

# Auchinleck Community Development Initiative Review

15 November 2016

## 1. Context

Auchinleck Community Development Initiative (ACDI) is a community anchor organisation operating as a social enterprise with charitable status in East Ayrshire. ACDI was established in 2005 and seeks to advance the development of Auchinleck by maintaining, improving and regenerating its physical, economic, social and cultural infrastructure. The organisation also seeks to assist people who are at a disadvantage because of their social and economic circumstances.

The demise of two major industries in the area, mining and textiles, has led to significant economic and social challenges. Auchinleck currently has a total population of around 3,750 in approximately 1,720 households. According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2016, two of the four Auchinleck data zones are within the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland. ACDI seeks to address the local economic and social challenges through a focus on place, enterprise and people.

The organisation is supported by a volunteer Board of Directors and has grown rapidly in the last few years. This has largely been through capacity building funding from the Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) and two key funding awards from the Big Lottery.

## 2. How has the Trust impacted on the lives of people it works with?

Green space in the local community has been reclaimed and enhanced and this is having a positive effect on how residents feel about the look and safety of their environment. Older and vulnerable adults' quality of life is being enhanced through their use of community gardens and accessible raised beds. For example, around 20 adults attending day care at the Boswell Centre regularly enjoy accessing the dementia friendly outdoor space. Residents and carers at the Glennie House care home like using different senses when working with their chosen plants. They benefit from using the garden more actively and more often.

The staff in Auchinleck Premier Landscaping (APL) are well supported to develop and extend their skills and experience. They are gaining in confidence, feel more motivated and are improving their interpersonal skills. A few young people have gained SVQ Level 2 in Horticulture and Pesticide licences. The procurement of new landscaping and maintenance contracts is increasing the variety of work for staff whilst generating additional revenue. A few staff contracts have been extended beyond an initial six months enhancing their future employment prospects.

Young people are developing their skills and knowledge of horticulture and transferable skills leading to employment at the Quarry Knowe Community Garden through Community Jobs Scotland and Auchinleck Premier Landscaping (APL). They are gaining in confidence and are supported to progress to further learning, employment and self-employment. However, there is a need to better track staff destinations to understand immediate and longer term impact when they leave APL. This information could also be used to make further improvements and to promote and increase the sustainability of the programme.

ACDI working with local schools on an anti-sectarian project, in particular a visit to Belfast, is beginning to impact on a few young people at Auchinleck Academy. They are now more aware of the issues surrounding sectarian attitudes and how these impact on their community. Young people in the art department were involved with ACDI in producing an anti-sectarian logo. There is potential to use this in future anti-sectarian work. Some early work with primary schools is starting to focus on tackling sectarianism. This included a 'Bigot Busters' educational workshop with both primary schools from Auchinleck. There is potential for further work between ACDI and local schools. Some of the outcomes from the anti-sectarian work are

harder to measure and it is difficult to assess the longer term impacts. There is scope to revisit the project outcomes and develop strategies to take this forward.

Clients in the relatively new Support To Engage Programme (STEP) are very well supported in their journey towards employment. An effective outreach approach in cafes and door-to-door is successfully engaging new clients and helping to break down barriers. A holistic and person-centred approach is resulting in individuals making positive steps towards first engagement or re-engagement in their journey towards employment. One to one relationships are prioritised over short-term outputs, creating a safe space for clients to identify their own needs and overcome barriers to employment. Local people, a majority who have been out of work for several years, are being well supported to develop skills and confidence through engagement with highly skilled staff. As a result they are better able to take control of their own lives and address barriers such as literacy and numeracy difficulties, drug and alcohol dependency and mental health issues.

ACDI does not yet have a full understanding of their reach or impact. There is a need for more systematic monitoring and gathering evidence of impact on the lives of individuals and the community. Collecting and analysing numbers of people attending the community gardens, festivals and events would strengthen this. This could also support a marketing strategy through the development and documentation of client case studies.

### **3. How has the Trust impacted on the local economy?**

ACDI has secured significant inward investment to Auchinleck and the surrounding area exceeding 1.2 million in the last three years. This is complemented by additional in-kind support from East Ayrshire Council and East Ayrshire Leisure to assist with premises and some running costs. A number of other additional investment streams are being pursued. For example, Catrine Auchinleck Sorn Energy Turbine (CASET) is making good progress towards erecting a wind turbine that will benefit the community in Auchinleck by around £200,000. The group successfully secured a loan of £100,000 and are currently negotiating with the energy company. Volunteers in CASET are well supported by ACDI to progress the project.

In addition to being an affordable local supplier of fruit, vegetables and plants, the Quarry Knowe Community Garden is generating additional income that is reinvested into ACDI. APL is also generating income through its landscaping and ground maintenance contracts. This is being reinvested into the community and creating employment. In addition, at least 32 people have progressed to secure employment following their Community Jobs Scotland contract with ACDI community garden.

The STEP Programme has clearly defined outcomes and indicators that address individual, local and partner needs. The programme is still at an early stage but thus far STEP are meeting or exceeding their targets around its three key outcomes. For example, there is an increase in the number of economically inactive people in Auchinleck, Catrine, Muirkirk, Logan and Lugar who have made a positive decision to develop their employability.

The annual Alive and Kicking Weekend Musical Festival is a popular event attracting people locally and from a wider area. This is helping to promote Auchinleck, attract people to the area and is generating additional revenue for local businesses.

There is a high level of commitment by the volunteer Board of Directors and staff to improving the lives of people in Auchinleck and the surrounding communities. The expansion of ACDI in the last few years has brought with it fresh skills and expertise through the appointment of key staff. The introduction of new administration systems is helping to improve resource and people management and is reducing the need for outsourcing.

Staff are supported, motivated and empowered and able to identify and take advantage of professional learning and development opportunities. They are able to contribute ideas and to discussions on the activities of the organisation. However at present there are no formal training and development plans for staff and volunteers. This will be needed as the organisation continues to grow. The Development Manager may also benefit from more formal support.

Although key projects have a clear rationale and business plan, there is currently no overarching ACDI business plan to unify the energy of the organisation and to help ensure sustainability. There is a need for ACDI to be clearer about its core purpose and ensure that new developments enhance rather than detract from a clear agreed vision. Otherwise, there is a risk that the organisation will stretch beyond its current capacity.

#### **4. How has the Trust improved outcomes through partnership working?**

ACDI consulted widely in developing a clear purpose for STEP. As a result they are successfully addressing the needs of individuals, partners and the community in delivering localised support at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the East Ayrshire Works Strategic Pipeline (EAWSP) without duplicating other services. STEP staff are developing good informal contacts and relationships with local training and employment providers at an operational level. Although at an early stage, a new operational group has the potential to strengthen this partnership further through more formal arrangements and links to public services such as the NHS and Police Scotland. STEP's contribution is also being valued on strategic forums such as the EAWSP network as one of 23 employability providers from the public, private and voluntary sector.

Partnership working between the Auchinleck Community Council and ACDI has resulted in improvements to the events calendar such as the reintroduction of Christmas lights, gala days and festivals. ACDI has developed positive, long standing and mutually beneficial relationships working with various organisations including Community Enterprise and the Barony A Frame Trust. ACDI has also developed a range of partnerships with local schools such as the anti-sectarian project and a wildlife garden. Partners are clear about their role and the role of ACDI.

As ACDI continues to grow and evolve they need to consider extending partnership working further beyond current interdependencies to help ensure future sustainability. There is also a need for a stronger strategic direction to ensure that its own role within informal and formal partnerships is clear and unambiguous. Closer strategic alignment to Community Planning Priorities may also further support partnership working around achieving joint outcomes for the local and wider community.

The development of a new school campus to accommodate Auchinleck and Cumnock presents an opportunity for further joint working between ACDI and schools. This could also help embed community cohesion and engagement. There is also considerable potential for ACDI to develop and strengthen new partnerships, for example with faith groups and local churches.

In the absence of a community-led action plan, ACDI may also benefit from co-ordinated planning arrangements with partners such as East Ayrshire Council's Vibrant Communities, CVO East Ayrshire and youth work providers to ensure shared outcomes for the area.

**The review of Auchinleck Community Development Initiative found the following key strengths.**

- Success at addressing and removing barriers to employment and increasing opportunities locally through a uniquely person-centred, holistic and outreach approach to employability.
- Increasing skills, confidence and mind-set of young people and adults towards employment.
- Contributing to the local economy through significant inward investment to Auchinleck and through reclaiming and enhancing the environment.
- Highly skilled and motivated staff working together for the benefit of the community supported by the board.

**We discussed with the board and senior staff how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.**

- Take time to develop and agree a clearer strategic direction supported by an ACDI business and action plan.

## **5. What happens at the end of the review?**

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that Auchinleck Community Development Initiative and partners can build on and take forward the key strengths and recommendations in this report. We will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this review.

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