

# THE BIG LOTTERY FUND'S NATIONAL WELL-BEING EVALUATION

## OVERVIEW

The Big Lottery Fund began its £160 million National Well-being Programme in 2007. The programme provided grant funding to projects across England which worked to help people to improve their well-being. 17 organisations, including local health bodies and leading charities were funded to deliver the projects and the programme had three key objectives:

- Encourage healthy eating;
- Increase physical activity; and
- Promote good mental health.

In September 2008, CLES Consulting and the Centre for Well-being at the new economics foundation (nef) were commissioned by the Big Lottery Fund to undertake an impact evaluation of the Well-being Programme. The evaluation, known as [the National Well-being Evaluation](#), also included some activity from the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces Programme which funds community groups who want to improve local green spaces. The evaluation ran for five years and measured the programmes' overall impact on participants' well-being and studied how and why certain projects had a greater impact than the others. The key research questions were:

- How have participants' behaviours, feelings and goals changed as a result of being involved with the programme?
- How do the three strands of well-being, and social and personal well-being, impact on each other and link together?
- What factors influence how successful or not projects are in improving well-being?

To measure the programmes' impact, we conducted extensive research to gather a large amount of high-quality qualitative and quantitative data. A set of questionnaires were developed which participants' completed at the start of their involvement in a project, at the end of their involvement in a project, and three to six months after their involvement had ended. We also conducted 19 case studies of individual projects which involved interviewing numerous participants, volunteers and staff members. The qualitative and quantitative data was analysed and synthesised and compared to findings from similar research. We are confident that this evaluation is the most comprehensive evaluation of the impact of well-being interventions in the UK so far.

## THE FINDINGS

[The final report](#), which has just been published, found that the programme as a whole had a significant impact on all three strands of well-being; mental health, physical activity and healthy eating, as well as on participants' social well-being and personal well-being. What's more, the improvements were sustained after participants had left the programme.

The headline findings:

- Participants' average life satisfaction rose significantly;
- Engagement in the programme increased participants' life satisfaction three times more than would be expected if the person had doubled their income;
- The proportion of people reporting depressive symptoms fell by over a third (35%) after taking part in a well-being project;

- The proportion of participants likely to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day increased by 16%;
- Across all age groups, the proportion of people spending 11 or more hours sitting during a day decreased significantly;
- The proportion of participants who reported feeling relaxed increased by 14% and projects which gave participants a routine and a purpose helped them to feel more motivated; and
- Participants' self-esteem improved, with an increase of almost 25% more people feeling good about themselves and optimistic about the future after taking part in a project.

## Who benefits most?

We used the evaluation data to identify which social groups benefited the most from participating in the programme. The data showed very clearly that it was those who started with the lowest levels of well-being who experienced the greatest improvements in their well-being. We also found that females experienced greater improvements than males and that the largest improvements were found amongst the 35-44 years age group. This may be due to the lower well-being starting point for this age group. The value of volunteering to well-being also emerged very strongly. Project volunteers experienced huge improvements in their own well-being; gaining a greater sense of purpose and self-worth, and some volunteers moved into paid work as a result of their volunteering.

## A positive cycle of increasing well-being

An important finding from the evaluation is that there is a virtuous upward spiral of health and well-being. Increasing opportunities for socialising with others and having fun developed a person's self-confidence and self-esteem. This led to participants feeling more motivated and determined to adopt and maintain healthier behaviour in other areas of their life, such as diet and exercise. As participants noticed their health and happiness increasing, they felt motivated to keep up their new healthy habits; forming a positive self-reinforcing cycle of increasing well-being.

Much of the research in this area<sup>1</sup> suggests that increasing healthy behaviours (such as physical activity and healthy eating) improves personal well-being and mental health. However, our research suggests that for individuals to make healthy changes to their behaviour, they first need to improve their personal well-being and mental health. Our findings are supported by other research into behaviour change<sup>2</sup> which suggests that gains in self-confidence need to be made before lasting behaviour change can be achieved.

## Key success factors for improving well-being

The evaluation identified a number of factors which influence how successful a project is in improving participants' well-being. We found that how a project is delivered is far more important to its effectiveness than the actual activities themselves. In general, the projects which took a holistic approach to well-being; building self-confidence, increasing participants' enjoyment and skills, and enabling friendships to develop were most successful in improving well-being. Some of the key success factors of the most effective projects were:

- **Engaging the target group and sustaining participation:** understanding the barriers preventing people from joining a project and working with local organisations to reach target participants was important for reaching those with the lowest levels of well-being. Projects encouraged participants to stay involved by providing opportunities for socialising, making activities fun and sign-posting people to other opportunities, such as volunteering.
- **Involving volunteers:** projects which involved volunteers had a greater impact on participants' overall well-being than those which did not. Volunteers themselves experienced significant improvements to their well-being and they provided important peer support to others.
- **Co-production:** involving participants and the local community in designing and delivering a project can give them a sense of ownership which can increase their motivation to change their lifestyles and improve their personal and social well-being.

1 For example; Penedo, Frank J., and Jason R. Dahn. 'Exercise and well-being: a review of mental and physical health benefits associated with physical activity.' *Current Opinion in Psychiatry* 18.2 (2005): 189. <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/500789>; The Mental Health Foundation (2006) 'Feeding Minds: The impact of food on mental health' <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/Feeding-Minds.pdf?view=Standard>

2 For example; Dixon, A. (2008) Motivation and Confidence: What does it take to change behaviour?, King's Fund, [http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/files/kf/field/field\\_document/motivation-confidence-health-behaviour-kicking-bad-habits-supporting-papers-anna-dixon.pdf](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/files/kf/field/field_document/motivation-confidence-health-behaviour-kicking-bad-habits-supporting-papers-anna-dixon.pdf)

- **Imparting skills and knowledge:** participants can gain greater self-confidence and self-esteem through learning new skills and understanding how to improve their well-being. Being able to measure their progress was found to motivate participants to maintain lifestyle changes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation findings provide important lessons for a range of stakeholders involved in the well-being agenda. The key lessons include:

### Service providers

The success factors for increasing well-being which the evaluation identified can be considered by service providers when designing and delivering their projects. It is recommended that service providers embed monitoring and evaluation in the project design from the beginning and record financial information so they can demonstrate a project's value for money.

### Service commissioners

The evaluation provides commissioners with information on the characteristics of interventions which are most effective for increasing well-being. Commissioners can consider these characteristics when developing and choosing services to fund to improve well-being.

### The Big Lottery Fund

The Big Lottery Fund has considerable power to influence and promote the future well-being agenda. They can use their position to support voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to partner with the new public health bodies and champion their work to national policy stakeholders. Areas for future well-being research could include: the impact of social isolation on well-being, the importance of self-confidence for changing behavioural habits, and the cost effectiveness of well-being initiatives.

### Government

Both national and local government can use the evaluation findings to inform their public health strategies in order to address physical and mental illness, unhealthy lifestyle habits, and poverty and deprivation. Key lessons for the Government include:

- The findings highlight the benefits of tackling multiple strands of well-being in one intervention. Government can lead by example by encouraging joined-up working across departments and cross-sector partnerships, especially between local public sector service providers and VCS organisations;
- As the public health reforms are introduced, government could work to ensure the new commissioning bodies and public health policy stakeholders are accessible to VCS organisations;
- Government could continue to explore ways of supporting VCS organisations which work to increase well-being by creating more networking and training opportunities and supporting alternative finance models.

## WHAT NEXT?

The full report and accompanying case studies have been published on the Big Lottery Fund's website and dissemination of the findings to policy-makers, practitioners and commissioners is underway. This began with an event hosted by the Cabinet Office where the Big Lottery Fund, CLES and nef presented the evaluation results to policy contacts from across government. Further information about the evaluation can be found on the [Big Lottery Fund's website](#) or by contacting Clare Cummings at [clarecummings@cles.org.uk](mailto:clarecummings@cles.org.uk) or 0161 236 7036.

The Big Lottery Fund has invested a further £40 million in the Well-being Programme to develop the sustainability of its work during 2013 - 2015.

