



# Evaluation Report

**Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian (VSGWL) COVID-19 Third  
Sector Response Fund 2020 - 2021**

May 2021

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## About the Fund

Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian (VSGWL) applied to the National Lottery Community Fund in May 2020. The fund had been established, as part of the Scottish Government investment package, to support local communities and households in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The investment package aimed to provide financial support targeted through community anchor organisations, working in partnership with others in the community and with public services, in co-ordinating local responses to the pandemic.

VSGWL were successful in their application to disburse grants totalling £52k to support local, grass roots organisations and groups in West Lothian in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design and preparation tasks began of what became known as the VSGWL COVID-19 Third Sector Response Fund. The process was underpinned by a strong partnership approach with WLSSEN (West Lothian Social Enterprise Network) and The National Lottery Community Fund. The National Lottery held the final say regarding successful awards.

The fund was open to charities, social enterprises, community groups and other voluntary organisations that had their own bank account, independent governance, and an asset lock. Applications from small, grassroots organisations with an income of under £50K were particularly encouraged to apply. Non constituted groups, newly formed in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis, were encouraged to join forces with a local established organisation and explore the potential of submitting a joint application.

Prospective applicants were required to focus their activity concepts on providing immediate support to the most vulnerable, with new or enhanced needs specifically arising from the COVID-19 crisis and/or because of measures being taken to control its spread.

VSGWL's COVID-19 Third Sector Response fund was disbursed in two phases. The first phase, launched 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020, saw awards offered between £600 and £2,400. Successful organisations were required to complete all funded activities by the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2020, submit an interim update and complete a one-page evaluation form by the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2020.

The second Phase, also open to previous successful organisations of Phase 1, launched 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020 with awards offered between £500 and £1,000. Successful Phase 2 organisations were also required to submit a completed one-page evaluation by the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2021. All successful applicants in both phase 1 and 2, were required to keep a financial record of fund expenditure for a period of one year and to share the record with VSGWL and/or the National Lottery on request.

## Fund Preparation and Launch

A suite of on-line Fund resources were designed to make the application process and reporting arrangements as easy as possible for applicants; these included one-page interactive application, grant agreement, and evaluation forms. Timelines and processes were also agreed. Once in place, the Fund was promoted extensively when it went live at the end of May. Publicity and information on the fund and how to access the on-line interactive application and downloadable guidance was shared directly with partners, stakeholders and registered organisations; posted on Twitter, Facebook and other social media platforms, and launched on the VSGWL website.

## Applications

Overall, 66 applications were made to VSGWL COVID-19 Third Sector Response Fund requesting just under £94,600. Following a robust assessment process which included The National Lottery Community Fund, 38 funding awards were supported and monies distributed to 28 organisations. 10 organisations received a funding award in Phase 1 and continuation award in Phase 2. The total sum of awards made was £51,537, leaving a small underspend of £468.

All unsuccessful applicants were informed that this had been due to at least two of the following primary reasons:

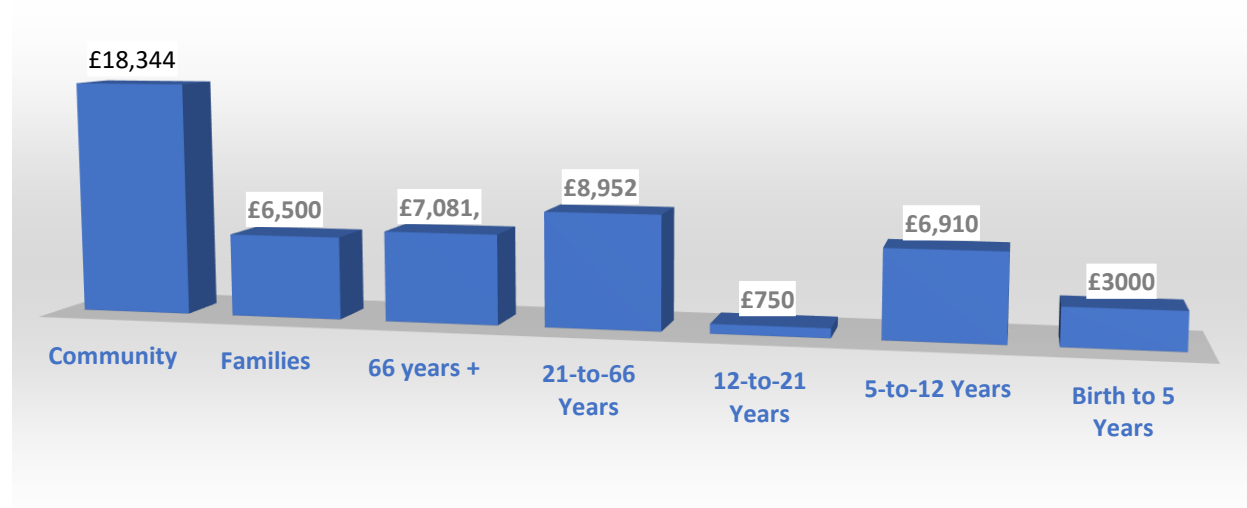
- Organisational income levels were well in excess of £50k with no significant adaption, due to COVID-19, to main work
- Organisation had been significantly successful in receiving funding from other COVID related funds for the same or similar purpose
- Information on the application form indicated that the activity would be out-with the fund's short timeline
- Information on the application was of poor quality either not evidencing activity, spend and outcome within timeline

## Evaluation Forms

Interim reports were received from all Phase 1 successful organisations. Interim reports were not required for Phase 2 applicants due to reduction in award funding. A total of 27 out of 28 organisations receiving an award submitted the final one-page evaluation form, leaving one organisation's final evaluation form outstanding.

## Target Groups Supported

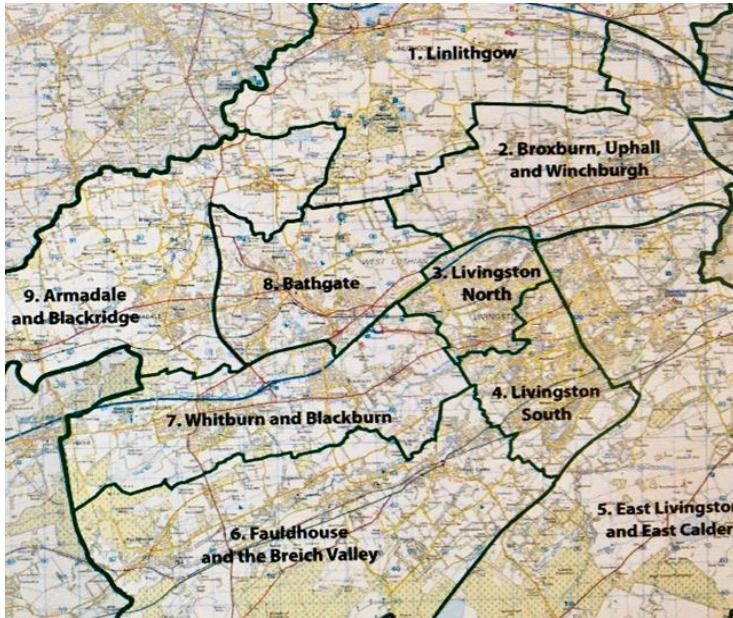
The total sum awarded £51,537 supported 7 target groups.



- 1. £18,344 supported Communities and Neighbourhoods**  
Funding comprised of 13 awards to 10 organisations with 3 organisations receiving a continuous funding award in Phase 2.
- 2. £6,500 supported Families**  
Funding comprised of 5 awards to 3 organisations with 2 organisations receiving a continuous funding award in Phase 2.
- 3. £7,081 supported people over 66 years of age**  
Funding comprised of 5 awards to 4 organisations with 1 organisation receiving a continuous funding award in Phase 2.
- 4. £8,952 supported people between 21 and 66 years of age**  
Funding comprised of 7 awards to 5 organisations with 2 organisations receiving a continuous funding award in Phase 2
- 5. £750 supported young people aged 12 to 21 years of age**  
Funding was awarded to 1 organisation in Phase 2
- 6. £6,910 supported children aged 5 to 12 years**  
Funding comprised of 5 awards to 4 organisations with 1 organisation receiving a continuous funding award in Phase 2
- 7. £3,000 supporting early years children birth to 5 years**  
Funding was awarded, in both Phase 1 and 2, to 1 organisation.

## Wards Areas

Information from the 27 returned final evaluation forms show that 14 organisations used the funding to deliver services West Lothian Wide. Two organisations each funded support services to 3 separate council ward areas.



Awards to the remaining 11 organisations provided supports to one council ward.

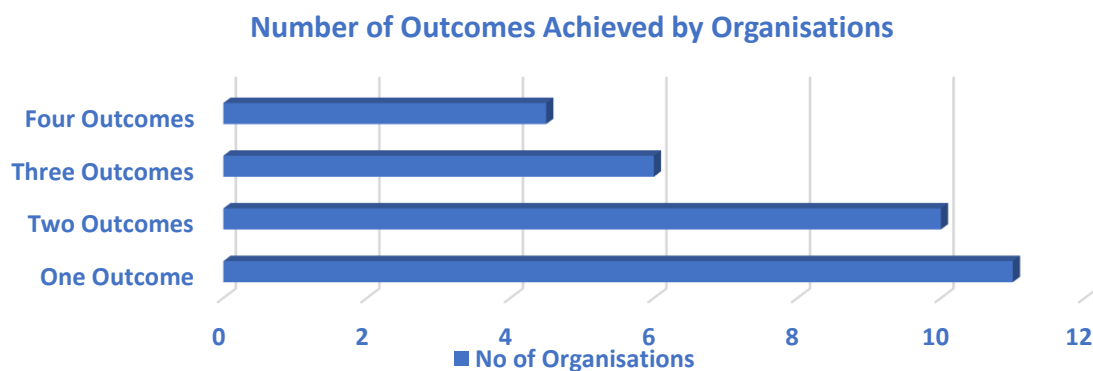
5 organisations provided direct support to Ward 6, Fauldhouse and Breich Valley, 3 organisations supports to Ward 9, Armadale and Blackridge area.

No applications were received from organisations solely supporting Ward 2, Broxburn, Uphall and Winchburgh.

## Outcomes

There were four overarching outcomes. Analysis of phase 1 and 2 evaluation forms show:

- 11 organisations met one outcome (1 received continuous funding in phase 2);
- 10 organisations met two outcomes (6 received continuous funding in phase 2);
- 6 organisations met three outcomes (3 received continuous funding in phase 2);
- leaving 1, phase 2 funded, organisation ticking all 4 outcomes.



## The breakdown of outcomes

### 1. Increasing health and wellbeing

22 organisations used the award to provide support aimed at increasing health and well-being

### 2. Reducing Isolation

15 organisations used the funding to provide support aimed at reducing isolation

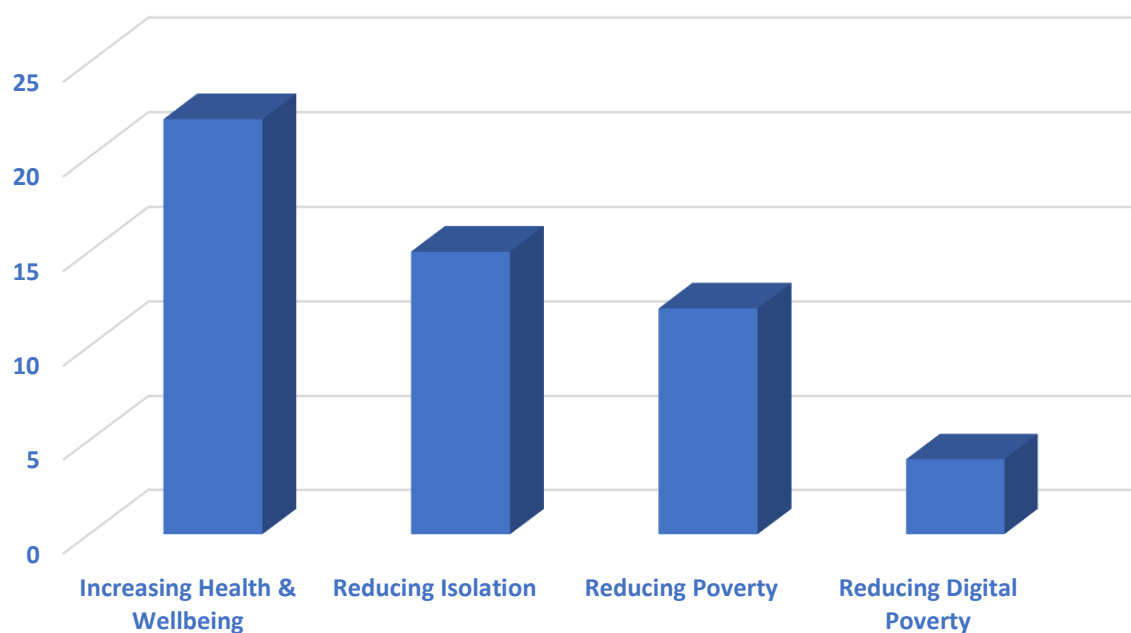
### 3. Reducing poverty

12 organisations used the award to provide support aimed at reducing poverty

### 4. Reducing Digital Poverty

4 organisations used the funding to provide support aimed at reducing digital poverty

Number of Organisations supporting each outcome



## Learning

The VSGWL COVID-19 Third Sector Response Fund has been an unquestionable success, bringing funding directly to West Lothian's small grassroots organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. As VSGWL's first experience in disbursing funding awards, all information guidelines, forms, processes, and timelines had to be designed from scratch.

### Key elements contributing to the fund's success were:

#### ✓ **An emphasis on accessibility and accountability whilst reducing bureaucracy**

We did this by firstly designing a non-bureaucratic interactive one-page application form, we asked only essential questions, used tick boxes and dropdown menus, and ensured the form could be signed and submitted on-line. We maintained consistency using the same style and components when designing the evaluation and grant agreement forms.

We ensured our funding information guidelines set out clear criteria, expectations, process, and timelines.

We made sure publicity, information and how to access the fund was shared across multi-media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as well as directly with partners, stakeholders, and registered organisations. In addition, we promoted the fund during meetings and forums, and communicated the fund in advance of the launch on the VSGWL website.

#### ✓ **Consistency and Timeline**

We achieved this by '*branding*' VSGWL COVID-19 Third Sector Response Fund; consistency of design style, font, colour, partner logos on all forms and information sheets.

We were as transparent as possible, promoting and sticking rigidly to the agreed action and process timelines (*see appendices 2 and 3*). Despite extremely tight and somewhat ambitious timelines we are proud to have successfully delivered an impressive 4-week turnaround from the launch of Phase 1 and 2 to successful applicants receiving their awards.

#### ✓ **Robust Assessment Process**

We implemented a robust 3-stage assessment process very early on in the Fund design. Following closing dates for applications information's submitted were transferred to a spread sheet. Three assessors, two from VSGWL and one from WLSN, were allocated equal number of applications to separately assess and complete an assessment spread sheet. A traffic light system was used to code assessors' recommendations; Red – rejected, Orange – conditional consideration



and Green – recommended for an unconditional award. The three assessors then met to discuss their individual assessments and reach a collective agreement on final recommendations which were then forwarded to the National Lottery for verification. Once verified, successful organisations were notified and the process of acquiring bank details and transferring the awards began. As importantly, it was at this stage that unsuccessful applicants were also informed and given feedback.

### ✓ **Outcome**

We successfully disbursed over £51,537 of lottery funding to 28 of West Lothian's grassroots organisations supporting 7 target groups: Community/Neighbourhoods, Families, People aged 66+, 21-66, 12-21, 5-12 and birth to 5 years. Organisations in turn, went onto provide support, to West Lothian residents, aimed at increasing health and wellbeing, reducing isolation, poverty, and digital poverty. Whilst secondary our small team at VSGWL have also gained recognition, from an MSP, West Lothian Councillors, Officers and Organisations, for taking the initiative to apply to the National Lottery Community Fund and being successful in receiving the full amount requested.

## **What we would do differently**

### ❖ **Underestimating the work involved**

Very quickly into the process it was evident we had massively underestimated the task on hand, in particular the amount of work hours that managing the fund in a timely, accountable, and highly professional manner involved.

WLSEN and VSGWL received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to support our management costs, however we had underestimated the costs needed to cover overheads such as the 123 Form Builder subscription and staff resource to manage all designs, administrative tasks and processes. To ensure the costs were seen to be proportionate we also massively underestimated staff resource hours. On reflection it is now clear that irrespective of the amount of funds being managed and distributed the design, administration tasks and processes are as demanding.

Going forward we now have the evidence and experience to make a more realistic estimate of the administration and related costs in any future applications.

## Organisations reported

*Immense benefit to those who were suffering emotionally and psychologically from the effects of isolation*

This funding has massively helped towards paying for staff enabling and managing our very successful twice a week food shop and delivering meals and food parcels

*We were able to provide practical assistance to families and individuals with grants towards utility costs. People who received support were in 'emergency situations'*

This funding allowed us to purchase essential PPE

The home learning resource packs, including pencils, colouring pens, highlighter, glue, scissors, white-board, and pen, post-its, jotter and a drawing pad have proven to be essential for our families. The children, families and school have expressed their thanks and gratitude to the parent council and VSGWL for the funding that allowed us to make a difference to every family.

*We used the funding to purchase essential resources to support talking book volunteers to carry out recording tasks while observing social distancing*

We used the funding towards the purchase of 15 mobile phones sims for volunteers and to provide training for 23 volunteers on grief and bereavement.

*We used the funding to purchase resources to produce craft and healthy eating packs. Packs were distributed to vulnerable children and provided fun games and activities educating on healthy foods and promoting oral hygiene.*

**Our funding award was used for co-ordination, food pick ups, suppliers invoice, volunteer expenses and general running of our food outlet – which has been described as a “ life saver “ and “god-send”**

***The project was able to facilitate access to a select group of qualified counsellors to support 10 people across the Third Sector in West Lothian with their Mental Health.***

We used the funding award to pilot a virtual book and cooking club targeting isolated people living on low incomes. Both initiatives were successful, first time for everyone involved taking part in a cooking or book club and in learning the technology to be able to do so using zoom. In addition to the zoom we set up what's app groups to enable participants to share pictures of their finished dishes, saving money tips and what books they were reading. This meant that there was social interaction nearly every day. This learning opportunity will support us to take forward virtual meetings for other clubs in the future.

**2020 saw a massive 100% increase in referrals for Christmas toys and selections boxes for children of families experiencing poverty. The funding was split between buying selection boxes and toys for specific genders and age groups as we began to run out due to increased demand.**

The funding allowed our community club to purchase waterproof jackets and a Gazebo to keep young people and their belongings dry and when restrictions allowed outdoor training.

**The funding supported the delivery of an online 'Empowerment Group'...hosted by a therapist specialising in anxiety, emotions and trauma. The workshop was delivered via zoom, also the therapist was available for 1 to 1 support. In addition on line meditations and coaching was provided by another therapist... alongside access to on-line YOGA. Participants reported these activities made a positive difference to their lives, especially during continued COVID restrictions**

## Phase 1.

### Appendix 1

#### Summary

Thirty-eight applications were received with a total fund request of just under £70,600. Following assessment process twenty organisations were successful in receiving awards between £600 and £2,400. The total sum of awards made was £37,181. leaving a balance of just under £15,000 to be distributed, resulting in a second phase.

#### Timeline

5 <sup>th</sup> May	Application submitted to the National Lottery Community Fund
11 <sup>th</sup> May	Notification of successful application by the National Lottery
25 <sup>th</sup> May	Interactive forms, guidance, promotional materials designed
28 <sup>th</sup> May	Fund launched
5 <sup>th</sup> June	Applications closed
11 <sup>th</sup> June	Internal assessment process complete
16 <sup>th</sup> June	External assessment verification received from National Lottery
22 <sup>nd</sup> June	Successful organisations bank details verified
24 <sup>th</sup> June	Interactive on-line Grant Agreement Forms issued
3 <sup>rd</sup> July	All Grant Agreement Forms returned
7 <sup>th</sup> July	All funding awards transferred
31 <sup>st</sup> August	All interim update statements received.
8 <sup>th</sup> October	Interactive on line one-page evaluation form sent
3 <sup>rd</sup> November	95% completed evaluation forms received

#### Target groups

- £13,480 split between 6 organisations supported Communities/Neighbourhood
- £3,500 split between 2 organisations directly supported families
- £6,581 split between 4 organisations supported people over 66 years
- £5,310 split between 3 organisations supported people between 21 and 66 years
- £5,910 split between 4 organisation supported children aged 5 to 12 years
- £2,400 awarded to 1 organisation supporting early years children birth to 5 years

#### Outcomes

Phase one evaluation forms show 5 organisations met 1 outcome, 9 met 2 outcomes, and 5 met 3 outcomes. Resulting in:

- 15 organisations provided support aimed at increasing health and wellbeing
- 11 organisations provided support aimed at reducing isolation

- 9 organisations provided support aimed at reducing poverty
- 3 organisations provided support aimed at reducing digital poverty

## Phase 2.

### Appendix 2

#### Summary

28 applications were received with a total fund request of just over £24,000. Following assessment process 18 organisations were successful in receiving awards between £500 and £1,000, which included 10 successful phase 1 organisations receiving continuation funding awards. The total sum of awards made was £14,356 leaving a small underspend of £468.

#### Timeline

30 <sup>th</sup> September	Update Interactive forms, guidance, promotional materials
5 <sup>th</sup> October	Phase 2 launched
16 <sup>th</sup> October	Applications closed
19 <sup>th</sup> October	Internal assessment process complete
26 <sup>th</sup> October	External assessment verification received from National Lottery
28 <sup>th</sup> October	Successful organisations bank details verified
5 <sup>th</sup> November	Interactive on-line Grant Agreement Forms issued
9 <sup>th</sup> November	All Grant Agreement Forms returned
9 <sup>th</sup> November	All funding awards transferred
1 <sup>st</sup> February	Interactive on line one-page evaluation form sent
1 <sup>st</sup> March	95% completed evaluation forms received
12 <sup>th</sup> March	100% completed evaluation forms received

#### Target Groups

- £4,864 split between 7 organisations supported Communities/ Neighbourhood
- £3,000 split between 3 organisations directly supported families
- £500 awarded to 1 organisation supporting people over 66 years
- £3,642 split between 4 organisations supported people between 21 and 66 years
- £750 awarded to 1 organisation supporting young people aged 13 to 21 years
- £1,000 awarded to 1 organisation supporting children aged 5 to 12 years
- £ 600 awarded to 1 organisation supporting early years children birth to 5 years

## Outcomes

Phase two evaluation forms show 6 organisations met 1 outcome, 7 met 2 outcomes, and 4 met 3 outcomes and 1 met all 4 outcomes. Resulting in:

- 17 organisations provided support aimed at increasing health and wellbeing
- 10 organisations provided support aimed at reducing isolation
- 8 organisations provided support aimed at reducing poverty
- 1 organisation provided support aimed at reducing digital poverty

## Contact details

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