



Tobacco & Inequalities project

Evaluating Community Development Work

Briefing paper three



conclusions

funding

evaluation



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ASH Scotland

Action on Smoking & Health Scotland

Evaluating Community Development Work

The ASH Scotland *Tobacco and Inequalities Project* ran for three years from 1999 to 2002, and built upon the work of the *Women, Low Income and Smoking Project*, which is described in the publication *Breaking Down the Barriers*. The project was funded by the Department of Health, Scottish Executive, and the Health Education Board for Scotland (now part of NHS Health Scotland).

The aims of the *Tobacco and Inequalities Project* were:

- To support the development of community based services to encourage the reduction of smoking amongst people living on low income.
- To develop evaluation approaches relevant to those undertaking smoking based work at community level.
- To support national, regional and local initiatives developed in response to White Paper on Tobacco, *Smoking Kills* and the White Paper on Public Health, *Towards a Healthier Scotland*.

A report is available, the *Tobacco and Inequalities Project Evaluation Report*, which describes the activities of six initiatives which received small grant funding of up to £10,000 to undertake community based tobacco work. It presents the process and findings of the evaluation of their work, and outlines the development and dissemination of *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups*.

The purpose of this series of briefing papers is to provide further information on specific aspects of the project that will assist practitioners and policy-makers interested in developing, funding and evaluating community based tobacco work. The briefing papers draw upon the experiences and work of the initiatives, which were based in a range of settings within urban, rural, and island locations.

Facilitators and participants and an independent evaluator recorded the work of the initiatives. In this briefing paper we present evidence from each of these sources on issues and challenges in the recording and evaluation of small grant work. We

also consider the origins and the process of developing *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups*.

Evaluation Strategy of the Tobacco and Inequalities Project

The evaluation strategy for the small grant work took account of a number of issues, including:

- Taking the opportunity to ask the initiatives to pilot the first draft of *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups*.
- The wish to allow sufficient time for facilitators and participants to clarify their needs for evaluation and to consider resources, partners and specialist support.
- The community development ethos of the project, and consequently the need for the evaluation to be participative, and to form part of the learning for the participants and organisations involved.

A decision to appoint an evaluator independent of the initiatives, who would have distance and objectivity about the work, was taken at the outset of the project. The evaluator who was employed by ASH Scotland used an action research approach. Thus feedback, which reflected the data that was being collected and the issues that were emerging, was regularly provided to the initiatives. The evaluator collected information using methods that included interviews and focus groups. A full description of the approach to and methods of the evaluation can be found in Chapter 4 of the final report (ASH Scotland, 2003).

Recording and Evaluating the Work of the Six Initiatives

The information that emerged from the recording and evaluation of the work of the initiatives was crucial to the development of the project. In addition, it provided learning to share with others



(Scottish Office 1999; ASH Scotland, 2003). Each of the initiatives undertook their own recording and evaluation work. The project manager, the external evaluator, and the availability of the draft version of *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups* provided support in this work. The methods used by the initiatives to record their work varied, and included keeping minutes of meetings; the collection of information about numbers of participants, content of sessions and nature of outputs; photographs, and videos. Evaluation data, i.e. data which enabled the initiatives to make a critical assessment of their work, included a combination of interviews, focus groups, diaries, photographs and questionnaires.

The need for a resource

The idea for *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups* emerged from a series of interviews conducted with facilitators involved in the *Women Low Income and Smoking Project*. This had provided small grant funding to 19 initiatives between 1996 and 1999 (Gaunt-Richardson et al., 1999).

It was clear that a resource was needed that would help community groups to overcome the social and structural concerns that made it difficult for them to feel that they had ownership of their evaluation activities. Further, this resource needed to provide practical advice to enable them to plan their data collection and encourage participation in evaluation, in a manner that would meet the expectations of commissioners, funders and government bodies supporting community health work.

The analogy of a journey emerged early on as participants drew upon the language of travel and journeys to express the frustrations and satisfactions of evaluation work. This theme was well received at every stage of the development and dissemination and appeared to resonate with the everyday experiences of many communities.

Development of the Resource Pack

The first version of the pack, drafted in Summer 2000, drew on the data collected from the interviews with facilitators from the *Women, Low Income and Smoking Project* and the experiences of the project manager. It provided definitions; reasons for undertaking evaluation; conventional and unconventional methods for collecting data; guidance on analysis, report writing and the sharing of learning. Strong emphasis was placed upon evaluation as being linked to the planning of projects from the application stage, and the value of wide participation in both planning and evaluation.

This draft was peer reviewed by several of the initiatives funded under the *Women Low Income and Smoking Project*. From this review and other debates, it was clear that there was a high level of support for the further development of the pack, and that it should have relevance to a wide range of community health projects.

In 2001 the six initiatives funded under *Tobacco and Inequalities Project* were invited to pilot a revised version of the pack. Feedback suggested that emphasising planning and evaluation as being linked from the outset was productive and did facilitate participation in evaluation activities. The format was found to be accessible and logical, and enabled users to dip in and out as they needed. The pack draws upon the experiences of a range of projects across Scotland and this was welcomed, as it put the issues into a readily understood context. Facilitators requested further guidance on basic information to collect, methods of collecting data, means of presenting/sharing learning with participants, as well as signposting related organisations and resources. Changes to the wording were suggested as, in parts, it was considered too academic.

National Consultation Exercise, Publication and Dissemination

A series of workshops, and a video-conference, took place in the autumn of 2001, with over 50



representatives from health, arts and recreation, community education and schools. This national consultation exercise informed a re-working of the pack. Major changes were made to the ordering and content of the section on collecting information. This section now describes the methods of community development working that also allow for the collection of information: for example, collages, creative writing and photography.

The pack was edited by the Plain English Campaign and gained their crystal mark to indicate that it could be read, understood and used by the intended audience. The final version of the pack is printed on heavy gloss paper and in an A5 ring binder format. 4,000 copies of the pack were printed, and a brief questionnaire requesting feedback was inserted into each. In addition, a down-loadable version was placed on the ASH Scotland website: www.ashscotland.org.uk/inequalities/tobacco.html#eval Over one hundred delegates participated in dissemination workshops in Scotland, England and Wales and by September 2002 over 3,000 copies had been distributed. A recurring theme in the dissemination workshops was a wish for the establishment of an evaluation facilitation service.

The Evaluation Experiences of the Six Initiatives

In addition to their use of *The Evaluation Journey: An Evaluation Resource Pack for Community Groups* the initiatives valued the support that was given by the project manager and the external evaluator. This help was drawn on most when the initiatives were at the report writing stage, and the help that was needed was not only with writing but also in dealing with the volume and variety of data that had been collected. One commented that an outside view was helpful and verbal feedback was felt to be less threatening than a written commentary. In some of the initiatives there were staff in partner organisations who had experience in evaluation and who were also able to provide support. Experiences of evaluating their work varied in the initiatives. Some questioned the need to undertake

their own evaluations when there was an external evaluator in post. However, there were also positive outcomes for the initiatives, which included recognition of:

- the potential to use their final report to leverage future proposals,
- the value of minuting meetings not only as a record of activities but also as a means of enhancing communication within the initiative and with partner organisations,
- the production of an initiative scrapbook as an achievement in itself,
- the acquisition of transferable learning,
- the contribution to capacity building through enhanced skills and the potential for the development of evaluation plans for future work,
- the opportunity to use the information collected to improve the activities undertaken during the course of the initiative,
- the widening of the debate around tobacco issues in the partner organisations as a result of evaluation findings, and
- the opportunity to share learning.

However, not all initiatives were comfortable with the process, and they found it was difficult to include participants in the evaluation activities. There was a further challenge in ensuring that the evaluation reflected the views and experiences of discrete groups of participants. There remained serious concerns about the time required for the planning and implementation of evaluation activities.

Further information on programme development and impact can be found in Chapter 7 of the final report and in Chapter 8 the issues of capacity building, partnership working and sustainability are considered (ASH Scotland, 2003).

References

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Practice and Policy Implications

The work of small grant funded initiatives should be evaluated since this allows facilitators, participants, funders and others to learn what works and what does not. Sharing this learning enables the improvement of services and provides evidence to inform the development of future projects.

From the evidence of the evaluation of the *Tobacco and Inequalities Project* and the experiences of those involved in the *Women Low Income and Smoking Project*, it seems that evaluation is best developed as a core part of planning activities. It should be owned by those participating in and organising activities, and does not have to be undertaken by an independent evaluator.

A number of challenges exist to the development of appropriate planning and evaluation work. These include:

- Lack of resources: funding; time; skills and experience.
- Difficulties in sourcing appropriate resource packs, tools and specialist advice.
- Limited appreciation of why evaluation is important, and its links to project planning.
- Limited understanding of how best to use and share the findings of evaluation work.
- Limited communication between funders and initiatives.
- Concern, in the current climate of competition for funding, that ideas might be adopted by others without due acknowledgement.

Key Points

Evaluating small grant community development work offers a number of opportunities and challenges for groups and initiatives. People who had been involved, directly or indirectly, in the work of the six initiatives in the Tobacco and Inequalities Project described a range of experiences and issues. Key points to share with community groups, practitioners and policy makers are:

- There is a need for independent advice to support community groups in undertaking evaluation activities. The possibility of setting up an independent advisory service should be explored.
- Evaluation activities should reflect the nature of community work processes, and funders should be encouraged to accept qualitative approaches to evaluation.
- Continuing dialogue between community groups and their funders is important to ensure mutual understanding of the evaluation methodology and enable feedback on evaluation activities.
- Evaluation should form a key part of work planning, and should itself be designed to ensure that lessons are learned both during and at the end of the work programme.
- Community groups undertaking evaluation activities require support such as appropriate resource packs, evaluation tools, and specialist advice, and the level of demand for these resources will vary at different stages of the evaluation.
- It is essential that the role of any external evaluator is clearly understood. This is particularly the case if there are a number of initiatives included in a programme of work, and there is a comparative element to the external evaluation.



ASH Scotland Briefing Papers Series from
the Tobacco and Inequalities Project

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Contact Details:

ASH Scotland

8 Frederick Street
Edinburgh EH2 2HB

Telephone: 0131-225-4725

Fax: 0131-220-6604

Website: www.ashscotland.org.uk

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