



Totally Socially Final Evaluation

Charlotte Pace
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Institute for Voluntary
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Acknowledgements

This report has been written by Charlotte Pace based on interviews carried out by the author with over 30 Totally Socially participants, staff and other stakeholders between October and December 2019. It builds on the Mid-Term Review (Jan–March 2019) that explored people’s experience of the support and the changes it had brought about. This time we have taken a closer look into the themes that emerged at that time.

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Project and participants:

Apple Tree Futures – Alex Rose
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Funmanby – Amanda Fisher
Hun – Free – Heather Nicholson and Karen Hollinghurst
Peasey Hill People – Sally Solak
Ryedale Free Fridge – Lindsay Wrightson

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Sound of Scarborough – David Yates and Jim Taylor
Stainsacre Socials – Derek Scott
Whitby Lighthouse – Diane Leith
Whitby Beach Sweep – Elaine Marsh and Jo Hindley -Richardson

Businesses:

Esme Short – Social Entrepreneur, **Hannah Thompson** – Business Owner

Stakeholders:

John Allsopp – Digital Marketeer, **Tasha Billington** – Student, **Paddy Chandler**, North Yorkshire County Council, **Philip Coyne** – Beyond Housing, **Hannah Degge** – Lecturer in Public Health, Coventry University Group, **Matthew Joseph** – Neighbourhood Support Officer, Scarborough Borough Council, **David Kerr** – Tees, Esk and Weir NHS Trust, Scarborough, **Victoria Thompson** – Project Officer South Cliff Gardens, Scarborough Borough Council.

Staff:

Charlotte Angus, Dan Green, David Stone, Jo Laking, Mel Bonney-Kane

Evaluation workshop attendees (including staff):

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Part One: Introduction

1.1 Background

Totally Socially aims to support individuals and groups in local communities to turn their ideas into action and was initiated to provide demonstrable evidence of the **value of putting communities in control**.

The three-year programme is funded by The National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund (March 2017 to March 2020) and there are four Totally Socially Locality Workers covering the areas of Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale who work alongside people and groups to get their ideas and projects off the ground.

The Totally Socially approach (read on!) evolved from the Coast & Vale Community Action (CaVCA) ethos of **doing things with, not to, communities** and is a vital part of their working principles. Through the programme this has become a two-way process. The listening and learning happening in communities flows back into CaVCA too, informing its practice overall.

Evidence of the need for Totally Socially was gathered from local community organisations, voluntary groups, service users and local residents, highlighting that while services continue to be available for those in greatest need, those who are vulnerable but not yet at the threshold of entitlement are becoming further **disengaged and isolated**. There are particular issues for those with (often undiagnosed) mental health difficulties, families with dependents with additional needs, and older people who are isolated.

The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR)¹ is the evaluation partner to Totally Socially. In the Mid-Term Review (Jan–March 2019) we spoke to more than 30 people and groups who had been supported through Totally Socially to gather their feedback and reflections. There were some surprising results, in particular those around the changes that had been brought about in **reducing social isolation and improving people's health and well-being**. In October 2019, we were asked to build on the mid-term findings by speaking to people in communities (some repeat conversations, others for the first time) to home in on people's experiences to better understand their journeys and 'what it takes' for people to make changes for themselves.

1.2 The purpose of this evaluation

CaVCA engaged IVAR to:

1. **Build on the learning from the Mid-Term Review**, specifically a handful of the 'key features' (below) previously identified and an embedded question:

¹ www.ivar.org.uk

what empowers or disempowers real community engagement in the first place?

- Less isolated, more connected
 - Improvements to people's health and well-being
 - Learning new skills
 - Confidence and motivation
2. **Cascade the values and behaviours that come from helping people to do it for themselves** – what are the journeys people go on – from 'behind closed doors' to playing an active role in their community? What are their turning points? (see case studies in Appendix Two).
 3. **Understand what we are learning here** about the true value of relationships and trust at a community level, and what this means for local (and other) 'systems'? What have the three years of Totally Socially activity shown up/demonstrated about this way of providing support – particularly in terms of ways to engage people and communities in their own well-being?
 4. **Create a stronger evidence base for this way of working with people in communities**, underpinned by the three lottery outcomes (see Part Three).

Field work has been carried out with over 30 people across Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale using the following methodology:

- a) Speaking to new groups and individuals for the first time
- b) Going back to people and groups first spoken to in January 2019
- c) Developing case studies to better understand people's journeys
- d) Speaking to people and professionals on the periphery of Totally Socially – i.e. parties with an interest and appetite for knowing more

It is worth noting that the people we spoke to had wide-ranging backgrounds including business, voluntary and public sector and the NHS. We also held a two-hour evaluation workshop that was attended by 16 people from projects across the area.

A series of conversations took place with the Totally Socially team and a summary of those can be found in Part Five.

Terminology

Throughout the report, the following terms are used:

- **Programme** for Totally Socially
- **Workers** for team members of the programme providing support
- **Participants** for individuals and groups in communities who received support and who were interviewed for this evaluation
- **Stakeholders** for those with an interest, including current or potential partners

See Appendix One for the full list of questions asked during the fieldwork, Appendix Two for the case studies, and Appendix Three for the evaluation workshop findings.

Part Two: Describing Totally Socially

In this section we focus on how the groups and individuals describe the support they receive from Totally Socially.

It's inevitable. It's a neutral space – anything can happen, and good things do happen.

Totally Socially helps all sorts of projects, on their terms. From the seed of an idea to getting people better connected in a village or taking a new direction in their lives, even starting a new social business or charity. Networks of support have been built providing support in particular to unblock things, to **get things moving** and off the ground. There is a universal approach that brings about a **union of people** from all backgrounds with **people helping people** they didn't expect to. It is noticeable too that the help and support provided by Totally Socially comes in **a variety of forms** to help **communities thrive**, and the approach includes both informal groups and small and developing independent business and social enterprise, supporting towns and residents to prosper, bringing an economic value too.

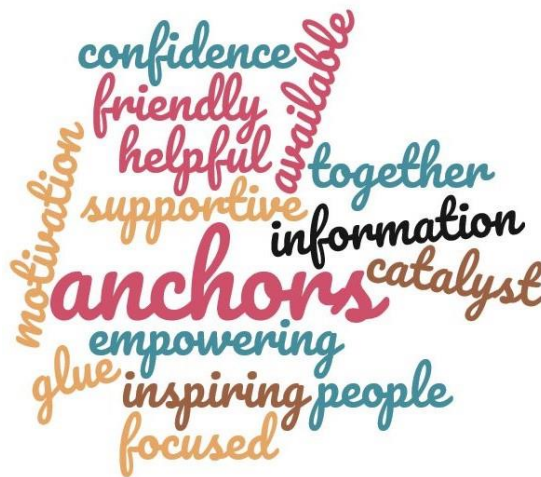
It's a refreshingly simple process

The informality of the support stands out, as does the time the Locality Workers spend with individuals and groups. The fact that it's not labelled as a particular type of support (like 'business, fundraising') doesn't mean it isn't as good! It is frequently described as a listening service and a way to find out more of what is happening in communities. It is led by a belief that achievements happen through community action, bringing ideas to life.

It is essential to mention what people said *it isn't* as well. It is described as not being formulaic, working on the basis that anything is possible. And a fundamental aspect is the '**walking alongside**' element, especially prominent in conversations. There was always someone to turn to, either hands-on support or simply a friendly voice and a **feeling of belonging** to something.

If she hadn't been there, I don't know what would have happened, it was so overwhelming.

The support is highly valued; however, there is a lack of knowledge about what other support Totally Socially is linked to, and an appetite to know more about CaVCA and what other services are being delivered. There are also calls for



'better publicity', as coming across Totally Socially in the first place felt like a chance encounter, and it needs to be more locally recognisable.

I didn't really know the extent of the support they could offer; it was very enlightening and helped us to expand our ideas, it was instantaneous help.

However, this more accidental way of doing things was also attractive – the fact that Totally Socially doesn't take the usual approach but is flexible and responsive on a wide range of issues. Sometimes that's hard to grasp, and the 'unstructured-ness' doesn't always make sense to people. One participant described it this way:

It's about allowing people to have those conversations, to realise their own potential then know they did it by themselves. I watched as groups developed and grew – how quickly it went from being a conversation to a constituted group.

Totally Socially is ambitious. This isn't small scale. Projects range from bus shelter get-togethers to turning a local pub into a 'home from home' for young people with learning disabilities. New opportunities open up every day and both participants and the team are regularly surprised by what is being achieved, day-to-day, and how inspiring it has become to see communities doing things for themselves.

We are always engaging and new things keep coming on board, we don't expect it, it just happens.

Part Three: What difference did Totally Socially make?

The Mid-Term Review identified four key outcomes for individuals supported by Totally Socially:

- Less isolated, more connected
- Improvements to people's health and well-being
- Learning new skills
- Confidence and motivation

Here these areas are explored in more detail: getting underneath the 'what it takes' to support people to 'do it for themselves' and also 'what are the things that **empower or disempower real community engagement?**'

3.1 Achieving outcomes

Taking the outcomes below as a framework, the Totally Socially programme has engaged thousands of people across the Coast and Vale area of North Yorkshire. There is real synergy between what The National Lottery Community Fund is trying to do, and support for people in communities, and how the programme has succeeded. And for Totally Socially in particular, there is something explicit about the power of working towards outcomes that people *themselves* have identified.

The Lottery has enabled a freedom of approach – it would not have worked otherwise.

The outcomes and indicators set and achieved for the programme are shown below and represent the figures at the time of writing the report – December 2019 – with project end due in March 2020:

Outcomes

1. Local residents will be more involved in the life of their community, more active and better able to work collectively to solve their problems, due to increased knowledge and confidence.
2. Residents will have improved transferable skills/confidence to develop community-owned solutions to locally identified needs, giving them/their communities better chances in life.
3. Local residents will be less isolated through having improved access to services and facilities specifically designed and delivered within the community to meet their needs.

Indicator set (March 2017)	Indicator achieved (Dec 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local people are actively attending networking opportunities in their local communities – 120 per year Locally people will be better connected with more opportunities to informally and formally network and develop ideas – 36 opportunities provided in years one, two and three 	129 opportunities provided with 6,171 attending over the three years
Local people are developing community-owned solutions – 15 new groups/projects year one; 20 in years two and three	67 new groups and projects have been developed
Project participants undertake training and skills development – 120 per year	205 opportunities have been taken up
Local residents reached by the project and other beneficiaries will report increased involvement in the life of their community and an increase in the number and range of community-led activities for the benefit of the community – 60% at end of project	End of year two – 97%
Stakeholders report an increase in the number and range of community-led activities for the benefit of the community – 60% by the end of the project	End of year two – 84%

Of note is Totally Socially's Facebook presence that is highly active. There has been a weekly reach of 2000+ with 200+ interactions a week. Interest depends on what is on the page and at the moment it mostly relies on who is tagged in posts (relevant parties) and then who shares them. This element has been the result of well-connected Locality Workers who are prolific on Facebook, and it may be analysed more closely in the future to get a better picture of some of the trends and what the hot topics are. In terms of issues and projects, to date the most popular are Community Fridges, Beach Sweeps and, more recently, Stainsacre socials.

From the data shared above it must also be noted that the figures take no account of the '**ripple effect**' that often came up in conversations with participants. Projects and ideas don't stop because the team isn't there, so it isn't possible for everything that has happened or is happening to be captured.

At the evaluation workshop in October 2019, participants were asked about their project achievements and how they reflected each of the outcomes (see page 6). The overarching message (in their words) was that Totally Socially provides a people-focused approach; it has the ability to share skills, make connections and achieve far-reaching pathways!

It's [the support] got me further than I ever imagined.

Every time I have asked, they have been able to deliver it.

(See Appendix Three for a summary of the workshop discussions.)

The sheer quantity of things that are happening as a result of the connections between people is significant, and **outcomes are not pre-determined**. This takes the pressure off. Lots of people talked about how they just wanted to get something going, often something they had been thinking about for a while but didn't know where or how to start. The Totally Socially approach has enabled

them to do that *without* having to fit into specific criteria. This freedom has led to a more accommodating and fluid approach where the scope is wider, it allows for the **unexpected** and embraces new possibilities – **it isn't set**, so gives people time to grow their ambitions in an organic way.

They are voices of that community. Listen and trust them and it will happen.

3.2 Engaging people in the first place

A significant feature of the Totally Socially approach is its informality. The Locality Workers are 'around' with an offer of floating support. Participants talked about knowing about them through someone else or because they were actively looking to volunteer so were using channels like Facebook, community noticeboards or the local paper. But the support is also very practical, involved and hands-on at the same time – a balance is struck, helping people where they need it and standing back when they don't. What people talk about most is the **encouragement** they get from the Locality Workers.

It makes you believe you can do it

What also came up was why people sometimes *don't* engage with things. Why does support fail to help people move on or recognise what they are capable of? This is often how more traditional support is delivered – assuming rather than asking that is wanted (the help), and if it is, deciding or taking a lead on what that support looks like. This is different to Totally Socially. They recognise the need to **start at the grass roots** – in particular with services or funding designed to influence or create change in some way. The Totally Socially 'way' is universal and unlabelled; it provides an open door with minimal criteria and no hoops to jump through – **everyone can take part**.

It's unrestricted – it doesn't have to follow any rules

There were several points made about the constraints public authorities are under and the importance of enabling people in communities to take risks. Totally Socially supports ideas in a way that could be challenging for statutory agencies to manage, but both endeavours have a grounding in the community, so a new era of each playing to their **cross-sector** strengths has promise, especially in building future capacity around community-led support.

An example of community engagement on a larger scale is a recent evening get-together for 'Totally Socially people' in Whitby, deemed a great success by those who attended. Organised to connect people and their ideas – one participant revealed how they almost didn't go, but at the last minute dropped in and made several great local connections and some leads on how to attract small business funding. There is a wide recognition of the effort that goes into building such networks, and it is highly valued by participants – almost all said this was what had helped most, and got things started. Another spoke about how their new enterprise for health and well-being had benefited from a broad spectrum of support and that it isn't limited to charities but takes a wider view of **helping people who are setting out on a path to make good things happen locally**, while also recognising that some of these ideas and projects will support the local economy too.

It left me feeling more open to that sort of thing, instead of thinking you have to protect your corner – maybe there are enough corners for everyone.

3.3 The big issues

Totally Socially has inadvertently helped communities themselves to tackle some of the 'big issues'. The findings outlined in this report have come from talking to people about their experiences, as opposed to analysing data from a specific evaluation measure. **Reducing social isolation** has been the main outcome.

Alongside feeling less isolated, people's **mental health** improved through making these new connections, and it was prominent too how social isolation and poor mental health were referred to interchangeably, with one often leading to the other.

I feel like I have a purpose again.

It's normalising and inclusive, I was treated with value.

It remains clear that Totally Socially works best when **there is no fixed agenda, starting with** what people want and evolving from there.

Learning new things came in lots of different forms – and usually not in a formal way. Totally Socially 'walking with' people helped them to discover ways to do things, together. The question 'what did you learn?' was a real moment of reflection for participants and it provoked lots of discussion. The things people talked about most were how to set up a group with a constitution, apply for funding, approach businesses, lead and manage people and develop interpersonal skills. Formal learning included Food Hygiene & Safety certificates for those volunteering in the Community Fridges.²

Taking control requires confidence and it was clear that people develop this through the projects. More personal changes for participants, as described here, have come about because of support given to the initial small steps, gradually building confidence, that in turn build motivation. That first step is crucial and has been described as 'stepping over a line' – for some that had previously felt more like a brick wall. They are offered gentle steps and gentle guidance – at their own pace, with people leading when they are ready. The timing of this is absolutely critical and the workers show real skill in knowing how to support, without taking over.

The talking is different here – the barriers are down.

3.4 The ripple effect

It is much much harder to engage in something if you feel disconnected. So, while Totally Socially has been instrumental in making that difference – it is the people they have connected with that have made this happen – it's been like a chain reaction or ripple effect.

People helping people is the clearest way to explain how this happens.

A small crystal of an idea – the ripple effect, should be replicated – it's like social glue.

The Totally Socially team are surprised by what things can lead to and admit they don't know the half of it! What often starts out as a bit of help to get things going

²<https://www.hubbub.org.uk/the-community-fridge>

– for example booking a meeting space, providing refreshments or supporting publicity – goes on and develops simply because people were connected in the first place. One participant talked about how this coming together has led to support for some older people in their village, who often lead very isolated lives, to the extent that one very frail local resident now has a panic button in their house and feels more supported generally by other community members.

People are able to talk about their problems and get help.

I've met lots of new people. And lots of other people said they bumped into people not seen for years. But all in the same village.

Participants talked about some core things they had taken away from their experience and used in other contexts – how to build relationships, creating community champions, meeting people in a safe environment, building trust – and they described the positive influence that ripples out.

The difference it's made. It's been massive. I would not have got such a good understanding of the local community; it has drawn others into my project and we now have a steering group.

Funding helps. Considerable support provided to individuals and groups has been to help them access a variety of pots of funding. What is key about this, however, is that it hasn't been done *for* but *with*, and in most cases, it was about 'showing' but not 'doing'. Participants feel more able to apply for funding independently as a result. The programme itself has been able to provide small amounts of funding too – mostly to get something up and running – perhaps refreshments, a meeting venue and/or providing support to get people there. It's quite remarkable too, that these actions have made quite a difference – it's been one of the things that has demonstrated belief in the ideas.

They funded a meeting room and some lunch, so I knew it was worth a try!

Part Four: Totally Socially people – stories of change

Totally Socially people have something in common. They are all passionate about community.

As part of this evaluation we were interested in understanding **what it takes** for people to gain the confidence to do things for themselves, in particular when life experience means bigger hurdles and challenges have had to be overcome.

Everyone has a story and you could argue too, that everyone also has an idea. During this process it was fortunate to hear many of them, and especially the experiences that led people to where they are today.

Loneliness, tragedy and poor health (mental and physical) all featured – and so did determination, passion and grit.

When life gives you a bad knock, you have to look at the positives and what you can do, not what you can't do, as if you look at the negatives you end up in a bad dark place, whereas I prefer to stay in the positive light place.

It's hard to work out if some of the vast array of projects and ideas would have happened anyway, without the extra support, but what we do know is that there were key ingredients that made a real difference to getting ideas and projects moving, better and more quickly, and it wasn't in the form of more traditional support:

- Working alongside
- Someone to talk to
- At my own pace

Totally Socially works on the principle that everyone is capable and then fills in the gaps. This is the true meaning of 'strengths-based'. The people involved in this study are *all* skilled, and *all* talented – recognising that must be at the centre of what any community development initiative tries to do. People genuinely leading at the front, while support follows, picks up on cues and shapes itself around what is already happening.

People taking part in this study were generous with their time, and we share three of their stories in Appendix Two.

Part Five: What has been learnt?

5.1 Learning from the ideas and projects

Where do the ideas come from? In some cases, the ideas are inherent, in people's minds. They have been sitting there for a long time and Totally Socially draws them out of people – the things they have always wanted to do but never felt brave enough or simply didn't know where to start. People thought they couldn't – until they found they could!

Life changes have a powerful effect – and Totally Socially has been described as a way to channel all sort of emotions. The sorts of triggers people described were relationship break-ups, long illness, family trauma, moving to a new area, overcoming personal battles – and sometimes it was simply that Totally Socially provided the nudge, and that was all it took.

People learnt as their projects took shape. Whether it was when setting up a group or a charity, an event or longer-term projects like redeveloping a building, what often started as a back of a postage stamp idea led to all types of learning, most of it unexpected. Participants learned how to approach businesses and get them on board, to manage a community budget. Other skills were highlighted like working openly and transparently, and being diplomatic. Even learning how to evaluate events and then adapt them from the feedback.

Because of the support, when we went to the Council, we were fully prepared.

For those 'taking part' a great deal has happened. People recounted going from quite a prescribed life, of having an idea of something they wanted to change not feeling confident enough to take action by themselves. This approach has shown people how they themselves can **be an instigator** – and Totally Socially has had a role in almost relieving them of that pressure, by supporting them to get on and do it, often with the mantra, *what's the worst that can happen?* It's like permission is needed and then given.

It's been massive to people and is about switching mindset.

Some people drop away – the membership of a group changes – but of the five returned to, all had kept going in some shape or form. The focus may have shifted, the people moved on, and in some cases, activity had reached a temporary halt; however, all were looking for ways to continue and revive their ideas – it had been like opening a door.

Is the Totally Socially team spread too thinly? There were suggestions that this is felt by some groups – with the workers being pulled in different directions – and that it could be great to see a joint focus on one thing to get it off the ground instead of (or even as well as) being stretched across the area and being involved in all kinds of different projects.

The work they do is not set up around health – but they are there making an impact – if done well it has potential to improve quality of life.

5.2 Learning to take away from the Totally Socially 'style'

Things can happen quickly. There's no panel or form, outcomes aren't rigidly set, and the cost to set something up is small. It's surprising what can happen – and most people are very surprised at what does!

People only need a little bit of something.

There are a range of **values and behaviours** that come from **helping people to do it for themselves**. Most obvious is workers standing back and away from the action unless they are responding to cues that they are needed. Sometimes it's a direct question or ask, but most often it's an **awareness** that comes only from **listening to people**. What's imperative is the **not taking over**.

We have to be invited in, it's their idea.

Empowerment runs through everything like a golden thread. Helping people to feel confident and instilling that belief that *it is possible* and *you can*. Workers talk about **noticing** what is happening and having a well developed radar – they are aware of people.

When it comes to **spreading the word**, the majority of participants valued media such as the local paper and radio, and publicity to find out about what's going on locally, such as posters and flyers, but the most used method for linking and involving people is Facebook; this is how the majority of people found out about ideas and also how they initially engaged. Social media works well as a way of connecting people. And, while it's not the only way, it is definitely central to the approach. Word of mouth is valued too – but again it isn't the only way and shouldn't be relied upon – a good mix of methods, agreed at by asking people from a range of contexts what has worked best for them, seems ideal.

Starting somewhere and starting small. Participants appreciated the workers **being present**, near them, in local places and at public events, with the sole intention of helping people to have a conversation. This works.

They actively and positively put themselves out there.

There are fundamental aspects too – be positive, be kind; support isn't reaching out to *them*, rather it's putting *them* in a position where they are or can be reaching out to you. Participants valued the fact that Totally Socially never criticises or downplays someone's idea.

There was progress, not just a conversation but a route map to people and money.

Universal approaches work. Environmental issues bring people together, everyone can join in. For example, reducing food waste and the developing community fridge network in North Yorkshire. The progress is quite outstanding and, while not a panacea for all society's ills, there have been some surprising results. People have been helped in ways they could not have imagined. The volunteering aspect and the connection to others this brings has led to some important life changes for people. It has provided a safe place and help that was

needed but which people didn't know how or where to access. For some it has been quite transformational, helping them feel like they belong to something.

Expect the unexpected. Totally Socially workers described how this had become part of their daily working lives: new ideas, new progress and surprising developments, achieved often through participants' own new-found confidence, and especially their passion.

A university lecturer commented on how Totally Socially had resonated with their delivery of a Public Health Degree, in particular their 'promoting healthy communities' module. It is a good fit and for the local students – having and knowing what is there, right on their doorstep, has been revelatory. The team has contributed to the course content and it will lead to future collaboration, not just for Totally Socially but also through looking at different types of leadership model, with CaVCA being a local example of a social enterprise.

It is their asset-based approach and for Public Health with our move away from a needs-based language it is the most striking thing of it all. Seeing it in action through Totally Socially.

5.3 Learning for the 'bigger picture'

What has been particularly evident throughout the programme is the true value of **relationships and trust** at a community level, and what this way of doing things changes for *people* and *services*. Based on the evidence emerging from Totally Socially alone, we can see how this idea of letting go of control brings out capabilities in people not yet understood, by them or others. And there is much more. Connections have been made with the Human Learning Systems³ work being led by [Collaborate](#) and the [University of Northumbria](#) that acknowledges that the world is complex (people, issues and systems) and this means recognising the variety of human need and experience, building empathy between people and deliberately working in a way that builds trust. This has been an important discovery for CaVCA, joining up their *thinking and doing* with a wider movement of activity that they are now a part of and can learn with and from.

A learning approach is key. Totally Socially shows how a continuous process of learning and adaptation can challenge the more narrow forms of accountability, and with everyone working as part of one *system* rather than separating out communities and funders, there is much greater potential. So, collaborating more effectively (and naturally) leads to better outcomes without them being dictated.

The **positivity around failure** in Totally Socially is important. Participants consistently reported how much this had helped them to get started and carry on (and incidentally how rarely things do actually fail). We see this too in examples such as the commissioning of services – with an over-emphasis on outcomes, indicators and targets.

The strengths of Totally Socially lie in their no strings attached approach – there is no hidden agenda and people are getting involved.

³ <https://collaboratecic.com/exploring-the-new-world-practical-insights-for-funding-commissioning-and-managing-in-complexity-20a0c53b89aa>

One Director from an NHS trust explained how hard they had been working to engage with the rest of the world on the NHS [long-term plan](#), and how lots of work had been done around understanding the principles and values of working with communities to make sure that there is needs-based individualised care that is relevant to local 'places'. What they are learning is that making connections in communities, in the form of *introductions* especially, is what works – *referrals* less so – going on to say that it is *active joining up* and putting people in touch directly that supports people most and reduces use of stretched services.

We need to know what's out there and seize the opportunity, get more people trained in mental health first aid.

What else does Totally Socially fit with? In the Mid-Term Review the potential connections between Totally Socially and social prescribing were obvious. The local knowledge, the impact on people's health and well-being, the understanding of communities – all came together. Are there other opportunities? The NHS has realised it can't continue in isolation. An NHS Director commented on Totally Socially:

It's early days but some knitting together is needed. There are not enough inroads for us (NHS) into communities.

Some strong statements were made about health provision and the Totally Socially 'style'. It **provides space without the complexity of targets**. An ex-public sector worker reflected on their experience of counting (assessments of care):

People are frightened to death of failing – it's how we performance manage.

The worker went on to ask: what about the value of relationships? It's easy to count, less so to produce the actual goods.

There needs to be a clear intention on positive connections.

The style of Totally Socially support and its unbounded reach has potential to work alongside other agencies, in particular the statutory sector who themselves recognise they can be 'held back' at times. Partners such as councils, infrastructure organisations, and housing providers in both the statutory and voluntary sector, all hold high **the value of resident-led initiatives, with the community in the driving seat**. As has been suggested by some participants – on some of the 'big issues' for the town and local area, *is there potential to scale up the support that is offered to communities together?*

There's room for both – and sharing the learning – it works.

Let's come together and avoid duplication – but value each other.

Part Six: Reflecting on the three years – from the team

It has shaped who I am and shown me you can work with people in a positive way. Most people are happy to see you even if they are complaining!

Are we making a difference? Discovering a way of working that doesn't place the outcomes centre stage is integral to the Totally Socially approach. Not because they *don't* matter – but because they *do*. Looking back, the team has reflected on how things were at the beginning of this process, when they first started out:

We were working quite traditionally in a more structured way.

At some point along the way, Totally Socially stopped *making* things happen and realised things were starting to happen more by accident, in a more organic way. This shifted things – they started to achieve more through **truly hearing** what people are saying. And not trying to skew things to fit but working with their truth made it easier.

Starting with the people and listening to them – makes it easier.

Be an instigator! On the numerous occasions the team have experienced people's ideas, the barrier to doing something about it has often been around the question of whose responsibility it is to come up with the answer. Totally Socially has played a key role in relieving people of that burden, with a style of approach that encourages people to 'just do it, what's the worst that can happen?'. Is this a form of permission?

Looking for people complaining – not realising they have the answer – shooting the breeze with that person.

'Noticing' – we have a well-developed radar – aware of people.

The biggest achievements as reflected by the team:

- **Bringing people together** – in informal and productive ways
- **The network of fridges** – developing a network up and down the area and the unexpected outcomes
- **Creating leaders for the future** – newly confident people who will carry on making a difference in communities
- **A focus on waste – plastic and food** – a theme running through Totally Socially, it has united people
- **Music** – for everyone, making it accessible and exceeding expectations of what is possible
- **Helping people feel good** – simply that, not to be under-estimated!

People are starting to understand Totally Socially, and the team are *invited* in. The team are unanimous in that they get better results *this way*. People in communities are feeling better and there's a sense of real pride in their achievements.

I come from a statutory background and had to retrain my brain to do this job.

The learning is subtle and it's been the informal delivery of it that has worked best. It might not be visible in more formal ways but it can be seen in people's health. These changes are significant and the workers have observed people on their journeys, becoming gradually brighter in themselves, talking to other people more, inviting people into their homes.

Every person I have worked with their confidence has grown.

It's the right thing. Looking out for opportunities to solve our own problems with people in communities in the lead. Totally Socially has arrived and it is becoming more rooted in the local area. However, the team is starting to see groups trying to do some of the same things but not working together, and starting to think about some quite meaty issues – so there is a sense of having done the legwork, had the conversations and met fantastic people, so now being ready to bring people together into a wider network. This next phase is about learning from the *people doing it* (in communities).

Our work fits with some of the big issues like isolation, there is a connectedness.

The overwhelming message from the team's experience of the last (almost) three years is that things have **just got going**. It's taken time to get up and running and there's more to do.

We know what we are doing now.

Now Totally Socially is fully formed there's more to develop, more people to meet and more lives to change. Team confidence is high, and the brand is well known – this is a people-led approach in action.

Totally Socially is a gamechanger for CaVCA and communities.

Part Seven: What next?

Last time we asked: what have we learnt and how are we learning about what it takes to work in this way, alongside people in communities? How can this approach be tried out or tested by other organisations and agencies – even sectors? This evaluation has been able to respond to some of those questions, and the next phase will involve some strategic thinking around the opportunities that lie ahead, and future direction, with a range of partners (existing and potential) and participants. More of the same? Definitely. But what else? How is CaVCA and Totally Socially – one and the same – communicating what it does? The learning of the last three years, and CaVCA's overall experience of working with communities, is a power for social good – distributing that must be central to the next phase of the programme.

Partnerships and collaboration: What are the opportunities for the programme to partner up more? And perhaps to tackle some bigger issues in the local area. Homelessness and Health were both suggested as areas where collective efforts could be worthwhile and where more capacity could be created.

What more could be achieved by working together [agencies]?

There may be benefit in joining up Totally Socially's more flexible support with that of statutory partners. It has become more 'embedded' (over the three years), and while some work has been complementary (health and well-being hubs, social isolation projects), there are areas that still remain distinctly separate (local regeneration, targeted support for immigrant communities and tackling poverty), and the opportunity to link together for the bigger local picture has potential for creating a more *healthy system*.

What are the ways we can use the great resource we have – getting around the table – taking a more strategic look together, in areas such as school readiness? And developing the Stronger Communities agenda – we are all on the same page.

Totally Socially aligns well with a Human Learning Systems approach (aforementioned). It holds those same values and beliefs, and it experiences the difference it makes to work, responding to people's strengths and devolving power and decision-making. What are the opportunities then to make more explicit connections to local health and well-being priorities? At the time of writing this report, CaVCA has started to deliver a social prescribing contract in Whitby, building on their wide experience, including that of Totally Socially. Is there a possible role here in supporting link workers across the area through the extensive and developing networks and connections? Whatever unfolds for the future of the programme, the learning must be directed where it best fits. Social prescribing in Whitby has already benefited from this incredibly well-networked local programme – what are the other untapped benefits out there?

A voice and advocacy role. Totally Socially has a track record in helping people to find their voice. Encouragement and support is the brand – what are the opportunities in this space to hear quieter voices? This highly skilled team of 'empowerers' may well have a role in supporting people in communities who are

less heard and often (despite best efforts) still aren't, not in the meaningful way that is being sought and is needed.

It's a new way of thinking for me, I always want to offer advice and have something to say – it's also good to listen, that's what I have learnt, that I don't always have to know the answer. This is empowerment.

Asset-based approaches: The considerable impact the programme has had on people's **confidence and motivation** should be grabbed hold of – if asset-based is how neighbourhood approaches are going to look for the future, recognising the value of this programme will be essential. For example, working with churches as a community asset has been enlightening and it has made lots of sense to do so. Their experience of fundraising, and the available space and time of those involved, is considerable. A careful approach is required to maintain inclusivity, but an assessment of the resource and where it complements other work could be worthwhile.

Facilitating connections has been a major strength of the programme and Community Fridges are a good example of this. Some of the best support has been peer-led and is where Malton has taken a lead in supporting other fridges. From Hunmanby to Filey, Pickering to Scarborough – this knowledge is shared *without* Totally Socially and is now its own network.

Meeting needs beyond food waste – it's meeting human needs.

New initiatives have been supported in surprising ways, including financial, through bringing interested parties together and inspiring people to get involved and volunteer. Good things are happening and communities have reacted in unexpectedly positive ways.

I am working the hardest I ever have, it's an absolute pleasure.

Supporting volunteering has been a consistent feature throughout. It has led to some big changes. In the Community Fridges, for example, this inclusive and safe environment enabled people of all ages to get the support they needed or didn't know was available, and from **an unexpected place**. It has given people the confidence to move on and away from difficult situations, to feel like they are worth something and to connect – for example people in villages who have stayed in their home until now, mostly cut off and often with deteriorating health as a result.

In our community people are choosing between food and heating. They appear well off but are on a state pension and are making difficult choices.

Training volunteers has led to some great results, not just the more formal qualifications like Food Safety but building knowledge around setting up groups and all that involves, including managing accounts, people, processes, IT skills and other volunteers.

Totally Socially has created confidence and a *buzz*, especially for the many people who had not yet realised their own potential or valued themselves as individuals. It's exciting to think about the next phase – whatever its shape, whatever it is called – and most crucially how what has been learnt can continue to make a difference in communities.

Final note:

This report has been written about the last three years. 'Interviewees' have been asked to reflect *and* to look forward; some have been on the journey the whole period, and others have just joined in. While there is uncertainty about future funding for Totally Socially, for the participants and the Totally Socially team it is 'business as usual'. This summary of findings hasn't designed a new future for Totally Socially – it has reflected and questioned, made suggestions and drawn some conclusions – with all content provided by participants, observers and staff themselves.

Appendix One: Evaluation questions

Questions for individuals and community groups

a) First time round:

Understanding the context (how the story starts)

1. How did you come to know about Totally Socially?
2. Describe the idea or community challenge you became involved in (and why you did). How is it going so far?

Working with Totally Socially and help for 'the idea'

3. What help has been offered and what difference has this made up to now?
4. What have you learnt along the way (e.g. learnt new skills, gained new knowledge)?

Networks and connections

5. Who have you met/joined up with as a result of being involved?
 - How has this helped/supported you or your organisation?
 - The project/challenge?

Change

6. What has the Totally Socially experience changed for you or your organisation?
 - What is different now? (community life, being active, playing a part, making a difference, etc.)
 - Is this what you expected? (if not – explain)
 - Any surprises?
 - Anything you do now that you didn't before?

(Need to draw out community involvement aspects)

What's next?

7. What's next for you/the project? (future plans and making it stick) and what support do you need from here?

Your reflections.

b) Second time round:

This time we are focusing on four areas that stood out from what people said (explain rationale):

- Less isolated, more connected
- Improvements to people's health and well-being
- Learning new skills
- Confidence and motivation

By coming back to you we are going a bit deeper into what it takes to create the conditions for real community engagement in the first place, especially what empowers/disempowers people to take action.

1. Where are you now?

Since last time, current focus and priorities and how Totally Socially are involved

2. From your experience – how does your project or idea support the four areas (in turn) – ideally specific examples/stories of how that has happened

Prompt with what is meant by each from the Mid-Term Review

- 3. (Again drawing on your experience) What are the things that support change to happen in communities? What doesn't (or goes against)? And how does the Totally Socially approach fit with that?**
- 4. Turning ideas into action – the following five areas stood out from all those we have spoken to so far**
- Relationships
 - Starting where people are
 - Supporting adaptation
 - Spreading the word and sharing ideas
 - Practical support

What are the signs (for you) that show things are starting to happen? Take shape? Move on?

- 5. What are the more 'human' elements of the support and what do they mean to you? Why?**
- 6. What does it really take for people to do things for themselves?**

Questions for the case studies

We are interested in what it takes for people to gain the confidence to do things for themselves, in particular when life experience means bigger hurdles and challenges have had to be overcome

Questions designed to help someone to tell their story, not necessarily asking all

1. Describe the project or ideas you are now involved in. How is it going?
2. Stepping back from that – what were the events that led up to that point?
3. What help has been offered to date (e.g. activities) and what difference has this made up to now?
4. What has got in the way of things being better before, and how is this any different? (overcoming barriers)
5. What have you learnt along the way? (new skills/confidence)

6. Have you met/joined up with others as a result of being involved? (support networks)
7. What's next for you? (longer-term change)
8. What support could Totally Socially offer that it doesn't now?

Questions for the Totally Socially team

1. How is it going?
2. Thinking about what you set out to achieve, what has been Totally Socially's greatest success (overall and for you personally)?
3. In the Mid-Term Review we drew out four main themes:
 - Less isolated, more connected
 - Improvements to people's health and well-being
 - Learning new skills
 - Confidence and motivation

How has each one developed/played out in your view?

4. What's on your mind/how are you feeling about the future of Totally Socially?
5. What would you do differently if you had your time again?

Additional conversations were held with people and professionals on the periphery of Totally Socially with an interest in knowing more. All conversations had one question in common: 'How did you first come to know about Totally Socially?'

Appendix Two: case studies

What does it take for people to gain the confidence to do things for themselves, in particular when life experience means bigger hurdles and challenges have had to be overcome?

Case Study 1:

Moving somewhere new can feel isolating, especially when you don't feel very confident. It was tough trying to meet people but I knew I needed something for me and I realised I'd never had that, what with caring for children, marrying young and having a job. When we came here, I was shocked to find myself in this position – in a new area where I knew no one, no family nearby and a husband that worked nights, I thought what have I done? I literally had no idea where to start. I thought I'd be living the dream but it wasn't like that at all and I wanted to go home, I missed my grandchildren.

It was while reading the Whitby Gazette that I came across them. There was an ad for the Sheds. I was familiar with the idea as my cousin had been involved with one in Manchester, and I knew it had done so much good for people. There was a meeting about a women's shed and I knew it was what I was looking for.

I went on the bus and even then, on the journey there, I was in two minds. I walked into the room and was standing there, at a bit of a loss, when she [Totally Socially Locality worker] slowly wandered over and started talking to me, just gently asking me questions about gardening, etc. It had been very difficult for me to go into that room – but the idea, it really drew out what I was looking for, without me really knowing it. And then the meeting started ...

Since then I have hardly looked back. It's been life changing. I now make decisions where before I had always worried about confrontation and let other people lead. Now I use my voice differently and I would be comfortable saying 'no I don't think that's right'; I am involved with things I knew nothing about like getting a constitution in place, setting up an organisation and dealing with people, in all sorts of ways. And every bit of support that can be given, Totally Socially gives it. And it's not just the practical help with the projects, they keep an eye on you (the whole team) and whatever the problems are that arise they help you solve them – all the time making sure you keep control and make your own decisions.

Now there are more sheds and we are guiding them, and I find myself being very conscious of others that might be in a similar situation to the one I was in – a mother or grandmother in whichever group I am with (there are several!) and if people come along for the first time – I look for those who might be a bit lost, the gratification of seeing someone else progress and get their confidence back like I did, is so worthwhile – it's empowering.

There's been lots of learning along the way. My latest is getting to grips with how to use social media to support the projects and Totally Socially have helped me

do that. The commitment of others and how willing they are to give up their time is enormous (I get overwhelmed by it). Totally Socially shows us things in our own community that we wouldn't have known were there, a lot of people need that and it takes surprisingly little money to get something going, people value things more when they achieve things with so little.

From there to here – everyone knows about the Sheds and the Beach Sweep. They've had a huge impact on this community (and me) and we are joined together by our passion to make the area plastic-free and by helping each other not to be lonely like I was. I used to go out and I would never speak to anyone, now I am the one that actually makes the conversation. Totally Socially have been with me (and us) all the way. We need more of them, in spite of all they do they are spread very thinly – there is still more to do, more ideas, projects and challenges ahead. The difference is I am stronger now, imagine what can happen!

Case study 2:

I had been poorly for a while and was pretty much housebound. As I gradually got my strength back, I started to feel able to get out a bit, I wanted to meet people but didn't really know where to start and then I saw a message on Facebook – a litter project asking for volunteers. I had seen the posters up around the town so I made contact, it's so easy to make connections using Facebook. We set up a meeting, just the two of us in a coffee shop I knew. She was lovely to talk to – we even got onto how isolating it can feel living somewhere where you don't know anyone, and how it'd be nice to set up a group because there was nothing to join (or so we thought). Other people had said the same thing so she went ahead and put up a message asking for any interest in setting something up for people who wanted to meet others. It was very informal. Branching Out started with a few of us doing homemade crafts and decorating the local church Christmas tree (an annual activity for community groups to promote what they do), to now where we meet every Thursday – thanks to the Funeral Coop parlour.

From here things got even busier. I got support from our Totally Socially Locality Worker and ended up organising a meeting to set up the community fridge in the local pub. She gave me the confidence to do that by starting it off (and jumping in when I got stuck) and it was that support that really helped me believe in myself, especially when I was doubting I could do it. From then to now we have been supported to find out more about other groups in the area and also with all the funding and forms and speaking to the council. I still litter pick – it gets me out and I need that. Now that I am so empowered to make stuff happen, life has become focused.

Something scary has blossomed into something good, this fulfilment is beyond my wildest dreams – it's priceless – now I am doing something so worthwhile, it's what gets me out of bed in the morning.

Today the group is getting stronger and stronger. I now have some very good friends and we all support each other. I still have my down days and I suffer from anxiety too but what's different is I feel so supported. I was encouraged to stand for the Council – that was a moment for me – I wouldn't have believed I could ever do anything like that. I don't look back, there are new ideas all the time, and they [Totally Socially] start you off and let you go – then you do it all!

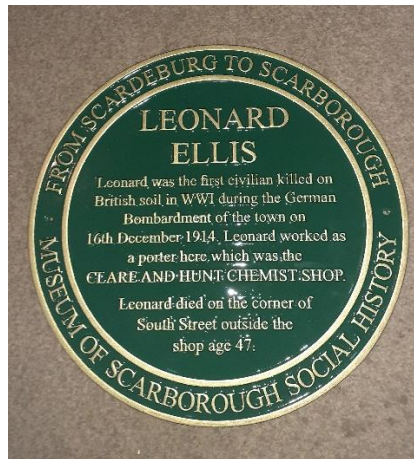
Case study 3:

From Scardeburg to Scarborough is the name of a new social history museum in Scarborough initially set up in 2018, from an idea sparked off by a small collection of old bottles and other treasures that I had collected when digging trenches on local building sites – to give recognition to normal everyday folk who often get overlooked for their contribution to local history and community life.

After a series of tragic events including a motorbike accident in 2009 and then a leg amputation four years later, as well as a close family bereavement, I had two choices. I could either find a way to carry on with life, dealing with a new disability, or give up and let the problems take over. I chose the first and used the time I had recovering to read up on local history and think about setting up a museum and memorial to the people of Scarborough, and in particular celebrating the lives of the 18 victims of the 1914 Bombardment. I haven't looked back since.

Getting the project off the ground started to become a reality when, through being on a resident evaluation panel, I was connected to Totally Socially and told I might be able to get some support to move the idea in the right direction. I took my bag of objects and the museum idea to a meeting there and instead of being knocked back (as had happened a few times up to this point) I actually started to feel like something might actually happen. As well as being put in touch with others who could help – at the Council and the town's market, I was positively encouraged. Whilst it's true to say I probably could have managed it on my own, this way was better, quicker and meant I had people alongside me that I could go to at any time, for support to get things off the ground.

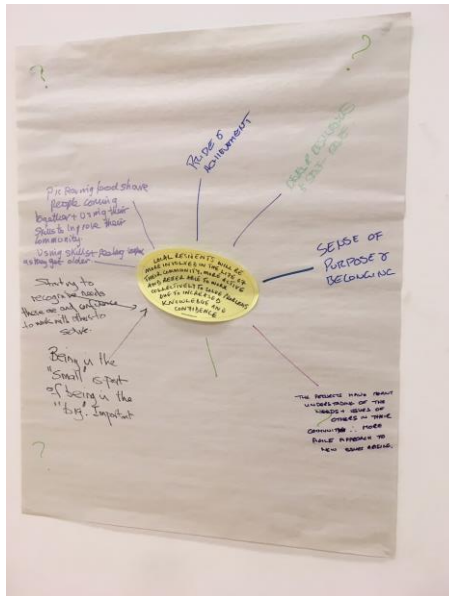
In the end it was a combination of support that got things off the ground. The Council led me to the Market Leader where I was eventually successful in getting a space in the Market Vaults and Totally Socially helped with local publicity (including flyers, a local talk at The Street and social media), so it was like lots of cogs in a wheel all fitting together. I had been really surprised that with all the empty spaces in town how restricted things were, and I soon found out that getting funding is a lot harder than I thought too. However, with determination and my new connections I was able to take advantage of opportunities like a Meet the Funders event and through that was able to access support from the Lottery. As a result of the guidance I've had, today I am focusing on using all of this new learning to demonstrate the museum's track record of engaging with local people. Having now successfully set up a committee (thanks to market traders) we can take steps together to building this local attraction into something really special for the town.



Success has been surprising. The museum's Facebook page got over 400 likes in the first year and already I have branched out into two premises creating an additional exhibition room with space for groups of local school children to visit. And, this month also sees the unveiling of the first social history plaque. My ambition next is to develop a social history trail for residents and visitors alike as well as more plaques and a statue that recognises key people over the years and inspires more people to come to the museum.

I am much more connected now and have discovered other people in the town also interested in commemorating the lives and achievements of local people. I don't look at what I can't do anymore – I look at what I can do. It's all about mindset. When life deals you a bad hand you have choices – it's determination and passion that gets you there. There's a fantastic community spirit in Scarborough that isn't really recognised and it should be embraced.

Appendix Three: Workshop findings

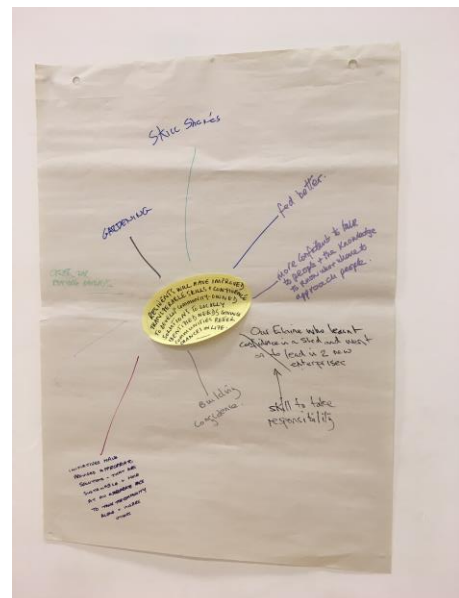


Outcome one

- Pickering Foodshare – people coming together and using their skills to improve their community (using skills and feeling useful as they get older)
- Start to recognise community needs and work with others to solve
- Being in the 'small' is part of 'being in the big' – important
- Pride and achievement
- Develop resilience and self-belief
- Sense of purpose and belonging
- The projects have meant a better understanding of the needs of others so now a more agile approach to new issues arising

Outcome two

- Gardening
- Create far reaching pathways
- Skills share
- Fed better
- More confident to talk to people and the knowledge to know who and where to approach people
- Our friend who learnt confidence in a shed and went on to lead two new enterprises
- Skills to take responsibility
- Building confidence
- Initiatives have provided appropriate solutions that are sustainable and move at the right pace for the community



Outcome three

- Enables people to do things for themselves not just about what they are entitled to
- Getting to know more about what is going on and those doing it – supporting new things
- Why don't people know about social prescribing?
- True understand of needs other than what is perceived through data
- Volunteers for the Hunmanby Fridge have become less isolated
- Isolation of people with poor mental health or a disability to be able to be more a part of their community and to feel wanted and useful
- Support with identifying networks that enables the right people to come together
- Involved in a worthwhile project that enhances life
- New friends
- Be able to be part of something at your own pace
- A sense of belonging

