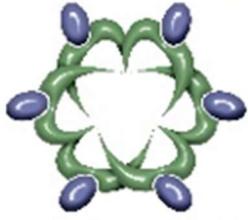


**Rotherham
Federation**



Strengthening Communities

Voices and Choices

Final Project Evaluation 2018

287 new
community
volunteers

“We are determined to change this community. Within 5 years we want a community centre where everyone can go”



Over 4,200
people taking part
in community
activities



27 new
groups and
activities



“This project has changed my life. I used to be shy and hide in the background. Now I have a dream to be an Organiser”



Rotherham Federation of Communities, Springwell Gardens Community Centre, Eastwood View, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S65 1NG. Email info@rotherfed.org, Tel 01709 368515, www.rotherhamfederation.org. Company Number 5913521 Charity Number 1158600

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Rotherham Federation's Mission

Rotherham Federation believes that Rotherham needs strong, local communities to achieve its potential. We support communities in the Rotherham Borough to grow and develop, working with them to build their sense of belonging, community pride and spirit. We work with and through grassroots community groups that are committed to bringing communities together, giving all communities a voice and creating local solutions to local issues.

Rotherham Federation has been supporting local communities since 2006. We represent a wide range of community-led organisations including tenants and residents associations, groups supporting communities of interest and groups offering particular activities. All our groups are managed and run by the communities they serve. Our work helps new and existing community-led groups to:

- build stronger, more capable communities
- empower people to speak up, create their own solutions
- make communities happier places to live and work
- influence strategic stakeholders enabling them to better understand local need
- work together to create shared solutions to borough-wide problems

We deliver a wide range of services, support and grant activities that help communities grow and become strong, including community development, governance, funding, financial, legal, marketing and practical support.

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Photos: Above – Rotherham United Football Club supporting football in Canklow

NB. All volunteers names have been changed to protect confidentiality

Section 1 – Introduction

In April 2016 Rotherham Federation won £401, 800 from the Big Lottery’s Reaching Communities Fund to deliver its Community Voices and Choices project. The 36-month project adopts the Community Organiser approach and seeks to address the lack of social capital, building community strength and empowerment in eight of Rotherham's most deprived communities. It:

- creates new groups and delivers new activities
- engages more local people in volunteering and community delivery
- increases local people's ability to engage with community, voluntary and statutory partners
- trains new community workers who have lived experience of life in local deprived communities

Rotherham Federation contracted this evaluation from an independent community consultant. It aims to:

- assess the project’s progress towards its outcomes
- identify learning that can be used to improve delivery
- gather community feedback to inform the direction of the community organiser approach in Rotherham.

Project Outcomes



Section 2 – Strategic Context

Community Organising

Where does Community Organising come from?

Community Organising has been developed over the last 100 years by merging ideas from Europe, the United States, South Africa and South America. It draws on learning from a range of empowerment and justice movements including civil rights, suffragette, co-operative, tenant involvement, trade unions, social justice and community enterprise.

What is Community Organising?

Community organising creates new and healthier social contracts between people and power. Based in at local communities, it allows people, particularly the most excluded from power and privilege to come together and be counted.

How does it work?

Community Organising empowers communities to take control of their identity and direction. It works inside and with local communities supporting them to make the changes that mean the most to them and is supported by work enabling people to realise their individual and collective potential. It:

- uses 1-1 conversations to help communities identify what they care strongly about
- develops community leaders
- supports communities to decide what action will bring about the changes they need
- builds strong relationships and networks that can support a struggle to create change
- mobilises people to take collective action to achieve a shift of power and social change

About Rotherham

Rotherham is characterised by a proud industrial heritage, attractive villages and rolling countryside (which make up more than half the borough), a mix of villages, small town and urban centres where most of its 263,400¹ people live. Areas in Rotherham town centre are becoming increasingly multicultural².

Economy and Demographics –

As with much of South Yorkshire, Rotherham has a strong industrial heritage based on coal and steel, though most its traditional industries closed in the '80's and '90's. It's now developing industries in IT and light engineering, helped by its excellent transport networks.

However, it struggled disproportionately in the 2008 recession and locally unemployment remains higher than the national average³. It faces other common demographic changes that create challenge.

¹ Demographic profile of Rotherham 2017-18, RMBC.

² Minority ethnic groups make up 8.1 per cent of the population. Source RMBC.

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/200088/statistics_and_census_information/699/research_and_statistics/2

³ According to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2015), 75% of Rotherham's working age population live in areas that fall into the 50% most deprived for Employment in the country, 64% in the 20% most deprived and 24% in the 10% most deprived. Source ONS.



High levels of deprivation affect communities in Rotherham's centre, urban fringe and rural surrounds. These localities are diverse and include:

- traditional indigenous communities isolated by rurality /or industrial decline
- a fragmented mix of new migrants struggling with a new society & cultural difference
- communities of South Asian heritage who were beginning to become established but have been fragmented by recent sexual abuse scandals.

Poverty will continue to be entrenched in particular communities in the coming years. Rotherham's JNSA predicts that the Government's welfare reform programme over 2011- 2018 has increased and intensify deprivation in Rotherham by reducing the incomes of the poorest households, particularly people who are disabled or long term sick and families with children.¹² Reflecting national trends the local food bank report increases in demand since the roll out of Universal Credit in Summer 2018.¹³

The Project's deprived communities

All of the projects target communities had worklessness levels over 20% and in 2010 were in the top 4% most deprived nationally.

Central Rotherham - Canklow, Eastwood and Ferham & Masborough are neighbourhoods with high levels of poor quality, private rented housing and high population turnovers driven by rebuilding, inward migration, empty homes, fear of crime and 1-year private lets. They have large BME communities (over 50% in Eastwood, Ferham & Masborough.) The population turnover disrupts community life, leads to a lack of community vision. Belonging is made harder by the neighbourhoods' range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This includes Pakistani, Kashmiri, Polish & Slovakian communities, a fledgeling Roma community, faith-based Syrians & Zimbabwean communities and an isolated elderly white community. In Canklow over 50% of households claim benefits. Unemployment is above 31% in all three communities. All areas are in the worst 1-3% most deprived in England.

Rural Rotherham – Dinnington and Maltby are small towns in rural Rotherham with mining heritage. Both have neighbourhoods with high deprivation. Dinnington Central has mixed housing stock with 8% of empty homes. East Maltby is mainly council housing. Both are in the 4% most deprived in England, Worklessness was 29% and 28% respectively in 2013. The areas have a young age profile, and many families face multiple problems. As industry and work have declined communities already isolated by rurality have further fragmented. Crime is high, and 66% of people feel unsafe¹⁴.

Rotherham Fringe – Dalton & Thrybergh, East Dene & East Herringthorpe are all in the Rotherham's urban fringe. 45% of East Dene and East Herringthorpe tenure is social housing. Local communities are mainly white British with an isolated, Black African community in East Herringthorpe. The areas were severely hit by recent recessions. In 2013 East Dene, Dalton, Thrybergh and East Herringthorpe and unemployment rates were over 30% (up 4% since 2007). The areas are in the top 3% most deprived in England. Crime is high, and RMBC describes the all areas as vulnerable. Local communities used to have stronger identities but lost their sense of direction as the income that funded community life dried up.

¹² Rotherham's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2017

¹³ The Trussell Trust showed that foodbanks operating in areas that have been in full Universal Credit rollout have experienced an average increase of 52% in demand in the following year. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>

¹⁴ Source – RMBC 2014.

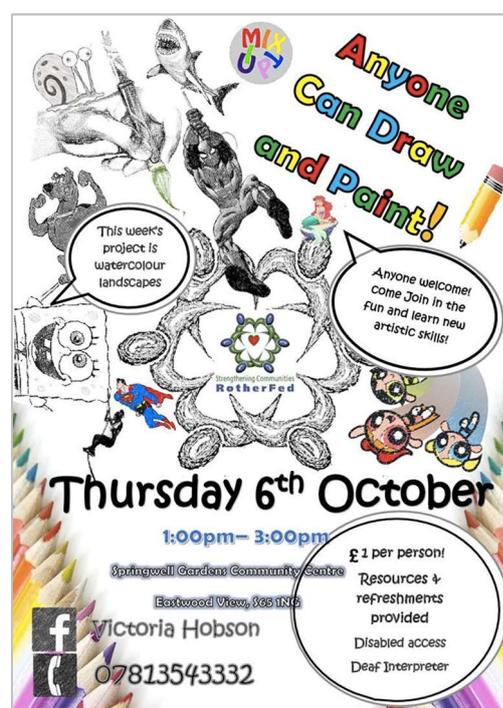
Deprived communities' experiences of taking control – People living in Rotherham's deprived areas have little experience of taking control of their lives and generally view themselves as powerless. All of the project's target communities have low levels of community-led activity, low community spirit/belonging & poor belief that they can determine their own futures. Few people volunteer, not least because of lack of opportunities and fear of benefit sanctions. Local people lack the confidence & education to challenge decision makers comfortably and don't share a vision of what will make their communities better places for all. Trust in mainstream providers is low. The few local groups that exist are challenged by lack of funds and struggle to start the processes which could create change. There are not enough skilled community leaders who have the confidence of local people.

Section 3 – The Evaluation Process

The evaluation was delivered in winter 2018 by an independent community consultant. It reviewed all areas of the project delivery across its lifetime and cross-referenced progress against the project's interim report in 2017. The evaluation focused on data gathered during the project's delivery, one-to-one interviews with key internal and external stakeholders and feedback gathered from participants both community groups and volunteers.

While containing an analysis of statistical data, the report is primarily qualitative. Data examined included:

- trainee and volunteer training feedback
- one-to-one interviews with users, trainee community organisers, project management, community volunteers and key stakeholders
- contemporaneous video interviews with volunteers and community groups
- a volunteers' survey and a stakeholder survey
- analysis of the project's statistical data and case studies.



Challenges

The project has helped the Federation understand what evidence enables quality evaluation. However, in terms of delivering sustainable change to community life in deprived areas, it's still in relatively early days. Longitudinal work to demonstrate impact has begun, and learning has been gained on what and how to gather meaningful evidence as the project has evolved. But the Federation has struggled with how to measure community-wide impact effectively within available resources. Other challenges have included:

- the lack of any benchmark measures
- the failure of some groups during the project meant it was not possible to include their input into impact findings

- some staff failed to record agreed monitoring data as rigorously as the project wanted
- the reliance on manual data recording and analysis until year three.

As a result of the above, this evaluation focuses more on identifying the elements of delivery that support communities to make early change and the pros and cons of the trainee programme.



Section 4 – The difference we made

Introduction: what we did – The project recruited 11 Trainees and supported them to become qualified Community Organisers through a 12-month, ‘on the job’ training programme. These staff regularly engaged with communities in Dalton, Rawmarsh, Canklow, Ferham and East Maltby listening to what local people thought and wanted, providing community activities and campaigns, training local people as volunteers and supporting them to deliver their own solutions to community issues. During our first 18 months we also offered activities around the well-used Mowbray Gardens Library in East Herringthorpe/East Dene, which established our profile there and laid the groundwork for future work. The project planned to transfer the majority of work in months 18 – 36 to Dinnington, Masborough, East Dene and East Herringthorpe but staff turnover, slow early progress and the fragile nature of new groups led to an agreement to retain the focus on embedding success in the first five areas¹⁵. Some Listenings and limited project support were delivered in year three in Masborough.

Involving more vulnerable people in community life

We planned to... deliver 800, 1-1 Listenings to local people living in target areas; 400 in year one and 400 in year 2.

Listening to what people really have to say

Community organising starts with a process of in-depth listening to local people through semi-structured, one-to-one conversations, on the doorstep, outside schools, in coffee mornings, basically where ever people are.

¹⁵ For the purpose of calculations these count as 4 areas as they were presented this way on the bid.

What we did – In its first 18 months, the project delivered 783, one-to-one Listenings across 6 geographies, rising to 1027 by the end of the project, 28% over target. Organisers report that delivery in some areas has been very challenging with only 78 Listenings delivered in Ferham. In delivering Listenings the project found that the more diverse an area and the less current community activity, the warier local people are in talking to people they perceive as outsiders.

The best time to deliver Listenings – The Community Organiser model starts with intensive listening activity. However, Voices and Choices chose to deliver Listenings throughout the project. Project Managers report that:

- trainees found delivery of Listenings at the expense of other activities demotivating
- the reluctance of local people to talk to strangers meant that time was not always being used productively
- trainees were on a massive learning curve and understandably wanted to get on with practising other areas of work

For this reason The Federation felt that regular use of Listenings would be a more a valuable way to engage people and gather feedback.

What did Listenings achieve? Feedback from participants and Organisers showed that Listenings gave local people a chance to consider that things might change, perhaps for the first time. The conversations let them to build a relationship with the Organiser, be heard, have their ideas valued and be introduced to the concept of giving back to the community through volunteering. All organisers reported finding early volunteers through Listenings. Common issues raised were the lack of community facilities and activities, particularly for children and litter and poor quality parks and play areas. The lack of opportunity for

“Listenings are so valuable. Without these initial conversations, the idea that things could change would never have crossed people’s minds. These hundreds of small discussions have led to huge changes.
Community Organiser”

“Listenings let me think about volunteering. I didn’t do anything about it for quite a while, but I did think” *Volunteer*

“People are startled and wary that anyone even cares enough to ask them what they think. They keep asking why are you trying to help us?” *Volunteer Organiser*

“Initially no one would talk to me. I was just seen as another outsider”

“It helped that I was not from a white British background. People can tell from looking and talking to me that I share their experiences of migrating to this country”

“Initially people were downright hostile blaming Rotherham Federation for some old history”

“I found several of the people who set up several of the early activities through door knocking. I wouldn’t have found them otherwise”

Community Organisers

children and young people was the chief concern in all areas. The Project Manager reports that as local people gained confidence speaking up can lead to change, later Listenings have produced a fuller range of issues. In year 3 the project particularly used Listenings to gather feedback from hard to reach groups and invite participants to take part in community activity. Offering Listenings at venues such as schools and older peoples groups has been successful in reaching groups such as older people, people with mental health problems and young people.

Learning Points – Listenings

(These identify ways Rotherham Federation can use evaluation learning to improve its activities, or good practice the project uses that others may want to adopt).

Listenings

- Listenings are a great way to start work in an area and provide the basis for early action. They should form the backbone of the work and delivered consistently throughout the project.
- The contributions Listenings make to becoming known, sharing ideas and building trust should be viewed as positively as the issues they identify
- People need time to develop their ideas about what they want. Your listening may be the first time anyone has ever asked them
- Listenings can be a great way to engage hard to reach groups
- People living in fragmented areas particularly different ethnic groups, may be very reluctant to take part in engage in Listenings and this may force a different approach early on.
- Enabling local groups to deliver Listenings themselves needs to be the final objective of supporting community groups. If capacity building providers deliver all Listenings themselves for too long, they become something 'we don't do' and stop once provider support ends.

Taking part in new community activities – All the target areas have low levels of community life and volunteering, and several have lost community facilities or groups due to austerity cuts over recent years.

We planned to... engage 224 local people in new activities for local people across the three years of delivery

What we did – Over its lifetime, the project delivered 205 new opportunities to engage in community life through 68 different activities¹⁶. This included 152 one-off activities and 53 activities offering multiple sessions, (excludes meetings to help groups plan /develop^{16, 17}. The

number of one-off activities decreased from 67% of activities in year 1 to 7% in year 3. This reflects regular community group-led provision taking over from larger, higher profile engagement activities aimed at tempting people out of their doors to find out what was happening.

¹⁶ Data taken from project activity and attendance records, Rotherham Federation 2015-18

¹⁷ A poor level of activity monitoring by some trainees means that its probably the project under-recorded it's level of activity. All activities included in this report have been validated

Merry Mowbray

Mowbray Gardens Branch Library, East Dene /East Herringthorpe is one of the few places in this diverse community where everyone feels welcome and safe. It's always held a Christmas event but with Rotherham Federation's support matched by funding from Neighbourhood Housing, RMBC and a local councillor, it created a magical event in 2017 that brought the whole community together.

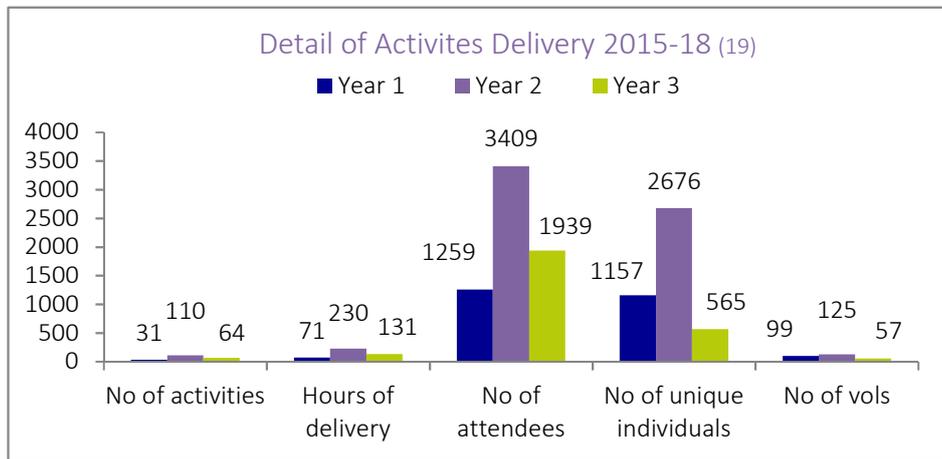
Rotherham Federation's Senior Organiser said "with reindeer, Santa, African drummers and carols the event had something for everyone. Everyone got on and different people chatted over the activities. The atmosphere was incredibly welcoming". 250 local people turned up. Local community groups offered taster sessions and Women's Aid, Housing Associations and the Job Centre were amongst just some stallholders.

- "The event sounded so good we used several different pots to secure the funding needed" *Neighbourhood Housing Officer*
- "The schools brought in all the classes in rotation" *Library Manager*
- "People who would never normally contact a councillor came and talked to me" – *Local Councillor*
- "They brought together a range of organisations that communities would never normally go and talk to" *Neighbourhood Housing Officer*
- "80 people joined the library on the day and more children have borrowed books since then. Several people stepped up to volunteer" – *Library Manager*
- "Seeing other people 'have a go' quickly got people trying out drumming. Several local people have joined us since. Rotherham Federation and its approach work. They are helping people realise what we have here in Rotherham" – *African Drummers Co-ordinator.*

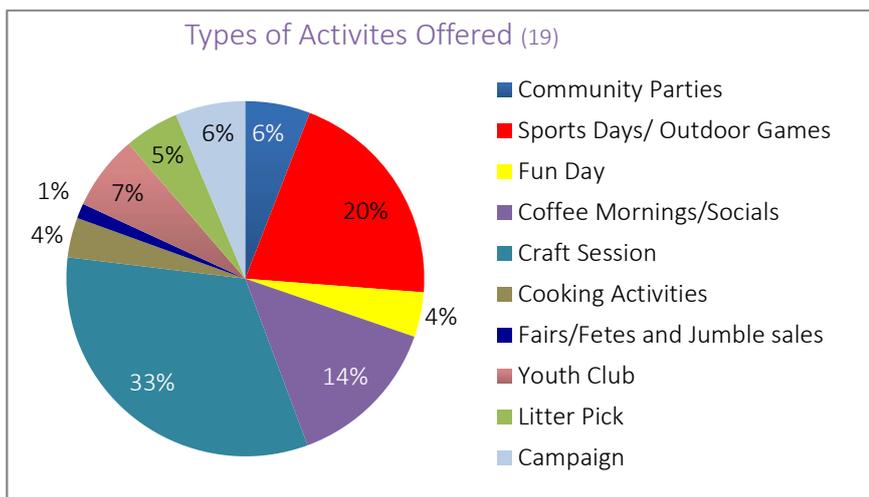
In 2018 the library put on another great event with the support of local volunteers and planned and delivered it without any input from Rotherham Federation.



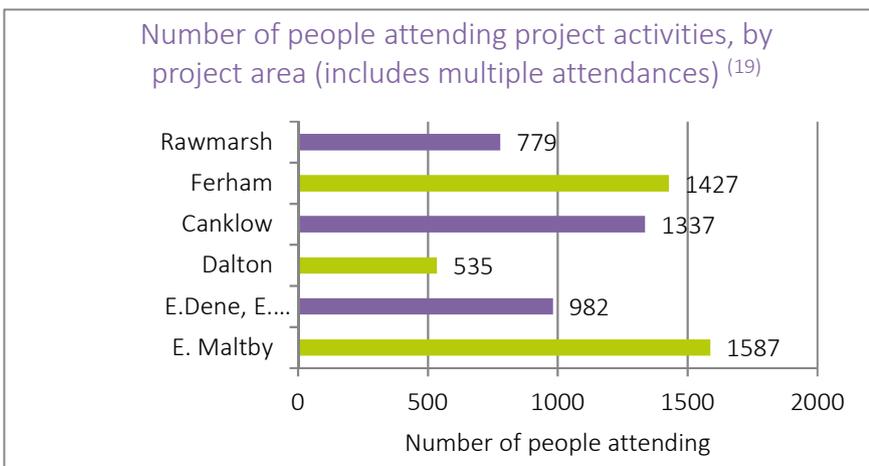
Counting repeating activities, this conservatively provided 432 hours of engagement to local people. Rotherham Federation projects that there have been over 6,600 attendances for some 4,200 people¹⁸. These figures don't include fourteen thousand from across the Borough who have been



involved in the Rotherham Rocks initiative, though many will have been from the project's target areas. Activities have ranged from coffee mornings with 3 – 4 people and regular youth clubs for 30 children to community fun days for over 500 people. This massive over-achievement, involved 18 times more people in activity than the project target¹⁹. The number of new individuals engaging with the project reduced in year three, as attendees became regular participants who had joined the project in previous years.



The fun day was fantastic. Loads of people came from across all the communities. Everyone felt welcome and had fun. People keep coming and asking me what we are going to do next.
Local volunteer



New or Existing – All activities were new in that they allowed more of a current activity to happen (e.g. an extra evening of football) or a brand new activity to be delivered to more local people. None of the activities the project supported were already happening in target areas.

¹⁸ Counting repeat attendances by individuals at public events has not been possible but Rotherham Federation has repeat attendances into its recording of attendances at regular events.

¹⁹ Source - Project monitoring data 2016 – 18, Rotherham Federation.

²⁰ Note activities in Rawmarsh didn't start until year 2.

Early Activities – Delivery of activities started during the summer of 2016 and naturally led to a range of community festivals and fetes and children’s summer activities²⁰. Early Listenings found that people didn’t believe community life was possible, so Rotherham Federation started by arranging events which disproved this and inspired people to want more. In most cases, the Community Organisers led in this early delivery due to the inexperience of project volunteers, but they involved local people in planning throughout. We found little early willingness to engage in campaigning for change. People found this personally daunting and thought it would be impossible for the community to do. Because of this the project didn’t focus on supporting movements for change until year three.

Volunteers, identified through Listenings, were persuaded, often with difficulty to ‘help out’. Even staffing a stall or serving refreshments proved daunting to many local people and the number of ‘helpers’ ultimately involved was secured through the persistence and enthusiasm of the Organisers. Volunteer and stakeholder feedback spoke of how the events were, on the whole, well organised, affordable, sited in local community spaces and welcoming to the entire community.

Quick Wins – Organisers spoke of how these events provided them with opportunities for quick wins. Project volunteers interviewed as part of the evaluations said the activities:

- gave people chance to relax and have a day out
- gave young people constructive things to do
- gave local people opportunities to talk to stallholders stalls (police, fire brigade, council, housing providers, charities and community groups). These were groups local people would never usually have contacted, but the informal setting made this more possible
- gave residents the chance to meet the Community Organisers
- let local volunteers do something they could feel proud of
- made people realise that they wanted more of these types of events.

Awareness of why we plan events

The project has helped Rotherham Federation become widely recognised for providing community activities and events. What is less well understood by communities, groups and statutory partners is the reason and the way they do this.

Local people are used to organisations never delivering on their promises. We only offered things that we could achieve and made it clear they would only happen if communities helped. But the fact that we listened and then delivered what people had said they wanted ... - ‘things for the kids’... helped us to move from being strangers to someone communities felt was on their side.

Local volunteer

The ‘Merry Mowberry’ Christmas Party was such a great idea. I spent nearly my whole budget for community activities on it”

Local Councillor

“Events are so much more than events. They are tools to grow communities”

*Senior Organiser,
Rotherham Federation*

The organisation doesn't parachute itself into a community, deliver an activity and leave behind only memories of a 'good day'. Instead, they use activities to inspire and engage communities to gain skills and create change themselves. The Federation's Senior Organiser said "People think we are here to give them something to do. At first they don't understand that when we plan and deliver activities we are using these as ways to empower communities. We help communities listen to need, become a trusted friend, identify engage and build the capacity of volunteers, grow community hope and create fledgling groups who have a desire to take control of and do something".

Good marketing and promotion – Rotherham Federation has consistently used high-quality promotion throughout the project (great marketing material, good online promotion through Twitter and area Facebook pages and collaborations with existing organisations). The quality images these promoted helped to attract local people and have been part of what has made the project work. Local partners have been generous in sharing their intelligence of communities, which in turn has helped the organisation be introduced as a trusted friend. Listening to communities about where to advertise and producing bright and snappy posters which people feel proud of have helped generate excitement around events and activities.

Accept where communities 'are at' – The project has shown that community empowerment will happen at its own pace and you can't force the change. Early work on campaigns and delivering cross-community activities in Ferham has shown that if communities, particularly diverse communities are not ready for these activities, they will just vote with their feet and not participate. Organisers need to keep focused on the changes that communities want to prioritise and work with them as they define these for themselves. Whilst ensuring messages about equality are embedded, it's particularly unrealistic to expect groups to want or feel able to mix across cultural and racial boundaries before they are ready.

Don't remove support too soon – Fragile groups can quickly fail if support is not available. In 2017 trainee turnover led to support being removed from one developing social group for several months. By the time the new Organiser was in place, disagreements and loss of motivation had caused the group to fold. This learning underpinned Rotherham Federation's decision to retain the focus of work on the same 5 areas in the 2nd half of the project, rather than expand to new areas as originally planned.

Learning Points - Activities

- It's a big ask to expect people who have little belief in community life to stand up and create it. Delivering direct activities that give people the opportunities to benefit by volunteering is a fine way to start, but they must be accompanied by the messages that if you want more you have to do it for yourself and we are here to help you. Children events, summer parties etc. give natural opportunities for people to step up and join in.
- Early activity should focus on giving volunteers positive experiences and involve minimal bureaucracy. Engagement should inspire people's self-belief and build confidence to do more.
- Work with communities as they define themselves and accept that it's unrealistic to expect people to mix across cultural boundaries before they are ready.

(Continued)

Learning Points – Activities continued

- You need to avoid failure as disadvantaged communities can easily give up. Start small with things you know will be successful. Disadvantaged communities find it easier to initially engage in volunteering that gives them opportunities to deliver activities to communities rather than challenge authority. Experience says that campaigning work to change services, facilities and the local environment will follow but unless there is an existing current issue that people are strongly motivated to challenge, campaigning work early in engagement is likely to be less successful and will be demotivating.
- Expect early progress to be slow in very deprived and fragmented areas. Keep in mind the number of times they have been given failed promises. Your role is to be consistent and give them time to join you. Don't remove support too soon.
- Promote yourselves through trusted groups and use quality marketing and promotion.

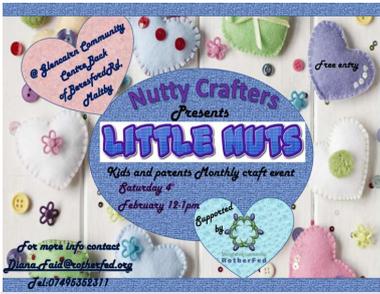


Rotherham Rocks

In winter 2017, Rotherham mums (from East Dene and Rawmarsh) were struggling to motivate their children to walk to school. So they encouraged the children to paint small stones, then hide them on their walk. The children uploaded photos of their stones and posted clues about where to find them. This activity quickly became a craze. Children loved finding the rocks and after snapping a photo and uploading this to a Facebook page, they re-hid the Rocks. The activity quickly spread across Rotherham and beyond, with adults joining in.

Recognising the idea's potential to engage communities Voices and Choices administered the scheme's Facebook page. When it advertised a 'paint a rock' workshop it had 500 responses within six minutes and ran five sessions in Voices and Choices areas. Unlike most 'crazes', Rotherham Rocks is free, has no 'collecting' and everyone can join in.

At its height 14,000 people took part. A volunteer group has now taken over the Rock's Facebook page and are planning more creative activities. The initiative has left a legacy of reduced social isolation and increased use of green spaces. It has enabled ordinary people to commemorate personal and community events. When two local children died the 'Rock community' was quietly supportive organising balloon releases in local parks attended by 3,000 people. People have learnt art and social media skills, gained confidence and felt part of 'something bigger'. Participants have joined other community, arts, crafts and social groups, engaged in social media activities and built friendships on and offline. One of the Community Organisers commented that the "scheme had given local people something to be proud of and a chance to celebrate their young people... something they don't have many opportunities to do".



The Nutty Crafters of Maltby

When the Project Organiser went into Maltby, she met an existing group called the ‘The Nutty Crafters’ who had a passion for craft. They had tried to set up a children’s craft group, but their attempts had failed, as often happened locally with new activities. Members were very disappointed not least because local parents were complaining that there wasn’t enough for their children to do.

As our Community Organisers had made good links with local families, the Nutty Crafters decided to come along to a local Christmas party being organised with Rotherham Federation. Everyone felt able to come to the party, and the event was a huge success. Over 70 children and their parents turned up. Once there, parents and children were keen to have a go at the craft activities. The Nutty Crafters worked with everyone to make some great Christmas Crafts. Even one of the local ward councillors dropped in to have a go. Some of the mums enjoyed it even more than the children and Parents had a chance to get to know the volunteers.

With connections made and mums feeling more confident in their skills everyone was keen for craft sessions to become a regular event. Rotherham Federation supported the group to produce a poster and leaflet the area, and the ‘Little Nuts’ children’s craft group was born. The group now offers children and mums a monthly escape into creativity. The group offers parents a space to relax, develop projects with their children and make new friends. As trust develops both volunteers and members are now beginning to join in with other local activities. Except for a little IT support to produce leaflets (the Crafters’ older volunteers are not into IT), the group is now completely self-sufficient. At the end of 2018, its children’s craft group is still going strong.

Sarah’s Story

Sarah lives in Rawmarsh. In her 60’s, she has few friends, lives alone and until recently didn’t go out much. When the Friends of Rosehill Park left an advert for a community consultation in her local shop, she found herself joining 45 other local people and going along. Before she knew it she was joining in with group activities to clean up and develop the park. Her work with them put her in touch with the newly forming Rawmarsh Runners. Not only did she join them, but she became their Treasurer. Sarah now describes her life as full. She believes people can do things from themselves and that for Rawmarsh, success is self-reinforcing, with success in one group leading to people joining others.



Local people become community volunteers

We planned to... engage 80 local people in active volunteering over the three years of delivery

Large numbers of local people have become volunteers. Many started by just helping out, e.g. serving tea or deliver leaflets, Other people have slowly joined in with either new

activities or been linked by the project to existing groups. Unlike organisations where the volunteering experience begins with induction and training, Rotherham Federation has focused on getting people involved quickly to overcome their anxieties and prove to them they can “do it”. They have kept form filling to the absolute minimum and at all stages engaged volunteers in designing and planning of activities. Throughout they have emphasised that people are volunteering for their area or group, not Rotherham Federation.

How many volunteer and for how long? – In total, some 287 people have volunteered during the project’s lifetime (3.5 times the project target. Dalton, East Maltby, Rawmarsh and Canklow have each generated a pool of some 50 volunteers. 20 volunteers emerged in Ferham, though most only for a short time. The pattern is for groups of five or six volunteers to come together into formal or informal groups focused around a specific activity. Formal volunteers help plan and regularly deliver activities and are likely to take up training to help them run the group and its activities better. The Organisers report that most formal volunteer ‘rope in’ another 2.5 informal ‘helpers’ who are willing to be called in ‘on the day’ to help with practical tasks. It’s common for someone to be a key organiser in one group and then an occasional helper in another.

Slow going in Ferham – Work in Ferham has been slower to get going. The fragmented nature of local communities affects people’s confidence and willingness to volunteer. Many ethnic groups have no cultural experience of volunteering. The project has also found that the level of deprivation locally leads people to focus on issues linked to survival, (e.g. affording food, finding housing). The reality is that many people are not yet ready to get involved, though they are willing to attend public events such as fun days. Those who have ‘stepped-up’ often only offer activities for their own community, e.g. the Slovakian Music Group. The transitory nature of the communities has also been challenging. People are there one day and gone the next, moving for work or to be with family in other northern towns. But the project has found that people are willing to come together more in neutral community venues such as the school and park, and it has attracted volunteers from all communities to help deliver local fun days and craft groups. In the project’s third year one community group has been

“At first it was a bit daunting to be asked what we thought should happen or the best way to do things. We expected to be told what to do.”
Volunteer

“We are starting by persuading people in very fragmented communities that it is safe to come out of the house and join an activity. Many are a long way from volunteering”
Community Organiser



Strengthening Communities
RotherFed

Strengthening Communities Running your Group



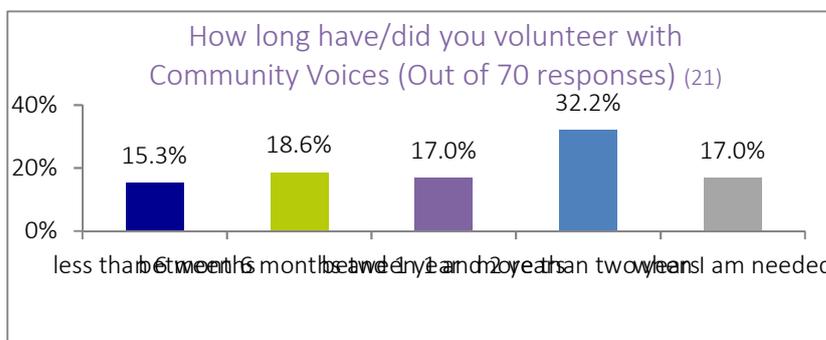
FREE COURSE
Tuesday 17th January 2017 , 10am - 12pm
Springwell Gardens Community Centre
The session will show you about getting organised, arranging your meetings, activities and putting into place your group aims.
Contact info@rotherfed.org or 01709 368515 to book your place

formed by local Asian Women wanting to use craft to bring women together. Local VCES and Faith groups are collaborating in a monthly forum to start to tackle many of the areas entrenched issues and a local church has begun free, weekly, community meals with the support of parishioners and some local volunteers from a range of communities. So while there have been lots of one off activities in the area with high attendance numbers the community is still only taking ‘baby steps’ towards being able to delivery community life. But, the project has shown where the work needs to focus. Support in Ferham will continue in Phase Two of the project, More Voices and Choices 2019-21.

Who are the volunteers? – Project volunteers included people who were already involved with local groups, who are looking for support to do more and do better and people who have never before considered that they had anything to offer the community. The project’s been very successful in attracting this last group. The 70 formal volunteers surveyed for this research came from all project areas except Ferham.

- All volunteered regularly and played vital roles in developing local groups
- 25% were retired, a much lower percentage than the general volunteering profile in most community groups
- 23% described their role as parents or carers who look after dependants
- 32% were working, (12% part-time), 5% were studying so they could get a better job, 12% had long-term ill health suggesting that 15% were unemployed
- 44% of participants said they were now active in other groups including 25 (35%) who volunteered elsewhere. This suggests that 66% of Federation supported activities were local people’s only route into community life.

Nearly half of survey respondents (49%) had volunteered with the project for more than a year. The number of new volunteers (under 6 months) shows that recruitment is active and on-going. Only 6% of volunteers surveyed had left project activities²¹. Overall this suggests high levels of volunteer satisfaction with



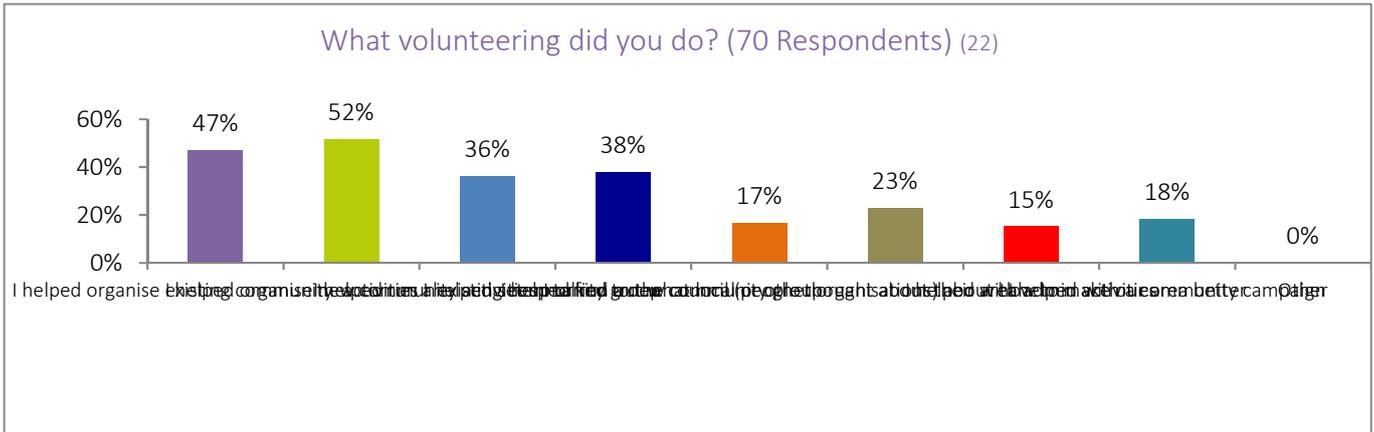
the differences the project is enabling them to fulfil for themselves and their communities. Most people offered at least three different types of support follows: (See chart overleaf).

Breaking Isolation – It’s clear that the project has helped lots of volunteers to get out of the house, join in, break isolation and find a place in their community. Most volunteers offered between 1 – 5 hours a week but a staggering 22% donated over 10 hours weekly, a massive commitment and indication of the value of the work to local people.

- Every single volunteer surveyed said the project had helped them make more friends (up from 67% in the interim survey 2017)
- 86% said it had changed their views about people who are ‘different from them’, (50% in 2017)

²¹ Data taken from Dec 2018 volunteer’s survey with 70 (24%) of all volunteers. 58 of these volunteers were ‘formal volunteers’ who helped plan and run activities regularly. They made up 82% of all the project’s formal volunteers.

- every volunteer said they were more willing to try new things, (up from 63% in 2018)²².



Learning Point- Finding and using volunteers

- Use Listenings to identify people who want to make things different and match them with your own or other organisations activities
- Use your own staff if you have them to meet minimum safeguarding requirements, e.g. for children’s activities so that things can start. But remember to explain that volunteers will need to go on the necessary courses at some point
- Keep bureaucracy and form filling down to an absolute minimum while making sure people do take on important safeguarding messages
- Create a flexible group of volunteers, not everyone needs to be involved in everything. An informal group of people who will help out on the day is just as important as those regular volunteers who help every week
- Even if you are delivering elements of the planning make sure volunteers are engaged in the decisions and understand that they will have to do things themselves if the activity is to happen
- Where possible use existing local community organisations to help you present yourself as a trusted friend to new communities. This will help get things going much more quickly
- Invest in quality marketing. Good quality promotional material reflects your seriousness about investing in local change
- Where deprivation is so high that prevents people from recognising the value of community life focus on the issues that are important to people as a way of gaining trust.

Improved social capital and resilience in very vulnerable communities

Increasing social capital (groups and activities) and resilience (ability to bounce back) in target communities was a key project goal. When these exist, it’s much more likely that strong and empowered communities will develop and sustain themselves, especially when levels of support reduce. We planned

²² End of project volunteer’s survey with 70 respondents – Dec 2018, Rotherham Federation

to do this by supporting the development of new and existing groups and activities which could better meet community need. Also through enabling local people to feel more confident, powerful and in control of their community through jointly designing community plans.

New community groups/organisations developed to meet community need

We planned to... develop 28 new community groups and organisations over three years

What we did – To date, the project has helped its target communities to create 23 brand new community groups, including constituted and informal associations of community volunteers who come together both regularly and occasionally to make local activities happen. After three years of support, all groups are now

self-organising, though ad hoc support is still available through Rotherham Federation and phase 2 of the project, More Voices and Choices. (See appendices for full details).

New Constituted Groups – The project recognised that the lack of existing groups in many target areas meant that new groups are needed if community life is to ‘take off’. But it also listened to volunteers concerns about the responsibilities of running a group and prioritised developing volunteers skills and confidence to deliver activities in early months over the creation of new legal structures. By month 18 it had created five new constituted groups rising to eight by the end of year 3. These groups included:

- **Canklow Rainbow Kids Club** – Mums and toddlers activities, Youth group, Community Fundraising
- **Dorothy Taylor Foundation, Dalton** – Managing a Community Room and providing activities for older residents
- **Nutty Crafters, Maltby** – residents craft group that also runs craft sessions for local children
- **Friends of Dalton Parish Council** – supporting a range of community activity in Dalton
- **Friends of Rosehill Park and Pavilion , Rawmarsh** – Volunteers supporting the local park
- **Birch Park, Ferham**
- **One Voice, Ferham** Asian Women’s Group in Ferham
- **Apollo Street Tenants and Residents Groups (Rawmarsh)**



Wind chimes designed by Rawmarsh Craft Group

New Informal Activity Groups – The project helped create 12 new informal activity groups. Many of these groups deliver a few ‘timed’ activities such as summer holiday activities and Christmas and Easter Parties. Others focus on particular interests such as youth football or craft activities. In time, the Organisers feel some of these ‘collaborations’ will become a constituted group, but most will rightly remain informal groups. They say there is “no point over-complicating community structures”.

- Maltby Mums
- Rawmarsh Community Clean-up
- Barbers Avenue Community Park Group
- Friends of Turner Close
- Valetta House Residents Group
- Dalton War Graves Group
- Ferham Music Club
- New Life Church Maltby Volunteers
- Timeless Together
- High Street Allotments
- Friends of RAD
- Canklow Mums and Toddlers Group

One Voice, Ferham

After 18 months of struggling to engage Ferham’s diverse residents diverse, the project was approached by 12 local Muslim ladies aged 20 – 50. The women wanted to help other women to challenge local hate crime. They had formed a group called One Voice and wanted Voices and Choices to teach them to run it correctly. We provided them with training on safeguarding, first aid community organising and the roles of Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. One Voice has become a constituted group, and a Rotherham Federation member. All members booked onto the Federation’s accredited Community Organiser course in October 2018

Group members are keen to engage women from all Ferham’s communities. To build a cross-cultural network the group started by inviting women from other communities to an end of Ramadan meal.

In recent months the group has struggled as the very positive response it has received from a wide range of organisations has pressured members to achieve objectives they felt they weren't ready for and didn't want. The Project Manager told researchers “ I am incredibly impressed by this group of ground-breaking women. Their approach is very supportive and empowering. While its early days, working with and through the women of Ferham is an approach to cohesion that has a strong chance of succeeding. One Voice’s members now have more confidence and are attending the monthly Masborough Forum to learn how ‘things’ work (*see p.31*). We are keen to continue supporting them and will make sure they can develop at their own pace”.

“The organisers encouraged the local community to come together regularly to participate in run/walking from Rose Hill Park. Our members have blossomed since we started in July. They have built their confidence, made new relationships across all ages and abilities” *Group organiser*



Existing community organisations better able to meet community need

We planned to... support 16 existing community groups to better meet the needs of their local community

What we did – The project supported 28 existing local community groups to better meet local need plus several

Rotherham-wide organisations and statutory partners. This is a 75% over achievement.

Local support focused on building group's capacity to do something new by offering skills, knowledge or access to equipment. Support to larger organisations involved giving them access to community knowledge, spotting opportunities for joint work, using our 'goodwill' with communities to bring them in as trusted providers, and using our Listenings to find and match volunteers to existing groups.

- **Rotherham United Football Club** – Our Listenings in Canklow identified two men who wanted to help deliver community football for children. When we linked them up with Rotherham United Football Club, this additional resource meant the group was able to put on an extra weekly football practise for local children and young people.
- **Dalton Parish Council** – Had always struggled to reach into the grass roots of its communities. By basing our Community Organiser in their offices and working collaboratively with them and the community for over 18 months, we helped improved links between the two, enable them to better support the community's needs and begin to turn them into the local "go to" organisation. We've also helped them form a constituted Friends Group.
- **Rotherham African Drummers** – Have used the Project's community events and fun days to engage people in drumming activities, building confidence, contact different types of community groups and recruit new members from communities who would never have normally crossed the borough to try them out.



Community Easter Egg Hunt at Maltby



Mama Africa - African ladies who formed a Tenants and Residents Group to help other ladies integrate and socialise to reduce isolation

Developing existing groups – Existing groups have particularly taken up opportunities to develop their skills through Rotherham Federation's main training programmes with 70 people taking courses such as bookkeeping, planning events and health and safety and community organising. In addition the project supported several existing informal groups to become constituted.

Partnership Funding – The project has increased the level of activities it can deliver with communities and built community group’s knowledge of community funding, by seeking matched funding from a range of local sources, including RMBC and small grants from local trusts. Communities have also raised their own funds from sponsored activities and jumble and car boot sales. While Organisers initially dealt with ‘the paperwork’, groups soon got involved in setting budgets and talking to stakeholders about their needs. The mums from Canklow Rainbow Kids Clubs secured £700 for their youth club’s room hire costs from RMBC after giving a presentation to council officials. Developing groups’ abilities to apply to small grant-makers is part of the skills set the project developed in its emerging leaders in year three. In total organisers have helped groups bring £18,750, into their activities through fundraising and secure an additional range of gifts in kind²³. All but £1,700 was brought in year 3. Project staff warned about the risks of giving low capacity groups too much money, too quickly. The Manager explained, “new groups need seed money to spend doing small amounts of activity well. The point is to be successful. Getting too much money too quickly can create unnecessary pressures and tensions, and cause new groups to fail”.

Partnership Activity – Themes of collaboration and partnership run throughout the project. Examples include:

- Community clean-ups delivered by volunteers used RMBC waste collection services to collect and dispose of the litter.
- Rotherham-wide football clubs have put on extra sessions using volunteers identified by the project
- Community libraries have hosted events and parish councils have hosted Organisers
- As Rotherham United’s users wanted something different to do they are now using Canklow Rainbows’ skills to deliver craft activity sessions for the football club.

There has been a generous level of sharing from all organisations and a lack of territorialism that has delivered greater gains for everyone. There appears to have been little duplication of delivery with RMBC and other charities. Staff from other agencies adapted and flexed their delivery in target areas, so their work complemented project activities, giving greater gains for users overall.²⁴

Disappointed traditional partners – It’s worth noting that some longstanding Rotherham Federation members were confused and frustrated by the lack of support they received from the project for their regular activities. Conversations with the Organiser suggest that these groups either mainly worked outside the project’s target area and / or had well-established delivery that they did not want to expand. But that said, Rotherham Federation might want to think about how it could ensure these longstanding members better understand how the project’s brief differed from the Federation’s usual work.

Building Sustainability – Building sustainability into the design of new activities has been key to the Voices and Choices approach. It has helped make sure that communities can afford to sustain delivery over the long- term. One community group commented “most of our activities can run through small fees from users and funding activities like jumble sales. Communities feel proud that they can do things themselves and are wary of the obligations that accepting funding from places like RMBC might create. They want to be in control of what they are doing”.

²³ Most smaller activities have covered their costs through small fees to users with the project budget covering some of the costs of larger community celebrations in conjunction with RMBC.

²⁴ This said RMBC staff did note that early in the project there was some duplication as inexperienced trainees were not initially good at telling all stakeholders what they were doing. They noted that this problem has resolved itself.

Pressure to deliver statutory agendas – Several volunteers and Community Organisers spoke of the pressure over-zealous, statutory staff can put on emerging groups to deliver wider agendas. Whilst well meaning and not inappropriate, this pressure can simultaneously come from multiple departments. This can be overwhelming to emerging groups, cause them to over-commit and feel obligated to deliver unwanted functions. Rotherham Federation’s role here has been to encourage groups to step back and think about what they realistically want to do given their time and resources and at the same time manage messages back to statutory partners.

Learning Point- New and existing groups

- Don’t rush volunteers into forming constituted groups unless their activities or need for independent funding requires it. Instead give volunteers time to build their practical skills and confidence, ensuring they are ready to accept and take on board the more formal learning and responsibilities that come with constituted groups.
- When groups are considering becoming constituted make sure they take up relevant training and skills development so they are ready for the formal roles required.
- Support groups to avoid them becoming territorial. Encourage them to see collaboration as a way to deliver more for their community.
- Support groups to be confident enough to say ‘no’ to statutory partners when delivery would either push group volunteers beyond their capacity or take the group into areas of delivery they either are not yet ready for or simply don’t want to do.

Ashwood Primary School, Rawmarsh



An unhappy octopus!

Just before we visited thirty, ten/eleven-year-olds from Ashwood Primary School to deliver a community questionnaire the children had been studying plastic pollution in the sea. When they talked about their area, their main concerns were the amount of litter. They said they wanted to be part of the solution, so we worked with them to arrange a litter pick. The children set up recycling bins around school for plastics, glass and cardboard and put up hand made posters about recycling. On our second visit, they created artworks about clean seas using some of the items they had recycled. The children used these to educate their peers about the impact of recycling and their scheme has now become a permanent part of the school’s waste management. In year three of the project, we have linked them into the Rosehill Park Campaign and the Greenhill Lantern Walk so they can participate more directly in community activities and social action.

Maltby Full Life Church – Extending their delivery

The congregation of Maltby Full Life Church had wanted to do more for local young people for some time. They already ran a local youth club and wanted to put on outside activity days. But they had been put off by worries about safety and the mechanics of organising the day. When the Voices and Choices project set up in Maltby, the Church offered their local organiser a base. While she rarely used the facilities it did improve the groups understanding and trust in Rotherham Federation. So they asked the Organiser for help to learn how to do similar events.

The Organiser said “The group was a lot more capable than they thought, but they lacked the confidence to do something new. I supported the assistant vicar to understand how to plan a children’s outside games event, helping them structure the day, consider issues like staffing, refreshments insurance risk assessment, music and permissions. We supported them through their first day and still lend them equipment. The group now runs 6 sessions a year for about 50 young people and at the end of 2018 is still going strong.



Local people more confident, powerful and in control

We planned to...
support and develop 8
community plans

What we did – We planned to use the information gathered through community Listenings and events to support each of our target eight communities to develop community plans and to begin to deliver them.

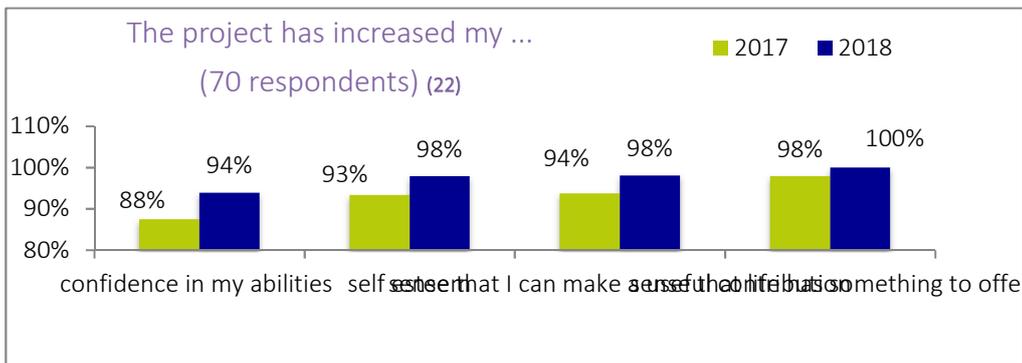
In the first 18 months, progress towards these outcomes was limited. The lack of any critical mass of people who believed that their community could define what it wants for itself limited people’s willingness to engage in activities that can lead to challenge and change agenda. To help break down this entrenched resistance, Rotherham Federation started work in years 1 and 2 by building leaders, who could inspire people to believe in a different future and delivering small scale wins.

The Volunteer Survey (December 2018) showed striking/ life-changing improvements in volunteers’ confidence, self-worth, and aspiration. It’s likely that these gains underpin the project’s low volunteer turnover.

It’s worth noting that performance improved in 2018 even

“Once they have the feedback from Listenings it’s a natural step to say well what are we going to do about it”
Community Organiser

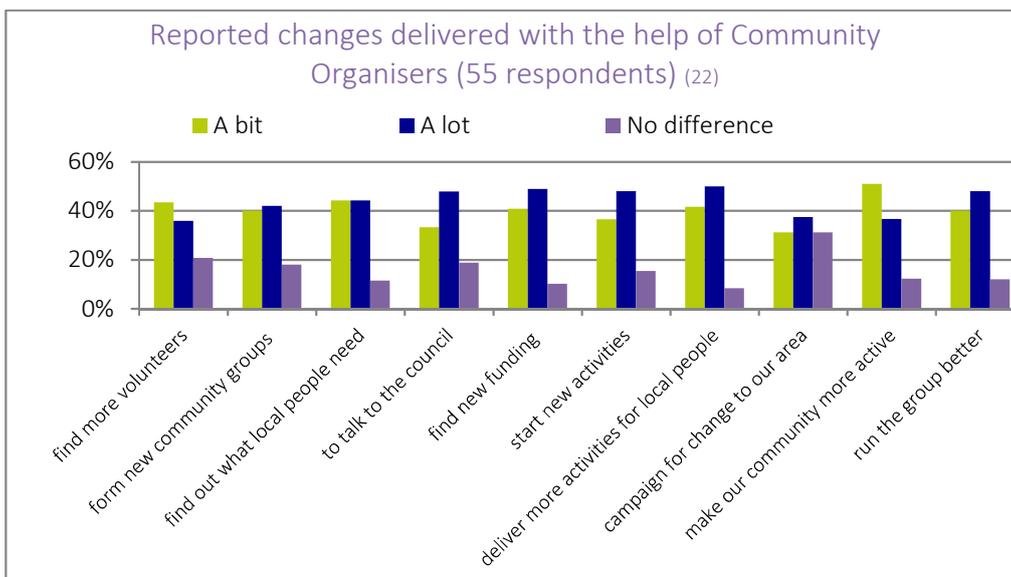
“We are determined to change this community. It has to stop moaning and relying on other people to do things and start doing them itself”
Volunteer Organiser



after the excellent results for 2017. This shows the cumulative impact of the gains that volunteers are experiencing.

The project planned to start delivering wide-scale community plans in year three. However, feedback from both project staff and volunteers found that this is just not viable or even desirable. Local volunteers report that their communities have very little interest in creating large plans.

“Vulnerable communities are simply not aware of their potential and power. Community Organising is the only thing in communities today that is saying you could do this ... and this is how. Even now we get residents asking us why we are helping them” *Community Organiser*



So rather than force communities to go through a technical process for the sake of project goals, Voices and Choices instead supported community groups to identify and address issues that naturally occurred in their work. Most of these campaigns were

small scale but have had a significant effect of the people involved. The willingness of communities to take-up issues and challenge service providers that evolved during year three validates the project’s approach to focus on skill and activity development as a route to capacity building. Across the five project areas ten campaigns have/are taking place. *See page 31 for more information.*

What about the council’s community plans? – In talking about developing community plans, Rotherham Federation acknowledges that RMBC has local community plans for each of our five areas developed as much as possible with local people. However, these are not plans that local people recognise, agree with or even realise exist. Rotherham Federation’s vision for a community plan is a simple, straightforward document that focuses on creating a community change that most local people say they want. The project feels that both the Council’s plans and their own early thoughts were trying to deliver change over areas that were too large for local people to relate to. Vulnerable and deprived

people have a small sense of what is 'local'. Their plans need to relate to the areas they identify with. So while a match between RMBC-led community plans and ones delivered through this project would be great, the Federation has not seen this as something they need to create.

Belief in their own power is coming – Rotherham Federation's slower approach is allowing these leaders to naturally identify themselves and gives them time to develop the skills and confidence they need. More local campaigns have started in the project's last year, and The Federation is confident that the project's groups now have the skills and abilities needed to lead campaigns where they identify there is a need. Active volunteers are regularly engaging with local statutory bodies, e.g. applying for a licence for an event or small scale funding, telling council officers about their activities, arranging for council representatives to attend community fun days, and finding the right person to talk to about an issue.²⁵

Individuals who have taken community organising training now realise that they can empower communities through a logical and manageable process. Already two local groups are delivering their own Listenings. In Canklow where local mums have developed a vision for a new community centre which can support the whole community, and are giving themselves five years to make it happen. Feedback from community groups involved in the project has repeatedly told a story of a growing capacity over time allowed groups to run themselves and their activities effectively. While the project has taken longer to achieve planned goals and achieved gains in less areas than it initially planned, the gains that have been made appear to surpass anything envisaged in the project design. Project successes validate its decisions to extend the period of support to evolving groups and individuals to make sure that the skills and confidence to succeed are properly embedded.

Slower Progress in Ferham – Within this wider success, gains in Ferham have been much slower. The lack of any focal point other than the school, the population turnover, people's widespread distrust of anyone in authority and reluctance to mix with other communities means individuals are very worried about the personal consequences of being more active.

After 3 years there are a few positive gains such as good relationships with the school and church and residents attending events in neutral locations like the park. The Forum and One Voice group show some early progress. But residents are nowhere near seeing themselves as a community with a shared identity. They remain generally unwilling to even help identify the local changes that are needed, yet alone join in with making this change happen.

"It hasn't been easy for the Organisers because some of the communities they are working in are very transient. It's much more challenging to get things going when there isn't a level of current community activity"

Tenant Involvement Coordinator RMBC

"The project 's not a step in the right direction in empowering residents but a leap"

"A year ago these residents wouldn't even volunteer for an afternoon. Now they are running community groups and asking for training"

Community Organisers

²⁵ Based on 20 respondents – Dec 2017.

Learning Point- Community led plans -

- Don't rush to create formal plans. Delivering short-term consecutive campaigns and plans be more achievable than creating large plans which house all strategies for change
- Campaigns must grow out of a real community appetite for change. Imposing a change programme is unlikely to win the involvement of local people, even if the change is needed.
- To deliver community plans you need confident and skilled community leaders. When no such individuals or organisations exist, action plans are more likely to fail. In deprived communities where few individuals have the necessary skills and confidence, it's better to start work by supporting activities that create opportunities for skilled leaders to develop.
- Because every community and volunteer is different, capacity builders need to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to growing community leaders. Volunteers from deprived communities are likely to respond best to developing skills and knowledge through informal, bite-sized learning opportunities and practical experience. Classroom learning should be left until volunteers gain more confidence and self-belief.

People from vulnerable communities lead change

People from vulnerable communities develop skills to lead change

We planned to... support 28 emerging community leaders to improve their skills and capacity to represent local people

Every single volunteer surveyed in 2018 said that the project had increased their belief that people can make change for themselves (26)

What we did – Identifying and developing emerging community leaders has been a key project theme in all areas. 62 volunteers each attended at least two courses from the Federation's training programme for emerging community leaders 124% over the project target. Popular courses included in first aid, child protection, fundraising, health and safety, safeguarding and food hygiene. 54 attended multiple, informal, skills support. There is no question that the project has improved volunteer's skills and capacity and the project has more than doubled the target number of community leaders it needed to support.

Improving Volunteer Skills – Organisers helped volunteers to develop their skills through one to one mentoring, demonstrations and opportunities to gain practical experience. Structured interviews showed volunteers appreciated this close support, which was as much about building confidence and esteem as it was teaching hard skills. Survey results identified that volunteers gained a range of skills, particularly skills linked to communication. Examples include:

²⁶ Volunteer's Survey Dec 2018, Rotherham Federation

They help people come forward to volunteer

They help local people share experiences and build their confidence together

They helped us understand about funding and getting that early

Community groups and volunteers recognise and value the skills we get at Rotherham Federation

They bring people into the library who then join the library. About 80 joined after the last Christmas event

The fun day brings different people together and gets them mixing and working

We collect cans and do jumble sales to raise money for things

When the kids activities went monthly, 5 of us parents said we can do that... so we did

It's given me the confidence to realise what my community needs and what can be done

Rotherham Federation give good training and support to everyone

I did a survey in the village to find out what people wanted

We are going to get this community making its own changes

We want to make the village a place people want to come to live, rather than feel they have to live

The project has helped me understand who I am as a person rather than just a package of skills that goes to work

Nothing would have happened without the Community Organisers and no one's views would be being heard

Our volunteers said...

Supporting Dalton Parish Council to engage more effectively with communities

Parish Council's, the bottom tier of the council structure look after their local area. All parish councillors are volunteers. Serving the deprived communities of Dalton and East Herringthorpe, Dalton Parish Council had been struggling to establish links into the grassroots of its community 'for ages'. Its Clerk said the council knew more was possible but that most local people didn't understand what they did or how to work together.

The Community organisers changed this. Their Listenings provided information about what the community wanted, and close working with the Parish Council helped to start things happening. In the project's first 18 months the Organisers worked with existing and new local groups. They:

- got permission from the Parish Council for local volunteers to use the football field to run a weekly ball activity for local children. The Federation re-marked the pitch
- supported an informal group of volunteers to clean up the local war graves, sourcing spare tools and material to do the job from local people
- helped residents challenge a plan to close the community room in the Dorothy Taylor Centre,. This is now used for weekly activities by residents of this sheltered schemes
- found volunteers to run bingo sessions, children's parties, an Easter Event and publish a quarterly community newsletter.

One significant joint venture has been to involve the community in renovating a local outside play area. The council had been 'saving up' for the refurbishment for some time, but the Parish Clerk said that community involvement really improved the design. It made sure that the equipment was what the community wanted including making sure it was accessible for disabled children. The council hopes that the involvement of the children and parents in the design will prevent the new area from being vandalised.

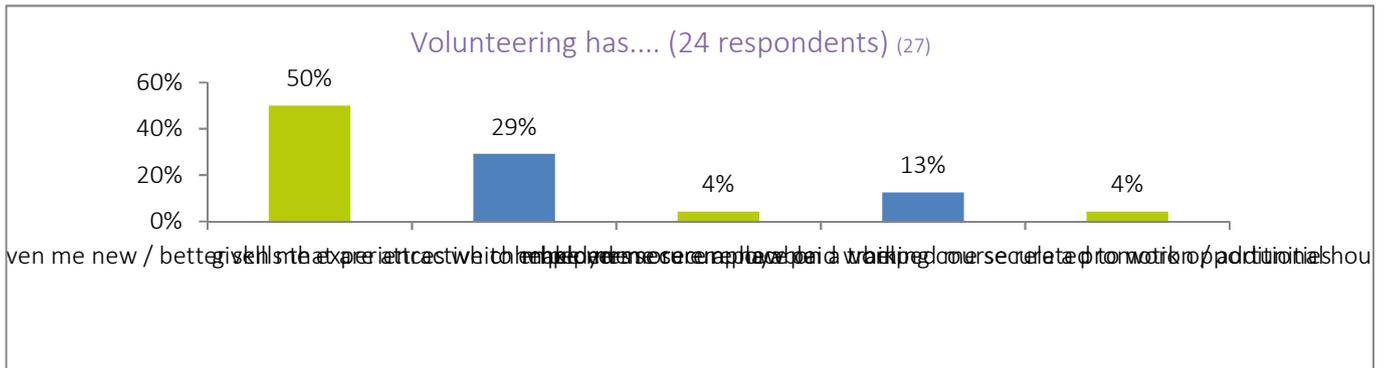
The Parish Clerk told researchers that "small groups of local people are now getting together informally to do things themselves. She said, "Our organiser was great. He helped us change things. People are now popping into the council more and talking to us. They realise we are here and know what we do.



Examples of improved volunteer skills include:

- planning activities (95% of volunteers improved their skills)
- running community groups (90%)
- communicating with local people (94%)
- communicating with local groups and organisations (89%)
- encouraging and supporting others 98%). See appendix 4 for full details²⁷.

Increased Employability – 52 (74%) of project volunteers were of working age. 24 (34%) said they were seeking work/better work, either now or in the future. All 24 respondents felt the project had improved their employability in some way.



- 66% of volunteers said that they were better able to represent the views of local people to Rotherham organisations
- 84% said they better understood the way the council works
- 88% said they feel able to challenge decisions that effect them ²⁶

More Community Organisers in Rotherham – The project has definitely increased the capacity of local communities to listen and speak for communities. During the project, 52 people from target communities accessed the Social Action Hub’s Introduction to Community Organising, Purpose, Practice and Principles (Accredited at L3). Whilst outside the scope of the project a similar number attended this training from other parts of the borough. Collectively these two groups are helping create a critical mass of skill leaders who can together change the culture of community empowerment across Rotherham. These ‘volunteer organisers’ are now working to lead change back in their target community and being mentored by their organisers. Interviews with project volunteers identified a determination not just to create more community activity but also to increase the community’s voice and ability to influence change.²⁸

What others said?

“Volunteers’ confidence is often very low, and we try to make sure that they don’t fail in early tasks. They quickly develop the resilience they need to take things over”
“Community Organiser”

²⁷ Volunteer Survey, Dec 2018, 70 respondents

²⁸ Source Rotherham Federation training data 2015-18

“I’m feeling quite confident about organising the fun day. Vickie is going to show me how to do everything. She says I can do it so I expect I can. It would be different if Rotherham Federation weren’t there to help with the first time” *Volunteer Organiser*

“Ten people have taken community organiser training with another ten booked on courses soon to start” *Senior Organiser*

“Groups are being given the information and tools required to represent local views” – *Co-ordinator, Statutory body*

“They provide insight and local knowledge as well as access to the communities. They help us hear, listen and act on what communities want to create change”. *Development Officer, Yorkshire Sports Foundation*

Local people and groups challenge decisions that effect them and representing their views key stakeholders

We planned to...

- support 92 residents to local challenge decisions that effect them
- support 12 groups in total to lead work challenging decisions on behalf of their community

What we did – The project has supported the delivery of 10 local campaigns, slightly short of the target of 12. These campaigns involved 150 residents (65% more than the project target) in making change to their community or challenging decisions that affected them. Four informal groups formed around these issues.

Dorothy Taylor Centre – In Dalton, the project successfully supported 32 residents from a local sheltered housing complex to prevent the closure of the community rooms they used for social activities. By organising a joint meeting with the Local Authority residents were able to explain why activity at the centre had recently dropped off. They described the important contribution the centre made to their lives, and with our support, formed a ‘proper group’ to run the centre and deliver a new programme of activity.

Canklow Housing Development – In Canklow over 20 Listenings identified concerns about a new housing development. In response, the project arranged an event to allow challenge RMBC's assumptions that the development would not place stress on already pressured local infrastructure. The meeting allowed local people to feel 'heard' and the local councillor began to work with local people to lobby for more resources for local GP's and schools.

Canklow Play Area and Park – Listenings in Canklow also identified concerns about the state of the local park. The project helped local people organise a community clean-up and lobby the council to improve local play facilities. We supported residents to arrange a meeting between local council representatives, the local councillor and local people. This gave residents a chance to raise their worries about the run-down play facilities and feelings that the park was unsafe. The local councillor is led a small group of residents to pressure the local authority for improvement. While nothing has yet changed, residents again feel heard and have built trust in their local councillor.

Valetta House Residents, Rawmarsh – The 32 residents of this sheltered scheme were dissatisfied with their accommodation. The project helped them meet with the Housing Association to share their concerns and discuss possible improvements. We also supported the group to organise some shared social activities.

Friends of Green Spaces, Rawmarsh – The project helped this group of volunteers form a group to improve local green spaces. As well as supporting community clean-ups, members have met with their local councillor to find out how to get their issues onto local agendas.

Friends of Rosehill Park, Rawmarsh – This action group campaigned to create a play area in their local park. They held a community consultation event with 45 people, identified the need to install disabled inclusive equipment and got RMBC to agree to fit the play equipment and maintain the area if the group bought the equipment. The Federation hosted a successful bid to the Scurrah Wainwright Trust for £3,000, and the group raised a total of £18,000 from the Area Housing Office, a local church and a local business. The new play areas will open in March 2019. The group's community organiser feels this will really help to convince local people that they can make changes. She reports that RMBC now sees the group as a key local partner. The group is now planning to create a tennis court and an outdoor gym. Visitor numbers are up, the park's tea rooms host a local 'knit and natter' group and the local community running group uses it several times a week.

Ferham and Masborough Forum – Ferham's Community Organiser describes the lack of social and community life in Ferham as standing in an empty field and shouting "Hello is there anyone there". In response to the lack of local services and community action in the Ferham and Masborough, local VCSE organisations have set up a monthly forum to improve communication, and plan how to meet needs linked to the area's deprivation and poverty. They are planning a local 'summit' combining consultation with a job and skills fair. Already several organisations, including The Federation are collaborating with St Paul's Church to use surplus food provide free meals and friendship to people in poverty and isolation. The group is also looking at how it can create

**Canklow Play Area,
Canklow Road
SITE VISIT**




— — — — —

**Wednesday 19th July
3:15pm - 4:15pm**

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Boston Castle Ward Councillors and officers from RMBC Greenspaces and Neighbourhood Partnerships will be at the play area on Canklow Road to listen to the views of residents and discuss any issues residents have for the area

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If you are unable to attend but would like to discuss the play area or raise any issues, please contact Helen on 07557 312941 or e-mail helen.thorpe@rotherham.gov.uk



87% of emerging community leaders are more willing to represent the views of local people to Rotherham Organisations

64% of volunteers surveyed said the project had helped their community campaign for change

“They are successful precisely because they don't wear a suit and a badge”

Neighbourhood Housing Officer RMBC



community allotments and bring advice and early help services into the area to offer the practical help local families need.

Barbers Avenue, Rawmarsh – This group ran a successful online campaign to provide a new play area/park with the support of Voices and Choices and a local councillor. They are now at the planning stage and waiting for a start date for the building work. The new play area should be completed by Spring 2019.

Friends of Turner Close – The Friends of Turner Close (unsupported older people's housing) felt their community 'centre' had safety issues and needed repainting. So we supported eight of the residents to lobby the council for improvements. In response, RMBC arranged for this work to be delivered by people on community rehabilitation schemes. Residents re-launched the centre and now offer coffee mornings and lunch clubs for 36 local older people. With RMBC's help with transport costs, residents are funding their own activities through £1 activity charges. The local councillor now regularly visits the group and helps members with any issues.

The Walker Museum, Masborough – A local history group is linking up with communities in Masborough to create a new purpose for the now derelict Walker Museum and its surrounding land. Cited in the centre of Masborough, most local people have no awareness that this was originally a celebrated local building, a social space and community bowling green and was built by unemployed men in 1724. In Phase Two of the project we plan to deliver Listenings connected to the museum and test ideas for it to become a park or community space.

Challenges to Challenging – It's not easy to create communities where people feel safe enough to 'have their say' and challenge bureaucracy. In all project areas, local people are wary of 'people in suits with clipboards' if not downright hostile. There is little or no trust in RMBC staff or other 'helper' agencies including local support organisations such as charities. Trust is often only won on an individual basis, and few community organisations have a community mandate to speak for local people. Local people simply do not take part in consultation events arranged by the council. The reticence of local people to be seen to challenge authority has led the project to focus on building the confidence and skills of emerging community leaders. This approach is paying off. By delivering activities that the community want and value, these leaders are beginning to be seen as 'people who know what's going on'.

Out of 26 community leaders:

- 24 felt more local people are joining in with activities (88%)
- 23 thought more local people feel able to speak up about what they want in their community (85%)
- 25 thought more local people believe they can change their community if they work together (96%)

Survey responses, Volunteers Survey 2018

Stronger Communities In December 2018, we asked 54 community leaders and volunteers if they felt their community was stronger because of the changes facilitated by the community organisers. 46 said yes (85%). 37% said they felt their communities were a lot stronger.

Organisers report that groups in all areas but Ferham, are successfully achieving their goals and helping some parts of local communities to become more confident. More established groups are finding and training their own volunteers and reporting that local people are turning to them for help with issues. The organisers feel that the volunteers are thriving on the trust local people have in them. They are embedded into networks like local VCSE structures and feel able to challenge statutory bodies if issues arise. Most importantly, if they need help, they know where to go to get it.

Recognition of the Value of the Community Organiser approach by stakeholders – While the Federation has always been well-regarded by local strategic stakeholders across Rotherham, feedback from stakeholders suggests the project has helped transform the organisation into a key partner. Voices and Choices is held in high regard and stakeholders, particularly statutory services recognise its approach as innovative, effective and worthy of duplication.

You do have to go to people before they go to you. I think this (the Community Organiser Approach) is the way forward to empower people at grass roots level and give them more control over their lives. *Local Councillor*

“Ferham’s Community Organiser has gone a long way to tackle the trust issue. Many immigrant groups don’t like the formality of statutory agencies. As a migrant herself she is trusted more and local people are more willing to accept her advice It’s a very good decision to stay in those areas”. Being remote from the council is part of the organisers’ strength. They are definitely achieving more for communities. The partnerships make them very special and give partners a route straight into the community”.

Neighbourhood Housing Officer, RMBC

“Working with the Community Organisers has been very positive. They have very open conversations and are able to find out what the community want. Their approach is innovative and creative. They bring something different to communities and have a valuable role in community activism. They can deliver community action and campaigns that fall outside RMBC’s brief. In Maltby and Herringthorpe they have supported the development of emerging leaders and helped new groups take baby steps towards activity by getting the basics right. They definitely add value to our work with communities.”

Tenant Involvement Coordinator RMBC

“The project’s helped us to connect with the most vulnerable, hard to reach and challenging to engage with. The Organisers provide use with a bridge to local knowledge that allows our programmes to be the as successful as they can. They give us access to communities and help us hear, listen and act on what communities want to create”.

Development Officer, Yorkshire Sports Foundation



Challenging Housing Plans

As part of a borough-wide plan to develop more affordable homes in Rotherham, RMBC is developing over 80 new family homes in Canklow. Our Community Listeners had identified that residents were wary of this change. They felt their worries had not been listened to during the planning process and didn't trust the messages the council was putting out about the change. This said local people were wary of challenging the Council and only one person went to RMBC's consultation event. So Canklow's Organiser arranged another meeting and supported ten local mums to put their concerns to the council. She also fed back concerns she was hearing on the street. Local people were worried about:

- reports that the school had space for more children when local children were already having to attend schools a bus journey away. These buses were unreliable and often made children late
- the lack of local post boxes, delays for GP appointments and poor bin collection
- levels of rubbish, unsafe local parks and unfit local play areas
- the lack of any community centre and the shortage of children and young people's activities.

As a result of this initial meeting, this ad-hoc group of parents met with the local councillors and school again. The local councillor began advocating for residents at local meetings, work began to amend the planning application to reflect residents' views and pressure the development company to refurbish the local park. A small group formed to work with the councillor to address the lack of local provision for children and young people.

In year 3 the developers Waite Bros. Builders Ltd started conversations with Canklow Rainbow Kids Club about refurbishing the sports changing/meeting facilities that they used for their activities. No progress has been made on improving the local park. Residents still have little trust in RMBC, but they have begun to realise that there are routes that they can use to raise concerns, and they can work together to try and change things themselves.

Sonia and Canklow Rainbow Kids Club



Sonia says she used to be unconfident, shy and nervous, someone who was happy to hide in the background. Her ten-year old son was also shy, but had really enjoyed The Federation's Canklow summer activities. He was heartbroken when these ended so Sonia joined other mums to ask the Federation for more. When the Federation explained the money had run out, the mum's asked if they could run the sessions themselves. Sonia can't believe the journey this has taken her on.

Rotherham Federation explained that as the group was working with children the mum's would need some basic skills and training to prove they could deliver activities safely. They would also have to find funding. Sonia said, "the Federation made it clear if we wanted activities we would have to make them happen ourselves (with their help)". Over eight months these five women formed Canklow Rainbow Kids Club, shadowed their local Organiser, and took over the practical elements of the activities while their Organiser attended activities to ensure safety. The mums gained health and safety, first aid, safeguarding and food hygiene qualifications. They raised money through fun runs and jumble sales and worked with their Organiser to win a grant from RMBC for their rent. Initially, Rainbows ran a fortnightly session for 30 children but this became weekly in 2018.

The Club is thriving. The group now deliver an annual programme of fun days and are planning to additional craft sessions for players at Rotherham United. Estimates suggest that half the community attended one of their activities in 2018. These mums have become change makers. They want to change the local culture of 'moaning but doing nothing' and are looking for more local people to join them. Their 5-year dream is to develop a community centre that is open to everyone and provides help, friendship and something to do. Local people regularly talk to them about community issues, particularly if they are about children. Their Community Organiser says 'Rainbows' have given the community something to be proud of.

And Sonia – She says this opportunity has changed her life. She is more confident, has delivered public talks and challenged local stakeholders. She's taken accredited Community Organiser training and bookkeeping on top of the other courses and is now the group's Treasurer. Despite being dyslexic, she involves herself with all the paperwork. She leads any catering activities and is currently looking for more funding for the group. Sonia says her son has picked up on her newfound confidence and has become much more outgoing. She herself has new friends in her life, new skills and new dreams. When her children are older she wants to use her qualifications and training and find work as a community organiser.

Increased Organisational Capability and Strength

As part of its big lottery commitment, Rotherham Federation delivered an organisational strengths review in spring of 2016, and again in Spring 2017. It used this to inform the spending of a £15,000 Reaching Communities capacity building grant and other development funds.

What the review found – Rotherham Federation’s strengths review found the charity was strong in the areas of strategic planning, sustainability and track record/capability but the organisation needed a more robust approach to ensuring quality, particularly in the areas of evaluation, capturing outcomes, marketing and securing opportunities.

“The whole organisation is now much more focused on delivering meaningful differences to communities and finding ways to demonstrate that change has occurred”
Rotherham Federation’s CEO

What we did – As a result of this review, Rotherham Federation drew on both its funds and a Reaching Communities Capacity Building Grant to:

- deliver an organisation-wide review of its Evaluation Framework with management and senior staff, completely redesigning its outcomes and indicators, specifying what it needed to measure and how to do this across a wide range of delivery services
- improve its ICT infrastructure, installing a server network, developing a proper CMS system for all data and training all staff to work the new systems
- deliver an early progress report from an external community organiser which comments specifically on the way new Trainees were working and compares their work with the ‘pure’ Organiser model
- as a precursor to the Voices and Choices project, Rotherham Federation brought in external experts to increase the knowledge of a range of key staff and partners on the principles and processes of Community Organising and Community Development to ensure everyone had a good ground in these basic approaches
- brought in external support to develop a marketing strategy and created organisation-wide brand guidelines

Rotherham Federation is stronger and more empowered – The Interim report found that, while retaining all the elements that are valued by communities, Rotherham Federation is a more professional organisation.

Influence – The charity has more influence with key stakeholders, particularly RMBC. It is being engaged more often to broker conversations between statutory departments and communities and is now seen as a ‘can do’ organisation in communities.

Evidencing outcomes – Rotherham Federation’s approach to evaluating is now much more consistent across the organisation. The Federation's CEO reports that staff are more skilled at identifying and measuring changes made in communities. The charity has methodical systems it can use to measure

change, using language that makes sense to communities and stakeholders. This hard evidence is helping all partners realise the value that Rotherham Federation's work brings to community growth. At a time of cuts, this is helping the charity protect its position and income. In particular, the charity is collecting equalities data more effectively. It's also assisting the Federation to target services to communities in the most need of support.

A sustainable training function – Rotherham Federation has always delivered training to volunteers and community groups, but this project has substantially supported its development towards setting up its training function as an accredited social enterprise which can cross-subsidise its Rotherham based community organising activities. It now:

- regularly delivers Co Ltd Community Organiser training for the Social Action Hub across Yorkshire and the Humber
- provides training workshops for Co Ltd, Yorkshire wide
- offers accredited qualifications (Open Awards) through Holistic Partnership

To achieve this, it has made a considerable investment in its staff, especially its Senior Organiser; supporting her to gain the Award in Education (formerly PTTL), Level 3 in Undertaking End Point Assessment and to study towards a Diploma in Community Development and TAQA (assessors qualification). This growing training role is bringing more diversity to Rotherham Federation's delivery and income and is increasing its sustainability.

More skilled staff – Rotherham and Rotherham Federation now has more Community Development Workers who understand and are trusted by its most deprived communities. These staff are now highly skilled and attractive to a range of organisations. The challenge to the Federation now is to retain them within the organisation.

Community Organising – The project has helped The Federation become much more skilled at delivering the Community Organiser approach. It is now confident in when and how to vary the 'pure' model. Regular reflections amongst staff have become an integral part of responding to community need and working with volunteers and project findings are feeding into the organisational business planning processes. This is strengthening the charity's credibility with RMBC across a wide range of direct delivery contracts. RMBC's own Community Involvement Team is incorporating learning from our approaches into their own ways of working and reporting.

Developing a skilled pool of Community Organisers

The lack of local community development workers, particularly people trusted by local communities meant the project had to start by growing its own staff. The project planned to employ and train 4 Trainee Community Organisers in year 1 and then employ them as qualified Organisers in years 2 and 3. However, turnover meant that to date the project has employed a total of 11 trainees, 8 of whom have qualified as community organisers.

Who were the Trainees – The trainees were all unemployed or under-employed adults who had life experiences that reflected the challenges faced by many project users. They included people who had:

- failed at school
- histories of substance and alcohol misuse
- long term unemployment
- struggled to succeed in education because of caring responsibilities
- minority Ethnic backgrounds
- histories of mental ill health and minor offending.

All Trainees had some prior community volunteering experiences and a passion for making communities stronger. That was the primary requirement for the job. Recruitment was innovative, enabling and robust. It was designed to support unconfident and vulnerable applicants to compete with prospective trainees invited to a workshop style event where they could have a chance to engage and find out more before a formal round of interviews.

Qualifications Gained – All Trainees have taken a blended programme of core courses, plus training that met their particular needs. Individually Trainees had access to over 40 online RMBC courses. They collectively gained:

- Open Awards – Introduction to Working with Communities
- Certa – Level 2/3 Award in Community Organising – Practice, Purpose and Principles
- Certa Level 2/3 Certificate in Community Organising
- RMBC online Safeguarding Children from Abuse by Sexual exploitation, Safeguarding Adults, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace
- Personal safety for Lone Workers, Emotional Resilience and Stress Management, Managing Budgets, IT skills,
- Courses including Risk Assessment On-Site and At Work, and Mental Health Awareness; Staff and Volunteer Relationships
- HABC Level 3 Award in First Aid at Work – Highfield
- Level 3 Award in Education and Training (PTLLS) – Northern College



Trainee organisers celebrate graduation

“As a manager I have to slow down, step back and realise the trainees are on a learning curve”
Senior Organiser

“The development I got was phenomenal”

It’s given me a career path and opened doors.

“Before Rotherham Federation I did not see ‘work’ as something which could benefit people. The placement has definitely made me realise I’m in the right sector”

“I couldn’t have made this change to my life without the project”

“I didn’t know communities could come together to be heard and change their lives before Rotherham Federation”

From the beginning I’ve been given responsibility and trusted to use my ideas, imagination and creativity to do the job well. That’s empowering”.
Community Organisers

- L2 Certificate in Understanding Behaviour that Challenged – Leicester College accredited
- Open Learn Open University Facilitating group discussions
- Post Graduate Certificate in Education

How have Trainees benefited? – Whilst delivering gains to the Trainees were not primary project outcomes, it's clear that they have received a major benefit from its activities. Feedback from nine of the eleven employed trainees reported improvements in confidence, self-esteem, practical skills in organising and delivering community activity, improved skills in listening and speaking for communities and better knowledge of how to work with stakeholders and lead multi-agency work³⁰. Trainees recognised that the training and experience they have received has put them on a path to a professional career. Since graduation, the final employment trajectory of the trainees has been diverse.

- Two ex-trainees now work as community/project officers in South Yorkshire's voluntary sector, where their Organisers skills are central to their work
- One graduate stayed with The Federation as a team leader and has since become part of the Federation's management team
- Two trainees still work for the Federation as full-time organisers
- Three have found employment elsewhere but outside community work.

Management Perspective – The Project Manager echoed the trainees' perception of the positive gain they have made in skills. She reported however, that the use of trainees did initially slow progress more than expected as they simply had to give trainees time to 'learn the job' before they could start supporting groups to deliver, provide activities and take on issues. This was one of the reasons early delivery focused on delivering a range of community engagement activities (fun days, summer holiday schemes etc.).

Organisers assessed that their average confidence and self-esteem increased from 3 out of 10 to 8.5 out of 10 during the project ²⁹

"I can now confidently interact with people from any background and profession to carry out the job"
Community Organiser

The Emergency Event Box – Learning from our Mistakes

The trainees were running two similar events on consecutive days. At first lots of practical things went wrong, mainly due to a lack of co-ordination and allocation of responsibilities amongst trainees. The trainees were very downhearted by these failures. Back in the office we put a full Action Reflection Cycle in place to enable trainees to learn from what had happened and plan for contingencies more effectively. Amongst other things the learning led to trainees developing an Emergency Event Box – for all those things that will go wrong. It's now a standard piece of kit and one Rotherham Federation encourages community groups to develop.

²⁹ Volunteers Survey 2017

³⁰ Two trainees were not available for the researchers to question



To make sure trainees properly planned delivery and only took forward viable activities, Rotherham Federation implemented 'protocols of proposals' and approvals for planned activities that quantified projected gains, budget, staffing and potential risks before any activity started. This, plus a positive attitude towards learning from mistakes, is one of the reasons why the project has been so successful despite using such inexperienced staff.

Using community hosts – Plans to base Community Organisers into the buildings of local hosts were discontinued in most areas after about 6 months of delivery. Some hosts were putting pressures on inexperienced staff to deliver the host organisation's agendas. Other organisers found that they didn't really need to use the office facilities but appreciated the strategic links the host offered them. Rotherham Federation feels that having access to a local host who can offer its Organisers a local base still has value but it feels Rotherham Federation now realises the need for a more careful advance agreement about roles and purpose of the placement.

Using trainees with challenging life experiences – Managers are positive about using trainees with challenging life experiences. They report that communities find it easier to initially relate to and trust such staff and are more willing to engage in activities they provide. They are pleased to give such staff positive opportunities, however, also reported that some Trainees have needed significant support and supervision to make sure they progressed through the early months and that this placed unexpected demands on management time. The project had to dismiss two trainees for misconduct because of their reluctance to change unprofessional lifestyle behaviours and follow organisational conduct requirements.



Learning Points – Trainees

- When taking on trainees it's important to plan early activities in a way that gives trainees time to gain practical experience as well as add value to communities. Without this, trainees' confidence will be undermined and their development slowed
- For the same reason it's also important to provide the trainees with appropriate levels of supervision and practical mentoring. The process of delivering needs to incorporate steps of approval and checking to ensure planned deliveries are viable and well-executed
- Using learning from practical activities, particularly where mistakes have happened can be a really valuable way for the whole team to learn how to make improvements
- Managers need to recognise that any trainee scheme will have people who fail but when taking on trainees who also face life challenges they need to be willing to offer additional support and supervision
- When matching Organisers with local hosts care needs to be taken to make sure hosts are seen as accessible by the whole community and able to appropriately use and support Organisers. Otherwise, some sections of the community may come to see Organisers as unavailable to them

Section 5 – Voices and Choices, What Next....

Summary of achievement

Voices and Choices has proved the Community Organiser approach is an effective way of empowering very deprived communities to start to build community life. In Dalton, Canklow, Rawmarsh and East Maltby local people have begun to believe they can make change in their communities. Community volunteers are delivering new activities and have learnt the 'Organiser' approach. They have formed new groups, new community leaders and volunteers organisers are emerging and community-led campaigns are developing. In Ferham locals are beginning to peak out of their doors but the barriers caused by lack of language and confidence, cultural difference and distrust of bureaucracy means the project still has a very long way to go.

What Next?

Dalton, Canklow, Rawmarsh and East Maltby – In its final year, the project embedded the emerging practice identified in its interim report in Dalton, Canklow, Rawmarsh and East Maltby creating more confident and capable leaders. To make sure community growth remains on track in Phase 1 areas, Phase 2 of the project 'More Voices and Choices' will offer Phase 1 groups the safety net of ad-hoc support. However, direct delivery in Phase 1 areas except Ferham will stop, making sure communities now 'stand on their own feet'. Rotherham Federation's wider community development work will pick the engagement of local groups into borough-wide networks and partnerships. The Charity will make these groups they are involved in the borough-wide initiatives that will help inform continuing change. This should achieve the interim evaluation recommendation to make sure emerging groups don't fail once intensive support is removed.

Ferham – In response to interim evaluation recommendations to prioritise continued support in Ferham, Phase 2 of the project will link work in Ferham with neighbouring Masborough which shares many similar challenges. Without this, the small beginnings that the project has created are likely to fade away quickly. The lack of any services, deep distrust of 'official's and resident focus on activities that 'aid' survival means that the Federation needs to adopt a different approach in this area and feedback from statutory stakeholders suggests the area needs some form of permanent community presence. These will help take collaborations forward and act as a trusted place to base services. With austerity continuing at the local level, that's a big 'ASK', but maybe one that the new forum can focus on. As a minimum, the current Organiser approach needs to be continued for several more years.

East Herringthorpe, East Dene – Some work has happened in these areas over the last year to raise the profile of community life and activity, and the library is emerging as a community focal point. While these areas are also fragmented and diverse, the success of this early activity so far suggests these communities are more ready to take advantage of the Organiser approach. These neighbourhoods have become a target area for phase 2 of the project, which is due to start in January 2019.

Work in other areas – The issues in Dinnington and Masborough which initially brought them into this lottery bid, remain unaddressed, and they are now covered by Phase 2 of the project. The commitment of The Big Lottery Fund's Reaching Communities Programme to Rotherham needs acknowledging here. So

does the project's success in winning another three years of funding, not something that is easily achieved and one that implicitly acknowledges The Federation has 'got it right'.

What could improve?

The final evaluation identified a few additional suggestions of how project activity should improve. Most of the learning identified in the interim evaluation has already been acted upon. Improvements not previously mentioned include:

- **Updating strategic partners** – Strategic partners wanted to be advised more quickly about new Federation initiatives so they could make sure their own staff were better able to collaborate effectively. In response, the Federation created a specific stage at the start of new work which covered liaison with partners
- **Working collaboratively** – Delivery partners felt it was essential that the project maintained its collaborative approach, using its trusted status to enable statutory partners to engage more effectively with communities about the change they want to see. Feedback from the project manager said that success here in year three varied. The impact on austerity cuts on both some statutory and VCSE partners has led to some partners behaving more territorially at the grass-roots level, through Rotherham Federation's commitment to collaboration still remains at the core of their approach. In addition the project found that its function to protect and enable developing groups to grow at a pace they could cope with often sat in conflict with the desire of statutory bodies to use community groups to deliver their agendas. The project continues to support statutory colleagues to be more aware of how their needs do not always match those of community groups and at times can sit in conflict.
- **Limit staff turnover** – Rotherham Federation responded to interim evaluation recommendations to limit the number of trainees in place at any one time by adopting a more measured approach to their use. It remains committed to developing community workers with lived experience of targeted communities but plans to employ no more than two at any time to ensure it's focus is not directed away from the community into trainee development. Phase 2 of the project will employ experienced staff.

What else....

- **Resourcing the Federation** – the project's existing strategy has always been to embed the groups developed through the project into Rotherham Federation's core support. This will make sure that project gains are not eroded and groups continue to grow. Absorbing 53 additional groups into mainstream delivery will have resource implications and the Charity needs to make sure it has the capacity to deliver the work this will generate.
- **Evidencing Outcomes** – Rotherham Federation's Interim Evaluation found that the Charity needed to develop more effective ways to measure its longitudinal impact and ensure consistent use of its monitoring framework. By year three the Federation had produced and trialled monitoring tools and built their use into day-to-day work. The Charity has purchased nationally recognised relationship management/monitoring software and is in the process of training staff

and embedding this into its performance management and impact monitoring systems. The use of more experienced staff in future will also improve its future monitoring delivery.

The final evaluation found that further improvements could be made in the gathering and recording of gains and that staff were still failing to give monitoring/impact work sufficient priority. It was still also struggling to identify how it could measure impact in its target communities in a meaningful way. Moving into Phase two of the project The Federation needs to make sure that:

- all staff understand and have bought into the gains that impact evidence can make
- it has designed realistic and achievable evidence and impact monitoring plan that all personal then deliver
- its monitoring database is used to its full capacity
- it gathers baseline evidence early on in its work so that the impact of the project is easier to quantify.

The organisation also needs to:

- **make sure groups deliver Listenings** – Embed the need for relevant community groups to deliver Listenings as a core skill right from the beginning of the project. This will increase capacity and ensure this basic activity is one that can continue without Federation involvement in the long term.
- **share learning** – Create ways for groups that have succeeded in phase 1 to share learning in year 2, perhaps through a buddy scheme or project networking meetings

Jana's Story

Jana is a refugee from Jordan. She was very shy and had little involvement in life outside of her home. However, she was persuaded to help provide the community meals at St Paul's Church, to make sure the Church was providing meals that local people would find attractive. When it was obvious her skills surpassed those of other helpers she began to help to organise the catering and teach other people about her culture. Jana is now more confident and feels valued for the skills she has. She's helping tell other refugees about the meals and encourages them to join in.

Appendix 1 – Research Participants

Role	Organisation
One-to-one Interviews	
Tenant Involvement Coordinator	Neighbourhood Partnerships, Adult Care, Housing & Public Health, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC)
Officer	Dalton Parish Council
Group Leader	Canklow Rainbow Kids Club
Group Leader	Maltby Model Village Community Association
Councillor, Rotherham East	RMBC
Library Manager	Mowbray Community Library RMBC
Neighbourhood Housing Officer	RMBC
Project Manager	Rotherham African Drummers
Tenant Involvement Co-ordinator	RMBC
Development Officer	Yorkshire Sports Foundation
Co-ordinator	RMBC
Organiser	Rotherham Pride
Volunteer survey – 90 responses	
External stakeholder survey – 11 responses	
Volunteer Video Interviews – 2	
Staff Interviews – 9	
Feedback from groups 12	

Appendix 2 – Summary of Voices and Choices Targets

Outcome	Indicator
Outcome 1 Very vulnerable communities will improve their social capital and resilience as a result of developing new community groups and organisations	New community groups/organisations developed to meet community need
	Existing community organisations better able to meet community need
	Communities feeling more confident, powerful and in control
Outcome 2 More people from vulnerable communities will be more involved in community life, enabling more cohesive local communities	People living in deprived areas will become community volunteers
	Local people contributing to community visions
	Local people taking part in new community activities
Outcome 3 People from vulnerable communities will develop skills to be better able to lead individual and community change more effectively and sustainably	Community leaders engaged with improved skills and capacity to represent local people
	Local people better able to participate in / challenge decisions that affect them
	Local groups / organisations actively representing the views of local people to key stakeholders
Outcome 4 Rotherham Federation will increase its capabilities acquire supporting tools and used these to deliver its outcomes more effectively and sustainably	Within three months the organisational strengths review has been conducted
	In year 1 the organisation will have bought in expert support and tools as relevant to develop capabilities as prioritised by the strengths review

Appendix 3 – Lists of New Activities and Groups Supported

The project has worked with 51 different groups and organisations over its lifetime. Most of the new groups created have been informal and focused around volunteers stepping up and identifying with the delivery of particular events. They include:

New groups Year One – on-going support provided in subsequent years

- 1) Maltby mums
- 2) New Life Church, Maltby volunteer groups
- 3) Nutty Crafters, Maltby - Constituted
- 4) Little Nuts, Maltby
- 5) Friends of Dalton Parish - Constituted
- 6) Dorothy Taylor Centre – Constituted
- 7) Ferham Conversation Club
- 8) Ferham Music Club

New Groups Year Two –on-going support provided in subsequent years

- 1) Canklow Rainbow Kids Club - Constituted
- 2) Canklow Mum and Toddler Group
- 3) Friends of Rosehill Park and Pavilion, Rawmarsh – Constituted
- 4) High Street Allotments, Rawmarsh
- 5) Rawmarsh Craft Group
- 6) Valetta House Residents Group, Rawmarsh
- 7) Timeless Together
- 8) Friends of RAD
- 9) Dalton War Graves Group
- 10) Rawmarsh Library Volunteers

New Groups Year Three

- 1) Barbers Avenue Community Park Group, Rawmarsh
- 2) Birch Park, Ferham – constituted
- 3) Rotherham Runners
- 4) Apollo St TARA, Rawmarsh Constituted
- 5) One Voice, Ferham – Constituted

Existing Groups Year One – on-going support provided in subsequent years

- 1) Echo
- 2) Dalton Parish Council
- 3) Chinatown TARA, Maltby
- 4) Maltby Model Village
- 5) Canklow Community Connections
- 6) Mowbray Volunteers and New Arrivals Group, East Herringthorpe/East Dene
- 7) Ferham School Association
- 8) Mama Africa, Tenants and Residents Association

Existing Groups Year Two – on-going support provided in subsequent years

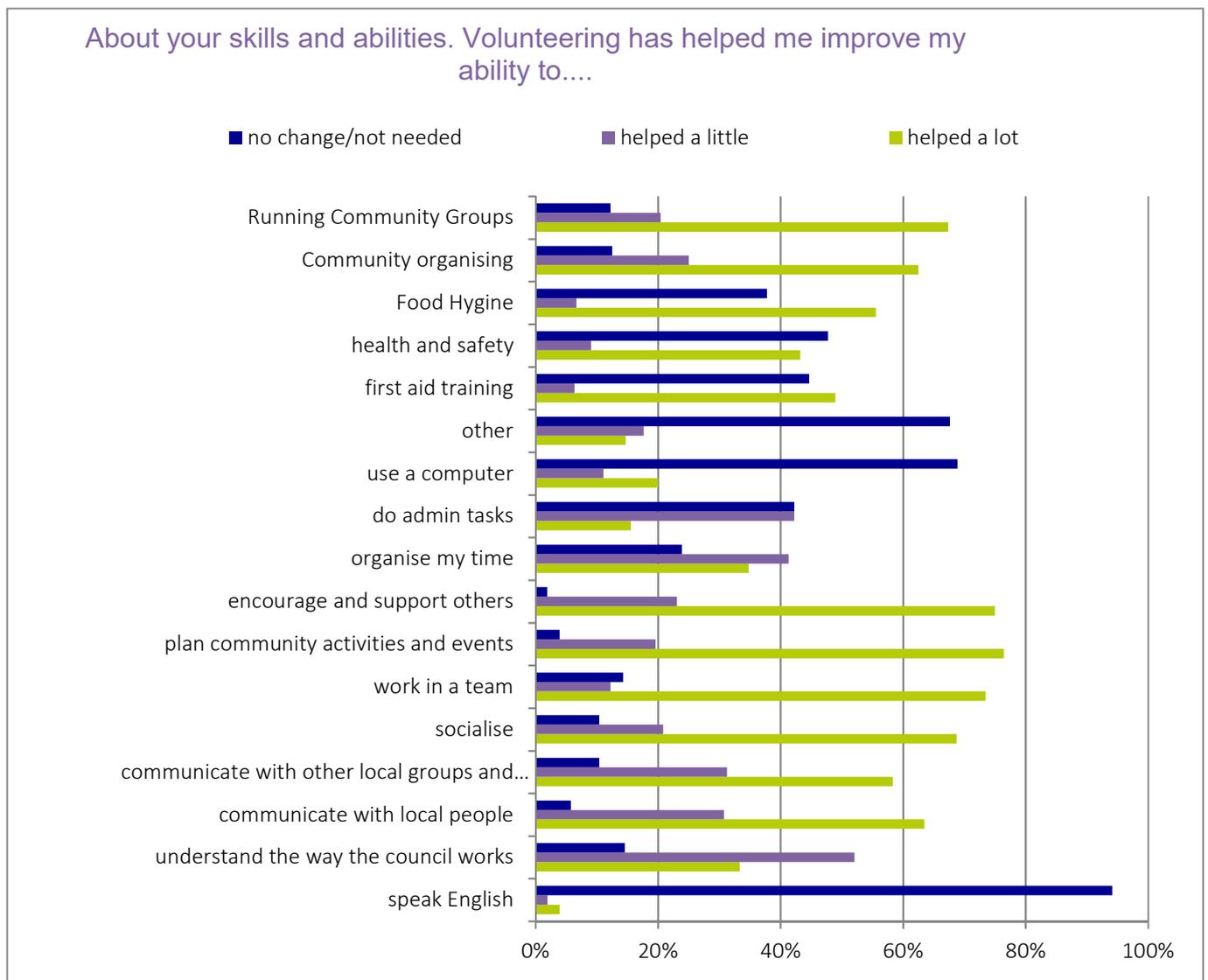
- 1) Friends of Rawmarsh and Parkgate Green Spaces – Constituted
- 2) Parents Voice – St Josephs, Rawmarsh – Constituted
- 3) Henley Community Centre/TARA, Ferham
- 4) Knit & Natter, Mowbray

- 5) Lings Monday Club
- 6) Polish Society Group – Library, Mowbray
- 7) Liberty Church – Ferham
- 8) Red Cross –
- 9) Mix It up
- 10) Social Eyes, Rawmarsh
- 11) Rawmarsh Bingo Group

Existing Groups Year Three

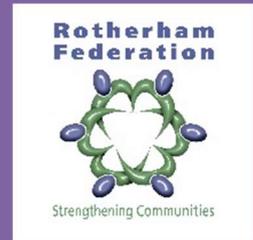
- 1) Arc Church
- 2) Better Dinnington
- 3) Friends of Turner Close, Rawmarsh
- 3) High Nook, Dinnington
- 4) Howard Street TARA, Constituted
- 5) Clean-up and Create Volunteers
- 6) Greenhill Lantern Walk Volunteers
- 7) St Joseph’s Primary School PTA, Rawmarsh – Constituted
- 8) Rotherham Rocks Facebook Group

Appendix 4 – Volunteers skill improvements – from Volunteer Survey Dec 2018



Rotherham Federation

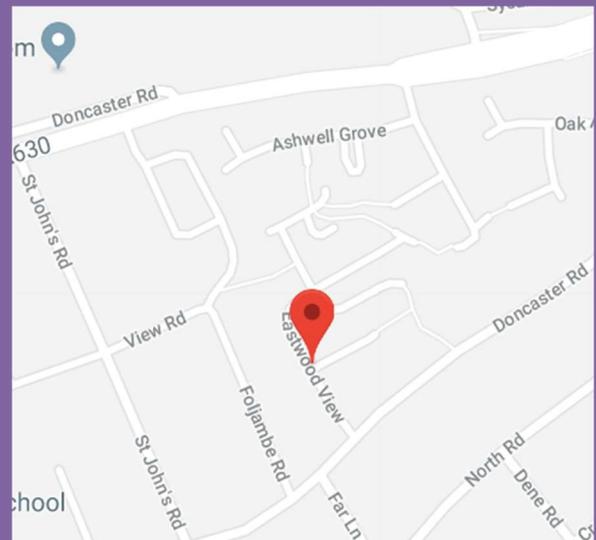
Strengthening Communities



Our services include

- Support to engage with RMBC
- Support to develop community voices
- Money Management Drop-ins
- Training for community groups
- Services for community groups
 - Support with your accounts
 - Community grants
 - Quality awards for community groups
 - Safeguarding briefings and sample policies
 - Support to develop new groups
 - Community organiser training

Where to find us



Become a volunteer

We offer a wide range of volunteering opportunities. If you want to...

- make friends
- develop new skills
- gain new experiences
- help your community

... get in touch

Rotherham Federation of Communities Ltd | Springwell Gardens Community Centre | Eastwood View | Rotherham | S65 1NG Phone 01709 368515 | Email info@rotherfed.org

Judith Courts

INSPIRING SUCCESS

Report produced by independent community consultant Judith Courts on behalf of Rotherham Federation of Community Association in January 2019

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