Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute

Evaluation of the Community Organisers Programme

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1.1   Introduction

This summary presents findings from the evaluation of the Community Organisers (CO) programme. Ipsos MORI and NEF Consulting were commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the CO programme by the Cabinet Office. The same team also evaluated the Community First programme in recognition of the close relationship between the two programmes.

Evaluation work began in October 2012 and ended in June 2015. This report therefore provides a summary of our final assessment of the programme. The programme was evaluated to understand both process effectiveness and the social impact achieved. The evaluation included both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The core aspects were online surveys of programme participants, longitudinal community-based case studies, and ongoing analysis of management information. As such, this report is based on both quantitative and qualitative data.

1.2   Programme overview

The Community Organisers programme was a national training programme in community organising and a grass-roots movement for social action. The key target for delivery was to recruit 5,000 community organisers by March 2015, broken down as follows:

- 500 Trainee Community Organisers (TCOs), employed full-time for 51 weeks of training, development and practical experience; and

- 4,500 Volunteer Community Organisers (VCOs) recruited and trained by the TCOs.

At its core, the theory of community organising is about empowering communities and harnessing the power of individuals to work together in their shared self-interest. Community organising involves building relationships in communities, mobilising people to take action and supporting projects which make a difference to people's lives. Community organising creates social and political change through collective action. Community organisers listen to what people want to see change in their lives and community and help them to achieve this, working in and through democratic structures. Community organisers have no agenda, and do not lead or do things on behalf of people.

In particular, the programme sought to support people in deprived communities, placing TCOs in areas of most need, in order to improve their neighbourhoods and tackle existing and emerging problems. The

programme was being funded by the Office for Civil Society in the Cabinet Office, and delivered by Locality.[1] It drew on the Root Solution Listening Matters (RSLM) approach developed by Regenerate,[2] who provided training support for the programme.

Programme delivery began with politically independent and locally based organisations recruited by Locality to host between two and five TCOs, providing practical support and a physical base for them to operate. TCOs were recruited jointly by hosts and Locality and employed for 51 weeks on a full-time contract.

Training for TCOs was rolled out in waves across 14 cohorts, trained between October 2011 and June 2015. The training was practice-based, with TCOs working in a local neighbourhood, or 'patch', during their year. Formal training consisted of residential courses, e-learning modules, monthly online support sessions, supervision meetings and optional modules provided by external trainers. TCOs were expected to complete an accreditation in the Foundations of Community Organising.

Part way through the programme the training was revised to reflect feedback from TCOs and the programme team. The new approach was implemented for cohorts 12-14, and, among other changes, included a second residential for TCOs after six months.

Over the course of their 51 week training, TCOs were expected to meet the following targets:

- Listen to at least 500 people in their 'patch' or local area;

- Recruit at least 9 VCOs;

- Identify 3-5 fledgling projects that could be supported by the wider network(s) they had started to build up; and

- Form a network of VCOs and other engaged local people to listen in the community, research, plan and take collective action that attempts to have a broader influence in their area. This was known as a Community Holding Team (CHT).

Progression funding in the form of an employment start-up grant of up to £15,000 towards the cost of a second year of organising was available to all eligible newly qualified community organisers (also known as Senior Community Organisers or SCOs). To apply for the grant, they needed to have achieved the Foundations of Community Organising; have an employer; and have secured local matched resources, of which £7,500 had

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[1] http://locality.org.uk/
[2] http://www.regeneratetrust.org/

to be in cash and the rest could be in-kind (e.g. an organisation giving use of space).

Third year progression grants were made available for a small number of Community Organisers in cohorts 1-9, but further analysis of how well this worked is outside the scope of the evaluation.

A Volunteer Training Programme was developed later in the programme, offering a six month accredited training course based on the first three modules of the Foundations of Community Organising course developed for TCOs. This was carried out with VCOs in 15 partner organisations in late 2014 and early 2015.

To help facilitate the development of a broader movement for change across England, Locality set up an independent legacy body called Community Organisers Limited (known as CoCo), which more recently changed its name to The Company of Community Organisers (COLtd).

1.3 Social outcomes

The social outcomes are assessed based on an intervention logic model for the programme developed at the outset. For each of the main beneficiaries we describe the evidence about whether or not they experienced the anticipated outcomes, before reflecting on what we know about why those outcomes have or have not resulted from the programme activities.

In considering the evaluation findings described below, it is important to recognise that the nature of the evidence has allowed us to draw different types of conclusions in the following areas of impact:

1 **Personal impact** on those most closely involved in programme activities – based on high quality evidence from the relevant individuals. This allows strong conclusions to be drawn.

2 **Community impact** in the patches where TCOs worked – based on good quality evidence including from case studies, information about projects, and the perceptions of local hosts. This allows good conclusions to be drawn.

3 **Sustainability of community impact** – some evidence from those involved with programme activities including TCOs, VCOs and hosts. However, it is still early to determine the extent to which community impact will be sustained in patches. This allows reasonable but more limited conclusions to be drawn.

The main impacts of the programme were on those closely involved: TCOs, VCOs, project leads, and to some extent hosts. In particular, most TCOs and many VCOs described their involvement as being transformative, changing the way they saw themselves and other people.

Through their work, TCOs engaged a huge range of people in community activity. This included individuals who were isolated or lacked confidence before getting involved with the TCO's team; those who were already leaders in their community; people who were passionate about a particular issue; and those who were interested in seeing broader community change in their area. The CO programme approach was able to develop confidence and skills in individuals, and to encourage them to take action in their community.

Many of these people will continue to engage in improving communities, either as a career (in the case of some COs) or by working in their own neighbourhoods. Others will use the confidence, skills and experience they developed in other areas of their lives. For these individuals, it is likely that the programme will have longer term impacts, some of them significant.

Significant social value was also created through the listenings and projects. TCOs were generally successful in engaging people through listening, and there were examples of outcomes for individuals who were listened to, even when they did not take action within the programme.

There were also many specific examples of people benefiting from the programme through the projects run by VCOs and others as a result of TCOs' work. Most TCOs met the training target of supporting 3-5 fledgling projects. Given the large number of projects supported (around 2,000 across the programme) it is likely that significant social value was created as a result, in line with the outcomes seen for social action projects more generally. The impact on individuals and communities through projects was one of the main successes of the programme.

In most areas COs were able to animate local people on the key issues that mattered most to them. However, in terms of the ambition to generate sustainable networks and a broader movement for change, the programme was less effective. In some areas this did happen and COs were able to animate people in sufficient numbers to begin developing a wider movement for change and this continues. However these represent a relatively small number of cases.

There is therefore a question about what the fundamental ambition of community organising should be: to engage people in specific areas of mutual self-interest, or to galvanise people around the broader aim of improving their neighbourhood generally. This programme demonstrates that COs can be successful at getting local people to engage and work together on individual projects to address particular needs in their communities. Encouraging this kind of engagement is an achievable objective for community organising that can have considerable impact on those involved. Creating a broader movement for change in communities, which was an ambition at the outset of the programme, is considerably more challenging.

The experience of progression suggests that more time may have helped with this in some areas. That said it is clear that there are substantial challenges around moving individuals from interest in a specific issue to being involved in a broader network able to tackle wider, as yet unspecified issues, as they arise.

TCOs

Anticipated: TCOs develop technical and people skills, improve their local networks and awareness of local issues and actors.

Overall, TCOs reported moderate to substantial improvements in their self-assessed skills and knowledge during their first 51 weeks. The 18-month in-depth interviews suggest that these improvements continued during the second year. TCOs developing these skills was a crucial first step in the intervention logic model, and the consistent evidence from across the evaluation is that most did so through the training year.

Improvements included the technical skills required to carry out programme activities; the people skills needed to effectively communicate with those in their community; their knowledge of local issues; and the skills needed to bring local people together to create change (see Figure 1.1 for self-reported improvements in a selection of these skills).

Evidence from surveys and interviews with TCOs shows progress in skills needed for the role, provided those recruited had basic skills and the necessary support to improve. In addition to technical and people skills, many TCOs reported improvements in their ability to deal with difficult situations, their understanding of their own strengths and limitations, and the nature of community development, among others. Hosts were also positive about improvements in TCOs' skills.

Figure 1.1 – TCO confidence in key skills – as reported following training, and at10 months

Q. How confident, if at all, did you feel before the residential/do you feel after 10 months about doing each of the following?

% confident (8-10 out of 10)

Skill	Before the residential	After 10 months
Working with people who come from different backgrounds than you	71	86
Talking to new people	68	87
Working alone	63	77
Problem-solving	58	75
Leading other people	47	70
Motivating other people to do something for themselves	44	75
Developing skills in other people	41	70
Using social media and online platforms in work projects	42	57
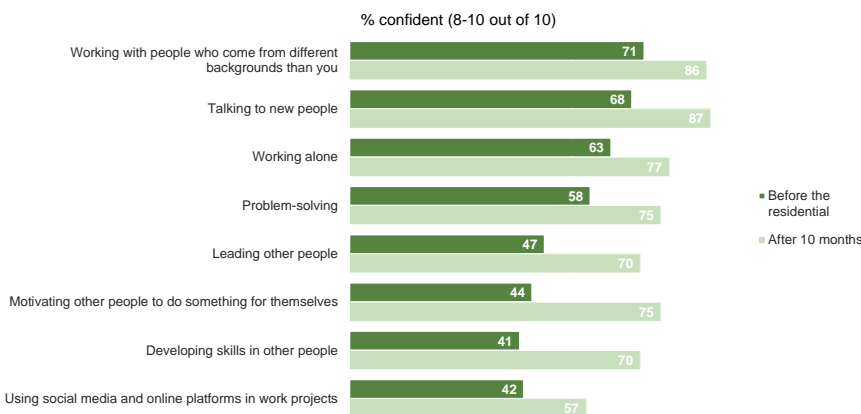
Base: Post residential (222 TCOs, Cohort 7-14) and 10 month survey respondents (203 TCOs, Cohort 4-14) Fieldwork dates: June/July 2013 – April 2015

Source: Ipsos MORI

> It has been an emotional roller coaster, and I feel much more able to deal with difficult situations. I have excellent listening skills, and much more knowledge and confidence with regards to helping people within a community.
>
> TCO

VCOs and CHTS

Anticipated: VCOs and CHT members increase confidence in collective ability, expand networks of contact, develop new technical and people skills, increase wellbeing, positive feelings about their local area and their appreciation of local resources.

The intervention logic model assumed that volunteers engaged through listening and network building would be able to overcome barriers to get involved in action they felt passionate about. There have been challenges in collecting data from VCOs, therefore the outcomes and impact described relate to those observed by hosts, TCOs and from VCOs engaged through case studies.

Taken together, volunteer outcomes represented a significant impact on those individuals who have been successfully engaged through the programme. TCOs had success in making volunteers feel valued and giving them access to and awareness of their own skills and talents as well as connecting to others in the local community.

TCOs engaged a range of different types of VCOs who had diverse motives for getting involved; some were initially isolated or had very low confidence, and thus had much further to travel than others before becoming active members of a local community network. Others were more confident about their abilities, often because they were already involved in the community in some way.

TCOs spent significant time and energy developing and nurturing these relationships, with case studies highlighting that many VCOs had difficulties in their personal lives, and in many cases required tailored, personal support to become active VCOs. The examples below highlight some of the main, mostly personal, outcomes for VCOs and other community members who the TCOs worked with (such as those who became involved in projects, and those who had been listened to through the programme). The examples are listed broadly in order from the most common to those we have seen less frequently:

- Increased self-esteem and confidence

- Expanded social networks, and a greater feeling of belonging

- Increased pride in place

- Valuing their existing skills, and sense of legitimacy in using them in their local community

- Increased knowledge about the area/resources

> I have supported two community members, who when I first met them were in a personal crisis. Now those two people have started volunteering in their community and moved from receiving benefits to being employed.
>
> TCO

- Improved technical skills such as ICT and bid writing

- Improved communication skills, including within teams

- Listening skills

Volunteers usually experienced several of these outcomes if they stayed involved with the TCO's team. However, some were not involved with the local network for long enough, stopping because of the commitment required or because of external factors, like changes in their personal circumstances. Others were simply happy to have met some new people or helped run a specific project – and so made a contribution and benefitted from the experience but couldn't commit to further sustained involvement. There were also examples from case studies and stories of VCOs who experienced other outcomes as a result of their involvement with the programme, including gaining the confidence to move into work.

While the overall picture across the programme was positive, in some neighbourhoods TCOs found it very difficult to get individuals to volunteer in any significant capacity. In others, both the host and the TCO questioned whether the VCOs had the skills to sustain community activity without further support. In these cases the outcomes for individuals were much more limited.

In some areas, those engaged worked towards more fundamental change, challenging power and building a network that attempted to have a broader influence in their area. However feedback from TCOs, VCOs and the programme team makes it clear that one year is not enough time to form a sustainable CHT.

The evidence collected during the evaluation does not allow us to determine in detail the reasons why some networks appear to be more sustainable than most. Even so, there is evidence of some specific factors that contributed towards volunteers sustaining their involvement beyond the project they were initially engaged by.

One important factor was the existing skills of local people. In areas where local people had a range of abilities relevant to community activity – including project management, IT, communication and relationship building skills – it was much easier for TCOs to encourage projects and to begin building a network. Another enabler of sustained involvement from volunteers was an appetite among VCOs and others to see general improvements in their area (as opposed to a tackling a specific issue). In these circumstances, those working with the TCO were much more likely to focus on building a broader network with the variety of skills and experience they felt was needed to achieve their shared priorities. Finally, a crucial factor was how good TCOs were at motivating individuals in a way that supported building a wider network. TCOs' skills were a very significant influence in achieving the desired outcomes for VCOs.

Other local people

Anticipated: local people experience an increase in quality of life and pride in their local area.

Across both TCOs and hosts there was a perception that some changes occurred for local people who participated in local activities, and they attributed this at least to some extent to the CO programme.

Surveys of TCOs and hosts (alongside qualitative evidence) show that, in most neighbourhoods where TCOs worked, they felt it was more common for local people to have good support networks; form new groups around shared ideas or projects; understand the needs of others; have skills to organise activities; and have the confidence to lead.

Community outcomes around trust, pride and acting on community rights were more difficult to evidence robustly in the absence of community surveys but were seen as having happened less frequently by those involved. In some areas there were signs that people's perceptions of community organising, and their role in this, did change. From the surveys, both TCOs and hosts typically said that these outcomes have become 'a bit more common' rather than 'much more common'.

In the first 51 weeks the main beneficiaries of the programme were those who were more heavily involved as VCOs, or those the TCOs spent time developing in other ways. This is what we would expect after a year of organising, and is consistent with the longer term nature of the theory of change, even where TCOs have been relatively successful within the programme. However, there is evidence that the CO programme approach results in outcomes for at least three other types of people within communities. These are outlined below.

i) Local people who were listened to but did not become involved

Listening seemed to lead to some people re-engaging in community activities they were previously involved with or already interested in but which were not directly related to programme activity.

ii) Local people who took part in projects

Some of the main types of project outcomes observed through the case studies included:

- Improved local environment

- Improved skills

- Better social networks

> It's nice that the community feel they are being listened to. Small, changes are happening. It's that awareness that there is a community – even as small as being introduced to a neighbour.
>
> Host

- Enjoyment and recreation

- Improved health and lifestyles

- Protecting and improving community assets

However, many of the projects were based on the mutual interest of specific groups around an issue, rather than on a shared mutual self interest in improving the wider local community. The latter was identified as important for building a network to drive community change in the original programme logic model (see Chapter 3). This focus on specific groups – along with the fact that projects were sometimes one-off events rather than longer term ongoing activities – meant that not all types of projects that happened as a result of the programme resulted in broader community outcomes, even if there were positive impacts for the individuals involved.

iii) Local people who had no direct contact with programme activities

There were many examples of projects with the potential to benefit local people more broadly, even if they were unaware of the programme, or had no direct involvement in any of the activities that happened through the programme. For example, other local people benefited from one-off activities such as litter picks, concerts and children's fun days, and more ongoing activities including campaigns to renegotiate local taxation rates, save services, or petition local authorities to provide new ones. Most TCOs succeeded in starting multiple projects even within the first ten months, and there was evidence of positive outcomes from these. However, the broader community outcomes were less common, particularly after the first 51 weeks.

Sustainability

A key question for assessing social impact is whether the incremental changes experienced by individual community members and developing local networks (where they existed) were enough to catalyse longer term outcomes. Evidence from the perspectives of TCOs, VCOs and hosts can provide some indication of how likely this is.

When asked whether they anticipated the changes related to the programme to last over the next two or three years, 12% of hosts stated that they expected this would happen to a great extent and 63% to some extent, while 14% did not know (12% thought that the changes would hardly be sustained, or not sustained at all). This covers all of the changes that they saw in the community, and suggests muted optimism that changes had the potential to be sustainable.

At the end of their first year and at 18 months after the start of their roles,[3] TCOs had a range of perspectives on whether the activities they helped to galvanise would be sustained. The greatest confidence was around the sustainability of ongoing projects, provided they had a strong core team, access to resources (time, skills and money) and were running well. Many TCOs were optimistic that some of these projects would continue without their support. Other TCOs felt they had very limited impact beyond the fledgling projects they supported, with little progress on building a wider network of volunteers or establishing a CHT. Without these steps having happened, TCOs were pessimistic about any sustainable change being created.

Even those who had seen some success tended not to be confident about sustainability unless their emerging network continued to receive some support (e.g. through them progressing, or support from the host or other local organisation). In particular, they pointed to networks needing administrative and organisational support, access to the contacts that TCOs had built up, and advice on difficult situations or problems. TCOs believed it was unrealistic to expect CHTs to take on these responsibilities when they had only been in operation for a few months at most. Hosts and VCOs interviewed in the follow-up case studies shared this view.

Where TCOs did not continue to organise in the same patch after their first 51 weeks, in these areas it was unlikely that progress in building the network would be sustained, even if some projects continued. Emerging networks were still dependent on the active participation of the TCO or other experienced community support, particularly if they were to develop in a way that would help achieve the broader community outcomes.

Sustainability and progression

Additional time organising in the same area generally improved individual and community outcomes. As such, the design of the progression process could have been improved. Too many organisers moved to work in a new patch. Longer term funding linked to continuing in the same neighbourhood would be a better way of ensuring sustainable community impacts in some areas, even if this meant that progression funding was available to fewer TCOs. This lesson was taken on board by the programme in the design of third year progression funding, which was only made available to organisers continuing in the same neighbourhood.

1.4 Process effectiveness

Assessing the effectiveness of programme delivery helps to highlight the mechanisms of success and failure within the programme. Processes were evaluated throughout programme delivery and therefore helped to steer

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[3] This included a mix of NQCOs who did and did not progress to organise for a second year.

ongoing improvements. This was an innovative programme and lessons were undoubtedly learned along the way, and processes were adapted as a result. The evaluation assessed the following key areas:

1)   Central programme activities

The programme was delivered on time and to budget, and the core target of recruiting 5,000 community organisers was achieved. Central resource was very small in the context of overall programme size. This, combined with an experimental, rolling design meant that central programme management was at times reactive, and led to some frustrations among TCOs and hosts on the ground. However, administration improved significantly over the course of the programme as challenges were dealt with, processes established, and the number of TCOs on the programme reduced. In particular, the revised training for cohorts 12-14 worked well.

2)   Host recruitment, induction, and support

The programme attracted a very wide range of organisations as hosts. Host induction and support were broadly successful. More than two in three hosts (69%) rated the induction positively in terms of helping them to understand their role, and just over half (53%) reported being satisfied with the support they received. However, more than one in three (36%) said that they would like more support around progression, and one in five (21%) would like other practical support.[4]

The most successful hosts were those who had the best understanding of the programme (including the role of a TCO and their own role) and were able to balance offering support and knowledge with encouraging sufficient independence. TCOs really valued host support, and those who had limited support from their hosts often struggled.

3)   TCO recruitment, induction and support

A large majority of hosts were happy with the quality of applicants for the role of TCO. Overall, 78% were satisfied with diversity of applicants, 77% with applicants' skills and 73% with their experience.[5] Across the programme there were around eight applicants per place – demonstrating clear interest in and demand for this type of role. The range of recruitment approaches taken by hosts led to a real mix of experience, backgrounds and skills among TCOs. This was generally a strength of the programme. However, it also meant that those TCOs recruited with the most to learn had not always been able to make significant progress in the community in the 51 weeks available, particularly when compared with more experienced recruits.

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[4] Base: Host survey (76 hosts, cohorts 4-14), fieldwork dates: May 2013 – February 2015
[5] Base: Host survey (76 hosts, cohorts 4-14), fieldwork dates: May 2013 – February 2015

In the post-residential TCO survey, the residential training was rated relatively highly, with 70% reporting the training as good or very good at preparing them for their role. Other aspects of training, such as style of teaching were also rated highly. TCOs were generally less positive about the demands placed on them during the training and how well the training prepared them for accreditation (see Figure 1.2). Ratings of the residential training improved slightly after the training redesign, particularly around preparing TCOs for accreditation.

Figure 1.2 – Rating the residential TCO training

Q10. On balance, how would you personally rate the residential training in terms of…
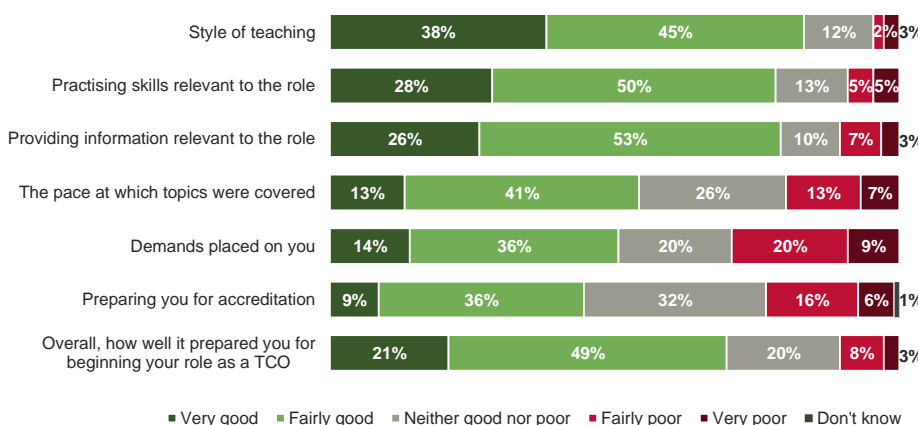
	Very good	Fairly good	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor	Very poor	Don't know
Style of teaching	38%	45%	12%		2%	3%
Practising skills relevant to the role	28%	50%	13%	5%	5%	
Providing information relevant to the role	26%	53%	10%	7%		3%
The pace at which topics were covered	13%	41%	26%	13%	7%	
Demands placed on you	14%	36%	20%	20%	9%	
Preparing you for accreditation	9%	36%	32%	16%	6%	1%
Overall, how well it prepared you for beginning your role as a TCO	21%	49%	20%	8%		3%

■ Very good ■ Fairly good ■ Neither good nor poor ■ Fairly poor ■ Very poor ■ Don't know

Base: Post-residential survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 7-14 (222) : Fieldwork dates : April 2013 - August 2014   Source: Ipsos MORI

At the 10 month point, TCOs were less positive about the training received after the initial residential, with fewer than half rating the ongoing training and support as good on most aspects. This led to changes to ongoing support, including revisions to the initial residential, the nature of contact between TCOs and the training team, and the introduction of a second residential course at the mid-point of the training year. There was a marked improvement in ratings after the redesign, with more than half of those in cohorts 12-14 (56%) saying that overall the ongoing training and support was good in terms of preparing them for their role (compared with 43% in cohorts 4-11).[6]

While there were some issues with levels of responsiveness of ongoing support, and the stress imposed by the accreditation process, overall the majority of TCOs felt they were well trained and supported. At times there was a lack of understanding among TCOs around specific issues like the role of a VCO and how strictly they should adhere to the RSLM process (which emphasised the importance of listening and empowering rather than giving direct, practical assistance to individuals and groups). On both of these points there were fewer problems as the programme developed.

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[6] Base: 10 month survey (203 TCOs, cohorts 4-14), fieldwork dates August 2013 – April 2015

A training programme for volunteers was also developed towards the end of the programme to encourage VCOs to increase their knowledge of the CO programme approach. While the evaluation did not gather specific feedback on this aspect of the programme, there was good demand for the training, with programmes run in 15 locations around the country.

4) Areas reached by programme

Evidence suggests that the programme was targeted at particularly deprived areas, as intended. The criteria used to decide patches were extremely varied but most hosts chose an area that was seen as in need of help, and where there was little community action or engagement – "forgotten areas" where there is a "blank page" for organisers to work on.

The biggest challenges TCOs felt they faced in their patches were linked to the attitudes and outlook of individuals within the area. This included people not wanting to get involved in community action and focusing on problems rather than solutions.

Patches often changed throughout the year, usually as TCOs decided to narrow their focus when they found that their patch was too big to cover meaningfully. This was noted particularly amongst the earlier cohorts.

In addition, patch boundaries often blurred as projects developed. Focussed and sustained effort over two or three years on a single patch might well lead to greater social impact than has been the case during this programme, in which patches were more fluid.

5) Listening, VCO recruitment and community activity

Figure 1.3 - Fulfilment of training year targets

Q22. Have you already achieved the following targets for your training year, or not?
How likely are you to achieve the following targets during your 51 week training?
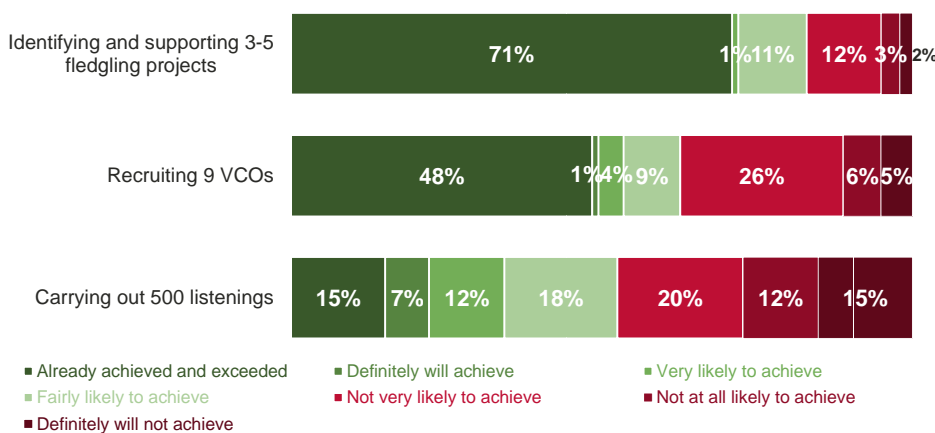
Base: 10 month survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 4-9 (99) : Fieldwork dates : July 2013 – June 2014   Source: Ipsos MORI

> Patch was up to us, we were given two wards decided to do the whole thing. Probably that was a mistake…would have been better to do a little area first.
>
> TCO

As Figure 1.3 shows, TCOs have been particularly successful in supporting fledgling projects (a mean of around 5 projects after 10 months). Three in five TCOs had already achieved the target by 10 months.

Recruitment of VCOs improved throughout the programme, and the overall programme target was exceeded. Later cohorts were successful in recruiting VCOs earlier in their training year. While across cohorts 4-8 only 45% said they had achieved the target of recruiting 9 VCOs within 10 months, for cohorts 9-12 this had increased to 69% and this was largely maintained for the final cohorts. Some TCOs reported particularly high levels of VCO recruitment, often linked to specific campaigns or wider community projects. Progression also allowed COs to continue to recruit VCOs in their second year.

Organisers listened to large numbers of local residents across their training years, though often struggled to meet the training target of 500, given the other demands on their time. After 10 months, 52% of TCOs thought they definitely would or were likely to achieve this target within the 51 weeks.

In terms of sustainability, the 18 month interviews suggested optimism that at least some projects would continue into the future. There is however less evidence around the formation and sustainability of CHTs.

6)   Progression

Progression was effective in ensuring that a large proportion of TCOs (60% of those who completed the year) were able to spend a second year practising the skills developed in the training year. For the later cohorts, performance management became more stringent, which helped to ensure that the best organisers went on to a second year.

The experience of progression varied depending on access to high quality support, either from their hosts or Locality, with some TCOs having little trouble in securing the match. The later cohorts were supported during progression by a Progression Support Officer from Locality, and input about progression at the mid-point residential helped TCOs to be more proactive about progression planning. However, sometimes the match was not secured in time for graduation, and there was a more general perception among TCOs that the financial climate has made it challenging to find funding.

A small number of TCOs experienced personal strain and sometimes economic hardship while seeking progression funding. This reduced their ability to focus on activities in the community.

7)   Legacy

The development of CoCo (now COLtd) as a network for nurturing and supporting TCOs and networks will be important for maintaining and

> Locality have been really supportive… as soon as mentioned there were issues they appointed me a progression officer in who met with us within a day or two.
>
> TCO

building on programme learning. While there have been some developments in recent months, including COLtd running a conference for community organisers and appointing a chief executive, the organisation remains in fledgling form as of Autumn 2015.

1.5   Key findings and lessons learned

Overall, programme processes worked well, given the innovative nature of the approach. Importantly there is good evidence of learning and improving throughout the phased roll-out. The programme fulfilled its core targets of training TCOs, recruiting VCOs and enabling TCOs to access progression funding, and there is evidence that this supported individual and some community outcomes.

These outcomes happened in many – but not all – of the areas where organisers worked. A lack of consistency of outcomes across areas is unsurprising given the experimental nature of the approach, and the diversity of areas and communities reached by the programme.

1.5.1   Process learnings

The main challenges encountered with the process were:

1. Unevenly distributed support

Many organisers were very well supported centrally and locally, but a minority struggled in their roles due to insufficient support. This was usually due to one of or a combination of the following factors:

- The host support varied significantly

- Team support could energise TCOs, but a lack of support could be demotivating

- Central support was at times inconsistent

In earlier cohorts, TCOs felt that formal training was unevenly distributed across the year – this was improved by the introduction of the residential training after six months.

2. Progression aims insufficiently focussed on sustainability

There was a lack of clarity in the programme around what should happen in local communities after the 51 weeks, particularly in areas where the TCOs did not continue in their role. The progression process focused on ensuring that the TCOs with the most potential were able to continue to use their organising skills, rather than on sustainability in particular communities. Given that many organisers who progressed changed patch, over half of the initial areas reached by the programme were left without an organiser after 51 weeks. There is limited evidence that CHTs were able to continue

the TCOs' work in these areas after they had left, and without ongoing support.

More importantly, the duration of progression funding was arguably too short. Third year funding was made available to a small number of NQCOs who progressed well in their second year. In order to increase the chances of sustainable social outcomes this was only available to those who continued to organise in the same patch, in line with earlier feedback from the evaluation.

Evidence from the case studies found that many communities were already suffering from consultation and regeneration fatigue, as a result of numerous fixed term initiatives. Any future provision should take into account negative outcomes which may arise within communities where work is not sustained in the longer term.

3. Insufficient time in the training year

The initial programme theory of change assumed that it was possible for TCOs to make progress towards building a network of individuals committed to creating change at a community level. However this assumption does not hold – 51 weeks is simply not enough time to allow for TCO development, all TCO training targets to be met, and a new network of local people to be developed in a way that is sustainable if the TCO does not continue. This issue was recognised and to some extent addressed through progression funding, which was introduced early in programme development.

1.5.2   Enablers of success

Looking across the programme, the criteria for 'success' in terms of achieving social outcomes were:

- Communities where COs have built or further developed networks of local people through listening and encouraging fledgling projects;

- That individuals in those networks have taken action together; and

- Given the right support, those networks showed signs of being sustainable in a way that was consistent with the programme rationale (with a focus on bottom-up community action grounded in listening to others).

The most important enablers of successful community organising within the current model are aspects of individual TCO's ability and skill, alongside factors in local neighbourhoods. These include:

> **Community work can't happen in a year – changes can't happen that quick but you can see little subtle differences, listening to people and getting them to commit to taking some kind of action in the community actually works.**
>
> TCO

1. TCO ability and skill

The following characteristics seemed to influence how well TCOs engaged people and generated community action:

- Commitment to listening

- Pragmatism about engaging with existing local structures or more actively supporting projects that catalyse further local action

- Leadership skills and ability to develop others

- Understanding of their own power in the emerging network

- Emotional resilience

- Using external support and advice appropriately

2. Community capacity, capability and assets

From the evaluation evidence, it is not possible to say definitively whether the CO programme approach works best in certain types of area. However, there are emerging findings about the features of an area which seemed to enable success within the programme:

- Well-defined, manageable patches

- Access to a shared space within the community

- People willing to act as local leaders

- Existing or latent skills and confidence locally

- Support from existing structures

In summary, both the TCO's skills and the nature of the area were important to enabling successful community organising within the constraints of a training year, as illustrated by the following chart.

Figure 1.4 – An emerging model for understanding success in the CO programme
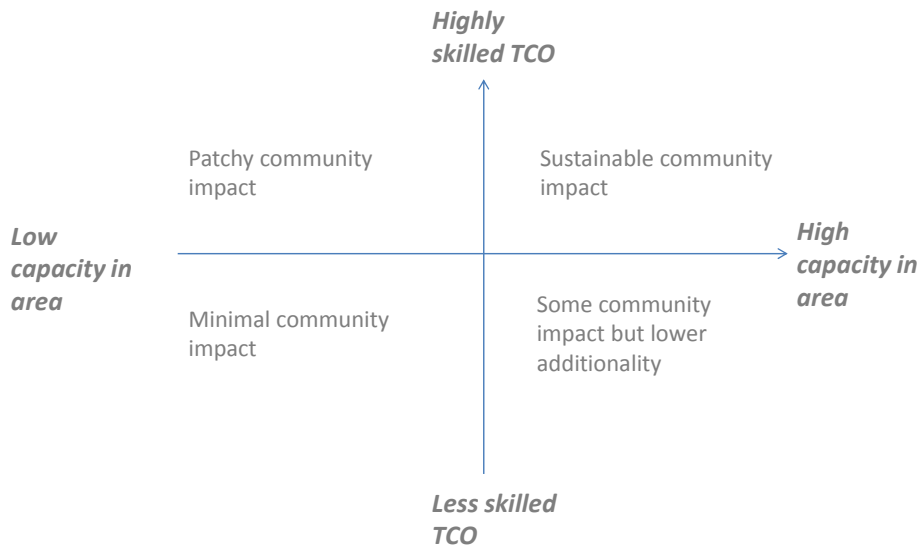
This model helps explain why there was so much variety in terms of progress and outcomes across the different neighbourhoods included in the programme.

Background and evaluation scope

2 Background and evaluation scope

2.1 Background

The aim of the Community Organisers (CO) programme was to recruit and train 5,000 community organisers in order to support and build community networks and drive change around the needs and priorities of people in local areas. The key target for delivery was to recruit 5,000 community organisers by March 2015, broken down as follows:

- 500 Trainee Community Organisers (TCOs), employed full-time for 51 weeks of training, development and practical experience; and

- 4,500 Volunteer Community Organisers (VCOs) recruited and trained by the TCOs.

Community organisers listen to what people want to see change in their lives and community and help them to achieve this, working in and through democratic structures. Community organising involves building relationships in communities, mobilising people to take action and supporting projects which make a difference to people's lives. Community organisers have no agenda, and do not lead or do things on behalf of people.

In particular, the programme sought to support people in deprived communities by placing TCOs in those areas which are in need, in order to improve their neighbourhoods and tackle existing and emerging problems. The programme was funded by the Office for Civil Society in the Cabinet Office, and delivered by Locality[7], with Re:generate[8] as the delivery partner responsible for training until early 2014, and still involved to a lesser extent with running training in the later stages of the programme.

This programme was delivered concurrently with the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund programme, which made just under £30 million available to fund community projects in some of the most deprived areas of the country.[9] The funding encouraged people to give time, expertise and resources towards the projects they identified in their areas. The fund matched these projects at least pound for pound. The two programmes, Community Organisers and Community First did not run together in every neighbourhood.

Ipsos MORI and NEF consulting were commissioned by the Cabinet Office to conduct an evaluation of the Community Organisers programme. The same team

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[7]http://locality.org.uk/
[8]http://www.regeneratetrust.org/
[9]http://cdf.org.uk/neighbourhoodmatchedfund

also evaluated the Community First (CF) programme. This report builds on interim findings delivered to the Cabinet Office and published in spring 2015,[10] and provides a final assessment of the programme.

2.2 Evaluation scope

The programme has been evaluated to understand both process effectiveness and the social impact achieved. In summary, the overall aims were to evaluate:

- How well the programme has been managed and implemented, how it could be improved, and what lessons can be learned for future work.

- The extent to which the programme has delivered the expected outcomes.

- The extent to which outcomes and lessons from the delivery model are sustainable / sustained beyond the lifetime of the programme.

- How the programme compares to other programmes / interventions which sought to improve levels of community action.

- Where there is overlap between the CF and the CO programmes, how well they have worked together to deliver shared outcomes.

To fully assess the process effectiveness we carefully mapped out our understanding of the flow of activities and outputs derived from each during an extensive scoping phase. These key activities were explored through the evaluation research programme. We considered the process effectiveness in terms of the volume, quality and range of outputs and outcomes which have been derived as a result of the programme activities.

At the evaluation design stage, intervention logic models were developed to articulate the programme inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and anticipated impacts. We have also articulated the theory of change, which identifies the underpinning assumptions and key stakeholders for whom benefits will be realised. This provides a clear analytical framework for our assessment of impacts.

Feedback mechanisms were used throughout the programme to ensure the evaluation team highlighted key emerging findings to the Cabinet Office and Locality, the programme providers. In this way, lessons learnt from the programme were fed back while both the evaluation and programme delivery were ongoing.

Section 3 of this report sets out more detail on the strategic context and programme design.

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[10] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-organisers-programme-evaluation

Programme assumptions and strategic context

3 Programme assumptions and strategic context

3.1 Programme context

Devolving decision-making away from central government and into the hands of individuals and communities was a core tenant of the previous Coalition Government's ambitions for community empowerment. The Community Organisers programme sat within that agenda, by seeking to challenge people to take ownership of their communities, driving change themselves and building social capital as they went.

Another crucial part of the context for the CO programme was the broader world of community organising, both in the UK and elsewhere. At its core, community organising is about empowering communities and harnessing the power of individuals to work together in their shared self-interest. Through listening to and engaging with communities at a grassroots level, community organisers aim to help citizens to identify problems in their communities and develop and start to implement their own solutions or push for better public policy solutions.

The CO programme model was influenced by two key thinkers, Paulo Freire and Saul Alinsky. Freire's method is about giving the marginalised the self-confidence to effect social change and Saul Alinsky's theory of community organising is 'power-based'. In his view the primary aim of organising is to build networks and coalitions in order to demand a redistribution of power from government and markets back to communities.

Locality's approach to delivering the programme sought to learn from both these approaches, and was grounded in the Root Solution Listening Matters (RSLM) strategy developed by RE:generate over the past 25 years.[11] The RSLM approach involves listening to people one on one to explore the things that they love about their area, things that concern them most, their motivations and their ideas for action, while focusing on and drawing out potential solutions. The ultimate aim is to encourage individuals to take action, and activate wider networks to better meet the needs of their communities and neighbourhoods. This approach is particularly well suited to getting people animated about the issues they already care about as a starting point for becoming more involved in working for change generally in their local area.[12]

The delivery mechanisms used by the CO programme were informed by the problems the programme sought to address, namely:

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[11]RE:generate, *A guide to Root Solution Listening Matters – engagement that works*
[12] More background information can be found in the Evaluation Design Document.

- Many local communities are not sufficiently organised and this prevents them from improving their neighbourhoods and tackling problems

- Many local people lack awareness that their needs and aspirations are shared locally

- Many local communities do not believe they have or can develop collective power to improve their neighbourhoods and tackle problems, and often focus on deficits rather than assets

- Local action is crucial, but a national movement is necessary to create sustainable, long-term societal change

3.2 Summary of programme design

Programme delivery began with organisations recruited by Locality to act as hosts for TCOs. These organisations were required to be politically independent, locally based and willing to take on between two and five TCOs. The hosts provided practical support and a physical base for TCOs. In total, 14 Cohorts of community organisers were trained in groups of c.30-50, rolled out in waves between October 2011 and June 2015. For Cohorts 1-6, hosts made decisions about recruiting TCOs themselves, using a job specification and guidance prepared by Locality. From Cohort 7, hosts recruited a shortlist of candidates who attended a Regional Assessment Centre run by the central programme team.

TCOs were employed for 51 weeks on a full-time contract (or 78 weeks for those on part-time contracts). Training consisted of 4 days at a residential training centre, e-learning modules, monthly online support sessions and supervision meetings. By the mid-point of the 51 week training period TCOs should have submitted seven units for assessment and accreditation in 'Foundations of Community Organising', a new accreditation specifically designed for the programme. Then they took on one of four 'Go Deeper' options for further learning in the second half of the training period. The TCO was required to use RSLM to carry out listening, network building and reflection throughout the rest of their 51 weeks. Over the course of their training, TCOs were expected to meet the following targets:

- Listen to at least 500 people in their 'patch' or local area;

- Recruit at least 9 VCOs;

- Identify 3-5 fledgling projects that can be supported by the wider network(s) they have started to build up; and

- Form a Community Holding Team (CHT) of VCOs and other local leaders to listen in the community, research, plan and take co-ordinated action.

In response to feedback and discussion within the programme team the training was revised by Locality. These changes were introduced from Cohort 12 onwards, and are discussed in more detail later in this report.

Progression funding in the form of an employment start-up grant of up to £15,000 towards the cost of a second year of organising was available to all eligible newly qualified community organisers (known as Newly Qualified Community Organisers, or NQCOs). To apply for the grant, they must have achieved a foundation certificate; have an employer; and have secured a local match, of which £7,500 must be in cash and the rest can be in-kind (e.g. an organisation giving use of space).

To help facilitate the development of a broader movement for change across England, Locality set up an independent legacy body called Community Organisers Limited (CoCo). It functioned as the national membership body for qualified Community Organisers. CoCo's strategic aims were:

- To provide solidarity and support for trainee and qualified organisers;

- To offer training for new 'generations' of organisers and CPD for those who have qualified;

- To act as a hub for impact evidence; and

- Provide a national voice for local communities involved in the programme.

More recently, CoCo has been renamed as The Company of Community Organisers (COLtd) and is in the process of reviewing its role and strategy now that the training element of the CO programme has been completed for all cohorts.

3.3 Logic model and evaluation questions

The programme logic model was developed following interviews with programme stakeholders and participants. It makes explicit the expectations around what the programme will deliver. Each causal link in the logic model is underpinned by an assumption we have made about how the programme activities will lead to the anticipated outputs and outcomes, and in turn how these will lead to anticipated impacts

Problems and challenges
- Many local communities are not sufficiently organised and this prevents them from improving their neighbourhoods and tackling problems
- Many local people lack the awareness that there may be many locally shared needs and aspirations
- Many local communities do not believe they have or can develop collective power to improve their neighbourhoods and tackle problems, and often focus on deficits rather than assets
- Local action is crucial, but a national movement is necessary to create sustainable, long-term societal change

Regional / National impacts
- Sustainable, long term societal change
- Shift in power to communities
- More resilient and capable communities
- New nationwide movement of people skilled at challenging power

With scaling

Cabinet Office and CO Programme: aims to train 500 community organisers (TCOs, who will become NQCOs) who will then recruit 4,500 voluntary community organisers (VCOs) to support them. They will help communities that lack existing social networks by bringing people and groups together and will help generate action at three levels – individual, group and regional/national. Locality is the delivery partner for this programme.

Community outcomes (hierarchical)
- Local people have increased well-being and pride in place
- Communities better able to self-organise to improve neighbourhoods and tackle problems
- Communities better able to secure funding and resources for action, including making better use of existing assets
- Local residents able to share information with providers of public services to better meet local needs
- Shared understanding of community needs and aspirations
- VCOs and project leaders have increased capacity to lead change
- Local residents have increased confidence to participate
- Improved local networks with new associations and new groups
- Projects benefit wider community

Theory of change

Purpose
To build the connections between and belief among local people that they can collectively improve their neighbourhoods and tackle problems

Beneficiaries
Local people, SCOs, VCOs, host organisations, local public sector

Desired effect
SCO brings local people together to identify shared concerns, set priorities for action, motivates to use collective skills and assets to drive change. Legacy of VCOs and Community Holding Team (CHT).

Inputs

Direct
- TCO bursaries
- TCO training, accreditation and prof. development
- Host fees
- Matched funding for NQCO progression
- Locality programme management

Indirect
- Volunteer hours (e.g. VCOs and project leaders)
- In-kind support from hosts
- In-kind support from other organisations
- Office for Civil Society staff time to manage programme

Activities

Host recruitment + induction

TCO recruitment, training and professional development:
- Residential (intro to RSLM)
- Online and face-to-face

TCO/NQCO community organising:
- Listening
- House meetings
- Project support
- Community Holding Team
- VCO recruitment
- Leadership development

TCO progression

Establishment of Community Organisers' Company (CoCo) and Inspiration Network

Learning and Evaluation Advisory Team (Imagine)

Outputs

500 NQCOs

4,500 VCOs

No. of listenings

No. of fledgling projects

No. of Community Holding Teams

Stories

Listening records

CoCo and Inspiration Network

Individual outcomes
- TCOs develop transferable skills in listening, organising and mobilising others
- Local residents able to articulate views on area and benefit from project activities
- VCOs, project leaders and others engaged in community activity

Source: Ipsos MORI Policy & Evaluation Unit and NEF consulting

The assumptions underpinning the logic model are appended to this document. The logic model enabled us to create a set of evaluation questions, which are explored in the remainder of the report.

3.3.1 Key process evaluation questions

- What are the attributes of successful and unsuccessful host organisations?
- To what extent is the TCO recruitment process finding the right types of people to become TCOs?
- Is the training and support provided an effective learning and development approach for community organising?
- What types of areas are being reached by the CO programme?
- What are the key barriers and enablers to successful community organising?
- What roles do VCOs, project leaders and the CHT play in the programme?
- To what extent are fledgling projects being identified and developed through the programme?
- How well has the progression process worked?
- How effective are CoCo and the Inspiration Network in beginning to create a movement for change?

3.3.2 Key impact evaluation questions

- To what extent have TCOs developed skills and knowledge?
- To what extent do VCOs / CHT have increased confidence in collective ability, expanded networks of contacts, new skills, increased well-being, positive feelings about their local area and more appreciation of local resources?
- To what extent do other local residents experience increased quality of life, and pride in local area?
- To what extent have social networks strengthened, community commitment from local people increased and community capacity to self-organise improved?
- To what extent do the networks and action facilitated through the CO programme continue?

Methodology and methodological limitations

4 Methodology and methodological limitations

The evaluation included both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. The core aspects were online surveys of TCOs, VCOs and host organisations; longitudinal community-based case studies; and ongoing analysis of management information and secondary data.

Over the course of the evaluation, several changes have been made to methodology to better reflect the nature of the programme and in response to challenges encountered with conducting some aspects of the evaluation. These changes are also discussed in this section.

4.1 Online surveys

A core aspect of the primary research was a series of online surveys with TCOs (at two key stages of their 51 week programme), hosts and VCOs. This approach allowed large numbers of programme participants to be included in the evaluation.

Table 4.1 – Summary of evaluation surveys

	When	Who	Method	Final response rates
TCO survey 1	After residential training	Cohort 7-14	Online	73% (222 TCOs)
TCO survey 2	After 10 months	Cohort 4-14	Online	57% (203 TCOs)
Hosts	After 6 months	Cohorts 4-14	Online	70% (78hosts)
VCOs	After at least 6 months	Cohorts 9-14	Online and paper	12% of VCOs contacted (95 VCOs)

Source: Ipsos MORI

In order to mitigate the risk of non-response bias the evaluation team focused on increasing participation using email and targeted telephone reminders. This proved an effective way to increase response, and overall the response rates achieved have been high, especially given how busy many of the key individuals were.

Due to the survey approach, much of the quantitative impact data was self-reported. Impact data was therefore triangulated with findings from interviews with TCOs, hosts, VCOs, as well as evaluators' observations made during case study visits.

4.1.1 TCO surveys

The first TCO survey was sent to organisers a few days after they completed their initial residential training. It provides a baseline on self-reported skill and confidence around the key programme competencies and asks the organisers for their views on the residential training, their expectations for ongoing support, and information about their background and demographic characteristics.

The 10 month survey provided an update on the skills and confidence metrics, as well as asking organisers about their plans for progression, their progress against targets, their view on the support available to them and their perception of the impact of the programme in their area.

4.1.2 Host survey

Host organisations were surveyed around 6-9 months after their TCOs begin work. Data was collected on how hosts recruit their organisers, how they assigned organisers to patches and their perspectives on the impacts of the programme on TCOs and the areas they worked in.

4.1.3 VCO survey

Surveys were also carried out with VCOs recruited by organisers as part of the programme. The original intention was to gather the experiences of volunteers using an online survey. In practice this has proved very challenging because of the limited contact details available for VCOs, and digital exclusion. Many TCOs were concerned about providing extensive contact details to the central programme team for the VCOs they had recruited. The challenges around the VCO role are discussed later in this report.

Instead, a paper version of the questionnaire was distributed to TCOs to administer to their own VCOs. These were sent out in early June 2014 to organisers in Cohorts 9-12, and then to organisers in Cohort 13 and 14 in November/ December 2014, after they had been in their patches for six months.

Overall, despite efforts to increase engagement, the response rate for the VCO survey has been low and it is important to consider the findings in that context. Though the responses do give us an indication of VCO experiences, they are not representative of VCOs as a whole and are likely to account only for the most engaged subset.

4.1.4 Engaging TCOs after the first 51 weeks

The evaluation design included a further online survey with TCOs 18 months after they started on the programme, whether or not they had progressed or moved on from the CO programme. Following initial work on the evaluation, the design was changed to 30 depth interviews with organisers in Cohorts 4-9 because:

- There was relatively little existing information available on what organisers and former organisers were doing at 18 months, and this made designing the questionnaire challenging. In part this was a result of the welcome decision to introduce progression funding, which complicated the range of available options for NQCOs after the initial training was finished. From available information, it was clear that organisers were engaged in a wide variety of activities, meaning that designing single questionnaire to capture their experiences was not possible;

- There were very limited contact details for people who had left the programme; and

- The qualitative method we opted for instead was very well suited to the impact questions which were so critical to explore further.

Depth interviews were carried out with organisers or former-organisers across Cohorts 4-9, with a mix of people who had left the programme, progressed or who were still seeking progression at the time.

4.2 Case studies

The programme worked in different ways in each patch. Given this variety, it was important to get a sense of how the programme approach played out in different areas, and the interplay between area, host, organiser and local community. For that reason, a total of 11 longitudinal case studies across Cohorts 3-14 were built into the research programme (including 5 where there was overlap with the NMF programme).

During these visits, researchers spent up to two days with TCOs, hosts and volunteers in a single location. They undertook depth interviews with hosts, organisers and community members and volunteers who had been involved with the programme (e.g. through projects or the CHT where appropriate). They also observed organisers working in their patches as they went about their usual activities.

These visits took place with organisers in varied patches including a spread of urban, rural and suburban settings; in the South East, West Midlands, East Midlands, North West, North East and Yorkshire. We sampled to ensure a range of host structures and types and to include overlap and non-overlap with NMF areas.

4.3   Secondary data analysis

It was a goal of the evaluation to investigate external secondary datasets in local areas to explore the impact on communities of community organisers. It has become clear that this was not possible because:

- Details of TCO patches were not provided in enough detail to match to the administrative boundaries used for collecting national statistical and survey data.

- CO patches were fluid, often changing across the course of their training year, making it difficult to accurately capture which areas were being affected by the programme.

- Community organising results in a wide range of projects, and diverse changes for individuals. This means that there were different outcomes in each community. Such a range of outcomes is impossible to detect using a systematic approach across a wide range of very small CO patches using national or local survey data. That said analysis of cross-cutting outcomes at the community and individual level was in part possible – using wellbeing data and community life data sets.

- Even if we could detect an association with increases in specific cross-cutting measures it would not be possible to attribute the change to the programme.

Given these constraints and limitations we focussed our approach on measuring individual and community outcomes through self-reported perceptions of the impact among TCOs, hosts, VCOs. These findings are supported by longitudinal case studies.

Monitoring information (i.e. secondary data generated *within* the programme) has been used to understand programme implementation and progress. This includes qualitative analysis of case studies and stories written by TCOs and others, to help understand the nature of the community activity they supported.

4.4   Reporting conventions

Given the nature of data collected across numerous different sources (surveys, interviews, workshops at the scoping stage, case studies, observations, stories, websites, informal conversations at Action Camp etc.), some findings are drawn from a number of these sources. Where survey data is being used, exact percentages are reported. Where other data is being used but the evidence is strong enough to allow some commentary on strength of feeling or balance of views, we have used words like many, some, a few, a handful.

Social outcomes

5 Social outcomes

This section reflects on the changes that TCOs have experienced through their training and beyond, alongside evidence around the outcomes for VCOs and others in local communities. Where possible, we use examples from case studies, interviews and stories submitted by community organisers to illustrate key successes and challenges faced by TCOs and those in local areas.

The outcomes are assessed based on the intervention logic model and theory of change, both of which are explained in greater detail in the Evaluation Design Document developed during the scoping phase. For each of the main programme beneficiaries we describe the evidence about whether or not they experienced the anticipated outcomes, before reflecting on what we know about why those outcomes have or have not resulted from the programme activities.

5.1 Individual outcomes: TCOs

Anticipated: TCOs develop technical and people skills, improve their local networks and awareness of local issues and actors.

Overall, TCOs reported moderate to substantial improvements in their self-assessed skills and knowledge between the baseline survey[13]and the follow-up survey near the end of their first 51 weeks. TCOs developing these skills was a crucial first step in the intervention logic model, and the consistent evidence from across the evaluation is that most did so through the training year.

TCOs improved in the technical skills required to carry out programme activities, the people skills needed to effectively communicate with those in their community, their knowledge of local issues, and the skills needed to bring local people together to create change. Hosts were also positive about improvements in TCOs' skills.

However, the skills that TCOs struggled with most were those needed to develop a more formal network of volunteers committed to sustainable community change (the CHT). This will be considered further later in this section.

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[13] At the post-residential baseline survey they were asked to assess their skills and confidence both before and after the residential training, depending on the skill in question. The text and figures in this section make it clear which assessment we are using for each specific skill.
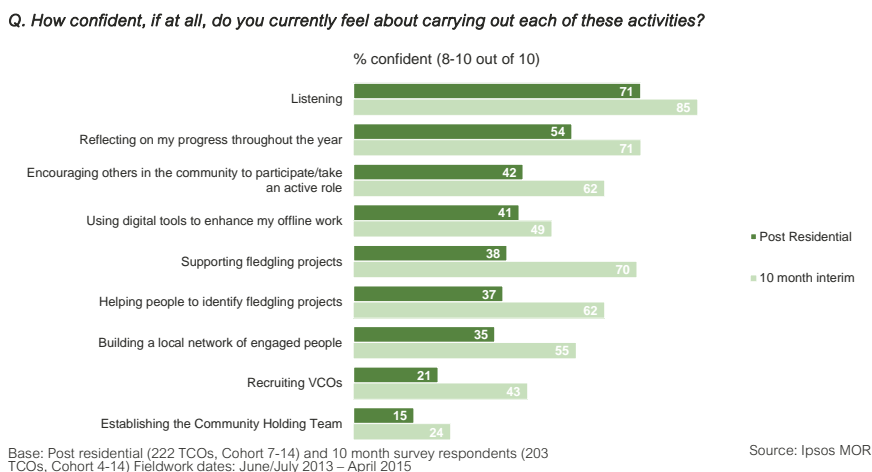
5.1.1 Technical and role-specific skills

Both TCOs themselves and their hosts felt that TCOs developed many of the **technical and role-specific skills** needed to deliver community organising activity.

Although there were initially mixed views of the residential training (views got better with improvements over time), most TCOs embarked on their role feeling like they had a good grasp of at least the basic skills for the role. As shown in Figure 5.1 around seven in ten TCOs were confident about listening after the initial residential training. This figure increased to 85% after 10 months on the programme.

TCOs' confidence in some of the more challenging parts of the job increased even more significantly as they continued their training year. The majority completed their first 51 weeks confident when it came to encouraging others to participate, helping people identify projects, supporting those projects, and building a local network of engaged people. These are all key skills for TCOs to develop in order to begin to encourage and sustain community activity.

The interviews with COs at 18 months indicated that confidence in these skills continued to grow following progression. Some noted that it was only in their second year that they felt they had really got to grips with the skills required for their role.

Figure 5.1 – TCO change in confidence on role-specific skills

Q. How confident, if at all, do you currently feel about carrying out each of these activities?

% confident (8-10 out of 10)

Activity	Post Residential	10 month interim
Listening	71	85
Reflecting on my progress throughout the year	54	71
Encouraging others in the community to participate/take an active role	42	62
Using digital tools to enhance my offline work	41	49
Supporting fledgling projects	38	70
Helping people to identify fledgling projects	37	62
Building a local network of engaged people	35	55
Recruiting VCOs	21	43
Establishing the Community Holding Team	15	24

Base: Post residential (222 TCOs, Cohort 7-14) and 10 month survey respondents (203 TCOs, Cohort 4-14) Fieldwork dates: June/July 2013 – April 2015
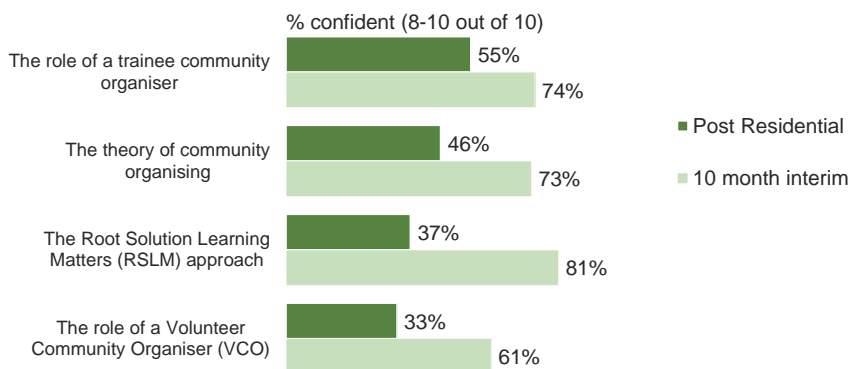
Source: Ipsos MORI

Despite increases, the two aspects of the role that TCOs were least confident about when starting their year remained the lowest rated at 10 months: recruiting VCOs and establishing the Community Holding Team (CHT). Just over two fifths were confident about recruiting VCOs (43%) by 10 months, more than double compared with the post residential findings (21%). There was less movement in TCOs' confidence around establishing CHTs, with only one in four confident after 10 months.

This lower confidence around VCOs was reflected in TCOs' understanding of different aspects of the CO programme: while their understanding of the VCO role increased overall, over the 10 months, it remained lower than for other aspects.

Figure 5.2 – TCO change in role understanding

Q4/Q1. How much, if at all, would you say you understand each of the following?

% confident (8-10 out of 10)

	Post Residential	10 month interim
The role of a trainee community organiser	55%	74%
The theory of community organising	46%	73%
The Root Solution Learning Matters (RSLM) approach	37%	81%
The role of a Volunteer Community Organiser (VCO)	33%	61%

Base: Post residential (222 TCOs, Cohort 7-14) and 10 month survey respondents (203 TCOs, Cohort 4-14)
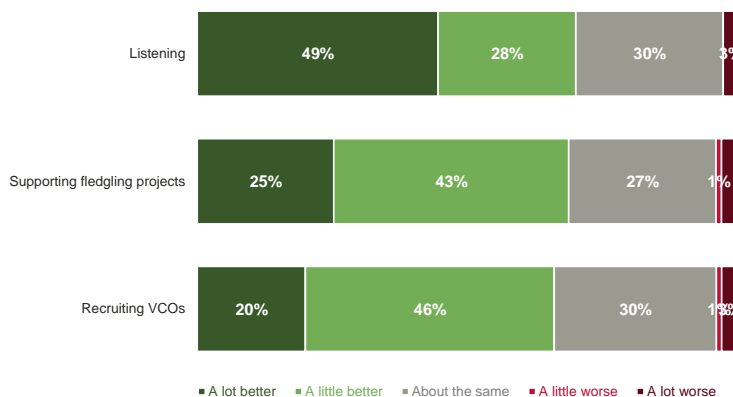Fieldwork dates July/ April 2013 – April 2015   Source: Ipsos MORI

Some of those COs interviewed after 18 months described their difficulties in setting up a CHT, suggesting that a year was a very short time in which to do this, and that even after 18 months it remained a challenge for those who had stayed in the same area. Many COs cited recruiting more VCOs as a key aim for their second year. Recruiting volunteers and establishing the CHT were key stages in the programme logic model, intended to improve the sustainability of any community outcomes that happened as a result of the TCOs' work.

Hosts also saw improvements in TCOs' skills during the training. When hosts were asked about up to two of their TCOs, they felt that two thirds had improved their general personal and communication skills (68% in both cases), while in over half of cases hosts had seen improvements in IT skills (56%).

For role-specific skills hosts were again positive, citing improvements in TCOs' listening abilities and supporting fledgling projects. As Figure 5.3 shows, they also reported improvement in VCO recruitment. Very few had seen TCOs get worse in any of the areas asked about.

Figure 5.3 – Host perceptions of role-specific skills

Q. And thinking in more detail about role specific skills, since the start of the training year, do you think they have improved, stayed the same or got worse when it comes to:

	A lot better	A little better	About the same	A little worse	A lot worse
Listening	49%	28%	30%		3%
Supporting fledgling projects	25%	43%	27%	1%	
Recruiting VCOs	20%	46%	30%	1%	3%

Base: Host survey respondents, Cohort 4-14 (78 hosts asked about 150 individual TCOs) Source: Ipsos MORI
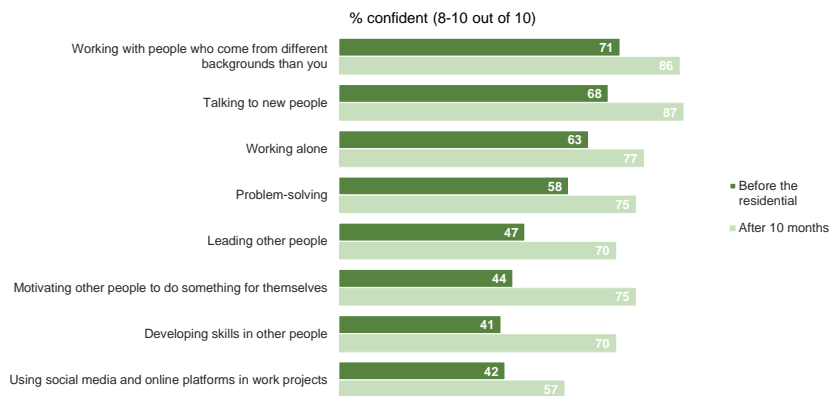
5.1.2 People and leadership skills

Underpinning the CO programme approach were strong **people and leadership skills**; listening, communicating, defining roles, delegating responsibilities and coaching others.

TCOs rated their people skills fairly highly before starting the programme. These are some of the skills most relevant to the job specification for TCOs, so we would expect many of them to already have confidence in these areas. Even so, confidence was much higher overall at 10 months for skills like leading other people, motivating others and developing skills in other people (see Figure 5.4). These self-reported findings provide good evidence that the training and practical experiences created positive changes in the skills most specific to developing as a community organiser.

There was also some evidence of changes in the way that TCOs perceived other people. For instance, following the residential training 45% felt that, generally speaking people could be trusted, whereas after 10 months this figure had increased to 50%.

Figure 5.4 – TCO change in confidence on people skills

Q. How confident, if at all, did you feel before the residential/do you feel after 10 months about doing each of the following?

% confident (8-10 out of 10)

Skill	Before the residential	After 10 months
Working with people who come from different backgrounds than you	71	86
Talking to new people	68	87
Working alone	63	77
Problem-solving	58	75
Leading other people	47	70
Motivating other people to do something for themselves	44	75
Developing skills in other people	41	70
Using social media and online platforms in work projects	42	57

■ Before the residential

■ After 10 months

Base: Post residential (222 TCOs, Cohort 7-14) and 10 month survey respondents (203 TCOs, Cohort 4-14) Fieldwork dates: June/July 2013 – April 2015

Source: Ipsos MORI

As the quotations below illustrate, improved people and leadership skills were important outcomes of the programme for TCOs, resulting from both formal training and experience in communities.

"I am far more confident talking with new people, and I am much more reflective and can deal with conflict and difficult situations better."

TCO

"I have learnt a lot about interacting with people, challenging their views, listening and accepting people more, even when their views are different from mine."

TCO

The 18 month interviews indicate that confidence in these skills continued to grow during the progression year.

"It's like when you're learning to drive, once you pass you only get better"

SCO

Individual journeys: skills development and starting points

Over the last few years **K** has done a mix of various part-time jobs and voluntary projects. This included public relations projects, bar work and presenting and producing for a local radio station.

The community organiser role appealed to his mix of skills and interests. He has used the programme as a foundation, and thinks that many of the skills that he has learnt can be used in his next job, whether he progresses in the programme or not. The main things he learnt were how to speak to new people confidently, develop relationships and build trust. **K** feels particularly positive that he would be able to use some of the specific skills he learned through the programme, like listening, in the future.

R came to the programme with 30 years' experience of community work across several local authorities. He felt becoming a TCO would be a good way to go 'back to the chalk face' of community development work, rather than primarily to improve his skills. He has seen many previous programmes and took a pragmatic approach to the organiser role.

He felt that being the 'old new kid on the block' has given him a substantial advantage: 'I get to the solution more quickly' but can rub people up the wrong way. He has struggled to balance sharing his experience with coming across as a know-it-all (to his host and other TCOs). However R has developed a successful partnership with another TCO who was allocated to the same patch, allowing him to pass on some of his existing skills.

B is a recent graduate who studied near the area, and applied for the role in order to be able to stay locally. The role appealed because she has extensive experience of volunteering in the city as a student, and is passionate about change in communities. However, before the programme B had never worked in a similar community role.

She thought her people skills were strong before beginning the year, and was also confident about the formal training elements. However, her experiences in the local community, particularly some early frustrations, have allowed her to develop many new skills. In particular, she felt more resilient, and more confident in supporting others to achieve their goals. B wants to continue in community organising.

C completed a college child development course, then worked in a residential care home but was retired on medical grounds at the age of 21. She was doing voluntary work in the community when she applied for the Community Organiser role.

During the training year C connected with a lot of different people and developed her skills. She decided to apply for progression because she "felt in my element in my role." She has progressed with the same host, but now has some additional responsibilities as a result of the funding

5.1.3 Local understanding and networks

In order to be able to support people in their area, the programme logic model assumes TCOs need to develop an awareness of **local issues and actors.** Given the programme approach we would expect TCOs to gain extensive knowledge about the areas where they work.

When asked how much they knew about the organisations and people that have influence in the local area, 42% of TCOs said they knew a great deal and 53% a fair amount at 10 months (10% and 52% respectively at the post-residential survey). As such, almost all TCOs feel they know about the areas they work in, even though many were unfamiliar with the neighbourhoods before beginning their training year.

This message was also reinforced by hosts, who said that seven in ten (71%) of the TCOs they were asked about knew a great deal or a fair amount about the organisations and people with influence in their local area. Hosts were even more positive about TCOs' knowledge of their specific patches and the major issues people face in the area, with around 9 in 10 reported to know a great deal or a fair amount about each of these issues (87% and 89% respectively).

Similarly, TCOs interviewed for case studies said they had gained considerable local knowledge. Even those who had lived or worked in the area previously found out more about the people and organisations in the neighbourhood the through their work. They said they had a much better understanding of personal, social and economic issues people faced. This was seen as an almost inevitable consequence of spending time in an area, listening to people and bringing them together around the issues they cared about.

However, two in five TCOs (42%) saying they knew a great deal at the 10 month survey means that most still thought they had more to learn about the area. This emphasises the challenges they faced in their first 51 weeks. It takes time to understand the influential organisations and people in their patches.

"I have learnt more about the area in which I work and live and I have more pride for this community."

<div align="right">TCO</div>

Those who continued to organise in the same area following progression were able to benefit from the local knowledge they had already gained, and continue to build on this. For those who moved to a different patch after progression, engagement with the local area had to start again from the beginning. Although they were going in with greater confidence and skills obtained from their training year, this still could be challenging and take some time.

In order for TCOs to facilitate community activity, they needed to move from knowing about the area to developing a **network of local contacts**, including local people and those with influence in the area. In many cases, increased knowledge has helped TCOs target the people and organisations best placed to share their knowledge and facilitate action.

"I've made a good connective network and been able to motivate people into action and this has been good personal development."

<div align="right">TCO</div>

A majority of TCOs (55%) felt confident about their ability to develop a network of local contacts at the 10 month survey.[14] Hosts surveyed felt that around four in ten of the TCOs asked about were very successful at building a local network (41%), while a similar number were felt to have middling rates of success (39%). Around one in five (19%) were felt by hosts to have low rates of success in building a network. Hosts also saw improvements in TCOs' understanding of power relations and network building.

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[14] This was not asked at the initial post residential survey, so it is not possible to comment on any changes.

Figure 5.5 – Host perceptions of local network skills

Q. And thinking in more detail about role specific skills, since the start of the training year, do you think they have improved, stayed the same or got worse when it comes to:

■ A lot better ■ A little better ■ About the same ■ A little worse ■ A lot worse
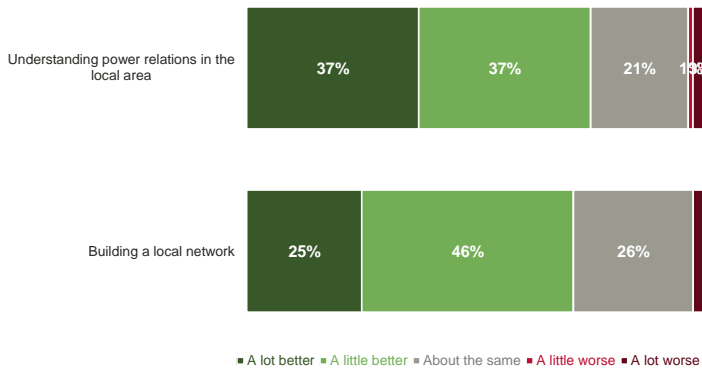
Base: Host survey respondents, Cohort 4-14 (78 hosts asked about 150 individual TCOs)   Source: Ipsos MORI

For those COs who stayed in the same area after progression, the second year was seen as a good opportunity to continue to strengthen and develop the networks they had formed. The fact that volunteers would have seen some of the impacts achieved in the first year was felt to be beneficial as it meant that they had a better understanding of the value of the work.

(The second year is a) "...richer experience because the volunteers understand the value better than in year one."

NQCO

5.1.4 What enables outcomes for TCOs?

Overall, the evidence is that the training year enhanced relevant skills in TCOs, provided the individuals recruited have basic skills and the necessary support to improve. These skills could then be further developed and strengthened if the COs progressed onto a second year.

In addition to the technical and people skills included in the surveys, many TCOs report improvements in their ability to deal with difficult situations, their understanding of their own strengths and limitations, and the nature of community development, among others.

"I have gained more confidence, especially in talking to new people and forming relationships."

TCO

"It has been an emotional roller coaster, and I feel much more able to deal with difficult situations. I have excellent listening skills, and much more knowledge and confidence with regards to helping people within a community."

TCO

Our analysis suggests that several factors were important in determining the extent to which TCOs developed skills during their first 51 weeks:

- **TCOs' experience of the central training and support** was important. Those who developed their skills most found that they were able to learn in a way that fitted with the style of the residential and ongoing training. They were also able to draw on additional support from programme partners, and Re:generate in particular. The revised training programme was designed to deal with some of the feedback about differing experiences of central training and support.

- The nature of the **local and other support** available was crucial. Those TCOs working in functional teams with peers available to listen or provide advice tended to feel more confident that their skills were developing. Others received similar support from their host, or from peers or more experienced COs working in different places (e.g. through the Inspiration Network). Having support outside the central team helped TCOs deal with the many difficult situations that stretched their skills. Without this additional support, some TCOs found it difficult to develop as much as they wanted to during the programme.

- Some of the **patches TCOs worked in were challenging**, and perhaps too challenging for their skills at the beginning of the programme. Consideration of TCOs existing skills should be important when selecting patches since TCOs with little or no experience of community work found it difficult to deal with the existing problems in areas. Further guidance to hosts to help them select patches where TCOs have a realistic prospect of seeing some success in 51 weeks would be helpful.

- Finally, some **aspects of the programme administration have acted as barriers** to TCOs experiencing the anticipated outcomes. Problems with accreditation and/or progression plans towards the end of the year often act as a drain on TCOs' time, preventing them from carrying out the core activities.

By design, TCOs who progressed to the second year were most likely to be those who had good outcomes during their training year. With the experience of the training year on their side those who progressed tended to be positive about their second year and the skills that they were continuing to develop. On the whole the 18 month interviews suggested that the support and training received in the progression year was well received, especially the support through the Inspiration Network.

5.2 Individual outcomes: VCOs/ CHT

Anticipated: VCOs and CHT members increase confidence in collective ability, expand networks of contact, develop new technical and people skills, increase wellbeing, positive feelings about their local area and their appreciation of local resources.

The intervention logic model assumed that volunteers engaged through listening and network building would be able to overcome barriers to get involved in action they felt passionate about. There has been movement towards achieving this in many neighbourhoods. However some TCOs (especially the earlier cohorts) struggled to maintain engagement and achieve formal commitment from VCOs, making it less likely that any changes in these areas will be sustained in the longer term.

The challenges around defining the VCO role and the improvement in VCO numbers over the course of the programme are discussed in more detail in Section 6.6. The outcomes described here relate to all those who would see themselves as being part of a TCO's team, even if they do not meet all the criteria for being a VCO (e.g. having some experience of listening).

VCOs took on a range of leadership and support roles for the community organiser teams. Results from a small, limited sample survey of VCOs (95 respondents) illustrate how their activities incorporated publicising TCO teams' work and conducting listenings (see Figure 5.6). Over half also said they were part of a particular project team, reflecting how many VCOs were introduced to community organising through an interest in a particular issue or project.

Figure 5.6 – VCOs' self-reported roles

Q10. Which of the following activities have you done since you joined the community organiser's team?

Helping promote or publicise the work that the team/project is doing	61%
Being part of a project team	55%
Listening to local residents with the community organiser(s)	53%
Listening with other members of the team	45%
Listening alone	29%
Being a member of the Community Holding Team	12%
Other	18%

Base: VCO survey respondents (95)   Source: Ipsos MORI

5.2.1 Types of volunteers

Based on the qualitative research and TCO stories we have developed a number of volunteer typologies. This analysis gives an indication of the range of starting points and motivations for getting involved with the TCO's team, as well as how volunteers describe the difference the programme has made for them.

1 **Initially isolated:** these individuals were not engaging with many people or organisations, and often viewed the TCO as a source of social and emotional support. They could gain confidence and skills to become VCOs who took action, but this required significant investment on the part of the TCO. In this respect, striking the right balance between providing intensive support for isolated individuals and recruiting a broad number of volunteers was often a challenge for TCOs.

Example VCO: case study

A is 40 and described by the TCO as *"down on his luck"* – he has no formal learning, has never really had a job, and is very quiet. He is caring and thoughtful, and has lots of ideas for improving his area.

Meeting the TCO has led to him volunteering in various ways – helping out at the food bank in the church, and helping out the elderly in the community that the TCO links him up with (often in return for a cooked dinner).

"I like to help people…I just ask [the TCO] if he knows people I can help out, do their gardens. I'd rather do it for nothing."

He feels he has learned a lot more about how vulnerable a lot of the people (especially old people) in the community are through shadowing the TCO, which has motivated him to do more. He hasn't yet joined any of the more formal groups or project teams yet, and is slightly daunted by the prospect.

"I'm just an ordinary guy, if the government look at me they'll see I'm on the dole, have nothing behind me…why would they give me money."

2 **Already leaders:** these were people respected in the community, and who may have some previous experience of community or voluntary activity. Even if they did not see themselves as leaders or having a formal role, these individuals were already well known by others locally, and had the contacts, skills and confidence to bring other people into the emerging network. They were usually gatekeepers for meeting other potential volunteers. Identifying and engaging local leaders was important in those areas where TCOs

have had success relatively quickly. However, TCOs can also come to rely on these volunteers to the extent that they do not continue with building the network further, particularly towards the end of their 51 weeks.

Example VCO: case study

G is a local sports club coach and has lived in the area all his life. He is a champion for young people and has helped secure funding for sports pitches and motivated parents to help run evening sports clubs.

When the local TCO approached G for tips on how to set up a girl's football club he was excited. He saw potential in the TCO and "*took her under his wing*". He encouraged her with further project ideas and opened doors to useful community representatives and a pool of parent volunteers. In this way G has been helping with the TCO's activities more as a mentor and advocate rather than an individual looking to grow their own skills.

3 **Passionate about one issue:** many case studies and stories referenced local people who have expressed an interest in dealing with a particular local issue. They found it easy to bond over this common concern with others, and arrange/ participate in local activities. However, evidence from the case studies suggests that these volunteers were not always willing to become involved in a broader network, or to engage with the wider issues that might make a difference in their neighbourhood.

Example VCO: case study

In one case study area, a group of very young mothers have come together to start a toddler group. They were brought together through their shared concern about the lack of any low cost activities for mothers and children in the area.

Though initially lacking in confidence, and unsure that the group would be anything other than temporary, the core group have enjoyed it so much that they have taken steps to acquire insurance, constitute the group and apply for Community First funding to pay for play equipment. However, most members of the group are interested in becoming listening VCOs, or becoming part of the CHT. For now at least, organising the group is the extent of their community involvement.

4 **Low confidence:** there are many examples of local people who had strong opinions about their local area, but did not have the confidence to participate in discussions or local activity, or did not know where to start. They did not feel they had the skills and resources to take action, but they did have a willingness to get involved given the right support and links to others who share their passions.

Example VCO: case study

D moved to the community in the late 1990s following a career in the army. Initially, the tight-knit nature of the area and the low-level criminality meant that many people were suspicious of him, and he was threatened with violence by those residents he saw as being in control of the neighbourhood.

After many years of wanting to help improve the area he had largely given up and withdrawn. He had no idea where to start, and no sense that others in the area had an appetite to improve things.

Getting involved with the group of TCOs working in the area has transformed his outlook and put him in contact with others who wanted to take action locally. D now sits on the Community First Panel and is helping to lead several projects in the community, including an IT club.

"To be honest, this has completely changed the way I see the area and my own life… we have some hope that things might get better here."

5 **Interested in broader community change:** these were people interested in seeing change in their community, over and above a specific issue or issues. They wanted to get involved, bring new people in and tackle local power structures, even if they might not use this language to describe their actions. This was the group that TCOs need to engage in order to create a broader movement for change and a sustained network. Some people quickly saw the potential of the CO programme approach and start their involvement in this way. Other VCOs moved towards this as they were connected to people who shared their interests, and as they gained experience through projects and listening.

> **Example VCO: case study**
>
> S is a former drug addict and dealer who was born in the area. Some years ago she became involved with a faith group (which her TCO is a part of, and how they were introduced). The staff supported her during her recovery.
>
> She was a key member of the team that organised the 'pop-up parties' in the area and subsequent 'pop-up Christmas wish' mass-listening event. With support, she put together and presented the pitch to the Community First Panel for the initial funding. As well as helping to lead other projects, she is also comfortable doing listenings with the TCO who trained her (though she found that formal RSLM is difficult amongst people who know her well, so she prefers to 'talk to them normally').
>
> S has been a huge support to her TCO and the wider community. All that has happened since she met the TCO has had a significant impact on the way she feels about herself and where she lives.

5.2.2 Outcomes experienced by VCOs

The examples below highlight some of the main outcomes for VCOs and others the TCOs have worked closely with, observed through the case studies and stories. Broadly, these outcomes are in order from the most to the least common.

- **Increased self-esteem and confidence:** this is a common theme for almost all VCOs. For many, just being listened to by someone with no agenda was a new experience, and one that helped them clarify the way they saw their own life and how their neighbourhood could be improved. Their involvement with the TCO and others in their community gave them a sense of being valued and a greater connection to where they live.

- **Expanded social networks:** volunteers made new friends as the network builds, and often described the benefits of knowing more people who live in the area. They have more people to draw on when things go wrong, but also to socialise with.

- **Increased pride in place:** many VCOs described a change in the way they viewed their area, moving from feeling frustrated and powerless to being proud of what they and others could achieve. Whether they experienced this outcome depended to some extent on the nature of the projects they were involved with – typically, those projects that sought to improve or involve the community generally increased pride more than those that addressed the needs of a specific group.

- **Increased sense of purpose:** many VCOs moved from being stuck in routines which isolate them to discovering new opportunities or realising long held aspirations. TCOs often spurred VCOs on to feel "things can get done" and gave them a reason to take action.

- **Valuing their existing skills:** taking action made VCOs appreciate the skills they already have. They described a sense of satisfaction when they were able to help an individual in a practical way (e.g. repairing something or assisting them with an application), or able to help with running projects locally.

- **Increased knowledge about the area/resources:** as the network develops, VCOs develop a richer understanding of their neighbourhood, in terms of the needs and aspirations of other people and organisations with influence locally.

- **Improved technical skills:** running projects and being involved with other volunteers meant VCOs often had to do things they had never done before. They developed a range of new skills depending on their involvement, from IT and social media, to managing the finances on a project.

- **Improved communication skills:** as they interacted with different types of people and learnt about the needs and aspirations of others, VCOs developed their communication and people skills. This was particularly the case for those who had some experience of listening (even if they did not conduct formal listenings themselves).

- **Listening skills:** in those neighbourhoods where there was most success, the VCOs almost always bought in to the listening approach. They put understanding others and encouraging them to take action at the heart of their developing network.

Volunteers usually experienced several of these outcomes if they stayed involved with TCO's team. However, some were not involved with the local network for long enough, stopping because of the commitment required or other external factors, like changes in their personal circumstances. Others did not want to develop their skills, instead being happy to have met some new people or helped run a specific project.

There were also examples from case studies and stories of volunteers experiencing other outcomes as a result of their involvement with the programme, including gaining the confidence to move into work. This is clearly a very positive outcome for these individuals, and some – although not all – continued to volunteer alongside their new jobs.

Taken together, volunteer outcomes represented a significant impact on those individuals who have been successfully engaged and animated by

TCOs. As predicted by the theory of change and logic model, TCOs had success in making volunteers feel valued and giving them access and awareness of their own skills and talents as well as other in the local community. Capacity to support and lead change increased. In some cases this built up to an increased commitment to act in the local area and challenge power. Within the programme there were many examples of these higher level outcomes being experienced by local people, but not in all of the areas where TCOs were working.

5.2.3 What enables outcomes for VCOs?

While there were positive outcomes for VCOs across the programme, in some neighbourhoods TCOs found it very difficult to get individuals to volunteer in any significant capacity. Where engagement was low, both the TCO's skill and the nature of the neighbourhood seemed to play a role. For example, in some patches local people were sceptical that the TCO could really help them make any difference to long-standing problems other organisations had been unable to tackle. Economic deprivation, criminality or tensions between parts of communities (based on ethnic or other differences) also made individuals reluctant to get involved. In some areas there was little existing sense of shared identity or desire to see the community improve, with people preferring to keep to themselves even where they wanted to see things change. Unless TCOs had well-developed skills to help overcome these barriers, few volunteers became involved.

With these caveats, there is good evidence that volunteers who engaged in the programme for a significant length of time experienced some of the individual outcomes outlined above. However, to create sustained local networks and a broader movement for change depended on VCOs shifting their focus from specific projects or personal development, to building a local network for change.

In some areas, those engaged did begin to work towards more general change, beyond the initial project that engaged them initially. In these cases they contributed to growing a network that attempted to have a broader influence in their area. As discussed in Section 5.5, CHTs were formed in some of the neighbourhoods where TCOs have been working. This makes achieving these sustained change much more likely.

"A residents group is now in its infancy and enthusiasm and excitement as to their next steps are being discussed – a magical experience and something that have been very privileged to be part of and witness."

TCO

The heterogeneity of projects and different views among case-study participants themselves means it is not possible to determine in detail what shapes whether or not these networks of volunteers would be sustainable in

the longer term. However, there is evidence about the factors that facilitate individual volunteers moving beyond their motivations for initial engagement and joining a broader movement for change.

First, **where VCOs started** in terms of skills and experience was important. In areas where local people had a range of abilities, it was much easier for TCOs to encourage projects and to begin building a network. This included existing technical skills (e.g. IT and finance), organising skills (e.g. experience running events), and leadership skills (to build trust and take responsibility). The most talented TCOs brought together a number of volunteers with complementary skills, resulting in additional outcomes being experienced by different individuals.

VCOs' motivations for getting involved were a second important factor. Where VCOs wanted to see change in their area that was not limited to tackling specific problems, they were much more likely to take the steps to develop their skills in order to achieve this.

"I think it will be hard to transform (the neighbourhood) and I'm not sure that's really what we want to do. We want to get on with helping people but I don't see that as being about changing the world."

VCO

"A couple of the project groups seem to be reaching a plateau, where they are content with the activity they are carrying out and uninterested in moving further forward... I have to decide what role I should play in this, how hard I should push, and how to go about supporting them further."

TCO

Related to this, the third important factor is how **good TCOs were at developing individuals** in a way that supported building a wider network. While this may be an obvious point, TCOs' skills were very significant in achieving the desired outcomes for VCOs.

TCOs displayed their skills around developing individuals in many ways through the judgments they made about using their time and energy, and how they nurtured VCOs through different activities. Some of the challenges TCOs faced in this regard are outlined below:

- **Balancing personal outcomes for individual VCOs with building a network:** some TCOs found it difficult to build a local network during their training year. As a result they focused on supporting a small number of individuals closely, as it helped them to feel a sense of achievement. In some cases this led to projects getting off the ground, and this may help develop a local network in the longer term. In other cases, the outcomes did not move beyond improving the

individuals' wellbeing and social networks, and are unlikely to contribute to broader community change.

"I have supported two community members, who when I first met them were in a personal crisis. Now those two people have started volunteering in their community and moved from receiving benefits to being employed."

TCO

- **Deciding which projects to support actively:** given limited time, some TCOs focused on supporting the 'quick wins' that were likely to result in significant action happening within their first 51 weeks. But the most successful TCOs often prioritised projects that were less obvious to others in the community because they involved developing individuals or helping networks to form or strengthen. The activity itself was less important; instead, the best projects encouraged VCOs and others to think about how they could work together on shared issues across their neighbourhood.

- **Thinking in a structured way about the development needs for individuals and the emerging network:** TCOs who saw it as part of their role to encourage and support VCOs in different ways often had the biggest influence on their volunteers. This might mean working with VCOs to strengthen their skills in areas where they have some existing capabilities or potential, and in ways that fill gaps in the skills of the emerging network more broadly.

5.3 Individual outcomes: local people

Anticipated: local people experience an increase in quality of life and pride in their local area.

Across both TCOs and hosts there was a perception that changes had occurred for local residents, and that this was attributed at least to some extent to the CO programme. Table 5.1 below shows how TCOs and hosts viewed some of the specific changes in their neighbourhoods. Overall, TCOs were usually more positive about outcomes for local residents than hosts, particularly around local events being relevant to different local needs, levels of trust between people, and strengthening social networks.

Table 5.1 – TCO and host perceptions of outcomes for local people

	% TCOs think this is more common	% Hosts think this is more common	Gap in perceptions between hosts and TCOs
People form new groups around shared ideas or projects	80%	69%	-11
People in the neighbourhood know others who can help them when they face problems	77%	62%	-15
People have the skills to organise activities and projects for themselves and others in the neighbourhood	75%	63%	-12
Local groups organise events and activities to address the needs of others in the neighbourhood	71%	55%	-16
Local groups, events, and activities reflect what different types of people in the neighbourhood want	70%	49%	-21
People understand the needs and aspirations of others in the neighbourhood	69%	58%	-11
People feel confident to become leaders to make changes in the neighbourhood	67%	56%	-11
People are aware of their community rights	56%	44%	-12
People feel proud of their neighbourhood	56%	42%	-14
People trust each other	55%	36%	-19
People get involved to change the way local services are provided	48%	50%	+2
People act on their community rights	39%	N/A	N/A

Base: 203 TCOs at 10 months; 78 hosts

There is stronger evidence for the outcomes we would expect in the short term: in most patches, TCOs and hosts felt that it was more common for people to have good support networks; form new groups around shared ideas or projects; understand the needs of others; have skills to organise activities; and have confidence to lead. Higher level outcomes around trust, pride and acting on community rights were seen as having happened less frequently.

"There has been more connection between community groups in the area. There is more awareness from the community of resources available, for example getting lighting for the football pitches."

Local resident

It is also the case that perceptions of change around these outcome areas were not particularly strong. Both TCOs and hosts typically say that these outcomes have become 'a bit more common' rather than 'much more common'.

Overall, the case studies and stories support the view that in the first 51 weeks, the main beneficiaries of the programme were those more closely involved as VCOs, or those the TCOs spend time developing in other ways. This is consistent with the longer term nature of the theory of change.

The COs interviewed during their progression year also tended to report impacts concentrated around those individuals who were heavily involved. However, they typically felt that in their second year they had been able to include more people, broadening the impact of their work. Where COs were continuing in the same area, the networks they had built up were also thought to be beneficial in terms of cementing some of the impacts they had already achieved.

The impact on other local residents was mostly through the fledgling projects supported by TCOs, and this is considered in more detail below.

5.3.1 Types of local people experiencing outcomes

Through the evaluation (particularly the case studies), it is evident that the CO programme resulted in outcomes for at least three types of people within communities, beyond those who were involved in the programme more formally as VCOs or project leaders. While measuring the outcomes for these individuals is beyond the scope of the evaluation, there is qualitative evidence about the nature of the outcomes they experienced.

1) Local people who have been listened to but do not become involved

The evaluation activities did not allow us to capture this group consistently, but there were examples of outcomes for individuals who have been listened to, even when they do not take action within the programme.

"The other interesting thing about this work is that…you don't know what happens after the conversation."

SCO

In particular, listening sometimes seemed to lead people to re-engage in community activities they were previously involved with but that were not directly related to programme activity:

- Someone was inspired by the listening process to get back into helping out with a local kids' sports team, after having told the TCO he did not have time to get involved. The TCO only found out about this through a later conversation in the street.

- A listening revealed that someone used to teach woodwork in the past. Despite expressing an interest in doing so again, nothing appeared to happen. A few months later, they contacted the TCO to say that as a result of the conversation they had secured workshop space and had begun woodworking again, with plans to start teaching others in the near future.

There is no evidence about the scale of this kind of action as a result of being listened to, and no consistent pattern emerged for the sorts of activities this they decided to get involved with. Having said that, the evidence suggests that these outcomes were more likely among those who already had the skills and experience to take action themselves, without the need for support from the TCO.

2) Local people who have taken part in projects

There were many specific examples of people benefiting from the programme through the projects run by VCOs and others. As discussed in Section 6.6 most TCOs met the training target of supporting 3-5 fledgling projects and these were responsible for most of the short term outcomes for local people.

However, because of the nature of the programme, information was not collected about each individual project. This means we do not know overall how well projects were run or how many people were involved, other than through the case study evidence. It is therefore difficult to assess the outcomes experienced through projects across the programme as a whole.

This lack of systematic evidence should not be read as a lack of impact. Given the large number of projects supported (around 2,000 across the programme) it is likely that significant social value was created as a result. We would expect that many of the outcomes experienced by local residents were in line with the outcomes seen for social action projects more

generally.[15] As such, they mirror some of the outcomes described for VCOs, including improved social networks, wellbeing and health outcomes, and other improvements in quality of life.

Evidence from the TCO survey – summarised in Table 5.2 – also allows us to categorise the types of projects, giving a further indication of the outcomes we might anticipate were experienced by local residents.

Table 5.2 – Categories of project being supported by TCOs

Connect people together – neighbours, residents, families, vulnerable people etc	84%
Improve the environment and encourage interaction with local surroundings – e.g. greening, neighbourhood watch, decorating, public art etc	61%
Help people to learn – e.g. culture, music, drama, cooking, gardening languages, job skills etc	54%
Encourage people to volunteer, donate or participate in the community	54%
Encourage people to be active and healthy – e.g. sports, dance, healthy eating etc	47%
Improve, repair, replace equipment and facilities	37%
Address unemployment and financial hardship	21%
None of the above	3%

Base: 203 TCOs at 10 months

The case studies and stories provide further evidence that large numbers of projects in all of these categories took place in local communities. Some of the main types of outcomes observed included:

- **Better social networks:** groups to allow specific types of people to socialise were widespread, including older people, parents, young people, and some intergenerational projects. These built new friendships and wider community relationships.

- **Environmental outcomes:** in almost all areas, people wanted to take action to improve their local environment. This included litter-picks, campaigns to tackle dog mess, community gardens, and combatting

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[15] For example, see http://cdf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/SROI-Report-FINAL1.pdf

fly-tipping, among others. These improved the quality of outdoor spaces.

- **Enjoyment and recreation:** many projects increased involvement in recreational activities such as crafts, music groups or other shared hobbies. These brought people together and had a positive impact on individual wellbeing.

- **Improved skills:** there were projects that attempted to improve a broad range of skills, including languages and IT, as well as allowing people to take up hobbies in a social setting.

- **Improved health and lifestyles:** projects that helped local people eat better, exercise more and participate in sport were common across the programme.

- **Protecting and improving community assets:** a number of projects focused on campaigning and/or raising money to protect or strengthen local assets, from bus stops and local parks to community centres and ambulance stations.

Examples of specific projects

The bottom-up nature of the programme means that a huge range of projects have been initiated, with diverse outcomes for local people. While there are themes (as highlighted above), the way projects work locally and the outcomes for those involved vary considerably.

The following two examples from one case study highlight how different projects can be.

1. A community garden project, where local people came together to work on developing an abandoned and littered driveway into a communal green space. Spearheaded by the TCO and two women who lived adjacent to the driveway, the project drew in numerous volunteers from the local streets on a drop-in basis. This project was described as leading to:

    - Increased wellbeing for leaders and volunteers

    - Improved local environment

    - Increased mixing among local residents as people either help out/donate things to the garden

    - Reduced problems with young people's behaviour in the relevant street

2. A project where students from the local Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) were given listening training. The pupils were so engaged by the approach that the TCOs were invited to come back and work with them, and the pupils eventually ran a charity fundraiser, which was attended by pupils from the local school. This project was described as leading to:

    - Increased confidence for the young people involved

    - Increased mixing between students from the PRU and those in the local school

    - Improved listening skills

    - Fund-raising skills

Many of the projects were based on mutual interest around specific issues rather than on the kind of shared mutual interest in improving the wider local community envisaged by the theory of change. While some of the people who took part in these specific projects went on to become listening volunteers, or become part of the CHT, or use the skills developed for other projects in the local area, others were only interested in volunteering as part of an individual project.

This interest in individual projects – combined with the fact that projects are sometimes one-off events rather than longer term ongoing activities –

challenges the assumption that projects will necessarily lead to the longer term community outcomes anticipated by the programme.

3) Local people who have had no direct contact with programme activities

Given the broad range of activities at a local level, it would not be possible to systematically measure the outcomes for individuals in each of the communities included in the programme. Furthermore, a pre- and post-intervention community survey around a common set of outcomes would be very difficult to design and expensive to deliver.

Secondary analysis of outcome indicators was also challenging because patches are usually small, do not fit within administrative boundaries, and change during the course of the programme. In any case, this programme is only one part of a rich tapestry of local actors, social infrastructure and interventions. It would therefore be difficult to attribute any change at a community level to the CO programme.

However, many of the projects had the potential to benefit local people more broadly, even if people were unaware of the programme and had no direct involvement in programme activities. From the evidence gathered, the main themes around broader community impact were:

- Improvements in the local environment

- Events or activities bringing large numbers of local people together

- Reductions in anti-social behaviour and crime

- Protecting or improving local facilities

- Public services being more responsive to local needs

There were examples of these wider community outcomes observed through case studies but they were relatively uncommon, particularly after the first 51 weeks. There was more evidence of these types of outcomes where NQCOs were able to progress and continue organising in the same patch.

In order to gather further evidence about community impact, the Office for Civil Society at the Cabinet Office commissioned the Community Life Survey to be carried out in seven Community Organiser areas (in parallel with the national survey in 2014). The results were then compared to the findings among similar people in similar non-Community Organiser areas. This approach provides a snapshot in time during which the Community Organisers were operational in a small fraction of areas. However, it did allow tests for meaningful differences between these and comparator areas.

The full findings and further details are available on the Cabinet Office Analysis and Insight blog:[16]

- Patches were found to be similar (statistically the same) to comparator areas across a broad range of measures including civic participation, social action and volunteering rates.

- Community Organiser patches were found to be better in a few notable areas. A greater proportion of those in the patches felt that people pull together to improve their area, and individuals within the patches also reported a stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhoods.

- Small but statistically significant differences in well-being were also found. Those surveyed in patches reported a greater sense of 'worthwhile' in life and those living in patches were more likely to answer medium or high than the more extreme scores of low or very high for life satisfaction and happiness.

While it is not possible to draw a causal link between the programme and these differences, the analysis highlights the value of the Community Life Survey in providing supporting evidence for future policy evaluations.

5.4 Sustainability and moving to community impact

There is evidence that TCOs, VCOs and others in many of the neighbourhoods included in the programme experienced the anticipated outcomes, at least to some extent. A key question for assessing social impact is whether the incremental changes experienced by individual community members and developing local networks (where they were formed) were enough to catalyse longer term outcomes. While it is difficult to be certain about whether or not any changes will be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the programme, there is evidence from the perspectives of TCOs, VCOs and hosts around how likely this is.

5.4.1 Sustainability after 51 weeks

When asked whether they anticipated the changes to last over the next two or three years, 12% of hosts stated that they expected this would happen to a great extent and 63% to some extent, while 14% did not know (12% though that the changes would hardly be sustained, or not sustained at all). This covers *all* of the changes that they saw in the community, and suggests muted optimism in the second half of TCOs' first 51 weeks that some changes have the potential to be sustainable. This was reflected in the views of hosts in the case studies. Most felt that without some ongoing

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[16] https://coanalysis.blog.gov.uk/2015/08/11/community-organisers-inspiring-people-to-build-a-bigger-stronger-society/

support, the progress made in neighbourhoods after the first year was at risk of being lost.

At the end of their first year, TCOs had different perspectives on whether the activities they helped galvanise would be sustained. Their greatest confidence was around the sustainability of ongoing projects, provided they had a core team and were running well. Many TCOs were optimistic that some of these would continue without their support.

"Many of my projects don't really need me anymore."

NQCO

Some TCOs felt they had very limited impact beyond the fledgling projects they supported, with little progress on building a wider network of volunteers or establishing a CHT. Without these steps having happened, TCOs were pessimistic about any sustainable change being created.

Even those who saw some success tended not to be confident about sustainability unless their emerging network would continue to receive some support (e.g. through them progressing, or support from the host or other local organisation). In particular, they pointed to emerging networks needing administrative and organisational support, access to the contacts that TCOs have built up, and advice on difficult situations or problems in the group. TCOs felt it was unrealistic to expect CHTs to take on these responsibilities when they have only been in operation for a few months at most. CHT members interviewed in the follow-up case studies shared this view.

"There is no way we would've kept going if (CO) had left after a year – we didn't have the confidence to do it. Now that we've been meeting for a few more months we're getting closer... but I still wouldn't want her to leave."

VCO

"The main thing I want to say is that (COs) have to continue for a while longer. We've managed to do a lot but we couldn't keep it up without them – at least not yet. We need their advice and support, particularly when things get tricky."

VCO

Where TCOs did not continue to organise in the same patch after their first 51 weeks, in most areas it is unlikely that progress in building the network was sustained, even if some projects continued. This was the general expectation of those interviewed at 18 months who were no longer working in their original patch. Emerging networks were considered dependent on the active participation of the TCO or other experienced community support, particularly if they were to develop in a way that would help achieve the higher level community outcomes.

5.4.2 Progression and impact

Almost three in five (59%)[17] of those who progressed stayed with their initial host – either as employer or accountable body – and the rest moved on to other organisations or self-employment. It is not possible to be certain what proportion of NQCOs continue to organise in their initial patches, both because organisers may start working in new patches even if they stay with their initial hosts. However, the evidence suggests that 50-60% of those who progress – which works out at around a third of organisers who complete the training year – continue to organise in their original patch, at least to some extent.

If the intention with progression was to allow the time necessary for the community outcomes and impacts to take hold and become sustainable, the design of the progression process could have been improved, as too many organisers moved to work in a new patch. Longer term funding may be a better way of ensuring sustainable community impacts in some areas, even if this meant that funding was available to fewer organisers.

If the aim of progression was to ensure that the 'best' organisers continued to use and develop their skills, then it was a partial success. The organisers who had particularly visible success in their communities in the training year often overlapped with those who were best able to raise funds for progression. In addition, extra time to access the progression funds (and sometimes access to interim funding to allow the progression year to start before all of the matched funding has been secured) was made available to the most promising organisers. The approach means that poorer performing TCOs did not progress. However, it is also clear that some good organisers were lost because they were unable to raise matched funds.

The impact on the training year must also be taken into account. While the matched element of the funding aimed to encourage self-sustainability among organisers and was often effective in doing so, the work involved in raising the funding added a considerable distraction towards the end of a very busy training year. This was often demotivating for TCOs, just when they needed to be focused on developing the individuals they had engaged during their year.

There were several examples we found of TCOs focusing on securing funding rather than building a network, reducing the likelihood that outcomes in the local community would be sustained – and the issue was likely to be wider spread than these few examples. Given the difficulty of finding matched funding after 51 weeks, any future programmes should explore alternative models for funding progression.

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[17] Based on Locality progression data for cohorts for 1-14

"I have been highly motivated all year and I have put so much effort into my work, but this motivation is disappearing slowly which is also knocking my confidence slowly. I am unsure what to do work-wise, do I go out door knocking? What is the point if I do not progress? If I go out door knocking am I leading people to believe that we can make change then never chasing them back up again?"

TCO

5.4.3 Sustainability after progression

Follow-up case studies were conducted in a small number of areas. Along with the 18 month interviews with newly qualified COs, these provide some indications of whether sustainability is more likely after a second year.

- In one area, the NQCO is still involved in the patch where he spent his first year, but the CHT that began to emerge broke down because of a difficult relationship between two individuals. He is spending less time in the patch (because of the role he has with his new employer), and is becoming pessimistic that the work is sustainable without a CHT in place.

- For a different patch, the project activities appear stable and sustainable, but the NQCO does not feel the CHT have made much progress at further developing the local network. A key leader in the CHT is no longer able to be involved because of illness in their family, and this has stalled the progress.

- In another area, the CHT established towards the end of the first 51 weeks has made good progress, and is now formally constituted and responsible for running several projects. They rely less and less on the NQCO, although still value the support she provides. The NQCO is increasingly confident that the network is self-sustaining, largely because of their focus on listening and drawing others in.

5.5 What were the outcomes from the CO programme?

The main impacts of the programme were on those closely involved: TCOs, VCOs, project leads, and to some extent hosts. In particular, most TCOs and many VCOs described their involvement as being transformative, changing the way they saw themselves and other people. The CO programme approach was able to develop confidence and skills in individuals, and to encourage them to take action in their community.

Many of these people will continue to engage in improving communities, either as a career (in the case of some COs) or by working in their own neighbourhoods. Others will use the confidence, skills and experience they

developed in other areas of their lives. For these individuals, it is likely that the programme will have longer term impacts, some of them significant.

In most areas, significant social value was also created through the listenings and projects. However, in terms of the ambition to generate sustainable community impact, the programme was less effective. In some areas, COs were able to animate people in sufficient numbers to begin developing a wider movement for change, and this continues in a relatively small number of cases.

But there were substantial challenges around moving individuals from interest in a specific issue to being involved in a broader network. The experience of progression suggests that more time would have helped with this in some areas. The key lessons learned from the programme are considered in more detail in Chapter 7.

Process effectiveness

6 Process effectiveness

This section of the report summarises the findings around the key process questions for the evaluation, covering:

- Host recruitment, induction, and support
- TCO recruitment, training and support
- Areas reached by programme
- Listening, VCO recruitment and community activity
- Progression
- Central programme activities
- Programme legacy

As explored in Section 5, there is evidence of a range of social impacts across the areas where organisers worked. In some areas these outcomes were numerous, large scale and potentially sustainable, while in others they were fewer, limited and likely to be short-lived.

This section explores programme process effectiveness, commenting on whether or not the assumptions that underlie the Theory of Change have held. It describes some of the process-related reasons why impact has been greater in some areas and more limited in others, with the aim of drawing out lessons that may help to improve impact for future programmes that aim to draw on community organising principles and approaches.

While this section focuses in particular on some of the challenges, it should be borne in mind that in many areas the outputs and outcomes of the programme were achieved. Sometimes this was in large part because the programme processes worked well, while in other cases this was in spite of problems with how the programme was delivered centrally and locally.

6.1 Central programme administration

The programme was administered centrally by a small team committed to the ethos and success of the programme. This team expanded as the programme grew. Given the scale of the programme, central resource was relatively small.

Running an innovative programme with a rolling design, involving large numbers of people and organisations has been challenging for the central team. They were supporting several cohorts of organisers and hosts at

once, all of whom were at different points in the training year or second progression year.[18]

Despite some of the challenges being anticipated and understandable, they did at times cause difficulties for TCOs, hosts and NQCOs. In particular, the level of central resourcing (especially early on) made it difficult for programme partners to effectively monitor how the programme was working on the ground and anticipate problems before or as they arose. Overall, central administration tended to be reactive in a way that at times made things frustrating for organisers on the ground.

However, there is evidence from case studies and stakeholder interviews that suggests the administration benefitted from lessons learned and improved significantly as the programme continued, in large part because of experiences gained in dealing with the early cohorts. In particular:

- **Training and support:** later cohorts rated both the residential and ongoing training more positively following the redesign for Cohort 12, and felt better supported when it came to accreditation.

- **Responsiveness:** there was greater clarity around communication channels and better management of the process of responding to TCOs' queries.

- **Helping hosts**: as the central team became more experienced they were able to provide improved support to hosts.

- **Progression:** there was a more structured process for assisting TCOs as they sought funding for a second year.

- **Management information:** more details about TCOs, progression and volunteers were available as the programme continued.

On the whole, problems identified within the programme were addressed well, and comprehensively, but sometimes significantly after they were identified. For example, while guidance about the role of VCOs was produced in 2011, this was not comprehensively reviewed to address feedback from TCOs until mid-2013. Similarly, a guide to employing newly qualified organisers was put together in April 2014, despite progression being in place since late 2012.

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[18] The report by Imagine on 'Learning and change' in the programme sets out these benefits and challenges in detail, which suggests that a feasibility stage might have helped avoid or mitigate some of the challenges faced in the first year of the programme.

6.2 Host recruitment, induction and activities

Hosts were locally rooted organisations that were politically neutral and able to demonstrate their independence. They typically agreed to host between two and five local TCOs. TCOs were expected to be independent and not aligned with their hosts' agenda, but they received practical support from the host organisation, and a physical base to operate from.

Host organisations received a £3,500 contribution towards the cost of the support they provided as well as £250 for each TCO they hosted. The hosts took part in a two-day induction session prior to TCO recruitment to explain the programme methodology and approach in more detail.

6.2.1 What types of organisations acted as hosts?

The programme partners[19] initially worked with Locality members to become 'kickstarter' hosts at the beginning of the programme. After this Locality invited open applications. Prospective organisations had to make a written application detailing their background and local roots (including evidence of community involvement in governance), their motivations for becoming hosts, details of how they would recruit, host and facilitate learning, and how they would make a distinctive contribution to the programme. Shortlisted organisations were then interviewed before being chosen by programme partners.

Overall, the application process itself worked well from hosts' perspective, with around eight out of 10 of successful hosts very or fairly satisfied with the information available about the programme (81%) the information available about the application process (81%) and the host application process itself (78%). In addition, the high number of applicants per host place (estimated at around four by the programme partners) suggests that the programme was well advertised and appealed to a range of locally-rooted organisations.

The programme partners did not systematically collect and collate organisational data for all organisations that applied to host. However, in line with programme ambitions, across the more than 100 host organisations, there was a broad range in terms of organisational structures, aims, target groups and size. This range had implications for the type and level of support on offer to TCOs, as some organisations were able to offer greater resources and experience than others. This also influenced TCOs' chances of progression. While supporting progression is not a core

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[19] Programme partners refers to Locality or RE:generate, or both organisations.
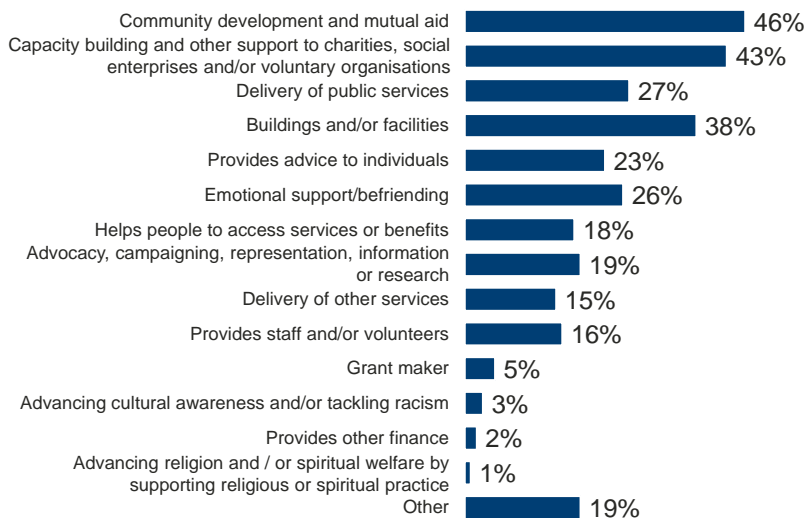
function of hosts, some host organisations were in a good position to offer - or offer support in securing - matched funding.

Further details of the types of organisations that acted as hosts within the programme are provided below:

- **Aim:** As Figure 6.1 illustrates, almost half of host organisations counted community development and mutual aid as one of their main roles. These organisations often had considerable institutional experience to draw on when supporting TCOs, including the ability to advise on approaches to community development, to offer informed support in carrying out community work, and put TCOs in contact with potential second year funders.

Figure 6.1 – Main roles undertaken by the organisation

Q34_1. What are the <u>main</u> roles your organisation undertakes?

Role	%
Community development and mutual aid	46%
Capacity building and other support to charities, social enterprises and/or voluntary organisations	43%
Delivery of public services	27%
Buildings and/or facilities	38%
Provides advice to individuals	23%
Emotional support/befriending	26%
Helps people to access services or benefits	18%
Advocacy, campaigning, representation, information or research	19%
Delivery of other services	15%
Provides staff and/or volunteers	16%
Grant maker	5%
Advancing cultural awareness and/or tackling racism	3%
Provides other finance	2%
Advancing religion and / or spiritual welfare by supporting religious or spiritual practice	1%
Other	19%

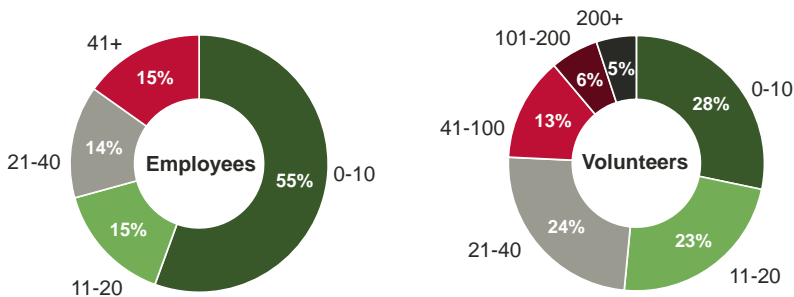Base: Host survey respondents, Cohort 4-14 (78)   Source: Ipsos MORI

- **Size:** Host organisations were generally quite small, with just over half (55%) employing up to 10 employees, and a similar proportion supporting fewer than 20 volunteers. However there was a large range, with the biggest host employing 9,000 people and supporting 2,000 volunteers.

Figure 6.2 – Number of employees and volunteers per organisation

Q35. How many employees does your organisation currently have?
Q36. And how many volunteers does it typically support?

- **Structure:** Host organisations included long-standing community charities, umbrella groups and voluntary service trusts, as well as much more recently formed local residents groups, social enterprises and Community Interest Companies (CICs). A small number of hosting partnerships were piloted across the programme, to enable groups of small organisations to collectively host organisers. In a few cases, newly qualified community organisers became hosts themselves, usually setting up CICs in order to do so.

- **Target groups:** While most host organisations were community groups working on behalf of all people living in a local area, some organisers were hosted by organisations that work on behalf of specific groups, including disabled people, refugees, Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer (LBGTQ) groups, and adults with complex needs.

Having diverse organisations act as hosts was a deliberate aim of the programme, and part of its experimental nature. This seems to have enabled the range of TCO experience anticipated, and also allowed the programme to reach traditionally under-supported areas with low levels of community action.

However it is also clear that some hosts, often those which were unusual (universities, newly-formed residents' groups, city-wide host partnerships) struggled more in their role than others. This was usually because they had less experience of employing community workers and needed additional support to fulfil their role. In some cases this had knock-on effects on the performance of TCOs. While the diversity of hosts brought strengths to the programme, the induction and support was not always enough to ensure that less experienced or unusual hosts were effective in their role. This is explored in the next section.

6.2.2 Did hosts understand their role?

Host recruitment, induction and support was generally good. The majority of hosts understood their role and felt sufficiently supported to carry it out.

The findings in this section focus on areas where the programme could have been improved. However, these findings must be seen in the context of the limited resources available within the central programme team for supporting hosts. The difficulties that some hosts experienced could potentially have been avoided if more resources had been allocated. Within the programme design and without extra resource, a greater focus on hosts would have had an impact on other aspects of the programme.

Induction and support

The key programme contact with hosts was through the residential induction. Based on host feedback, the induction was successful in preparing organisations for hosting. Most hosts rated the induction as good or very good across a number of aspects related to their understanding of the CO programme and their role.

The induction was seen by hosts to be most effective in helping them understand roles and skills of the TCOs, and least on RSLM theory (which arguably they didn't need to know in detail) and some of the practicalities of hosting.

Figure 6.3 – Rating the residential host induction

Q5. On balance, how would you personally rate the residential host induction that you attended in terms of…
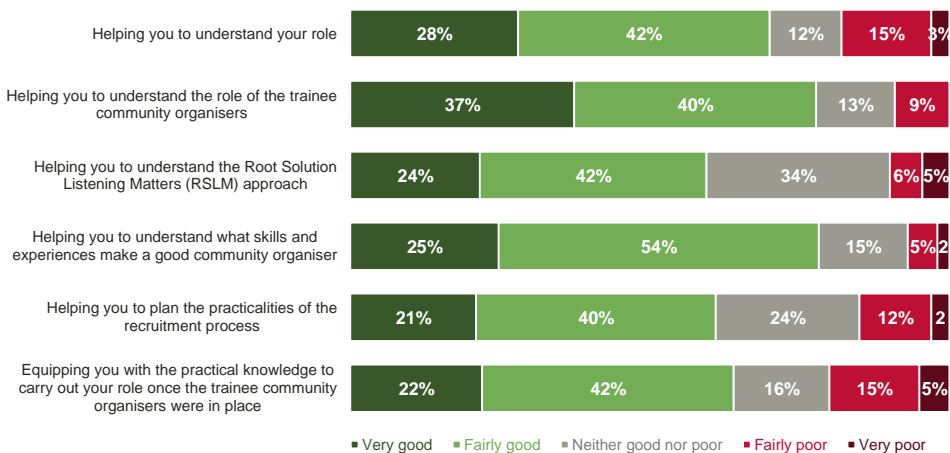
Base: Host survey respondents, Cohort 4-14 (67)   Source: Ipsos MORI

When asked "Is there anything the induction could have helped you more with?", hosts from the later cohorts echoed many of the earlier suggestions for improvement which are explored in the Imagine report on hosting[20]:

- **Timing and focus:** The induction was seen as too long by some – with time perceived to be 'wasted' on activities – and too short by others, as there was not enough time to explore practicalities and RSLM.

  "(At induction) most topics seemed to be covered but all of it was just very rushed. The session on the RSLM model felt especially rushed, 'lectured to' and little opportunity for discussion or deeper exploration/understanding of, for example, different elements of the process e.g. role of and how 'holding teams' would work."

  Host

- **Clarity:** Some wanted more specific information on processes, the RSLM approach, and the level of support that the host should input.

- **Building on experience:** Hosts would have appreciated more feedback from hosts and organisers who had already been through the CO programme process, perhaps through workshops or case studies.

  "There was a lot of time spent focussed on 'hypothetical' and 'theoretical' activities, when more could have been done to focus on what a host should/shouldn't do and learning from existing or pilot providers"

  Host

- **Interactivity:** Some would have liked more time for discussion and reflection.

- **Managing expectations:** There was a sense that some of the guarantees about levels of support made at the residential were not kept, and a call for expectations to be set at a more realistic level or met more fully.

Overall, the induction was fit for purpose, with nearly seven in ten hosts (70%) rating it as 'good' in terms of providing them with a clear understanding of their own role. Even so, a significant minority of hosts (18%) did not feel clear on their role even after the residential and, where

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[20] 'Locally Rooted? Hosting community organisers,' Jenny Pearce, Marilyn Taylor, Mandy Wilson, Tricia Zipfel., 2012, http://www.cocollaborative.org.uk/sites/default/files/casestudies/hosts_case_study.pdf (accessed August 2015)

this lack of clarity continued this sometimes had an impact on TCOs' progress during their training year.

As they moved through the programme, around half of hosts (53%) were satisfied with the level of ongoing central support, with a quarter (23%) dissatisfied. Hosts would have liked more support with progression, the practicalities of hosting, and dealing with the conduct of the TCOs that they hosted. Additionally, some would have liked more timely answers to queries, and better access to peer support from other hosts.[21]

Figure 6.4 – Areas host would like increased central support in

Q15. What, if anything, would you like more central support with?
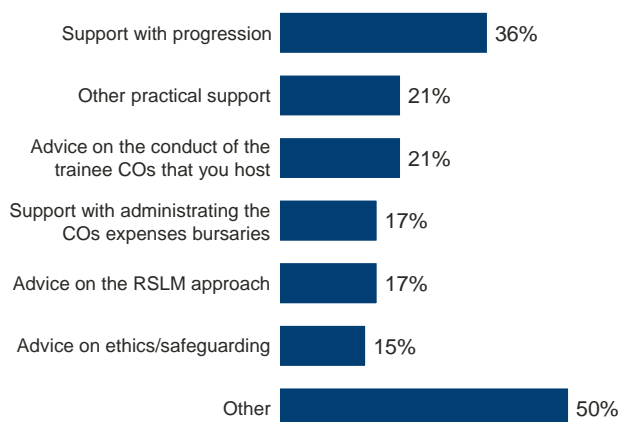
Base: Host survey respondents, Cohort 4-14 (78)   Source: Ipsos MORI

6.2.3 How do different models of host-TCO relationship impact on how well TCOs perform their role?
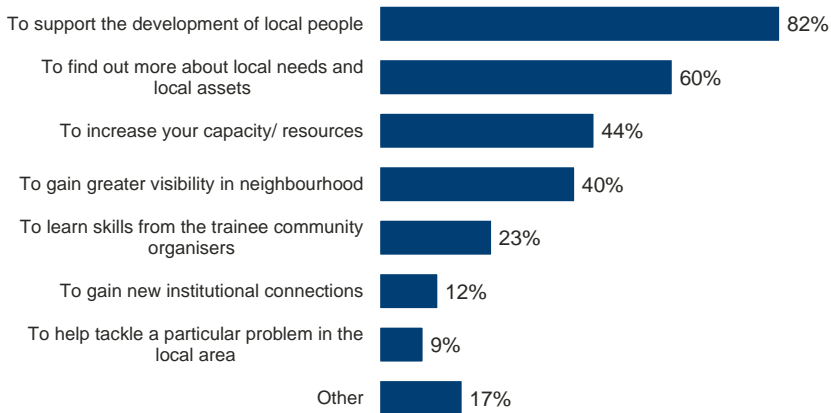
Models of host-TCO relationships

Within the programme there were a number of different types of host-TCO relationships. How these worked in practice had a significant influence on how well TCOs performed in their role. Much depended on the personality and availability of the particular individual within the host organisation who led on supporting the TCOs. As such it is difficult to draw any overall lessons on how different types of *organisations* performed as hosts.

Host motivation and expectations also had an important influence on TCO progress. Evidence from the case studies suggests that organisations that balanced enthusiasm about the opportunity the CO programme presented with realism about what could be achieved in a training year provided the most fertile ground for TCOs.

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[21] These were common answers to the 'Other – please specify' to Q15 on the host survey 'What, if anything, would you have liked more central support with?'

Figure 6.5 – Motives for becoming a host organisation

Q2. What were your organisation's motives for becoming a host organisation?

Motive	Percentage
To support the development of local people	82%
To find out more about local needs and local assets	60%
To increase your capacity/ resources	44%
To gain greater visibility in neighbourhood	40%
To learn skills from the trainee community organisers	23%
To gain new institutional connections	12%
To help tackle a particular problem in the local area	9%
Other	17%

Base: Host survey respondents, Cohort 4-14 (78)

Source: Ipsos MORI

Analysis of the qualitative evidence suggests that hosts tended to belong to one of three main 'types':

|	Host type		
	Organising enthusiasts	Pragmatic joiners	Community spirits
Organisation type and motivation	Enthused by and committed to the method, and how it differs from traditional community development work. Includes former TCOs.	Organisations or individuals within them who have a pragmatic view of the programme, based on experience. See it as a low-risk opportunity to try an approach they couldannot afford to fund.	Hosts who liked the idea of engaging the community and see the programme as a way of bringing resource (and sometimes jobs) into the area. Often small organisations with limited resources.
Expectations	Expect lots of impact of TCOs and the individuals they support but understand community change takes time.	Expectations are usually quite muted, as they understand the experimental nature of the programme.	That the programme will benefit their organisation significantly and often more than could reasonably be expected.
Support offered	Levels of support range from fairly hands off to full line management.	Varying levels of support, though usually able to provide particularly useful community links and advice on activities and funding. TCOs who need extra help may struggle.	Support is usually minimal (though not out of keeping with how the host role is outlined in programme documents) and hosts ill-prepared for those TCOs who need more help.
Impact on TCO	Mixed – can lead to well-supported TCOs and in others to lack of independence	The most independent TCOs thrive, with pragmatism of host allowing them to feel more creative with the method. Some can feel under supported.	Mixed – TCOs can feel under pressure to work outside their remit. Others withdraw from host and work independently.
Outcome	TCOs progress as listeners and animators but may have less community impact (which host understands may take time). These organisations may find it difficult to raise progression funds.	Often leads to most community impact as these host organisations find it easiest to raise progression funding. However the main host individual may find it difficult to persuade other stakeholders of the value of TCOs.	Can end up disillusioned with and even negative about the programme. These hosts often don't get involved in progression – their responsibility is to their community, not the TCOs. In a very small number of cases hosting relationships have broken down.

Supporting TCOs

Most hosts (57%) felt that the TCOs needed more support from them than expected, with a quarter (24%) saying their TCOs needed a lot more than expected. The qualitative research shows that hosts were usually happy to offer more support than envisaged, and made sufficient resources available to TCOs.

For a small number of hosts providing extra support was a strain on their organisation. This was a source of frustration when TCO support needs stemmed from perceived gaps in the central training and support. While hosts were positive about the central support overall, the small number of hosts who did not feel supported really struggled with some aspects of their role. On occasion this led to potentially serious issues such as absenteeism and underperformance being left unresolved for significant periods of time. More generally, it left some hosts feeling unsure how to fulfil their roles, and in a small number of cases becoming disillusioned with the programme.

TCOs, for their part, placed enormous value on the support that their hosts gave them. The majority said they had a great deal (39%) or a fair amount (26%) of support from their host over the course of their training year.

Figure 6.6 – Expected and received support

Q16/20. How much support, if any, do you expect to/have you receive(d) from the host organisation throughout your training year (so far)?
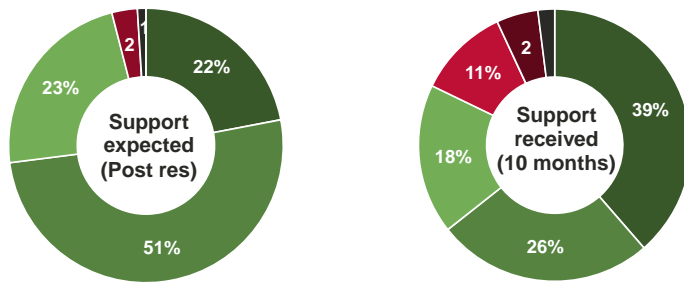
■ A great deal of support ■ A fair amount of support ■ A little support ■ Hardly any support ■ No support at all ■ Don't know

Base: Post residential (222 TCOs, Cohort 7-14) and 10 month survey respondents (203 TCOs, Cohort 4-14)
Fieldwork dates: July 2013 – April 2015

Source: Ipsos MORI

The support that TCOs rated as most useful was the line management/ supervision that hosts provided, along with physical resources such as space and access to the internet. The emotional support that some hosts offer was also very important in enabling TCOs to develop resilience. Their advice was critical for some TCOs at stressful points in the programme.

"(Our host is) very good, very supportive. I was invited to his house shortly after Christmas because I felt quite dejected (by perceived lack of responsiveness from programme partners and feeling unsupported during online supervisions) ...and he helped me through it basically, didn't just tell me to just 'sort it out'"

TCO

The small number of TCOs who have received hardly any (11%) or no support at all (2%) from their host typically struggled. However, in a few cases where the TCO was particularly resilient this lack of local support led to greater independence.

In some case studies, perceived lack of TCO success in the community had instigated a negative cycle with hosts withdrawing active support and TCOs consequently becoming further demoralised. This was also been the case where hosts were unwilling or unable to offer progression funding, or significant support in finding it. Where this is compounded by a feeling of lack of support from programme partners, TCOs with high support needs did not make significant progress against their training targets.

It was of course possible for some TCOs with limited support needs to make substantial progress without a 'good' host. But across the programme the evidence is that a productive and engaged hosting relationship was one of the key ingredients that helped TCOs develop and make progress.

Successful hosting

There were a number of important ways hosts supported TCOs to be successful within the programme:

- **Understanding of CO role:** Hosts who fully 'bought in' to the community animation process were best placed to support the organisers through the often difficult emotional process that accompanies this type of work. By contrast, where the TCO role was less well understood, this could cause significant problems for the TCOs who were then expected by hosts to undertake work outside of their remit, such as publicising services and events.

- **Understanding the training element of the programme:** Hosts who viewed TCOs as trainees rather than fully fledged community organisers were better placed to offer appropriate support.

- **Focus on CO needs:** Where hosts have been able to offer tailored support, TCOs have tended to feel more secure in their work and make better progress. In some cases, TCOs have needed more intensive line management, and understandably not all hosts were able to provide this. This also required striking a fine balance between support and challenge, in order to avoid too much dependence on the host.

- **Community links**: Where the host was able to make links between the organisers and existing networks this was often very useful, especially in the short time available for TCOs to gain an understanding of the community and make an impact. Indeed almost all hosts (94%) saw this as one of the strengths their organisation offered as a host, and many organisers considered the hosts' introductions to other local organisations (51%) and local people (29%) as some of the most important support they have received from their host.

- **Access to funding:** As explored in Section 6.4 below, hosts' ability to help raise progression funding had a huge influence on a TCO's final months. Where hosts could commit to offering significant support – in the form of time, contacts or money – this ensured that TCOs were able to spend much more of their final few months encouraging fledgling projects and building their local network. Where the host has no access to funding or ability to support the TCO, the last months could become very stressful and focussed on fundraising.

- **Co-location with TCOs:** While not essential, sharing a base allowed some hosts to help organisers deal with issues quickly and effectively before they escalated. This was particularly important in encouraging COs back into the community and door-knocking when they became discouraged by a lack of obvious progress.

6.3 TCO recruitment, training and support

TCOs who had the skills to successfully animate individuals and communities were crucial to the programme's anticipated community impact. Recruiting people with the aptitude to develop these skills was crucial for the programme approach.

6.3.1 Did the TCO recruitment process finding the right types of people to become TCOs?

TCOs were locally recruited in 14 waves, starting from late 2011. Hosts were primarily responsible for recruitment, to a job specification developed by programme partners.

TCOs in Cohorts 1-6 were recruited solely by hosts, and took part in a short telephone interview with the programme partners as a final quality check.

It was decided that this final quality check was insufficient in ensuring that all recruits were right for the programme. Therefore from Cohort 7 a regional assessment centre day was introduced, to which hosts were obliged to send their shortlisted candidates. Programme partners would then let the hosts know who was unsuitable to join the programme, and hosts could then select from their remaining shortlisted candidates.

The TCO role is a difficult one, and many different skills were needed in order to successfully carry it out. According to the job specification prepared by programme partners, TCOs need to have:

- Organisational skills
- Functional literacy
- Strong listening and communication skills
- Mature social and interpersonal skills
- Good leadership and teamwork skills
- The ability to reflect and analyse

In addition, they needed to be very confident and resilient to deal with the emotional demands of the role. The ability to recruit people with these skills was crucial to enabling success within the programme.

At a programme level introducing the regional assessment centre was seen as having improved the quality of new recruits. However, a few hosts felt that attendance proved a practical barrier that deterred some otherwise good candidates, for example those who could not arrange cover for their responsibilities in the time available.

Hosts took very different approaches to recruitment, with some concentrating on recruiting local people, some on getting unemployed people into a job, and some on recruiting those with community experience who they thought could hit the ground running. Many hosts tried to ensure a group of TCOs with a mix of complementary skills.

Hosts were expected to advertise the positions widely according to best recruitment practice within the resources available. Opportunities were also advertised through national social media. As the chart below illustrates, TCOs were most likely to learn about the programme through word of mouth. There was a huge variation in application numbers across host organisations. Extrapolating survey figures to the entire population of hosts in Cohorts 4-14, there were around seven applications per TCO place. Just under one in five (18%) had fewer than ten applications in total (when recruiting for several places), while at the other end of the scale 8% had more than 50 applicants.

Figure 6.7 – Recruitment methods

Q1. Where did you find out about the trainee community organiser role?
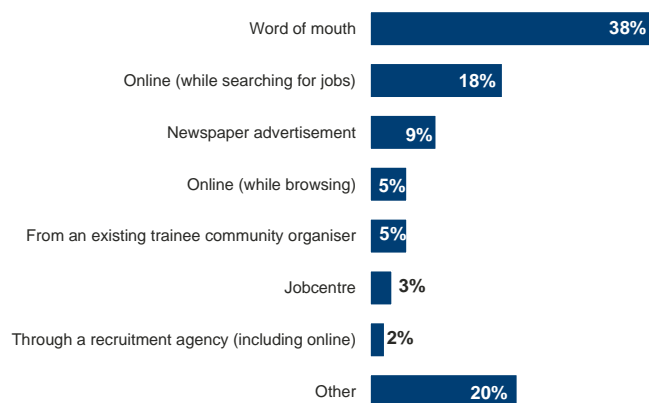
Base: Post-residential survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 7-14 (222) : Fieldwork dates : April 2013 - August 2014   Source: Ipsos MORI

In practice, some hosts struggled to recruit TCOs with sufficiently strong skills and aptitude to make a sustainable impact in the community in the training year. However, hosts themselves were generally satisfied with the diversity (78%), skills (77%) and experience (73%) of those who applied.

Application processes were robust, with most hosts favouring written applications (CVs/forms/covering letters) and individual interviews. Just under a third (31%) had applicants take tests, and around one in ten (9%) conducted group interviews. The majority said that they would not change the application process if they were to run it again. Of the hosts who said that that would change their process, the main changes suggested were:

- Advertising more widely:
  - o In the press
  - o Through open days
  - o Using partner organisations to promote the role
- Advertising over a longer period of time
- Including group activities in the application process
- Simplifying the application pack to increase diversity of applicants

Overall, the recruitment process and the range of recruitment approaches led to a real mix of experience, backgrounds and skills among TCOs. The
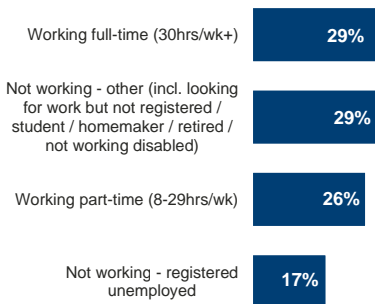
chart below illustrates the demographic details of all TCOs from Cohorts 1-14, and the work background of the organisers from Cohorts 4-14 who took part in evaluation surveys.

Figure 6.8 – TCOs' demographic details and previous employment
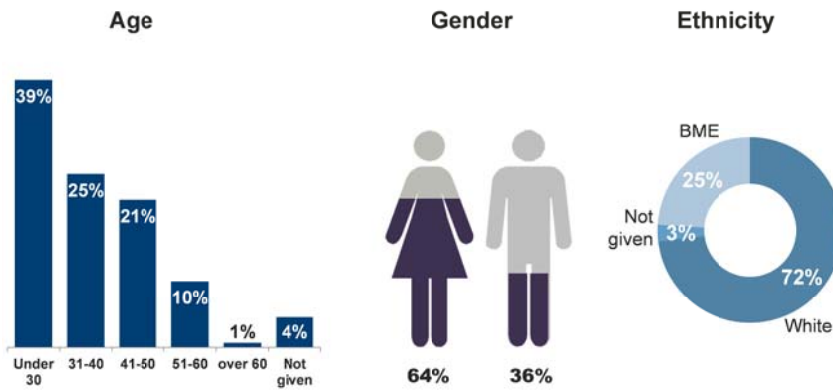
Source: Management Information (456 trainees Cohort 1-12)

Source: Management Information, Post residential survey respondents, Cohorts 7-14 (222) : Fieldwork dates : April 2013 - August 2014

The gender split among organisers was perhaps surprising, and there is little evidence to suggest a clear reason for more women becoming TCOs. The age split in favour of younger organisers is perhaps more understandable, given differential unemployment rates, and the challenging nature of the post in relation to the salary.

Motivation for applying to become an organiser also varied, though seemed to break down into four main 'types':

- New graduates who wanted an interesting job that would develop a broad range of skills, and occasionally to start a career in community organising or community development
- Career changers/re-starters who saw the role as ticking a lot of boxes in terms of skills they already had

- Community development workers who were attracted to the 'back to basics' approach
- Ex-VCOs who had been engaged by the programme and were excited by the listening approach

In addition, there were some who simply applied for the role because they were unemployed. This sometimes meant that they did not have a clear understanding of the role until quite far into the application process:

"I'd lived here for a long time and I didn't know people. I was a volunteer in a children's centre when I heard about the job. I was initially confused by the job description but pushed through because I was quite interested, it's something new. When I went to the assessment centre I was nicely surprised; I met people who were challenging and interesting, I was treated like a human. I thought 'I don't know what it's about, but I want to be part of it.'"

TCO

The diversity of backgrounds, experience and motivations of TCOs was a strength of the programme. However, this also meant that those TCOs with the most to learn were not always been able to make a large amount of progress in the community in the 51 weeks available.

For example, some who lacked recent work experience (new graduates, those who have been out of the workplace for a long period) struggled with the demanding nature of the role. Conversely, where TCOs had a natural aptitude for the programme approach or significant community experience, progress in the community was more evident.

The leaver rates across the programme were relatively consistent, ranging from 13-26% per Cohort (18% overall[22]), even after changes to recruitment practice. Reasons for leaving included:

- Personal health
- Family reasons
- Permanent employment
- Study
- Relocation/emigration
- Dismissal due to poor performance
- Stress
- Lack of satisfaction in role

Around a third of leavers (36%) cited personal reasons such as health or family for leaving, while a quarter (25%) cited reasons relating to dissatisfaction with the role. Just under a quarter left as a result of gaining other employment (23%).

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[22] Locality quarterly report, July 2015

While there are no strictly comparable benchmarks for the leaver rate, it could be viewed as high when compared to other education and training programmes. For example, the drop-out rate for mature students with a previous higher education qualification now studying for a full-time degree (around 11%).

However, given the innovative nature of the programme, the demands on TCOs, and the introduction of a rigorous performance management framework for later Cohorts, it is to be expected that some of those who began the training would not finish. The leaver rate could perhaps have been reduced by doing more at the recruitment stage to ensure that prospective recruits were sufficiently informed about demands on their time. Hosts could also have been better briefed on the very high level of confidence and skills necessary to be a successful organiser, and the need to identify individuals with the right potential (even if they do not have all of the existing skills at the outset).

6.3.2 Was the training and support provided an effective learning and development approach for community organising?

Training for Cohorts 1-11 consisted of:

- A four-day residential before TCOs start community work

- Online training modules and supervisions

- A 6 month mid-year day-long session

- On site visits from members of the programme partner training team

- OCN Level 2/3 accreditation – Certificate in the Foundations of Community Organising

- Meetings with progression supporters

- A 'Go Deeper' module in the second half of the year where TCOs can choose from one of four courses

The first residential training focussed primarily on the Root Solution Listening Matters (RSLM) approach to community organising, developed by Re:generate. Following a review, the training approach was reshaped for the final three Cohorts.

The revised training for Cohorts 12-14 fitted with the performance management framework for TCOs and was aimed at ensuring that the trainees gained an understanding of both the foundations of listening and other elements of the community organising process. The main changes included:

- Greater focus on different models of organising and TCO practicalities at the initial residential

- Shorter webinars, with earlier focus on progression and some content previously only covered in Go Deeper

- Regional bi-monthly meetings led by Inspiration Network

- A two-day residential at the mid-point of training year

- Go Deeper replaced by two additional learning modules per TCO (out of a choice of 5)

- Final one day face to face module focussing on sustainability

- Accreditation gained at the end of the programme rather than the middle

The resources used to train and support TCOs was the key programme input. Ensuring that the TCOs were properly trained to inspire action in others was a crucial stage in the programme logic model.

TCOs consistently rated the initial residential training highly. Seven in ten (70%) found it good or very good in terms of preparing them for beginning their role as a community organiser.

Cohorts 12-14, who received the revised version of the training, were generally more likely to be positive about different aspects of the training. The difference was most noticeable in terms of preparing TCOs for accreditation: while around two in five of those who received the original training rated this aspect as good or very good (39%), this figure improved to over a half (53%) for those who received the revised training.

One area where there was a slight fall in positive ratings was around practicing skills relevant to the role (although this was still highly rated overall).

Table 6.1 – Proportion of TCOs rating residential training as good or very good

	Cohorts 7-11	Cohorts 12-14	Overall
Style of teaching	81%	87%	83%
Providing information relevant to the role	78%	81%	79%
Practising skills relevant to the role	80%	76%	78%
The pace at which topics were covered	52%	57%	54%
Preparing you for accreditation	39%	53%	45%
Demands placed on you (e.g. time, energy)	50%	52%	50%
Overall how well it prepared you for beginning your role as a trainee community organiser	69%	71%	69%

Base: Post residential survey respondents, Cohorts 7-14 (222), April 2013-August 2014

TCOs also reported that the residential training increased their:

- Confidence in carrying out many of the key TCO skills, particularly leading, motivating and developing skills in other people;
- Understanding of community organising (increases from 20% before the residential to 69% after[23]); and
- Skills, particularly their ability to facilitate groups, handle difficult situations, and use self-reflection to improve their work.

Overall, most TCOs left residential training with a good understanding of the main aspects of the role, and high or medium level of confidence across all of the activities involved, as illustrated in Figure 6.9 below. Ratings were similar before and after the training redesign, although Cohorts 12-14 were more likely to say they understood their own role (61% compared with 51% for Cohorts 7-11) and the role of a VCO (37% compared with 31%).

Figure 6.9 – TCOs' understanding of various aspects of their role

Q4. How much, if at all, would you say you understand each of the following? Please answer on a scale of 1-10 where 0 means you do not understand at all and 10 means you fully understand it.
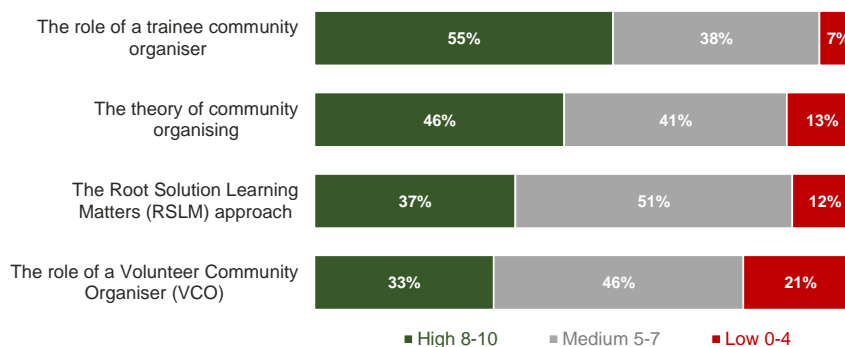
Base: Post-residential survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 7-14 (222) : Fieldwork dates : April 2013 - August 2014   Source: Ipsos MORI

Qualitative feedback consistently indicated that, while useful, many TCOs found the initial training fast-paced, often overwhelming, and emotionally exhausting. More specifically, there were repeated concerns about covering so much content into such a short space and the efficacy of long back-to-back days in creating a positive learning environment.

Feedback from Cohort 12 onwards indicates that while there have been improvements some of these issues have continued. Cohort 12-14 trainees also said that the residential could have benefitted from:

- An longer IT session on 'Digital Organising' earlier in the residential to reflect its importance
- More focus on understanding and practicing listening

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[23]Figures based on those indicating a confidence level of 8 or more out of 10

- Greater focus on the practicalities, and for this to be addressed earlier in the training
- More time for questions and for reflection, particularly at the end

Accreditation

Two in five organisers (40%) said that gaining a qualification in community organising was one of their motivations for applying to the programme. At 10 months, just less than three quarters of TCOs thought that the accreditation work had been helpful for their role as a community organiser (73%), and for their own personal development (72%).

While the learning itself was seen as useful, the experience of gaining the accreditation was stressful and challenging for most organisers, particularly in the earlier cohorts. Many described really struggling with a lack of feedback and support. At 10 months, three in ten (31%) rated the ongoing training and support as good or very good in helping them prepare for the accreditation. In particular, the accreditation placed a strain on TCOs for whom extended academic writing was a new or long unpractised skill.

"Accreditation wound me up. I had no practice, I'm not academic. It felt like being back at school. If it had been at end (of the training year), I could have used the experience I'd built up. I found it horrible, I cried all the time."

TCO

This did lead to new skills however, and on reflection some thought that the process needed to be difficult to help them learn:

"If accreditation doesn't kill you it will make you stronger. I studied 20 years ago; there was no internet, nothing. It helped me realise you need to be creative, flexible, do a lot of your work in a different way, use the internet."

TCO

Those who had recently finished degree and masters level courses tended to be more comfortable with the content, but often found the accreditation process time-consuming and felt it was a distraction from the work of organising. At 10 months, a third (32%) of organisers were still revising work to gain the accreditation, at a time when they also need to work on Go Deeper assignments, raising progression funding and developing projects, recruiting volunteers and the developing a Community Holding Team.

The issues with the accreditation process during the early cohorts are laid out in detail in the report on learning in the programme.[24] Evidence from the case studies suggests that, despite improvements in how the central team

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[24]http://locality.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Learning-about-learning-2.pdf

managed this aspect, some of the problems persisted at least as late as Cohort 9. Several TCOs in Cohort 14 were more positive about the accreditation.
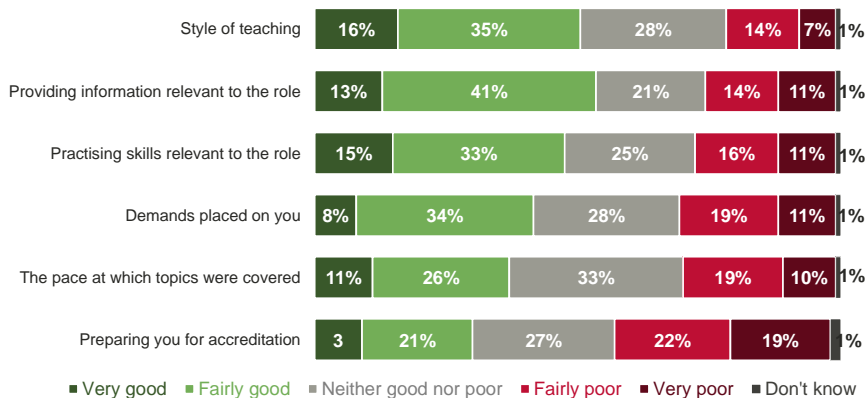
Given the tension between the useful content and stressful process, it is worth reflecting on whether the accreditation needed to be a compulsory element of the training year. As explored later, the 51 week training year was very busy, and many elements distracted organisers from their core work in the community. An optional accreditation or one that could be submitted when the TCO felt ready (which could be after the programme ended) might have helped mitigate the negative impact of the accreditation process on TCO morale.

<u>Ongoing learning and support</u>

Ongoing learning and support has been viewed less positively than the initial residential. As the chart below illustrates, at 10 months, TCOs did not feel as positive about this aspect of the learning programme, with fewer than half rating the ongoing training and support as good in most aspects.

Figure 6.10 – TCOs' ratings of the ongoing training and support programme

Q7_1. On balance, how would you personally rate the ongoing training and support you have received since the residential training in terms of...

	Very good	Fairly good	Neither good nor poor	Fairly poor	Very poor	Don't know
Style of teaching	16%	35%	28%	14%	7%	1%
Providing information relevant to the role	13%	41%	21%	14%	11%	1%
Practising skills relevant to the role	15%	33%	25%	16%	11%	1%
Demands placed on you	8%	34%	28%	19%	11%	1%
The pace at which topics were covered	11%	26%	33%	19%	10%	1%
Preparing you for accreditation	3	21%	27%	22%	19%	1%

Base: 10 month survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 4-14 (203) : Fieldwork dates : July 2013 – April 2015   Source: Ipsos MORI

The training redesign did improve TCOs' perceptions of the ongoing training. As Table 6.2 shows, ratings for Cohorts 12-14 were higher across all aspects, particularly in terms of providing information and practising skills relevant to the role.

Table 6.2 – Proportion of TCOs rating ongoing training as good or very good

	Cohorts 7-11	Cohorts 12-14
Style of teaching	46%	57%
Providing information relevant to the role	45%	65%
Practising skills relevant to the role	41%	76%
Demands placed on you (e.g. time, energy)	37%	47%
The pace at which topics were covered	30%	44%
Preparing you for accreditation	21%	43%
Overall how well it equips you for your role as a trainee community organiser	43%	56%

Base: Post residential survey respondents, Cohorts 7-14 (222), April 2013-August 2014.

However, it is important to consider these lower ratings in context. As explored in the programme learning report, the training year was a journey, that TCOs experienced a range of emotional responses at different stages, and that some of the negative experiences and feelings in retrospect were important for personal development, particularly in building resilience.[25] In addition, some of the key issues (such as the timing of different courses and information) were addressed by the training redesign.

The qualitative data indicates that much of the negativity about the ongoing training was rooted in the ad hoc support available from programme partners. The causes of this negativity were:

- **Perceived lack of responsiveness:** TCOs sometimes found it difficult to get timely answers to practical and theoretical questions. This was often been bad for TCO motivation, and meant that some simply stopped asking questions, even where important.

  "People feel really dejected quite quickly when you don't hear anything back. You don't want to email them again 'cause then you feel like you're pestering but then it's, well wait, they're getting paid to support us."

[25] Ibid

- **Perceived favouritism:** Some individuals and groups of TCOs felt less supported in comparison to other TCOs, who were seen as the 'favourites'. Evidence suggests that this may stem from the perception that more confident TCOs who were most comfortable with phone contact tended to get more support.

- **Perceived lack of openness to challenge:** Programme partner representatives were viewed as being defensive towards TCOs who challenged programme theories or processes. Overall, there was a feeling that the voices and opinions of TCOs themselves were not being heard in a way consistent with the programme approach to work in communities

In many cases, these issues did not have a significant impact on TCO work on the ground, and were simply minor frustrations. The perceptions of poor support and conflicting messages from the central programme did tend to have a negative impact where host or peer support was limited or inadequate, compounding the sense of isolation felt by a minority of TCOs.

Understanding the VCO role

There was one very important area where the training was not seen as clear for most of the duration of the programme. As Figure 6.9 illustrates, only a third (33%) of TCOs left the residential training with a good understanding of the role of VCOs. Indeed, even at 10 months, two in five TCOs (39%) still did not have a good understanding. This lack of clarity had implications for their work across the year and their ability to reach the training target of recruiting 9 VCOs.

In case studies, interpretations of what constituted a VCO varied widely. Initially, attempts were made to clarify the original programme policy that all VCOs should do some listening. This definition communicated was broadened for later cohorts, with all those volunteering as part of a TCO's team eligible to become VCOs. As a result, the numbers of VCOs recruited increased substantially, and ultimately exceeded the original target of 4,500 across the programme.

Understanding RSLM

Over the course of the programme, there was a changing message about how 'purist' TCOs should be in implementing the RSLM model. From the programme partner perspective, it was important to instil a more 'purist' message at the start of the 51 weeks, to ensure that all TCOs were aware of the power of listening, and its centrality to the RSLM approach. Even so, it was always the intention that TCOs could be less 'purist' where the circumstances allow for it. Mixed or changing messages were caused by:

- Different individuals within the programme partners having different views on how to apply RSLM
- Timing of different information and training inputs

TCOs typically become less 'purist' as they progress throughout the year, starting to interact with other organisations in the area, offering significant support to individuals or on projects where necessary. Some had the confidence to make departures very early on without external input, and saw that as key to their success.

Others described an epiphany moment, often after a discussion or supervision with a programme trainer. Many do so unconsciously, in the bid to grow projects and make an impact in the latter half of the training year. The qualitative work suggests that in retrospect TCOs often regretted their initial level of purism, and wished that the initial training had explored how and when it is useful to make compromises within the RSLM model.

"I thought the whole point was to do this whole proper listening process, really organic-like and then (we were told at 6 month training) "Don't be a slave to RSLM. Use it but use your common sense with it." We felt like we'd spent six months being brainwashed about RSLM and then this was a 180 degree turn."

TCO

On the other hand, in one case study area the TCOs attributed their success to the purism of their approach, which rapidly led to a network of engaged people forming. Of course, it is not possible to systematically measure how purist individuals or teams of organisers have been, and therefore to say with certainty how this influences success within the programme. However, the qualitative evidence suggests that where TCOs have been confident in the approach but also pragmatic enough to deviate from it where necessary, they have made better progress towards individual and some community outcomes within the 51 weeks.

6.4 Progression

At the beginning of the programme, there were no plans to offer funding for TCOs after their initial year. It was anticipated that TCOs would become self-funded by the community, or local organisations who valued their work. It quickly became apparent that the 51 week training year was too short to embed some of the social outcomes of the programme, and therefore for organisers to demonstrate the full potential value of their work. Therefore progression funding was put in place in time for the graduation of the first Cohort of trainees.

Newly qualified organisers could apply for a bursary of £15,000, provided they raised matched funding themselves, at least half of which had to be in cash. The full £30,000 had to cover the cost of NQCO salary, National Insurance, expenses, overheads, and the annual membership fee of £500 for the legacy body. In a small number of circumstances, the Office for Civil Society underwrote part of the progression funding for particularly promising organisers who had exhausted other options for funding.

NQCOs were usually employed by the organisation that offered their matched funding, or could become self-employed. They were expected to continue to use the RSLM method to organise in their local community, but may also spent up to half of their time doing community development that focuses on their funders' priorities.

6.4.1 How well has the progression process worked?

The process was effective in ensuring that a large proportion of TCOs were able to spend a second year practising the skills developed in the training year. Progression figures per cohort are presented in Table 6.4.[26]

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[26] Later figures cannot be seen as final, as some part-time TCOs are still in post, and others are still attempting to raise matched funding and may progress as a later date.

Table 6.3 – TCO progression by Cohort

	Starters	Completers	Progressed	Progression rate
Cohort 1	47	38	19	50%
Cohort 2	41	35	25	71%
Cohort 3	36	31	17	55%
Cohort 4	34	29	18	62%
Cohort 5	37	30	19	63%
Cohort 6	35	28	12	44%
Cohort 7	38	29	19	61%
Cohort 8	42	33	24	71%
Cohort 9	36	32	19	59%
Cohort 10	30	21	16	76%
Cohort 11	39	27	16	59%
Cohort 12	39	34	27	79%
Cohort 13	42	31	15	48%
Cohort 14	47	41	17	41%
Overall	543	439	263	60%

Source: Programme management information (July 2015)

Motivations

Almost all TCOs wanted to continue their work into a second year. Qualitative evidence suggests that the main motivation was a desire to build on the progress they had already made in their community.

At 10 months, around eight in ten TCOs said that they intended to apply for progression funding. The gap between intention (84%) and success (60%) suggests that across the programme, around a quarter of newly qualified organisers would have liked to progress did not do so. However, this may be a sign of the success of the process, as the intention was not to allow all organisers to progress, but those who had been most effective in their communities.

Of the 32 (n) organisers who said at 10 months that they did not intend to progress, 10 (n) said it was because it would be too difficult to raise matched funding.

Progression process

The changes to the training year helped address some of the issues around the timing of progression support. The fact that six in ten TCOs progressed shows that most found a way to raise the funds they needed. However, more could have been done to target support at the TCOs whose hosts were unlikely to be in a position to offer advice and support, and to help TCOs struggling to raise funding locally to identify regional or national funds to apply to.

For a minority of TCOs the progression process was smooth, as their initial host offered the matched funds. This is largely down to being fortunate enough to have a host who was both enthusiastic about the programme, and had access to sufficient funding. Some hosts were happy to match funds for organisers even where they thought that first year progress had been relatively disappointing, at least in terms of perceived community impact. However, other organisations struggled to justify releasing funds where there was little hard evidence of change at the community level.

"It was really easy, my host and Locality met very quickly to discuss my plans...I would have struggled to fundraise for myself"

TCO

"It was ok for me as the host was already interested. It was hard to get hosts to do all the paperwork. I don't think he even did it all"

TCO

Other organisers who had less difficulty were those who had accessed non-local funding, for example the Health Lottery, or who had experience of applying for funding before becoming a TCO.

"It was quite straightforward for me. There was a fund that happened to want to fund community organising, which is rare because a lot of people have to piece together money which is quite difficult if you're not good at fundraising yourself...I put a funding bid in for the People's Health Lottery who wanted to fund community organising in this area, just in time for progression so that seemed to go really smoothly."

NQCO

There was considerable variation in organisational experience of fundraising across hosts. Those hosts who regularly applied for grants and had strong knowledge of the funding available were able to offer support and advice to organisers, even where they did not have funding available within their organisation. Where hosts could not offer support TCOs found the process much more difficult, and spent a large amount of time in their final few months looking for funding, which was often a cause of significant

stress and anxiety. Some were also hampered by the impact of the RSLM approach, as they lacked the organisational contacts that would lead to local funding opportunities.

"When it comes to progression that is not helpful to be an unknown quantity to the local organisations you're asking to fund you."
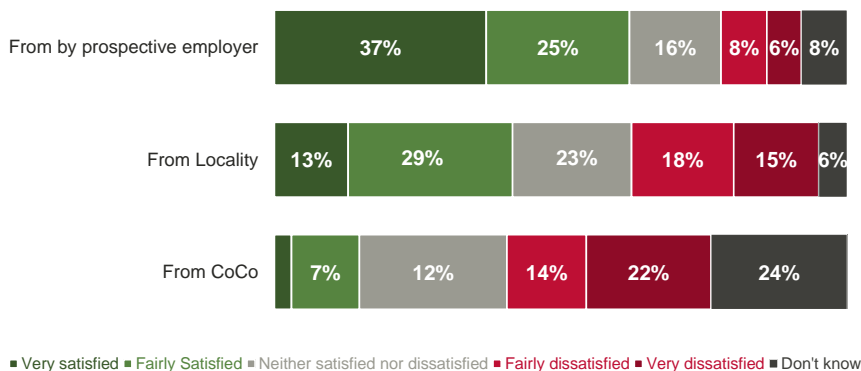
<div align="right">TCO</div>

At 10 months, 37% of those who intended to progress did not know how they would be employed the next year. For many of these TCOs, funding was not settled by the time they graduated, and some took up to six months to start work again. During this time they could experience economic hardship, and momentum could be lost in the community.

As the chart below illustrates, views were mixed when it came to the support TCOs received for progression, particularly from the programme partners. Again this needs to be interpreted in the context of limited resources to provide such support at a central programme level, and bearing in mind that CoCo had no formal role in this process. In addition, the aim was for TCOs to move towards a self-funding model, and as such they were expected to do the work involved in raising the matched fund themselves.

Figure 6.11 – Satisfaction the level of support for finding progression funding[27]

Q30b_1. To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the level of support available to help you raise your matched progression funding?

	Very satisfied	Fairly Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
From by prospective employer	37%	25%	16%	8%	6%	8%
From Locality	13%	29%	23%	18%	15%	6%
From CoCo		7%	12%	14%	22%	24%

Base: 10 month survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 4-14 (203) : Fieldwork dates : July 2013 – April 2015   Source: Ipsos MORI

Each group of TCOs was also assigned a progression supporter from Locality. In some cases, this supporter was crucial in putting the TCO in touch with an organisation that has become their second year employer.

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[27] In second year, NQCOs were directly employed by a locally rooted organisation, usually the organisation that has provided the matched funding. They can also be self-employed.

"Locality have been really supportive... as soon as mentioned there were issues with my (original) host, (they) appointed me a progression officer in (my area), who met with us within a day or two. He has a lot of contacts with organisations and came up with a few ideas, he listened to our ideas and suggested a few different ways we can go about finding new employers."

NQCO

For others, the progression meetings were less helpful, described as 'a formality' by TCOs.

"My 6 month meeting didn't happen until 8 months because my supporter was too busy, then when they did come they knew nothing about the programme."

NQCO

For later cohorts there was a progression workshop, partly in response to feedback from previous organisers. This was seen as very useful by the TCOs who attended. However, this was delivered to groups of cohorts, and came too late for some organisers to put funding in place before graduation.

6.5 Areas reached by programme

Each TCO was initially assigned a 'patch' in which to work. Hosts have been free to choose these patches themselves and had to explain the reasoning around their choice of patch in their application.

How areas were selected

The criteria used to decide patches varied extensively. At a high level, hosts usually chose areas within the physical 'boundary' within which they worked. Most chose an area that was seen as "in need of help", and most usually areas where there was little community action or community engagement – "forgotten areas" where there is a "blank page" for the organisers to work on.

"We started with areas that hadn't been listened to previously"

Host

Around one in three chose areas that were particularly deprived, or the most deprived areas within their remit.

"Our TCOs cover a fairly large deprived area which has high unemployment/mental health/disabilities/drug and alcohol addiction/immigration and anti-social behaviour plus HMOs"

<div align="right">Host</div>

Other criteria that hosts used to choose patches included:

- Prevalence of facilities (chose those with the fewest)
- How much scope there was for the TCOs to learn by working in that area
- Whether or not the TCOs had the right skills to organise in that area
- Funding prospects (BIG Local, Community First etc).
- Overlap/lack of overlap with host target area
- Housing tenure
- Achieving maximum geographic coverage
- Ensuring that different local communities were listened to

While some engaged in consultation with various agencies and conducted analyses based on statistical evidence, patch choice was usually based on local knowledge. A significant minority engaged the TCOs themselves in the decisions, with some offering them a shortlist and others free reign over the choice.

Qualitative evidence shows that patches often changed throughout the year, usually as TCOs decided to narrow their focus when they realised that their patch was too big to cover meaningfully. In addition, patch boundaries tended to blur as projects develop.

"We initially decided on two estates about 10 minutes from each other, based on understanding that these had particular challenges and would benefit. However, within a few weeks of their arrival, we agreed that one estate was big enough for both organisers to split between them. This way they could support each other more."

<div align="right">Host</div>

Some hosts divided the areas for TCOs, giving them each an individual patch, while others give a patch to the team as a whole to cover. This has significant implications for how the TCOs went about their work and the amount of progress they made. Working a single patch together – door knocking alone but sharing strategy and findings – enables faster progress but can lead to overdependence within the team. Working in individual patches can help TCOs to develop their independence but sometimes leads to feelings of isolation and consequently demotivation.

The nature of the patches

The diversity of patch type and size has made it difficult to analyse the precise nature of the areas covered by the programmes. Programme partners generally collected patch information at a postcode district level (e.g. SW1), which in almost all cases covered areas much wider than the actual patches, which were often very self-contained, sometimes little more than a few streets.

Analysis of this postcode data shows that the areas were more ethnically diverse that the national average. People were also more likely to live in social and privately rented houses in these areas than the national average, and less likely to be employed than the national average.

Table 6.4 – Key patch characteristics

	England 2011 (%)	Areas covered by the CO programme (%)
White British	79.8	72.4
Other White	5.7	7.52
Asian/Asian British	7.8	11.39
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	3.5	5.79
Mixed/multiple ethnic group	2.3	2.9
Other ethnic group	1.0	1.68
Total	100	100

Source: ONS, Programme management information

	England 2011 (%)	Areas covered by the CO programme (%)
Owned: Owned outright	30.6	25.6
Owned: Owned with a mortgage or loan	32.8	29.5
Shared ownership (part owned and part rented)	0.8	0.9
Social rented: Rented from Local Authority	9.4	12.5
Social rented: Other	8.3	10.0
Private rented: Private landlord or letting agency	15.4	18.7
Private rented: Other	1.4	1.4
Living rent free	1.3	1.4
Total	100	100

Source: ONS, Programme management information

	England (%)	Areas covered by the CO programme (%)
Economically active: Part-time employee	13.8	13.2
Economically active: Full-time employee	38.6	37.5
Economically active: Self employed	9.8	8.8
Economically active: Unemployed	4.4	5.2
Economically active: Student	3.4	4.0
Economically inactive: Retired	13.7	11.8
Economically inactive: Student	5.8	7.1
Economically inactive: Looking after home or family	4.4	4.8
Economically inactive: Long term sick or disabled	4.0	4.9
Economically inactive: Other	2.2	2.7
Total	100	100

Source: ONS, Programme management information

It was not possible to measure Index of Multiple Deprivation scores at a postcode district level. However, the tables above suggest that the programme reached areas that were slightly more deprived than average. Evidence from across the evaluation indicates that within the postcode district area organisers usually worked in particularly deprived patches. While this is not an explicitly stated aim of the programme, it has been implicit in the assumptions made about patch choice.

Challenges associated with area selection

While the focus on deprived areas means that the programme funding was being well-targeted, it also meant that the individuals TCOs were attempting to engage often had significant personal barriers to taking a more active role in the community. The areas also faced social problems that could not necessarily be solved by community action alone. For example, in one of the case study areas, the patch included a ward in the top percentile for IMD nationally. The TCOs found that acute housing problems, a highly transient population and language barriers made organising particularly

challenging in their patch. Recruiting VCOs in this area was difficult, as it was often impossible to establish lines of communication without a shared language.

In addition, focussing mostly on deprived areas has also meant that in some patches, TCOs must overcome regeneration fatigue, or even find themselves in direct competition with other programmes using very different approaches to try to improve the local area.

"There was X local improvement group, the Council community task force, and us. Just a month before we arrived one had done a consultation, and the other had gone around to houses, checking whether people had doctors, checking immigration status – so people were suspicious of us, or wanted us to 'fix' things. And we (TCOs) were seen (by the other groups) as undermining good work done…there was a lot of animosity and threat."
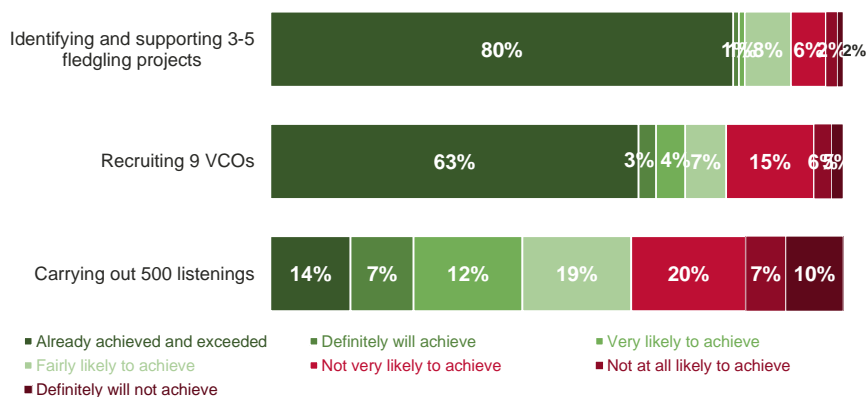
Host

6.6 Listening, VCO recruitment and community activity

TCOs were tasked with listening to 500 people in their patch over the course of the training year. The theory of change holds that listening to this number of local people would enable them to recruit at least 9 volunteers (VCOs), identify at least 3 fledgling projects, and collect data that could be analysed to gain a deep understanding of community priorities. These were the main 'targets' that TCOs were asked to meet over their 51 weeks of training. These were training targets, and not targets imposed by the Cabinet Office.

While management information was not collected on numbers of listenings, evidence across the programme suggests that a large number of organisers did not manage listen to 500 people over the course of the year. As illustrated in the chart below, at 10 months, one in three organisers (33%) thought that they would not achieve this training target. Despite this, most organisers expected to recruit their target number of VCOs and identify and support 3-5 projects.

Figure 6.12 – TCOs predictions on achieving their targets

Q22. Have you already achieved the following targets for your training year, or not? / Q22n_1 How likely are you to achieve the following targets during your 51 week training?

Identifying and supporting 3-5 fledgling projects — 80% | 1% | 8% | 6% | 2% | 2%

Recruiting 9 VCOs — 63% | 3% | 4% | 7% | 15% | 6% | 3%

Carrying out 500 listenings — 14% | 7% | 12% | 19% | 20% | 7% | 10%

- ■ Already achieved and exceeded
- ■ Definitely will achieve
- ■ Very likely to achieve
- ■ Fairly likely to achieve
- ■ Not very likely to achieve
- ■ Not at all likely to achieve
- ■ Definitely will not achieve

Base: 10 month survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 4-14 (203) : Fieldwork dates : July 2013 – April 2015

Source: Ipsos MORI

Evidence from case studies suggests that achieving fewer listenings was not a result of lack of commitment to the approach. TCOs were usually very enthusiastic about the power of listening, and the empowering nature of the RSLM method. Instead the listening target was a casualty of competing priorities, particularly in the second half of the year.

Organisers found that having listened to two or three hundred local people, that they had enough people to start developing volunteers and projects. As a result, they prioritised spending more of their time doing follow-up listenings, nurturing volunteers and supporting projects, which cut the time available for fresh listenings. This was in addition to ongoing learning, administration and progression preparation. This suggests that the target of listening to 500 people was too high, and that a lower target would have worked better, particularly given the number of other demands on organisers' time.

The chart overleaf illustrates the mean amount of time that organisers spent on the different aspects of their role at 10 months. On average, by this point, TCOs were spending around a quarter of their time on fresh listenings. Depending on average time per listening, this would make it difficult to reach large numbers of people and meet the target.

There was no consensus on the ideal average length of a listening. Some TCOs said that their listenings routinely lasted for over an hour, which would make it difficult to achieve more than 4 or 5 in a typical week where 10 hours is spent on fresh listenings, taking into account time spent door knocking. This would put the training target out of reach, even though the balance towards fresh listenings would have been higher earlier in the year. Other TCOs tended to be faster at carrying out listenings, which could mean completing up to 15 in that amount of time. While the latter approach made the target of listening to 500 people easier to achieve, it could also

mean that chances were missed to move some of the people who were listened to closer to action.

Figure 6.13 – Average TCO weekly activities broken down by hours

Q5. In a typical week, how many hours would you say you spend doing the following tasks?

Activity	Hours
Listening to members of the community for the first time	10.20
Reading/studying/preparing work for accreditation/Go Deeper option	5.30
Administration/paperwork	5.21
Actions to support fledgling projects	4.50
Follow-up listening/house meeting/other listening	4.67
Other meetings (e.g. with other community organisers, host)	4.08
Reflection on practice	3.09
Fundraising for progression	2.13
Tasks on behalf of your host organisation	0.97

Base: 10 month survey respondents, TCOs Cohort 4-14 (203) : Fieldwork dates : July 2013 – April 2015   Source: Ipsos MORI

There was no correlation between the performance against the listening target and whether COs decided to apply for progression funding.

6.6.1 What roles did different kinds of volunteers play in the programme?

A key output of the programme was training 4,500 Volunteer Community Organisers (VCOs). The theory of change posits that these volunteers would assist the TCOs in listening to their local community, and form the community holding team (CHT) that instigates and sustains local change beyond the lifetime of the programme. When they recruited a new VCO, TCOs were required to fill in a VCO alert, registering the volunteers' name, contact details and key demographic details.

VCO recruitment

The definition of a VCO changed throughout the programme. The initial programme guidance stated that volunteers should support TCOs in their work, and all should do some listening. However, the working definition among TCOs was that VCOs could include any key members of their local network, which encompasses people who lead and contribute to projects but that do not carry out listenings. These differing definitions had an effect on the numbers of VCOs recruited, as some organisers were more likely to register volunteers than others. The central programme definition of a volunteer was later broadened, reflecting the nature of the work organisers were doing with local people on the ground.

Recruitment of VCOs improved throughout the programme. Across Cohorts 1-14, alerts were issued for 5,997 VCOs, representing 14 VCOs for every organiser who had *completed* the programme, but also includes VCOs recruited by TCOs who left the programme before graduating. This represents significant progress as a result of increased focus on volunteers since early 2013. The table below illustrates progress towards the target for each cohort of organisers.

Table 6.5 – Numbers of VCOs per TCO

	Mean VCO alerts (per starter)
Cohort 1	6.3
Cohort 2	7.3
Cohort 3	10.9
Cohort 4	14.2
Cohort 5	10.7
Cohort 6	14.0
Cohort 7	12.8
Cohort 8	12.3
Cohort 9	11.1
Cohort 10	11.5
Cohort 11	9.8
Cohort 12	12.4
Cohort 13	7.1
Cohort 14	9.2
Total	10.69

These averages mask considerable variation across the programme. There were a significant number of organisers falling short of the target of 9. Just over one in five TCOs (22%) recruited three VCOs or fewer, as illustrated below. (It is worth noting however that this figure shows an improvement from the interim reporting stage, at which point 30% of Cohorts 1-9 had recruited three or fewer VCOs).

Figure 6.14 – Number of VCOs per TCO

Q2. What were your organisation's motives for becoming a host organisation?
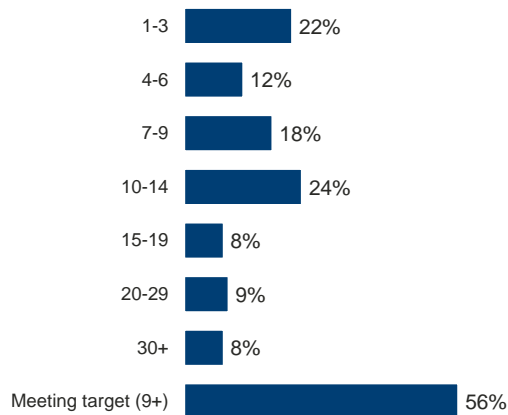
Base: COs (Cohorts 1-14) who have registered at least one VCO (504)   Source: Ipsos MORI

However, the variation may also be exaggerated by the above figures. The VCO alert data does not include all who volunteered with the programme (as not all were registered), and may also include those who volunteered for a very short period of time.

There were also some barriers to overcome in gaining consent from volunteers for registration. For example, some volunteers had concerns about their access to benefits, and refused to be registered. Locality guidance on VCOs clarifying the rules around volunteering while claiming benefits appears to have helped some TCOs overcome this issue.

Encouraging listening

Evidence from the case studies suggests that across Cohorts, TCOs have often found it difficult to recruit volunteers who will take up listening in their communities. Many have had volunteers try listening and decide it's "not for them". Others have listened with the organiser but never wanted to listen alone.

The key barriers to VCO listening tended to be:

- Lack of confidence/shyness
- Potential for opposition on the doorstep
- Preference for project work
- Mobility issues (due to age/frailty/disability)
- Other health issues, including mental health

Some of these barriers were permanent, and others were impossible to overcome in the timescales available.

However, the success of some TCOs in encouraging large numbers of VCOs to carry out listenings suggests that it was possible for many people to overcome them. The qualitative case studies suggest that this was

strongly linked to the individual TCOs' confidence (or lack of confidence) in the power of the listening method. Where TCOs were unconvinced that listening was crucial, or where they have become jaded because of limited personal success with the approach, they were unlikely to encourage others to listen. On the other hand, those who remain committed to listening often seemed to be able to instil this in their volunteers.

TCOs have also found it difficult to train volunteers because they felt ill-equipped to do so. More emphasis could have been placed on developing these skills and reflecting on them.

"I don't feel like I am trained enough to now run training sessions for my volunteers. The programme trainers are really good at getting people to buy into it. I bought into it and I think it's great. I don't feel confident enough to be able to relay that"

TCO

Access to support in training VCOs in the listening approach has also been crucial; areas where programme partners have offered listening workshops have had more success in encouraging a listening culture.

Creating CHTs

A Community Holding Team (CHT) in each area was a key output of the programme. According to the theory of change, having a core group of committed community members who lead on listening and creating projects was a prerequisite for the sustainability of the early community outcomes in TCO areas, and consequently a precursor to many of the anticipated longer term and higher level community outcomes. The CHTs also had a role in holding and analysing the listening data collected by the TCO and VCOs in the area.

At 10 months, 15% of TCOs had established a CHT in their area, while two in five (42%) planned on doing so before they finished. However, there was no mechanism in place within the programme to determine whether this happened or not[28]. More than one in three (37%) did not think that they would have set one up by the end of their training year. It is clear that in many areas CHTs have not been in place after the initial 51 weeks, increasing the importance of TCOs progressing and staying in their area to achieve sustainable change.

TCOs' confidence in the likelihood of them setting up a CHT in their area may reflect the fact that the establishment of a CHT in some form is a prerequisite for gaining progression funding. However, qualitative research

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[28]Locality have plans to do some work on monitoring CHTs in late 2014.

suggests that TCOs often struggled to unite sometimes very disparate VCOs and project volunteers at the end of the year, and that even where a CHT was in place at the end of the year, it may not have been sustainable. For example, one described "throwing together" a CHT at the last minute before progressing to a different area. There is little evidence that many CHTs analysed or used the listening data.

Where TCOs developed CHTs early on in the process, this allowed the CHT time to grow and connect before the end of the TCOs training year, thus increasing the chances of sustainability. In areas where the organisers worked in the same neighbourhood, the CHT sometimes emerged from the input of more than one organiser. This strategy was a useful way of making the most of the group's work and linking up VCOs who had previously interacted exclusively with one organiser.

6.6.2 To what extent were fledgling projects being identified and developed through the programme?

Identifying 3-5 fledgling projects was a key training target for TCOs. The projects were important in developing VCO skills and initiating community action in the local area.

TCOs generally made very good progress on this aspect of their work, with eight in ten (80%) having met or exceeded this target by 10 months, and fewer than one in ten (9%) thinking they were unlikely to do so before the end of the year. TCOs supported an average of 5 projects after 10 months, which aggregated across the programme represented over 2,000 community projects initiated across the country.

The relative success on this target may be because it was perceived as the least challenging to fulfil by TCOs, especially where initial progress has been slow. Across case studies, TCOs have described putting more and more of their energy into encouraging and supporting projects as the year progressed. Towards the end of the training year embedding projects seemed like a better use of time than listening in terms of building some sustainability into their work. Others described how listening was a more productive process later in the year, when they had a better understanding of the area, and were able to immediately offer to join the people they listen to with fledgling projects and groups.

The process by which fledgling projects were developed usually fell into one of the categories described below. Many of these models do not correspond with RSLM theory, and may involve some 'doing for' and a large amount of 'doing with':

- TCO supporting projects that already existed in the community
- TCO leading new projects

- Individual leading projects supported by the TCO
- A group created by a TCO who leads the project
- A group created by a VCO who leads the project
- TCO's team/CHT leading projects

Many of the projects were based on the mutual interest of specific groups: older people, young mothers, jobseekers, sports lovers etc., and not always on mutual self interest in improving the wider local community.

It often proved too big a challenge to bring together these various and often disparate projects into a CHT made up of people who wanted to improve the area generally. However, as described in Section 5, even one-off and special interest projects have been effective in developing VCO skills, and in creating some new community connections, and benefits for those who took part.

6.6.3 How effective is CoLtd in beginning to create a movement for change?

A key element of the theory of change for this programme was the establishment of a national legacy body to enable regional and national impacts, and allow for the sharing of best practice to further enhance individual and community impacts. CoCo – now renamed The Community Organisers Company (COLtd) – is the legacy body for the programme, and did at one stage employ all TCOs during their training year (they were later employed by Locality, and seconded to their hosts).

CoCo progressed more slowly than envisaged at the start of the programme. While there was understanding that CoCo needed to develop properly, there was some frustration among hosts and TCOs, who were unclear about the aims for CoCo.

Elected directors were appointed to the CoCo board in 2014, with a new chief executive hired in 2015. Under its new guise as COLtd, the organisation ran a conference for the programme in early summer 2015, where the future for community organising generally and COLtd specifically was discussed in more detail.

Potential effectiveness will depend heavily on whether the organisation can develop to offer at least some of the following:

- an inspiring vision for how TCOs, VCOs and other community members can work together at a regional and national level to effect change;

- a sustainable business model for developing the community organising approach in new contexts in different places around the country;

- a credible process for continued professional development for qualified organisers; and

- an attractive training programme for any future TCOs after March 2015.

After calls for more mentoring and sharing of experience across the programme, the Inspiration Network was also involved in providing support e.g. regional meet-ups for later Cohorts under revised training package.[29]

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[29] The Inspiration Network is a group of NQCOs who have completed their training year, and who work to support other organisers in a voluntary capacity, alongside their full-time roles.

Key lessons from the evaluation

7 Key lessons from the evaluation

Overall, the programme processes worked well, given the innovative nature of the approach. The programme fulfilled its core targets of training TCOs, recruiting VCOs and enabling TCOs to access progression funding, and supported individual and some community outcomes. These outcomes happened in many of the areas where organisers worked, though the early signs of sustainable community change were only evident in a minority of areas. A lack of consistency of outcomes is unsurprising given the experimental nature of the approach, particularly given that this was a training programme.

The first section below focuses on the main challenges that have been encountered with the processes, to draw out lessons for how future programmes could be even more effective. We then consider the most important enablers of successful community organising within the current model, to draw out lessons for how this approach can be used to create positive change in local communities.

7.1 Process learning points

1. Unevenly distributed support

It is clear that a number of factors, few of which the individual TCOs could control, affected the amount of support available to them in their training year and afterwards:

- The inconsistency of central support across the training year was an ongoing theme since the early days of the programme.

- The host support varied according to organisational and individual resources and availability. Those who had significant amounts of support from their host organisation saw themselves as "lucky".

- Support within TCO teams ranged from an energising means of development, to a drain on energy and time that demotivated potentially successful organisers.

- Support in the form of formal training was unevenly distributed across the year, not always coinciding with the points on the learning journey at which that input was needed, although this was improved with the training redesign.

As outlined throughout the report, significant progress was made in trying to address these challenges, including improved responsiveness to queries, the training restructure and building peer support into the programme. More

could perhaps have been done to target support at those who needed it most i.e. those with low-capacity hosts or teams who were struggling.

It is also worth emphasising that the training approach, with its emphasis on learning through work in communities, did successfully developing the skills of most TCOs. This approach also allowed them to make a difference in communities as they learnt.

2. Progression aims unclear

In part because progression was not built into the original programme design, there was a lack of clarity in the programme around what should happen after the 51 weeks, particularly in areas where the TCOs had left. It was unclear whether CHTs in these areas should still be seen as part of a national movement, and what mechanisms were in place for the programme to continue to communicate with CHT members in the absence of the TCO.

The aims of the progression process were not fully focussed on sustainability in particular communities, as organisers were allowed to move patch, many did so. Instead, the focus was on ensuring that the TCOs with the most potential were able to continue to develop their organising skills.

Progression has therefore been a partial success, with most of the organisers who have done well in their first year and who wanted to progress managing to raise funding. On the other hand, some organisers who struggled progressed by virtue of ready access to matched progression funding. Furthermore, a small number of organisers who were successful had to leave the programme despite wanting to progress, due to an inability to find sufficient funding in the time required.

More importantly, the duration of progression funding was too short to ensure sustainable outcomes in the local areas in which organisers work. For example, funding progression for two years for the most effective organisers, or organisers who were willing to stay in their initial patch, might have been a more effective use of the funding in terms of community impact.

3. Insufficient time in the training year

This is a well-rehearsed criticism of the programme, and one that the progression funding was introduced to address. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting on here, as it is the most significant problem with the programme design. The programme design assumed that it would be possible for trainee organisers to use the condensed RSLM model to animate a network of individuals committed to creating change at a community level. However this assumption does not hold – 51 weeks was almost always insufficient time to allow for:

- **TCO development:** This was especially true where TCOs had limited experience of community development, a low skills base or low confidence and resilience.

- **All TCO training targets to be met:** Few managed to balance the formal learning programme, reporting and reflection commitments, progression and meeting the targets within the programme. Those who managed these competing demands tended to be those with the best local support (hosts, other team members, exceptional VCOs). In particular, the training target of listening to 500 people was challenging, and could arguably have been lower. Greater clarity about the expectations around the training targets may have helped reassure TCOs. Particularly in the early cohorts, TCOs seemed to be more concerned than they perhaps should have been about meeting these, instead of focusing on developing key skills, building a network and having an impact in their patch.

- **Community outcomes:** Especially where TCO development was slower, or where there were particular socioeconomic barriers in the local area to overcome.

- **Sustainable change:** It seems unlikely that community change was ever going to be sustainable if the TCO left after graduation. Overall, there was insufficient focus on network building to ensure that TCOs and VCOs channelled their efforts into doing this towards the end of the first year, at least in the original training approach.

7.2 Enablers of successful community organising

The CO programme resulted in many examples of powerful changes at the individual level for those engaged by the programme. However, the evidence is also clear that the impact across different areas, especially at a community level, was much more uneven. Some of the key factors that act as enablers and barriers to success in the first 51 weeks have become clear through the evaluation.

These dynamics seem to be important for success within the constraints of the CO programme, particularly the limited time available. As such, the criteria for 'success' are:

1 communities where COs built networks of local people through listening;

2 that individuals in those networks have taken action together; and

3 given the right support, those networks showed signs of being sustainable in a way that was consistent with the programme rationale (with a focus on bottom-up community action grounded in listening to others).

It is unlikely that these factors would play out in exactly the same way if an alternative model of community organising was used, or if the measures of success were different.

In summary, both the TCO's skills and the nature of the area are important to enabling successful community organising, as illustrated by the chart below:

Figure 7.1 – An emerging model for understanding success in the CO programme
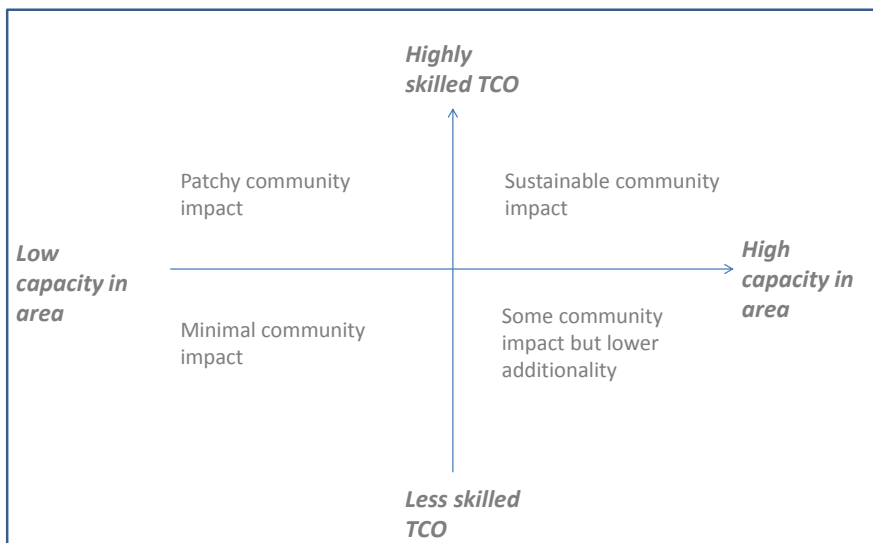
The factors outlined in Section 7.2.1 help explain why there was so much variety across TCOs and in the different neighbourhoods included in the programme.

7.2.1 TCO ability and skill

The evidence does not support a single 'successful' approach to being a TCO. Individuals from different backgrounds and with a range of skills made 'good' community organisers, and this diversity brought much strength to the programme. However, there were some characteristics that seemed to help organisers make progress.

None of these characteristics was enough on its own, and equally none of them were essential. There were examples of members of the community quickly taking responsibility for leading (at least for projects) with little input required from the organiser other than making the connection between individuals who shared a mutual passion.

But the following characteristics do seem to influence how well TCOs engaged people and generated community action:

- **Commitment to listening:** successful organisers were almost always passionate about the power of the listening approach.

Initially, they simply got on with the listening process, even if there were few encouragements and little sign of a network developing. They were convinced (or become convinced) that starting from people's needs and interests is a great way to make a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. These TCOs also passed on this enthusiasm for listening to the VCOs they recruited.

- **Commitment to capacity building not issues:** as per the fundamentals of community organising, the most successful organisers focused their energy on enabling others and then gently withdrawing from individual projects. A remarkable number of organisers gave significant amounts of energy to individual projects and issues and judged their success against these. The best organisers judged their success by how easily they had been able to let go of projects and how much people felt "part of a movement in their area".

- **Pragmatism about existing structures:** a marker of many successful TCOs was an ability to navigate tension between rooting their network in listening and making the most of existing structures. In early cohorts in particular, many TCOs appeared to have been so wedded to a 'pure' listening approach that they did not connect engaged people to others who would be able to help them. While building a network from scratch may be possible over the longer term, within the bounds of the programme it appears to have led to missed opportunities and frustration for some volunteers. However, these are not straightforward judgments – encouraging communities to lead change themselves was often the best course of action, and has been an understandable focus for the programme team, given the assumptions underlying the approach.

- **Leadership skills:** the TCO being someone community members respected and would follow was a key ingredient in many of the areas where there has been more success. Of course, this leadership can come in different forms, but without an ability to inspire enthusiasm and commitment in others it was difficult for TCOs to move beyond listening or 'doing to' those they met.

- **Understanding their own power:** being a leader was necessary but not sufficient. Those organisers who created more sustainable change used their leadership skills to develop others, encouraging them to increasingly take responsibility. This may be the case for projects initially, but also for the CHT as it developed. Rather than trying to dominate the network they helped it grow, they were aware of the power they held and the potential for this to prevent volunteers from becoming a sustainable force for change in their community.

- **Emotional resilience:** having an ability to bounce back when things went wrong – to learn from mistakes and setbacks rather than dwelling on them – was another marker of many successful TCOs. They often used reflection to improve how they approached similar situations in the future (rather than viewing reflection something they had to do).

- **Using support wisely:** TCOs all needed support and advice. This may have come from the other TCOs in their team, TCOs based elsewhere, their host, or via the wider programme. Openness to support and advice on the one hand, while being able to discern whether or not to heed that advice in their particular situation was an important skill often seen in successful organisers.

7.2.2 Community capacity and assets

It is not clear whether training TCOs using the programme approach works best in certain types of area. There were examples of community organisers successfully developing their skills and encouraging others to take action in very different communities, with no discernable pattern or types of neighbourhoods where the approach always does or does not work.

However, there were a number of factors which seemed to help enable TCOs to develop skills, build networks and encourage others to take action:

- **Well-defined, manageable patches:** the first enabler was TCOs organising in a patch that was not too ambitious. A manageable number of households in an area that people identify with seemed to help encourage a broader desire to see community change, beyond specific projects or campaigns.

- **Access to a shared space:** having somewhere to meet and build the network outside people's homes was an important enabler of the transition from individual to community action. This could be a community centre, a café or pub, or indeed any other space people were able to meet to discuss their ideas and priorities for the area.

- **Local leaders:** TCOs engaging individuals who had leadership skills (whether they realised it or not) was almost always crucial to success within the timescales of the programme. Many of these leaders were involved in community activity before, but some were not.

- **Community skills and confidence:** as well as leaders, developing networks needed individuals with a range of skills, and the confidence to take responsibility for different aspects of the work they wanted to do (e.g. finances, project planning or marketing). Where these skills already existed in areas, this made getting community action off the ground easier. This was also likely to make

short term impact more sustainable.

- **Support from existing structures:** as developing networks grew, an ability to draw on support from other individuals or organisations was often important. This may be advice, funding, or other in-kind benefits such as use of facilities or individuals helping out. There were risks associated with this, particularly if existing organisations had not bought-in to the community organising approach and sought to move community members towards their way of doing things. As mentioned above, navigating this was usually linked to the TCO's judgments about when this was appropriate and when it was not, as well as the volunteers' commitment to the CO programme approach.

7.3 What community organising can achieve

There was an ambition, reflected in the logic model developed for the programme, that COs would establish broad movements for change in the communities where they worked. In order to achieve this, COs were expected to set up CHTs that would be sustained and connected after the COs finished their training year, in part through the programme legacy body.

While there were some examples of functioning CHTs being formed, overall the programme did not succeed in building this broader movement for change. Among stakeholders there were different views about the importance of this goal from the outset of the programme, and the challenges around realising this ambition were apparent early on.

However, the programme approach was successful in mobilising large numbers of people around specific issues and areas of mutual self-interest in their communities. As such, a more realistic ambition for any future programmes aiming to build on the CO approach would be to focus on delivering sustainable change when it comes to particular problems and opportunities in local communities. The evidence is that this still delivers valuable impact on individuals and communities.

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