



BUILDING BETTER OPPORTUNITIES: COMMUNITY MATTERS FINAL EVALUATION

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**Produced by Forever Consulting for Heart of England Community
Foundation**





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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
A2B	Access to Business
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BBO	Building Better Opportunities
BRC	Bilston Resource Centre
CJRS	Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
CRM	Client Relationship Management
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural Investment Funds
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
IAG	Information Advice and Guidance
IFA	Ideal for All
JCP	Job Centre Plus
JST	Just Straight Talk
MFCA	Manor Farm Community Association
SRoI	Social Return on Investment
TNLCF	The National Lottery Community Fund
VCSE	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction to Community Matters

Community Matters was a c£5m programme bringing workless people closer to the labour market and into employment and training. The programme was delivered across the Black Country between September 2016 and October 2020. It was part of a wider Building Better Opportunities programme funded by ESF and TNLCF.

The focus of the Community Matters programme was to engage workless people in the most deprived parts of the Black Country and in the community setting through local VCSE organisations.

The Local Context

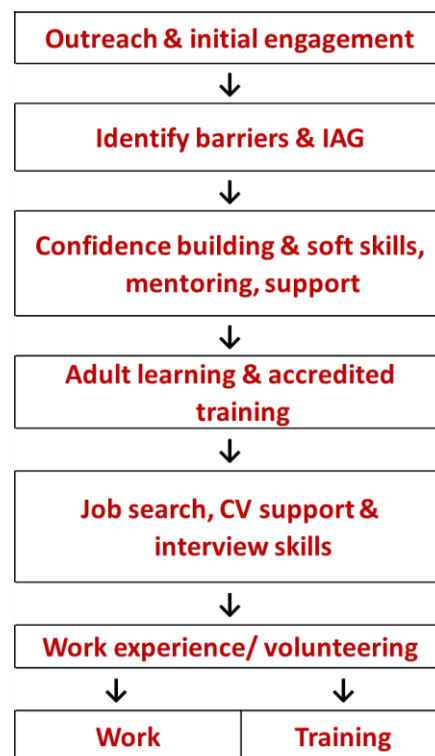
At the start of the programme in 2016, rates of worklessness (including both unemployment and economic inactivity) in the Black Country were higher than regional and national averages. People faced significant barriers to employment, including lack of skills, lack of experience, language barriers, digital exclusion, confidence and issues with childcare. There were also wider structural issues limiting people's employment chances, such as below average jobs density, meaning there are fewer jobs per head of population, the roll out of Universal Credit and the legacy of structural economic change.

By March 2020, rates of worklessness across the Black Country overall began to fall, and at a faster rate than the national average, meaning the gap was beginning to close. This suggests that Community Matters and other local programmes were beginning to have an impact before Covid.

Following the first lock down in March 2020, claimant rates spiked in the Black Country, and in some areas, at a slightly faster rate than the West Midlands and England averages. The full impact of Covid is still unknown. The Black Country could be disproportionately affected. Sandwell, Dudley and Wolverhampton are cited in the 20 areas most likely to be hardest hit. This is based on their share of local jobs in the hardest-hit sectors and number of people currently supported by CJRS¹.

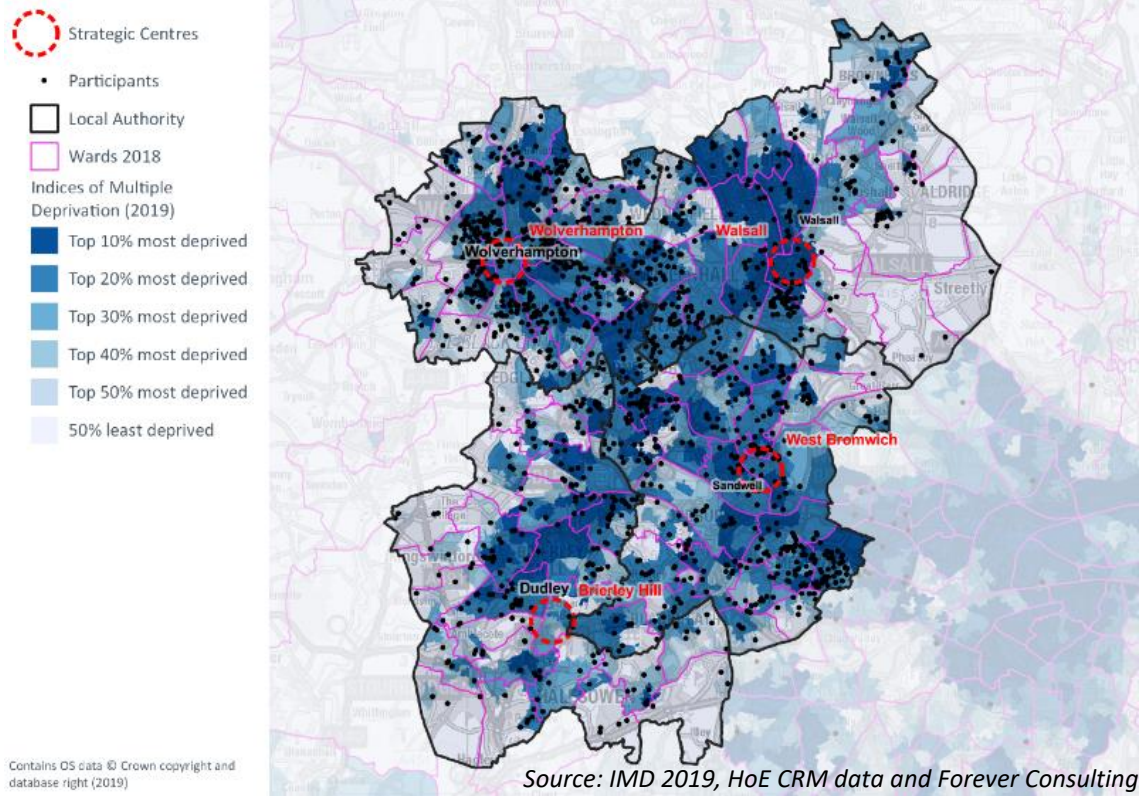
Impact of Community Matters

Figure 1 (over) shows the locations of Community Matters participants on a map, cross referenced against the Index of Multiple Deprivation. This shows that Community Matters engaged c2500 vulnerable and workless people from the most deprived parts of the Black Country, (except for a few outliers).



¹ JRF 2020

Figure 1: Location of Community Matters Participants



Evidence from the evaluation showed that people had received support at different stages of the route to employment, covering initial advice and engagement, through to developing softer skills, vocational training, work experience and support with accessing employment. Key outputs and outcomes are summarised at each stage of the route to employment in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Key outcomes and results



The evidence shows a clear relationship between the role of Community Matters in engaging workless people from vulnerable groups and locations; giving them skills and confidence to become closer to the labour market; and with 11% of participants securing employment and 13% moving onto further education and training. *This compares well against the performance of BBO nationally which achieved 10% of participants securing employment and 6% of participants moving into further education or training².*

The evaluation deems the programme to be effective, and particularly when considering:

- ∞ The complex and changing local context in which Community Matters was delivered;
- ∞ The complex and multiple barriers faced by workless people accessing the programme;
- ∞ The prevalence of barriers which were beyond the influence of Community Matters;
- ∞ The range of outcomes achieved, not to mention those which couldn't be counted due to compliance issues.

Value for Money

A Social Return on Investment Analysis was undertaken to assess value for money. It assessed a full range of benefits based on the outcomes data above, including for example, increased confidence, reduced isolation, access to new skills, employment and training. The results showed that the programme has achieved excellent value for money, estimated at £5.78 of social value per £1 spent, higher than other comparable benchmarks.

What Worked?

The Community Matters programme was managed by the Heart of England Community Foundation and delivered through carefully selected local VCSE delivery partners. A key success factor in this model was getting the right delivery partners on board and giving them the level of ongoing support needed to manage complex funding programmes. The benefits of this approach were:

- ∞ Local VCSE delivery partners bring a deep understanding of their communities.
- ∞ The Community Matters service offer was tailored and bespoke to individual's needs, often offering holistic support and addressing multiple needs. People could self-refer and often did.
- ∞ The support offer was alternative and additional to mainstream services, with many participants saying that JCP was not suitable for their needs.
- ∞ Delivery partners engaged people around their interests rather than employability. This enabled them to reach people with most complex barriers and address primary needs.
- ∞ Services were based in community settings which meant they were local and accessible to target participants.
- ∞ The VCSE partners were known and trusted in their community, which enabled them to reach people who were not engaged with other services or had dropped out.

² National Evaluation of BBO, 2019,

- ✘ There were many examples of delivery staff and volunteers who had lived experience of the challenges being faced by participants. This meant they could empathise well and participants didn't feel judged or perceived by labels.
- ✘ Delivery partners offered a warm, welcoming, supportive and engaging environment which made it easier and less intimidating to participants. Participants reported a sense of belonging and being part of a family.
- ✘ VCSE partners often delivered informal drop-in sessions and an open-door policy alongside more structured sessions. This was more suitable to participants and meant they could also engage on their own terms, particularly those with chaotic lives or who struggled with routine.
- ✘ Selected VCSE delivery partners had often operated long before Community Matters programme. This meant that they could offer a continuity of service, building trust and relationships with participants. There were many examples of participants who had already engaged with partners in the past or had been engaged over years.

What Can Be Improved?

The following challenges should be considered when designing future programmes aiming to support workless people into employment. Further, funding mechanisms (such as ESIF) bring their own challenges to programmes like Community Matters, and these issues became prevalent through the evaluation.

- ✘ The level of administration required and risks around achieving compliance with programme regulations create a large cost to VCSE organisations, who often employ additional staff to manage this. (Similarly, with payment by results programmes).
- ✘ The performance monitoring requirements are very stringent and mean that some results aren't counted because the evidence base is not compliant, or the impact happened beyond the allowed timescales. This means often impacts are missed. Often projects did not claim back expenses due to the time and evidence required, resulting in additional costs for people.
- ✘ National determined programmes do not always reflect the distinctive local contexts. For example, workless people over 50 was a nationally determined target group for the programme. However, the baseline showed that this group was not disproportionately affected locally, which contradicts the rationale for programmes like BBO aiming to address inequality.
- ✘ People who are closer to the labour market may not need long term and holistic support and are often supported through mainstream services such as JCP. However, the nature of the target group means that some people will take years to resolve their barriers and move into employment and training. The level of support needed to bring the target participants closer to the labour market can be extensive. The results indicators and targets do not reflect the extent of support needed or reflect the smaller wins for people on their journey. Our analysis showed that it costs c£19,000 to support a workless person into employment. Future targets and monitoring should reflect this, as well as better mechanisms to measure distance travelled over time.
- ✘ Policy makers and future programmes need to recognise that some major barriers to employment cannot be addressed alone through programmes like Community Matters. For example, the legacy of industrial decline and structural economic change, the low

job density, the challenges created by benefits system, the prevalence of zero hours contracts.

- ∞ The short-term and temporary nature of funding is challenging for VCSE organisations and impacts their long-term sustainability. For example, staff on temporary contracts leave and capacity is lost. Staff spend considerable time chasing and administering grants programmes which creates inefficiencies in public service and resources.

Moving Forwards

The level of worklessness in the Black Country is increasing following the Covid pandemic and there is potentially further uncertainty created by Brexit. The full impact is not yet known, but programmes like Community Matters are needed even more in today's climate.

The Comprehensive Spending Review 2020 confirmed the launch of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which will replace money formerly provided through EU structural funds. This will begin with £220m next year for local areas to pilot programmes before ramping up to 'at least match receipts from EU structural funds, on average reaching around £1.5bn per year'.

The chancellor also announced plans for a £4.6bn employment support package to help people back to work, including:

- ∞ £2.6bn for Restart scheme to support those out of work for 12 months;
- ∞ £1.6bn for the Kickstart scheme to subsidise jobs for young people; and
- ∞ £375m skills package, including £138m to provide Lifetime Skills Guarantee.

The £4bn Levelling Up Fund may also be relevant, given the disproportionate impacts of Covid in the Black Country.

It is important that the lessons and learning from Community Matters are used to inform future employability schemes moving forwards. Further, the VCSE delivery partners have been active in supporting vulnerable and workless people throughout this crisis and have maintained the links between vulnerable workless people and local VCSE services. This continuity could support the implementation of future programmes.