



## **Hands-on communities**

The community and wellbeing benefits of learning and sharing practical skills



## **New Economics Foundation (NEF)**

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## Foreword from Dax Lovegrove

Director of Sustainability & Innovation, Kingfisher plc



Empowering people with hands-on DIY skills can help them improve their homes and neighbourhoods. This is something we have recognised at Kingfisher, which is why we provide online training and DIY classes in some of our stores and at various events.

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At one event we hosted last year, one guest said: 'If you have pride in your street, you're more likely to do things to your home like paint your front gate.' It is this kind of appetite among people that inspires us to think how we can do more to support those who want to improve their surroundings.

*“DIY skills can be a great enabler for people making their homes more energy efficient and this is a big part of ensuring carbon emissions from the built environment are reduced”*

People's increasing interest in DIY and making things can also be seen within the 'maker movement'. This trend is strong in the US and is now creeping into the UK, where we now see maker spaces starting to take off in cities this side of the pond. The movement is attracting all kinds of creative

minds and people who want to skill up. They will bring new thinking around using materials more efficiently and re-using materials, which will in turn accelerate moves towards the circular economy.

The other opportunity to embrace is one of tackling the energy wasted in homes while also addressing people's concerns about rising energy bills. DIY skills can be a great enabler for people making their homes more energy efficient and this is a big part of ensuring carbon emissions from the built environment are reduced in line with the latest climate science.

*“I’m excited that DIY can bring people together to build meaningful connections in the community.”*

The sharing economy is another important area. This economy helps to move us away from a throw-away society to one where we unlock the use of idle assets and open up opportunities for collaborative access to goods and spaces that are often significantly under-used.

The Hands-on communities report from NEF and its great range of case studies helps us to increase our understanding for how learning and sharing practical skills matters to people. I’m excited that DIY can bring people together to build meaningful connections in the community and look forward to all kinds of organisations making the most of supporting better homes and better lives.



**Dax Lovegrove**

### About this research

This report was written by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) with support from Kingfisher plc, Europe’s largest home improvement retail group. In 2012, Kingfisher launched Net Positive, which it sees as a commitment to work towards making a positive contribution to people and the planet, while growing a stronger and more successful business. As part of that approach, Kingfisher’s constituent companies will develop a range of community activities that are about sharing or learning practical skills. This report is therefore intended to be useful to Kingfisher plc itself, and the staff who design and work on these community activities.

However, we hope that the findings of the report will also be a broader contribution to the conversation about how learning or sharing practical skills, or indeed skills in general, can enhance communities and improve individual empowerment and wellbeing.

## Summary

What role does the learning and sharing of practical skills play in our communities? Evidence shows do-it-yourself (DIY), gardening, and other hands-on activities may significantly boost wellbeing. They can also help strengthen communities and combat unsustainable throw-away consumerism. This research explores why this is and how organisations seeking to make practical activities a force for good can maximise their impact.

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Hands-on skills are making a comeback. From online market places for handmade goods to maker movement clubs and TV programmes focusing on home improvement and gardening, more and more people are being inspired to cook, grow, build, fix, and make.

Businesses and charities can and do play an important role in supporting this trend through their own assets, operations, and outreach – and with good result. Learning, sharing, and using practical skills enrich our lives, communities, and the planet in several important ways.

- It **boosts wellbeing** by making people feel more competent, active, and connected with others.
- **Community empowerment is reinforced** through sharing and being able to learn from and help each other.
- A make-and-mend culture can help us **minimise our resource use** in contrast to a throw-away culture leading to over-consumption.

The wellbeing benefits of hands-on activities are striking. Studies suggest that learning gardening and cookery raises self-esteem and a sense of autonomy, and leads to an increase in life satisfaction equivalent to what could be expected if one's income were to triple.

People who regularly spend time in the garden are more satisfied with life than those who do not, even when controlling for demographic variables like income and education. Similarly, older men and women who do DIY have been found to have higher life satisfaction than those who do not.

### Why do hands-on activities make a difference?

Our research suggests that skill learning and sharing strengthens wellbeing and community because it:

- Builds self-esteem and a sense of competence
- Contributes to a sense of control and identity
- Can lead to employment
- Saves money
- Fosters relationships and builds social cohesion
- Drives community empowerment

It's not just participants who can benefit from these kinds of projects. Staff at businesses running them can also benefit from improved wellbeing thanks to a sense of social value, and the opportunity to interact with people in positive ways. This can create valuable knock-on effects in terms of productivity and staff loyalty.

### How can those seeking to encourage practical skill learning as a force for good maximise the impact of their work?

We developed five practical principles for programme designers to take into account.

- 1) *Mix it up.* Activities based on sharing and learning new skills provide an opportunity for people to meet others whom they might not otherwise meet. The bridging social capital this creates can lead to wider benefits in the community, including greater trust and reduced inter-group tensions.
- 2) *Give and take.* For people to flourish, they need to feel that they can contribute positively to society. This means giving and sharing their own knowledge, skills, and assets – as well as receiving help from others, in the spirit of **co-production**. Community organisations and businesses should provide opportunities for this.
- 3) *Joy in learning.* The extent to which learning is enjoyable has an impact on how effective that learning is. The **five ways to wellbeing** offer a tool for thinking about how to make learning more fun.
- 4) *Relish the challenge.* A well-set challenge can be valuable for building self-esteem and confidence. For DIY, the feeling of success from completing a project that requires new skills and presents a challenge is one of the key pathways through which wellbeing is positively impacted.
- 5) *From me to we.* The challenge is to encourage people participating in skill-learning and skill-sharing programmes to see the skills they learn as assets for the community as a whole, not just for themselves. Practical skills are ideal for this, because they can be used to provide positive impacts in communities.

## Introduction

How can learning and sharing practical skills help to empower people and communities?

This report demonstrates how hands-on skills like DIY and gardening can improve wellbeing, strengthen communities, and combat throw-away consumerism.

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In this report we develop a model of how the learning and sharing of practical skills has a positive impact on communities and individuals, and we explore the theoretical underpinnings and evidence that support this model. The model is built on a dynamic understanding of wellbeing, whereby to thrive, people depend on their psychological needs being met. In turn, thriving people are better placed to strengthen their own psychological resources and improve the wellbeing of others.

After this introduction, the report consists of four main sections. In Section 1, we highlight the kinds of interventions that are taking place to enhance or share practical skills and how they sit among important current trends. In Section 2, we present evidence on the overall impact of learning and having practical skills on wellbeing. In Section 3, we develop a model of how learning, having, and sharing practical skills can lead to improved wellbeing and community outcomes, based on an array of evidence on the different pathways involved. Finally, in Section 4, we make five clear recommendations for those seeking to enhance community and individual empowerment through skill sharing or learning.

This report is based on a literature review covering academic research from many fields including marketing, business studies, consumer studies, economics, design, and psychology, as well as reports written by think-tanks, NGOs, and government. Most of the literature found to be relevant came from the UK or the USA. We conducted primary analysis of the UK's 'Understanding Society Survey' and the Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme evaluations, interviewed two experts in the field of communities and wellbeing, and spoke to staff at Kingfisher who are working on some of their communities projects in the UK, France, and Poland. Given the nature of the subject matter and the research, we expect the lessons learnt to be relevant in all high-income countries.

### The triple challenge

At an individual, a community, and a wider environmental level, we face as a society an urgent triple challenge. We cannot pretend that a bit of DIY is going to deal with all these issues on its own. But there is evidence

### Box A. Definitions

Some of the terms used in this report require clarification and definition:

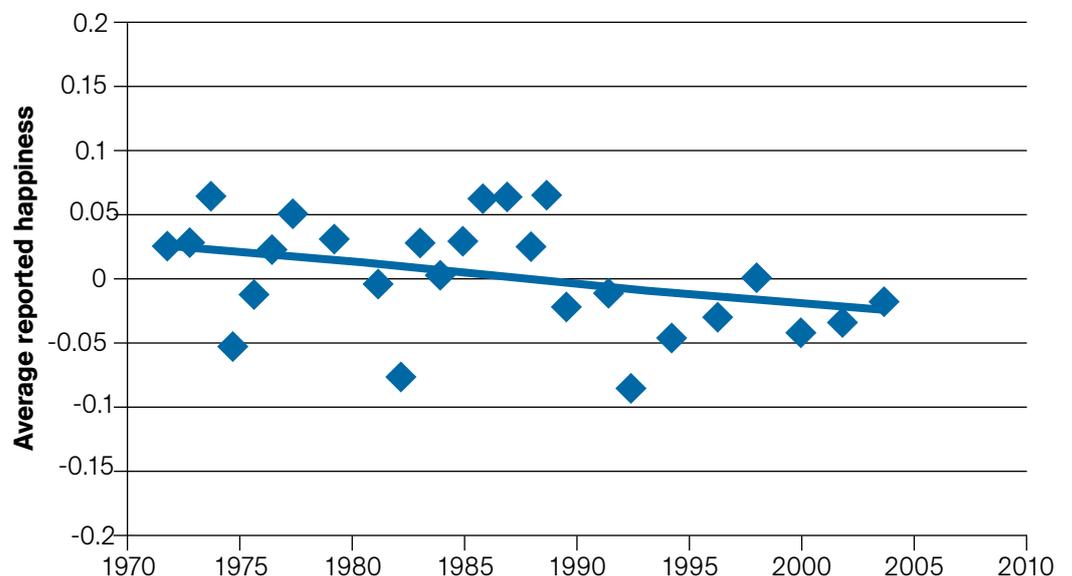
- **Practical skills** – The ability to carry out a range of activities with your hands, requiring dexterity and knowledge; for example, DIY, gardening, mechanical repairs and craftwork.
- **Empowerment** – Increasing the ability for either individuals or communities to achieve self-defined goals, through the enhancement of ‘non-tangible’ assets such as knowledge, psychological resources, and social relationships.
- **Wellbeing** – An individual’s experience of their life overall.
- **Social capital** – The ties, habits, and trust that a community is built on. It is considered ‘capital’ because it takes time to develop, and because it can lead to on-going positive benefits for the community.

that the sharing and learning of practical skills can help in addressing challenges at these three levels. Here we will present all three challenges, though the research presented in Sections 2 and 3 focuses on how practical skills can help address individual and community level issues.

#### *Flatlining wellbeing and the risk to mental health*

Since the 1970s, social scientists have been aware of a surprising finding in relation to people’s experienced wellbeing, as measured in national surveys.<sup>1</sup> At best, since the collection of wellbeing data started in the 1950s, it has risen at only a mediocre rate; at worst it’s actually fallen in several countries (including the USA; Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Economists have pondered why there is such a disconnect between flatlining wellbeing and real GDP per capita which has tripled in countries such as the USA since 1960. Some have suggested that falls in social capital have offset increases in income.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1: Happiness in the USA since 1972.



### Box B. Five ways to wellbeing

The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a set of evidence-based actions which increase people's wellbeing. They are: **Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, and Give**. These activities are simple things individuals can do in their everyday lives, and which can be integrated into community activities to maximise their impact on wellbeing.

The Five Ways were developed by NEF from evidence gathered in the UK government's Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing. The Project, published in 2008, drew on state-of-the-art research about mental capital and mental wellbeing through life.

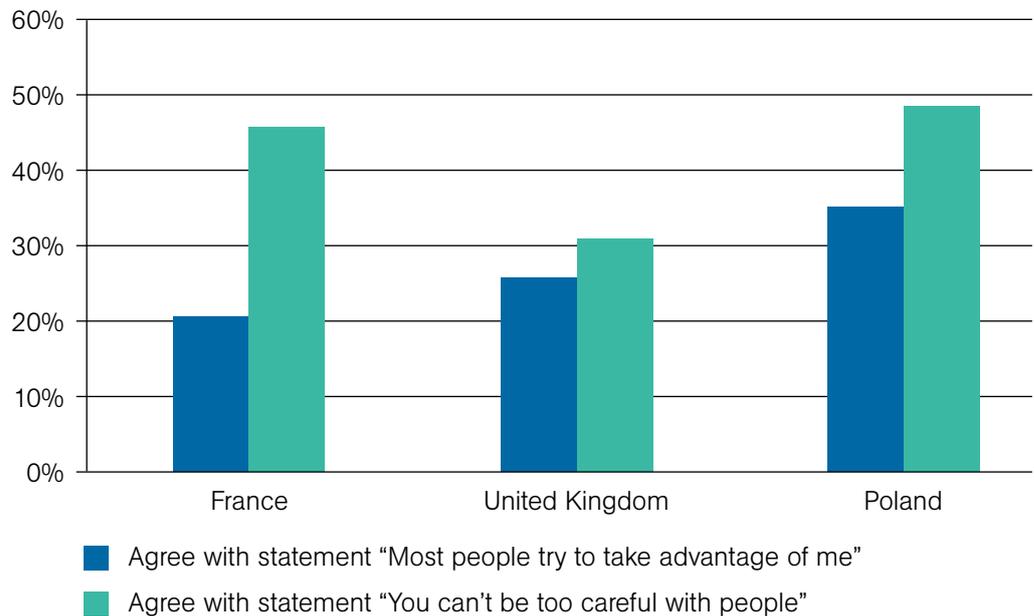
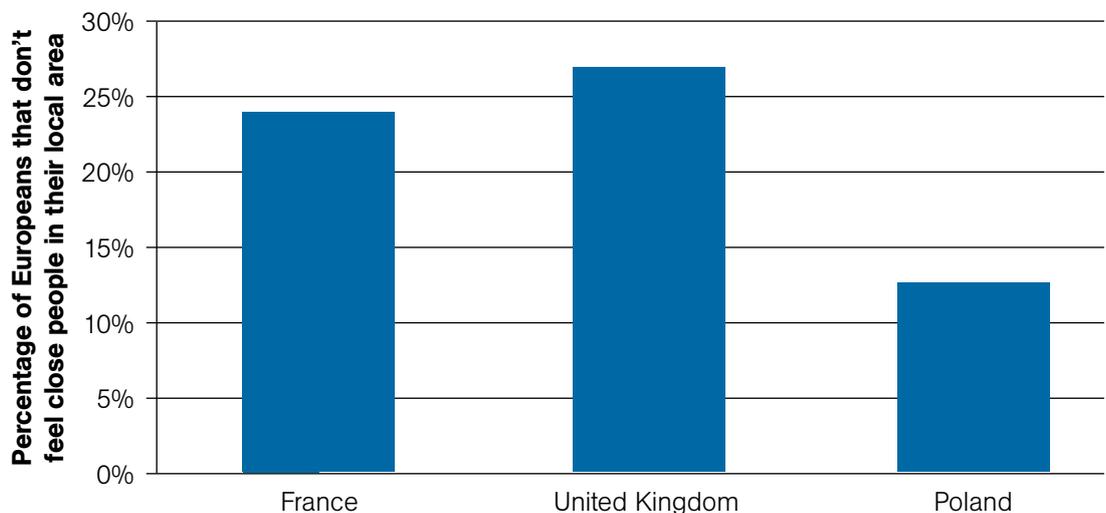
The Five Ways have been used by health organisations, schools, and community projects across the UK and around the world to help people take action to improve their wellbeing. They've been used in lots of different ways; for example, to develop organisational strategy, to measure impact, to assess need, for staff development, and to help people think about their wellbeing and incorporate more positive activities into their lives. More information, including a report on how the Five Ways have been used, can be found here: <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-wellbeing>. In 2013, the Children's Society carried out a survey showing that the Five Ways are of relevance to children's wellbeing as well as adults.

The burgeoning field of wellbeing science provides much insight into the determinants of wellbeing.<sup>4,5,6</sup> Box B provides a summary of the Five Ways to Wellbeing, which are a set of five easy actions that can improve wellbeing.

Some psychologists believe that improving wellbeing in the population at large might reduce the prevalence of mental illness.<sup>7</sup> Today, there is a growing awareness of the scale of the challenge posed by mental health problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in Europe more than 1 in 4 people report experiencing a mental disorder in the last year. The WHO estimates that the cost of mental health problems overall to developed countries is between 3 and 4% of their GDP. In a study published by the UK Department for Work and Pensions, 41% of days off work were attributable to mental health issues – by far the biggest proportion (back problems were the second biggest cause at 9%).<sup>8</sup>

The causes of mental health disorders are complex. According to a report by the Mental Health Foundation,<sup>9</sup> two of the four most important sets of risk factors are lack of social relationships and minimal physical activity – two areas where the learning and sharing of practical skills can have an important influence.

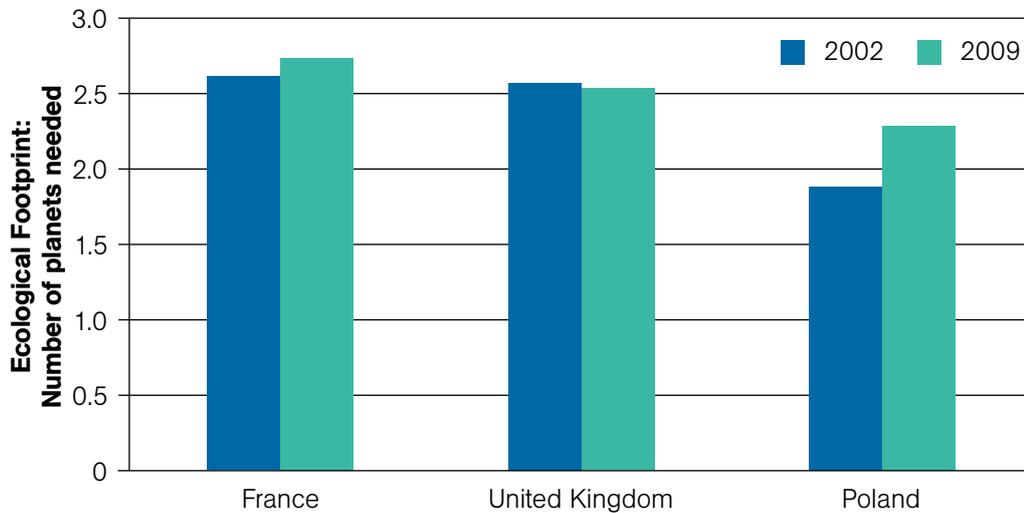
It is difficult to assess trends in mental health, as cultural factors have a big influence on the likelihood that those suffering from disorders will report them. However, the NHS Confederation in the UK reports data

Figure 2: Levels of distrust of others<sup>10</sup>Figure 3: Feelings of isolation in the local area<sup>11</sup>

showing that the prevalence of adult mental disorders had increased by 14% between 1993 and 2007.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the number of children admitted for psychiatric problems approximately doubled between 1998 and 2012.

#### *Weakening communities and social ties*

American sociologist Robert Putnam brought home the idea that societies are facing a decline in social ties back in 2000 with his book *Bowling Alone*. He presents evidence that social capital had fallen in the USA over recent decades. For example, he reports a 43% drop in the frequency of families having dinners together over 25 years. Economist Stefano Bartolini replicates these findings, and associates them with the decline

Figure 4: Ecological footprints in 2002 and 2009<sup>13</sup>

in subjective wellbeing in the US, though he does not find the same phenomenon taking place in Germany.<sup>14</sup> The Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the UK identified declining community as one of four 'social evils' in a review conducted in 2008.<sup>15</sup> Sociologists in the UK argue that this decline in social capital is taking place only amongst those on lower incomes; for those in the middle class, social capital is reported to be rising slightly.<sup>16</sup> Time poverty, receding community spaces, increasing television viewing, the growing online world, declines in spirituality, and high geographical mobility have all been put forward as reasons to explain this decline. Sociologists talk about how we have moved from 'communities of place' – built around locality – to 'communities of interest' – built around common interests. Whilst this might make it easier to share with like-minded people, it also does the opposite – that is to say, it makes it less likely that we will interact with people who are different to us.

#### *Throw-away consumerism and environmental impact*

According to the Ecological Footprint, if everyone on the planet consumed as much as people do in the UK or France, we would need 2.5 Earths to meet the resource demands (Figure 4). Despite discussion about the rise in pollution associated with developing countries, it is still the West that is responsible for the highest levels of consumption, in turn representing an unfair share of carbon emissions.

Time is running out to act on limiting the effects of climate change. According to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), it will no longer be likely that we will avoid irreversible climate change, if CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere exceed 400ppm (parts per million).<sup>17</sup> At the end of 2007, the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration was 377ppm. In February 2014, it was 398ppm<sup>18</sup> (Figure 5). Indeed, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, on some days, the atmospheric concentration globally has already exceeded 400ppm.

Figure 5: Atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> since 1960<sup>19</sup>

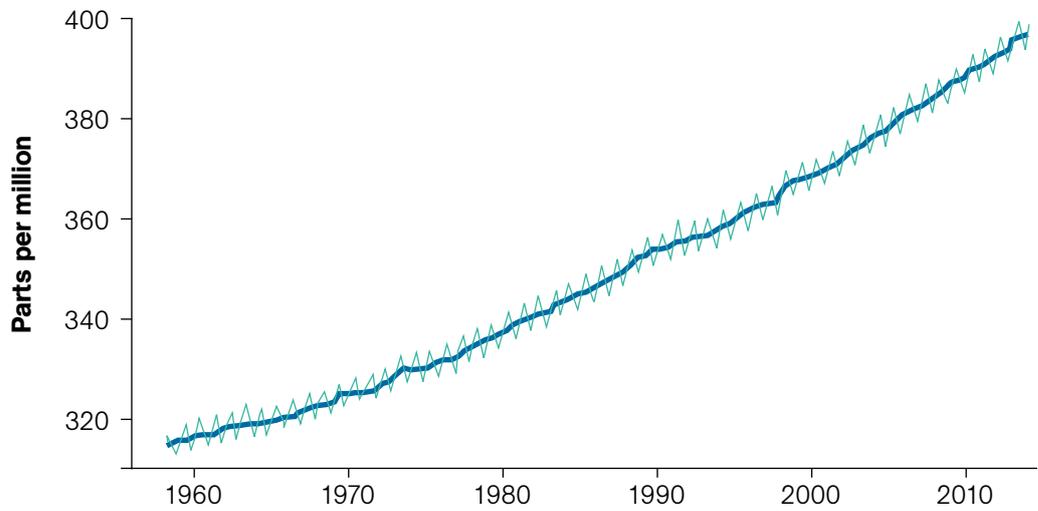


Table 1: The triple challenge, in numbers

Wellbeing and the risk to mental health	Weakening communities and social ties	Throw-away consumerism and environmental impact
Wellbeing has been in slight decline despite GDP tripling in the USA since 1960	The USA experienced a 43% drop in families having dinner together over 25 years	If, globally, lifestyles were similar to those in France or the UK, 2.5 planet Earths would be needed to sustain world's population
Cost of mental illness in developed countries estimated as 3–4% of GDP	In Poland, 35% say 'most people try to take advantage of me'; in France, 46% say most people can't be trusted	242 million new phones purchased in the USA in 2013 (total population was 314 million)
41% of days off work in the UK are due to mental health issues	In the UK, 27% don't feel close to people in their local area	398 ppm atmospheric concentration of CO <sub>2</sub> in February 2014. The IPCC has set a threshold at 400 ppm to avoid the worst effects of climate change

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and indeed atmospheric concentrations, and bring them back to safe levels will require fundamental transformations of our economy and society. Technological innovation will be required to reduce the carbon intensity of the economy – that is, how much CO<sub>2</sub> is emitted for every pound or euro of economic activity. Changes in the way we consume are also necessary, with authors calling for down-shifting and a spirit of sufficiency – i.e. only consuming what is necessary.<sup>20</sup>

Some experts, including psychologist Tim Kasser in the USA,<sup>21</sup> economist Serge Latouche in France,<sup>22</sup> and sustainability expert Tim Jackson in

the UK,<sup>23</sup> argue that tackling materialism and consumerism is a key task in making consumption patterns more manageable in a world of finite resources. For example, in 2013, just under 242 million new phones were sold in the USA<sup>24</sup>, which almost equates to one new phone for every citizen aged between 10 and 70 that year. A recent BBC series *The men who made us spend*, described how some businesses have run advertising campaigns encouraging consumers to regularly throw away and replace high-value household items such as furniture, rather than looking after and repairing these products. The idea of reusing and repairing products, as an alternative to this 'throw-away consumerism' is an integral part of the circular economy (discussed in Section 1).

Bringing things back full circle to the wellbeing and social challenges, research on materialism has also associated it with lower wellbeing, greater risk of mental health problems, and less pro-social behaviour.<sup>25</sup> In other words, a value shift away from materialism could have positive impacts in terms of the environment, communities, and wellbeing.

While there is an urgent triple challenge, the rest of the report shows that learning, sharing and using practical skills provides an opportunity to confront each of the aspects of this challenge:

- **Wellbeing** is strengthened by being active, competent, and connected with other people.
- **Community empowerment** is reinforced by people sharing and being able to learn and to help each other.
- **A make-and-mend culture** can help us minimise our resource use in contrast to a 'throw-away' culture leading to over-consumption.

# 1. Learning and sharing of practical skills – in context

*‘The cool thing is that I can say that I built this with my own hands. Part of it is also pride in the ability of building something like that. A project like that attracts a lot of attention and acts as a conversation starter; it shows what you can do.’<sup>26</sup>*

The research cited in this report shows that people being able to do DIY in their homes and communities is in itself a positive thing, increasing life satisfaction and leading to a sense of accomplishment and control.

In this section we highlight some of the types of interventions specifically designed to encourage the learning and sharing of practical skills, and which in turn are often designed to build community empowerment. These activities are happening in many places, many of them at a very local level. The Big Lottery Fund, one of the UK’s largest charitable funders, has funded a whole raft of such activities, as part of its Wellbeing Programme (Box C). Kingfisher’s operating companies such as B&Q and Castorama are running many activities (Box L and Box M). And Timebanking, a concept developed in the USA (Box D), has swept across the world. Yet what’s interesting is that they share many characteristics and together start to form a picture of what can work in equipping people with practical skills. These examples start to demonstrate how the ability to connect and contribute to a community, the tangible benefits of getting practical tasks done, and husbandry of resources go hand in hand.

Further examples are included in Sections 2 and 3, where we review the evidence for impacts.

## 1.1 Learning and sharing practical skills in action

### *DIY SOS<sup>27</sup>*

DIY SOS is a project in Sussex, England, launched in 2011 to train volunteers in DIY skills so that they can maintain local community buildings and green spaces. Run by a local housing association, Amicus Horizon, and funded as part of the Big Lottery Fund’s flagship Reaching Communities programme, it offers intensive five-week DIY courses, as well as basic home maintenance courses to residents of deprived areas. Programme coordinator Naomi Mileham has said that participants learn skills like plumbing and wallpapering and tackle various problems like cracks in walls, getting to know the tricks of the trade.

### Box C. The Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme

This is a £160-million programme that ran from 2007 to 2013 in the UK, and has recently been extended. A wide range of projects run by statutory, voluntary, and community organisations received funding from the Big Lottery Fund, with the three stated objectives of increasing physical activity, increasing healthy eating, and improving mental health. Many of the projects funded have elements of learning practical skills, and particularly gardening and cookery. These projects are drawn upon for examples and evaluation of impacts throughout the report.

#### *Repair Cafés<sup>28</sup>*

Repair Cafés are meeting places where people can bring broken items, and fix them for free using tools provided at the café and advice from skilled volunteers. In October 2009 the first Repair Café was held in the foyer of Amsterdam's Fijnhout Theatre. Almost 100 people turned up with everything from toasters and radios to clothing and a banjo, all in need of fixing.

In 2010 the Repair Café Foundation was created, which in 2011 started to provide support to local groups wanting to create their own Repair Cafés. Today, 500 regularly take place worldwide, as far-flung as Brazil, America, and Australia. Each provides tea and coffee, and is funded by donations and supported by volunteers.

#### *Les Troc'Heures*

*Les Troc'Heures*, which literally translates as 'Barter Hours' is a community skill-sharing website launched by Castorama France in 2011, where individuals can exchange hours of DIY help with one another. To date, there are more than 10 000 members, posting over 3800 job-swap adverts. As well as the immediate intentions of getting people to share their skills and make DIY appear easy, *Les Troc'Heures* is also a response to what is perceived to be an increasingly atomised French society – where more and more people live in single-person households and loneliness is rising. Furthermore, there is a concerted effort to ensure women are engaged in practical activities, and 46% of website members are female. What's more, the website is not always used for exchange: sometimes individuals offer to help out without receiving any barter in return.

#### *The Restart Project<sup>29</sup>*

The Restart Project is a London-based social enterprise that encourages and empowers people to use their electronics for longer, by teaching them fundamental repair and maintenance skills. Its aim is to 'fix our relationship with electronics', reducing consumption, unnecessary waste, and the frustration associated with broken electronics. Founded in 2012 and supported by funding including from Lloyds Bank Social Entrepreneurs Programme, Restarter groups have now hosted events from Florida to northern Italy.

### *Rushey Green Timebank*

Rushey Green Timebank in South East London was developed by a local doctor's practice in 2000 as a way to tackle isolation and depression in the community. For a while this timebank specialised in DIY, but today a range of services are exchanged through the timebank in an effort to make it easier for reciprocal exchanges to be formed. These services include befriending, running errands, giving lifts, arranging social events, woodwork, poetry writing, teaching sewing, babysitting, and gardening.

The aim of the timebank was to generate social support for the most isolated members of the community, and provide basic practical help that could enable older people to stay in their own homes. One positive example of someone who benefited from the timebank:

*'A middle-aged man was referred to Rushey Green timebank by his doctor, as he was suffering from depression and isolation, partly due to unemployment. Through the project he learned DIY skills and began to help other members, gaining a sense of purpose and self-esteem, as well as making new friends in the process.'*

See Box D for more on timebanking.

#### **Box D. Timebanking**

Timebanking was developed by an American professor Edgar Cahn whilst working at the London School of Economics in 1986 as a way to strengthen social ties. The idea is simple – members of the timebank help other members in exchange for time credits – one hour means one time credit. Timebank members can then use these time credits to 'buy' time from other members, to do things for them. Examples of the ways that people help one another include language classes, gardening, looking after children, or jobs around the house. In timebanking, all units of time are usually valued equally, such that an hour of gardening assistance is of equal value to an hour of childcare.

Timebanking starts from a philosophy that everyone has something to contribute, and comes from a recognition that traditional service models which involve individuals being volunteered 'at', without being given the opportunity to reciprocate, can be demoralising and reduce self-esteem. Advocates argue that 'people and communities must play a bigger role in defining their own needs and have more power to do what it takes, individually and collectively, to improve and meet those needs.' Timebanking is an example of co-production, which is an approach that has attracted much interest in the public sector as a way of delivering services more effectively and efficiently. It works by activating and utilising community assets not valued by the market – human relations, time, social networks, and the knowledge and skills of residents. It also seen as a preventative approach, stopping needs from arising by ensuring communities are empowered and engaged.<sup>30</sup>

### *Majsterkowo*

Majsterkowo is a scheme run in all Castorama stores in Poland (there are over 60 stores) aimed at teaching young people basic DIY, gardening, and practical skills. The scheme was first piloted in 2012, before being rolled out country-wide. Groups of children from local schools come in store to attend sessions led by store staff which involve both traditional teaching and hands-on activity. Each session lasts up to 1.5 hours. As well as enhancing practical skills and developing children's independence, the classes also have an objective around increasing environmental awareness. Castorama aims to reach 65 000 children a year with the scheme.

In Poland, the scheme emerged in a context where manual training had been dropped from school curricula. Traditionally, parents would have passed on these skills to their children, but the Castorama staff interviewed noted that parents often don't have the time to do this anymore. Furthermore, there is still a perception, post-communism, that making things by oneself, or repairing things is what you had to do during the communist period, and that in the modern Poland it's not necessary or desirable. Tackling this perception is part of the challenge.

### *Landsbury Gardening Club<sup>31</sup>*

The Landsbury Gardening Club was set up under the Greater London Authority's Well London Alliance community action programme, a programme designed to promote health and wellbeing in London's most deprived neighbourhoods, and funded by the Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme (Box C). A community gardener was employed to deliver weekly sessions, teaching gardening skills to a diverse range of community members, so that a community garden of flowers, fruit, and vegetables could be established. Members of the community have now taken over facilitation of the weekly gardening sessions.

The project aimed to engage as wide a range of community members as possible, and to increase individuals' mental wellbeing and physical activity, as well as encouraging healthy eating, making sustainable green spaces for the community, and encouraging environmentally sustainable growing practices.

### *Street Club*

Street Club is a local social networking tool developed by B&Q in the UK that enables neighbours to get together to create their own social network online. The intention is to increase community resilience and sense of connection, and enable community members to start planning things together, share tools with each other, and help each other to get things done. There is also an environmental objective, in that sharing items through collaborative consumption should reduce environmental impact.

There were over 3500 people signed up to Street Club by early 2014, mostly middle income, aged 40–60. There are challenges in increasing take-up in both low-income and high-income areas.

Street Club emerged from a sense that many of the barriers to people engaging with DIY were relatively easy to overcome, including a lack of skills, and misperceptions about the costs involved.

## 1.2 An emerging new materialism

Programmes to equip people with practical skills, and to share the practical skills that exist within communities, are happening in the midst of some important and potentially formative trends. Commentators are observing an emerging spirit that is being called *prosumerism* or *new materialism*. The philosophy behind this potential new paradigm is not to entirely reject the ownership of goods, but to build a different kind of relationship with the things one owns. It is a rejection of 'throw-away' consumerism – whereby people buy products which they discard and replace rapidly. Instead, advocates describe new materialism as a concept whereby through making, caring for, improving, and repairing objects 'we grow a more deeply pleasurable, and also respectful relationship, with the world of "things"'.<sup>32</sup> In an interview conducted for this project (Box E), Etienne Hayem describes how this trend relates to the kind of practical skills that we are focusing on:

*'Doing DIY and gardening provides people with an awareness and understanding of how stuff is made and grown which creates a stronger link with the physical world.'*

The 2014 European Home Report finds an increasing proportion of people in Europe are able to carry out their own DIY, with Germans and French being the most confident DIYers.<sup>33</sup>

The new materialism movement can be seen entering the public consciousness with individuals doing crafts, selling their handmade items on websites such as Etsy, and TV programmes showcasing practical skills such as cookery, gardening, or home improvements. However, the transformation to a circular economy is a long-term process. For the transformation to succeed in the long-run, products need to be designed to be easily repaired and upgraded, people need to have the skills to look after and repair the things they own, communities need to have networks to promote these skills, and cultural values need to shift (and stay shifted) such that repairing, reusing, and DIY are perceived as more fashionable and desirable than throwing away products and buying new ones.

Related to the emergence of new materialism has been the rise of the 'maker movement'. This is an umbrella term for the growing ranks of people who are inventing, designing, and building, often bringing together the newest technologies like 3D printing with traditional artisanal and DIY skills.

The movement has its own magazine, *Make*, with a readership of 300 000 in 2013<sup>34</sup> as well as hands-on Maker Faire events where enthusiasts can meet, make, and share. In 2014 there are 140 Faires scheduled all over the world from Shenzhen to the first White House Maker Faire in June.

The *Economist* has observed that the trend for making and repairing is a move towards the type of circular economy supported by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, and away from the current economic system where we ‘take, make, and dispose’. It remains to be seen whether this new trend is a seasonal fashion, or whether it genuinely is the start of a new way of thinking about the things we own. For these movements to succeed, people need to have the skills to look after and repair the things they own, and the networks to promote these skills. Furthermore, cultural values need to set in such that this activity is perceived favourably. If this is successful, it could offer hope against the triple challenge identified in Table 1.

*‘The maker movement encourages people to discover the maker in themselves, and to seek out other makers in their communities. Technology is making it easier for all makers to make things and share their projects with others. They are using this technology to create new kinds of products and drive innovation.’<sup>35</sup>*

**Dale Dougherty, CEO of Maker Media and founder of Make and Maker Faire**

Although not the focus of the rest of this report, the maker movement has been identified as part of the solution to the challenge of over-consumption and the unsustainable use of resources.

**Box E. Talking Head – Etienne Hayem**

We interviewed Etienne Hayem, founder of an alternative currency project called Symba. He recently spoke at the OuiShare Fest in Paris, an annual event jointly sponsored by Castorama France which in 2014 brought together 1000 people from over 30 countries under the theme 'The Age of Communities.'

For Etienne, timebanking is part of a broader movement to reverse the trend of 'commodification' which he sees as having chipped away at communities over the years. Services and activities which used to be free, communal, or provided as favours, from babysitting to removals to education, are increasingly seen as services that must be bought on the market. For Etienne this reduces the degree to which we are interlinked as communities, because it reduces the level of 'social debt' we have to one another. Friends and acquaintances don't exchange favours in a very strict one-to-one way, but we do have a sense of when we owe someone something for a favour they've done for us. This is social debt which, when managed fairly, brings people together. He says:

*'Sharing skills, and sharing those things that are used rarely such as power tools, is part of a process of rebuilding community.'*

What role do businesses such as B&Q and Castorama have to play in this? Etienne sees such businesses as playing an important stewardship role. Whilst water companies are increasingly understanding their business model as being about stewarding and maintaining water supplies, some enlightened manufacturers see their role as stewarding the raw materials they rely on. He believes that B&Q and Castorama should in addition see their role as being about stewarding the knowledge and skills required to maintain resilient and autonomous communities which are able to use practical skills to their benefit. He believes that communities have great potential to apply these skills to broad communal benefits, and that this sometimes just needs a little catalyst:

*'When you propose a challenge, greater than us, then people gather to meet that challenge.'*

## 2. The wellbeing impacts of using and learning practical skills

*“The potential is great for learning DIY to have an impact on people’s ability to learn skills in general, on people’s opportunity to engage with others, and to improve themselves and the local community.”*

**Dharmendra Kanani, England Director for the Big Lottery Fund**

This section presents evidence showing that people who get involved in learning and sharing interventions benefit from increasing wellbeing overall. In most cases this evidence is quantitative, in some cases based on data from national surveys. The section is divided into three parts. First, we ground this report, by presenting the dynamic model of wellbeing and a theory of wellbeing and the universal psychological needs that underpin it.

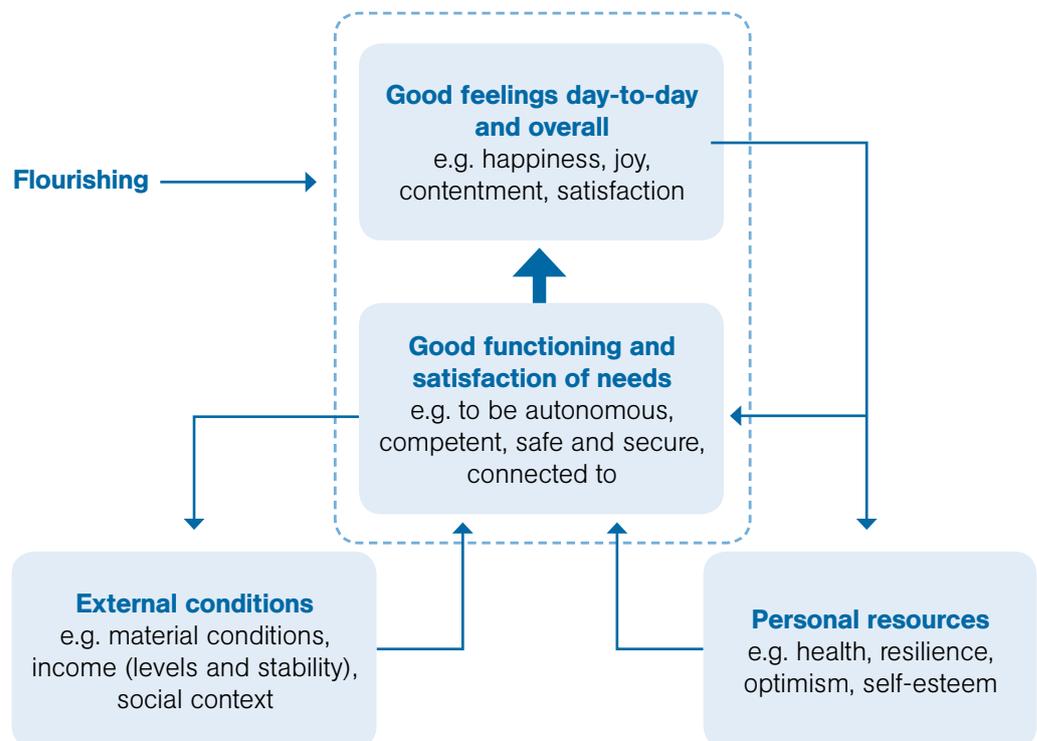
Second, we look to see if people who frequently practice practical activities have higher wellbeing than others. As well as drawing on evidence from three pre-existing studies for adults, we also carry out some primary analysis of data on children in the UK using the Understanding Society Survey.

Third, we look at the impact over time of interventions where people learn new practical skills. This evidence comes mostly from the quantitative evaluation of the Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme which was mentioned in Section 1, and which will provide much of the evidence in Section 3.

### 2.1 A dynamic model of wellbeing

The dynamic model of wellbeing (Figure 6) was developed in 2008 for the Foresight Commission on Mental Capital and Wellbeing, a government review of what was then a very new and emerging topic. It combined several different understandings of what individual wellbeing is, and how it should be measured. It is a model of individual mental wellbeing, so factors like physical health and community are considered as drivers rather than actual elements of wellbeing.

The model sees wellbeing as something that emerges from the interaction between external conditions (things like income, urban environment, family, etc.) and a person’s personal resources (self-esteem, optimism, personality, etc.). In other words, two people can have very different levels of wellbeing despite their life conditions being identical, because they have different sets of personal resources.

Figure 6: Dynamic Model of Wellbeing<sup>36</sup>

This interaction determines the extent to which an individual meets their psychological needs. The concept of psychological needs can be traced to the psychologist Abraham Maslow who proposed a hierarchy of needs in the 1940s. The idea is that, beyond basic physiological needs, such as the need to eat and sleep, there are also *universal psychological* needs that all individuals must satisfy to flourish. The extent to which these are met is determined by one's external conditions and personal resources, and when they are met an individual can be considered to be flourishing. We will return to these needs later in this section.

The top box of Figure 6 shows how an individual's day-to-day emotions – how much of the time they feel happy or sad – and overall assessments of how their life is going – often measured by questions about satisfaction with life – are determined by the extent to which they are able to satisfy their psychological (and of course physiological) needs.

The model is dynamic in that there are multiple feedback loops. Figure 6 highlights the most important of these. First, individuals who are flourishing in their day-to-day lives are able to master and influence their external conditions to their benefit. For example, someone who feels confident about their ability to do a job well is more likely to apply for that job. Secondly, a stream of evidence beginning in the 1990s has led to the broaden-and-build theory – which shows how people who are experiencing positive emotions approach the world in a different way, think more creatively, build psychological and social resources, and achieve long-term positive outcomes, including better health, longer lasting social relationships, and success in one's career.<sup>37</sup> For example, a now famous

study which looked at diaries of young women when they joined a convent found, many years later, that those whose diaries included more positive emotions than negative emotions, lived seven years longer than those whose diaries had more negative than positive emotions.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.2 Self-determination theory

The model presented in Figure 6 identifies three universal psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This is based on self-determination theory, which is an updated version of some of Maslow's model.<sup>39</sup> The theory builds on decades of research into the things that enable people to achieve personal growth, integrity, and wellbeing.<sup>40,41</sup> Satisfaction of psychological needs is associated with sustained higher subjective wellbeing and sense of vitality, and better mental health.<sup>42</sup>

The three core needs are:

- **Autonomy** – a feeling of choice and authenticity about your thoughts and behaviours. This is not about complete freedom, but more about being who you are, and about your actions all having some internal motivation.
- **Competence** – a sense of efficacy and self-esteem, and a sense that you can have a meaningful impact on the world around you.
- **Relatedness** – feeling that people care about you, and feeling close to others.

As we will see, learning and sharing practical skills has clear impacts on all three of these core needs.

One of the strengths of this theory is the evidence that these needs are fundamental to people from all cultures. This is even the case for autonomy, which some people have suggested is a more 'Western' need, of less relevance for some Eastern cultures.<sup>43</sup> There is ample research demonstrating that people in a wide range of cultures, for example Chinese, Russian, Korean, and Japanese, all benefit from a sense of autonomy. One powerful study of school children in the USA and Russia demonstrated that children in both countries benefited from teaching and parental styles that were autonomy supporting – in terms of a wide range of outcomes including life satisfaction, self-esteem, and depressive symptoms.<sup>44</sup> Whilst average levels of autonomy support and wellbeing were much lower in Russia than in the US sample, the effect was just as strong. In other words, on the whole children in both countries benefited from autonomy support, but children in Russia received much less autonomy support (and consequently had lower wellbeing).

## 2.3 Overall benefits of having practical skills

### *Amongst adults*

A couple of studies have directly explored whether people who do practical activities have higher wellbeing than those who don't.

### Box F. Life satisfaction – measuring overall wellbeing

How do we measure ‘overall wellbeing’? Much of the evidence in this section comes from asking people about their satisfaction with life overall. Various questions have been developed to assess satisfaction with life, and they all encourage questionnaire respondents to consider their life ‘overall’ or ‘as a whole’. For example, the British Household Panel Survey asks the question:

*‘How dissatisfied or satisfied are you with your life overall?’*

Responses are made on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means ‘not satisfied at all’, and 7 means ‘completely satisfied’.

Economists have seen this question as an effective single measure to assess what they call ‘utility’, and much analysis has been conducted to determine what conditions, behaviours, and events are associated with higher or lower life satisfaction. Whilst psychologists argue that a single question is too narrow to assess someone’s overall life, and that other concepts such as those mentioned in Section 2 (autonomy, competence, social relations, etc.) are also integral to wellbeing, life satisfaction can be seen as a good summary measure if one wants to get a simple top-line assessment.

Many countries have started collecting data on this question in official surveys. In the UK, it is included in several official surveys, the biggest of which is the Annual Population Survey which goes out to around 160 000 households each year, and incorporated questions on wellbeing since 2011. In France, life satisfaction is measured in the *Statistiques sur les ressources et conditions de vie* (statistics on resources and conditions of life). In Poland, the official statistics office has included measures such as life satisfaction in the Quality of Life and Social Cohesion Survey starting in 2011. In 2013, Eurostat, the European Union’s statistics agency, included a set of 20 questions, including life satisfaction, in an *ad hoc* module administered in all member states. Some countries, including Poland, have already carried out and are disseminating preliminary analysis of data from this survey, but the full data set will not be out till 2015.

Professor Toni Antonucci, who studies changes in lifestyles associated with aging, has analysed data from the Americans’ Changing Lives Survey in 1986, which had a representative sample of over 3500 respondents.<sup>45</sup> The vast majority of respondents reported doing at least some DIY – 93% of men and 82% of women. On average men spent 9 hours a month doing DIY, and women spent 6 hours a month. Antonucci focused on respondents aged 65 and over, and found that those who spent more time doing DIY activities reported higher life satisfaction (see Box F on how life satisfaction is measured). The effect held, even when controlling for demographic variables such as age, income and education. What that

means is that, if one were to find two people with the same age, income, and education level, the one that spent more time doing DIY would likely have higher life satisfaction.

Indeed, the positive effect of carrying out DIY was the strongest in their study, stronger than the effect of income, and stronger than the effects of other activities such as volunteering and helping others. This pattern was true both for men and women. The authors conclude:

*'The data indicate that for both men and women, engagement in do-it-yourself activities is significantly related to life satisfaction.'*

In 2005, academics from Dutch and American institutions looked at the relationship between gardening and life satisfaction, using the 1996 British Household Panel Survey. This is a large-scale and regular survey, which at that time reached a representative sample of 9000 adults throughout Great Britain. They found that the 48% of people who worked in their garden at least once per month had higher life satisfaction than those that did so less often or not at all. Like with the DIY study in the USA, this positive impact was significant even after controlling for a range of demographic factors, including employment status, working hours, income, age and level of education.<sup>46</sup> The effect was almost twice as big as the effect of income on life satisfaction.<sup>47</sup>

Neither study is able to provide an explanation for why people who spend more time gardening or doing DIY have higher wellbeing. This 'why' question will be addressed in Section 3.

### *2.3.2 Amongst children*

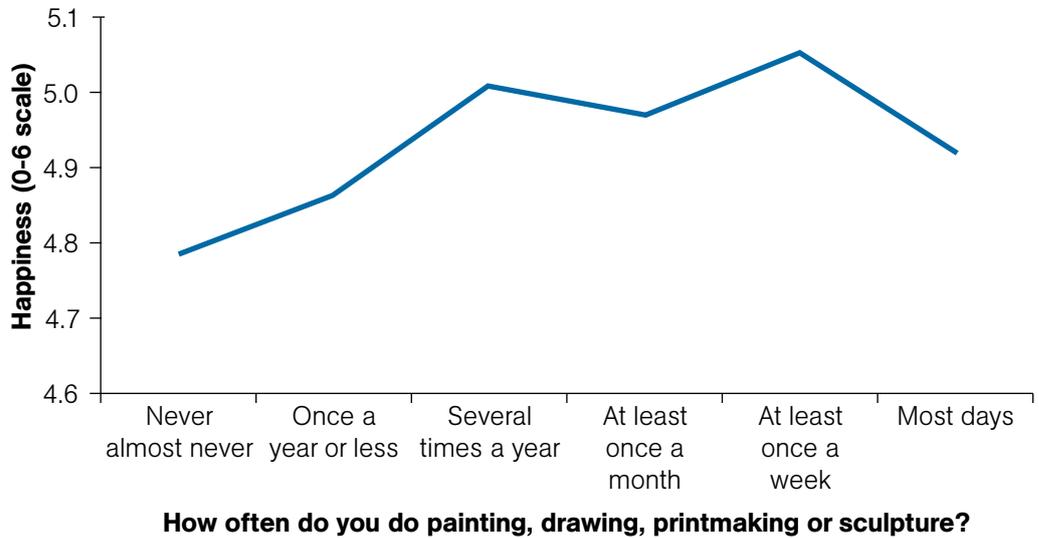
There is also evidence of the benefits of having and using skills for children. The Understanding Society Survey is a large-scale survey covering 40 000 households in the UK. As well as an adult questionnaire, the research also includes a children's questionnaire which, in 2011, was completed by children aged between 10 and 15. Two of the questions from this survey asked about specific manual skills, though it should be noted that they are both related to artistic activities – arts and crafts, and music:

- 1 How often do you do painting, drawing, printmaking or sculpture?
- 2 Do you play a musical instrument?

We analysed the data to see if there was a relationship between these two questions and the children's self-reported overall happiness with life.

Figure 7 shows how average happiness varies depending on the frequency with which children participated in arts and crafts activities. As can be seen, those children who carried out such activities more frequently had higher levels of happiness – but only up to 'every week'. Children who carried out arts and crafts 'most days' had slightly lower happiness, perhaps because the children's engagement in those activities is too regimented and no longer feels optional.

Figure 7: Levels of happiness amongst children as a function of participation in arts and crafts



and children's age. This is important – it could have been the case, for example, that children from wealthier households had more opportunities do arts and crafts, and that they are also generally happier, but for other reasons. By controlling for income we are able to identify that a child that did more arts and crafts would generally be expected to be happier than one that did less, even if their families had the same household incomes.

Whilst children who played musical instruments were happier than those that didn't, this effect disappears when one controls for household income

Figure 8: Children's self-esteem as a function of participation in arts and crafts, or playing a musical instrument

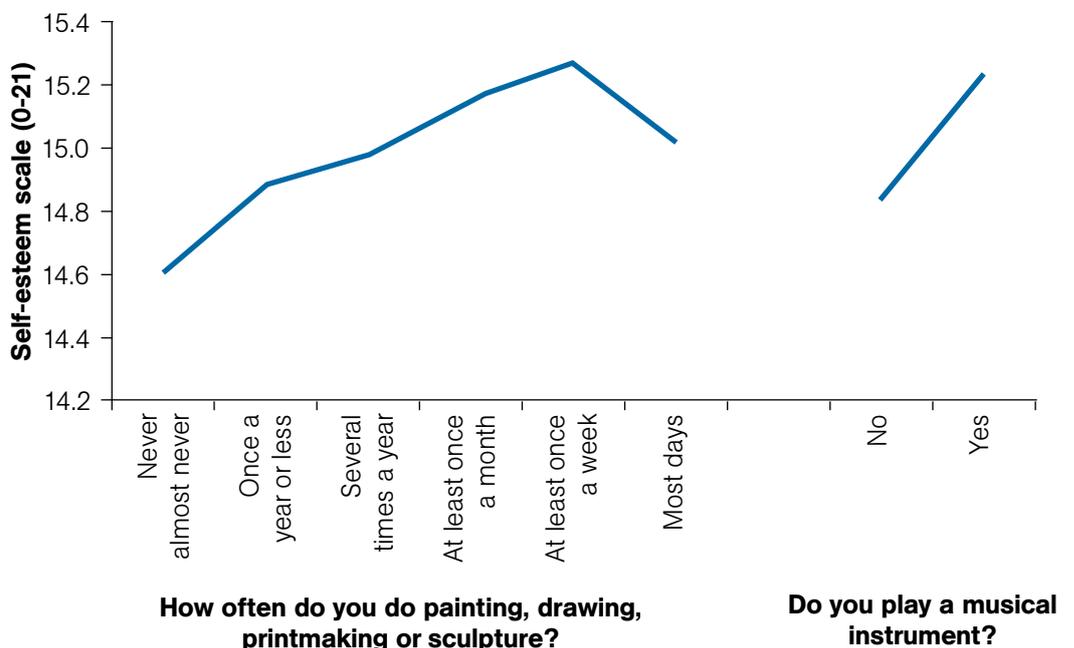
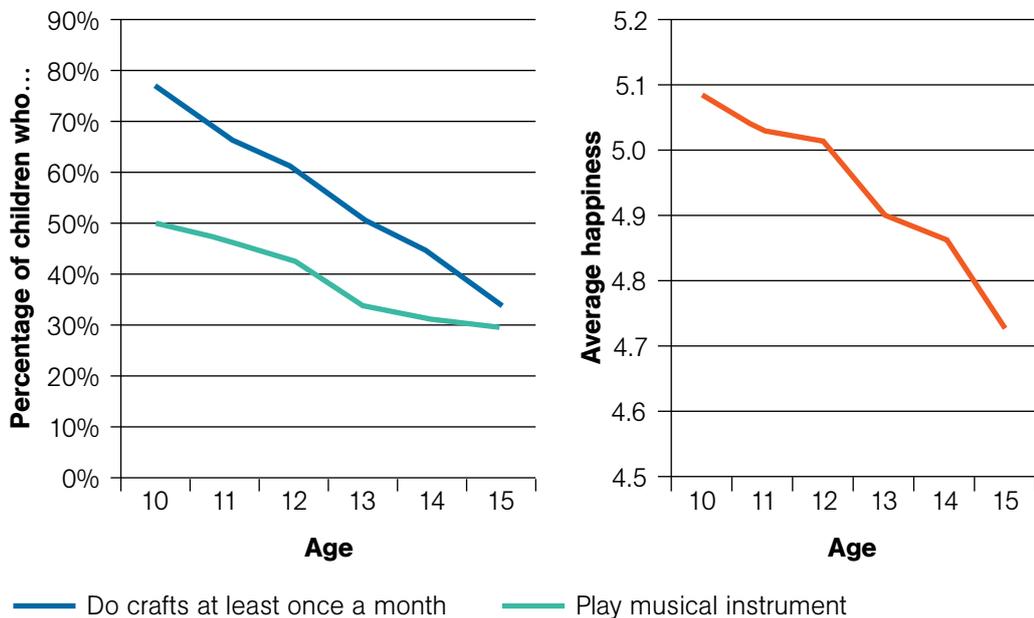


Figure 9: Involvement in practical activities and average happiness as a function of age



or material deprivation. This suggests that, in contrast to arts/crafts, playing a musical instrument was not associated with higher levels of happiness.

Confirming the dynamic model of wellbeing presented at the beginning of this section, we also found that children who participated more often in arts and crafts had higher levels of self-esteem- measured using a scale based on seven questions (Figure 8).<sup>48</sup> Unlike overall happiness, there was also a significant impact of playing a musical instrument, even after controlling for income. So, playing a musical instrument appears to have a significant association with self-esteem, but not overall happiness.

Might increasing children's participation in arts and crafts activities increase their wellbeing? Possibly, but the typical trend is for children to do fewer manual activities as they get older, not more (Figure 9). Figure 9 shows the percentage of children who participate in arts and crafts activities once a month falls with age from 77% of those aged 10, to 33% of those aged 15, whilst the percentage of children who play a musical instrument falls from 50% to 30%. Meanwhile, average happiness and self-esteem also falls. This reflects a pattern also seen in the data from the Children's Society survey (Section 3), whereby both wellbeing and participation in five ways activities fell with age.

## 2.4 Overall benefits of learning practical skills

Key to this report is evidence that people who get involved in activities where they learn skills have higher overall wellbeing after such an intervention than beforehand. This requires careful evaluation, using a before-and-after methodology.

The Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme (introduced in Section 1) included such an evaluation, applied to a subset of the hundreds of

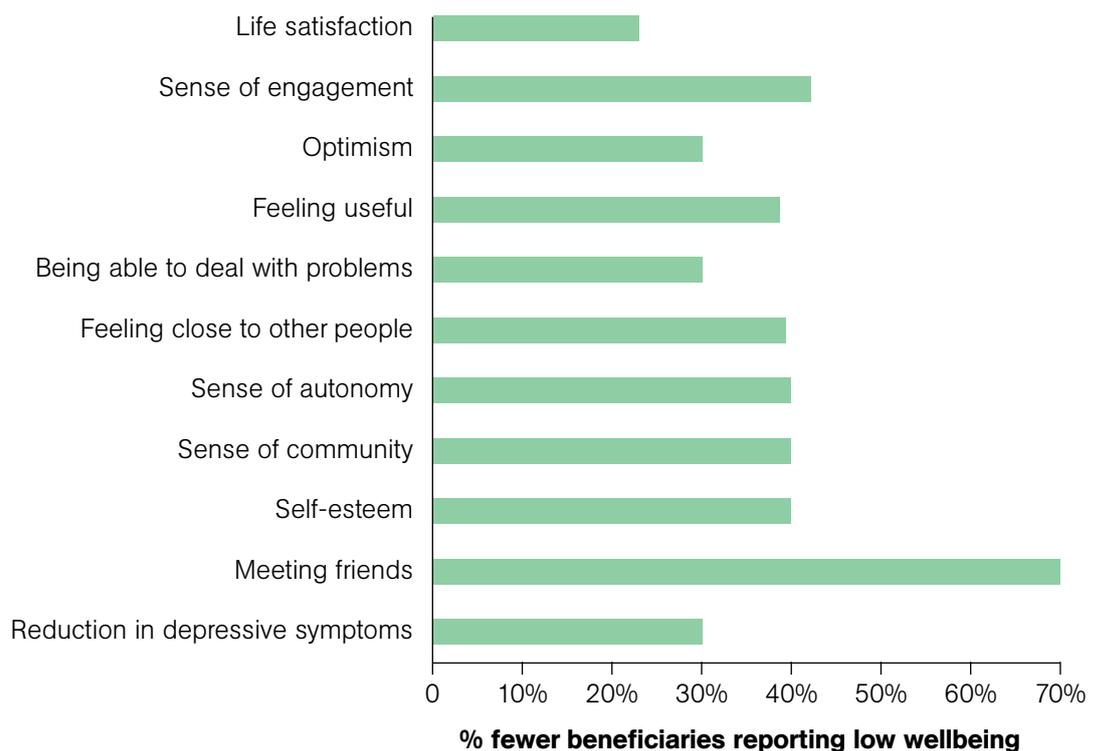
funded projects.<sup>49</sup> A standard questionnaire was developed for all projects included in the evaluation, and staff delivering projects were asked to administer the questionnaire to project beneficiaries at the beginning and end of the project. Where possible, beneficiaries were also asked to complete the questionnaire six months later. Each time, the questionnaire administered asked the same questions about overall wellbeing including satisfaction with life, a series of questions on eudaimonic wellbeing, and a series of questions asking about the frequency of positive and negative emotions. Questions were also asked about behaviours and attitudes in relation to physical activity and healthy eating.<sup>50</sup>

With the kind permission of the Big Lottery Fund, we have analysed the data from those projects in the evaluation where beneficiaries learnt or practiced practical skills – specifically either gardening or cookery, to assess the impacts of these projects in terms of overall wellbeing. Figures 10 and 11 provide a snapshot of some of the impacts of these projects.

As can be seen, for gardening (Figure 10) and cookery (Figure 11) projects, there were multiple significant impacts on wellbeing, including on overall life satisfaction as well as sense of engagement (feeling immersed in whatever you are doing), feeling useful, and several social measures. The decrease in depressive symptoms is also important, and echoes the evaluation of learning projects with homeless people, which

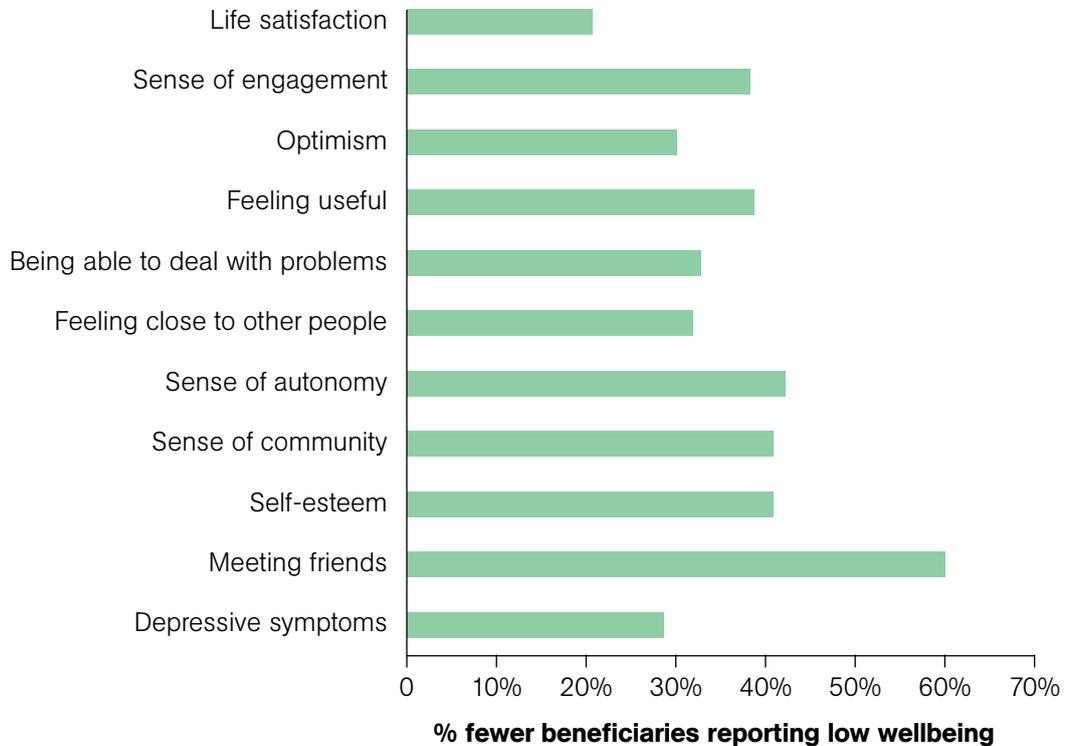
**Figure 10: Wellbeing improvements associated with gardening projects in Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme**

Percentages represent the reduction in numbers of beneficiaries' experiencing low wellbeing for each aspect of wellbeing



**Figure 11: Wellbeing improvements associated with cookery projects in Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme**

Percentages represent the reduction in numbers of beneficiaries' experiencing low wellbeing for each aspect of wellbeing



also noted improved mental health and reduced substance misuse.<sup>51</sup> Of course, projects also had impacts on healthy eating, including higher proportions of people eating five fruit and vegetables a day. Both cookery and gardening projects had positive impacts in terms of physical activity as well.

In most cases, impacts were sustained at least three to six months after a project had finished. For example, life satisfaction remained 0.7 points higher for both projects involving cookery and gardening.

And the impacts compared favourably with other projects within the Big

These are very big impacts. Analysis of the British Household Panel Survey, which asked people about their wellbeing from year to year, shows that, for a person's life satisfaction to increase that much through increased income alone, their income would have to *triple*.

Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme. Out of 20 projects for which there were good samples, two of the top three projects in terms of increasing life satisfaction involved endowing participants with skills, specifically cookery and gardening.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that learning skills is a particularly effective method of increasing life satisfaction, compared to the other activities undertaken (which included a range of activities from one-to-one peer mentoring for young homeless people to museum outings for elderly people).

The overall Wellbeing Programme evaluation noted people whose wellbeing was lowest at the start of the projects saw the biggest increases in wellbeing afterwards, highlighting the benefit of targeting people with lower wellbeing. It also found that women's wellbeing increased more as a result of interventions than men's did.<sup>53</sup>

Two caveats should be kept in mind with regard to these analyses. First, projects identified as cookery or gardening projects may well have included other activities as well – in which case, some of the benefits seen may well have been a result of those other activities. Second, not everyone who completed a questionnaire at the beginning of the project also completed a questionnaire at the end of the project; as such, we're not able to say what happened to the wellbeing of those participants who didn't complete the exit questionnaire. Nevertheless, the interviews and qualitative evidence from the evaluation (explored in Section 3) suggest that the development of practical skills and the learning process were integral to the achievement of the wellbeing outcomes.

### 3. How do learning and sharing practical skills enhance community and individual wellbeing?

This section explores the question of *how* skill learning, as well as skill sharing, leads to both wellbeing outcomes and community empowerment outcomes.

We demonstrated in Section 2 that people who have and/or learn practical skills have higher wellbeing. This section unearths the sometimes surprising evidence about how that happens, and how these skills lead to community empowerment outcomes as well as individual benefits. We conclude the report with the *Hands-on communities* model (Figure 16), which depicts the multiple pathways that are laid out in this section.

The impacts of learning and sharing skills can be divided into four categories:

- **Intermediate impacts.** These include learning skills and meeting people. These may be valuable in themselves, and are also valuable because they lead to the three other categories.
- **Individual wellbeing impacts.** These are impacts which are intrinsically valuable to individuals, for example increasing sense of competence. We will frame these impacts in terms of the leading theories of wellbeing.
- **Community wellbeing impacts.** These are positive impacts that are best understood at the community level, for example sense of community efficacy and opportunities to interact. The key thing is that they impact people beyond those who directly interact with the intervention in question.
- **Environmental impacts.**

This report focuses on the individual and community impacts that lie beyond the intermediate impacts. These will be looked at for skill learning and skill sharing separately, as the impact pathways are distinct. At the end of this section, we will also consider the wellbeing benefits for staff involved in delivering or facilitating skill-learning and skill-sharing activities – which is of particular relevance for businesses wishing to incorporate such activities in their community impact programmes.

### 3.1 Skill learning

In understanding the impact of activities where people have the opportunity to learn practical skills, we distinguish between three stages of that impact:

- a) The learning process
- b) Having practical skills
- c) The material benefits of what can be done with those skills.

After considering the individual benefits at each of these stages, we consider the benefits to the community.

#### 3.1.1 *The benefits of the learning process*

First, individuals benefit from the process of learning new skills. The Government Office for Science Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing highlighted the benefits to wellbeing and mental health of lifelong learning.<sup>54</sup> This finding was so important, that 'Keep Learning' was identified as one of the Five Ways to Wellbeing which were developed as a synthesis of the report (Box B).<sup>55</sup>

#### *Learning new skills leads to self-esteem and a sense of competence*

*'It looks great and I did it myself! It feels great!'*<sup>56</sup>

Learning has the immediate effect of increasing sense of competence and self-esteem, whether or not that skill is actually used. Rosenberg's (2011) analysis of the personal narratives of (mostly Australian) members of an online home-improvement hobby forum called Our House DIY-Club found that the acquisition of practical DIY skills creates a sense of accomplishment, as individuals can 'bask in the glory, pleasure and material manifestation of their efforts'.<sup>57</sup> The quote above comes from one of the forum members interviewed in the study.

Research on the impact of skill-learning interventions carried out by the charity Crisis for homeless people (Box G) found a range of positive outcomes for beneficiaries, including improved communication and social interaction skills, improved wellbeing and mental health, reduced substance misuse and other harmful behaviours, development of the 'soft' and hard skills necessary for employment; contacts in the labour market; a chance to establish a work record; and improved earnings once in work.<sup>58</sup> Notably, 58% of interviewees reported that the scheme built their confidence and self-esteem.<sup>59</sup>

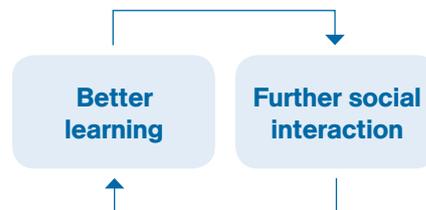
An independent inquiry sponsored by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education consulted experts from government, business, academia, trade unions, public services, providers, the third sector, and learners identified that learning could 'act as a catalyst in securing improved mental health'.<sup>60</sup>

### Box G. Case Study– Crisis<sup>61</sup>

The homeless charity Crisis delivers a range of interventions designed to teach skills such as computing, life skills, music, art, dance, and first aid to homeless people in the UK. Learning and skills activities form part of some structured day programmes funded by local Drug Action Teams to help clients improve their social functioning and community rehabilitation; life skills and vocational or educational goals; personal independence and responsibility (including improvements in family and social support networks); and physical and psychological health.

#### *Learning new skills leads to meeting people, which creates relatedness*

A second immediate impact is a result of the fact that most skill-learning activities we reviewed involved group classes, and therefore provided an opportunity for social interaction and to meet new people. The U, a social action programme developed by the Young Foundation in the UK aimed at strengthening communities, foregrounds this social element in the skills classes it provides (Box H).<sup>62</sup> It sees the relationship between learning and social interaction as two-way. There is plenty of evidence that learning can be fun,<sup>63</sup> so the idea is to build on this, and bring in social interaction to make that learning more effective. Secondly, the learning context provides opportunities and ‘an excuse’ for building social contact. It provides a common experience and common interest about which people who otherwise don’t know each other can relate.



Three projects funded by the Big Lottery Fund where beneficiaries learned practical skills provide evidence for the potential for increasing social interaction. The Growing Food for Life project, where beneficiaries learnt cooking and gardening skills, created opportunities for social interaction and meeting friends with a common interest. In evaluation, beneficiaries reported social ties as a positive outcome of the project:

*‘The friendships formed within the group now extend beyond growing fresh food as group members organise group bike rides and trips and attended the Growing Food for Life celebratory event.’<sup>64</sup>*

Similar evidence came from the Family Cookery project teaching cookery skills to families in Banbury, England (Box I).<sup>65</sup> In interviews afterwards, participants enthusiastically reported that developing friendships and support networks had been one of the main benefits of being involved in the course, with one participant stating:

*‘...we’re friends in the group and we help each other.’*

### Box H. Case Study– The U

The U is a social action programme developed in 2011 by the Young Foundation in the UK, aimed at strengthening communities, developing social bonds, and bringing people together. The hope is that such outcomes will lead to communities that are better able to respond to social challenges. The aim is to enhance both human capital and social capital.

The central methodology is a series of learning events in communities focused on useful skills, one of which is first aid. Learning is designed to be fun, and social interaction is a key element of it. There is a strong motif within the programme of signposting beneficiaries towards opportunities where they can apply the new skills for some social good.

Many of the participants reported that the course had been a valued opportunity to socialise, and some families stayed in contact with the new friends they had made, with some continuing to cook and eat together.<sup>66</sup>

Lastly, the evaluation of the Growing East Midland project found that one of the key outcomes of the project was reduced social isolation and greater social ties. Several participants commented on this, stating that:

*'It's easy to get involved with the site and feel part of it'... 'there's a really good community spirit, everyone helping each other'... 'I've made loads of new friends, friends of all ages.'*<sup>67</sup>

### Box I . Case Study– Family Cookery

Family Cookery was an intervention run by the Sunshine Centre, in Banbury, England. Part of Chances4Change's portfolio of Big Lottery-funded projects, 392 participants were involved in the Family Cookery programme, which delivered courses to teach parents and children to cook together. The weekly courses run for one school term, and consist of hands-on lessons in how to cook simple, healthy, and affordable meals, whilst involving children in the cooking process. The programme has also included one-day events, where families prepare a picnic together in the morning, and then travel by bus to a picnic spot to spend an afternoon enjoying their picnic and playing outdoor games.

#### *Intervention aims*

The project is designed to reduce the impact of deprivation, exclusion, and health inequalities for families in the Banbury area. Family Cookery targets 'at risk' groups and aims to address social isolation, low self-confidence, poor health, and improve access to support by teaching both cookery and social skills, and encouraging participants to have greater involvement in their community.

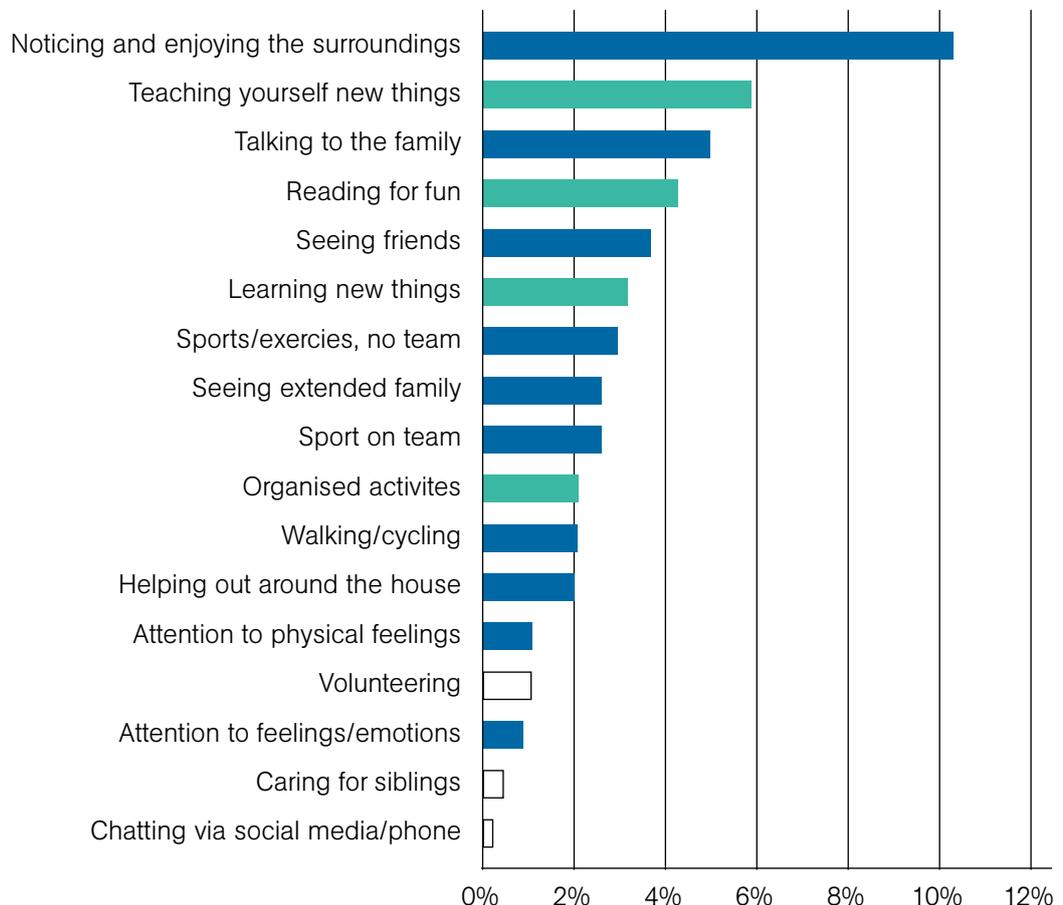
Meanwhile, the evaluation of the Crisis project working with homeless people highlighted the opportunities learning activities gave beneficiaries in terms of building up social contacts that might lead to employment.<sup>68</sup> These opportunities can be particularly valuable for individuals who are socially isolated.

### 3.1.2 The benefits of learning for children

Research has also highlighted the specific benefits of extra-curricular learning for children's wellbeing. The 2013 Good Childhood Report produced by the UK Children's Society included analysis of a survey commissioned by the Children's Society which included questions on wellbeing as well as participation in Five Ways to Wellbeing activities (Box B).<sup>69</sup>

Figure 12 shows the variation in subjective wellbeing explained by the frequency with which children carry out particular activities or behaviours. A score of 100% means that a child's wellbeing is completely determined by the frequency with which they carry out an activity. A score of 0% means that the behaviour is completely irrelevant in explaining a children's wellbeing. The hollow bars with black borders indicate effects that were not statistically significant – i.e., behaviours were not significantly related to wellbeing.

Figure 12: Variation in children's wellbeing associated with various behaviours, including learning behaviours<sup>70</sup>



The questions related to Keep Learning activities are highlighted in turquoise. As one can see, children teaching themselves new things is the second strongest predictor of wellbeing, and three out of the four learning activities are in the top of the graph. All four are significant predictors of wellbeing.

The analysis here controls for demographic factors such as age, gender, parental education, and household work status. This is important as it shows the effect is not just because children from wealthier families happen to spend more time doing learning activities and have higher wellbeing. A child who spends more time in learning activities is likely to have higher wellbeing, regardless of the background of their parents.

### *3.1.3 The benefits of having and using practical skills*

The process of learning skills is of course intended to lead to *having* skills, and there is plenty of evidence that having (and using) practical skills has direct impacts on wellbeing.

*Having and using skills builds self-esteem, a sense of competence and autonomy, and a sense of identity, all core needs for wellbeing*

Completing a task provides a sense of control, boosts self-esteem, enhances sense of accomplishment, and helps people meet their need for competence – feeling that they have a positive impact on the world around them.<sup>71-76</sup>

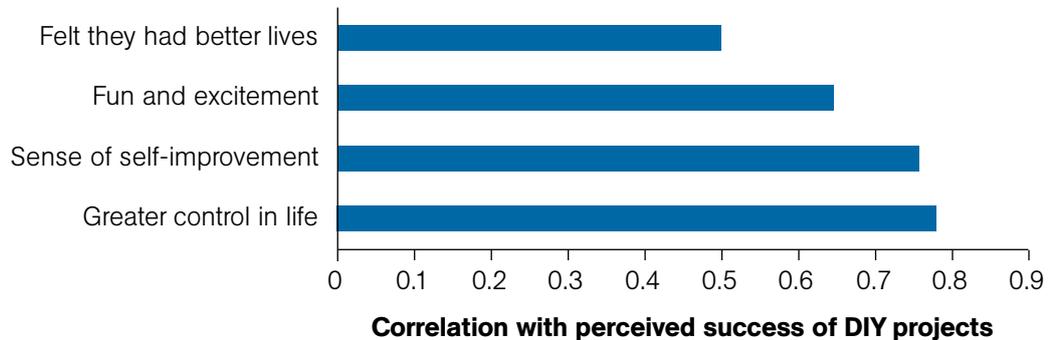
*'You feel a sense of achievement. Also, and this continues to this day, sometimes you go out and think – wow, I built this... Doing these kinds of things always make me realise the things one can do.'*<sup>77</sup>

*'DIY home improvement is one such technique, through which enterprising citizens seek to improve and 'take control' of their lives in a late modern world of uncertainty and risk.'*<sup>78</sup>

As well as evidence about the direct experience of completing a task, there is also statistical evidence that people who are more successful at DIY feel more in control of their life more generally. A study of a small but representative sample of 245 Americans who carry out some DIY found that those who considered their DIY projects had been successful also felt that they had better lives.<sup>79</sup> The authors of the study hypothesised that this effect was produced as a result of the subjects experiencing fulfilment and gratification as by-products of their DIY success, causing a positive attitude towards life to develop, as well as from the 'psychic reward of completing a project'. The study's authors also found that perceived success at DIY projects is correlated with feeling greater control in life, fun, and excitement, and a sense of self-improvement (Figure 13).

Being able to share this success with others provides an opportunity to demonstrate skills and a sense of pride,<sup>80</sup> as illustrated in the following quotes from a study during which experienced DIYers were interviewed about their motivations for undertaking DIY projects:

Figure 13: Positive feelings that are more likely to be reported by individuals who have perceived their DIY projects as being successful



*'The cool thing is that I can say that I built this with my own hands. Part of it is also pride in the ability of building something like that. A project like that attracts a lot of attention and acts as a conversation starter; it shows what you can do.'*<sup>81</sup>

*'When I start something new, it is like climbing a hill. I want to do this. I want to say that I did it. I think it is more like I want to say with confidence that I did that, that I can do that. Because some people make claims of things they have never done. I like the idea of having the confidence and knowing that I can do it by myself.'*<sup>82</sup>

There is even evidence that DIY is important in relationships. The survey for the 2014 European Home Report asked people what traits they found desirable in a partner – practicality around the house was the second-most desirable trait in men!<sup>83</sup>

Those capable of doing DIY consider this competence as part of their self-identity.<sup>84</sup> Marketing researchers, Marco Wolf and Shaun McQuitty, identify the following four aspects of identity development:<sup>85</sup>

- **Feeling a sense of empowerment**
- **Building a sense of identity as a craftsmen**
- **Feeling like one is part of a community of DIY enthusiasts**
- **Satisfying the need to be unique from others.**

Meanwhile, in research that informed the development of the U, one interviewee said that her skills *'made me what I am'*.<sup>86</sup>

However, there is also a flip side – failure to complete a task can have negative psychological consequences, which can be exacerbated by the evidence that people tend to ruminate on failure more than on tasks which they have successfully completed.<sup>87</sup> These negative feelings are demonstrated vividly in the following quote from an interview with an experienced DIYer:

*'When I was younger I threw a wrench at the car. I would be so frustrated with not making this happen. I would scream and blame*

*the metal and get angry at the screws. But that's the time when you have to realise that you may want to get someone [a professional] to help. It is just not the same as if I had finished it though.'*<sup>88</sup>

Having said that, the *challenge* of self-improvement is seen as a positive element of practical activities like DIY. Projects offer people the opportunity to test themselves and their DIY knowledge and skills, particularly when elements are unfamiliar. There is a sense of self-improvement.<sup>89</sup> The creative element provides an opportunity for problem solving and self-expression. The challenge of employing knowledge, skills, and creativity enhances the positive impact on self-esteem and self-identity.<sup>90</sup>

#### *Having and using practical skills is fun*

The challenge is probably also related to the findings of researchers on the simple 'pleasure' and 'entertainment' of DIY behaviours. According to two studies, including the one presented in Figure 13, DIY is 'fun'.<sup>91,92</sup> Self-determination theory distinguishes between activities which are intrinsically motivated and those that are extrinsically motivated.<sup>93</sup> Doing something due to intrinsic motivation is about doing something for its own sake. Doing something due to extrinsic motivation is about doing something to achieve something else. Doing things that are extrinsically motivated is not necessarily bad for wellbeing and is, of course, a fundamental part of living in a complicated world. However, doing activities which are intrinsically motivated – doing things for their own sake – has a special impact on wellbeing.<sup>94,95</sup>

DIY activities are not always intrinsically motivated. An individual might repair something because they can't afford to buy a replacement. However, for many, there is an element of intrinsic motivation, of doing DIY because it is an activity that is enjoyed and actively pursued for that reason. There is much evidence of actions being motivated by the pursuit of enjoyment, with business studies Professor Morris Holbrook arguing that consumption isn't only motivated by 'economically rational purchasing decisions', as early consumer research tended to suggest, but also by the pursuit of other experiences, including the experience of 'hedonic pleasure gained from playful activities or aesthetic enjoyment'.<sup>96</sup> Another study identifies the enjoyment associated with producing goods at home as being a motivating factor in decisions over whether to 'make or buy'.<sup>97</sup> Intrinsically rewarding activities are typically associated with characteristics such as the satisfaction of curiosity, the opportunity to experience and master a particular skill, entertainment, and novelty.<sup>98,99</sup>

The evidence from positive psychology shows that, when people are having fun, this has long-term impacts on their psychological resources, for example building a positive attitude towards life. A sense of producing a better life can derive from this.<sup>100,101</sup>

#### *The outputs of DIY help to create a sense of identity*

There is strong evidence to show that people place more value on objects they have created by themselves. For example, in one experiment participants were split into two groups. One group was presented with a

storage box and asked to say how much the box was worth. The other group was required to assemble the box themselves from a flat-pack kit, before valuing it. The 'DIY' group valued the box at a price 63% higher than the pre-assembly group, and also reported liking the box significantly more.<sup>102</sup>

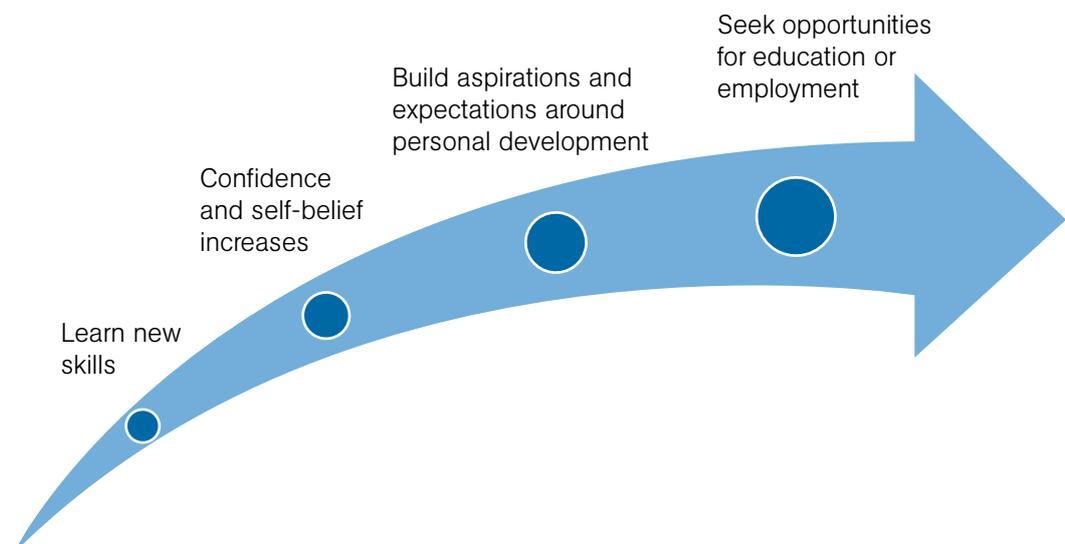
In a similar experiment, one group of participants was given the opportunity to make origami objects and then value them. A second group did not make any origami, and was simply asked to value origami made by experts and origami made by other participants. The second group valued the origami creations of experts highly, but those made by other participants were valued much less. Meanwhile, those participants who made their own origami valued their creations as highly as the second group valued expert creations.<sup>103</sup>

### *Having and using practical skills can lead to employment*

Unsurprisingly, many people have pointed to the benefits of having practical skills in terms of increasing employability. Research by the UK Government's Social Exclusion Unit has found that the increase in confidence associated with learning skills can prompt people to build aspirations, which in turn, encourages people to seek education or employment.<sup>104</sup> This finding is supported by Luby and Welch's (2006) research into the potential benefits of learning and possessing skills for homeless people, which found that several homelessness agencies reported the restoration of confidence and self-belief as a crucial catalyst 'for encouraging homeless people to progress from living a day-to-day existence towards one which includes goals, plans, and expectations of personal development and growth'.<sup>105</sup> This pathway is summarised in Figure 14. This applies both to the 'hard' practical skills learnt, and the 'soft' skills developed by being involved in classes (e.g. skills related to self-presentation).<sup>106</sup> The importance of not being unemployed for wellbeing should be pretty evident.

#### *3.1.4 The material benefits*

Figure 14: The pathway from learning skills to education or employment



### *Using DIY skills can save money*

Lastly the application of practical skills means that individuals are simply able to 'do more' or spend their money on other things.<sup>107</sup> This has material impacts in terms of providing people with an opportunity to save money:

*'DIY activities can contribute to a higher standard of living by redistributing resources within the household, that is, income does not have to be spent on professional help and is available for other purchases.'*<sup>108</sup>

This is illustrated by a quote from a series of in-depth interviews with DIY enthusiasts in the USA, when one participant commented:

*'The estimate for the bathroom was between \$3000 and \$4000, but we did it for less than \$1000. The money we saved we can use for something else like upgraded appliances or fixtures we wouldn't have money for otherwise.'*<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, several studies have found that saving money is one of the key motivating factors spurring individuals to undertake DIY activities. In face-to-face interviews with people in Southampton and Sheffield, 44% of respondents from lower-income urban areas reported 'economic' as the primary reason for undertaking DIY tasks, as well as 10% of those in higher-income urban areas.<sup>110</sup> In an online survey of residents living in the Sheffield area which asked about the motivations behind DIY behaviours of the respondents, 40% indicated that economic reasons represented their motives, agreeing to statements such as: 'I did it myself to save money' and 'I didn't have the money to pay others.'<sup>111</sup> Based on an extensive literature review and interviews with industry experts, research into women's motivations for doing DIY found 'saving money' as one of the key motivations behind completing home improvement projects.<sup>112</sup>

### *3.1.5 Community benefits*

Empowering communities is at the heart of this report. Authors highlight multiple benefits of such empowerment, including reductions in anti-social behaviour and crime, greater safety and feelings of safety, social engagement, improved housing and physical environment, and increased citizen participation and mutuality.<sup>113</sup>

But how can the skills learnt by an individual benefit the community? Learning new skills was proposed by the UK government's Learning and Skills Council as a way to promote social inclusion and cohesion. During its existence, the Council specifically dedicated a segment of its budget to encouraging community development and engagement through skills-learning.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, a survey of 140 learners carried out by the UK government's Learning and Skills Development Agency, found that one in four learners reported increased involvement in social, voluntary, or community activities as a result of their learning experience.<sup>115</sup>

### Box J. Talking Head – Dharmendra Kanani



Dharmendra Kanani is England Director for the Big Lottery Fund, one of the UK's largest charitable funders. He is a strong believer in the importance of seeing communities as assets, and ensuring that opportunities are in place for people within communities to drive the changes they want.

He recognises that people today lead more isolated lives: '[We lead lives which are intensely individual, private and not connected](#)', but sees the situation as very complex, where social capital remains strong in some places and for some groups, but very weak in others. For Dharmendra, the role of technology is mixed, with the potential for positive impact, but also the tendency for electronic communication to drive out face-to-face contact.

Dharmendra is working to get community impacts to be taken more seriously by governments, and by other funders. He believes that not enough has been done to rise to the challenge of properly measuring impacts of different interventions and policies on community, and not enough has been done to explain the central role of social capital to traditional policy areas such as health and the economy.

There are three main mechanisms at play here. There is evidence for all three, but for community benefits to emerge and be maximised, skill sharing and learning activities need to be designed with them in mind.

#### *Meeting people creates bridging capital*

First, as we have already highlighted, the social context of learning together provides opportunities for interaction between people who would not usually meet. This has individual benefits in terms of forming friendships and people feeling more part of the community. It also has wider-reaching benefits in terms of creating 'bridging capital' (Box K). For example, an assessment of the public value of learning found that learning and skills are particularly valuable to neighbourhood renewal and social cohesion, and promote active citizenship and social integration.<sup>116,117</sup>

The evaluation of the Growing Food for Life project funded by the Big Lottery Fund revealed some positive examples of such bridging capital. The project, which was based around cookery and gardening classes, was successful at engaging residents from a diverse range of backgrounds. For instance, residents from a shelter for young offenders were involved in looking after the allotment at their local community centre. One community organisation reported how residents from the local white and Asian communities came together at food growing and cooking events. In a neighbourhood with high levels of crime, the engagement of the police in the project was noted as being valuable, as it helped break down barriers between the police and youth in the area.<sup>118</sup>

The American sociologist Robert Putnam believes that bridging capital is easier to form in 'non-verbal' contexts which allow people to begin interaction on a more level playing field.<sup>119</sup> It is easy to see how classes where people learn practical skills can, at the very least, reset the playing field, if not level it entirely.

*Having and using practical skills results in pro-social behaviour*

*'The energy of learning something new gives you motivation to do something.'*

**Etienne Hayem, Founder of Symba**

The second way that learning skills can have positive community impacts is in terms of the skills themselves. Obviously, how this happens depends somewhat on what skills are being learnt. The U project focuses on skills that can be used for a social good (such as first aid), and the co-ordinators of the project believe that learning can 'provide that vital spark that promotes responsiveness to others' and 'be the stimulus that encourages citizens to do more'.<sup>120</sup> They also believe that learning new skills can provide an impetus to link with local institutions. A report by the Department for Education and Employment, the forerunner to the

### **Box K. What is Bridging Capital?**

Sociologists talk about two types of social relationships that are important for neighbourhoods. One is bonding capital –the stronger ties between people within a particular close-knit community; for example, a sports club or a religious group. Equally important, however, are the looser ties of bridging capital. These are the lighter touch links between people who don't have that much in common. For example, chatting to the shopkeeper about the price of bread these days, or with someone at the bus stop about the weather, or indeed someone at the DIY class about the best way to deal with a blocked pipe. Evidence of this type of interaction was found during a series of interviews with DIY enthusiasts in the USA:

*'Just the other day I went into ACE Hardware. The guy there had a similar project as mine. So we talked about all the troubles we were running into. The time I spent talking I probably should have used on my project [laughter].'<sup>121</sup>*

These exchanges are rarely the start of an intimate friendship, but rather ensure a sense of community and social cohesion in a neighbourhood. Knowing and trusting the people around you leads to more pro-social behaviour (i.e., people being 'nice' to one another), and reduces crime. It provides opportunities for reciprocity, sharing, and mutual learning. In today's diverse communities, and in urban environments where closer ties are difficult, such ties are particularly important.

### Box L. Case Study – B&Q and the Scouts

B&Q in the UK has an ongoing relationship with the Scouts, which has many facets, including Scout Community Week – when Scout groups around the country help out in their local communities, the opportunity for Scouts to work towards a DIY badge, and the opportunity for Scouts to take DIY classes which are normally a paid-for activity within stores.

With regard to DIY badges (which B&Q sponsors), Scouts need to spend 3 to 4 hours doing DIY activities, supervised by Scout leaders, to earn a badge. In-store classes differ from store to store, but are often delivered in partnership with local schools.

Department for Education and Skills, also found a community-level benefit of informal learning (that is, learning which takes place outside of the formal setting of a school or institution). For example, skills learned for house building were used to produce new or improved housing for the community.<sup>122</sup> One DIY enthusiast interviewed stated:

*'I'm also doing things in the neighbourhood like mowing lawns and keeping things nice... I'm retired and can be active and be outside. My wife is at work during the day so I get to do stuff and I get to be around people.'*<sup>123</sup>

This impetus to apply newly learnt skills to social good can also be relevant for DIY and gardening skills. For example, in the UK, B&Q's partnership with the Scouts (Box L) includes activities whereby Scouts carry out activities to improve their communities. These activities often involve the application of DIY and gardening skills – for example, decorating a community centre, or planting new flowers. There are many ways in which these kinds of skills can be applied to enhance the community or help people more in need, so skill learning is a key element of building capacity within a community.

#### *Greater employment drives social cohesion*

Other times, as has been mentioned, the skills learned may help beneficiaries find a job – either directly because they are immediately relevant to the job, or indirectly because skill learning leads to increased self-esteem or confidence. Of course finding a job is of immediate benefit for the individual. But it is also of benefit for the community, as participation in the workplace is integral to sustained social inclusion.<sup>124</sup>

The social pathway to community benefit and the skill-learning pathway also interact. In 2000, the UK Department for Education published a report that underlined the benefits of adult learning to communities. The report highlighted the ways in which *informal* learning shifts the focus away from individual activity leading to personally 'held' skills towards a wider range of outcomes and benefits including social capital, capacity-building, and citizenship.<sup>125,126</sup> In other words, the social context can catalyse the application of individual skills to achieve community benefits.

This point is reinforced by the Family Cookery programme (mentioned earlier), where course participants reported going on to share the recipes and advice they learned during the course with others in the community.<sup>127</sup>

### *Wellbeing leads to pro-social behaviour*

The third and final pathway by which learning and having new skills can lead to community benefits is via the individual impacts of learning that we have already discussed. Self-determination theory studies indicate that people with higher levels of eudaimonia (i.e., those that feel greater levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness) behave in more pro-social ways, thus benefiting the community as well as themselves.<sup>128</sup>

## **3.2 Skill sharing**

Timebanks have become a popular and recognised mechanism for sharing practical skills in communities. Apart from direct benefits of the skills exchange, they are popular with their participants because they promote social exchange and drive personal and community wellbeing. Many of the findings in this section are drawn from research on timebanks to understand the impacts of sharing practical skills.

*'Timebanking can help give people more control over their lives, prevent needs arising and grow what we call the "core economy" – our ability to care for and support each other.'*<sup>129</sup>

To understand the benefits of interventions involving skill sharing, such as timebanking and the Castorama website *Les Troc'Heures* (Section 1), the interactions involved need to be broken down into four elements:

- Being helped
- Helping others
- Meeting people
- A different ethos

Unlike with skill learning, we shall consider the individual and community level benefits together here.

All the evidence and theory presented here is related to timebanking, which is a particular type of skill-sharing activity. However, there is no reason to believe that it does not apply to programmes such as *Les Troc'Heures* and *Street Club* (Section 1.1), which are also based around skill sharing, albeit a more narrowly defined set of skills.

### *3.2.1 Being helped*

#### *People who are helped can save money*

The most obvious and tangible benefit of skill-sharing networks is that gained by the person being 'helped'. If someone comes in to repair your leaking sink, then you have saved money or time.<sup>130</sup>

### *People who are helped learn new skills*

Often, those being helped take on a more active role and take the opportunity to learn from the person who is offering their time. For example, in Rushey Green Timebank, one individual who offered his time to help with DIY also taught the people he was helping as he went along.<sup>131</sup> In an evaluation of a timebank in Wales, 85% of those involved reported having learnt new skills as a result of the scheme, at least partly through this kind of teaching-whilst-helping approach.<sup>132</sup> Other studies have found that those involved in timebanks have learnt skills relevant to the labour market.<sup>133</sup>

### *3.2.2 Helping others*

#### *Helping others leads to self-esteem and a sense of competence*

The greatest value of skill-sharing networks is probably not reaped by those receiving help, but by those *giving* help (Box B on Five Ways to Wellbeing). Timebanking emerged from a recognition that being volunteered 'at' can reduce self-esteem and lead people to see themselves simply as being a drain on others and not having anything to contribute. By ensuring reciprocity and providing opportunities for people to help others and feel like a valued member of the community, skill sharing networks build self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of agency, rather than erode it – a finding repeated in multiple studies.<sup>134-139</sup> The evaluation of the Welsh timebank mentioned earlier found that 66% of participants reported increased self-esteem as a result.<sup>140</sup> This increased self-esteem makes people more powerful and able to effect change.<sup>141,142</sup>

As we have seen in the section on skill learning, these outcomes can also help people find employment,<sup>143</sup> get involved in the wider community,<sup>144</sup> and reduce social exclusion.<sup>145</sup>

It is also possible that time-bankers who report learning skills may actually be doing so in order to help others. In other words, having the opportunity to help others through timebanking may incentivise people to learn skills which they can then share.

### *3.2.3 Meeting people*

#### *Meeting people builds relatedness and bridging capital*

Aside from the give and take, skill sharing also offers opportunities to meet people, leading to the bridging capital we discussed in Box K.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the one-to-one nature of skill sharing potentially provides scope for stronger ties developing between people involved. The *Les Troc'Heures* project in France certainly sees reducing loneliness as an objective.

Again, this benefit is seen to be particularly valuable for people who are socially isolated, reducing social exclusion. For example, a 2001 survey in the UK found that timebanks were more successful than traditional forms of volunteering in attracting socially excluded groups.<sup>147</sup> Older people are a group which particularly benefit.<sup>148</sup>

Meeting people appears to be fundamental to broader outcomes in terms of mental and physical health. An evaluation of the Community Exchange

Network timebank in Pennsylvania found that 18% of members reported improvements in physical health, and 33% reported improvements in mental health. In both cases, when asked what had led to these improvements, the most common answer given by members was to do with the social interaction facilitated by the timebank. For example, one member commented:

*'Making social contacts and additional contributions to the community improves my mood and fills the gaps in my social life and friendship network; this improves physical feelings.'*<sup>149</sup>

#### *Bridging capital drives trust and social cohesion*

As discussed under skill sharing, the benefits of meeting people are felt at the individual level, but can also lead to community benefits by enhancing trust and social cohesion, creating social networks, and building bridging capital.<sup>150</sup> For example, evaluation of the Rushey Green Timebank (described in Section 1.1 of this report) found that it brought together members of the community, helping friendships and mutual respect to be forged where there was previously a prominent racial divide.<sup>151</sup>

#### *Trust and social cohesion leads to pro-social behaviour*

Gill Seyfang, an expert on 'grassroots innovation', reports that engaging in timebanks leads to people feeling more like part of a group, rather than a collection of individuals. This group formation leads to a range of community activities and social events, as well as other activities intended to have wider benefits for the community.<sup>152</sup> More broadly, members also had greater levels of trust and confidence for people in the local area. For Seyfang:

*'The primary rationale for timebanking is community-building, and the projects are successful at developing social capital and new supportive networks.'*<sup>153</sup>

Research on the Welsh timebank corroborates this finding, with 72% of participants reporting that they had noticed an improved community.<sup>154</sup> The evaluation suggests that this improvement can be attributed to three key impacts:

- Stronger community networks and inter-generational relationships.
- Improved relationships between the staff involved in hosting timebanking events (e.g. staff working in community centres) and the participants.
- Greater collaboration between groups (e.g. one local church began hosting a youth club, and a youth group began offering decorating services to a residents' group).

#### *3.2.4 A different ethos*

##### *A new ethos helps to support self-esteem, a sense of competence*

A fourth more subtle pathway to positive impact is via the very framework of sharing. Timebanks explicitly state that everyone's time is worth the same. In a timebank, one hour of time from an unemployed person, or someone who left school at age 16, is worth the same as an hour of time

from a university professor, or a highly paid stockbroker. *Les Troc'Heures* is also based on the principle that everyone's time is worth the same. This philosophy of equality, this opportunity to redefine what is considered 'valuable', has been found to be important by participants. It is perceived as being fairer than conventional market exchange, especially by those whose work is normally unvalued or undervalued in the economy.<sup>155, 156</sup>

What are the specific impacts of this in terms of individual wellbeing and community? This does not appear to be thoroughly studied. One clear outcome is likely to be improved self-esteem for those who feel more valued by such exchanges than they are by the market economy. There are also possibly more diffuse impacts though, which might include contributing to a sense of identity as someone who is engaged in something 'alternative' and, in combination with the development of a sense of community, to engaging in further pro-social behaviour.

### 3.3 Wellbeing benefits for staff

*'Given that a job feeds into one's self-identity, it can be important to find personal worth in what one is doing.'*<sup>157</sup>

**Peter Warr, Emeritus Professor at the Institute of Work Psychology at Sheffield University**

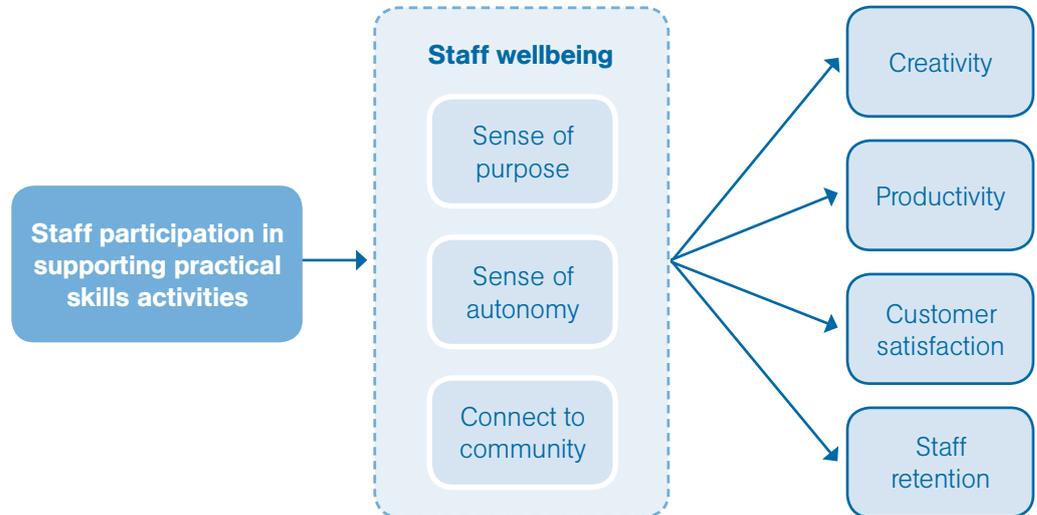
For commercial organisations supporting community activities, benefits to staff wellbeing are also an important outcome. For Kingfisher, in France and Poland, the activities where children learnt DIY skills and information about environmental issues, were delivered by staff within the companies. The Diversity Manager at Castorama France, who is responsible for *Les Troc'Heures* noted that skill-learning activities were often supported by HR departments and talked about the 'positive impacts for employees'. In this section we explore some of the impacts she mentioned and wider evidence about this in the blossoming field of research around wellbeing at work.

First, delivering classes may lead to staff perceiving their organisation and their job as creating social value, as a result of witnessing first-hand the benefits experienced by the individuals taking part in the activities. Evidence from longitudinal, cross-sectional and review studies carried out during the past 50 years shows that as the perceived social value of one's job increases, levels of job satisfaction also tend to increase.<sup>158</sup>

#### Box M. Case Study– Kids classes at Castorama France

Kids' DIY classes are available in some Castorama stores in France. Classes are run informally; children can drop in and drop out when they want. There is a strong effort to ensure classes are first and foremost fun for children. In store, members of staff are able to volunteer to deliver classes during their working hours. Castorama are also keen for stores to involve retired people in their local community to deliver workshops so as to foster inter-generational interaction, and to boost the self-esteem of older people who may otherwise feel excluded.

Figure 15: The business case for staff involvement in supporting practical skills activities



*'[Delivering classes] gives sense. It is an activity with positive and concrete benefits for the local population.'*

Secondly, where employee participation in delivering skill-teaching programmes is something that staff can opt in to, which is usually the case; this presents an opportunity to endow staff with feelings of autonomy. Having such autonomy at work has been found to be positively associated with job satisfaction<sup>159--161</sup> and general satisfaction with life,<sup>162</sup> even when controlling for other relevant factors, such as employees' educational qualifications.<sup>163</sup>

*'Autonomy is important for us. We want our team to be autonomous.'  
'It gives a chance to interact with the community.'*

Finally, the opportunity to relate to others as a result of being involved in the delivery of such programmes also seems likely to improve the wellbeing of staff by presenting opportunities for positive social interaction. Evidence shows a strong connection between such interaction and wellbeing, even after controlling for other variables.<sup>164</sup>

### 3.3.1 The business case for staff wellbeing

*'We show that Castorama is a good company for the employees.'*

In turn, there is also plenty of evidence that high staff wellbeing leads to benefits for businesses. Employees with higher wellbeing have been found to be more likely to display a range of skills such as creativity and loyalty, and better performance in terms of customer satisfaction.<sup>165,166</sup> This relationship has been found to hold across industries (including manufacturing, education, local authority, police, and academia) and job types (including professional, administrative, and manual) as well as countries.<sup>167,168</sup> Increasing employee wellbeing has also been shown to initiate a powerful feedback loop, whereby greater wellbeing increases

engagement and productivity levels at work, which in turn, increases both health and wellbeing.<sup>169</sup> This health benefit is particularly relevant for employers today, as the financial crisis has produced a less secure and therefore more stressful environment for many individuals,<sup>170</sup> and mental health problems are a major cause of absenteeism. The benefit of fostering wellbeing at work in terms of reduced absenteeism has been recognised by the UK government, which has introduced a Health, Work, and Wellbeing initiative, to 'protect and improve the health and wellbeing of working age people', with particular emphasis on protecting and improving health and wellbeing in order to reduce days of work lost to sickness absence.<sup>171</sup>

#### Box N. Co-production: creating a new model for public services

We have been focusing on the impacts of skill learning and skill sharing for individuals and communities. There may, however, also be a broader benefit of skill sharing for society as a whole, and implications for the delivery of public services. Timebanking advocates situate the practice in the broader concept of co-production. Co-production is about moving away from the traditional mind-set whereby people with needs – the sick, the unemployed, and the elderly – are 'dealt with' by professionals in a one-directional sense. Co-production not only recognises the right for everyone to have a voice in shaping how services are provided, but also that everyone has assets and expertise that can make that service provision more effective.

*'People and communities must play a bigger role in defining their own needs and have more power to do what it takes, individually and collectively, to improve and meet those needs. For this to happen, they must have more control over the processes that shape and deliver services. They must be co-producers, with frontline professionals and others, of their own wellbeing.'*<sup>172</sup>

In the UK, co-production has been a way to produce public savings, by catalysing the potential for citizens to be involved in service delivery, and by preventing the emergence of needs down the line.<sup>173</sup>

*'Public services and support systems that underpin co-production must be robustly and sustainably resourced. We can no longer assume that the economy will grow at a rate that can fund ever-expanding services... So not only must we avoid unnecessary expenditure by giving priority to prevention, we must also look to the human resources that are not priced by the market – the wealth of human relations, time, social networks, and knowledge and skills based on lived experience. These assets are abundant in every community and they don't ebb and flow with the vagaries of the market – although without them the market economy could not function. They are the operating system that underpins the private and public sectors. As such, they are more than just the "non-market" economy. They are the 'core economy', which can be grown for the benefit of all.'*

## 4. Lessons for the future

The first lesson from our research is that projects where people have the opportunity to learn or share practical skills are valuable and worth doing.

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There is evidence that learning and sharing practical skills can lead to the improvement of the wellbeing of all involved – the people learning skills, the people teaching skills, the people being helped out in their home, and the people doing the helping out.

There is also good evidence that these activities can lead to increases in social capital in the wider community, including greater trust and cohesion, opportunities for reciprocity and sharing, increased pro-social behaviour and civic engagement, and the formation of bridging capital - those social ties which create bridges between community members who might not otherwise interact.

Based on the analysis of the Big Lottery Fund Wellbeing Programme, the wellbeing boost associated with participating in skill-learning activities was equivalent to the effect one would expect with a tripling of household income.

### 4.1 The Hands-on communities model

Section 3 presented a step-by-step analysis of how activities involving learning and sharing skills can lead to positive outcomes. In both cases, the impacts are complex and multiple – there are many pathways to impact. The *Hands-on communities* model (Figure 16) brings these various strands of evidence together. Most of this model has been demonstrated through direct evidence, and further links have been made drawing on the academic literature on the subject. The model illustrates the pathways through which wellbeing and community impacts are achieved, and can serve as a tool for understanding these impacts.

### 4.2 Principles for developing future practical skills activities

Achieving maximum individual and community benefit from learning and sharing practical skills cannot be taken as a given: activities need to be designed purposefully from the beginning. That's why we've developed five practical principles for how to maximise that benefit.

### 1. Mix it up

It's all too easy for people to spend all their time with people like themselves. Activities based on sharing and learning new skills offer some opportunity to mix things up and for people to meet people who they might not otherwise meet. This creates *bridging social capital* which creates long-term benefit for all involved, including building trust, reducing tensions, and helping people feel like part of a wider community.

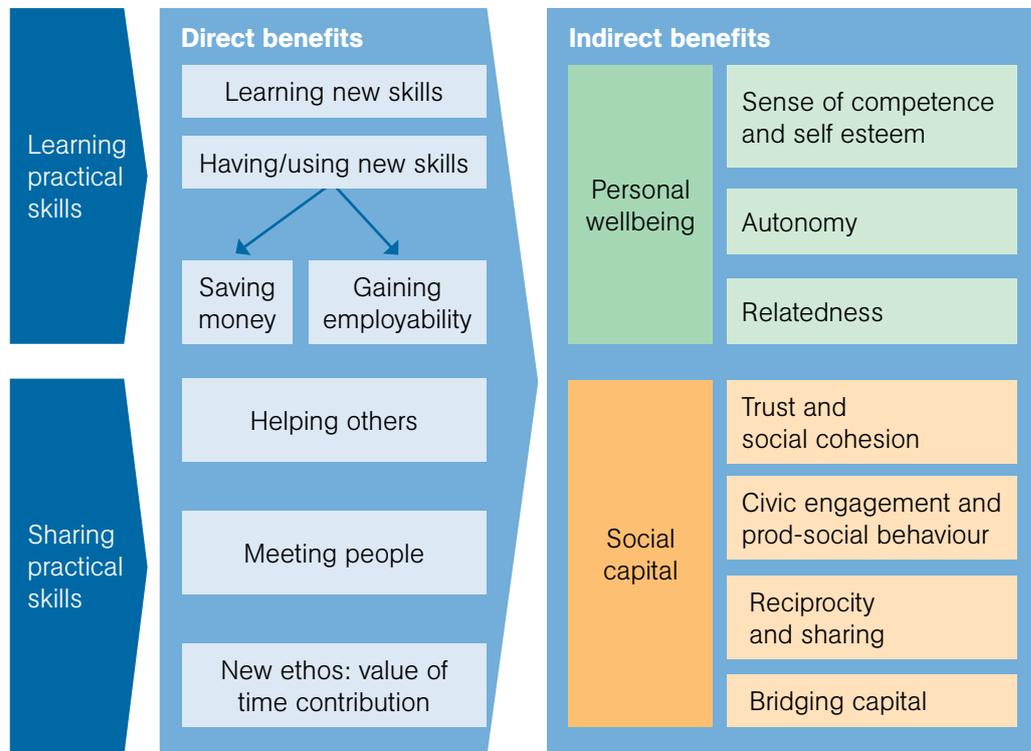
People organising such activities should attempt to maximise the chance to mix things up, by using a diverse range of channels to engage possible participants. Our recommendations include:

- **Target people who are socially isolated** or have fewer economic resources. Such people will receive the biggest wellbeing benefits from any intervention. Aside from neighbourhood groups, housing associations and family doctor's clinics are key pathways to access such people.
- **Shake up hierarchies.** People get used to their perceived status in society – those who are perceived as important and successful walk tall. But practical skills such as gardening and DIY can be a great leveller, helping people who are used to seeing themselves at the bottom of the pile build self-esteem. In skill sharing activities such as *Les Troc'Heures* and timebanking, everyone's time is worth the same.
- **Work for a gender balance.** Typically, activities aimed at improving wellbeing and community development struggle to engage men. For men, framing activities as about 'wellbeing' tends to be a turn-off; rather they prefer things to appear practical and useful. That's why interventions about practical skills are an excellent way to engage men. Meanwhile, interviews with female DIYers have found that for some women, the act of acquiring DIY skills is attractive as it presents an opportunity to defy gendered expectations about appropriate leisure pursuits.<sup>174</sup>
- **Extend beyond DIY.** In the case of skill-sharing activities like timebanking, there is evidence that restricting the range of skills that can be shared also restricts the people who feel able to get involved. In particular, a DIY focus may lead to women and certain age groups getting less involved. It makes a lot of sense to have resources where people can find people with particular types of skills, but it may be worth considering mechanisms by which those that would benefit from people with DIY skills, but don't feel comfortable with their own DIY skills, could offer something else instead, for example gardening, language classes, or cookery.

### 2. Give and take

Community organisations and businesses striving to create a positive impact often assume that the best thing they can do is to 'give' something to people with needs. However, for people to flourish, they need to feel that they, too, can contribute positively to society, by giving and by sharing

Figure 16: The Hands-on communities model of how learning and sharing practical skills helps to empower people and communities



their own assets – this is the core of the idea of co-production which has been enjoying growing popularity .

Timebanking, and programmes like *Les Troc'Heures* and *Street Club* are firmly built on the principles of co-production. In all cases, the importance of reciprocity, of give and take, needs to be remembered. For people who find themselves receiving more help than they are giving, there should be opportunities to share assets. When skill-sharing networks are focused on particular types of skills, such as DIY, this may require some flexibility so that skills outside the core skill are can also be offered.

Those who find themselves giving help more often than they receive it should also be considered. It is a slight overstatement, but one could say that such people are depriving others of the opportunity to give! Mechanisms which encourage people who have given a lot to draw on the skills of others could be embedded in skill-sharing networks.

In the realm of skills classes, we found other opportunities for reciprocity being developed. **Peer-to-peer classes**, where the 'teachers' are part of the same community as the learners, can be an effective tool, including the idea of people who have completed a class successfully going on to do the teaching themselves.

### 3. Joy in learning

Learning can be fun. Both children and adults who have opportunities to learn, particularly outside of formal education, have higher wellbeing. Furthermore, the extent to which learning is enjoyable has an impact

on how effective that learning is. For example, positive psychology has demonstrated that people who are in a positive mood are able to think more creatively, and better develop their own personal resources. Some would even go as far as to say that learning should be 'hidden' from those learning – so that learners feel that the activities they are involved in are about something other than learning.

NEF developed a set of five heuristics for improving wellbeing, which can be applied to the running of activities with the aim of teaching practical skills. The five ways are – **Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, and Give**. Some of these, for example 'keep learning', are obviously integral to learning activities. Give and connect have already been mentioned under 'mix it up' and 'give and take'. Connect need not just be about meeting people from different communities; it is also simply about recognising that classes provide opportunities for social interaction which can make the whole experience more real, and more fun. Indeed, for one programme we reviewed, social interaction was placed at the heart of the learning process. The other two messages – 'be active' and 'take notice' – can also be part of the process of making learning activities more fun.

#### *4. Relish the challenge*

Setting people up to fail by giving them a task that is too hard is demoralising and lowers self-esteem. But providing them with a challenge, and pushing them to test themselves, can be valuable for building self-esteem and confidence. For DIY, the feeling of success from completing a difficult project that requires new skills and presents a challenge is one of the key pathways through which wellbeing is impacted positively.

**Achieving the sweet spot** between too difficult and too easy is, in itself, a difficult challenge, particularly in settings where people with different levels of ability are brought together. Those teaching or delivering skills training should be sensitive to the skill levels of the people they are working with, and should adjust the challenge accordingly. Sometimes, this might mean some participants being given more difficult tasks than others.

Furthermore, **setting a clear goal** to be achieved can be an excellent way to motivate learners and potentially provide a common mission to work together on – for example, a cookery class where the final goal is to produce a meal for the whole community.

#### *5. From me to we*

How can those organising skill-learning and skill-sharing activities ensure that the positive impact of the skills learnt and shared there can spread further into the community? The challenge is to move from 'me' to 'we',

so that people participating in such programmes see the skills they learn as assets for the community as a whole, not just for themselves. Practical skills are ideal for this, because they can be used to provide positive impacts in communities, for example through the improvement and decoration of community spaces or supporting people unable to do their own DIY.

Programmes can maximise the community impact by steering participants towards opportunities to **apply their practical skills for community good**, for example by linking up participants to organisations that might need their help, and thinking of useful community projects that their new skills would be relevant for. One example shared with us by Dharmendra Kanani of the Big Lottery Fund was of a community that came together to set up a wood-burning pizza stove using locally sourced ingredients. People with a range of skills needed to come together for this to be successful, including gardening skills, accountancy, and DIY.

Dharmendra suggests that **social media** is already being used in innovative ways to help communicate opportunities for people to use skills, and to share a wider sense of the potential positive impact. He believes that large organisations, including public sector and private sectors organisations, can play a role in this.

This is also related to encouraging participants to think big and think of challenges – it's not just about learning gardening skills to do your own back garden, but also to help out in the garden of the local school or church. As Etienne Hayem, founder of Symba puts it, people will rise to a challenge that is bigger than they are by working together.

The social context of learning can also play a role. Learning which engenders a collective spirit builds a sense of emotional connection between participants which could spur ongoing action – this is the notion of **learning in company**.

## Box O. Impetus for further research

### *Measuring community impacts*

Beyond the lessons for the practical implementation of projects, our research, and particularly our interview with Dharmendra Kanani of the Big Lottery Fund, highlighted the importance of developing a better understanding of community impacts. In recent years, the measurement of personal wellbeing and mental health has become more commonplace and national statistics offices in all countries in the EU have started collecting robust data on these issues. By contrast, little priority is placed by governments and by funders to properly measure the community impacts of activities and policies. Measuring these impacts would help us better understand how to maximise them. It would also raise their profile and help build interest across multiple sectors in devising solutions to strengthen communities.

Related to this, more measurement of social capital and community would help us understand the knock-on impacts on other areas such as the economy and people's health.

### *Avenues for further research*

Our research has identified some important future directions for research to:

- Quantify the cost-saving that DIY and other practical skills confer to people. The key here is to compare how much people with these skills spend on home improvements versus how much people who have fewer skills spend for similar outcomes.
- Explore to what extent people with DIY skills recognise and value the autonomy and independence that having these skills gives them.
- Determine the character of the bridging capital formed in skill-learning and skill-sharing activities, including its durability and the specific types of tensions that it is best suited to overcome.
- Understand how to design skill-sharing initiatives to ensure that the people who are being helped learn from the people helping them.
- Identify the specific needs and benefits of online-based skill-sharing networks like Les Troc'Heures, compared to a network based primarily in the physical community.
- Further understand the importance of the ethos of equal value in timebanking, and the impact that has on people's self-esteem and pro-social activity.

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