Evaluation of the On-line Development Project

carried out by Bufferzone on behalf of the Community Foundations in Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire and funded by the Blagrave Trust

Purpose

The purpose of this work was to assess the impact of the On-Line Development Project on the sustainability of voluntary sector groups in Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire.

Many voluntary sector groups face cuts in funding, particularly from statutory sources but also in the reduction of available grant funds. The Internet and social media offer many opportunities but also many challenges to small local community groups.

To build awareness of the issues facing local communities and to raise the profile of the local voluntary sector and therefore the support it receives, each of the three Community Foundations received funding from the Blagrave Charitable Trust to employ an On-Line Development Officer for a period of three years. The purpose of the role was to build awareness of the benefits of using social media and on-line giving by local charities and community groups.

The purpose of this evaluation was to look at what was good and what was bad about the project and allow the Community Foundations to inform any future activity if planned.

It also looked at whether the Community Foundations delivered against expected outputs and what constraints and opportunities they faced in doing so.

Finally the Community Foundations wanted a resource that could be shared within their counties and with all other Community Foundations in the UKCF network concerning how groups can engage with on-line resources and the benefits and pitfalls of doing so.

Bufferzone is an independent consultancy working for over 16 years with and for the voluntary and charitable sector in the South West, specializing in those areas considered 'hard to reach'. www.bufferzone.org.uk

Summary

Looking at on-line giving alone, the overall picture was that those groups with social media expertise found on-line giving more useful than those without. However, there was still a large proportion of groups with expertise that found on-line giving of no use. The small and medium size groups with expertise were more likely to find on-line giving useful than not. Of those groups with no expertise at all most found it no help. Most of the groups with no expertise were small to medium size groups.

Relative to income however, the amount raised on-line by the small groups was a much larger proportion of their annual income and had a greater impact on whether they survived or not

On-line giving, though felt to be of no use by a greater proportion of the small and medium size groups, had a bigger impact on their survival than the large groups. For the large groups it was useful, but not essential. For an organisation with an annual income in the millions, 20k is useful but they would survive without it. For small group £1,000, or just a few hundred, would make the difference between surviving for another year or not. Hence, although the numbers were lower, the impact was much bigger.

The biggest benefits overall from the project were for the smallest groups, not in the on-line giving, though this was important, but in the first steps taken in starting or improving their use of social media.

With the use of social media, again the difference for small and medium groups could be substantial. Not in terms of money raised initially but in terms of presence, supporters and delivery of their service. As their on-line presence grows they will be in a better position to raise funds in the future.

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Limitations

The project started over 3 years ago, 5 years for Berkshire, and personnel changed both at the Community Foundations and the groups involved. A lot happened in that time and memories are not always reliable. The number of groups referred to us for this project did not always align with the numbers previously reported and may have excluded groups that did not continue with the project, or not include groups that did not sign up to Local Giving.

Although the on-line development project brief covered all on-line giving platforms as well as social media, Local Giving had been active in Berkshire and Hampshire since before the project start. This may have skewed the results between the counties.

There was some difficulty in the adoption of one project by Community Foundations in three counties which operated in different ways. The original funding brief was to set up an On-line Development Worker post 'for localgiving.com providing skills for local groups to access on-line giving'. However, the Blagrave Trust's funding allowed for a broad interpretation and implementation of the project and thus a different approach in each county. Two of the Community Foundations in particular are keen to continue to provide support to the groups involved.

Berkshire Community Foundation (BCF), having been the trial area for Local Giving, continued throughout to assist new groups in signing up to Local Giving as well as *'working with the groups so that their websites, social media and fundraising work together.'* With the Blagrave project, groups were also introduced to other on-line giving platforms and supported to make best use of them.

Hampshire had been partners with Local Giving so promoted Local Giving as an on-line service. However their Blagrave project was about getting groups online and using social media for online giving and not just Local Giving and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation (HIWCF) helped groups to gain the necessary skills to get online and try out social media.

At the start, Wiltshire Community Foundation (WCF) ran workshops to explain in detail what groups have to do to access social media and drive traffic to on-line fundraising sites, not exclusively Local Giving. The project shortly became focused on offering the tools and knowledge needed to make use of all social media, for fundraising but equally for other benefits such as raising profiles and recruiting volunteers.

Methods

We carried out a short on-line review of relevant research and other documents to identify any similar work carried out. This was not a rewarding exercise and although a plethora of often confusing and unclear Social Media advice and guidance was found, no similar project was identified.

Telephone/face to face interviews were conducted with a random sample of voluntary sector groups involved in the project in each county and with staff at the three Community Foundations and the Blagrave Charitable Trust.

Interviews were supplemented with an internet search to discover existing use of social media by the groups involved.

The interview script

We conducted interviews with 87 groups and 5 Community Foundation and Blagrave Trust staff with some follow up email contact to clarify information. We used topic boxes, to allow as natural a conversation as possible, keeping to the information we needed to gather whilst allowing the respondent to add information that they felt was important and/or relevant.

The full interview content and process, for groups and for Community Foundations, can be seen on page 35.

The evaluation

We looked for aspects of on-line giving and social media that groups and organisations found useful, and why. We looked at the size of group, ranked by annual income, at whether they had the services of someone with social media/IT skills, and whether they remembered having received training. We also compared groups by county as each area had approached the programme in different ways.

We divided the groups or organisations in two; large being over 50k pa income and small or medium being from £0 to 50k pa. There were 42 groups in the large category and 45 in the small to medium. The highest income per year was £10,000,000 and the lowest £0. There were 5 organisations with annual incomes of over a million and 13 groups with incomes between £0 and 5k.

The groups and sample size

Groups by county

We received information from each Community Foundation regarding groups that had been involved in their programme. Both Berkshire and Hampshire provided lists of groups which had been involved with Local Giving. Wiltshire however provided a list of groups involved in training and advice, not just those that signed up to Local Giving.

The total number of groups referred to this work was 608, fewer than the original estimate of 750. We took a random sample of 20% (121) of the groups from each area which gave us a response rate of 15% (87).

No group refused to take part. Of those groups which we could not contact some may have ceased to exist. However, they may have changed contact details, names, locations and we cannot say for certain which no longer existed and which were simply very hard to reach.

Total samples

County	Total groups	20% sample	Groups that responded	Actual %	No reply/not found
B	245	49	36	15%	13
H	190	38	24	13%	14
W	173	34	27	16%	7
Totals	608	121	87	15%	34

Groups by county and size

County	B	H	W	Totals
Total large	17	13	12	42
Total small/ medium	19	11	15	45
Total sample	36	24	27	87

Here it should be noted that there were no groups from Wiltshire in the very top band of large groups, those with annual incomes between £1,000,000

and £10,000,000. In the very smallest band, £0 to £5,000 per year, most groups were from Berkshire and Wiltshire.

As a percentage of each county's sample, both Berkshire and Wiltshire had more groups in the lower band than the larger, with Wiltshire having the highest percentage in the lower band and Hampshire the highest proportion in the larger band.

Large groups – income from £51k to £10,000k pa

County	Total groups	% of sample
B	17	47%
H	13	54%
W	12	44%
	42	

Small and medium groups – income from £0 to £50k pa

County	Total groups	% of sample
B	19	53%
H	11	46%
W	15	56%
	45	

The three Community Foundations engaged with the project at different times and in different ways. The initial two year pilot with Local Giving ran in Berkshire with the focus on signing up as many groups as possible, with quantitative targets. Local Giving also worked in Hampshire prior to the start of the Blagrave Trust funded project.

The three year project across three counties through the Community Foundations was funded by the Blagrave Trust with the one uniting theme of sustainability. It was felt that with increased competition for a decreasing pot of grant funding, on-line fundraising could be a way for groups to market themselves and raise their own funds. Each Community Foundation was able to develop and evolve the project in ways they found fit.

In Berkshire *'We wasted time just signing up and not helping them. Without help they do not use online fundraising or progress.'* At the time they were additionally trying to meet the requirements of the SAF funding. BCF later changed its focus to one of more understanding of groups and their needs. They offered training and support and encouraged groups to 'think differently' and to take a broader view of fundraising.

Hampshire also felt that *'In the long term (on-line giving) is a powerful way for small groups to raise money, to move away from rattling tins and raffles. It's critical, vital, for small charities and groups to learn how.'* They provided information, advice, training and encouragement about technologies and *'got the message out there. We were not just selling Local Giving'*

Wiltshire's ethos has been to create social media opportunities. It was up to the groups what they did with those opportunities. They wanted to increase capacity and awareness overall and provide the tools they needed. They saw the project as being about recruiting volunteers and raising profiles as well as fundraising. *'It's about being encouraging, you <u>can</u> do it, that they have a worthwhile story to tell.'* They offered training and on-going one to one support.

As there are different histories, timescales and approaches to the project, a straight comparison of on-line giving ratings between counties will be misleading.

The results

On-line giving

The groups used a wide range of on-line giving platforms and sometimes were not sure which ones they used. The most frequent confusion was between Local Giving and Just Giving. The larger organisations often used a wide range of platforms and some of the smaller groups also used a variety of ways for people to donate.

Other sites used were; Just Giving, Virgin, btmydonate, Ammado, CAF, Charity Checkout. Groups also used payroll giving, Text giving and PayPal. Most groups had linked Local Giving or other platforms to their websites, although a few had not and most of these did not realise they were listed on Local Giving. Some larger organisations self-managed donations via their own websites. Other ways of raising funds via websites were games such as Bingo and Lotteries and the sale of products.

Reasons for using platforms other than Local Giving were that they were cheaper and reached a bigger audience.

The replies from groups when asked if on-line giving was useful fell into 3 categories; 1 very useful, 2 of some use, and 3 no use. We used these to rate the groups' experience of on-line giving.

No use - no benefits, financial or otherwise, and not worth starting or continuing

Some use – some benefits though nothing substantial but worth keeping on for now

Very Useful – on-line giving had been very beneficial and they would definitely continue its use.

Totals - on-line giving rating by group size

Group income/size	Number of groups that found on-line giving;			
£k pa	Very useful	Some use	No use	Total groups
1,500 – 10,000	3	1	1	5
500 - 1000	2	2	2	6
101 - 350	0	7	9	16
50 - 100	3	4	8	15
Total large	**8**	**14**	**20**	**42**
20 – 50	2	8	11	21
5 – 10	1	3	7	11
0 – 5	4	1	8	13
Total small/medium	**7**	**12**	**26**	**45**
Total all	**15**	**26**	**46**	**87**

This shows that 46 groups found on-line giving of no use and slightly fewer groups (41) found on-line giving very useful or some use.

Twenty six of the smaller groups found on-line giving of no use, whilst 20 of the larger groups found it no use.

Given the sample size, these are not large differences. However, amongst the larger groups a similar number found it useful (22) as those that found it no use (20). Amongst the smaller groups there is a slightly larger difference with 19 finding it useful and 26 finding it of no use.

The groups with income under £5K were of particular note. These were the ones who may have benefited from Local Giving as this was the one site which they could use without being a registered charity. However, the majority (8/13) said it was of no use for them.

Expertise

We looked at whether groups had the services of someone interested in or knowledgeable about social and on-line media. This varied from professional teams with social media and fundraising experts to someone, a volunteer, group member or part time staff, who had a personal interest and used social media already, to a novice who was just picking it up; *'We muddle along.'*

We rated social media/IT expertise as expert, adequate or none.

None - The novice or unskilled may have learnt how to open on-line accounts and update them but it took a lot of time and effort and they needed help when faced with changes or the unknown; *'Our skills are very basic. The site was setup by a volunteer but now she has left and we don't have the password and can't update or change it.'* They did not work to a plan and sometimes came unstuck.

Those with 'adequate' skills used social media themselves and were accustomed to it. However, they were accustomed to personal use rather than for the promotion of a charity or the raising of funds. Some were very enthusiastic but quite chaotic. *'The trustees don't have a clue but do know of facebook. Put in place by youths but the turnover is high so it's never the same people. They all do their own thing and are not aware of others and new youths start up other bits. They just go with the flow'.*

The experts were often in professional teams with experience and knowledge in the use of on-line platforms for promotion and fundraising. Some groups included individuals with these skills, from running their own IT business for example or from previous work. They used agreed strategies for the most effective and coordinated use of social and other media.

On-line giving, group size and expertise

Comparing the large and small/medium groups and their assessment of on-line giving, there was no significant difference: just slightly more of those in higher income bracket groups found online giving useful and more in the small group category found it of no use at all. However, those that found online giving very useful tended to be clustered amongst the largest and the smallest groups – 5 at each end.

For the 5 groups at each end of the size spectrum, those with professional fundraising teams were able to incorporate on-line giving into an overall fundraising strategy and to use multiple on-line giving platforms. The small/medium groups were those that were able to raise small amounts of much needed funds via one online source.

Although many groups did not know how much they had actually raised on-line, the smaller groups were more likely to be aware of every pound raised. Amounts mentioned by the very large groups were in the range of 20k. For smaller groups the amounts were usually between £300 and £1,000, or one of £6.25.

Relative to income however, the amount raised by the small groups was a much larger proportion of their annual income and had a greater impact on whether they survived or not.

The higher income groups tend to have the professional, paid, social media and fundraising teams. However, having expertise, whether a paid professional or a keen volunteer, did not guarantee the group finding on-line giving useful.

On-line giving rating and group size summary

Rate	very useful	some use	no use	Total groups	% no use
Total large	8	14	20	42	48%
Total small/m	7	12	26	45	58%
Total all	15	26	46	87	53%

Expertise summary

Expertise	Experts	Adequate	None	Total groups	% no expertise
Total large	29	10	3	42	7%
Total small/m	19	13	13	45	28%
Total all	48	23	16	87	18%

On-line giving rating with expertise

Rate	very useful	Experts	Adequate	None
Total large	8	7	1	0
Total small/m	7	5	1	1
Total all	**15**	12	2	1
Rate	some use			
Total large	14	11	2	1
Total small/m	12	6	4	2
Total all	**26**	17	6	3
Rate	no use			
Total large	20	11	7	2
Total small/m	26	8	8	10
Total all	**46**	19	15	12

More than half the groups (46/87) thought that on-line giving was no use for them.

Of those that found on-line giving either very useful or of some use, most (37 groups) had either expert or adequate help. However a similar number of groups with expertise (34) found on-line giving of no use.

Of those groups with no expertise at all (16), 4 found on-line giving useful or some use and 12 found it no help. Most of the groups with no expertise were small to medium size groups (12) and 10 of these found online giving of no help.

Expertise, size and usefulness, by percentage

	% those **with expertise** (number)	% those with **no expertise** (number)
Group size	who found **useful**	who found **useful**
Large	100% (8)	0
Small/medium	86% (6)	14% (1)
All	93% (14)	7% (1)
	who found **some use**	who found **some use**
Large	93% (13)	7% (1)
Small/medium	83% (10)	17% (2)
All	88% (23)	12% (3)
	who found **no use**	who found **no use**
Large	90% (18)	10% (2)
Small/medium	62% (16)	38% (10)
All	74% (34)	26% (12)

As the numbers are small the percentages must be viewed with some caution.

The overall picture is that those groups with expertise found on-line giving more useful than those without. Similarly, a decreasing percentage of groups with no expertise found on-line giving useful, from 26% of no use to 7% very useful

However there is still a large proportion of groups with expertise that found on-line giving of no use; an average 90% of groups with expertise found on-line giving very useful or of some use, whilst 74% of groups with expertise found it no use.

Of interest is that large groups with expertise were almost as likely to find on-line giving of no use (90%) as they were to find it useful (average 96%).

The small and medium size groups with expertise were more likely to find on-line giving useful (average 85%) than not (62%)

This could reflect that the income that small groups could raise on-line was a greater proportion of their annual income than that of the very large groups. It may also reflect the reasons the groups gave for finding on-line giving useful or not.

If we look at why groups found on-line giving no use, the main reasons were the cost and lack of capacity. Those that found it helpful were those that were able to link on-line giving to campaigns and events and promote it via other social media and thus boost their income.

Whilst having expertise may have helped groups to determine whether on-line giving was useful for them or not, having no expertise often prevented groups from making full use of on-line giving.

Why on-line giving was useful and why it was not

Of those groups that said that on-line giving was either partially or very useful, most comments (12) were about the benefits of boosting income from planned events, sponsorship and specific appeals.

> *"We run campaigns when match funding comes up. We link it all together with all our social media"*

> *"It's useful for specific items like equipment and to promote the charity. Small numbers but when match funding comes up we put it on facebook so people viewed information all together. It helped top up to our target amount."*

There were 7 comments about income raised.

> *"We get so much back the £72 is worth it. It's worth the investment. We started this year, raised over £1,000 in one night which coincided with a fundraiser – got £300 through grow your tenner."*

> *"It helped us get started raising precious funds which helped get the group off the ground."*

> *"It will be very useful in future as grants get harder to find"*

The on-line presence was equally valued for the promotion, enquiries and contacts it generated (7)

> *"We didn't think it was appropriate for our club but were surprised that we raised some funds and got some enquiries through the site too"*

> *"We did receive anonymous donations and nice messages."*

> *"It's good because donors can leave messages and we can thank donors on site"*

> *"We were spotted by Comic Relief on Local Giving and were invited to apply for a grant and subsequently received £27,000 over 2 years. Without the presence on Local Giving we definitely would not have applied or received it."*

Only three mentioned that it was good for those that were not registered charities, three mentioned match funding and gift aid, and 4 said it was easy to use. *"It's easy to do – people just click on the link."*

Of those groups that said on-line giving was not useful, most had been tempted by the fee free first year and by match funding. Lack of skills was not the reason given for not continuing with on-line giving. Only three groups mentioned this as most found it a simple process to sign up to. The main reason given was lack of income raised and being too expensive (21).

> *"We signed up for Local Giving but it was no help and after the first free year we made about £6.25 after paying the fee."*

Four other themes were repeated;

They had tried on-line giving but were struggling with the workload and had no time to do the planning and promotion necessary to make on-line giving work. (10)

> *"It takes far more man hours to get in lots of donations of £10 than it does for signing someone up for a monthly standing order"*

> *"We do not have the time to promote and it's not worth it unless you do"*

> *"We can't compete with larger organisations who have dedicated staff to do this stuff, both on-line and fundraising. We're not very successful; don't have the time to develop a presence."*

The service offered was not helpful, the match funding was now set too low and sudden announcements of match funding left them with no time to develop or promote the opportunity. (9)

> *"It's not worth the effort now. We tried one morning to get all the trustees together to log on to Local Giving and do the match a tenner. It took so long to do it that the feeling was, next time we'll save ourselves the trouble and just donate £20 in the first place."*

> *"It's not terribly well set up for the visually impaired and isn't easy to update. I'd rate it as a 6/10 for usability."*

Their main user group and supporters were not on-line due to low income, age or disability (6).

> *"Not very useful. Our clients are mostly over 80 on low incomes."*

> *"Many of our members are on low incomes and few have computers. One family has just had their phone cut off"*

Their supporters preferred to donate direct or didn't like going on-line (6).

> *"It's a barrier for known donors who don't see why they should go through an on-line site."*

Other issues were that they weren't the kind of organisation people donated to (2) and that it generated too much 'junk mail'.

Of the 46 groups that said on-line giving was no use to them, 10 had not signed up to any online giving platform. One of these groups was in Berkshire and the remainder in Wiltshire. This may reflect Wiltshire's wider aims of increasing groups' capacity and the wider range of group information forwarded for the study.

Eight of these groups had annual incomes under 20k and the two other had incomes of 25k and 114k.

Six groups said they did not need on-line giving as they raised enough income in other ways. Two groups plan to sign up in the future. The two remaining groups were both very small with older retired members and no IT skills. Both of these groups would like someone with expertise to help them and one was also the only group which did not use any social media.

On-line giving rating by county

We compared the groups' rating of on-line giving between counties.

Rate	very useful	B	H	W
Total large	8	4	2	2
Total small/m	7	2	4	1
Total all	**15**	**6**	**6**	**3**
Rate	some use			
Total large	14	6	6	2
Total small/m	12	6	3	3
Total all	**26**	**12**	**9**	**5**
Rate	no use			
Total large	20	7	5	8
Total small/m	26	11	4	11
Total all	**46**	**18**	**9**	**19**
Total groups	87	**36**	**24**	**27**

This chart shows that in Berkshire the groups were split 50/50 between those that found on-line giving very or of some use (18) and those that found it of no use (18).

In Hampshire a larger proportion of groups thought on-line giving was useful (15) against that did not (9). In Wiltshire, most groups thought on-line giving was of no use (19) with only 8 finding it useful.

This reflects each county's approach to the project with Wiltshire's development of groups' social media as well as on-line giving, Berkshire's development of groups' capacity plus their initial signing up of groups to Local Giving, and Hampshire's concentration on on-line giving.

Training and advice received

The comparison of training and advice provided by each county must be viewed with some caution. Although training was offered in all three counties, the project started over 3 years ago and in Berkshire some groups were involved in a trail project around 5 years ago. In that time groups' personnel have changed and memories are unreliable.

BCF is keen to point out that 'All groups were invited to join group training sessions and all groups were offered the opportunity of one to one training on multiple occasions.' HIWCF also state that they carried forward their training programme right up to the last month of the project.

What was of note was that groups know and remember individuals who have helped them, frequently giving names in Berkshire and Wiltshire. Although there were some changes at the start, both counties have had a consistent provider of training and advice who were remembered, and much appreciated, by groups.

In Hampshire, there were frequent changes in staff throughout the project. Moreover training was provided with the local CVSs and groups did not recognise the Community Foundation as the provider. Those groups that did remember training said this was provided at the start of the project only. In the other two counties personal support was provided continually by the same person though in different formats. Berkshire's main source of on-going support was via an emailed newsletter as well as offering one to one support. Wiltshire also provided these but as well as one to one sessions and support visits following social media workshops.

Training and advice stated as received by group size

	Training/advice	None	Total
Total large	19	23	42
Total small/m	20	25	45
Total all	39	45	87

This shows that there was no significant difference between the provision of training and advice stated as received for large or for small to medium sized groups although overall there were slightly more groups which said they did not receive training compared to those that did.

Comparing provision between counties however shows the difference between the counties.

Training and advice stated as received by groups by county

	Large			Small/medium	
	Total groups	**Groups trained**		**Total groups**	**Groups trained**
B	17	7	B	19	6
H	13	1	H	11	2
W	12	11	W	15	12
Total	**42**	**19**	Total	**45**	**20**

	The % of groups trained, by county	
	large groups trained	**Small/medium groups** trained
B	41%	31.5%
H	7.5%	18%
W	91.5%	80%

A higher percentage of training and advice was stated as provided to larger groups, except by Hampshire which provided more to the smaller groups than larger.

How useful was the training and advice?

Training and advice varied between how to sign up and use Local Giving and how to use all facets of social media. In brief, the Berkshire and Hampshire groups reported training on how to set up on-line giving. Wiltshire groups reported training about all aspects of social media.

The comments regarding training and advice are not straightforward as some received guidance only from Local Giving when they started on-line giving, whilst others attended workshops or one to one sessions from the Community Foundation. In Berkshire and Hampshire the groups themselves

were often not clear or sure of where they had received support from. Several of the Berkshire and Hampshire groups were signed up by Local Giving direct.

Many of those who did not get training said they would very much like some and many that did get training in on-line giving when they started would like more about social media. In Wiltshire no group said that there was a gap in training. Some were planning to develop their social media and intended to go back to the WCF for advice. Many reported the need for on-going advice as social media was constantly changing and for novices this was particularly confusing.

In Berkshire, groups were happy with the support they received and most felt they could get in touch if needed. However, most commented that further training in the use of social media would be welcome.

> *"Some training would have been useful and we would like more information so we can understand how it can be used."*

> *"They (BCF) are very supportive "*

> *"We linked to BCF via Local Giving, get regular emails re Local Giving promotions. We were never offered training or information re other social media"*

> *"I'm worried about loss of ideas, don't understand it all and need training"*

> *"I can vaguely remember that training or guidance was available but we didn't take it up at the start and need it now. Free training on how to use the website and social media would be very very helpful to the group"*

> *"The initial training was very helpful. A workshop on the use of social media (especially safe social media) would be useful."*

> *"It's under used (Social Media). We would benefit from training to understand its potential."*

> *"We never got to grips with it. We get emails regularly but don't have the time to read them. Social media training would be very useful"*

> *"BCF are lovely to deal with and were responsive and helpful with funding advice."*

In Hampshire, some groups remembered getting training to sign up to on-line giving at the start, but none since.

> *"We get newsletters on funding. Don't know of any training and support re social media at the Community Foundation".*

> *"We can't afford to pay for training"*

> *"Training would be useful in applying social media to fundraising events."*

> *"I don't feel that training would be useful in social media as the group's needs are specific and unless Hants CF had a member of staff that was trained in effective online media for the visually impaired it's unlikely they could teach us anything"*

In Wiltshire the groups were happy with the training and support they received

> *"We get lots of advice and support."*

> *"We got advice on how to setup facebook. Very useful and helpful"*

> *"The workshop was very useful. I was completely new – they told us what platforms were and which are best for us. So helpful and I know I can go to back if I need help. Nice to be able to have 1 to 1 sessions. They told me about privacy and extra options for the future. Takes a lot of time to trawl through the internet for information then you're not sure what is best or suitable"*

> *"I was a complete novice, a member put up facebook for me. I set up a website and twitter with support from WCF"*

> *"Advice from WCF is helpful such as preparing write ups to go online"*

> *"All seemed a mystery, complicated, but WCF made it clear. We have moved on a lot since then. The course was very useful – kick-started us and we've gone from strength to strength"*

> *"We are going to do a website and will go back to WCF for advice as they are very helpful"*

Nearly half the groups had benefited from on-line giving and most of these said they had received at least initial training and support.

Local Giving was useful to some groups as a way to have an on-line presence without any other form of social media. However, those groups that used on-line giving most effectively were those that coordinated campaigns through other social media and who promoted their cause continuously and regularly.

The training was most valued by those groups that were total social media novices. Even though some did not have the capacity to embark into social media at present, they were aware of the potential and hoped to be able to develop its use in the future.

> *"Training was very useful and raised awareness of the potential of social media. Possible in the future but we do not have the capacity to do anything at present."*

> *"We are a very small group and we're all over 70 but we think social media would help us. We want to find a young person who could do it for us"*

The training was especially useful for small to medium size groups. We can assume that the larger bodies, with professional staff to do this work, would make use of social media and on-line giving without help from the CFs. The small and medium size groups probably would not and some of them definitely would not.

Use of social media

We looked at groups' use of social media, what they used and what they used it for.

The most popular on-line media used by groups was a website, followed by Facebook and then Twitter. Other sites used were; Linked In, You Tube, google+, Pinterest and flikr.

We also looked at those groups that did not use social media or made minimal use of it.

Five groups used no social media at all.

Three said this was due to lack of time

> '*We are volunteers and have to maximise productivity – time is best spent on grant applications*'.

One of these groups said they also lacked the skills.

Two groups said they had no need. Of these one said it was not suitable for their clients and the other that their group was full and they did not want the publicity.

Three groups used facebook only; one because 'the kids like it', another as their volunteers were 'ok' with computers and facebook was free. The third used it as a closed group for their members.

Twelve groups used only a website.

Five think it would be good to develop their social media but do not have the capacity.

> '*I think it could be powerful and useful but it's no good unless you do it properly. We are swamped with work so it's on the back burner.*'

> '*We have no facebook or twitter as there is no one to do it. I know it is essential now, even charity shops do it but we need the trustees on board and I've got enough to do!*'

Four think it's not worth the effort involved.

> '*Our donors ask about our website but are not interested in any other media. The trustees don't buy into it and I also need to be convinced it's worthwhile.*'

> '*We need to work effectively and take care with our time. We're not convinced the benefits are worth the time.*'

Three would not use social media as their clients are vulnerable.

> '*We need a low profile as we work with female ex-offenders, so no facebook or twitter.*'

'We do not use facebook or twitter because of the issues surrounding permission to use photos or personal information and the issues involved in monitoring the platforms for possible offensive or derogatory comments. Our members are all learning disabled'

Small groups

Of the very small groups with annual income of £5,000 or less, only one has staff; a part time cleaner. Everything is done by volunteers. Of groups up to 35K pa, most have minimal staff numbers (1 or 2 full time equivalent) and rely on volunteers for much of the work. The more people that were involved, the more they were able to pool their talents but they still struggled with the work loads.

Using social media effectively is time consuming in relation to the size of the group – it takes a similar amount of time to do whether the group has no staff or 52. For small groups the choice is often between updating social media or doing essential work. Thus one person reported updating Facebook and Twitter in bed at night.

The **'small group surprises'** were particularly rewarding;

"I set up facebook to prove a point that the charity didn't need facebook and that it wouldn't be successful. Actually it then turned into a massive success with over 2,000 friends who regularly log on."

"We said that social media was not appropriate for our group but then we found a surprising number of our members do use social media. Their average age is 85yrs."

"We use facebook. Actually I set it up by mistake and then thought we might as well carry on with it."

What groups used social media for and how they used it

The groups used social media for some or all of the following; 1 being most used for, to 7 the least. The small groups used social media mostly for 1 and 2.

1. **Tell what they do;** inform present members and public about events, activities, programmes, times and schedules, ticket sales
2. **As part of service;** offer information about an issue, condition, activity. Offer advice on-line**,** signposting, awareness raising for non-members.
3. **Raise profile;** promote service, public face for funders
4. **Asking for;** Funds, (including sale of goods, competitions), Volunteers**,** Donated goods. *'It is also useful as a link for businesses and schools and they find the regular tweets useful to keep them updated'*
5. **Recruit;** supporters, clients, new members
6. **Keep in touch;** tell their stories, *'kids can connect can share their cooking'.* Keep in touch with and involve the community. Particularly for youth, LGBT, Carers, closed groups for members only
7. **Connect with agencies;** that signpost people to them, to spread news of project, provide information, expand number of contacts, for signposting and referrals.

The way social media was used varied from sporadic updates when time allowed, to a continuous sustained programme. The implementation of a sustained programme was not restricted to the large organisations with professional teams, but rather to the groups having at least one person who was keen and aware of social media's potential.

Thus for example, a group with 2 part time staff set up facebook with help from WCF and updated and promoted it regularly, gaining a sizable following of young people who used it to share their cookery.

Another small group said;

> *'Facebook has been incredible, we update weekly and it has grown. The last post reached 900 people. We will develop more and get the charity known.'*

Other groups said;

> *'We use facebook and twitter specifically for different purposes. Facebook is more official for the production photos and details about the production whereas twitter is the behind the scenes photos and the*

blogs. Both feeds are edited and uploaded in part onto the official website.'

'We use the web for detailed information, tweets for promotion, ticket sales, and reminders'

'We use the same feeds which are interchangeable. All are updated weekly.'

It was of note that although many of the small and medium size groups were struggling with workloads, those that engaged with social media mostly did so very effectively. The benefits for them were being able to extend their reach and spread their service outside the local area, keep their members up to date with events and services, gain new members or clients, gaining more information and become better known to a much wider audience – something they could never do without an on-line presence.

'It's well-used by the community now, we have 500 members'

'For a small organisation our clout is so much bigger now. News from today – we helped a student doing research and put it in the public domain. It was picked up by a government department, other groups and funders and was re-tweeted. It went to a national refugee body. We are so pleased that we have contact with a large body. Our social media has also made for a better relationship with a funder, now we have a named relationship with somebody.'

'It is often the funders who are most media savvy and are reassured by a strong social media presence. This helps them understand the group better and they can see that the group is accessible to everyone'

'Twitter links us to others in the dementia world, campaigns, policy development, opinions, on a professional level. Its brilliant to keep in touch, and it keeps us in the radar for a wider audience, promotes us.'

Those that did not benefit from social media

These tended to be the vulnerable, disabled and those on very low incomes.

'We could benefit from a higher profile via social media as for example we have 12 computers available for computer classes but no students have signed up and so the classes aren't running. The new one way system has reduced the traffic past the building and made it harder for people to get to us. But our members are all on very low incomes and we don't have the skills to do it.'

'I think it's fairly important but those with a disability are statistically less likely to have access to social media'

'Our members have learning/physical disabilities and are vulnerable. We're concerned about moving on-line and managing risk'

Many groups did not have any social media policy. Groups suffered from turnover of staff and volunteers when they had no procedure or policy. Key people would leave and no one would be able to pick up where they left off. There were safety issues that had not been addressed, particularly with youth groups where everyone was involved in the group's social media with little oversight. There were also on-going training needs. One group told of their 'trickle down' training procedure, where those who had been trained shared new skills and knowledge with those who had not. However this was not practical for many of the small groups who relied on transient volunteers and part time staff.

Was it worth it?

Discussion and conclusions

'There is not enough money to go around. Huge pressure; local groups have to compete with big organisations with professional fundraisers – they've got the upper hand. BCF gives out £100s of thousands in grants but it's not nearly enough. Groups have to market themselves, raise their own funds. They can't exist on grants alone' BCF

The lack of adequate funding and the workload for small and medium sized groups was an issue illuminated by this evaluation. Many people were working all hours to keep their group or charity going. Many had seen the potential of social media but did not have the capacity to make full use of it to raise income and lower their workload; a vicious circle.

Nearly half the groups had benefited from on-line giving and most of these had received at least initial training and support. However, for those that were able to use any platform to raise funds, small amounts could make a significant different to a small group. Although many larger groups did not know how much they had actually raised on-line, the smaller groups were

likely to be aware of every pound. The main reasons why groups found on-line giving of no use were the cost and lack of capacity. Those that found it helpful were those that were able to link on-line giving to campaigns and events and promote it via other social media.

Relative to income the amount raised by the small groups was a much larger proportion of their annual income and had a greater impact on whether they survived or not.

Unlike the large groups, the small and medium size groups <u>with</u> expertise were more likely to find on-line giving useful than not. Lack of expertise as well as lack of time prevented many groups from making good use of on-line giving and social media. For the very smallest groups with incomes under £5,000 and not registered charities, Local Giving should have been useful, but these were also the groups with the least expertise and capacity. When small amounts mattered, the cost of Local Giving became very relevant and often outweighed any financial benefits. Most of these groups found their time better spent writing grant applications.

Training and support was important to these small groups, particularly the on-going and targeted hand holding and the support from a known officer that the complete novices needed to build confidence and adopt new skills. When we looked at results by county, most groups found on-line giving useful in Hampshire, 50/50 in Berkshire and the least in Wiltshire. This reflected each county's approach to the project and pointed to the other benefits groups gained from having an on-line presence.

The benefits gained from on-line giving were not just the boost of income from events and sponsorships but also the on-line presence and the contacts. However, it had to be cost effective.

The training in Berkshire and Hampshire was good for groups setting up in first place; most of those that found on-line giving useful remembered having received training of some sort. However many of these groups wanted more and on-going training to help with social media. In Wiltshire, all the groups were satisfied with the training and support they received.

The training was most valued by those groups that were total social media novices and especially useful for small to medium size groups. Even though some did not have the capacity to embark into social media at present, they were aware of the potential and hoped to be able to develop its use in the future. It was a slow process and often in small steps but it brought big rewards to small groups not least of which was the confidence to 'have a go'.

'The advice was very helpful. We had no social media and a minimum web site. We set up facebook, twitter, improved the web with rolling news, improved functionality, its now interact-able. We have a broader strategy now. Two years ago we had no marketing plan – just leaflets in shop windows'

We can assume that the larger bodies, with professional staff to do this work, would have made use of social media and on-line giving without help from the Community Foundations. The small and medium size groups probably would not and some of them definitely would not.

For the small and medium groups, using social media was the key first step to sustainability rather than signing up to on-line giving.

Using social media effectively is time consuming in relation to the size of the group – it takes a similar amount of time to do whether the group has no staff or 52. For small groups the choice was often between updating social media or doing essential work. That some did both was inspiring and their enthusiasm infectious.

They recognised that they need to be known before they will be able to raise funds on-line. Some of the sports and other clubs demonstrate this. Although relatively small and with minimal social media coverage, they had large memberships consisting of people who could afford to pay, often with families and friends who would also support sponsorships or events. Small groups that were little known with a restricted following, such as carers, ex-offenders, the old and those on low incomes, had few followers who would support such campaigns.

One simple facebook page could make a big difference to a small group, increasing its visibility and following.

There were some spectacular 'wins' from having an on-line presence, but these were like a lottery win; nice to dream about but not to rely on to pay the rent. The groups' priority was delivering their service. Social media often allowed them to do this more effectively. They used social media in the first place to deliver their service and keep their members up to date and in touch. The extra rewards were, for example, reaching 900 people through one post, getting over 2,000 facebook 'friends', and gaining the confidence to do more. They improved their service, proved it was wanted, told their story and helped make their case. They become better known to a much wider audience – something they could never have done without an on-line presence.

It is hard to quantify these benefits financially as in the short term it was about providing a better service to more people. In the long term however it was, possibly, a major step towards sustainability. Better known means more supporters means more donors.

Of equal importance were those groups which did not benefit.

These were the vulnerable, those with disabilities, and those on low incomes. This was due in part to capacity, part to safety issues, and part to accessibility.

There were self-help groups for people with disabilities or vulnerabilities who were very nervous of using social media as they did not know how to ensure their own safety on-line. Others did not use on-line giving as it was not suitably designed for use by people with disabilities. Those groups with members on low incomes had little or no access to computers. Some, but not all, groups for older people had members with both low incomes and disabilities. Despite this, most of these groups recognised the potential of social media but did not have the skills, knowledge or support to make use of it.

Needs and recommendations

- Small and medium sized groups need social media policies. Those few that did have policies then had a template to be used by anyone in the group and no matter how many volunteers or staff came and went. Groups told of problems they faced due to there being no agreed procedure for setting up and using social media. There were also groups that were vulnerable to on-line abuse due to a total lack of guidelines or procedures for its use. *'They just go with the flow.'*

- They needed expertise. There were groups who were struggling but were open to social media and just need a bit more confidence or someone with know-how to get them started. *'We need a young person to help us'*

- They needed up to date information. Things change rapidly in the on-line world and trawling the internet for answers can be time consuming and very confusing. *'You get confident then something changes and it's gone, it's time consuming, not got the time to keep up with it all'.* Those groups that had a known adviser/trainer particularly appreciated having one known person they could call and ask the

simplest of questions without feeling foolish. *'Changes can be frustrating and time consuming and I don't know what to do. I usually call X - it's the on-going support, she's there, not a one off'*

There is much that the groups themselves can do to address these needs although this would need some coordination and organising. There are groups who are very willing to help others and to share their experience. *'We could train other people now'* and others had a plethora of members with IT skills. One group for example was for LGBT people who used social media extensively to keep in touch and share news. They were '*very social media savvy'* and were very aware of how to keep them-selves safe on-line. Others offered help such as;

'Our organisation could proof any web-based materials to make sure they were screen reader accessible'

'We would be happy to partner up with other organisations that might need support.'

Networks were found to be very useful, for the contacts and for sharing information and experience. Although first thoughts would suggest an online network this would exclude the very groups that most need help. Moreover, the groups appreciated the chance to meet others face to face.

'We met useful contacts through the training event'

'We feel that partnerships between local voluntary sector groups could lead to useful information sharing and support. It would be good to see more networking organised through BCF'

'It would be very useful to be able to compare successful case studies from other groups'

And lastly, they wanted one point of call for information.

'It would help if there was a single source of information, if CF and others coordinated, were more joined up, had a strategy'

'Just one point of call would be very useful.'

Conclusions

So, what impact did the On-Line Development Project have on the sustainability of voluntary sector groups in Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire?

Part of the answer depends on how 'sustainable' is defined. If simply in terms of income, then the project certainly helped those small and medium sized groups which would not have signed up without encouragement and for whom a small amount of funds could make a big difference. Extrapolating from the 15% sample, approximately 127 small to medium sized groups across the 3 counties raised significant funds due to the project. (This assumes that the large groups would have done so without the project.)

Other aspects of sustainability are confidence, skills and service delivery. Again for small and medium sized groups, their use of social media, enabled by training and support provided by the project, allowed them to deliver their services to a wider audience and in more effective ways. They could promote themselves and become better known. In the long term this was essential to their gaining credibility and thus access to more support and funds.

One big issue was the lack of capacity and resources for small and medium sized groups. A sustainable group is also run on the enthusiasm, energy and commitment of its volunteers and staff not just, or even, funds. The other essential aspect of social media was the boost this often gave, the energy induced by the realisation that their group had the support of many others. To find that one post had reached 900 people or that their site had 2,000 members could give that extra energy they needed to keep going and to look to the future.

A second part of the answer is whether social media and on-line giving was suitable for all and a significant number said that it was not. This was not always due to the lack of skills or knowledge but due to the nature of their work or of their supporters. Some were doing very well without any on-line presence but others were not and were vulnerable due to the issue they addressed, low income or disability. However for some of these groups the right support and skills could have opened the door to the benefits of on-line media.

If sustainable means significant funds and/or being more effective, efficient, more confident and enthusiastic, then the project worked for a number of the small and medium sized groups. However, low capacity, lack of resources and vulnerability remained as threats to sustainability.

Interview content and process

Group topics

	Topics	Sub-set questions

1.	**A. Did you sign up for;**
	   i. Local giving?
	   ii. Other on-line site?
	
	B Take part in/receive;
	   i. Training?
	   ii. Guidance/advice?
	
	If no ➡️ If yes ⬇️
		for those **Not** on Local Giving / other
		
		Understanding why Groups entertained the possibility but took no action -
		• What were the barriers?
		  i. all causes may not suit these media channels,
		  ii. skill sets of workers,
		  iii. time commitments
		What else??

	Groups who have engaged with the concept	

2.	**Training advice, guidance** –
	  1. **did it help?**
	  2. The most effective training mechanisms
	  3. Who from? What did it lead to?
	     a. eg on-line giving,
	     b. other
	  4. Other benefits gained through working with Community Foundations via this project
		Understanding why groups who did engage have now lapsed
		
		• The reasons?
		  i. all causes may not suit these media channels,
		  ii. skill sets of workers,
		  iii. time commitments
		What else??

3.	**Impact on sustainability and soft outcomes**
	  1. The impact of having a web presence
	  2. How effective/useful on-line fundraising is
	  3. money raised .v. money that would have been raised
	  4. diversification of funding sources
	  5. profile generated,
	  6. confidence in the future
	  7. other benefits
	  8. How do/did you promote and use the different Social Media
	  9. Was on-line giving dependent upon available match funding and subscription grants
	Other/prompts;
	  A. Social media expertise
	  B. Personal use of social media
	  C. Other	

	Specific information re hard outcomes
	• from what channel? Ie local giving or other
	  ○ money raised
	  ○ volunteering generated,
		Basic information needed;
		• number of staff – full time equivalent
		• number of volunteers
		• annual income

Community Foundations (CFs) interviews

Where did the idea come from? What input to the original project was there from CFs?
What motivated your CF to take part? • Money? • Blagrave input? • Was there pressure to take part? • Other
How proactive should funders be in developing project ideas?
What did the CFs **hope to** get out of project at start?
Did the project **change** along the way and why • constraints and • opportunities
What do you feel the Community Foundations **did get** out of the project? • what was good, what was bad • what you think you delivered against expected outputs?
and what did **groups get** out of it? • what was good, • what was bad
What did you **learn** from the project? What would you change/have done differently?
How would you **plan future activity**?

Bufferzone   **20/04/2015**