



# Co-production in microfunding: Case Studies



# CASE STUDY 1: Richard, funding panel volunteer at Ageing Better in Birmingham



Birmingham Fund panel members

*Richard Green has been involved with Ageing Better in Birmingham from the very beginning. He's a member of the coproduction cohort, the Age of Experience group, which help steer the programme and who are involved in all aspects of it.*

**1) How long have you been involved in the Ageing Better in Birmingham fund panel?**

I have been involved in the Ageing Better in Birmingham Fund Panel since it's inception. That must be 5+ years now.

**2) What do you enjoy most about being a panel member?**

I enjoy reading the ingenuity and innovation of the ideas contained in the funding applications: From lunch clubs, to walking football, to man sheds and cooking groups. It can be isolating for older people in BAME communities in a big city like Birmingham, especially if you don't speak English well. It is heartening that there are people out there developing initiatives to bring such people together and end their isolation.



---

### 3) What makes an effective fund panel member? What skills/qualities are needed?

I think key qualities are: the ability to read the applications carefully; ensure applications meet the criteria for funding and offer value for money; to especially look for ideas for activities that have come from group members themselves and not focus on what others think are the activities they should be doing.

### 4) As a fund panel member how do you ensure the fund are supporting a diverse range of activities or groups?

A lot of this is down to the [Birmingham] 'enablers' who encourage the submission of applications. However, we on the Funding Panel get an overview of the applications received, and can highlight any obvious omissions. We are also, as volunteers, part of the local community and can use our community contacts to encourage applications. It isn't always easy for volunteer-run community groups to submit applications in the format required. When we receive an application which looks worthwhile but which isn't quite compliant, instead of rejecting it outright, our panel members can give feedback to the enablers who can then support the applicants to develop the activity in a way that supports the group and meets the criteria of the fund.

## **CASE STUDY 2: Susan, funding panel volunteer at Ageing Better in Birmingham**

*Susan Thorne has been involved with Ageing Better in Birmingham from the very beginning. She's a member of the coproduction cohort, the Age of Experience group, which help steer the programme and who are involved in all aspects of it.*

### 1) How long have you been involved in the Ageing Better in Birmingham fund panel?

I've been involved with it since the beginning of the programme, since 2016.

---



---

## **2) What do you enjoy most about being a panel member?**

I enjoy being part of a panel where my opinions as an ordinary volunteer, with no prior experience of such a panel, are respected and listened to. It was great to receive training and to develop my skills. It is also satisfying to know that by awarding funding to local projects we are helping to make a difference to people's lives and helping to bring people together to alleviate loneliness and isolation for older people in Birmingham. I also enjoyed going along to see and evaluate how some of the activities were working by joining in with the groups and talking to the participants. Hopefully many of these activities will continue beyond the funding period and real differences will be made to the quality of people's lives.

## **3) What makes an effective fund panel member? What skills/qualities are needed?**

I think it is someone who is able to analyse and evaluate the application according to the funding criteria without being subjective. But at the same time being aware of the specific needs of the group applying and realising that not everyone can complete the form in the same way. For some groups it could be the first time that they have filled in such an application form. Also for many of the applicants in Birmingham English is not their first language.

It is also necessary to listen to and respect the views of the other panel members. Sometimes our initial views on an application may be widely different. This is the bit I enjoy. Explaining why I thought as I did by matching the application to the funding criteria, as I saw it. But then being prepared to modify my scoring, or not, after knowing the views of the other panel members.

## **4) As a fund panel member how do you ensure the fund are supporting a diverse range of activities or groups?**

In Birmingham, by the very nature of the way the hubs were formed it is easy to ensure that activities reach sections and communities in Birmingham. LGBT, applications from different ethnic groups etc. It was also good when it was realised that fewer groups for men and different age groups within the 50+ age band were being represented. So we were able to address this factor.

---



---

# CASE STUDY 3: Horfield 'Shed Men' group, funded by Bristol Ageing Better Community Kick-Start Fund

*This case study from Horfield 'Shed Men' group in Bristol shows how a small amount of funding for equipment can have a big impact on a small group, enabling them to reach more people in the community and share skills between themselves.*

During 2014-15 the 'Friends of Horfield Common' refurbished the community building (The Ardagh) as a community café. This renovation project provided a space, which proved popular with local volunteers from all age groups, but it was noticeable that it had specifically interested and motivated older men in the community to engage with the project, who wouldn't be interested in volunteering through traditional voluntary sector channels.

These were men who had specific practical skills and who lived locally. The 'Friends of Horfield Common' knew there was more work to be done on the Common and felt there was a potential for a project where men in particular might wish to come together because of a shared interest in making or renovating things: a 'Men's Shed' project.

Once an old container was purchased to serve as a workshop space the group then applied to the Community Kick-Start Fund for tools and facilitation to get the project moving.



Horfield Shed Men

---



---

*“The Community Kick-Start Fund has been fantastic for us; it has allowed us to test something that we thought there was a need and a demand for. But funding can be difficult, so this has allowed us to actually get the shed and the tools together, and get this group up and going...it has brought different people together to work on different things; it’s been a lovely merging and sharing of skills.”*

**-Friends of Horfield Common**

*“The people who have come along are people who live locally, people whom we see wandering about all the time. Suddenly, they have realised that this is an activity that they are interested in and they have decided to come along. The majority of them have had engineering experience or building trade experience, but have found themselves just at home, usually watching television on their own.”*

**-‘Shed Men’ facilitator**

The project started with making bird and bat boxes for Horfield Common, but it went on to build planters and other garden furniture.

*“The project has done all the things we were hoping for, it has linked people to a wider group, it means people know each other. We have younger people – volunteers from the edible garden project - popping round to theirs to help do things, changing light bulbs... it has created those links between different communities, which is what being a community organisation is all about.”*

**-Friends of Horfield Common**

---



# CASE STUDY 4: Revive Fitness 'Happy Hearts' Group, funded by Bristol Ageing Better Community Kick-Start Fund



Revive Fitness 'Happy Hearts' group in Bristol

*This case study from 'Happy Hearts' fitness group in Bristol describes how the group adapted their activities in order to continue during the Covid-19 pandemic, with two different options for taking part.*

## 1) What did the project look like before Covid 19?

This group started around March 2019 but had been trialed for a short time before applying for the money. The group – named 'Happy Hearts' – meets every Friday – sometimes there would be 10 – 12 people, sometimes there would be 20 in the room, all women, ranging in age from fifties to seventies.

The group is fitness-based but the emphasis is on fun fitness, and includes activities that people didn't expect they would do. Amanda tailors things like boxing to suit their needs, such as those with bad knees and hips or co-ordination difficulties. It is promoted as a gentle class so as to include people with certain conditions. Some people sit and do what the others are doing standing. There are no floor exercises. One lady wears a harness, her husband stands behinds her thus enabling her to join in.

---

The charge for the class is £5 weekly, and includes the use of equipment such as boxing pads, pilates balls, rings, mats, resistance bands and balance equipment. Some of this was bought by the Community Kick-Start Fund but others come from Amanda's general fitness classes that she runs separately.

## **2) What happened to the group during lockdown?**

When the classes stopped Amanda did not leave the equipment at the venue. She gave out the resistance bands and mini trampolines, delivering them when required. The 'Happy Hearts' group is now an outdoor exercise group - weather permitting - and is run for regulars who could not or did not want to use Zoom. This is held twice weekly in the car park at Hengrove Community Centre and Amanda is not being charged for the use of this space.

There are 5 participants, all socially distanced. They bring a chair by car; most live nearby. Amanda takes a couple of disinfected garden chairs for those who can't bring a chair. There are 2 participants who are unable to pay at the moment, and 2 people from the original group have stopped attending completely.

The original Friday session has changed to a Zoom class called 'Good Vibes' so as to attract younger people who are less mobile. The Zoom class can include up to 24 participants including the instructor. Amanda's husband is a trained Level 3 personal trainer fitness instructor, and he sits with her, observes and corrects. At the Zoom class there are some men, partners, and some new participants.

## **3) Do you have any concerns that moving online has excluded people? In what way might they have been excluded?**

About 8 people stopped from the original 'Happy Heart' gym group and out of those Amanda has lost touch with only 2. The others moved onto the Zoom class. Those that did not have the technology or did not want to use Zoom have moved to the outdoor group.

## **4) How does it feel running the class online? Have you had to get used to it? What have you learnt?**

Amanda has been able to incorporate some floor exercises in the Zoom class as people have furniture at home. She has learnt to use an online booking system, before it was pen and paper.

For some people knowing only the instructor can see them gives them more confidence as they are not worrying about not keeping up. But they can slack off too!

---



---

In order to continue Amanda had to do risk assessments and change her insurance policy. Everyone was asked to renew their consent form and waiver and she had to register emergency contact names and phone numbers in case someone had a seizure or collapsed. Amanda reported that this experience has opened her mind to a lot of things.

*“It makes us all so happy and we love doing it and I love the group (Happy Hearts) as much as they seem to love me. I love talking about it and it’s been a lifeline for us all I think.”*

**-Happy Hearts instructor**

## **CASE STUDY 5: Chat and Splash, women’s swimming lessons, funded by Birmingham’s Ageing Better Fund**

*This case study from ‘Chat and Splash’, a women’s-only swimming group in Birmingham illustrates how one of the projects supported by Ageing Better in Birmingham, Chat and Splash, has helped to improve the lives of older people, as well as adding benefit to the wider community.*

### **About Chat & Splash**

Chat and Splash is a group for women that meets once a week at Moseley Road Baths in Balsall Heath. Sessions comprise of a class in English language skills, followed by an hour’s swim. The group’s founder, who has experience of teaching English as a second language and as a swim instructor, was approached by trustees of the Moseley Road Baths to provide additional support for non-English speaking women who were attending Birmingham City Council’s Be Active swimming lessons at the baths. The group has grown considerably since it was established. Initially starting with six participants, 41 women now attend, the maximum capacity the swimming pool can host at any one time.

Chat and Splash is attended by women with diverse backgrounds and from

---

many different countries including Ukraine, Egypt, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Iraq, Somalia and Syria. Over half the women are aged over 50. Some of the women have been in the UK many years, yet have not socialised a great deal outside their own homes. Others have recently arrived as refugees or asylum seekers. A lack of spoken English can contribute to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. The English class focuses on providing the women with practical skills to help them in their everyday lives. A steering committee meets every 6 to 8 weeks and members make suggestions and vote on activities they would like to do, for example, arts and crafts.

*“What they [the members] need is functional skills to get out there and go and pay the bills, take the children to school, get to the doctors, and that is what I teach them in the English classes.”*



Chat and Splash in Birmingham

## About Moseley Road Baths

Moseley Road Baths is a Grade II listed Edwardian swimming pool in Balsall Heath. The baths were under threat of closure for many years. Local people grouped together to take over the pool as a community-run swimming facility. Moseley Road Baths Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was set up at the end of 2017. The baths help to ensure that the people of Balsall Heath, a deprived area of Birmingham, can continue to enjoy swimming, fitness and wellbeing activities that would otherwise be unavailable to them. The CIO trustees are members of the local community and regular swimmers and the pool is run by a mixture of volunteers and paid staff, so community engagement is an important element in keeping the baths open.



---

## Support from Ageing Better in Birmingham

Chat and Splash successfully applied for funding from the Ageing Better Fund. This enabled them to set up the first 15-week programme of English classes and swimming. The funding was used to hire the room for classes, book the pool and buy snacks for the women. The group leader is experienced at running community groups but still appreciated the support, advice and encouragement from the Ageing Better in Birmingham Network Enabler, who could help connect the group to other community activities and resources.

*“She’s been absolutely fantastic. [...] I think she’s key because she has an overview of what else is happening in Birmingham [...] Very supportive, very positive, always available.”*

### Ingredients for success

Chat and Splash has been successful in attracting women from a diverse range of backgrounds because they are particularly sensitive to their cultural and religious needs and preferences. Moseley Road Baths changed their timetable to ensure that no school groups are present while the women have their swimming lesson. A female staff member is on reception to greet them and the instructor and lifeguard are always female. Creating a women-only space has been really important in encouraging the women to come along.

*“It does make us more relaxed it’s women only, wherever we go, not just swimming. Some of the women in my group, if there is a man coming to a class to learn Arabic or English, they will not feel comfortable.”*

Some potential members initially lacked the confidence to attend. In order to relieve any concerns, members were encouraged to bring a female family member (usually daughters and daughters-in-law) to participate in the session and support them. This was appreciated by many of the older women and was a key factor in attracting them to the activity and sustaining their involvement. Members have since grown in confidence, in both their language skills and attending the baths and so no longer feel the need to have their family with them. The group cultivates a sense of community and mutual support among members, with more abled women supporting their peers, whether that be with swimming or English.

Those running groups need to be ‘open and curious’ about participants in order to understand their needs and preferences. The Chat and Splash group lead gets into the pool to interact with the women and make them feel

---

welcome and included. Learning about their circumstances and history also means she is in a stronger position to support them. Holding the sessions in a familiar community space like Moseley Road Baths means people feel comfortable attending and it is within walking distance for locals. Membership is flexible and participants can just 'drop in' so that if they have to miss a week for whatever reason, they do not lose their place on the course.

*“The experienced swimmers help the non-swimmers and there’s a nice sense of fun and playfulness. I like that. It’s good to see them having opportunities just to let go of all their other worries and troubles and responsibilities. Have a bit of time for them.”*



Chat and Splash in Birmingham

## Impact

Chat and Splash has had a positive impact on those attending the sessions, on Moseley Road Baths and the wider community. The group provides opportunities for learning, fun and friendships. These different elements contribute to a sense of emotional wellbeing for members, as well as the physical health benefits of regular exercise. Some of the group members have had traumatic past experiences and have sought asylum in the UK. Some have grown up without the opportunity to learn and play as a child. The sessions are designed to provide emotional support, give participants space to support one another and most importantly, have fun. Many members have felt socially isolated. The group provides them with opportunities to socialise and feel connected to other women and the wider community. Real friendships have developed as a result. The group has also enabled the women to try new things and discover their capabilities. They have grown in confidence as a result and some have subsequently gone on to take up courses at local colleges to retrain for work or join other community groups.



---

*“We need the swimming, everybody needs to exercise because we can’t go anywhere, you understand? This is a big effort for us, because we’ve got to speak English. ... We’ve got the swimming and we are happier.”*

**-Shaima, participant**

*“For some of us, the socialising is the main thing. We come in the morning to have a chat, talk about relatives back home, what’s happening in Birmingham. [...] For us, it’s just excellent.”*

**-Hawah, participant**

### **Impact on Moseley Road Baths and the local community**

The success of Chat and Splash has also made a difference to the baths and the wider community. Moseley Road Baths is a listed building requiring ongoing repairs and maintenance. Groups like Chat and Splash that use the baths are an important source of income. The popularity of Chat and Splash prompted the baths to add five sessions of women-only swimming per week. This has increased the volume of people paying to use the facilities. The baths also decided to employ a swimming instructor and offer lessons, which has helped to further broaden its offer to the community. The involvement of Chat and Splash has helped the baths become a more inclusive space for women. Staff are now more aware of the women’s specific needs, whether around privacy or the need to ensure that activities are flexible enough to accommodate religious events such as Ramadan, where members may be fasting. The baths have also provided additional opportunities for Chat and Splash members. The baths worked with local artists to create an animated film to celebrate the reopening of the Gala Pool. The women from the Chat and Splash group all contributed paintings for the film.

*“I think the people in Moseley Road Baths and this community working with these women learn from them and that really helps break down barriers, stereotypes, all kinds of often false ideas about what we should or shouldn’t expect from a certain person. Say a woman walking in wearing a full hijab sort of thing. These women have a rightful place in the space here.”*

---

As word about Chat and Splash has spread, members of other women's community groups have started to attend. This connection between community groups has also led to conversations about funding opportunities and working together in future. This type of collaboration has helped the baths to develop stronger connections to local community groups. As a result, they are able to reach more people in the local area, which in turn supports them as a charitable organisation to generate more income.

## Looking to the future

The Ageing Better funding ended in November 2019, however, the success of the programme has encouraged Moseley Road Baths CIO to secure additional funding from other sources. They have secured two years of funding from The Active Wellbeing Society and recruited a Women's Community Development Officer. The Officer will work one day a week to help organise activities and trips for the women and do outreach work with local GPs and schools. The aim is to maintain the support for the women who attend the group and help broaden their horizons by providing additional activities.



Chat and Splash in Birmingham



# CASE STUDY 6: Walking Football team, funded by Birmingham's Ageing Better Fund, achieve World Cup glory



'Men United' walking football team in Birmingham

*This case study from 'Men United' illustrates how one of the projects supported by Ageing Better in Birmingham brought a group of men together following the bereavement of one of their mutual friends.*

A group of friends, aged between 53 and 59, who formed a football team to help tackle feelings associated with isolation, bereavement and marriage breakdown revealed in World Cup glory after winning the title for England at the first ever Walking Football World Cup back in 2019.

Reunited at the funeral of a mutual friend, the former school friends, decided to get together more regularly to support each other and formed the

five-a-side team. Goalkeeper Michael Clacken said:

*"Saying goodbye to one of our good friends made us realise we needed to stay in touch and get together more often, you never know when you might need each other."*

Michael contacted Ageing Better in Birmingham for support. Michael added:

*"We were given funding for kit and a space to play. It motivated us, because we all looked forward to meeting up each week. Several of us have experienced isolation, bereavement and marriage breakdown and the football has really given us a lift. I've given up smoking and a number of us have lost more than a stone in weight. When you introduce an activity centered around a passion for football, it's like a magnet, everyone comes out."*

Turning adversity into triumph the team began their road to success after entering the 2019 FA People's Cup. They saw off thousands of others in a series of heats which began in February that year and collected their winner's trophy at Wembley Stadium in front of 85,000 fans at the FA Cup Final in July.

Selected to represent England following earlier success in the 2019 FA People's Cup, they took on Cyprus, Turkey, India, France, Singapore, Italy, and Belgium before claiming victory for England in a 2-0 win over France in the Walking Football World Cup final.

Ageing Better in Birmingham Programme Director, Stephen Raybold, said:

*"The programme provides that life-changing kick-start which allows people to take control of their life, to start activities for themselves together with their friends and neighbours and enables them to continue long into the future. This is brilliant! It's great to have played a part in supporting this group of men who thoroughly enjoy spending time together and are such an inspiration to others to make a change for the better."*

