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RESEARCH

Partners in Progress: the Healthy and Active Fund and its theory of change (summary)

A report on the programme level theory of change developed for the Healthy and Active Fund. The theory of change will provide a focus for all subsequent stages of the evaluation.

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Contents

Findings and implications

Contact details

Findings and implications

The Healthy and Active Fund (HAF) is a new Programme to improve people's mental and physical health by enabling active lifestyles. It is led by two Departments of the Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, and Sport Wales, and is being delivered through 17 Projects led by third sector and public bodies at a cost of £5m+ over 3 years. The focus is on Projects which either support those facing significant barriers to leading physically active lives, and/or strengthen community assets and influence behaviour change. Its aims are to sustainably increase the physical activity of the less active and to improve mental wellbeing by promoting social interaction and access to physical activity.

The Programme-level evaluation of the HAF is a long term, real time evaluation throughout which learning is anticipated which will inform the remainder of the HAF itself as well as other future programmes. Part of the evaluation is to develop a theory of change for the HAF to illustrate how the activities are intended to achieve an increase in physical activity and improvements in mental wellbeing. We gathered evidence at both Programme and Project levels, both documentary and through interviews and workshops. The fieldwork was completed prior to the first COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020), and the constraints associated with the restrictions imposed by the pandemic have materially slowed down its completion, and have also affected the HAF Projects considerably. The nature of the impacts which the pandemic has had on HAF projects should be an issue that future evaluation work explores.

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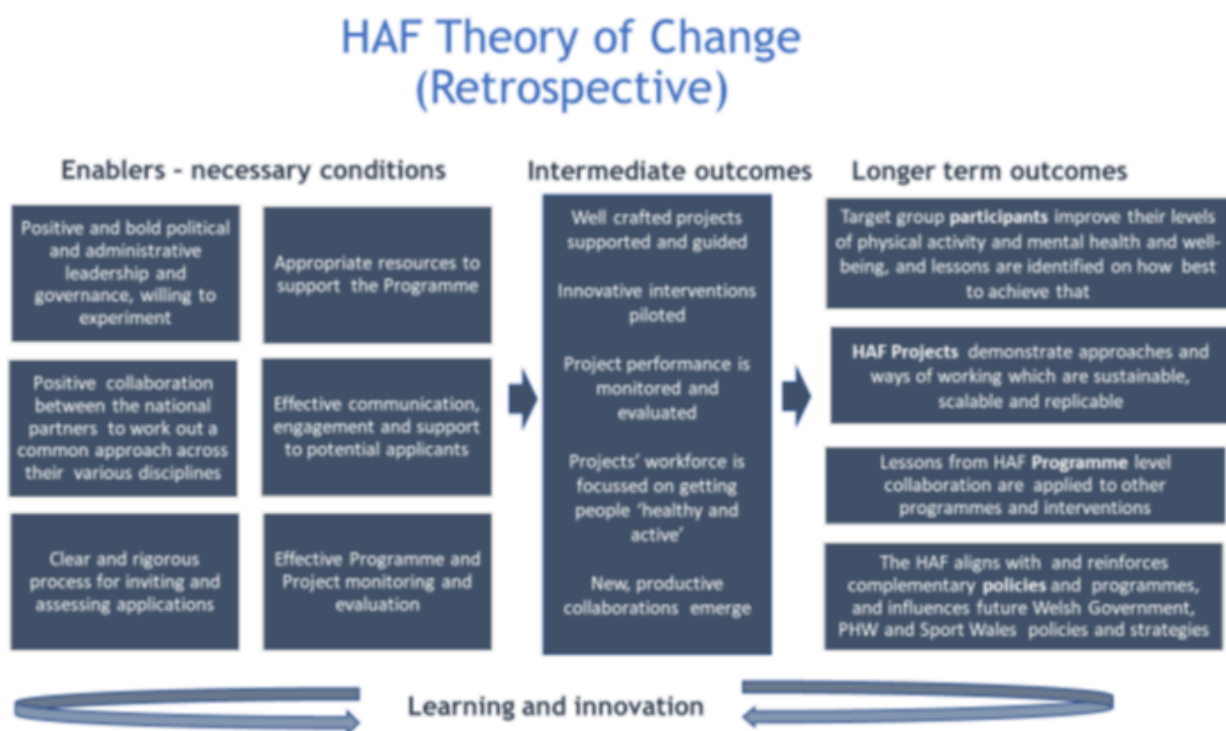
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The HAF theories of change

The HAF took strength from Ministerial interest and support in order to test out new approaches, and brought together key actors at senior level across the four bodies to enable resources to be shared, and a common set of objectives to be agreed, for a programme to fund projects against bids. The evidence we gathered suggested there was an implicit overall HAF theory of change, which we have represented in diagrammatic form.

Figure 1.1: Retrospective Theory of Change



There are also three 'subsidiary' theories of change: one focussed on the substantive aims of the HAF, one on the HAF design process, and one focussed on 'ways of working'.

The retrospective theory of change reflects the assumptions and aspirations that (implicitly and explicitly) informed the development and implementation of the HAF. It was also possible to develop a HAF theory of change going forward. This reflects elements of the original and overall theory, whilst geared to the current stage of delivery of the Programme (see Section 6 of the main

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report). This Model could give rise to quite different approaches by the HAF Project Board depending on the resources available and the Project Board's preferred way of working. Once a choice has been made as to where the HAF Board wants to be on the continuum between the two Scenarios, it could underpin a forward HAF theory of change along the following lines:

'The HAF Theory of Change for the remainder of the Programme is designed to provide leadership, resources and other enabling conditions so that Projects will be supported and monitored effectively, and lessons will be actively learned. This in turn will enable the HAF Programme to inform future health and physical activity grant programmes in terms of their form, process, and content. It will also influence mainstream policies and programmes, including those aimed at improving physical activity, mental and social wellbeing, and reducing health inequality.'

This forward HAF theory of change can inform the role of active learning and sharing between Projects, and also between the Programme and wider policy frameworks such as the agendas for tackling obesity and longer term prevention. It can also help frame thematic areas to explore through the Programme level evaluation and inform the questions which need to be asked during the remainder of the HAF evaluation.

Contact details

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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