



Funding success! How funders support charities to evaluate

A review of Evaluation Support Accounts with Laidlaw Youth Trust and Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland

“The process of working with ESS has greatly assisted our Project’s monitoring and reporting ... It has helped to streamline our information gathering while improving the quality of information collected.”

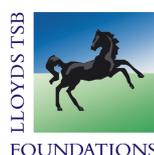
Quote from charity in Laidlaw Youth Trust support account

“[since offering evaluation support accounts with ESS] We now see reports presenting more information of individual and programme wide impact, honest reflection of weaknesses in programme planning or delivery and learning.”

Maureen McGinn, Chief Executive of Laidlaw Youth Trust

“The benefits of us continuing to fund evaluation support not only means that the Foundation receives clearer, better reports which tell us the difference our funding is making, but organisations should be better equipped to apply for funding and to report effectively to other funders.”

Connie Williamson, Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland



**Lloyds TSB
Foundation for Scotland**

Summary

Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) works with voluntary organisations and funders so they can measure the impact of their work. We provide practical support and access to resources and tools. We take action to build evaluation and learning into funding and policy-making processes.

This report summarises the learning from two 'evaluation support accounts' with **Laidlaw Youth Trust** and with **Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland**. The funders paid for funded charities to access support from ESS so those charities could measure and report on the outcomes of their work.

Headlines:

1. About **three quarters of charities** that accessed evaluation support improved their confidence, skills and systems to measure outcomes. The improvements in charities' evaluation skills were most significant when the charity itself was motivated and positive about evaluation. Some charities made progress with only one contact with ESS. However generally we made the most difference with more than one contact with the charity - usually through a mix of workshop places and face to face tailored support sessions.
2. Around **half** of charities that accessed evaluation support **produced good or excellent reports on outcomes**. Some charities needed support on analysis and reporting and there was not always time to provide this. Other charities did not realise they needed it. But most charities that improved evaluation systems also improved their ability to report on outcomes.
3. A key factor in ensuring positive take up and impact of evaluation support is the active engagement of the funder. This includes making clear links between their reporting requirements and the support provided and giving feedback on charities' reports.

Connie Williamson, Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland sums up the Evaluation Support Account:

"The charities we refer to ESS tend to range in experience / knowledge of evaluation – for instance, some need more support than others in areas such as understanding what outcomes are, whilst some need more help in developing systems for measuring what difference they were making. I think that the flexibility of the Evaluation Support Account is therefore key to the success of the programme, as it enables organisations to tailor the training to their needs. Feedback provided to the Foundation's assessors by the charities involved has been extremely positive and there has been only praise for the ESS staff involved in the delivery of the programme.

"The benefits of us continuing to fund evaluation support training not only means that this Foundation receives clearer, better reports which tell us the difference our funding is making, but organisations should be better equipped to apply for funding and to report effectively to other funders."

Background

In an evaluation support account funded charities have a “bank” of evaluation support time paid for by their funder. The Laidlaw Youth Trust (LYT) and the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland (the Foundation) evaluation support consisted of places on **ESS workshops** and **1-1 tailored support** time. Charities used their support allocation at a time and in a way that suits their needs.

Charities chose from ESS’s programme of workshops on different aspect of evaluation (see www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk). Tailored support is where a few staff from one charity have face to face support with an ESS officer.

What we want to achieve through evaluation support accounts is that:

- **Charities** increase their skills to measure and report on the outcomes of their work – and learn and improve their services.
- **The funder** has a better understanding about the impact of funded work.

Our evaluation support account (ESA) with the Laidlaw Youth Trust (LYT) ran from 2007 to 2009 when LYT wound up (although some additional support to charities was provided until the end of 2010). Our ESA with the Lloyd TSB Foundation for Scotland (the Foundation) began in summer 2009 and is ongoing. This report is based on the period August 2009 to January 2011.

Some differences between the Evaluation Support Accounts (ESAs)

How charities were referred

LYT referred nearly all its funded charities for support. At the start of the grant LYT agreed the outcomes the charity would report on and diagnosed the charity’s evaluation support needs¹ as low, medium or high.

The Foundation referred a limited number of charities. Assessors agreed which charities should be referred for support and completed a referral form to identify the specific evaluation support needs.

With both ESAs, ESS discussed the diagnosis of support needs with the charity and their own assessment of need. We agreed how the charity should draw down their support.

Support entitlement

The allocation of support for LYT was as follows:

- **Low:** 2 workshop places and 2 hours of tailored support
- **Medium:** 2 workshop places and $\frac{3}{4}$ day of tailored support
- **High:** 3 workshop places and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ days of tailored support

With the Foundation, the allocation was the same for all charities: up to 3 workshop places and 2 half days of one to one tailored support.

¹ This was done by Mark Bitel on a contract to LYT. Mark is a consultant from Partners in Evaluation with significant experience in evaluation and youth work.

What did we do?

LYT referred **73** charities and **61** charities (84%) took up support. The Foundation referred **21** charities for support and **19** (90%) took it up.

	Workshops place	Tailored support sessions
LYT	40 charities took up 81 places - 56% of available workshop places	56 charities took up 93 sessions - 80% of total support available.
Foundation	15 charities took up 46 places - 53% of entitlement.	19 charities took up 27 sessions - 64% of entitlement.

Tailored support in both ESAs involved support on methods for evaluating outcomes. With the Foundation ESA we helped charities get to grips with outcomes in the first place. LYT charities were usually already clear about their outcomes so there was more time available in the ESA to support analysis and reporting.

Other separate support from ESS that added value to the core support provision:

Supporting the funder

LYT and the Foundation were among 11 members of the Scotland Funders' Forum to undertake the Evaluation Declaration Health Check in 2007. This is a self-assessment tool to help funders to improve their own evaluation and reporting practices. ESS wrote a 'health check report' which set out what each funder was doing well and some areas for improvement. This helped lead both funders to provide better guidance on charity reporting.

The LYT Chief Executive said that ESS helped LYT understand its responsibilities as a funder. They used this insight to create a 'funding contract' that set out LYT's expectations of funded charities and what charities could expect from LYT.

Peer learning events (LYT only)

ESS facilitated two peer learning sessions for LYT charities working in the fields of employment mentoring and outdoor activities respectively to discuss and share learning about evaluation methods and impact.

Feedback on reports (LYT only)

When (LYT) closed in 2009, 38 charities were still delivering funded work. As LYT wanted to maximise the legacy of its funding and would not be there to receive end of year reports, it paid us to perform that function. We made clear that we had no power to judge the charities' performance. But we offered a 'report feedback service' and **24** (63%) eligible charities took up this service.

What difference did we make?

Overall about $\frac{3}{4}$ of charities that accessed evaluation support improved their confidence, skills and systems to measure outcomes.

Around **1 in 2 charities** produced good or excellent reports on outcomes

This section explains the positive difference made to charities by making use of their ESA. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of charities improved evaluation skills. Some of the remainder may also have improved but we don't have sufficient evidence to be sure – or to claim a link to our support.

Progress was greater for some charities than others – depending on their starting point. We have set out the main themes below.

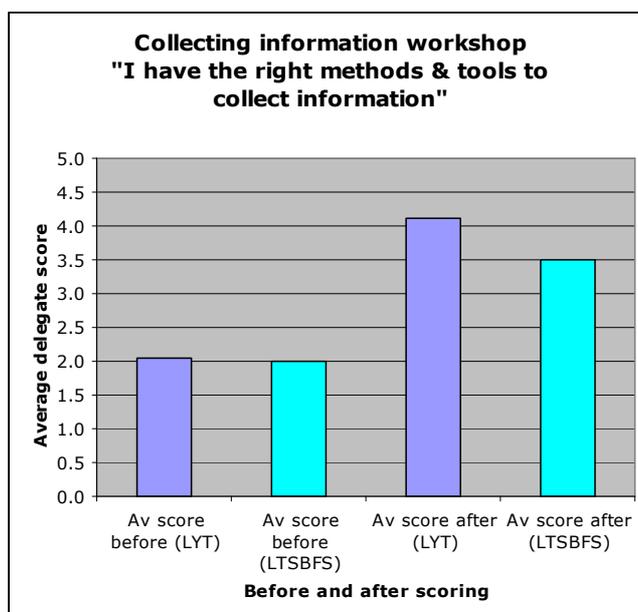
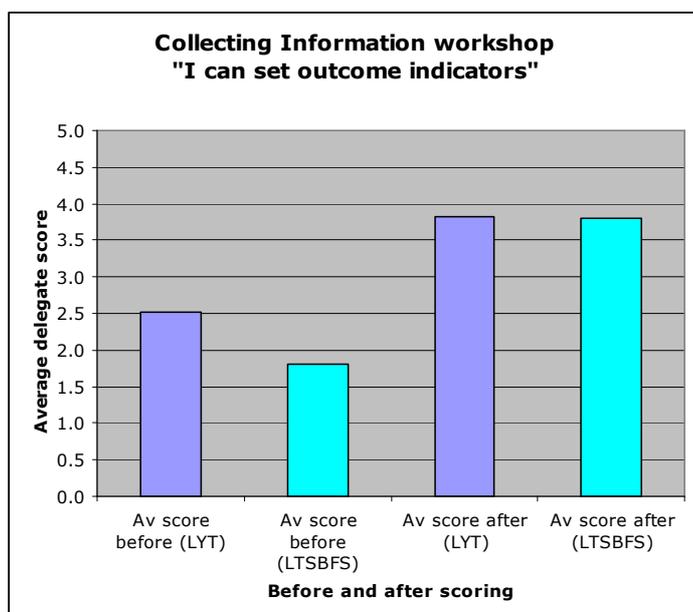
➤ The ESA helped charities clarify the outcomes of their work

Most LYT charities already had this skill but about $\frac{2}{3}$ of Foundation charities said our support had helped them clarify and state the outcomes of their work.

➤ The ESA helped charities develop skills to measure their outcomes

Workshop delegates reported **improvements in measurement skills** – for example see Graphs 1 and 2. We also helped charities develop creative alternatives to questionnaires and put in place systematic observation schedules.

“We have caught a sort of Evaluation Fever as a result of having ESS support!” Charity B



Graphs 1 & 2: Feedback from 18 LYT funded delegates attending workshops 2007-09 and 12 Foundation funded delegates attending workshops 2009-10. Delegates self-assessed their skills on the workshop learning outcomes before and after attending.

➤ **The ESA helped charities put in place systems for storing data**

We helped many charities develop simple databases or spreadsheets to record and store outcome feedback. For example Charity E said:

“The support given by your organisation was very much appreciated and helped us focus on what we wanted to get out of developing a data base.”

➤ **The ESA helped charities improve their services**

Charity F found from evaluation that activities they provided for one group of children were not challenging enough. The charity manager said:

“[In future we will] give them challenging activities where they are taken out of their comfort zone. This will have a real impact on them and thus form more of a relationship between us and the group and make evaluation easier.”

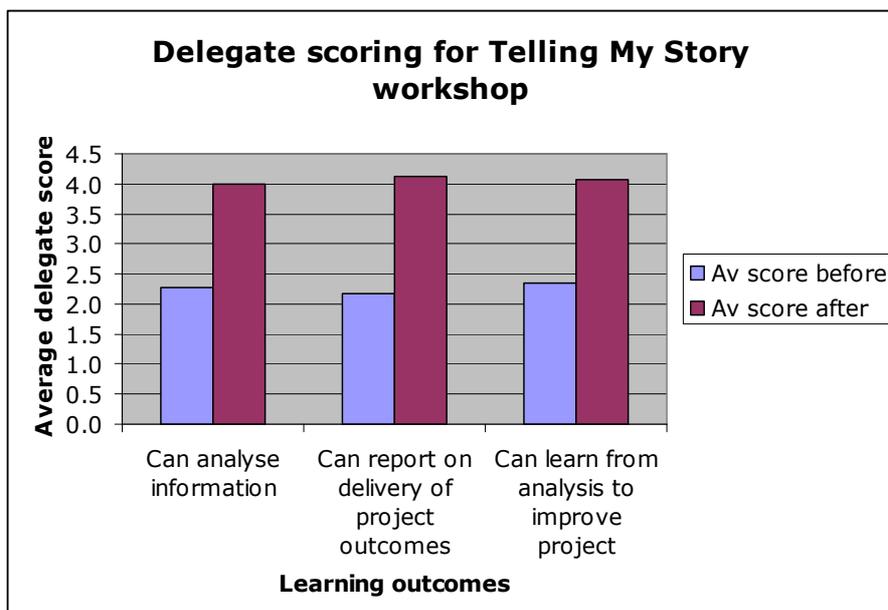
Charity H found following up a sample of volunteers who had ‘dropped out’ “was really useful and is something we will now build in to our evaluation.”

Charity S said better evaluation had helped make them more sustainable:

“I can safely say that the sessions with yourself and the [peer learning] event with Laidlaw were key points in developing and improving our evaluation systems. I also believe that the improved methods of evaluating and presenting the results of courses we have run since then were major factors in the decisions of funders to award us grants.”

➤ **The ESA helped charities improve their reporting on outcomes**

Charities said we had helped them improve their ability to analyse and report on outcomes (see graph 3 below).



Graph 2: Feedback from 17 LYT funded delegates attending workshops 2007-09 (data from 10 Foundation delegates is very similar- for clarity this hasn't been shown.)

What the funders thought

As far as the funders' view was concerned, around half of charities in each ESA produced **good or excellent** reporting of outcomes after receiving evaluation support. In other words there was clear evidence of the difference the charity made. The other half had **average or poor** outcome reporting. It was (usually) clear what the charity did but **not** what difference they made.

The table below shows the correlation between take up of support and quality of reporting in LYT support accounts.

Assessment of report	Took up all support	Took up less support than entitled	No support
Excellent or good	11	3	0
Average or poor	6	4	5

While the numbers are too small to draw strong conclusions **ESS support does seem to have assisted charities to produce good reports**. Those charities that used all their support entitlement seem to have produced a better report than those who used no support or less than they could have done.

ESS was not the only factor in improved reporting. Both funders improved their own guidance on reporting (with ESS support) so it was the combination of support from ESS and the funder direct which helped make the improvements.

Maureen McGinn, Chief Executive of Laidlaw Youth Trust said in 2009:

“We started to notice the difference in the general standard of report writing and the sources and amount of evidence presented by those with Evaluation Support Accounts (ESA) last year [2008]. We provided ESAs to those charities new to LYT. Our control group were the charities which had been inherited from the Laidlaw Youth Project and which, generally, were not in receipt of ESAs. With this group it would be fair to say that there were no significant changes in the quality of reporting. However, we did notice improved reporting by the new LYT charities as they started to draw down support from ESS.

“In the reports we received before we introduced Evaluation Support Accounts, we noted a tendency to describe why outcomes were needed and then were given an account of the activities designed to ensure the clients obtained the outcome. But rarely were we able to see evidence that the outcomes had actually been delivered except for some general statement or a case study or two.

“We now see reports presenting more information of individual and programme wide impact, honest reflection of weaknesses in programme planning or delivery and learning. The best reports we see present this information in a variety of formats – tables; pie charts; summary statistics; quotations from clients and stakeholders; and well chosen case studies. This immediately inspires confidence that the charity is delivering what it says it does.”

Factors which helped and hindered take up of support

Negative factors affecting take up and impact (for charities)

- Time – some charities were unable to make the time to access the support, for example due to staff sickness or funding crises. Small charities in particular found it hard to make the time to access support.
- Geography – we travelled right across Scotland and gave phone support. However some rural charities did not get as much support as they needed.
- Leadership – in a few cases an individual within a charity was enthusiastic about evaluation but was not supported by the manager or board so it was hard for them to implement new evaluation systems.

Positive factors affecting take up and impact (for charities)

- Relevance to funding requirements: There was a clear link between the evaluation systems we helped charities put in place and the funder's reporting requirements. So most charities could see why it was worth doing.
- Funder feedback: Feedback on good reports reinforced the charity's evaluation work and feedback on poor reports encouraged charities that had been dragging their feet to take up support. This was particularly true with LYT where charities were funded for more than one year.
- Seeing broader benefits: For example charities used the outcomes and measurement systems for other funders.
- Tailored approach: charities said that the mix of workshops to build basic skills and tailored support to integrate learning in a way that made sense for their work meant the support seemed relevant rather than a 'necessary chore'.

Limits to the difference our support made

We could not always help charities to get evaluation perfect straight away.

“I think we are definitely getting the idea a lot more but it is still very much a work in progress.” Charity K

A few charities implemented new evaluation systems but found it hard to get useful data. For example Charity M sought young people's feedback but:

“We found many of the young people just didn't know what to make of it all; some just did not want to participate at all ... and some couldn't be bothered. When we came to analyse the results, we couldn't reach any reliable conclusions”

Fortunately this charity wasn't put off and developed different ways to build evaluation into day to day work which gave them meaningful outcome data.

Learning

1. **Evaluation support does make a difference to a charity's ability to measure and report on its outcomes.** The improvements in charities' evaluation skills were most significant when the charity itself was motivated and positive about evaluation. The difference we made for most charities was incremental rather than transformational. Whilst charities' evaluation systems improved they are not necessarily perfect.
2. **The active engagement of the funder is crucial in ensuring positive take up and impact of evaluation support.** This includes making clear links between their reporting requirements and the support provided and giving feedback on charities.
3. **Charities' improved evaluation ability can be sustained.** It's too early to say this for the Foundation ESA but for many LYT charities, the benefits of support received 2-3 years previously had been sustained in 2010. ESAs also benefitted some charities as a whole (not just the funded work) as the charity implemented evaluation systems across their services.
4. **Diagnosis is crucial:** It allows tailoring of evaluation support to meet the specific needs of the charity. It provides a baseline against which to evaluate the evaluation support itself.
5. **The evaluation support offer should not be too complicated.** Having high, medium and low support accounts for LYT was a great idea in theory but in practice was complicated to administer. More than a 1/3 of 'low' support charities did not take up any support. This may be because they thought they did not need it. Other charities with low or medium support needs required more support than they were 'allowed'.

The Foundation's approach was more straightforward. Only charities with the greatest evaluation needs got an ESA but it was the same support package for all charities referred.

6. **A mix of workshops and tailored support is an effective approach to evaluation support.** Workshops allowed charities to learn basic evaluation knowledge and network with other charities. Tailored support enabled a more focussed support about the charity's own systems.
7. **Charities need encouragement to access support.** Nearly all charities needed encouragement through email and phone calls to take up support. But there was a balance to be struck between strongly encouraging a charity to take up support and forcing them to do so. Charities have to recognise the value of evaluation before they will do it. The good news was that with our ESAs, some charities changed, by their own admission, from grudging acceptance of evaluation to enthusiastic advocates.
8. **It is important to set ground rules about ESS's role.** ESS, as support provider, has a relationship both with the funder and the charities. It is important to ensure the funder and the charities understand that ESS was there to work alongside charities.

Case studies

Charity N – developing creative evaluation tools

Charity N, a LYT funded charity, received 2 tailored support sessions and email comments on evaluation materials. Two staff attended the *Visual Approaches* workshop. One attended the outdoor activities peer learning event. The support helped them develop outcome measurement tools for use in outdoor activity work with young people. They introduced new feedback forms to help young people focus on areas that they need to work on. They introduced video diaries with groups. In July 2009 they wrote to ESS and said:

“The support and training that we have gained from ESS has been invaluable in helping us to understand and articulate our aims and outcomes, and in equipping us with knowledge of the different evaluation methods available to us...we are continually striving to make the biggest difference that we can to the lives of the young people with whom we work.”

Charity T – creating a whole organisation evaluation system

Charity T, a Foundation charity had good basic evaluation systems in place but each of its projects had its own system, driven by funders’ need, and it was hard for communicate the overall impact of the charity. After attending workshops and receiving tailored support the director said there was still a lot way to go. However they had started on a positive journey:

“ESS’s support helped us to think clearly about the common outcomes we were looking for from all projects ... Group workshops were good, but one to one support was fantastic ... We have now almost completed a common evaluation system”.

Charity P – from good to excellent

One or more staff attended all our workshops (they paid for some extra places themselves). We gave two tailored support sessions to help them build outcome evaluation into their assessment and delivery of support to young carers.

The Chief Executive said in writing:

“It was reassuring and useful to have the support offered through ESS. Although the Centre collected much information for monitoring purposes, it did not have systems in place to meet the reporting requirements of the Trust in respect to outcomes. The assistance to develop these systems was very welcome and of great benefit to the organisation ... We are now much more confident in measuring outcomes ... The tools used to measure outcomes for this project have now been rolled out across the whole Young Carers Service to evidence the effectiveness of the work undertaken with all young carers”.

Charity Q – better reporting and sustaining evaluation skills

Charity Q, an LYT charity, did not access any support before submitting their end of first year report in early 2008. LYT was disappointed at the level of outcome evidence provided. We then provided 2 tailored support sessions and the project worker attended *Visual Approaches* and *Telling My Story* workshops.

Maureen McGinn said, of the end of year 2 report:

“The difference between the 2008 report’s outcome evidence (2 line summaries of activity) and that shown in the latest 2009 report is simply outstanding.”

In the final report in 2010, the quality of outcome reporting had been sustained. They used of graphs, quotes and statistics to demonstrate the impact they had made. And the report was believable because not every young person had made progress – and they could say why. The charity said (in 2010):

“The words monitoring and evaluation used to fill us with dread as we were unsure what exactly we had to do. With the support of LYT and ESS this is now an area where we are growing in confidence. Over the past few years we have identified areas where changes could be made or new measures introduced to improve the delivery, impact and outcomes of the services we provide. The implementation of these changes has made a significant improvement in our ability to compile, write and provide full and comprehensive reports”

Charity R - a more challenging case study

Despite phone and email contact from ESS, Charity R, an LYT charity, only accessed one short session of tailored support towards the end of their funding. They had lost core funding and found it difficult to think beyond the crisis.

The end of grant report contained little evidence of outcomes although a lot of honesty about the challenges they had faced. When ESS provided feedback on their report to the manager it became clear in the conversation that there was a more positive story to tell about the charity’s impact than had been communicated in the report. The manager said:

“We barely used the evaluation support. We have spent far more time applying for funding than we anticipated and evaluation has taken a back seat, which we may find has been a mistake. We have been bad at using the support offered as we were overwhelmed by other things happening”

More recently the charity secured other funding. One of their new funders is providing evaluation training for funded charities through ESS and this time the worker attended 3 ESS workshops.

How we wrote this report

This report was written by Steven Marwick of Evaluation Support Scotland.

We are extremely grateful to Maureen McGinn, former chief executive of the Laidlaw Youth Trust and Connie Williamson of the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland who provided input to the report and supported ESS to review the learning from and impact of evaluation support accounts.

The evidence for whether we did (or did not) make a difference to the charities we supported comes from:

1. Workshop evaluation sheets
2. Responses to follow up emails from ESS after tailored support
3. Observed physical evidence such as new tools developed
4. Both funders asked for direct feedback on our support
5. Observations by the funder. With LYT this was qualitative. Foundation assessors filled in the referral form again to give a 'before and after' comparison.
6. The quality of end of year reporting on outcomes by charities.

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