Integration Area Programme: Community Ambassadors Evaluation

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Aims

The aim of this study was to evaluate the ‘Community Ambassadors’ programme which formed part of the Integration Area Programme (IAP). The IAP was launched in 2019 by the then Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It followed the 2018 Integrated Communities Strategy green paper. It took place in five local authorities and involved testing new social integration approaches. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) commissioned IFF Research to conduct the evaluation.

Methodology

- The Community Ambassadors programme that was the subject of this evaluation took place in three of the five integration areas: Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford and Walsall.

- Community Ambassadors completed surveys at the start and end of training, and a follow-up survey three months later. There was substantial drop off in completion, with 104 participants completing the first survey, but only 20 (most of whom were in Bradford) completing the follow-up survey.
- A counterfactual survey completed by people not acting as Community Ambassadors, enabled the researchers to assess whether any attitudinal changes are likely to have been due to being an Ambassador, or to other factors.
- Wider members of the community who had had contact with the Community Ambassadors were also asked to complete surveys, but the response rate was so low that this data could not be used. This was related to the fact that programme delivery was impacted by pandemic restrictions.
- There were up to 12 in-depth interviews with Community Ambassadors in each of the three areas, as well as one or two interviews with delivery partner managers, and a small group discussion with delivery partners.

Analysis was undertaken of management information collected in each area.

Key issues

The Community Ambassadors were volunteers recruited to support integration in their local communities. Activities varied between participating areas. For example in Bradford it was called ‘Bradford for Everyone’ with the aim being increased social mixing.

The programme was impacted by the pandemic, with restrictions limiting scope for Ambassadors’ work in their communities, and interventions having to be altered and in some cases delayed. These limitations resulted in little data being collected on the programme’s impact on the wider community, therefore the evaluation focused mainly on the impact

on the Community Ambassadors themselves.

The evaluation focused on all three integration areas involved in the Community Ambassadors programme (Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford and Walsall). It measured outcomes for Community Ambassadors in seven key areas:

- social mixing
- ability to engage with those with challenging views / behaviours
- respecting differences
- motivation to improve the neighbourhood
- empowerment
- increased belonging
- involvement in local activities.

- The evaluation found that with regard to several outcomes, the programme's impact was statistically significant. It was reported that in comparison with a group of non-participants, 'Ambassadors were significantly more likely to report improvements in the extent to which they felt comfortable talking to people from different backgrounds; their motivation to work with others to improve the neighbourhood; and their perceived ability to influence decisions affecting the local area'.
- Ambassadors were found to have improved their understanding of other cultures, become more empowered to effect positive local change, and to have found inspiration for greater community involvement. Some had made new social connections, and others reported improved self-confidence.
- The programme did not appear to have impacted on Ambassadors' confidence in engaging with local officials (although note that the baseline was high) – it's thought this may be because it was not covered in the training.
- Despite an increase in Ambassadors' confidence in being able to influence local decision-making, there wasn't a change in the

perception of opportunities for local people more generally to be involved in improving the area. Ambassadors' involvement in local activities didn't increase during the intervention, but pandemic restrictions were in place at this time.

- Levels of paid employment among Ambassadors changed little during the intervention, although there was some qualitative evidence of a few Ambassadors accessing employment as a result of support from the programme.

Several key learning points were identified for successfully delivering a Community Ambassadors intervention:

- Representation of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds was better where Ambassadors were recruited directly from the community, rather than from a group with previous experience of community work.
- Social mixing between Ambassadors was effectively facilitated by including stimulating discussions as part of the training, and encouraging Ambassador engagement in community activities.
- Ambassadors were prepared to engage with people with alternative views, as a result of having a safe space to discuss challenging subjects, and learning techniques such as working with people rather than 'pushing solutions onto them', and critical thinking.

Ambassadors were inspired to greater involvement in community activities, due to peer support, and greater exposure to such activities. Ambassadors' feelings of empowerment to facilitate change locally resulted from skills developed through the programme. Including Ambassadors with previous community engagement experience was found to be beneficial.

Conclusion

The authors conclude that while this model has had a positive impact on Ambassador participants, it's not yet been evidenced that this will result in increased involvement in local activities, or other local people being encouraged to drive change.

Underrepresentation of some community groups within the Ambassador cohort was thought to have hindered engagement from those groups.

The authors acknowledge that the evaluation was limited by being conducted during the pandemic, and by the small scale of the interventions. If the programme were to be repeated, ideally evidence of its impact on the wider community would also be collected.

Web Link
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-integration-areas-...
Topic
Community and society
Community cohesion
Integration
Place
Bradford
Year
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Resource Type
Report

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/integration-area-programme-community-ambassadors-evaluation*