

4 different examples of alac in practice *continued*

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Mental illness is a very individual thing – that could be too narrow. More sharing of experiences enables more powerful storytelling ... Mental health is such a hidden thing in society and people don't talk about it..... wider space for sharing feelings – but an organised experience, not random

ALAC Participant

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2.3 Becoming an active citizen – New Arrival Communities

Participants

New arrival communities were identified as a key target group from the outset. Originally referred to in the bid as 'migrant workers', the participants' preferred to adopt the phrase 'new arrival communities' to better reflect their situation.

Promoting and Outreach / Engagement Process

Unlike the voluntary sector organisations that were already active participants in the Lincolnshire Citizenship Network the individuals we were hoping to enrol from new arrival communities were not engaged with the University at the start of the project. Through a process of meeting and talking to individuals about their situations and learning interests the Project Manager developed a 'curriculum' of provision. New Arrivals, were not a particular group at the start of the project. This group grew by word of mouth, through networks of friends and work colleagues of the individuals we first contacted. However, by the end of the project it has proved to be the largest group in terms of participants and numbers of learning hours undertaken. It has also created some very tangible new opportunities for those involved. Engagement has been through organised learning opportunities – organised primarily through the University.

These have included:

➤ English language tutoring coupled with civic engagement learning

➤ Radio production training (in partnership with Siren FM)

Due to the prior work commitments of many of these individuals much of this activity goes on 'out-of-hours' at evenings and weekends.

Course content or forms of experiential learning

This project has supported more than 30 learners from the Polish community to reflect and develop their experiences of being citizens in Lincolnshire and to develop their capacity to be active citizens and engage in the community. This 'curriculum' of provision has been developed around the theme of active citizenship and meets the distinct needs of these learners. It includes ESOL training, production of a weekly community radio programme from SIREN FM and employment/skills support. Members of the New Arrivals group have created a social enterprise as part of this project and advice and support has been co-ordinated to develop this.

Reflective Practice

Maintaining activity in Polish by the group as well as developing understanding of English language and life in the UK, has enabled participants to reach a Polish audience about engaging in UK civil and civic society. The Christmas markets, January Sales and Polish elections have all provided reason to reflect on a wide variety of citizenship issues whilst English for Speakers of Other Languages was assessed by tests taken at both entry and advanced levels.

Specific Learning Needs & Barriers to Participation

This group of learners presented distinct learning needs. Providing learning spaces required a flexible response to provision that took in changing shift patterns and other changes in personal circumstances. It also needed to take into account the related skills development needs and the employment barriers caused by being a new arrival.

4 different examples of alac in practice *continued*

In particular, the project offered ESOL activities coupled to civic engagement learning, CV development, support for improving the quality of employment and specific technical skills – e.g. radio production.

Active Citizenship Focus

This activity has taken the concept of “VOICE” very literally and has developed the idea of active citizenship learning through ESOL and other activities (most notably through training and support to produce radio programmes with Siren FM). The combination of improving English skills, providing a voice (in Polish) to/for the community and the content of the programming (to include issues of governance, life in the UK and cohesion issues) has been very fruitful and has led to the establishment of a social enterprise to continue this activity in a community-owned manner. It is highly relevant that “Voice.PI – Lincolnshire Polish Association” has been the name chosen by the group for their new enterprise.

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How do we hear the voices of those that don't shout loudest?

ALAC Participant //

Headline reflections

Social change / justice

- Promote social solidarity to strengthen communities
- Enable people to know their rights and find their voice

Inclusion / participation

- Informal Learning for new arrivals
- University links – meeting/production space, identity as students / informal learning
- Encourage excluded groups to engage in public life
- ESOL tests – entry level and 3 Advanced English tests

Challenging inequalities

- Active Citizenship (& cohesion) through ESOL+
- Employment support / support to create/maintain a social enterprise

Promoting diversity

- Active voices – Creation of Voice.PI Lincolnshire Polish Association
- Regular Polish broadcast – linked to issues of citizenship and identity

Lessons for the future

Provision of active learning for active citizenship for migrant workers (hereafter referred to as new arrival communities) highlighted the importance of another concept of active citizenship – that of providing learners with opportunities to have a stronger voice. Working with EU residents from Eastern Europe (mostly Polish residents in Lincoln) provided the project an opportunity to explore issues of citizenship, identity and life in the UK. Creating provision to meet the groups situated learning needs through civic learning was found to be a powerful and popular combination (e.g. providing support for career development or advice on social enterprises as well as ESOL with civic engagement). Delivering active learning for active citizenship with this learner group also requires the provider to be flexible and provide activities in the evenings and weekends to fit around learners work commitments.

Outputs and Outcomes

This part of the project has created an opportunity to explore people's experiences and to see how new arrivals could become more active citizens – i.e. understanding and engaging in UK civil and civic society. Whilst some learners enrolled for ESOL and Citizenship sessions only, most went on to be engaged in the creation of the radio programme and this core group see the activity as much more than simply language or radio development alone. The project worked in partnership with Siren.FM, a community radio station based at the University and a core group of learners have developed a regular programme in Polish and set up a social enterprise ‘Voice.PI - Lincolnshire Polish Association’ to help sustain and support their activities supporting the Eastern European community.