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Evaluation of the Health Challenge Wales Voluntary Sector Grant Scheme 2013-15

Summary report

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Summary report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Executive Summary

The aim of the Health Challenge Wales Voluntary Sector Grant Scheme (HCWVSGS) is to develop the capacity and capability of national voluntary sector organisations in Wales to work in partnership with the Welsh Government and other voluntary sector organisations to promote sustainable health and wellbeing through support for core and project activities. The objectives of the 2013-2015 HCWVSGS were to:

- Influence the conditions necessary for people to lead healthy lives and to improve their health.
- Support individuals and groups to do what they can to improve their own health and that of their families. Promote health and wellbeing messages effectively.

Six projects were funded through the 2013-2015 HCWVSGS as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 HCWVSGS 2013-2015: funded projects

Organisation	Project name	Key theme
Mind Cymru	Perinatal Mental Health and Resilience – Early Support Project.	Promoting healthier lifestyles for pregnant women
Sustrans Cymru	Healthy Hospitals Project.	Supporting the creation of a Healthy Hospitals initiative
Sustrans Cymru	Healthy Universities Project.	Supporting the creation of a Healthy Universities initiative
Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs	Play, Learn and Grow Healthy Project.	Supporting individuals to lead healthier lifestyles and discouraging people from risky behaviours
The Prince's Trust	Active Youth Project.	Supporting individuals to lead healthier lifestyles and discouraging people from risky behaviours
Breast Cancer Care	Best Foot Forward Project.	Supporting individuals to lead healthier lifestyles and discouraging people from risky behaviours

1. Evaluation aims and objectives

The HCWVSGS evaluation was undertaken by Ecorys, in partnership with Swansea University. The purpose of the evaluation was to inform the future development of the HCWVSGS. The aim of the evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the HCWVSGS. The objectives of the evaluation were to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent has the 2013-2015 scheme achieved its aims and objectives as outlined above?
- What, if any, influence / impact has the scheme had on participating organisations, projects, communities and individuals?
- What changes, if any, are required to maximise the effectiveness of the scheme?
- Has the scheme influenced the plans of participating organisations to sustain the project activities beyond the funding period?¹

2. Evaluation methods

The methods used by the evaluators were as follows:

- Logic models and impact maps were developed to better understand the theory of change underpinning the scheme and its constituent projects.
- Strategic stakeholder interviews were conducted at the beginning of the evaluation.
- Survey questionnaires were designed using standardised scales / validated questions where possible.
- On-going evaluation support was provided for projects, to ensure they were able to systematically collect and record survey data in a format which was suitable for analysis.
- Progress reports and self evaluation reports produced by the projects were analysed to identify progress and lessons learnt.
- Project consultations - in-depth interviews with the project managers / grant holders were conducted in Autumn 2014 and were repeated in Autumn 2015 to inform the final report.
- Programme manager interviews - with the programme managers from the Welsh Government took place in March 2015 and late November 2015.
- Economic analysis - Swansea University led the economic analysis, which sought to quantify the full cost of project delivery and the full range of benefits achieved, using a cost consequences approach.
- A case study visit was conducted with each of the six projects between March and July 2015.
- Ecorys also interviewed several voluntary sector organisations that were involved in the programme as partners or benefited from training.

¹ Specification for the evaluation of the Health Challenge Wales Voluntary Sector Grant Scheme 2013-2015, published by the Welsh Government.

3. Assessment against objectives

The final report provides an assessment of project progress against the objectives of the 2013-2015 HCWVSGS, based on the project consultations, case studies and self-evaluation analysis. A summary of key findings is provided below.

3.1 The programme has made good progress towards meeting the stated aim of the programme, which is to develop the capacity and capability of national voluntary organisations in Wales to promote health and wellbeing activities that have sustainability potential, as follows:

- The 2013-2015 HCWVSGS helped increase organisational capacity in several ways. Some projects used their grants to increase organisational capacity by funding new posts.
- The 2013-2015 HCWVSGS also supported national voluntary organisations to work with other voluntary sector organisations, helping the sector to share expertise.
- The 2013-2015 HCWVSGS also supported capacity building within the voluntary sector by providing volunteering opportunities.

3.2 The projects made good progress towards meeting the stated objectives of the programme, as follows:

Objective One: To influence the conditions necessary for people to lead healthy lives and to improve their health.

- All of the projects were designed to better inform people by enhancing their knowledge about healthy lifestyles, and providing information to enable people to make healthy choices.
- Some of the projects focused on systems change; working to improve the conditions and services available to support people to lead healthy lives and improve their health.

Objective Two: To support individuals and groups to do what they can to improve their own health and that of their families.

- A range of project activities empowered and enabled individuals to improve their own health, by fostering a 'can-do' attitude amongst participants.
- None of the projects were specifically designed as whole family interventions, but some were hopeful that their support might benefit participants' families indirectly.

Objective Three: To communicate the 'better health' messages effectively.

- All of the projects identified key messages to promote 'better health'. All of the projects delivering training to staff or professionals developed clear messages that are being communicated in their training materials.

4. Influences and impacts achieved by the programme

4.1 Impact on participating organisations and projects

- Impacts on partner organisations were clear at the final reporting stage. Most organisations hoped to mainstream at least some of their HCWVSGS activities. The programme helped to up-skill and retain staff, enabling organisations to secure alternative funding sources in some cases.
- Several projects commented that support received from the Welsh Government supported the promoting organisation to disseminate lessons to policy audiences.

4.2 Impact on participating communities and individuals, in relation to the key themes of the Scheme as follows:

Theme One: Promote healthier lifestyles for pregnant women, which have a positive impact on them and their family's health.

- Only one project was commissioned to work with this target group and was focused on strengthening perinatal mental health. The project supported pregnant women by developing perinatal mental health curriculum and resources, training practitioners to support pregnant women and running support classes for pregnant women. Some of the participants already had children and so the project may have indirectly impacted on their family's health, but that was not a specific objective of the project. The project was also impacting at a policy and strategic level.

Theme Two: Encourage and support individuals to lead healthy lifestyles by encouraging physical activity and a balanced diet, and discouraging people from risky behaviours such as smoking and excessive drinking, to decrease those at risk from cardiovascular disease (including coronary heart disease and stroke), cancer and diabetes.

- All of the projects promoted the take up of healthy lifestyles by encouraging physical activity and healthy eating, although there was less of an emphasis on this in the project focused on pregnant women.
- The survey analysis demonstrated there was a trend towards increased levels of physical activity and healthy eating behaviours amongst participants at the end of their involvement (compared to that reported at the outset). However, there was no change in reported levels of life satisfaction.

- However, the qualitative evidence suggested the programme was supporting people well in relation to the physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing themes. Less success was reported in relation to the smoking and excessive drinking themes.

Theme Three: Support the creation of a healthy hospitals initiative or a healthy colleges and universities initiative.

- One organisation was commissioned to work on the healthy hospitals and healthy universities themes. The project manager for both these projects initially reported considerable difficulties in engaging universities and hospitals to participate in the projects. The project manager mainly attributed this to gatekeeper issues within relevant organisations, and the existing workloads of relevant personnel within those organisations. However, good progress had been made on both these projects in the final year of funding. Both projects were revised to primarily focus on staff wellbeing, with positive results, particularly in terms of engagement and awareness raising.

4.3 Impact on policy, in relation to the key themes of the Scheme as follows:

- A number of projects had informed policy developments by the end of the programme, particularly Mind Cymru, Sustrans Cymru and the Prince's Trust.

5. Learning for future programme design

A number of lessons were identified through consultation with programme managers, grant holders, delivery partners and other voluntary and community sector (VCS) representatives:

- Clear guidance should be provided for applicants around project-level monitoring and self-evaluation requirements and collaborating with external evaluators for the programme-level evaluation. This would help projects to see the link between monitoring, self-evaluation and external evaluation, and to understand how project-level monitoring can inform and support evaluation activity.
- Consideration should be given to providing support during the application process to develop logic models and impact maps to ensure projects are robustly designed and impacts can be measured.
- Programme-level evaluation should be required to demonstrate alignment with project-level evaluation activity (external or self-evaluation). This would help to avoid duplication and reduce the potential for research fatigue.