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EVALUATION OF NEW LEAF NEW LIFE

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1 INTRODUCTION

New Leaf New Life (NLNL) is the North East regional portfolio, funded under the Big Lottery Fund's Well-being Programme. NLNL comprises projects that have a particular focus on increasing physical activity, encouraging healthier eating and improving mental health.

CLES Consulting was commissioned in March 2010 to undertake a final evaluation of the programme. This report presents a summary of the programme design, an overview of projects and their outputs/outcomes (in terms of benefits received by both stakeholders and beneficiaries) and identifies conclusions and key lessons learnt.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 What does the portfolio look like?

NLNL applied for a total of £4m funding from the Big Lottery Fund Well-being Programme. Funding was allocated to 39 projects¹ across the following areas:

- ❑ Physical activity: £859,000 (23.6%);
- ❑ Mental Health: £1.7 million (46.8% of the funding); and
- ❑ Healthy eating just over £1 million (29.6%)

The programme was successfully led by the North East Strategic Health Authority (SHA) in partnership with specialist providers in the voluntary, statutory and private sectors.

2.2 The challenge to improve health & well-being

The North East region suffers from poor health outcomes. Compared with other regions across England, the North East has the worst level of deprivation and life expectancy, and the highest rate of early deaths from cancer.²

The region's rates of smoking in pregnancy and breast feeding initiation are also the worst in England³.

According to regional sport and leisure surveys, levels of physical activity amongst adults are poor. Fewer than one in five (16%) adult's complete three sessions of thirty minutes moderate exercise activity per week, the second lowest of all nine English regions.

Obesity levels in the North East are 13% higher than the England average. Statistics on employment and mental health conditions are also startling, with over two fifths (41%) of Incapacity Benefit claimants in the North East related to mental health compared with just over a quarter (27.5%) nationally.

¹ Some projects cut across more than one theme

² North East NHS (2008), Our Vision, Our Future; Our North East NHS

³ NESHA (2010): <http://www.nepho.org.uk/topics/Health%20Inequalities>



There is a strong rationale for the existence of the portfolio. It contributed to a number of local and regional strategies to promote and tackle low levels of well-being experienced by residents in the North East. Interviews with key stakeholders highlighted strong links between the portfolio's aims and objectives and those outlined in the North East Regional Health and Well-being Strategy.⁴ They also recognised the role that the portfolio had played in developing and implementing the strategy:

*'There are ten key themes in the strategy, including obesity, diet and physical activity, mental health, and early life...alignment with the portfolio is very strong.'*⁵

⁴ North East NHS (2008): North East Health and Wellbeing Strategy 'Better Health, Fairer Health'

⁵ Programme stakeholder interview

Considerable effort was put in at the start to get a good balance between the three portfolio strands, and stakeholders felt the portfolio management team had been successful in doing so.



Stakeholders and project staff reported the importance of focusing on the key issues for the region in a coordinated way; and commented that the portfolio approach has been successful in providing regular opportunities for joined-up delivery and greater partnership working.

The innovative nature of the portfolio, with its aim of developing the third sector and building relationships between third sector providers and commissioners, was also set out clearly in the evidence base presented to secure funding from the Big Lottery Fund.



The NLNL programme aimed to support people in making changes to their lives which resulted in a measurable improvement to their health and well-being.

There were four aims associated with the programme portfolio's activities, as follows:

- 1) community engagement, using social marketing techniques to help gain insight into the factors that motivate people to change toward healthy lifestyles;
- 2) building knowledge, skills and capacity within projects to ensure their work with individuals and communities has the greatest impact and is evaluated for its effectiveness;



- 3) support and advice to sustain projects beyond the portfolio through social enterprise initiatives; and
- 4) a commitment to share learning and good practice from project's more widely across the region.

The majority of NLNL projects were voluntary and community sector led and this was regarded as a distinct advantage by the key portfolio stakeholders interviewed in this evaluation. These service providers are often closer to the communities they are working with, meaning communities are setting their own goals and are closely involved in the implementation of initiatives and achievement of outcomes:

*'Achieving better health and well-being is a very much greater task than just the activity of the health service.'*⁶



The design of each project was carefully put together through a process that encouraged strategic working between different local organisations, including the voluntary and community sector, academia and the public sector.

In total, the portfolio achieved over 89,500 outputs during its lifetime, three-quarters (75.2%) of these related to mental health outputs. Just over one-in-ten (12.3%) related to physical activity; and a similar proportion (12.5%) related to healthy eating outputs.

The next section provides a summary of a selection of the portfolio's projects; and highlights key areas of impact. In particular, it illustrates the projects that have structured their activities to help them meet their own objectives and those of the overall portfolio.⁷

⁶ Programme stakeholder interview

⁷ More detailed information is contained within six case studies accompanying the main formative evaluation report. Link: <http://www.northeast.nhs.uk/what-were-doing/new-leaf-new-life/>

3 PORTFOLIO ACHIEVEMENTS

The following section illustrates the portfolios main achievements. Findings are based upon interviews with stakeholders, project managers and key delivery partners, and project beneficiaries.

The evidence presents a consistent view that projects have delivered meaningful change across all three strands of well-being. It also suggests that the portfolio's impact was much greater than just the direct beneficiary outputs. For example, where families have engaged with NLNL, there is potential for behavioural change to become embedded in family life and for the outcomes to benefit children and young people, as well as parents and siblings.

3.1 Growing participation in exercise

The evaluation evidence illustrates that NLNL made significant progress in developing a greater understanding of health and well-being, both with beneficiaries across the portfolio and amongst the different delivery partners. It has also helped to identify what works in the development and delivery of health and well-being projects.



The projects encouraged greater uptake in exercise and healthy eating activities, and gave beneficiaries the confidence and encouragement to undertake physical activity in their own time. For example, the largest proportion of funding received by the Key Enterprises project has been used to provide physical activities such as football, walking, bike rides and gym sessions. Beneficiaries reported feeling healthier, both physically and mentally, as a result of continuing to take part in exercise, either with the project or with other groups:

*'I'm now more comfortable doing a bike ride,
I bought a bike and I'm doing some in my spare time.'*

The New Opportunities in Sport for Looked After Children project has helped build young people’s self-confidence and encouraged beneficiaries to engage in more sports and activities outside of school.



The project has given young people the chance to develop coaching and leadership skills, helping to open up employment opportunities:

*'Friday nights I would sit on my PlayStation.
Now I go out and get involved, my life has changed.'*

Innovative approaches to exercise, health and the environment were achieved through the Green Start project, which was delivered by Groundwork under the physical activity strand. The initiative has been an excellent way of engaging young families and encouraging small

children to get involved in the environment, including 'grow your own' activities.

3.2 Improving mental health and wellbeing



Groundwork has also rolled out their successful Green Gym - a two year health and personal development project running from 2009 to 2011 - where sessions offer a range of activities, including allotment development, nature conservation, and the restoration of community gardens and spaces.

As well as a physical work out, beneficiaries also had chance to meet and socialise with colleagues. These were seen as critical factors in building clients’ confidence and skills, especially those that have been out of the workplace for some time:

'I never really got into exercise before I came here. When you can see the change in your waistline, it's a big incentive, it motivates you.'



The Therapeutic Activities Programme (TAP into Life) has successfully increased physical activity, encouraged healthier eating, and brought about improved mental well-being for project beneficiaries. The project's overarching objective was to improve the mental health of TAP clients by improving their physical health. Physical exercise forms the starting point, unlike many traditional mental health interventions that focus more exclusively on mental health:

'TAP completely opened up new horizons for people... it did so in terms of social inclusion, new skills and new interests.'



The Creative Routes to Improved Mental and Emotional Well-being project aims to prevent older people from developing serious health problems by providing a wide range of interest groups and volunteering opportunities. Beneficiaries highlighted that the project had encouraged them to keep active. It also provided them with companionship and greater self-confidence:

'The physical activities help your confidence a lot... it gives you the motivation to get on and try new things.'



Similarly, the evaluation of the Mind in Gateshead - Community Cafe project reported reduced social isolation, improved communication and inter-personal skills, and greater assertiveness. The café provides 'light bite' healthy food options to the local community in Bensham, an area experiencing high levels of deprivation.

Volunteers are involved in a range of activity, with the particular tasks undertaken by individuals dependent upon skills & experience; and the nature of mental health condition. Some volunteers work in the kitchen, preparing food or washing dishes, with others undertaking more customer-facing roles. Many have progressed into work.



The Mental Health Concern's Social Inclusion project had a specific remit to encourage service users suffering from first episode psychosis into mainstream employment and education. The project has been a huge success, with beneficiaries taking up employment; and participating in regular sports and social activities:

'The football group is great. I get a high from the endorphins.'



3.3 Tackling the stigma attached to mental health

NLNL has supported a number of projects that tackle health inequalities through awareness raising with the general public. This has helped to address mental health issues in a preventative way that supports social inclusion, economic opportunity and long term economic development.

The Regional Time to Change project used the concepts which have already been developed by the national Time to Change campaign and local case studies to successfully tackle stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health. The key messages from the project were as follows:

- ❑ mental illness is one of our last taboos – stigma wrecks by stopping people getting back to work and getting on with life;
- ❑ mental illness is far more common than you think – one in four people experience a mental health problem at some point;
- ❑ you can help – don't cut someone with mental health problems out of your life; be there for them.



Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a two day training programme that promoted mental health awareness and mental well-being, provided an outline of support to help anyone experiencing an episode of mental distress, and helped guide a person towards professional help.



The project was delivered by Stockton and Middlesbrough Mind on behalf of the North East Mind MHFA Partnership. Delegates said they had learnt new skills they would not have learnt from other courses elsewhere:

*'The best part has been learning new skills to support people in an appropriate manner, especially for the staff I manage...
...as well as the people we help.'*

3.4 Promoting healthy eating

The portfolio projects have played a key role in demonstrating the benefits, and communicating the impact of healthy eating activities to other stakeholders - including funders, projects and employers.

What's Cooking Kids? works with young people, their families, trained Community Food Leaders (CFLs) and the wider community to share and learn life skills covering: diet and nutrition; food handling and preparation; food safety; and consumer awareness. Involvement with the project has allowed young people to make new friends within a safe local environment, as well as encouraging families to cook and eat together.

Two key outcomes were identified by CFLs:

- 1) the young people's willingness to try new foods they would otherwise not have tried; and
- 2) fostering a greater understanding of less healthy foods and the importance of eating a healthy, balanced diet.



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The portfolio's Regional Weaning Programme⁸ reported strong social outcomes from a course designed to build parents' confidence about weaning and cooking healthy food for their families. It aimed to increase the skills, knowledge and confidence of expecting and new parents to be able to provide their child with a homemade, nutritionally balanced diet that is accessible, affordable and culturally acceptable. Two focus groups were conducted with a combination of new mothers and mothers with more than one child in order to gain an understanding of the different experiences of food.



The structure of the course inspired confidence and made new and existing mothers feel at ease and able to ask questions about sensitive issues. The programme was structured as a cascade training model in which health development specialists train other child and healthcare service providers to deliver a practical course to new parents, teaching them how to successfully wean their children:

'I got everything I needed from the course; if I wanted to know something I could ask...and they were always able to answer.'

⁸ Set up across the North East, with County Durham Primary Care Trust as the lead organisation

3.5 Engaging hard to reach families & facilitating inclusion

One of the most challenging, but significant outcomes, from the portfolio's activities has been its ability to engage hard to reach and vulnerable families.

Stakeholders and project managers felt that previously it had been very difficult to get parents involved in school activities. However beneficiaries and project delivery partners at the Kids Café project indicated that the project had helped to get the message home about healthy eating through the influence of children on their parents:

'We've seen families benefiting, as well as the kids that come here after school.'



The Supported Housing project provided intensive supported housing services to young adults that have recently been diagnosed with a first episode of psychotic illness.

By offering individualised packages of care in a stable environment, the project reduced the likelihood for hospital admission, and enabled individuals to live as ordinary lives as possible. The project has also had a significant impact on the mental health and social inclusion.

3.6 Helping people gain new skills and employment

The portfolio has provided the opportunity for clients to learn new skills, including 'hard' skills such as participating in new or less familiar sports, and skills in cooking and healthy eating.

Clients from the TAP into Life project progressed to accessing Darlington Mind's Whole Life project, which has successfully focused upon helping people into college courses, work placements, employment and volunteering opportunities:

'I now do voluntary work with [a local charity]. I'd not done anything like this before – [TAP] has made a big difference, I'm a totally different person.'

Participants of the Creative Routes project have had very definitive tangible outcomes, with activities incorporating: skills development through IT classes and internet access; creative writing classes; music sessions; art groups; language classes; and drama classes.

One user explained that after completing an IT course at the centre, he went on to enrol at the local college and passed six GCSEs.



Project delivery partners commented on the friendly, open offer of support they had received whilst developing their project. It has also helped organisations to consider whether becoming a social enterprise was a viable option for the future of their project:

'I can run ideas by them – they give you confidence to do that.'

3.7 Building knowledge, skills and capacity within projects

NLNL has worked hard to build knowledge, skills and capacity within projects to ensure their work with individuals and communities has the greatest impact and is evaluated for its effectiveness. Demand for this support was already exceeding the supply of provision and enterprise support within the region.

The portfolio commissioned specific project activity (the In Good Shape social enterprise project) to support the long-term organisational development of portfolio members; and to raise understanding of social enterprise as a way to sustain a project.

4 THE ADDED VALUE PROVIDED BY NEW LEAF NEW LIFE

The NLNL programme has a strong strategic focus. Interviews with project delivery managers and stakeholders highlighted significant levels of added value that was generated throughout the lifetime of the programme. Examples are outlined in the following section.

4.1 Providing leadership and effective communication of priorities and success

One of the key strengths has been the regional approach taken by the portfolio, allowing it to develop regional projects, often scaling up much smaller pilot projects. Another strength has been the breadth of the portfolio, which has drawn upon a variety of ideas to address health inequalities.

The portfolio has worked hard to build capacity amongst many of its third sector providers, opening doors and building relations with projects to help them with contracting in the future.

The location of the portfolio within the SHA has meant that the well-being agenda is championed by senior staff and has gained considerable press coverage. The portfolio has also helped contribute to the region's 'Better Health, Fairer Health' strategy.

The portfolio has also been promoted through significant local press coverage, annual reports and DVDs. NLNL branding has been included on adverts as part of the regional 'Time to Change'

campaign, which has helped to significantly reduce the stigma attached to mental health and discrimination.

4.2 Encouraging coordination and knowledge exchange

Knowledge exchange and shared events, such as the one day conference on World Class Commissioning, have helped disseminate learning and best practice widely across the region. Representatives from different professional occupations attended the conference, including those from organisations outside of the portfolio. This has helped to influence wider strategic thinking and delivery activity, as well as raising the profile of the portfolio itself.

In terms of influencing delivery, links have been made with the Department of Health Change4Life Convenience Stores project, which encourages corner shops to prioritise the scale of fresh fruit and vegetables. The portfolio has brought these stores together with cooking clubs to help engage with schools and community centres.

Partnership working across the portfolio has been very positive. Senior managers have worked with projects to help them make the most of the opportunities that arise; and to assist them with delivery if projects are not progressing to plan.

At a more strategic level, the Regional Advisory Groups have invited a range of people and organisations to contribute to portfolio activity under the different health and well-being themes, embedding the agenda across the region, and providing a good partnership base.

Significant synergies have been achieved through encouraging coordinated approaches to delivery and supporting the scaling up of activities. This has given localised projects a regional remit, a larger target audience, and also helped to reduce 'silo' working.

4.3 Ensuring equality and diversity

The NLNL portfolio and the projects within it have made every effort to engage effectively with the diverse communities living in the North East. For example, Beacon, a third sector infrastructure organisation for BME groups, ran a one year project looking to improve women's mental health;



The evaluation evidence suggests that the portfolio has helped to widen participation in projects to address health and well-being. It has also raised awareness of exercise and healthy eating within local neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation and poor health.

4.4 Supporting a sustainable legacy from the programme

A lot of effort has been put into ensuring the sustainability of the portfolio. Each of the three main strands has a Regional Advisory Group that has remained strongly focused on how projects and activities might be embedded across the region through mainstreaming, commissioning, and social enterprise approaches. The portfolio management has also supported projects with social marketing; and has worked to embed these techniques within public health agencies.

In terms of a partnership legacy, the programme management team and advisory groups were keen to ensure that connections have been made across the portfolio. The events programme has brought together portfolio deliverers with external organisations, and has proved valuable in facilitating shared learning sessions.

Despite the strong levels of support, project managers presenting mixed views on future sustainability. They felt that some projects were more commissionable than others, in particular those that:

- ❑ have relationships with multiple funders;
- ❑ were able to set up as a social enterprise;
- ❑ have significant volunteer involvement;
- ❑ were less dependent upon single grant funding.

Ensuring sustainability or mainstreaming projects in the current funding climate is clearly extremely challenging. Added to this are

the changes that are taking place in NHS commissioning and public health, making it even more difficult to ensure future sustainability. With this in mind, the SHA should be commended for the importance placed on building the third sector's long term capacity, and on creating partnerships between mainstream NHS and third sector providers.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

Overall, the evaluation has found that the NLNL portfolio is strong and has had a positive impact on local communities. The key strengths of the portfolio are:

- ❑ the regional approach to developing projects, often scaling up much smaller projects;
- ❑ the portfolio's ability to build capacity amongst the VCS and enhance skills and improve practice in mainstream services;
- ❑ the ability to draw upon a vast variety of ideas to address health inequality, both new and tested ideas.

The projects that form part of NLNL understand what is needed in the communities in which they work and have developed projects to respond to these needs. There have been a range of positive outcomes flowing from the activities that were delivered, including:

- ❑ healthy eating benefits for those people directly and indirectly engaging in the projects;

- ❑ the promotion of anti-stigma messages around mental health & well-being that have been communicated across the region;
- ❑ the portfolio has led to wider impacts, such as volunteering and employment opportunities; and
- ❑ a number of examples of strategic added value, in particular fostering a more independent third sector.



The sustainability of outcomes and successful services that have been piloted under NLNL has been a key driver for the portfolio throughout its lifetime. In particular, the SHA has opened doors and built relations with projects to help them with contracting in the future. The portfolio and projects have embraced the opportunity to test riskier projects, whilst developing an evidence base of what works for future commissioners. The portfolio team has worked well with third sector organisations that have engaged the target audience. For the most part, it was felt the portfolio was very well managed, with good opportunities for training and partnership working. NLNL management team should be commended for developing a portfolio of activity that has responded to the health and well-being needs of local communities in the North East.