

15. DCDP Case Study: Inspiring Scotland & Volunteer Dundee

Volunteer Dundee hosts Inspiring Scotland's Link Up project in Whitfield, Dundee. The project started in June 2012 as part of the national Link Up programme operating in ten vulnerable Scottish communities. In July 2015, the project was selected to become part of Rank's Dundee Community Development Programme.

Link Up starts from the premise that the ingredients for lasting change already lie in our communities in the shape of the passion, strengths, skills, knowledge and interests of local people. Our Link Up workers in Whitfield (Gill and Emma) enable local people to harness these assets, establishing activities they want to take part in and support. In Whitfield, this has led to nine activities being initiated: Lunch Club, Allotment Group, Camera Club, Dance Group, Cinema Club, Youth Activities, Arts & Craft Group, Social/Bingo Group and Family Drop-ins.

Through regular participation, these activities help local people in Whitfield build relationships with fellow residents, creating new social networks where they look out for each other. Coupling these support networks with the positive and nurturing environment created by our workers, people gain the confidence and skills to effect positive change for themselves, their family and their community.

Building on the foundations laid in previous years, Link Up Whitfield has gone from strength to strength in the year to end June 2016 with 748 local people participating in activities (447 of them new people) and with 81 people volunteering (30 of them new).

During the year, our Link Up workers undertook a range of evaluation activity spanning three individual case studies and four group evaluations (Cinema Club, Dance Group, Camera Club and Xmas Fayre). This activity highlighted a range of key outcomes for individuals and the groups including:

- Increased levels of social interaction with other community members
- Improved relationships with other community members
- Improved physical and mental well-being (including reduced isolation and anxiety and increased confidence)
- New skills developed
- Individual is proactively seeking to improve their circumstances
- Increased capacity and/or motivation to positively influence what happens in our community

Examples of the types of changes seen in individuals and groups in Whitfield include:

A's story

A is a dedicated volunteer who has been helping the lunch club for the past 6 months. 'A' has a background in childcare and helped at local schools and nurseries in Dundee until her circumstances changed: "I got into an abusive relationship and lost confidence that resulted in medical problems, procedures and operations."

Prior to joining the lunch club 'A' advised that she basically just "spent time at home". Through her involvement with Link Up, 'A' has developed new friendships. She says some days it can be difficult due to anxiety, but this reduces as she attends. The group is also helping increase her confidence; she said she "would be confident applying" for the right job when it comes along.

In addition to the cooking skills courses that 'A' has been on, she is now Secretary for the Lunch Club Committee and is learning committee skills. Thanks to her Link Up volunteering, 'A' has also taken the opportunity to help with food provision at local school events in the community.

Dance Group

In August 2015, a local secondary schoolgirl approached Link Up wanting to start a youth dance group. She'd been going to another local dance group, which had since disbanded so she wanted to find a way of filling that gap by organising something herself. An initial taster session was very popular with 18 people attending and a solid group of four girls then formed and kept going, running sessions twice a week. The group's aim is to choreograph their own dance routines and to learn from one another by sharing their skills.

In November 2015, the group was given an opportunity to perform in public at an annual dance battle with the inclusion of nine coaching sessions by the event organisers to help them improve their technique. They rose to the challenge, developed a lot of skills including team work, and successfully took part in the event. The organisers (*Showcase the Street*) gave them an Achievement Award in recognition of the fact they were the only dance group to create their own choreography. Reflecting on their experience, the group members said:

“It was ‘amazing’ that we didn’t give up during rehearsals ... if something went wrong we fixed it”.

“I felt like there was another person inside me waiting to show the world.”

“I wanted to do something for kids in the community.”

“I want other people to come in and show their talent like we did when we came in because this dance team is a unit”.

In addition to the outputs and impacts detailed above, Rank Foundation funding has enabled Link Up Whitfield to continue to develop in several important ways:

Enhanced partnership working: Throughout the last year Link Up has formed many partnerships, including hosting two comic book workshops with Dundee Comics Creative Space, tea time provisions with Awfy Well Under 12s, family drops in with Discoverin’ Families and a successful holiday hunger summer programme with One Parent Families Scotland. These partnerships have enhanced both the reach and impact of our respective projects, setting the basis for future collaboration.

New Activities: three new groups have been established in the past year (Allotment Group, Social/Bingo Group and Dance Group) helping to connect more local people and help them to develop and share their skills.

Group sustainability: a key aim for each group is to become self-managing. In the past year, the Lunch Club has taken important steps towards this: building on it becoming constituted with local people filling all key committee roles and becoming increasingly self-sufficient financially, such as raising funds to meet the costs of their Public Liability Insurance and other running costs.

Wider Community Engagement: the continued engagement of more local people in the project remains a priority, but a key measure of the growing reputation of the project was the 2015 Christmas Fayre. This was attended by over 200 local residents with over 20 volunteers helping on the day. In addition, local partners made a material contribution to this event: a grant from Dundee Healthy Communities meant free food packs could be provided to each family; Morrisons donated Christmas decorations and selection boxes so every child could get a gift from Santa; and the Lunch Club provided everyone with a cup of soup for free using money from Awfy Well Under 12s.

**Gill Bain, Link Up Whitfield
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