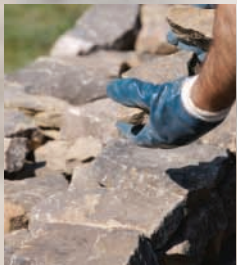


Taken for Granted

Why local communities need small grants



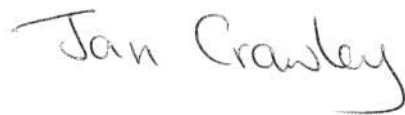
Introduction

The importance of smaller voluntary and community organisations has become increasingly clear over the past year as successive government white papers and initiatives have emphasised the value of community engagement, and the vital role of a healthy community sector in delivering it.

Earlier this year, members of the South West Funders' Forum concluded that these organisations were not receiving the level of small grant funding and support they need to continue to thrive - and the South West is a region which is particularly rich in the voluntary activity led by these groups. They depend on national grant makers, regional independent trusts and foundations and local authorities for support, which is worth giving for the following reasons:

- The link between small community groups and local engagement and democracy is now understood. Government expects strategic bodies to use this link, and will know if they fail
- Many of the groups in the South West that are essential to creating engaged communities are telling us that they are threatened with a funding crisis
- A successful programme of grants and support that will enable strategic bodies to meet their objectives does not cost a great deal, but delivers huge benefits

We hope that making these points clear will act as a call to action to everyone in a position to ensure that the small amounts of money and assistance that are required to keep local communities thriving continue to flow.



Jan Crawley
South West Foundation



Steve Keable
Devon County Council

Joint Chairs, South West Funders' Forum

Name: **Ups and Downs South West**

Location: **Somerset**

Grant: **Started with a grant of £1,300 which led to £179,933 of total funding over five years**

Small grants lead to great things



Ups and Downs South West is the only volunteer support group in the UK to offer a wide range of services to families who have a child with Down Syndrome – whether it’s a chat over a coffee, help

filling out a form, or providing specialist advice to teaching staff or health professionals. The driving force behind the group, Wendy Hellowell, founded it in Somerset in 1997.

When Wendy’s son Oliver, who is now 9 years old, was born, she soon discovered that there was little in terms of support for new parents or accurate information about the condition.

“I wanted to read everything there was to read about Down Syndrome, but most of the books I came across at that time painted a very outdated and misleading picture. I wouldn’t accept that and wanted to find a new, positive, optimistic image and then share that with other people,” said Wendy.

In 2000, Ups and Downs were successful with an application to Awards for All and received a grant of £1,300 which provided books, teaching materials, videos. It has grown hugely since then. Further help from the Big Lottery Fund has enabled it to hold conferences, run a telephone helpline and, in particular, to provide Advisory Teachers who visit schools to provide in-school training for staff.

“Children with Down Syndrome have a very specific learning profile and this is not normally an area offered as a specialism by support services at the LEA,” explained Wendy.

The group now has around 100 member families across the South West, from Cornwall to Wiltshire.

Big government supports small grants

The link between supporting grass-roots community groups and achieving strategic objectives is now clear, and government is acting because it understands how supporting community groups helps build engagement and local democracy.

An £80 million small grants programme for community action and voice, a £50 million endowment fund to be matched by local independent foundations, £40 million to invest in local community assets and enterprise development, and £6.5 million immediately to support community building within Local Area agreements were among the announcements in the Office of the Third Sector and Treasury Review 2007.

This investment is about civil renewal and community engagement:

‘The Government wants to ensure that all communities can thrive, with the capacity to bring people together to deal with common concerns and achieve change. At the heart of this active participation of communities in civil renewal and neighbourhood regeneration are community based organisations providing the platform not only to meet the needs of individuals but for empowerment of individuals to bring about transformation of communities. Community organisations also act as a bridge between individuals and the state, providing opportunities for



people to express their voices, building democratic engagement.’¹ Office of the Third Sector Review

New government money alone will not bring this about – continued and enhanced local commitment is also required, and an understanding that this is about more than ‘hand-outs to worthy causes’.

The Local Network Fund for Children and Young People (LNF), part of the Government's national strategy to alleviate child poverty, distributed £10.6 million in grants averaging £4,600 in 2001-2006 in the South West. Administered by local independent funders - seven Community Foundations – a total of 2,264 grants were awarded benefiting 380,064 children and young people.



“If we hadn't had the money from the Local Network Fund we would not have been able to keep the Saturday club going.”

From March 2006 applications were linked to the five themes of the Government's 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme. An evaluation of the LNF's

impact in the South West found that it contributed overall to the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes and in particular to the priorities and targets of Children and Young People Plans and LAAs:

'There is clear evidence of the contribution that groups funded under LNF in the South West have made and could continue to make to the achievement of ECM outcomes and the priorities of Children and Young People Plans in the South West – and therefore with the achievement of the targets of Local Area Agreements, particularly health, achievement and access to services targets.'⁴

This finding has been replicated in similar studies of LNF elsewhere in the country. The evaluation also found that the fund has been responsive to local needs, and 'enabled a real step change in skill levels and confidence of groups to undertake other projects'. The Local Network Fund will close on March 2008.

An order to engage

The other partners in civil renewal are the statutory bodies that communities engage with. Government is acting on its view that 'Engagement between the local voluntary and community bodies and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) is inconsistent at best and weak at worst.'² Legislation has followed.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act includes a new duty requiring local authorities to inform, consult and involve local people in running local services. Empowered citizens and greater engagement of local people in shaping public policies and services are a key benefit of the Act.

This new statutory duty extends to planning, as the Planning White Paper explained: 'A new statutory best value duty to appropriately involve, as well as inform and consult, in the exercise of the local authority's functions, including planning, will help to ensure that local authorities practise high levels of community engagement. The Comprehensive Area Assessment will include consideration of community engagement.'³ Planning White Paper.



So, what have planning, Local Area Agreements and a more joined up approach to involving the wider community got to do with small grants for small groups? And if the Government is putting cash into them, why should we be so concerned just now?

There is a real connection between grants made to local community groups and the achievement of government and LAA outcomes, as a recent study of the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People (which is linked to the Every Child Matters programme) shows.⁴

Name: Devon County Council

Location: Exeter

Grant: Joint councillor resources totalled £15,000

One Plus One Equals Four - small grants can add up to much more than the sum of their parts



Councillors in many parts of the region now have budgets of their own for making small grants. Used imaginatively, these can produce big results.

When Devon Youth Service in Exeter had two minibuses for youth activities, Councillor Vanessa Newcombe noticed that young people west of the Exe were not well served, typically getting trips out only two or three times a year. So she took up the matter. As her allocation was not enough to buy a minibus, she teamed up with neighbouring Councillor Rob Hannaford. Their joint resources came to nearly £15,000 which, when joined to the buying power of the County Council, and some extra funding from the Community Safety Partnership, enabled the purchase of a minibus, for use primarily in the West Exe area.

The bus was bought in time for the 2007 summer holidays, when it was used nearly every day. And the police have also been able to use it for trips out for young people with whom they have been engaging. According to Vanessa Newcombe: "Rob and I are so pleased that we have been able to make a very real difference to the lives of many young people in the West Exe area of Exeter - an area with large patches of deprivation - giving them opportunities to go and see places and do things they would otherwise not have the opportunity to do."

Now you see them, soon you won't?

Just when the sector is rising up the government's agenda, voluntary organisations in the South West appear to be heading for a funding crisis.

A recent funding survey by South West Forum (the regional voice of the voluntary and community sector) reported 'Previously buoyant, able organisations unable to obtain funding from any source'.⁵ Small community organisations – which have a key role in building communities – are particularly at risk. National studies echo regional concerns that smaller groups are threatened by the winding down of various funding streams, the move to commissioning and contracting, cost-saving in local authorities and a failure to understand and provide for their need for continuing grant support.

'A healthy community sector is critical for the sustainability of local communities. It is not an end in itself. It helps deliver social capital, social cohesion and democratic participation'.⁶ Local Community Sector Task Force

A study carried out by the South West Foundation, based on the views of over 350 mainly smaller voluntary organisations collected in 2006, noted that 'The focus on project funding, lack of funding for core costs and short-termism are all interlinked. . . It leads to the waste of resources and the closure of essential and well-delivered services'⁷. The report also found that organisations experienced more difficulty obtaining funding from local authorities than from government or the National Lottery.

"District Councils have their targets and they want the groups to help them to these. This is often at the risk of the groups having to change what they really want to do."
BME Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation

At the very moment when government is emphasising the importance of community engagement and empowerment, creating the instruments by which it can be measured - and the means of holding public authorities to account through the Comprehensive Area Assessment - the community groups which are needed to deliver this are under threat. But it would not be difficult to save them.

Name: **Springbourne & Boscombe West Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder**

Location: **Springbourne & Boscombe West, Dorset**

Grant: **Butterfly Foundation was funded £1,980**

Small grant helps Butterfly spread its wings by ensuring sustainability and extending activity

The Butterfly Foundation is an arts based support group for survivors of domestic abuse. Neighbourhood Management funded the project with £1,980 through its Community Wins small grants scheme.

The overall purpose of Butterfly is to empower victims of abuse and help them regain control of their lives. It does this by increasing an individual's confidence and self-esteem which allows them to break the cycle of abuse.

The main aims are to:

- Offer a safe and accessible source of advice and information.
- Increase the confidence, self-esteem and independent living skills for members.
- Raise awareness of the effects of domestic abuse on the individual, family and the wider community.
- Increase confidence to report domestic abuse.
- Reduce the isolation and fear of those individuals living in an abusive environment.

Butterfly has been in existence for a few years, run solely by a few dedicated volunteers. The group came to Neighbourhood Management when it needed support to establish an office base and provide basic administrative requirements to allow it to consolidate and develop. The grant is helping Butterfly ensure the group's sustainability and extend its activities and scope of operation.

In addition to the grant, Neighbourhood Management is supporting Butterfly wherever possible including assisting them in attracting long-term funding, awareness raising and promoting the group with other key stakeholders.

We know the answers

There's plenty of evidence of what is needed to support a thriving, engaged local community sector.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Neighbourhood Programme, for example, worked with 20 neighbourhoods across the UK over four years. Its report confirmed that 'Sustainable neighbourhood-based organisations are vital to effective community engagement. If the intention to engage communities at neighbourhood level is to become reality, local authorities and the key strategic partnerships . . . need to have a community development strategy that maps existing resources and commits local and regional bodies to providing 'light touch' and more intensive support as circumstances require.'⁸ Lessons from the JRF Neighbourhood Programme

The light touch support advocated by the report as making 'a real difference to neighbourhood groups' (with more intensive community development support needed where there is a long history of disadvantage) meant:

- Access to a facilitator
- Help with networking, planning, negotiating with other organisations and power-holders
- Cash: 'small amounts of unrestricted money can make a big difference, particularly to smaller community groups and those just starting out'.



Name: **Pathfinder @ Westward Ho!**

Location: **Bideford, Devon**

Grant: **£4,898**

Learning a new skill helps get life back on track

Pathfinder @ Westward Ho! was set up to provide IT training to a rural community in North Devon. The Comic Relief grant has enabled local people to access free accredited IT training to help improve their life and job skills.



Fran Gardner from Pathfinder describes a recent example: “A local man in his 50s approached us as he wanted to improve his IT skills. Within a year he has completed a basic introductory course on computers, a further course on

using the internet to surf the World Wide Web and send e-mails, started a course that will lead to a Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) qualification and he is about to sit his first exam.”

“This man had an alcohol problem when he first came to Pathfinder, but during his training he has become much more open and communicative and begun to look at how he might address his alcohol use. There is still a long way to go but knowing how to e-mail has helped him contact relatives in parts of the country to which he is unable to travel, helping him to begin to re-establish those relationships.”

Although Pathfinder is in its twelfth year, and has eight centres, work like this depends on endless fundraising from small pots, says Fran: “Our funding is on a knife-edge – I’m always looking for more money to continue supporting our learners.”

These lessons are well understood by some local authorities in the South West. Gloucester City Council is one of four local authorities whose grant funding practice is highlighted in a report by NAVCA (the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action) on the importance of grant funding⁹.

“We see grant funding as a way to work more closely with communities.”

Sue Oppenheimer, Assistant Director: Community Engagement, Gloucester City Council

The City Council’s grants budget of £841,544 (about 5% of its total revenue budget) includes £72,930 in small grants under £5,000 and a further £10,000 in very small one-off grants. Most organisations receiving over £5,000 have three-year funding or service level agreements. Voluntary and community groups are involved in the Local Strategic Partnership, and the Council funds the local association for voluntary and community action.



Name: **Swindon Small Grants Fund**

Location: **Swindon**

Grant: **Delivering micro-grants of up to £500 or £1,000**

A better service for local groups

A new way to deliver small sums of money more effectively is being pioneered in Swindon. Since 2006, the Community Foundation for Wiltshire & Swindon has had a partnership with Swindon Borough Council to deliver micro-grants of up to £500 to small local groups for set up and running costs.



The Council makes a grant to the Community Foundation, which then increases its value by both matching it with grants from other local donors and also using its ability to serve the wider development needs of the groups.

In addition, Swindon Borough Council has created a £50,000 annual Grassroots Grants programme targeted at small groups who do not usually benefit from grant awards. This fund gives out grants of up to £1,000 for groups to hold celebrations, events, purchase new equipment and uniforms, improve facilities or launch new activities. There is a new neighbourhood focus with all applications supported by a Ward Councillor and the process has been streamlined to keep it as simple as possible.

“This partnership is bringing real benefits to all involved by increasing Swindon Borough Council’s ability to make a major contribution to the development of small groups in its area,” says Colin Lovell, Cabinet Member for Community and Neighbourhoods at Swindon Borough Council.

The NAVCA report makes the link between independence, freedom and flexibility – core values of the voluntary sector – and grant funding:

‘In the past, grant funding has been one of the sources of income which has enabled VCOs to maintain this independence and flexibility. Both of these are under threat if significant sources of grant funding, including local authority grant funding, dry up. All four areas participating in this study see value in continued grant funding.’ NAVCA report.

Funding community groups through grants of capital and revenue pays off, in urban and rural areas.

Recent research on capital investment in South West village halls (which usually need to put together a package of funding from a wide range of sources for refurbishment and re-building) found that income increased by 167% in the halls studied once the project had been completed, while expenditure increased by 67%. The grants not only made the



halls more sustainable but also, said the report, could have a positive impact on other village facilities¹⁰.

“Our community could never have raised the funds necessary to undertake this refurbishment project. The Hall would have undoubtedly closed by now without a grant”. Ibberton & Belchalwell Village Hall, Dorset.

An evaluation carried out for the Greater Bristol Foundation (now Quartet Community Foundation) in 2004 on the impact of their small grants programme¹¹ found that:

- 45% of the groups who responded reported an increase in users, leading to greater sustainability for the groups, and greater involvement in the community for their users;
- There was some evidence of economic benefits, with funded activities leading to some users gaining jobs, and 21% of groups reported a decrease in crime and vandalism;
- 64% of groups said that the Foundation played a key role in building their confidence, particularly to make other grant applications.

This last finding shows that it's not just about money: the relationship between the funder and those it funds matters too.



Name: **Wiltshire Race Equality Council (WREC)**

Location: **Trowbridge, Wiltshire**

Grant: **£500 - £1,000**

A little goes a long way

Wiltshire Race Equality Council (WREC) plays an integral role in assisting small community organisations and supporting a wide range of black and minority ethnic groups to develop and establish themselves throughout Wiltshire. Such groups often just need small but vital sums of funding to cover essential items such as transport costs, child care and tutor time. Over the last six years WREC has been working with the South West Foundation to help establish these groups.



Using its own skilled development workers, WREC identifies what is needed and helps with the practicalities of setting a group up. WREC then contacts the South West Foundation for a small grant of between £500 and £1,000 depending on need.

One example of this is the Women's Minority Ethnic Group. Initially women just met to improve their language skills and to socialise but with the help of support from WREC they now have the facilities to undertake a number of activities. As a member of the group explains, this has a wide range of benefits: "Having the chance to get involved with different activities is a good way of meeting and speaking to other people - it has helped members from a variety of backgrounds integrate and share cultures."

Since WREC started working with the South West Foundation ten organisations have been assisted with development in this way.

Conclusion

There is ample evidence, nationally and in the South West, that supporting community groups with small grants is good value for money and can help meet strategic objectives.

There is also evidence in the South West that for complex reasons many voluntary organisations, including small ones, are heading for a funding crisis.

Small voluntary organisations have an important role in building communities and local democracy. This is a time when a little more support will make a big difference.

Footnotes

- 1 The future role of the third sector in social and economic regeneration. Office of the Third Sector and HM Treasury. July 2007
- 2 Strong and Prosperous Communities - The Local Government White Paper. CLG October 2006
- 3 Planning for a Sustainable Future – White Paper. CLG May 2007. 8.4
- 4 The Local Network Fund in the South West An Evaluation of the Fund's Impact. HRA Consultants July 2007
- 5 Forumfocus May 2007
- 6 Report from the Local Community Sector Task Force. CLG January 2007.
- 7 Funders' Footprints. South West Foundation 2006
- 8 Changing neighbourhoods: lessons from the JRF Neighbourhood Programme, Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2007
- 9 Why grants are important for a healthy local VCS. NAVCA for the Finance Hub, June 2007
- 10 The Impact of the Investment in Village Halls. Village Halls Advisers in the South West of England 2007
- 11 Evaluation of the Impact of Greater Bristol Foundation's Grants Programme. www.quartetcf.org.uk/index.asp



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For more copies of this pamphlet, contact Creating Excellence. A pdf version is available at www.creatingexcellence.org.uk

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