

COMMUNITY GRANTS Evaluation

May 2023



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Background

ESF Community Grants is a programme that aims to support small and voluntary organisations with grants of £1,000 - £20,000 for local initiatives that will move unemployed and inactive people towards employment, training or education.



Participant making and labelling preserves at Launchpad CIC

ESF Community Grants is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency, and is being managed by Petroc in Devon and Somerset. Grants support a range of activities aimed at moving individuals towards the labour market by improving their access to local employment and skills provision. They provide support to underrepresented communities and individuals, especially those from deprived communities, to access employment, including self-employment, or further learning and training.

From its inception to 31 July 2022 Community Grants has supported 762 individuals, helping them to grow in confidence, learn new skills and in many cases move into training, volunteering and employment.

See overleaf for a breakdown of some key achievements on Community Grants across Devon and Somerset.



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Numbers achieved

Devon

	Achieved
Participants starting Community Grants	622
Participants progressing into employment	72
Participants progressing into education / training	28
Priority Groups	
Over 50	160
Disability	341
Ethnic Minority	73
Female	346

Somerset

	Achieved
Participants starting Community Grants	140
Participants progressing into employment	2
Participants progressing into education / training	7
Priority Groups	
Over 50	38
Disability	87
Ethnic Minority	8
Female	83



Objectives

The 4 objectives of Community Grants are:

- 1. Moving Forwards:** participants move towards or into employment, job search, training and education, or they experience an improvement in soft skills and attributes such as self-esteem, social confidence, personal responsibility.
- 2. Capacity To Deliver:** partner organisations can grow and sustain provision and build networks thanks to the opportunities afforded by the Grant.
- 3. Community Impact:** the work undertaken by partner organisations has a positive impact on the local and wider community, as well as their participants.
- 4. Cross Cutting Themes:** the projects have a focus on enhancement of equality and sustainability.

Over the next pages, we will demonstrate the success of the projects in delivering these objectives, as well as the project's contribution to the Petroc Strategy 2025.

Not all of the Community Grants projects have been mentioned in this report as there are too many to include. However, all of the projects that have been funded by Community Grants since the project started have provided excellent support and opportunities to their participants. Their contribution is equally valuable.

The evaluator has spoken to a representative from every project and their comments and feedback have informed this report.

Moving Forwards

Participants and partners overwhelmingly report good results in terms of participants moving forwards due to the activities they undertake on Community Grants projects.

Case study, Time to Shine, I Can Do That!

Time to Shine is a Community Grants funded project run by I Can Do That! in Torquay. The aim of the project was to deliver a confidence and motivation course to increase confidence, motivation and self-worth to move people with disabilities towards employment. This approach gave participants the self belief they needed to make changes and move forwards in all aspects of life. I Can Do That! shared case study about participant, CH, summarised below.

At the time of joining the course in February, CH had been out of work for over 6 months. He lacked confidence and was anxious about applying for work as he had been unsuccessful in many previous attempts. On the first day of the course we discussed confidence and believing in your abilities, not letting negativity stand in your way.

CH enjoyed the course and it changed his mindset: he decided to make a positive attempt to get into work starting that very day. He took his CV into a local tyre fitting business and asked if they had any jobs, something he would not have considered doing before, they hadn't have opportunities at that time but kept his CV on file, CH did not let this get him down.

After day 2 of the course, CH went into a local pub: they offered him a work trial as a kitchen porter, he really enjoyed the work and they offered him a fulltime contract working 40 hours a week. CH is no longer in receipt of universal credit and is really enjoying earning his own money and looking to move into his own flat.



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Moving Forwards

Jade Crouchman's Story, Gilead

The decision to leave my London based life to move to supported housing on a farm in rural Devon was a huge and terrifying one, although with hindsight it shouldn't have been. The life I left behind was chaotic at best and traumatic at worse. Through mistakes that I had made and events that I had no control over, life had become a constant struggle. Violence, drug taking and drinking to obliteration a daily occurrence. But taking that leap of faith, making the choice to try something different was still so overwhelming. I can honestly say I am thankful every single day that I came to Gilead.

From nearly the moment I arrived at Gilead I knew this was a special place, it helps that its surroundings are beautiful. We have work therapy on a farm with animals and also learn about plants, gardening and growing our own vegetables, we have acres of farmland and woods to explore by foot or bike and group outings to swim in lakes or find waterfalls. But the reason Gilead has been truly transformative for me is the constant support I have received, there is always someone willing to listen, advise, encourage and push you towards reaching your full potential.

I have been here for 7 months now, I was a shell of a person when I arrived. I have a part time job in a local supermarket now, I can't decide what A levels to take because I'm not sure what I'd like to do as a job yet but I do know I'd like to work with animals. I also know I've been given the perfect opportunity to make something of myself, to live a happy life. That's what Gilead has done for me, given me the chance to make the right choices.



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Capacity to Deliver

Increased resource and capacity due to Community Grants

Feedback demonstrated that many organisations are now better placed to continue to deliver, and develop, the provision that was initially funded through Community Grants.

Ellacombe Partnership were able to use the Grant to pay for a pilot trialling their community café. It was a success and they continuing to deliver this opportunity, thanks to Community Grants.

Similarly Exeter Northcott Theatre was able to pilot the Tech Futures programme for people to experience theatre production work. The pilot enabled the technical team to test the viability of having inexperienced people training alongside them, alleviating any doubts. This is now running as a permanent project following great success.

Gilead Foundations reported that the horticulture project funded by Community Grants was so effective that the horticulture worker, Ingrid, was kept on using central funding to enable the work to continue. Also, the food being grown as a legacy of this project is being used in their next Community Grants funded project, Cooking for Life.



Images of the harvest from Gilead's ESF funded Horticulture project, and their participant Sharon tending to the olive tree and herbs.



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Capacity to Deliver

Learning and development to improve delivery through Community Grants.

ODILS, for example, provided a report on the cultural barriers their participants often face when seeking employment, and how this project allowed them to reflect on this. Jo Pickering, ESF Innovation Developer, said:

“Realistically, some of the participants who have secured work through this project will be back at our door when it’s time for them to change roles. We acknowledge that, while we have successfully delivered the project’s outcomes, we haven’t had access to the resources we need to overcome many of the systemic and cultural barriers faced by this group. However, the valuable learning from this project has helped us to develop new roles within our team that will support future participants to develop their cultural understanding of employment in the UK and to actively work with employers to help them ensure their roles are inclusive and accessible. We are also using our learning from this project, and the others currently running, to help develop better skills development pathways for participants to ensure that they do not become reliant on us every time they need to find a new job. “



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Capacity to Deliver

Building networks and strengthening partnerships

Another important part of the Community Grants project is the opportunity it provides partners to network with each other, share best practice, and make more effective referrals to one another to ensure the best provision is available to their participants.

Events such as the Launch Event on 18 June 2019, and more recent partner meetings and conferences such as the Empowering Enterprise Conference in February 2020, enable partners to come together, learn more about each others' areas of expertise, and make connections



Community Impact

In **Touchwood Southwest's Women Build** project, women in the Criminal Justice System or unemployed learnt carpentry and DIY skills along with mental well-being 'tools'. As part of their learning, they constructed a mini log cabin and attended school visits so that children could learn house building skills from them. This had a dual benefit of teaching the children whilst building the women's confidence.



Launchpad CIC ran a project that offered adults with learning disabilities the opportunity to learn and practise employability skills through producing preserves including jams, marmalades, chutneys and curds. These professional products were sold locally which highlighted the skills and success of the participants to the wider community, and helped fund the provision. The project was based in Budleigh Public Hall where the Councillors and Mayor are situated which further raised the project's profile. The Mayor was so impressed Launchpad were asked to provide catering for the Mayor's outgoing reception, and several participants were employed to serve guests at the function. Through this project. Local people discovered that adults with learning disabilities have a great deal to offer as employees, breaking down barriers and Improving community relations and Understanding for everyone's benefit.



Launchpad participants at the Mayor's reception



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Community Impact

Coldharbour Mill used the grant to teach conservation skills to participants who were then able to develop and improve the Wildlife Meadow and recreation resource which is open to the local community at all times.. In addition to promoting well-being for the whole community, the new green space provides an educational resource for local schools, youth organisations and other young people. Coldharbour Mill also welcomed community volunteers who worked alongside the participants, increasing social opportunity and joint working.

Makers HQ used their Community Grant to fund ABC level 1 award qualifications in industrial manufacturing, to engage and sign up those people in the Stonehouse and Devonport community currently furthest removed from the job market. There is a significant shortage of people with industrial textile manufacturing skills, and those currently employed with the skills are an ageing workforce. Makers HQ, based in the former purpose-built Jaeger factory, is reinvigorating the passion, pride and legacy of textile manufacturing in the local area which was once a key textile industry area before the factory closed down in 1997. They are focussing on key local need such as textiles for yachts and the Ministry of Defence, and hope to become their preferred provider, boosting the employment and morale of the local community as a whole.

Seed of Hope Community Gardening Group was set up using the Community Grant. Seed of Hope participants helped those less able to manage their own garden, whilst gaining valuable work experience, training and opportunities moving them into or closer to the labour market. They used their skills to help local vulnerable residents, dramatically improving their quality of life. The participants also invested time and efforts in improving the green space around the community centre at which they are based which has a wider positive impact on the community, increasing the likelihood of general improvement across their home area.



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Cross Cutting Themes

Community Grants are inherently linked to supporting the Cross Cutting themes of Equality & Diversity and Sustainability. They target vulnerable groups and are required to be delivered in such a way that they promote environmental sustainability and create a legacy. Here are some examples of projects that have excelled in these areas:

St Sidwell's Community Centre's Cooking for Life, for Work and for Pleasure project brought together small groups of people facing barriers to employment to participate in 4 month courses to improve health and wellbeing, acquire life-skills and vocational skills and progress into further training or employment. Their second cohort consisted of a number of Afghan refugees which was particularly important in terms of diversity and inclusion. The activity of cooking brought enabled sharing of recipes and spices between different cultures, bringing the Afghan refugees into the community through a shared appreciation of food and cooking. They also promote sustainability by growing much of their own produce through their gardening project – as many other Community Grant projects do, such as **Gilead** and **Launchpad**.

Bike Space in Plymouth and **On Your Bike** in Wellington promoted environmental sustainability through providing all participants with a bicycle, along with the skills and knowledge they need to maintain their clean transport. This enabled recycling of existing bikes, reducing landfill and waste, and also gave participants a permanent means of transport which increase independence and widens their work opportunities.



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Cross Cutting Themes

Coldharbour Mill's Community Grant funded long-lasting improvements to their Wildlife Meadow, improving access and creating habitats for wildlife to thrive. For instance, participants installed reptile and amphibian holes, protected by felt covers, to encourage them to nest in the Meadow area. The Wildlife Meadow area of Coldharbour Mill is always open and provides a conservation area for the whole community to enjoy.



Petroc and Living Well's collaboration to produce a British Sign Language version of the project handbook, with thanks to Deaf-Led services for their interpretation skills.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR-XfEjPREQ&list=PLaKxH2Cn10c5LMuC8V3eSzsCUBIFNmFE3>



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Cross Cutting Themes

Case Study, Mohamad, ODILS

ODILS Learning Foundation is a charity for those isolated by language and culture, with a primary focus on education and training. The Community Grant enabled them to provide specialist employment and guidance support to BAME/ ESOL participants who are aged 25+ to help prevent unemployment and prevent underemployment.

ODILS participant Mohamad came to Plymouth in 2019 under the Home Office's Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme with his family. He has a degree in Maths from the University of Damascus and has been self-employed as a café and shop owner for most of his working life. His dream is to run his own café or restaurant here in the UK. Although the most obvious barrier to employment for Mohamad is surrounding language, he started the project with Entry 1 level English, this has not been the only challenge he has faced. Working culture and practices in Syria and Egypt, where he has previously lived, are very different to those in the UK, meaning Mohamad has missed key knowledge around how to create CVs, apply for jobs and what laws there are surrounding work. This has only intensified through his desire for self-employment, as he also needs additional knowledge around creating a company, registering and complying with self-employment laws, as well as hygiene and health and safety laws required to run a food establishment. As Mohamad's long-term goal was to be self-employed and he was getting no replies on his formal applications, he and Paul took a new approach to finding him employment by registering him as a food delivery driver. Although not the most secure of roles, this is a great foot in the door for Mohamad and means he is able to practise a number of skills while he gets ready for his next steps; such as improving his English on the job and practising reporting earnings as self-employed. Mohamad still dreams of running his own café or restaurant but is using his current opportunity to learn and develop his self-employment skills ready for taking on a much bigger venture.

Covid 19 Impact on Delivery

Feedback from the Community Grants recipients shows that Covid 19 had significant impact across Community Grants. As well as the inevitable delays caused to those projects due to start around the time the first lockdown started, other key issues included the following:

Difficulties with recruitment and face to face provision

Recruitment became challenging as a lot of referral agencies, such as JCP closed.

Working with individuals face to face, whether for mentoring or other opportunities like work experience and skills development was impacted.

Inequalities in access to online provision

Lack of technology, digital skills and access to devices hampered efforts to work online with participants. Some rural areas have poor connection.

Some found accessing from home challenging, for instance they may have been single parents with children in the background, or they may have felt unable to speak openly about matters when other family members, e.g. parents, were nearby.

Increased anxiety and related issues

Anxiety around Covid 19 itself, and simple mixing again after a time in isolation was a big challenge for some participants.

Vulnerable participants

Participants with health issues making them particularly vulnerable to infection because even less able to access support.

Uncertainty and attendance problems

Illness and self-isolation caused attendance issues including staff issues. Cancellations were common. Individuals had other caring and home-schooling responsibilities, schools and other services closed from time to time at short notice.



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Covid 19 Impact on Delivery

However, there were some indirect positive impacts of the pandemic:

Catalyst for digital provision

Organisations had no choice but to improve remote access to provision and digital skills in staff and participants. They found that an online approach suited some learners very well, particularly those who were nervous meeting in person. However, it is important to move towards face to face to increase confidence and get people out of their homes, so a hybrid approach is preferred.

Environmental sustainability

Reduction of travel saved time, costs and pollution. Organisations were able to see the benefit of some remote delivery, as well as reduced travelling to large events such as partner meetings.

Development of new resources / delivery models

Some partners came up with new models of delivery to overcome the lockdown challenges, some of which have continued beyond lockdown.

Battling On created a suite of skills development videos and resources which are still in use and available to all on their website.

Bikespace sent out bike parts and instructions to individuals so they could work through their skills development at home

Ellacombe Community Partnership participants designed Christmas menus remotely which were later created when the group was able to meet again.

Sources of support and information

Grant Recipient organisations found that participants were finding out about Covid 19 through various resources online, some of which were unreliable. They were able to support them in finding reputable information sources and alleviate concerns around misinformation.



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Petroc Strategy 2025

There is a clear correlation between the following aims and objectives of Community Grants and Petroc's Strategy 2025 and the Petroc Ways of Working.



Transform life chances and employment prospects for all

Community Grants offers those individuals who are struggling to progress in life the opportunity to build confidence and skills. This results in them taking the opportunity to move forward in their personal, educational and professional lives, whether that be volunteering, applying for jobs, starting work or becoming more active members of their community. The project ensures everyone is given the chance to succeed.



Build community and prosperity within North and Mid Devon and the wider south west of England

Community Grants has supported organisations across Devon and Somerset to build and sustain community stability and economic resilience in their local area.



Tackle the climate emergency

Community Grants projects have a focus on the Cross Cutting Theme of sustainability, and many promote activities that tangibly improve the local environment, for instance encouraging green travel, teaching skills and knowledge in conservation, and developing enterprise that is resourced and staffed locally.



Personalised and customer-focussed

Community Grants offers a bespoke, one to one support experience for participants, tackling each individual's barriers and challenges, and working with them using techniques that suit their personal needs.



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Summary

Community Grants has been an overwhelming success, particularly in terms of how it reaches out to the widest range of hard to reach participants with a truly flexible and bespoke offering.

A number of points of feedback have arisen that might be considered for future provision of this sort:

- There were a number of individuals on low hours or zero hours contracts who would have benefitted from Community Grants, but they were not eligible as they were employed. This support may have enabled them to increase their working hours and gain more secure employment, resulting in a longer term positive impact on the individuals and the wider community.
- Exploring recruitment issues, particularly in Somerset, during the design stage of the project could ensure the funding is directed where it is best needed, and that there is an established pipeline of participants.
- The Community Grants bespoke model is very effective and accessible, offering something for everyone, and covering all needs.
- The Petroc structure of delivery has allowed a large number of smaller organisations to use this funding when, as individual organisations, they wouldn't have the infrastructure to work on this project alone. This in turn has allowed for localised, personalised provision across the whole region as opposed to being based out of one larger organisation in, more often than not, a more urban location.
- Given that there is still a clear need for this kind of support, we would have sought funding to continue with this delivery model if any were available. Unfortunately, the UK Government are not in a position to provide the additional funding at this point in time. The tragedy of this is that teams with years of experience in managing and providing this type of activity will be disbanded and lost unless financial support becomes available imminently.

