

■ The Local Network Fund

■ In The South West

■ An Evaluation Of The Fund's Impact

■ 2001 - 2006



HRA Consultants July 2007

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Introduction

This report summarises the findings of a study of the impact of the Local Network Fund for Children and Young People (LNF) in the South West of England between 2001 and March 2006. The report assesses:

- The Fund's *impact* on groups applying for and receiving financial assistance - especially the groups' views on how LNF had helped them increase their skills and confidence to undertake projects involving children and young people.
- The ways in which *young people had been involved* in the planning and decision-making process associated with the Fund.
- The *overall impact* of the Fund in terms of involving people as volunteers and beneficiaries.
- Whether the *delivery* of the LNF through Community Foundations in the South West has been successful and what might be done to improve delivery in the future.

The report has been structured to provide a readable document of manageable length for a variety of stakeholders including community groups and young people involved in delivering projects. The report highlights the key findings of the research. More detailed information can be sourced in the appendices, a separate document.

The Local Network Fund for Children and Young People (LNF) was launched by Government in May 2001. It totalled £150m over five years, is managed by the Department for Education & Skills (DfES) and offers grants of between £250 and £7000 to small voluntary and community groups for projects involving young disadvantaged people aged 0–19 years old (up to age 25 for those with learning disabilities). It is administered in England by fifty-seven voluntary sector organisations. Although the programme was planned to end in 2006 the Fund was extended until 2008 when funding for support of disadvantaged children and young people will fall to local Children's Trusts. LNF Administrators are taking account of wind down and

“The project has helped 59 families in 6 months, to maximise income and resolve schooling issues. It has proven itself needed and successful.”

“This Fund has been essential for projects with young people. It is unthinkable that it should be ceasing at a time when children and young people Services to young people will be significantly reduced when this funding ceases.”

transition arrangements in their grant making processes to enable all Local Network Fund activity to be concluded by 31 March 2008.

The key purpose of the Fund is to enable communities to develop projects and activities for children and young people with limited opportunities or access to services that many young people take for granted. In the South West the Fund is distributed through the following Community Foundations:

- Cornwall Community Foundation
- Devon Community Foundation
- Community Foundation for Bournemouth Dorset and Poole
- Gloucestershire Community Foundation
- Quartet Community Foundation
- Somerset Community Foundation
- Community Foundation for Wiltshire and Swindon

This report covers the period 2001 to March 2006 when applications were linked to four themes:

- *Aspirations and Experience*: helping children and young people to reach goals that they would otherwise be unable to achieve.
- *Economic Disadvantage*: helping families cope with difficulties that come from being on low income.
- *Isolation and Access*: supporting and providing opportunities for children and young people who feel isolated or alone, or have difficulty accessing services available to others.
- *Children's Voices*: giving children and young people an opportunity to make their views known and to contribute to improving policy and services on issues that concern them.

Since March 2006 applications have been invited under five new themes linked to the Government's 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme. These are:

- *Be healthy*
- *Stay safe*
- *Enjoy and achieve*
- *Make a positive contribution*
- *Achieve economic well-being*

“The grant was to help us get our senior youth club up and running. It was super to have a budget for the year. Now that the club is going it is possible to get grants from other sources to help with our running costs.”

“We are a small organisation with only one paid member of staff. However we have a lot of courses and activities offered to the local community running from the centre. Without the help of the Local Network Fund we would have closed due to lack of finances. I know the Local Network Fund is finishing but I do hope something is put in place to replace it as the staff have always been helpful and the grants help organisations like ours to survive.”



Main Messages

- The Local Network Fund has been very positively received by groups in the South West – the distribution of small amounts of money has enabled projects in which a large number of children and young people have participated, both as volunteers and beneficiaries
- The award of an LNF grant has enabled a real step change in skill levels and confidence of groups to undertake other projects
- A diverse range of projects has been funded which have contributed overall to the Government's 'Every Child Matters' outcomes and in particular to the priorities and targets of Children and Young People Plans and Local Area Agreements
- Groups funded have worked with those individuals and groups that are harder to reach such as rural young people, disabled young people and young parents
- Community Foundations have proved to be an excellent delivery agent: local, knowledgeable, cost effective and accessible
- The Fund has been used creatively by Community Foundations to fund innovation, for example funding the more risky projects that needed time to pilot or prove themselves
- The experience and skills of the Panel and committee members have enabled the Fund to be responsive to local needs – Panel and committee members have also been available to signpost groups to other forms of support and help
- Local knowledge and their prior experience has enabled the Community Foundations to be a 'safe pair of hands' in distributing the Fund; reducing the risk of fraud and enabling the Fund to support even small, very local neighbourhood and community schemes.

“The Foundation was extremely helpful and supportive throughout the process, friendly and approachable.”

“I have found the staff at LNF to be very friendly and helpful and the application process has enabled our group to clarify parts of our structure which will inevitably be of value in liaising with other organisations. They've been accessible and relatively simple forms have made an application smoother. I was very pleasantly surprised by the pro-active and supportive nature of the services and staff.”

Report Summary

The Local Network Fund forms part of the Government's national strategy to alleviate child poverty in England. From 2001 – 2006 it provided funding under four themes to help vulnerable children and young people achieve their potential by investing directly in the work of local community and voluntary groups providing local solutions to the problem of child poverty. From March 2006 to the scheme end date in March 2008 the Fund has aligned itself to the five themes of 'Every Child Matters'. After March 2008 funds allocated within Children's Trusts for improving children and young people's lives are unlikely to be ring-fenced for specific grant programmes.

The contract for delivery of LNF in the South West was awarded to Community Foundations, of which there is one in each county, with Quartet covering the area that used to be Avon county. Community Foundations are charities located across the UK dedicated to strengthening local communities, creating opportunities and tackling issues of disadvantage and exclusion. Community Foundations target grants to make a genuine difference to the lives of local people. They manage funds donated by individuals and organisations, building endowment and acting as the vital link between donors and local needs. The Community Foundations' South West Network secured consultants Hannah Reynolds Associates (HRA) to carry out an independent evaluation of the impact of the Fund in the region and of the value added by delivering the programme through Community Foundations, rather than by any other means.

The consultants reviewed national and local evaluations, surveyed - by on-line survey and telephone interview - a sample of 438 groups which had received a grant and discussed the impact of the Fund with committee members and staff of the Foundations themselves.

“The initial grant enabled us set up a new provision for pre-school parents and their children, the only such provision in our location.”

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Mini case studies of one LNF funded project in each of the sub regions were conducted through visits and telephone calls, to add a local flavour to the report and, most importantly, to provide an opportunity to reflect directly the views of young people on how the Fund had impacted on their lives.

South West Community Foundations began distribution at different times in the Fund's evolution (see grants table in Main Report). The key facts in grant distribution between April 2001 and March 2006 are:

- 2,264 of grants were awarded
- £10.6 million was distributed
- 29,853 child, young person and adult volunteers were involved
- 380,064 children and young people benefited from the Fund.

The consultants found that the impact of the grant on the skills and confidence of the groups involved has been extremely positive, with over 70% of groups surveyed feeling that they now have the confidence to take on other activities – a knock-on benefit of their positive experience with the Fund.

Community Foundations were seen to be more than grant distributors, rather they were perceived as partners in improving the quality of life for disadvantaged children and young people in the South West, acting in some cases as innovators and catalysts for change by funding projects that other funders saw as too small or too risky, yet having the potential to act as test-beds or spring boards for further activity.

“The whole process was really easy - the club has benefited greatly from the grant it received.”

“Lovely helpful people – I expected the process to be incredibly difficult but my experience was that people went out of their way to help me.”



Main Report

Research Methodology

In assessing impact of the Fund in the South West the consultants have used the following impact measures for this evaluation:

- £ awarded in grants
- Number of volunteers involved
- Number of beneficiaries involved
- The perceptions of volunteers on the extent to which their group and individual confidence and skills have grown to undertake other projects
- Range of skills and experience involved in assessment panels and grant making committees
- Examples of participation by young people in decision-making processes – within projects and as part of the assessment
- Contributions to national and local priorities e.g. ‘Every Child Matters’, Children and Young People Plans and Local Area Agreements
- Comparisons with findings from national evaluations of LNF – similarities and differences
- Value-added contributions – e.g. improved links between community groups

“It has been great to see the increase in confidence in the young people with a physical disability who have benefited from our project.”

“The process from the initial enquiry and request for an application pack to completing the form seemed very straightforward. Compared to some other funding applications this was a pleasurable process.”

Grants Information

The LNF grants information from each of the Community Foundations was collected and a summary of the key facts is in tables below.

What other studies say about the Local Network Fund

There have been a number of studies and evaluations of LNF and other small grants programmes carried out at national or local level. The consultants analysed these and summarised the main messages

from them that might have relevance for the impact evaluation of LNF in the South West. (see detail at Appendix 1)

Children and Young People Plans

The Children and Young People Plans that have been developed in each of the local authority areas were summarised for key issues and actions, to note correlations between the Plans' actions and the LNF grant outcomes. This summary of Children and Young People Plans is included as Appendix 2.

“If we had not received the first grant from the Community Foundation the project would not now exist.”

Local Area Agreements

In 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (now Department for Communities and Local Government) published 'The Future of Local Government: Developing a 10-Year Vision'. As part of this strategy, local area agreements (LAAs) have been developed in each sub-regional local authority area. LAAs are voluntary, three-year agreements between central government, local authorities and their partners. They will deliver national outcomes in a way that reflect local priorities, in 'blocks' of priorities, including 'Children and Young People'.

The consultants summarised the LAAs for the South West region to explore where LNF outcomes could contribute to LAA priorities.

The consultants' working summary of the LAA Children and Young People block priorities in the South West is included as Appendix 3.

“Excellent responsive Fund which delivers without a long bureaucratic process.”

Survey of 15% sample of groups

Consultants sent out an online survey, using a tool called 'Survey Monkey' to a 15% (438 surveys) sample of LNF grant recipients, asking about their experiences of applying for and using the grant. The response rate was 63% and the findings are summarised as Appendix 4.

Interviews with groups

Telephone interviews were carried out with ten groups selected at random from the survey, to explore responses in more depth. The interview script is Appendix 5.

“Thank you for giving our group the opportunity to help many families.”

Interviews with representatives of the Committees and Panels

Short telephone interviews with members of Community Foundation committees and panels, including young people panel members, were carried out to get their impressions on how the skills and experience of local people have been used to help decisions for LNF grant-making.

Mini Case Studies

Consultants visited or interviewed a group who received a grant in each of the Community Foundation areas, to illustrate and understand more fully how children and young people had been involved in LNF as volunteers and in decision-making about grant-making. In Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole, rather than carrying out a visit to a group, consultants instead interviewed key adults and young people about the involvement of young people in decision-making in the LNF grant-making process. A summary of these mini-case studies is included as Appendix 6.

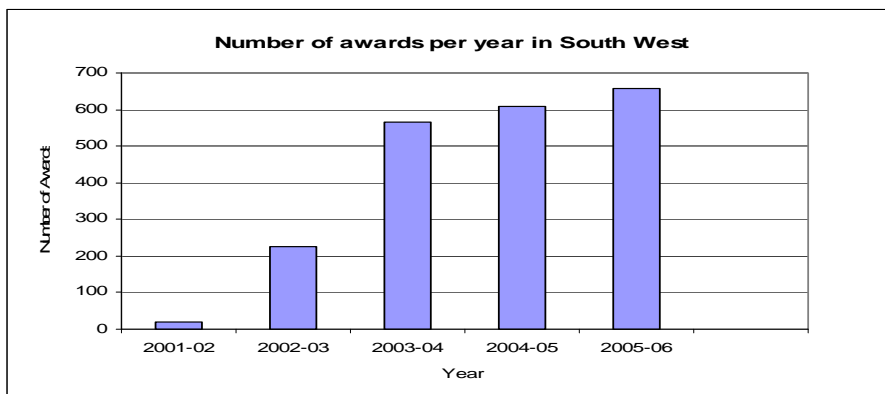
“I am sorry that you will no longer be offering these grants to groups who really do need it. I find that you are all very helpful in coming to the aid of the small groups. I thank you all.”

Telephone Interviews with LNF administrators

Following an initial interview with Devon Community Foundation as ‘client representative’ for all the South West Community Foundations, consultants also interviewed LNF grants administrators in each of the South West Community Foundations, to gather their views on how the Fund has evolved. The survey questionnaire and summary responses is Appendix 7.

Results and Findings - Analysis of awards

Comparative analysis of the awards made by the seven Foundations in the South West would be unhelpful because different Foundations joined the LNF programme as grants distributors in different years. Also Community Foundation areas have quite different and distinct characteristics which generate different influences on the Fund. For example Foundations which contain large urban areas have tended to produce more applications than those in rural areas. Communication and community infrastructures vary in each of the sub-regions. There are also areas where a large number of retired people live and which have a lower concentration of young people. The figures outlined below are therefore intended to act as a guide to the LNF grant making patterns of the Community Foundations in the South West.

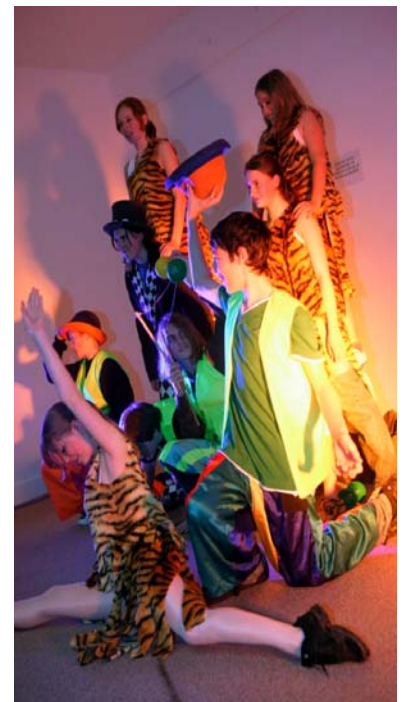
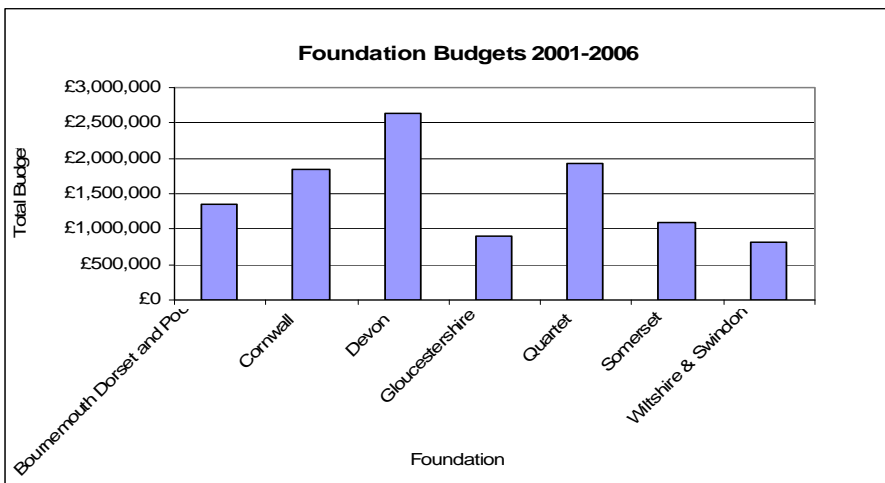
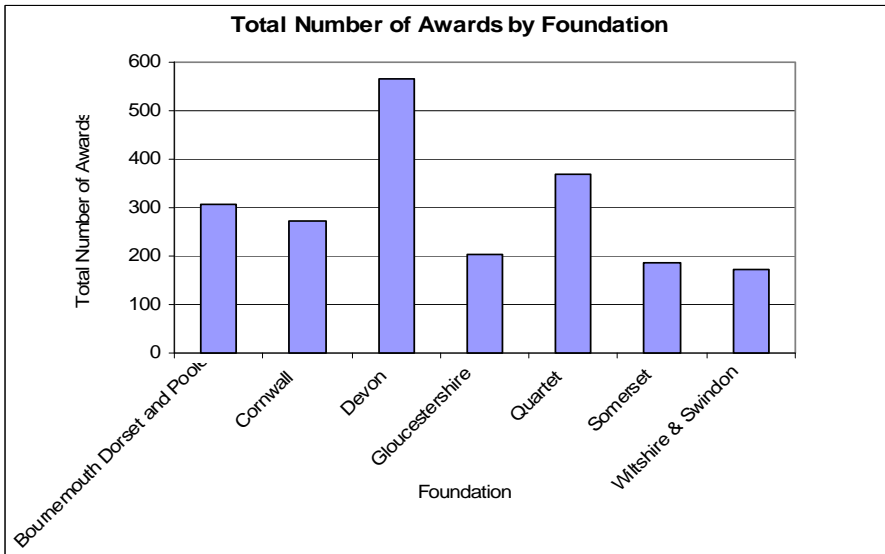


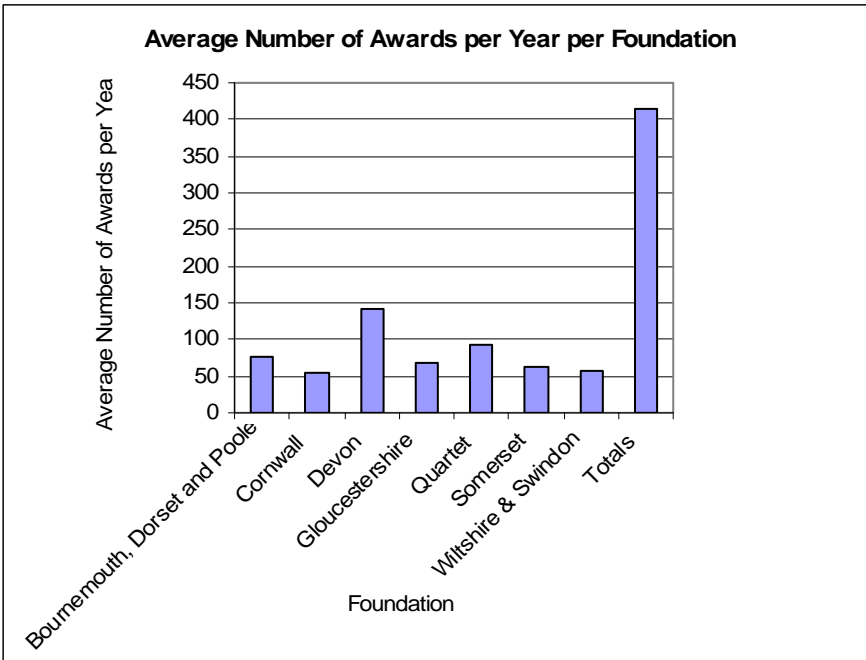
The seven Foundations in the South West made a total of 2,264 awards valued at £10.6 million during the period of study - an average grant of £4,628. The number of grants awarded peaked at 648 in 2004 and has fallen slightly since then. The figures for 2006 only represent the first three months of the year up to March 2006 when the 'themes' changed to match the Government's 'Every Child Matters' Programme.

The total number of grants awarded by individual Foundations ranged from 186 in Somerset to 566 in Devon, reflecting, as has previously been said, the nature of the areas, the length of time that Foundations had been involved in the programme and the amount of funding available to each Foundation.

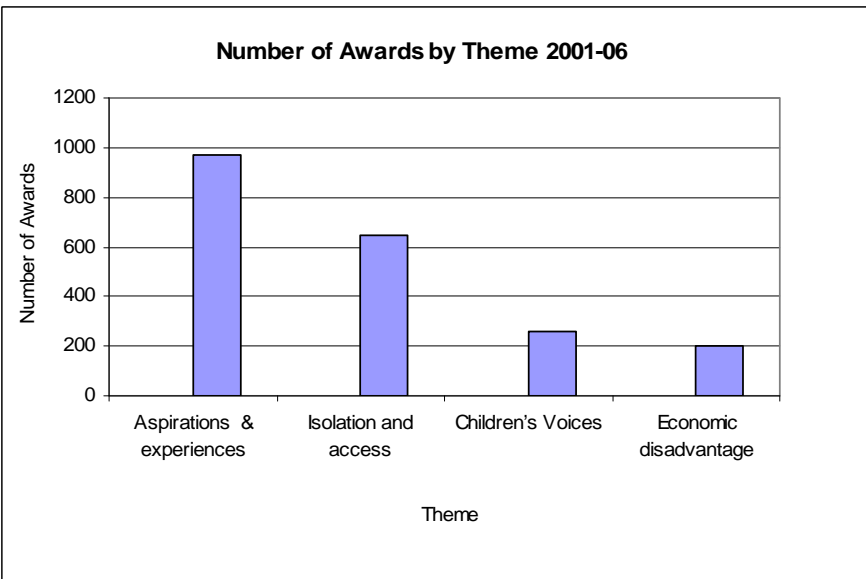
“The Local Network Fund has provided invaluable help in funding projects from which children have benefited greatly and the advice of the Community Foundation Outreach Worker has been excellent. Thank you very much, and long may the Local Network Fund continue.”

“A real boost to extending the programme that we are running. It has been the catalyst to push on with new schemes involving large numbers of the local community.”





“I cannot thank enough everyone who has played a part in putting this event on. It has been a real life-saver for someone who has felt so isolated, but wanting to feel part of something bigger.”

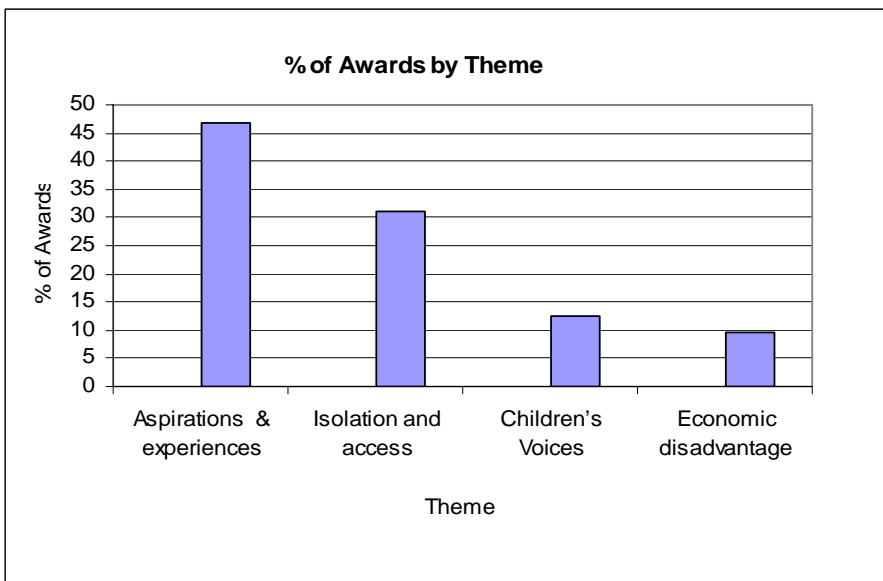


“As an organisation we have always felt you could turn to the Community Foundation if you needed help with funding a project even if you had used them in the past. I do not know what we would do without them. It is also very helpful having different grant opportunities under one roof.”

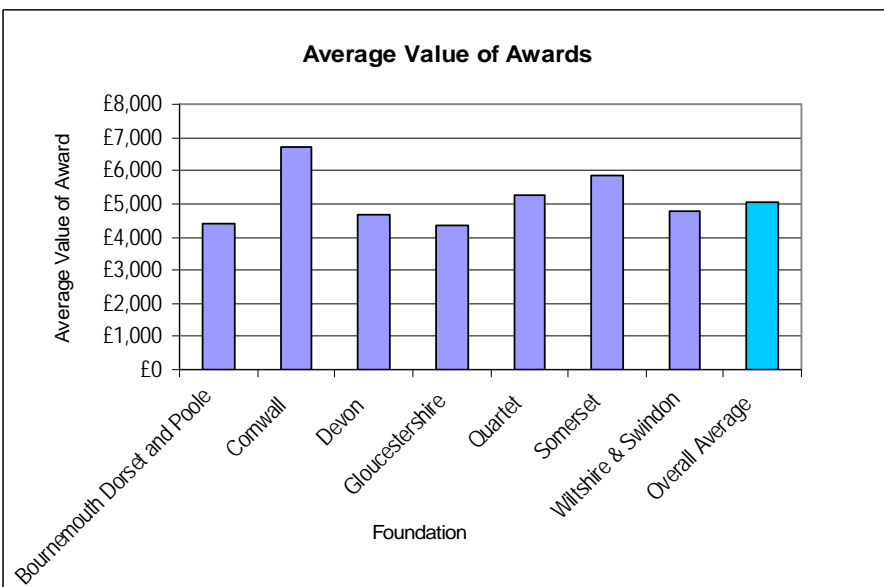
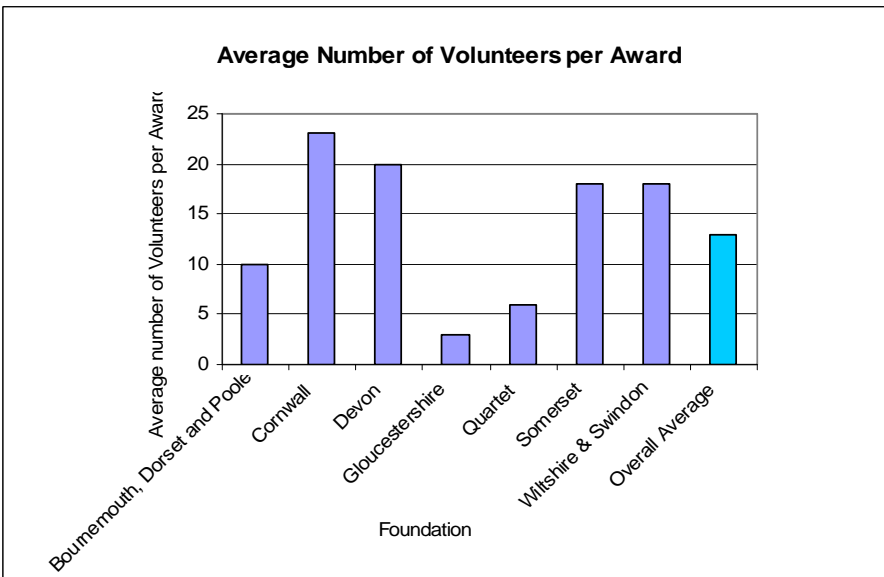
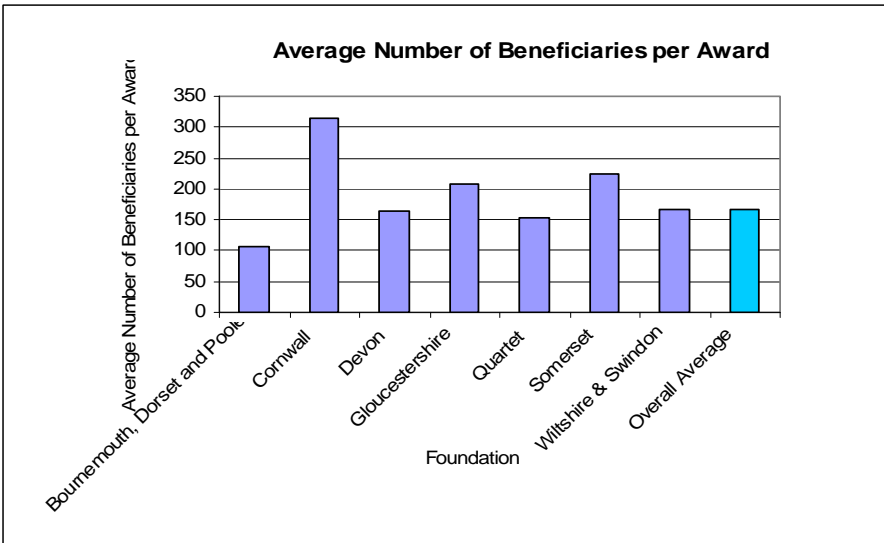
Quartet and Devon accounted for almost half of the awards made and the average number of awards made by Foundations each year varied from around fifty, or an average of one a week, for Cornwall, Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire to almost double that for Quartet and Devon.

More than three quarters of the awards (1,716) were for projects which addressed the ‘Aspirations and Experiences’ and ‘Isolation and Access themes’ with the ‘Children’s Voices’ and ‘Economic Disadvantage’ themes accounting for just over 10% each. The

themes of LNF were set by central Government and Community Foundations report that there were initial confusions among applicants about the theme titles; for example some groups thought that ‘Children’s Voices’ was an application category for singing groups. Others highlighted in their applications under ‘Aspirations and Experiences’ their project intentions for children, young people and families suffering disadvantage due to low income. The higher levels of awards under the ‘Aspirations and Experiences’ and ‘Isolation and Access themes’ also reflect the predominantly rural nature of the region where alleviating the effects of geographic and social isolation is a major concern of the voluntary and community sectors. A key interpretation on this finding may also be that projects funded under one theme heading have enabled additional contributions towards the other three themes.



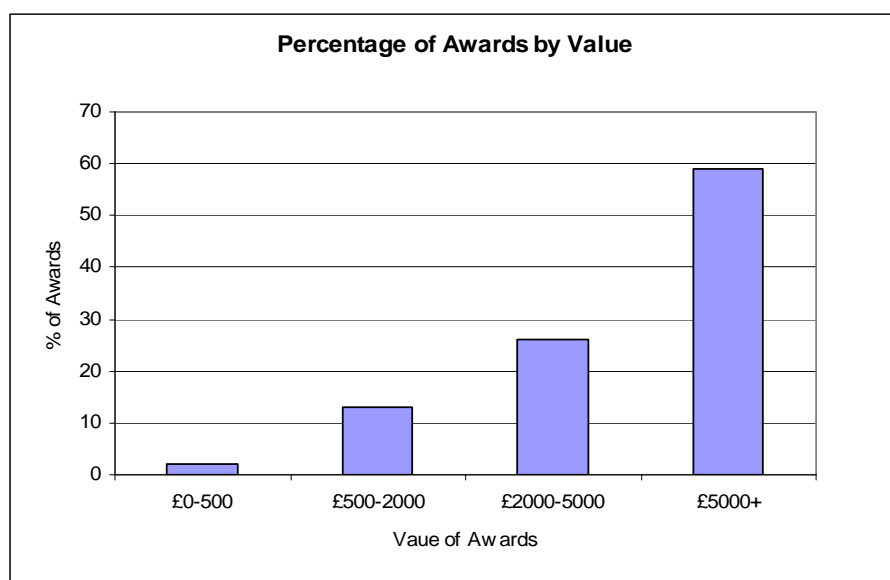
“The two grants enabled the start up for the organisation and the development of two activity clubs for children and young people with special needs.”



“If we hadn't had the money from the Local Network Fund we would not have been able to keep the Saturday club going”

Only 1.5% of the awards (31) were for amounts up to £500, 56% (1,179) being for £5,000 plus. The higher percentage of larger awards echoes findings from the national evaluation of LNF and from studies of other small grants programmes such as ‘Awards for All’, that volunteer-led groups use their own shared resources where they can and apply for grants when the projects they wish to tackle are bigger and more costly than their own resources can stand. Given the survey responses in relation to the benefits of having good assistance from the Community Foundations prior to making application, it may be argued also that community groups felt more confident as a result of this support to take on larger projects.

“I attended the Local Network Fund funding workshop and found it very inspiring to meet the team and listen to projects that have become sustainable.”



The Fund has reached applicant groups of varying size, from very small, new neighbourhood groups to more established, larger groups. The average number of beneficiaries per award ranged from just over 250 to around 100 and the number of children and young people, parents and other volunteers ranged from twenty per award to three. Note that the average number of volunteers (all ages) involved (from the survey of 438 groups) was 21 per project.

What other studies say about the Local Network Fund

A number of published reports which evaluated the impact and performance of the LNF at a national and at a local level were

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reviewed to identify their main conclusions and any issues that should be dealt with in future. (see Appendix 1)

At a national level the involvement of Community Foundations in distributing LNF funds was found to have increased both the capacity of both the Foundations and grass roots community groups to deal with local issues in a flexible way which was responsive to local needs. Foundations were better able to respond to local groups with local needs than national organisations due to their existing infrastructure, local knowledge and the local networks within which they operated. They were also able to add value to their grant-making

“The frequency of the Panel meeting, the approachability of those concerned, the personal touch and the speed and efficiency of advising if successful were particularly good.”



through the advice and support on constitutions, safeguarding issues and good practice available through experienced support staff within the Foundations, through the skills and experience of volunteer members of assessment panels and grants committees and through in-house work or partnership with outreach organisations which were able to provide ‘hands on’ individual support to groups as well as surgeries, workshops and other support events. Because they already had the infrastructure in place to deliver programmes their administration costs were reasonable; their activities were cost effective; they were able to cope with ‘surges’ in applications and were successful in attracting other funds to complement the LNF investment.

“We are very grateful to the Network Fund for helping us to provide a playground for the children. It has also helped to encourage others to do things.”

The interviews with groups, volunteers on grants panels and administrators of LNF in Community Foundations of this LNF impact evaluation would support these findings in the South West, too, particularly in Community Foundations, as trusted local partners, enabling groups to attract in or 'lever' other funds (such as Community Chests in Plymouth and Bristol and Bristol Social Enterprise Fund in Quartet Community Foundation area), donors and skills/experience on panels to bolster and add value to LNF at sub-regional level.

“I think LNF is a good funding system and actually really empowers young people.”

Several issues were identified in national LNF evaluations, including the need to speed up the introduction of child protection policies; the need to make greater efforts to engage 'hard to reach groups', especially BME groups and groups in rural areas; the number of grants used to buy equipment and the lack of indicators with which to measure the impact of the Fund in a consistent way. Individual Community Foundations have taken measures to address these issues locally, with the exception of indicators which are set nationally.

At LNF inception the central Government perception of the value of LNF was as a 'pump-primer' to provide small grants for groups (whom it was expected would be largely 'below the radar' of other grant making schemes) to improve life for disadvantaged children and young people. It was expected that projects funded would be locally valuable and that groups funded would grow in confidence and projects developed *may*, if appropriate, move on to more mainstream funding in the future. With these expectations as a 'given', and a lack of specific outcomes identified for LNF, Foundations were inhibited from implementing local interpretations of the Fund according to local circumstances and asking for feedback on specific local outcomes which would have provided valuable information for local targeting.

“The Community Foundation has been a wonderful source for advice, information and funding opportunities.”

The experiences of South West Community Foundations operating LNF in rural areas echo the findings of the national evaluation in

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terms of difficulties in engaging groups from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities for example in rural villages the bme population may be as few as one family. As has been shown in other studies, small rural groups run by and for black and minority ethnic communities lack established networks and are isolated from support services i.e. where small rural groups generally lack infrastructure, the networking potential for black and minority ethnic groups is even more difficult – particularly as findings from the South West evaluation show that many groups hear about sources of funding through other groups. However the picture for the South West has proved different for urban areas e.g. Bristol, Bath, Bournemouth, Swindon, Exeter and Plymouth, where Community Foundations report much more success (above national average) in both engaging BME groups in early stages of their development and in providing support that results in a grant and a successful project.

“What are we going to do when LNF closes?”

Representatives of public sector organisations on grants panels interviewed for this South West evaluation noted that Foundations’ missions had a ‘good fit’ with their own – the partnership potential was highlighted within the national evaluations, too. Highlighted in both national and South West evaluations is the view that Foundations are local and embedded in their communities; vigilant in detecting fraud and likely to know the groups they were dealing with. The view is that in delivering LNF they were cost effective, skilled at setting up new partnerships and willing to guide groups to other organisations which might be able to help them and to other funders and sources of finance.

Evaluations of Community Foundations’ performance at a sub-regional level in the South West reported positively on the benefits of their local knowledge and ability to target funds effectively. Their outreach activities were considered to be particularly successful in helping small, newly formed groups as was their willingness to collaborate with other partners such as local authorities to attract additional funds. The skills and local knowledge of the awards panel members had built up the community’s trust in the Foundations as

'honest brokers' and their willingness to help groups access other sources of finance was seen as very positive. Community groups had benefited by having the increased confidence to make further applications for assistance; improved planning and management skills and increased ability to form new friendships and networks, deepening their involvement in the community and increasing their capacity to become involved in local issues.

The same studies at sub-regional level reported that the beneficiaries of the groups' activities had better access to services and improved skills and confidence in their abilities to set up, finance and manage new activities which in turn led to a reduction in their feelings of isolation.

"I found the Local Network Fund easy to apply for and the staff were very helpful - if they were not able to answer questions I was put in touch with someone who could."

Children and Young People Plans

Children and Young People Plans are one key way that central government wishes to encourage the integration of services for children and young people. By preparing a Children and Young People Plan for every local authority area, agencies can jointly plan what services will meet the needs of children and young people in their area.

The Children and Young People Plans in the South West reflect local priorities, of course, so they are different for each area. Scrutiny of the Plans highlights two key common concerns of young people in the South West area: staying safe from bullying and crime; and access to facilities and services. Four of the Plans also contained comments by young people at the consultation stage, that they wanted to be listened to and more taken seriously by adults. Key priorities for action in the Plans in the South West are:

"I cannot put into words the difference the Community Foundation has made to our work."

- Physical health and access to services
- Tackling childhood obesity
- Supporting vulnerable and looked after children and young people
- Combating teenage pregnancy
- Improving educational attainment

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Community Foundations are mapping their grant-making under the original four themes of LNF 2001 -2006 to the five outcomes of 'Every Child Matters'. For example, Devon has mapped its LNF grant-making against the five ECM outcomes as:

ECM Outcome	No. Grants
Be healthy	154
Stay Safe	27
Enjoy and achieve	374
Make a positive contribution	111
Achieve economic wellbeing	12

In addition, within the sample survey of 438 groups awarded LNF grants across the South West, conducted by the consultants, groups were asked to map their own projects against the five ECM outcomes. Groups could tick more than one ECM outcome. The pattern of responses across the region mirrors that of Devon, i.e. that the highest responses were in the ECM outcomes of 'Be Healthy', 'Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a positive contribution'.

ECM Outcome	No. Responses
	(482 responses from 194 groups)
Be healthy	98
Stay Safe	76
Enjoy and achieve	167
Make a positive contribution	111
Achieve economic wellbeing	30



Groups were further asked if they felt the aims of their projects under these outcomes had been achieved.

Completely	103 (53%)
Partially	74 (38%)
Not at all	0 (0%)
Too early to say	18 (9%)

From the sample results above, and the stories of volunteers interviewed for the mini case studies appended to this report, there is clear evidence of the contribution that groups funded under LNF in the South West have made and could continue to make to the achievement of ECM outcomes and the priorities of Children Young People Plans in the South West – and therefore with the achievement of the targets of Local Area Agreements, particularly health, achievement and access to services targets as outlined below.

“I found the support provided extremely positive and it really helped me to look at the application from an objective viewpoint.”

Local Area Agreements

There are effective linkages between the Children and Young People Plans in the South West and the Local Area Agreements. Well being, sport and physical activity have been identified in the Government's Sustainable Community Strategy as key tools in tackling a wide range of health and social issues. Physical activity and improved sport and leisure facilities therefore feature highly as a common thread to address issues across all the Children and Young People blocks of the Local Area Agreements in the South West, as does improving access to services. Improving partnership working is a key feature of all the Local Area Agreements.

“The grant was towards the cost of a planning day for the next 12 months’ activities. Although only 2 months into the year there are more young people getting involved.”

Survey of 15% sample of groups

An online survey was sent out via email to 438 groups which had received a grant from LNF. 98 surveys were returned immediately as ‘undeliverables’, unsurprising since some email addresses may have changed in the six years since LNF began. 217 surveys were returned, a response rate of 63%. Many of the questions were multiple choice, which accounts for percentage totals of over 100% in

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responses on the survey summary response sheet. A summary of responses is outlined in the paragraphs which follow.

Most groups had heard of LNF through another community group (20%), with 18% hearing through the Community Foundation adviser and 14% through another community group's adviser. This emphasises the benefits of personal contact in promotion of the Fund and the contribution by Community Foundations and their outreach services to the generation of applications to the Fund.

91% of groups felt they had completely or partially achieved their objectives, the remainder felt it was too early to say.

'More confidence to take on activities' was the response most chosen (72%) by respondents to the multiple choice 'impact of grant on the community' question, with 69% of respondents also feeling that the grant had enabled 'increased skills within our community group'. The wider impacts on the community received less (although still significant) numbers of responses: better community relations (49%), improved networks between community groups (36%), improved environment (23%), less crime (17%).

The average number of volunteers (children, young people and adult) for each project in the survey was 21.

Nearly half of survey respondents had had previous contact with their local Community Foundation for advice or previous receipt of a grant. During the application process 84% of respondents contacted the Foundation for help and advice on eligibility and clarification or confirmation of the guidelines, 38% had help with how to fill in the application form and 26% received advice on other potential sources of funding.

These responses bear out the feelings of Community Foundation staff when interviewed, that one of the key benefits of the way in which the Foundation managed the LNF application process was the personal

“The grant, used in conjunction with other funders grants, in particular The Linnet Trust, enabled us to work with over 1800 primary school children and 322 primary school staff and parents/carers.”

interaction between staff and community groups, enabling maximum benefit from the transaction for the community group.

For 90% of respondents, the experience of interacting with the Community Foundation was that the Foundation was 'well informed, professional, friendly and helpful, easy to contact'. 7% had 'some difficulties but in general felt it had been 'a good experience'. No responders found their Foundation 'unhelpful', whilst 3% had specific difficulties with Foundations that related to response times on applications.

Interviews with Groups

Consultants carried out telephone interviews with ten groups selected at random from the survey database.

Groups were very clear about the need for the project, what they wanted the grant money for and what they had done with the funding. They were less specific about what the outcomes of the project had been intended to be i.e. what they had planned would be better/different as a result of the project, their responses tended to highlight instead the more general benefits that they felt children and young people *had* gained, for example increased confidence or greater social networking.

Increased confidence in the organisation to tackle new projects was an outcome mentioned by all interviewees and new skills gained was mentioned by half the respondents. Testing the 'added value' of the Fund, we asked who the groups felt they are reaching through the grant that other agencies cannot. Three of the ten interviewees mentioned particularly the isolation that disadvantages rural youth. These groups felt they had been able by their project to bring together these young people and provide a social network, a listening ear or access to activities that were not being provided by agencies working in the area.

"I wish it could be continued past next year. It feels a very successful fund and meets the needs of local children and communities. The staff are very helpful."

"From start to finish the process was dealt with very professionally but also very personally and we weren't left alone to struggle with forms or what was required."

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Four of the ten interviewee groups highlighted how they had been able by their project to re-enthuse disengaged young people, enabling them to feel their opinions were valued and empowering them, through making decisions in the project, to make decisions about other aspects of their lives. All ten groups interviewed stressed that young people had been involved in the initial design, the planning and the delivery of the project.

All groups had had contact with their local Community Foundation before LNF - for advice and information or 'we just knew they were there'. Three had received a previous grant. All commented positively on their contact, seeing the Community Foundation as both approachable and helpful.



“Young people with learning disabilities were able to start the process of person centred planning and we were able to train peer advocates (all people with learning disabilities) to help them with this process.”

Representatives of the Committees and Panels

A telephone interview was carried out with one panel/committee member from each of the Community Foundations. A face to face interview was carried out with a young panel member from one Community Foundation. We asked the panel/committee members what value they thought was added to the grant making process by having a local panel or committee to assess applications. The following comments were collected:

- “Geographic spread of committee gives good coverage across the county, we are disappointed that the Fund is coming to an end – the committee has a diverse range, business people, area health authority. One project we funded as a pilot is now being considered for a national rollout”.
- “We can draw on a large skills base right across the area. We know our own patch very well, plus we know the organisations that are applying. Committed people are on the committee, with a range of skills - local government, health visitor, play leaders, grass roots organisations. Wide definition of deprivation is used by panel because of their skills and knowledge”.
- “There are two trustees on each grants committee, so there is good linkage back to the main Community Foundation board. We have a range of skills on the committee including business people, which gives a broader perspective on the applications. We have excellent links with corporate sector – they are very important in our area”.
- “We have brought in skills from across the county. Outside interests are subsumed to focus on the project itself. A side benefit is that local people get to meet and discuss projects so get to know each other much better, too”.
- “We have excellent local knowledge about groups, partnership working, a good sharing of knowledge and are good at challenging each other in respect of any conflicts of interest due to our excellent prior knowledge of the groups. We have been able to help groups develop – either through the outreach facility in the

“Without this grant we would not have been able to run any activities for children who are in need. A very big thank you.”

“It’s a great shame that funding through the Local Network Fund is coming to an end later this year. It’s a very valuable source of support to small, local community groups.”

Fund or by individuals on the committee signposting the group to other agencies that could help. We have really developed a feeling of ownership of the Fund and now local people are actively keen to promote the idea of such a small grants fund continuing”.

- “I was first of all part of a group that received a grant. Then afterwards the Foundation was looking for a young person to come on to the Panel and I said I was interested. It’s been a really good experience and I think the other people on the Panel value my opinion and think I’ve got something to offer”.

“We were very happy to receive this funding and were able to deliver a really worthwhile project which resulted in 10 young people building the skills required to re-engage into the school system.”

From the comments above it seems that the committees/panels of local people have added a great deal of value to the LNF grant-making process in the South West. Through the skills and experience of the panel and committee members, applicants have been able to get additional advice and support and the quality of the decision-making process has been enhanced by local, detailed knowledge of the groups. The panel/committee members have also been able to act as promoters of the Fund, drawing in applicants and also signposting them to other sources of help. One area for improvement noted by four of the seven Community Foundations interviewed was that they had no young person on their committee, despite recruitment attempts. Others have been more successful, for example the Torbay panel is chaired by a young person. Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Community Foundation is running a participation project to enable more young people to become involved in grants decision-making processes.

“A great opportunity for us to provide very important quality provision that would not be possible without your support.”

Telephone Interviews with awards staff

One staff member from each Foundation involved in the awards process was interviewed by telephone for 25 to 30 minutes. The interviews were loosely based on a set of set of seven ‘open’ questions. No attempt was made to ‘guide’ the interviewees. The main points which are detailed below are those *mentioned* by more than half of those questioned. Although some points were only mentioned four or five times, this does not mean that some

Foundations disagreed with them, only that some Foundations did not mention them spontaneously.

Foundations felt that the LNF had definitely benefited the communities in their area and that many projects had only been supported due to the efforts of the Foundations. Even if the funding had been available other distributors would probably not have made the considerable effort that the Foundations had put into developing and approving very small awards which were nevertheless of great importance to beneficiaries. Many projects that the Foundations had supported were 'below the statutory radar level', were probably too small for other bodies to bother about but were vital to the organisations receiving support. The Foundations provided 'seed corn' support at a grass roots level and their friendly and helpful attitude had encouraged applicants to come forward who might have been deterred by a more formal approach.

"..very grateful for the support - we now have over 200 children right across our area involved."

The added value that the LNF had brought to the Foundations' 'mission' was that it had allowed Foundations to be more entrepreneurial and creative in developing projects which would match the LNF funding criteria while helping to achieve the Foundations' own goals by targeting 'in need' groups. LNF funding had been useful also in raising newer, less established Foundations' profiles, helped them develop their expertise and capacity and contributed to a successful track record. This had increased the local community's confidence in their Foundation as well as the confidence of statutory funders.

"An excellent opportunity for young people to obtain funding to help develop their group."

The best thing noted about the LNF process was that it had genuinely helped young people. The Foundations had approached the process in an entrepreneurial way. They felt that they were the creators and facilitators of projects which would be of value to young people in need in their communities rather than the administrators of a grant giving programme. The LNF had also helped to develop considerable expertise within community groups and within newer Foundations

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themselves on how to originate, develop, finance, set up and manage a project.

The main difficulty identified by some Foundations was their failure to fully engage young people in the whole process. Because of the number of initiatives targeting young people there was 'competition' between public and voluntary sector organisations to attract the 'right' young people onto the Panels – and Foundations are just in the early stages of adopting or supporting other mechanisms for bringing forward young people's views. With notable exceptions, there were few young people involved in awards assessment panels and committees. While there were many young people's groups in urban areas there were fewer in rural areas which has made it even more difficult to engage young people in these areas with agencies.

“The grant has enabled our organisation to develop in a really positive way.”

The particular added value that Foundations had brought to the LNF was their existing infrastructure which had been enhanced over the last few years; their local knowledge; their ability to build the capacity of the local community and their willingness to be entrepreneurial and be more willing to take risks and to 'go the extra mile' to help new small groups develop and manage their projects.

“Attended a workshop before filling out form – helpful to see people face to face. Very worthwhile – it's a pity it's ending.”

Outreach had been vital in helping community groups to develop ideas because of its easy access - in one place with a 'named' contact. It was also a sensitive way to help very small groups. It was seen as a vital part of some Foundations' operations and particularly useful in helping new, small groups to bring forward projects and for developing and supporting opportunities that other organisations might be unwilling to fund.

The Future: Meeting Strategic Outcomes

The Local Network Fund has structured grants in a strategic way which has supported 'Every Child Matters' outcomes by finding and funding priority groups. The Fund has also supported groups to achieve outcomes that contribute to sub-regional priorities around health, access to services, achievement and participation. The groups surveyed and interviewed for this impact evaluation report improved confidence and skills to undertake more projects and activities. Large numbers of young people have been involved in LNF as volunteers in projects and on grant assessment panels. Networks between groups and agencies have improved as a result of partnership working and skills brought to grants assessment panels and committees.

As the research shows, the professional advice and encouragement provided by Community Foundations in the South West and the ways in which they have structured and supported the programme's delivery have contributed greatly to these outcomes. Community Foundations see themselves as more than an administrator – rather they see themselves as a proactive partner in the development of services for children and young people; the evaluation findings support this view. As LNF begins to wind down, so Community Foundations are already building links with the emerging Children's Trusts to ensure that the best practice, benefits and achievements of the scheme can be transferred to the new Trust arrangements.

“Great to be able to provide a Homework Club for children in a deprived area. I hope this club will be the first of many. One volunteer received an award from the High Sherriff for her work at the Club.”



Appendices

The following appendices are designed to be read as supporting documentation to this evaluation report and are available as separate documents:

Appendix 1: National and Local Studies Summary

Appendix 2: Children and Young People Plan Summaries

Appendix 3: Local Area Agreement Summaries (Children and Young People block)

Appendix 4: Survey Responses

Appendix 5: Telephone interview script

Appendix 6: Mini Case Studies

Appendix 7: LNF Administrator interview responses

Appendix 8: LNF Awards Summary Table

Acknowledgements

South West Community Foundation Network is grateful for the support of the South West Regional Development Agency in carrying out this evaluation. All photographs and comments were provided by volunteers on grants committees and panels and groups funded by LNF. The authors gratefully acknowledge their help in compiling this report.

