

Progressing community organisers in Exeter – discussion paper

Agreed at ECF Steering group meeting 13th September 2016

1. Recommendations

- a. That a public invitation for local organisations with an expertise and track record of community development (and supporting community organising) to apply to host one or a number of community organisers.
- b. That the host organisation(s) will work with (one another and) ECF and its members to determine where community organisers should be located and which communities to serve,
- c. That the host organisations offer training, support and supervision to the community organisers
- d. That an annual report on impact of the work of the community organisers is reported to communities and ECF – using shared measures of impact.
- e. That talk to the ICE programme about seeking funding together to complement the Community Connectors' roles to complete the model to locate community organisers in those communities not already served by a community organiser, and look at other opportunities to match fund this work to extend the programme and impact.
- f. That we request that ICE provide training to existing community organisations and interested volunteers/community development workers about community organising and suggest that some of their funding is used to run and communities and health event to promote this agenda and explore joint funding opportunities.

2. Background

Community organising is about “empowering communities and harnessing the power of individuals to work together in shared self-interest. Community Organising involved building relationships in communities, mobilising people to take action and supporting projects which make a difference to people’s lives. Community organising creates social and political change through collective action. Community Organisers listen to what people want to see change in their lives and community and help them to achieve this, working in a through democratic structures. Community Organisers have no agenda and do not lead or do things on behalf of people”¹

The role of community organisers can contribute towards many different wellbeing and inclusion outcomes and such an approach is endorsed by the principles for health action set out in the A CHARTER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN HEALTH² from the NHS alliance and New Economics Foundation’s³ 5 steps to wellbeing research. These are “connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give...”

The Exeter Community Strategy itself commits to: “**Supporting community organising.** This can include any initiative which seeks to bring people together, to achieve a specific objective, or increase quality of life. One element will be to build capacity among people living within communities to develop solutions to the problems they face, rather than taking a direct lead in solving them. Community organisers have been shown to be very effective, for example in Wonford. The programme will work with partners to match-fund organisers in other communities. Where a community plan is being supported in a particular area, the community organiser will work closely with the community plan facilitator, to ensure as many people as possible are able to take part in developing and implementing the plan.”

Issues to consider – a suggested approach below draws on the ECF meeting with members, discussions informally with Dawn Rivers, Niall McCloud, ECI/ICE, and community organisers.

Communities: It is suggested that most of the community organisers are located and work with communities:

1. Of around 2,000 – 3,000 people (this can extend over a number of years),
2. Are, in the majority, in areas that wish to work with a community organiser and willing to set up or have mechanisms for the community organiser to feed into (e.g. via a community association). Community associations could offer a support network, promote the community organiser role in the community and to other community groups and actively help with fundraising for the post.
3. In a smaller number of communities that do not yet have the community infrastructure to offer the support outlined about but meet one or more of the priorities outlined below.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415860/Community_Organisers_Programme_Summary_Report.pdf

² <http://www.nhsalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/NHSA-CD-Charter-FINAL.pdf>

³ <http://www.fivewaystowellbeing.org/>

It is recommended that community organisers are located (principles rather than specifics suggested in this first instance).

Areas to prioritise:

1. New communities and communities preparing for significant development in or near their area
2. Areas experiencing relative high levels of social exclusion or inequality and poverty.
3. Depending on further discussion with ICE areas to complement the 6 GP surgeries that will host community connectors as part of the ICE programme and currently don't have a community organiser: (ICE plan to work with A - Mount Pleasant Health Centre, B - Wonford Green Health Centre, C - Pinhoe Surgery, D - Topsham Surgery, E - St Thomas Health Centre, F - Fox Hayes Surgery) see map: (<https://batchgeo.com/map/2084564df9516455e8572f1637254812>)

Hosts: It is envisaged that one 'main' host for a team of full or part time community organisers would come forward to act an employer. It maybe the case that one or a number of other hosts wanting to add additional hours to an existing role to undertake community organising specifically, others may have the wherewithal to act as an employer may come forward or some larger charities with a specific purpose might come forward. Hosts should commit to:

1. Offer line management and supervision for the community organiser(s).
2. actively engage with local communities (community organisations) to offer a formal local support group to the community organiser, (bearing in mind the learning from the Young Foundation that a high degree of local ownership is vital⁴).
3. Provide an annual evaluation and report of the work against agreed key indicators to Exeter community forum and their communities they work with. This should be provided by the 'main' host and with contributions from other hosts.
4. Lead fundraising efforts to secure the posts of the community organisers they employ, working with local community organisations and ECF as necessary.
5. Co-operative positively with other hosts, ECF and ECC, and promote community organising to a range of agencies for who the approach might benefit the communities they work with.
6. Signed up to the principles of the Exeter Community Strategy, the principles of community organising and working in the interests of communities in Exeter, especially to promote social inclusion including among Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities in Exeter.

Training and development: That some training is provided in the next 6 months to community organisations, volunteers community development workers on community organising and learning from the experiences in Exeter to date. Once community organisers are appointed that this team should meet together across the city with other community organisers and community development workers to share learning, training and develop issues. The 'main' host should co-ordinate and ensure the delivery of an ongoing training and development programme for all community organisers. This group should provide regular feedback and input to Exeter Community Forum.

Joining up: The community strategy has the following priority:

"To complement other investment taking place across the city, either directly, by providing match funding for key initiatives that help to achieve the strategy aims, or indirectly, by supporting a complementary initiative. An example of this is supporting community organising; the organisers who are recruited may well help people access initiatives supported by other investment streams in the city."

As such we should build on the relationship developed with Integrated Care Exeter (ICE), to complement their work with community connectors based in GP surgeries, and look for other similar opportunities to achieve joint outcomes and also develop a joint approach to funding such posts. There is a good opportunity to combine introduction to community planning and the issue of community health in a conference/ training event to engage community groups in Exeter on the issue.

We must also ensure that community organisers work closely with communitiy organisations and also the emerging work about **community planning**.

Community organisers should generally look to build relationships with a wide range of groups and agencies/authorities.

⁴ <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Growing-Community-Organising-FINAL-V3.pdf>

Funding The New homes Bonus/CIL funds will not support a team of 30 community organisers for 10 years!
Therefore the following approach is suggested:

- a. Identify community partners - both potential hosts and community groups as outlined above to develop joint funding bids – where ECF/CIL funds can act as matched funding for one or, preferably) more local areas
- b. Connect to other programmes- as mentioned above community organisers clearly link to the work ICE are doing and discussions should continue, with a view to joint action. Other opportunities should be considered – such as open spaces etc.
- c. That ECF/CIL funds are a long term (3-5 year) commitment and efforts are made to use these to lever in other funds.

Impact: quite simply some indicators need to be agreed which can use used across the community organisers cohort to assess the impact their work will have in the city. These can draw on issues identified in the community strategy (e.g. volunteering), particular indicators relevant to Exeter e.g. levels of loneliness and national 'commonly used indicators' relevant to the impact of community organising.

Review: The work of community organisers and hosts will be reviewed on an annual basis, and hosts, communities and community organisers will be expected to contribute to that review.

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