the group. Barnwood Trust have awarded the group a small grant of £250. Between December '18 and May '19, the group had six regular participants, plus others who attend on an occasional basis. The participants come from a range of backgrounds, but have started to form good friendships. Members of the group talked about organising other activities.

"I find it difficult to know what's happening around here. It's not always on the net. I've only recently had a computer. I find out through the library or shop fronts. In other places I feel awkward being alone. They're also expensive and you can't stay for that long." [#3m]

¹⁸ Oct18 Interview

¹⁹ May19 interviews

"I'd like to put something back in you know. I've never claimed and I don't know about benefits and stuff like that. So if we can raise a bit of money for charity then I'm up for that." [#6f who disclosed low income, isolation, and a serious long term health condition]

"I really like coming here – it gets me out. I've met new people. At first I didn't know who [the project workers] were. I knew they were doing things, but they just seemed like everyone else, I didn't know they were running the café." [#4f who disclosed mental ill health]

The group has grown in terms of attendance and, according to one member, "we haven't lost anyone yet – I'd say that's pretty good [#6f]." Some members come from outside the project area. However, the project team are keen not to exclude anyone on the basis of residence. The club is largely self-managing with the leadership of the founder, but as it develops, the group appreciates facilitation and occasional supervision from project staff in the café.

4.5 Heritage society

The CDW has supported the Cinderford History Society. In 2018, this group ran an event for the Heritage Open Day in which 18 people attended. The event coincided with the opening of the old bank building, which the town council has recently bought, and the tower in the middle of the town was open to visitors. There was also a Memorabilia Day event held at the town council offices. Cinderford is a difficult town to move around for someone with accessibility issues. The group have organised three history trail walks around Cinderford, each relatively short, easy walks in which they wanted to test out whether people with disabilities would come and get involved.

4.6 Gardening club

The initial community engagement work helped the CDW identify available spaces on Two Rivers Housing Association land for community gardening. These areas are under-used and, with the use of 'No Ball Games' signs, signalled a message to restrict community engagement. The CDW has helped start out a pilot gardening club. To start, there was a clash of agendas. The housing association supported a two-hour gardening club for Two Rivers residents, but did not want to open it for use by the wider community: this led to artificial barriers.

Subsequently, the gardening club has taken on the renovation of other areas in Cinderford. The group started renovating the garden at the back of the Community Café in April 2018. They have also taken on beautifying a small garden next to the town hall, which is where a lot of wedding photography takes place, from the registrar office. They are hoping to get a hold of other land around Cinderford that are currently unused, which has potential to be turned into a community allotment. Equipment and resources to the value of £250 have been donated. In 2018, key ideas around a Spring Plant Fair, a Christmas Market, and Town Beautification were explored to provide revenue and sustainable growth. A charitable endeavour through providing respite gardening services is being discussed in collaboration with Adult Social Services²⁰.

4.7 Memory cafe

The memory café was set up to offer a weekly informal meeting place for people with dementia, their carers, and others. The group started well and attracted a variety of people who lacked alternative events at time of the weekly meeting. The space has enabled informal contacts with other people attending the café and is therefore less segregated than other dementia groups. Despite clear evidence from some residents of the need for memory cafés, the project team have had some difficulties making links and getting recommendations through dementia services. This is connected to the lack of intermediaries who are able to signpost and connect people. A limitation of the GP social

²⁰ Jul18 interview

prescribing work is that link workers are only likely to refer those coming to the attention of GP services²¹.

4.8 Rollercoaster Peer Mental Health Support

Led by a person with experience of mental health issues, Rollercoaster is a small voluntary project that offers a listening ear, advice and signposting. Café 31 has set up a weekly drop in for Rollercoaster. The service is open and very informal. The lead is currently developing new facilitation skills through a local adult education course.

4.9 Community sports

While there is a local leisure centre, the costs of facilities hire are prohibitive for many residents in the project area. In May 2018, the CDW set out to negotiate block bookings of sports facilities during the summer period and to recruit additional volunteers to lead on some taster sessions. Five regular attendees took part in racket sports²². Additional ‘walking’ sports events have been organised through Freedom Leisure and promoted through the Café.

5. Community engagement with the project: summary

A principle of the project has been to avoid creating hard distinctions between ‘project participants’, ‘volunteers’, ‘local residents’, ‘target groups’, ‘agency staff’ and others. Therefore, it is not straightforward to determine rates of participation and participant characteristics in the sense commonly used in more structured community interventions. Nevertheless, in line with the original project plan and CDW job description, the project team maintain monitoring, register, and diary notes to provide a record of activity delivery and engagement. The table below gives a summary of leading forms of quantitative data related to the project. There are some limitations to the information, given that the records overlap, sometimes under-record, and can only partially distinguish individual patterns of engagement.

Table 3: Summary of key projects and indications of community engagement

Activities led or supported by the project	Indication of community reach or engagement	Source/Note
Distribution of project newsletter	Approx. 1500 households leafleted	Status report
Door knocking	Approx. 150 doors knocked 5 residents engaged in the project	Status report
Initial neighbourhood meetings	Very low engagement via Town Council & 2 Rivers Housing.	In project plan
Café 31	Approx. 350 activity sessions 1750 estimated participations 11 CVS partners and 6 statutory collaborations 9 individuals volunteer regular basis, contributing 200 volunteer hours Weekly average of 60 participants	April19
LDD Community Work Experience	3 weekly Participants	Project record
Community Ed Mentoring	2 weekly Participants	Project record
Crafty Club	Range of 4-18 participants per session 6 regular participants	April19
Racket Sports Group	5 participants	Status report
Gardening Club	3 Core volunteers + 2 regular participants	Project record
Heritage society	18 people attended open day	Sept18

²¹ Apr19 Interview

²² Sep18 Interview

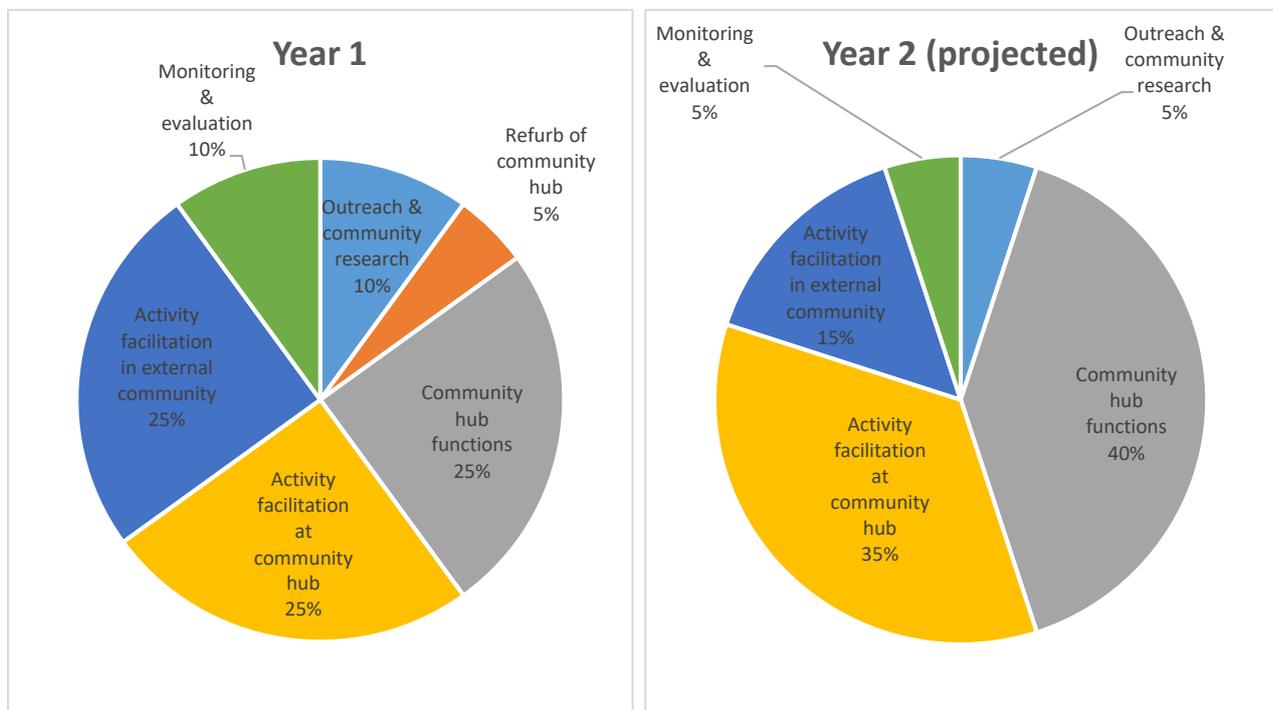
Rollercoaster mental health support	2 average per week	Interview Apr19
Forest Rocks	4 Regular participants	Project record
Memory café	Range of 6-20 participants per session	April19
Barnwood Grants drop-in	Average of 2 referrals made per session.	Project record
Xmas Buffet Meal 2018	23 local residents participated	Project record
International Women's Day	65 Participants	Project record
Forest Pride Event	60 Participants	Project record
CindyFest Garden Opening	105 Visitors	Project record

6. Financial, resource, and social value aspects of the project

As with most SLC projects, staffing was the primary cost for the Cinderford project. The funds were used support a 20-hour contract over a 24-month period. Management and office support was provided through FVAF. The FoD lead council officer met with the project team on a regular basis, but was not directly involved with the delivery of the project. FVAF secured substantial complementary grant funding through the Tudor Trust.

In practice, it is difficult to distinguish between SLC and Tudor Trust funded activities. The lead CDW has been employed to undertake 20 hours SLC and 20 hours Tudor Trust project work per week. The charts below summarise estimates of the breakdown in time in SLC project years 1 and 2. These show that the SLC project is strongly oriented to supporting the development and activities at the community hub, and that this continues to be a major focus as the project has developed.

Charts 1 and 2:



The main areas of social value are likely to lie in personal development support for community members taking part in project activities. While there is undoubtedly value linked to the gardening, sport and heritage activities, there may be substantial benefits to participants in the craft and memory café activities. This value is of benefit to mainstream social care and health services.

Additional forms of value are likely to accrue for voluntary and public sector agencies making use of the café as a point for collaborative and client-based work.

A largely intangible form of value, but an important one reported by participants, is the role of Café 31 as an example and inspiration for informal and grass-roots community development. In the short term, some of this benefit is likely to be evidenced through support from volunteers and practitioners.

7. Engagement with the SLC programme Action Learning Set

FVAF staff have attended 5 out of 8 ALS meetings to date. As experienced community development practitioners, the team were able to bring considerable expertise to the group. The CDW is a part-time University lecturer in Community Education and Development, and the project manager and trustees have extensive experience in youth, community and social work fields. However, FVAF reported difficulties making attendance a priority alongside other commitments, especially those linked to the staffing of Café 31. Although considered initially useful as discussions focused on building links, collaborations and capacity, the team felt the ALS meetings became less pertinent to their own experience as the various projects diverged.

8. Sustainability and future development of project activities

Over the course of the project, FVAF was successful in securing funding that complemented the delivery of the project. Some of the surplus from the café will be put towards extending the project activities. However, after the middle of 2020, the café is currently expected to revert to CANDI management and become limited to CANDI youth club activities. FVAF are in the process of exploring an alternative location for a Cinderford community hub but efforts to secure a continuation of the Café 31 pilot are ongoing. The former Splinters youth club located at the Forest High/Freedom Leisure site was initially identified as an 'under-utilised' asset and, compared to Café 31, the venue has the attraction of a larger space, greater accessibility and potentially higher footfall. From a youth work perspective, a further argument for the additional hub has been that young people are diverse, and one space is unlikely to meet the needs of multiple interest groups in the area.

9. Discussion of strengths and main areas of project success

There were a number of strengths to the project model in Cinderford:

- The host organisation provided pre-existing community connections and local experience that helped the project make an effective start.
- FVAF staff and trustees have extensive experience in the fields of community development and voluntary action. This expertise informed the principles and methods used in the project.
- The experience of the project team helped them mitigate against issues commonly faced in community development. For example, flexible contract working hours for the project lead helped to meet seasonal fluctuations in community development activity.
- Despite considerable social and economic adversity, Cinderford has a rich history of community activism that informed the direction of the project.
- There has been strong support for the project from local agencies such as adult mental health social services and local councillors.
- The host agency successfully obtained additional funding that complemented the core aims of the project. This enhanced the ability of the team to develop activities within the time available, and to create opportunities to sustain activities after the SLC funding period.

10. Discussion of challenges arising for the project

Some challenges that the project has encountered have been²³:

- The SLC Health Profile data was of very limited use. This was due to lack of match with the project neighbourhoods, the granularity and quality of the data, and difficulties reconciling 'need-based data' with an assets-based approach.
- The initial framework for the UWE questionnaire-based evaluation with participants was not compatible with the project principles for community engagement.
- There were some communication difficulties between the SLC Steering Group and FVAF regarding programme priorities and local project autonomy.
- The project team did not attend some ALS meetings due to competing priorities and the constraints of operating a fixed staffing timetable to ensure Café openings.
- For some project activities, change was restricted by external factors such as the preparedness of partner agencies make commitments at a point that fitted with the project plan.
- The small neighbourhood focus of the project restricted the scale of the community development impacts. This was complicated by the split focus across two separate neighbourhoods.
- There was disappointing engagement, and some resistance, from established local voluntary sector agencies. This included working with people who were change averse, working in silos, or defensive of their remit and gatekeeping role
- There have been difficulties engaging some public sector agencies, such as adult social services regarding dementia support. Responsibilities for referral, publicity and facilitation were not clarified.
- One partner agency did not wish to engage with community members wider than their client group and often expected or assumed sole use of the Café space.
- There was scepticism about the project goals from residents concerned about cuts and reorganisation in local health services. This was particularly heightened around the use of 'medical' histories and service use as key monitoring indicators.
- Lack of continuity in staff and volunteers across a range of organisations has led to leads being lost and repetition of meetings with newly appointed staff. New staff often brought different priorities and perspectives to those already discussed or agreed.
- There were pressures to fill in for capacity issues for external projects. This hindered the ability of the project to focus on strategic goals.
- At times, day to day running of the Community Hub risked taking over from other SLC tasks.
- The longer-term future of the new groups is entwined with the long term sustainability of the community hub model. The business income has not yet been proven to suggest staffing and rental costs can be covered.

11. Conclusions

This report forms the stepping stone towards the final evaluation reporting on the Cinderford project and wider SLC programme. At this stage, the evaluation shows how the FVAF, with the support of FoD District Council, are delivering a highly active project that has made good use of local resources and capitalised on additional funding. The project has initiated and developed a wide range of small-scale activities and attracted residents with social needs who, at the same time, bring local contributions that are valued by others. A feature that marks out this project has been the blurring of lines between roles such as 'participants', 'service users', 'practitioners' and 'organisers'. This flexibility supports

²³ Compiled from a variety of records

informal and creative forms of community engagement and acts as a model for similar work in the district and county.

12. Sources of data

The evaluation is based upon a variety of sources of data collected from the inception of the project. These include:

- Ten individual or group interviews with the FVAF trustees and project delivery team.
- Interviews and informal activity observations with eleven project participants/partner staff/volunteers.
- Notes from programme Action Learning Sets (5/8 attended) and Steering Group meetings.
- Analysis of project records including project plans and logic model, CDW job description, project monitoring records, status reports, funding report, email and phone correspondence.