

Learning from failure in a community development programme

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About Ambition for Ageing

- £11m Community Fund programme to reduce social isolation of older people
- Community development support and investment schemes in 25 neighbourhoods
- Over 22000 people engaged in 1400 projects
- Several large scale projects
 - Community media
 - Equalities research
 - Supporting older carers into work



About Test & Learn

- Limiting risk to a small number of carefully selected sites
- Using an iterative process
- Ensure you can tweak approaches
- Trace changes – an earlier approach may still be better
- It takes time



Test & Learn needs failure

- New things aren't perfect – complete success suggests we haven't tested properly
- Understanding the difference between places
- Points of friction create the need for solutions
- Helping others avoid mistakes

Challenges to identifying failure

- Professional status of workers
- 0.01% of our activity may be 100% of someone else's
- Failure gets fixed and forgotten
- Low income and marginalised communities aren't resourced well enough to afford failure
- Communities needed to live with the result – we can poison the well
- Quick wins and cautious approaches can build the capacity for failure

Putting failure in context

- GM Festival of Ageing
- Over 200 community activities over 2 weeks
- 1000's of people involved in community events
- People still talk about it now
- Our large, city centre launch event our team attended was ok but underwhelming
- We can judge activity by our expectations and not the experience of others

The Importance of Success

- Working Potential – supporting carers into work
- Carers already have work
- Few entered employment
- We were able to offer tailored coaching to improve lives and understand the needs of carers
- Strong process evaluation – partnership with the Centre for Ageing Better

Bad Failure

- Claiming understanding of communities but using a one-size-fits-all model
- Partnerships of organisations who claimed joint working but hadn't worked on a contract together
- Overstating capability or track record
- Is it failure? Might it be negligence, complacency or fraud?

Summary

- You learn more from a bit of failure than absolute failure
- People comfortable with failure are more likely to be comfortable
- Who's failing? Who's learning?
- How do we help our clients recover from our failures?