

Altogether Better: Social Return on Investment (SROI) Case Studies

Key messages from a report by York Health Economics Consortium (YHEC), commissioned by the Altogether Better Learning Network, November 2011.

Summary

An SROI analysis of 15 case studies from 15 projects in the Altogether Better programme found that all demonstrated a positive social return on investment (SROI) of between £0.79 - £112.42 for every pound invested. SROI values provide an *indication* of the return on investment based on a number of estimates and assumptions made. This review of case studies was high level and there was a great deal of variability in the data available for each case study, however, the figures provide a useful indication of the *potential* levels of return for the Community Health Champion approach for funders.

- **Altogether Better** is a collaborative designed to build understanding and capacity to empower communities to improve their health and well-being which began as a five year Big Lottery Funded Programme in 2008. The Big Lottery outcomes were to improve diet and nutrition; increase physical activity; and improve mental health though project activities incorporated a much wider set of well-being outcomes.
- Social Return on Investment (SROI) was used to help quantify the social value that projects are creating. SROI calculates the economic value of social benefits by translating social objectives into financial measures. This allows the social value created to be compared to the investment made.
- Using the principles of SROI described in the Cabinet Office guide¹, 15 Altogether Better project case studies were used to calculate the SROI of Altogether Better's work. The project case studies were used to identify inputs, impacts and outcomes. Assumptions were made around the costs of these elements and SROI ratios calculated for each project².
- Examples of the potential benefits generated through Altogether Better Projects include reduction in prevalence of obesity and diabetes, reduction in workplace absence due to stress, increased attendance and participation in social groups, reduced number of people accessing health services and reduced unemployment. Financial proxies are identified for each of these benefits.
- All case studies demonstrated a social return on investment although a wide range in the potential returns on investment was found (between £0.79 - £112.42 for every pound invested). Sensitivity analysis was used to examine how the SROI would change if different assumptions are adopted. Most of the calculations are highly sensitive, so if the level of impact (e.g. number of people benefitting) is revised upwards or downwards, the SROI can change considerably.
- Due to a great deal of variability in the data available for each case study, the findings and figures should not be used as definitive statements of the benefits derived, however, they provide a useful indication of the potential levels of return of particular projects. It is important to stress that it is the fact that there is a return on investment that is most important, rather than the scale of that return.
- This SROI analysis provides important evidence that the work of Altogether Better Projects is having a demonstrable impact. However, this finding should be used along with other evidence which demonstrates the effectiveness and achievements of projects.

The full report can be downloaded from: www.altogetherbetter.org.uk and should be referenced as follows: *Hex, N. and Tatlock, S. Altogether Better Social Return on Investment Case Studies (2011). A Report commissioned by the Altogether Better Learning Network, Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Observatory. Produced by York Health Economics Consortium.*

¹ A Guide to Social Return on Investment, Cabinet Office, Office of the Third Sector. 2009.

² The Appendix to the full report provides details of all the assumptions made and references for costs used.