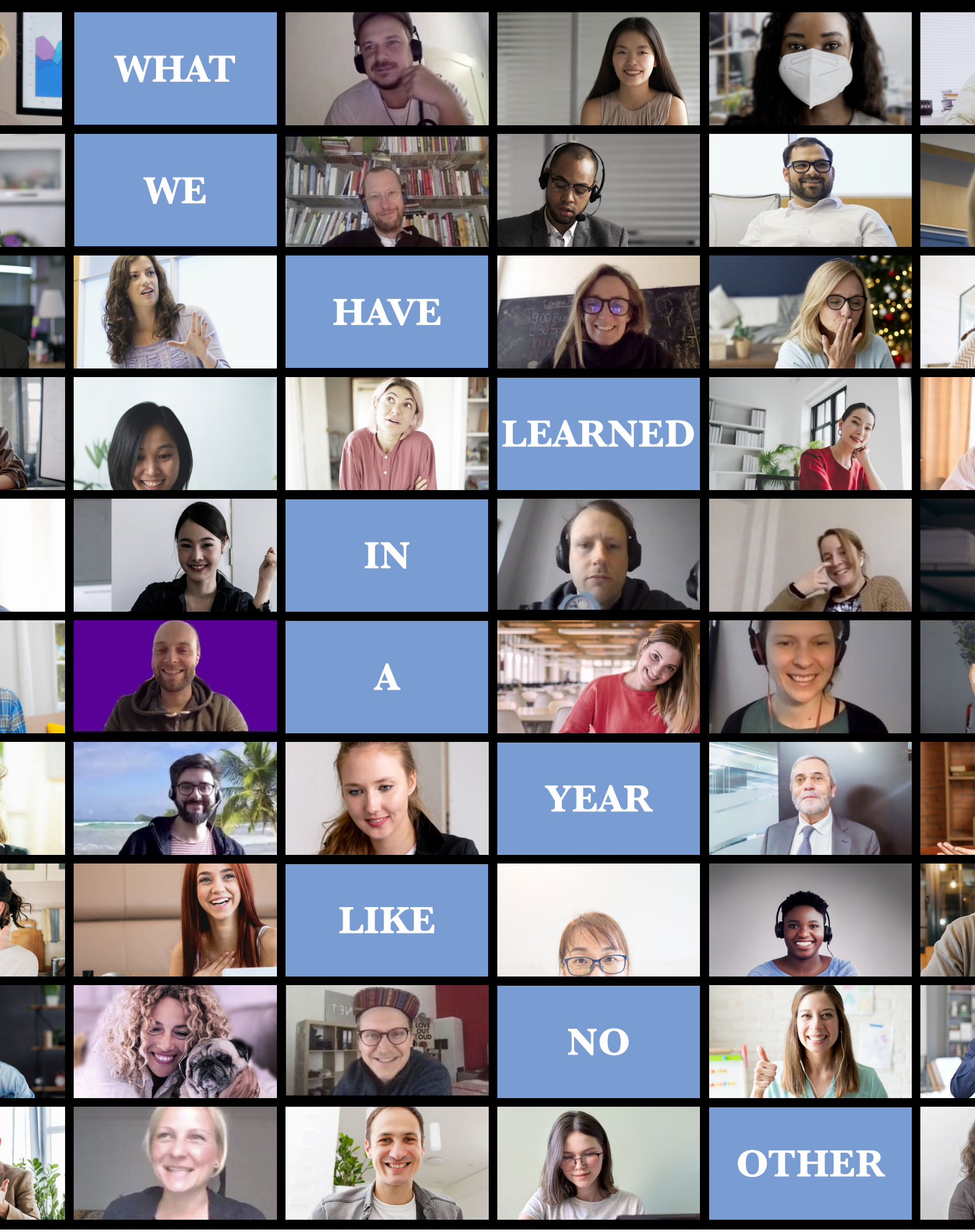

Annual Review 2020/2021

Evaluation Support Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

Remaining relevant in difficult times

Welcome to our 2020-21 annual review. If we were to sum up the story of our year, it would be that ESS remained relevant in difficult times, while working with more organisations than ever before. We believe that's because, for the third sector, **making a difference** and **acting on learning** has never been more important.

Throughout the year we helped the sector:

- Evaluate their adapted **services**
- Adapt their evaluation **methods** to work online
- Analyse and report on a broad and more qualitative **range of evidence**

As ever, we practiced what we preach and evaluated ourselves! So what did we discover this year? We found that most of our clients learned equally well through our online support - we even became more accessible for some. But we didn't get everything right first time, so we responded to feedback, adapted, and improved.

We're happy to say our existing resources remain relevant, and we also created new free tools. While our key principles were reinforced by Covid-19 - namely that evaluation should be useful, proportionate, and meaningful for service users.

We discovered there is a strong desire in the third sector to learn from Covid-19 experiences. They told us it's important to evaluate so they can:

- Celebrate success
- Check they are doing the right things in the right way
- Find out what to keep doing or stop doing in future
- Share learning with others

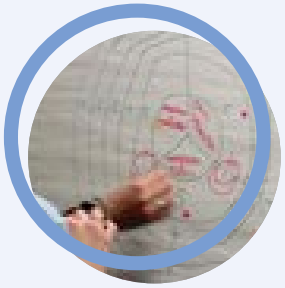
This annual review gives a flavour of the work we did and the difference we made during 2020-21.

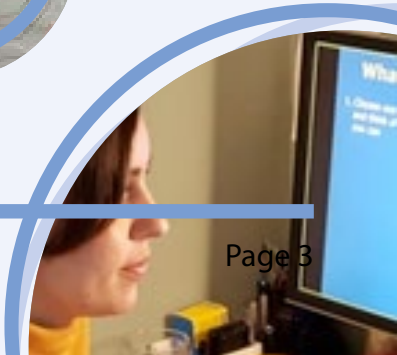
And the future?

We'll continue to support the sector, use learning and evidence to improve their services, to influence the "recovery" and to develop and maintain positive partnerships with the public sector and funders.

We'll develop a blended approach to our service, continuing to deliver online where that's more suited and going back to face-to-face where appropriate (when we can).

So does the third sector need evaluation in a pandemic? Yes we do!





EVALUATION SUPPORT - SPECIFIC TO COVID-19

Our new **Covid-19 web page** with free resources, methods and case-studies went live on 13 April 2020 and unsurprisingly, quickly became our most popular section.

From February 2021, we revamped the page to highlight resources and workshops focusing on evaluating online delivery.

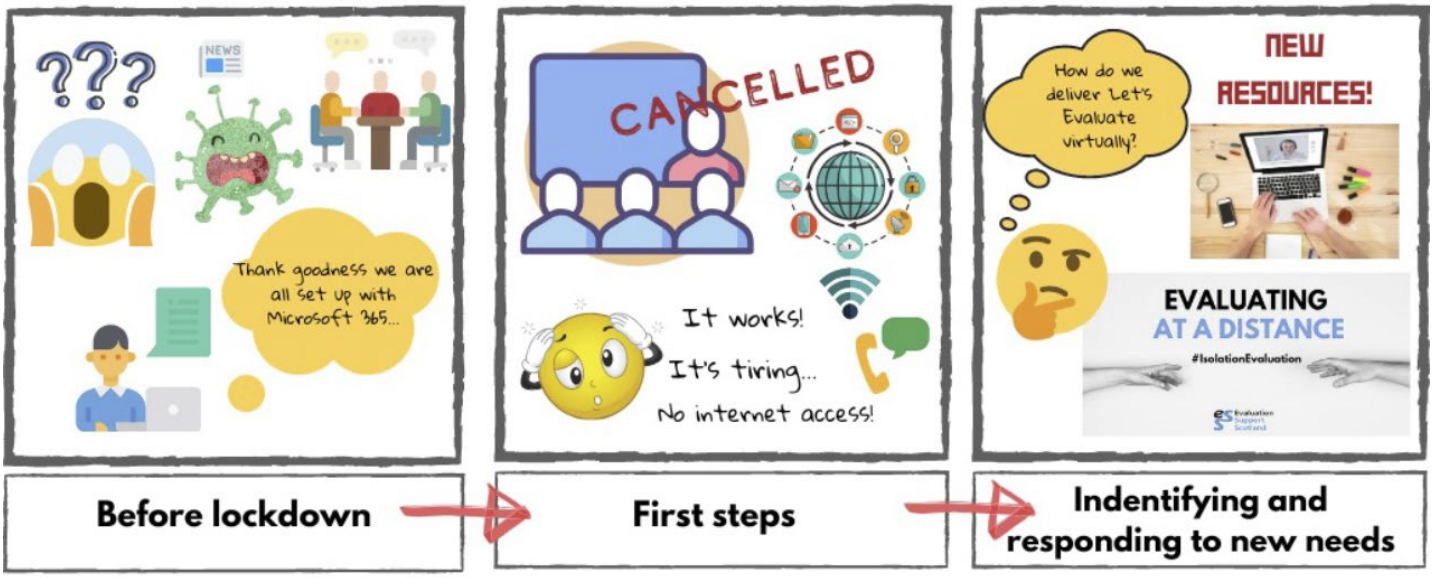
"Like so many organisations across the third/charity sector you adapted quickly, responding to immediate challenges and sharing knowledge/ new ways of working and ideas in a way that was actually useful"

Feedback in stakeholder survey

We ran events and workshops focusing on **evaluating at a distance**, analysing qualitative data and using lived experience evidence.

The images below are from our storyboard resource. One organisation on twitter said:

"A really useful guide to tracking your #COVID-19 activity, for those organisations having to move fast to adapt. Super accessible for wearied minds, too."



FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY

We successfully worked with a group of National Lottery Community Fund grantholders to support them **evaluate** and **learn** from their response to Covid-19 and to help them strengthen their response and recovery.

Following this we published 7 case studies and even recruited a second cohort.

> "This has given me focus and help to set out a plan for the virtual delivery."

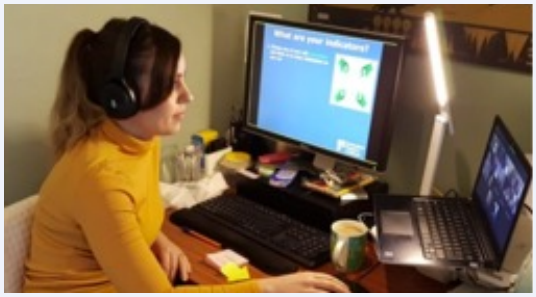
Grantholder

Working with SCVO

We also worked with SCVO to set up the **Covid-19 Strategic Oversight Group** to pull together evidence and data on the impact of Covid-19 on the sector. Work continues on this exciting collaboration, so watch this space.

ESS ONLINE

We moved our ever-popular Let's Evaluate! training programme online at the end of April 2020.



ESS Senior Training Officer Shona Wells

> "I think you've done a fantastic job of moving these sessions online - I wasn't sure what to expect attending training via zoom but the sessions have been great, informative, interesting and interactive."
>
> Disability charity

We provided tailored support over Zoom to help individual organisations with their evaluation systems.

These three case studies below illustrate what we did together:

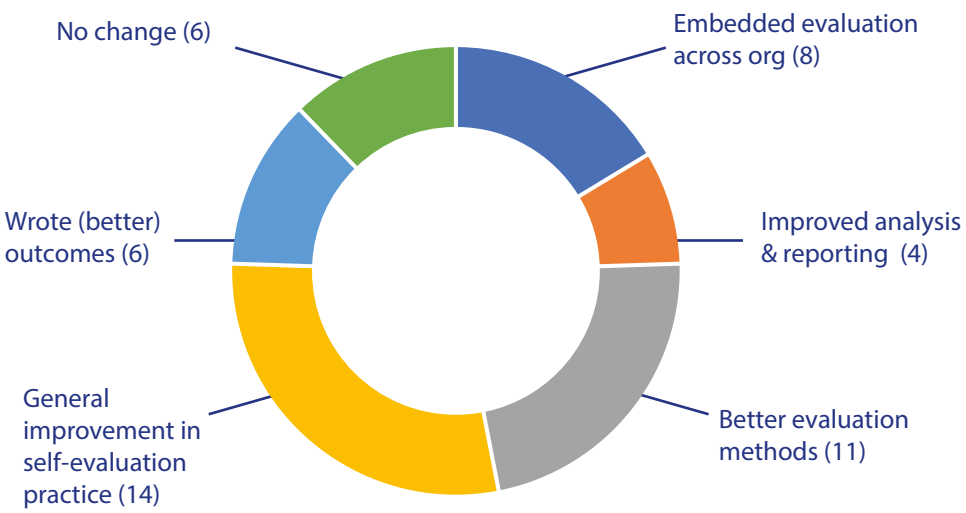
Age Concern case study

Scottish Ballet case study

Funeral Link Scotland case study

Workshop follow up feedback

Feedback from 49 participants 3 months after attending **Let's Evaluate!**



MORE ONLINE DEVELOPMENTS

New website

We launched a new website this year to make it even easier to access our resources.

> "Lots of resources available/ online tutorial very good/great at contacting to keep offering services/ organisation exudes a friendliness and openness."

Stakeholder survey respondent

New guides and blogs

We also created a new online learning module on logic modelling.

We produced a new suite of support guides on analysing data and guides on evaluating partnerships, evaluating publications and on "good enough" evidence.

> "Providing excellent resources and tools around how to measure, evaluate and report outcomes/ indicators for projects."

Stakeholder survey respondent

We wrote insightful blogs and signposted to relevant resources to help the sector reflect and report simply and effectively on their work and impact.

We launched a guide to help the sector judge the quality of its evidence.

We also consulted on how we can best promote evidence use and the outcomes approach - and what the sector told us will inform our future work.

FUNDERS SUPPORTING EVALUATION AND LEARNING

This year, ESS had 7 Evaluation Support Accounts (ESAs) where a funder pays for training and support for grantholders. For example, The National Lottery Community Fund paid for 105 grantholders to access workshops, tailored support or learning programmes. Of 35 grantholders whose support ended this year, 29 achieved all or part of their evaluation support goal.

Tweet from Robertson Trust grantholder

"You have clarified many evaluation outcome questions. It has inspired us and given us confidence to work on a more streamlined plan."

Substance misuse charity

"You really helped us to think through different collection methods and also ensure that what we collect is clearly tied to our outcomes."

Health Charity

"I feel that I have learned more about evaluation in the past 6 weeks than I have in the previous 16 years of practice."

Youthwork charity

How's it going?

We ran our third session designed to bring together organisations whose support has finished with their funding officers. Participants kindly updated our messages for other grantholders.

SHARED LEARNING PROGRAMMES

Along with Health and Social Care ALLIANCE self-management fund and The National Lottery Community Fund's homelessness cohort, we brought together funded projects to generate shared learning instead of writing traditional funder reports. Learn more here.

Events were a little more challenging without the energy of face-to-face engagement, but projects and funders told us they really benefited:

> We're seeing a lot of richness coming out about the complexity of work around preventing homelessness and supporting people at risk."

The National Lottery Community Fund

> "Reporting is the least favourite element of my role, however I have looked forward to attending these sessions and had some great discussions ... I would really encourage this way of reporting to become the way of the future!"

Homelessness charity

Scottish Government as a funder

We ran our Funding and Relationships workshop for 41 Scottish Government officials who manage third sector grant funding. Participants told us they increased skills and knowledge:

> "I can see already how to follow best practice, get useful outcomes and build relationships with the third sector."

Official

We helped the Scottish Government Access to Childcare Fund, administered by Children in Scotland to establish proportionate evaluation systems. We also ran workshops on reporting for grantholders.

We supported the sharing of learning amongst grantholders of a Scottish Government Fund that aids third sector organisations to support people to access benefits.

GETTING ON BOARD WITH EVALUATION

"Really helpful to have time and space to think through and discuss with others. Inspired me to ensure we make some time to plan our evaluation methods - easy to keep putting it off!."

Children in Scotland

Through Inspiring Impact we ran peer learning events: "CEOs and evaluation" (with ACOSVO), "Evaluating online" and "Tackling evaluation challenges when working with children" (with Children in Scotland).

We undertook research to find out about who leads evaluation in third sector organisations and how to do it well. Our report and key messages were launched at a successful peer learning event.

Young people in the lead

We rounded off a two-year programme concerned with putting young people in the lead during evaluation with a showcase event. We supported four organisations to make videos with young people talking about what they did.

"Designing our own evaluations makes us feel good."

Young person participant

SUPPORTING THIRD SECTOR RESEARCH

In February our Third Sector Research Forum conference, **Researching Well**, focused on ethical research and was attended by 144 delegates. See conference report.

"The largest and best organised online conference I've attended to date"

"The whole experience was fabulous. Being a whole day, with speakers, contributors and presentations flew in. Was all well thought out with breaks and lunch. Had an amazing day sharing experiences with all."

New guide and "What the forum does" film

At the conference we launched a guide to applying ethical principles for third sector research plus our TSRF film to share evidence of the Forum's impact.

SHOWING THE SECTOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Recognising our rich tapestry is our resource, developed with the sector, that helps demonstrate their contribution to tackling health inequalities.

This year we produced four in-depth case studies to show how organisations can successfully prove that contribution.

We shared the case studies at a learning event we ran with our partners VHS, CHEX and Public Health Scotland. 81% of participants "definitely" learnt something new about evaluating health inequalities:

> "What this toolkit taught us was we have a plethora of data and evidence, sometimes lost in 40 page monitoring reports, this format offers key pieces of information gathered from a variety of sources which can be far more powerful than the 40 page thesis!"

Case study organisation

Evaluating ourselves

As usual, throughout the year we evaluated our service, but this year especially we undertook more regular analysis and reflection to make sure our online services were still making a difference – and to improve them where needed.

We also ran our **biennial stakeholder survey**. There were 114 generous respondents. See here for the informative results.

> "You are available when approached, you are well respected in the sector, you are known as the go to org re M&E"

> "Always relevant to my work and always helpful"

> "You approach evaluation with enthusiasm, try to make it streamlined and more straightforward for everyone"

Quotes from our stakeholder survey

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

634 organisations supported

114 workshops and events

1,535 workshop and event participants

67 organisations received tailored support

3,082 on our mailing list

2,526 twitter followers

Income: **£401,298**

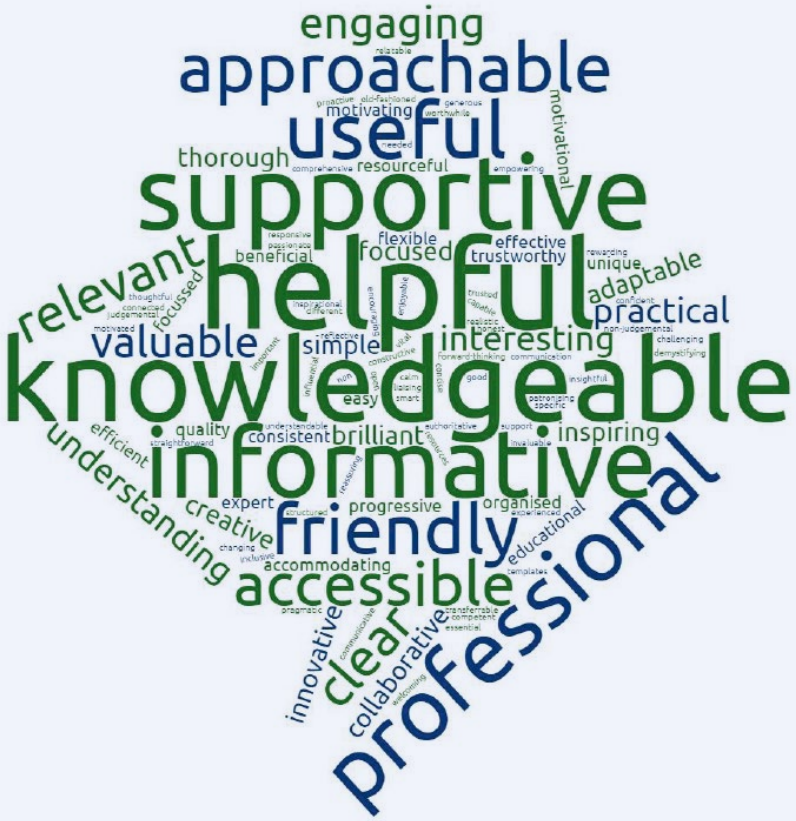
Expenditure: **£396,915**

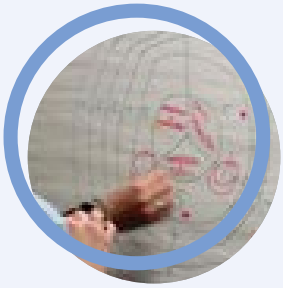
We received grants from the Scottish Government and New Philanthropic Capital (NPC). The rest of our income comes from contracts and fees.

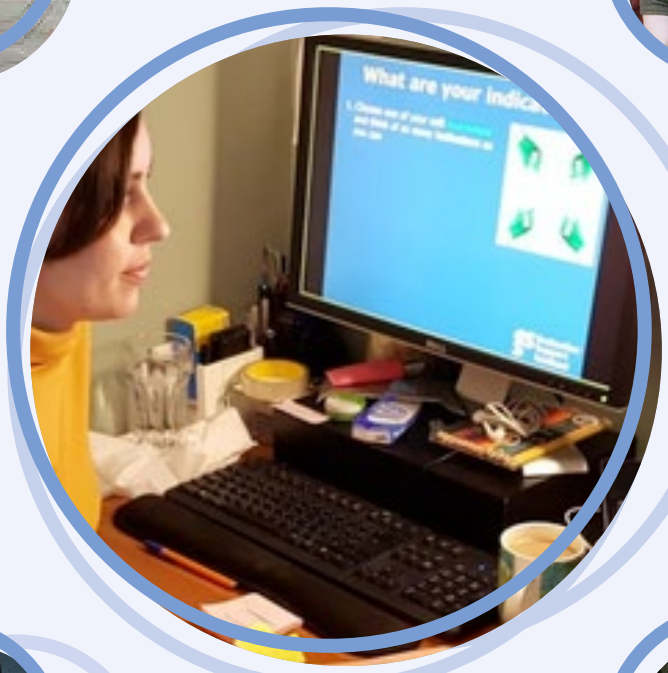
Our full Annual Report and Financial Statement 2020/21 is available to view on our website.

What people are saying

Feedback from 114 people who completed our stakeholder survey in the autumn of 2020.







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