



Social Return on Investment Evaluation



Recycling Lives Charity & Social Enterprise

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Contents

Overview	3
About the author	4
What is Social Return on Investment?	5
About Recycling Lives Charity	6
Stakeholder voices	7
Process & Methodology	8
Scope & Limitations	10
The evaluator's approach	11
Stakeholders	12
Outputs & Outcomes	14
Valuing the outcomes	18
Impact & Causality	22
SROI results	24
Recommendations	26
Appendices	27-35
Statement of Report Assurance	36

Overview

The true value of the work done by Recycling Lives Charity & Social Enterprise is best shown through its participants' stories – sharing their individual testimonials of challenges and triumphs.

The Charity has always strived to demonstrate its wider social and economic impact too, though.

This Social Return On Investment (SROI) analysis of its work adds an independent assessment of its impact and the value created for all stakeholders, extending beyond just direct programme participants or beneficiaries.

It found:

For every £1 invested in its programmes, Recycling Lives Charity generates £8.44 of value.

This comprehensive analysis was completed by an independent assessor, reviewing the Charity and Social Enterprise's activities between January–December 2020. Engaging with programme participants, volunteers and staff, and commercial and public sector partners, surveys and conversations covered the change experienced by each group. The qualitative and quantitative data collected was then used to measure and account for the value of the change experienced and created.

"I feel like I can be something again - but a different, better something. I can do something with my life. Recycling Lives have given me that confidence," – Programme participant

"[Their work] allows people to grow their self-worth and stand on their own two feet," – Public sector professional

"I'm in a place now I didn't think was possible – I'm clean, I'm working and I'm looking at flats. They're there for you on the good days, the bad days and all the other ones too," – Programme participant

Social Return on Investment (SROI) takes a principles-based approach to understanding and accounting for change. It offers one way of quantifying the relative importance stakeholders place on the change they experience in their lives.

SROI is **not** cost benefit analysis. It does not analyse fiscal benefits or cost savings – it looks at the **value of change** for stakeholders. It is a widely used approach, centred on an exploration of broader concepts of value.



About the author

Nicola Lynch is both an independent consultant to the voluntary, charitable and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors in the UK and the National Lead on Civil Society for Social Value UK. She is an Associate Practitioner with Social Value International.

“A huge thank you to the team at Recycling Lives and all the people who spoke so movingly and openly to me – both in person and via every digital method we could muster. Your stories of change were a privilege to hear and to hold.”

Nicola Lynch



What is Social Return on Investment?

With every moment that passes people, organisations and communities are creating and destroying value. Although the value we create and destroy goes far beyond what can be captured in pounds & pence this is too often the only type of value that is measured or accounted for.

'Things' with financial value take on a greater significance and many important things are left out. Decisions made with - and actions based upon – financial information alone will never be the best they could be for people, place and planet.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework for measuring and accounting for change that embraces a much broader concept of value. As with all methods it has its own benefits and limitations and the Recycling Lives management team is using SROI to complement other ongoing monitoring and evaluation activity. SROI takes a principles-based approach rather than following a prescriptive set of specific processes – it focusses on stories of change and includes the gathering and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data.

SROI Principles

- Involve stakeholders
- Understand what changes
- Value what matters
- Include only what is material
- Avoid overclaiming
- Be transparent
- Verify the result

SROI is **not** Cost Benefit Analysis and it is centred on an exploration of value **not** fiscal benefit, finance or money. It uses money as a proxy because money is a familiar unit and a widely accepted way of conveying value. It is centred on involving and understanding stakeholders and expressing what matters most to them through open enquiry. It embodies a conscious desire to seek out those voices that are too often subsumed by evaluation processes that focus solely on meeting targets or establishing fiscal benefits.

About Recycling Lives Charity



Recycling Lives Charity & Social Enterprise is an organisation based in Preston and serving the North West of England. It delivers three specific programmes of offender support and food redistribution.

The **offender rehabilitation programme** works with ex-offenders both in prison and in the community. By supporting men and women to improve their skills, confidence and resilience and secure good jobs, it significantly reduces reoffending rates.

The **residential programme** supports men experiencing homelessness. Offering personalised support, access to training and work placements and safe, stable accommodation, it supports men to regain their independence, moving into work and a home of their own.

The **food redistribution programme** aims to tackle food poverty while preventing food waste. Working in partnership with FareShare it takes surplus stock from food retailers and redistributes this to communities, feeding people in need.

“Our work impacts individuals, families, communities and wider society, creating a range of social, financial and environmental benefits. Each programme has its own social mission and outcomes but all are united by a commitment to changing lives for the better.”



Reducing reoffending

What? Engaging participants in meaningful work, supporting each to identify and overcome obstacles to stable lifestyles and offending behaviours, and develop skills, confidence and resilience ready to move into employment.

Who? Supporting serving and ex-offenders in prison and in the community (on probation, day release or following release); men and women of all ages with multiple and complex needs, including histories of substance misuse, mental illness, negative peer networks, limited work experience, low educational attainment and/or unstable housing.

How? Operating eight prison- and one community-based recycling workshops, allowing participants to earn an enhanced wage, set aside savings, develop transferable work skills and improve their life skills. Offering intensive, personalised support for each participant. Partnering with employers across all sectors to place people into work placements or paid roles.

Reducing homelessness

What? Providing quality, stable accommodation and access to training, work placements and personal support ready to move into employment and independent housing.

Who? Supporting men experiencing or at risk of homelessness with multiple and complex needs, as above.

How? Providing stable accommodation, allowing participants to live safely, undertake training and work placements, develop transferable work skills and improve life skills.

Reducing food waste and food poverty

What? Redistributing surplus goods from the food sector to community and charitable groups – using this to offer volunteering and training opportunities.

Who? Supporting participants including long-term unemployed, prison leavers, refugees, foreign exchange students and mental health unit outpatients.

How? Engaging volunteers in a range of administrative and operational roles, allowing participants to develop work and life skills while ‘giving back’ to communities.

Stakeholder voices

“You’re just obsessed with getting out...but then like at some point you have to look in the mirror. And I hated it...me. I was a waste of space. [Staff members] stood by me while I kept looking in the mirror until I changed what I was seeing. It’s hard and lots of days are really s**t but they didn’t give up...so I suppose I couldn’t. I’d like to get paid more like all the lads but none of us would have changed without [RL.] We’d be out of prison and back where we were...”

From one-to-one interview with beneficiary

What impact do you think RL is having on the wider community?

“Reducing the stigma of people with a conviction, reducing the number of victims by reducing the number of people who reoffend, delivering quality services to the community by developing a great workforce, reducing the number of people without a safe home (thus reducing demand for housing, even slightly), providing assurance to the family members of the people you work with that their loved ones are getting the support they need to turn their lives around. This list could go on and on!”

From online survey of external stakeholders

Do you have any reflections to share on what you think Recycling Lives has achieved so far and how it can continue to improve in the future?

“The number of people Recycling Lives have helped is a testament to their effectiveness. Reoffending rates are far lower than the national average; paying people inside prison for working then banking half the money so on release they have enough for accommodation or transport is an effective way to build confidence. As the charity helps their business as well, I can’t think of much they could improve.”

“RL has achieved massively, keeping reoffenders out of prison, allowing people to grow their self-worth and allowing them to stand on their own two feet financially.”

From online survey of external stakeholders



Please note:

From this point forward in the report Recycling Lives Charity & Social Enterprise will be referred to as RL.

Process & Methodology

The RL team commissioned Nicola Lynch to carry out this evaluation. The methodology of this evaluation was informed by the seven principles of social value as described by Social Value International and quoted below. (At the time of writing the eighth principle had not been released.)

Table 1:

Principle	How the principle was applied to this evaluation
Involve stakeholders	Stakeholders are at the core of the SROI process. Beneficiaries were directly involved, through direct contact with the evaluator, in describing their own outcomes, valuing or ranking those outcomes and identifying other stakeholders. Other stakeholders also had the opportunity to engage directly with the evaluator through a range of methods. A wide range of stakeholders were invited to contribute to the evaluation by RL staff and those that granted consent for me to contact them were subsequently approached.
Understand what changes	Stories of change are fundamental to SROI and all stakeholders were invited to discuss changes they had observed in themselves and others. Again this was done through a variety of methods including surveys and 1-1 interviews.
Value what matters	The relative importance of outcomes was assessed by the stakeholders themselves through 1-1 interviews, in focus groups and via online surveys.
Include only what is material	The outcomes referenced in the report are all generated by stakeholders involved. Although early discussions with the RL team explored outcomes that were likely to be expressed nothing was 'pre-determined.' Stakeholders decided which outcomes were most relevant & significant and these are included in the map.
Avoid over-claiming	Throughout the analysis the evaluator remained open to hearing and respecting 'whole' stories of change but also drilled down into those aspects of the change (outcomes) that were directly related to Recycling Lives' interventions. Attribution and displacement were considered in discussion with stakeholders. Valuations have been approached cautiously to avoid 'double counting' and only outcomes that were raised and evidenced throughout the process have been used.
Be transparent	This report sets out the methodology, valuations and calculations as well as the assumptions & judgements made throughout the process as transparently as possible.
Verify the result	At all stages of the process the evaluator 'played back' what she was hearing in interviews and sought stakeholder verification of key decisions. The evaluation was also submitted for external assurance by Social Value International in Autumn 2021. It successfully passed assurance in January 2022 and the certificate is included above. This offers reassurance of the sound application of the social value principles.

Sources of data used in the evaluation:

- Previous social value analyses written by and for RL
- RL in-house monitoring and evaluation of outputs and outcomes (including a sample of Life Circles – see Appendix II)
- FareShare centrally co-ordinated monitoring reports
- A sample of beneficiary case studies provided by RL
- Online survey of staff & volunteers (carried out by report author June/July 2021)
- Online survey of Community Food Members (carried out by report author June/July 2021)
- Online survey of external stakeholders (carried out by report author June/July 2021)
- 1-1 and group interviews with the external evaluator:
 - 22 primary beneficiaries were interviewed one-to-one via mixed methods including face-to-face at the RL premises, online via zoom, on the phone and via text message.
 - Of these 22 beneficiaries 7 also engaged in 2 focus groups exploring ranking & valuation.
 - 4 volunteers were interviewed face-to-face at RL premises and a further 3 via phone.
 - 5 staff were interviewed via mixed methods including face-to-face at RL premises, online via zoom and on the phone.
 - 4 external stakeholders (eg. probation officers) were interviewed either via zoom or by telephone.

Table 2:

Stakeholder group	Method of engagement	Numbers involved
Primary beneficiaries	One-to-one interviews	22
Primary beneficiaries	Focus groups	2 groups (3 & 4)
Volunteers	One-to-one interviews	7
Staff	One-to-one interviews	5
External stakeholders	One-to-one interviews	4
Staff & Volunteers	Online survey	90 sent out and 56 responses
External stakeholders	Online survey	41 sent out and 22 responses
Community Food Members	Online survey	Unknown number sent out by CFM Manager and 42 responses

Stakeholders were selected largely by their willingness to engage. A broad call was sent out by the RL team to as many contacts as possible following the stakeholder mapping exercise (further detail is provided on this in Section 2 on ‘Stakeholders.’) People were asked to respond giving permission for me to contact them and most of the people who responded with permission were subsequently contacted for their input.

Scope & Limitations

(including transparency & judgements)

Accounting for complex change requires judgements to be made. There is no single or absolute truth when it comes to describing the complexities of people's lives, the systems they live within and the many experiences that contribute to each individual or collective story of change. Judgements in SROI are guided by the principles of social value as outlined above.

This report sets out to make transparent these judgements, estimations and assumptions and shows what has been included and excluded from the analysis. It isn't practical to include everything that was discussed or considered and every judgement that was made but the author is open to enquiry, debate and challenge. None of the values included in this report represent an absolute truth and none of them are 'right or wrong.' They are all based on stakeholder feedback and subsequent judgements and what they tell us can only be understood in the context of the overall piece of work.

The scope of the work was agreed between the client and evaluator at the outset of the process. All areas of the charity's activity were to be analysed and the timeframe for that analysis was 1st January 2020 – 31st December 2020. This is a retrospective analysis and not a forecast.

Notable limitations

First and foremost, the experience of Covid has had a significant impact on everyone's operations, their time and resource availability and the evaluator's ability to gather qualitative evidence in a fluid and 'unfolding' manner. The team at Recycling Lives have maintained service levels through an extremely challenging time and while they devoted significant resource to supporting this learning activity it was important that any diversion of resource was bounded.

For example – the evaluator spent a day on site in face-to-face conversation with stakeholders and this involved two members of staff accompanying the evaluator for a full day as well as significant input from staff in planning before the event. It involved beneficiaries being directed away from and back to their work bubbles and covid-secure processes being managed to ensure that was all done safely. This is not a process that could have been repeated many times without negatively impacting upon the work of the Charity.

It is always vital that any evaluation work is conducted with appropriateness and sensitivity in mind. Now more than ever individuals and their families are under significant stress and judgements had to be made about where to 'draw a line' in pursuing people for feedback.

Linked to the above point one stakeholder group that were not ultimately included in this evaluation were the families and/or dependents of beneficiaries. There were also judgements to be made around sampling of stakeholder segments and these judgements are further outlined from page 12 of the report.

I therefore acknowledge that the above limitations have reduced the scope of this work and impacted upon full stakeholder segmentation & engagement. I strongly recommend a follow-up SROI in coming years (when Covid restrictions are not in place) so that more extensive stakeholder segmentation can be conducted.¹

Recycling Lives work in an environment rich in third-party research. The team use this research literature to help shape their work and for the purposes of this SROI they wanted to focus on testing their success in delivering outcomes and impact rather than exploring their activities in relation to the literature. They were keen not to narrow the scope to testing a theory of change but rather wanted to ensure this particular process remained open to hearing stories of change in the authentic voice of stakeholders. I therefore adopted a largely 'blindfolded' or inductive* approach to this SROI that approached stakeholders with an open mind as to what I might find.

*"While deductive reasoning begins with a premise that is proven through observations, inductive reasoning extracts a likely (but not certain) premise from specific and limited observations."

Finally - evaluation work of this nature is always more like a 'polaroid' than a 'fly-on-the-wall, 24/7 docuseries.' It represents a moment in time and does not capture everything that could possibly be known or learned.

It is also useful to note that the additional strain on public service professionals in the current environment resulted in reduced engagement with face-to-face interviewing. There was however a very strong response to the online survey (which stakeholders could complete in their own time and at their own pace without committing to a meeting time) and therefore we do not see this as a limitation.

Recommendation 1 – See Page 26 for summary of recommendations
<https://www.livescience.com/21569-deduction-vs-induction.html>

The evaluator's approach

All SROI practitioners bring their unique professional (and indeed personal) histories to the process of evaluation. It is foolish and damaging to pretend otherwise as it only perpetuates a perception of objectivity that is a fantasy and ignores the fact that evaluation is as power-laden as all other activity.

This evaluator brings an acute awareness of power dynamics to her work – and will therefore stop talking in the third person at this point as it implies that 'objective superiority!'

When I enter into stakeholder engagement it is from a place of respect and experienced 'un-knowing.' I do have decades of work on the frontline under my belt and am familiar with many of the themes and patterns in the human stories our society creates - but only the stakeholder knows their unique story.

My interviews are conversations about change between human beings, not 'hard and fast' scripts based in assumptions or superiority. I do refer to a check list of questions to ensure I offer everyone the same opportunity to be heard and explore their experiences (see Appendix II). I ask everyone to consider things they don't want to share before we begin any conversation and I regularly 'check in' with people who may wish to close the conversation as it unfolds.

I ensure anonymity for everyone that works with me, and I aim to create safe spaces in all my work. I do not release names or identifiable details in my reports and I do not record conversations in audio or video (unless for very specific reasons).

I also take feedback and conversation in any format that best allows the individual to express themselves – that may be face to face, via video call, via phone call or via text/WhatsApp.

As a social value practitioner and trainer, I ask people every day to remain curious and ask regularly "am I creating as much value as I can with the resources I have available to me?" The same logic applies to any evaluation activity and with my clients we commit to doing the best work we can within the resources we have.

Theory will inevitably bump up against reality and compromises need to be made. I believe in a process which balances the need to question and learn with the need to act. I do not believe it is right to divert so much resource to a learning activity that it detracts from vital or life-saving service delivery.

Finally - evaluation is not an act of omniscience. I make no claims about achieving perfection or 'ultimate knowledge capture' in this work. It has been co-created with everyone who joined in on the journey and we present it as an open and transparent exploration of change in the Recycling Lives Charity universe...

Stakeholders

Potential stakeholders and their possible outcomes were identified in an initial consultation with RL staff. The stakeholder list was reviewed after each round of stakeholder contact and the final list is below.

In each interview stakeholders were asked to identify other stakeholders that may have experienced change as a result of RL's work (see Survey Findings) This information was used to constantly review the stakeholder list as the evaluation process unfolded. There are undoubtedly sub-sectors of stakeholders whose stories of change did not come through in this particular analysis.

As highlighted in our introduction to the Scope & Limitations, the experience of Covid has had a significant impact on everyone's operations, time and resource availability and hampered our ability to gather qualitative evidence in a very fluid and reactive manner.

SROI definition of stakeholders: People, organisations or entities that experience change as a result of the activity analysed

Table 3 :

Stakeholder and activity	Outcomes directly caused by the activity of RL (both positive and negative)	Included or excluded from the calculation
Primary beneficiaries Sub-sectors (a) Men experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness (Residential programme) (b) Men currently in prison (Prison Programme) (c) Women currently in prison (Prison programme)	Improved sense of personal agency	Included
	Improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members	Included
	Improved mental health	Included
	Improved self-confidence	Included
	Reduced isolation	Included
	Increased isolation	Included
External stakeholders Sub-sectors (a) Referring agents including Probation (b) The 'State' (c) Community Food Members	Improved ability to meet own organisational aims	Included
	Delivery of a higher quality service to beneficiaries	Included
	Reduced re-offending	Included
	Reduced demand on homelessness services	Included
	Reduced demand on unemployment services	Included
	Reduced demand on substance misuse services	Included
	Improved ability to provide food to those experiencing food insecurity or poverty	Included
	Improved ability to avoid food waste	Included
	Improved ability to bring communities and/or groups within communities together	Included
	Improved distribution of organisational resources	Included
Staff & Volunteers	Increased sense of purpose	Included
Family and/or dependents of primary beneficiaries	Improved emotional & mental well-being	Excluded due to insufficient evidence and engagement

Notes on stakeholder segmentation

I discussed segmentation with all the stakeholders I spoke to (including staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and external stakeholders.) After these conversations we agreed on the above list of stakeholders as representing those **most** impacted by the work of RL.

The group here labelled as ‘the State’ was born out of conversations about a slightly shifting and nebulous entity variously described as ‘the taxpayer,’ ‘the general public’ or ‘the government’ (both local and central.) This entity was raised by **everyone** involved so it represents an important if slightly messy concept to try and capture.

Beneficiary subgroups

When it came to beneficiary segmentation the list expanded and shrank again as the engagement process and interviews unfolded. In the end it proved difficult to deliver enough ‘purposive sampling’ to achieve a significant level of detail on the segmentation in relation to outcomes, e.g only two women engaged with the evaluator in a one-to-one conversation on outcomes; therefore it was not possible to make claims about them being fully representative of that segmented group.

For future exploration it is recommended that women’s experiences within the programme are more fully explored. The small amount of engagement I had with women suggested that the range of outcomes was very similar to those already included here but that they might value and/or rank those outcomes differently. Both women I spoke to were parents whose priority was to re-engage with their children and manage more positive interactions with them. (This was also discussed by men as you can see but there was more emphasis or ‘urgency’ expressed around on this outcome in the limited interviews I held with women.)³

Family and/or dependents of primary beneficiaries

As noted in the limitations, it proved impossible to engage family members in the stakeholder engagement process. The RL team and I did reach out to some people that were identified as suitable and not in extremely vulnerable circumstances at the time. They did not respond however and as the evaluator I made a judgement not to pursue people at a time of great stress up and down the country (which was adding to the stress of these families already living through difficult circumstances.)

Based on feedback from the primary beneficiaries and other stakeholders it is highly likely that families and/or dependents experience **some** of the following outcomes:

- Improved positive interactions with the beneficiary leading to improved stability within the family unit
- Reduced negative role-modelling (the often-expressed fear that children would follow in the offending parent’s footsteps and indeed regret that some already had)
- Reduced negative mental health impact of an absent parent
- Reduced negative mental health impact of a present parent where that parent isn’t functioning in a nurturing way
- Improved financial stability
- Reduced negative mental health impact of living with fear & uncertainty about the offender’s behaviour and consequences

Many people mentioned domestic abuse in the course of these conversations, but I will not try to summarise the complexities of the issue in a brief bullet point here. It is likely that reducing offending behaviours - and addressing the many inter-linked issues around drug dependence, poverty and poor mental health to name a few – will result in reduced levels of domestic abuse within some families. I recommend that the experience of families & dependents be explored more fully when the situation allows for the evaluation activity to be ethically expanded.⁴

³ Recommendation 2 – see page 26 for summary of recommendations

⁴ Recommendation 3 – see page 26 for summary of recommendations

Outputs & Outcomes

Recycling Lives' **outputs** are well documented through the use of consistent project management data gathering processes. It is not the purpose of this SROI calculation to audit outputs but the team does publish these for discussion and scrutiny in other documents such as their annual report. The evaluator received a lot of very positive feedback through the SROI process from external stakeholders and organisational partners, such as this:

"The whole concept of Recycling Lives is excellent it goes beyond the extra mile and the staff are very supportive and are happy to give offenders numerous chances and accept there can be lows as well as high. Recycling Lives are very resilient and are all working towards the same goal and outcome."

I have not included much of this feedback in this report because the SROI process is focusing in on outcomes and impact but the team at RL will be making this feedback available through their annual reporting. The same applies to a small number of negative comments raised in regard to operational matters such as food delivery timescales.

SROI definition of outcomes: The changes resulting from an activity. The main types of change from the perspective of stakeholders including unintended (unexpected) and intended (expected), positive and negative change.

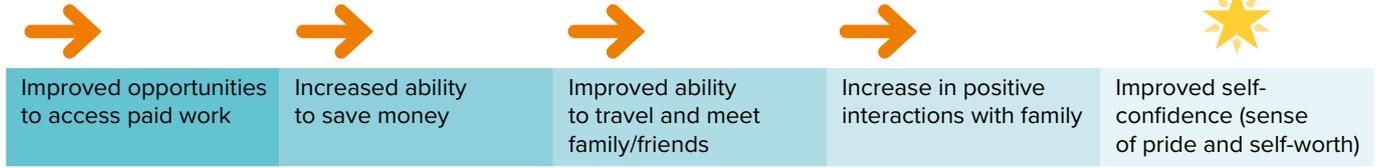
For the purposes of an SROI we focus on **outcomes**. The aim of focusing on **outcomes** is to engage in a process that tries to understand **change** in a useful way. It is impossible to form a complete and accurate statement of all of the changes that all beneficiaries might experience as people's lives are complicated and people are often experiencing a variety of different changes all at the same time. The issues of attribution & deadweight (who caused what change in what quantity and 'what would have happened anyway') are also complex and discussed further below.

To help focus any study on what information is most **useful** to informed and purposeful decision-making one of the principles of SROI is to only include what is material.

A material outcome is an issue that will influence decisions, actions, and performance of an organisation or its stakeholders. The first filter that is used to establish materiality is relevance. If the outcome is relevant then the significance of the outcome needs to be considered and these filters were used to help focus this calculation on the most relevant, significant - and therefore material - outcomes. The material outcomes for the purposes of this calculation are identified in Table 3 above.

One of the other methods used to establish the **key**, material outcomes was the exploration of 'outcome chains' with stakeholders. Several examples of outcome chains as described by different beneficiaries in our conversations are opposite:

Example 1



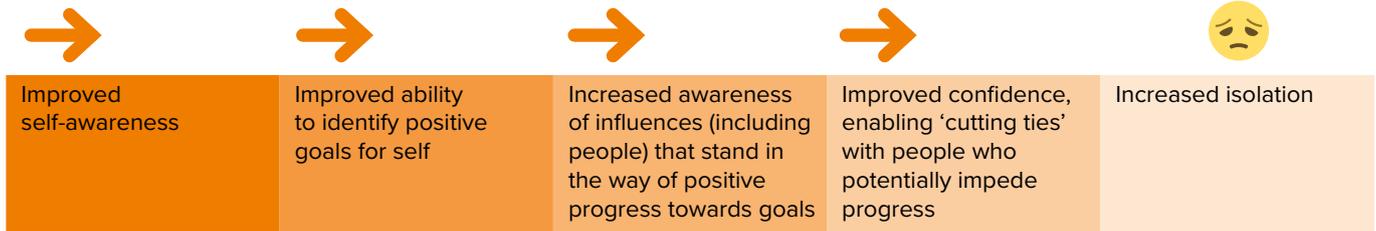
EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



The process of exploring 'outcome chains' (in direct conversation with the stakeholders themselves and under their full ownership) helps to slim down a potentially very lengthy list of outcomes and focus our attention (and therefore decision-making) on what matters most.

All stakeholders shared thoughtful feedback and the stories of change shared by beneficiaries in particular were often profound, complex and defied easy articulation.

I share overleaf a sample of the quotes gathered through the interview and focus group discussions with beneficiaries that supported my growing understanding of those material and most valued outcomes.

Increased self-confidence

“You come from a world where you’re the king to this place where you’re nothing. You’re worthless. Everyone hates you coz you’re just scum. So either you go back where you came from or you sit there feeling worthless for the rest of your life. [RL] gave me another option. Working with them has given me a way out...I feel like I can be something again...but a different, better something. I can do something with my life, and they’ve given me that confidence.”

Improved mental health

“I’ve always gone back to the drugs coz I couldn’t face not being wasted. The doctors have tried me on all sorts but I can’t cope with my own head... it’s like the doctors and social and everyone wants to do one bit of me but it never worked. If I wasn’t on drugs I just wanted to kill myself. I’m in this weird place now that I didn’t think was like possible. I’m clean and I’m working here and I’m looking at flats with [staff member.] There is no way my head would ever have been like this without [RL.] They’re there on the good days and the [bad] days and all the other ones too. They take you other places and get help for you that you really need not just one bit of it. They stand by you.”

Improved sense of personal agency

“I’m on the way up and out, lass. Even before coming into [prison] I wasn’t never my own boss. I’ve never in my life done what I wanted or had my choices left to me. Dad was drunk and then the gang...then prison’s worst of all. How is anyone supposed to get better in there...I don’t know. [Staff members] taught me how to make decisions and when I got them wrong, they’ve been there for me. I’m in a house now with a job and I can make my own choices to keep me right.”

Reduced isolation & Improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members

*“I’ve always been looking over my shoulder. Didn’t trust no one and wouldn’t talk to my fam. Prison’s a *ing lonely world man. So the biggest thing for me was just meeting all these new people at [RL.] They’re different. I don’t want to go talking feelings, but they just get it. They helped me think through talking to my daughter again and now we talk on the phone. I’ve never laughed so much that kid’s so funny.*

Increased isolation

“It’s hard at first...you’ve got all these people that you’ve been around all your life as far as you can remember... but if you stay with them - go back out to them - then you’re back in the same place every time you come out aren’t you. [Staff member] helped me sort things out to stay in residential and not go back there this time but it’s hard. They’re my friends and my family. I’ll be honest I don’t know if I can do it.”

The ‘numbers’ in the value map

To answer the ‘how much change have we delivered?’ question the evaluator reviewed the output figures gathered and reported on by the team at Recycling Lives over the last five years. The average annual number of men and women reported as receiving support is 237.2 across all programmes with a lowest figure of 162 and a highest of 318.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total:	207	318	288	211	162

The Prison Programme reports in arrears so the latest confirmed figure for attendance on the Prison Programme was 88 people. Eleven people were accommodated and working within the residence project at latest count. To select a cautious figure for our calculations I have opted for the sum of prison programme and residence occupants at their lowest number – 99.

The outcomes attributed to these stakeholders were those referenced by all the beneficiaries interviewed however I have still accounted for a majority of beneficiaries not having experienced these positive outcomes to assume a position of caution. A relatively small number of beneficiaries (three of 22 interviewed) referenced increased isolation in my contact with them so I have opted for a figure of 10 for the value map. This equates to approximately 10% of the 99 figure.

What happens to the stakeholders that did not engage directly with this consultation?

We cannot be sure what happens to every individual that interacts with the programme and there are always going to be stakeholders that are not accounted for. I believe I have sampled a robust set of stakeholders in the current circumstances (see Section 1 on Limitations) and gathered little evidence of negative outcomes in any stakeholder group. The only material negative outcome uncovered is listed above as ‘increased isolation’ among primary beneficiaries.

It appears that, as with many voluntary programmes, those people who choose to fully engage with the programme do experience a range of positive outcomes – although some to a lesser degree than others of course (see ‘depth of outcomes’ below.) Beneficiaries are living complex lives within complex systems, and many are faced with multiple challenges so choosing to engage with the programme is a big step. Staff and volunteers talked at length about the need for people to engage at the right time for them and the team support people with this decision-making. While people do leave the programme because the timing isn’t right for them I found no evidence to suggest they are experiencing negative outcomes – more that the programme isn’t right for their individual circumstances in a particular time frame. I recommend that going forward RL retain and publish more data on beneficiaries that withdraw from the programme to aid improved understanding of how & when the programme works best.⁵

Depth of outcomes

I approached the understanding of the depth of outcomes by engaging in discussions with stakeholders about ranking, levels of importance and the concept of value (what matters most to people.) On this occasion I did not use a specific measure of depth (columns I & N remain empty in the attached RL impact map.) The Life Circles referenced in the data sources and demonstrated in Appendix II offer a **potential** source of information for measuring depth in the experience of the direct beneficiaries going forward.⁶

However:

At the minute they are not used with all beneficiaries and I judged the sample I had as not large enough to create a reliable measure of depth for this particular report.

In two cases I interviewed people whose Life Circle scorings I had seen and in both cases the depth of certain outcomes they had experienced was ‘undersold’ by their scoring. The concepts of ‘depth’ and ‘significance’ became much more apparent to them through a process of guided exploration and of course with the passage of time/ opportunity to reflect on past & present experiences.

The sample I reviewed also highlighted a significant challenge in using a measure like this as the sample had extremes of experience not adequately conveyed by an average score. Any use of standard scales or measures needs to be supported by qualitative engagement to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the data and - most importantly - to enable the targeted improvement of services where the data suggests it is needed.

For all the above reasons I opted to understand and express ‘depth’ in this report through the choice and application of ranking and the subsequent use of financial proxies. See the following section for further information about other stakeholder groups and valuing outcomes.

⁵ Recommendation 4 – See Page 26 for summary of recommendations

⁶ Recommendation 5 – See Page 26 for summary of recommendations

Valuing the outcomes

The practice of Social Return on Investment analysis includes the valuation of material outcomes to stakeholders. The purpose of valuation in SROI is to quantify the relative importance of outcomes for each stakeholder group. It is not to find an actual cash value of outcomes.

Therefore, the data needs to be good enough to show the relative importance of outcomes. The questions we are exploring when we engage in conversations about value are ‘which outcomes are most important?’ and ‘where are we doing the most good?’

Overall the study identifies a range of proxy values that correspond to the outcomes and their indicators. Further notes on the different stakeholder groups are below.

Beneficiaries

Identifying suitable financial proxies to express ‘what matters most’ for this group of beneficiaries was particularly challenging.

For many of the people I interviewed the relationship between money, wealth, crime, violence, imprisonment and loss was both deeply emotive and highly complex. It was also quite a polarising discussion in the focus group and while healthy debate and conflicts of opinion are common they need to be sensitively approached. Consensus was not possible and it was not in the interest of the people involved to force a divisive discussion upon them.

The beneficiaries were actively and more meaningfully engaged in conversations about ranking however. Consensus was comfortably achieved on the ranking of our final list of outcomes (also verified through these groups) and is as stated below:

- Increased self-confidence
- Improved mental health
- Improved sense of personal agency
- Reduced isolation
- Increased isolation
- Improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members

These findings were also triangulated with other stakeholder’s observations of what matters most to beneficiaries in their experience (see survey findings Appendix II.) Financial proxies from well-established, commonly referenced external sources were chosen to reflect the ranking agreed by beneficiaries. These sources included the HACT Social Value Bank, Simetrica/Jacobs evaluations of adult learning and volunteering, the GM Unit Cost Database and New Climate Economy reports. Given the concerns about selecting appropriate proxies in this environment I recommend using anchoring as a more suitable approach in the future.⁷

External Stakeholders and ‘The State’

Referring agents and other partners responded to both interview and survey questions about the outcomes most important to them. Many were confident that what some people described as benefits to ‘the taxpayer’ or ‘the government’ were the most suitable way to capture the value of RL’s interventions to them. This explains why the proxy allocations for the outcomes of ‘Improved ability to meet own organisational aims’ and ‘Delivery of a higher quality service to beneficiaries’ have been included in the proxy allocations for ‘The State.’ It also supports the evaluator’s chosen, cautious approach to avoiding ‘double counting’ or ‘over-claiming.’

Community Food Members

I consulted external sources to identify the financial proxies for CFM’s and this was felt to be adequate for this aspect of the SROI evaluation. It was not within the resourcing boundaries to include 1-1 interviews with CFM’s and they already engage in quite a lot of evaluation & monitoring activity through FareShare central. This data was reviewed alongside the direct responses to the online survey provided by the evaluator.

Staff & Volunteers

As with external stakeholders I have been cautious in the application of financial proxies to staff & volunteer outcomes. Staff & volunteers spoke very strongly about the positive impact of working for RL and feeling part of its mission. The outcome of ‘increased sense of purpose’ was clearly identified and ranked as being the most significant outcome this group experienced. They also felt strongly that their contribution to those ‘state benefits’ already discussed here was a collective outcome they delivered on behalf of RL and its communities.

⁷ Recommendation 6 – see page 26 for summary of recommendations

Table 4 (Financial Proxies):

Stakeholder	Outcome	Indicator & data source	Financial proxy + source	Value
Primary beneficiary	Improved sense of personal agency	Beneficiaries report improved sense of control over their own lives in interviews and focus groups with external consultant. Supporting data (1) Client held data eg. 'Life Circles' (2) Interviews & questionnaires carried out by external consultant with staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (eg. referring agents) where these stakeholders were asked to offer their perspectives on beneficiary outcomes.	HACT 'feel in control of life'	£15,984
Primary beneficiary	Improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members	Beneficiaries report improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members in interviews and focus groups with external consultant. Supporting data (1) Client held data eg. 'Life Circles' (2) Interviews & questionnaires carried out by external consultant with staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (eg. referring agents) where these stakeholders were asked to offer their perspectives on beneficiary outcomes.	HACT 'can rely on family'	£6784
Primary beneficiary	Improved mental health	Beneficiaries report improved mental health in interviews and focus groups with external consultant. Supporting data (1) Client held data eg. 'Life Circles' (2) Interviews & questionnaires carried out by external consultant with staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (eg. referring agents) where these stakeholders were asked to offer their perspectives on beneficiary outcomes.	Average of HACT 'relief from depression/anxiety (adult) £36766' + HACT 'Good overall health £20141'	£28,454
Primary beneficiary	Improved self confidence	Beneficiaries report increased self-confidence in interviews and focus groups with external consultant. Supporting data (1) Client held data eg. 'Life Circles' (2) Interviews & questionnaires carried out by external consultant with staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (eg. referring agents) where these stakeholders were asked to offer their perspectives on beneficiary outcomes.	HACT 'high confidence £13080' + 'financial comfort £8917' + 'secure job £12034' + Simetrica/Jacobs 'Part-time adult learning improves learners' satisfaction with social life because they may meet people more frequently and/or build better-quality relationships £1,315'	£35,346
Primary beneficiary	Reduced isolation	Beneficiaries report reduced isolation in interviews and focus groups with external consultant. Supporting data (1) Client held data eg. 'Life Circles' (2) Interviews & questionnaires carried out by external consultant with staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (eg. referring agents) where these stakeholders were asked to offer their perspectives on beneficiary outcomes.	Simetrica/Jacobs "Loneliness monetisation report" Wellbeing valuation for 'lack of mild to moderate loneliness'	£8157
Primary beneficiary	Increased isolation	Beneficiaries report increased isolation in interviews and focus groups with external consultant. Supporting data (1) Client held data eg. 'Life Circles' (2) Interviews & questionnaires carried out by external consultant with staff, volunteers and external stakeholders (eg. referring agents) where these stakeholders were asked to offer their perspectives on beneficiary outcomes.	Simetrica/Jacobs "Loneliness monetisation report" Wellbeing valuation for 'lack of mild to moderate loneliness'	-£8157

Stakeholder	Outcome	Indicator & data source	Financial proxy + source	Value
Referring agents	Improved ability to meet own organisational aims	Referring agents report improved ability to meet their own organisational aims in interviews with external consultant and through online questionnaire.	Valuation included in benefits/ outcomes for 'The State'	£0
Referring agents	Delivery of a higher quality service to beneficiaries	Referring agents report delivery of a higher quality service to beneficiaries in interviews with external consultant and through online questionnaire.	Valuation included in benefits/ outcomes for 'The State'	£0
Community Food Members	Improved ability to provide food to those experiencing food insecurity or poverty	CFMs report improved ability to provide food to those experiencing food insecurity or poverty through online questionnaire.	One tonne's worth of meals served per CFM	£2383
Community Food Members	Improved ability to avoid food waste	CFMs report improved ability to avoid food waste through online questionnaire.	One tonne of food waste avoided using New Climate Economy Report figures	£4536
Community Food Members	Improved ability to bring communities and/or groups within communities together	CFMs report improved ability to bring communities and/or groups within communities together through online questionnaire.	HACT 'feel belonging to neighbourhood'	£3753
Community Food Members	Improved distribution of organisational resources	CFMs report improved distribution of organisational resources through online questionnaire.	Included in above CFM-related valuations to avoid over claiming	£0
Staff & Volunteers	Increased sense of purpose	Staff & volunteers report increased sense of purpose in interviews with external consultant and through online questionnaire.	GVE Estimating the value of volunteering using subjective wellbeing data (Daniel Fujiwara, Paul Oroyemi and Ewen McKinnon) Reference: Fujiwara, Oroyemi, McKinnon Datasource:	£13,500
'The State'	Reduced re-offending	Reported through Recycling Lives ongoing contract management relationships	GM Unit Cost Database - Offender, Prison Average cost across all prisons, including central costs (costs per prisoner per annum)	£37,543
'The State'	Reduced demand on homelessness services	Reported through Recycling Lives ongoing contract management relationships	GM Unit Cost Database - Rough sleepers - average annual local authority expenditure per individual	£7,900
'The State'	Reduced demand on unemployment services	Reported through Recycling Lives ongoing contract management relationships	GM Unit Cost database - Job Seeker's Allowance Fiscal and economic benefit from a workless claimant entering work	£12,657
'The State'	Reduced demand on substance misuse services	Reported through Recycling Lives ongoing contract management relationships	GM Unit Cost Database - Drugs misuse - average annual savings resulting from reductions in drug-related offending and health and social care costs as a result of delivery of a structured, effective treatment programme	£3614

The financial proxies have been chosen to convey the relative importance and ranking of outcomes by stakeholders – for example the outcome ranking and valuations for beneficiary outcomes are as follows:

Outcome	Ranking	Proxy
Increased self-confidence	1st	£35,346
Improved mental health	2nd	£28,454
Improved sense of personal agency	3rd	£15,984
Reduced isolation (the same proxy has been used for the negative outcome of 'increased isolation')	4th	£8157
Improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members	5th	£6784

In cases where I did not conduct extensive interview and focus group work, for example with the Community Food Members, I used an analysis of the online survey findings (where percentages of respondents replied to questions about their aims & objectives and 'what mattered most' to them) to select proxies reflective of their feedback on value and ranking.

Summaries of the survey findings are available in the Appendices.

Impact & Causality

All outcomes have been considered for causality – would they have happened anyway? Are the outcomes down to someone else? How long might the last? Have they displaced other outcomes?

SROI definition of causality, in relation to impact analysis: The difference between the outcomes for participants, taking into account what would have happened anyway, the contribution of others and the length of time the outcomes last.

The evaluator has used a ‘very low, low, medium and high approach’ to discounting for causality based on the overall analysis of all data gathered & reviewed throughout the process. Causal questions formed part of all conversations (see Appendix II.) They included:

- Where do you think you would be/what would you be doing now if you weren’t working with RL? **Deadweight**
- Did anyone else help you make these changes apart from the team at RL? **Attribution**
- Did you give anything up to work with RL? Have you had similar support from somewhere else? **Displacement**
- Where do you think you’ll be a year from now? How will some of the changes we’ve talked about grow or develop further? Do you think anything of the changes will ‘stop’ or fade away in the future? **Duration & Drop-off**

Outcomes have accordingly been discounted by 10%, 25%, 50% or 75% depending on the feedback given by stakeholders and the individual discounts against each outcome are included in the attached value map. Not only were stakeholders asked the above questions during the engagement process but I also used the opportunity of time in focus groups (as well as the usual ‘end of interview’ reflective summaries with individuals) to check my understanding and analysis of their feedback on discounting factors.

Some key points raised in relation to discounting factors were:

A strong thread running through the wide range of stakeholder feedback was RL’s uniqueness in its geography. Referring agents were clear that there were no other services exactly like those provided by RL for them to refer into. Beneficiaries also shared that from their experiences of accessing support external to prisons there was nothing like RL. This feedback is reflected in the judgements about discounting for **deadweight & displacement**.

Partnership working is central to the success of RL and its stakeholders. Beneficiaries were most likely to describe RL as the ‘hub’ of that success and other agencies as ‘spokes.’ Often the relationship between beneficiaries and statutory services was not an easy, positive or productive one and beneficiaries describe RL as playing a key role in improving those relationships to a point where they may not be entirely positive but they were at least not entirely negative. This feedback is reflected in the judgements about discounting for **attribution**.

The RL re-offending rate data is extremely positive. In SROI we see reduced re-offending as a means to improved quality of life outcomes and not as an end in itself. It is a particularly useful indicator for understanding **deadweight** - although not the only one of course and not in isolation.

In the last full reporting year (2019/2020) just three of 88 participants returned to prison. This is a reoffending rate of only 3.5% compared to the latest quarter reporting at a national level that puts reoffending rates at 26% (combined adult and juvenile offenders.)⁸

The report also notes that “over time the overall proven reoffending rate has fluctuated between 26.0% and 31.8%” further highlighting the success of RL’s support and interventions. This highlights that in reference to deadweight in RL’s work there is a strong likelihood that some beneficiaries would have experienced much worse and/or negative outcomes without RL’s interventions. This data is reflected in the judgements about discounting for **deadweight, displacement, duration & drop off**.

RL do not follow beneficiaries for a long period of time but do stay in touch for up to a year after they leave the programme. As discussed above the reduction in reoffending rates in the short term is excellent but as we do not have longer-term data we have remained cautious in claiming **duration**. In interviews & focus groups I did ask beneficiaries the following questions:

- Where do you think you’ll be a year from now?
- How will some of the changes we’ve talked about grow or develop further?
- Do you think anything of the changes will ‘stop’ or fade away in the future? (See Appendix I)

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/proven-reoffending-statistics-july-to-september-2019/proven-reoffending-statistics-july-to-september-2019#overall--adult-and-juvenile-offenders>

Of those interviewed the majority were very positive and hopeful about sustaining the changes they had described, and many mentioned that they felt reassured by knowing they could always reach out to the team at RL should they 'stumble.' External stakeholders, such as probation officers, were also asked to comment on the longevity of outcomes in their interviews and their views were positive.

One possible avenue for **displacement** to occur more significantly within the work of RL is in the area of employment and training access. It could be argued that employment & training going to this particular group of beneficiaries disadvantages other groups who would also like to/benefit from accessing the same opportunities. I believe, however, that as the business was designed with this specific goal in mind this is not a significant factor to explore.

The discounting process is one of making judgements informed by analysis of the data and being embedded in the process of interviewing and engaging with stakeholders. My judgements are fully open to debate. As mentioned at the beginning of the report we were focussing on analysing internally generated data for this particular evaluation. In future iterations of the exercise, however, some other sources of data or evidence could be used to 'add weight' to the assessments made herein:

Deadweight

- Further analysis of local as well as National reoffending rates could prove useful in establishing more accuracy around deadweight calculations.
- Data could be researched on the prevalence of poor mental health among offender populations and how many offenders are experiencing poor and/or worsened mental health on release.

Attribution

- There was a great deal of feedback from both the direct beneficiaries and external, referring partners (such as probation officers) that while people were engaged with multiple services - and RL actively promoted and enabled that engagement – the outcomes under discussion were in the majority attributable to RL.
- A 'deep dive' analysis of which local partners (both statutory & VCSE sector) contribute most to differing outcomes would be both informative in regard to decision-making but also improve the understanding of attribution in greater detail.

Displacement

- A service mapping exercise could be undertaken to establish with absolute accuracy where the nearest similar service operates.
- Quantitative data may be available that shows historical trends in referral behaviours for local probation & prison services. This could potentially offer insight into when and how referral activity RL has accrued from the wider 'market.'

Duration & Drop-off

- Longer-term tracking of even a small sample of beneficiaries would of course be extremely informative. It is also notoriously difficult. This difficulty is not necessarily reflective of a negative outcome – a number of people I interviewed suggested in response to questions about the future that if they did succeed in maintaining a positive trajectory they would **not** want to look back...

SROI results

On the basis of the information set out within this report and the attached impact map we conclude that the social return on investment of Recycling Lives activity between 1st January 2020 – 31st December 2020 is

£1: £8.44

This information can also be represented in the following range £7.33 – £9.35 in accordance with the findings from the sensitivity analysis overleaf.

The financial value of the outcomes after taking into consideration the above detailed causality factors (displacement, drop off, attribution, deadweight) are set out below:

Table 5:

Outcome	Impact calculation [Number of people (quantity) x value - deadweight, displacement and attribution]
Improved sense of personal agency	£1,062,116.55
Improved self-confidence	£2,361,996.45
Improved ability to manage positive social interactions with family members	£604,454.40
Improved mental health	£1,901,438.55
Reduced isolation	£454,242.94
Increased isolation	-£15,294.38
Improved ability to provide food to those experiencing food insecurity or poverty	£217,150.88
Improved ability to avoid food waste	£867,258.82
Improved ability to bring communities and/or groups within communities together	£158,329.69
Increased sense of purpose	£182,250
Reduced re-offending	£1,055,896.88
Reduced demand on homelessness services	£70,389
Reduced demand on unemployment services	£512,608.50
Reduced demand on substance misuse services	£50,821.88
TOTAL FINANCIAL INPUT	£1,794,567
TOTAL SOCIAL VALUE CREATED	£9,517,240.94

The financial input figure is an **average expenditure figure** taken across 2 financial years (2019/2020 and 2020/2021.) This is to reflect the timeframe of the evaluation itself being 1st January 2020 – 31st December 2020. As a charity the accounts for RL are a matter of public record and can be provided on request.

You can also find this information on the Charity Commission website at :

<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regId=1116562&subId=0>

and here:

<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/05781363/filing-history>

We did not record a financial value for volunteer time as an input on this occasion as robust data was not available to adequately express the value of the input. This is noted as a recommendation for future evaluation activity.

Sensitivity Analysis

As stated often throughout this report the evaluator has used a combination of desktop data analysis, stakeholder engaged conversations and subjective indicators as well as making a continual series of professional judgements regarding issues like attribution and deadweight. All of these judgements are imprecise by their nature and therefore a more detailed and robust way of presenting the SROI is in a range.

The following are the main areas identified as impacting most significantly on the overall return figure when tested for sensitivity:

Test 1 - Numbers of beneficiaries experiencing the outcomes. As interviewing all beneficiaries would have been impossible (not only due to the resources required but also due to beneficiaries moving out of the programmes) the evaluator is reliant on using sampling to estimate numbers experiencing outcomes. I am confident I have chosen a cautious approach to this number but have tested both increasing and decreasing the figure as shown below.

Test 2 - Choice of higher valuations/financial proxies. The choice of proxies is always up for debate! If I reduce the 2 highest value proxies for 'increased confidence' and 'reduced re-offending' by 50% the results can be seen below.

Test 3 - Increased and decreased discounting rates. I have doubled and halved the assessments for deadweight, attribution, displacement duration & drop off.

Tests 1 & 2	Outcomes affected	SROI figure	New SROI figure	Difference
1 Reduce numbers of beneficiaries by 10%	All positive outcomes	8.44	8.15	-0.29
1 Increase numbers of beneficiaries by 10%	All positive outcomes	8.44	9.30	+0.86
2 Reduce highest financial proxy by 50%	Increased self-confidence	8.44	7.41	-1.03
2 Reduce highest financial proxy by 50%	Reduced re-offending	8.44	7.80	-0.64

Neither of these tests indicate a very significant level of sensitivity to the changes but do create a ratio range of **£7.41 – £9.30**.

Test 3	SROI figure	New SROI figure	Difference
Deadweight - doubled	8.44	7.33	-1.11
Deadweight - halved	8.44	9.35	+0.91
Attribution - doubled	8.44	6.28	-2.16
Attribution - halved	8.44	9.84	+1.40
Displacement - doubled	8.44	8.50	-0.06
Displacement - halved	8.44	8.73	+0.29
Drop off – doubled	8.44	8.35	-0.05
Drop off – halved	8.44	8.81	+0.37

None of these tests indicate a very significant level of sensitivity to the changes but do create a ratio range of **£7.33 – £9.35**.

Recommendations

Throughout the report there are footnotes that highlight recommendations for future SROI and other evaluation work.

For ease of reference I have included them in a single summary, here:

1. The limitations laid out in this report have necessarily impacted upon full stakeholder segmentation and engagement. I strongly recommend a follow-up SROI in coming years (when Covid restrictions are not in place) so that more extensive stakeholder segmentation and engagement can be conducted.
2. Linked to the above point it is recommended that in future evaluation work women's experiences within the programme are more fully explored.
3. I recommend that the experience of families & dependents also be explored more fully when the situation allows.
4. I recommend that going forward RL retain and publish more data on beneficiaries that withdraw from the programme to aid improved understanding of how and when the programme works best.
5. The Life Circles referenced in the data sources and demonstrated in Appendix II offer a **potential** source of information for measuring depth in the experience of the direct beneficiaries going forward. They would need to be competed with a larger sample of beneficiaries to function as a measure of depth and I recommend the RL team discuss & determine an appropriate way forward on this issue with the evaluator.
6. I recommend using anchoring as a more suitable approach to valuing outcomes in future SROI analyses. (See Social Value International guidance documents.)
7. See Page 21 for a series of recommendations in regard to refining the calculation of deadweight, attribution, displacement, duration and drop-off in future SROI analyses.
8. The RL team do collect some quantitative and qualitative data around volunteer outputs and outcomes. I recommend gathering data on activity or 'input' as well in the future to account for that input using an appropriate financial proxy. This could be number of hours volunteered, for example.
9. Longer-term tracking of even a small sample of beneficiaries would of course be extremely informative. This kind of activity has been carried out in the past with some ex-beneficiaries that have remained part of the RL 'family' by staying in employment with the company. These stories are important and valid of course but they do invariably have a 'positive bias' built in. An exercise which actively seeks out beneficiaries that have not remained in close orbit of RL is therefore highly recommended to generate feedback on a broader range of experiences.

Survey Findings

Three online surveys were conducted by Nicola Lynch. There were 56 responses from staff and volunteers, 42 responses from Community Food Members and 22 responses from external stakeholders (including referring organisations).

Headlines from these surveys are included below for reference and the full data sets are held by the team at RL.

In addition to the information below some feedback was gathered on 'customer service' related issues and potential operational improvements. The team at RL will be acting on those findings and although they are out of scope for this piece of work they are happy to discuss those separately with anyone that is interested.

Staff & Volunteers

(56 responses)

How long have you worked for or volunteered with Recycling Lives?

Less than 12 months	37.5%
More than 3 years	37.5%
12 months – 3 years	25%

In one or two sentences describe what you think the purpose of Recycling Lives is?

There were 56 'open text' responses. Most suggested that the purpose of the charity was to **help ex-offenders return to employment and find accommodation**. 15 mentioned that it was to **help those in poverty**, specifically mentioning the aim of FareShare.

Which of the following outcomes do you think beneficiaries experience due to the support of Recycling Lives?

Improved self-confidence	66.67%
Increased sense of pride in self	55.56%
Improved mental health	55.56%
Reduced isolation	51.85%
All of the above	50%
Increased sense of control over their own lives	48.15%
Improved social relationships e.g friends and family	44.44%
Improved physical health	44.44%
Stabilised accommodation	38.89%
Stabilised financial position	38.89%
Improved management of addictions	35.19%
Improved access to other support services	33.33%
None of the above	1.85%

Please tell us which of the previous outcomes are most valued by the beneficiaries in your experience?

17 suggested **improved self-confidence, sense of pride and self-worth**. 16 people mentioned a **sense of control** in life and **financial stability**. Nine **said improved relationships** with family and friends. Eight said **improved mental and physical health**.

Do you think Recycling Lives should always offer support to beneficiaries that have moved on from their initial period of support?

70.37% said yes, 24.07% said they don't know and only 5.56% said no.

Do you think Recycling Lives has an impact on the wider community?

85.19% said yes, 14.81% said they don't know and 0% said no.

External stakeholders

(22 responses)

What is your connection to Recycling Lives?

Delivery partner	18.18%
Commissioner or Local Authority	9.09%
Funder/donor	4.55%
Referring agent	4.55%
Supplier	0%

There were also 14 open text responses:

Prison service	50%
Drug and alcohol service	7.14%
The Corbett Network	7.14%
Employers Forum for Reducing Reoffending (EFFRR)	7.14%
Recruiter of ex-offenders	7.14%
Business with mutual interests	7.14%
Employer	7.14%

What do you think the overall aim of Recycling Lives is?

There were 22 open text responses. Nearly all mentioned **helping ex-offenders gain employment and find accommodation**. Four added to help them **rebuild their lives/offer them a second chance**. Three added **distribution of food** to low income families. Two said to **reduce reoffending rates**.

Which of the following outcomes do you think beneficiaries achieve as a result of their support from Recycling Lives?

Improved self-confidence	4.55%
Stabilised financial position	4.55%
Improved mental health	0%
Improved physical health	0%
Stabilised accommodation	0%
Reduced isolation	0%
Increased sense of control	0%
Improved relationships	0%
Increased sense of pride	0%
All of the above	90.91%

Do you think Recycling Lives works well with delivery partners and referring agents?

90% said yes and 10% said they don't know

Does the work delivered by Recycling Lives support you in the achievement of your own organisational outcomes?

90% said yes and 10% said they don't know.

Community Food Members

(42 responses)

How would you describe your organisation?

Voluntary community group or venue	47.62%
Charity or social enterprise	40.48%
School	14.29%

There were also two other responses - one specified Church and one said Not for Profit Community Interest Company.

How would you describe the main aims of your food service provision?

Feeding people experiencing food insecurity or poverty	93.75%
Avoiding food waste	59.38%
Bringing communities (or groups within communities) together	37.50%
Meeting urgent basic needs other than food – e.g getting people help that are experiencing homelessness or other crisis conditions	9.38%
Offering leisure activities	3.13%

There were also two other responses. One said to **save on grocery costs of running a charitable nursery** and one noted that it was to **encourage people to eat more fruit and veg.**

Do any of the following statements apply to your organisation?

We save money that we can reinvest for our beneficiaries	50%
We save time for other tasks because we are not struggling to source food	40.63%
We access a better variety of food	37.50%
We can meet other needs among our beneficiaries because the provision of food is undertaken by FareShare	28.13%
We access better quality food	21.88%
None of the above	6.25%

There were also three other responses. One said that the need to purchase food from busy shops has been reduced as part of the Covid-19 strategy. One said **we help our community to afford food and to budget.** Another stated that the Fareshare provision isn't consistent and that other providers supply more fruit and veg.

Does the work delivered by FareShare support you in the achievement of your own organisational outcomes?

Yes	37.50%
No	9.38%
I don't know	6.25%

There were also an added 15 responses. Seven mentioned **helping low-income families** in particular. Two mentioned **reducing carbon emissions and waste.** Two said **managing budget.** The rest of the responses included **caring for the vulnerable, fulfilling corporate social responsibilities, accessing food from various sources** and one mentioned that food parcels go out for over 200 people a week. One said that they have been able to maintain and improve fresh food contents of parcels without increasing food costs in store, however the quality and quantity has noticeably reduced over recent months.

What impact do you think the work of FareShare has on the wider community?

There were 29 'open text' responses. 13 skipped. 12 people stated that the **stigma surrounding food poverty is reduced.** 11 mentioned **environmental benefits of reducing food waste,** 11 also mentioned that low-income families in the community benefit from this service. Two stated **reduced isolation for the elderly.** One suggested that people feel they have a **purpose (helping the environment)** as well as benefitting themselves. One mentioned the lack of transparency as many who donate believe it is going to their local foodbank, which affects direct donations to small, independent food banks. One said that the wider community is unaware that FareShare exists.

Questions

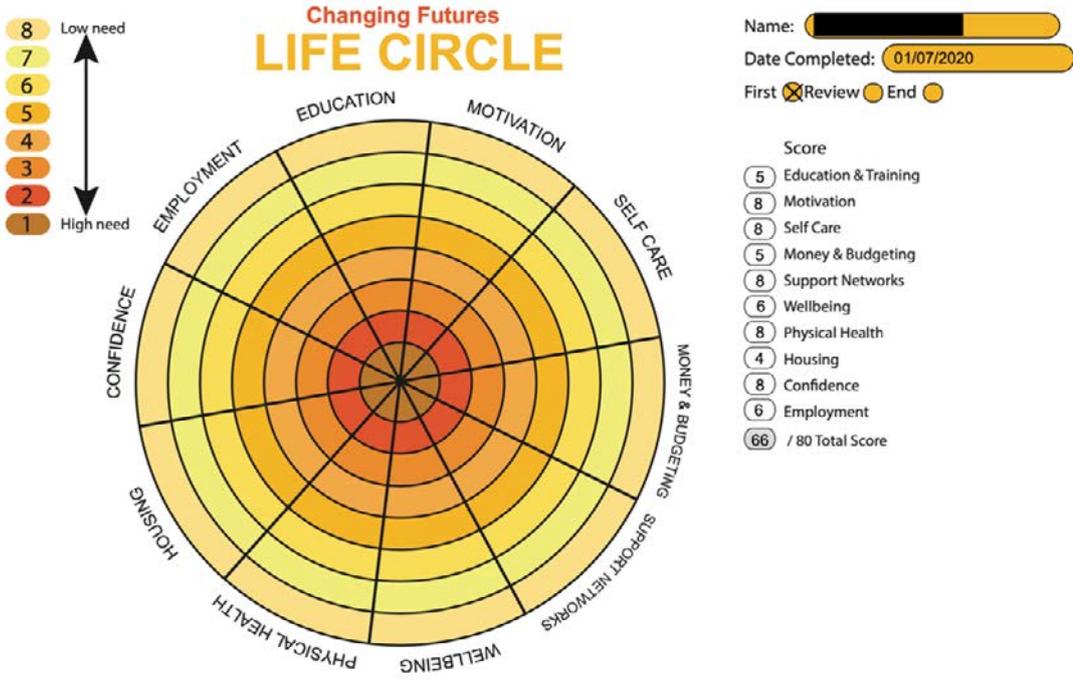
Samples of things referenced in the report:

Question check list for beneficiary conversations

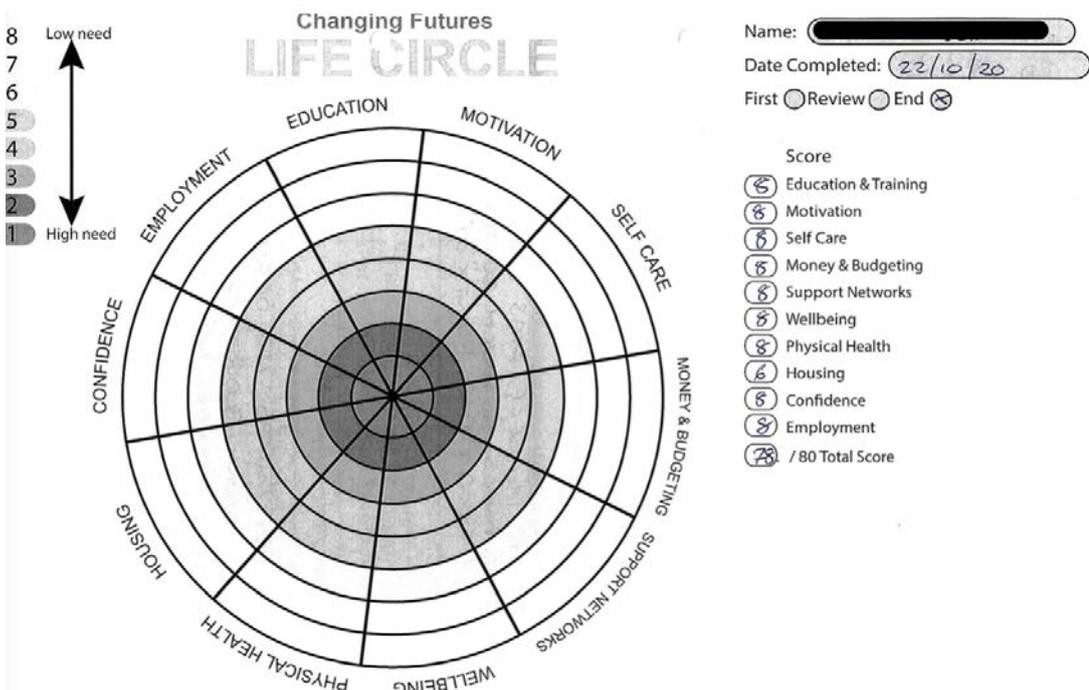
- *How are you involved with Recycling Lives?*
- *What has changed for you in *the last year*? (identify timeframe/use anchor point – e.g think about where you were at Christmas last year? Do not mention RL specifically in this question)*
- *What is different now?*
 - *What do you do differently now?*
 - *Do you feel differently now?*
- *Has anything negative or unexpected happened?*
- *I've made some notes of the changes we have talked about so far but just to make sure I have got them right - and using your own words not mine - could you summarise for me your three most important changes?*
 - *What order would you put them in?*
 - *If needed - tell me a bit more about what matters most to you and why?*
- *Did anyone else help you make these changes apart from the team at RL?*
- *Where do you think you would be/what would you be doing now if you weren't working with RL?*
 - *Did you give anything up to work with RL? Have you had similar support from somewhere else?*
- *Where do you think you'll be a year from now? How will some of the changes we've talked about grow or develop further? Do you think anything of the changes will 'stop' or fade away in the future?*
- *Do you know anyone else that has experienced change as a result of RL's work?*

Life Circle example

Self-scoring conducted at the beginning of the intervention:



And repeated at the end of the intervention:



Case study example

Taken from Recycling Lives Charity's Impact Report 2020/21

“This food’s better in a belly than in the bin.”

“We started our first food pantry about three years ago. We did a pilot and it was very successful. Well, we couldn’t just stop then - people were still going to be hungry.

“We’d just opened a second pantry in 2020 when Covid hit. We knew more people would need help.

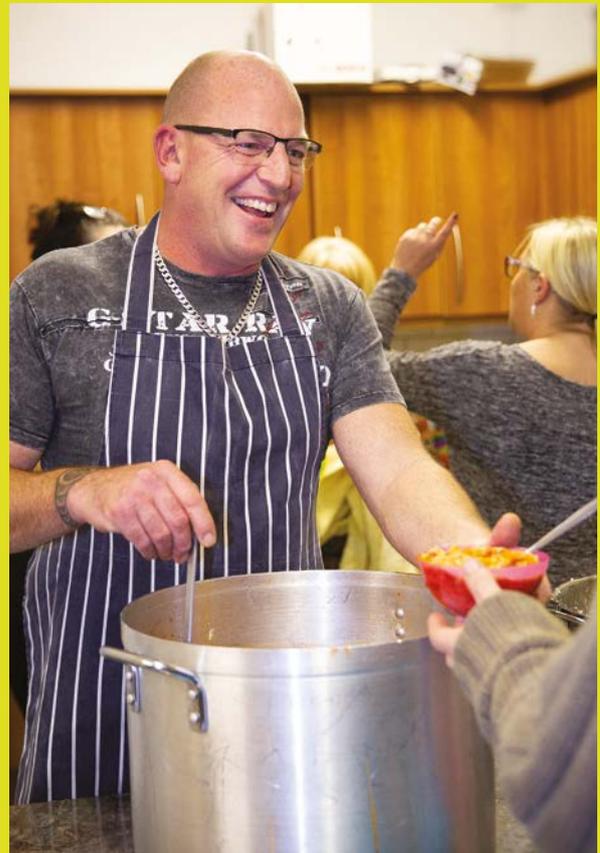
“We helped a massive range of people – families on low-incomes, pensioners who couldn’t get out to the shops.

“I’d get regular phonecalls from people who were desperate. We’ve got a good network of organisations who can refer people to us and there’s not the same bureaucracy so we can go and help people out, no questions asked. It’s just done quietly.

“It’s about providing people with some security so they’re not going to bed on an empty stomach.

“It’s humbling to be able to help people but also concerning when there’s so much need.”

Antony McGuckin, Vice President
Workington Derwent Rotary Club



“The food was vital for us to help families in crisis.”

“When Covid arrived, it was a nightmare. There was a period where we had to buy food vouchers for families out of our own budget.

“Around half of our pupils are eligible for free school meals and a lot of our parents worked in the gig economy, are low paid workers, on zero hours contracts or are single parents. We had a lot of families losing low paid employment or having to self-isolate.

“The Food Redistribution Centre gave us a really substantial amount of food that meant we could give our families an opportunity to fill the cupboards.”

Cheryl Taylor, Headteacher
Grange School, Preston

“Being with Recycling Lives was a big part of my recovery.”

“I loved it in the workshop. I was promoted to orderly, passed my fork-lift truck licence and got my Level 2s in maths and English.

“Before jail my bipolar was really bad. I was really unwell but I started using drugs and then I kept getting sectioned.

“Then I woke up in jail.

“I knew I had to ask for help and work on myself so my life could be different.

“I was able to achieve that with Recycling Lives' help.

“I started to feel good about myself from working. And if I hadn't worked there, I wouldn't have been able to answer any of the questions in my job interview when I got out.

“I could talk about the importance of PPE, experiences of working in a team, helping other people to do their jobs and overcoming problems.

“Now I'm in a job and I'm achieving all my goals.”

Kayleigh – HMP Styal





“They showed me the light at the end of the tunnel.”

“I was homeless for three years – just living in a tent. I never begged, never stole, I just had Universal Credit.

“One day I bought a phone and started talking to my sister again and eventually she got me into the charity.

“I’d asked for help before but when you’re put in a place with people who are using drugs it’s no good. I wanted to sort my head out - I wanted to help myself.

“The other lads in the residential, they want that too, so it’s a good atmosphere.

“It showed me it was possible to get back to where I’d been before.

“I had everything – my own home, a girlfriend and kids, a car, a good job. I had it good. But it all deteriorated because of drugs.

“The experience in the residential is what you make of it. The team are amazing in what they’ll do for you, but they can’t do it all for you. I kept my head down and good things have come my way.

“Now I’ve got a home, a job and a girlfriend. And I’m back in contact with my children and my mum and dad.

“I just wanted my life back and that’s what I’ve got.”

Martin - Resident

Value Map

The value map is an Excel document that is either attached to this document or can be provided on request.

SOCIAL VALUE

INTERNATIONAL

Statement of Report Assurance

Social Value International certifies that the report
**Recycling Lives Charity - Social Return on
Investment analysis**

published on 27/01/22, satisfies the requirements of the assurance process.

The assurance process seeks to assess whether or not a report demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of, and is consistent with, the Principles of Social Value. Reports are independently reviewed by qualified assessors and must demonstrate compliance with the Social Value report assurance standard in order to be certified. The Social Value report assurance standard can be downloaded from the website socialvalueint.org.

Assurance here is against the Principles of Social Value only and does not include verification of stakeholder engagement, report data and calculations.

Awarded 27/01/22

Signed 

Mr Ben Carpenter
Chief Executive Officer
Social Value International



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