

Help In A Box



Commissioning Learning and Skills From the Voluntary Sector

**Produced by LEARN East as part of the Engage and Enable
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1. Introduction to Help in a Box

The Help in a Box resource is designed to help you, as the Commissioner or Prime Contractor know as much as you can about the voluntary sector and what it can offer you in the delivery of learning and skills across the Eastern Region.

This document partners the “Help in a Box – Commissioning Learning and Skills from the Voluntary Sector” resource, which should be sitting on your desk right now, ready to help you through the process of working with the voluntary sector to achieve the best possible outcomes for learners in your area.

This resource tells you more about:

- The voluntary sector – What it is, where to find it and how it can help you;
- The benefits and strengths of the voluntary sector in working with the hardest to reach learners;
- How to get the best out of your commissioning relationship with the sector;
- Other sources of help and support in working with the sector, and
- Sign posting to more information.

It explains how the voluntary sector is particularly good at reaching some of those groups which are the hardest to reach, and includes a range of examples and case studies which we hope will demonstrate just how good the sector is at delivering learning and skills to some of these groups.

2. About Learn EAST

Learn EAST is a network of six county-based learning consortia and partnerships, covering the East of England joined by COVER, the representative body for the voluntary and community sector in the region. Each Learn EAST member brings together a wide range of voluntary sector learning providers within its network. Learn EAST provides stakeholders, such as prime contract holders, with a single point of contact from which to engage the voluntary sector. The network also provides its membership of providers with relevant, up-to-date information about developments in the Learning and Skills sector.

Learn EAST members:

- GET Group – Cambridgeshire
- Hertfordshire Training and Development Consortium (HTDC)
- Learning Partnership – Luton & Bedfordshire
- Norfolk Unites - Norfolk
- Suffolk Learning Consortium - Suffolk
- Voluntary Sector Training – Essex
- COVER – Eastern Region

Commissioning Learning and Skills from the Voluntary Sector

This resource has been developed as part of the Engage and Enable Project, funded by the European Social Fund, and delivered by Learn EAST.

For more information on all of the members, and links to their websites, please visit the Learn EAST website at www.learneast.org.uk, or:

- The Get Group website can be found at www.getgroup.org.uk
- The HTDC website can be found at www.htdc.org.uk
- The Learning Partnership can be found at www.learningcommunities.org.uk
- The Norfolk Unite website can be found at www.norfolkunites.org.uk
- Suffolk Learning Consortium's website can be found at www.suffolklearningconsortium.org.uk
- The Voluntary Sector Training website can be found at www.voluntarysectortraining.org.uk
- COVER's website can be found at www.cover-east.org

3. What is the Voluntary Sector?

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) defines a voluntary organisation as:

“An independent, self-governing body of people who have joined together voluntarily to take action for the benefit of the community...(it) may employ paid staff or volunteers, but must be established otherwise than for financial gain”.

The National Audit Office (NAO) defines the voluntary sector as:

“...The range of institutions which occupy the space between the State and the private sector. These include small local community and voluntary groups, registered charities both large and small, foundations, trusts and the growing number of social enterprises and co-operatives.”

And that:

“The primary requirement for a 3rd Sector organisation is that it principally reinvests any financial surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives that bring about a significant community benefit.”

In addition, the NAO publication “Hearts and Minds – Commissioning from the Voluntary Sector” identifies that the voluntary sector has 3 distinct groupings, each with a different perspective on, and a different capacity for, service delivery:

- Small, volunteer-only, community-based groups that are providing specific services on a modest scale, primarily through grant funding;
- Small- to medium-sized voluntary organisations that are already delivering, or want to deliver, services, and
- Large national or regional voluntary organisations that are already delivering services under contract.

Most people will know it by a number of names – independent, not-for-profit, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) – but they all come down to organisations who are non-statutory and neither governmental nor for-profit businesses.

4. What is a Voluntary Sector Organisation?

A **voluntary organisation** is a formal organisation run by a management body made up of volunteers who are engaged in that activity for environmental, economic or social good.

A **community group or organisation** is a less formally organised body run by a management body made up of volunteers who are engaged in that activity for environmental, economic or social good.

The voluntary sector is made up of a diverse range of organisations, which include some or all of the following:

- Registered charities;
- Voluntary organisations;
- Community groups;
- Tenants and residents groups;
- Faith groups;
- Housing Associations;
- Most co-operatives and social enterprises;
- Most sports organisations;
- Grant making trusts, and/or
- Private clubs.

These organisations can take a variety of forms including one or more of the following:

- Mutuals;
- Community interest companies (CICs);
- Industrial and provident societies;
- Not for profit trade associations;
- Charitable trusts;
- Companies limited by guarantee, and
- Unincorporated groups.

Case Study 1

ASCEND, South Oxhey

ASCEND is based in the heart of South Oxhey in Hertfordshire, an area nationally recognised as a regeneration district with social deprivation issues. As a community based charity (and limited company), ASCEND's work is all about moving people forward, challenging their perceived barriers to education and training; providing people with more choice and control over their lives.

ASCEND was originally set up in 1996, in response to an awareness of low skills levels on the estate and elsewhere in the community; low social, literacy and numeracy skills and poor self-esteem had led to high levels of worklessness on the estate.

ASCEND currently has 6 staff plus a fund raiser, and hold Investor in People quality accreditation.

Client Group

The majority of service users refer themselves into the organisation and are mainly aged from 25 to around 50, but referrals for users aged 16 – 25 are also taken from Probation, Connexions, youth centres and schools.

Background to the Provision

ASCEND works mainly at the organisation's base on the South Oxhey estate, accessing learners through self-referral and outreach, which has always been fundamental to the work, tailoring learning and skills directly to the needs of the local community.

Benefits that ASCEND identify in the approach to the delivery of learning and skills to their user group, include:

- No pressure to achieve or go faster than the learner is comfortable with;
- Trust between the organisation, tutors and individual learners;
- The valuing of each individual learner;
- Moving people on along their chosen path, and
- Realising the potential of each individual.

ASCEND currently runs a range of formal and informal learning at a range of levels, with embedded literacy and numeracy in all low level classes:

- Speaking with Confidence;
- Numeracy from pre-entry level to level 2;
- IT;
- Skills for Life, especially literacy and numeracy;
- Arts and Crafts, and
- So you want to be a teaching assistant.

Commissioning Learning and Skills from the Voluntary Sector

ASCEND runs a popular creative writing group which has just published a book, and monthly book club in association with the local library. The BBC RaW campaign (ASCEND is a Regional Centre for the programme), has also strengthened ASCEND's ability to deliver high quality and accessible IT programmes.

After completing their learning with ASCEND, and progressing through a full 3 stage IAG assessment, or a Skills for Life assessment, learners are also followed up by personal phone calls at 1 month, 3 months and 6 months. Because ASCEND is firmly rooted into the local community, workers often "bump into" former learners and receive informal updates on their progression since moving on from the organisation.

Learners mainly move into paid work or volunteering either in the classroom or in the foyer at ASCEND or elsewhere.

ASCEND holds an annual Awards Ceremony and certificate presentation, as well as monitoring learners' success through progression through Individual Learning Plans and individual responses.

Word of mouth is critical to the success of the organisation with their learners, and ASCEND also identifies the strength of the staff team as crucial to the strength of the organisation, leading to the achievement of the Learner of the Year Award.

ASCEND's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Survival! – Still seeing clients, and have 2 new huge projects on the horizon, so still looking forward
2. Over 1000 learners getting nationally recognised qualifications in 10 years

Contact Information

ASCEND:
All Saints Church Centre
Gosforth Lane
South Oxhey
Watford WD19 7AX

Phone: 020 8420 1364
Email: info@ascend.org.uk
www.ascend.org.uk/

5. Getting to Know the Voluntary Sector

A Commissioner or Prime Contractor of skills and learning needs to know the local marketplace, and know who the potential providers are. The more potential providers that are known about, the more chance there is of finding the best service provider for the work.

Ways of finding out about local voluntary sector providers of skills and learning include:

- Using the NAVCA website directory to find and contact the local infrastructure organisation;
- Using the NAVCA website to find a list of local voluntary organisations;
- Contacting the local Learn East member;
- Attending the local voluntary sector forum meetings;
- Talking to COVER;
- Talking to other Commissioners or Prime Contractors and/or
- Doing an internet search on the local area.

6. The Benefits of Working with the Voluntary Sector

Here are just a few of the many benefits of working with the voluntary sector to deliver public services:

- An in-depth knowledge of their service users and their needs;
- Extensive experience of delivering specialist services to their users;
- A trusted route into a range of services, from the users' perspective;
- An ability to respond quickly to their service users' needs, and adapt as those change;
- A holistic approach to service users' needs;
- Excellent value for money;
- Resources are focussed on their service users' needs, and any surpluses are re-invested back into their communities, and
- A focus on early intervention often saves money by preventing problems from escalating.

Case Study 2

The Blue Cat Initiative, Norfolk

The Blue Cat Initiative is run by staff with a background in mainstream education, and was set up in 2003 to engage hard to reach communities through innovative, valuable and worthwhile lifelong learning activities; all of Blue Cat's projects have been developed through learner and community consultation.

Focus groups on future activities demonstrated a high level of skills amongst homeless people, which led to Blue Cat looking at how they could change perceptions of the homeless, as well as tackling issues including substance abuse and mental health. Blue Cat now runs a combination of skills and learning programmes, including the 30 week Street Life programme, a Norfolk-wide football league, the Fit for Learning, Fit for Life programme, the Street Media project as well as working with 16 – 18 year olds on the Step On Foundation Learning Programme.

The Blue Cat Initiative is a UK Registered Learning Provider, an OCN Accredited Centre, and also offers skills training for workers from a range of agencies and other organisations.

Client Group

The Blue Cat Initiative works with people who are homeless and/or vulnerably housed young men/women, aged mainly aged 25 to around 40. The Street Life Soccer Programme, developed by Blue Cat Initiative and Norwich City FC's Football in the Community, engages homeless and vulnerable learners in learning activities and competitive football, and recently won the NIACE 2009 National Opening Doors to Adult Learning Award, with one of the learners achieving National Outstanding Learner of the Year for the Eastern Region.

Background to the Provision

The Blue Cat Initiative works with those disadvantaged within wider provision in any way, including the gifted and talented, accessing learners primarily from the various homelessness hostels and agencies in Norwich and across the county, but also through self-referral and word of mouth: service users often come on the strength of word of mouth that it is an interesting, engaging and supportive environment. Referrals, especially for the Step On programme, are also made through partners including Connexions and the Youth Offending Team.

Learners often also have a range of additional needs, such as housing and mental health issues, English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL), financial issues, literacy, numeracy and skills issues, which the Project deals with by recognising professional specialisms, and including key workers and support workers in the sessions, so that relevant professionals are easily accessed to provide wider support.

Commissioning Learning and Skills from the Voluntary Sector

The Blue Cat Initiative offers a range of courses, for both the service users, but also professionals working within partners and other agencies, and often to former users of the Project's services, including:

- Football Street Life Soccer Programme;
- OCN Progression Levels 1 and 2;
- OCN Mentoring Level 2, and
- Sports Leader UK – Community Sports Leader.

The Blue Cat Initiative has specifically developed a Level 2/3 Continuing Professional Development Training Programme to meet the needs of key workers across the sector, which includes OCN Teaching and Supporting Vulnerable Learners and Dyslexia Support in the Community.

Achievements

The Blue Cat Initiative identifies its greatest strengths in working with learners as the ownership of the work, which is driven by:

- The needs of the target group;
- A holistic approach;
- A supportive environment;
- Flexibility of the person-centred approach, and
- Relevant learning.

This approach is supported by a process of round-table learning, supportive peer learning, and an in depth knowledge of each individual learner.

Learner progress is monitored through continuous observation as part of the induction process, building client trust for a more in depth assessment, and in addition, as part of the monitoring process, Blue Cat encourage a reflective process in participants. Many learners progress into employment and volunteering often in sport or media, some move into formal learning at local colleges, working in the care system, and often move back into accredited mentoring schemes with Blue Cat, working as volunteers and coaches for the organisation.

The Blue Cat Initiative's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Engaging over a 100 16-18 year olds in a 4 month period on the Step On programme
2. Receiving NIACE's Opening Doors to Adult Learning Award for 2009 for Street Life Soccer, as part of Adult Learners Week
3. One of Blue Cat's participants achieving Outstanding Learner of the Year for the Eastern Region as part of Street Life Soccer
4. Street Life Soccer participants attending Homeless World Cup Trials with one reaching the final team as a reserve
5. 7 years on, Blue Cat still has a passion for change.

Contact Information

The Blue Cat Initiative: 07968 864484

7. The Role of the Compact 1

What It Is

The Commission for the Compact describes the Compact as:

“...a voluntary agreement between the government and the third sector in England which recognises shared values, principles and commitments and sets out guidelines for how both parties should work together to ensure that better outcomes are delivered for local people.”

All local areas in England are now committed to better partnership working between local government, local public bodies and the local voluntary sector and through Local Compacts, which are living documents that inform joint working at a local level, and set out:

- shared vision and principles;
- undertakings from both sides;
- Government’s commitment to respect the independence of the sector; and
- systems to help make sure that the agreement works.

Local Compacts are living documents that inform the whole range of joint working at a local level, from police working with the community sector to tackle anti-social behaviour to social services improving their contracting with social care organisations.

8. The Role of the Compact 2

What It Does

The National Codes of Good Practice inform local Compact codes, and this resource refers to the Compact Code of Good Practice on Funding and Procurement. That Code identifies principles and undertakings that underpin the financial relationship between public and voluntary sectors, which should result in financial relationships being constructed in such a way that allows outcomes to be maximised.

The Compact is supported in total by five codes of good practice, covering:

- funding and procurement;
- consultation and policy appraisal;
- volunteering;
- black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary and community organisations, and
- community groups.

At the time of writing (November 2010), the Compact is currently under review.

Case Study 3

Breakout (Norfolk and Suffolk), Lowestoft

Organisational Profile

Originally founded by the Lowestoft housing charity St. John's Housing Trust in 1994, Breakout is an independent charity and a limited company. Breakout aims to "raise the social, personal and vocational skills of disaffected young people by providing training and development opportunities and guidance and support mechanisms which enable them to 'breakout' of the no qualification, no job, and no hope merry-go-round that many find themselves in".

Client Group

Breakout takes referrals from schools, Children's Services, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), and Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) co-ordinators. While some of the young people remain on the school roll, attending Breakout as part of an alternative curriculum; others are under the auspices of the EOTAS Co-ordinator and/or the social inclusion officer, and attend as part of a package.

The young people who come into Breakout are usually aged 14-16, and mainly boys; the girls that Breakout works with often have more complex issues. Many of the young people are affected by issues of homelessness, low achievement, are school refusers or are excluded from school, young offenders, and often have low self-esteem and self-confidence, and with little or no qualifications or work experience.

Background to the Provision

Training has always been at the heart of Breakout, starting with a programme of bicycle maintenance, and providing a range of life skills and basic introductions to silver smithing, plumbing, electrics and carpentry through the four on-site workshops in the centre of Lowestoft.

Breakout works in partnership with other local providers, such as the PRUs and other out of school learning units, which provide literacy and numeracy skills, with young people then also attending Breakout on a regular basis during the week for more practical skills and learning.

Breakout provides roll on roll off provision throughout the year, and young people work in maximum groups of 6, with a mix of provision based on need and interests, enabling high levels of individual attention. All the young people have Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), which are reviewed every 6 weeks and copied to the referring agent.

Breakout currently offers a varied programme of 20 AQA Single Unit Awards in a range of skills, including Cycle Maintenance and Repair Skills, as well as Design and Craft; the multimedia courses offered are always popular along with plumbing and home maintenance.

Achievements

Breakout has an annual award ceremony, as well as regular awards which include the Shining Star Awards, Attendance Awards and the Manager's Shiniest Star Award. The award ceremony is held as part of the annual summer Open Day, which is an opportunity for parents and other students, as well as a range of partner organisations, to see what has been achieved by the young people during the year.

Most of the young people return into mainstream education through local colleges; some move into apprenticeships as a result of their work experience, and a few move into employment; much effort is put into ensuring that any move back into mainstream education is successful, with Breakout staff supporting learners in visiting and gaining entry to local colleges, and learners often choose to go to a college other than their local college, to avoid falling into old patterns of expectation and behaviour through peer pressure.

Breakout's Proudest Achievement as a Provider of Learning and Skills

Is seeing the reaction of parents attending the annual Open Day: for some, it is the first time that they have ever had any positive feedback about their children.

Contact Information

Breakout (Norfolk and Suffolk)
Units 1, 3 and 4
Herring Fishery Score
Lowestoft NR32 1XE

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Email: office@breakout1.co.uk

www.breakout1.co.uk

9. The Merlin Standard

The previous Government made a commitment to the development of healthy high performing supply chains when it published the DWP Commissioning Strategy and Code of Conduct in February 2008, setting out a new way of working with providers, by offering larger and longer contracts with more outcome-based funding, giving providers more opportunity to invest in the development of their staff and organisational infrastructure.

The resulting “Merlin Standard” aims to recognise that a framework is needed to support future healthy working relationships between prime and sub-contractors, and is applicable to organisations from the private, public and voluntary sector, and to help ensure all providers act with integrity.

The Merlin Standard and Assessment process are flexible and benchmark industry practice, and is built upon four fundamental and integrated principles; Supply Chain Design, Commitment, Conduct and Review which have been designed to examine key areas of the relationship between a Prime Contractor and its supply chain partners.

The Merlin Standard was launched at a DWP Welfare to Work Convention in 2010, and is being piloted for two years. Draft guidance which supports Merlin assessments is being revised and will be updated following feedback from the pilot activity.

The final version of the Merlin Standard is available to download from the DWP website at www.dwp.gov.uk or the Compact website at www.thecompact.org.uk

10. The Legislative Framework for Commissioning

The 2004 Gershon Efficiency Review, reflecting the key concerns of both the Compact and the 2002 Treasury Review, recommended that Government should adopt four key principles for VCS funding:

- Longer-term funding;
- Appropriate balance of risk between the funder and the voluntary sector organisation;
- Full cost recovery, and
- Streamlined monitoring and reporting.

Commissioning Learning and Skills from the Voluntary Sector

Much of the current approach for commissioning and procurement is driven by key initiatives taken by the Labour Government between 1997 – 2010, including:

- The Futurebuilders Fund, which provides (until 2011) loans, grants and professional support to 3rd sector organisations to bid for and deliver public service contracts;
- The Capacitybuilders Fund, established to build the capacity of 3rd sector infrastructure organisations to deliver services more effectively to frontline 3rd sector organisations;
- The Communitybuilders Fund, an investment fund for 3rd sector organisations to build more active and empowered communities;
- The Social Enterprise Action Plan, which sets out four key areas of social enterprise support, and
- The Asset Transfer Unit, established as a result of the 2007 Quirk Review into community asset transfer, which made the case for local groups owning and managing community assets (such as community centres and village halls) with a view to the asset providing a source of revenue to such organisations.

In addition, the Community Enterprise Strategic Framework which was published in early 2010 made clear the specific role of community-based social enterprises and their role in local regeneration, employment and training, especially within the area of the regeneration of specifically deprived communities.

Case Study 4

Cambridge Women's Resource Centre (CWRC), Cambridgeshire

Organisational Profile

CWRC was set up in 1982, when a group of women decided that they wanted to work towards the greater representation of women at the top of companies and especially locally developing organisations in the IT sector, but quickly realised that there were too many issues that needed to be addressed before being able to make such moves.

CWRC is a registered charity and limited company employing 23 staff. Training has always been at the heart of the organisation – building women's skills and especially non-traditional skills. The organisation operates mainly from a base in central Cambridge, where they offer both a crèche and Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

Client Group

CWRC's learners are all women aged 25 to around 40, and they prioritise the needs of non white-British women; most women that they work with are unwaged but not unemployed. Learners often come to CWRC with a wide range of additional needs, including a history of sexual and domestic violence, housing and debt issues, as well as childcare needs.

The specialist DAWN Project, which is about addressing offending behaviour, also address issues around drugs, alcohol, prostitution, immigration, social isolation and mental health.

Background to the Provision

CWRC offers a wide range of personal development courses such as Jobsearch, Personal Safety & Self Defence, as well as accredited vocational and pre-vocational training on site, including:

- ESOL – pre-entry level 3, entry level 1, 2 and 3;
- IT Basic Skills;
- Basic Skills literacy and numeracy;
- Return to Work workshops;
- Anxiety Management;
- Depression;
- Psychology – Yourself and Others, and
- Confidence and Self Esteem.

The most popular courses are the ESOL course, as well as Return to Work and the informal courses such as the art group drop in.

Achievements

Learners come into CWRC through a range of routes, mainly through word of mouth and self-referral, and CWRC is looking at using social media such as Facebook to spread the message to a wider audience of women. Progression through CWRC's learning is very much self-directed, and learners are assessed when they join a course, and IAG is available on site. Learners are followed up postal questionnaire, and many of their learners move on to paid employment or further formal education.

Flexibility is built in to the provision, to meet learners' needs, and CWRC place a high value on the quality of their staff, the multi-cultural nature of the centre and the crèche facilities as promoting the success of the provision. In addition, CWRC identify the value of working and remaining at grass roots level, responding directly to, and prioritising the needs of, their learners, especially with the hardest to reach groups.

CWRC's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Survival and hoping for continued survival
2. Bringing the offer of something for every woman back
3. Staff meeting the needs of their service users

Contact Information

CWRC:
The Wharf
Hooper Street
Cambridge CB1 2NZ

Phone: 01223 321148
Email: enquiries@cwrc.org.uk
www.cwrc.org.uk

11. The Coalition Government and the Future of Commissioning

The advent of the coalition Government in May 2010 is likely to accelerate the broadening commissioning and procurement agenda. The Conservative Big Society Agenda and the implications for public services was laid out in the Conservative Paper Big Society, Not Big Government (March 2010):

“Our public sector reform programme is designed to cut costs while improving standards and to enable social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups to play a leading role in delivering public services and tackling deep-rooted social problems...”

At the time of writing, the implications for public service provision, and the commissioning landscape in particular, is not yet clear: the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 will have significant implications for the speed of change, and increase the emphasis on the role of social enterprise.

12. Opportunities and Issues when Working with the Voluntary Sector

“Think Smart, Think Voluntary” identifies a number of issues which may act as barriers to the voluntary sector in bidding for tenders:

- Lack of early and effective consultation with the sector in the development of policy, programmes and strategies;
- Failure to properly assess and to consider the voluntary sector as serious contenders;
- Insufficient recognition given to the sector’s strengths and skills;
- Difficulty in finding out about contract opportunities;
- The trend towards large scale national or regional contracts, and
- Complex and costly pre-qualification and tendering procedures which mean that invitations to tender can be consigned to the “too difficult” pile.

Gershon’s 2004 Efficiency Review recommends adopting 4 key principles for voluntary sector commissioning:

- Longer-term funding;
- Appropriate balance of risk between funder and provider;
- Full cost recovery and
- Streamlined monitoring and reporting.

Case Study 5

First Stop Centre, Braintree

Organisational Profile

The First Stop Centre started in the 1980s as a jobclub, and is now a registered charity serving the disadvantaged of the Braintree community through the provision of a community drop in centre with education, providing a new direction and change for their service users. First Stop has 4 part time staff, and the majority of training is on site, delivered by First Stop IAG qualified staff and a wide range of volunteers.

Client Group

The First Stop service users are mainly aged over 40 and unemployed; they often also have a range of additional needs, including mental health, substance mis-use and addiction issues as well as being affected by issues around rural isolation, health, housing, chaotic life styles, and lack of personal control of the situation.

Background to the Provision

First Stop offers a range of courses at various levels, including:

- Skills for Life - Introduction to Literacy and Numeracy;
- ICT for Beginners;
- CV writing;
- Interview skills, and
- Anger management.

First Stop takes referrals from the local job centre, college, Social Services, Probation and Connexions, as well as working in partnership with Essex Village Agents, or learners refer themselves, hearing about provision through word of mouth.

Learners go through an initial assessment when arriving at First Stop, which creates an atmosphere of personal respect and a way of communicating, which in turn promotes a commitment to education and change.

Additional needs, such as housing, mental health, alcohol and substance mis-use issues are dealt with through the advocacy side of the organisation, or referred out to specialist support providers.

Flexibility is key to achieving results with learners, working around their needs, in order to enable engagement, and often makes the difference between completing a course or not.

Achievements

First Stop identify their strength with hard to reach groups as the fact that the provision is not a formal “school” set up, but offers a way into learning and change which builds their learners’ confidence and supports them until they are ready to move on.

As a result, the small group learning environment provides a non-judgemental, non-threatening framework in which their learners can become aware of their potential, do their best, take risks, and know that their well-being matters to someone else.

Progress is monitored through the IAG assessment and ILPs depending on funder and course, and reviewed every week.

Learners benefit from improved self-confidence, self-esteem and employment prospects, and on completion, many learners come back into the organisation as volunteers, or move into work, formal education at the local college or on to other local voluntary organisations.

Achievements are celebrated at a Learners’ Celebration, but much of the achievements by learners are individual to them – for some it is the achievement of a certificated qualification, sometimes for the first time ever, but for others it’s the journey to confidence and self esteem.

The First Stop Centre’s Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Celebration of learners’ achievements
2. Seeing the distance travelled
3. Small things and changes

Contact Information

First Stop Centre:
29 Bocking End
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Essex
CM7 9AE

Phone: 01376 346535
Email: through the website
www.firststopcentre.org.uk

13. Opportunities and Issues 1

Length of Funding

With longer term funding, voluntary sector organisations can retain staff and aim to make longer term investments in services.

The Commission for the Compact recommends working towards awarding contracts over a longer term, on the basis that funding contracts for 3 years not only represents better value for money and creates the right environment to achieve the desired outcomes, but also makes it easier for voluntary sector organisations to provide continuity of service. Longer term planning and financial arrangements also reduce the amount of time and money spent on applying for new funds or renegotiating contracts.

14. Opportunities and Issues 2

Balancing Risk

Balancing risk minimises the chance of the service failing during the contract period, but in order to do this, Commissioners and Prime Contractors need to:

1. Be aware of the proportionate risk of the contract, and bear in mind that over concentration on the risk element may act as a barrier to voluntary sector providers in bidding for contracts;
2. Discuss the risks involved in service delivery with potential voluntary sector providers as part of the planning process, and
3. Place responsibility for the risks with the organisation best able to manage them.

Commissioners and Prime Contractors need to reassure themselves that organisations have the resources and business skills to deliver the required service, and in addition, should take particular care not to include insurance requirements which voluntary organisations either could not meet or would find too expensive, unless they are deemed absolutely necessary following an analysis of the risks and benefits.

Case Study 6

MOVEON east, Norwich

Organisational Profile

MOVEON east (formerly Norfolk ACRO) operates across Norfolk and Suffolk from a base in central Norwich, and is a limited company and a registered charity, as well as holding both Investor in People and Matrix quality marques. MOVEON east was originally founded in 1991, and now employs 42 people providing accommodation and employment services, as well as learning and skills training.

Client Group

The core client group is ex offenders and those at risk of offending. The referral routes come through Norfolk and Suffolk Probation Trust for the Accommodation Contract and National Offender Management Service (NOMS), employment contract with additional referrals via A4e and TNG (Flexible New Deal contracts) and Trobius (Flexible Routeways contract). MOVEON east is also a member of the Great Yarmouth Working Neighbourhood Fund consortium. Any offender commencing a new order is automatically referred to MOVEON east for a Skills for Life assessment and, if appropriate, is encouraged to take up one to one tuition to raise levels; equally unemployed offenders are referred for an employment assessment.

Background to the Provision

With a main focus of moving clients back into work, or maintaining them in existing work, the main difference in MOVEON east's training provision compared to that of many other providers is that the Skills for Life and/or the employment assessments undertaken by clients are part of a Probation Order and so is not a voluntary engagement, however further attendance for learning is undertaken voluntarily with encouragement from Offender Managers and the courts. Once the Probation Order has been completed, a client no longer accesses these particular services, and in addition, if a client is deemed to be in breach of their Probation Order, the consequences may remove the client from training. Once the Probation Order has finished, MOVEON east will sign post learners to outside provision.

Much of the training is 1 to 1 based on the ILP, and any additional needs which are identified (such as accommodation or drug or alcohol issues) are fed back to the Offender Manager for resolution.

Externally certificated courses currently include OCR Levels 1 and 2 – Literacy, Numeracy and ICT, EdExcel Entry Level, 1, 2 and 3, and in addition to being a CSCS Test Centre for the construction industry, MOVEON east provides in-house certification of Employability Skills.

Achievements

Staff members provide strong role models to clients who have sometimes experienced extremely chaotic lives, providing a constant single point of contact and support for the client.

MOVEON east identifies the experience and commitment of the teaching staff, and their understanding of working with the client group as a key factor in their success, achieving nearly 300 awards in Adult Literacy & Numeracy to date.

In 2010, MOVEON east piloted two new schemes, one working with vulnerable clients on probation living in deprived wards of Norwich, and the second working in partnership with the Purfleet Trust in King's Lynn, working with homeless migrant workers with an offending history to improve employability skills, particularly in relation to language skills and the understanding of cultural differences. Both pilot projects have had positive outcomes for clients, and MOVEON east hopes to be able to continue to develop similar ground-breaking work in the future.

MOVEON east's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Seeing an increasing awareness of the value of soft outcomes for clients.
2. Seeing the increasing acceptance of the value of an holistic approach to their clients.
- 3..Understanding the value of the work that MOVEON east is doing, by learning through each new project that the organisation undertakes.

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15. Opportunities and Issues 3

Full Cost Recovery

HM Treasury first endorsed the principle of full-cost recovery in 2002, when it recommended that “Funders should recognise that it is legitimate for providers to include the relevant element of overheads in their cost estimates for providing a given service under service agreement or contract”. In 2006, it added that “A third sector organisation unwittingly subsidising a public service is unlikely to represent good value for money, particularly in the long term.”

Whilst the responsibility lies with the voluntary sector organisation bidding for a contract to demonstrate that they have properly costed the bid, and the Commissioner or Prime Contractor to satisfy themselves that the bid is not priced at a long-term sustainable level, voluntary sector organisations may well worry about pricing themselves out of the market if they use a full cost recovery model.

It may be that some Commissioners or Prime Contractors are simply unaware of factors which can affect service delivery and cost in certain areas of the market (for example the provision of services in rural areas), and some voluntary sector providers may worry about pricing themselves out of the market if they use a full cost recovery model.

As a result, as part of the bidding process:

- Voluntary sector bidders must prove that tenders are well costed and that they understand their costings, and
- Commissioners and Prime Contractors need to be confident that the bids that they receive represent sustainable, well-costed value for money.

By aiming to reimburse the full costs of service delivery, the Commissioner can also look at transferable knowledge from good procurement practice relating to small and medium sized private sector organisations, with whom many voluntary sector organisations share many characteristics.

16. Opportunities and Issues 4

Bidding, Monitoring and Reporting

Proportionate bidding, monitoring and reporting, linked to the value of the contract, are often critical to a voluntary sector organisation's decision to bid for a contract or not.

This can be achieved by:

- Reducing complexity in the commissioning process, and ensuring that the actual tender bid is proportionate to the value of the contract;
- Streamlining application processes, for instance by using a two-stage process, or online application forms and portals;
- Making payments in advance of expenditure, as few voluntary sector organisations carry enough reserves to pump-prime projects, and
- Profiling payments or paying contracts by instalments, reducing financial risk for the organisation.

By ensuring during the planning stages of a tender that the monitoring and reporting on a contract have a direct link to value and risk, the Commissioner or Prime Contractor can help maximise the number of responses received from the voluntary sector.

Case Study 7

Polish British Integration Centre, Bedford

Organisational Profile

The Polish British Integration Centre Ltd (PBIC) grew out of the changes in EU law in 2004 which meant that for the first time, Polish workers were able legally to come to the UK and work. The influx of the migrants was so huge that it soon became clear that there was not enough help for the migrants to aid their smooth integration into local communities.

With the support of the Learning Partnership, Bedford Race Equality Council and Bedford CVS, PBIC was formed in 2007, becoming company limited by guarantee in 2008, and opened its first office in the town in 2009.

Client Group

The vast majority of the people that PBIC sees are Polish migrant workers aged 19+, but such is the demand for support, PBIC also sees people from other Eastern European countries. People mainly come to PBIC for language help and advice, but stay in order to join formal language programmes and to receive careers advice. PBIC also delivers activities for children and young people supporting their process of integration and building their positive identity.

The organisation offers “Introduction to Polish Language and Culture” courses addressed to British learners who want to develop better knowledge of Polish language and culture.

Background to the Provision

PBIC provides pre-entry level language skills through the ESOL for Integration programme, which is designed to build language confidence and develop culture awareness and knowledge of local services .

The program was originally developed under “ESOL for Integration” NLDC project delivered with the support of The Learning Partnership.

PBIC also has experience in delivery of bilingual Art Awareness and Business Start Up courses for Migrants.

Achievements

Under Big Lottery funded Polish British Integration Project there are currently around 50 people learning on a variety of courses, many learners use the language skills gained through the ESOL for Integration courses to move into paid work. Some move onto further learning with local colleges, including further childcare courses. The organisation now sees up to 100 people per week.

PBIC's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Community Impact Award in 2010 Creating Future Awards for the Young Entrepreneurs Project.
2. Achieving silver standard in QCAS (Quality in Community Advice Services)
3. Shortlisted for the 2010 Creating Future Award in Basic Skills.

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17. Why the Voluntary Sector is a Good Choice

In 2004, the public sector provided £6.6 billion of the voluntary and community sector's annual income.

By working in partnership with you to deliver public services, the voluntary sector can:

- Use their expertise to inform policy;
- Promote equality and social cohesion, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life;
- Build social capital, by developing, supporting and empowering service users, volunteers and communities;
- Provide opportunities for voluntary action and participation in public life;
- Devise cost-effective solutions to a wide range of social problems;
- Identify new service needs and better ways of meeting existing ones, and
- Provide high quality services complementary or additional to public services.

In addition, the voluntary sector:

- Offers established links with the community;
- Understands the needs of specific client groups;
- Offers passion, focus and commitment to action on a specific issue;
- Can reach and earn the trust of excluded or disadvantaged groups;
- Maintains independence and freedom from institutional pressures;
- Are enthusiastic, committed, flexible and responsive to needs, and
- Innovative.

18. Getting the Best from the Voluntary Sector 1

There are several things that you can do to get the best out of your relationship with the voluntary sector, by using the principles of good commissioning:

Decide what to commission and research the market at an early stage, enabling dialogue with potential providers

Decide what is realistic to commission, based on whether there are suppliers who are actually able to deliver to the proposed specification.

Engage with stakeholders and the market before you go out to tender.

Build capacity by offering training for voluntary sector organisations, social enterprises and small businesses, to help them bid for contracts, so that better responses will be received to invitations to tender.

19. Getting the Best from the Voluntary Sector 2

Working through these stages with the local voluntary sector enables the Commissioner or Prime Contractor to work with organisations which:

- Have a good local knowledge and strong local relationships;
- Engage the 'hard-to-reach' sections of the community;
- Deliver a holistic, one-stop approach to their service users;
- Can help to ensure the services are well networked, local labour is employed and supports the local economy;
- Spread risk through multiple small-scale delivery;
- Deliver services on a more intimate scale;
- Provide flexible and responsive services;
- Are often free from institutional pressures, and
- Have a strong track record of self-help and user involvement.

Put simply, an effective commissioning process enables the Commissioner to:

- Provide accurate information to communities about commissioning opportunities;
- Conduct some effective "myth busting" around the commissioning process, and
- Work with communities to shape services, including where they're delivered.

Case Study 8

St Edmunds Society, Norwich

Organisational Profile

The St Edmunds Society, a registered charity, started in 1948, providing temporary accommodation and services for homeless young men aged 16 to 49+ in Norwich and Norfolk. In 1995, the Society opened a drop in centre open from 9am – 1pm daily, and which provided basic facilities – tea and coffee, washing facilities etc open to anyone living on the streets, and drawing upon experience from the drop in centre, in 2006 the organisation undertook a feasibility study into the practical skills needs of the client group. Following this study, and further extensive research, the Bull Close Road training facility opened in 2008, since when the organisation has trained 140 young people in practical skills such as carpentry and joinery, plastering, painting and decorating, wall and floor tiling, as well as transferable skills such as literacy and numeracy.

Client Group

The St Edmunds Society holds contracts for the provision of skills and learning to young people at Key Stages 3 and 4, 16+ and for Adult Education, training people aged up to 49. Primarily the Bull Close Road centre provides training specifically for young people who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education, or who are already excluded.

Background to the Provision

The St Edmunds Society currently provides City and Guilds Level 1 in Basic Construction and NOCN Levels 1 and 2 in a range of carpentry, joinery and furniture making units, as well as plastering, wall and floor tiling, and painting and decorating, with literacy, numeracy and ICT skills embedded within the courses. Functional skills and personal social development units are also available as part of Foundation Learning.

The provision is entirely flexible, based on need: once referred, learners join on a rolling basis, deciding on a course and how long they want to work on it. All courses have high staffing levels (8 learners to 2 staff plus support staff), and in the first year of the new provision at Bull Close Road, 30% of learners progressed into further education, employment or training.

The biggest issue affecting completion rates is the impact of a range of learners' additional needs, including housing issues, sexual health needs, drugs and alcohol issues, a history of offending behaviour, family issues, are in or leaving care as well as a history of chaotic lifestyles. The St Edmunds Society offers in house signposting to other sources of support, and works extensively in partnership with other specialist providers to meet the needs of the client group.

Achievements

Most learners are referred through Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), schools, Youth Offending Teams and Children's Services, or through word of mouth from current learners; within the main client groups, St Edmunds Society specifically targets young people who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), young offenders and those leaving care.

All learners have a formal Individual Learning Plan, and are constantly monitored in order to assess their progress and change. The St Edmunds Society puts their success with such a hard to reach client group down to great staff, who are able to communicate to the learners that they are "worth the effort", and who enable the young people to reach their own potential. Much is achieved by staff working holistically within a non-threatening environment where learners are respected, treated fairly, and offered high levels of intense support, but working within clear and strict boundaries.

The St Edmunds Society's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Seeing individuals grow and change through their achievements;
2. Gaining a Silver Medal at the Chelsea Flower show in 2010;
3. Taking part in the Lord Mayors procession annually, and winning in 2010, and
4. The reputation of the organisation for being good at what they do.

Contact Information

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20. How You Can Help the Voluntary Sector

The NAO made the following recommendations on how public bodies should aim to engage with the voluntary sector:

- **Get informed** – Keep accurate information on the local sector’s contribution to public service delivery;
- **Get organised** – Develop effective joint working systems to improve funding practices;
- **Get resourceful** - Build commissioning capacity to ensure that you know and have the resources needed to work with the sector;
- **Get going** - Turn high level commitments into practical action;
- **Get proportionate** - Identify risks, simplify systems and reduce complexity so that it is proportionate to the commissioned work;
- **Get planning** - Work through all the steps of good commissioning practice;
- **Get real** - Aim to reimburse the full costs of service delivery;
- **Get committed** - Move away from annual or short term contracts and into three year agreements, and
- **Get streamlined** – Think about simplifying processes, and using IT to make them more accessible.

Case Study 9

The Bridge Project, Sudbury

Organisational Profile

The Bridge Project Sudbury was set up as a Registered Charity in 1995 and a local initiative that provides vocational training, education and employment opportunities for adults that face multiple disadvantages. The Bridge Project focuses on listening and responding to the local needs of adults with learning disabilities/difficulties who want to go to work, but require support and assistance to participate in vocational training, work experience, volunteering and employment, and continually responds to the changing needs of the local community, supporting those that find mainstream training difficult or uncomfortable to access. The Bridge Project strives for people with disabilities to have full opportunities and choices to improve their quality of life and be respected and included as equal members of society, meeting this need by working collaboratively with organisations from the voluntary, community and statutory sectors.

Client Group

The 'core' client group is adults with learning disabilities (currently in excess of forty) who experience multiple disadvantages in accessing alternative local learning opportunities. In addition, the Bridge Project also seeks to address wider community needs and assist hard-to-reach disadvantaged adults who are not engaged in any other form of learning; are typically low skilled and would benefit from re-engagement in the learning process. We therefore aim to assist adults who face multiple disadvantage through their learning, physical and hidden disabilities, such as aphasia/dysphasia; auditory/attention deficit disorders; Aspergers Syndrome; autism, dyslexia, mental health issues, epilepsy, allergies, learning difficulties, speech and language difficulties and short term memory and attention span difficulties.

The Bridge Project has a proven track record in engaging with and meeting the individual needs of 'hard to reach' vulnerable adults who experience multiple disadvantage in accessing local services, and strives towards the vision of 'a community within a community', offering a safe and supportive environment where adults can learn and grow in confidence.

Background to the Provision

Beyond the core students, many of whom are referred through Adult and Community Services, the charity takes referrals from GPs, Community Mental Health Teams and Jobcentre Plus, trying to reach the most isolated people in their community and accordingly works with people who are long term unemployed through disability or illness and those with recovering mental health problems. Successful grant funding applications have enabled the development of pre-employment skills (such as confidence, self esteem, team working etc), and a mental health 'Open Door' project aimed at self help and peer support.

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Well known and loved by local residents, the charity's attractive premises in the heart of the town also houses a popular courtyard café where students prepare and serve fresh, locally sourced food to members of the public in the café, older people's lunch clubs and hot meal deliveries to frail elderly that cannot attend lunch clubs. As well as the main kitchen, the charity has a fully equipped tutorial kitchen where students can acquire practical skills and knowledge in surroundings that reflect a typical domestic set up.

As a partner provider of the West Suffolk College, the charity offers accredited vocational training in a wide range of areas including: basic skills, ICT, Catering, Retail, Admin, Skills for working life and work based learning. They also offer work experience and opportunities for paid employment.

Achievements

The Bridge Project operates a person centred planning approach and identifies the time spent on the welfare and support of each person as one of their 'key strengths', as well as the diverse range of activities and experiences on offer. All training activities are tailored to individual need, and the Project works hard to put people at their ease, with a high degree of inbuilt flexibility which responds to learners' needs.

On joining The Bridge Project, each person is assessed regarding their preferred learning styles, particular learning needs, their preferred vocational area and what they would like to achieve, developing and agreeing an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Each learner's soft skills (such as time keeping, hygiene, eye contact, confidence and self esteem) are also reviewed through a base line assessment, which is scaled at the beginning and end of each course. Ongoing assessments continue until the end of each training programme; three monthly reviews are held for annual vocational training courses. At the end of all training, continuing learners are reviewed to find out what they want or need to do next, and others complete an exit evaluation and signposting.

The Bridge Project's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Celebrations at the annual 'Presentation of Student Awards Evenings' - everyone achieves!
2. 'Peace Day' when we organised communities to come together, with refreshments served by our students and staff, and Terry Waite led prayers for peace in the world.
3. When a non verbal student spoke for the first time, and we cried with emotion!
4. When an autistic student finally gave eye contact!

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21. How the Voluntary Sector Can Help You

The Commission for the Compact also identifies that there is a lot that the voluntary sector can do to help get the best from commissioning, when working with public sector bodies:

- **Contribute constructively** to the design of programmes and systems;
- **Focus their contribution** on the needs of service users;
- **Be clear** about who they represent;
- **Be accountable** for representing their views.
- **Respect confidentiality** in the commissioning of services;
- **Consider the risks** associated with delivering outcomes when discussing terms of delivery;
- **Communicate risks** clearly to Commissioners;
- **Understand** timescales and the decision making process;
- **Be clear** about how their work will meet outcomes and that delivery fully meets commissioning requirements;
- **Understand** all the costs associated with the delivery of the service when developing bids;
- **Have good systems** in place to manage and account for funding, and
- **Be transparent** in reporting.

22. - A Word About the EU...

The European Community (EC) Procurement Regime consists of:

- EC Treaty Principles;
- EC Procurement Directives, and
- Relevant case law from the European Court of Justice.

The **EC Treaty Principles** of non-discrimination on grounds of nationality, equal treatment, transparency, proportionality and free movement of goods and services apply to all public sector contracts.

The **EC Procurement Directives** have been transposed into UK procurement Regulations. With a few exceptions (e.g. secrecy), they apply to all contracts for goods, services and construction works awarded by public sector contracting authorities over a certain financial threshold. The Regulations have two levels of application – Part A services (a full regime for priority services) and Part B (a lighter regime for other services). Many of the services likely to be the subject of contracts with the voluntary sector, such as those relating to health and social services, education, recreational and cultural activities are Part B services, subject to the lighter regime.

The **ECJ** interprets the Treaty and the Directives when legal problems arise in particular procurement cases, as do the UK courts.

Case Study 10

WinterComfort for the Homeless, Cambridge

Organisational Profile

WinterComfort was started in the 1980s, and after working closely with Cambridge Cyrenians and Jimmys, it became an independently registered charity in 1991, and from its base in central Cambridge, WinterComfort now employs 15 people, supporting people who are homeless or at risk of losing their homes by offering them basic amenities, opportunities for educational development and recreation, and a range of services designed to help them achieve greater autonomy.

Client Group

The core service is a drop in for homeless or vulnerably housed people, the age range is 18+; mainly men aged 25 to around 40,; around 15% of service users are women, but usually with more and more complex issues. The age of service users is getting younger, and often with more multiple and complex needs, and WinterComfort is seeing increasing numbers of Eastern European and Accession State nationals using the service.

WinterComfort provides daily learning from 10am – 3.30pm through Centre Forward, which offers a wide programme of activities, information, advice and guidance to support personal development in social, leisure, occupational, volunteering, educational, training and employment sectors, focusing on people's skills and aspirations.

Background to the Provision

WinterComfort provides most of their training on site, accessing learners initially through the Comfort Zone, which runs from 8.30am – 10am, and which responds to service user needs such as breakfast, clothes, showers, and washing facilities; learners are also engaged through partner referral and word of mouth.

Qualifications in food preparation and cooking and food hygiene are popular, as is gaining the CSCS construction industry skills card, as both open doors to employment. In addition, IT resources are popular, as they offer a way of staying in touch with family via email, developing CV's and job hunting; numeracy courses are less popular, in part often as a result of peoples negative experience of childhood education and most service users have the functional maths skills that they need.

After an initial needs assessment on entering the service, when WinterComfort is confident that a service user is going to attend consistently, they are moved into a 121 personal development plan, including skills and SOUL (Soft Outcomes, Universal Learning) assessments, which are designed to identify service users'

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existing skill set, any gaps and how these are going to be filled through action
planning.

Achievements

WinterComfort holds funding from Cambridgeshire County and Cambridge City Councils for learning and development services for homeless and vulnerably housed people.

WinterComfort identifies engagement and raising aspirations as a key strength of the work that they do, which contributes to a range of outcomes for their service users, including:

- Self confidence;
- Self esteem;
- Motivation;
- Stability;
- Resilience;
- Abstinence, and
- Employment.

WinterComfort attends a range of multi agency meetings and tracks their service users and learners who leave the service through weekly reporting, but often the transient nature of the user group makes follow up difficult; many do move on into employment, but may not stay in the area, making tracking of progression and outcomes very difficult.

WinterComfort's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

1. Combining a service that meets people's essential needs in crisis and inspires aspiration once stability is achieved.
2. Creating a culture of participation in an activity programme that supports individual personal development.
3. In one day we might celebrate someone washing up in the kitchen, another participating in music workshops, someone else getting a food hygiene certificate and another a job. We visibly see people grow and celebrate that with them.

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23. The Road Ahead....

At the time of writing, there are plenty of challenges ahead:

- The 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, and the impact on public spending;
- The March 2011 deadline for many funding agreements and contracts to come to an end;
- The move to ever larger contracts becoming further out of reach for smaller voluntary sector organisations;
- The move away from the grassroots of provision, and
- The corresponding rise in large “holding” companies bidding for contracts, only subcontracting down to local level.

Maintaining strong communications with local voluntary sector learning and skills providers and local infrastructure organisations will ensure that you stay abreast of any changes in the sector.

Staying in touch will also enable Commissioners and Prime Contractors to build an atmosphere of trust and confidence directly with the local voluntary sector during what is likely to be a difficult road ahead.

Case Study 11

Zinc, Chipping Ongar

Organisational Profile

Theatre Resource (now Zinc) began in 1990, running youth theatres and residential activities, later merging with Artlink Essex, and broadening its focus to work with disabled and disadvantaged young people and adults. Over the past 20 years, the organisation has grown and developed to include all arts and creative activities, including film and digital media. Theatre Resource changed its name to Zinc in 2010.

A registered charity and limited company, Zinc is now the 5th largest social enterprise in the UK with a turnover of over £1.8m, and is one of the largest 'disabled-led' arts organisations in the UK and the only one to own and operate its own arts education centre.

Client Group

Zinc primarily provides services and activities for disabled and disadvantaged young people and adults, supporting people to build life and work skills through innovative creative approaches, fostering an enjoyment of learning and arts. Zinc provides pathways of learning for participants, ranging from taster workshops through to supported employment opportunities, enabling learners to build skills across a variety of projects and programmes. Zinc also provides short breaks for disabled children, their parents/carers and training for professionals in arts, education and social care fields, and well as regular activities including The Biz, an annual programme for young adults with learning disabilities and a weekly arts drop-in for mental health service users.

Background to the Provision

Zinc offers a wide range of courses, including OCN and AQA accredited units in the following areas:

- Workshop Leader training;
- Personal and Social Development skills;
- Employability Skills;
- Delivery of Foundation Learning Tier modules.

In addition, Zinc works with a range of partners to deliver different strands of their work, including NEET Prevention contracts for Cambridgeshire, Essex and Hertfordshire; Aiming High in Essex and Hackney, and leads the Creative Learning in Partnership (CLiP) Consortium in the Eastern region.

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Central to the success of the organisation are the following factors:

- High quality staff;
- Activities led by past participants/professionals who have similar life experiences to participants, providing positive role models and demonstrating the ability to progress through working with Zinc;
- High quality artistic experiences, using professional resources and resulting in production of creative outcomes i.e. DVDs, CDs etc, and
- The ability to provide enjoyable learning experiences that meet the interests and learning styles of participants.

Achievements

Zinc is currently undertaking a building programme to be completed in 2011, which will provide fully accessible residential facilities within a 28-bed overnight stay block, enabling Zinc to run residential courses at its own, specifically designed centre with a variety of workshop spaces and a studio/community hall space, which will be developed, managed and run by a new social enterprise, and which be available for hire. Zinc has also partnered with East Thames Housing Association to provide an additional 9-unit supported housing block for tenants living on-site for up to 3 years, providing a range of education, training and supported employment in the arts and ancillary fields i.e. catering, hospitality and housekeeping to both tenants and day students, with a view to building independent living skills.

Most people come to Zinc with an existing needs assessment and referral from partner organisations. Zinc provides further assessment and works with learners to complete an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), through taster activities and initial conversations. Progress is monitored through the ILP, and Zinc gets feedback on learners' subsequent progress.

Zinc identify the benefits to their learners of their approach as moving away from the classroom experience and delivering skills through the creative process, which enables people to take responsibility for their own learning, work on 'live' projects in teams and discover new areas of learning in which they can excel.

Zinc's Proudest Achievements as a Provider of Learning and Skills

Zinc is very proud of the fact that it delivers learning that meets the needs and interests of learners as well as providing challenging activities that stretch participants. It provides opportunities for learners, professionals and family members to see individuals achieve where this has not previously been experienced and to experience success, building aspirations and motivation for a future fulfilling life.

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24. Good Practice in Commissioning 1

The Compact

The Compact Commission states a number of principles that should govern any financial relationship entered into as part of commissioning:

1. **Focusing on outcomes:** a key indicator of the success of the funding.
2. **Simplicity and proportionality:** processes should be as simple as possible and in proportion to the amount of money involved.
3. **Consistency and co-ordination:** parts of the funding or procurement chain should be joined up by funders and purchasers in order to minimise burdens on organisations and ensure a focus on delivery;
4. **Timeliness:** allowing time for planning, decision making and action so that they can have a real effect;
5. **Transparency and accountability:** allowing informed decisions about spending priorities to be made;
6. **Discussion and dialogue:** building trust and identifying and overcoming problems before they impact on the delivery, and
7. **Empathy:** understanding each other's needs and requirements should help avoid problems and help achieve outcomes.

25. Good Practice in Commissioning 2

The Main Principles of Good Commissioning

The Compact Guide to Commissioning and Funding breaks the process of joint planning and commissioning down into four processes:

- Analysis;
- Planning;
- Sourcing, and
- Monitoring and reviewing.

These steps enable the Commissioner to get the best from the process, by

- Consulting with communities and the third sector;
- Consulting with potential providers to shape services;
- Putting outcomes for users at the heart of service planning;
- Mapping the full range of providers;
- Considering investing in the capacity of the provider base;
- Ensuring contracting processes are fair and transparent;
- Considering sub-contracting and consortia-building;
- Ensuring long term contracts and risk sharing, and
- Reviewing the process with feedback from service users.

26. Good Practice in Commissioning 3

Analysis 1 – What it Means

Effective analysis provides a solid basis for commissioning: a firm understanding of the needs of service users, highlighting where resources should be directed, and defining the desired outcomes as a result of the process. Equally, identifying the widest range of potential suppliers ensures the greatest chance of successfully finding the best service provider.

Understanding and evidencing the needs of service users enables the Commissioner or Prime Contractor to:

- Identify unmet needs;
- Understand and map who delivers services;
- Identify gaps in service provision;
- Consider how these gaps can be addressed, and
- Be clear and defining outcomes to be delivered.

27. Good Practice in Commissioning 4

Analysis 2 – What it Looks Like

Effective analysis of the commissioning process should:

- Enable a clear understanding of the market, how this relates to commissioning objectives;
- Provide an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the various potential service providers;
- Identify gaps in the market;
- Identify the outcomes to be delivered, which form the basis for effective sourcing and monitoring;
- Provide a clear understanding of the impact of funding decisions on local supply and service provision;
- Create an awareness of the tensions that might affect organisations that have both advocacy and service delivery roles, and
- Identify existing services that no longer meet the required outcomes.

28. Good Practice in Commissioning 5

Analysis 3 – How to Involve the Voluntary Sector

The analysis stage is a crucial time to involve the voluntary sector, because by communicating with them, they can help you understand:

- Services available in the market place;
 - Strengths and weaknesses of local voluntary sector providers;
 - Issues faced by those providers, and
 - Constraints that they are working under.
-
- You can do this by:
 - Using the NAVCA website directory to find your local infrastructure organisation;
 - Using the NAVCA website to find a list of local voluntary organisations;
 - Talking to your local Learn East partner about local providers;
 - Working with your local infrastructure organisations or voluntary sector networks to access third sector organisations;
 - Meeting and talking to your local providers, and
 - Providing opportunities for timely, transparent and accessible engagement with a wide range of relevant third sector organisations.

Above all, finding your way into your local voluntary sector, and spending time communicating is well worth the effort – and will provide you with the best picture of local provision to help you plan the process.

29. Good Practice in Commissioning 6

Planning – 1 – What it Means

This is probably the most important stage of the commissioning cycle, because the planning process is where consideration is given to the “who, what, why, where, when and how” of meeting the outcomes identified at the analysis stage. The planning stage enables the Commissioner or Prime Contractor to secure the most appropriate provider to deliver the required outcomes, the funding of a service, and manage risk in service delivery, by creating the right conditions for providers to focus on the delivery of outcomes.

30. Good Practice in Commissioning 7

Planning 2 – What it Looks Like

Effective planning of the commissioning process should enable the Commissioner or Prime Contractor to choose the most appropriate approach to achieve the desired outcomes, by:

- Considering investment in organisational capacity to enable providers to develop their ability to deliver the required outcomes;
- Identifying possible barriers, through dialogue with existing providers and relevant voluntary sector providers;
- Identifying the terms on which the service will be delivered;
- Focussing on outcomes;
- Identifying risk, and how best to manage it;
- Talking to potential voluntary sector providers about monitoring and review;
- Considering payment scheduling, as many voluntary organisations cannot risk the investment of resources up-front;
- Ensuring clarity of specification documents;
- Establishing workable timetables for all potential providers to respond to the process;
- Considering the possibility of partnership responses;
- Ensuring proportionate paperwork and bureaucracy for the size of commission;
- Widely advertising the opportunity, so that the greatest number of potential providers can know about it, and
- Communicating effectively with all parties to the process.

31. Good Practice in Commissioning 8

Planning 3 – How to Involve the Voluntary Sector

As with the analysis stage, the key to involving the voluntary sector in the planning process is to communicate openly and effectively with your local voluntary sector providers of skills and learning.

Open and accessible communication benefits both the planning and the commissioning process because of the wide range of input that is available from the voluntary sector: as individual organisations and/or potential providers; the wider sector through the local infrastructure body, or through a specialist local learning and skills sector body, such as one of the Learn EAST partners.

32. Good Practice in Commissioning 9

Sourcing 1 – What it Means

Sourcing is the method of securing the most appropriate provider(s) to deliver the chosen outcomes, and the process of securing the best provider for the job is vital: it means that individuals and local communities receive the most appropriate services which have the greatest impact on them.

If you have created the right environment for sourcing your services using a strong planning process, this should be the easiest part of the work!

33. Good Practice in Commissioning 10

Sourcing 2 – What it Looks Like

The actual sourcing of services should be an open and transparent process, resulting on the contract award to the most appropriate provider.

This is achieved by:

- Being clear, transparent and open at all stages in the process;
- Effectively communicating how bids will be scored and assessed;
- Awarding contracts on the basis of best value for money, taking into account considerations of quality and outcomes, and
- Providing feedback to unsuccessful organisations, enabling them to develop any future tenders for which they bid.

34. Good Practice in Commissioning 11

Sourcing 3– How to Involve the Voluntary Sector

As with most commissioning issues, a close working relationship with your local voluntary sector is vital:

- Provide as much notice as possible of forthcoming commissioning;
- Include a section on your website about future tenders;
- Publicise lower value opportunities widely: use the trade press, relevant websites (including your own), and email potential providers who you know may be interested to tell them about the advert;
- Consider how you can provide more information about sub-contracting opportunities to the voluntary sector;
- Use a supplier list for procurements below the EC thresholds (if you know your market and the suppliers within it very well) and update it regularly, making it easy for new suppliers to join, and
- Publish a named contact point where suppliers can get further information about both current and forthcoming tenders.

35. Good Practice in Commissioning 12

Monitoring and Review 1 – What it Means

This is the process of assessing provider performance against the original contract objectives, and identifying any changes that could inform future commissioning and outcomes.

Monitoring and review:

- Enables funders to make sure that services are delivering value for money and are having a positive impact on the required outcomes, and
- Provides information to both Commissioners and providers to think about whether any changes are needed to improve future service delivery.

It is important that monitoring and review are proportionate to the value of the contract: proportionate reporting enables smaller voluntary sector organisations to concentrate their resources on service delivery rather than bureaucracy, and also to include their service users in the process, wherever possible.

This is the process of assessing provider performance against the original contract objectives, and identifying any changes that could inform future commissioning and outcomes.

36. Good Practice in Commissioning 13

Monitoring and Review 2 – What it Looks Like

Effective monitoring and review can enable:

- Continuing focus on outcomes;
- Arrangements that are proportionate to the size, value and level of risk associated with the contract;
- The voice of the service user to be heard;
- Effective avoidance of crisis if delivery is not going to plan, and
- Enough time to make changes such as in commissioning priorities, or contract termination.

37. Good Practice in Commissioning 14

Monitoring and Review 3– Involving the Voluntary Sector

Involve the voluntary sector in monitoring and review, from helping to design the programme of monitoring, to feeding into the review of the programme for future reference:

- Involvement in the design of contract management procedures ensures that the process is efficient, effective, and appropriate;
- Clarify the contract management arrangements in the tender documentation so that the voluntary sector can allow for the resources and costs involved in their tender price;
- Focus on management reporting and outcomes, avoiding onerous reporting requirements, which can mean that flexibility is lost;
- Allow for time for changes in reporting requirements so that the provider can implement them effectively, and
- Enable cost savings and service improvements to be identified during the course of the contract.

Developing good working partnerships with the voluntary sector takes time and effort, but the benefits are often well worth it in terms of value for money and service development.

38 –Useful Sources of Information and Support 1 Organisations

Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)
www.acevo.org.uk

The Commission for the Compact
www.thecompact.org.uk

Compact Voice
www.compactvoice.org.uk

Learn EAST
www.learneast.org.uk

Local Government Association (LGA)
www.lga.gov.uk

National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)
The national voice of local support and development organisations in England.
www.navca.org.uk

NAVCA searchable on-line voluntary sector directory at
<http://webdb.navca.org.uk/home.aspx>

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)
NCVO aims to give a shared voice to voluntary organisations and to help them achieve the highest standards of practice and effectiveness in all areas of their work.
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/

Office of the Third Sector
www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/thirdsector

39. Useful Sources of Information and Support 2

Publications

Big Society, Not Big Government
Conservative Party, 2010

EU Procurement Guide – An Introduction to the EU Procurement Rules
Office for Government Commerce
www.ogc.gov.uk

Funding and Procurement Code of Good Practice
Commission for the Compact
www.thecompact.org.uk/information/100023/100219/publications/

Growing the Big Society: Encouraging Success in Social and Community Enterprise
in Deprived Communities
Ed Cox and Katie Schmuecker, IPPR

Hearts and Minds: Commissioning from the Voluntary Sector
The Audit Commission
www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/Pages/heartsandminds.aspx

Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency: Releasing resources to the front
line, Sir Peter Gershon OBE
www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_sr04_efficiency.htm

Maximising the VCS Contribution to 14-19 Learning Provision
Young People's Learning Agency
www.ypla.gov.uk

NHS Commissioning Guide for the 3rd Sector
Summary on a Page, COVER
www.cover-east.org/cms/uploads/MEDIA/DOCUMENTS/Apr-2010---NHS-Commissioning-Guide.pdf

Pathways Through the Maze: A Guide to Procurement Law
NACVA and NCVO
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/pathways

Report on Third Sector Commissioning Survey
Bristol Change Up Consortium
www.voscur.org/

Commissioning Learning and Skills from the Voluntary Sector

Think Smart, Think Voluntary Sector: Good Practice Guidance on Procurement of Services from the Voluntary and Community Sector
Office for Government Commerce and Home Office
www.ogc.gov.uk/documents/Think_smart_think_voluntary.pdf

Please note that the OGC website is under re-development at the time of writing.

Thoughts on the Big Society
British Urban Regeneration Association
www.bura.org.uk/Resources/BURA%20Corporate/People/Documents/BURA%20Big%20Society%20PDF%20Current.pdf

Working with the Third Sector
National Audit Office
www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/05-06/050675.pdf

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