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Abstract title: Assessing the value of community health programmes using a Social Return on Investment framework.

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Background

Contemporary theories and models applied in health promotion evaluation lack sensitivity with respect to recognising and accounting for the wider ecological context in which behaviour takes place. This leads to a deficit in knowledge concerning the nature and value of outcomes experienced by people at which programmes are targeted. An evaluation framework was devised to understand and value the changes that occurred as a consequence of physical activity and sport projects implemented via a two-year health promotion programme in the UK.

Methods

A Social Return on Investment evaluation framework was devised using a grounded theory approach which articulated the nature and scope of outcomes experienced by beneficiaries of community health promotion activities. A number of salient measureable outcomes ($n = 11$) were assessed via pre and post surveys ($n = 135$) to measure changes over time following which the potential reach of the activities were estimated for the whole programme.

Results

The findings suggested that every £1 invested in the programme returned £7.25 to society in the form of social and economic outcomes across the three main outcome domains of community connections and resources, education and skills, and health and wellbeing. Breaking down the magnitude of benefit according to the three domains revealed the programme produced approximately two thirds of its societal return in health and well-being, followed by community connections and resources, and then education and skills.

Conclusions

The Social Return on Investment framework provided a means of understanding and valuing the wider social changes of the health promotion programme and ensured the outcomes were grounded in the realities of the people who experienced and implemented the programme. This

represents an innovative approach that addresses some of the limitations of contemporary health promotion evaluation approaches.

Main messages

Our conceptual framework helps to understand the wider societal impacts of health promotion interventions which are often neglected.

The indicators of change provide a means of assessing self-reported change in health and wellbeing in community settings, and in turn the value for money delivered through health promotion programmes.