Evaluation of the public health outcomes of Time Credits in Wisbech

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The research

• Evaluation collaboration with Spice, Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge Housing Society Group.

• Research collaboration between the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR) and the Cambridge Institute for Public Health (CIPH).
Time Credits

• Time Credits are a way of recognising and celebrating the time people spend volunteering with a local organisation, community group, volunteer group or a statutory sector service provider.

• In exchange for their contribution, they ‘earn’ printed Time Credit notes, one for every hour they give, which they can then ‘spend’ on a range of leisure and other opportunities in a network of Spice partners across the UK.

• Evidence of benefits of time-based currencies drawn from small-scale, qualitative studies or using a self-recall method.
Key objectives of the evaluation

Key aim

To evaluate the outcomes of the Time Credit project in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, with a focus on health outcomes.

The primary objective

To analyse the potential of Time Credits to address public health issues by:

– Reducing loneliness and social exclusion
– Improving wellbeing
– Increasing community cohesion and social capital
Methods overview

- Mixed methods research design - using both quantitative and qualitative tools
- Co-production is the ethos that underpins the evaluation
  - Interviews with key stakeholders
  - Systematic review of Time Credits and health outcomes
  - Secondary data analysis
  - Developing a theory of change
  - Longitudinal survey with individual new Time Credit members
  - Face to face interviews with individual Time Credit members
  - Survey and face to face interviews with partner organisations
  - Ethnographic methods including visual ethnographies and participant observation
Time Credits in Wisbech

- Wisbech, England – area with above average levels of deprivation and a range of challenging social issues.
- Market town – agriculture and food processing – immigration.
Time Credits in Wisbech

- 17 local organisations where people can earn Time Credits
- Include schools, homeless hostels, children’s centres, adventure playground, project supporting people into employment
- Activities include reading with children, after school clubs, gardening, office work, working in a café and kitchen, litter picking
- Spend activities include cinema, gym, swimming, beauty treatments, social events, theatre tickets
Time exchange

• Time banks
• Time Credits
• How time exchange works in a local community
• The ‘core economy’ - the non-monetary, unmeasured sector of the economy comprising family, neighbourhood and community
• Exchanges are built on a sense of obligation and reciprocity, rather than price determined by supply and demand
Co-production

- Spice model
- Working together for an agreed outcome
- Co-production in services - services are designed, developed and/or delivered with or by people, instead of for them
- Co-production in research (working paper) - conducting research ‘with’ communities rather than ‘on’ communities
- Best research practice lies in a synthesis of academic research, practitioner knowledge and research participant ‘expertise by experience’
- Challenges and opportunities
Community approach to public health

- One approach to reducing health inequalities is through improving social capital and reducing isolation.
- Solid evidence that increased levels of community engagement and social participation have a positive impact on health behaviours, physical and emotional health, and self-confidence, especially among disadvantaged populations (Public Health England, 2015).
- These benefits are so widely acknowledged that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance endorses community engagement as a strategy for health improvement.
Theory
How Time Credits can lead to positive health outcomes

• Assume positive health outcomes emerge through a causal process - range of ‘lower level’ outcomes (or ‘waypoints’) affect health and wellbeing, potentially across the life-course.

• Outcomes may be direct or indirect and benefits may accrue to individuals, to the wider community, or to both.

• Pathways to health outcomes can be complex.

• Some activities impact health directly - spend Time Credits to go swimming or to the gym - health benefit immediate and directly linked to the activity.

• Also indirectly - using Time Credits to access health and leisure facilities - expand social networks and reduce loneliness, leading to better mental health.
Findings
## How Earning and Spending Time Credits Can Lead to Positive Health Outcomes

### Individuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increased community participation</th>
<th>Opportunities to feel needed and able to make a positive contribution</th>
<th>Increased social participation</th>
<th>Expanded geographical horizons</th>
<th>Resources to access facilities and activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work experience</td>
<td>Improved self-confidence and skills</td>
<td>More active lifestyle</td>
<td>Strengthened family relationships</td>
<td>Increased physical activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved employability</td>
<td>Increased satisfaction with life and self</td>
<td>Improved awareness of medical and social support services</td>
<td>Opportunities for children</td>
<td>Improved physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased labour market participation</td>
<td>Increased social contacts reducing loneliness and isolation</td>
<td>Reduction in substance misuse</td>
<td>Intergenerational exchanges</td>
<td>Improved mental health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Communities

| Increased social capital         | User involvement in the design and delivery of services          | Services retained in spite of funding cuts | Reduction in wealth inequalities |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------
| Increased community resources    | Improved services - client needs are better understood and addressed | Reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime | Environments that facilitate a more active lifestyle |

More cohesive, resilient and safer communities

- Indicates strongest evidence of positive outcomes
Case study – ‘Alice’

• Career working with children, poor health kept Alice from working for nearly a decade.

• Time Credits gave her the opportunity to return to working with children at the Orchards School
  – Share her skills & make use of her previous experience and training
  – School gave her a formal paid job
  – She become a valued member of a community

“When I went to the first Time Credit meeting, at that point, I never ever had anybody come visit me... the only people I spoke to were my neighbours. I always worried, because I am diabetic, if I’m ill that nobody would find me. Now, I go to that school every day, I may go in sad but I come out with a smile on my face... I finally got somebody, who, if I don’t turn up at school they will come looking to see if I’m alright”.
Case study – ‘Peter’

• Lives in a Ferry hostel halfway house and volunteers in the Ferry project kitchen – came from prison.
• Now volunteers most days and treats it like a job.
• Learnt new skills, found a new passion.
• Feels like he’s giving something back, enjoys it, sense of achievement – hopefully route into employment.
• Spending Time Credits – rebuild relationship with wife and daughter:

“We are on benefits and the money only stretches so far ... using the Time Credits, it gives me enjoyment to take my little girl to the movies with what I have earned. If it wasn’t for the Time Credits, we wouldn’t be doing that many things with her. And because we go out more, we are closer as a family.”
Outcomes for volunteers

• Earning Time Credits can have both direct and indirect health benefits for individuals.

• Improvements in physical health.
  – “I was told that I need to keep my weight down. So I thought, if I come here, it’s better for me. If I’m on my feet all day that’ll help me keep my weight down instead of sitting next door in my room all day, moping all the time, and succumbing to depression.”

• Improvements in mental health.
  – “Since I’ve been working here, my depression has been a lot better and I’ve got a lot more confidence to talk to people… I’m more confident and upbeat, and I get up at a reasonable time.”

• Reduced loneliness and social exclusion.
  – “I was getting lonely. I thought what am I going to do with myself?…I come out and I feel like ‘wow’, I’ve got my energy back.”
Outcomes for volunteers

• Making a positive contribution.
  – “It has made me feel that I’m a person again. I feel appreciated. I’m not just a person at home doing housework.”

• Improved self-confidence, skills development, work experience, paid employment.
  – “In terms of getting paid work. [Volunteer] has health problems. But volunteering keeps her skills. [Volunteer] has applied for jobs and is actively looking for a job. It increases their prospects, especially if it is a job in an area where they volunteer. The process shows they want to go to work, shows willing, that they can keep to a routine. Employers take them more seriously.”

• Strengthened family and wider relationships.
  – “One lady, her kids never left the house but she will use Time Credits to take them out in the holidays.”

• Resources to access activities and services that they would not otherwise be able to afford or would not have tried.
Outcomes for organisations

- Enabled to recruit more volunteers and increase capacity.
- Challenged stereotypes and brought diverse people together.
  - “It has also changed staff attitudes. Some staff thought that ‘these people’ volunteering would be a hindrance not a help. Then they realised that they have skills. The staff started to see them in a different way…Understandings have changed.”
- Recognition of skills that exist in the community and desire to nurture and support people into employment.
  - “What I am most proud of is getting people into jobs. These people would not apply for jobs and now they have paid jobs.”
- Develop a more reciprocal relationship with volunteers – co-production.
  - “It feels more rewarding. Instead of someone volunteering and just saying thank you, you can give them something in return”.

School for Public Health Research
Spend organisations

- **Increases footfall – additional sales or repeat business**
  - “It gives us greater footfall through the door. It increases our clientele….. We encourage students to sell, so it is retail, rebook and recommend. It means we get new people in and can sell”.

- **Image and brand**
  - “They [customers] are more inclined to think well of us and not see us as a big corporate machine”.

- **Ethos of engaging with and supporting the local community**
  - “We have a community focus and want to get involved with the local community…..People who earn Time Credits do a great job volunteering and it is good to be able to give a bit back and give them a nice time…. It gives the staff a nice feeling, being able to reward people for volunteering”.
Evidence of challenges

• Lack of local spend opportunities – travel and transport, aspirations and geographical horizons.

• Core of few very active volunteers – benefits concentrated?

• Context – inequality, poverty, unhealthy lifestyles, social groups and bonds.

• Pressures on staff – needs committed, energetic individuals to make it work and be sustainable.
Research challenges

• Moving beyond qualitative evidence – impactful – but not necessarily in the world of public health.

• Evidencing outcomes – longitudinal research using validated health scales in online survey.

• Co-productive research – worked well co-producing the evaluation with Spice and CCC.

• More traditional research pattern.

• Difficult to encourage and engage people to get involved in ways led and shaped by them.
Conclusions

• Simple concept – but a complex intervention
• Challenges and opportunities of evidencing public health outcomes
• Beneficial outcomes - improved health, wellbeing, skills and confidence, loneliness and social exclusion
• Time Credits provide the opportunity to be active citizens, to share experiences and skills and make positive contributions that foster a sense of inclusiveness and help shape own community
• Tool for engaging people to develop more inclusive communities
Outputs to date

- Working papers
  - Time Credits and time banks
  - Co-production in research
  - Co-production in public services
  - Theory of change
  - Wisbech context
  - Using ethnography

- Interim report

- Time Credits member case studies report
- Time Credits partner organisation case studies report
- Two conference posters and two conference presentations
- Presentation to public health CCC
- Festival of Ideas event
Outputs to complete

• Feedback – revise findings, model, follow up
• Final report
• Summary report – printed and distributed
• Academic journal articles
• Systematic review
• Three short films
• Launch event(s)
• End of March 2017
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