



# Glens Healthy Places

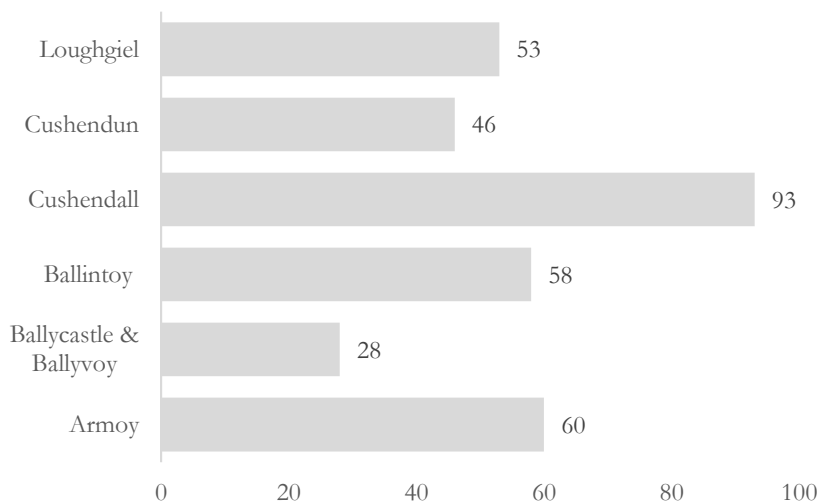
2019 - 2020

## Impact and Learning Summary

# Isolation, Loneliness & Rural Communities

The **Glens Healthy Places Programme** was led by the Northern Area Community Network (NACN) across the Glens DEA in partnership with a *Local Implementation Group* that brought operational expertise across health and social care, public health, participatory budgeting and Community Planning. The programme was designed in 2 phases, with Phase 1 led by the PHA, involving local consultations and the preparation of a findings report along with an outline action plan. The Local Implementation Group changed the design from a focus on Participatory Budgeting across the Glens to four separate programmes. This enabled a more diverse approach as a pilot programme in Phase 2 as well as more time to prepare the PB initiative. This was implemented between November 2019 and April 2020; with a budget of £110,500 invested in: Glens Men, which aimed to address loneliness and isolation among males of all ages; a Participatory Budgeting initiative in Armoy village; Small Grants programme by NACN that lifted the award level to £7,000 where community projects addressed health and wellbeing; and Fresh Little Minds, which supported the mental health of Primary School children across the DEA.

The **Glens Men** element targeted men of all ages living across the Glens DEA to help reduce social isolation and tackle issues linked to loneliness. The primary aim was to encourage men to leave their home, identify activities that would incentivise mixing and to make firmer social connections with others across a largely dispersed rural community. Organised across the six areas of Armoy, Ballycastle & Ballyvoy, Ballintoy, Cushendall, Cushendun and Loughgiel, there was a dedicated focus on trying to engage men who are hard-to-reach or have in the past shown reluctance to participate in community events. In total, twelve trips and twelve get togethers/planning meetings/big breakfast were organised across the six villages. This involved 338 contact cases (see below by area) and the average number of men attending each organised event or activity was 13.



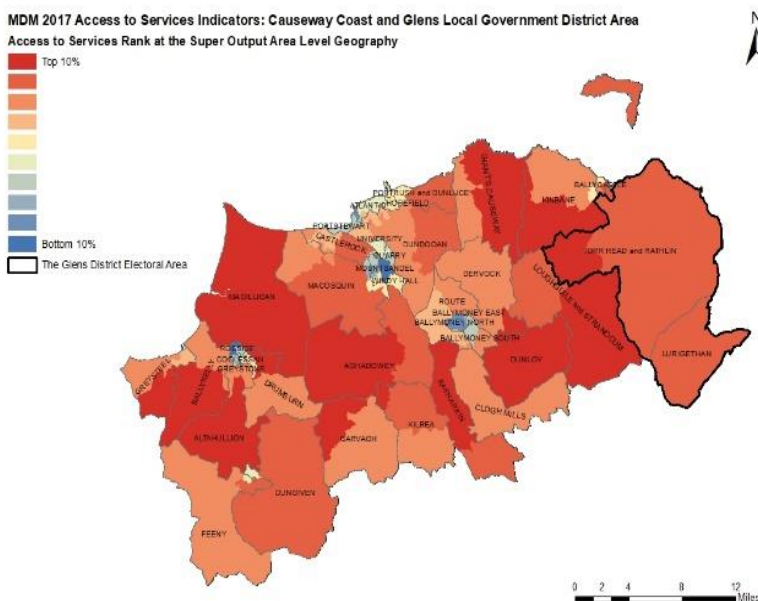
- Out of 142 satisfaction surveys completed across the village areas, 97% of the respondents rated the programme “Excellent”. No programme respondents rated it “poor”.
- Two-thirds (66%) of the men that took part were aged 65 and over. However, some areas like Loughgiel had representation across age categories including younger men aged 26-34 and even < 25.
- 75% of the respondents were married and just under a quarter (23%) were either divorced or single. Less than 2% of those that responded were widowed.

Healthy participant numbers demonstrated that the programme was well marketed and clearly generated keen interest across the Glens areas. Although some attendees were already members of existing community collectives, luncheon clubs or arts and crafts groups, some had not been involved in any previous formal activity. The age mix shows how the programme provided a platform for intergenerational activity which created mutually beneficial outcomes such as building a shared understanding and values as well as new skills, particular during the activities. Feedback from the village of Armoynagh below demonstrated how for some men, participation in the programme had provided them with an opportunity to socialise with people from the other community.

*“I visited St Patrick’s Heritage Trail, Downpatrick recently with a self-selected cross-community group of men from Armoynagh, under Public Health Agency initiative ‘Glens Men’ outings. They were quite overwhelming in their appreciation of the whole experience. A number of these men had possibly NEVER as part of a group experienced listening to anyone, anywhere speak to them in a respectful, interesting way”*



Moving forward it will be important to sustain the networks and relationships that have been developed in the context of the Glens Men programme. COVID-19 has tested the resilience and effectiveness of these relationships in the short term. Already some of the men have demonstrated an unprompted willingness to provide support to other participants who might be geographically isolated and more vulnerable. This shows the degree of solidarity that was developed during the delivery phase and how participants are willing to do more than just share their time to support the welfare of others. The supply of rescue packs, hot food and safe-distance visits also underscore the ability of community structures to respond effectively to the pandemic.



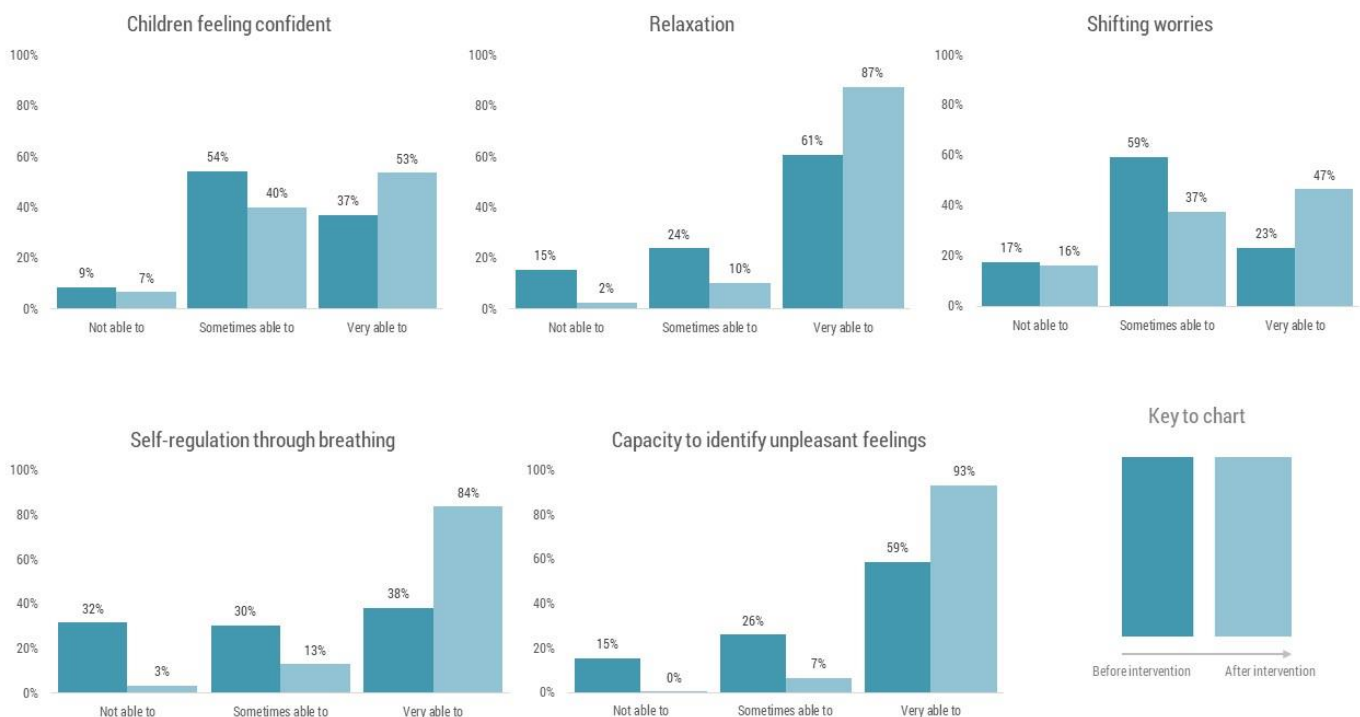
The Glens Men project shows the potential to scale-up responses to disconnectedness and loneliness. In order to develop this place based approach. A *Loneliness/Social Isolation Index* (for both the Causeway Coast and Glens or NHSCA area) could provide a baseline analysis of pressure areas (hotspots), sectors (older men) and service needs (such as demand-responsive transport). Connectivity via multiple means (interpersonal, online, transport) is an area where a community-based approach, soft networks and hard infrastructure (transport and greenways) could be pulled together in a more ambitious strategy for the Glens and wider Council area.

# Early Years and Mental Health

Fresh Little Minds (FLM) are a group of facilitators who offer a range of programmes to support children's mental health and develop their individual resilience. Delivered across schools in the Glens DEA, FLM taught children practical strategies to improve their self-confidence and provides them with tools to cope better with life's worries or challenges. The 6-week programme that was delivered as part of the Glens Healthy Places project was called GROW and allowed children to explore their emotions and learn a range of self-calming and relaxation techniques.



Fresh Little Minds facilitators worked with 293 children in mixed classes (aged P3-P6) over a 6 week period across 13 different schools in the Glens DEA. Pre- and post-perceptions of the participating children (presented below) showed how the GROW programme helped them to develop practical tools which could help them relax, shift their worries, reduce their anxiety, and exert more control over other parts of their lives.



Feedback from facilitators also showed how the GROW programme helped children increase their conceptual understanding about mental health and resilience. This involved learning how to identify unpleasant feelings, become more confident and cope with difficult situations but also how to improve relationships with their peers, teachers, parents and siblings. The FLM sessions were well supported by the schools themselves as well as the teachers that participated who are already working to integrate learning content into the broader planning of the curriculum.

Post-programme, participating teaching staff were asked to reflect on the effectiveness of the programme by rating its success, commenting on the difference it made and suggesting how improvements could be realised. They agreed that the content of the programme was appropriate, pitched at a suitable level but also effective in terms of supporting children's health and wellbeing needs:

*“It has educated the children to understand more about feelings they are experiencing in their bodies. They now have a toolbox with ways they can use to help themselves if they are feeling low for whatever reason”*

The skills and coping mechanisms which were developed during the GROW programme were also shown to connect well with other personal development areas such as safe and effective communication. This was important, especially given the growing concerns many teachers and parents shared regarding their child's safety and behaviour on social media:

*“In a world becoming so concerned with connecting online, this helps children connect with themselves. It gives them safety and confidence”*

Likewise, parents were also allowed to feedback the impact of the programme on the attitude of children in the home and in particular on interpersonal relations with siblings but also in terms of prompting positive conversations on what might be new or challenging subject areas:

*“Some parents remarked that their children had been talking about how much they enjoyed their experiences at home. They expressed that the information given about the sessions was impressive and much needed in today's society”*

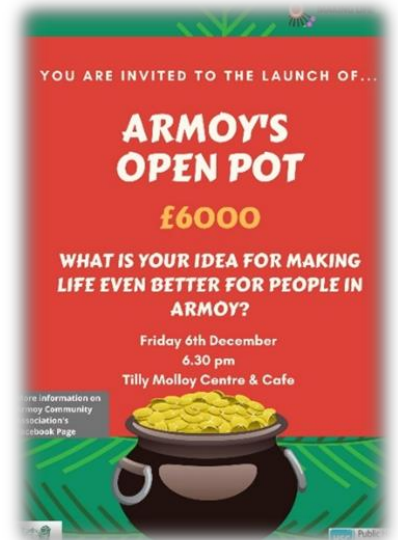
These domestic reflections are important. Firstly it shows how GROW helped to engage parents in helping to support their child's wellbeing at home but it also shows how it can help address some of the broader societal stigmas that surround mental health. This demonstrates the importance of investing in preventative models like FLM, which can clearly help to improve mental health and build emotional resilience at an early age.

The evidence presented here has shown how taught resilience strategies can create positive outcomes which in the long term can help children feel less overwhelmed, minimise disruptive behaviour and provide a range of tools for young people to manage difficult situations. Early intervention responses such as FLM's GROW programme are increasingly important not just because of the positive impacts they have on the participating children but as they also reflect a creative approach which in the long term can help to ease or reduce stress on the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision. This outcome is important, especially as wider research shows how there is a 10 year delay between young people presenting first symptoms and getting the support they need. It is also increasingly relevant here in Northern Ireland where mental ill-health rates are 25% higher than in other parts of the UK and the demand on local CAMHS services is shown to be on the rise.



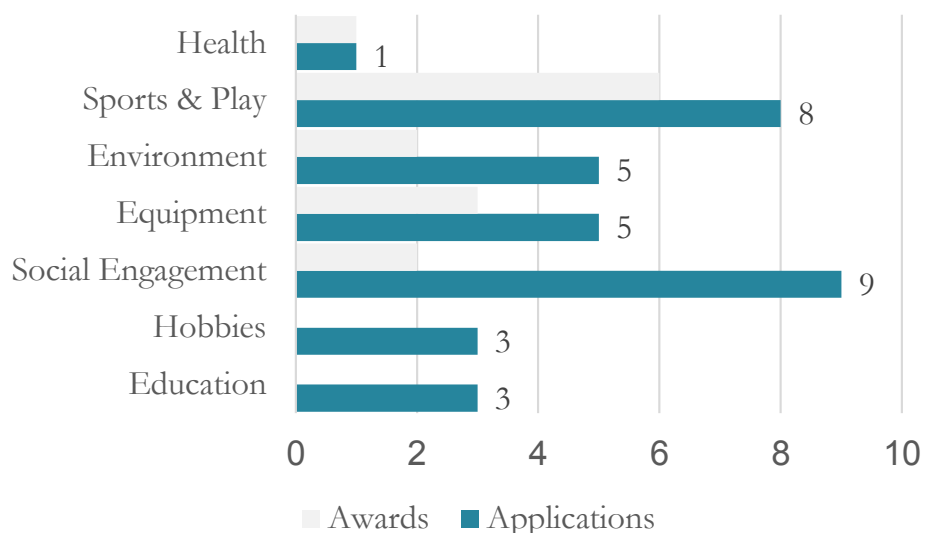
# Participatory Budgeting and Health

Participatory Budgeting (PB) can take different forms and can be used to achieve very different objectives, depending on the degree of involvement of, and ultimately the power delegated to participants. Armoys' Open Pot represented a PB exercise which sought to advertise and allocate a budget of £6,000 to individuals and community groups who were encouraged to pitch an idea to help 'make life even better for the people in Armoys'. The idea was submitted by a written bid and had to be safe, legal and delivered by spending £500 or less between February and March 2020. Once the community had submitted their written bids, a voting night was held which allowed bidders to pitch their ideas to other community members who were then asked to vote to determine which bids received funding.



Armoys' Open Pot created genuine excitement and was attended by over 350 local residents including a broad mix of young and older people. The 14 awards (£6,000 total) reflected a broad range of bids including support for a summer scheme, local fun days and a range of health and wellbeing activities led by schools and community groups—some of which were un-constituted and had received no or very little grant funding in the past. Groups that were not awarded funding such as the Armoys Social Club also benefited from the opportunity to showcase what they do, which involves providing support for young adults with learning difficulties. Post event this group have been able to grow their membership and attracted additional support to help raise funds to sustain their own activities as well as other charitable causes.

To summarise the PB exercise a total 34 bids were made and the 14 that were eventually awarded funding on the Voting night. The chart on the right shows how the proposed ideas were wide ranging but that their content had relevance to a range of areas that included physical and mental health, recreation and community socialisation.



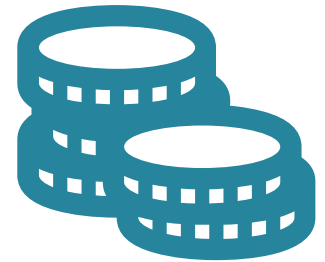
The Armoyn Summer Scheme was awarded £500 to purchase equipment to help with the delivery of their annual summer scheme. In its 26<sup>th</sup> year, the summer scheme currently avails of funding from Children in Need (£10,000) which helps to cover operational costs such as the use of facilitators to co-ordinate and deliver a mix of activities and excursions. However, this funding is restricted in that it does not permit the group to buy equipment and materials. The unrestricted nature of the PB funding has allowed organisers to purchase play equipment that was important to the ongoing sustainability of the summer scheme. This in a broader sense helps to create positive health and social outcomes, especially for the 111 children who participate in the scheme annually. Finding new ways to support and maintain the quality of activities delivered also helps local working families that rely on the scheme as an affordable form of childcare during the school holidays.



- The use of PB processes provided an opportunity to build Armoyn's community infrastructure and the 14 bid awards will help to sustain an annual calendar of local events. This will be especially important moving forward in the COVID-19 post-lockdown period.
- PB represented a departure from previous community engagement projects and created genuine excitement and a 'real buzz' for all those that made bids or attended the voting night. This was evident during the conversations between residents on the voting night but also through the positive social interactions that evolved across social media.
- To a degree PB has acted as a catalyst for some members of the community to develop spin-off grassroots projects. For example, volunteers from the Armoyn Community Association have drawn on the PB process to explore the feasibility of developing a *Community Fridge*. This aims to address waste and food poverty by providing a 'second hand' market in local food supply.
- PB processes in Armoyn promoted intergenerational contact and mutual support. These took place during the organisation of the voting night but also in the delivery of some of the supported projects. The voting age being set at 8 years old also helped to cultivate a family friendly atmosphere that strengthened participation from young and older people alike.
- The use of PB in a small rural context such as Armoyn has created enthusiasm and hope for local change. It has also provided a dedicated opportunity to address local health and wellbeing inequalities whilst simultaneously help build positive relations in a community that has experienced tensions in the past.

# The Value of Micro-Funding

The Small Grants element was managed and administered by the project lead, Northern Area Community Network. Community and voluntary organisations throughout the Glens DEA area were invited to apply with proposals which would work to support a range of wider policy themes and strategic priorities including: Making Life Better, Programme for Government (Outcomes 3 & 4), Health and Wellbeing 2026 Delivering Together, Systems not Structures, and Protect Life 2. The size of the grants ranged from £2,500 to £7,000 and were available to both non-constituted and constituted community groups which represented a significant uplift from the previous £1,000 limit. Grant awardees by delivery area/value are summarised below



Award Recipient	Target Group	Primary Theme	Total Funding awarded
Gaeil Ruairi Og agus Gaeil na nGlinnti	Wider Community	Mental Health	£4,207.50
Friends of Glenariffe	Local Community and surrounding villages	Isolation	£4,996.00
Cushendun and District Development Association (CDDA)	Everyone in the Glens District Electoral Area	Mental Health	£3,220.63
Antrim Glens Traditions Group	Wider Community	Isolation	£2,370.00
Cushendall Development Group (CDG)	Cushendall and Mid-Glens area	Mental Health	£4,474.42
Loughgiel Community Association	Loughgiel, Armoy, Stranocum and surrounding areas	Transport and Connectivity	£4,730.56
Glens Storytelling and Cultural Heritage Group	Public in Ballintoy, Ballycastle, Rathlin, Armoy, Stranocum, Mosside, Loughgiel, Ballyvoy, Cushendun, Cushendall and Glenariffe	Isolation	£4,532.50
Ballintoy Young at Heart	Men and Women over 55 living in Ballintoy and surrounding area	Isolation	£3,947.00
Glen's Youth Club	Youth living in Cushendall, Cushendun, Glenariff areas	Mental Health	£3,293.85
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>£35,772.46</b>

The Local Small Grants scheme allocated £35,772.46 across nine different community based projects working across the Glens DEA. The nine grant awardees reflected a broad spread of supported activities (driver training for a community mini bus service; arts and crafts for older people; storytelling, Yoga/Pilates classes), targeted users (isolated and vulnerable groups, young as well as older people) but also geographic coverage across the Glens DEA. These funded activities connected well with the three social need areas (isolation, mental health, transport and connectivity) that were identified during the Glens Healthy Places consultation phase and engagement report.

The small grants helped groups organise activities across rural communities which in the past may have experienced limited access to dedicated health and wellbeing services. Before the COVID-19 outbreak disrupted the schedule, planned activities had been well attended (at times oversubscribed) and connected well with the interests and physical capabilities of those taking part. A review of the impacts created by three supported projects is summarised below:

Loughgiel Community Association were awarded £4,731 to help a project which allows them to transport vulnerable people to a GP or other health related appointment as well as other social outings to improve their wellbeing. The service is used by over 40 people, many of whom are registered clients through Supporting People and experience a range of underlying mental and physical health problems. As a way to enhance rural connectivity the minibus service is also used to help facilitate a local social prescribing scheme delivered in partnership with GPs in Loughgiel and surrounding areas. During the COVID-19 outbreak it is worth noting how the minibus has played a critical role in distributing hot meals to vulnerable people living in Loughgiel, Armoy, Cloughmills and Dunloy.



The Cushendall Development Group were awarded £4,474 and performed an umbrella role to help other local groups (some unconstituted) who don't usually receive funding or support. The CDG then allocated resources to the groups themselves or individual facilitators who worked collaboratively to deliver a series of different mental health and wellbeing activities in venues across Cushendall and Mid-Glens area. Apart from events which had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak, attendance was high, consistent and at times oversubscribed with a total of 103 people taking part in a broad range of activities which included Chair Yoga, Flower Arranging, Pilates, Cookery Demonstration, Circuit Classes and Singing/Music classes. Participation in the activities was positively received and those taking part benefited from the opportunity to meet new people, get more active and learn new hobbies or skills in a friendly group environment.

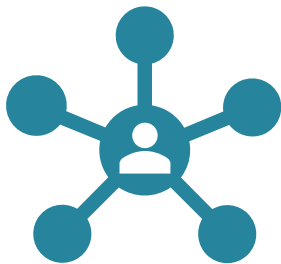
In addition to hosting a series of different health and wellbeing activities The Friends of Glenariffe also used their £4,996 grant award to organise adult safeguarding and child protection training for volunteers that support their new community centre which opened last year. Revenue funding like these small grants undoubtedly help cover operational costs which many third sector groups struggle to cover or in some cases simply cannot afford. This type of flexible support proved to be highly relevant for all groups especially the Friends of Glenariffe, who are currently working to develop a mixed income model to sustain their new built community asset in the short, medium and long term.



# Implications

Stakeholders across the community, voluntary and statutory sector highlighted the strength of the programme as a rapid and flexible response to the needs of local people, an ability to align priorities raised in the consultation with delivery projects and the way in which the approach targeted a diverse range of needs over such a large area. The value of a place-based approach to health; working through local structures; building on soft infrastructure and community assets; and bringing together expertise across the statutory sector highlights the potential of such initiatives to work beyond the confines of a pilot programme.

The pilot showed a commitment to social innovation by drawing on community assets to tackle health challenges around excluded older men, early years in mental health, the value of community infrastructure and the capacity to mobilise local resources in the context of *disconnected* groups, especially given the impact of Coronavirus



Delivery programmes with a focus on resource integration, clearly evident in the pilot, could reenergise a *Total Place* approach to area-based health planning. The alignment with multiple policies and programmes (community transport, disconnectedness, wellbeing among early years and older men) show that spatial, problem-focused approaches, has important potential in the *delivery* of health reforms across Northern Ireland.

In this respect, the pilot demonstrates the value of intermediary community structures to relate local needs to statutory providers; coordinate action at the sub-regional level; and implement discrete programmes of work (independently, via re-grant modes and in partnership with other voluntary groups and agencies).

There is a need to: integrate programmes of work more effectively (an embryonic life-course approach can be detected); build connectivity (only small scale support through the grants scheme was invested in transport); and sustain social capital to deliver a more sustainable community-based health and wellbeing agenda.



The Glens Healthy Places programme was underpinned by well-developed and valid monitoring and evaluation systems, inevitably truncated by the impact of Coronavirus. But it shows the potential of effective social value measurement to account for impact and return on grant investment. This is important in developing a stronger culture of inter-organisational, and cross-sector working to achieve more sustainable health outcomes.