Learning Community Accounts Pilots Case Study Report 3

Fairyland

Research

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Analysis for Policy

Learning Community Accounts Pilots
Case Study Report 3: Fairyland (Neath)

Audience   The voluntary and community learning sector, providers of training and DCELLS programme delivery, funding and planning departments.

Overview   The evaluation of the Community Learning Account pilot has involved individual evaluations of each pilot and a collective evaluation of the overall approach. This report presents the individual 'case study' findings for one of the five pilot projects.

Action required   None

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Additional copies   This report is available online at
http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/research-and-evaluation/124540/?lang=en

Related documents   Case Study Report 1: TDG
Case Study Report 2: CwmNi
Case Study Report 4: Caia Park Partnership Limited
Case Study Report 5: Cardigan and South Ceredigion
Evaluation of the Learning Community Accounts Pilots

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1 Introduction to the Learning Community Account Pilots

In 2007 BMG Research was commissioned by The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, Welsh Assembly Government to evaluate the Learning Community Accounts pilot projects. The LCA pilots ended in March 2008.

The purpose of Learning Community Accounts (LCAs) was to:

- transfer skill, knowledge and resources to communities to enable them to participate and design solutions to community learning needs by upskilling key individuals

- embed learning and skill development within community regeneration, by supporting communities, families and individuals to develop and engage in learning activity which is learner focused, flexible and accessible to all, and

- provide a mechanism that integrates communities in to the local planning process, and also supports and empowers them.

The desired outcomes of the LCAs were:

- increased learning activity that contributes to community regeneration, widening participation, skills and employment;

- opportunities to engage and up skill socially excluded individuals and allow progression to employment;

- a cohort of qualified development workers focused on learning and a general increase in the capacity of individuals involved in community development; and

- the availability of a collaborative and quality provision that meets the needs of communities and contributes to community regeneration.

There were five pilot projects in total:

- Caia Park Partnership Ltd, Wrexham

- Cardigan and South Ceredigion Regeneration Forum

- CwmNi – Communities First, Treherbert, Rhondda Valley

- Fairyland Communities First, Cwmafan

- Cymorth Cymru –Housing Associations (pan Wales) Known as Tai Dysgu a Gwaith, (TDG)

The first four of these were identified as primarily geographical communities, whilst Cymorth Cymru was a 'community of interest' focusing on homelessness.

Each LCA project has been written up individually as a 'case study'. Case studies are often described as a form of 'qualitative' or 'thick' descriptive research of an activity viewed in depth. This approach allows the provision of a comprehensive description of the project(s) being evaluated including the specific context and an exploration of the experiences of the people involved in it. In this context, therefore, they provide a detailed understanding of how each LCA pilot works and what the experiences are of those who have been involved. There are five case study reports in total, each reporting on one of the LCA pilots. This report focuses on the Fairlyland (Neath) LCA pilot.

An evaluation report has also been produced which brings together and synthesises the information from each of the case studies to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the LCA pilots to date in meeting their objectives as well as identifying areas of good practice and 'lessons learnt' with regard to this approach to community based learning. This in turn will inform the future development of Learning Community Accounts, and community learning as a whole.

1.1 The evaluation

The research aims and objectives suggested that a mixed-method 'triangulation' approach was most appropriate. It was agreed therefore that the evaluation should comprise a combination of qualitative and quantitative work, as well as incorporating available monitoring and administrative data.

As each LCA pilot project was different, both in terms of its set-up and organisation as well as its delivery stage, the evaluation also adopted a case study approach. An evaluation framework was developed which was applied across all case studies (detailing, for example, the key research issues, proposed method and key stakeholder groups) with the acceptance that some projects would

be able to provide greater access to an evidence base than others. It was recognised that the two pilots that were most advanced in their development (Caia Park and TDG) would provide the fullest evaluation evidence whilst the remaining three would concentrate more on start up and process evaluation rather than any assessment of impact.

The research approach was therefore as follows:

- Telephone discussions with some key WAG staff involved in the inception and development of the pilots (ongoing)

- Early familiarisation site visits to each pilot, including initial discussions with the manager. The visits were also used to identify possible learner respondents (where available) and other stakeholder respondents and appropriate methodology to be employed.

- A review of key documentation including delivery plans, annual reports, monitoring data (including evidence gathered during familiarisation visits)

- In-depth discussions with operational and delivery staff including the Co-ordinator, the Super Learning Champion (appointed to support Fairyland residents to engage in learning) and representatives from the Accountable Body and key partner agencies;

- In-depth discussions with two groups of learners, both men and women, including the identification of potential individual case studies.

The longitudinal element of the evaluation (as proposed in the original tender) was reconsidered in light of the subsequent requirement to complete the evaluation prior to March 2008 and the recognition that there was therefore insufficient time to conduct follow-up work with pilot participants.

2   Project description

2.1 Project aim and objectives

The initial aim of the Learning Community Account pilot project was to produce a Fairyland Learning Plan as a tool with which to take forward the learning needs of the young community. This initially necessitated the prior identification of three 'learning champions'.

The main objectives were to enable young people to gain skills and to subsequently progress to become Learning Champions for the benefit of the community, breaking down the barriers that prevent young people accessing education and conducting community led consultation on learning needs.

2.2 Community context

The Fairyland estate, located in Neath in South Wales, has a population of approximately 334 residents according to project documentation. The estate has been identified by the Welsh Assembly Government as a Communities First sub ward. Characteristics that identify Fairyland as such an area includes a culture of benefit dependency, a high proportion of lone parents, low levels of educational attainment, high levels of long-term sickness and disability, high unemployment, and a perception of high levels of drug and alcohol misuse. The estate also has a young population, with some 47% being under 25 years of age (Census 2001). The estate is perceived locally to be poorly designed and difficult to maintain and, as a consequence, many residents have fears based on perceptions of community safety. Most residents do not have access to a car, and public transport is thought to be unreliable and infrequent. According to staff, there is an unwillingness for young parents to use formal childcare. Staff were also of the opinion that substance misuse and high alcohol consumption amongst Fairyland residents who are potential learners is one of the biggest issues of concern.

2.3 Project inception/set-up

The Fairyland Project grew out of the Fairyland Communities First Partnership Action Plan. Three stakeholders, Communities First, Neath YMCA and Neath Port Talbot Youth Service successfully made an application to deliver a Learning Community Account (LCA) pilot. The aim of the LCA pilot was to take forward the learning needs of the young community. The Project applied to become part of the LCA Pilot in 2005

The first phase of the project had three main stages. Firstly, an external training consultant was employed to train three Learning Champions – two local residents and the Communities First Co-ordinator. A session was then led by the Learning Champions in which they worked with other stakeholders to plan a residential event. The second stage then was engaging with residents to help design a two-night residential course in order to consult with them and capture their learning needs. A total of 12 residents took part, and the programme enabled participants to consider their learning styles, what they wanted to achieve in their lives and how engagement in learning might help them achieve this. Each individual developed their own learning plan. Finally, by examining commonalities in terms of learning needs and barriers, the Communities First Co-ordinator collated the work to produce the Fairyland Community Learning Plan.

The Learning Plan was submitted in August 2006, and ELWa drew up the contract in September of that year. The person responsible for the contract left ELWa in October 2006, and the contract was produced by DCELLs in May 2007. Whilst negotiations were underway with DCELLs to fund the Fairyland Community Learning Plan project staff sourced alternative funding to begin to address Fairyland's young community learning needs. Introductory learning activities such as; Basic IT, First Aid, Cooking On A Budget and Personal Fitness were offered to learners thanks to funding from YMCA Community College, Neath Port Talbot's Inclusive Learning Project, Communities First Trust Fund and Cymorth.

In the second phase of the project's development project staff recognised the amount of time needed to develop and co-ordinate the delivery of the Learning Plan. Existing project staff did not have sufficient time to facilitate its delivery therefore the delivery of the Fairyland Community Learning Plan was facilitated by a Super

Learning Champion. The role of the Super Learning Champion was to engage with learners, facilitate the delivery of the learning modules and report back to project partners and DCELLs. Since the appointment of the Super Learning Champion significant progress has been made.

The first meeting after the Super Learning Champion had come into post (Phase 2) held between the Learning Champion and Fairyland residents was attended by 10 learners. The group agreed and prioritised a number of key training areas – computer skills, exercise and fitness, family learning, home maintenance, financial management and coping with stress. The identification of these thematic areas subsequently informed thinking around learning design and content.

2.4 Organisational structure

The Project was located at the YMCA in Neath, in close proximity to the Fairyland Estate. The YMCA acted as the 'accountable body'. Senior YMCA officers had to be satisfied that the procedures in place for financial administration were sufficiently robust. Discussion with staff and the Accountable Body indicated that there was evidence of shared organisational support and mutually beneficial learning.

3 Current activities

3.1 Staffing

The Fairyland LCA was been co-ordinated by Communities First in conjunction with Neath YMCA and Neath Port Talbot Youth Service. The 'Super Learning Champion' was the dedicated project facilitator responsible for overseeing the delivery of the Fairyland Learning Plan. The Super Learning Champion came into post once the contract with DCELLS has been completed, in the middle of July 2007. A lack of funding for a dedicated project manager appears to have hindered the delivery of activity. The 'Super Learning Champion' has the most intensive relationship with learners, with some form of contact on a weekly basis.

The Super Learning Champion, an experienced youth worker, has undertaken the Pacific Institute, 'Investment in Excellence' training, and also completed 'Facilitation Training' required to enable the community development version of this training to be delivered to Fairyland learners.

3.2 Learners

Targets for Phase 2 of the Fairyland LCA, in the period 07/08, specified that the project worked with a total of 50 learners to include 10 Learning Champions. At least 30 learners from the Fairyland Estate and 20 from neighbourhood areas were to be included in the project. At the end of March 2008, there were a total of 52 learners being supported (some from outside of the Fairyland area), with staff estimating that most of that group would not have participated in learning were it not for LCA Fairyland. Thirty seven of these learners were enrolled after September 2007, so it is clear that most progress was made after the Super Learning Champion took up post.

Project staff suggested that there was initial reluctance amongst learners to identify as 'Learning Champions'. Despite this fear of labelling, however, there has been some real progress made with 11 Learning Champions identified as of the end of March 2008. A number of the Learning Champions were learners who have been involved in the LCA since the first stage of the pilot.

According to Project staff, one of the key characteristics of Fairyland learners was the 'group dynamic'. It was suggested that many of them have known each other for a long time, and considered themselves as having a set of shared circumstances and responsibilities. Furthermore, it was suggested that there was an inherent trust between them, coupled with a reluctance to 'stray from the group norm'. They shared childcare between themselves, for example, and appeared to have a lack of confidence in formal childcare provision.

Age was an issue – those in their twenties, for example, considered themselves "too old to go to college – too old to mingle with 16 year olds" – and they perceived it would reduce their confidence even more. The male learners readily described the impact of their drug and alcohol use – some had gone on to develop depression as a result of drug use; others had increased their intake of alcohol to offset a reduction in smoking marijuana. As with female learners, there existed a real bond of 'solidarity'. Male attendance at the YMCA would appear to have been influenced by their girlfriends or partners, and they seemed to be mostly attracted to sporting sessions – accessing the gym, 'doing weights', being able to use the swimming baths. The men sometimes perceived their self-confidence to be linked with their fitness levels, and this input, under the auspices of 'Health and Wellbeing' will be picked up later in this report.

Maintaining contact with learners by project staff was vital, and they used a combination of formal and informal methods. Use of texts – reminding people of classes or event –proved to be effective.

Identifying new participants for learning has been challenging. Staff suggested that despite efforts marketing and promoting learning activities, reaching targets was more challenging than anticipated. Staff recognised the difficulty in engaging with young people who were often furthest from the education and training system to become voluntarily involved in the Fairyland LCA.

3.3   Learner referrals

As a result of previous project staff activity on the Fairyland estate, quite a lot of background knowledge on potential participants already existed. Accordingly, those involved in promoting the LCA pilot worked on the basis of responding to 'known needs' such as

transport, flexibility of approach, childcare etc. Some of the Fairyland group used to attend the YMCA youth club when they were younger – indeed some have been known to the YMCA since the age of ten.

Some people found out about the project by the Learning Champions or via peers, others via the Communities First team, community meetings, Neath YMCA, Forward 4 Fairyland Residents' Association and the Youth Service.

Whilst at an embryonic stage, efforts were being made by staff for closer links with the Probation Service, with the intention being that they may refer their clients from the Neath area who could benefit from the Fairyland LCA..

3.4   Learning activities

The Fairyland Project worked to support young people through a process of peer-led consultations and learning, with a focus on young parents and customised learning opportunities. This approach was driven by prior knowledge of local capacity and recognition that most young people they were seeking to engage with had had highly negative experiences and/or perceptions of school or formal learning.

Phase One outcomes from March 2006 included 3 learning champions that had been trained to identify individual learning styles, barriers to learning, compiling learning plans, develop consultation and support skills (12) and deliver a consultation workshop for residents. There was a slight increase in learners by November with 15 participating in activities.

During Phase One barriers to learning – physical and psychological - were identified through individual and group working. Some of the identified barriers include personal, collective and circumstantial challenges including low levels of confidence, emotional and financial stress associated with change, poor levels of emotional and physical well-being, a lack of appropriate childcare, poor numeracy and literacy, negative experiences of formal education and real fears of leaving the perceived 'security' of the welfare benefit system. As a result of the aforementioned concerns around drug misuse, much of the learning activity was underpinned by health education.

One of the barriers to overcome for Phase Two of the Project was the reluctance of parents to leave their children whilst learning was taking place – often parents would not participate in any sort of learning unless there was 'on-site' childcare'. This was not just an issue for women, with men often articulating a need for on site childcare coupled with transport.

The client group had considerable needs in terms of mentoring and day to day support. The learners themselves did not readily identify 'learning goals' or 'learning plans'. However, at the end of October, 6 Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) had been completed. By mid February 2008 a total of 14 ILPs had been completed. The Project took the decision to postpone ILP meetings until the review of learner files to incorporate aspects of the TDG Guide[1] has been achieved.

More positively, delivery of the first 'STEPS' course began in the middle of November 2007, with a second course planned. 'STEPS' is a particular approach to training which uses psychological concepts to equip participants with a set of tools to develop thinking skills and self-belief. These sessions for Learning Champions were planned to be delivered in a variety of formats including weekend full day delivery and evening sessions.

3.5 Delivery

During Phase One the residential consultation identified a number of Learning Goals which were put into four categories: 'physical and emotional well-being'; 'learning', 'work' and 'general'. In Phase Two, nine members of the group of learners received support to enable them to participate in a three-day programme of confidence training, and two of the participants subsequently attended appointments with Want 2 Work – a local training programme. In addition, the nine went on to undertake training in Food Hygiene (certificated) which was viewed by participants positively on the basis that it would help with possible employment in the catering sector.

Several of the learning opportunities (in terms of courses/classes) commenced in the middle of October 2007 after an intense period

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[1] The TDG guide to Learning and Work Programmes was originally developed by Cymorth Cymru and subsequently developed by TDG following the experiences of the LCA pilot (see Case Study Report 1)

of networking and relationship building by the Super Learning Champion. These courses included: boxercise; confidence to cook; aromatherapy, first aid, basic food hygiene, introduction to I.T etc. At that point, Personal Development Plans were still in the process of being developed. There has been a concerted effort to think about the quality of engagement with the learners bearing in mind the requirements of the funding regime. Since this time, a number of learning opportunities have been undertaken, including Family Learning (positive play, parenting etc), 'Return to Learn' (addressing basic skills), Steps, Safe Use of the Internet (how to use Paypal, child safety online etc.)

Learning opportunities were largely available at the YMCA, which has the appropriate facilities and includes an on-site gym. Unfortunately, more recently the Boxercise and the Aromatherapy courses have been cancelled, as the minimum required class sizes were not being met. Again, the informality of sessions is noteworthy – when learners were offered, for example, places on a higher level aromatherapy course, learners took the view that they were not yet ready for structured, accredited learning.

One particular example that was cited by learners was a 'financial literacy' class. This was, essentially, about personal finance (benefits, debt, credit cards) and whilst being of a personal nature, it also helped raise issues of numeracy and began to explore the sorts of skills expected in the workplace. Unfortunately, only two people attended, and the Project was unable to justify continuing with the class.

The principles of community development – building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect - were a strong feature in the design and delivery of learning and staff took the view that a number of participants have developed more confident relationships with partners and neighbours as a result of this approach. Several learners subsequently regularly attended and had the confidence to contribute to community meetings including the Fairyland Communities First Partnership, Forward 4 Fairyland residents meetings, Fairyland Community Allotment Steering Group meeting and the local PACT (Partnerships & Communities Together) meetings.

A presentation evening was held at the end of October in recognition of the achievements of the Learning Champions, and

all 11 were presented with certificates. Four of the learners were in the last stages of completing the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

According to the staff, one of the difficulties experienced by the Fairyland project in planning training has been the difficulty in the recruitment of suitably qualified tutors who also understand the beneficiary group.

Staff suggested that the Open College Network accreditation framework is difficult for some learners who have chaotic lifestyles. If there were significant gaps between sessions, for example, it was thought that it could be difficult for learners to resume courses. This may underpin the reluctance of some learners to enrol on more formal learning options.

4 Partnerships with other organisations

4.1 Formal partnerships

Links with Communities First, not surprisingly, were strong – knowledge and understanding of organisational delivery structures and national and local strategies helped facilitate good support networks for the Fairyland Project. For example, partner voluntary and statutory organisations attended a workshop to consider how they could offer individual mentoring support to the Fairyland learners.

Neath YMCA worked with learning providers, including the New Learning Network, University of Wales and the YMCA Community College, in an effort to secure funding with which to support a programme of flexible learning. Neath and Port Talbot Youth Service and the YMCA have sought to develop health and well-being programmes to help support the needs identified in the Fairyland Learning Plan.

The Fairyland Project suggested it had a good working relationship with the local police and housing officers, along with drug support agencies. Professional links with drug support agencies were described as key – one of the fundamental issues to emerge from the residential was that of alcohol and substance misuse, with some learners readily identifying the impact this had on their ability to manage stress and, consequently, their motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

4.2 Informal links

To raise initial awareness of the Pilot Project a multi-agency event was held, and participants included Communities First, the Genesis Project, Want 2 Work and the Neath and Port Talbot New Learning Network. The Open College Network as an accreditation method was a key mechanism for learning – four male learners, for example, enrolled on a entry-level 'Confidence to Cook' course provided by Neath and Port Talbot Public Health Team. There have also been useful relationships established with theatre companies who have delivered workshops for the pilot.

5   Quality standards

Assessment of the quality of what the project is delivering was largely undertaken via a self-evaluation process.   Regular monitoring and evaluation reports were submitted to DCELLS. These contain details of activity, training and development undertaken, including the number of learners participating in learning opportunities and the number of qualifications gained.

6   Identifying outcomes

6.1 'Hard' outcomes

As noted previously, this is a challenging client group to engage with and support, but there was some evidence of 'hard' outcomes via engagement in further learning or progression into employment or voluntary work. At the end of March 2008, 10 Fairyland learners had progressed into full-time employment, 8 regularly volunteered with partner organisations or local companies, and 4 learners were undertaking a higher education course (with 3 more about to start further training). A total of 33 learners (out of 52) had achieved a total of 47 qualification or training credits.

6.2   'Soft' outcomes

Soft outcomes such as improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem, have been difficult to measure.   However, informal discussions between the evaluator and learners suggest some attitudinal change. Those that had engaged in healthy eating and cooking, for example, indicated that it introduced them to the concept of 'healthy eating' – they readily admitted never buying fresh fruit or vegetables, preferring fast food or ready meals. The recognition that health and well-being can impact on job-seeking was also evident during interviews with learners. There was also evidence to suggest that the learners were becoming more active members of their community.

6.3   Capturing progress/'distance travelled'

It is clear that some learners were benefiting from the Fairyland project, whilst demonstrating high level support needs. Of the nine participants who successfully completed the Food Hygiene training, for example, seven who were male and in their early twenties had not participated in any sort of learning since leaving school.

The presentation evening, held in October 2007, also evidences 'the distance travelled' by learners and potential learners. Each of the ten Learning Champions was responsible for identifying other learners – becoming 'ambassadors' for the LCA project.   The Learning Champions reported that previously they would not have considered participating in such an event had it not been for efforts

to build confidence and make informal learning available through the pilot.

7   Project funding issues

7.1 How was the funding used?

LCA funding has provided a catalyst for local learning amongst Fairyland estate residents, but not on a scale originally envisaged, as can be observed from the relatively low numbers of active learners for most of the pilot – although the pilot did increase its participants to target in the last few months. Project staff were of the opinion that it is necessary to work, over a long-term, with those who are significantly marginalised.

In addition to staff costs, some of the funding has been used for marketing and promotional activities, and for funding consultation workshops.

7.2 Cost per learner

The budget for 2007/08 was £46,576, equating to approximately £932 per learner. This reflected the high support needs of potential recipients, who will often need extensive input before real learning can properly take place.

8 Added Value of Learning Community Accounts

The Fairyland LCA Project has benefited from the close links with the YMCA as the Accountable Body, being able to take advantage of support and facilities, such as the on-site gym and childcare. The relatively small geographical area of the Fairyland Estate and the recruitment approaches used by Project staff have helped facilitate relationships with learners based on trust and mutual respect. Within the local Fairyland Estate there appear to be no other community learning opportunities for local residents.

9 Case studies

Lauren, aged 23, dropped out of school in the final year, but managed to take exams whilst at home. She has lived on the Fairyland estate all her life, and is currently single. Since leaving school she has held a number of jobs including stacking shelves in a shop and working for a local minicab firm. Lauren describes herself as totally lacking in confidence and unable to properly engage with other people – she has convinced herself that getting a job will not be feasible until she overcomes this. The women on the Fairyland Estate provide her with emotional and practical support and the group dynamic appears to be fundamental to engagement with any sort of learning activity. Lauren recognises the progress made by some of her friends since participating in the Pilot. She enjoys attending activities herself, but balks at the idea of ever engaging in more formalised learning. At 23 she says she is '*way too old for college'*. The participation of her peers is crucial to Lauren progressing. Lauren places high value on the relationship with the 'Super Learning Champion' and informal communication – such as text messaging – works well for Lauren and her friends.

Robert has lived on the Fairyland Estate all his life, and is 21 years old. He currently lives with his girlfriend. He has never worked, and left school with the understanding that he would '*always go on the sick'*. He is prescribed a range of medication to help with mood swings and depression, and also sees a psychiatrist on a monthly basis. Once he left school he would spend the bulk of his day smoking cannabis and drinking. As with other residents, Robert has a strong attachment to the Fairyland Estate, and would not consider moving very far away. If it was not for his girlfriend (and her wider group) attending the YMCA, Robert says he would be unlikely to go. He readily admits that the available boxing and other exercise classes are significant attractions (and to an extent help reduce his drug and alcohol consumption). Other learning activities, designed to help increase confidence or self esteem, such as arts and craft classes or I.T, hold no attraction whatsoever for Robert, so it would appear as though any personal or learning development would need to be fairly well-embedded into mentoring or engagement during physical activity.

Elaine is 28 and lives on the Fairyland estate. She has acquired two part-time jobs, both of which are low paid with unreliable hours. She has a young son and also supports her partner. She is keen to learn, having done nothing since leaving school, and wants to set a good example for her young son. The day to day, practical realities for Elaine – combining two jobs with caring responsibilities and looking after the house – leave her energy levels depleted. Because of the numerous demands on her life and her time, she finds it enormously difficult to make time for herself. Consequently, she can sometimes find herself wanting and agreeing to take part in learning events or training sessions – and would enjoy the social aspects of meeting people in similar situations – but the demands of her domestic life take over.