

Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP): The role of advocacy in designing public services

Locally-based providers and local commissioners need to develop trusting relationships if they want to improve local services.

Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP) has been working with people in the Coalfields area of Sunderland since 1981. By providing access to welfare rights and support, they help local people take control of their own lives and influence the future of their communities.

Sunderland City Council undertook a review of its advice services and engaged community organisations in the debate. One senior officer had done a work placement at ShARP and so arranged to visit them to see what ShARP does. The city-wide findings confirmed that local people wanted local access. As a result, the Council decided to break their single city-wide first-tier advice contract down to five smaller area-based ones. Smaller organisations like ShARP could then bid. ShARP has built up these relationships with local authority staff and councillors over 30 years.

“In the first six months of this year, we have already helped 2,130 clients with 2,829 issues. Our areas of advice are expanding and our clients are coming to us with increasingly complex and difficult issues, but understanding the needs of our local community is what we do best.”

From our work on Collaborate for Commissioning, bassac has found that, like ShARP, relationships count if you want to have a say in how local services are delivered.

Sandwell Community Caring Trust

In the mid-1990s, Sandwell Borough Council needed to reduce its social care budget by over £8m. In response to this they chose to establish a social enterprise - Sandwell Community Caring Trust (SCCT).

SCCT aimed to provide existing services more cost effectively while improving quality; provide well-remunerated, stable employment for former council employees; and find alternative sources of capital funding.

SCCT has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to achieve these aims. It focused its efforts transforming the organisational culture to an empowering environment in which staff were valued and supported, while being a commercial and efficient entity. It has had considerable success.

- Absenteeism fell from 22 days a year in 1997 to 0.3 days in 2008, staff turnover is below 4% generating huge savings.
- The proportion of turnover spent directly on front-line care is up from 62 percent in 1997 to over 82 percent in 2008.
- Where it cost the local authority £657 per person per week to provide adult residential care, SCCT can provide outstanding quality care for £328.

Crucially, the trust believes that happy, supported and autonomous staff are better able to develop strong long-term one to one relationships with service users raising the quality of the service.

It is a model that has been replicated across the country with considerable success.

About Us

communityalliance
transformation through community anchors

The Community Alliance is a partnership of bassac, Community Matters and the Development Trusts Association. Up and down the country, organisations known as community anchors are making extraordinary differences to people's lives. These place-based, multipurpose and holistic organisations sit in the heart of their communities. They know their communities inside out and from this knowledge devise tailored activities, services and support.



bassac is a membership body for community organisations. Our members help people to fulfil their potential and neighbourhoods to thrive. We support them and give them a national voice. Find out more about us at www.bassac.org.uk



Community Matters is the national federation of community organisations and our aim is to build stronger communities in which everyone is valued and can play their full part. For over 60 years we have been promoting the role of community organisations in a strong civil society.



The Development Trusts Association is a network of community enterprise practitioners. We help people set up development trusts, and we help existing trusts learn from each other and work effectively. We also influence government and others at national and local level, to build support and investment for the community enterprise movement.



The Social Enterprise Coalition is the UK's national body for social enterprise. The Coalition represents a wide range of social enterprises, regional and national support networks and other related organisations. As well as showcasing the benefits of social enterprise, and sharing best practice, we work closely with our members to inform national policy.



ACEVO is the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations and we are the leading voice for chief executives in the third sector. With over 2,000 members nationwide, we support, develop, connect and represent third sector leaders.

“The Time is Now”

A manifesto from the Community Alliance, Social Enterprise Coalition and ACEVO

In the context of increasing austerity in public spending, a widening poverty gap and a climate change crisis of global proportions, the time is now, more than ever, that government needs:

- Active, socially responsible, caring and involved citizens,
- Strong, cohesive and fair communities,
- Vociferous activists, campaigners and advocates, and
- Individuals and communities committed to tackling climate change.

To respond to these huge challenges and to meet these needs government must provide robust public services that are:

- Citizen focused,
- Shaped and co-delivered by communities of place and interest,
- Delivering prevention, early interventions and add social capital,
- Cost efficient to deliver, while achieving better outcomes, and
- Environmentally sustainable.

A thriving third sector can make this a reality

With over 870,000 organisations and almost 1,350,000 paid employees, making up 8% of GDP, the third sector is a major economic and social force.¹

Yet the sector is as impressive in its diversity as it is in its scale. From the community group dedicated to turning round a run-down neighbourhood, to a regional housing association with £billions of assets; from the small charity which relies on its dedicated volunteers to the major care providing social enterprise, this is a sector unified by its desire to improve lives, build stronger communities and provide world class services.

By supporting and enabling an independent space for civil society, government can do more for less.

¹ The UK Civil Society Almanac, NCVO 2009

To support a thriving third sector government just needs to get four things right:

1. Smart investment in an age of austerity

- Use a variety of funding vehicles when working with third sector organisations which are best suited to the desired outcome, including contracts, grants and loans.
- Support the capitalisation of the third sector by continuing to develop social investment, the creation of the Social Investment Wholesale bank and stimulating new forms of social finance such as social impact bonds.
- Attract private investment into the sector through adapting investment tax incentives to give a higher return for those organisations delivering social or environmental benefit.
- Transfer more assets into community ownership and invest in the communities which will manage those assets.
- Deliver better banking by reforming financial regulations so that banks can more easily deliver for all the communities they need to serve.

2. Improved public service markets and the democratisation of commissioning

- Create an environment where commissioners are able to take risks and dare to try something new.
- Ensure a level playing field, transparency and openness in all public procurement, with simplified and proportionate processes.
- Value co-design in the commissioning of services.
- Respect the terms of the Compact.
- Supporting the development of social enterprise models across public sector agencies.
- Commission services on a scale which makes sense to service users and allows third sector organisations to play to their strengths.
- In tendering processes support and facilitate collaborations between local partners, between large and small, and between national and local organisations and those with different business models.
- Value social and environmental outcomes in commissioning processes.
- Support and incentivise capacity building through procurement.
- Develop skills of commissioners and providers, and create the space for strategic conversations.
- Ensure services are personalised and joined-up.

3. A supportive architecture

- Sustain a department and minister with sole responsibility for the third sector at the heart of government.
- Performance manage government departments on their involvement and engagement with the third sector in all areas of policy development.
- Reform benefits to remove disincentives to volunteering and allow part time paid work in community groups and social enterprises.
- Reform regulation affecting the third sector to encourage more community action and volunteering.
- Allow more flexible governance arrangements in the sector.
- Continue to invest in building the sector's capacity, in particular in leadership and governance, with a smarter more demand led approach.
- Create a tax system which promotes social entrepreneurialism and philanthropy while maximising returns to the sector.

4. An environmentally sustainable relationship

- Deliver the recommendations of the third sector ministerial taskforce.
- Embed green outcomes in public procurement.
- Place the third sector at the heart of a green economy.
- Support all organisations to deliver a triple bottom line.
- Support third sector leaders to respond and adapt to the future of public services.

Case Studies

Kiveton Park & Wales Community Development Trust (KPWCDDT)

Kiveton Park & Wales are two adjacent villages about ten miles South East of Sheffield. Until the mid 1990s the area had a large coal industry, and with the closure of the colliery came high unemployment and a general loss of community spirit.

The Trust embarked on Kivo-Ebiz, a social enterprise selling unwanted items on e-bay on behalf of local people. 80% of the sale price goes to the seller and 20% is retained by the trust to cover running costs, with any profits being ploughed back into community projects. The enterprise is run by local volunteers which helps keep the costs down. Kivo-Ebiz also provides free training for buying and selling on e-bay and a number of people that have accessed the training then go on to volunteer with the project – developing new skills and making new friends.

Over a period of 18 months Kivo-Ebiz has brought £50,000 to the local community. There are plenty of examples where the trust has been able to use Kivo-Ebiz to put money directly into the hands of those who need it. These include a disabled lady who at the age of 78 was making and selling ornaments at car boot sales to supplement her very low income, and a young dad who had just been made redundant. In both cases the trust was able to sell items on their behalf and provide them with much needed cash.

Addaction

Addaction has been piloting a project called 'Breaking the Cycle', funded by the Zurich Community Trust and set up specifically to help children in drug or alcohol abusing families, in different areas of the UK. Families are referred from a variety of agencies; including treatment organisations, children and family services and probation.

A typical BtC client is in their 30s has had considerable problems with getting free of drugs or drink and often had a fraught relationship with statutory services.

The project provides a case manager for the family, acting as an advocate, organising and coordinating support, ensuring a holistic and balanced approach and acting as a central point of information for other professionals working with the family.

Breaking the Cycle's Success:

- 81% of the families helped significantly reduced their use of drugs and/or alcohol
- 86% significantly improved their skills as parents, putting the needs of their children first
- 86% of parents began looking for work, further education or volunteering

It costs around £50,000 to run our project which would support: 25-30 families in a year. As well as making a positive difference to the life prospects of these children and their families, the saving to society through reduced foster care, health and crime costs would be in excess of £1,100,000.²

Age Concern South Staffordshire

Age Concern South Staffordshire run a discharge support service in seven hospitals under contract from the local authority. The service was developed to reduce emergency admissions to hospital, to support older people on discharge from hospital and to prevent unnecessary admissions to hospital, respite or care homes.

The service includes an initial assessment which includes the risk of falling. 21 hours of support are then provided in the person's own home which includes personal care and shopping, home safety checks and signposting to other services and activities to meet ongoing need.

In 2007-8 around 10% of all A&E admissions of people over 60 in the county received the service and fewer than 2% of those 3,065 referrals resulted in re-admission. The service also reduced average length of stay in hospital and in total is estimated to have saved 8,320 bed days at a potential cost of £2,496,000. The service costs £180 per patient and in total cost around £0.5m.

Commissioners have applauded the service as being run by a professional and reliable partner and is seen to have a positive impact on the whole system of care. In January 2008 the service at Queens Hospital was rated as "excellent" by the CQC. 98% of service users said they were happy with the service and 66% said it was instrumental in supporting them to remain in their own homes.³

² Based on 25 drug users reducing their activities, saving of £1,100,000 to Society in terms of health and potential crimes costs at £44,000 per user per annum. This does not include the savings in terms of reduced care from the state for the children and families that would otherwise be incurred.

³ *Prevention in Practice*, Age Concern England and Help the Aged 2009