

# Voluntary and Community Action

## Creating Social Value in New Communities

### Extracts from the Social Return on Investment (SROI) Evaluation of Sandhills Community House and the Sandhills Community Action Project

The Sandhills Community Action Project is a five-year innovative project designed to create new social networks and community activities on a new housing development at Sandhills in Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire. As part of a commitment to evaluate our work, we engaged Lodestar to undertake a Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluation of the project, which is based at the Sandhills Community House. SROI is a framework for measuring the social value of an activity.

The SROI analysis finds that the community development approach adopted by Voluntary and Community Action is a crucial factor that leads to the outcomes experienced by residents who engage with the project. The project is run for, and to some extent by, local residents who tend to get involved in the activities and a significant number of them find that they want to become more involved in activities that support the local community.

The community development approach adopted by Voluntary and Community Action is therefore indispensable. When new housing developments are created and people are moving to a new area, often the feeling of isolation is quick to embed itself, particularly for adults. Negative outcomes can be avoided through engaging people to develop a sense of community to work together.

The importance of the provision of planned meeting space in new communities is all the more significant in providing opportunities for more people to engage and build relationships. This

SROI analysis finds that feelings of isolation is one of the most common experiences reported by the residents we engaged with right across the age spectrum. They report that if it were not for the existence of the Community House, they would not be as happy living in the area and that they would develop problems that could become significant as time went on. In short, the relationships they formed at the Community House gave many different groups of people a lifeline to a better quality of life and they attribute this not just to the existence of the facility but also to the staff who work there.

The importance of the existence of the house as a meeting place, Voluntary and Community Action's commitment to the promotion, development and support of local community action; and the community development skills set of staff are significant in the creation of social value in the area.

The report outlines the detail of what changes for Sandhills stakeholders and how these changes were established, measured and valued through this particular SROI research approach.





**THE SANDHILLS COMMUNITY HOUSE IS THE HUB FOR INFORMATION ON LOCAL SERVICES AND OFFERS A PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES, LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, EVENTS AND SERVICES.**

**OUR PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS, ORGANISED FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND ADULTS, TAKES PLACE AT THE COMMUNITY HOUSE AND AROUND SANDHILLS. GROUPS MEET DURING THE DAY, IN THE EVENINGS AND AT WEEKENDS. STAFF AT THE COMMUNITY HOUSE WORK CLOSELY WITH RESIDENTS AND LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS TO ARRANGE ACTIVITIES, DELIVER SERVICES AND PROVIDE INFORMATION AND ADVICE.**

The analysis set out essentially to address the following questions:

- Do services delivered at the Community House result in change for stakeholders?
- Who are the stakeholders who experience important change?
- What is the nature of the change experienced?
- How can the change be properly demonstrated and evidenced?
- What is the value of the change that is purely down to Voluntary and Community Action activity?
- How does this compare to the cost of providing the change?

This was done through a process of initially talking to different groups of residents who use the facility and then testing those findings across a wider sample of residents through the use of a survey. The main stakeholders, groups of people or agencies for whom the most important changes were found to have taken place were as follows:

1. Adults 50 and under who attend the centre
2. People over 50 who attend the centre
3. Parents who attend the centre (with young children)
4. Young children who attend the centre with parents
5. Volunteers (residents who help with various services and activities)
6. Current owners of the building
7. National Health Service



While the above groups 1-6 were separately engaged to determine if they experienced different outcomes, in fact most of these groups had quite a number of common outcomes as well as a few different ones. The common outcomes are most likely down to the

fact that across age ranges, the issues of isolation, the need to engage in new relationships outside family and home, the need to enjoy roles in addition to looking after others, the need for a bit more time for self, the desire to have opportunities for personal development and the need to have more engagement with the local community and with opportunities to help others was quite universal.



Common outcomes across some of the groups included:

- Reduced isolation and loneliness leading to better mental and physical health.
- Decreased stress and anxiety
- Improved well-being through wider circle of relationships and local contacts
- Improved relationships at home
- Increased feelings of safety and security
- Improved personal development
- Increased opportunities to help others
- Access to reliable local information

For parents, particularly a large group of younger parents attending the Centre with their very young children, they found that the engagements their children were able to make with activities and with others, better prepared them for the big step of going to school.

The outcomes for volunteers were reflected in the above outcomes but the following outcomes were additional to these and directly related to their volunteering activity;

- Skills being recognised and usefully deployed leading to increased sense of purpose and fulfilment.

- Increased job related experiences and improved career aspirations leading to improved career decision-making abilities.
- Improved employment prospects.

An indirect outcome for The State is the benefit created by individuals who would not call on NHS services as much for physical/mental health issues or for the treatment of stress and anxiety that could lead to a more serious mental health condition.



One area of negative change reported by the younger parents was related to their increased activity at Community House and the consequent increasing support mechanisms they had access to outside their home. This could result in shifting the support role away from family members or in particular, a partner, and could lead to increased tension at home. This is not an issue for the Community House other than the lead it may give to particular activity programming which could provide a facilitated discussion forum to support individuals in considering how to deal with such issues arising for all concerned.



SROI is a unique approach to Impact reporting in that it uses financial proxies to assign a value to outcomes and hence gives rise to the opportunity to compare the Return on Investment in the activities under study. The return value relates to social value return.

Over the year of study the total value of material outcomes for Community House stakeholders created by the project is £1,245,081. Most outcomes are projected to last for the same period they attend the centre and some are thought to last a further year. The net present value representing the value today rather than in two years' time is £1,201,228. The investment cost including a valuation for volunteer input time is £130,329. **The net ratio of return is therefore £8.22 for every £1 invested.**

This result can be viewed in the following context. If one was investing in High Street institutions, investing today at a 2.5 or 3% return is barely achievable (December 2014). In terms of the Social Value world, this Sandhills Community House SROI analysis conservatively demonstrates social value returned at a level of not two or three or five times the investment but in fact over eight times. This is remarkable and demonstrates the extent of benefits accruing to engaged local residents that is solely attributable to the work of this Voluntary and Community Action project.

Over the year of study the project creates some £1.2M in returned social value. The time during that year to accrue enough value equal to the investment of £130K would be less than 1.5 months.

Testing some elements of data in sensitivity analysis varies the return ratio. The range within which the return ratio can be expressed even with the most conservative application of data variables is between £7.74 and £9.37 for every £1 invested.



**THE SOCIAL VALUE CREATED IS SIGNIFICANT – VALUED AT OVER EIGHT TIMES THE INVESTMENT IN THE PROJECT, AN SROI RETURN OF £8.22 FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED.**

A focus on the value created per head demonstrates that people over 50 experience the highest social return individually:

Stakeholder	Value per head
Adults 50 and under who attend the centre	£1,025
People over 50 who attend the centre	£1,857
Parents who attend the centre (with young children)	£1,625
Volunteers	£841*

\* Over and above the value they experience as members of other groups

The highest social value accrued for any of the stakeholder groups is for parents who attend with young children. This group experiences 50% of all the social value created but this is down not just to the range of outcomes experienced but also the fact that this is the largest stakeholder group.

The study also looked at outcomes that

might be expected, due to the nature of the interventions, compared to unintended outcomes. The total element of value created that is due to positive unintended change for stakeholders is 43% of all the value claimed. This is significant value that will not have been accounted for before by Voluntary and Community Action in any form of previous reporting.

The following are some important key messages drawn from the study:

- The Sandhills Community House Project and the Sandhills Community Action Project is creating social value that would not happen without its continued influences and existence.
- Very significant beneficiaries benefiting from the highest social value created are older people and young parents with children.
- Isolation is a huge factor for all the stakeholder groups who represented their views in this research. The Community House provides a focal point for residents who say they would not be able to deal with isolation and loneliness without it.
- This Social Value at this level would not happen without the conscious Community Development approach adopted by Voluntary and Community Action.
- Stakeholders report that they would in some instances face deteriorating mental and physical health issues without the support network they have gained through the Community House
- Residents' well-being will be at risk if maintaining social value is not central to future policy in this area.
- Social value will not be maintained merely through a shift to a different building.
- Voluntary effort from engaged residents is key to maintaining these levels of social value.
- A social value account should be maintained to track future policy implementation
- Voluntary and Community Action is in a position to develop and offer skills to encourage policy makers to use Impact Reporting and the maintenance of a social value account to inform community building initiatives in the future.

**6 PLOVER ROAD**

**Community  
House**

Providing ...

- meeting space
- community café
- volunteering
- information
- community groups
- social activities
- community events
- adult learning



the  
**Tudortrust**



LOTTERY FUNDED



Working in partnership

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### **Further Information**

For a copy of the full SROI report or for further information on the Sandhills Community Action Project and the Sandhills Community House visit our website: [sandhills-communityhouse.org](http://sandhills-communityhouse.org) or email [communityhouse@action-centralbeds.org.uk](mailto:communityhouse@action-centralbeds.org.uk)

For further information on Social Return on Investment (SROI) evaluations visit The SROI Network website: [www.thesroinetwork.org](http://www.thesroinetwork.org) or email Karl Leathem of Lodestar at [lodestarinfo@sky.com](mailto:lodestarinfo@sky.com)

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