

Growing Guidance in the Community



Kent Guidance Consortium



The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation initiated and supported by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

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The Government's current strategy for information, advice and guidance for adults in England is based on a partnership approach to the delivery of local services. Particular emphasis is being placed on the participation of community and voluntary groups. These are regarded as being the most accessible agencies for many people.

This Briefing:

- outlines the strategy adopted in one area for involving community and voluntary agencies;
- describes the role of Community Learning Advisers, and the support structures provided for them;
- identifies key issues raised by the work to date.

The Briefing is based on an evaluation of the first year of the Kent and Medway Information, Advice and Guidance Partnership. It has been written by Lesley Haughton (NICEC Fellow) and Tony Watts (Director of NICEC).

CONTEXT

THE PROJECTS

Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Partnerships made a successful bid to the DfEE for funding to become an Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) "Pathfinder" area for 1999-2000. It was planned that the service would build on existing provision, and particularly on the knowledge and experience of community groups and voluntary agencies. It would take information, advice and guidance out into the community, with structured support for delivery staff in community agencies.

Four Community Guidance Projects were located in areas with contrasting geographical and socio-economic profiles. Target groups were identified for each of the areas (Medway, North Kent, East Kent, and Mid and West Kent).

TARGET GROUPS

The target groups included:

- unemployed adults not in receipt of the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA);
- residents in wards with high unemployment and/or low skill levels;
- Asian women and other ethnic-minority groups;
- adults with disabilities and/or mental health difficulties;
- adults on isolated estates;
- refugees;
- traveller communities;
- employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- employees in particular industries.

Common features of the potential target groups as identified by project staff during NICEC evaluation visits included:

- effects of poor educational experiences and low achievement;
- effects of long-term unemployment, often across generations of the same family;
- low self-esteem and limited aspirations;
- lack of confidence and unwillingness to take up opportunities provided at colleges, or to visit specialist adult guidance services, even after outreach sessions or "tasters" had been offered;
- unwillingness to take up referrals, and preference for maintaining contact with a trusted individual who would

undertake to return with information or engage in advocacy;

- low levels of car ownership, and therefore reliance on (often limited) public transport;
- need for free child care, provided locally;
- need for free learning provision or substantial concessions.

Issues included:

- targeting might mean that some disadvantaged groups were not reached;
- some target groups might be difficult to identify, especially if they did not form themselves into groups in the community;
- some target groups might be difficult to work with, particularly where few community agencies/groups were currently working with them, and where there might be safety issues in trying to make contact – any effective work with such groups was likely to be slow and long-term;
- it might be difficult to work with a target group if the agencies that currently had a foothold with them were reluctant to work with the project.

METHOD

Access to target groups was provided through networking with community groups and voluntary agencies, resulting in a new style of partnership agreement to include:

- a personal contact;
- an agreed timetable of work;
- networking with other local groups if appropriate, so that identified learning needs could be met locally;
- linking with the IAG Partnership, to include facilitating intranet access;
- a brokerage service to meet learning needs locally if appropriate;
- continuing guidance and support for individuals while learning, to promote progression;
- training of community workers in the provision of information and advice, including NVQs in Advice and Guidance or other appropriate accredited learning.

The key staff responsible for facilitating this process were called Community Learning Advisers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the Kent and Medway IAG Partnership is available from:

Kent Guidance Consortium, 22 High Street, Ashford, Kent TN24 8TD (tel. 01233-640214; fax. 01233-640215).

Further copies of this Briefing are available from:

NICEC, Sheraton House, Castle Park, Cambridge CB3 0AX, on receipt of an A4 stamped (20p for 1 or 2 copies, 31p for up to 4, 38p for up to 6) and addressed envelope.

COMMUNITY LEARNING ADVISERS

The original plan was to have four full-time Community Learning Advisers (CLAs). In the event, two were full-time; the funding for the other two was split between four part-time CLAs, partly to take account of the geographical distances involved and the different needs in different areas.

The CLAs had different experience and qualifications, in terms both of information, advice and guidance and of community development work.

Two CLAs lived in the area where they were working and had local knowledge, including previous contacts in other roles with local community-based organisations. The other two lived some distance from the geographical area they were working in, and had to become familiar with it.

In order to provide maximum opportunities for networking and for access to information, each CLA was employed and managed by a different lead partner within the Kent Guidance Consortium (KGC) (the vehicle chosen by the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Partnerships for implementing the programme). They thus operated on different salary scales, and had different terms of employment and job descriptions. Contracts varied from 0.3 to full-time. CLAs were managed on a day-to-day basis by the employing institution, but with formal links to the IAG Project Manager.

Issues included:

- those in part-time roles had other part-time commitments as well, some of which complemented the CLA role, and others of which may have resulted in conflicts of interest or confusion;
- the status of CLAs in relation to other guidance professionals was not sufficiently clear;
- accountability to the lead partner was a source of potential role conflict.

ROLE

The role of the CLA was planned in two phases.

PHASE 1

- To map groups or agencies which already provided or might provide IAG services in the selected communities.
- To identify and liaise with existing services and projects working with the target groups.
- To establish working relationships with a range of voluntary/community groups, projects, agencies or organisations in preparation for Phase Two.

PHASE 2

To undertake a range of activities appropriate to the needs of the selected groups or agencies, including:

- awareness-raising of IAG opportunities;
- setting up group sessions on guidance, particularly as part of other provision, courses and activities;
- exploring ways of increasing access to IAG systems (including use of information and communication technologies);

- supporting referral to guidance partners and liaising with other support services;
- developing the guidance skills of people working with these communities and groups, and exploring relevant forms of training and accreditation;
- providing feedback to educational providers on unmet needs;
- identifying ways of developing a wider guidance partnership or network and formalising links between community agencies and the IAG Partnership;
- implementing appropriate evaluation systems;
- feeding back to IAG services on effective methods of working with under-represented groups in order to develop services.

STRATEGIES

Four broad strategies underpinned the work of the CLAs:

- to facilitate *referrals* from community agencies/groups to existing IAG services;
- to facilitate *outreach work* in the community by the existing IAG services;
- to engage on their own account in *direct delivery* of IAG;
- to engage in *capacity building* – developing the agencies'/groups' own capacity for delivering IAG.

The strategy for capacity building was based on three main elements:

- *resources*, including printed resources, audio-tapes and software – CLAs were asked to identify the IT hardware capacity of different agencies/groups;
- *training*, including the use of a pack developed by the National Extension College;
- *quality standards*, including signing a Partnership Agreement outlining the range of IAG services to be delivered, and agreeing to the Guidance Council Code of Practice.

Priorities and ways of working varied between the CLAs, depending upon:

- the nature of their other jobs and commitments;
- the nature of their managing organisation and its priorities, and their level of contact with their line manager;
- their understanding of their role and their degree of confidence in taking the initiative;
- the nature of their previous and current contacts with local community agencies/groups;
- the order in which resources provided were received, and the instructions provided with them.

Community agencies/groups saw the role of the CLA in different ways:

- some saw the role in very *general* terms – e.g. to develop the potential for community learning, or to treat the cycle of unemployment in families, or to motivate people to come to community centres and take up opportunities;

- some saw the CLA as an IAG *direct-delivery* resource – e.g. providing information or careers advice;
- some saw the CLA as an IAG *training/support resource* – e.g. providing Jobline 500 and training in how to use it, or training others to provide careers advice;
- some saw the CLA as a *college liaison officer* (where the lead partner for the CLA was a college, this could support such a perception);
- some saw the CLA in terms of their *other roles* – e.g. as an IT tutor.

The last two of these were potentially problematic.

Confusion about the role of the CLA appeared to be due to a number of factors:

- the term "Community Learning Adviser" was unfamiliar to all concerned and could lead to a variety of different interpretations;
- some CLAs were unclear about their role and were communicating this lack of clarity to the agencies;
- some contacts or groups were pursuing their own agendas and only heard or noticed aspects of the CLA role that fitted these agendas;
- it could be tempting for CLAs to present their work as part of, or closely related to, something else, and there could be advantages to this, but it could put the work on the wrong footing and be difficult to retrieve.

Other issues included:

- The balance to be achieved between the strategies adopted had considerable implications for outcome measures (was an *increased* or a *reduced* level of referrals being sought?), and this decision affected the priority given to each strategy.
- It was not originally intended that the CLAs would engage in direct delivery of IAG; some however wished to do so, partly as an effective way of establishing credibility with community agencies/groups, and partly because it would help in meeting the programme's client targets. The capability of CLAs to offer such direct delivery differed, depending on the extent of their IAG experience.
- The facilitation of outreach work from existing IAG services varied, and attention was being given to developing a closer understanding of the ways in which specialist IAG services operated and how to interact with them.
- There was a risk that the role might be used by the managing or other organisations to fit other agendas or priorities.

SUPPORT

Support structures for the CLAs were at a number of levels:

- The line manager for each of the CLAs was nominated by the lead partner that employed the CLA concerned. The lead partner was responsible for arranging the CLA's accommodation and for providing induction into its own organisational structures.

- The IAG Partnership Manager was responsible for providing training, resources and other support to the CLAs. She worked on the IAG programme on a 0.8 basis and reported to a Management Group. This included the KGC Co-ordinator, part of whose role was to develop quality-assurance and continuous-quality-improvement systems.
- Resources provided to the CLAs by the IAG Partnership Manager included equipment (laptops, mobile phones, etc.) and support documentation. The latter included a Project Log, designed to help the CLAs to be systematic and to reflect on their work.

Issues included:

- the management structure was somewhat confusing – the CLAs needed clear line management;
- more time needed to be allocated to meet with other CLAs, both with and without line managers;
- CLAs wanted more opportunities to visit and learn from other CLAs;
- CLAs indicated that they would find it useful to have access to consultancy from other individuals experienced in offering IAG in community settings.

TRAINING

Briefing and training required by the CLAs was in the following areas, depending on their prior skills and experience:

- briefing about both KGC and the managing organisation, and about the principles on which they operated;
- briefing about the broader operation of both KGC and the managing organisation, and the partnerships and networks they were involved in;
- regularly updated information about the full range of local learning provision and the potential capacity of local providers;
- briefing about the role of the CLA, lines of management and accountability, and the support and resources that could be expected;
- procedural induction (e.g. health and safety, reporting systems, storing and transferring data);
- initial training in the underlying principles of good practice in IAG delivery;
- updating in specific areas, e.g. local labour market information;
- specific training about the resources to be made available to community groups, and how they might be used;
- initial training in community development skills.

Issues included:

- it was difficult to ensure that essential induction, briefing and training were provided at the start of a project when staff were appointed at different times, and had different experience and qualifications;
- some needs depended on the clarification of roles and responsibilities as the project progressed.

COMMUNITY CONTACTS

IDENTIFYING CONTACTS

Various strategies were employed to identify contacts in the community. The CLAs were provided with a Community Group Matrix, which referred to three types of groups:

- well-established groups (e.g. NACRO, Citizens Advice Bureaux) with fund-raising capacity and employed staff;
- established groups set up to address particular issues, e.g. ethnic-minority or disability issues;
- small groups set up on a volunteer basis to address local issues, e.g. tenant groups, village societies.

For each category, notes were included in the Matrix on likely level of premises, computerisation, staff competences, guidance competences, and training preferences.

In practice, groups appeared to be selected partly on the basis of prior contact, and partly on other criteria, including:

- the groups' level of contact with the target-groups;
- their potential for influence, e.g. disseminating information or initiating community activity;
- the strength of their infrastructure – this tended to give preference to larger and more formally structured agencies/groups.

The CLAs had a brief to map and produce a directory of local community agencies/groups, and this was done in different ways by each CLA. The purpose of the mapping, and the use to be made of the directories, needed to be more clearly defined and understood.

In addition to community agencies/groups, the CLAs identified individuals seen as key focal points for disseminating information or initiating community activity. These might be community leaders, or community workers, or health, social-care and other professionals.

Of the eleven community agencies/groups visited as part of the evaluation, one had a primary focus on guidance-related activities, one a primary focus on education and training, and one a broad remit which did not directly include education and training; the other eight all had a broad remit including education and training. Eight provided services for all members of the local community; the other three were targeted at particular groups – ethnic-minority groups or offenders and ex-offenders.

MAKING CONTACT

In initial approaches to community agencies/groups, the key elements of the process were:

- the CLA introduced him/herself and his/her role;
- feedback was invited on the views and needs of the client-group of the agency/group, and about its levels of participation in education and training;
- agencies were asked if they currently offered, or would like to offer, IAG to their clients;
- an offer of training in IAG skills was made, and views invited on the most appropriate form this might take, and who would be appropriate recipients;

- in some cases, an offer of outreach sessions was made;
- information was requested about practical issues such as the space for storage of resources or for outreach activity, and IT capacity;
- an information resources list was left for consideration;
- in some cases, computer-based resources were offered or demonstrated;
- the partnership agreement was left for consideration, in some cases (but not all) after a detailed discussion of its implications.

In all, of the eleven community agencies/groups visited as part of the evaluation, one preferred a simple outreach strategy; eight preferred a capacity-building strategy (which might also involve some outreach provision), with the main emphasis on information provision in three cases and on broader IAG training in the rest; the remaining two had not yet indicated a preference.

Issues included:

- Knowledge of the local guidance network was generally patchy; there was a prevailing opinion among community contacts that even if referrals were made, they were often not taken up, and that individuals preferred to accept information and advice from community contacts, however partial and inadequate this might be.
- Opinions on the usefulness and appropriateness of outreach sessions or surgeries varied widely: some felt this was the only way forward; others that communities could be "over-outreached" and could end up feeling like a "social experiment" or "goldfish in a bowl". Those holding the latter view considered a better approach to be training existing, trusted workers to play multiple roles.
- It might at times be difficult for the CLAs to accept the slow pace required to work with community agencies/groups: the need to set out the offer of involvement in small stages, and to introduce resources, key documents and activities at appropriate points.
- There was some pressure for CLAs to meet numerical targets for contacting and signing up organisations, which might not be appropriate until all the working procedures had been agreed and understood.

REACHING AGREEMENT

Community agencies and groups were offered the opportunity to become Associate IAG Partners. A brief document setting out the terms of this arrangement was introduced to the groups by the CLA.

Issues included:

- the use of a contractual document at an early stage could be seen as threatening;
- the document represented a substantial commitment by agencies, and needed to be written in accessible language and fully understood;
- the implications of a commitment to meet quality standards needed clarification, with an explanation of how any process of change could be resourced and staged;

- it might be too ambitious to ask small community groups to meet these quality standards, although some progress could be possible.

MAKING RESOURCES AVAILABLE

A package of resources was made available to community groups who wished to participate in the project, including books, audio-tapes and computer software. This idea was generally received with enthusiasm.

Issues included:

- key aspects of the CLA's role needed to be clarified before introducing the resources;
- it was important that the CLAs were familiar with the resources so that they could advise and support agencies in displaying and making use of them;
- books might not be the best and most accessible resources for the most disadvantaged learners, particularly if their use was not mediated;
- the resources should be appropriate for the target groups (e.g. those with disabilities);
- resources should be easy to update;
- questions might be asked by agencies about whether hardware could be supplied as well as software – allowances might need to be made for this in budgets;
- security and confidentiality could be an issue with some computer programs, particularly those which stored information about the user.

TRAINING THE CONTACTS

Training was an important aspect of the offer made to community groups and agencies. A range of options was being considered, for both accredited and non-accredited training. A Learning Needs Analysis tool had been piloted with some of the agencies.

Issues included:

- a clear view was needed of the skills required by those offering information and advice in a community setting, within the context of an IAG Partnership;
- the programme should relate to quality standards in use by the Partnership;
- the full range of practical information about the options needed to be available at the time of making the offer;
- those who were delivering the training might need briefing and training themselves if they were not already qualified and experienced;
- clear criteria needed to be drawn up to assist community agencies to select the most suitable individuals to undertake training;
- a system for analysing training needs should be in place.

LOCAL LEARNING PROVIDERS

In addition to networking with community contacts, CLAs had made contact with local providers of education and training, and it was part of their role to act as a broker and give feedback on unmet client needs. Some CLAs were line-managed by Colleges or Adult Education Services.

An important part of the "brokerage" role was to encourage local learning providers to find ways of offering a series of small steps to individuals, in partnership with trusted contacts and groups in the community who could act as intermediaries. While it is often possible to provide IAG and even "first step" or "taster" learning provision in community settings, progression will inevitably require individuals to move to mainstream provision at some stage. Barriers to this include:

- poor or expensive transport;
- poor or expensive child-care provision;
- lack of free or subsidised learning provision;
- lack of confidence and motivation, and the time needed to overcome these;
- the need for provision consisting of a series of small manageable steps.

The dual role of the CLA in facilitating access to IAG services, and to appropriate learning opportunities, was seen as crucial in helping individuals to move on.

Issues included:

- CLAs needed an in-depth knowledge of all local learning providers in order to maintain impartiality. This was a particular issue for CLAs managed by learning providers, who were fully aware of the provision made by the managing organisation, and had good contacts within it, but were not so familiar with the activities and potential of other providers.
- An equitable and impartial system for giving feedback to all local learning providers, not only to the managing organisations, was essential if the interests of the client were to be central.
- It was difficult to find sources of funding to develop suitable "next step" provision for the target groups.

CONCLUSION

There is little by way of established good practice or accumulated wisdom to draw on in community-based IAG. What there is has usually involved dedicated individuals in small, often temporary, projects, the lessons of which have not been widely disseminated. The developing strategy in Kent for involving community and voluntary agencies provides a model for other IAG Partnerships to use as a starting point and to build upon. This Briefing is designed to provide early national dissemination of information about the project and the lessons being learnt from it.

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