

The Nationwide Foundation

## Lessons in Grant Making

*Supporting Families*

Grant Making Strategy 2006-10

Evaluation Report Summary



*Supporting communities  
nationwide*

## The Strategy

The *Supporting Families* strategy which ran from 2006-2010 was developed from the Nationwide Foundation's past grant making experience, recommendations from the independent evaluation of its former strategy and from grantees' feedback.

It sought to reduce crime and violence, strengthen families and make our communities safer, better places to be. It facilitated this by making grants which met three strategic aims.

**Aim 1: Domestic Violence** - To promote the well-being of young men, women and children whose lives had been affected by domestic violence and to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence through increased service provision, education and awareness raising.

**Aim 2: Prisoners' Families** - To improve the quality of life of families with a member or members in prison, through the provision of services responsive to their needs.

**Aim 3: Young Offenders** - To provide young people who had been or continued to be involved with the criminal justice system with a rehabilitation programme designed to provide them with the skills, confidence and personal support networks necessary to lead fulfilled and successful lives.

The Foundation funded the work through its two grants programmes:

- o The Small Grants Programme – this gave grants of up to £5,000 to charities with incomes of under £500,000, every two months.
- o The Investor Programme – this gave £2.7m in the form of three-year grants of £150,000 to 18 charities: six per aim.

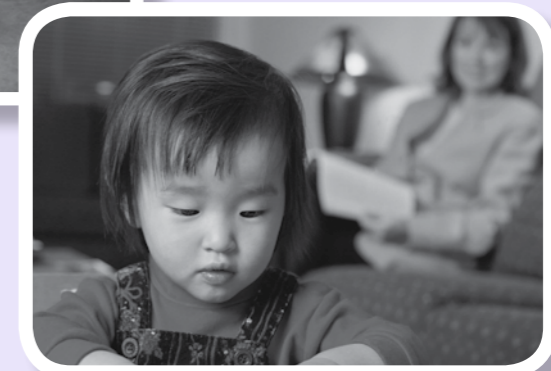
The strategy was evaluated by the independent consultancy, EdComs. The summary findings focus on the Investor Programme.

*In most cases, beneficiaries attribute Foundation funded work as “life-saving” and “life-changing”. In many cases, beneficiaries were having their needs met for the first time, supporting the value of investing in niche charities and unpopular causes.*

EdComs

The Investor Programme is the Foundation's flagship grant programme. Under the *Supporting Families* strategy it featured:

- o Three-year funding for core, project and development work that could be used flexibly;
- o Streamlined application processes – inviting one-page expressions of interest, followed by in-depth interviews, before a select few charities were invited to make formal bids. This saved the Foundation and applicants considerable time;
- o Light touch monitoring - quarterly monitoring and support visits were made to each charity, and each charity submitted a formal annual report on progress made with the grant;
- o Partnership work – each group of six charities funded under each aim was brought together, every six months;
- o Exit strategy support – the Foundation engaged independent consultants to help the charities prepare for the end of the Foundation's grant;
- o Independent evaluation – to measure the Foundation's effectiveness as a funder and identify areas for improvement; and also for grantees to identify ways in which they could improve their own services and to help them evidence the benefits of their work to other funders.



## Lessons from Monitoring and Support Visits and Exit Consultancy

Quarterly visits, although initially regarded with apprehension by some charities, soon came to be generally well received. Charities were not asked to provide written reports for these, just a couple of hours of their time. As well as helping to ensure the work funded was on track, the Foundation found that the visits enabled:

- Strong relationships and trust to be formed between the funder and grantee and hence clearer, more accurate reporting;
- Issues to be identified at early stages, which the funder could help to resolve. For example the Foundation or the charity suggesting the grant be used in different ways for greater impact, which the grantee might otherwise have been too nervous to raise with the funder;
- Other organisational needs to be identified and addressed e.g. recommending improvements to governance practices, signposting to support agencies, assisting with grant applications;
- The funder to see work in progress, talk to staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, enabling a better understanding of the charity's work and the issues it addresses.

*The development of open and strong, professional relationships between the Foundation staff and charities was a key element of risk reduction and investment safeguarding, as charities were able to report honestly.*

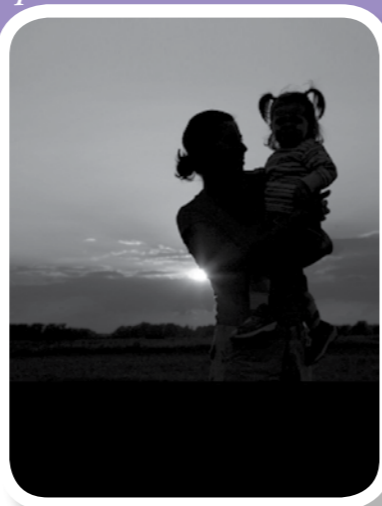
EdComs

*The monitoring process was seen as rigorous and meaningful by charities and in many cases has enabled them to strengthen their monitoring standards.*

EdComs

*“The unusual thing about the Nationwide Foundation is they have taken a genuine interest in what we do, unlike any other funders and we have other organisations who have funded us. They've been to prison and to the court and see what we get up to. It's fascinating that they take that interest in what we do and have given me appropriate advice and hints along the way. It's been very good.”*

Investor Programme grantee



### Evaluator's Recommendations on Monitoring and Support Visits

- Ask applicants to outline their approach to governance in their applications, including any related risks. This can be used to help the Foundation ensure these risks are addressed and monitored.
- The Foundation should have access and resources to address governance issues, such as funds for consultancy and training needs identified during visits.
- Foundation staff should be trained in how best to approach governance issues, for example, knowing when to signpost or suggest that consultancy or training is needed by the charity.
- Have clear terms of reference about how to work with grantees when offering support with governance issues. Consequently grantees will be aware that the Foundation may make recommendations to improve the organisation's practices and the grantees will know whether they have to follow the advice given.
- Foundation staff should accompany each other on visits, to ensure consistency of approach.

### Evaluator's Findings on Exit Strategy Consultancy

The deployment of consultants to help charities plan for the end of the Foundation's grant was overall seen as worthwhile.

Lessons learned to improve this process were:

- Ensuring consultants follow clear terms of reference;
- Asking grantees to identify in advance how the provision of such consultancy could have maximum benefit;
- Acknowledging and adapting to grantees' differing level of needs;
- Allowing charities to have some say in selecting their consultant.

*Many of the charities responded positively to the additional investment made in exit strategy consultants. This was seen as another unique element of support from the Nationwide Foundation. In a number of cases, this support led to new funding being secured and in many cases, this experience led to a greater awareness of funders, funding, proposal development and sustainability planning.*

EdComs

## Lessons from Partnership Working

### The Approach

Six charities funded under each of the three strategic aims were brought together, with expenses paid, every six months. Each group was offered £250,000 towards developing and implementing partnership activities with one another. The charities were offered this opportunity recognising that they were all experts working in the same fields to address issues affecting the same beneficiaries. The aims of bringing the grantees together were to:

- create a larger voice
- share learning and resources
- help to avoid duplication
- help to achieve greater outcomes for beneficiaries.

Charities were made aware from the point of application of the Foundation's desire to encourage partnership working. This became a key part of the assessment and bid process. A framework setting out how the partnership element of the strategy would be run was developed and communicated to the charities. Ideas for projects had to involve at least two members of the group and could be small or large. Ideas were approved against formal written proposals, on a first come, first served basis.

Over 30 projects were funded through the partnership initiative. These ranged from shared training to a documentary featuring Cherie Blair and a number of parliamentarians which was championed by the Guardian. Generally the partnership element of the strategy was considered a success, although the amount of time and effort it required from the Foundation was far greater than anticipated.

*“Sometimes, when you're developing partnership, you need a sense of fluidity and then when ideas are generated, you can pull on those and anchor people in. We seemed to have the same things coming up time after time and, instead of enabling things to move on, it became very stagnant. That period of the project could've been a lot more exciting time for all involved. On the other hand, it still happened.”*

**Investor Programme grantee**

*“I don't think you can do anything these days without partnership working. I'm a strong advocate for it. I did enjoy meeting up with the other organisations. I think that's really valid, having time to network with them.”*

**Investor Programme grantee**

### Key Lessons from Partnership Working Approach

The Foundation found that:

- The different sectors represented by each group (domestic violence, prisoners' families, young offenders) responded completely differently to this element of the strategy.
- The charities were generally not used to having access to this style of funding and so found deciding what to do with it challenging.
- The Foundation needed to provide far more support than anticipated to help the charities formulate ideas, develop proposals and deliver the activities.
- Initially, some charities felt the Foundation had a wider agenda with regard to partnership working, beyond the aims which were described to them.
- Partnership working is heavily dependent on the personalities involved.
- It typically took 18 months to develop partnership projects, due to the time it took to build trust and positive relationships.
- Forging genuine and mutually beneficial partnerships between the grantees was a challenge, particularly for those who were natural competitors. For example, some partnership proposals were submitted with only a token reference to partnership; and some charities would submit proposals without first consulting with the charities with which they had proposed to work.
- Many of the charities stayed in touch after the Foundation's support ended.
- Some partnership projects were planned to continue after the Foundation's support ended.

### Evaluator's Recommendations

- The Foundation should draw up guidance on its role in fostering and funding partnership projects, as well as clear guidance on the charities' requirements to deliver on partnership projects. Such requirements should be translated into individual charity objectives and should be monitored by the Foundation.
- An approach to partnership projects could involve developing a partnership fund, which charities can apply for and which involves their local partners and networks, instead of working only with the Foundation's funded charities.
- The idea of partnership working could be maximised further by acknowledging the existing networks that charities already work within and using the partnership project pot as a way to work within these, with new partners or with other Foundation funded charities.

## Evaluator's Recommendations for Improving the Foundation's Grant Making Approach

### Developing a Grant Making Strategy

The evaluators advised the Foundation to apply a 'theory of change' model to its future strategy development. This would help it to achieve clearer outcomes and enable it to measure the difference its funding makes more easily. It would also help charities have a clearer understanding of what they can apply for.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

Charities have many demands from funders with regard to monitoring and evaluation. The Foundation and other funders should determine if the approach can be consolidated for greater efficiency.

The added value elements of the Foundation's approach, for example helping to improve grantees' governance, should be planned more strategically, with clear objectives, so the benefits can be measured more easily.

Charities should be encouraged to develop their own processes to conduct longitudinal monitoring of beneficiaries, for example following up with beneficiaries over the course of a year after the Foundation has finished supporting them. This would help wider benefits and impacts achieved to be captured.

An end of grant interview should take place with each grantee to help close the relationship and collect any final thoughts and feedback from the charity on the impact of the grant and the Foundation's support.

### Communications

The Foundation should have a well developed and well resourced communications strategy if it wishes to share its lessons on grant making and raise its profile as a funder which embraces good grant making practice.

The Foundation could expand its communications with its grantees for example through a regular e-newsletter. This would help to keep them up to date with the Foundation's activities and support and remind them of the Foundation's ongoing interest in their work.

The Foundation could offer support to help charities develop and implement their own communications strategies and plans. This would increase expertise at the organisations and help them to raise awareness of their own work.



### Other Support

It transpired that the charities funded wanted the Foundation to facilitate links to policymakers, help with awareness raising and policymaking. The Foundation should recognise the role it can play in this regard and draw on experts to help provide specialist advice and insight, as well as help to support sectoral and policy change.

*Attention to impact measurement is vital in order for the Foundation to be able to evidence the real impact of funding on beneficiaries and wider society.*

**EdComs**

*A key success of the 2006-2010 Investor Programme was the clear and consistent organisational gains across Aim 1, 2 and 3 charities. In many ways, the organisational benefits were almost as strongly felt as those by beneficiaries. In that way, the Nationwide Foundation has been incredibly successful in supporting and influencing the working practices of funded charities and their partner organisations.*

**EdComs**

*"I don't think I would be here. I think I would have died. I felt alone, I would have had no one. I don't talk to my mum about things; I come here and talk to other people."*

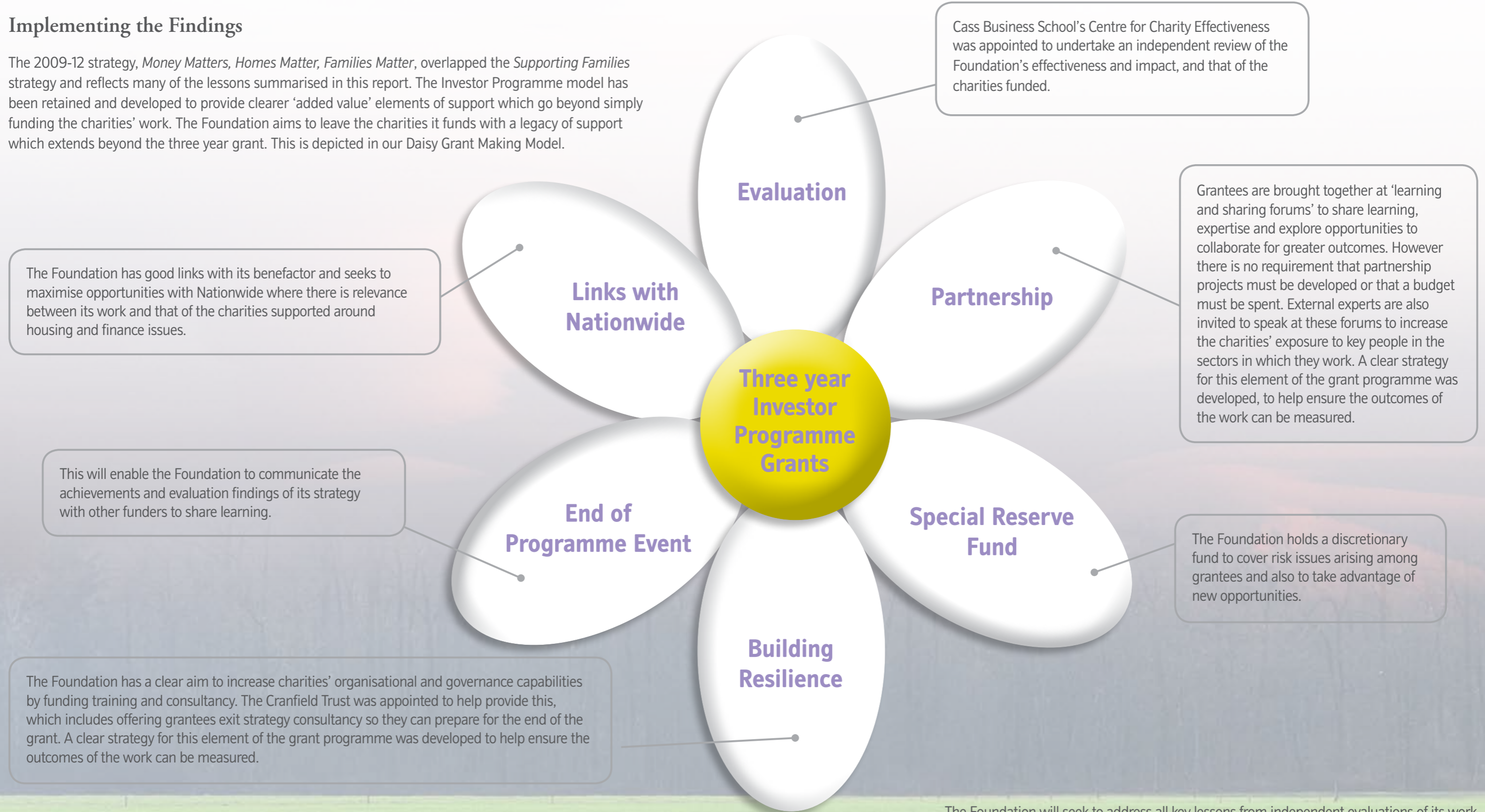
**Beneficiary of an Investor Programme grantee**



## Adding Value ‘Daisy Model’

### Implementing the Findings

The 2009-12 strategy, *Money Matters, Homes Matter, Families Matter*, overlapped the *Supporting Families* strategy and reflects many of the lessons summarised in this report. The Investor Programme model has been retained and developed to provide clearer ‘added value’ elements of support which go beyond simply funding the charities’ work. The Foundation aims to leave the charities it funds with a legacy of support which extends beyond the three year grant. This is depicted in our Daisy Grant Making Model.



The Foundation will seek to address all key lessons from independent evaluations of its work, when it comes to develop its next three year strategy.

The Foundation is delighted to have been shortlisted for various awards in respect of the *Supporting Families* strategy.



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This Evaluation Report Summary was written by the  
Nationwide Foundation.

Find out more about the Nationwide Foundation at  
**[www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk](http://www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk)**

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