

# Well-Being Matters

A research and policy briefing as part of the national evaluation of the Well-being and Changing Spaces programmes

In this issue of well-being matters, we explore the relationship between well-being and Big Society. What is the role of well-being in achieving Big Society and what can Big Society do to improve well-being? What are the opportunities and challenges of linking the two issues? This issue considers these questions, as well as including a round-up of some of the latest well-being news.

## Well-being and 'Big Society: opportunities and challenges

Part of the Conservative Party's election manifesto, the Big Society has emerged as one of the most well publicised concepts of the Coalition Government. The concept of the Big Society and what it means for policy and practice is still evolving, but it is clear that the Coalition Government is committed to it.

The same goes for well-being. This was illustrated by David Cameron's announcement in late November of the National Well-being Project and the intention to measure the nation's well-being through a household survey administered by ONS.

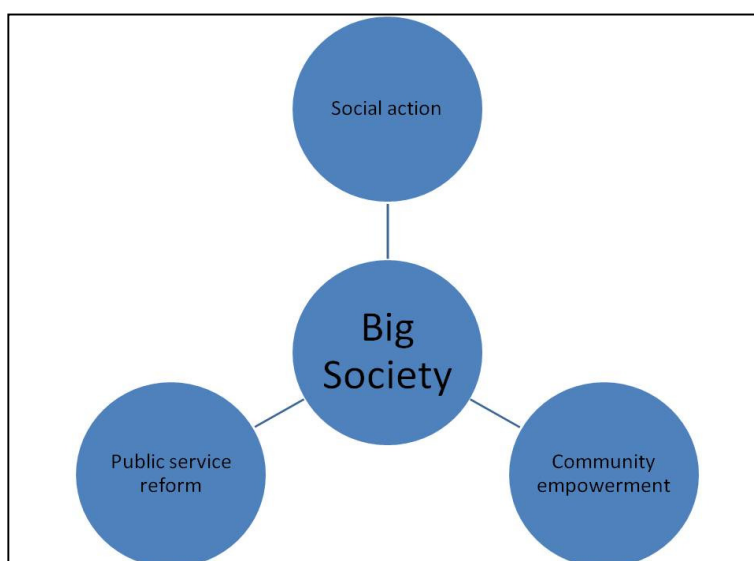
## The policy landscape

For the Coalition Government, the Big Society is a vision for greater personal, professional and civic responsibility where social problems are solved by the communities they affect; social action is prioritised over state intervention: **'the innovation and enthusiasm of civil society is essential in tackling the social, economic and political challenges that the UK faces'**.<sup>i</sup>

Published shortly after the election result, the Coalition Document<sup>ii</sup> sets out agreements on different areas of policy, including the Government's approach to the voluntary and community sector and the Big Society, which is at the heart of the Coalition Government's policy making.

David Cameron has outlined the key strands of the Big Society agenda:

- public service reform
- social action
- community empowerment.



## Understanding the connections

Despite the Coalition Government's announcement of their intention to measure well-being the term does not feature prominently in descriptions of the Big Society, there are however clear links to be made between the two agendas.

### Social action and well-being

According to the Coalition Government, the Big Society is a call for greater social action: for people to give up their time, effort and money to support local causes as part of a new culture of voluntarism and philanthropy. The Government hopes that by reducing the role of the state, greater responsibility will be devolved to the local level and that, in response, residents will rise to the challenge of taking greater control over shaping their local area and responding to local challenges.

#### **Volunteering increases a person's sense of well-being**

*As part of the Cornwall Healthy Living Centre's Pathways to Health and Well-being project volunteers are paired with organisations or individuals who need assistance, friendship or social interaction. The idea behind this that the recipient benefits from the services or time given by the volunteer, often in practical way, but also that the volunteer has an increased sense of purpose and self esteem as a result of volunteering. In addition, the volunteer and the recipient benefit from increased social interaction and reduced social isolation.*

Academic studies have demonstrated that volunteering can have a positive effect on a range of aspects of individual well-being, including: happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, improved physical health and alleviating depression<sup>iii</sup>. As such, there is the potential for the Big Society to promote higher levels of well-being amongst individuals. The prominence of the Big Society agenda also places renewed emphasis on the role of the voluntary and community sector in society. It is an opportune time for organisations to evaluate their role generally and to consider specifically how their well-being activities might fit with the principles and priorities of the Big Society.

### Community empowerment and well-being

In order for Big Society to develop the Coalition Government believe that it is vital that residents feel empowered. Community empowerment covers a broad range of activities: from efforts to enhance residents' skills, for example supporting people to bid for public sector contracts, to encouraging a sense of community confidence and activism. These are activities which increase the sense of well-being a person may feel and are activities that are often an inherent part of well-being projects.

#### **Enhancing well-being assets increases the likelihood of a person volunteering**

*By being involved with the Cycle Champions project in South Yorkshire, several beneficiaries, who were new to cycling, have not only become proficient cyclists but are also now real advocates for the sport and for making cycling accessible for all. With new found confidence, self esteem, enthusiasm and better personal health they volunteer their time to help deliver cycling sessions, act as 'champions' for cycling more generally and have become involved in other projects as volunteers such as Health Champions.*

A higher level of well-being within communities is likely to support the Big Society as people who are happy and healthy are more likely to be able and willing to come forward as volunteers.

Whilst recruiting volunteers to deliver the Big Society may be challenging, there are also potential barriers that may inhibit individuals becoming active citizens, including: caring responsibilities, poor physical and/or mental health, or a lack of confidence.

There is a convincing argument to be made that activities to support well-being will be important if individuals are to have the capacity to



participate in the Big Society. As such, there is potential for a mutually reinforcing relationship between the Big Society and well-being.

### Public service reform and well-being

Big Society is also about opening up the running of public services to alternative deliverers in order to dismantle 'centralised bureaucracy'. Alternative delivery organisations could include charities, social enterprises, communities

and private companies. There is also renewed enthusiasm for mutualism. In particular, the Coalition Government proposes a new model of public service delivery in which services are provided by social enterprises led by frontline workers, owned by them and the communities they serve.

#### Enhancing well-being through holistic support to communities

*Key Enterprises is a charity providing training and development opportunities to individuals with a moderate to severe mental health condition or learning difficulties. As a result of participating in the activities and training provided by Key Enterprises, beneficiaries reported a greater ability to live independently, increased interest in activities outside of their working day which has helped prevent the onset of depression; and a greater desire and ability to eat healthily. Social enterprises and charities are accustomed to working in this way and can build on their experience of doing so to deliver services in the future.*

Providers of well-being interventions are going to have to look at alternative funding streams and may need to demonstrate a broader remit than previously required. However, the end of ring-fenced grants could potentially afford greater creativity and flexibility in service design and in the process of commissioning the voluntary and community sector.

### Delivering well-being and Big Society

Links with Big Society mean there are opportunities for those delivering well-being projects but there are also challenges to consider:

#### Delivering in the context of cuts

The recently announced public sector cuts present challenges to all areas of the economy, including the voluntary and community sector. With significant cuts to public sector funding, local authorities and other public sector bodies, there will be fewer discretionary funding streams available. Furthermore, at the same time, voluntary and community sector organisations may experience a rise in demand for their services if and when public sector services are cut back. With fewer resources for managing, facilitating or developing volunteers an unpaid workforce might also be problematic. nef's report *Cutting it* discusses this further.<sup>iv</sup>

#### Nurturing relationships with 'unusual suspects'

Public sector cuts will mean that some of the organisations that voluntary and community sector organisations have traditionally sought funding from, such as Strategic Health Authorities, may no longer function in the same way. This will mean that the voluntary and community sector will have to be flexible in their approach to seeking funding and may need to consider developing new collaborative relationships, for example, developing links with private sector organisations (e.g. contracting, sub contracting or working with social finance intermediaries). It may also be necessary to develop strategies to increase the amount of funding received via charitable giving and philanthropy, either from individuals or as part of businesses' corporate social responsibility functions.



## Developing the capacity to operate competitively

With the emphasis on voluntary and community sector organisations bidding for opportunities to deliver public services, the Big Society agenda potentially presents an opportunity for the sector to enter into a more sustainable funding relationship than offered under the grants-based approach to funding. However, this will mean that smaller voluntary and community sector organisations will require the capacity to operate competitively in bidding for contracts.

## Tips and solutions: Enhancing well-being and creating Big Society

Looking at these challenges we have set out a few tips and solutions that will help providers overcome them and help to make the links between Big Society and well-being.

1. **Demonstrating impact** – As ring-fenced budgets disappear, VCS organisations will have to demonstrate their impacts in terms of broader outcomes, such as the well-being of beneficiaries and the wider community. Tools such as those used in the [National Well-Being Evaluation](#) will help VCS organisations achieve this, as well as some of the methods being used by portfolios within the well-being programme (see the Sharing Learning and Best Practice elements of the well-being website).
2. **Working with corporate partners / the private sector** – Big Society emphasises the importance of corporate social responsibility and corporate social activism. These are opportunities that providers of well-being services can use to help increase volunteer networks and build capacity as well as increase or enhance the well-being of these volunteers.
3. **Economic value or return on investment** – Well-being providers will also need to consider measuring the full economic value of their services or the return on investment generated by their interventions. This will help make the case for commissioning well-being related services, even in a restricted funding environment. This method is being used by a number of the well-being portfolios in their evaluations and a range of methods exist. For more information contact the evaluation team or look at the well-being pages on the website ([www.cles.org.uk/wellbeing](http://www.cles.org.uk/wellbeing)).
4. **Full cost recovery** – Applying full cost recovery for commissioned services will help to reinforce the value of services and demonstrate that VCS organisations are not just seen as the ‘cheapest option’. For example VCS organisations funded under the New Leaf New Life portfolio have been funded under a full cost recovery scheme for their time in developing and implementing the North East Health and Well-being Strategy. This is also fully supported by the [Big Lottery Fund which has provided guidance on the issue](#).
5. **Managing increased demand** – Using existing capacity in the smartest way will be key. This might involve developing and delivering a range of services (with different levels of intensity for different needs) to help manage increased demand and make best use of scarce resources (both people and finances). It might also mean recruiting volunteers or working with corporate partners.
6. **Using and managing volunteers** – This can help VCS organisations meet Big Society objectives and also help them to manage increased demand for services. Although the



importance of training, managing capacity and supporting volunteers should not be overlooked by those delivering well-being related interventions.

We hope that these tips help you to make the links between well-being and Big Society and to incorporate elements of the two agendas into your activities.

### Other well-being news

- David Cameron announced the National Well-being project in late November, setting out the Coalition Government's intention to start measuring the general well-being of the population. [ONS are consulting on how this should be done and what should be measured on their website.](#)
- The All Party Parliamentary Group on Well-Being Economics had its first meeting since the elections, on 28<sup>th</sup> October 2010, on how well-being economics can help deal with climate change.
- The Children's Society ([www.childrenssociety.org.uk](http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk)) launched their new Good Childhood Index based on a quarterly survey of children across England.
- Three Welsh local authorities (Caerphilly, Torfaen and Carmarthenshire) have launched a new children's website ([www.greengrin.co.uk](http://www.greengrin.co.uk)), developed by nef, allowing children to measure their own well-being and environmental impact, and providing them with tailored feedback.
- Well-being researchers at the London School of Economics have developed an iPhone app called *Mappiness* to map happiness across the UK.
- The European statistics agency Eurostat will include a module on well-being in their main social survey in 2013. Meanwhile, in the UK, the 2010 Health Survey for England will, for the first time, be using questions used in the Well-Being Programme evaluation on well-being assets.
- The Health White Paper, published in December 2010, refers to the need to promote general well-being and public health and sets in place a number of structures to do this.

### Further information

For further information about any of the issues raised in this briefing, or for any general queries regarding the National Well-being Evaluation please contact Victoria Bradford at CLES Consulting on 0161 236 7036 and [rrt@cles.org.uk](mailto:rrt@cles.org.uk) or Saamah Abdallah nef (the new economics foundation) on 020 7820 6300 and [well-being@neweconomics.org](mailto:well-being@neweconomics.org)

<sup>i</sup> HM Government (2010), 'The Coalition: our programme for government', accessed at: [http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/05/The\\_Coalitions\\_Programme\\_for\\_Government.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/05/The_Coalitions_Programme_for_Government.aspx)

<sup>ii</sup> HM Government (2010), 'The Coalition: our programme for government', accessed at: [http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/05/The\\_Coalitions\\_Programme\\_for\\_Government.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/05/The_Coalitions_Programme_for_Government.aspx)

<sup>iii</sup> Thoits, P. A. & Hewitt, L. N. (2001), 'Volunteer Work and Well-Being', *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2001, Volume 42, Issue 2, pp.151-131

<sup>iv</sup> Coote A (2010) *Cutting it* (London: nef)

