



The Equal Brighton & Hove Outreach Network

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Foreword

The Equal Core Team identified outreach as an area where Equal could provide some additional capacity, both to our delivery partners and other frontline staff working in the sector across Brighton & Hove. This project sought to address issues around information exchange and the sharing of practice among outreach staff, some of whom work alone with varying degrees of contact and support from their parent organisation. By supporting outreach workers to improve their knowledge and practice, we anticipated that the services received by disadvantaged people in the city might be enhanced.

The Network also offered an opportunity for frontline staff to contribute to the policy debate around skills and employability by exploring the barriers facing harder-to-reach clients and the organisations which work with them.

This short report summarises the activities and discussions held by the Outreach Network over the last seven months and the key messages which emerged. Our intention is that these messages should be taken to policy makers and funders, along with other lessons learned from the Equal programme, and be used to inform future planning of services.

The report goes on to consider how effective the project has been and options for sustaining the Network beyond the life of Equal. As part of the evaluation, I have considered what worked well and what worked less well, from a personal perspective as project manager and facilitator of the Network. I hope that this will be of use to others interested in setting up similar fora.

The Outreach Network was part of Equal Brighton & Hove's city-wide approach to tackling barriers to labour-market participation. For a small financial investment, we were able to engage with a large number of workers and organisations and make a greater impact on their work than if we had invested the same amount in the individual organisations. This kind of infrastructure investment is vital if we are to build capacity and create the environment for a thriving third sector which can deliver local and national priorities.

I would like to thank the following for their invaluable advice, support and involvement in the project: Members of the Network and their parent organisations; Rachel Brown, Rhiannon Gower, Lana Garth and everyone at Equal; Claire Mitchell, Karen Barford and the Engage forum.

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Recommendations

Over the course of five workshops, the Outreach Network discussed the barriers facing outreach workers and their needs in terms of organisational support and professional development. The following recommendations are based on these discussions:

Outreach Workers

- Funders to identify and support capacity building activity, such as developing networks for the exchange of information and practice
- Organisations to identify and address training and support needs of frontline staff
- All frontline staff to receive appropriate induction and ongoing support, particularly in the case of lone working
- Organisations to facilitate sharing of practice and experience among frontline staff, both internally and externally

The Outreach Network went on to consider the barriers facing their clients, including structural barriers outside local control, and the challenges faced by their own organisations and made the following recommendations:

Less duplication; better collaborative working

- Local authority to have a clear **vision** of which services it wants provided and who is best placed to deliver them
- Local authority to identify how it will support organisations to deliver its priorities
- Where there is duplication, funders to make evidence-based decisions about whether to continue funding or support organisations to change/merge
- Delivery organisations to identify areas where they can work more closely with other organisations in the same field
- Commissioning process to maintain choice of providers for clients where appropriate
- Organisations to be encouraged, through capacity building activity and the commissioning process, to share information and best practice
- Information and best practice exchange to take place between frontline staff and at organisational level
- Local Authority and its partners to take a lead on sharing of experience and best practice at local, national, regional and international levels.

Unsurprisingly, outreach workers were interested in funding. Their focus, however, was on reducing divisive competition between organisations, so that they could work together more effectively and serve their clients better. Funders were seen to have a role in this:

Funding arrangements

- Funders to promote partnership and collaboration rather than cut-throat competition between delivery organisations
- Longer-term funding where possible within current rules
- Short-term projects to be under the umbrella of longer-term projects/programmes where appropriate
- Funding decisions to be based on capacity to deliver (or potential to develop that capacity) and the ability to engage with client group, rather than size of organisation
- Funders and delivery organisations to jointly agree targets and indicators, to ensure buy-in
- Targets to take account of appropriate hard and soft outcomes, and be based on good quality local intelligence

Outreach workers also had a lot to say about eligibility criteria and flexibility of services and the role of employers:

Eligibility and flexibility:

- Funders to move away from rigid eligibility criteria that may exclude some disadvantaged individuals that they are seeking to help
- Flexibility for clients during periods of transition, particularly around housing benefit and support services
- Ongoing support for disadvantaged individuals moving into training/work to help keep them there
- Mentors/job coaches in the workplace for new entrants

Employers

- Training for employers around support needs of potential employees
- Local authority and its partners to champion the business case for good workplace practices in terms of staff retention

What do we mean by “Outreach”?

Outreach “essentially entails services being taken out from their normative and mainstream institutional settings and providing those services in local community settings.¹”

Outreach provision can be differentiated from mainstream provision by its emphasis on working with “harder to reach” individuals who may be less willing to engage with statutory services; the voluntary nature of participation; and a more holistic or individualised approach.

For the purpose of this project, outreach was defined broadly in order to encourage wide participation. The network was open to all organisations doing outreach work with an employment or skills focus in Brighton & Hove, not just to EBH partners; the intention being to provide a city-wide service which did not operate in a silo. Staff from one organisation travelled to Brighton from their Eastbourne office to participate.

Some participants were frontline staff employed by mainstream services, who took these out into community settings on a full or part-time basis and had clients come to them. Others spent the majority of their time away from their desks seeking to engage “hard to reach” individuals in training or employment opportunities. Outreach activities included awareness-raising and marketing, advice and guidance and delivery of services.

The full list of organisations which participated is at Annex 1.

¹ Dewson, Davis and Caseborne (2006): “Maximising the Role of Outreach in Client Engagement” DWP Research Report No.326.

The Story of the Outreach Network

The Outreach Network was set up in April 2007 and held its first networking event and workshop on 22 May. This was followed by four further events facilitated by Jane Zacharzewski, the Equal Outreach Co-ordinator.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, the Outreach Network exists in virtual form, via a mailing list and page on the Equal website. These resources will continue beyond the end of the Equal programme in December 2007.

The cost of running this project was approximately £10,250, including catering for the networking lunches and salary costs for the Outreach Co-ordinator, who was based in the Core Team 1.5 days per week.

Networking Events and Workshops

Tackling Common Barriers

The focus of the Outreach Network events held in July, September and October was on identifying barriers faced by individual clients, frontline workers and their organisations.

At the July meeting, the group began by discussing the tools they bring to their jobs, such as practical equipment, services for their clients, their knowledge and expertise. They went on to look at what might be missing from this "toolkit".

The list of tools can be found at Annex 2.

At the September event, the focus was on identifying common barriers which participants had encountered in the course of their work. This led to a discussion of which barriers:

- Were specific to clients or workers
- Were faced at organisational level
- Could be worked around
- Were non-negotiable
- Were outside the power of the worker, the organisation or even the Local Authority and its partners

In October, the group discussed and added to the list of barriers and drew up a wish list, aimed primarily at policy makers, of things that could make a difference to them as workers and, mostly importantly, to their clients. This list forms the basis of our recommendations, listed on page 3 of this report.

Presentations and Speakers

Two of the Outreach Network Events included presentations by outside speakers.

Adult Learners: Searching for Course Information on the Web

Tess Gill, from Adult Skills & Learning at BHCC, and Mark Walker from the Sussex Community Internet Project (SCIP) ran a session for the Network to coincide with Adult Learners Week in May. This was an opportunity for members to learn more about the new Google-type search facility on the Adult Learning website and to try it out for themselves. This stimulated a discussion about access to information and the reliability of the information itself. Tess and Mark were able to use feedback from the group to inform further development of the website.

For more information, contact Tess on 01273 294287 or by email: tess.gill@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Or Marc Walker at SCIP on 01273 234049 or by email: mark@scip.org.uk

Tess has also conducted a piece of research on the availability of adult course information on the internet. The research makes a number of recommendations about how to maximise the searchability of your website and what categories of information might be listed.

The report "Adult Learning Courses in Brighton & Hove: What can you find out online?" by Anna Davies and Tess Gill (2006) can be downloaded from the Equal website, along with an executive summary: <http://www.equalbrightonandhove.org/node/369>

The Parent's Guide to Money

Sarah Colombo, Early Years and Childcare Strategy Manager at Brighton & Hove City Council, joined us for the final Network Event in November. Sarah gave an introduction to the new "Parent's Guide to Money" which has been produced by the Financial Services Authority and is being distributed to all pregnant women in the city through health-visitors and midwives. The group discussed how they might use the guide with their clients and looked at some of the particular issues facing parents with regards to training and (re)entering the labour market.

Sarah can be contacted at Brighton & Hove City Council on 01273 294218 or by email: sarah.colombo@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Monitoring and Evaluation

Event Satisfaction Ratings

The Outreach Network held 5 networking lunches and workshops between May and November 2007. The average number of attendees was 8.4, with the first meeting being the best attended meeting (12 participants) and the final meeting only attracting 4. The number of participants demonstrated a downward trend over the five meetings.

All participants were asked to complete a short evaluation form after each event. It should be born in mind that small overall numbers mean that each individual response had a big effect on the percentages quoted.

We look at the reasons why individuals were unable or chose not to attend some meetings in our analysis of the final questionnaire below.

Satisfaction with meeting content was consistently high with between 75% and 100% of participants scoring this aspect 4 or above on a 6-point scale at each meeting. The July and November meetings scored the highest satisfaction ratings, with 100% of participants scoring satisfaction with content at 4 or above. 75% of participants at the November event gave this aspect a 6.

Satisfaction with networking also elicited a positive response, with between 83% and 100% of participants rating this aspect 4 or above. In May and November, 75% of participants rated their satisfaction with networking at 5 or 6 on the scale.

Satisfaction with the venue was high. Between 83% and 100% of participants gave this aspect a score of 4 or above at each meeting. On each occasion, only 1 respondent gave the venue a score of 3 or lower (apart from the November meeting at which all participants scored this aspect a 5 or 6). All events were held at the same venue - the Equal offices at New England House - though the catering was supplied by two different companies.

The majority of participants in the networking events reported **making useful business contacts** at each meeting, with 100% of participants ticking this box at the initial meeting in May and between 70% and 80% doing so at the remaining meetings.

Final Outreach Questionnaire

Shortly after the final networking event, all members of the Outreach Network were invited to complete a short questionnaire about their experiences of participating in the Network and what they would like to see in the future. 10 individuals completed the questionnaire, which represents a 36% response rate. Of these, 6 worked for organisations funded by Equal and 4 did not. 8 of out the 10 had taken part in the networking lunches and workshops.

Half of all respondents (5) had heard about the Network for the first time when approached directly by the outreach co-ordinator. A further 3 heard about the network via Engage, an Equal-funded forum which brings together organisations in the field of employer engagement².

Questionnaire Headlines

Nearly all respondents (80%) agreed strongly that they had **enjoyed the opportunity to network**. The remaining 2 may have been the same 2 people who reported that they did not participate in the networking lunches.

Knowledge and information: 50% of respondents reported that they had increased their knowledge, 40% that they had gained new information and 50% that they were now able to provide their clients with more accurate up-to-date information as a result of their participation in the network. Half of all respondents reported accessing additional resources, such as reports and guides, but 40% had not.

50% of respondents reported that they had used the network to **publicise their own organisation**, with only 2 disagreeing. 40% of respondents had made new contacts through the network.

6 respondents (60%) felt that they had **contributed to the debate on skills and employability**. Only 2 people disagreed with this statement.

The picture on **sharing best practice and experiences** was more mixed. 30% reported that they had shared their experiences and the same percentage that they had shared their knowledge, expertise or practice. A high percentage of respondents (60%) neither agreed nor disagreed with these statements, suggesting that they may have been unsure what the question meant or felt that it was not particularly relevant to the nature of their participation.

No respondents reported that they had **changed the way they worked** as a result of participation in the network, with 8 of them disagreeing strongly with the statement.

Only 1 respondent reported using the Outreach section of the Equal website.

² For further information on Engage, see www.engagesolutions.org.uk

The most commonly cited reasons for not being able to attend the networking events were “**clashed with other meetings**” and “**too busy at work**” (5 each). 2 respondents said that meetings would **take too long out of their day** and 2 could not attend at that time/day. No-one cited relevance of content or issues with the venue. No-one reported that they were unable to attend because their manager would not release them.

Almost all respondents would be interested in using a **mailing list** in future (90%). **Networking events, information events and information on a website** were also popular options (7 respondents each.) 6 people reported that they would be interested in **training events** aimed specifically at outreach workers but only 1 person reported that they would be interested in using a discussion board.

Additional Comments from the Questionnaire

Respondents were also asked for their additional comments and suggestions.

4 people chose to complete this section. 1 respondent asked for more up-to-date information about member organisations, including their services and opening times, to be made available via the website or a quarterly e-newsletter. The other responses highlighted the usefulness of the Network, although 2 respondents expressed regret at not being able to make the time to attend meetings.

Contact details for organisations which participated in the Network are now available in the Outreach section of the Equal website, along with links to their websites:

www.equalbrightonandhove.org/outreach

What worked well; what didn't

The co-ordinator's perspective

In addition to the data from the evaluation sheets completed by workshop participants and the questionnaire circulated after the final workshop, I have drawn together my reflections on what worked well and what worked less well, from my perspective as both project manager and facilitator of the workshop events. This is intended to complement feedback from the Network members, rather than offering an exhaustive list.

What worked well:

- Research - talking to outreach workers about what they did and the challenges they face; this learning helped to shape the project
- Using own premises - cost and convenience (for the host)
- Publicising events via the mailing list
- Publicity and information on our website - Lots of hits, though few people reported using the site (questionnaire results)
- Having a clear focus for each session
- Building each session around a pre-planned focus activity
- Good catering - appreciated by participants
- Participants from a wide range of organisations, both Equal-funded and other organisations
- Lots of new contacts made (supported by evaluation sheets)
- Quality of discussion
- Open, supportive atmosphere
- Willingness to share
- A route for outputs as part of Equal's wider dissemination and mainstreaming work
- Core Team gained too in terms of information/intelligence and making new contacts
- Resources will be available on-line beyond end of Equal
- The Network cost very little to run but engaged with lots of people

What worked less well:

- Venue not very central or attractive (but evaluation scores suggest this was not a barrier to participation)
- Some meetings were poorly attended
- JCP & Working Links expressed interest but rarely attended
- Didn't get training or work shadowing off the ground despite some initial interest
- Lack of clarity over best route/audience for messages
- Sustainability not secured by last meeting
- Insufficient time to get the Network established and introduce new activities, such as training and information events

Annex 1

Organisations which participated in the Outreach Network

Many thanks to all who participated in the network, whether by attending events and taking part in the discussions or via email and the Equal website.

Brighton & Hove City Council, Adult Learning Team
Brighton & Hove City Council, Want to Work
Business Action on Homelessness
Care Co-ops
Constructing Futures, City College Brighton & Hove
Connexions
Engage
Friends Centre
Hollingdean Steps
Impact Initiatives
Jobcentre Plus
Rainer Training
Sussex Careers
The Bridge
Tomorrow's People, Eastbourne
Varndean College
Working Links
Working Together Project

Annex 2

What's in My Toolkit?

My own knowledge and skills:

- Knowledge of the local area
- HR & counselling experience
- Prior working/education experience
- A non-judgemental attitude
- Being flexible and accommodating
- A positive attitude
- The ability to motivate and enthuse

Information and organisational resources:

- The Engage Good Practice Guide
- Employer Engagement (EE) Directory
- EE expertise
- Membership of the Engage forum
- "The Wave" (Brighton & Hove Council's intranet resource)
- Web searching
- Resources room
- Back-up of the employer solutions team
- Getting an additional tutor

Practical tools:

- Laptop
- 3G card (for internet access)
- My bike/bus pass

On offer to my clients:

- Preparing job application forms, CVs and covering letters
- Confidence workshops
- Workshops on interview and application techniques
- Skills check
- Needs assessment form
- Information and advice on local education, training and employment opportunities
- Job-search support
- Internet access for clients
- Careers guidance from qualified practitioners

What's missing from my toolkit?

NB Not all of these applied to all participants/organisations

- Existing assessment tools to build on/adapt
- Information in appropriate formats, eg for clients with literacy issues
- A comprehensive Directory, both on-line and on paper
- Personal alarms
- Mobile phone provided by organisation
- Better timesheets
- Simplified diary systems (team, personal, paper etc)

- The right level of management support
- Back-up from teams within my organisation - eg managers working on employer engagement so that I can do my job with clients more effectively
- Good enough induction (variable)
- Information on clients in advance of meeting (possible risks)

- Connections with others in a similar role (lone working; potential isolation)
- Networks
- Better joined-up/partnership working (instead of negative attitudes, competitiveness and backbiting!)

- Better access to employers
- More work placements for clients
- More job opportunities for clients

Training and professional development for me:

- Access to nationally recognised qualifications or accreditation
- Work-shadowing opportunities
- Specific training in outreach work, including
 - Safety/lone working
 - Assertiveness and self-care
 - Time-management, setting boundaries and saying "no"
 - Note-taking
 - Organising information
 - Preparing and asking the right questions in client interviews
 - Self-defence techniques

Structural challenges

- Lack of strategic planning to avoid duplication
- Lack of national government funding to deliver national priorities
- Working across different geographical areas:
 - lack of consistency around funding, structures and procedures
 - networks and resources available in some geographical areas but not others

Annex 3

Our Wish List

- A good central source of community information (something like that available online for West and East Sussex)
- Fewer organisations?
- But don't lose the good small ones and maintain choice of providers for clients
- Longer-term funding
- Short-term projects under the umbrella of longer-term organisations or projects
- Less duplication
- Less competition; more partnership (problems created by contracting/funding arrangements)
- The RIGHT targets, standards and indicators
- Flexibility for clients during periods of transition
 - Benefits, especially Housing benefit
 - Ongoing support once they leave intensive support services
- Mentors in the workplace for new entrants (as well as external support)
- Educated employers, who understand support needs
 - benefit in terms of staff retention
- Sufficient, appropriate, affordable move-on accommodation
- More sharing of experience and best practice with other EU states
- Better early identification of those at risk of disadvantage

Barriers faced by clients

- Not eligible for services
- Childcare
- Feeling disengaged
- Transport costs
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of right skills/qualifications
- Long time out of the job market
- Accommodation costs
 - hostels, supported accommodation, private rented
- Availability of move-on accommodation and services
- Benefits system for those who want to work part-time, especially Housing Benefit
- Lack of funding for their ongoing, long-term support

Barriers facing Outreach Workers/Delivery Organisations

- Lack of resources - money, facilities, staff
- Lack of management support (variable)
- Out of date information
- Clients don't meet eligibility criteria
- Job insecurity
- Too much information!
- Overlap/duplication of services
- Confusion over who does what
- Short-term contracts (adds to the confusion)
- Scramble for funding
- Time taken up with securing funding