

Know Your Neighbourhood

Year 1 Evaluation of UKCF-funded projects



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Know Your Neighbourhood Fund

Year 1 achievements...

95

**projects
funded.**



£1.22m

**grants
allocated.**



4,500+

**beneficiaries
supported.**



700+

**volunteers
engaged.**



About the Know Your Neighbourhood Fund

The Know Your Neighbourhood (KYN) Fund is a package of up to £30 million, which is designed to widen participation in volunteering and tackle loneliness in 27 disadvantaged areas across England.

£15 million of KYN funding is being delivered by UK Community Foundations (UKCF) and a consortium of community foundations. The funding supports activities that enable volunteering and tackle loneliness in nine targeted disadvantaged areas in England.

More specifically, the KYN Fund's objectives are, by March 2025, to:

- ∞ Build the evidence to identify scalable and sustainable place-based interventions that work in increasing regular volunteering and reducing chronic loneliness.
- ∞ Increase the proportion of people in targeted high-deprivation local authorities who volunteer at least once a month.
- ∞ Reduce the proportion of chronically lonely people in targeted high-deprivation local authorities who lack their desired level of social connection.
- ∞ Enable targeted high-deprivation local authorities to implement sustainable systems and processes that encourage volunteering and tackling loneliness.

The key outcomes of the KYN Fund are to:



Increase the number of people involved with volunteering.



Reduce the number of people who are chronically lonely (those who feel lonely often or always).



Increase social connections within the local community.



Increase feelings of pride in the local area and the sense of ownership of the local area.



Improve skills and encourage self-development.



Improve mental health and wellbeing.

Many delivery partners are delivering projects that aim to make positive impacts across more than one key outcome.

Methodology

Forever Consulting conducted 10 interviews with delivery partners and community foundations during October 2023, as part of an evaluation to explore how learning from Year 1 has informed plans for Years 2 and 3.

Delivery partners who received funding in Year 1, and also Years 2 and 3, were included in the sample. Projects were selected to cover KYN's main objectives and different geography types. More information about how the sample was selected is appended.

7 delivery partners / projects interviewed:

Volunteering focus:

- ∞ The Bread Kitchen CIC, in Great Yarmouth
- ∞ Hull & East Riding Citizens Advice Bureau, in Hull
- ∞ TimeBank Hull and East Riding, in Hull
- ∞ Motive8 Youth C.I.C, in Wolverhampton

Social connection for those experiencing chronic loneliness focus:

- ∞ The Shoebox Enterprises CIC, in Great Yarmouth
- ∞ Goodwin Development Trust, in Hull
- ∞ Age UK Wolverhampton, in Wolverhampton

3 community foundations interviewed:

- ∞ **Rural:** Norfolk Community Foundation
- ∞ **Medium urban:** Two Ridings Community Foundation
- ∞ **Large urban:** Heart of England Community Foundation

Interviews covered the following topics:

- ∞ Understanding what projects aimed to achieve in Year 1.
- ∞ The local context and external influences which may have affected the impact of projects.
- ∞ The success of projects in making their intended impact on participants* and the local infrastructure.
- ∞ The lessons and learnings from Year 1 to inform plans for Years 2 and 3.



YEAR 1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Delivery partners' aims and objectives in Year 1

The delivery partners interviewed wanted to develop or scale-up projects that will be sustainable beyond the KYN Fund.

The Year 1 delivery period was January to March 2023. In this timeframe, the delivery partners interviewed primarily focused on laying the foundations of their project to ensure they were in a good position to make an impact against the KYN Fund's key outcomes in Years 2 and 3. In addition to the key outcomes of the KYN Fund, in Year 1, delivery partners also aimed to:



Increase participation and the number of opportunities available for engagement for beneficiaries and volunteers.



Increase awareness of project activity to different types of people ahead of Years 2 and 3.

More broadly, delivery partners' main objectives in Year 1 were to:

- ∞ Experiment, test and trial new ideas to find out whether they worked and if they met local needs.
- ∞ Research and test the feasibility of projects in new areas, including how they could be introduced in a sensitive and impactful way.
- ∞ Develop and strengthen relationships with the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, community venues to host projects, and the local community to better understand the need and appetite for project activity. These strengthened relationships helped shape project delivery in Years 2 and 3.
- ∞ Co-design the project and activities with target participants, with the expectation that this will encourage participation and achieve greater impact.
- ∞ Prepare materials and resources to expand their offer and reach, and ensure they were ready to deliver greater impact for participants in Years 2 and 3.

Community foundations' aims and objectives in Year 1

The community foundations interviewed encouraged and supported organisations to apply to the KYN Fund...

- ∞ The community foundations interviewed had ongoing dialogue with organisations applying for Year 1 funding about what could realistically be achieved in the delivery period, and they supported organisations to develop their applications to ensure the greatest impact possible could be achieved in the timeframe available.
- ∞ The community foundations interviewed received many strong applications. They used their local knowledge and experience to focus Year 1 funding on organisations with a strong track record of delivering the same or similar key outcomes to the KYN Fund in the timeframe available.

The community foundations interviewed revealed proportionate expectations of what projects could achieve and evidence, given the short delivery timeframe...

- ∞ The community foundations interviewed were mindful of the pressure on delivery partners to hit the ground running and deliver their project in the short timeframe. They were conscious this would cause some stress, particularly on smaller, grassroots organisations who were already operating in a difficult climate and facing pressures.
- ∞ The community foundations interviewed recognised that Year 1 funding provided security for delivery partners, and enabled them to test their ideas and learn how best to engage with target beneficiaries to align project activity with local needs. They did not expect delivery partners to be able to demonstrate any quantifiable impact on participants or the local infrastructure after only 8-12 weeks of delivery.



LOCAL CONTEXT

Local context – Challenges to delivering project activity

The delivery partners and community foundations interviewed highlighted that several of the known factors for chronic loneliness and low volunteering levels that the KYN Fund is seeking to address, also created challenges for them reaching participants and delivering their projects. These challenges were not new during the Year 1 delivery period, but included:

- ∞ The cost-of-living crisis
- ∞ Long term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic
- ∞ Poor transport infrastructure
- ∞ Lack of local opportunities
- ∞ Low levels of pride in the local area

Unique physical barriers arose in Great Yarmouth during Year 1...

During the Year 1 delivery period, a World War 2 bomb was discovered in Great Yarmouth, which resulted in a lot of the local area being closed for an extended period. This included the buildings where some projects were delivering activities – indeed the base of one project became a refuge for those who were displaced from their homes during this time! Local transport routes were disrupted, and it was harder to navigate around the local area. This created an additional barrier for delivery partners to run activities, and for people to get involved.



YEAR 1 FINDINGS

Year 1 findings from the test and learn phase (part 1)

The delivery partners and community foundations interviewed felt that they managed to make a positive and proportionate impact within the short delivery period. All delivery partners interviewed worked with equal or greater numbers of beneficiaries and volunteers than they anticipated. It is unknown how many volunteers were new to volunteering at this stage. Given the short timeframe, impacts on participants were not quantifiable, but anecdotally, the delivery partners interviewed have observed several positive outcomes...



Increased numbers of social connections amongst project beneficiaries...

One delivery partner reported that two beneficiaries, Sarah and Michelle*, who have lived in the same neighbourhood and have seen each other in passing many times before, started to build a strong friendship through attending the same activities. They fed back that they now see each other regularly, go shopping and cook meals together.



Increased feelings of pride in the local area...

A project which focussed on volunteering through gardening in the local hospital's staff wellbeing garden noticed improvements in perceptions of the hospital, which has historically been a "scary place" for many of the volunteers. Through creating a positive space in nature and supporting the wellbeing of hospital staff, anecdotal evidence suggests that volunteers felt proud of their work and the space they have created, and this has reduced the stigma of the hospital as being a scary place. Looking to Years 2 and 3, the project hopes to expand their gardening activity into other outdoor spaces in the wider local area, such as public parks and around libraries.

* Participant names have been changed for the purpose of this report.

Year 1 findings from the test and learn phase (part 2)



Improved skills and self-development

Two projects interviewed that focused on volunteering noted the positive impact that offering training has had on volunteers, both in terms of sustaining their commitment and on improving skills and confidence.

One project interviewed that worked with volunteers noticed a lack of confidence amongst some members to volunteer at sessions that they had previously attended as beneficiaries. This was due to fears that they would be perceived differently by their former peers. This project offered training and supported the development of new skills, such as first aid, social action and sports leadership, and subsequently they reported that these volunteers had increased confidence and self-belief.

All of the projects interviewed that focused on reducing the number of people experiencing chronic loneliness also reported positive impacts on skills and self-development.

For example, one delivery partner invited English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners to bingo sessions with regular KYN project beneficiaries. This allowed both groups to build new connections, and the regular KYN beneficiaries also supported the ESOL learners to develop their English language skills.

Year 1 findings from the test and learn phase (part 3)



Increased confidence, health and mental wellbeing

One project described the following experience of a volunteer: Laura* left her job because of poor management and a disregard for the struggles she was experiencing in relation to her health when going through the menopause. On the surface she appeared to be facing no real challenges, but her experience with her previous employer had completely knocked her confidence and she was struggling with her mental health.

Coming to volunteer at the KYN project was an extremely positive and welcomed experience for Laura. She has told staff that she has felt accepted just as she is and has been given the space to take time out when she needs to, without fear of judgement, or any questions asked.

The project reported that Laura's confidence and mental wellbeing has improved due to feeling like she has contributed to something positive. She committed to continue volunteering beyond Year 1 as a result.

One project running disco sessions for older members of the community reported vast improvements in confidence in Simon*, who entered his first session very warily and dependent on a walking stick. After socialising and enjoying some music that he listened to when he was younger, he had a dance and left carrying his walking stick! The project reported that Simon said he felt more confident on his feet and less dependent on his walking aid after only one session. He has since continued to attend sessions at the project.

* Participant names have been changed for the purpose of this report.

Year 1 findings from the test and learn phase (part 4)



Increased awareness of project activity and increased participation...

One delivery partner shared the story of an older gentleman, John*, who lost his wife some years ago. Despite several organisations offering community activity on his doorstep, he wasn't aware of any of it.

The delivery partner acknowledged the need for non-digital advertisement to raise awareness of the KYN project. They placed posters listing the different activities on offer in local shops, which caught the eye of John. He got in touch with the delivery partner with excitement to get involved and try something new – baking!

Since attending his first baking session, John continued to stay active in the community through attending other KYN project activities. He has also started to attend non-KYN Fund groups in the venues that KYN activities have taken place.

* Participant names have been changed for the purpose of this report.

Year 1 findings from the test and learn phase (part 5)

The impact of the projects interviewed on the local infrastructure could not be evidenced in the short timeframe. Changes to local infrastructure and systems will take a significant amount of time and effort to materialise, but delivery partners highlighted some progress through...

- ∞ Starting to build new relationships with Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) and other local VCSE sector organisations, and continuing to develop already existing relationships.
- ∞ Building relationships with other local venues by testing and trialling activities into new areas.
- ∞ Working in partnership with local institutions such as the hospital or university to collaborate and create sustainable opportunities to get involved beyond the KYN Fund.
- ∞ Developing relationships with public bodies, such as the local council, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), National Health Service (NHS), police teams and local schools and colleges. These were new relationships for some, and for others, relationships were already in place to varying degrees. Some delivery partners invited members of these organisations to attend activities to highlight the capabilities of VCSE organisations and the impact they are capable of generating when funding is available. They also expect that strengthened relationships will increase referrals and enhance the type of support they can signpost participants to in Years 2 and 3, which in turn will improve other aspects of their lives. Delivery partners interviewed highlighted that these relationships will also benefit the people they support outside of the KYN Fund.
- ∞ One community foundation highlighted that one delivery partner has focused their project activity on working with smaller organisations to develop their capacity to support volunteering in the longer term.

Year 1 findings from the test and learn phase (part 6)

Whilst the delivery partners interviewed were able to anticipate most of the positive impact they made, some reported unforeseen impacts...

- ∞ One delivery partner trialling their project in a new area noted the invaluable support from volunteers and beneficiaries from their existing location, and their unexpected willingness to encourage participation in the new project area. Many existing beneficiaries of the organisation attended new project events and activities to share their own positive experiences and the impact the organisation has made to their lives.
- ∞ For another delivery partner, the KYN Fund has brought together many pockets of their organisation which have traditionally worked in isolation, providing different types of support to different groups. The KYN Fund has strengthened internal relationships and brought groups together.



LESSONS LEARNT IN YEAR 1

Lessons learnt (part 1)

Through delivery in Year 1, delivery partners interviewed have learnt several lessons about what works best to boost the recruitment of participants. These lessons have informed project plans in Years 2 and 3...

1

A high staff to participant ratio is key to supporting participants, some of whom may have complex vulnerabilities and require additional support.

2

Marketing matters. Digital promotion can be missed by some groups, e.g. older people. Posters or flyers in key locations can raise awareness of activities amongst target participants, and therefore increase the opportunity for greater impact.

3

Project activity incorporating additional benefits, e.g. a hot meal, is an attractive offer for participants and can contribute to sustained engagement.

4

For projects trialling in a new area, taking a gentle approach to integrating into the local community is essential for building relationships and mutual trust. It can also be beneficial to have team members with excellent local knowledge to guide this process.

5

Timing of sessions is important. Project activity which only occurs during the day can limit participation and exclude those who are in full- or part-time employment. Project activity occurring too early in the morning may also attract fewer participants.

Lessons learnt (part 2)

Anecdotally, delivery partners interviewed also shared the following lessons around what works best to recruit, support and retain volunteers:

6 The term 'volunteering' can be off-putting for some. It can indicate a bigger commitment than some individuals have capacity for.

8 Training opportunities for volunteers can work better face-to-face, for both the trainer and the trainees. It allows for more social interaction and connections to be formed than when provided online.

7 For those involved in volunteering, training opportunities are an attractive offer to sustain engagement. Accredited training provides further opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills and boost confidence.

9 For projects requiring volunteers to undertake training before starting volunteering activities, the length of training is important to sustain motivation. People want to see the benefits within a reasonable timeframe.

Lessons learnt (part 3)

Anecdotally, delivery partners interviewed also shared the following lessons around what works best to achieve impact:

10

Engaging with established local agencies who have longstanding relationships with members of the community can support engagement, e.g. the butchers or bookmakers. They may recognise when someone is struggling and can direct them to KYN Fund projects.

11

One organisation can't always do it all. Building relationships with other VCSE organisations and public bodies is important to support participants and increase engagement, e.g. social prescribing teams.



LOOKING AHEAD TO YEARS 2 AND 3

How delivery partners and projects are changing in Years 2 and 3...

Delivery partners felt they achieved what they intended to in Year 1, and that Year 1 allowed them to unlock the potential to achieve greater impacts in Years 2 and 3. They expect to do so by...

Increasing the opportunities for participation and engagement through:

- ∞ Scaling up by extending activity to new areas and to more/new groups of people. This could be through one project or through partnering with another organisation to increase capacity and reach.
- ∞ Increasing the frequency of project activity by offering more sessions.
- ∞ Altering the timings of project activities to ensure they are accessible to a broad range of people and circumstances.

Employing new project team members, for some this means those with excellent local knowledge, to:

- ∞ Increase organisational capacity to support greater numbers of participants.
- ∞ Support gentle and appropriate integration of projects into a new area.
- ∞ Kickstart community activity and continue to build relationships within the community. This was highlighted by projects taking an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach.

Networking and partnering with other local organisations to:

- ∞ Share best practice on what works to achieve the greatest positive impact on participants and local infrastructure.
- ∞ Offer additional opportunities and service offers for participants.
- ∞ Increase the long-term sustainability of opportunities for participation beyond the KYN Fund.

How community foundations are adapting in Years 2 and 3...

The community foundations interviewed also highlighted some changes to their approach beyond Year 1, including...

- ∞ Facilitating more opportunities for KYN Fund delivery partners to come together to network and to share best practice. Given the short delivery time frame in Year 1, community foundations did not want to add unnecessary pressure or requirements for delivery partners. However, the feedback they received indicated that there is an appetite for these opportunities. Delivery partners are keen to come together and work in partnership to show the impact they are achieving and to 'put their area on the map'.
- ∞ Encouraging a collaborative approach for delivery partners applying for funding in Years 2 and 3 and stressing that there would be a greater likelihood of funding if they partnered with another organisation to strengthen their offer and to avoid duplication. In one area, partnership applications were awarded more funding than those working alone.
- ∞ Community foundations reported that they feel projects are making – and will continue to make – a considerable positive difference to the KYN Fund's key outcomes, though had some concerns about being able to demonstrate how and why positive changes have occurred in their local context. It is intended that impact in Year 2 and 3 will be demonstrated through local area reports and place-based evaluations.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion...

In Year 1, delivery partners aimed to lay the foundations for project activity in Years 2 and 3, and beyond the KYN Fund. They were not focused on making a significant impact on the Know Your Neighbourhood Fund's key outcomes, as set out in the Theory of Change.

Nevertheless, in the short timeframe, delivery partners noticed positive changes in many of their project beneficiaries and volunteers, which align with the KYN Fund's key outcomes.





APPENDIX: EVALUATION SAMPLING CRITERIA

Evaluation sampling criteria

Community foundations

The nine participating community foundations were mapped across areas types: rural, medium urban and large urban. Within each area type, the community foundations who funded the greatest number of projects in Years 1-3 were selected for interview.

Delivery partners

53 projects who were funded in Year 1, also secured funding for Years 2 and 3. These projects were mapped by area type and the key outcomes of the KYN Fund that they said they would achieve in their application form. Delivery partners who were awarded the highest amounts of funding, or who aimed to support the highest numbers of participants were long-listed to be included in the evaluation. The projects selected were finalised in partnership with community foundations.



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