



# **I**NSPIRING IMPACT

## **Are you leading for impact?**

Five questions for voluntary sector leaders  
April 2013



## Inspiring Impact

**Inspiring Impact** is a programme that aims to change the way the UK voluntary sector thinks about impact and make high quality impact measurement the norm for charities and social enterprises by 2022.

Over the next decade we will work towards five key objectives under five themes, answering the key questions for the sector:

- **What does good impact practice look like?**
- How do we know what we need to measure?
- How do we measure it?
- How can we compare with and learn from others?
- What's the role for funders?

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# Are you leading for impact?

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## Introduction

This pamphlet is one of the outputs of the Inspiring Impact programme (find out more at [inspiringimpact.org](https://inspiringimpact.org)). Based on a mix of desk research and interviews with voluntary sector chief executives, it asks leaders in the voluntary sector to reflect on five questions relating to impact:

1. **How could focusing on impact help you do your job better?**
2. **How could focusing on impact help with your long-term finances?**
3. **Is focusing on impact the new normal?**
4. **The time to prioritise impact: if not now, when?**
5. **What could you do today to get started?**

The pamphlet is structured around these five questions, with most of the content based on case studies of individual voluntary sector leaders and the work they are doing to plan, understand and improve the impact they have. We hope that the questions and case studies will encourage you to think more about your impact, and to act on your reflections.

When we talk about ‘focusing on impact’, we do *not* just mean measuring impact, important though that is. Instead we mean thinking strategically about what impact you want to have and how best to achieve it, assessing what impact you’re having, communicating this information and learning from it.

By ‘impact’ we mean the broad or longer-term effects of a project or organisation’s work. This can include effects on people who are direct users of a project or organisation’s work, effects on those who are not direct users, or effects on a wider field such as government policy.

## 1. How could focusing on impact help you do your job better?

If you are thinking about where your organisation should go over the coming years and what it should focus on and do (or not do); if you are delivering services and want to improve them; if you want to influence the way government and others deal with the issues your organisation cares and knows about; if you want your team to be more energised and united behind your long-term goals—if any of these ‘ifs’ apply to you, it is worth asking yourself how a focus on impact might help.

### If you are formulating your organisation’s strategy...

Many voluntary sector leaders are currently struggling with strategic questions about where their organisation goes over the next few years, what it should do or stop doing with its limited resources, who it should work with, and how it should change. Planning and understanding your impact is a fundamental part of answering those questions—clarifying what impact you want to have, how you think you can best achieve it, and how and to what extent your various activities currently contribute to your goals.

The **Alzheimer’s Society** case study below provides an example of how a focus on impact can lead to some services being discontinued, others grown, still others delivered differently, staff incentivised to achieve different things, and resources spent in a refocused way.

### Case study: Alzheimer’s Society

**Alzheimer’s Society** is a membership organisation working to improve the quality of life of people affected by dementia in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. A national charity, it has 20,000 members.

The charity recently went through a process of drawing up a five-year strategy, with an examination of its impact at the heart. As chief executive Jeremy Hughes explains, Alzheimer’s Society did not know whether everything it was doing was producing the desired results, and it was focused on measuring volume of activity rather than outcomes. The charity also wanted to drive innovation, and hoped that a focus on outcomes rather than activity would help frontline staff to innovate. Staff knew too that the expectations of the charity’s funders (commissioners and grant funders) were growing.

So Alzheimer’s Society went ‘back to basics’, looking at people with dementia, their needs and what they wanted. On that basis it drew up a handful of key outcomes (such as people with dementia having choice and control over their lives; an end to discrimination and stigma) and for each outcome formulated a series of plans, each with one- and five-year targets. All this combined to provide the framework for the charity’s impact reporting through annual reports.

The exercise helped them focus their resources. For instance, where previously the charity had primarily measured the volume of its service delivery, it is now able to look more at the

outcomes its services achieve, identifying areas where ‘less is more’ (for instance, where training other professionals, such as GPs, might be more effective than increasing the charity’s own service delivery). As part of the strategic review, the charity categorised services into those it should always provide, those it might choose to provide, and those it should not provide, but leave to others better placed to do so (including other charities). One result is that the charity is now in the process of closing 60 services that it concluded it should not be running, and refocusing resources elsewhere. To take forward its desire to stimulate more innovation among frontline staff, the charity has set up a £250,000 innovation fund, which staff can bid for, setting out what outcomes they hope to achieve with the money and how they will measure success.

The increased emphasis on focusing and measuring impact has had its internal challenges. Alzheimer’s Society is wary of imposing too much form-filling on frontline staff, so is looking into ways of using technology (e.g. electronic service user records) to reduce the burden. It is also investing in training and support for managers, including material on measuring good performance and impact, rather than the traditional volume of activity. Persuading long-term volunteers of the need for change can also be hard, and has required the charity—which has 6,000 volunteers—to invest a good deal of time and energy in communicating the reasons for doing things differently.

But frontline staff were more supportive of the change than Jeremy Hughes expected. He had anticipated more desire to ‘do what we’ve always done’, and was surprised at how much the changes have empowered frontline staff, a mood which comes through in staff surveys. Similarly, he was surprised at the appetite of service users to get involved in helping choose which outcomes matter and helping to plan services on that basis.

Alzheimer’s Society is on a journey—this new way of measuring impact will take time to implement, and there is more to come. For instance, it will shortly start running a large-scale annual survey of people with dementia, and introduce a service-user involvement programme aimed at influencing practice on an ongoing basis. But already the charity feels that the renewed focus on impact has produced dividends.

### **If you want to improve the quality and efficiency of your services...**

You are more likely to be able to improve the quality and efficiency of your services if you understand and articulate what you want them to achieve, take steps to understand to what degree your services are meeting those ambitions and why, and learn from what you find—as the case study below of **Place2Be** illustrates. A focus on impact can help you base changes to your services on robust evidence of what works.

#### **Case study: Place2Be**

**Place2Be** provides school-based mental health and wellbeing services for children. The charity’s services include one-to-one counselling, self-referral services, and group sessions on issues such as friendship and the transition from primary to secondary schools. It works

in over 170 schools in England, Wales and Scotland, with a turnover of £8.2 million, funded by a mix of schools, local councils, central government, the NHS, grant-making trusts and the private sector.

When the charity was founded, it secured funding to research the impact of its work; in the words of chief executive Benita Refson, *'it was in our DNA from the start'*. The motivation was always to be certain that the charity was helping children, not harming them, and to use evidence to develop and improve its services. Place2Be measures its impact using a range of tools, including a Department of Health-recognised Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; surveys of teachers, headteachers and volunteers; and annual reviews with the headteacher and other staff in each school it works in, looking back over the previous year and ahead to the next. An internal research group analyses the data the charity gets back.

The result is that Place2Be has a huge range of insights into the effectiveness of its work. For instance, it can analyse its impact on attainment, can see which types of children its interventions are most effective for, can compare its impact with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provided by the NHS (Place2Be's impact is more positive), and can see that it reaches children other mental health services cannot or do not.

Initially some of the charity's staff were less than enthusiastic about capturing data, because it involves a degree of form-filling and takes time. Place2Be's response was to acknowledge these issues as real, but to explain and restate the importance of understanding impact as a necessary part of improving and sustaining services. It has also made increasing use of technology to ease the burden on staff—moving online, and looking at greater use of smart devices such as iPads.

The information the charity gathers helps it to develop new services (for instance, its expansion into secondary schools, and a service to support parents of the children it works with to carry out their parenting role). This information also helps the charity improve its existing services. It can make changes where its support is having a less positive impact, and can profile its clients' needs to inform the training it provides to staff and volunteers—ensuring, for instance, that staff working with families where there is a domestic violence or drug problem get the appropriate support. The data it collects, such as impact on school attainment and comparisons with services run by other organisations, also makes it easier to justify investment in the charity by schools, government and other funders.

Benita Refson acknowledges that some charity CEOs may see all this as too time-consuming, but argues: *'If you don't do it, you are just another organisation with an opinion. And in the end, we owe it to the people who use our services that we understand the impact we have.'*

### **If you want to influence others...**

Many voluntary organisations deliver their own services, but achieve a wider impact by persuading other people to do things differently—governments or public sector professionals—using their understanding of 'what works'. As the **Streetwise Opera** and **Volunteer Now** case studies illustrate, a focus on impact can help show 'what works', but also give organisations renewed confidence in taking their message to those they want to influence.

## Case study: Streetwise Opera

**Streetwise Opera**, a small charity with a turnover of £500,000-700,000 per year, uses music to help homeless people move forward with their lives. The charity runs music workshops in homeless centres, and puts on large-scale performances involving homeless people. Its work helps homeless people develop their self-esteem, confidence and social networks, and often leads to participants engaging further with other homelessness services.

In 2006, the charity started to develop an 'Evaluation Tree' to measure the impact of its work, with a range of outcomes represented as the roots of a tree (confidence, self-esteem, skills, enjoyment, social networks, participation), and resultant developments (from sustaining tenancies to tackling self-harm) represented as the leaves of the tree. Outcomes are measured through focus groups, questionnaires, interviews and personal development plans, with both clients and homeless centre staff. You can find out more about the Evaluation Tree at [www.streetwiseopera.org/about-us/the-results/](http://www.streetwiseopera.org/about-us/the-results/).

The development of the Evaluation Tree aimed partly to help the charity improve the quality of its work, and partly to demonstrate the impact of its activity in an environment where funders increasingly ask for evidence of results. It was also important to be able to demonstrate to non-funder stakeholders (homeless centre managers in whose centres the charity operates; the venues it performs productions in) the value of what it does. And the charity was also keen to demonstrate more broadly the potential for arts-related interventions to help address social problems.

The fact that Streetwise Opera can now demonstrate the impact of its services has brought a number of different benefits. It has lifted staff morale. Chief executive Matthew Peacock suspects that it has made it easier to fundraise, and to maintain relationships with existing funders. And it has also made Streetwise Opera more confident in telling its story to a range of policymakers and stakeholders, allowing it to demonstrate the value of its approach. Its work has been recommended by a range of organisations ranging from Homeless Link to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Matthew Peacock's view, based on his experience of charities in other parts of the world, is that the UK is ahead of the game. Many charities are taking impact seriously, investing in planning and understanding the difference they make, and developing models to do so, from outcomes stars ([www.outcomesstar.org.uk](http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk)) to Evaluation Trees. The challenge is to build on that success.

## Case study: Volunteer Now

**Volunteer Now** is a charity with around 70 staff promoting and supporting the development of volunteering across Northern Ireland.

In 2011, a number of developments led the charity to embark on a piece of work with the six Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland to help them measure the impact of the work of volunteers. The impetus for this work included conclusions from a conference held by the Volunteer Managers in Health Forum in 2010, highlighting the need for a more coherent, strategic approach to volunteering across the Northern Irish health and social care system, underpinned by a good evidence base. The policy landscape was also changing, with the addition of new commissioning arrangements in health and social care creating unique opportunities to influence policy change, and therefore the need to be ready to demonstrate the value of volunteering.

Using the Volunteer Impact Assessment Toolkit (developed by the Institute for Volunteering Research), Volunteer Now worked with the trusts to help them look at the impact of volunteering on both volunteers and staff. It looked at a number of potential outcomes, including skills development, development of innovations in services, developing relationships with people from different backgrounds, feeling connected to one's community, and improving employability.

The exercise has had many benefits, but one of the clearest was to help Volunteer Now and the volunteer organisers within the trusts to influence others. The process allowed volunteer organisers to raise the profile of volunteering across their individual trusts, giving them an opportunity to talk to other staff about the role of volunteering and its positive impact. The results also showed that, contrary to concerns about the relationship between volunteers and staff, trust staff were not hostile to volunteers but appreciative of their involvement, and saw the need to spend resources on volunteer support and management.

The pan-Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency are now developing a regional plan for volunteering, and the evidence gathered through the impact assessment project is being fed into this process to inform policy making. Additionally, the fact that such a high-profile public sector body had used the toolkit and seen the value of it enabled Volunteer Now to promote impact assessment amongst a wider range of organisations that involve volunteers across Northern Ireland.

## If you want to energise your team behind you...

When members of your team are clear what goals they are part of trying to achieve, and can see the positive impact they are having, it can lead to higher staff morale and productivity.

Almost all the organisations included as case studies in this document reported a positive effect on staff morale from taking steps to understand their impact. For instance, **Home Link Family Support** found that using an Outcomes Star to record the progress families were making when supported by one of its befriending volunteers meant that volunteers could see they were making a difference, even when they felt they were stuck in a rut. **Alzheimer's Society** was surprised at the appetite amongst frontline staff for its recent review, which put impact centre-stage. The charity expected staff to want to '*do things like we always have done*', but in fact found staff keen to think about what worked and change services on that basis—and now internal surveys increasingly show that staff think the organisation is going in the right direction.

## 2. How could focusing on impact help with your long-term finances?

Being able to demonstrate your impact does not necessarily translate into money in the bank tomorrow. Most voluntary sector leaders know all too well that the process of getting funding is not as simple as being able to prove your impact. Some organisations today are doing well financially despite not being able to prove their impact; others can demonstrate the difference they make but struggle to raise money based on it.

But the long-term direction of travel is clear. The world is changing in a way that means those charities that can demonstrate their impact will increasingly be at an advantage.

- **Funders are increasingly asking for demonstrable results.** A survey of 1,000 charities in 2012 found that the main reason why the vast majority put more effort into measuring their impact today than they did five years ago was a change in funders' requirements.<sup>1</sup>
- **This trend is accelerating, as the public sector increasingly looks to pay by results.** Billions of pounds of welfare-to-work contracts are already commissioned on a payment-by-results basis in England, Scotland and Wales, and the government in England in particular is keen to extend the concept to a wide range of other services, from drug treatment to offender rehabilitation. Organisations that can demonstrate results, know what they look like and how much it costs to deliver them, are likely to find themselves with a major competitive edge.
- **The current decade—and next—is likely to see increasing emergence and growth of social investment,** with social investors more and more able to unlock new opportunities for charities in the UK. Again, these investors, interested as they are in getting both a financial and a social return on their investment, will want demonstrable social impact from those they invest in.
- **In a drawn-out age of austerity, there is growing competition for resources** (dwindling public sector budgets, the funds of grant-making foundations or private sector corporates), which is also likely to put those who can demonstrate impact at an advantage over those who cannot.
- **It is not just grant-makers and commissioners that care about impact:** polling published by NPC in 2013 found that 58% of individual donors pay close or extremely close attention to evidence an organisation is having an impact when they give to charity.<sup>2</sup>

Partly due to the difficult economic context, and partly due to a range of public sector reforms, many charities in the UK will also be looking to find new ways of funding their activities over the coming few years. They will look to build new relationships with new funders that they do not currently know. Here, being able to demonstrate your impact can

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<sup>1</sup> NPC, *Making an Impact* (2012)

<sup>2</sup> NPC, *Money for Good UK: Understanding donor motivation and behaviour* (2013)

also give you greater agility, making it easier to impress upon new stakeholders the value of your work, as the case studies of **Toynbee Hall** and **Teens and Toddlers** illustrate.

## Case study: Toynbee Hall

**Toynbee Hall** is a multi-purpose community organisation supporting people in the City and east end of London. With a turnover of £6.2 million, it delivers a range of services, from advice and financial inclusion programmes to services for young and older people.

Four years ago, the organisation received funding to overhaul the way it planned and measured its impact. Before this, there was no real performance management system in place. Toynbee Hall introduced theory of change models, based on CES' approach, which led to a planning framework, the identification of milestones to be achieved, and decisions as to what the organisation would measure and how. As chief executive Graham Fisher explains, this took the organisation forward but was quite cumbersome when applied to many small projects, so wasn't used effectively.

Toynbee Hall took stock, with the support of an experienced evaluator who volunteered her time to conduct a review, and had a rethink. For many services, funders continue to be primarily interested in outputs rather than outcomes. It can also be challenging to measure outcomes when clients tend to dislike being tracked after they have been helped, and staff and volunteers providing advice have moved onto a new set of clients. Toynbee Hall decided to continue measuring outputs, but also saw that measuring the difference it makes—its outcomes and impact—was crucial. It developed a logic model, an approach which considers resources and inputs, outputs, and outcomes in the short, medium and long term.

Toynbee Hall is also developing a shared measurement tool for financial inclusion, to track the difference services make in this relatively new field. To demonstrate the impact of its services for children and young people to other stakeholders, including schools, which it hopes in future to recruit as funders of these services, it chose to use a wellbeing tool developed by NPC. For its wellbeing services for older people, Toynbee Hall knew that what it was delivering wasn't as high-quality as it would like, so undertook a transformational change project for the service, bringing in an Outcomes Star to measure impact.

All this was not without difficulties—it took time to think through and implement, and for staff to buy into the idea. But there have been many benefits. This impact focus has improved the quality of Toynbee Hall's services—for instance, the organisation now feels satisfied that its services for older people are top quality where it did not previously. The relationship between its services and service users has changed, with the latter more consciously engaged in co-producing the outcomes they want to achieve. Elsewhere, it has enabled the organisation to convince schools of the value of its services for children and young people, and schools now help to fund them. It has helped Toynbee Hall to speak to new funders about the value of its work. The impact on staff morale has been positive too—staff can see the value of their work. As Graham Fisher says, *'it's very powerful to be able to talk to staff about the impact they've had, to make it tangible. It provides a real lift.'*

## Case study: Teens and Toddlers

**Teens and Toddlers** works to help young people stay in school and fulfil their potential; develop life skills and aspirations; build confidence, self-esteem and social skills; and avoid risky behaviour such as teen pregnancy. It does this partly by taking teenagers into nurseries and children's centres, and assigning them a 3 to 5-year-old to become a role model or mentor to. It accompanies this with training. The organisation has a turnover of £1 million and works with around 600 young people per year.

An emphasis on understanding its impact has been 'in the charity's DNA' from the time it was founded. Teens and Toddlers takes an innovative approach to working with young people that is based on positive psychology, which seeks to empower and enhance the innate potential in young people rather than to modify their behaviour. From its beginning, the charity wanted to demonstrate the value of a positive, rather than a deficit, approach to changing the lives of participants.

Over the years the charity has evaluated its work through a mix of surveying the young people it has worked with (using pre- and post-project questionnaires and tracking how the young people fare until they reach the age of 20), conducting focus groups, and commissioning independent studies. It employs an in-house researcher to collect and analyse the data, and spends roughly 18% of their its turnover on evaluation. Initially its in-house research post was funded by a grant-making trust, but when the funding came to an end the charity decided to fund the post as part of its core costs.

Teens and Toddlers makes this investment primarily to build its understanding of what works, and thereby to improve its services (for instance, making changes to the training element of the programme to make it more engaging for the young people involved). But it became increasingly clear to the charity that funders liked its emphasis on evaluation, and now a fundraiser works with their in-house researcher to ensure that amongst the things measured are outcomes that funders are interested in. That has enabled them to win new funding—including a DWP payment-by-results contract—and thereby weather a significant drop in funding from local councils, which used to fund 80% of the charity's work and now fund less than 20%. Teens and Toddlers fear that many other charities of a similar size will struggle to survive without the ability to demonstrate results in the way that it can.

There are issues to manage—the focus on evaluation does mean more paperwork for staff and the young people the charity helps, and it has to keep a constant eye on ensuring that it continues to measure what it needs to know as well as what funders are interested in. But the emphasis on impact generally has a positive effect on staff morale; people know that what they are doing works.

### 3. Is focusing on impact the new normal?

Across the sector, charities are consciously focusing more on impact as they carry out their work.

In 2012, a survey of 1,000 charities across the UK with an income over £10,000 found that:

- **Three quarters of charities say they invest more effort into impact measurement than they did five years ago.** For charities with an income over £1 million, more than 80% invest more now than they used to.
- **As a result, three quarters of charities say they measure impact for some or all of their work,** and just over half say they measure impact for all or nearly all their activities.
- **78% of charities (and 88% of those with an income over £1 million) believe that measuring impact makes an organisation more effective.**<sup>3</sup>

In other words, impact measurement is already the norm, not the exception. And the direction of travel is clear.

Many are making the shift for reasons already set out above—because funders' requirements are changing, because they want to improve their services, or because they want to know the differences their services are making.<sup>4</sup>

Others want to keep up with best practice, or see putting greater emphasis on impact as part of what it means to be a modern, professional charity. For one of the CEOs interviewed for this pamphlet focusing more on impact was *'part of the transition from being a kitchen-table charity to a professional one'*.

In the context of the world changing, most charities changing with it, and competition for resources getting ever tighter, many worry about those left behind. As one CEO said, *'this world is here to stay, and you have to embrace it or fall behind. So we have to get on with it!'*

#### Case study: Shannon Trust

**Shannon Trust** is a small charity with eight staff, working in 150 prisons across the UK where it supports literate prisoners to teach non-reading prisoners how to read. Each year the charity works with around 1,500 mentors and 5,000 learners. It is funded exclusively by foundations and corporates or individual giving, but is interested in exploring statutory funding at some stage.

Up until a few years ago, the Shannon Trust measured the number of new learners it took on each month, the number of mentors it trained each month, and its contribution to *'purposeful activity'* within a prison. It felt that it wasn't clear on what its impact was—it had

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<sup>3</sup> NPC, *Making an impact: impact measurement among charities and social enterprises in the UK* (2012)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

lots of anecdotes and measures of volume of activity, but not much more. The charity wanted to be clearer on what it was achieving, and also felt that being better at measuring its impact was part of its growing maturity as a charity—the transition, as chief executive David Ahern put it, *‘from kitchen table charity to professional charity’*. It knew too that going forward, funders would want more evidence of the impact organisations have, and that particularly if it was to access statutory funding at some point in the future, it would need to be better able to evidence its outcomes.

Advised by the Institute of Education, The Shannon Trust started surveying the prisoners it works with about the impact they thought its services have had on them across a range of factors such as self-esteem, likelihood to continue learning, and progress in reading ability. The charity used a ‘Reading Measure’ to monitor learning progress, which doubles as a tool to inspire the prisoners it works with, reflecting what they are achieving. The Shannon Trust will soon start asking its volunteers how well different aspects of the service are going—for example how supportive prison governors are. It hopes this will help it identify which prisons need more support, and what kind of intervention works under which circumstances. As part of its efforts to monitor impact, it managed to persuade the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to track the progress of Shannon Trust learners using the NOMS database.

The charity was wary of being driven by processes rather than the needs of prisoners with poor reading skills. It didn’t want to lose what was powerful about the charity in its early days—‘passion at the coal face’—and some trustees had to be won round to the idea. But it believes the shift will enable it to deliver better services; for instance, by enabling it to better track clients when they move from one prison to another, an important step forward given how difficult it is to track prisoners in the system. And its long-standing funders increasingly want more evidence of impact, which the charity is now able to provide.

## 4. The time to prioritise impact: if not now, when?

An understandable reaction to the argument that voluntary sector leaders should focus more on impact would be to say that whilst it is indeed important, most leaders in the sector have more pressing things to do—particularly given the current financial climate. *‘Of course it matters, and it’s on my to-do list. But other things have to take precedence today.’* But if you put it off today, when will you take action on it? When will be a better time?

There are good arguments for saying that now is precisely the time to focus more on impact.

The financial crisis has given rise to talk of ‘zombie companies’—businesses that are able to keep going, staggering on without going bust, but not able to generate enough profit to invest and grow, and at risk of collapsing if interest rates go up. The image will be familiar to many voluntary sector leaders. Many will be aware of ‘zombie charities’—organisations that are hanging in there, but without a great sense of direction or vigour, with low levels of staff morale, and teetering on the edge of going under.

As the case studies in this pamphlet illustrate, focusing more on impact can help clarify where an organisation is heading—what you want to achieve and how you are going to get there. It can help you prioritise investment of resource into one activity over another, or identify smarter ways of achieving the same objective. It can lift staff morale. And it can give you a greater degree of financial resilience, helping you to build relationships with new funders, faster. In other words, it can help organisations to be the opposite of a ‘zombie charity’: more purposeful, more efficient and effective, with more productive staff and greater financial resilience.

If you are now thinking more about how to prioritise where you put your resource and effort; if you are now thinking more about smarter ways to achieve your objectives; if you are now thinking more about how ensure you can attract new funders over the coming years; or if you are now thinking more about maintaining or lifting staff morale—then now may be precisely the time to think about how focusing more on impact could help.

### Case study: Home Link Family Support

**Home Link Family Support** is a small charity with a turnover of £275,000 operating in Edinburgh and Midlothian, which aims to give children a positive start in life by supporting families under strain. Its activities include a volunteer befriending service for families with a child under five, and therapeutic work with families. It supports about 120 families per year.

When the charity’s current chief executive Paula Swanston joined in 2009, from an organisation with a well-established focus on impact, she felt it was time for Home Link Family Support to pay more attention to impact, or in places shift the focus of what was measured. This partly flowed from her sense of what was good practice, and her previous experience of clients benefiting from a charity assessing and working on its impact. But it

also came partly from the knowledge that funders (often ‘inundated with applications’) were increasingly asking for evidence of impact.

Initially some staff were wary of what Paula wanted to do; some felt the approach was too clinical, out of keeping with the way the charity operated. But being clear on the reasons for change, and involving all staff in choosing the outcomes they most wanted to focus on, helped overcome that wariness. A working group of staff, volunteers, trustees and beneficiaries led the process, and the charity brought in external expertise from Evaluation Support Scotland to help them think it all through. The charity has now incorporated a self-assessment into the family befriending services, which families and volunteers both fill out every three months, assessing progress against four or five outcomes. For the therapeutic service, every six weeks the charity uses SCORE (a paid-for package widely used for a range of therapeutic work: <http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/score.html>).

In the beginning it meant more work, and it can take time for staff to get into the rhythm and for the benefits to be realised. But now the positive effects on service quality are clear. Volunteer befrienders can see what impact their help is having on a family, and do things differently if need be. Project managers can speak to volunteers about trying a different tactic if progress is slow. And families themselves can reflect on how far they’ve come—the charity has been surprised at the appetite of families to see how they are doing. Paula’s sense is that this spurs families on, and can help them set their minds to change, particularly when the family is involved in setting the outcomes they want to achieve. There are also positive implications for volunteer morale: if, halfway through a project, a volunteer feels stuck in a rut with a family, the regular measurement of key outcomes often enables them to see that in fact they are making real progress.

When it comes to funding, the charity now feels *‘ahead of the game’* compared to many other small charities. It can quickly pull off statistics and qualitative information for funders demonstrating the positive impact it has, giving it an agility others lack, so that if tomorrow a local authority puts a new service out to tender, it would be ready where others might not. Paula worries about people *‘who still operate in a world of the 1970s-style charity and how they used to function, thinking they have a right to local authority money without providing measurable evidence of their impact on clients.’* That, she argues, is a dangerous mindset in an age of deep spending cuts. For organisations like hers, the ability to improve and demonstrate impact *‘is a question of survival. It’s not enough to say you make a difference, you need to be able to show you do.’*

## 5. What could you do today to get started?

If you want to sharpen your focus on impact, you can get started today, without spending a penny.

As the case studies in this pamphlet illustrate, a useful focus on impact doesn't have to cost the earth, and the resources put into it should always be proportionate. But it does require some investment of time and/or money. If in some aspect of your work you think you could be focusing more on impact, you will want to make sure you set about things in the right way, and do things proportionately.

There are a range of actions you could take today—even if it's just sending an email to set up a conversation—which would allow you to take your focus on impact a step further.

For instance, it might be helpful to...

- ...have a conversation with one of your peers grappling with similar issues.
- ...have a conversation with your chair or a trustee.
- ...have a conversation with your senior management team.
- ...ask a member of staff to look into the issue.
- ...download some of the free tools available to help you get started. For instance, the *Code of Good Impact Practice* provides broad guidelines for focusing on impact, setting out a cycle of impact practice and a series of high-level principles to follow, or the *Impact Measurement Diagnostic* helps organisations identify what they need to do to improve their impact measurement. Both of these tools have been drawn together on the basis of wide-ranging consultation with frontline charities and a number of umbrella bodies within the sector, and will be useful resources for thousands of organisations across the country. They are available for free at [inspiringimpact.org](https://inspiringimpact.org).

The example of **Julia's House**, below, shows how relatively small steps can make a big difference.

### Case study: Julia's House

**Julia's House** is a children's hospice in Dorset, with a turnover of £3.5 million, offering care in children's homes as well as in a hospice setting, and respite services.

It has long carried out an annual survey of parents of the children it cares for, and this is now mandated by its regulator (the Care Quality Commission) and NHS commissioner. But a year ago it decided to be more ambitious with its survey, going into greater depth, getting more honest feedback and seeking to hear back from a bigger proportion of parents. An independent researcher was brought in to carry out the survey, at a cost of £2,000, agreeing the questions and process with a group of staff and clients and getting the response rate up from the normal 40-50% to 90%.

One of the key findings was that parents placed a lot of importance on reliability of community care, and were dissatisfied with visits to family homes being cancelled at the last minute. Julia's House has responded by creating a post to manage the bookings of community care, improve how bookings are recorded in the charity's IT systems, and track how many sessions are cancelled each month. It is also training staff to be able to deal with more types of children's conditions, thereby making it easier for other members of staff to carry out a visit if the original staff member becomes unavailable.

Another major finding was that a significant number of parents wanted Julia's House staff, when visiting a child's home, to be able to look after the child's siblings too, thereby enabling the parents to go out. In the end, Julia's House decided not to offer this as part of its service, because of the costs involved (it would, for instance, have required different skill sets from staff, and a license from a new regulator). But the process allowed it to identify the issue, give it serious consideration, decide what kind of activities it should pursue and what it should not, and communicate and explain its decision fully to parents.

Julia's House are wary of over-surveying the parents of the children it works with, particularly as they know these parents have to go through significant amounts of paperwork relating to their children at the behest of different public sector agencies. And the charity knew there was the potential that any negative feedback might be discouraging for staff. But Martin Edwards, CEO at Julia's House, argues this kind of feedback is a critical tool for the chief executive in challenging poorer aspects of a service internally.

The charity has now decided to conduct an in-depth survey like this every two years, and has also started a three-year project with Bournemouth University looking at the impact of its frequent respite services on family break-up and divorce, building on anecdotal feedback from parent couples that they wouldn't be together if it weren't for the hospice's support. Since part of the charity's mission is to give the families it works with a normal life, the impact here is important, and Julia's House wants to understand if the impact it suspects it is having is real, and if it is, to get the issues higher up the government agenda. The study is being half-funded by Julia's House (costing them £7,000), and carried out by a PhD student as part of a doctorate.

Martin Edwards' view is that too many people in the charity sector think that they are too busy to invest time and energy into better understanding their impact. But in both time and money terms, he says, *'it doesn't have to cost the earth.'*

## Conclusion

Charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups exist to make a difference; to deliver on their mission; to have an impact.

Consciously focusing on your impact can help you deliver more of it. It can help you plan better, help you deliver better services, help you influence others more effectively, help you get your team behind you, help you with your long-term finances—and help you deliver against your mission, and for your beneficiaries.

More and more people are doing it. Now is as good a time to focus on it as any. And you can get started today.

We would urge you to ask yourself the five questions set out in this pamphlet:

- 1. How could focusing on impact help you do your job better?**
- 2. How could focusing on impact help with your long-term finances?**
- 3. Is focusing on impact the new normal?**
- 4. The time to prioritise impact: if not now, when?**
- 5. What could you do today to get started?**

– and on the basis of your answers, to act.



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