Local Trust
trusting local people

IVAR — we listen, and learn together

Just Ideas — Facilitation Evaluation Research

Building community leadership

Learning from the Community Leadership Academy

Executive summary

August 2023

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Local Trust

Caption: A flag-making workshop at Boston Central Big Local.

Credit: Zute Lightfoot

Executive summary

When Just Ideas and the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) came on board as evaluation and learning partners to the Community Leadership Academy (CLA) they set out to:

- Generate developmental learning to inform the design of the CLA programme.

- Understand the difference the CLA makes to individuals, Big Local areas and their wider communities.

- Explore how the CLA approach might develop beyond the Big Local programme.

This executive summary shares an overview of a new report from Local Trust, IVAR and Just Ideas. Published in August 2023, Building Community Leadership is a new report exploring learnings from the CLA.

What is the Building Community Leadership report about?

The Building Community Leadership report summarises the findings from evaluation activities between November 2019 and October 2022. Our findings were drawn from a range of approaches, including observations, surveys, interviews and case studies.

This work allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, helping to capture a complete picture of the programme's successes and areas for improvement.

The CLA sought to support residents in delivering community leadership within their local area. The term community leadership in this context, draws on the distributed leadership model [1], and can be thought of as:

> Leadership... shared across those who have relevant skills and expertise and can shift around according to context and circumstance. United by a common purpose or outcome, a community exercising distributed leadership will see many different people – whether out in front, out back, introverted or extroverted – influence and lead change in multiple different ways."
> (Goulden, 2022)

This executive summary explores some of the key findings of the Building Community Leadership report, published in August 2023.

---

1 Goulden, H (2022) `Leading change: Why now is the time to invest in community'. Local Trust: London.

Key changes to CLA design and delivery

At first the CLA was offered only to individual Big Local participants, but later it extended its recruitment to groups (more than one participant from the same Big Local area) and Local Trust's network of partner organisations.

Over time, Local Trust and its delivery partners refined how accessible the recruitment process was, to help reach and engage with more emerging leaders to bring about local change.

The programme successfully pivoted online at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Delivery included a mix of online and in-person sessions, which engaged and supported participants with busy and complex lives.

The CLA created safe spaces for participants to:

- talk and listen to one another
- encourage their programme engagement
- feel that their feedback was actioned quickly to improve the programme.

Supporting Big Local residents to achieve their potential

The CLA has successfully enabled Big Local residents to achieve their potential.

- With tailored and focused support, residents can improve their confidence and understanding of the role they can play in communities, leading them to create and take up opportunities to bring about positive local change.
- The CLA helped participants name, recognise and overcome 'imposter syndrome', which was a key blocker for most participants.

- The CLA is inclusive, flexible, responsive to the needs of its participants and aware of the diversity of people's experiences who are part of the Big Local programme.

Other positive changes in individuals, partnerships and communities through programme participation included:

- shifts in behaviour and practices within Big Local partnerships, including awareness of conflicts of interest, boundary management and creating open and inclusive spaces for conversation
- sharing views as experts by experience
- shifts in the power dynamics and a feeling of cohesiveness in partnerships and communities
- grounded and effective decision-making at all levels
- better understanding of local context to influence change.

Delivering inclusive and accessible support to community leaders

There were areas that were, and still remain, challenging in the programme's delivery – for example, engaging partner organisations and participants in a programme initially designed for Big Local residents, and supporting participants and groups to integrate their learning at partnership level.

However, the academy has four distinctive and successful features that allow the programme to deliver inclusive and accessible support for residents leading community change.

These features are:

1. Its operation at multiple levels of community development (national, hyperlocal and individual)

2. A different approach to leadership that turned away from traditional ideas about a single leader towards distributed leadership

3. Enabling and embedding a learning environment. A key part of enabling learning was creating reflective spaces to share experiences and embedding opportunities to apply what was taught in sessions and put learning into practice

4. Championing the power of lived experiences, where individuals feel confident to influence partnerships, local developments or decision-makers through sharing their experiences

The CLA operated most effectively when focused and linked to the Big Local infrastructure, namely by being a part of and accessing the collective resources of the wider Big Local programme.

Legacy and the future

The CLA continues to consider and respond to challenges and draw on its successes, thinking about how to act upon the evaluation findings. Having an independent learning partner has proved helpful for the CLA to reflect on real-time insights and iteratively develop the programme in response.

Divided into three parts, the Building Community Leadership report explores the learning from the CLA, the impact of the programme on participants and conclusions for other community leadership initiatives to take away. The findings shared and explored are being applied to the current cohort of the CLA.

About the Community Leadership Academy

Local Trust's Community Leadership Academy (CLA) provides support for residents leading change in their local area. The programme uses one-to-one coaching, group learning workshops, masterclasses, informal peer support and networking to build participants' skills and knowledge in leading positive change as volunteers in their communities. Created by Local Trust, the CLA was developed by Koreo, the Young Foundation and Northern Soul.

The CLA initially supported Big Local residents and later expanded participation to residents within the networks of partner organisations (organisations that work with the Big Local area to deliver projects and change). Big Local is a resident-led funding programme delivered by Local Trust and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund to create long-lasting change in 150 areas in England.

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources, and decision making into the hands of communities.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding, and to draw on the learning from our work delivering the Big Local programme to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

localtrust.org.uk

@LocalTrust

IVAR

The Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) is a small charity that works with other charities, foundations and public agencies to strengthen communities across the UK through action research. We listen, and learn together with our partners. What makes us distinctive is our unrestricted funding – which enables us to maintain our independence and neutrality, and gives us the freedom to act as a sounding board and thought leader at the interface between charities and their funders.

www.ivar.org.uk

@IVAR_UK

Just Ideas

Just Ideas Sustainable Solutions Ltd. is an independent social consultancy established in 2007, supporting communities, charities, public sector organisations and businesses working towards positive social and environmental change. We believe in supporting people to realise their power and voice. We value connecting people so they can create positive change locally and globally.

www.just-ideas.co.uk