

EastXchange evaluation report

September 2019

Nigel Lloyd
NLH Partnership Ltd

Contents

1 Introduction	3
1.1 Background to the EastXchange project.....	3
1.2 EastXchange project aims	3
1.3 Structure, development and operation of the EastXchange project	4
1.3.1 Structure	4
1.3.2 Development and operation.....	5
1.4 Aims of this evaluation	8
2 Methodology.....	9
2.1 Overview	9
2.2 Ethical considerations	10
2.4 Data analysis	10
3 Findings	11
3.1 Routes into the EastXchange project.....	11
3.2 Project delivery, reach and outputs.....	13
3.3 Project outcomes/impacts – quantitative analysis.....	15
3.3.1 Main outcomes questionnaire - overview.....	15
3.4 Project outcomes/impacts - qualitative analysis.....	21
3.4.1 Increases in self-confidence and self-efficacy	21
3.4.2 Improvements in members’ feelings of wellbeing	23
3.4.3 A reduction in social isolation and increased social networks and linkages....	26
3.4.4 Increased opportunities for learning about different cultures and the promotion of a sense of community.....	28
3.4.5 Increased capacity to take on ‘community leadership’ role.....	30
3.4.6 An increase in feelings of self-worth and value.....	31
3.4.7 Gaining of new skills	33
3.4.8 Contribution to partners’ work and objectives	33
3.5 Factors enabling project success and outcomes	34
3.5.1 The skilled work of the staff team, and their friendly, approachable and encouraging nature.....	34
3.5.2 Inclusiveness and the lack of barriers to engagement.....	36
3.5.3 Low-key, non-threatening nature of the project	36
3.5.4 The resources, networks and services provided by Hubs such as BBBC.....	37
4 Discussion.....	40
Appendix 1: Project outcomes questionnaire	41

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the EastXchange project

EastXchange is a skill-sharing, timebanking project that enables people to share skills through a mutual exchange of their time. The project uses participants' 'time' as a currency. It links people and projects providing particular skills, with people in need of those skills.

Timebanks began in the 1980s, and are community-based volunteer schemes that typically involve participants giving and receiving volunteering services in exchange for 'time credits'. One hour's time volunteered typically equals one hour of 'credit', which can be 'banked' and then redeemed at a later stage¹ (for example, by requesting an hour of 'work' in return).

The EastXchange project enables project members to exchange a very wide range of skills. These skills can be exchanged on a one-to-one basis or group basis (for example, by an individual offering her/his skills to a group of people). However, EastXchange differs from a traditional timebank in a number of key ways. For example, the project employs a great deal of flexibility regarding giving and receiving time. Participants are encouraged to volunteer their time if appropriate for the individual, but they may also receive skills and 'services' through the project without any compulsion to give time back to the project. Community development and community ownership of EastXchange is also central to its ethos, and the project is used as a vehicle through which community members can become empowered to make decisions and take action that benefits themselves and their communities. Although a central team supports the delivery of the project, the project aims to encourage community members to take ownership of the project – viewing it as their project rather than a service that is being delivered for them.

EastXchange is funded by Big Lottery Fund's 'Reaching Communities', local partners offering additional, in-kind funding. Big Lottery project funding began in October 2016 and is due to cease in September 2019.

The project's lead organisation is the Bromley By Bow Centre (BBBC), a registered charity located in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The project was developed through collaboration between BBBC and a number of local partners and organisations. It built on the success of a previous Lottery-funded timebanking project led by BBBC that ended in November 2014.

1.2 EastXchange project aims

The EastXchange project focuses on bringing about positive outcomes for specific, vulnerable members of the community, particularly older people, those with mental health needs, and members of migrant communities. The project's stated outcomes (as stated in its Big Lottery funding bid) are:

¹ Seyfang, G. (2003). "With a little help from my friends." *Evaluating time banks as a tool for community self-help*. Local Economy, 18(3)

- Vulnerable residents, in particular older people and those with mental health needs, experience reduced isolation and increased positive relationships with others
- Vulnerable residents, in particular migrant communities and those with mental health needs, gain new skills and are able to address barriers to inactivity and unemployment
- Vulnerable residents, in particular older people and those with mental health needs, benefit from improved health and well-being

A key aim of the project was to extend timebanking across the Borough of Tower Hamlets by working with local partners to develop local 'Hubs' providing the focus for the project's locality-based timebanking work. As stated in section 1.1, the project aimed to be community-led, with local community members assuming ownership of the project, and responsibility for delivering key aspects of it, with support from the EastXchange staff team and local partners.

1.3 Structure, development and operation of the EastXchange project

1.3.1 Structure

The EastXchange project officially became operational in October 2016, although the full staff team was not in place until later that year. The full EastXchange staff team comprises:

- A Programme Manager, who manages the BBBC 'Community Connections' programme which includes the EastXchange project
- A full-time Project Manager
- Two part-time (0.5 equivalent) Community Facilitators

Key project partners, who provided resources for the project, as well as being engaged in the ongoing governance and delivery of the project were:

- BBBC
- Tower Hamlets Homes
- Swan Housing
- Bromley by Bow Health Partnership

Representatives from these partner organisations, along with representatives from the EastXchange staff team comprise the membership of the project Steering Group, a key project governance structure, that meets periodically (approximately quarterly) to guide the development and delivery of the project.²

² Tower Hamlets Homes reduced its involvement with the EastXchange project during Year 2 of delivery (2017-2018). There was no Tower Hamlets Homes representative sitting on the project's Steering Group after this point.

1.3.2 Development and operation

1.3.2.1 Overview

During EastXchange's first year of operation a significant proportion of the project's work (and the work of the staff team) was devoted to the implementation and development of the project, which focused on two Hubs: BBBC and Blackwall Reach. This involved, for example:

- Raising awareness of the project among local residents
- Encouraging community engagement with the project (from both timebank 'givers' and 'receivers')
- Supporting the development and launch of new EastXchange projects
- Encouraging and supporting the development of Peer Champions
- Assisting in the delivery of group-based services
- Encouraging and supporting project members to enable them to assume responsibility for running group-based projects
- Supporting project members who were delivering EastXchange projects
- Working to begin the expansion of the project across the Borough
- Developing project delivery systems and processes
- Developing local partnerships
- Conducting data collection and monitoring and evaluation tasks

During Year 2, the project built on the success of its Year 1 outreach work, and began working through an additional Hub (XX Place). EastXchange currently delivers projects through four community Hubs, namely:

- The Bromley By Bow Centre: Operational since the start of the project in October 2016 *(and incorporates St Andrews Health Centre, which is a 'satellite' Hub)*
- Blackwall Reach (Swan Housing): Operational since November 2016
- XX Place: Operational since July 2017
- Exmouth Estate (Swan Housing): Operational since July 2018.

In addition, during Year 2, the EastXchange project began delivering services through a new Hub at the Praxis Centre in Bethnal Green, East London. However, delivery ceased quickly, and resulted in only 5 members being recruited. Because of the limited work conducted at Praxis, The analysis presented in this report does not include analysis of Praxis based work, and focuses instead on the four Hubs described above.

1.3.2.1 Core project delivery elements

The EastXchange project has a number of core elements to its project delivery. These are described below.

Outreach work

The EastXchange project team conducted significant amounts of outreach work to raise community awareness of the existence of the project, its aims, purpose and benefits, and to encourage local people's engagement and involvement. Outreach work has been on-going throughout the duration of the project, but during Year 1, there was a particular prioritisation of outreach work, as the project was new and establishing itself. This was also the case when the project expanded into delivery from a new Hub.

Outreach work has included:

- Door-knocking to raise awareness among local residents
- Publicising the project outside school and other community buildings
- Running and facilitating publicity events
- Establishing links with local partner organisations, such as schools and GP surgeries
- Conducting one-to-one discussions with potential members, to allow them to find out more about how the project works and the potential benefits of involvement.

Member-run sessions and activities

Member-run and facilitated sessions are at the core of EastXchange's project delivery. In keeping with the project's ethos of co-production and community ownership, the project team support members to facilitate their own EastXchange projects.

Most member-run sessions are 'activity' focused, with a member or members, supported by the EastXchange team as necessary, facilitated a group-based activity (typically on a weekly basis). Member-run sessions include:

- Sewing classes
- Coffee and conversation
- Healthy cooking sessions
- Exercise classes

In addition, outreach-focused coffee mornings/afternoons are a key part of project delivery. They offer potential, new, or existing members the opportunity to attend a fun, informal group session, where they can find out more about the EastXchange project, and discuss ideas for new activities/sessions and ways to become involved and engaged. Coffee mornings/afternoons are utilised as a key tool through which to engage clients, and as an entry point and stepping-stone to further involvement. They also offer a space for members to come together to meet others on a regular basis.

Trips and events

As part of its civic participation work, EastXchange has organised a range of trips and events for members during the course of the project. These have included events based around religious or cultural festivals and celebrations, such as Eid, Diwali, Christmas, Hanika, Easter, and Pancake Day. Such events aim to foster knowledge and understanding of these festivals, and encourage community members to come together and participate, encouraging greater community understanding, cohesion, and participation. Trips to landmarks and places of interest have also been organised by the project, offering the additional benefit of providing new experience for members.

Trips and events have included:

- Easter Extravaganza
- Eid party
- Visits to museums (for example, Victoria and Albert, and Museum of London)
- Seaside trips (for example, Southend and Margate)
- Trips to Kew Gardens
- International Women's Day party

Training and development

One stated aim of EastXchange was to address barriers to economic inactivity and unemployment by assisting 'vulnerable' residents, those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, and those with mental health needs, to gain new work-related skills. EastXchange aimed to achieve this both directly and indirectly. The project provides formal and informal skills development opportunities, enabling members to gain the skills (and qualifications) necessary to deliver sessions and activities, and also providing opportunities to increase members' self-confidence, experience of learning, and capacity for development.

Training and development work conducted by the project included:

- One-to-one liaison between the staff team and members, to ensure that members receive tailored support and training to enable them to effectively deliver EastXchange projects.
- Referral and signposting to other, relevant, local work-related projects.
- Opportunities to gain a formal, accredited qualification (for example, in first aid, food hygiene, or walk leading) in order to deliver group sessions.
- Opportunities to participate in group-based activities focused on acquiring a new skill.
- Opportunities for participate as a volunteer, delivering a session and thereby gaining valuable employment-related experience.

1.4 Aims of this evaluation

In summer 2016, NLH Partnership was commissioned to assist the EastXchange project with its monitoring and evaluation work. NLH Partnership is an independent research, training and development organisation that provides research, evaluation and development support to not-for-profit, statutory and independent sector organizations.

NLH Partnership's work has included:

- Developing a project monitoring and evaluation data spreadsheet, to assist in the systematic collation and tracking of project outputs and outcomes.
- Amendment of existing outcomes measurement tools to improve their efficacy.
- Development of bespoke outcomes measurement tools.
- Advice and guidance on effective outcomes measurement.
- Production of brief, annual evaluation reports (October 2017 and September 2018).

NLH Partnership has now been commissioned to conduct a final evaluation report for the project.

With this in mind, the evaluation aims to:

- Incorporate available outcomes data, alongside qualitative data collected for this evaluation, to identify key outcomes for those who have engaged with the EastXchange project.
- Assess the outcomes of the EastXchange project for clients, in terms of the project's range of intended outcomes.
- Highlight the processes through which the EastXchange project brings about positive outcomes for clients, and the nature of clients' journeys through the project and beyond.
- Identify aspects of the project's operation and delivery that have worked well and/or been particularly effective.
- Highlight learning that may prove useful for the sustainability of the EastXchange project and/or for the development of similar, future timebanking projects.

2 Methodology

2.1 Overview

This evaluation utilised the following data collection and analysis methods:

- Primary data collection: Individual, in-depth, qualitative interviews with three representatives from two of the project's three key partners organisations, namely: Bromley by Bow Health Partnership and Swan Housing.
- Primary data collection: An in-depth, qualitative, group interview with the four members of the EastXchange staff team.
- Primary data collection: An in-depth, qualitative, focus group discussion with 10 EastXchange members.
- Primary data collection: One-to-one, in-depth, participatory interviews with 9 EastXchange 'Lead Members'^{3,4}

These interviews were conducted with the use of a specially designed 'participatory' tool. Participatory tools allow researchers to involve participants in visual, interactive, and easy to complete tasks, keeping the data collection process fun and informal and increasing the likelihood that participants will provide honest accounts of their experiences.

During the interview, participants were asked to draw three separate 'timelines', representing: 'what and when' they had been involved/engaged in with EastXchange (for example, attending activities or facilitating sessions); 'key people' who were important in their initial or continued engagement; and 'difference' – the changes and impacts for them, their family, or community, as a result of EastXchange participation.

Participants' completion of the timelines was guided by the interviewer, and by the end of the interview, there was a timeline that visually represented their involvement over time. The timeline tool allowed us to capture the changing and varied nature of members' engagement over time.

- Secondary data collection: Analysis of available project monitoring and outcomes data provided by the EastXchange project

The main source of quantitative project outcomes data is a five-point, 'pre-' and 'post-' EastXchange engagement questionnaire, which is completed by members on registration, and again some months later. The questionnaire includes 12 outcomes questions and statements, which members were asked to respond to on 5-point 'likert' type scales.

³ 'Lead members' are defined by the project as members who have 'taken some kind of leadership role within the project - for example, running activity sessions or coffee mornings, or 'buddying' other members'.

⁴ These one-to-one, in-depth interviews were conducted by Nigel Lloyd from NLH Partnership and Naomi Mead (a researcher from Bromley by Bow Centre).

2.2 Ethical considerations

Written, signed informed consent was gained from all evaluation participants prior to conducting any individual or group interviews (all participants were required to sign a consent form). All participants were made aware of the nature and purpose of the evaluation, how information they provided would be used, and assured that their anonymity would be protected.

All interviews were audio-recorded. Specific consent for this was gained from participants, and participants were made aware of how long recordings would be kept before being destroyed. Participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation and of their right to withdraw their participation in the evaluation at any time.

Participants were also made aware that their data would be collected and processed in line with GDPR regulations, for the primary purpose of conducting the EastXchange evaluation, and were provided with the details of where to find the privacy policies for NLH Partnership and the Bromley by Bow Centre.

Where illustrative case studies are provided in this report, members' names have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

2.4 Data analysis

A thematic, framework analysis was conducted of all qualitative data. The aims of the evaluation provided a clear framework around which to analyse the data, and so the qualitative analysis draws out the key themes that emerged in relation to these aims.

Primary data collection forms the core of this report, but the report also draws on findings from previous years' evaluations conducted by NLH Partnership, where this adds insight and detail.

3 Findings

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 provide analysis of quantitative monitoring and outcomes data provided by the EastXchange project. Section 3.4 provide analysis of qualitative outcomes evidence.

The quantitative data presented in section 3.2 below, are for the period September 2016 to 31st July 2019.

3.1 Routes into the EastXchange project

The EastXchange project was not able to provide data on the number of referrals into the project from key referrers, nor the number of members referred or signposted from EastXchange to local projects for additional support.

However, there was agreement among team members/partners that the Bromley by Bow Social Prescribing Team was one of the most frequent referrers into the EastXchange project. The Social Prescribing Team receives referrals from GPs, and where appropriate refer these patients on to the EastXchange project.

The Bromley by Bow Centre Connectionzone, which is co-located with EastXchange on the BBBC site, and provides the main welcome point for visitors to BBBC, was highlighted as the second most frequent referrer into EastXchange. In addition, the BBBC Employment Team was highlighted as a common referrer of residents who are interested in entering or re-entering the labour market, but require some training, additional experience of voluntary work, or a boost in their self-confidence.

Other identified routes through which members came to engage with the EastXchange project were:

- Through direct outreach work conducted by the EastXchange staff team
- By word of mouth and recommendation from other EastXchange members
- By GP and GP surgery staff referral directly to EastXchange
- Through the Macmillan Social Prescribing team

Interviews and group discussion with partners and staff team members suggest that referrers have a good understanding of the nature of EastXchange, and that referrals into the project are generally appropriate.

This may be due, in part, to the large amount of initial work conducted by the staff team at the beginning of the project, to liaise with potential partners and raise awareness of the nature and aims of the project, and the types of referrals that would be appropriate. The fact that EastXchange is not a 'typical' timebanking project, may have made this work all the more important, and close liaison between the team and partner organisations continued throughout the project.

The appropriacy of EastXchange referrals is further ensured through one-to-one discussions held between staff team members and new, potential EastXchange members prior to them registering with the project. These initial one-to-one meetings

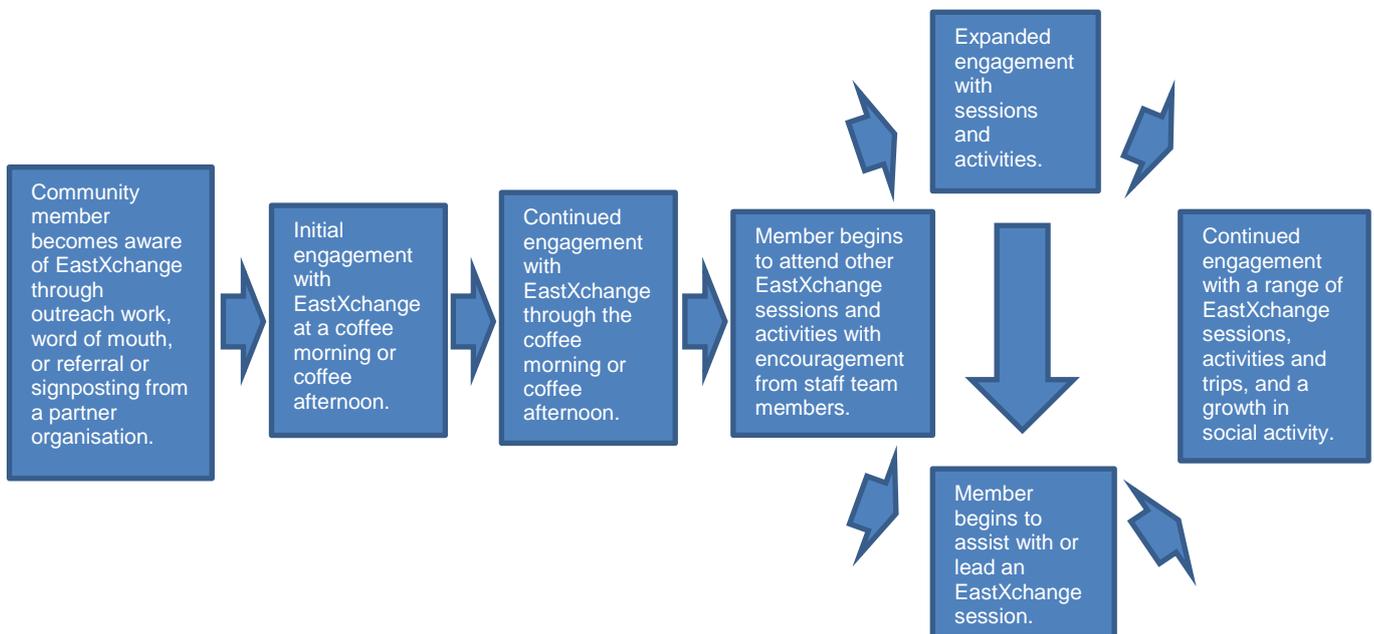
allow staff team members to discuss the nature of the project and what it offers, and provides an opportunity for potential members to decide whether or not EastXchange membership is appropriate for them.

Although every members' journey was unique, analysis of qualitative data around members routes into and through EastXchange highlighted some commonality of experience. Figure 1 below, presents a 'typical' involvement journey for a community member with no previous knowledge of EastXchange or history of engaging with community activities.

As the figure shows, outreach work, word of mouth, or formal referral were typical routes into the project. Coffee mornings/afternoons were a key point of initial engagement (as discussed in more detail in section 3.5.3), as well as a stepping-stone to further involvement. Members' trajectories from coffee mornings/afternoons varied, with some engaging with coffee mornings/afternoons for a period of weeks or months to build their self-confidence prior to engaging with other activities. Other members quickly moved from attending coffee mornings/afternoons to participating in other sessions and activities. The encouragement of the staff team was typically important in facilitating this further engagement.

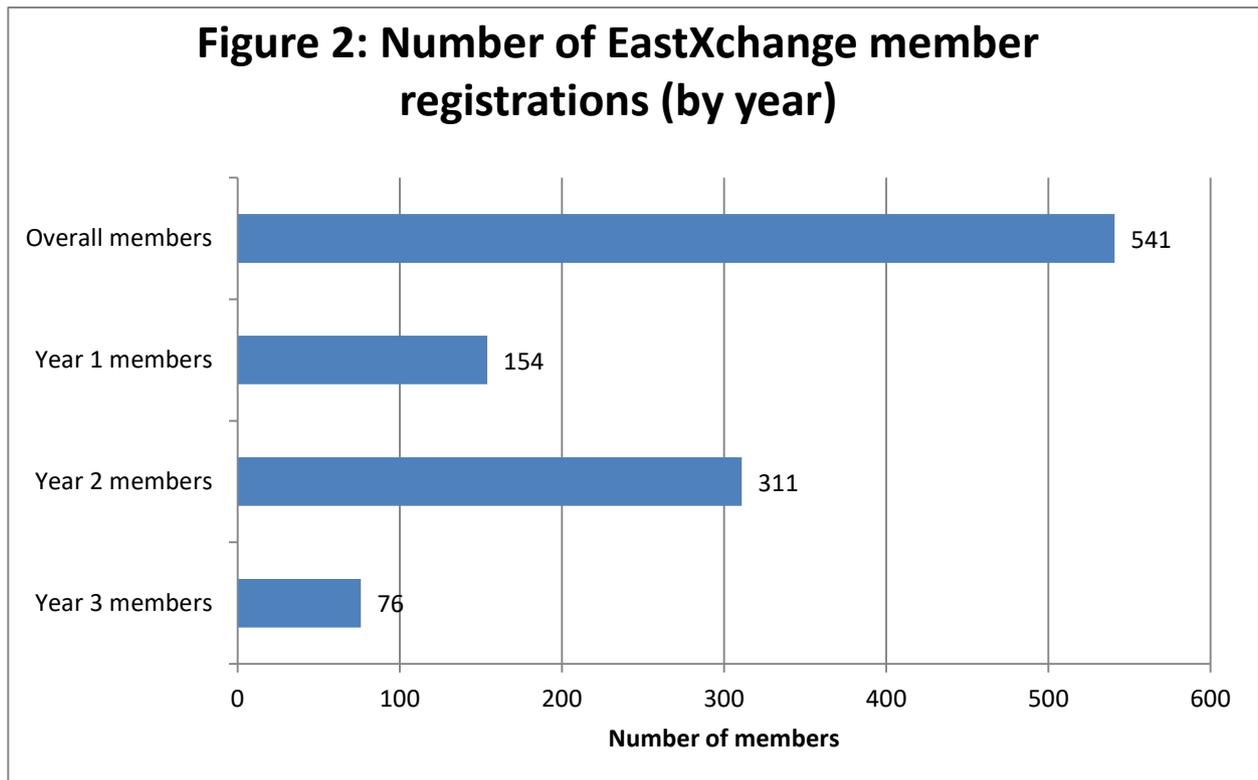
From here, some members continued to expand their engagement in EastXchange activities, whereas other moved quickly to assisting with or leading sessions. Expanded involvement with EastXchange might involve, for example, attending session, events or trips, or participating in training courses provided by EastXchange or partner organisations. Almost all participants who participated in interviews or group discussions cited an increase in their level of social activity as a result of the EastXchange project.

Figure 1: A 'typical' 'involvement' journey for a member with no previous knowledge of EastXchange or history of engaging with community activities



3.2 Project delivery, reach and outputs

As of 31st July 2019, the EastXchange project had registered a total of 541 members. Figure 2 below presents this 'total' registration figure alongside figures for project registrations broken down by year of registration. As the figure shows, there were 154 registrations in Year 1, 311 in Year 2, and 76 in Year 1 (for the period to July 31st 2019). The data indicate a doubling in registrations between Year 1 and Year 2, with registrations reducing in Year 3.



As mentioned in section 1.3.2.1 above, EastXchange currently delivers timebanking through four community Hubs. Of the total 541 members, the large majority (380, 70%) were registered at BBC, 138 (26%) were registered at Blackwall Reach, 12 (2%) at XX Place, and six (1%) at Exmouth Estate. An additional 5 members (1%) had been registered at Praxis.

EastXchange project data also provided an indication of the number of hours given and received by members. In total, project data indicate that in excess of 16,000 hours of time was received by EastXchange members over the course of the project's three years of operation. Project data indicate that a total number of 3,395 hours were given by the project members during its three years of operation, and 16,103 hours were received by project members.

A total of 6,345 of the hours received, were received by members through their attendance at training, trips and events. Therefore, in excess of 10,000 hours have been received by members through engagement with the various EastXchange sessions and activities.

Table 1 below, shows hours given and received through Eastxchange projects and activities, by Hub. As the table shows the large majority of hours given (2, 933 hours – 83%) and received (8,234 hours – 84%) were by members registered at BBBC.

Table 1: Hours given and received through EastXchange projects and activities

Hub	Hours given	Hours received
BBBC	2,933	8,234
Blackwall Reach	303	1,015
Exmouth Estate	10	16
XX Place	149	493

In addition, project monitoring data indicate that a total of 93 (17%) of the 541 members registered with the project had given time to the EastXchange project by leading or supporting the delivery of a project or activity. This finding suggests that a significant number of EastXchange project members gave time, in addition to receiving time from the project, and indicates a relatively high level of active engagement in the EastXchange project (with almost one-fifth of members giving time to the project at some point).

EastXchange project data also indicate that during the three years of the project, a total of 38 trips or events were delivered, and 10 training courses were run. These data are displayed in Table 2 below, which provides a breakdown of trips/events and training course delivery by year. As the table shows, the number of trips and training courses delivered peaked in Year 2.

Table 2: EastXchange trips/events and training courses by year

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Overall
Trips/events	2	21	15	38
Training courses	0	7	3	10

Examples of training courses delivered include:

- Basic First Aid
- Accredited Level 3 First Aid training
- Accredited Level 1 Food Safety in catering
- Food Hygiene
- Walk Leader
- Fire Marshall

Examples of trips and events included:

- Celebration for a range of religious or cultural occasions such as Diwali, Hamuka, Eid, and New Year
- Key Gardens visit

- Victoria and Albert Museum visit
- Margate seaside trip
- Museum of London visit

Project data indicate a ‘volume’ of attendance at trip/events of 1,131 during the course of the project, and a ‘volume’ of attendance of 106 at training courses⁵. Table 3 below displays the volume of attendance at trip/events and training courses by year of operation. As the table shows, there was a large increase in the number of members attending trips and events in Year 2 (from 50 to 530), with numbers increasing slightly in Year 3 (to 551 members). The volume of attendance at training courses increased from 0 in Year 1 to 76 in Year 2, with a decline to 30 in Year 3.

Table 3: ‘Volume’ of attendance at EastXchange trips/events and training courses by year

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Overall
Trips/events	50	530	551	1131
Training courses	0	76	30	106

Whatsapp and text groups were a key route through which members maintained communication with the project and each other, shared information, and built connections and relationships. Project data indicates that as of 31st July 2019, there were 5 active EastXchange Whatsapp/text messaging groups. A total of 333 EastXchange members were a member of one or more of those groups.

3.3 Project outcomes/impacts – quantitative analysis

3.3.1 Main outcomes questionnaire - overview

As stated in section 2.1, the main source of quantitative project outcomes data is a five-point, ‘pre’ and ‘post’ questionnaire which is completed by members on registration, and again some months later. The questionnaire includes 12 outcomes questions and statements, which members were asked to respond to on 5-point ‘likert’ type scales.

Project staff aimed to complete follow-up, ‘post’ questionnaires with each member three months after their registration. However, because of time and workload constraints this proved challenging, and there was some lack of consistency in terms of when these ‘post’ questionnaires are completed, with a number of ‘post’ questionnaires being completed up to six months or longer after initial completion.

⁵ It should be noted that these figures indicate total ‘volume’ rather than ‘reach’, and therefore figures for attendance across trips and events indicate the number of ‘attendances’ registered rather than the number of different individuals who have attended.

The aim of the questionnaire was to capture outcomes for members across a range of outcomes areas, namely:

- Ability to prioritise health needs
- Knowledge of available health services
- Ability to recognise symptoms and access appropriate health services
- English reading, writing, speaking and listening skills
- IT and employment-related skills
- Feelings of isolation
- Level of social engagement and social networks
- Engagement with, and understanding of, people from different cultural backgrounds

In autumn 2017, NLH Partnership worked with the EastXchange staff team to revise this questionnaire, so that it was better able to effectively capture outcomes for project members. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1, and the data presented below is based on this revised version of the project outcomes questionnaire. The outcomes questions/statements may be grouped into four broad but overlapping outcomes areas, namely:

- **Health related:**
Ability to prioritise health needs
Understanding of health services that can access
Knowledge of appropriate health services for issue
- **Employability related:**
Rating of English speaking and listening skills
Rating of English reading and writing skills
Rating of IT skills
Rating of employability skills
- **Social isolation:**
Feelings of isolation
- **Socialisation and positive relationships:**
Frequency of 'getting out' and socialising
Frequency of getting to know new people in local area
Frequency of spending time with people from other cultures
Rating of understanding of different cultures

It should be noted that pre- and post- outcomes questionnaire responses are not available for all members for all questions/statements. Time and workload constraints have meant that the staff team have not been able to complete follow-up, 'post' questionnaires for all members, and in addition, where pre- or post- outcomes questionnaires have been completed, responses for all outcomes are not always provided by members. However, for each outcomes question/statement there are typically in excess of 300 pre- and post- responses, which provides an adequate sample for statistical analysis.

Table 4 below, presents the average (mean) pre- and post- scores for each outcomes question/statement, for members for whom pre- and post- responses were available. As the table shows, for each outcomes question/statement there was an increase in mean score when pre- and –post scores were compared. This indicates that overall, there was an increase in the mean scores for members on their pre- and post- outcomes questionnaires, between pre- and post- questionnaire completion.

Table 4: Mean scores for outcomes questions/statements

Outcome	Mean pre-	Mean post-
Ability to prioritise health needs	3.48	4.09
Understanding of health services that can access	3.43	4.1
Knowledge of appropriate health services for issue	3.44	4.08
Feelings of isolation	3.14	3.27
Rating of English speaking and listening skills	3.52	3.97
Rating of English reading and writing skills	3.47	3.93
Rating of IT skills	2.88	3.43
Rating of employability skills	3.05	3.57
Frequency of 'getting out' and socialising	3.49	4.26
Frequency of getting to know new people in local area	3.22	4.13
Frequency of spending time with people from other cultures	3.25	4.19
Rating of understanding of different cultures	3.53	4.42

Figure 3 below, presents the overall mean differences between members' pre- and post-scores for each outcomes question/statement, for members for whom pre- and post-responses were available. As the figure shows, the outcome with the greatest mean difference was for the frequency with which they got out and met new people (mean difference of 0.94), followed by members' frequency of getting to know new people in the local area (mean difference of 0.91), and their rating of their understanding of people from different cultures (mean difference of 0.89). The outcome with the smallest mean difference was 'Feelings of isolation' (0.13).

Figure 3: Mean differences between pre- and post- outcomes question/statement scores

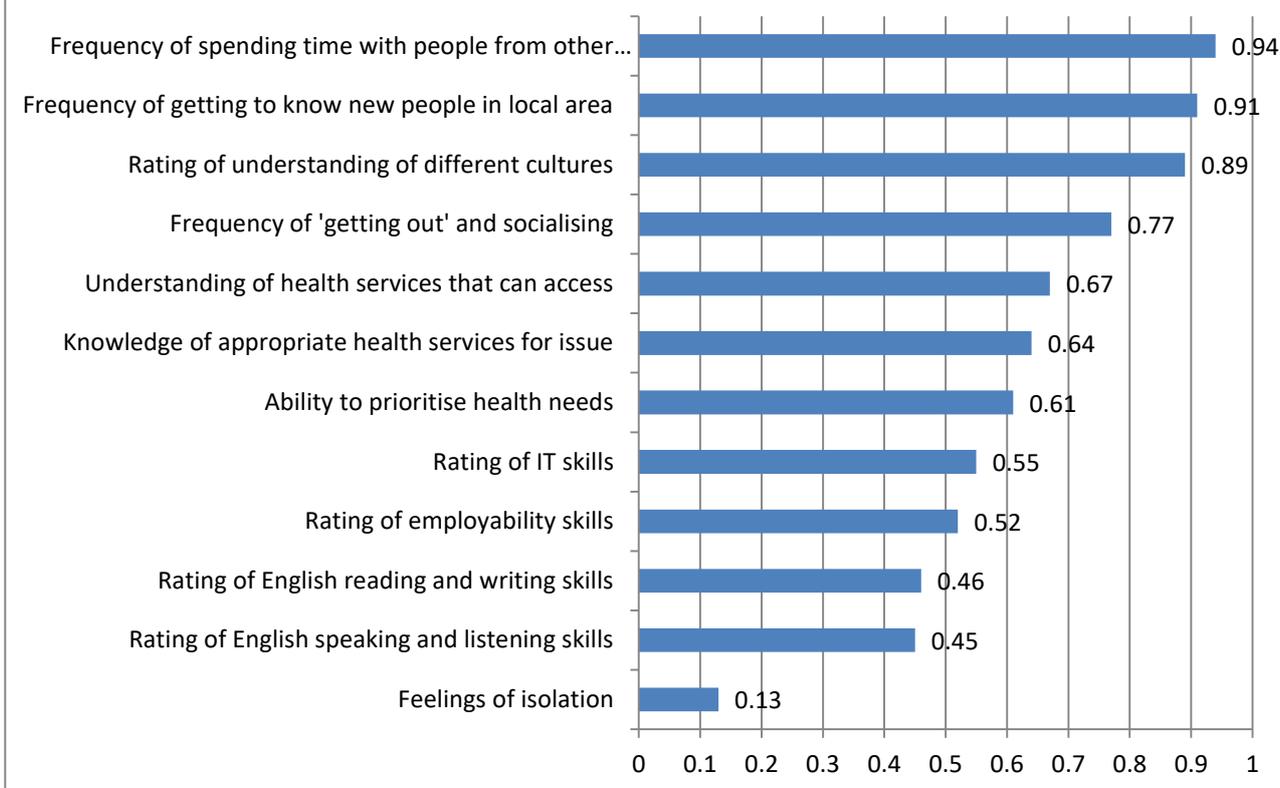


Figure 4 below, presents data for the number of members for whom there has been a positive change (as measured by their 'pre' and 'post' scores on the project outcomes questionnaire), across each outcome area. As the figure shows, the outcome for which the greatest number of members had experienced a positive change was the frequency with which they got out and met new people (253 members - 47% of the total membership), followed by 'Frequency of spending time with other cultures' (244 members – 45%) and 'Frequency of getting out and socialising' (241 members – 45%).

These findings suggest that EastXchange has been particularly successful in bringing about outcomes in terms of community members building additional community linkages, increasing the degree to which they socialise with other, and in members better understanding those from other cultural backgrounds.

Overall, for 11 of the 12 outcomes, between 188 (35%) and 253 members (47%) had experienced a positive change, indicating a relatively consistent occurrence of 'positive change' across these outcomes. The exception was 'Feelings of isolation', with data indicating that a smaller number of members (121 members - 22%) experienced a positive change in this outcome (as measured by the outcomes questionnaire).

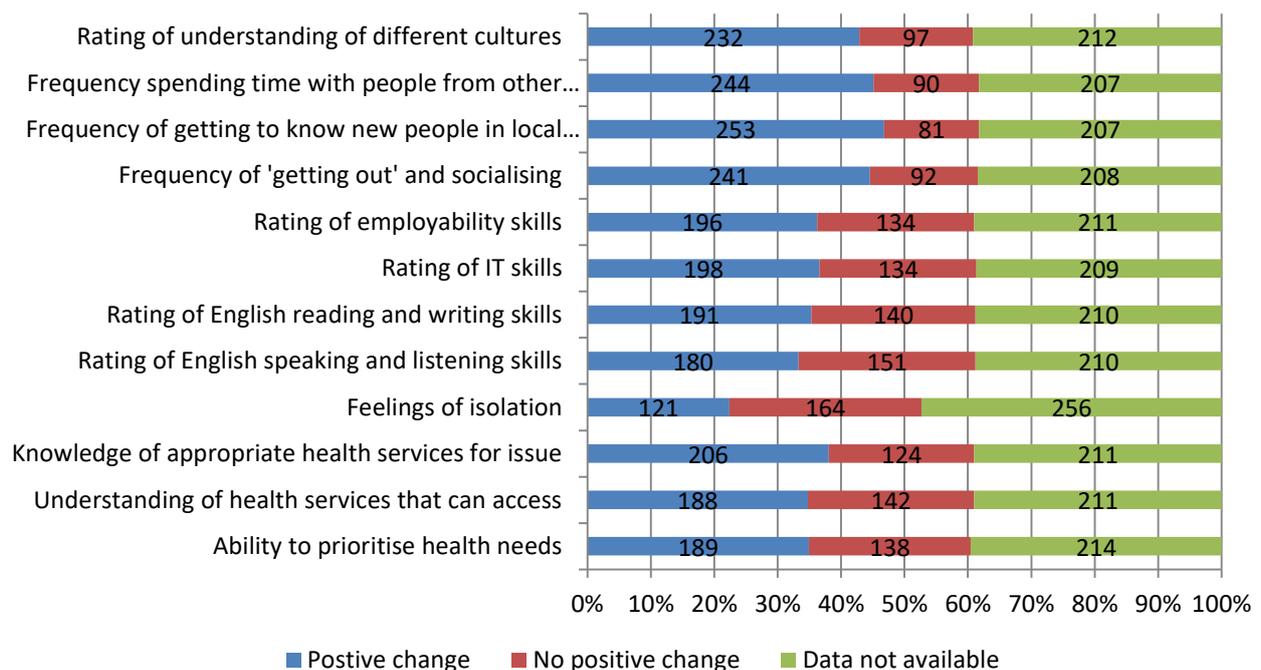
There may be a number of reasons for this exception, which may also explain the small mean difference for 'Feelings of isolation' highlighted previously in Figure 2, given that the qualitative analysis presented later in section 3.4 suggests that reducing members' social isolation was a key impact of the EastXchange project. For example, systematic recording of members' baseline (pre-) feelings of isolation did not occur during Year 1.

During this time an outcomes questionnaire without an 'isolation' outcomes measure was in use (although the other 11 outcomes were captured). It was only at the end of Year 1, when NLH Partnership worked with the project to develop a revised questionnaire, that feelings of isolation began to be captured systematically. This means that there is no baseline (pre-) 'Feeling of isolation' for Year 1 members. The fact that this data does not exist, may account, at least in part, for the lower mean scores for 'Feelings of isolation', since no pre-/post- 'isolation' data comparison is possible for these Year 1 members who have been engaged with the project for the longest amount of time, and for whom the changes in terms of this outcome could be expected to be greatest.

In addition, 'social isolation' is a complex concept. The outcomes questionnaire was measuring subjective 'feelings' of social isolation, and these might be distinct from, and change in different ways and over different timescales, to other measures of social relationships such as 'social networks' or social support', which might be more closely related to the 'isolation' changes highlighted by the qualitative data presented in section 3.4.

Similarly, the range of factors that influence individuals' feelings of isolation may mean that feelings of isolation are more difficult to change than some of the other variables captured by the outcome questionnaire. It might then, be the case that there has been less change in this outcomes area because of the inherent difficulty in reducing feelings of isolation, relative to the other outcomes being measured quantitatively.

Figure 4: Number of members for whom there has been a 'positive change' for each outcomes question/statement (n=541)



Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to test for statistical significance. The IBM SPSS statistical package was used and a non-parametric test for related samples chosen (Wilcoxon signed-rank test). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test for related data was used to compare the differences in the scores for each outcomes questionnaire measure (before) pre- and post- (after) engagement with the EastXchange project, for each member for whom there was available pre- and post- data.

As Table 5 below shows, for all 12 outcomes questions/statements, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that the observed difference between pre- and post-measurements was statistically significant.

These findings indicate significant differences across a range of outcomes areas relating to members' physical and mental wellbeing, employability, and ability to manage their own health and wellbeing.

Table 5: Results of Wilcoxon signed-rank test on pre- and post- outcomes scores

	N	Mean pre-	Mean post-	Wilcoxon Z score	Significance (p)
Ability to prioritise health needs	322	3.48	4.09	11.14	p<0.01
Understanding of health services that can access	324	3.43	4.1	10.96	p<0.01
Knowledge of appropriate health services for issue	327	3.44	4.08	-10.86	p<0.01
Feelings of isolation	282	3.06	3.27	-2.76	p<0.01
Rating of English speaking and listening skills	328	3.52	3.97	10.29	p<0.01
Rating of English reading and writing skills	328	3.47	3.93	10.68	p<0.01
Rating of IT skills	329	2.88	3.43	-10.29	p<0.01
Rating of employability skills	327	3.05	3.57	-10.11	p<0.01
Frequency of 'getting out' and socialising	330	3.49	4.26	-12.06	p<0.01
Frequency of getting to know new people in local area	331	3.22	4.13	12.45	p<0.01
Frequency of spending time with people from other cultures	331	3.25	4.19	12.8	p<0.01
Rating of understanding of different cultures	326	3.53	4.42	12.56	p<0.01

As highlighted in section 1.2, key aims of EastXchange were to bring about outcomes for members of 'migrant' communities (defined as BAME individuals) and those with 'mental health needs' (defined as those identified as experiencing mental health issue).

The EastXchange registration form asked prospective members whether or not they were experiencing a mental health issue of some type, and a total of 121 members stated that they were. A minority of these provided details of the issue they were experiencing, but the most common issues were anxiety, low mood, and depression.

The Wilcoxon signed-rank test for related data was used to compare the differences in the scores for each outcomes questionnaire measure (before) pre- and post- (after) engagement with the EastXchange project, for members from BAME backgrounds (429 members) and members who stated at registration that they were experiencing a mental health issue (121 members).

For BAME members, a similar pattern of results was found to that identified for 'all' members (as highlighted in table 5 above). For all 12 outcomes questions/statements, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that the observed difference between pre- and post- measurements was statistically significant.

For members with a mental health issue, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed that the observed difference between pre- and post- measurements was statistically significant for all 12 outcomes questions/statements except 'Feelings of isolation'. Possible explanations for this have been explored in 3.3.1.

Many of the outcomes highlighted above link closely to one or more of the qualitative outcomes discussed in section 3.4 below, and exploration of the qualitative data allows for a more in-depth understanding of the nature of outcomes, and the processes that were important in bringing them about.

3.4 Project outcomes/impacts - qualitative analysis

Analysis of the interviews and group discussions conducted for this evaluation provided further, strong evidence of the outcomes of the EastXchange project for individuals who had engaged with it, as well as for partners working with the project. A number of clear thematic areas in which EastXchange had made a positive difference to members emerged from this analysis. These are presented in the following sections.

3.4.1 Increases in self-confidence and self-efficacy

Interview and group discussion data suggest that increases in members' self-confidence and feelings of self-efficacy were among the main impacts of the EastXchange project for members. Member, staff team members and partners all highlighted this impact.

The qualitative data suggests that increases in members' self-confidence and self-efficacy may occur in one a number of ways. For example, for some members, particularly those who are socially isolated, simply attending EastXchange activities may allow them to gain confidence in participating in group-based activities and engaging with new people. The welcoming, non-threatening nature of EastXchange and sessions such as coffee afternoons, discussed in section 3.5.3 appears to be important here, as this enables members to engage with EastXchange at a pace that they are comfortable with. As one staff member/partner stated:

"I think it's that confidence...It's mostly the BME women who really don't get out of their house a lot, who will have, you know, cultural restrictions...this has been a place, a safe space where they can go and take part in other things, and you've just seen those things flourish in people."

(Team member/partner)

Another described members' changes in confidence in the following way:

"The impacts I've seen amongst the individual members, I think things like confidence – seeing them come out of their shell. To think back on when you first meet people and they're hesitant to even come, and then [later] they're coming out with suggestions and really getting involved. To see a change in people and that

growth, and them making that connection with people, and that meaningful connection has been really nice to see.”

(Team member/partner)

For other members, increases in self-confidence and self-efficacy occur through the opportunity provided by EastXchange for them to try new things and gain new skills, providing a sense of achievement and helping to increase their self-confidence. As one member stated:

“A lot of people are like: ‘Oh my God, I can’t do this’, and by the end of it they’re: ‘Oh, was that it!’. It’s really nice to see that change in their attitude after they get to it...they feel like they can do it, and you can actually see the transition of confidence. It’s building up and it’s changing in them.”

EastXchange member

Another described the process of members’ confidence-building in the following way:

“A lot of people feel like they can’t do things, and they have a certain amount of expectations for it. But once they actually have a go at doing something, they have a complete different feel for it, and I think that’s really good.”

EastXchange member

For some other members, the experience of taking responsibility for facilitating or assisting with sessions appeared to be a key factor leading to changes in self-confidence. In some cases, this was true for some members who had previous experience of delivering groups and facilitating sessions, as well as those who did not. As one member who facilitated an EastXchange project said:

“My confidence has started to come back, and whereas I’d lost all my confidence and I thought I’d never be able to do that again, now I find I’m doing it without even realising I’m doing it...it’s just feeling confident in what you know and passing it on...For me it was very simple and easy, but for other people, they were: ‘Oh my goodness, I didn’t know that.’”

EastXchange member

Another stated:

“The residents who take part, we’ve seen their confidence build. They seem more confident in coming and taking part in the activities that are running and lead on those activities. I think that sense of ownership...I think people have started taking that ownership.”

(Team member/partner)

There was general agreement among partners/staff team members, that the EastXchange project had led to significant increases in self-confidence that meant that many members were now confident enough to facilitate sessions, or take on broader ‘ownership’ of EastXchange projects, having previously lacked the confidence or skills to do so. As one partners/staff team member said:

“Some of the individuals who are involved with the project, now they’re so confident if you asked them to hold a project of a similar nature somewhere else, they can easily do it. So that level of impact it has had.”

(Team member/partner)

Case study: Ameena’s journey – Increased socialisation and confidence

Ameena’s motivation for joining the EastXchange project was that she was becoming increasingly socially isolated. As she says:

“I needed to get out of the house and start doing things.”

Her first involvement with EastXchange was through attending a coffee afternoon. She was a little apprehensive at first and was unsure about what it would be like. Ameena attended a few times and then started to help out during the coffee mornings by welcoming people and helping to facilitate the session. The EastXchange team members encouraged her to get become actively involved in the coffee afternoons and after a few months she took on responsibility for hosting a coffee afternoon.

Ameena had previous experience of community volunteering, although prior to EastXchange she had no experience of leading a session. She says that the EastXchange project is the most supported she has felt as a volunteer on any project, and has high praise for the whole staff team. Ameena says:

“They’ve supported me through things that have been stressful...they constantly support you and listen to you...they ask what you need and what they can do and they support in getting things done.”

Key impacts for Ameena have been around helping her to socialise, meet new people and make new friends. She is much more socially engaged than he was prior to becoming involved with EastXchange. Ameena says:

“Before I started coming here, I was coming out every day but just not doing anything. And I was at the point where I just, sort of, had to start doing things. And now I can’t stop!...I’ve met a lot of new friends and in some cases have cemented friendships with people I already knew...Just coming to the groups and talking afterwards and helping each other out.”

As with many EastXchange members, Ameena also feels that an increase in self-confidence has been a key impact for her. She says:

“Doing all of this this has got me more confident – I’ve been able to do more things...I’m getting more confident I suppose!”

3.4.2 Improvements in members’ feelings of wellbeing

A key theme that emerged from analysis of interview and group discussion data was that the EastXchange project has had a positive impact on the subjective wellbeing of members. The positive difference that EastXchange involvement has made was discussed by a number of members who participated in interviews and group discussions. In particular, members who stated that they had had physical, mental, or emotional issues prior to joining EastXchange, stated that these issues had been positively impact by project engagement.

The inter-relation between physical and mental wellbeing, and particularly the impact that poor physical health can have on mental wellbeing, was clear in many of these cases. A number of members highlighted the positive impact that EastXchange had had on their physical and/or mental wellbeing. As one stated:

“I think [without EastXchange] my life would be a lot different. Like the things I did, like the trips that we went to, meeting new people, and going out and doing things like that, if I didn’t have EastXchange I think that that sort of mentality would not be there for me. I would be more sort of restricting myself in terms of: ‘You can’t do it because of your health’ – I would use it more as an excuse.”

EastXchange member

Another described the positive impact of EastXchange in the following way:

“We all get bogged down in different things and I think it [EastXchange] keeps you grounded, takes you back to your roots again. It’s so easy to get tied up in your own world, doing your own things and not to think about anyone else or anything else...I have pain, it’s something I live with every day, but you feel a part of something and you’re doing something, it just makes it a bit easier.”

EastXchange member

There was evidence too, from a small number of members, that they felt so much better as a result of EastXchange engagement, that they had reduced their need for analgesics and/or had reduced their frequency of visits to their GP. Typically, these members stated that they now felt better able to manage their health issue/s. One member who had been referred through the BBB Social Prescribing Team, and who felt that EastXchange had helped her to manage her pain, commented on the therapeutic nature of EastXchange engagement in the following way:

“I don’t really come to the doctor’s very often now...it seems like the medical side of things, the thing that I initially came with – my injury, my depression, my anxiety seem to disappear because I have all of this going on. Because I felt valued, I had people calling on my...it just really helped. Far better that taking anti-depressants and going to group therapy. This in a way is a similar kind of thing in a way, you know, it’s helping me by introducing me to other people, having a coffee, getting me out. It’s just snowballed!...

The same member stated:

“Taking responsibility for my health and wellbeing, not just relying on the GP and medication to fix the problems...when your life’s feeling smoother, when you feel valued, you feel better in yourself and your health and wellbeing is much better....I would very rarely go and see the doctor now about pain management, because I know what to do, I know what I need. It’s taking control of yourself.”

EastXchange member

Members also highlighted the benefits for them to being able to regularly meet and share experiences with other community members who might be experiencing similar health issues as themselves. They typically commented that this sharing of experience assisted them in managing their conditions. As one commented:

“I used to leave there knowing that I’m a little better. And you know, being in a room with everyone who is at least going through something, or going through what you’re going through, makes a difference.”

EastXchange member

Members also highlighted the short-term positive impacts of specific sessions, such as coffee afternoons, exercise classes and craft-based sessions. One member, who highlighted the positive impacts of a craft session she attended, described the benefits of the session in the following way:

“When I do any of these activities, many of these activities have therapeutic aspects to them, and that’s really nice, you wouldn’t expect it to be like that...It’s very relaxing, you’re very focused and in the zone, it’s very calming, you lose sight of anything else that’s around you – it’s really nice.”

EastXchange member

Case study: Fatimah’s journey – Assisting members’ in managing their health conditions

Fatimah was referred to the EastXchange project by the BBB Social Prescribing Team who she was referred to by her GP. Her first contact with the project was at an EastXchange event, where she met one of the staff team and found out more about the project. Fatimah had initially intended to engage with EastXchange as a participant, but since she had previous experience of facilitating group sessions decided instead to begin running a group. Fatimah says that she was well supported by the staff team, who have been important in supporting her engagement throughout.

The flexibility of the EastXchange project was vital to her being able to run the session, as she has a health condition that means she is not always well enough to attend the session. Without this flexibility, Fatimah would have been unable to commit to running the session. She says:

“I told them, I asked them because of my health, I might not be able to do it every time, and they were like: ‘it’s really up to you when you want to do it and it’s really flexible for you to do it, and you don’t have to worry.’ And I felt really comfortable with that and I was very happy. I felt: ‘Yes, this is for me!’”

Fatimah hasn’t attended many other EastXchange projects, but is a regular participant at EastXchange trips. She says that the key impacts for her have been around her mental wellbeing which can be negatively impacted by her health condition. She said:

“I’ve always wanted to do stuff and I couldn’t, just because of my health I couldn’t do much... [Without EastXchange] I would have been more at home, more depressed, less sociable...I feel like this has become a part of me now and I really don’t want to let go of it. [Without EastXchange] And I can see myself in such a dark bubble where I am like, not doing anything, just staying at home, health is getting worse. Probably if I were to not be in EastXchange at all I probably wouldn’t be going to half the events that happen, or know about half the things that happen. My excuse would be that I don’t know anything and I’d be less aware about what’s happening out here, and that’s how I think it’s make a huge difference.”

The ability to get out of the house and socialise with other people has been central to bringing about positive impacts Fatimah, who feels that EastXchange is helping her to get back to being the positive, optimistic persona she was prior to her health issues. She says:

“I’ve met a lot of people...EastXchange gets me to meet people who are similar to me and sometimes not...Before my health [issues] I was bubbly, optimistic, outgoing, sociable, that’s how I was all the time. With my health, that kind of went away and with EastXchange coming into my life it’s slowly bringing me back up again, so it’s really helping me.”

3.4.3 A reduction in social isolation and increased social networks and linkages

Closely related to improvements in members' feelings of mental wellbeing, was the reduction in their feelings of social isolation and an increase in their social networks and linkages. Reducing social isolation was stated by staff and partners to be a key reason for referral into EastXchange, and a reduction in social isolation was one of the impacts most commonly cited by members.

It was clear that many EastXchange members who had been previously socially isolated, had found in EastXchange a valuable opportunity to go out and engage with other people, with positive outcomes for their mental wellbeing. For these members, the opportunity to get out of the house and engage with other people was hugely beneficial. As one member stated:

"I was having problems with depression and things like that at the time, so the person I saw [BBBC team member] said why don't you try [EastXchange], and I did, and I just get carried along with it...And it made a big difference to how I felt. It got me out of the house a bit, so I was doing something that I enjoyed doing so that was the main thing."

EastXchange member

Another said:

"I like to come because sometimes you just get lonely indoors, you've got nothing to do. Here you meet other people and you find out other things what is going on...it's a really, really good thing, and then you break your isolation."

(EastXchange member)

Another member commented:

"Some people think that isolation just happens to people who live on their own. But you could be surrounded by people, and even amongst that you can feel isolated...You can go out each day and feel that you don't connect until you come somewhere like here and then instantly connect, I think it's really good like that."

(EastXchange member)

The opportunity provided by EastXchange, for members to meet new people and build new relationships, was central to the project's ability to bring about reductions in members' social isolation. The majority of members who participated in group discussions or interviews stated that the project had enabled them to meet new people, and in many cases to establish new friendships. As one member stated:

"It's just amazing, the synergy, the friendships that have been made. People meet each other outside the group, go on cinema trips..."

(EastXchange member)

Another said:

"Through the whole thing I've made so many friends and got to know so many people...anybody could come together and talk about anything and share their

ideas, talk about their talents and what they can give to the community. It's brought us together, it's been really good."

(EastXchange member)

For some of these members, it was clear that the friendships and social networks they had would not have come about without the EastXchange project. One such member described her experience in the following way:

"It really helped me to come out of the house... You know, sometimes you feel isolated when you don't see people that you want to see... for a long time for me to be staying at home and not doing anything and with my health issue and stuff, it just put me in that corner. So, it just helped to come and engage with some people that I haven't met before, it just allowed me to see some people, some new faces."

(EastXchange member)

Members who participated in interviews and group discussions discussed the positive impact in terms of social isolation and social networks, of their general, on-going engagement with EastXchange, as well as discussing specific activities that had allowed them to build positive relationships with other. For example, one member described an EastXchange trip to the seaside in the following way:

"Because you travel, everyone, the whole group is spending the whole day together and also you get to meet people from other centres who come for the trip too. And we like it because we get good fish and chips! [laughs] And it's spending the whole day with friends at the beach, and it's like you've taken a trip, one day away from EVERYTHING."

(EastXchange member)

Partners and staff team members were also agreed that in their experience, and from their perspectives, a reduction in social isolation have been among the key impacts of EastXchange for members. As one stated:

"The social aspect has been a big impact... members keep saying: 'it's really benefitting my mental health- because I've been able to come out, and I would have been stuck'. For some people that's their only once a week they've been able to come out of their house. For those of us that come to work we think that that's the norm, but for a lot of people it's a big thing to be able to come out of the house once a week."

(Team member/partner)

Case study: Martina's journey – A comfortable, welcoming environment and impacts on self-confidence

Martina's first experience of EastXchange was a coffee morning that she attended after receiving an EastXchange flyer from a member of the staff team outside a local school. She didn't know what to expect from the coffee morning, but attended for a few weeks. She then began participating in an EastXchange session, and then started leading a session after a staff team member suggested she might be able to.

Martina had no experience of facilitating group sessions, but enjoyed the experience, as she was supported by the staff team. For her, the EastXchange Community Facilitator has been central to her continued engagement with EastXchange, and she also feels that the comforting, welcoming environment where the session took place helped her to feel comfortable and confident. Martina has continued to run this session and has started to facilitate another. She says:

"The community centre is comfortable, the environment is comfortable, they're always welcoming and supporting us, and I found it was a safe environment. And the people, they always supporting us, they appreciate us."

Martina is committed to the idea of making EastXchange sustainable, and sees it as an important space for the community to develop their own skills. EastXchange has made a huge difference to her. She says that she is now much more confident and engages far more outside her home:

"Confidence is the main difference. I'm a different person. Without EastXchange, I'm a quiet person, and now I'm different person, so I give all credit to EastXchange. And I'm also involved in our community in other session, so they also picked me as a volunteer. With me quality and personality, they said I am the right person...so, the whole week I'm busy!"

She also sees impacts for her wider community, particularly in terms of confidence and community cohesions. She says:

"A big difference – everybody's personality has come out. And more trust – they've got a whole community and they know more people and they're more confident now...it's like a big family now."

For Martina, the support of the EastXchange staff team was vital to her initial and maintained engagement. She says that:

"Welcoming, always they [EastXchange] welcome us. Always they give feedback to us and always they say to us: 'No need to do anything by force' And they're always behind our back and making sure we're happy and feel comfortable, and not forced to do anything."

3.4.4 Increased opportunities for learning about different cultures and the promotion of a sense of community

EastXchange provides opportunities for individuals from different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, and of different ages, to meet and share experiences. Analysis of qualitative data suggests that these opportunities were greatly valued by members' who often commented that through EastXchange, they had met or become friends with individuals who they would not typically have engaged with. One team member/partner described the impact in the following way:

“The getting together and speaking to other people. Because, for example, you know, a 60 year old Bangladeshi woman wouldn’t usually be seen with a 30 year old English, young male. And having that interactive space is nice.”

(Team member/partner)

Members highlighted the positive impact that EastXchange had had on them by helping them to feel a sense of connectedness to their local community – a sense of connectedness that they had previously lacked. The following quote was typical:

“For me, it’s been very important to feel a part of my community...And because we live in London and it is so vast and we’re all rushing around, I never realised that they cared for each other and worked together, so finding that sense of community and sense of being was just profound for me.”

(EastXchange member)

The diverse nature of EastXchange’s membership emerged as a key reason why members were able to form friendships and links with people from other cultural and ethnic groups. Members often stated that attendance at sessions and activities, as well as trips and events meant that they had engaged with a wider section of society than they would otherwise have done. In all cases, members stated that this had been a positive experience. As one member said:

“It’s just given me the freedom to join in with all other kinds of people and ethnic groups...We’ve all valued for our own uniqueness and our own identity and that’s really important...To be able to mix with all the mainly ladies as I do, and to feel comfortable with myself is really important...It’s very diverse, which is nice.”

(EastXchange member)

Another stated:

“It’s an amazing group and an amazing project. Different people from different backgrounds come together, and even different generations. And we come together and share and grow, and try things we’ve never tried before, and come out of our comfort zones – it’s great.”

(EastXchange member)

Another commented:

“Sometimes meeting people from different walks of life, that’s great as well. You meet the people that you meet regularly with a shared interest, but you also meet people that you wouldn’t normally be friends with. And it’s really nice to experience different ideas, different perspectives as well.”

(EastXchange member)

Staff team members and partners were also agreed that EastXchange had facilitated greater integration between different sections of local communities. As one stated:

“The other thing that’s happened is the integration of different groups within the community...you know, people making friends with people from different age groups, people making friends with people from different cultural backgrounds who they probably wouldn’t normally engage with if these sort of activities were not in

place....People supporting one another and friendships developing from people from all sorts of backgrounds, that's been a big thing as well."

(Team member/partner)

In addition, EastXchange events (such as Eid and Easter celebrations) were specifically highlighted by members as a route through which they had learned about other religions and cultures. The following quote, from a member who had attended a number of different celebration events was typical:

"Learning about different cultures, for me that's just really precious because I learned so much. We were talking a lot about Ramadan and Eid and I learned so many good things that I didn't know before about Islam, about fasting and celebration and what's the full purpose behind it, and it was really good. And before Christmas we were talking about Christmas itself and Christmas carols and the stories behind that, so I learnt a lot from that as well."

(EastXchange member)

3.4.5 Increased capacity to take on 'community leadership' role

For staff team members and partners, EastXchange had resulted in a noticeable increase in the capacity of members to engage with community activities and to take on 'community leadership' roles. Analysis of these respondents' comments suggests that a number of factors related to the nature of the project and its operation and delivery had been important to enabling this. In particular, the nurturing nature of the project, its non-threatening approach, and the on-going support and development provided by the project team, had helped members to gradually develop their skills, experience and self-confidence.

For staff team members and partners, the increases in members' self-confidence and self-efficacy were seen as key to their increased ability to engage in and lead community activities. Members had become familiar with engaging in, or running, EastXchange sessions and this appeared to lead to an increase in their self-confidence and a growth in their feelings of self-belief and empowerment. As one team member/partner stated, highlighting the increase s/he had noted in members' self-confidence:

"I noticed a lot of people being more confident. The project involves people being able to manage themselves a little bit...it's a matter of people being able to do things themselves and I've noticed a change in people just believing in themselves, and that motivation to do things as well."

(Team member/partner)

Another team member/partner described the difference she had noticed in one member in the following way:

"It took a lot of effort to get her involved, reassuring here and always reassuring that 'it's okay'. She had a lot of issues...and having a space or a person that she could talk to about it, and building that trust...And to see where she is now...she just gets on with it, she's bringing other people into the project and she's quite vocal now about the things she does."

(Team member/partner)

Swan Housing has community development and engagement as a key focus of its work as a social landlord, and EastXchange is able to provide a useful vehicle through which to bring community members together and encourage them to engage in community-based projects. Team members/partners highlighted the often difficult and time-consuming nature of encouraging community members to engage with EastXchange and particularly to take responsibility for, and ownership of, sessions and activities. However, it was also clear from interview/group discussion data that during Year 2, members were increasingly feeling a sense of ownership over EastXchange and feeling more enabled to actively engage in the project. More recent data collection suggests that this has developed further in Year 3.

One staff team member/partner, who stated that there had been a great shift towards the community feeling empowered to lead EastXchange projects stated:

“I must say that the users, it’s mostly user-led, so I would say the users are in the driver’s seat, I’d say 70 percent...Because they’re the ones who are running activities, they’re the ones who are organising the activities, so I think it’s a great achievement.”

(Team member/partner)

Another stated:

“I can see the transformation of power, or transformation of the capacity from the project workers to the project users.”

(Team member/partner)

3.4.6 An increase in feelings of self-worth and value

Another key theme that emerged from qualitative analysis was the positive impact of EastXchange engagement on members’ feelings of self-worth and value. It was common for members to state that participating ‘successfully’ in a session (for example, by learning a new skill or completing a task), led to a greater feeling of self-worth. For example, one member, described the impact for members of participating in a session and becoming aware of their skills and abilities, in the following way:

“I think the ladies need to be made aware, because so often they say to be: ‘I’m just a mother’, and I say: ‘You’ve got really good skills’...And then we plot down the skills they have...it’s very nice to see them when we’ve finished talking. They go home looking taller because they think: ‘I do time management, I do this, I do that...’.”

(EastXchange member)

In addition, members who facilitated sessions often discussed feeling an increased sense of their own self-worth and self-esteem because they had helped others. As one member, who delivered an EastXchange project stated:

“For me, it was just very important to remember that I was still somebody who had things to offer, even though I felt I didn’t...even when I’m out in Tesco’s and somebody calls my name and there’s this lady wanting to give me a hug, and I just think – I never ever thought my life could be like this, so enriched and so good.”

Another member described one of the the impacts of running EastXchange projects in the following way:

“You feel valued. You know, that use of your skills makes you feel valued...They really did allow me to build myself up and to feel that I did have some skills that were needed and used and valued. That was really important.”

(EastXchange member)

Case study: Nazmin’s journey – The importance of the staff team, partners and Lead Members in members’ engagement

Nazmin had a few years’ experience of voluntary work in the community prior to becoming involved with EastXchange. A worker from an EastXchange partner organisation suggested that she attend an information day about EastXchange, and within a few weeks of this first engagement Nazmin was running an EastXchange project.

Nazmin is well known in the local community, so she is able publicise the project she runs and other EastXchange projects and activities. She regularly signposts community members towards EastXchange projects and activities, and helps to facilitate their engagement. She described one instance in the following way:

“I remember one of the ladies came and asked if there were any cooking sessions going on and I said: ‘Yes’, I got her number and gave it to [worker] and she contacted her and now she comes every week to cooking session. Now she’s built her confidence up and she could run a cooking session if she wanted to.”

Despite having previous experience of volunteering, the support of the EastXchange staff team has been very important for Nazmin. She has built a close working relationship with one team member in particular, who has motivated and inspired her – a key reason for her continued, active engagement with EastXchange. She describes the team member in the following way:

“She’s a lovely woman, she’s encouraged me to come...If I like the person, I will do anything, and she’s my role model, [team member’s name]. She’s really good, call her anytime and she’ll reply...You know there are some people who you find it easy to get along with...There’s just a connection. And every single woman talks about her. Even women who can’t speak English, she listens to them and tries to understand them...She’s friendly, she’s a role model of mine – she’s really good!”

In terms of outcomes, Nazmin feels that one key differences that EastXchange has made is that it has enabled community members to meet and engage with each other, and build networks and friendships. She says:

“We’re meeting new people, we’re engaging the young children as well, during the holiday they did one activity - Easter Egg hunting, EastXchange, so people did come with their children – it did help the community. Coming to this sort of event, that’s how you get to meet new people.”

Self-confidence is another key impact that Nazmin highlights, both for members who have accessed her sessions and for herself. Despite having previous volunteering experience, Nazmin feels that her self-confidence has increased as a result of EastXchange. She says:

“This is why they were here – giving us the experience, telling us how to run the session. That’s what the timebank did, they made us confident...Even me, it gave me the confidence to do things.”

3.4.7 Gaining of new skills

Another key theme related to the aims of the EastXchange project was the gain in skills experienced by members. This typically occurred through one of three ways:

- Through participating in an activity focused EastXchange session, such as sewing or cooking.
- Through participating in training provided by EastXchange, such as fire marshall, first aid, or walk leader training.
- Through referral or signposting to EastXchange partners and subsequent support in areas such as CV writing and ESOL.

Qualitative evidence suggests that gaining new skills was positively linked to increases in confidence, with a number of members indicating that their confidence and self-worth had increased as a result of learning new skills as a result of EastXchange participation.

Some interview and focus group participants specifically discussed the difference that changes in members' confidence, and the fact that they had gained new skills, made to their general employability. As one member stated:

"A lot of people have been out of work. A lot of people have lost that confidence of going and looking for work, so it's an opportunity for them to starting learning things...first aid, that you would need in any workplace you go to, food safety training, things like fire marshall training."

EastXchange member

Similarly, a staff member/partner discussed the process through which EastXchange leads to increased self-confidence and positive changes in employability skills, in the following way:

"People that have gone into employment, the mechanism through which I think that happens is through that confidence building. So it's through networking, it's through being introduced to the employment team, it's through being: 'Yes, I have got a skill to offer'. I think that's the mechanism through which EastXchange works."

(Team member/partner)

3.4.8 Contribution to partners' work and objectives

It was clear from interviews and group discussions that the EastXchange project was greatly valued by its main partners and referring organisations, and that it contributed positively to partners' work and strategic and operational objectives.

For example, Swan Housing is a key partner with a strong social purpose and a desire to build effective relationships with the communities it serves. There is also significant new development in Blackwall Reach, in particular, meaning that there are a large number of new residents and therefore an increased need for effective community engagement and involvement. EastXchange has contributed positively to this by provided a route through which community members can meet each other and participate in positive, community-based activities. As one partner stated:

“If our goals are around connecting people to each other, tackling isolation, and making people feel part of something, then I think the work of projects like EastXchange are massive.”

(Team member/partner)

Similarly, EastXchange has provided a key referral route for the BBBC Social Prescribing Team, which is able to refer clients with a range of needs to EastXchange, with the knowledge that they will be able to engage at their own pace. Interviews suggest there are few projects similar to EastXchange locally, that have so few barriers to engagement, and encourage the involvement of such a diverse range of clients.

A range of other partners regularly refer to EastXchange, and partners involved in interviews for this evaluation were unequivocal that any loss of EastXchange capacity would be detrimental to their own work. As one partner stated:

“Going forward, it’s definitely something we would see as a big loss...the voluntary sector’s very fragile at the moment, and there’s a lot of short-term funding, and it was nice to know that there was a stable service there to refer into – that was really great.”

(Team member/partner)

Another stated, also highlighting the potential cost-effectiveness of the EastXchange project:

“They’re [EastXchange] resource-intensive, but not in a financial sense. They’re time intensive and emotionally intensive, but in terms of finance they’re not expensive projects, but they are critical to the work we do and the type of support we’d like to be able, to offer...they’re really important.”

(Team member/partner)

EastXchange has also been an important route through which community needs have been identified, and the project has been central to encouraging partners to run community-based sessions that members have highlighted a need for. These have included sessions around digital inclusion, employment support (for example, C.V. and interview skills workshops), and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). EastXchange sessions have also acted as vehicles through which partners have been able to deliver their own work, inform community members about their projects, and raise awareness of their services.

3.5 Factors enabling project success and outcomes

Interview data highlighted a number of aspects of the EastXchange project that have been particularly important in enabling project success. These are outlined below.

3.5.1 The skilled work of the staff team, and their friendly, approachable and encouraging nature

It was clear from interviews and group discussion with all participants that the work of the EastXchange staff team was crucial to the project’s impacts. Although the aim of

EastXchange was to encourage community ownership of the project, the staff team were essential to facilitating this. Without them, it would not have been possible to successfully conduct the time-intensive work of recruiting and supporting members, and encouraging and maintaining their engagement.

The nature of the staff team's work and project delivery emerged as central to the success of EastXchange. Enabling aspects of their work include:

- **The flexible nature of their role** – The staff team conducted a range of tasks in a flexible way during the course of the EastXchange project. The needs of the project were such, that the roles and tasks that needed to be conducted were constantly changing (for example, outreach work, development of new Hubs, support for particular groups or individuals), and the role demanded a flexible approach. As one interview participant stated:

“A skilled team. An agile, skilled team who are ready to go with the flow. You can't have someone who's really programmatic about it, you have to have someone who's flexible – flexible team work [is important].”

(Team member/partner)

- **The team's friendly, non-threatening approach:** Qualitative data collected since Year 1 has highlighted the friendly, non-threatening nature of the staff team as important to the project's success in engaging members and maintaining their engagement. As one interview participant stated:

“I can't give the team enough credit for how they work with people. The way they're able to connect with people, the way they're about to support people, I think they've got such a skill. I think the team and the type of support that they give are the two stand-out things... They've very approachable, very kind of personable, they're from the local community as well – the stuff that a good community development worker should be – they're good at listening, good at speaking to people, good at drawing out other people's skills.”

(Team member/partner)

- **The ability to build trusted relationships with members:** The team's approach means that they are able to build strong, trusted relationships with members. Qualitative analysis highlighted the importance of these trusted relationships in encouraging and maintaining members' engagement and involvement.
- **The tailored nature of the support provided:** Qualitative analysis highlighted the tailored, individualised nature of the support provided by the staff team to members. This included initial one-to-one discussions with members to ascertain their needs and how EastXchange might be able to meet them, and to refer or signpost towards other appropriate local services. The staff team also provide individualised support for members, tailored to their specific needs, which may be related to enabling them to access or deliver projects, or to ensuring that they received appropriate support for personal, emotional or physical issues. One member described the importance of the support she has received in the following way:

“They’ve [team members] given me encouragement to continue. Because I constantly think I’m going to give in. Sometimes I get nobody there, sometimes I’m on my own and then another week I can have five or six people. They constantly encourage me to just try another week and keep going.”

(EastXchange member)

3.5.2 Inclusiveness and the lack of barriers to engagement

A key factor cited by members and staff team/partners as important in encouraging community engagement with EastXchange, was its inclusive nature and the fact that there are few barriers to people’s engagement with the project. The project is open to any residents, and there are no criteria that limit engagement. Without this inclusiveness, members might not join initially, or might not continue to engage. As one staff team member/partner stated:

“There aren’t that many places to go that are like unstructured, flexible, no inclusion criteria. EastXchange is really minimal barriers to participation.”

(Team member/partner)

A member stated:

“It’s inclusive. It’s somewhere you can go, and no matter what you come with you’ll always get the solution, the help. I’m going to miss it if it ever stops.”

(EastXchange member)

This lack of barriers was highlighted as particularly important for residents who may lack confidence in interacting, who are socially isolated, or who are new to group-based settings. The lack of engagement criteria means that a wide range of community members are able to engage with the project. One staff team member/partner described the benefits of an inclusive project like EastXchange in the following way:

“The barriers that people experience mean that they’re not necessarily ready for an employment programme, maybe they are just not really not that confident to start thinking about volunteering, so I think it’s a really helpful kind of community hand-holding place where people can go and explore a bit more about who they are and what they’re interested in, practice speaking to other people in groups – that kind of thing.”

(Team member/partner)

3.5.3 Low-key, non-threatening nature of the project

Related to the project inclusiveness is its low-key, non-threatening nature. It was clear from interview and group discussions with members that many of them lacked confidence when they first attended EastXchange. Typically coffee mornings/afternoons were members’ first experiences of the project, and these sessions emerged as central to the project’s success in engaging members, and for many, a key stepping-stone to further engagement.

Coffee mornings/afternoons provided an opportunity for members to be introduced to EastXchange, and attend a group-meeting without any pressure to actively participate. It was common for members to state that they interacted little during their first few coffee

morning/afternoon attendances, before gradually gaining in confidence and interacting more. As one member stated:

“It’s nice that it gives you that opportunity that if you want to throw yourself into everything, you can. But you just want to come to the coffee morning and see how it goes for a couple of months, that’s okay as well. So you can work at your own speed. Whatever you do is recognised and it’s valued, and I think that’s what’s important.”

(EastXchange member)

A partner/staff team member described the important of coffee mornings/afternoons in the following way:

“The regular coffee mornings are really important. It’s a place where people can come and meet who this projects is...so many things are online and digital that I think that friendly, informal spaces are really important.”

(Team member/partner)

The low-key, non-threatening nature of EastXchange was also reflect in view provided by a range of interview and group discussion participants, that EastXchange provided a much-needed ‘space’ to take time for oneself. In a hectic, often pressured world, EastXchange was commonly seen as a ‘haven’. As one staff team member/partner stated:

“You’ve got kids, you’ve got work, you’ve got family, you’ve got deadlines, and I feel that EastXchange is really a time for people to just relax, enjoy, and forget about those types of stresses. It’s just about people.”

(Team member/partner)

3.5.4 The resources, networks and services provided by Hubs such as BBBC

Qualitative analysis highlighted the potential importance to the ability of EastXchange to bring about outcomes for members, of additional, accessible local services. Although many of the outcomes highlighted in the report were brought about through members’ engagement with EastXchange projects, an infrastructure of other partner organisations/services was also important, as members were often referred or signposted from or into these. Some partner/staff team members felt that this infrastructure of additional services might be a reason for what they saw as the particular success of EastXchange at BBBC and Blackwall Reach Hubs. In particular, the BBBC was highlighted as a Hub where this infrastructure of additional services had helped to enhance EastXchange’s impacts.

BBBC is a well-known local Hub where community members can access a range of support and services, across many areas including employment, training, health and wellbeing. It also has established links with, and referral routes into (and from), numerous local organisations and support services. BBBC remains the main Hub through which EastXchange’s work has been delivered, and it was clear from interviews that the reputation and scope of the centre’s work was extremely important in engaging the community in the EastXchange project.

Case study: Martina's journey – A comfortable, welcoming environment and impacts on self-confidence

Martina's first experience of EastXchange was a coffee morning that she attended after receiving an EastXchange flyer from a member of the staff team outside a local school. She didn't know what to expect from the coffee morning, but attended for a few weeks. She then began participating in an EastXchange session, and then started leading a session after a staff team member suggested she might be able to.

Martina had no experience of facilitating group sessions, but enjoyed the experience, as she was supported by the staff team. For her, the EastXchange Community Facilitator has been central to her continued engagement with EastXchange, and she also feels that the comforting, welcoming environment where the session took place helped her to feel comfortable and confident. Martina has continued to run this session and has started to facilitate another. She says:

"The community centre is comfortable, the environment is comfortable, they're always welcoming and supporting us, and I found it was a safe environment. And the people, they always supporting us, they appreciate us."

Martina is committed to the idea of making EastXchange sustainable, and sees it as an important space for the community to develop their own skills. EastXchange has made a huge difference to her. She says that she is now much more confident and engages far more outside her home:

"Confidence is the main difference. I'm a different person. Without EastXchange, I'm a quiet person, and now I'm different person, so I give all credit to EastXchange. And I'm also involved in our community in other session, so they also picked me as a volunteer. With me quality and personality, they said I am the right person...so, the whole week I'm busy!"

She also sees impacts for her wider community, particularly in terms of confidence and community cohesions. She says:

"A big difference – everybody's personality has come out. And more trust – they've got a whole community and they know more people and they're more confident now...it's like a big family now."

For Martina, the support of the EastXchange staff team was vital to her initial and maintained engagement. She says that:

"Welcoming, always they [EastXchange] welcome us. Always they give feedback to us and always they say to us: 'No need to do anything by force' And they're always behind our back and making sure we're happy and feel comfortable, and not forced to do anything."

Discussions with members suggest that the resources and networks provided by BBBC were key to their engagement with the EastXchange project. For example, a number of members stated that they had first engaged with EastXchange after being signposted to the project by a BBBC worker or partner organisation. In addition, members stated that the integrated nature of the BBBC's projects meant that they could be easily signposted to other relevant, local services or activities.

As one member, who found out about EastXchange through attending a BBBC project, stated:

“Everything’s that’s based here interlinks, so everyone feeds into each other’s projects. So you come for one thing and you end up hearing about more.”
(EastXchange member)

Another stated:

“There is a lot happening here, it’s a well-established community centre, everyone knows where it is, and it’s got a reputation as being that kind of centre...I think that plays a part [in the difference EastXchange makes]...”

4 Discussion

As this evaluation report outlines, EastXchange has been successful in bringing about outcomes for members across a range of areas related to its project aims. In particular, EastXchange aimed to bring about the following outcomes:

- Decreased in terms of decreased social isolation
- Increased positive relationships
- Reduction in barriers to economic inactivity and unemployment
- Improved health and well-being
- Gaining of new skills

The quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in this report suggests that EastXchange has been successful in all of these areas. Statistical analyses of members' pre- and post- outcomes questionnaire responses suggest that overall, EastXchange has made a significant difference in all of these areas, and this is further strengthened by the qualitative analysis. There is strong qualitative and quantitative evidence too, of the positive impact of EastXchange for 'target' groups, such as BAME communities and those experiencing mental health issues.

There is particularly strong evidence that the project has been effective in increasing members' social networks, encouraging them to participate in activities outside the home, improving their health and well-being, and enabling them to meet community members from a wider range of backgrounds.

Important factors enabling EastXchange's success include: the skilled work of the staff team and their in-depth work to offer broad support to members; the inclusive and non-threatening nature of the project; the strength of partnership working; the range of resources and services available to refer and signpost into; and the flexible approach taken towards 'timebanking' as a concept.

In addition, the outreach work conducted by the staff team was vital in order to effectively engage members at each new Hub, and coffee mornings/afternoons were an essential part of project delivery - often cited as a key steppingstone into the project. Effective and appropriate referral from partners such as BBBC Social Prescribing Team was also an important ingredient in the project's success.

In terms of continuation beyond the time that the project is being funded by Big Lottery Fund, it is clear that EastXchange now has a team of confident and committed members, and an established programme of sessions and activities. These members now have the confidence and skills to deliver their own sessions and activities. In addition, project partners such as BBBC and Swan Housing are intending to provide on-going, in-kind funding and support.

Interviews with partners suggest that although EastXchange has been successful in developing a team of committed members, similar volunteering projects usually require the support of a skilled, core staff team to ensure that they continue to thrive in the medium and longer term. EastXchange's key partners are therefore seeking continuation funding for the project to ensure that its strong outcomes can be maintained and enhanced in the future.

Appendix 1: Project outcomes questionnaire

Please think about the following statements, and tick ✓ to tell us how much you agree or disagree with them. There are no right or wrong answers – please be as honest as you can.

Even when I have a lot happening in my life, I am usually able to put my health first.				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't agree or disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>

I have a good understanding of the <u>other</u> health services I can access apart from my GP.				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't agree or disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>

I know the appropriate health services to use for different issues.				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't agree or disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>

I sometimes feel quite isolated				
Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Agree <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't agree or disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>

Please read the following questions and tick ✓ the answer that's right for you.

How good are your English speaking and listening skills?				
Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>	Very poor <input type="checkbox"/>

How good are your English reading and writing skills?				
Excellent <input type="checkbox"/>	Good <input type="checkbox"/>	Satisfactory <input type="checkbox"/>	Poor <input type="checkbox"/>	Very poor <input type="checkbox"/>

How good are your IT skills?				
Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How would you rate the skills you have to help you into employment?				
Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Very poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How often do you get out and socialise with people?				
Very often	Often	Sometimes	rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How often do you get to know new people in the local area?				
Very often	Often	Sometimes	rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How often do you spend time with people from different cultures?				
Very often	Often	Sometimes	rarely	Never
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How would you rate your understanding of people from different cultures?				
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>