Inspiring Impact Scotland case study: "Embracing change"

Maureen Trumper, Circle

About Circle

Circle is a Scottish charity working at the heart of deprived communities across central Scotland. Their aim is to support the most disadvantaged and difficult-to-engage children and families to improve their lives and promote their healthy development and potential.

Circle joined the Embedding Impact Practice Group (EIPG) facilitated Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) in October 2015. The EIPG sessions were designed and delivered so that members could:

- Improve their understanding of barriers and enablers to impact practice
- Identify practical steps to embedding impact practice in their organisation
- Have opportunities to share their experience and learn from peers.

Context and drivers

Maureen Trumper, Project Manager, represented Circle at the EIPG. Thinking about the context in which she joined the organisation about three years ago, she said that "Circle was a bit of a lip service in the sense that we were doing lots of work but we weren't picking up on actions we had agreed to take forward. Perhaps we were lacking driver to strategical direction."

In addition to organisational changes, Circle was moving to a new outcomes measurement database, Carista[1], and to reporting against SHANARI[2] outcomes, going from reporting on 5 outcomes (and associated indicators) to 8 outcomes (and associated indicators).

[1] http://www.carista.co.uk/
[2] SHANARI: *safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included*, known as the well-being indicators. These have been identified as areas in which children and young people need to progress in order to do well now and in the future.

At the time Circle joined the EIPG its Chief Executive, Liz Dahl, was retiring after over 20 years' service and a new leader was coming in, Rhona Hunter: *"We knew that we needed to be more creative about how we do things. Liz put the e-mail that ESS sent around the team. It came at the right timing for us."*

When joining the EIPG Maureen already had some experience and understanding of evaluation and impact measurement:

"I had worked with outcome measurement tools with two organisations using scaling methods and I had also been part of a project that was externally evaluated. In addition, I was managing a pilot project looking at whole family support which was undergoing monitoring around cost avoidance."

In her application to join the EIPG, Maureen wrote *"I want to use the learning from this project to re-evaluate how our organisation uses information to show what difference is being made by our support to families and also to cascade the learning within the different Circle teams."* Maureen has certainly lived up to these words and managed to embed impact practice across the whole organisation!

Rolling in the deep

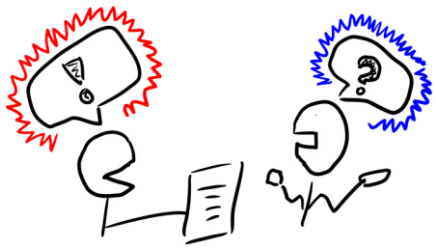
The EIPG was made up of nine organisations, including Circle. With facilitation from ESS, the group used good practice indicators set out in the free online self-assessment tool, *Measuring Up!*, to structure the content for the sessions. This allowed the group to identify one set of 16 core indicators to measure impact practice progress against and share learning about challenges and solutions within the group.

"The sessions were well constructed and facilitators' enthusiasm was helpful. The variety of the group was very interesting; it was good to have a couple of funders taking part and realise that funders go through the same challenges as funded organisations. There was always something to take away from sessions, either from Patty, from Tom or fro the group."

In order to establish a baseline of impact practice from the start of the sessions, each organisation filled in the diagnostic wheel in **Annex**. ESS Facilitators, Patty Lozano-Casal and Tom Scott, compiled the results and identified common 'weak' impact practice areas to focus the support on, particularly around:

- Making it happen, and
- Resourcing evaluation.

Thus, ESS provided training around setting outcomes and indicators, logic modelling, creating an evaluation plan, and data collection methods. Organisations were asked to do homework in between sessions to apply learning to their context and for their purposes. In addition, organisations with 'strong' scores in specific areas were invited to present their learning at sessions so that the group could fully benefit from experience in the group and create a peer support network.



"I had felt that Circle already had good impact practice but taking part in the EIPG has helped us to refine it and to make it more up to date on the agenda. We are very motivated to engage with good practice and have used the EIPG sessions to help us embed this into day to day activities. Being guided through the tools, the networking and being able to hear how other agencies tackled their issues helped enormously."

From dreading to yearning impact practice

The Code of Good Impact Practice recommends that everyone in an organisation takes some responsibility for impact. Following from this advice, *Measuring Up!* guidance encourages users to involve a variety of people who know the organisation: trustees, staff, volunteers and ideally beneficiaries. The idea is to bring different perspectives during the self-assessment process to ensure that the whole organisation understands what works, what doesn't work and how and why they will be working to implement the recommendations from *Measuring Up!*

In general, Inspiring Impact resources make you think about what you are doing and have a quality assurance type feel."

Taking on board this guidance, Maureen took the initiative to set up an internal Embedding Impact Group in her organisation. The group was varied in terms of roles and responsibilities, but also knowledge and skills. The Code was used to create the terms of reference for the group.

According to Maureen, Circle's embedding impact practice group met monthly at first, moving to quarterly meetings when they felt they had a good grasp on their impact practice plans. *"The group helped us focus on impact practice, rather than thinking of it as separate from service delivery. We know that when pressure hits part of the organisation someone is there to pick impact practice up.*

Maureen used this internal group to refine and complete the outputs from sessions and homework: *"I filled in the diagnostic wheel first; the group*

then met monthly to review it. We knew that we needed to embed impact practice across the organisation; Measuring Up! helped us go through the process. We could see where our impact practice was strong and where we needed to make improvements. Being part of this group really helped me focus on what we are doing.

"Starting from our vision and mission, we knew we had one; however, we weren't using it much or reviewing it. We didn't have a corporate entity really. When Rhona, our new CEO, joined the internal group she set out her vision for the organisation, which helped focus the work."

Circle's embedding impact practice group used and adapted the logic model that Maureen produced during the Inspiring Impact sessions for different strands of work and funding bids. In relation to this Maureen said, *"We have a staff team of about 45 people. We are all using the SHANARI outcomes framework. The internal group has been useful to know what outcomes each programme should prioritise. It helped us embed an outcomes approach across the whole organisation and at all levels consistently.*

"One of the challenges of adopting the SHANARI outcomes framework is that outcomes are for children. We work with children and families so one of the challenges we faced was identifying who owns the outcome, the child, a parent or the whole family. We have managed to clarify this now.

"We really appreciated this opportunity. We used the learning from the sessions in our tenders to demonstrate to funders that we are serious about measuring our impact and that we have it thought through."

"We found the Measuring Up! tool very practical and adaptable. It was good to see how our impact practice was improving, seeing 'ambers' turn to 'greens' and 'reds' progress to 'ambers'. It's still work on progress but we know we're improving.

Circle doesn't just go through the motions. Staff use the internal group lead on the self-assessment process and take forward action plans/ideas for development. For example, *"The group identified that we didn't tailor our messages to key audiences so we created a "marketing and communications subgroup" to help change this. We don't have a dedicated policy person but maybe this is something we could do in the future; for now we agreed that it's something Managers could take on."*

Getting our head out of the sand

"The internal group has also encouraged us to reflect on how we collect evidence in the organisation. We knew that our 'whole family' approach

works but when we tried to find evidence of our work to back it up we were surprised by inconsistencies and gaps.

We now all add evidence and review it routinely. To build on our evidence base we recruited a Development Manager, Angela Gentile, who is now undertaking a piece of research to evidence how and why Circle's family approach works. This is a selling point for us."

Impact practice today

"Our internal group continues to meet on a 6-monthly basis. We use Measuring Up! reports in different ways; for example, to inform management and feed into Committee meetings.

"The internal group created an action plan to address weaker areas which will also feed into our strategic plan. We do a self-evaluation every year and, on the back of the Inspiring Impact support, we are in the process of reviewing our evaluation feedback forms; up until now were evaluating the service delivery part rather than the outcome."

Circle are using this group now to look at how they can standardise what scores like '1' or '10' mean: *"This will allow us to be more consistent in the way we record information across the country."*

Take away message

"Embedding impact practice and evaluation is about always looking at what you're doing. It's a cycle you should be on all the time.

"Practitioners should always use time for reflection. It's easy to get bogged down on delivery and lose sight of what you want to achieve."