

Neighbourhood Matching year 1: headline evaluation

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Executive Summary

This report details the key successes and challenges from year 1 of the neighbourhood matching project in Leeds. Neighbourhood matching is a programme of volunteer led Social Action projects, co-designed and delivered by communities, where the commitment of volunteers is matched by funding that enables projects to grow.

214

volunteers
involved



76% of volunteers were 'new')

1,325

hours of
volunteering

(6.2 hours per person
on average)



4

organisations
across West &
South Leeds

Key learning

Projects were more volunteer-led

- Volunteers in each neighbourhood matching project have expressed a sense of ownership of their project, with the freedom to put ideas forward and bring their individual skills to the project.
- Coordinators from some groups reported that it took time for them and the volunteers to adjust to more volunteer-led ways of working.

Volunteers felt more valued as a result

- Volunteers reported that they felt more connected to where they lived and to one another.
- Volunteers felt a sense of satisfaction from having accrued funding through their volunteering hours.

Successes

- Volunteers were conscious of how they spent the money they accrued through volunteering hours and getting good value for money.
- There is clear evidence of volunteers sharing their skills and learning from one another, even between different projects.
- The role of the facilitator (the worker in each of the organisations) was important in recording data, helping with organisation and keeping projects moving.
- Projects have enabled volunteers to meet others from their community and form new bonds, with some people from different cultures mixing together when they otherwise may not have.
- Some volunteers and organisations drew upon their existing networks and relationships to support the social action projects, which allowed them to achieve more.

Challenges

One of the key challenges common across all projects was the time it took to collectively agree on a local social action project, plan the work and then carry this out. Some of the reasons identified were:

- It can take time for a newly established group to collectively come to a decision about what they want to achieve
- Several of the projects involved gardening and planting, which can be difficult over the winter period and in wet or cold weather
- Some of the projects required permission from local authorities or partner organisations, which took time
- Some volunteers didn't have the time they initially thought they would have to give to the project, so there was less 'people power' to carry out the project than planned.

Background and context

This report details the key successes and challenges from year 1 of the neighbourhood matching project in Leeds. Neighbourhood matching is a programme of volunteer led Social Action projects, co-designed and delivered by communities, where the commitment of volunteers is matched by funding that enables projects to grow. This programme build on asset-based community development approaches.

There were four distinct groups involved in the project from across Beeston, Holbeck, Cottingley and Armley, who all took different approaches to the year-long volunteer-led social action project.

New Wortley Community Centre

Volunteers at New Wortley Community Centre wanted to focus on making their local area more colourful, and several had an interest in gardening, climate action or art. Their projects were aiming to create a 'corridor of colour' throughout Armley, planting bulbs, flowers and vegetables, installing and painting benches, and hosting workshops to encourage more people to get involved.

Key outputs

- Number of volunteers – 103
- Number of new volunteers – 79 (77%)
- Number of volunteer hours – 428
- Average number of hours dedicated per volunteer – 4.2

Holbeck Together

Volunteers at Holbeck together had shared interests around gardening and DIY, and wanted to focus on making their physical area and more pleasant space to be in, to encourage local people to spend more time together outside. Their projects included planting wildflowers, installing planters and litter-picking.

Key outputs

- Number of volunteers – 36
- Number of new volunteers – 29 (81%)
- Number of volunteer hours – 319.5
- Average number of hours dedicated per volunteer – 8.9

Cottingley Community Centre (Health 4 All)

Cottingley Community Centre is run by volunteers, who were all keen to renovate the front and back gardens at the community centre to enable local people to spend more time there. Steps towards this involved leveling off the gardens, creating better drainage, painting fences and creating wildlife and sensory areas.

Key outputs

- Number of volunteers – 52
- Number of new volunteers – 30 (58%)
- Number of volunteer hours – 239
- Average number of hours dedicated per volunteer – 4.6

Hamara

Volunteers at Hamara wanted to focus on developing and sharing skills amongst local women. The group wanted to run open sessions where volunteers could share skills such as making cosmetics, crocheting, cooking and gardening with other people who attended. The group would be self-sufficient and aim to increase the confidence and relationships between attendees.

Key outputs

- Number of volunteers – 24
- Number of new volunteers – 24 (100%)
- Number of volunteer hours – 260.5
- Average number of hours dedicated per volunteer – 10.9

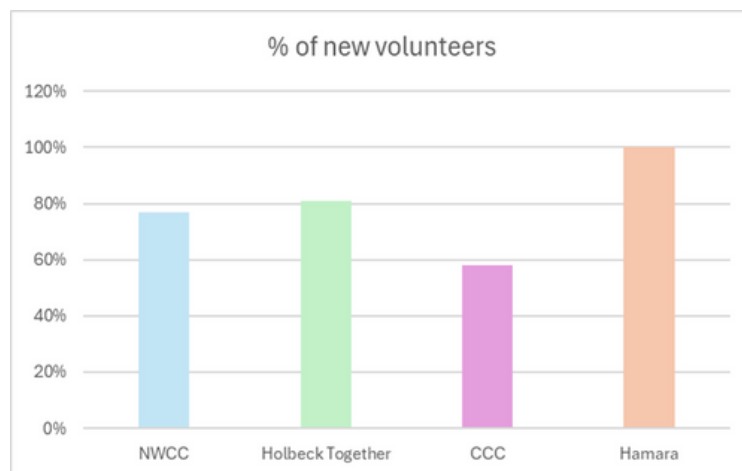


Figure 1: between 58% and 100% of volunteers involved in this project were new to the organisation they worked with

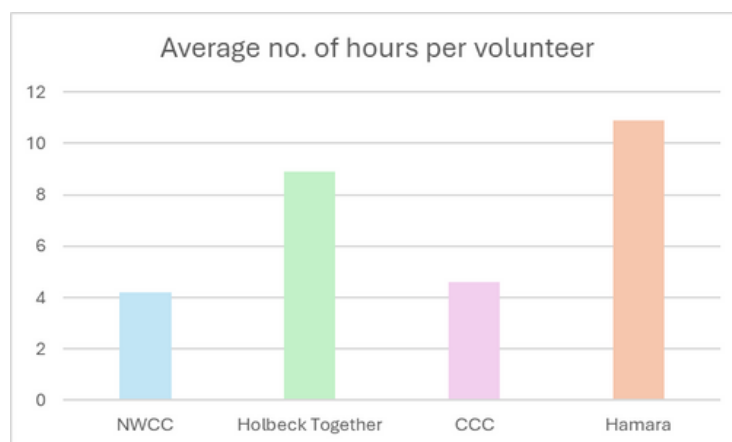


Figure 2: on average, volunteers dedicated between 4.2 and 10.9 hours each to this project

Qualitative data gathered

Alongside the overall outputs outlined above, this evaluation is measuring:

- Key successes and challenges from year 1 of this project, to inform learning and practice for future years
- Projects being volunteer-led
- Volunteers feeling more valued as a result

Evidence to evaluate these aims was collected through a range of methods, tailored to the nature of the planning process and projects. These included interviews with volunteers, interviews with coordinators, focus groups with volunteers, observations of planning meetings, and observations of skills sharing sessions. This evidence is available in the appendices to this report.

Cottingley Community Centre (CCC)

Although all the activity at CCC is volunteer-led, activity on this project didn't start in earnest until February 2024 (although some was recorded retrospectively). For this reason, interviews with volunteers and observations were not possible.



Volunteers weeding and painting at Cottingley Community Centre

Findings

Projects being more volunteer-led

Volunteers in each neighbourhood matching project have expressed a sense of ownership of their project, with the freedom to put ideas forward and bring their individual skills to the project.

- *We are almost leading our group ourselves. Yeah, which is really good, because when you know how everything works you feel like you can be in the group and discuss things, people can WhatsApp message if they didn't understand something, we can reply straight away. So it's like empowering – knowledge, freedom.” (Hamara, volunteer)*
- *“Laura’s [coordinator] not well at the moment, so I just went out to litter pick on my own” (Holbeck Together, volunteer)*

Coordinators from some groups reported that it took time for them and the volunteers to adjust to more volunteer-led ways of working.

- *“I keep saying to people, reminding people that it's their project and I'm not running it” (NWCC, coordinator)*
- *“Because this is led by volunteers, trying to get that across, that it needs to be their ideas [...] it's working now, but it was quite hard to get across at the beginning. It's been quite hard for me as well, I'm used to organizing all the volunteering so it's new for me! Everyone's used to me sorting it out and then they just arrive – it's about them thinking about, well what time do you want to do it, when shall we all arrive?” (Holbeck Together, coordinator)*

Volunteers feeling more valued as a result

Volunteers reported that they felt more connected to where they lived and to one another.

- *“People talk about Holbeck like it’s a place nobody wants to live but when you live here it’s a bit different. You realise it’s not just about the bad parts of the area, we’ve got a good community here and a strong community where people are friendly and they want to help each other. So knowing that and having people with ideas about how they can make things nicer for everybody is really good.” (Holbeck Together, volunteer)*
- *“It’s a little family and we always look forward to next week. When you get to know someone, you get comfortable. None of us knew each other when we first started!” (Hamara, volunteers)*
- *“It gives people pride in where they live and once they’ve done things like that then there’s more chance that, because they’ve been involved from the start, then they’ll continue working and checking it” (NWCC, volunteer)*
- *“I’ve lived in Armley for 20 years now and for a long time I didn’t set foot in the local community centre or anything like that, because some of my neighbours are quite scary or involved in anti-social behaviour so I don’t really want to bump into them. I’m gay as well, so you never know how welcoming places are going to be.” (NWCC, volunteer)*

Volunteers felt a sense of satisfaction from having accrued funding through their volunteering hours.

- *“And it’s for their own community, they’re working for something and they feel like ‘I’ve paid for that.’” (Holbeck Together, coordinator)*
- *“You can buy anything but when you make something from your own hand, it gives you the pleasure of making it and knowing that it’s unique, it shows the love and care you put into it.” (Hamara, volunteer)*

Successes

Volunteers were conscious of how they spent the money they accrued through volunteering hours and getting good value for money.

- Volunteers at Holbeck Together suggested ways of sourcing different plants for relatively little money, and were conscious of using plants that would thrive in different environments.

"I go to B&Q and see about 10 to 20 plants that are on their last legs. We could ask if we can use that and replant them in our community"

"Farmers in New Farnley will donate some of their seeds, they've given some to Farnley High School."

- Although an Amazon account was set up for volunteers at Hamara to use to purchase materials, they preferred to research different prices first and often sourced these from local markets or charity shops.

"They try not to order on Amazon because they always like going out with their group members and sometimes it's cheaper, if you go and buy it in the market and charity shops" (Hamara, coordinator)

There is clear evidence throughout all projects of volunteers sharing their skills and learning from one another. This was particularly evident during the seed bomb skills sharing workshop.

- *"It's a great idea using up old books – I've got loads at home from the kids that we could shred" (Holbeck Together, skills sharing session)*
- Volunteers at Hamara shared cooking skills and recipes from different cultures: *"So when you try cooking with different ingredients, you need to learn their names and everything. Then how to measure the product and how to make everything, it's like team work. You're cooking, cleaning, chopping together and have taster session and then clean everything back to zero again."* (Hamara, volunteer)

- Some volunteers used their strengths, for instance in research: *“I ended up spending quite a lot of time researching things like the seed bombs. [So the seed bombs were your idea?] Well yes I suppose they were really.”* (NWCC, volunteer)
- *“E and C both studied horticulture at Askham Bryan College... but 40 years apart! One is in their 20s one in their 60s. They have both used their knowledge and skills to help out with the project.”* (Cottingley Community Centre, coordinator)

The role of the facilitator (the worker in each of the organisations) was important in recording data, helping with organisation and keeping projects moving.

- *“It was definitely Victoria who was in coordinating things, doing all of the emailing people and getting things happening. I don’t think it would have worked without that.”* (NWCC, volunteer)
- *“We can do a few hours and then tell the boss [coordinator] and it goes on the sheet”* (Holbeck Together, volunteer)

Projects have enabled volunteers to meet others from their community and form new bonds, with some people from different cultures mixing together when they otherwise may not have.

- *“We know each other now, we’re friends now. You get to learn each other’s cultures – I don’t know her culture and she doesn’t know mine, but now we know them. We’re all from different cultures, New Guinea, Somali, Swahili, Pakistan, but when we come here we all feel the same!”* (Hamara, volunteers)
- *The kids always come as well and do the litter pick and it’s just a bit of fun for them, they can play on the park afterwards and also meet other kids.”* (Holbeck Together)

Some volunteers and organisations drew upon their existing networks and relationships to support the social action projects, which allowed them to achieve more.

- “[S] is a retired foreman, he brings in skills of project coordination to the group. He also has contacts within the industry and he has called in favours such as the skilled bricklayer that will give his time to us. (Cottingley Community Centre, coordinator)
- “And Victoria got some corporate volunteers involved, some corporate people who wanted to do some planting or something. So that was extra people, that helped.” (NWCC, volunteer)
- “We got it in West Leeds dispatch a couple of weeks ago about the corridor of colour, so that’s where I put most of my energies [...] I’ve been involved with the West Leeds dispatch since the start of the pandemic” (NWCC, volunteer)
- “Well what happened was we joined up with the Armley Commons Right Trust, and they told us the areas that they already knew that we could plant in and do stuff. And they had their own volunteers who sort of were attracted to this project.” (NWCC, volunteer)



Volunteers painting plant pots at Hamara

Challenges

One of the key challenges common across all projects was the time it took to collectively agree on a local social action project, plan the work and then carry this out. Some of the reasons identified were:

- **It can take time for a newly established group to collectively come to a decision about what they want to achieve**
 - *“We didn’t spend any money in the first few weeks because the group were mainly planning and talking” (Hamara, Co-ordinator)*
 - *“At this stage it was agreed that there are so many ideas they want to bring the ideas together through a public vote and that this should be through a variety of methods, including speaking to groups, having voting for ideas in public spaces, having an online method for voting.” (NWCC, planning meeting)*
- **Several of the projects involved gardening and planting, which can be difficult over the winter period and in wet or cold weather**
 - *“[My advice would be] don’t start a planting things at the end of summer and get permission early” (Holbeck Together, volunteer)*
 - *“Slight concern that the end of the project in March is prime time for planting therefore this may cause an issue.” (Holbeck Together, planning meeting)*
 - *“The timing was not great, by the time we managed to mobilise the winter was already here. [There was] lots of discussions and planning over the winter that was only captured retrospectively.” (Cottingley Community Centre, coordinator)*
 - *“We felt under pressure, partly because the project that we chose was something that depends on the weather and the seasons, like the bulb planting, we’ve got to get stuck in the ground before there’s frost” (NWCC, volunteer)*

- **Some of the projects required permission from local authorities or partner organisations, which took time**

- *“It’s when you have to keep on nagging and asking for things and it grinds you down, you just run out of steam” (Holbeck Together, volunteer)*
- *“The idea that they had of planting wildflowers on the grassed areas of the street didn’t really come off because getting permission was just so difficult. The other project [...] they’re allowed to do it but they’ve had to go down to a residents meeting to ask them what they want, and that’s been postponed twice.” (Holbeck Together, coordinator)*
- *“First thing you have to do is sort out the red tape” (Holbeck Together, planning meeting)*

- **There were challenges in planning work depending on volunteers available**

- *“The thing is some of the people who were there at the beginning, it turned out they didn’t actually have a lot of time to give, so they couldn’t do much volunteering actually.” (Volunteer, NWCC)*
- *“It’s thinned out a little bit, I think mostly because we haven’t done the planting. There were people who wanted to do that, and I think they’ll come back when we plant.” (Holbeck Together)*



Volunteers litter-picking at Holbeck Together

Next steps

- This headline evaluation will be shared with organisations involved in year 1 of the Neighbourhood Matching project, as well as the organisations who will be involved in year 2 (2024/25) and year 3 (2025/26).
 - Key learning will be reviewed and embedded in plans for year 2 and 3.
- The evaluation team will re-engage with organisations involved in year 1 of the programme in June 2024 to review some of the projects where activity was delayed.
 - Any additional learning will then be shared with all organisations involved in Neighbourhood Matching.



Volunteers teaching each other to make seed parcels at St Matthew's Church, Holbeck

Appendices

New Wortley Community Centre

New Wortley Community Centre		
Evidence	Date	Total volunteer hours at this point
Observation 1 – planning meeting	27/07/2023	0
Volunteer 1 (Joel) – interview 1	20/10/2023	48
Volunteer 2 (Paul) – interview 1	16/10/2023	48
Volunteer 1 (Joel) – interview 2	29/02/2024	220
Volunteer 2 (Paul) – interview 2	14/02/2024	214
Coordinator - interview	20/10/2023	48
Observation 2 – skills sharing	29/02/2024	409

Planning meeting observation: 27/07/2023

Themes	Evidence	Comments
Decisions about budgeting are made by volunteers	Volunteers asked about hours and how these would be tracked with the money.	
Decisions about project planning are made by volunteers	Idea about making projects that already exist stronger, increasing involvement from community members It was felt that having one project that everyone could focus on would be more ideal as it can bring the volunteers together	“There does need to be an accountable person who can lead the project”
Decisions about roles and responsibilities are made by volunteers	Idea of a steering group established Should there be a voting system where everyone takes part? Should be a quorum structure for voting, if the community can’t decide then responsibility should lie with the steering group	
Volunteers feel able to disagree/challenge	Ideas about bringing young people in an attempt to tackle anti-social behaviour was challenged	“There’s a huge drug problem here and it’s not something that we could challenge”
Volunteers feel able to ask questions	Volunteers asked about what subjects they could focus on e.g. recycling, also what current activities there are out there so as not to replicate existing work Questions about hours, are there any maximum hours for volunteers? How do we track these hours?	“Could there be something sustainable that we can create through this project?” “Can this project have a focus on recycling?”

Volunteers use language relating to ownership (e.g. “our project,” “we want to”)		<p>“We need to know what equipment’s available”</p> <p>“Are we able to attract people who have never volunteered before”</p>
Volunteers’ individual skills are being utilised	<p>Range of skills and backgrounds amongst volunteers, 9 volunteers attending altogether.</p> <p>Mainly Armley residents</p>	
The activities planned seem mutually beneficial	<p>Discussion around tackling anti-social behaviour among the youth. Plenty of youth activities going on therefore is there a way to make them more widely known rather than replicating them</p>	

Volunteer 1 (new volunteer) interview 1 – 20/10/2023

How would you say the project has gone so far?

“I find it really helps having Victoria kind of driving or doing a lot of the admin. She wanted to get as many ideas as possible from people in the community for a project and she was able to set up a few meetings where people came along and gave ideas. That was quite good because I realised there were some people that shared interests with me around wildlife and nature. I was sort of excited about that. So that was quite good and that got worked into the the final project.

Do you kind of feel like that takes a bit of the pressure off volunteers?

“Yeah it does, you can just have a bit more fun, be a bit more creative and actually feel like you're getting stuff done. It means that volunteers time and effort isn't like sort of put on all the organising and everything that I don't have experience with.”

Was it a long process to get the project up and running?

“I don't think it was a long process, but it just, but we felt under pressure, partly because the project that we chose was something that depends on the weather and the seasons, which we can't say like the bulb planting. We've got to get stuck in the ground before there's frost, but also this deadline of around February.

“I think we kind of started around July, August, so some people were away on holiday, then you get into September and people are going back to school and there's that's all that people again you know. Really kind of feel like time goes by really quickly.”

Do you think it would be easier to know the boundaries before you go in?

“Yeah, I know at the first meeting there was one person talking about doing something to combat l crime and someone said well that's above what a volunteer would be able to do. But also I didn't want to do something which is nice or well meaning, but then you're not really sure whether it's actually achieving anything.”

On personal impact of the project on them:

“You kind of get more connected with people. I've lived in the armley for 20 years now and for a long time I didn't set foot in like the local community centre or anything like that because some of my neighbours are quite scary or involved in anti-social behaviour so I don't really want to bump into them. I'm gay as well, so you never know how welcoming places are going to be. As we're out about doing stuff you get people going ‘I'm really glad you're doing XY or Z’, or sometimes they'll say ‘that's going to get trashed. Don't know why you're doing that’ and it's like, well, you might as well try. Yeah. Yeah. It's kind of like wolf. If you don't do it, it just doesn't happen and then it's always going to stay the same and just reiterates the whole problem. You could stay at home and worry about it and shout out to people on the internet, but at the end of the day, you really need to make something happen sometimes yourself.”

On the diversity of the group:

“Something that was a bit kind of frustrating was that a couple of councillors said, ‘this needs to be more diverse’ because I think the meetings were essentially all white. That was kind of like, well, I don't, I don't disagree with that but it's like, how do you make it happen? They talk about involving mosques or sikh temples and that's great but well, do you have any contacts there and they said no. So I wasn't disagreeing with them, it felt again like we're on a time scale and diversity doesn't just happen like that. There's a much more long-term thing about integration, which again is beyond our pay grade, but not a completely invalid point either.”

Volunteer 2 interview 1 – 16/10/2023

How has the project gone since the initial volunteer meeting?

“It's looked pretty good to be honest, I'm really impressed by how Victoria plans things, there seems to be a definite plan now as to what they're going to do with the corridor of colour for Armley and things like that, so there's seems to be a definite game plan for it.”

What was the process like of deciding on the project?

“It was mainly about grasping at things and saying, well, what about this? What about that? I remember one guy was saying, well, all young people are interested in is drugs and messing around and stuff like that. But after getting over that it was a case of saying, yeah, but if we could involve people and young people especially, then hopefully it's going to make them more responsible and take more pride in their community iLike so but That like first couple of meetings. Then there were like, a definite plan. To what could be done, as I say, with the corridor of colour and things like that, that it could be a case of people helping build the boxes, the planners and then somebody else if they don't want to get involved in that part, then they can get involved with planting the bulbs or whatever. So it. Up for everybody, everybody at every level can do it. Nobody's turned away or nobody feels. I didn't feel to me, didn't feel as anybody felt that there couldn't be involved, that they, if they wanted to be involved, there would be a way that they could get involved. Like as I say, like with a plan as if he if you don't want to do manual work like that or you've got disabilities or health issues, then there'd be other areas of it that you could do. Like you could end up putting the bulbs. It created an environment where everybody felt part of it and everybody could chip in and do the bit.

What would you say you say your role is in the project?

“Just going down to meetings and supporting them and if there are things that I can do to get involved with, I will do. Also, I'm quite happy that I can do a photography record of it so that we've got a photographic history of what we're doing as well. I do other articles and photography for West Leeds Dispatch, so whatever I want to put in there John let's me put in. I can always put links or Victoria's telephone number and things like that so people can think ‘oh yeah, I'll give that a go. I might be interested in that’ so it might bring more people in. But yeah, I can definitely do the promotional side of it if I don't actually do any of the physical building or planting.”

“I think the other good thing as well is how it can expand where somebody from Bramley or Stanningley travels through Armley and could see these and see that it's been done by volunteers. They can go back to their communities and say why can't we do stuff like that? Why

can't we get organised like this? So I think it can be a like a domino effect and I think it can open doors for other communities as well.”

Volunteer 1 interview 2 – 29/02/24

How have things gone so far?

Yeah they're ok. I would say it took us a while to get going. The time goes by much faster than you would think. One of the things was that we took quite a while brainstorming and asking as many people as possible about what they wanted to do. Some of the ideas were quite ambitious, we didn't have enough funding – like one person wanted to build an arts centre! So we couldn't do that obviously. And we had a few meetings where people debated things for a while before we really got started.

Now we've got the corridor of colour which, I don't know if it's a corridor but that's what we've done. We have planted things, some bulbs and things and they have just started coming out now so that's good.

[Where did you plant things?]

Well what happened was we joined up with the Armley Commons Right Trust, and they told us the areas that they already knew that we could plant in and do stuff. And they had their own volunteers who sort of were attracted to this project.

How have things worked between volunteers and Victoria?

It was definitely Victoria who was in coordinating things, doing all of the emailing people and getting things happening. I don't think it would have worked without that.

We did have some councillors involved at the beginning but they sort of fell by the wayside really. We didn't want things to get overtaken by politics and things.

The thing is some of the people who were there at the beginning, it turned out they didn't actually have a lot of time to give, so they couldn't do much volunteering actually. And the time went by so fast.

And Victoria got some corporate volunteers involved, some corporate people who wanted to do some planting or something. So that was extra people, that helped.

Why did you decide to get involved?

It's funny because in the beginning I thought I would quite like to do something in nature. And Victoria, her background is creative, whereas I'm much more into nature. But in the end we ended up doing something that was outdoors.

[What has been your role?]

So to start with I did quite a lot of research really, which I don't know if that was very good for me because I can tend to be a bit of an overthinker. So I ended up spending quite a lot of time researching things like the seed bombs, although I think I had a slightly different recipe.

[So the seed bombs were your idea then?] Well yes I suppose they were really.

Has the project achieved what you thought it would?

Well I don't know, I don't think I was expecting anything much when I started, I didn't know what to expect really. I suppose it has.

Volunteer 2 interview 2 – 14/02/24

How has the corridor of colour project gone since we last spoke?

“Yeah, that all seemed to go well, seemed to get plenty of volunteers doing that so that seems to have gone well and some of bulbs have already started up, so it looks as though it's been a success.”

“I know they did litter picks all in that area as well, then quite a few got involved in planting bulbs and then quite a few people go around checking it up on little walks they do so it's an ongoing thing that they're keeping interested in.”

Is the litter picking involved with the corridor of colour or is it separate?

“I think it was a little bit to start with but then they also do litter picks as well as an extra thing, so I think that's what they did initially was to get it all cleared and prepared for when they were planting the bulbs.”

Was the volunteers' idea to start the litter picking activities?

“I think it was Victoria, who sorted out some litter picking and then I think they tried to combine the two with the corridor colour as well. But the litter picking as well was a separate thing so I think Victoria was in charge of that.

“It gives people pride in where they live and once they've done things like that then there's more chance that because they've been involved from the start then they'll continue working and checking it. So I'd imagine if people are looking at bulbs and seeing bulbs coming up then if there's any litter there then that they'll pick it up. So it's about again getting it into the subconscious and making it a nice place to live and having pride in where you live.

“I think if you've actually contributed to some work and creating something then there's more intention involved in it and you think 'I'm going to keep it clear and I'm going to make it better, so I think again, it's even better for like the whole Community to start picking litter up and then continuing doing it.

Do you get involved in the litter picking sessions?

“Not really, no, because they're usually doing that during day and I work full time. So, the one thing I do is if they need any publicity I could publish it on West Leeds Dispatch or on Facebook or whatever.

“I think it helps the group to have that kind of publicity because there are so many groups doing great things but you don't know about them unless you're actually involved in it. I think it also helps as well to have visitors from the local councillors or someone else come and say it's really brilliant what you're doing then it just gives volunteers that boost. They wouldn't have to come to every meeting we know they're busy but just to have them come down and talk about the corridor of colour and how well the volunteers are doing, it just gives you that bit of a boost.”

Coordinator interview – 20/10/2023

How has the project gone for you so far?

“It's funny because it's easier now for recruiting people when you have an idea that's structured because it's a bit easier for people to digest, whereas before when I started to talk about the neighbourhood matching project you can see their face is going and they don't understand what it means. But now that the group knows what they want to do and they've got a clear idea of what they're doing it's easier to tell people what it is.

“I don't know how the other projects have gone about it but I've gone in the very ABCD way of saying I'm not going to tell you what it is you need to tell me what you want to do, which is what's happened and I think it's been quite successful. It was interesting because there were a lot of strong voices that came to the first few meetings. I think they were all much wanted different things, so I put together a little survey and sent it out to people to decide what we would do, then when we got all that back the group here came together and decided some umbrellas that all those things could fall into. So that's where the corridor of colour came from.”

How did the volunteers feel about taking charge of the project?

“Definitely the first few sessions it was challenging because I think there was an idea that they wanted somebody to tell them what to do, but I have said to them that you're in charge of this then you need to say what you want to happen.

“Everyone had their own idea of what they wanted to happen and I guess I was managing their expectations and saying ‘we've only got this amount of time, and we've only got this amount of money’. At one point, someone was talking about a community farm, which is a really nice idea, but it's not achievable in a project like this. So it's kind of been a case of keeping that role throughout almost like a mediator.

“Some of our land is community owned rather than council owned so if people in the area want something to happen on it, they can make it happen because it's it belongs to them. So if they want to plant like flowers on it, it's a case of it just happens.

What activities are the volunteers currently doing?

“So we've got a bunch of volunteers that get involved with stuff on weekends, they're going to do things to help with the corridor of colour and hopefully get more volunteers involved with helping them because they're always looking for volunteers. So the kind of how we're approaching it is there are lots of really positive things happening.

“Also, we couldn't fit this into anything initially, but somebody also put about creating spaces for women and girls and everybody was like, yeah, we need more of that. But we didn't know how we could do it. So this was a new branch of this project and from that there's been discussions with Shenanigans who are like a self-directed group of women in Armley, there's lots of members and they come together and they do things together quite regularly. So one of the people that came along to the initial group is involved in shenanigans I think that potentially was her suggestion and because of that we've had conversations with another woman who works in Bradford as a domestic abuse support worker. So that's a whole thing that's happening just off the back of this but separate.

“We've also got a couple of volunteers that started last week where one is an artist and she wanted to get involved in creating some art, which is why we're starting here because she's very

creative, she's younger and needs a bit of support, so it's kind of like building up her confidence as well, but she's going to start there and get people involved.”

On whether enough time had been given to form the project:

“I know there was a lot of planning going on before the actual projects that happened, but I think the person who's facilitating it needs a bit more time between that and the start of the project, because I felt personally that I was told about this and then it was happening. I think that I kind of understand it a bit more now, but to me it was like something needs to happen by this point here and I think that I could have done a little bit more planning and build up. In my experience of trying to get people in a room, we need a good 5-6 weeks to let people know something's going to happen.

“That could have been viewed and learning from because I know like a part of it was like trying to work with a bit of an established group but and we had a very small group.

“I think if I was to do it again because I'm in such a large place, I would like probably say not the whole of Armley, let's just concentrate on a corner of it and do something there. But the project that's come out that I think is a really nice project and I think it's got a potential to sort of engage people further on that.

“Because we live in an area that's got vicarious social behaviour a lot of people are saying that if we do something more permanent then there's potential for that to be vandalised, whereas planting bulbs if they get kicked down they'll grow back next year so it's something that's going to come back year after year, it's got that longevity. people are used to nice things being taken away from them around here, so having something nice like that can be a nice boost.”

Observation from seed bomb skills sharing session between NWCC and Holbeck Together

29.02.24 at St Matthews Community Centre

3 volunteers and 1 worker from NWCC

9 volunteers from Holbeck Together

Themes	Evidence	Comments
Decisions about budgeting are made by volunteers	<p>“If I take you with me, we can both do an hour [of litter picking] and that’s like twenty quid.”</p> <p>[When asked what will you be spending the funding on] “we don’t know yet”</p>	Clear evidence that volunteers understand how their time translates into funding.
Decisions about project planning are made by volunteers	“We should get some more fruit trees but they just get stripped”	
Decisions about roles and responsibilities are made by volunteers	“Every time I come it’s full of rubbish outside and it’s an eyesore, so I started sweeping outside and doing a litter pick a few times a week. Sometimes I feel down in the mornings and it does me good to go out and do it”	
Volunteers feel able to disagree/challenge		
Volunteers feel able to ask questions		
Volunteers use language relating to ownership (e.g. “our project,” “we want to”)	<p>“Laura’s not well at the moment, so I just went out to litter pick on my own”</p> <p>“We can do a few hours and then tell the boss and it goes on the sheet”</p>	<p>Volunteers feel empowered to carry out activities when the worker isn’t there.</p> <p>Some volunteers felt the worker was ‘in charge’ of certain things e.g. recording hours volunteered.</p>
Volunteers’ individual skills are being utilised	<p>“I like to feel useful”</p> <p>“I don’t usually like gardening but I’ve started to come to this group [when asked why] I like to see colour where I live”</p>	

<p>The activities planned seem mutually beneficial</p>	<p>“We’ve been learning from each other” “It works better when you squeeze all the water out” “I’ve learnt a lot from coming – I’ve got the timetable for what’s on here and I might come again” “It’s a great idea using up old books – I’ve got loads at home from the kids that we could shred” “I found out about a gardening group that’s basically next door to my house from someone here”</p>	<p>Lots of evidence of skill sharing around making seed ‘bombs.’</p> <p>One volunteer shared her experience of making a growing wall with her neighbour out of some old fencing and other volunteers were interested in doing the same.</p>
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Volunteers from Holbeck Together talked about the challenges they had experienced in getting permission to plant in different places.

“It’s when you have to keep on nagging and asking for things and it grinds you down, you just run out of steam”

“I’ve written to my councillor to ask about getting the old tree stumps taken out so we can plant new ones, it’s part of his manifesto aims and he said yes but nothing’s come of it”

“We’ve been asking for years to get the dead trees moved off Colenso Grove”

Some volunteers from Holbeck talked about vandalism and their work not being respected by other people who live locally

“We planted vegetables and flowers in the summer but they all got stolen”

“I would plant some fruit trees but there’s some at the side of the road already and every year you’ll see them one day and the fruits nowhere near ripe and the next day someone’s come and taken them all. They won’t even be nice, and me and the kids love coming to get a few cherries. We only ever take a few, I don’t understand why someone would take more than they need. Who even needs all those cherries?”

What’s the advice you would give other groups?

“Don’t start a planting thing at the end of summer and get permission early”

“Just get involved and try it”

Hamara

Hamara		
Evidence	Date	Total volunteer hours at this point
Planning meeting - observation	25/07/2023	0
Volunteer - focus group	29/11/2023	155
Coordinator – interview	05/03/2024	313.5

Observation of planning meeting: 25/07/2023

Themes	Evidence	Comments
Decisions about budgeting are made by volunteers		“We want to raise funds for help but it depends how many people are willing to put effort into the funding”
Decisions about project planning are made by volunteers	Volunteers wanted to make sure the boundaries of their project could be established. A decision was also made to set up a WhatsApp group with one volunteer being appointed during the meeting to be in charge of the group	
Decisions about roles and responsibilities are made by volunteers	Volunteers appointed a ‘leader’ during the meeting and it was decided that a WhatsApp group would be put together, with numbers exchanged during the meeting	
Volunteers feel able to disagree/challenge		“We could have a voting system but I don’t think we will need it as every decision that’s

		made is going to be for the benefit of our communities.”
Volunteers feel able to ask questions	Questions were asked by volunteers about what training would be available	
Volunteers use language relating to ownership (e.g. “our project,” “we want to”)	Consistently referred to “Our community”, also felt like the people in their local area were a “family” of different backgrounds and therefore wanted to bring the family closer together	
Volunteers’ individual skills are being utilised		
The activities planned seem mutually beneficial	Start more promotional activities of projects such as arts and crafts which are good for mental health – get to meet new friends in the group as well as crafts. Want to integrate elders into community.	

Focus group with 6 volunteers: 29/11/2023

How has the project gone since you first met in July?

Everyone has a different skill, so we take it in turns and share the skills we have. Currently we're doing crocheting but previously we've done pot plant paint and cooking. It's about sharing skills with everyone and everyone gets a chance to take a turn. We all discuss in a Whatsapp group, so one does their skill and then the next week the other does theirs.

We are almost leading our group ourselves. Yeah, which is really good, because when you know how everything works you feel like you can be in the group and discuss things, people can WhatsApp message if they didn't understand something, we can reply straight away. So it's like empowering – knowledge, freedom.

We feel empowered, it's our group and everyone gets a chance to do what they want. Some people have a lack of confidence to do things on your own without somebody supporting you.

Like this is our admin person, she's very good at advertising, making posters, anything. We work together, it's team work.

We've been doing socks now, you've got to keep warm! We've done scarves to cover hair and to keep warm. We did a wallet. This is my hat that I made.

My daughter is off on the half term holidays, so I bring her with me. She loves it. She is in year seven, one week she only knew how to do basic, and the next week she was doing a full hat. She had to go back to school but she's looking forward to the Christmas holidays. She is going to be taking this somewhere else, and someone else will learn the skill, and it will keep going. It's good for my daughter, it takes her away from the TV and phones. I taught her how to do it [crocheting] and she loves it!

I took the sample in our community and showed them to all the children, they're very, very interested to do that. Yeah, so I told them we can try and find some funding, buy some material and then we could start a session on crochet.

When you used to have a skill you would always pass it on to your children. Now they don't even know how to do the most basic, if it's broken you throw it away. It's good to teach them skills like these.

Next week we were thinking of doing soap making. One volunteer was googling the different ingredients and how much they cost, because when you buy a soap making kit it's more expensive. So we research the prices before we buy anything, use resources within the budget and go to different stores, go to Hobbycraft or wherever.

You can actually use this and start small businesses, like scrunchy businesses. My sister learnt loads of stuff from here and now she's launching a business from these small craft stuffs. So you can sit at home but instead of wasting your time you can make some money, do something productive.

It really helps you relax, just knitting, you can go away from everything for hours! It keeps your brain active, stress relieving. An empty mind is the devil's workshop anyway! I was reading an article somewhere about people with Alzheimer's disease or memory problems, the knitting and crochet can help them and they're less likely to get memory loss.

It's so therapeutic to me, I'm so focused when I'm doing it, I wish I had learnt it before.

My kids can't believe when I've made something, they said mum is this for us? When I crochet something for them, they won't even use it because they don't want to ruin it and I say what's the point!

You can buy anything but when you make something from your own hand, it gives you the pleasure of making it and knowing that it's unique, it shows the love and care you put into it.

People get bored at home when you don't have anything to do, I think this is a good way to socialize and meet new people. We know each other now, we're friends now. You get to learn each other's cultures – I don't know her culture and she doesn't know mine, but now we know them. We're all from different cultures, New Guineau, Somali, Swahili, Pakistan, but when we come here we all feel the same! We cook together, so when you try cooking with different ingredients, you need to learn their names and everything. Then how to measure the product and how to make everything, it's like team work. You're cooking, cleaning, chopping together and have taster session and then clean everything back to zero again. Then we make them for children and family and they think its amazing. You can't learn everything on YouTube, I'm a person that needs to see it and taste it to learn how to do it.

It's not just one day, its all weekend on the WhatsApp group. We discuss, well who's going to buy this and who will bring this, get the receipts and give them to Nachu. It's a little family and we always look forward to next week.

When you get to know someone, you get comfortable. None of us knew each other when we first started!

We were thinking when the resources and things run out in March, what are we going to do? We wish it would continue. What are we going to do, go back to zero and stay home and do nothing? We would like to continue and keep going.

We were thinking about making some stalls at jumble sales or at Beeston festival where we can actually show our work and what we've done.

That's where some of the publicity could go, we've been promoting the group, going out in the park and giving people leaflets, going to schools and community centres. People get to know and then they join.

I met up with a lady from the Somali community, she came with her daughter. When we were talking her daughter is starting sixth form and my daughter is starting here. So she stopped her and said, oh my mum told me that you are starting here too. Just from knowing mothers here, they've gone on to be friends at school!

What other activities are you planning?

Candle making, soap making. We are thinking whether anyone can teach us sewing, because loads of ladies want to know how to make basic alterations. Even if you don't want to start a business, just to be independent and help yourself out, when trousers are too big or sleeves too long.

Sometimes we get things wrong, we'll buy the wrong product or the wrong size and we have to take it back and discuss, it's quite time consuming. You might know it in your own language but most people don't know what it's called to buy it in English. So it's a lot more than just making socks!

Coordinator interview: 05/03/24

How has the project evolved since the first meeting?

“Normally the group meets every week and do different activities every week. Then once they have decided what activity they want to do one of them googles the items that they need. One of them will google what is needed and decide what it is they will buy but then another will be in charge of purchasing the item and Hamara will reimburse them for it.

“Now what they’ve done is they participated in a health research programme so that they can do consultations with people in the community. Some of the women in the group are more closely connected to the community than us, so they want to go out and speak to members of the public and find out why they are not participating in health research and what are the enablers and barriers for them. They are doing very well with that and have grown up as a group since the beginning, they make sure everyone gets a turn and haven’t missed a week other than Christmas. We never hired an instructor or a teacher from outside so everything has been coordinated by the group. The good thing is after seeing what the group have done a couple of others from another group in Hamara have seen this one and said ‘Oh this looks really nice, so would you be able to come and teach our group members to do the same thing?’, and there is funding for the other group to pay for instructors so it’s an opportunity for the women to go out and earn money which they haven’t been able to do before, they were born in a different country and have a fear of being able to speak the language, even though they have the talent they were afraid to speak in front of other people. They make a lot of crochet, hats, gloves and toiletries such as soaps, so they’re thinking of having a stall in Beeston Festival where they can sell it and then bring the money back to the group. So they’ve grown up as people as well and have also formed friendships too, they have their own whatsapp group where they socialise so it’s nice to see the bond forming outside of the group. They are from a mixture of different cultures, some are from parts of Africa and others from countries in Asia, so they are learning about each other’s cultures and food habits and doing some cooking as well in the meantime. Normally they might be scared to ask other people about their culture because it might be a borderline question but here it’s a nice space for them to ask each other.

“For one session during half term they brought their kids which included some of their teenage daughters who were aged 15 to 19. They not only enjoyed it but they are also wanting to know what else is happening in the community and how they can get involved. (The Group) are using their own initiative to get involved in wider training such as first aid or food hygiene and with grant funding they can utilise three different training sessions to get involved in.

“They are currently brainstorming what to do after March to keep the group going once the funding ends, they have applied for LCAN funding and figuring out whether they can keep the space.”

How quickly did things get up and running?

Initially it was very quick because I had only two weeks time to make the poster for the group and advertise it on social media and the very first meeting we had it was only around 10 days after I had got to know about the project, we did get more people turn up than I expected however I am not sure if it would work the same in other areas. We never did any activities for

the first two weeks of the project because it was mainly planning what we wanted to do as people had a lot of different ideas.

“I think say if you wanted to deliver a project from the first week of April, you would need to meet in the first week of March so you have a week or two to promote it and then for the volunteers to come into the session and give ideas about what they want to volunteer towards. It takes time so they will need one or two weeks for this initial stage. Otherwise if you start in the first week of April then you will be running over into May. We didn't spend any money in the first two weeks as we were mainly planning and talking, we were also lucky as we already had a venue ready. If you look to include all the different people's needs and come up with just one session, it takes time.”

Holbeck Together

Holbeck Together		
Evidence	Date	Total volunteer hours at this point
Observation 1 – planning meeting	14/09/2023	0
Volunteer 1 (Marie) – interview 1	08/02/2024	178.5
Volunteer 2 (Steven) – interview 1	12/02/2024	196.5
Volunteer 1 (Marie) – interview 2	25/03/2024	295.5
Volunteer 2 (Steven) – interview 2	22/03/2024	295.5
Worker - interview	05/02/2024	178.5
Observation 2 – skills sharing	29/02/2024	253.5

Planning meeting observation: 14/09/2023

Themes	Evidence	Comments
Decisions about budgeting are made by volunteers	<p>Discussed starting off with £500 and how they would manage it.</p> <p>Wanted to make decisions on budgeting in a group. Weren't fully decided yet on how often budgeting and decision meetings would be however noted down that these would need to be organised once the project was up and running.</p> <p>Volunteers wanted to hand over recording of expenditure and hours to Holbeck Together.</p>	<p>"You can plant a hell of a lot of plants with £500"</p>
Decisions about project planning are made by volunteers	<p>Older people who aren't able to do their gardening could receive help from Holbeck Together.</p> <p>One wanted to learn how to make planters, therefore someone could be brought in to teach this.</p> <p>Decided first goal was talking to highways to sort out different areas to plant</p> <p>Planned to initially door-knock, could potentially write letters and flyers however people tend to ignore them.</p> <p>Wanted to decide first of all which specific areas they wanted to cover. Decided that there would be four that they could initially cover.</p>	<p>"First thing you have to do is sort out the red tape"</p> <p>"Writing letters in easy but if you start something off with 'Dear Residents' it gets put in the recycling bin doesn't it."</p> <p>"We could start off a letter with 'We're planning to plant all these flowers on Holbeck Moor in the next six weeks, if you have an objection to this, please get in touch with this number"</p> <p>"I think education's also needed. There's no point putting the plants in only for them to not survive."</p>

	<p>Decided that some volunteers could go for a walk around to the different locations they wanted to plant in. This walk would be facilitated by Holbeck Together.</p> <p>Once this was carried out then there would be door knocking with volunteers putting themselves forward for this.</p> <p>Wanted to also provide education for people in order to keep the plants maintained.</p> <p>Used New Farnley as an example of where spreading the seeds on an area had made a difference to a piece of land. Farmers in New Farnley are also willing to donate some of their seeds, they event give them to Farnley High School.</p> <p>Was mentioned that volunteers can plan in meetings/activities from whenever they were available and as long as Holbeck Together know, there weren't any 'set days'.</p>	
<p>Decisions about roles and responsibilities are made by volunteers</p>	<p>Ideas so far have been along gardening, however volunteers encouraged to share if they have any other ideas. Impressed upon them that it is up to them what ideas they have.</p>	
<p>Volunteers feel able to disagree/challenge</p>	<p>Decided that any disagreements would be decided with a vote.</p> <p>Slight concern that the end of the project in March is prime time for planting therefore this may cause an issue. Funding would however have to be secured from March onwards. Claire mentioned that VAL have training courses available on applying for grants and writing a small funding bid.</p>	

Volunteers feel able to ask questions	Could Holbeck Together contact garden centres and ask for any spare plants that have been thrown out.	"I go to B&Q and see about 10 to 20 plants that are on their last legs. We could ask if we can use that and replant them in our community"
Volunteers use language relating to ownership (e.g. "our project," "we want to")		
Volunteers' individual skills are being utilised	One volunteer was skilled and knowledgeable around planting and was very keen to put these skills forward to advance the planting project.	
The activities planned seem mutually beneficial	<p>Gardening project planned to address overgrowing in the local neighbourhood.</p> <p>Wanted to build up a 'Community buy in' for the planting projects, Planters at Inghram Court and Communal Gardens in the area were discussed as different projects to tie together for the project.</p> <p>Start with five planting areas initially, see how it goes and then potentially build from there. End goal described as 'Holbeck in Bloom'</p>	"A lot of older people in this area can't do their gardening"

Volunteer 1 interview 1: 08/02/2024

“We had quite a few people attend the first meeting which I was quite pleased about, everyone had some really good ideas to help improve our area. We talked about doing some planting and trying to clean up our local area, people made suggestions about maybe getting some planters and putting some vegetable gardens out. It was a way to brighten and clear the area up, make it more presentable and a nicer place to live.

“People talk about Holbeck like it’s a place nobody wants to live but when you live here it’s a bit different. You realise it’s not just about the bad parts of the area, we’ve got a good community here and a strong community where people are friendly and they want to help each other. So knowing that and having people with ideas about how they can make things nicer for everybody is really good.

What sort of skills did people bring to the project?

“Yeah well I know a thing or two about planting vegetables and there were others who knew about where to get the planters and what kind of flowers to put in at what time of year.

“Obviously at this time of year in winter it’s a bit difficult to be going out and planting different things. We have got plans to do a lot of planting in spring. We’ve been doing a lot of things like litter picks and end of last year we did actually do some planting and we’ve just got some new planters to be able to plant stuff when the weather’s a bit better.

“We’ve been involving kids in the litter picks as well, my kids come and do litter picks and my older boy loves to help with the planting. The kids like to use the litter pickers as well so it gets them all involved, there’s some older people, some younger people and people with different abilities so it’s really good for bringing together the community.

“We usually come together on a Thursday when we’re all here (at Holbeck Together) and we’ll plan out the week and say ‘who’s free on what day’ and then we’ll go off and do around two hours. There’s some people who can’t do that amount of time and then there’s others who can also do longer so we just say ‘that’s fine’, because it all helps doesn’t it.

“It helps people feel like they’ve accomplished something when they get involved. And some people might only get out three times a week and they won’t see other people a lot of the time, so it’s a good way of engaging with other people that are like-minded to you.

Do volunteers feel a sense of ownership of the group?

“Oh definitely, they like being involved and getting to choose what to do rather than being told ‘this is what we’re going to do’, they like to have a bit of input, decide what’s going to happen next and where we’re going to go from there, that’s been really good as well.”

Volunteer 2 – interview 1: 12/02/2024

Can you tell me a bit about the project?

“It’s mainly been litter picking and doing a bit of gardening, putting plants here and there. We haven’t got the plants done yet because we’re waiting for the council, but doing the litter picking’s good because I don’t go out loads and coming down and doing that, it helps make your day go quicker, meet new people and make the area look better. It serves two or three different purposes.

“I’m enjoying it but I’m just waiting for the weather to get better, I’ve got nine planters that I could dig up myself but it’s too damp outside at the minute. [When it starts] I’d like to keep on with it, if I start something I want to get it finished and make it look nice.”

What sort of impact has the project had on you?

“Yeah it helps me get out of the flat and where I can help make the area look better, I can just go down and do two hours of litter picking and it brings in money for the project. If no-one else gets involved I usually go down myself, I’m just waiting for the better weather. I’ve got my own gardening stuff that’s in my mate’s cellar at the moment waiting to use. I think if we’d have started the project around April, May we could have got more done, I’m there [at home] all people have to do is just ring me up and then I can come down and start doing stuff. Other than that your sort of sat there like a spare part. That’s why I’ve been trying to do litter picking just to come down see people and share some ideas. Normally I’ll arrange the litter picking through Laura (the coordinator), nine times out of ten I’m here [at Holbeck Together] and she’ll tell me she’s free and we do it together, or she’ll ring me up.”

Volunteer 1 – interview 2: 25/03/2024

How has the project been since we last spoke?

“It’s been really good, we did the seed bomb event, that went really well, and what little wasn’t collected was planted in the graveyard by my daughter so hopefully we’ll have some lovely flowers there soon. Also we’re going to be building some planters, we’ve been sorting that out to build some planters for people to take home and build for themselves and we’re also going to be putting some flowers down the side of the church where the graveyard is. Tonight we’re also doing a litter pick in Beeston with kids club so that should be fun.”

How was the seed bomb skills sharing?

“It was a great event and it was really easy when they showed you how to do it, people are thinking of taking it away for their kids and grandkids, so it was great. It helped involved a lot of people who wouldn’t normally do something like that who maybe are disabled and aren’t physically fit so they were quite surprised that they were able to do it.”

How many people are still doing the litter picking?

“There’s been quite a few, I think every time we’ve done one we’ve had a few more people. It’s not the nicest thing to do but I think people just want to get out and see other people. I don’t think a lot of the elderly people around here see any body and there’s a lot of mental health going about so just to spend a couple of hours with someone else means a lot. I know myself I spend about 24 hours a day with the kids so just another adult to speak to sometimes is a bit of a bonus.

“The kids always come as well and do the litter pick and it’s just a bit of fun for them, they can play on the park afterwards and also meet other kids. Where I am there are a lot of kids but one of my sons has got special needs and I can’t let him out because every time I do he either gets bullied and comes home crying or he gets in trouble so we can’t really play out where we are. So

just getting to meet other kids where there's a lot of adults about and people can keep an eye on it is great as well.

"We might not see each other every day, it's just in passing we might say hello that sort of thing. So I think it's nice to have a chat every once in a while and so something constructive while we're doing it."

When do you think the planting might be starting?

"If I'm not mistaken it'll be in the next week, they're going to pick the plant either this week or next week and I think it'll be pretty much done soon after that. It'll be really lovely for people to look at when they come and people are really looking forward to it because they've been waiting for ages to do some planting. It's been a long winter and when you're waiting for something it feels like forever."

Volunteer 2 – interview 2: 22/03/2024

How has the project gone since we last spoke?

"Not too bad, I came down here the other day and swept down the side of the church. Laura and I have been round the side of the church a few times trying to make it look nice, it's mainly all the leaves that come onto the path, I remember seeing it one day and saying 'I'm going to clean it up', because it's just a mess otherwise.

We're thinking about using the big wooden planters outside [Holbeck Together] at the moment, there's some daffodils in there now so what I'm thinking is when they die off there'll be some new flowers that spring up after the winter.

Apart from that I've been down here and done a few litter picking sessions, some of them have been by myself because Laura has been off sick. There's still a big group doing the litter picking as far as I can make out but they're doing it in different areas, because they live in a different part of Holbeck towards Elland Road."

How has the project developed over the months that you've been involved?

"I'm not sure because it's mainly been me and Laura doing the litter picking down here. We had a seed bomb event where all members were there together. It was a good event, they taught you how to make the seed bombs which was really easy so there's some that I've got at home which I'm looking to put in my planter."

Has it been easier to plant things with the weather improving?

"Yeah it's been warmer, you can't really do anything around winter because it's just too soggy. We're also waiting really for the council to give us permissions to plant stuff, I don't know when it'll be confirmed, I know they were going to come down to ours for a meeting but they can't seem to find a time, so we don't know when we're going to start. It's a waiting game. When we first started I remember Laura asked me and another volunteer whether we'd like to come and pick out flowers to plant but we couldn't do it because it wasn't the weather for it."

Has it been good for you to be involved in the project while it's been running?

"Every time I've done it I've enjoyed it, I'm just looking forward to when we can go to the next stage, so we can say we've got that, now let's find out what we're doing and get stuck in."

Worker interview: 20/03/2024

So how have things evolved since the planning meeting we sat in on?

When we asked for people's ideas they were all gardening, so that's what we decided to do. But it's just a really bad time of year so litter-picking seems to have taken off. They wanted to make it look a bit nicer in here, so they've ordered some artificial plants for in here, and then some big planters for the entrance way, which will be on wheels so in the summertime they can go outside. But there have been a bit of trouble with vandalism in the area of flowers, people have planted boxes and then the flowers have disappeared the next day.

The idea that they had of planting wildflowers on the grassed areas of the street didn't really come off because getting permission was just so difficult. The other one at the sheltered housing down at the court is still happening but there's been a bit of red tape. They're allowed to do it but they've had to go down to a residents meeting to ask them what they want, and that's been postponed twice. It just takes time to do – they're still going to do it but it's just going to take longer to do.

I think if we would have started it in springtime it would have been much easier. It's when people are going litter picking and it's chucking it down, people aren't keen. In summer you can plant more, people have been doing research about what vegetables to plant and when.

Has your role shifted at all?

Normally I arrange everything, so that's been quite hard. Because this is led by volunteers, trying to get that across, that it needs to be their ideas – it's working now, but it was quite hard to get across at the beginning. It's been quite hard for me as well, I'm used to organizing all the volunteering so it new for me! Everyone's used to me sorting it out and then they just arrive – it's about them thinking about, well what time do you want to do it, when shall we all arrive? I'm a resident as well, I do the litter pick, so there's a bit of crossover.

I think it's because there's money you can earn for the group, it's a real incentive, people were excited. They were saying, can I buy this? And I was telling them, it's not up to me! But it was nice for them to be able to take charge themselves, and they were like we've set this up, we've chosen to spend the money on this, so I hope it encourages people to carry on.

It's shifted more from me setting the meetings off but now they've taken it on more, the power has shifted and the decision making, even about when we do things. And it's for their own community, they're working for something and they feel like "I've paid for that." It's still not entirely, people still come to me and ask 'what shall we do about this?' or 'can we do it on this day, is the room free?'

There's a little group that seems to have broken off and they're more focused on litter-picking and keeping the area nice like that. Which is a good thing, but I think they're just waiting to start the gardening really. We did also have a conversation about someone coming in to show us how to make bird houses or planters so that's something else we're waiting on. It looks like there's a little group who are going to keep going, the litter-pickers, they've ordered their own pickers, hoops, bags from the council. It's been good that they've got all the equipment they need, and it's easier for them to get on and do themselves.

Was that an idea that came from volunteers?

Yes, there was one gentleman who wanted to do it and then other people joined in and it seems to have really taken off. It seems easier for them to manage, because there's no red tape for that, just asking the council for the bags and leaving them in the right place.

How do you think this will continue?

It's quite good that I think the litter-picking will carry on, and I think the planting will happen in the summer, and it's all about making the area a bit nicer. I think if we did this in the summer and advertised it on a nice day, it would be really popular.

We've not yet had permission to plant the bulbs. The volunteers have their plan and their ideas ready for the residents meeting, they've researched it and know what questions they want to ask. If I went to the meeting, it might not be their exact plan that I put across, so that's another way of them owning it. In Cottingley they have their own garden, whereas we have had to wait to get the permission.

So it's been mostly planning and organizing so far?

It's actually been good because it's easy to get people there for the fun bits, for the planting and getting outside in the sun. But that work to plan and research and organize things, that's a bit harder, so it's been good for them to have that experience and learn that.

It's thinned out a little bit, I think mostly because we haven't done the planting. There were people who wanted to do that, and I think they'll come back when we plant. But new people have come along for litter-picking.

What's the plan when you can get started with planting?

There are lots of big planters out now that we're going to dig over, and then go out in our minibus to buy the plants, plant those and then there's already 3 people living on the court who are going to water it and get the weeds done.

One thing is all our volunteers need to be DBS checked, and that puts some people off, that's been really hard. We said for the community litter picks though, they don't need a DBS check, because it's not in here.

Skills sharing observation (as above)

Cottingley Community Centre

Cottingley Community Centre		
Evidence	Date	Total volunteer hours at this point
Coordinator interview	March 2023	0

Coordinator interview – March 2023

What's happened in the last quarter?

The timing wasn't great - by the time we managed to mobilise, the winter was already here. There were lots of discussions and planning over the winter that was only captured retrospectively.

There are some good examples of people using their skills. [E] and [C] both studied horticulture as Askham Bryan College... but 40 years apart! One is in their 20s one in their 60s. They have both used their knowledge and skills to help out with the project. There are things that they would recognise that we wouldn't have usually considered – things like what plants grow well and compliment each other. So some can't tolerate the same soils, some have to be rotated because of what they give to the soil. Soil nutrition and aeration and different types of fruit trees for the position in the gardens, things like that.

Then there's [S], who is a retired foreman. He brings in skills of project coordination to the group. He also has contacts within the industry and he has called in favours such as the skilled bricklayer that will give his time to us. [S] knows a lot about health and safety, so he has advised us around risk assessments and what less skilled members can be involved in.

Is there any key learning that you would like to pass on?

Just that gardening is quite a skilled task. For us, there are some things that have needed to be done that the whole group can't take part in, for example they got a digger in to do some of the work. The group have carefully considered how they can build in tasks that can involve everyone such as making the beds raised so they are accessible to wheel chair users or reachable from a sitting down position.