



Northern
Learning
Trust

Evaluation

Learning Hives™

Year one: 2016

LEARNING



LOTTERY FUNDED

About Northern Learning Trust

Northern Learning Trust (NLT) is a charity based in Newcastle upon Tyne that works across the North East providing literacy, numeracy, ICT and employability support for groups excluded from or without access to education. They deliver their services in a range of community locations, bringing learning to often disadvantaged groups. Their work also includes mentoring and employability services for ex-offenders, including Veterans, literacy and numeracy for children and families, parenting programmes for young parents and community education and employability delivered at Learning Hives. They are winners of a number of awards and are at the forefront of literacy and numeracy initiatives in the North East of England.



More information is at www.northernlearningtrust.org.uk

About the authors

Barefoot Research and Evaluation is a social research organisation based in Newcastle upon Tyne, working across the North East. They have carried out work on a diverse range of social welfare programmes in the voluntary and public sector. Dr. Christopher Hartworth, who set up Barefoot, has 20 years' experience of research and evaluation, beginning in developing countries in poverty alleviation programmes and continuing in the North East of England in work with disadvantaged communities. Joanne Hartworth has a First Class Honours Degree in Sociology, is a qualified teacher and an accomplished project manager, having managed projects in East and West Newcastle.



More information: www.barefootresearch.org.uk

Comments about the Learning Hives

The Learning Hives are unique.

Benicia Homes, Northumberland

They are the best thing in the Newcastle.

Learner, Walker Hive

We get great support from them, makes you feel really nurtured.

Student volunteer

I am really pleased with how things are going, they are really embedded within our communities.

Housing agency

If you can fit through the door, then you fit in.

Learner

It's like a learning community.

Learner

It's a friendly place.

Community volunteer

I wish there were more Learning Hives for people in other areas across the city.

Referral organisation

Never before has it been more important to break benefit dependency.

Housing agency

i. Executive summary

Learning Hives are a community education approach, which creates centres of learning in the midst of deprived residential areas. This is the first year evaluation of a three year Big Lottery funded Learning Hives project which is taking place in Newcastle and Northumberland in three community venues.

Project outputs

The Hives have become a well used community resource, with an average monthly usage of between 100 and 250 people (the variance appears to be due to length of establishment of the Hives, the longer they are established, the better they are used). Secondly, the Hives are being successful in engaging people into learning, with 400 people participating in learning programmes and 350 with Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). It is significant that the project has engaged with high numbers as it demonstrates a community need that was correctly identified. The numbers completing ILPs is also significant as it demonstrates a commitment and engagement with learning. Very importantly, there is a progression, with around 70 people being involved in some level of volunteering, a total of 46 people who have gained employment, over 60 who have gained qualifications.

Impact on learners and volunteers

The evaluation conducted a series of focus groups and in depth interviews with a selection of learners across all the Big Lottery funded Hives. The results have been thematically analysed and are presented in those themes in the following section:

Highly accessible learning: learners reported high appreciation for the accessibility of the support, resources and education delivery. Learners reported that the staff were always welcoming and engaging and there was an informality of learning contact, where learners could drop in or direct their own learning. Learners said that the high accessibility was contrasted to the difficulty of access to other learning or employment related resources in other community venues such as Job Centre Plus or library. Other learners contrasted the positive and engaging attitude and

behaviour of tutors at the Hives and other teachers that they have met in school and in college.

Improved mental health and reduced isolation: it was reported by many learners across all Hives that being involved in the learning had a number of positive impacts on their health and wellbeing. These included improving confidence and self esteem and reducing isolation. The tutors and the one-to-one support model created an atmosphere which encouraged learning in those who lack confidence. It was also reported that the Hives facilitated social engagement and helped learners overcome loneliness. Learners reported that the Hives had impacts on strengthening their social networks. This translated into increasing the amount of times learners left their house, the numbers of their social interactions and the number of people that they knew in their locality.

Providing access to resources that they did not possess: learners explained that the Hives enabled them access to computers and the Internet that would otherwise be very difficult. Some learners explained that they did not have computers or broadband at home. Others said these resources were difficult to get access to in other venues, such as the library or Job Centre Plus.

Reducing the risk of sanctions: benefit sanctions were a concern to users of the Hive and something that was reported to affect a number of people living in the local community. It was reported that the use of sanctions by Job Centre Plus was increasing in frequency and benefits would be stopped with little justification. A particular area of concern was removing people from disability related benefits and putting them onto job seekers allowance, which was also reported to affect a number of people and caused significant stress. As a result of the literacy support, access to contact details and telephone numbers and advocacy support, there were a number of examples of sanctions being avoided or overturned.

Impacts on volunteers: we found a number of impacts associated with the volunteers at the Hives, including:

Skill development: this was evident across all types of volunteers albeit on different levels. For example, students reported that being involved in teaching and learner support was invaluable in their acquisition of educational and employment related skills and knowledge; volunteers from the community spoke of how much they learnt from the experience of supporting other learners and carrying out administrative duties, with some saying that it was this experience that led to them finding paid employment.

Increased confidence: similar to the health and wellbeing impacts on the learners, volunteers reported that the positions gave them more confidence in professional environments. This was felt to be important on both a personal and professional level and it was this particular effect of the volunteering that led to some volunteers gaining paid employment.

Other findings

The section presents the results of our analysis of project data and overall performance. They are also presented thematically:

Representing a significant social return on investment: we have calculated Learning Hive's social value using HACT's (the housing support agency which provide the industry standard in calculating social impact and value) evidence based values. The cost of the total project per year is £112,341, revenue costs for the housing agency (Bernicia) for two Hives is £15,000 and an estimated 10% in kind cost to NLT, giving a grand total of £138,575 for three Hives. The social value cost using the figures presented in the main body of the report, give a social impact value of £2,374,327 over 12 months, representing a social return on investment of 1:17.

Recognition from partner agencies: there was a high level of satisfaction expressed by agencies in relation to a number of key areas, including the teaching and learning, the quality of the resources, communication and responsiveness and in the range of learning offered. There was also a good appreciation of the impact of

the Hives in the local community, with recognition of the Hives helping people maintain tenancies, improve qualities of life, assist people into employment and help people off benefits.

Serving populations located in areas of high need: the Hives are situated in areas of high deprivation with corresponding high rates of benefit claimants and low numbers with educational qualifications. The people that use the Hives are from the locality and thus share those characteristics. This demonstrates that the Hives are serving the populations they were intended to benefit: those without or with limited qualifications and those seeking employment. Also the areas are dominated by social housing stock, interspersed with private rented and owner occupied, and as such there is a clear imperative for social investment from housing agencies.

Few similar services: the availability of general community resources varied in relation the geographical location of Hive, corresponding to proximity to urban centre; Walker had most and Newbiggin the least. There were some community education services, for example at Bedlington there was a new nearby community resource which included educational activities and at Walker, there were other community venues such as Byker Sands, which provided some educational activities, such as basic skills. However there were no educational services like the Learning Hives, providing focused literacy, numerous and IT learning. There was also a shortage of community resources which are provided online access.

An effective management structure: Northern Learning Trust operates an effective management system which ensures Hives achieve their outcomes. This includes highly skilled and motivated Community Engagement Tutors (CETs), which are given a high degree of responsibility to manage learners, volunteers, course content, design of delivery mechanisms and a community house. These report to an Operations Manager who provides responsive and regular support on an operational and strategic level, i.e. responding to on-the-job issues as well as negotiating with partner organisations. This managerial support and function is essential to the ongoing successful delivery of the Hives. The Operations Manager in turn is managed by the Chief Executive of the Trust and receives direction from the Hive

steering groups. Outcomes are the result of this organisational structure, rooted in the experience of delivering community education, and not simply the result of placing a tutor in a community venue.

Increasing crisis referrals: over the first 10 months, the Hives have noted a steady increase in learners presenting with complex needs, often in crisis, exhibiting distress and poor mental health issues, many of them because of benefit sanctions and/or the withdrawal of Employment Support Allowance. The dwindling community resources as a result of Government austerity have resulted in meagre support and guidance for vulnerable people. As such, people will address their issues to those services which are still available and accessible, the Learning Hives are one such resource. Although, supporting vulnerable people with their complex problems is not within the remit of the Hives, they will not turn people away or refuse people. Thus, considerable time has been spent by staff and volunteers, trying to find additional help to stabilise people before they can engage in learning.

Conclusion

The Learning Hives are based upon solid foundations; a pilot period where there has been a development of the delivery model and growing relationships with housing agencies as delivery partners. The project outcomes are impressive and it shows consistent engagement figures. Delivery comes from a highly specialised, regional charity who are demonstrating excellent project and relationship management.

The Learning Hives could not have come at a more necessary time, with deprived communities being hit by the pernicious effects of austerity. Within these communities, removal of benefits, particularly Employment Support Allowance for disabled people and benefit sanctions are having significant negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Support structures and safety nets have reduced because of the removal of funding and local authority services at a time when they are most needed. NLT's Learning Hives have become, in the words of one learner, "*like an oasis*" offering support, advocacy and for some, a way out. The only

negative aspect of the Hives is that they are not in more neighbourhoods in the North East. The housing agencies have recognised these issues and are working in a proactive way to support the initiative, recognising that as a social landlord, emancipatory education provision is important. This has been backed up by the project's associated HACT social impact figures, which attributes a considerable financial value to social welfare interventions. Learning Hives seem an attractive investment opportunity for Social Impact Bonds.

Recommendations

Based on our research for this evaluation, we make a series of recommendations:

- **Reduce certain targets:** it is felt that the project has overestimated certain specific targets, especially for completed Warwick Edinburgh wellbeing scale. As it is raised in this report, there is a risk that relationships maybe put at risk because of the pressure of completing sufficient questionnaires. We advise negotiating with the Big Lottery Fund, to reduce these numbers.
- **Increase numbers:** the evaluation is aware that the project is paying particular attention at attempting to increase numbers of learners at Bedlington and to ensure a more equal gender balance (currently more men than women). It would be remiss of this evaluation not to include this as a recommendation. It is suspected that lower numbers is a developmental issue, which has been affected by the renovations issue at the beginning of the Hive. The gender issue may require further attention, for example, investigating methods to target women and families to encourage them into learning.
- **Expand provision:** again we are aware that there are discussions between NLT and housing agencies to create more Learning Hives. Based on the evidence in this evaluation, this is a necessary and logical step to take in the current social welfare situation. We think there is an argument for locating

learning hives in areas which have a similar IMD score and population number. Thus the potential for expansion is large.

- **Increase available courses and education resources:** learners were asked what would improve the Hives and they offered the following suggestions:
 - A greater number of accredited courses.
 - Employment related courses and certification such as qualifications needed for security professionals and builders.
 - Taster courses.
 - More educational resources, such as text books.

It is recommended to pursue this further with the learners and perhaps put in place such choices or resources.

- **Improve communication:** as a result of the research with partner agencies, there was an apparent need to improve the awareness of certain stakeholders. This was in relation to both the purpose and objectives of the Hives and of the delivery organisation. The release of an evaluation summary is a good opportunity to do this.
- **Explore Social Finance:** it is recommended that investigations be made into the potential for attracting social investment as a sustainable future funding model. The social finance market is becoming a viable option for some social ventures, via, for example, Social Impact Bonds.

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1.0 Introduction

This is the first year evaluation of a three year Big Lottery funded Learning Hives project, a community education initiative delivered by Northern Learning Trust (NLT). Learning Hives have grown from a pilot project developed in 2011 in partnership with a social housing agency in one locality, with investment from NLT, housing and the Big Lottery Transition Fund, to a mature model of community learning being delivered in three locations across two local authority areas. In this evaluation we explore the impact of the project on these communities and the learners who use the Hives. We have also looked at wider issues of organisational performance and partnership working.

1.1 The evaluation

An annual evaluation was included in the project and this first year evaluation has been carried out between March and July 2016 by an independent sector specialist research organisation¹. Such an evaluation function allows an action oriented, formative approach to be taken, which adds value to an already tried and tested delivery model. This has been carried out at month 10 to give early indications of performance and impact, to enable changes and modifications to be made in good time or if necessary.

The evaluation has used a mixed methodology to evaluate the work of NLT within a Grounded Theory framework (Glaser and Strauss, 1967²). Research methods included:

- Indepth interviews with: project staff (n=6) and volunteers (n=5); learners (n=8); and housing agency representatives (n=3).
- Focus group interviews with learners (n=35) at the Hives.

¹ www.barefootresearch.org.uk

² Glaser and Strauss (1967).

- Participant Observation of delivery (n=3).
- Examination and analysis of project datasets including project output and outcome monitoring systems, both quantitative and qualitative.

The qualitative information produced by the research was formatted into manageable data using framework analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994³) and constant comparative methods (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) were used to analyse the data to clarify meaning and examine, compare and contrast associations. Common themes became apparent and the report is structured in agreement with these.

The evaluation also collected and analysed the project's substantial quantitative datasets, which included project records and monitoring information. A review and analysis of secondary research and policy information was also carried out.

1.2 Background and context

Learning Hives developed from two convergent elements: NLT's project delivery experience; and the effects of government policy. NLT had been working within local communities in deprived wards for nearly 20 years, and some of this work has been delivered from community houses. Over the recent past, they have become increasingly aware of their longer term impacts on learners' lives using this method. For example, a literacy development programme delivered in 2001 from *Wor Hoose*, a community house in Walker, is now known to have resulted in sustainable employment for learners who passed basic literacy and numeracy up to 10 years ago. The organisation is continually looking for new and innovative ways to build on their experience to bring learning to disadvantaged and excluded groups.

The second element, the programme of welfare and employment reform, has created significant concerns amongst social housing agencies and the threat posed to their revenue streams. For example, Universal Credit meant Housing Benefit is

³ Ritchie and Spencer (1994).

paid directly to claimants with limited experience of managing household budgets and not the housing companies, as had been done in the past, creating the risk of non-payment; and the Bedroom Tax was reducing the amounts paid to claimants. New employment-related benefits introduced financial sanctions on people who did not demonstrate they were actively looking for work. For example Universal Job Match requires claimants agreeing and fulfilling weekly online job search plans, and the Work Programme requires claimants who have been unemployed for more than six months to engage in unpaid work-related activities, such as volunteering.

These two elements led to discussions in 2010/2011 between NLT and Bernicia, an independent social housing provider, in Northumberland, under the auspices of a local Housing and Employment Network established with Working Neighbourhoods Funding. Together, they agreed to pilot a project which would deliver learning within deprived communities, with the objective of increasing employment and education. The plan was to engage with local communities in a venue where they felt comfortable enough to access learning and volunteering, which would lead to further education and employment. Bernicia provided a house in the most deprived ward in Ashington, East Villas and NLT provided a Community Engagement Tutor (CET) for three days a week using £10,000 of their core funds.

In Northumberland, Bernicia started this work in the late Spring and early Summer of 2011 with a project funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The housing Agency wanted to provide a consistent support offer for their tenants concerning advice and employability. To respond to this, they contacted and began working with NLT and they co-located CETs with the other organisations at a residential property in Ashington. The NLT tutor ran a programme of family learning activities, consisting of entertaining and engaging arts and crafts based activities intended to attract local residents into the new Learning Hive. Bernicia advertised the Hives through their own marketing and communication channels (including leaflets to all residents). Through the period of engagement, the CET had discussions with residents and told them about the literacy and numeracy services that would be delivered from the Learning Hives. During that first 12 months, NLT developed the

model that included: one-to-one support; learner groups; activity based learning; access to computers that were needed to complete job searches and volunteering opportunities (see following section). This project worked very well and contributed to achieving elements of Bernicia's core business strategy, which included financial inclusion, social support and building brighter futures. The latter contained a specific employability and skills objective.

After 12 months of running the pilot, NLT and Bernicia were confident in the approach after seeing encouraging results. The housing agency needed to take back the property in East Villas for residential purposes and provided another house in Newbiggin by the Sea in an estate called East Lea, also an area of deprivation in Northumberland. Newbiggin Hive is open four days a week; Monday to Thursday between nine am and three pm. There are other organisations who provide services from the Hive including Tyne Gateway, who provide a family intervention service, and Job Centre Plus, who see jobseekers. The Hive also provides outreach at a local children's centre where they deliver numeracy to a young mothers group. This takes learning into the community and also attracts new learners into the Hive, increasing value to the local community.

In 2013, a Learning Hive was opened in Walker in Newcastle upon Tyne. This Hive used a slightly different approach as it is located in a local church hall and not in a Housing Association property. However, Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), the local arms length management organisation (ALMO), was a key partner, committed £10,000 for tutor costs and used their communications and publicity to promote the project. YHN has further invested in the Hives through locating one of their work placement employees at the Hives, part of their *Your Home Your Jobs* scheme. This gives a local resident a six month paid position and is intended to act as a route to employment. The Hive is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 9:30 am and 3:30 pm. They have two CETs, providing the equivalent of four days Full Time Equivalent work (one of whom works three days a week and the other, one day a week). The role of the latter is to carry out community outreach and encourage learners into the Hive. The Bedlington Hive is the most recent to be set

up and began in 2015 and is open four days a week, Monday to Thursday. It is also the quietest of the Hives, with usage dominated by male learners. Women with children use the Hive when there are parent and kids activities. The Hive has recently made links with a local children's centre where they are delivering an eight week entry level two and three literacy course. The Hive has engaged in marketing and publicity activities to respond to the lower numbers, for example, working through the local primary school, they have included information on the Hives in each child's book bag.

The context of the localities

In order to provide a context to the work of the Hives, we present three important pieces of information from the Office of National Statistics (ONS)⁴: benefit claimants; qualifications; and total deprivation scores. The data comes from the ONS's Lower Super Output Area which is the smallest unit of measurement used in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and covers the neighbourhood around the Hives; smaller than a ward but bigger than an estate. The data⁵ presented includes: number of benefit claimants; qualifications; and general IMD scoring.

⁴www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/

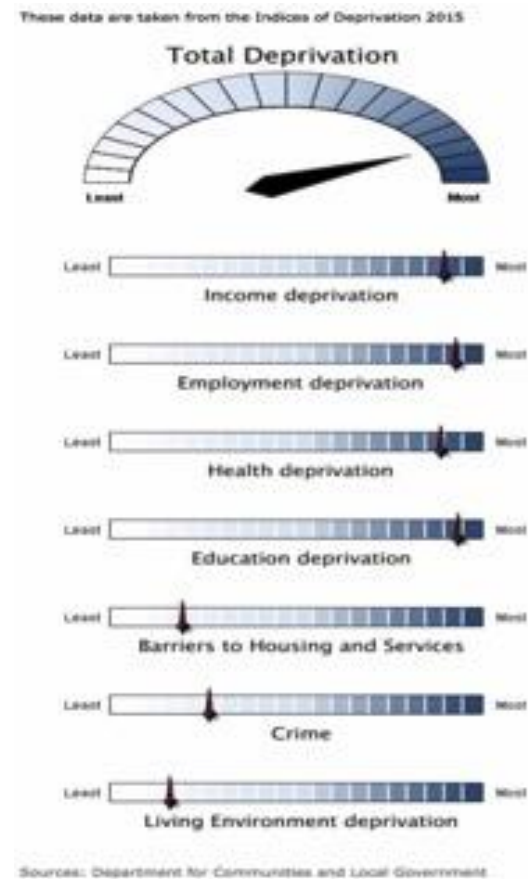
⁵ The data comes from the most recent datasets in 2011 and 2015.

Bedlington

The neighbourhood around the Bedlington⁶ Hive has a total of 1447 people in 631 households:

- A total of 26% of all people of working age were claiming benefits (National average is 15%). This included 12% who were on Incapacity Benefits.
- Just over 45% have no qualifications and 36% have level one or two equivalent.

Figure 1.0 Deprivation scores for the neighbourhood around the Bedlington Hive, 2015



⁶ The neighbourhood of Northumberland 020F.

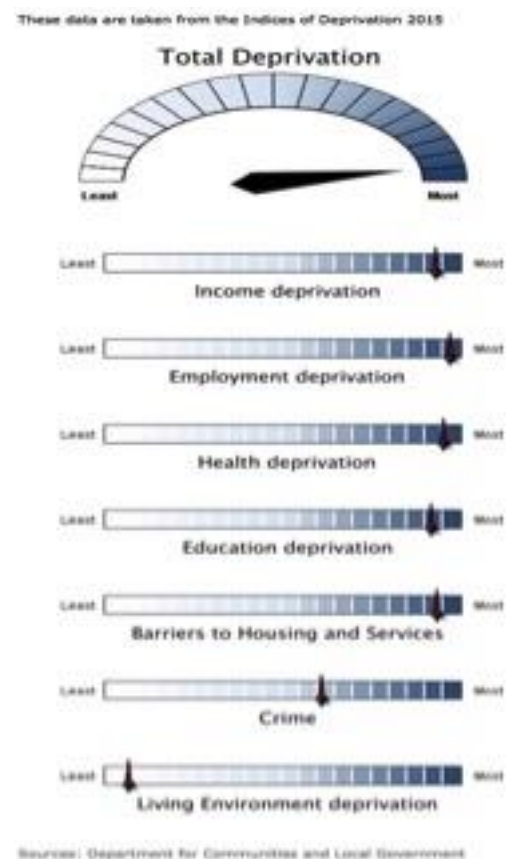
Newbiggin

The neighbourhood around the Newbiggin⁷ Hive has a total of 1600 people in 843 households:

- A total of 38% of all people of working age were claiming benefits (the National average is 15%). This included 16% who were on Incapacity Benefits.
- Over 50% have no qualifications and 30% have level one or two equivalent.

The overall IMD scores are as shown in the following figure.

Figure 1.1 Deprivation scores for the neighbourhood around the Newbiggin Hive, 2015



⁷ The neighbourhood of Northumberland 009B.

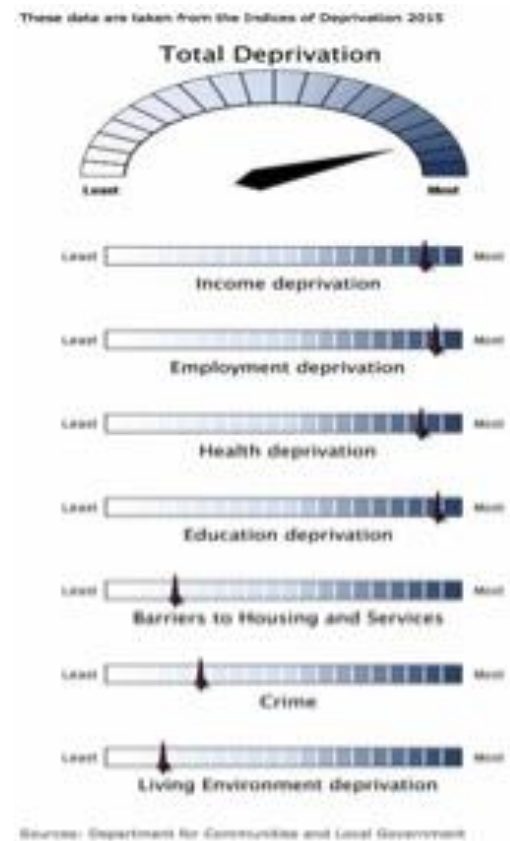
Walker

The neighbourhood around the Walker⁸ Hive has a total of 1,781 people in 1,030 households:

- A total of 46% of all people of working age were claiming benefits (National average is 15%). This included 21% who were on Incapacity Benefits.
- Just over 35% have no qualifications and nearly 20% have level one or two equivalent.

The overall IMD scores are as shown in the following figure.

Figure 1.2 Deprivation scores for the neighbourhood around the Walker Hive, 2015



⁸ The neighbourhood of Newcastle upon Tyne 030B.

The following figures show the areas where the learners live who use the Hives. As can be seen, the majority come from the estates around the Hives (these are marked with a red pin). This means that the learners are all from the estates which experienced the issues of deprivation presented previously.

Figure 1.3 Bedlington: source of referrals, 2015/16



Figure 1.4 Newbiggin: source of referrals, 2015/16



Figure 1.5 Walker: source of referrals, 2015/16



As well as the general background of deprivation, NLT's delivery must be seen in the context of diminishing community resources, For example, cuts to local services meaning reduced access to libraries and general community venues, fewer community services supporting basic community needs and a generally weaker social welfare sector.

1.3 The Learning Hive model

The Learning Hives are a community education approach, which creates centres of learning in the midst of deprived residential areas. These can be local houses belonging to social housing agencies, which have been adapted and made fit for purpose, or they can be within other community venues, such as church halls. Services are delivered from Hives by Community Engagement Tutors (CETs) who play a central role in the successful delivery of the project. They have an advanced skillset, having to deliver education, engage with partner organisations, manage learners (who can be demanding and needy), volunteers (who they must also attract) and approaches from the public. In short, they are much more than CETs.

The activities delivered from the Hive first consist of awareness raising and publicity, aimed at getting local people interested and drawing them into the Hives. This is done through engaging and interesting family activities, such as art, craft and play-based activities. Family learning plays a key role in the work of the Hives in engaging with the diverse members of the community. This entails providing activities that engage children and parents and otherwise attracts different learners into the Hive. All Hives conduct family learning activities: Walker Hive employs one CET for one day a week to focus on both family learning and outreach; at the Newbiggin Hive volunteers carry out family learning activities on school holidays. Residents are also drawn into the centre by providing access to computers that people need to complete job searches required by the Department for Work and Pensions in order to get their benefits. When people are using these resources, they are engaged by CETs in conversations about education and qualifications. As one learner said:

"I come in for job search and then I got interested in what they did and did a qualification."

Literacy, numeracy and ICT work then follows, through one-to-one, learner groups and activity based learning, where people work towards Basic Skills and ICT qualifications. All learners are offered one-to-one support which is delivered at times which are convenient to them in order to make it as accessible as possible. Each learner is given an individual file and learning plan which is completed on a quarterly basis. The learner can come into the Hive, access their Learning plan and work through it at a time that suits them. If required, a tutor will sit with them and assist them with their learning. Exams are negotiated with the learner and completed in a quiet room in the Learning Hive, in compliance with awarding body guidelines. In addition to literacy and numeracy, Northern Learning Trust offers a series of employment related activities/courses, such as CV development and health and safety. However, all the courses and activities that are run from the Hives have a literacy and numeracy slant, such as the parents and children activities and the health and safety training.

The Learning Hives quickly become embedded within communities because of their functional roles of providing accessible education, routes into employment and in ensuring households with minimum benefits. The Hives make it clear to the communities the roles/functions that they do not provide, i.e. they are not:

- Community centres.
- Delivered by housing officers or a social landlord.
- Drop-ins.
- Community houses.

There is an advantage of the Hives being delivered by a voluntary sector organisation and not by a housing or statutory agency; there is a perceived neutrality and independence to the delivery, and there is no risk of negative feelings towards the delivery venues or staff.

Volunteering

Volunteering plays an important role in the functioning of the Hives on several levels, including: introducing additional human resources; providing a progression route for learners; achieving social welfare goals; and developing a community skills base. As can be seen in figure 2.4, the project enables high number of learners to progress into volunteering. There are several different types of volunteering opportunities in the Learning Hives which cater for a number of different groups.

Student placements: The first of these is the provision of a voluntary role for university students on placement. Here, the Learning Hives provide on the job training and mentoring to students who are interested in community learning. There is a high degree of reciprocity demonstrated in this relationship, with students playing an important role in tutoring learners, either as assistants or delivering sessions themselves. This enables the project to reach and engage more people and deliver an improved service; an added value element to the delivery. The students in turn receive an apprentice style period of work experience. Student volunteers spoke very highly of the experience and the support received from NLT. For example one student volunteer said:

"It's like getting an apprenticeship for community learning ... you have the freedom to direct the learning and the support you need to enable you to do the job."

Community volunteering: this consists of volunteer roles filled by members of the local community who provide a traditional model of volunteering. Duties include such things as administration tasks, helping with delivery of specific activities such as healthy cooking and providing some assistance to learning or those coming to do job search. There is also a good degree of reciprocity with these volunteers, with the Learning Hives receiving utility value from the investment of voluntary hours in these tasks. The volunteer receives the rewards which come from working for the benefits of the local community and professional and personal skill development, including NCFE Level 1 Award and Online Health and Safety, Risk Assessment and Safeguarding accreditations.

Social welfare volunteering: this is where the Learning Hives are investing more in supporting a volunteer than they receive back. There is a very weak reciprocal relationship as the host commits time that they would otherwise spend delivering services to administering and/or guiding the volunteer. There may be other resource or cost implications for the Learning Hives from social welfare volunteering, such as using Hive utility costs or discouraging other potential learners from using the Hive. There has been a recognition that this volunteering, although providing a valuable social function, is often difficult to provide in the context of finite resources.

Work programme: this is a government scheme where a benefit claimant who has been out of work for 12 months must engage in voluntary work in order to qualify for continued benefit payments. These positions must be agreed by Job Centre Plus and NLT in advance of the placement. The volunteer spends three days a week carrying out administrative duties. These have allowed the CETs to spend more time developing and delivering education to community members.

As is the case with all professional positions, paid or voluntary, the quality of the individual is key; an unreliable and unprofessional individual is a drain on resources and morale; whereas the opposite is true for a high calibre individual. The Learning Hives have had both.

The project has developed a sophisticated approach to recruiting, interviewing and managing volunteers who work at the Hives. Advertisements for volunteers are placed on the Hives' Facebook Pages, with voluntary sector organisations such as local Council for Voluntary Services and adverts are placed around the locality of the Hive. Once engaged with project, volunteers can take advantage of all the learning opportunities available at the Hive, including taking a NCFE Level 1 Award in Volunteering.

1.4 Relationships with partners

The key relationship of NLT is with the local housing agencies with whom they work to deliver the Learning Hives. These include Bernicia (in Northumberland) and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN). The housing agencies, as social landlords, have social policies laid out in their corporate and strategic plans. Their social policies include sections on financial inclusion, employability and supporting vulnerable tenants. Both agencies have different approaches: YHN has an Employability and Financial Inclusion programme which has a range of initiatives including the *Your Homes, Your Jobs* apprenticeship style employment programme; Bernicia uses the Learning Hives as an important part of their social policies. For Bernicia, NLT is their only provider of education and employability-related inclusion services and for YHN they are an important partner and contribute to their already successful employment inclusion programme.

The local housing partner agencies provide additional human resources for the Hives either through investing time of their employees, as they do in Bedlington and Newbiggin (with staff from their Intensive Housing Management Team), or through placing people on their work programmes at the Hives, as they do in Walker. At the latter, YHN place a worker from their *Your Homes, Your Jobs* scheme at the Hive. These carry out administrative duties and sometimes provide cover. Bernicia Housing Officers have provided significant support in the Bedlington Learning Hive since it was established. They helped cover lone working before there were volunteers in place and they have also support the CET to engage learners through a range of activities such as the Gardening Project, which takes place at the rear of the Hive. As volunteers have become more engaged, the Housing Officers act as intermediaries and facilitators of any housing-related needs concerning the Hive.

1.5 Management and governance

The Hives have several layers to their management and governance. The first of these is a senior management group made up of the Chief Executive of NLT, the

Operations Manager and the **Business and Finance Manager** This group reports to NLT board of trustees. Each individual Hive has a management committee which consists of representatives from Northern Learning Trust and the local housing agency. These meet on a bi-monthly basis and receive reports from the CETs on project outputs and outcomes. They also play a developmental and problem solving role for the Learning Hives and are seen as a key method of operationalising partnership working.

On a day-to-day basis the Hives are administered and managed by the CETs. These receive management support from an Operations Manager. She provides regular and responsive support to all Hives as well as line managing each CET. The manager has experience of managing a Hive and thus is able to provide empathetic managerial support. The management of the Hives is underpinned by comprehensive monitoring and evaluation processes, which are discussed in the next section.

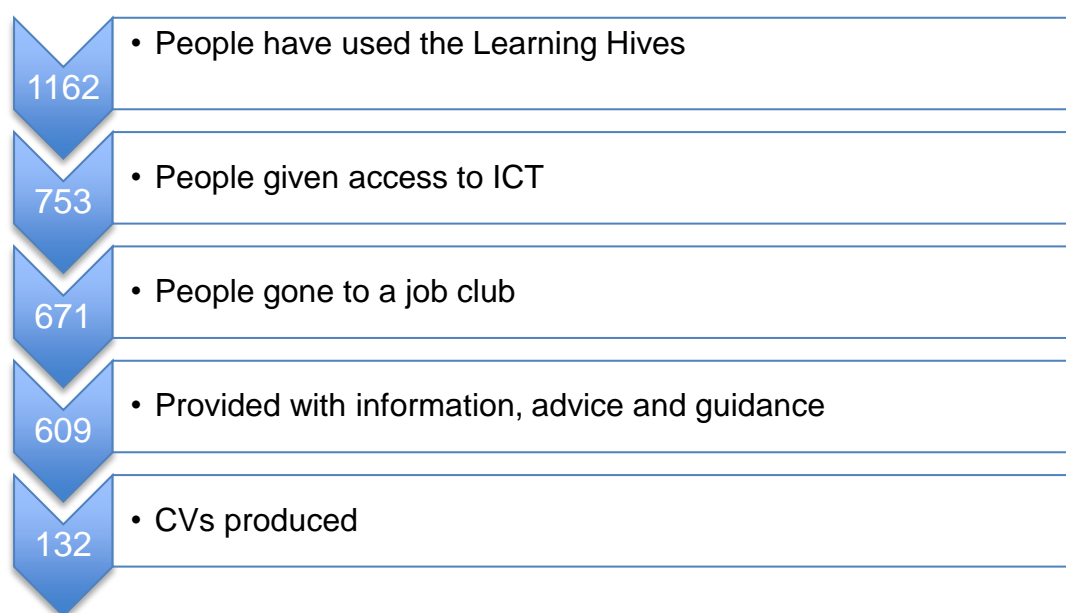
2.0 Evaluation findings

2.1 Findings from project data

NLT maintains a comprehensive set of project data which provides them with important management information and outcome data. This section presents an analysis of a selection of that data.

The first and most important aspect of any service is that the Hives are well used, with an average monthly usage of between 100 and 250 people (the variance appears to be due to length of establishment of the Hives, the longer they are established, the better they are used). Secondly, the Hives are being successful in engaging people into learning, with 400 people participating in learning programmes and 350 with Individual Learning Plans. Very importantly, there is a progression, with around 70 people being involved in some level of volunteering, a total of 46 people who have gained employment, over 60 who have gained qualifications. This section looks at those outputs in more detail.

Figure 2.0 Key project data, September 2015 to July 2016



The first figure shows how many people use the Hive each month. As can be seen, the Newbiggin Hive is the most well used and Bedlington the least.

Figure 2.1 Average number of monthly attendances, September 2015 to July 2016

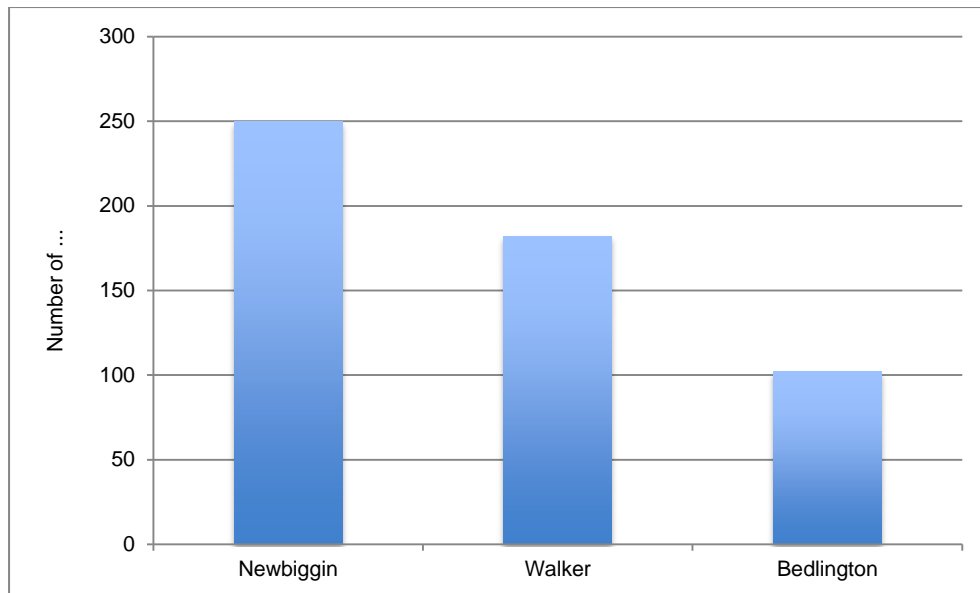
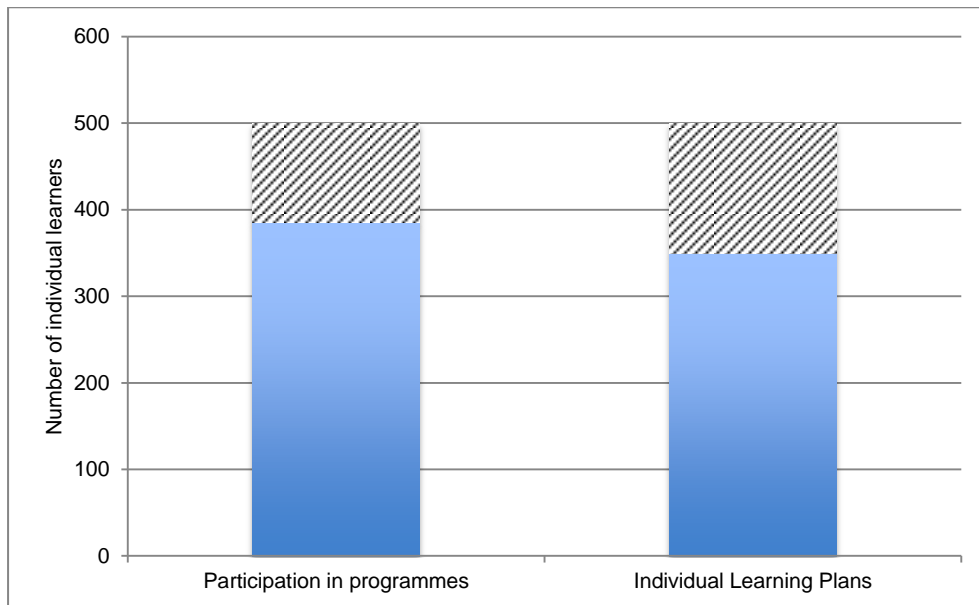


Figure 2.2 presents the number of learners engaged with the project and those who have completed an Individual Learning Plan over the first 10 months. The shaded areas represent the remaining numbers the Hives must achieve in the first year. It is significant that the project has engaged with high numbers as it demonstrates a need that was correctly identified. The numbers completing ILPs is also significant as it demonstrates a commitment and engagement with learning.

Figure 2.2 Learners participation in programmes and Individual Learning Plans, September 2015 to July 2016



The following figure shows the number of learners who have engaged in English and maths, key subject areas in community learning.

Figure 2.3 Learners engaged in English, maths and ICT, September 2015 to July 2016

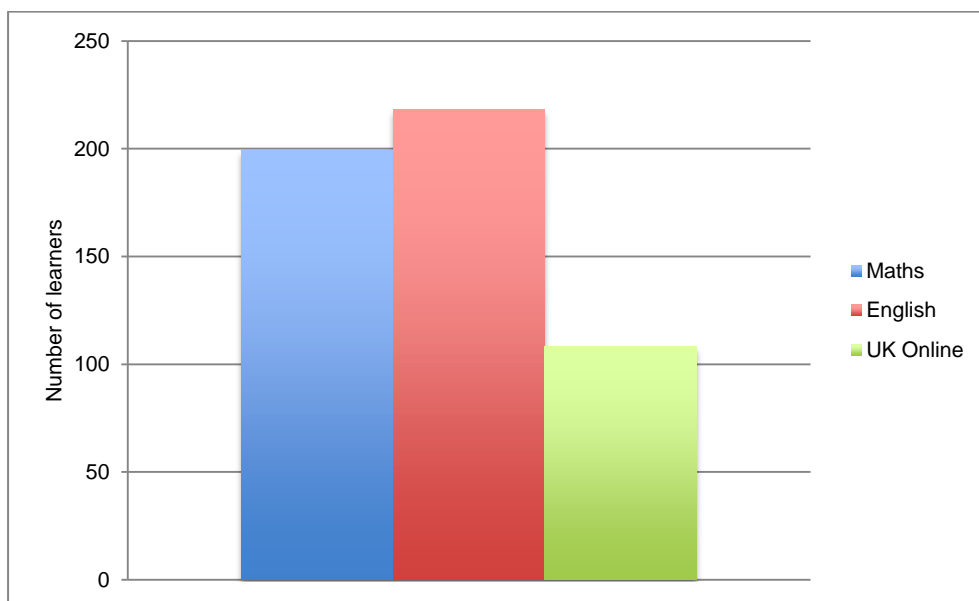
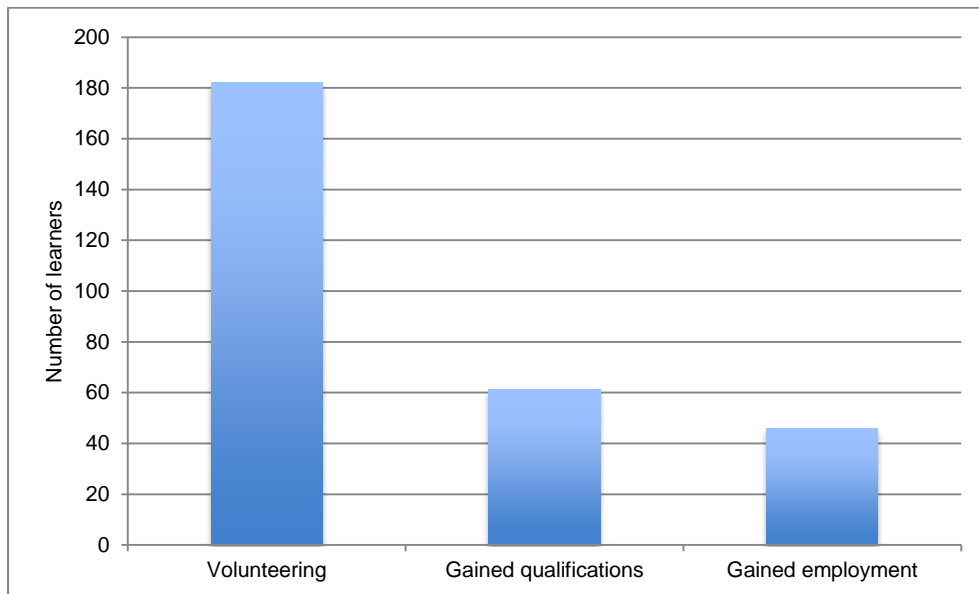


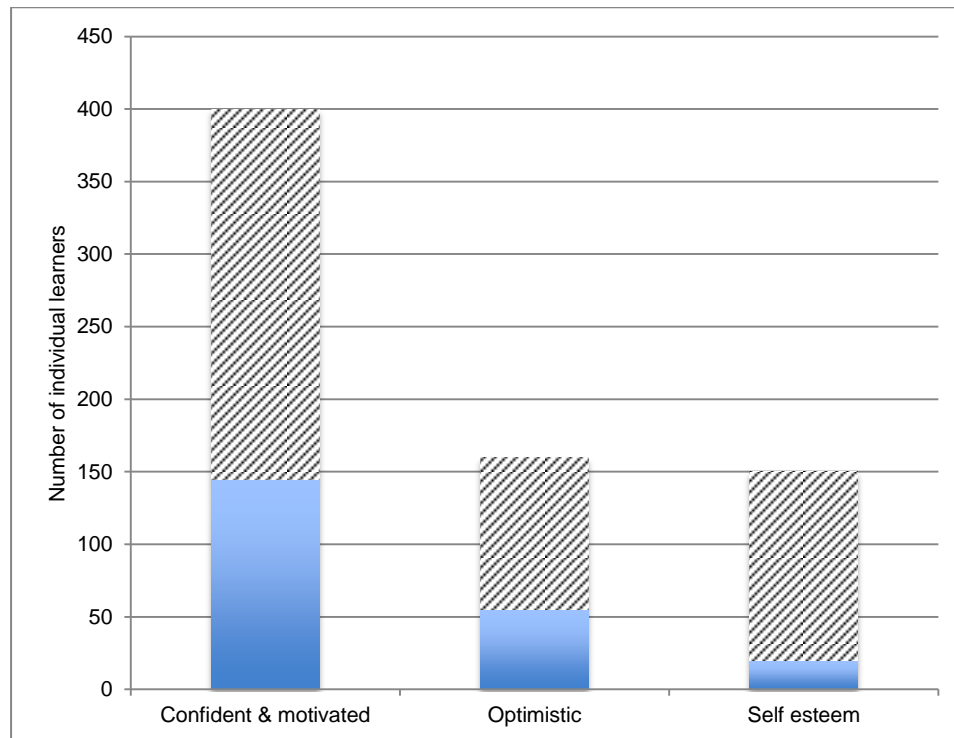
Figure 2.4 shows the important project outputs which demonstrate progression: the number of learners who have gone on to volunteer, gain qualifications and enter employment.

Figure 2.4 Volunteering, qualifications and employment, September 2015 to July 2016



The following figure shows the number of learners who report improvements in mental health and wellbeing outcome indicators. These have been compiled from learners completing Warwick Edinburgh Health and Wellbeing Questionnaires, which is a standard NHS measure, and evaluation questionnaires.

Figure 2.5 Warwick Edinburgh Mental Health and Wellbeing outcomes, September 2015 to July 2016



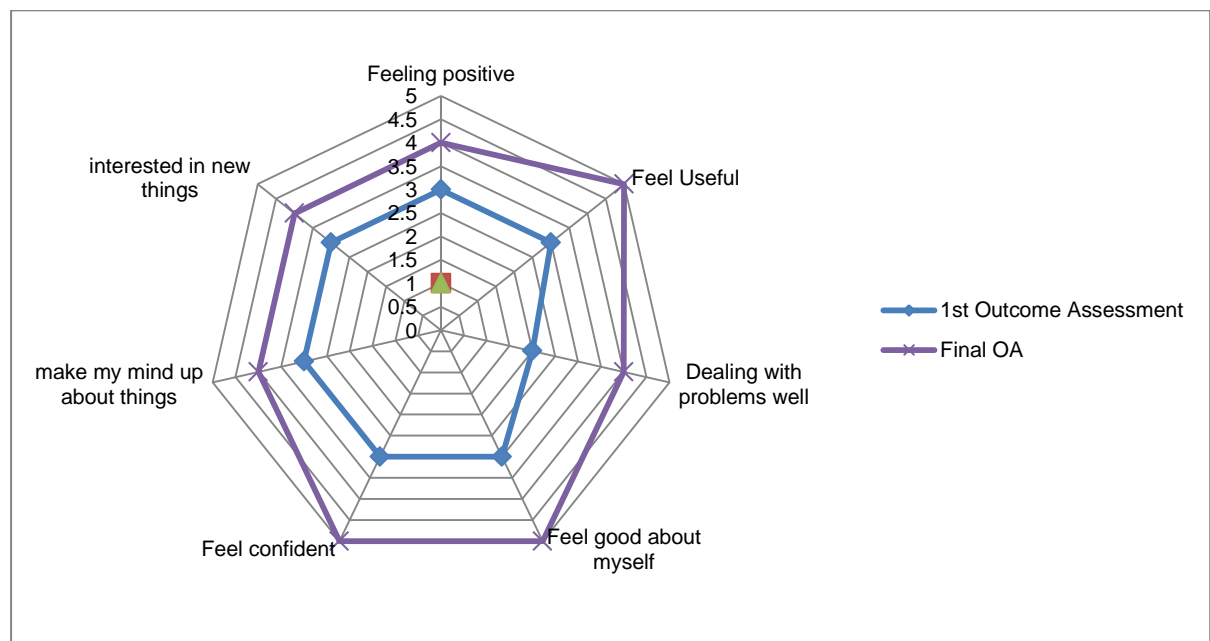
As can be seen, in the last 10 months almost 150 people have reported that they feel more confident and motivated as a result of participating in the learning. In addition, over 50 people reported feeling more optimistic and around 20 people reported that they had increased self esteem. As can be seen from the figure, much of the 12 month target remains. The issue is one of recording and monitoring tool: the Warwick Edinburgh can be seen as invasive and sometimes inappropriate to be addressed to learners. For example, the following figure shows some examples of questions; these can be felt by learners to be unconnected to learning and thus not appropriate to be asked. As much of the effectiveness of the work is dependent on the quality of the relationship between the Hive staff and volunteers and learners, there is an understandable desire not to endanger that relationship with out of place demands. However, for some learners, perhaps those who have made most progress in both their social wellbeing and their learning, these questions are valid to be asked. However, for others, they are not and it is this that explains the low numbers of completed questionnaires.

Figure 2.6 Selection of Warwick Edinburgh questions

- I've been dealing with problems well
- I've been thinking clearly
- I've been feeling good about myself
- I've been feeling close to other people
- I've been feeling confident
- I've been able to make up my own mind about things
- I've been feeling loved
- I've been interested in new things
- I've been feeling cheerful

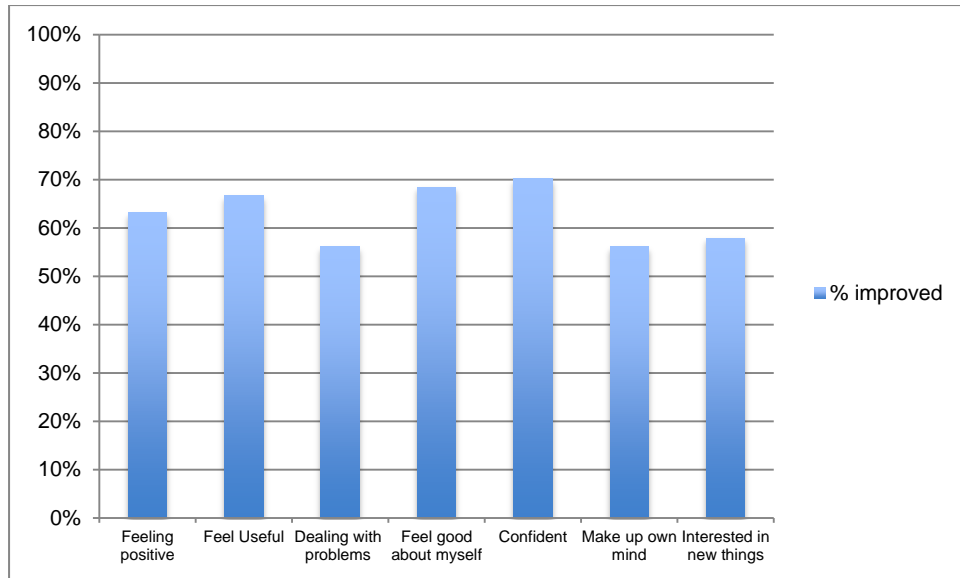
The project also uses the Outcomes Star to measure learners' progress and development in their mental health and wellbeing. The Stars use a number of indicators, such as feeling confident, improved problem-solving and being interested in new things, which are scored numerically on a before and after basis and are presented graphically. The following figure provides an example of one of the project's recent learners.

Figure 2.7 Example of a completed Outcomes Star



The Outcomes Stars can be amalgamated and presented as cumulative data. Using this method, the project has demonstrated improvements in all key areas in a sample of 36 learners, see figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8 Percentage improvement in learners' health and wellbeing



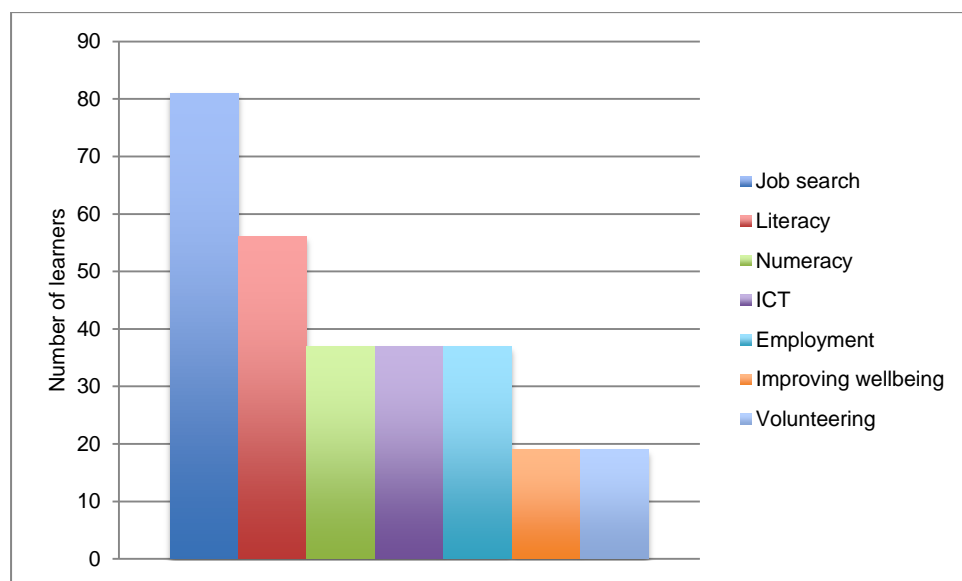
2.2 Findings from partner agencies

As part of the evaluation we conducted a questionnaire-based review with 30 organisations including housing agencies, Job Centre Plus and voluntary sector community-based organisations.

There was a good awareness (71%) from the organisations about the Hives and services that were delivered in the community. There was also a high proportion of organisations that were aware that they were a project of the NLT. However, 50% of organisations were not clear about the purpose of the Hives.

The figure below shows the range of reasons organisations referred people into the Hives. Most organisations made more than two referrals, often referring multiples. As can be seen, the most popular reason for referral was job search, followed by literacy, numeracy, ICT and employment support. It is interesting to note that approximately 20% of referrals were for the purposes of improving people's wellbeing, indicating the Hives play a social prescribing role.

Figure 2.9 Reasons for referral, September 2015 to July 2016



Almost half of the organisation surveyed felt that the Learning Hives helped them in both the work they carried out with their service users and in achieving their strategic objectives. For example, comments included:

'They are a great facility within the community to sign post people with a variety of issues.'

'It is good to have somewhere to send those who prefer to learn on a one-to-one basis.'

'They help me support families that are looking to extend their learning or who are looking to go back to work.'

'The Learning Hive supports the work that we do helping tenants maintain their tenancies.'

There was a high level of satisfaction expressed by agencies in relation to a number of key areas, including the teaching and learning, the quality of the resources, communication and responsiveness and in the range of learning offered.

There was a good appreciation of the impact of the Hives in the local community, with recognition of the Hives helping people maintain tenancies, improve qualities of life, assist people into employment and help people off benefits. Comments from agencies included:

'It has had a positive impact on the tenants I have spoke to that have attended both learning and socially.'

'Because of the way that all of that support is delivered at the Hive customers seem to progress a lot better and engage with the staff and volunteers well.'

'A positive impact especially in isolated communities and for people who don't have or can't afford broadband.'

The evaluation also conducted indepth interviews with senior representatives of partner housing agencies in Newcastle and Northumberland. The Hives were widely appreciated and they were found to have positive outcomes for tenants and their own corporate (and charitable⁹) social policy objectives. For example YHN runs a programme of pre-employment and employability courses for its tenants. These courses tend to be oversubscribed as demand for places is high. Referral paths exist between these courses and the Hives and vice versa, enabling development or continuation of learning for participants or those who cannot get a place on the courses. A YHN representative said:

"They identify people for us and we for them, it works really well."

This link also exists between other housing services and the Hives. For example, housing offices direct tenants into the Hives, and at employment events, tenants are told about Hives.

There were also other social policy objectives fulfilled by the Hives, Such as increasing digital access and addressing the skills gap. It was recognised by the housing agencies that the Learning Hives played a vital role in responding to an absence of skills and qualifications in particular communities. NLT's educational service response was also felt to be appropriate and accessible meaning learning could take place across many different capabilities. For some learners this related to functional literacy and for others, there were higher qualifications such as NVQ level two. NLT was felt to have clear objectives which were well delivered.

Overall there was a positive reaction from other community based organisations, both public and voluntary sector. Generally, agencies were aware of the services

⁹ YHN has recently created a subsidiary charity called Asphalia.

that were delivered from Hives and that they were a project of NLT. There appeared to be more work to be done however about raising awareness of the strategic objectives and what they are trying to achieve in the community.

2.3 Findings from learners

The evaluation conducted a series of focus group and in depth interviews with a selection of learners across all the Big Lottery funded Hives. The results have been thematically analysed and are presented in those themes in the following section.

Health and wellbeing impacts: it was reported by many learners across all Hives that being involved in the learning had a number of positive impacts on their health and wellbeing. These included the following:

- **Improving confidence and self esteem:** it was identified that the tutors and the one-to-one support model creates an atmosphere which encourages learning in those who lack confidence. For example:

"If you are under confident like people are, they encourage you, the one-to-one, it shows you, you can do it."

Another learner said:

"I can't tell you how much difference there is in me because of coming here and doing the courses. I did not think I was very good but when I put my mind to it I could do it. It makes you feel confident to deal with other things, apply for jobs, like I wouldn't have done that before, but I do now because I feel I am worthy to do it."

There were also links made by learners about the fear involved with returning to education and the role of the Hives in helping people through that fear. As one learner explained:

"It is scary, to start again, you think you cannot or are not clever enough, but they make it possible for you here, they help you with that so you can do it. Without them [NLT] and here I would not have come back to doing English and maths."

Another said:

"I have noticed a big difference in me, even my Gran noticed, I am like a changed person."

These findings are also backed up by other project data, which indicates a high degree of confidence.

- **Reducing isolation:** although not a learning objective, learners explained that the role the Hives played in facilitating social engagement and overcoming loneliness was very important. There was a peer support element to learning in the same venue with other community members. This function was also connected to the previous point of improving confidence and raising self esteem. For example, learners said:

"It gives you something to look forward to, get you out of the house, stop you going mad."

"I've made friends here with people who have lived on my estate for years."

"I was lonely in the house, now I come here to learn."

"It makes me feel better coming here ... I actually feel better."

The impact of loneliness on health and wellbeing has received increased attention over recent years¹⁰ and public health authorities have recognised the importance of activities which increase social connectedness. It seems from the reports of the learners that the Hives combined characteristics of being located in the midst of the community, providing accessible, welcoming and focussed activity results in a number of important health and social benefits.

Acting as a progression onto further learning and employment: progression was a key theme throughout the evaluation; in skills and confidence, into further learning and into employment. For some this was intentional and for others more coincidental. For example, a number of learners interviewed said that their involvement in the education delivered at the Hives was a precursor to further education and for jobs. For example, one learner said:

"I came here because I want to do A levels and I needed to brush up on my maths. It has helped me so much, given me so much confidence and I have even started volunteering here."

Another said:

"I started volunteering here to get experience so I could apply for a job, and I got it, I couldn't have applied and wouldn't have got the job if it wasn't for the Hive. I never thought of volunteering before."

¹⁰ Lim, M. H., Rodebaugh, T. L., Zyphur, M. J. and Gleeson, J. F. (2016) Loneliness Over Time: The Crucial Role of Social Anxiety, Apr, Journal of Abnormal Psychology.

The issue of developing self-confidence was seen as key to encouraging people back into work and it is an important factor in pre-engagement and engagement work. As one agency reported:

"There are many people who are nowhere near ready to go back into work. The Learning Hives provides them with a route in, builds their confidence and makes them feel worth something and yes, get them ready to go back into the world of work. But it is or can be a long process."

The progression shown by learners was evident to those that worked at the Hives. For example, a community volunteer said:

"When you look at people who come here there is a noticeable change in their behaviour and confidence levels, they progress, their skills and confidence grows until after a while they are unrecognisable to the people they were when they first came in."

Other learner spoke of the role of the Hives in easing them back into learning and/or educations. As one said:

"Coming here was the first step, I had been nervous for four years put now since coming here my confidence has grown and grown and I feel ready to take the next steps."

For other learners progression started from a position of needing to complete job searches in order to receive benefits. For example:

"I started coming in to do my job searches because I had to, I didn't have a computer at home, the people were canny, didn't bother me, let me do what I had to and then my interest got sparked so I came back and started a course, my level one in maths. It was good."

Reducing the risk of sanctions: there were a number of reports from learners and workers (volunteers and paid) about the role of the Hive in reducing the risk of benefit sanctions. It was apparent that this was a major area of concern to users of the Hive and one that was reported to affect a number of people living in the local community. It was reported that the use of sanctions by the Job Centre Plus was increasing in frequency and benefits would be stopped with little justification. A particular area of concern was removing people from disability related benefits and putting them onto job seekers allowance, which was also reported to affect a number of people and caused significant stress. As a result of the literacy support, access to contact details and telephone numbers and advocacy support, there were a number of examples of sanctions being avoided or overturned. Learners said:

"I was passed myself, they were taking me off ESA and putting me onto jobseekers but there is no way I can work, I was so stressed by it all I couldn't function but the people here helped and got me through it And I appealed and I was all right."

"They stopped my benefits over a tiny mistake, over nothing and it was thanks to [name of CET] that they removed the sanction and I got my benefit back, the stress was unbelievable."

This role played by the Hive is key to the relationship of trust and their position within the community, i.e. community members feel that the Hive is "on their side" as was reported by one learner.

As one volunteer said:

"Sadly, people are being sanctioned [by the Job Centre Plus] and we are helping them with that."

Highly accessible learning: users of the Hives explained how easy it was to access learning delivered by NLT. Learners reported that the staff were always welcoming

and engaging. This was identified by learners as a very important aspect of their role. Learners said:

"They are very helpful and make you feel comfortable, like you are allowed to be here ... they make it easier."

Other learners made the distinction between the attitude and behaviour of tutors at the Hives and other teachers that they have met in school and in college. For example, one learner said:

"They are not like other tutors, much more down to Earth."

Learners reported high appreciation for the accessibility of the support, resources and education delivery. There was also an informality of learning contact, where learners could drop in or direct their own learning. Parents could bring their children and it was a child friendly venue. Learners said that the high accessibility was contrasted to the difficulty of access to other learning or employment related resources in other community venues such as the Job Centre Plus or library. As one learner said:

'You get no time [at the Job Centre Plus]... there's never a free computer and when there is you only get 20 minutes'.

Flexibility of access and delivery was also a key factor in people's appreciation of the learning. Learners appreciated how they were able to "dip in and dip out" of their learning and engage at a time which suited them.

Reducing isolation and increasing social networks: learners reported that the Hives had impacts on strengthening their social capital. This translated into increasing the amount of times learners left their house, the numbers of their social interactions and the number of people that they knew in their locality. Learners commented:

"You look forwards to going [to the Hive], to get out of the house and to meet people."

Providing access to resources that they did not possess: learners explained that the Hives enabled them access to computers and the Internet that would otherwise be very difficult. Some learners explained that they did not have computers or broadband at home. Others said these resources were difficult to get access to in other venues, such as the library or the Job Centre Plus. One learner said:

"It is not like other places, they treat you like adults at the Hive, like human beings, not like schoolchildren."

Physical environment of the Hives: the learners reported mostly positive reactions to the Hives. There were most issues raised in relation to the Walker Hive as a result of the size and layout of the space and the acoustics. As one learner said:

"It can get loud."

However, conversely the same learner liked the fact that you were able to talk and said:

"It's better than the library because you don't have to watch how loud you're being, although you do anyway, it's more relaxed here."

There were some concerns expressed by the staff about feeling unsafe, particularly if they were on their own. It was also felt that people could walk into the Hive and go immediately into the kitchen without being seen, which was a concern. Furthermore, there had been some issues concerning inappropriate comments from some male users to females at the Hive, although these incidents were dealt with immediately and they have a zero tolerance policy on racism and sexism.

2.4 Other findings

The section presents the results of our observations and from our analysis of project data and overall performance. They are also presented thematically.

The Hives serve populations who are located in areas of high need: as section 1.2 demonstrates, the Hives are situated in areas of high deprivation with corresponding high rates of benefit claimants and low numbers with educational qualifications. The people that use the Hives are from the locality and thus share those characteristics. This demonstrates that the Hives are serving the populations they were intended to benefit: those without or with limited qualifications and those seeking employment. Also the areas are dominated by social housing stock, interspersed with private rented and owner occupied, and as such there is a clear imperative for social investment from housing agencies.

Few similar services: the availability of general community resources varied in relation the geographical location of Hive, corresponding to proximity to urban centre; Walker had most and Newbiggin the least. There were some community education services, for example at Bedlington there was a new nearby community resource which included educational activities and at Walker, there were other community venues such as Byker Sands, which provided some educational activities, such as basic skills. However there were no educational services like the Learning Hives, providing focused literacy, numeracy and IT learning. There was also a shortage of community resources which provided online access. The following reports from learners are illustrative of this situation:

"There is nothing else like this around here, it is unique."

"There are the library computers, But there are not many and you can wait ages to get on."

"You can use the computers at the Job Centre but that is miles away [from Newbiggin] and you have to do it loads, some people have to do it everyday."

It was recognised by community agencies that Learning Hives represent unique provision and nothing like them already exists in the community.

Developing relationships: much of the work of the Hive is focused on building relationships, with the local community, with learners and with organisations. This often takes place over prolonged periods and the Hive has been proactive in developing links and building trust with individuals, communities and agencies. Relationship development can be affected by factors outside of the control of stakeholders and this has happened with one of the Hives at Bedlington. Near the time of opening of the new Hive, housing repairs work was being carried on the estate where the building was located. As a result of different housing contractors, renovations of the Learning Hives were carried out before repairs were carried out on the residential houses on the estate. As a consequence of this there was some resentment of the Hive. As such, the CET has been proactive at attempting to (re)build relationships, such as conducting community walks, leafleting and engaging local residents in conversation.

In other work, the Hives have engaged with local schools, children's centres and other relevant local organisations as well as developing relationships with housing officers. These relationships are all aimed at increasing referrals and providing a better service for learners. As a result of the Hives existing before the Big Lottery funding period (with the exception of Bedlington), some of this relationship work had already started. However, some relationships were not ideal and had to be managed when the new funding period started. For example, the Learning Hive at Newbiggin had a core group of approximately eight people who were using the Hive as a defacto community centre which was affecting delivery of core services. The new CET was proactive in realigning relationships on a more professional and functional basis, moving away from a community centre ethos to a professional, learning environment. This complex task was carried out effectively and quickly. As

can be seen, relationship development is not straightforward and takes commitment and time.

Impacts on volunteers: we found a number of impacts associated with the volunteers at the Hives, including:

Skill development: this was evident across all types of volunteers albeit on different levels. For example, students reported that being involved in teaching and learner support was invaluable in their acquisition of educational and employment related skills and knowledge; volunteers from the community spoke of how much they learnt from the experience of supporting other learners and carrying out administrative duties, with some saying that it was this experience that led to them finding paid employment. One community volunteer said:

"It has helped me with my customer services, got me skills like first aid, how to work with vulnerable adults, it's helped me loads and this is going to help me get on in future."

Another said:

"I feel more skilled from working here."

Increased confidence: similar to the health and wellbeing impacts on the learners, volunteers reported that the positions gave them more confidence in professional environments. This was felt to be important on both a personal and professional level and it was this particular effect of the volunteering that led to some volunteers gaining paid employment. For example, volunteers said:

"If I hadn't of been volunteering here I would not have had the confidence to apply for the job that I got."

"I feel so much better about myself, more confident, more capable."

Increasing crisis referrals: over the first 10 months, the Hives have noted a steady increase in learners presenting with complex needs, often in crisis, exhibiting distress and poor mental health issues, many of them because of benefit sanctions and/or the withdrawal of Employment Support Allowance. The dwindling community resources as a result of Government austerity have resulted in meagre support and guidance for vulnerable people. As such, people will address their issues to those services which are still available and accessible, the Learning Hives are one such resource. Although, supporting vulnerable people with their complex problems is not within the remit of the Hives, they will not turn people away or refuse people. Thus, considerable time has been spent by staff and volunteers, trying to find additional help to stabilise people before they can engage in learning. NLT has created links with specialist organisations and have improved referral processes, indeed at Newbiggin, a family intervention project for troubled families now offers a surgery style service from the Hive. This has ameliorated the situation slightly although NLT is still conscious of the unmet community need.

An effective management structure: Northern Learning Trust operates an effective management system which ensures Hives achieve their outcomes. This includes highly skilled and motivated CETs which are given a high degree of responsibility to manage learners, volunteers, course content, design of delivery mechanisms and a community house. These report to an Operations Manager who provides responsive and regular support on an operational and strategic level, i.e. responding to on-the-job issues as well as negotiating with partner organisations. This managerial support and function is essential to the ongoing successful delivery of the Hives. The Operations Manager in turn is managed by the Chief Executive of the Trust and receives direction from the Hive steering groups. Outcomes are the result of this organisational structure, rooted in the experience of delivering community education, and not simply the result of placing a tutor in a community venue.

2.5 Social value and Cost Benefit Analysis

We have carried out a social value and Cost Benefit Analysis calculation using HACT¹¹ evidence based values; HACT the housing support agency which provide the industry standard in calculating social impact and value. This exercise is similar to conducting a Social Return On Investment, and indeed at the end of the section we offer a return ratio, based on these calculations. The following table produced from HACT metrics, presents a description of the value area, such as an individual finding employment and provides an estimated unit cost. We have added numbers to these areas based on project data and then we have calculated the total value corresponding with the subject area. It is routine practice when carrying out this exercise to remove a deadweight value; this is percentage likelihood that the outcome, such as feeling more confident, would have happened at some point without the intervention of a particular service. In calculating the numbers, we have chosen two HACT metric areas per individual: one activity value (where the social value is obtained by the person simply undertaking an activity) and one outcome value (which are values that can be applied when there is evidence that something has changed)¹². We have chosen the following combinations: regular attendance at voluntary or local organisation and high confidence; and regular attendance at voluntary organisation and general training for job. We chose these combinations because they are directly attributable to attendance at the Hive and have a low deadweight score, which we have estimated to be 10%. We chose not to select the other metrics (shaded in grey in the table) either because they were less likely to be directly attributable to attendance at the Hive, such as gaining employment, or their inclusion would cause a double counting (such as regular volunteering and regular attendance at voluntary or local organisation, and high confidence and feel in control of life). We have left the figures in the table to illustrate that there are other possible combinations which would produce different figures of social value and ours is just one of these.

¹¹ www.hact.org.uk

¹² Trotter, L., Vine, J., Leach, M. and Fujiwara, D. (2014) Measuring the Social Impact of Community Investment: A Guide to using the Wellbeing Valuation Approach, HACT: page 17.

The cost of the total project per year is £112,341 from Big Lottery funds, revenue costs of the housing agency (Bernicia) for two Hives of £15,000 and an estimated 10% in kind cost to NLT, giving a grand total of £138,575 for three Hives. The social value cost using the figures shaded in orange in the table gives a social impact value of £2,374,327 over 12 months, representing a social return on investment of 1:17; a significant social return on investment.

Table 2.0. Annual social value of Learning Hives

HACT code	Description	Unit cost	Numbers	Total value £
EMP1401	Full time employment	14,433	20	-
EMP1603	Part time employment	1,229	26	-
EMP1408	Regular volunteering	£3,249	180	-
EMP1609	Regular attendance at voluntary or local organisation*	£1,773	400	390,060
EMP1610	General training for job**	£1,567	202	316,534
HEA1601	High confidence***	£13,080	130	1,700,400
HEA1406	Feel in control of life	£15,894	20	-
FIN1407	Access to internet	£2,413	231	-
Subtotal (adjusted to 12 month equivalent)				2,792,113
Minus deadweight @ 10%				279,211
Total social value				2,512,902
Minus running costs				138,575
Social value				2,374,327

* Attends local and voluntary groups at least once per month for at least two months

** General work-related training to help find new job, to increase skills for job or to improve skills for job

***Response to a survey questionnaire indicating increased confidence.

3.0 Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 Conclusion

The Learning Hives are based upon solid foundations; a pilot period where there has been a development of the delivery model and growing relationships with housing agencies as delivery partners. The Big Lottery funding has enabled this model to be further refined and developed and also evaluated. This first year evaluation has served a number of purposes, including: confirmation and validation of the model of delivery; an examination of the emerging outcomes and impacts, especially on learners; and identify areas for improvement. The exercise has positively reported on the model and impact areas and also importantly verified that the approach taken by the project will successfully deliver on the agreed Big Lottery outcomes.

The Learning Hives could not have come at a more necessary time, with deprived communities being hit by the pernicious effects of austerity. Within these communities, removal of benefits, particularly Employment Support Allowance for disabled people and benefit sanctions are having significant negative impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Support structures and safety nets have reduced because of the removal of funding and local authority services at a time when they are most needed. NLT's Learning Hives have become, in the words of one learner, "*like an oasis*" offering support, advocacy and for some, a way out. The only negative aspect of the Hives is that they are not in more neighbourhoods in the North East. The housing agencies have recognised these issues and are working in a proactive way to support the initiative, recognising that as a social landlord, emancipatory education provision is important. This has been backed up by the project's associated HACT social impact figures, which attributes a considerable financial value to social welfare interventions. Learning Hives seem an attractive investment opportunity for Social Impact Bonds.

3.2 Recommendations

Based on our research for this evaluation, we make a series of recommendations:

- Reduce certain targets: it is felt that the project has overestimated certain specific targets, especially for completed Warwick Edinburgh wellbeing scale. As it is raised in this report, there is a risk that relationships maybe put at risk because of the pressure of completing sufficient questionnaires. We advise negotiating with the Big Lottery Fund, to reduce these numbers.
- Increasing numbers: the evaluation is aware that the project is paying particular attention at attempting to increase numbers of learners at Bedlington and to ensure a more equal gender balance (currently more men than women) at this Hive. It would be remiss of this evaluation not to include this as a recommendation. It is suspected that lower numbers is a developmental issue, which has been affected by the renovations issue at the beginning of the Hive. The gender issue may require further attention, for example, investigating methods to target women and families to encourage them into learning.
- Expand provision: again we are aware that there are discussions between NLT and housing agencies to create more Learning Hives. Based on the evidence in this evaluation, this is a necessary and logical step to take in the current social welfare situation. We think there is an argument for locating learning hives in areas which have a similar IMD score and population number. Thus the potential for expansion is large.
- Increase available courses and education resources: learners were asked what would improve the Hives and they offered the following suggestions:
 - A greater number of accredited courses.
 - Employment related courses and certification such as qualifications needed for security professionals and builders.
 - Taster courses.
 - More educational resources, such as text books.

It is recommended to pursue this further with the learners and perhaps put in place such choices or resources.

- Improve communication: as a result of the research with partner agencies, there was an apparent need to improve the awareness of certain stakeholders. This was in relation to both the purpose and objectives of the Hives and of the delivery organisation. The release of an evaluation summary is a good opportunity to do this.
- Social finance: explore further the potential for attracting social investment as a sustainable future funding model, for example Social Impact Bonds.

UNDERSTAND

The views expressed in this report are those of Dr Christopher Hartworth, Director of Barefoot Research and Evaluation and may not necessarily be those of Northern Literacy Trust. He can be contacted via:

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