

case study 3

Community Project Managers

One of the ways that ALAC has been engaging with the community is by its involvement with a group of community project managers. These people represent a wide cross section of organisations and groups which, in various ways, help to build active citizenship in the region. Each group or organisation assists people who, in a specific way, are hard to reach in mainstream formal education. ALAC has invited the project managers to share their experiences, discussing local community concerns, stories, expectations and good practices, especially with regard to the learning they have encouraged, promoted and provided in the community, which enables local people to develop their citizenship skills, knowledge and understanding. They have built connections, or bridges, between individual learners and community groups and organisations, they have empowered individuals and groups to interact with the decision-making process, and they have assisted vulnerable and unrepresented groups to have a voice in the community.

The ALAC hub has facilitated the growth of good work practices alongside COMPACT development. ALAC has enabled and facilitated a clearer vision for the group and the principles and codes that COMPACT is promoting.

Dawn Rennie

Extracts from Participants' Comments

ALAC has given to the Mental Health Service User and Carer Involvement and Development Project (based at the Community Council of Lincolnshire), the valuable tool of reflection amongst peers to enable a 360° view of the project aims and goals. It has enabled the project manager to define best practices and also increased morale as it has enabled her to see how much the project has achieved.

Rebecca Dray

CALL Advocacy in Lincolnshire has become more involved in the Citizenship agenda because of the ALAC process and now feels it has a much more realistic view of how advocacy fits into citizenship / developing communities. The ALAC conversations have allowed participants to explore and evaluate each others projects, thereby being critical friends and learning new techniques from each other.

Liz Ash

By discussing and analysing the Value Added's project methods, in comparison to other projects in the county, we have been able, through ALAC participation, to pool expertise, familiarise ourselves with different working practices and consider the differing needs of the diverse Lincolnshire communities.

Thomasi Alsop



case study 3.1

Involvement and Development (ID) - Mental Health

One of the projects working with the ALAC Lincolnshire/ East Midlands hub is the Involvement and Development project, which is funded by the Lincolnshire Partnership Trust and based at the Community Council of Lincolnshire. The ID project supports those who have had mental health treatment, people in recovery and their families and supporters, and members of the wider community, to be more involved in local service delivery, design and planning, interacting with the NHS trust, and learning from this process of interaction. The project aims to reduce the isolation and powerlessness of people with mental illness and their supporters by enabling them to influence the services and care they receive and to take charge of their own recovery.

By giving them the confidence, knowledge and structure to have a voice, the ID Project has created a two-way dialogue between the local health trust and its users.

The facilitators are providing the space to enable the learners to link to mental health services within the county and across the wider region. Service users and carers in Lincolnshire can now get involved in a variety of ways. This has led to local resolution of issues and a better understanding on both sides about the real situation on the ground for people in receipt of services.

The project has set up, and supports people to join, one of three local service user and carer run mental health forums. Each forum moves around to different locations in its area to ensure as many people as possible are able to get involved. The forums now visit eleven market towns and villages in the county.

A second way for service users and carers to get involved is to talk about their views, experiences and ideas on an interactive, information sharing website www.linkingvoices.org.uk. The proof was self evident from day one, as the popularity of the website was staggering. It had over 8,000 hits and gathered around 1,000 regular users in its first four months of operation.

The project also provides small grants to independent mental health support groups in Lincolnshire to help with costs that are traditionally hard to get support for, for example ongoing revenue expenditure, transport costs etc. This money has proved to be a lifeline for some small groups who struggle to keep going due to lack of funding.

The project has created a sustainable communication process, so that even after the involvement of the project is complete, the users of the service can continue to influence their service provider's policies in a constructive way.



Approaches to Good Practices:

- Enabling the group to identify its learning needs
- Planning how to achieve aims together with the group
- Identifying barriers for people's participation, and working around them - e.g. moving a meeting's location each month/providing support with transport
- Allowing for different ways for people to access the group
- Recognising that attitudes to learning may have to be addressed
- Building an atmosphere of free and open discussion. Establishing trust and a good relationship with the group
- Using a variety of techniques other than simply group discussion
- Retaining an outsider's viewpoint in group discussions as the facilitator
- Keeping integrity to the aims of the project
- Assisting the group to set its own priorities and become independent
- Giving the group the confidence to have a say in how it works with local statutory bodies

case study 3.2

CALL Advocacy in Lincolnshire



Everyone, at some time in their lives, may have felt powerless as a result of difficult circumstances. Advocacy supports people in these times of need and enables people to get what they are entitled to. More importantly, the process of advocacy empowers people and builds confidence, so that many are able to deal better with situations they might experience in the future.

CALL Advocacy in Lincolnshire is a charity providing free and independent advocacy to people in Lincolnshire. Advocacy gives people a voice to get their views heard and their choices respected. It gives individuals the ability and the confidence to achieve the outcomes they desire, supports them in achieving their rights and enables people to live with dignity.

Advocacy helps people speak up for themselves and challenges social exclusion at the ground level. Advocates do not give advice, but provide independent, conflict-free support to the individual in obtaining advice and support.

The support given depends on the issue. But in principle, advocates work alongside their clients, helping them to follow processes that will allow them to help themselves. We always allow the client to decide what level of support they require. On many occasions, clients build more self-confidence through the process. But in other cases, clients will need support again in the future.

What has been done - an example

A local hospital referred a lady to CALL. She was 40 years old, and had mental and physical health problems and learning difficulties. The lady had the additional complications of having children in care who were awaiting adoption, and having a violent ex-partner who was bailed on remand for his violence towards her.

CALL was asked to help to re-house her as her previous accommodation was unsuitable for her return. On the advocate's initial visit it became obvious that there were several other issues.

- She had not seen her children for two months due to her being in hospital.
- Her landlord had given her 8 weeks' notice to leave her home.
- Despite her various difficulties, none were classed as serious enough for her to be allocated a Social Worker. The County Council had been informed but it seemed that she had 'slipped through the net'.
- There seemed to be various organisations involved and they were failing to communicate with each other.
- She had no family or friends who could help her in any way. Even her neighbours were elderly and unwell.

The advocate worked with the client and it was agreed that the immediate priority was to re-establish contact with the children. The hospital staff confirmed that she could leave the ward to visit the contact centre.

case study 3.2

The advocate spoke to the children's Social Worker. It was found that the Social Worker had only very recently been informed that the lady was in hospital and had believed that she had chosen not to visit the children. Due to the advocate's intervention, contact with her children was resumed. The advocate then arranged for her to be granted a social worker.

The advocate spoke to the landlord and the local social housing group in her area. It was established that the housing group would put the lady on the emergency housing list, on the condition that the landlord re-wrote the terms of notice in the correct fashion.

The advocate spoke to all other organisations involved in the lady's care, including the neighbours, the Women's Centre and the solicitor, making them aware of her involvement. As a result, everybody started working together in order to help this lady.

After a few weeks the ex-partner was released from bail and returned to the family home, against the wishes of the lady and her landlord. He began writing to her and was reported to be removing bin bags from the house. The lady decided she would prefer to move to a house in a different area.

The advocate spoke to the Homeless Department at the local council and ascertained that due to her violent partner and physical difficulties she could be re-housed in the locality. The advocate gathered evidence to support the move from all other organisations involved and filled in the application with the lady, who subsequently moved into a ground floor flat in the area of her choice.



Outcomes

As in many cases, in this example, the issue that caused the client to be referred to CALL Advocacy was a minor one in comparison to the other problems this lady was encountering. The advocate's intervention acted as a catalyst in making real progress, in that she gathered all relevant information from all the organisations involved, meaning that she became the only fully informed person on the case. This enabled her to act on behalf of the lady, and to ensure that all organisations were kept up to date.

This ultimately led to the resolution of all issues. At the heart of the advocacy process is facilitating a process so that people are more aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. This can only be done by working with people where they feel most comfortable and giving them the skills to deal with issues better.

Approaches to Good Practices:

- Working with individuals where they feel most comfortable
- Building trust by showing empathy for the client's situation, and by calling back when promised and maintaining professionalism at all times
- Being flexible in the time allocated to each person
- Communicating issues and good practices to the national level, especially issues specific to rural areas
- Highlighting trends, poor policies and missing services to the authority responsible
- Working in partnership with local infrastructure organisations and other networks and institutions

case study 3.3

Value Added (Lincolnshire and Rutland Learning Partnership)

In recent years, there has been an increase in attention on the need to provide training and development to the voluntary sector. In particular, the following needs have been identified:

- The need for a change in approach to the valuing of skills development and access to opportunities.
- The need for organisations in the sector to develop robust, operational structures to improve organisation and ensure quality delivery.
- The need for workers' and volunteers' skill-bases to widen beyond their immediate work practices and to cover other areas – such as transferable skills and opportunities for cascade learning.
- The need for the sector to embrace the culture of income diversification in a manner which is sensitive to the make-up and operations of the sector. This change needs to be delivered in a way that is meaningful and inspiring.

In February 2004, the Lincolnshire Voluntary Sector Consortium was formed to help build the capacity of voluntary organisations in the county, in line with national strategy. As a result, research was carried out and part of this was to identify training needs in the community and voluntary sector. The results and recommendations of this research formed the basis of the Value Added project.

Previously, the sector had a piecemeal approach to its learning and skills development activity – there was no coordinated strategy across the sector, as there is for other business sectors. Training and development were traditionally low priorities for the sector, with funding for core activities often limited to minimal expense.

The aims and focus of Value Added and this project were: organisational development, workforce development and learning and skills advice within the Voluntary and Community Sector.

The importance of working with Organisations is increasingly relevant as communities form groups and organisations that enable them to fill gaps in service, respond to their own local needs and formalise their activities. Supporting these community led structures to develop their activities with local, regional and national agendas means that communities can have a greater level of influence over policy. In response, local authorities and funding bodies are able to work more effectively with well structured, developed and flexible organisations, in order to meet their agenda's and to access harder to reach communities. Although Value Added finished in September 2006 as a result of the Lincolnshire and Rutland Learning Partnership closure, it is hoped that the provision will be continued in recognition of Voluntary Sector needs.

This service was possible due to funding from Lincolnshire Enterprise and the Learning and Skills Council. Project funding of this nature meant the service has been delivered free of charge to beneficiary organisations, enabling an equality of service and an opportunity of development for organisations / groups of all sizes and stages of development.

This project enables a longer term vision towards formalised learning, through engaging organisations in development opportunities and working together to fulfil learning needs on a group and individual basis. The longer-term vision of this project is to develop a learning consortium.

What has been done - an example

An example of our work is a recent project with a local disability forum, a network of organisations that meet to act as a united voice for disability issues in the area.

The Workforce Development Adviser, representing Value Added, was invited to work with the group as an outsider, to assist the group to:

- identify its purpose. The group's members were concerned that the forum was becoming a 'talking shop' and was losing its direction.
- identify a structure to ensure that the identified purpose can be achieved effectively.
- work towards sustainability, to ensure that the purpose and established structure can be effective over the long term.

case study 3.3

How did we do this specifically?

- Our advisor facilitated an action planning session that allowed individuals to identify their own views on what the priorities of the forum were. She then put these views into a group priority list, on an interactive timeline. For each aim contributed by individuals, the group discussed its priority, its appropriateness and how realistic it was.
- The next stage was, as a committee, to convert this wall-based timeline into a paper-based action plan that can be used throughout the group's development.
- We then compiled a summary of the roles required within the group - through a skills audit of the individuals within the groups. Group members volunteered and nominated appropriate people for the roles.
- It was then appropriate to discuss the group's training needs and interests. Our advisor gave assistance on Workforce Development opportunities and Learning and Skills opportunities.
- The adviser worked with the group to establish the importance of looking into the future and planning.

Outcomes

We decided to do this because:

- we wanted to support people individually and contribute to their development
- we wanted to support the development of the whole group
- we wanted to benefit the wider community through an improved service, made possible by a more effective organisation



As a result of this:

- The forum became more aware of who made up the group, their needs and interests.
- The forum is made up of organisations which work in relation to disability issues. The group decided that each organisation would make an effort to introduce a member of their community to the forum, to ensure that the forum is more representative.

To do this it was agreed that current forum members would accompany individuals to the meetings until the individuals felt they were in a position to represent their views and the views of the organisation they were attached to.

- It was recognised that although the forum met regularly it had little structure or sense of shared responsibility. A lot of the responsibility rested on a small number of attendees. To overcome this the group identified different roles (such as chair person, treasurer, secretariat, minute taker) and organisations volunteered to ensure that role was fulfilled.
- The forum recognised that they are increasingly responding to statutory sector consultation and working together with local authority organisations. Whilst this was recognised as a positive, it was also acknowledged that this consultation had to be conducted appropriately.

Approaches to Good Practices:

- Establishing together what needs to be done to achieve these goals
- Being neutral, and not being influenced by one person more than others
- Encouraging the participants to lead and steer discussions
- Ensuring all who want to have their say; avoiding domination by one or more members
- Using a variety of techniques in group discussions, e.g. verbal, visual and interactive methods of communicating and sharing views
- Focusing on outcomes. Ensuring that the group has goals to work towards and that progress towards these goals is reviewed, and findings are acted on appropriately

case study 3.4

Interpreting and Translation Project

Integration Lincolnshire exists to promote social integration by facilitating co-operation between organisations and people that provide services to New Arrival Communities.

Within Integration Lincolnshire, the most successful part of its work to engage newly arrived communities is the Interpreting and Translation project. In line with the principles of Learning for Active Citizenship, it seeks to help:

- (a) individuals within communities to communicate,
- (b) communities to develop through shared experiences and
- (c) the identification and recognition of the “voice” of such communities through advocacy and representation.

Due to issues with the working conditions and the social welfare of economic migrants, mainly from Portugal and the 8 accession states (such as Poland, Latvia and Lithuania), there was a necessity for an unprecedented increase in the use of Interpreting and Translation, I&T, services in several languages “new” (at least on this scale) to the county.

Constraints on the use of such services were:

- Prohibitive costs
- Shortage of certain languages
- Use of translators/interpreters who had no appreciation of local circumstances
- Uncoordinated services
- Lack of quality control
- Lack of appreciation of when a translator/interpreter was needed

Initially, Interpreting and Translation was identified by the IL membership as a priority area. With no funds to resource it, the project has taken opportunities wherever they have presented themselves.

The project has been mentioned in every meeting and forum possible. Local District Councils and the Lincolnshire Criminal Justice Board - representing Courts, Police, Probation, Prisons, Crown Prosecution and Youth offending Services - have become involved with the project’s development.

Within the project, several clear strands are emerging, namely training of translators/interpreters, updating of course modules, research into needs/gaps, and development of a social enterprise. The aspect of the project that directly engages the migrant worker communities is the training of the translators and interpreters.



case study 3.4

Setting up the project

Interpreters need not only linguistic skills, but an ability to balance the requirements of sensitivities and ethical issues with their core roles. Therefore the desired qualities of interpreters and translators are:

- Proficiency/ fluency in English and other language
- Interpersonal skills
- Ability to advocate, and to deal with tension and conflict
- Ability to remain neutral
- Meeting certain quality standards in translating/ interpreting
- Confidentiality
- Meeting the criteria for entry onto the national register for public service interpreters.

The project was initiated by advertising within migrant communities, inviting people to come forward to undertake a basic introductory course in interpreting and translating and in primary health services, housing, benefits and education.

Applicants were from a range of countries: Portuguese and Polish migrants in the main, and some Russians and Latvians. 14 applicants were assessed (by telephone) as having the desired competencies and chosen to undertake the training. Local partners such as Boston College delivered parts of the process, such as some of the training.

A key part of the appeal of this process is that the interpreters and translators are encouraged to work directly with other migrants to help them to become active citizens.



Approaches to Good Practices:

- Researching the exact requirements before commencing the project: find what the users expect from the service
- Bringing together all the stakeholders to work on the plan
- Providing training and employment opportunities for individuals who can then become more involved in their communities
- Utilising the enthusiasm and commitment of the trained interpreters in other ways besides their standard job specification e.g. are they willing to work in other ways with different elements of their community?
- Avoiding pre-judging and making assumptions: these residents are very willing to be active participants in their community
- Learning from already-existing models of this type of service provision, especially with similar geography and origin of migrants
- Having the values of kinship with the stranger and empathy with the outsider.
- Ensuring inequalities are challenged.

case study 3.5

Lincoln Rural Stress Network (LRSN)

In the midst of a changing rural community throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, farmers have shown a dramatic decline in numbers as a proportion of the rural sector, particularly in the unsubsidized sectors of dairy, pig, and chicken farming and vegetable producers. Subsidies in other elements of agriculture, such as the arable sector, are not always on the large scale that the media portrays. Over 85,000 farmers and farm workers have left the industry in 5 years. There are important questions to be asked as to how this has affected social cohesion in the rural environment. Farming has a consistently higher suicide rate than all other types of employment.

The Lincolnshire Rural Stress Network was formed in this background, with a determination to inform and educate people about mental well-being, the effects and causes of stress and how to alleviate the symptoms.

The simple vision is:

“A healthier and happier rural community in Lincolnshire.”

The network’s mission statement is:

“To harness the human and financial resources available to improve the social and mental well-being of individuals in rural Lincolnshire.”

The Lincolnshire Farmers’ Support Group was formed in 1999, as a sub-section of the LRSN, to assist the Lincolnshire Agricultural Chaplain in his role. A voluntary group of twenty people now form a listening service that will signpost to key agencies according to needs identified. A number of the volunteers are willing to go on to the farms for visits.



The organisation went through a range of difficulties. Initially there were financial difficulties with the agency that provided the project manager, which compelled the group reluctantly to separate itself from that agency. Funding the charity has always been a challenge; though Lloyds TSB was generous in the first instance, and later a DEFRA grant has allowed the group to sustain a Project Manager.

Over the past year, the trustees have spent time learning and seeking advice, to help the organisation to become more focused and to clarify its governance structure. We have become less functional and more proactive, able to take the initiative independently of external providers of funding. We now have a clearer view of why we exist and how we are going to react to the needs in our community.

The Samaritans have conducted the core training with specific emphasis on active listening skills and confidentiality and reporting protocols. Role-play and team skills have engendered confidence and enthusiasm amongst the group. A dedicated telephone hotline has been launched, and the group is marketing and publicising the service with the help of certain key members of the voluntary team. The Network is also expanding the service to sparsely populated regions of the county.

Becoming embedded in the community, and creating solutions from the locality, appears to be the best way forward. The group uses a participatory method of teaching, and uses an initially small group to expand the network over a period of weeks. These are still the early stages of this process, but first indications from participants are very positive.

Approaches to Good Practices:

- Learning within the organisation is vital. There was a need to challenge the trustees to learn new skills beyond the private sector.
- Using the volunteers’ own suggestions and ideas to explore new ways of communicating.
- Wherever the needs exist in the community, projects such as this need to reach them, regardless of distance or rural isolation.
- If a central call centre is used, volunteers need to be available to respond in whichever locality is required.