

Money in Mind

Impact of the project on the financial skills and sustainability of groups

**Second evaluation and feedback report,
October 2011**



Introduction

The aim of the Money in Mind project is to provide appropriate, tailor-made, free support for small community groups who need help with the management of their group finances. The intended outcome of this support is an increase in effectiveness and financial sustainability for the beneficiary groups.

Project services are delivered by three partner organisations:

- Working Together Project, who run free training courses for voluntary and community groups covering finance and fundraising issues
- Resource Centre, who offer free one-to-one support and examinations of accounts to 'priority groups' – small groups based in areas of social housing or in black or minority ethnic communities, or run by disabled people
- Impact Initiatives, who offer free one-to-one support and examinations of accounts to any other small group (annual income below £35,000) based in Brighton & Hove

In addition, the project partners work together to provide written best practice information and accounts systems which can be downloaded free from the project's website.

Assessing the eventual impact of support for groups is a complex and difficult area. The Money in Mind project is providing opportunities for the partner organisations to learn more about how to gather feedback and work with groups to improve the effectiveness of our support.

This report looks at the information we have gathered about the impact of the project's activities, delivered between April 2010 and March 2011.

Our headline conclusions from the data presented in this report are:

- Groups find the support offered by the Money in Mind project to be of excellent quality, and all beneficiaries would recommend the service to their colleagues and friends.
- A large majority of groups who received support from the Money in Mind project report that their skills, confidence and knowledge have improved following the support.
- A majority of groups report that their groups are better able to raise funds following the support they have received.

Methodology

Between April 2010 and March 2011, the project provided support services to 161 different community groups in Brighton & Hove.

Groups used a variety of support services, from all three project partners. The number of groups using each type of support was as follows:

	Resource Centre	Impact Initiatives	Working Together Project	
Training courses	0	0	73	Total (allowing for groups using more than one provider)
One-to-one advice sessions	32	27	0	
Examination of accounts	63	7	0	
Total (allowing for groups using more than one service)	78	29	73	161

Initial feedback

People who attend Working Together Project training courses are asked to fill in three feedback forms:

- Course registration and learning outcomes – completed at the start of the course and at the end, to enable participants to assess any change in their level of knowledge of the subject matter.
- Equal opportunities monitoring (anonymous)
- Course feedback (anonymous)

The Resource Centre and Impact Initiatives give pre-paid postcards to groups, following each examination of accounts. These ask the group to rate the quality of the service and make any comments.

Groups are also asked to give immediate comments and a quality rating when they meet with Resource Centre or Impact Initiatives staff for one-to-one advice.

Follow-up survey

In July 2011, we contacted all the groups who had received one-to-one advice sessions or examinations of accounts from the Resource Centre or from Impact Initiatives, and invited them to respond to a follow-up survey, designed to assess the impact of the support they had received.

The follow-up survey was delivered by post, with a stamped addressed envelope for groups to return the completed survey.

In total, we sent the survey to 99 different groups. Some groups were sent more than one questionnaire, where different individuals in the group received different types of support. The total number of questionnaires sent out was 107.

The questionnaire was short and simple, with space for comments in addition to the tick-box questions. A copy of the questionnaire is appended at the end of this report.

We received a total of 50 completed follow-up survey questionnaires back, a response rate of **47%**.

Getting support from Money in Mind

The first three questions on the postal survey were about how groups had heard of the service and how easy they found it to use.

The majority of the respondents had used the services before. This reflects the fact that the project builds on the previous (but unfunded) support offered by the Resource Centre to priority groups, and offers support to groups over more than one financial cycle, should they need it. For those groups who were new to the project in this period, there was a fairly even breakdown between word of mouth, referrals from other support agencies (this includes referrals between project partners), and self-referral having seen publicity materials.

How groups heard about Money in Mind support services		
Referral	6	12%
Leaflet/brochure	5	10%
Word of mouth	8	16%
Used before	31	62%
Total respondents	50	

Surveyed groups were asked how easy they found it to contact the partner organisation who helped them. All respondents had found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to contact the project.

Groups who had received one-to-one advice were asked how satisfied they were with the length of time they had to wait for an appointment. Again, the results were overwhelmingly positive:

How easy it was to contact Money in Mind			How satisfied groups were with the length of wait for an appointment		
Very easy	43	86%	Very satisfied	26	79%
Easy	7	12%	Satisfied	5	15%
Quite Easy	0	0%	Somewhat satisfied	1	3%
Difficult	0	0%	Somewhat dissatisfied	0	0%
Very difficult	0	0%	Very dissatisfied	1	3%
Total respondents	50		Total respondents	33	

Improvements in skills, confidence and knowledge

Groups who had received an examination of accounts were asked if the examination made it easier for them to share financial information within their groups. 98% of those who responded agreed that it did.

Groups who had received one-to-one advice and support were asked to assess how much their skills and confidence in financial management had improved, following the support. The results are presented in the table below.

Individual participants in Working Together Project training courses are asked to rate their level of knowledge of the course content at the beginning and end of each course by giving it a score out of 10. Where this score increased by more than 3 points, we have shown this as 'very improved' in the table below. An increase of 2 or 3 points is shown as 'improved', 1 point as 'somewhat improved', no increase is shown as 'no change' and a decrease in the score is shown as 'less than before'.

Improvement in skills, confidence and knowledge following advice or training						
	Skills (one-to-one)		Confidence (one-to-one)		Knowledge (training)	
	Very improved	12	40%	8	27%	17
Improved	12	40%	17	57%	31	37%
Somewhat improved	5	17%	4	13%	9	11%
No Change	1	3%	1	3%	25	30%
Less than before	0	0%	0	0%	2	2%
Total respondents	30		30		84	

Overall, the support and training were seen as effective by a large majority of the user groups. This is further illustrated by the comments made by survey respondents. For example:

"I found the organisation most helpful and friendly. I was able to obtain all the help that I needed at that time. I would recommend anyone running a charity to use this service."

Gambia Community Empowerment Project

"When I took over as Treasurer for East Brighton Bygones, I'd never done it before and really had no idea of how to proceed. But thanks to the help and training I received from staff at the Resource Centre I can now adequately manage the accounts and feel a lot more confident about handling the group's money."

East Brighton Bygones local history society

Improvements in financial sustainability

Groups who received one-to-one advice were asked if their ability to bring in the funds they need had improved, following the support they received. Groups who had their accounts examined were asked if this made it easier to apply for grants. The results were as follows:

Improvement in financial sustainability of groups following support					
Ability to bring in funds improved (following advice)?			Easier to apply for grants (following examination)?		
Very improved	9	30%	Yes	33	75%
Improved	12	40%	No	1	2%
Somewhat improved	6	20%	N/A	10	23%
No Change	1	3%			
Less than before	0	0%			
N/A	2	7%			
Total respondents	30		Total respondents	44	

Several comments from groups responding to the postal survey illustrate the way in which financial management support can enhance the financial sustainability of community groups:

"Thank you so much for examining our accounts. Without your free service, groups like ours would really struggle to survive as we only have a small amount of funds."

Hollingbury Hello Newsletter group

"Very pleased with speed of turnaround and clarity of accounts. The clarity helped with our bid application."

Craven Vale Community Association

"The service provided has been invaluable. We have had 4 sessions in total. The support has helped our project grow and given confidence towards becoming sustainable. Thank you."

Forward Facing CIC

Evaluation of support and suggestions for improvement

Initial feedback indicated that groups were very pleased with all types of support provided by the project. The results for this period were:

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor
Support sessions	92 (93%)	7 (7%)	0	0
Examination of accounts	45 (94%)	3 (6%)	0	0
Training courses	13 (87%)	2 (13%)	0	0
Total	150	12	0	0

In the follow-up survey, groups who had received one-to-one support were asked to rate the competence of their advisor and the clarity of the explanations they had received.

Evaluation of advisors				
	Competence of advisor		Clarity of explanations	
Outstanding	22	67%	21	64%
Good	11	33%	11	33%
Adequate	0	0%	1	3%
Needs improvement	0	0%	0	0%
Poor	0	0%	0	0%
Total respondents	33		33	

It is reassuring to note that the initial excellent impression of our one-to-one support is borne out after groups have had a chance to put the information they learn into practice.

Groups who received one-to-one support or examinations of accounts were also asked if they would recommend the service to colleagues or friends. **100%** of respondents reported that they would.

The postal survey asked groups to identify areas for improvement. The suggestions made by groups are listed and summarised below:

Comments on quality of support or ease of access to services
As speaker of English as 2nd language it would be good to have easier explanations.
A centre on the flat or near a bus stop for us OAPs.
With more funding the turn around of accounts would be quicker but everyone works to cope with the pressures you're under.
The only problem is the length of time it takes for the examination of accounts, which can mean that you are without ongoing accounts paperwork for several weeks. I know that there is the facility to photocopy cheque book stubs and receipt books etc but this is quite time consuming and fiddly - I don't know what the best answer would be!

Requests for specific support services that are already offered by the project or project partners

Can you run more training on finance management targeting small community groups eg financial planning and reporting petty cash.

I really prepare my accounts manually and I want to learn how to do it in the computer and keep them in the computer. I want to learn spreadsheets to put every detail to know how much is left to spend.

A list of funders with lots of money to give away.

training on how you examined the accounts so we can understand what you do.

Sad Steve is going - one thing would be a beginners accounts factsheet maybe - a typewritten sheet of formulas on Excel and petty cash as this is something we struggled with.

further long term support.

Requests for additional services that are beyond the scope of the project

Working very closely with the groups and see them regularly. If you could tell all the groups when they should apply for funds before they run out of funds, that would be helpful.

Book keeping services

Where the services requested are already available, we are contacting the groups who made these comments, to let them know how they can access the support they need.

All the comments will be discussed at a project meeting and fed back to colleagues via the Brighton & Hove ChangeUp Consortium.

Other comments on the project

Survey respondents were also given the opportunity to make comments on the project overall. 38 out of the 50 respondents did so, and their comments are listed below:

Actors of Dionysus	Steven is always very clear, helpful and offers constructive advice. He is also calm and patient and very good to work with.
Amigos Preschool	Couldn't do it without your help
Aqua Seniors	Thank you for all your help
Barnard Centre	Always very helpful
BECCA: Bevendean Childrens Centre	Invaluable!
Belly Dancers 4U	Suggestion: further long term support. The advisor was very helpful, friendly and very supportive. Also very patient!
Bevendean Local Action Team	We have only used the Resource Centre for audit of our account, which has always been done to our satisfaction, and in a timely fashion. We are very satisfied with the service received.

Brighton & Hove Black History	Very good service. Excellent support as always from the Resource Centre. Many Thanks.
Brighton Pebbles	It is a very useful service and one that is obviously vitally important for groups like ours, especially as when applying for grants etc you do need to give evidence of accounts and they always look very professional.
Christian Arabic Club	You doing everything very good and satisfied. I haven't any suggestions.
City Reads	An invaluable resource for small non profit organisations that are developing.
Craven Vale Community Association	Not sure what you already offer - we have very simple financial needs. Last year we had a complicated grant bid to complete and managed to be successful without help (National Lottery) but it is good to know that you could have helped! Very pleased with speed of turnaround and clarity of accounts. The clarity helped with our bid application. And of course, it's always a pleasure to work with the team at Tilbury Place! You always do your very best to help, especially when printing our leaflets at such short notice!
Earthy Women and Kids	Steve was outstanding we will miss him much.
East Brighton Bygones	When I took over as Treasurer for East Brighton Bygones, I'd never done it before and really had no idea of how to proceed. But thanks to the help and training I received from staff at the Resource Centre I can now adequately manage the accounts and feel a lot more confident about handling the group's money.
Forward facing	Steve has been extremely helpful and supportive with the needs of our project. Cannot think of anything to improve the service. Excellent service. We have had excellent support advice and assistance through Steve. The service provided has been invaluable. We have had 4 sessions in total. The support has helped our project grow and given confidence towards becoming sustainable. Thank you.
Gambia Community Empowerment Project	I found the organisation most helpful and friendly. I was able to obtain all the help that I needed at that time. I would recommend anyone running a charity to use this service.
Goodtimers	Can do no better. Everyone is always polite and helpful. Very good service. Thank you.
Hereford Court Community Association	Always helpful and available for advice. Proactive and innovative - eg accounts management system
Hollingbury Hello Newsletter Group	Thank you so much for examining our accounts. Without your free service, groups like ours would really struggle to survive as we only have a small amount of funds.

Knoll Advice Centre	Satisfied with service given
Knoll Community Association	The Centre is always open to comments and suggestions offered by users. All services used by our group and associated groups are very professionally dealt with at all times. Very pleasant people work at the centre.
Knollites	This is the first time I've had any reason for using your service and found it very efficient and fast for results.
Leach Court Social Club	Always well satisfied with your work for us.
Metamorphosis Art Group	Staff are pleasant and efficient.
Migrant English Project	Excellent service. Very helpful.
no name given	You are perfect, keep going.
Oromo Community in Brighton & Hove	I don't see any problem with the service we are having. We are very happy. Thank you for your fabulous support.
Oromo Community in Brighton & Hove	I am very happy with the help Kate gave my community. Thank you.
QPCV Community Forum	Very friendly, skilled and able to look ahead and advise groups to their future planning.
Robert Lodge Project	Cannot think of anything to better the service. I have always found everybody helpful and polite. Thank you.
Sanders House Social Club	The only comment I can make is to say that the help and support we have received and still receive is excellent.
St. Richards Community Centre	Ideas and clarity of subject were explained in detail and I came away with a great sense of relief. Thank you.
Sussex Caring Pets	All has been very helpful and good advice
Turner Yoga Group	The service we received was very satisfactory. The group were given all the help we needed ie how to balance our books also the best way to advertise so cannot think of any more they could have helped us. We as a group are very grateful for the help and patience we have been given by all the people at the Resource Centre. We could not have the group going as long as we have. They have been there for us all the way. I personally have learnt how to manage the books, as when I volunteered to be the treasurer I had no idea what it entailed. I am much more confident and actually enjoyed it, once I understood it. Thank you for all the support we have had.
The Circus Project	The Resource Centre is brilliant. I feel very lucky to be able to access all of its services and often recommend it to others.

Transition Brighton & Hove	This is a great service and really valuable for small community groups. I hope it will continue. I found it very helpful to have someone to explain finance issues I was unsure of and how great to have access to free independent examination of accounts! Thank you.
Tuesday lunch club	The support of the Resource Centre allows groups like us to function without the worry of great costs for auditing books.
Youth Action Sussex	Steve has been brilliant. Very patient and supportive and always available to advise.

Conclusion

The results of this second survey are in line with the findings from our first survey, in July 2010.¹ This very positive feedback is further evidence that Money in Mind project support is having a clear impact on the effectiveness, governance and financial sustainability of the small voluntary groups who are the target beneficiaries.

Our survey shows that small groups need, and value highly, financial management support that is:

- Free of charge
- Flexible, fitting in with the busy schedules of small group volunteers
- Responsive to the specific needs of each group
- Available in the long term, to allow volunteers to develop skills at a realistic pace and learn from real life problems as they arise

The Money in Mind project will continue to offer this type of service, and will seek to sustain continued support in the future for small groups who need help with this vital aspect of their work.

¹ <http://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/money-in-mind/feedback/GroupFeedback2010.pdf>