

<b>Report title</b>	Working Assets 2011 Evaluation Report
<b>Date</b>	June 2012
<b>Author</b>	Rebecca Haslam, Tom Johnson, Steve Hillman
<b>Task Group</b>	Test Beds

## 1. Purpose of report

This report summarises how Foyers have embedded the principles of Working Assets since the end of the Foyer Federation seed funding. The Foyer Federation provided a total of £34,000 funding to 14 Foyers in this round, who worked with 160 young people. This works out as £212 per participant. We visited 7 of the 14 projects who took part in this round and this report summarises the feedback from project visits.

## 2. Background

The visits were carried out using a consistent approach, following the same four lines of enquiry for each Foyer. These were: What was the difference to the Foyer and young people?, How has the Foyer embedded working asset approaches?, What was the final impact?, What can the Foyer Federation do to help? and Different skills utilised in operating Working Assets?

The visits were carried out by a combination of Foyer Federation staff made up of Rebecca Haslam, Nicola Kidston, Dave Pendle and Tom Johnson. We met with practitioners and foyer managers to explore the lasting impact on foyer life post-Working Assets.

## 3. Concepts

### Why Working Assets?

“Working Assets” was developed as an enquiry into the capacity of housing associations to engage in the worklessness agenda. It responds to the report “Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England”, written by John Hills in February 2007. The report states that: “By Spring 2006 more than half of those of working age living in social housing were without paid work, twice the national rate. Some of this is unsurprising given the labour market disadvantages of many social tenants, such as lack of qualifications or disability. However, this does not appear to be the only explanation: employment rates of those living in social housing with particular disadvantages or with multiple disadvantages are substantially lower than those of people with similar disadvantages but living in other tenures. (p5)” It then goes on to suggest that there should be closer links between social housing and the employment agenda: “Housing and employment support tend to operate in separate boxes, but often what initially appears as a housing problem may have its roots in problems in the labour market. For some young people, for instance, combined employment and skills support with accommodation of the kind offered by foyers may be more appropriate than routes to a permanent social tenancy” (p9). Working Assets is an attempt to address the challenge of ‘joining up’ housing and employment support in a way that is asset-focused and puts Foyers and their housing associations at the forefront of community development in their areas.

Working Assets develops a more sustainable approach to worklessness by opening talent in young people, engaging young people in their communities and developing advantaged thinking in services. The policy and funding contexts Foyers operate in have shifted since the first round of Working Assets projects, but this model’s relevance to the current climate means that it can support young people and services thrive in challenging times. It is helpful to consider how Working Assets fits into the following developments and how your own Working Assets project can be used as a tool to make the most of them.

A recession has changed the employment landscape for young people. Youth unemployment at the end of 2011 stood at 1.04 million, one young person in every seven<sup>1</sup>. But youth employment was on the rise long before the financial crisis hit, which points to deeper structural conditions placing young people in a more severe position than other age groups<sup>2</sup>.

It is against this background the Coalition Government has developed its strategy to increase the participation of young people in education, training and work, which focuses on localised and targeted support to achieve this<sup>3</sup>. This strategy marks a greater expectation on local organisations to provide more effective, personalised and coordinated services, and a greater emphasis on encouraging employer involvement. Localisation is accelerating. More power will shift from central to local government, altering decision making processes and offering opportunities for civil society organisations to bid for public properties ownership or service delivery<sup>4</sup>.

The Coalition's Work Programme, and the scrutiny of its contracting, has led to a public debate about what good work experience is and how to ensure it. The Programme is mandatory for some JSA and ESA claimant groups and voluntary for others. It is important to note that there are conversations taking place about the Programme's value when it comes to equipping young people with the right skills for the workplace.

Raising the Participation Age commences summer 2013. From then on, all young people will be required to participate in education or training to the end of the academic year in which they turn 17. This will rise to their 18th birthday in 2015. Re-engagement provision, volunteering and internships will have roles to play in this new context of participation.

The Government has also developed 'Positive for Youth', a cross-government approach that sets out a more positive, active and empowering role for young people in society<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, the 2011 summer riots sparked a national conversation about why some young people feel they have no stake in society<sup>6</sup>. Such visions and incidents have forged a new space in which young people and the Voluntary and Community Sector can talk about the positive roles they have to play in their communities - how they can broker the 'deal'.

Volunteering is at the heart of the Government's vision for a Big Society, which is gathering pace. April 2012 saw the launch of the Big Society Bank, which finances organisations tackling social issues by encouraging investments with social return<sup>7</sup>.

All of this is occurring within an overarching context of a deficit reduction programme, in which the welfare system is being reformed and services face increased pressure to deliver more for less. The Government's welfare reforms are introducing a new system which aims to simplify the benefit system and increase work incentives for those who are unemployed or working part-time. Reforms include the introduction of Universal Credit and changes to Housing Benefit, areas very relevant young people transitioning into work.

Voluntary and Community Sector organisations have had to tap into new market opportunities, accessing a more diverse range of funding and becoming more enterprising in their approaches. Over the last few years public policy has paid increasing attention to social value focussed approaches to commissioning, and public service commissioners are now legally required to consider this<sup>8</sup>. Payment By Results (PBR) is a form of commissioning that funds a provider upon the achievement of specified outcomes instead of at the start of a contract. For example, in

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Characteristics of young unemployed people – 2012*, 22 February 2012

<sup>2</sup> Demos, *Youth Labour's Lost*, 2011

<sup>3</sup> HM Government, *Building Engagement, Building Futures*, December 2011

<sup>4</sup> *The Localism Act 2012*

<sup>5</sup> HM Government, *Positive for Youth: a new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19*, December 2011

<sup>6</sup> Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, *After the riots*, March 2012

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.bigsocietycapital.com/>

<sup>8</sup> *Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012*

February 2012 Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg launched a £126m scheme to support young people into work and invited bids for contracts on a PBR basis. The intended consequence is that providers become more accountable and more innovative in their approaches to delivery.

### **The Asset-Based Approach**

The rationale for “Working Assets” stems from the Foyer Federation’s analysis of how too many services for young people are ‘deficit-based’; they are too focused on need and risk, and on enabling service users to cope with and survive their current circumstances, rather than develop thriving and sustainable livelihoods. At the heart of the Foyer approach is the notion of the “contract”, the deal between the young person and the service where the young person ‘exchanges’ developments in their personal and social capital, resilience and employability for a tailor-made, personalised package of services and support. The “Working Assets” approach is an attempt to introduce an asset-based, progressive element to this contract in order to develop the capacity of services, and the capability of young people, to open up employment opportunities.

By working with, and developing, the personal, social and agency skills that young people already possess, the physical, financial and socio-cultural resources that the foyer and its local community possess, and the educational, employment and public opportunities in the community, “Working Assets” sets out to work with the assets that young people and their community have to shape the terms of an individual ‘deal’ that makes the connection between housing and employment, together with education, personal development and individual and community well-being.

## **4. Practice**

The Working Assets programme is divided into three separate ‘phases’: engage, build and recognise. The ‘engage’ phase is where the young people involved in the programme are recruited and devise the project that they wish to work on. The ‘build’ phase is where the majority of the project activity takes place, and the crucial skills-building work of the project is done. Finally, the ‘recognise’ phase involves the delivery of some sort of recognition ‘event’ where the young people involved in the project are able to articulate the development they have undergone. The practice findings from the follow-up visits are presented according to these three phases.

### **Engage**

At the heart of the Working Assets methodology is that the project that is delivered through the programme should be chosen by, and driven by, the young people involved. Staff involved in delivery reported that this sometimes requires a degree of flexibility not present in other programmes where attendance is mandated. Staff reported that letting the young people lead sessions in this way is often ‘scary’ and requires a shift in operational culture. It was found, however, that less effort was required in order for the young people to engage as a consequence.

Key findings from the follow-up sessions include:

- Enabling the young people to select their own project to deliver enhances turn-out and ‘buy-in’ from young people
- You don’t need all the answers at the outset as young people are capable of finding solutions as they go
- Staff need to be able to take a step back, to enable and coach, rather than advise or do

### How Bridge Foyer engaged young people

Young people applied to be part of the ‘Growing a Community’ project, a process which tested out their application and interview skills and helped identify the best roles in the project for each

young person to build their assets. Roles included maintenance, design, PR, community engagement, purchasing, budgeting and research. As well as developing further skills in these areas, the young people were able to benefit from hands on experience of project management, learning to cook with vegetables, recycling, team work and event organisation.

The 15 young people who applied to the project managed to forge links with the Mother's Union, community police, and another local foyer, to be part of the community garden, as well as to get involved in other joint activities with each partner. The young people planned the project timescale, researched and purchased seeds and equipment for the garden, designed the garden look, invited the community groups to help plant the beds with them, and continued to manage and maintain the garden and its community.

Quote from young person: "I love being a main member of the project and doing the garden so it ends up being beautiful and attractive. I will have a lot more confidence in myself when looking for a job and in the future".

### How Chichester Foyer worked alongside young people

During Working Assets they identified the need to develop a volunteer policy and committee. Having access to non-statutory adults meant young people were able to access different examples of success and professional advice such as financial management. Staff had to change attitude to let young people take risks and to be left alone with external adults. They began to take less control over their interactions with the wider community. Informal bonds of trust and respect were built between the adult volunteers and residents as they spent time to achieve a shared goal and learnt from each other's life experiences.

Instead of having fixed sessions, that usually resulted in failure to attend or lateness, they held open workshop sessions on Saturdays. Young People dropped-in to make t-shirts they stayed and paid attention for longer than they normally would. It was felt that this was due to the lack of obligation to attend. A small group of 6 took part and would sometimes get distracted from the work that needed to be done. This was usually because they wanted to spend time with friends who were not officially working on the project. So, instead staff let their friends join in on an ad-hoc basis which maintained involvement. This kind of informality is playing a strong role in creating a more positive culture of engagement in the foyer generally.

As a result of WA the Foyer did not re-commission the skills tutor and no longer provide pre-designed set activities. They feel that there are enough structured offers by school, college and job centre courses. They now run ad-hoc youth led projects in order to inspire residents. The Foyer learnt that youth-led activities improved engagement and now has an attitude to inspire their residents.

### **Build**

Clearly there is an extent to which the particular skills that young people develop as they deliver the project are dependent on the activity they choose to undertake. There is, however, a set of skills that were common to all projects regardless of the activity they undertook. These skills relate closely to those that employers frequently state that young people lack, or have not always had the opportunity to develop through mainstream education.

These skills included:

- Self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of purpose
- Resilience, ability to 'bounce back' from setbacks
- Communication, especially with those outside the young person's usual peer group
- Managing budgets, on a personal and group level
- Problem solving, again on an individual and group level
- Negotiation, of time and resources from volunteers and suppliers
- ICT, in producing and managing budgets, production of marketing materials, use of e-mail and the internet for communication
- Record keeping, in terms of expenditure, minutes of meetings, etc.

- Peer support, mutual coaching and mentoring
- Ability to set and achieve positive and realistic goals

Crucially, involvement in the project also enabled young people to relate recent experiences in their own life to the kinds of skills sought by employers, and to acknowledge and express their assets and strengths in this way. This has led to, as one Foyer put it, ‘a richer conversation about work in general’, one which is more closely rooted in the young person’s own life goals and aspirations.

Staff involved in the project were encouraged to use their own personal network of contacts and resources in order to gain access to the kinds of support that young people would need to deliver their chosen project. This led, in most cases, to an increase in the level of volunteers engaging with the Foyer. In some cases this was another culture change for Foyers as organisations, and is one which has been sustained after the Working Assets programme was completed.

#### How Swindon Foyer built on internal and external assets

Originally young people came up with a craft idea, which utilised an existing local partnership, and incorporated young people’s individual personal interests and specific career goals. For example, one young person wanted to set up an online business to sell skateboards he had designed himself, so linked his own goal into this idea.

Talent spotting and development was a strong characteristic of this Working Assets project. Staff identified talents within young people and utilised the resources and partnerships of the Foyer to develop them. One young person had a talent for cooking Caribbean food. The Manager invited a local chef to visit the Foyer to teach cooking skills. Here the chef noticed the young person’s talent, offered her a job at his local Caribbean restaurant, and is now training her up to take a more leading role in a new restaurant.

Working Assets also had an impact on the housing association’s offer to young people, by creating an environment in which assets can be demonstrated and recognised. A manager from the housing association attended an Open Talent Day event, discussed the possibility of hosting an Administration Apprenticeship at the Head Office, initially explaining that the team were worried about how much of a commitment it would be from Jephson. A young person from the Working Assets project was recruited and as it was a positive experience, the housing association will continue to run this Apprenticeship.

#### How Chichester Foyer built new skills

As a result of Working Assets, Foyer staff felt more confident to advise residents on self-employment and the steps towards setting up their own businesses. Staff gained a better understanding of how to run a small business and social enterprises within the Foyer. Following the toolkit they learnt the realistic steps it takes to achieve goals. Young People gained real examples to talk about when applying for a job. But importantly, both staff and young people learnt how to select the right jobs to apply for by looking at the job requirements first.

Paige is still taking opportunities, such as Christmas Fairs and car boot sales, to sell the remaining t-shirt stock. She works 4 days a week and has recently got herself a horse. She would like to become a police officer. Paige is described as highly motivated. Working Assets gave her the ability to break down her long-term goals into smaller achievable steps. She is looking at the person specification and entry requirements to become a police officer and has gained a greater understanding of how to gain those skills and experiences before making an application. One of her small goals is seeking voluntary experience with the Community Support Officer team to improve her chances of being selected for interview.

Tiffany wanted to set-up her own cleaning business. By taking part in the T-shirt making enterprise she gained a better understanding of investment and that she would need to seek or build up capital to buy cleaning materials before she made any money. Tiffany learnt planning

skills and why she should keep a record of the cleaning work she has done. She still aims to go self-employed but has made this a long-term plan whilst she builds up funds and experience to be successful working alone. Tiffany has actively started cleaning in different locations so she can better understand the range of equipment she would need to buy. Before taking part in Working Assets Tiffany did well at getting interviews but not always attend, she now attends all her appointments due increased confidence.

## Recognise

Recognition events took a number of formats in the Working Assets programmes under discussion in this report. In some cases, they were the culmination of the activity planned by the young people, as in the case of the Bristol Foyer Talent Show event, in others they were planned alongside the activity to showcase the achievements of the young people on the project. In all cases, staff reported that it was essential to let young people take charge of the event, to involve the local community, and to invite as many key local stakeholders as possible (including local media). The aim of the event is to establish a stronger 'deal' between the local community, the young people and the services that support them.

### How Bridge Foyer celebrated

The core team of young people planned a final celebration activity using the theme of 'Wartime recipes' to recognise the link between the 'Growing Community' project and a time of strong community values when people were encouraged to grow their own food and support each other to 'Dig for Victory'. The final celebration event was marked by the local conservative MP Stephen Mosley, who presented the young people with certificates of achievement.

As a result of the project, the Foyer has attracted donations to contribute to the garden, and is now planning to develop solar powered water features. The Foyer has continued the community garden as a project for young people to manage and develop.

### Bristol Foyers project aimed to celebrate talents

The Foyer organised, participated in and filmed a 'talent show' including music and dance acts to 'explore possibilities', challenge negative thinking, and encourage young people to understand their positive assets. The ability of young people to self-promote and tell their own story, to demonstrate assets to employers and community was central to this Working Assets project. Young people used the event to show case their performing arts talents and hopefully find employment or creative partnerships.

*"It was really exciting and I really enjoyed it. The experience made me realise how hard it is to organise a big event like the talent show, but it was really worth it",*  
Bristol Foyer resident.

The Foyer succeeded in engaging new local stakeholders that they will work with on future projects. Working Assets promoted better working relationships and was the first time the Manager collaborated with other agencies on such a large. As well as Safeplace and ITV Fixers the Foyer worked with fellow housing provider, a local music project, other local studios, the local police, Colston Hall and Trinity Arts centre.

The Foyer secured around £1,000 additional 'in-kind' funding from volunteers. A deal was brokered with the venue to save at least £100-£20. Prizes were donated for raffle and for the show. Food was prepared by Safeplace, all donated for free.

There was an improvement in public perception and a strengthened relationship with the local media. Before the talent show the Foyer had regular negative media attention in the local press. Since Working Assets commenced the Foyer has not experienced any negative or inaccurate representation. As a result of good PR around Working Assets the Foyer will be drawing up a PR strategy and begin to proactively create good press coverage.

## How Neath Foyer got competitive

Neath Foyer carried out cooking challenges. One of the highlights was the Neath Food Festival, at which young people cooked 2 forms of starter and 2 forms of main for their audience, including the Mayor. They combined this event with certificate presentations so the young people's efforts were celebrated in front of their community. The Neath Food Festival lasted 2 days and the group participated in a 'cook off' in front of 60 people, who voted in a 'Ready Steady Cook!' fashion. The Foyer's young people were pitted against the local W.I. - the young people won - everything was cooked from scratch by the young people whereas the W.I. used jarred sauces.

The cook off win will never be forgotten and other legacies remain such as each young person's room has been equipped with specific recycling and food bins, and general awareness has been raised regarding the environment and the importance of recycling. Staff have seen the potential to start a Fairtrade Foyers group. Working Assets has helped the Foyer realise that food and cooking is a really effective way of bringing young people, staff and community members together.

## 5. Outputs

- Chichester Foyer: 6 Young People developed a t-shirt making enterprise
- Swindon Foyer: 17 Young People (aged 17-23) to develop a craft enterprise
- Bridge Foyer: involved 12 young people (aged 16-20) in renovating the front yard space into a community garden
- Halton YMCA: involved 8 young people in renovating a block of 4 flats
- Neath Foyer; 9 young people (aged 17-23) in 'Work & Play' activities
- Llanelli Foyer; 8 young people (aged 16-23) in a gardening and green house building activity
- Bristol Foyer; 8 young people planned and held a Talent Show

## 6. Outcomes

Through the opportunities provided by Working Assets young people have had the chance to develop:

1. Specific vocationally related skills related to the particular activities undertaken through the project, such as art and design, woodwork, horticulture, etc. In some cases this has led to young people developing vocational interest in this area and pursuing employment or courses of study in these areas.
2. Specific enterprise skills such as costing products, understanding of supply chain, sales, marketing and branding, customer service.
3. Generic employability competences such as self-confidence, interview technique, budgeting, record keeping, ICT, resilience (ability to take risks and tackle challenges).

Foyers have reported that 66% of the young people involved in a Working Assets project have entered or been retained in education or employment, and 75% have made a positive move-on. It is further reported that these numbers are considerably higher than for other programmes of similar duration and intensity.

## 7. Impacts

In addition to the outcomes for young people, the Working Assets programme has led to some wider impacts for the services who have delivered. These fall into the following 3 categories:

Workforce development: changes in working practices so that staff took on more of a coaching or enabling role; 'changing the conversation' with young people so that it emphasises their assets and potential rather than needs and risks.

Opportunities for young people: commitment from partner housing associations to create an Apprenticeship post as a result of attending a recognition event; creating a mechanism within the organisation to provide work experience alongside the delivery of qualifications; creation/reassigning of posts to support community development and volunteering.

Sustainable Partnerships: ongoing relationships with local businesses, public sector and CVS organizations that were developed through the programme.

## 8. Conclusions

It is clear from the outcomes and impact data recorded that Working Assets provides a valuable and effective approach to developing young people's employability. Moreover, Working Assets has provided a catalyst for embedded and sustainable change in services delivering employability skills for young people. These include:

### Places

- Foyers taking part in this initiative had more innovative activity than other comparable accommodation run by their parent body, so it improved their image within their own housing association.
- The programme has enabled Foyers to demonstrate, both within their parent body and to the communities in which they operate, that they, and the young people they work with, are making a positive contribution to those communities

### People

- The programme increased staff confidence and creativity. Reporting at staff meetings and senior managers meetings raise profiles of the delivery staff and improves professional development.
- The majority of young people, staff and volunteers that took part in Working Assets have gone onto receive wider recognition for their efforts. They are winning internal awards from their parent body, community awards such as 'cook offs' and 'In bloom' competitions and volunteering awards such as ASDAN recognising the hours of commitment they have maintained.

### Opportunities

- Enterprise clearly remains a key feature of the projects the young people engage in.

### Deal

- Foyer staff, volunteers and external agents find the Working Assets Toolkit useful as it offers a structured guide and enables them to introduce people to new themes.

### Campaign

- Many of the Foyers who have participated in the programme have secured funding and/or other support for ongoing activities. It is crucial to the success of the initiative that the programme is not simply seen as another funded project and that lasting and sustainable changes to practice are made.

## 9. Recommendations

- We recommend that future rounds of Working Assets include specific staff and beneficiary training on setting up and running social enterprises.

- In order fully to represent programme impact it is necessary to track the progress of each young person as they undertake their Working Assets project. Tools to help achieve this were developed during the pilot phase, such as the Well-Being survey that forms part of the toolkit. Individual progress tracking is not, however, widely used on the programme. We recommend delivery partners give consideration to how this may be achieved.
- The majority of the Foyers used their own employability courses as Young People are already receiving this and did not feel the need to complete the 'Work Passports'. The 'Work Passport' was developed, however, as part of the project pilot, by a recruitment agency, who based it on the information that they ask for at the point of registering a new client. We found during the pilot phase that whilst Foyers did have their own employability programmes, that these did not always capture the same information as that included on the Work Passport. We recommended, therefore, that the Work Passport be considered a minimum requirement, so long as all the information on the Passport is captured elsewhere then there is no need to complete it.

## 11. References

1. Office for National Statistics, *Characteristics of young unemployed people - 2012*, 22 February 2012
2. Demos, *Youth Labour's Lost*, 2011
3. HM Government, *Building Engagement, Building Futures*, December 2011
4. *The Localism Act 2012*
5. HM Government, *Positive for Youth: a new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19*, December 2011
6. Riots, Communities and Victims Panel, *After the riots*, March 2012
7. <http://www.bigsocietycapital.com/>
8. *Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012*

## Appendices

1. Chichester Foyer follow up visit notes in full
2. Swindon Foyer follow up visit notes in full
3. Bridge Foyer follow up visit notes in full
4. Halton YMCA follow up visit notes in full
5. Neath Foyer follow up visit notes in full
6. Llanelli Foyer follow up visit notes in full
7. Bristol Foyer follow up visit notes in full