



Small Grants, Big Difference

Developing Community Resilience

The Community Chest Grant Programme
2008 – 2011 Evaluation



September 2011

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1. Executive Summary

In 2008, as part of its overall award for the Volunteering Scotland Grant Scheme (VSGS), the Voluntary Action Fund (VAF) received 3 years funding (£500,000 over the 3 years) from the Scottish Government to deliver a programme of grants and training targeted at Scotland's smallest community based organisations.

Priority was given to penetrating those local authority areas where historically there had been a very poor uptake of mainstream funding. Eligibility criteria were otherwise kept to a minimum to allow groups to respond to local needs and initiatives rather than being constrained by funders' criteria.

The evaluation of the Voluntary Action Funds' Community Chest grant programme sought to answer 3 questions:

1. What difference had the grant programme made?
2. What type of activity was delivered and who benefited from this activity?
3. What changes, if any should be made to the grant programme?

The evaluation was carried out from August 2010 to May 2011. It consisted of a survey of 319 funded organisations (192 took part, a response rate of 60%) along with desktop review of information held in the VAF database and other records.

Findings

Overall the evaluation found that the Community Chest programme had been innovative and successful in growing the capacity of small community led organisations. Capacity and skills developed via the workshops, combined with the increased activity funded through the grant helped these small groups build and sustain activity whilst making them more resilient going into a period of austerity.

The specific findings of the evaluation were:

1. The Community Chest has successfully engaged with very small community groups across Scotland with grants made in every local authority area

69% of applications were from, and 74% of grants awarded went to groups with an income of under £10,000. 63% of available funding was awarded to community groups or voluntary organisations not registered as a charity. Over a quarter of applications came from groups that had been operating for less than a year. For the majority of groups who responded to the survey, this was their first funding application.

2. The Community Chest successfully attracted applications from, and awarded grants in 6 local authority areas from which VAF and other funders had traditionally received few applications

The unique approach taken by VAF to penetrating those local authority areas where historically there has been a very poor uptake of mainstream funding was highly successful. Over the two and half years of the grant programme, an average of 40 applications came from each of the 6 priority areas. This compared with an average of only 24 applications from each of the other 26 local authority areas.

3. The Community Chest successfully helped over 500 small local organisations to build their capacity to sustain and develop their activities or services

The combination of a very flexible grant along with the delivery of free training was a powerful tool to engage small groups, and build the confidence and skills of volunteers and staff to sustain and develop services. Concrete outcomes were delivered by the grant programme for volunteers, the funded organisations and the wider communities in which they operate. In addition 20% of grant funding was directly for capacity building activities.

The training programme, delivered to 441 individuals from over 400 organisations in 21 Local Authority areas, was particularly valued by groups with 92% of survey respondents who had attended the training reporting that their group had benefited from the training.

4. The grant successfully helped sustain services to some of Scotland's most vulnerable people

Applications came from, and awards went to organisations delivering vital services, such as: advocacy advice or information; support groups and befriending; childcare or tackling health and disability issues.

62% of Community Chest funding was used to provide services to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities including: people affected by disability and illness; older people; people from a black or ethnic minority communities; children and families and young people.

70% of applications and grants awarded were for operating costs. 66% of groups responding to the survey stated that their activity could not have gone ahead without the grant they received from the Community Chest.

5. The size of grant, the funding criteria and operation of the Community Chest grant programme successfully met the needs of very small local community groups and the community within which they operate.

At a maximum of £1,000 the grant was large enough to make a big difference to a small group, yet small enough to manage, and allow the application process to be as simple as possible. The application process was considered by

respondents to the survey to be “straight forward” and “fairly easy”. The guidance notes and application form were “clear and easy to understand”.

The flexibility of the grant was an important component of the Community Chest grant programme. It allowed groups to address locally identified needs which they were well placed to both understand and react to when equipped with the skills and resources to do so.

Most applicants received a response to their application within 8 weeks. Four grant rounds were held per year to make the programmes as accessible as possible. However, this did mean that a small number of applicants waited up to five months before hearing whether their application had been successful or not.

A number of respondents to the survey also asked for more detailed feedback on why their application had been unsuccessful.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings a number of key recommendations are made for improving the Community Chest grant programme. These are:

1. Consideration should be given to encouraging applications which focus on capacity building activities that help an organisation grow and develop. A target could perhaps be set for this.
2. Consideration should be given to exploring delivering the capacity building training through local third parties, who could be provided with the course materials and trained in their delivery.
3. Consideration should be given to how the delivery and uptake of *Measuring Success*, the training course on monitoring and evaluation, can be increased.
4. A more detailed explanation of why applications were unsuccessful should be supplied wherever possible.
5. Consideration should be given to reducing the time from application submission to notification of decision.

2. Introduction

2.1 Scope and Purpose

In 2008, as part of its overall award for the Volunteering Scotland Grant Scheme (VSGS), the Voluntary Action Fund received 3 years funding from the Scottish Government to deliver a small grant programme targeted at Scotland's very small community based organisations.

The overall aim of the Community Chest grant programme was to increase the capacity of small community led organisations to achieve their aims and to increase their impact in helping develop stronger, safer, fairer, healthier and smarter communities across Scotland. This overall aim is achieved through a small grant of up to £1,000 and capacity building training.

The evaluation of the Community Chest Programme has three key objectives:

1. To assess whether the grant programme outcomes were achieved – what difference had the grant made?
2. To assess the level of grant making activity – the number of grants made, what type of group received grants? What type of activity was delivered and who benefited from this activity?
3. To recommend changes to the scope of the Community Chest and what improvements can be made to its operation.

The results of the evaluation will be used to:

- Report back to the Scottish Government and the voluntary sector the value of the Community Chest grant programme
- Inform debate and policy development around future funding of the community, voluntary and statutory sectors
- Inform VAF's development and the delivery of small grants programmes

2.2 Methodology

With support from Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) the evaluation was designed to collect and assess information on the activity of the grant programme (its outputs) and difference made or the change (the outcomes) that resulted from the grant programme.

At the start of the Community Chest grant programme staff identified 8 key outcomes that would contribute to the outcomes for volunteers, funded organisations and the wider community that were to be achieved through VSGS funding.

These are set out in Appendix 1 along with related outcome indicators and the source of information for that indicator.

Information was collected from:

- The grant programme database
- A survey completed in August 2010 of the 319 groups who had received a Community Chest grant up to December 2009. 192 were returned, an excellent response rate of 60%.
- Individual files held on successful and unsuccessful applicants
- Questionnaires completed by participants on the training courses
- Desktop research including various papers written for the VAF Board by the Community Chest Grants Officer, which show the consideration and justification for priority and eligibility decisions
- Questionnaires completed by staff and trustees.

3. Introduction to the Community Chest Programme

3.1 Background

The Community Chest grant programme was launched by the Voluntary Action Fund (VAF) at the beginning of September 2008 with £500,000 available to March 2011.

The overall aim of the Community Chest programme was to increase the capacity of small, community led organisations to achieve their aims and to increase their impact in helping develop stronger, safer, fairer, healthier and smarter communities across Scotland. This aim was to be achieved by building the capacity of funded organisations in two ways, by providing:

- A small grant of up to £1,000 to support their activities
- Running training & support workshops in each local authority area to funded organisations to encourage them to be more effective and sustainable, and more able to draw on their local support infrastructure.

The eligibility criteria and the purpose for which the grant could be used were kept as open as possible. This was intended to maximise the impact of the grant programme, ensure a high take up of grant and bring as many people as possible into the workshop programme. Another important rationale for the open nature of the grant was also to maximise the ability of the grant to meet local needs identified by the groups themselves.

To ensure the grant was targeted at smaller community groups and voluntary organisations the key eligibility criteria was that groups had to have an annual revenue income under £25,000.

The focus on very small groups was deliberate. VAF knew from consultation in communities and with other funders that the work of these small, volunteer-led community groups makes a vital difference to their communities. Their activities keep communities vibrant and encourage participation. They provide essential local services and contribute to social capital and wellbeing. Nevertheless, they tend not to be well networked and are often not known to Third Sector intermediary organisations in their areas.

It was also felt that to be successful in its overall aim it would be important that the Community Chest penetrate local authority areas where historically there has been a very poor uptake of mainstream funding. These are geographical areas which have proved challenging to all Scottish funders and which consistently emerge as being under-represented in the distribution of grants.

To achieve the maximum benefit from the programme VAF agreed a target of spending at least 40% of the grant funds available in the first year, up to March 2009, in three local authority areas from which VAF and other grant funders

received few applications. The three initial “priority” areas were: Clackmannanshire; South Ayrshire and Inverclyde. VAF took a structured and focused approach to build awareness at the very local level over a period of time. This unique approach included:

- Getting to know the areas
- Getting below the existing infrastructure
- Identifying key people and organisations to work with
- Working only with people and organisations that were willing to co-operate, and utilising their local knowledge
- Tailoring press releases to individuals and local media.

The training course element of the grant programme was considered an essential element in helping the very small community groups who were the target of Community Chest funding to sustain and develop their services or activities. A suite of 4 half day training courses was developed on the following topics:

- Making Successful Funding Applications
- Managing Money in a Small Organisation
- Measuring Success
- Charity Law

The courses were delivered in a local authority area once sufficient (10 or more) groups from that area had applied for a grant. Which course was delivered and when, morning, afternoon or evening, depended on the responses to a short questionnaire sent to successful applicants.

3.2 Operation of the Community Chest

Initially the Community Chest operated as an open programme with applications accepted at any time and a decision taken within 6 weeks. However, the demand for the small grant was so great that the £100,000 grant funding available for the first six months was spent within 3 months. The two part time staff administering the programme were also having difficulty meeting the 6 week turnaround target.

In December 2009 VAF set up a Community Chest review group to look at the spread of grant awards and consider issues from the early experiences. They were asked to propose appropriate changes to both the eligibility criteria and operational management of the Community Chest grant programme in order to maximise funding impact and best meet the aims of the Programme.

The following main amendments were agreed in January 2009 and subsequently incorporated into the guidance and decision making process:

- From March 2009 the Community Chest moved to quarterly deadlines with an allocation of £50,000 for each round.
- From March 2009 a number of “priority groups and theme themes” were added alongside the “priority” areas. The target was to spend at least 40% of grant across the priority groups and themes whilst maintaining a high grant spend in the priority areas.
- From October 2009, the focus areas changed to: West Dunbartonshire, South Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire.
- The spread of awards had made it impractical to justify running a workshop in most local authority areas. This, coupled with a high level of applications that were completed incorrectly, highlighted a need for some training in elementary fundraising techniques. It was agreed to open the workshops up to unsuccessful applicants to increase the quality of applications, to be able to fill workshops in every locality and to allow more small organisations the opportunity to benefit from free training.
- Clarification was introduced regarding the treatment of applications from Community Councils, Hobby Groups, Childminding Groups and Parent Councils or PTA's.

Upon receipt applications were checked for completeness. If anything was missing (e.g. constitution or accounts) applicants were notified and given an opportunity to submit the missing information or documents. Applications were then assessed for eligibility, and eligible applications further assessed as high medium and low priority, depending on whether the group was from a priority area or how the grant would address one or more of the priority themes.

Grant awards were made by a sub group of the VAF Board who received by email, a schedule of applications from staff with recommendations whether or not to approve the application.

3.3 Thematic Focus

On reviewing the awards made in the first three months of the programme, it was found that groups providing childcare, tackling health and disability issues or whose beneficiaries were people experiencing inequality, were under-represented both in the groups applying for, and being awarded a grant.

Childcare provision was viewed as of particular importance as a path which enables parents, often women, to engage with the voluntary sector. This can grow and develop into a lifelong involvement in community groups and voluntary organisations, building both their own capacity and that of the organisations they are involved with.

In April 2009 it was therefore agreed to adopt these priority themes:

- Health & disability issues
- Providing childcare
- People excluded due to ethnic origin, gender or sexual orientation
- Activities that help a group develop such as training for committee members, staff or volunteers, or professional support or conferences and visits to other similar groups.

With regard to the priority themes, substantially less development work was undertaken than with the early priority areas.

This was limited to making contact with representatives of national umbrella organisations such as CEMVO, Scottish Disability Equality Forum or LGBT Youth Scotland, to get them to help promote the grant to their member organisations or wider networks.

It was also not possible, with the programme now in full swing, to replicate the groundwork in the new focus geographical areas that had proved so successful in the initial focus areas. Nonetheless the resources that were invested had a marked impact in increasing numbers of applications and awards.

3.4 Community Chest Objectives

To meet the overall aim of building the capacity of smaller organisations to develop and sustain their activities or services while at the same time achieving VAF's mission to promote equality and social justice, VAF staff identified three objectives for the Community Chest:

1. Target small community led groups and voluntary organisations.
2. Spend at least 40% of the grant funds available in the first year, up to March 2009, in the three local authority areas from which VAF and other grant funders received few applications.
3. Spend at least 40% of grant on the "priority themes".

3.5 Community Chest Outcomes

Alongside its objectives the Community Chest also had to deliver the VSGS outcomes agreed with the Scottish Government for volunteers; the organisation being funded and the wider community.

VAF identified the 8 outcomes, listed in the table below, to be achieved by the Community Chest that would contribute to both the VSGS outcomes and the overall aim of the Community Chest to build the capacity of small community led groups to sustain and develop their activities.

VSGS Outcome	Community Chest Outcomes
Outcomes for Volunteers	1. Committee, staff or volunteers have increased their skills
	2. Improved confidence of committee, staff or volunteers
Outcomes for Communities	3. New services or activities
	4. Increased or improved existing services or activities
Outcomes for Organisations	5. Improved capacity
	6. Groups have grown or developed
	7. Linked into local support infrastructure
	8. Increased knowledge of other funders

4. Findings

The findings with respect to the eight outcomes and three objectives to be achieved by the Community Chest grant programme are presented below.

4.1 Did grant programme achieve its planned outcomes?

Key evidence for achievement of the planned outcomes is summarised in Appendix 2. More detailed information is provided below.

Outcome 1. Committee, staff or volunteers have increased their skills

The findings listed below demonstrate that the Community Chest grant programme did increase the skills of committee, staff or volunteers in small locally based community groups and voluntary organisations.

- 59% of people responding to the survey felt that they had increased their skills.
- 20% of grants awarded were for activities that could help an organisation grow and develop, such as attending conferences, training or for professional fees.
- 28 workshops had been delivered in 21 local authority areas as follows:
Making Successful Funding Applications – 20 Courses delivered to 349 people.
Managing Money in a Small Organisation – 5 courses to 43 people
Charity Law – 1 course to 29 people
Measuring Success – 2 courses to 20 people.
- Overall 441 attendees from over 400 organisations benefited from the free training.
- Up to 150 of the organisations attending training were also in receipt of a Community Chest grant and the remainder were unsuccessful applicants or other small voluntary organisations, bringing real added value.
- In 2010, just 20% of applicants submitted incomplete applications compared to 60% in 2008, giving a strong indication that capacity and skills were being developed via the funding workshops.
- 180 (60%) of respondents had attended at least one of the training courses with 92% of these reporting that their group had benefited from the training.
- 94% found the training “very useful”.
- 100% of VAF staff/trustees felt that training was as important as the grant and that feedback had been very positive.
- 111 (61%) of respondents had not had any other opportunity to attend free training - a check was always done with the CVS first to ensure no duplication was taking place locally.

It is clear from feedback in the survey that a small number of organisations were interested and disappointed not to have been offered the opportunity to attend training. There were two reasons for the training not being offered to them:

- VAF had not yet run training in that area as the numbers applying for a grant did not warrant running a course.
- The organisation applied for a grant after training had run in a particular area so would not have received an invitation to attend.

This indicates that there is an appetite for training among smaller groups that currently is not being met in other ways.

Outcome 2. There is an increased confidence of committee, staff or volunteers

- 66% of people responding to the survey reported improved confidence for committee members, staff or volunteers.
- 94% of individuals attending training felt “more confident” about the topic.

“Committee members more confident and knowledgeable. Accounts easier to manage, volunteers now claiming expenses without feeling guilty”

Outcome 3. New services or activities

- 47% of respondents reported that the grant was for a new service or activity.
- 123 organisations (66%) stated that the project or activity funded by the Community Chest grant would not have gone ahead without the grant.

Outcome 4. Increased or improved existing services or activities

- 59% of respondents reported that the grant had led to an increase in or improvement of existing services or activities.
- 57% of respondents reported that since receiving the Community Chest grant the number of users or members of their services had increased.

“We have been able to integrate more easily with other groups in the community. The grant has helped us to offer a service which is not necessarily restricted to our specific 'target' group of people. This has helped to engage a wider audience and educate them about the work we do, creating awareness amongst communities who previously wouldn't have known about us.”

Outcome 5. Improved capacity of organisations to deliver

- 57% of respondents reported that the grant had improved the capacity of their organisations to deliver their services or activities.
- 98 groups (52%) stated that the Community Chest application had been their group's first application, indicating the Community Chest was successfully engaging with new and small groups and helping them to develop and build their capacity.
- In 2010, just 20% of applicants submitted incomplete applications compared to 60% in 2008, giving a strong indication that capacity was being developed via the funding workshops.

"We are now recognised on an international stage, pioneering work in peer support from Scotland. Conference attendees received huge recognition for their work and returned inspired, with renewed vigour and with new ideas for service development."

Outcome 6. Groups have grown or developed

- 59% of respondents reported that the grant had enabled them to grow or develop.
- 20% of grants awarded were for activities that could help an organisation grow and develop, such as attending conferences, training or for professional fees (see Table 6 on page 26).

"It is a good amount which allows the organisation to develop, but not too problematic to manage."

Outcome 7. Linked into local support infrastructure

- 74% reported being aware of how to become involved in local structures. This perhaps surprisingly high awareness level may in part be due to having attended a VAF training course, where staff ensure that groups are aware of and can make contact with, their local CVS.
- 37% of respondents reported that they are linked into local support infrastructure. This involvement is generally through groups having individual links to staff in Local Authorities, Health Services, elected members, through CVS, umbrella bodies, local forums or through Community Councils

- The remaining 37%, who are aware of how to become involved in local structures but are not involved demonstrates that there is potential further work to facilitate involvement of smaller groups in local support infrastructure and planning fora.

Reasons given for not being involved included:

- “We are too small and don’t have the time to be involved”
- “Structures are clicky and impenetrable, a closed shop”
- “Decision making processes are too slow and bureaucratic”
- “We feel completely powerless”
- “Very little effort is made by the council to formally include us”

Outcome 8. Increased knowledge of other funders

- 52% of respondents reported an increased knowledge of other funders.
- Attending the training had a positive effect on groups, increasing the average number of applications made per group and the average number of successful applications per group to VAF and other funders.

Respondents before receiving a grant made on average 1.5 applications with 1.1 being successful.

After attending the training the average number of applications made per group rose to 2.8 with successful applications averaging 1.7

“although we have made one funding submission in the last year, we have supported several groups to successfully apply using the skills from one of your workshops“

CASE STUDY: The Carmichael Playgroup

The Carmichael Playgroup, in rural South Lanarkshire, was experiencing difficult times and needed to be able to attract more members. The Playgroup, based in a rather drab church hall, was not able to provide a safe play space for very young children.

The group felt that without this facility they would not be able to continue, as getting the mothers to attend with babies would guarantee numbers moving onto the pre-school playgroup.

A grant of £975 enabled the group to buy soft seating, new toys, play mats and safety barriers. The new equipment and toys had an immediate impact. The group was more bright and welcoming, with a safe space and activities for small children. Attendance increased dramatically and the group is now operating at capacity, with a small waiting list.

The voluntary committee is full, and fundraising events have increased and are better supported, not just for the playgroup but also the school and other community events.

For the community, the Playgroup is an important source of friendship and support for isolated families living in a rural area. It provides a place for parents to meet and for their children to play and mix with other children.

A modest grant has made a dramatic difference to the capacity of the Playgroup to serve this area but also had a marked impact on wider community participation.

CASE STUDY: The Touchwood Project

The Community Chest gave a grant of £949 to a new social enterprise, Touchwood, based in Orkney. At the time of application, they had no previous income and had just established as a company limited by guarantee.

The aim of Touchwood is to establish a tourism based enterprise offering workshops and experiences on Orkney's stone-age history and renewable energy. Profits will be used to fund community-based sustainable projects such as community gardens and small wind-turbine projects.

The grant paid for two volunteers to visit and learn from an Irish social enterprise with similar business activities. No similar enterprise exists in the UK. The visit crystallised Touchwood's thinking around the business plan and helped to refine its marketing strategy.

The visit also changed the way the project planned to organise and run its events. They reported learning a lot, also from the early mistakes which the host project had made.

The volunteers developed their skills and feel more confident about effectively managing their own project and organisation going forward. In the long term, the local community will benefit from a better quality, more organised enterprise. Like many organisations supported, this was their first grant award, which they described in a letter of thanks as a "landmark" for them.

CASE STUDY: Bonar Bridge Community Hall

Bonar Bridge Community Hall received £1,000 to purchase a screen, DVD and projector system. This enabled the Hall to show films as part of a programme of events for a newly formed youth club. The funding from VAF was a catalyst for a range of activities that helped increase the Halls' income and improve sustainability.

The course on Successful Funding applications provided by VAF also proved beneficial as it helped the group obtain £28,000 for stage 2 of their refurbishment programme.

A further £1,000 grant was used to upgrade the kitchen in the attached Hall House. This has helped attract a new tenant at a substantially improved rent, thus providing a valuable income stream, further aiding sustainability.

Bonar Bridge Community Hall is very grateful for the support provided by the VAF funding and training and feel that they have put the investment to good use, and generated community benefit as a result - in the form of better use of the hall, improved facilities & events offered and increased sustainability through increased income. The committee has also gained experience in successfully applying for funds and putting on more adventurous fundraising activities.

CASE STUDY: The Ayrshire Sikh Association

The Ayrshire Sikh Association, based in Irvine, were without a regular meeting place and felt that this was a priority for their community to come together, discuss their needs and to develop services appropriate to the Sikh community.

A Community Chest grant of £500 allowed the organisation to raise match funding and hire a community centre which meant the Sikh community could meet regularly for the first time leading to greater social inclusion. They have also used the grant to network with non-Sikh community groups to promote cultural awareness and diversity in the wider community.

In November 2009, the Association reapplied and it was striking to see the difference in the quality and detail of the second application. It was also clear that the project had progressed. Activities for older people to improve mental and physical wellbeing have now been identified as a priority in service development.

The Association are now more networked and have been working with other agencies to promote cross-cultural understanding. They have organised events to involve the wider community with the aim of tackling discrimination and celebrating cultural diversity.

4.2 Achievement of objectives

Objective One: Target small community led groups and voluntary organisations

The Community Chest successfully targeted smaller groups and organisations as:

- 69% of applications came from groups with an income under £10,000 with 27% from new groups operating less than a year.
- 74% of grants awarded went to groups with income under £10,000 with 25% awarded to new groups.
- 64% of applications came from and 63% of grant awards went to non charitable community groups or voluntary organisations

Objective Two: Spend at least 40% of the grant funds available, up to March 2009, in the three local authority areas from which VAF and other grant funders received few applications.

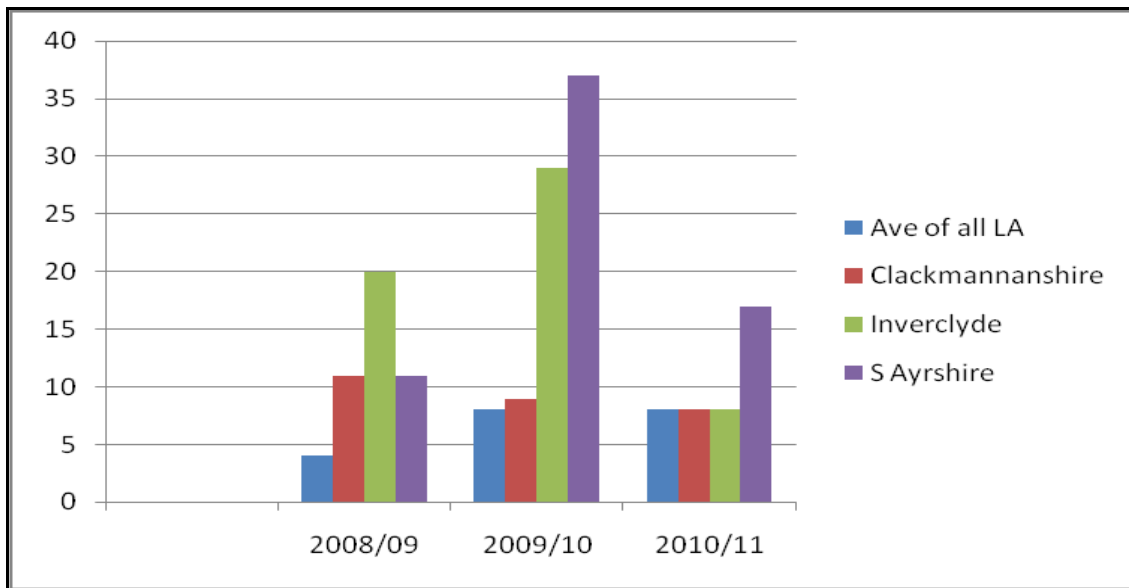
In the early promotional period, the unique approach taken to intensive development in the first group of priority areas was highly successful at stimulating both volume and quality. Most applications and awards came from these local authorities in 2008.

- 42% of grant funds awarded in 2008 went to the initial priority areas of Clackmannanshire, South Ayrshire and Inverclyde, exceeding the target set.
- Over the two and half year grant programme 29% of all applications came from and 31% of awards went to groups or organisations in the priority geographical areas
- Over the two and half years of the grant programme an average of 40 applications came from each of the 6 priority areas. This is compared with an average of 24 applications from each of the other local authority areas.

The initial priority areas were chosen as they were areas from which VAF and other funders received fewer applications than from other areas. As can be seen from Table 1 the initial development work, carried out in the priority areas in 2008/9, succeeded in substantially increasing, above the average for all other areas, the number of applications received from the initial priority areas.

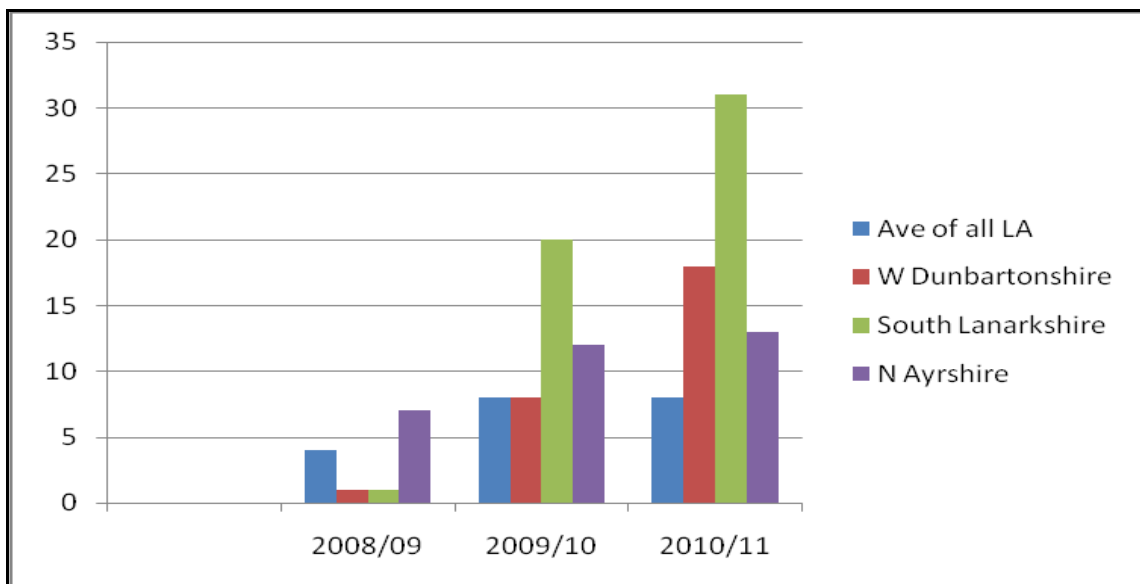
This effect, with no further development work, was sustained through 2009/10 and into 2010/11 where the applications received from two of the three areas was the same as the average for all other local authority areas.

Table One. Applications received from initial priority areas



The second set of priority areas introduced in December 2009 was also successful at increasing the volume of applications from, and awards to West Dunbartonshire, South Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire. As illustrated below, these areas continued at above the baseline of 2008/09 applications till the end of the Programme.

Table 2 Applications received from the second set of priority areas



The Community Chest successfully increased applications from, and awards to these “hard to fund” areas. This increase has been sustained for at least two years. This demonstrates that the structured and focused approach taken by VAF to get below the obvious infrastructure can have a real effect that could be emulated in other areas.

Objective Three: Spend at least 40% of grant on the “priority themes”

The review of the Community Chest carried out from December 2008 to January 2009 found that only 10% of funding in the first three months of operation was awarded to groups providing childcare, tackling health and disability issues or whose beneficiaries were people that experienced inequality.

From April 2009 the priority themes were introduced with a target of spending at least 40% on groups within these themes. As can be seen from Table 3 below the Community Chest successfully met this target spending 49% of grant awards on priority themes.

4.3 Operation of Community Chest grant programme

Over the two and half year grant programme the Community Chest:

- Received 864 grant applications with a total value of £793,992.
- Awarded 564 grants with a total value of £500,000.
- 300 applications totalling £270,479 were unsuccessful.

The Community Chest has successfully attracted applications and made awards in all of Scotland’s local authorities, see Appendix 3

While the application pack advised applicants that they would receive a decision on their application within 12 weeks the actual average turn-around time achieved was 8 weeks.

Table 3 below provides information on the successful and unsuccessful applications across the priority areas and themes.

Table Three: Analysis of applications received, approved or unsuccessful

Applications received, approved or unsuccessful									
	Total			Priority Areas			Priority Themes		
	No.	Value £	%	No.	Value £	%	No.	Value £	%
Received	864	793,992		240	226,8479	29	324	296,573	37
Awarded	564	500,000	63	168	154,526	31	269	247,204	49
*Unsuccessful	300	270,479	34	72	71,201	26	55	47,969	18

* Detail provided at end of findings section

The following findings from the survey suggest that the size of the grants, the eligibility and funding criteria and the application process met the needs of organisations applying for a grant.

- 85% of respondents thought that at £1,000 the maximum size of grant available was “about right”. Comments were that for very small organisations this was a “useful amount” that “could make a big difference” or “go a long way”. Some felt that if bigger the grant would have been more difficult to apply for.
- 84% of respondents found the application process “easy” or “fairly easy”. Comments made were the guidance notes and application form were “clear and easy to understand”; “the whole process was easy and straight forward”. Comments for improving the process were “waiting 12 weeks to hear was too long” and “would like more explanation as to why unsuccessful”.
- 92% felt that the eligibility criteria were about right. Comments were that it “enables a wide range of groups to apply”; “vital to be open to non charities as small organisations cannot cope with charity regulation”. Some felt that the threshold at £25,000 was too high and should be reduced to £10,000.
- 98% of respondents felt that the flexibility of what the grant can be used for was “about right”. Positive comments were it “allows groups to identify needs and priorities”; “enables groups to respond to local needs and initiatives”; “other funders too restrictive – appreciate the flexibility”. Comments for change were that the grant should be “allowed to fund individuals depending on what they want the grant for” and that “in a free society we should not exclude religion”.

Borders Asperger & Autism Group Support

"The [Community Chest] application was simple and straight forward. The timescale from application to decision making was speedy and no delays.

The assessor and admin staff were very helpful both before application and during the decision making process. All questions were relatively easy and straightforward to reply to, any queries or uncertainties which I had were answered simply and explained fully.

The training programme was not accessible for any of our committee, but that was mainly due to the limitations of travel and free time available due to our family/caring commitments.

Future venues for training programmes in the Central Borders would be helpful, though I appreciate this may not be practical!"

Derek Purvis, Chairman, Borders Asperger & Autism Group Support:

As can be seen from Table 4 below applications came from and awards went to organisations involved in a wide range of activities that cover most of the services and activities of community groups across Scotland.

Table Four: Main Activity of Applicant Organisations

Main Activity of Applicant	Applications	%	Awards	%
Sport	85	10	58	10
Social activities	86	10	51	9
Residents Association or Community Councils	68	8	40	7
Arts	64	7	33	6
Support groups and befriending	100	12	76	13
Advocacy, advice or information	63	7	48	9
Conservation	57	7	37	7
Youth work	77	9	42	7
Childcare	83	10	59	10
Health & disability issues	117	14	77	14
Community centre or hall	25	3	14	2
Animal welfare	6	1	3	1
Education	33	4	26	5
Total	864	100	564	100

Table 5 below provides a breakdown of the beneficiaries of applicant organisations and organisations awarded a grant. It demonstrates that a large proportion of Community Chest funding is used to provide services to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

Table Five: Beneficiaries of Applicant Organisations

Beneficiaries of Applicant	Applications	%	Awards	%
General community	315	36	188	33
Young people	141	16	83	15
Older people	90	10	48	9
People affected by disability and illness	108	13	92	16
Children and families	115	13	79	14
BME	59	7	48	9
Women	24	3	19	3
Other	12	2	7	1
Total	864	100	564	100

As can be seen from Table 6, 70% of applications received and grant awards made were for equipment and running costs. This, plus the survey finding that for 66% of groups their activity could not have gone ahead without a grant, demonstrates the importance of the Community Chest in enabling local groups to sustain their services.

Table Six: Purpose of Grant

*Purpose of Grant	Applications	%	Awards	%
Equipment	265	31	165	28
Running Costs	333	39	255	43
Events	94	11	57	10
Conference/training	147	17	102	17
Professional fees	25	3	15	3
Total	864	100	*594	100

Reasons for unsuccessful applications

As can be seen from the Table 7 below, excluding insufficient funds being available, the main reason for applications being unsuccessful was not providing a copy of the constitution or accounts (33%) or having an income over £25,000 (18%). This indicates a real capacity issue or training need amongst these small organisations to ensure they read and understand the eligibility criteria and application process.

The percentage of incomplete applications did decrease significantly from 60% in 2008 to 28% in 2009 and 20% in 2010. This is a strong indication that inviting unsuccessful applicants to attend funding workshops was beginning to make a positive impact.

Table Seven: Reasons for unsuccessful applications

Reason	Total	%
Low priority insufficient funds available	78	26
Have not provided copies of constitution or accounts	100	33
Revenue income greater than £25,000	54	18
Constitution allows distribution of funds to members	18	6
Bank account not in name of group	6	2
Unrestricted reserves > one years running costs	10	3
Application not signed or completed	6	2
Constitution not in name of applicant	2	1
Not a voluntary organisation	11	4
Project is a statutory duty of L.A.	1	0
Not agreed to attend VAF workshop	1	0
Application within 12 months of previous grant	3	1
Total	300	100

5. Conclusions and Learning

Overall, the Community Chest Programme has been innovative and successful in growing the capacity of small community led organisations. Capacity and skills developed via the training workshops, combined with the increased activity funded through the grant, helped these small groups continue to build and sustain activity whilst making them more resilient going into a period of austerity.

More specifically:

1. The Community Chest has successfully engaged with very small community groups across Scotland with grants made in every local authority area.

69% of applications were from, and 74% of grants awarded went to groups with an income of under £10,000. 63% of available funding was awarded to non charitable community groups or voluntary organisations. Over a quarter of applications came from groups that had been operating for less than a year. For the majority of groups who responded to the survey, this was their first funding application.

These very small community groups and organisations were delivering a substantial range of services. They were responding to locally identified need, across at least thirteen diverse areas of activity, to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

The high percentage of non charities applying and receiving a grant demonstrates the value of small grant programmes being open to groups that are not registered charities.

2. The Community Chest successfully attracted applications from and awarded grants in 6 local authority areas from which VAF and other funders had traditionally received few applications.

The unique approach taken by VAF to penetrating those local authority areas where historically there has been a very poor uptake of mainstream funding was highly successful. Over the two and half years of the grant programme an average of:

- 40 applications came from each of the 6 priority areas compared with an average of 24 applications from each of the other local authority areas
- 28 grant awards were made in each of the 6 priority areas, on average a total grant spend in each area of over £25,000. This compares with an average of 10 grant awards in each of the other local authority areas, on average a total grant spend in each area of £9,500

Against a target of 40% set in the first year, the distribution of grant in Clackmannanshire, Inverclyde and South Lanarkshire reached 42%. There was a sustained effect in these early priority areas. The volume of applications received remained above the average baseline of 8 to the conclusion of the programme, reaching a high of 38 in South Ayrshire in 2009.

By investing time in building contacts and reaching below the surface of infrastructure bodies, the message about the Community Chest took hold and spread through the communities. All of this was time and resource intensive but highly successful. It was not possible once the Programme was in full swing, to replicate the groundwork in the new priority areas. However, the resources that were invested still had a marked impact in increasing numbers of applications and awards.

3. The Community Chest successfully helped over 500 small local organisations to build their capacity to sustain and develop their activities or services

The findings in relation to the planned outcomes for the Community Chest set out in section 4.1 and summarised in Appendix 2 demonstrate that good progress towards building the capacity of the 564 funded organisations has been made.

The average grant award was only £887. The case studies from the Carmichael Playgroup; Bonnar Bridge Community Hall and the Ayrshire Sikh Association demonstrate how these tiny grants can have a huge impact on both the funded groups and on communities in which they operate.

The Community Chest offered a very flexible grant that prioritised activities which helped a group develop. This along with the delivery of free training was a powerful tool to engage small groups and build the confidence and skills of volunteers and staff to sustain and develop services.

The training programme was particularly valued by groups with 92% of survey respondents who had attended the training reporting that their group had benefited from the training. This finding is supported by the decrease in incomplete applications observed during the programme from 60% in 2008 to 20% in 2010. However, at 20% the number of incomplete applications could be considered quite high and indicates a continuing need to help build the capacity of these very small groups to successfully attract funding.

Offering training has been a real added benefit of the Community Chest Programme, not just for those who received a grant but also those who were unsuccessful and other small voluntary organisations.

In most areas, no other free training was available. 441 individuals representing over 400 organisations have benefited from the training made available through the Community Chest. This should result in better quality and more successful funding applications to VAF and other funders in the future. In addition the skills

developed in the other topics covered will enable the organisations to sustain and develop their services or activities.

However, the level of resource available to VAF to deliver training courses did constrain their delivery so that over the two and half year programme courses were delivered in only 21 of the 32 local authority areas.

4. The grant successfully helped sustain services to some of Scotland's most vulnerable people

Applications came from, and awards went to organisations involved in a wide range of activities that cover some of the most important services and activities delivered by voluntary organisations and community groups across Scotland including:

- Support groups and befriending
- Advocacy, advice or information
- Health and disability issues
- Childcare
- Youth work
- Education
- Conservation

A large proportion (62%) of Community Chest funding was used to provide services to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities including:

- People affected by disability and illness
- Older people
- People from a black or ethnic minority
- Children and families
- Young people

70% of applications received, and grant awards made were for equipment and running costs. This, plus the survey finding that for 66% of groups their activity could not have gone ahead without the grant they received, demonstrates the importance of the Community Chest in enabling local groups to sustain and develop their services or activities.

5. The size of grant, the funding criteria and operation of the Community Chest grant programme successfully met the needs of very small local community groups and the community within which they operate.

At a maximum of £1,000 the grant is large enough to make a big difference to a small group, yet small enough to manage and allow the application process to be as simple as possible.

The flexibility of the grant was really appreciated by groups and allowed the grant programme to address the locally identified needs of communities. Looking at the diversity of activity and beneficiary groups it appears that smaller

organisations play an important role in contributing to the health, resilience and life of local communities. They are well placed to both understand and react to local issues when equipped with the skills and resources to do so.

The application process was considered by respondents to the survey to be “straight forward” and “fairly easy”. The guidance notes and application form were “clear and easy to understand”.

The often precarious nature of funding for small community groups and organisations means that a fund of this nature must be able to give speedy decisions. VAF achieved an overall average of 8 weeks from application closing date to decision, in each round from 2009 onwards. However, with 4 grant rounds a year a small number applicants could wait up to five months before hearing whether their application had been successful or not.

While overall the operation of the grant programme seemed to work well some respondents to the survey felt that more information on why an application had been unsuccessful would improve the application process. Detailed feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of an application would certainly help build the capacity of applicants to successfully apply for funds in the future and not just to the Community Chest.



“The flexible approach still allowed VAF to achieve its outcomes for the programme.”

“The programme met its aim both in the range and diversity of small groups supported and through the capacity building measures.”

“[The grant] was enough to make a big difference but also small enough that we stayed focused on exactly what we were delivering.”

“Simple effective and well operated programme”



Recommendations

1. Over 70% of applications and awards were for operational costs – running costs or equipment. Only 20% of awards were for activities that help a group grow and develop. While operational costs are vitally important for small groups to sustain local services and activities the Community Chest also aims to “increase their capacity” to “develop”. Consideration should be given to encouraging applications which focus on capacity building activities. A target could perhaps be set for this.

2. Training is a successful component of the programme. It is however difficult to offer a rolling programme of workshops as locally and quickly as applicants would like. Consideration should be given to exploring delivery through local third parties who could be provided with the course materials and training in their delivery.

3. “Measuring Success”, the training course on monitoring and evaluation was one of the least requested training courses. Being able to measure and demonstrate achievements is a key skill fundamental to being able to successfully attract funding. Yet this seems to be unrecognised by the groups themselves. Consideration should be given to how the delivery and uptake of this workshop can be increased.

4. The Community Chest successfully focused on priority areas and priority themes. This approach should be continued with consideration given to widening the “childcare” theme to “working with families and young people” and adding “the environment” and “support for older people”

5. A more detailed explanation for why applications were unsuccessful should be supplied wherever possible. There is of course a resource implication in giving more than a standard reason but this feedback would be important to help groups learn and develop their fundraising skills.

6. Consideration should be given to how the operation of the Community Chest can be improved, within available resources, to reduce the time from application submission to notification of decision.

Appendix 1 Community Chest Outcomes

VSGS Outcome Group	Community Chest Outcomes	Outcome Indicators	Information Collection Method
Outcomes for Volunteers	Committee, staff or volunteers have increased their skills	Attended VAF training Grant for training or activity that will increase skills	Desktop trawl Survey
	Improved confidence of committee, staff or volunteers	Groups report increased confidence New services or activities	Desktop trawl Survey
Outcomes for Communities	New services or activities	Grant for new activity Group report new services or activities	Desktop trawl Survey
	Increased or improved existing services or activities	Grant for increasing or improving existing activity Group report increased or improved services or activities	Desktop trawl Survey
Outcomes for organisations	Improved capacity	New Skills Increased income More members/clients Expanded activities since receiving Community Chest grant	Survey Desktop trawl
	Groups have grown or developed	Increased income More members/clients New activities since receiving Community Chest grant	Survey Desktop trawl
	Linked into local support infrastructure	Training, advice or support from CVS Knowledge of support agencies Membership of networks	Survey Desktop trawl
	Increase knowledge of other funders	Increased income Training, advice and support from CVS Applications to other Funders Use of Funder Finder	Survey Desktop trawl

Appendix 2 Achievement of Outcomes for the Community Chest Grant Programme

As can be seen from the table below the grant programme has been successful at achieving the grant programme outcomes

Community Chest Outcomes	Outcome Indicators	% of Groups reporting achieving this outcome	Other evidence of achievement of outcome
Committee, staff or volunteers have increased their skills	Attended VAF training Grant for training or activity that will increase skills	59	441 people from over 400 organisations attended training courses 20% of grants awarded were for activities that could help an organisation grow and develop, such as attending conferences, training or professional fees In 2009, just 28% of applicants submitted incomplete applications compared to 60% in 2008, giving a strong indication that capacity and skills were being developed via the funding workshops
Improved confidence of committee, staff or volunteers	Groups report increased confidence New services or activities	66	94% of individuals attending training felt "more confident" about the topic
New services or activities	Grant for new activity Group report new services or activities	47	123 organisations (66%) stated that the project or activity funded by the Community Chest grant would not have gone ahead without the grant.
Increased or improved existing services or activities	Grant for increasing or improving existing activity Group report increased or improved services or activities	59	The monitoring forms demonstrate a number of examples e.g. Carmichael playgroup 57% of respondents reported that since receiving the community chest grant the number of users or members of their services had increased

Community Chest Outcomes	Outcome Indicators	% of Groups reporting achieving this outcome	Other evidence of achievement of outcome
Improved capacity	New Skills Expanded activities since receiving Community Chest grant	57	98 groups (52%) stated that the community chest application had been their group's first application, indicating the Community Chest was successfully engaging with new and small groups and helping them to develop and build their capacity. In 2009, just 28% of applicants submitted incomplete applications compared to 60% in 2008, giving a strong indication that capacity was being developed via the funding workshops
Groups have grown or developed	Increased income More members/clients New activities since receiving Community Chest grant	59	20% of grants awarded were for activities that could help an organisation grow and develop, such as attending conferences, training or professional fees
Linked into local support infrastructure	Training, advice or support from CVS Knowledge of support agencies Membership of networks	37	74% are aware of how to become involved in local structures.
Increase knowledge of other funders	Increased income Training, advice and support from CVS Applications to other Funders Use of Funder Finder	52	Respondents before receiving a grant made on average 1.5 applications with 1.1 being successful. After attending the training the average number of applications made per group rose to 2.8 with successful applications averaging 1.7.

Appendix 3 Awards by Local Authority Area

