

- Where the gaps are in our delivery
- How can we develop delivery models and design a more robust system going forward

We were very responsive to the impact of COVID-19 and although we managed it well, we know that there were areas that we could improve on. We have been so busy delivering our projects that we haven't allowed ourselves to do extensive and much needed evaluation of our project monitoring procedures.

## Moving from crisis to recovery - case study

This case study may be of interest to any third sector organisation who is having to adapt and learn as they go in uncertain times.

In 2020 Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) supported eight projects affected by the COVID-19 crisis to evaluate and learn about their response to the crisis. The aim of this support was to strengthen their response and their recovery, by improving what they do or guiding future plans and strategies. This work was supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.

**Forres Area Community Trust (FACT)** worked differently to support the local community during the crisis. This included partnering more with other local organisations to deliver emergency food parcels and support to help people to connect digitally. **Debbie**, Lead Development Officer at Forres Area Community Trust shares their learning.

### Why did we get involved in this peer learning programme?

We wanted to be involved because we thought that building our evaluation skills would help us understand:

- What approaches we need to take

### What are we learning about our work through this crisis?

#### a) We learnt that we need to join up more internally and collaborate more externally

Before the crisis much of our work was project-led – we tended to work in silos as projects had been set up to deliver a specific work plan. As time progressed it became obvious that the projects had complementary and mutual aims but they were still separate. During the crisis it was clear we couldn't keep working like this and have worked much more collaboratively than before.

During the lockdown in 2020 we reached more people, who might have previously slipped through the net, because we joined up across our projects and with other organisations. **Referrals** between different projects meant we could benefit communities more. For example there were 39 cross project referrals between the Food Project, Forres Online and the Cameron Project and 24 referrals from 10 different agencies and partner organisations into the projects we were delivering.

Also, our partnerships with other organisations such as Moray Food Plus helped us reach more people. For example,

- We recently supported a vulnerable young woman with health issues, who was homeless and rehoused in Forres. She was referred to the Food

Project for regular meal delivery and food vouchers. To combat her isolation, she was then referred to our project, Forres Online, and received a Chromebook and support to connect. We helped her gain the skills and the equipment to reconnect with family and friends and look for employment

- One of our befriending clients was referred to Forres Online. This individual was increasingly isolated due to poor health and the pandemic and missed her weekly bible classes that were being delivered via Zoom. The Forres Online Co-ordinator, through the connected Scotland scheme, issued her with an iPad and the digital tutor followed up by teaching. The individual now attends her bible classes remotely.

## **b) We need an organisational approach to our strategy and evaluation**

We learnt that our model doesn't work so well in these new times, and we need to adapt it for the future. We have started to review our impact over the last 9 months in comparison to the 9 years before (this is very good timing as FACT is 10 years old this year). This showed us that our evidence is quite fragmented, and project focused currently.

Some of the changes we plan to make include:

- Set organisational outcomes to show what difference we make. This will also help us be clearer about what questions we need to ask
- Collect more evidence along the way to show our impact
- Make sure we only collect information we need. We realised we had a lot of information that we had collected but not analysed as part of our overall review and work plan in the past but had looked at it only in the context of the individual projects

- Ask our other clients and the community in general what difference we've made

## **How is this helpful to our organisation?**

This has been a helpful process in reviewing our purpose and our evaluation systems. We are going to develop a new five-year strategy and use our learning to shape our priorities. We have decided to join up all our different projects using volunteers and recruit a new volunteer co-ordinator. We think this will help us use the skills of all our new volunteers better and be able to deliver our services in a more cohesive and efficient way. This work will help us decide when and who to partner with in the future.

## **Debbie's tips for others**

Don't underestimate the value of taking the time to review your work as you go. This has helped inform what we need to do next and how we need to adapt. For us, that is time well spent and makes us stronger as an organisation.

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### **Contact details**

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