

## Evaluation of the social value created by the Life Expectancy Wirral initiative – a summary

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The positive changes experienced by those involved in Life expectancy Wirral are related to: social factors, mental health and wellbeing, partnership working and new skills. Many of these are interlinked, however the strongest themes are social and partnership work.



### Background

On the Wirral, there are large discrepancies between life expectancy, with a twelve year difference between residents living in the more affluent west and those in the more deprived east. Life Expectancy Wirral (LEW) was set up in 2009 to **“enable Christian communities to respond to the issues surrounding the unacceptable differentiation in life expectancy on the Wirral”**. In working towards this aim LEW works in collaboration with other Christian denominations, communities and the voluntary and public sectors. The project aims to raise awareness of poverty and inequalities in life expectancy by: building on, improving and expanding its church pairings; forging meaningful and sustainable relationships and working partnerships between communities and within congregations; capturing learning and providing resources to those wanting to become involved in social action and harnessing the use of green spaces to improve health and wellbeing.

The main work of LEW has focused around a network of church pairings and its Green Space Champions project, the aim of the latter being to “increase the mental and physical wellbeing of those living in poverty by encouraging and enabling access to green space”.

### Aim and methodology of evaluation

This evaluation aimed to explore the impact and social value created by engagement with LEW for those involved in the initiative: the Diocese of Chester, representatives from the four church pairings that have been set up since its inception, volunteers, and members of the LEW steering group. This evaluation specifically focused on the health and wellbeing changes brought about as a direct result of engagement with Life Expectancy Wirral. A social return on investment analysis (SROI) was used to determine the impact and social value created by these changes and the health and wellbeing implications for all involved.

The SROI involved using a mixed-methods approach which involved a scoping exercise to identify key stakeholders (those who were involved in delivering the project, volunteers, and any other individuals), desktop-based logic modelling to identify the inputs (activities), outputs (results) and outcomes (impacts) associated with the initiative, and engagement activities to identify the wider impact of the project on those involved. Stakeholder engagement involved a series of interviews and a focus group to determine the financial value of changes in stakeholders’ quality of life. As part of this evaluation, a questionnaire on the use of green spaces was designed and distributed and analysed by the principal researcher. Further secondary data from feedback forms completed after attendance at LEW events was also collected and analysed.

### Evaluation results

The SROI evaluation found that for most stakeholders, the positive changes were related to: social factors, mental health and wellbeing, partnership working and new skills. Many of these were interlinked, however the strongest themes were social and partnership work.

This evaluation demonstrated that LEW tackles the issue of poverty and what it means by equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to understand the context of poverty in their own communities. Stakeholders reported how the initiative had helped to build, develop and sustain relationships between the church and public bodies and also focused on the environmental aspect by developing its Green Spaces initiative to encourage more people to use and benefit from their local amenities. The work of LEW helps provides an understanding about the wider determinants of health by learning more about what contributes to poverty, how it affects health and how this knowledge can be harnessed to improve communities' quality of life and overall health and wellbeing outcomes.

To date, three pairings are committed to dealing with inequalities and have taken in-roads to address this through relationships, partnerships and getting to know members of their linked communities. While pairings reported issues regarding communication, there was a feeling amongst stakeholders of a concerted effort to continue to develop pairings and to involve more communities and other faith denominations to ensure that local issues are addressed.

This evaluation found that a number of activities already exist in green spaces on the Wirral (e.g. walks and tours around Birkenhead Park for example), however, these tended not be readily accessed by those living in deprived areas. LEW secured funding to continue its work with green spaces, encouraging people to use local amenities while raising awareness of the effects of spending time in green space.

This SROI evaluation calculated that for every pound put into LEW, £5.53 of social value was generated<sup>1</sup>. Engagement with the initiative created many successful social outcomes for its stakeholders, including friendships, reduced isolation and increased inclusion. This evaluation found that the initiative also had the added effect of boosting mental health and wellbeing by making people feel good about themselves while being engaged, fulfilled and stimulated by the initiative.

This evaluation highlights that LEW is an important community asset for maintaining health and wellbeing. The initiative provides a good social return on investment, due in part to the fact that the initiative is run mainly by volunteers. The social benefits of engagement with the LEW are very positive. As a direct result of the initiative, individuals reported that they were more socially included within their communities. Improved community networks and partnerships had been created and sustained and there was more understanding of poverty and the situations of many vulnerable community members from both the affluent and deprived areas of Wirral. Mental health and general wellbeing improved as individuals felt included and active members of their community. Through engagement with LEW, individuals had learnt personal qualities such as empathy and confidence, and had developed a range of new skills including supporting others and sharing expertise. The initiative had further reinforced individuals' faith, which resulted in feelings of being Christian and helping others. The vast majority involved in the LEW initiative did so as volunteers, and as such this created much social value, improving both quality of life in stakeholders and general wellbeing.

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**For the full report, please go to our website:**

## **'What does this SROI value mean?**

During the twelve month study period, in return for an investment of **£24,715**, a further **£136,771.28** was generated in social value, creating a social return on investment ratio of **£5.53** for every £1 input when discounting for other attributable factors and the chance that changes would have occurred anyway. This figure is in no way comparable to other reports where SROI calculations have been used. This amount must be considered in conjunction with the accompanying report, and with consideration of the four themes of positive changes identified in the research as having occurred as a result of engagement with Life Expectancy Wirral: **social (wider) determinants of health, mental health and wellbeing, partnership working and new skills**. The financial proxies arrived at have been agreed and developed with stakeholders who have been involved in the research. To this extent, the SROI ratios presented in this report are subjective and relevant to the individuals on the day that the research was conducted. The ratio presented offers an insight into the holistic health and wellbeing benefits that are gained, and not an actual financial representation of what has actually been spent by stakeholders. The SROI figure is important in understanding that Life Expectancy Wirral generates a good return on investment: that the benefits experienced have a much wider impact that resonates across the Wirral.