



# Community Organisers Expansion Programme

End of Year Report 2018-19

**Community  
Organisers**

[www.corganisers.org.uk](http://www.corganisers.org.uk)

**LISTEN  
POWER  
ACTION**

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## The Summary

2018-19 was year two of the Community Organisers Expansion Programme. (COEP)  
This was a year of rapid growth and expansion.

- Cumulative learner numbers increased to 2,436, including 290 young people.
- Membership of Community Organisers increased to 1,185 members.
- We relaunched with a new brand and website and we launched the National Academy of Community Organisers.
- We launched 3 new quality-assured community organising one-day courses and courses leading to Qualifications in Community Organising.
- Community organisers listened to 8,200 people across 20 areas of England and hundreds of individual and collective actions took place to effect social change and build resilient communities.
- We gave out £464,000 in grants under the COEP to support training and peer support for community organisers.
- We collectively (with Social Action Hubs) raised £750,000 in match-funding from diverse sources (not Government) during the year for local community organising and training.

## Key messages

The ultimate aim of the Community Organisers Expansion Programme is for residents to take action together in and across England's most deprived neighbourhoods for social change – focused on the issues that matter most to them.

We are meeting this aim through three key strands:

- Training 3,500 people in the principles and practice of community organising
- Building a membership organisation for people who are involved in community organising which provides peer support, national profile and opportunities for professional development
- Creating a curriculum and infrastructure for training community organisers, based on local hubs of community organising (Social Action Hubs) and quality assured trainers.

## Why community organising?

We believe in the collective power of people to come together to change things for good.

We know that when people feel listened to, they begin to find the power to make change.

We want a healthy democracy, in which people participate and hold power to account.

*"We want to see a future where community organising is underpinning a vibrant democracy and sparking a diversity of local conversations in the most disadvantaged communities, inspiring and supporting people to take action on the things they care about and to have a potent voice."*

**Community Organisers Vision Statement**

## What is Community Organising?

Community organising is the work of bringing people together to take action around their common concerns and overcome social injustice. Community organisers reach out and listen, connect and motivate people to build their collective power to effect change.



## Achievements in 2018-19

### Learning

- 1,264 people joined a one-day introductory course in community organising.
- 341 people also attended a further one-day course to develop practical skills and more understanding.
- 39 people began a course to achieve a Qualification in community organising
- 92% of learners said our training met their expectations and 94% learned something new about community organising.
- 40 trainers quality assured and 300+ hours of support to trainers
- 761 people joined Community Organisers as members

### Engagement

- 40 local and regional gatherings for people involved in community organising
- 200 people attended CO18, a two-day member conference.
- 8,200 group and individual listenings were held across 20 Social Action Hubs and our membership
- 700 people were involved in community organising across 20 Social Action Hubs
- 15 trainees supported by each Social Action Hub each quarter on average with their community organising

### Investment

- £464,000 in grants to Social Action Hubs and member organisers for community organising training and peer networking
- £750,000 raised during the year for local community organising and training (by Social Action Hubs and Community Organisers)

### Reach

- The new Community Organisers [website](#) has had 14,000 unique readers and received 1,947-page visits during the initial three-day launch period.
- We reached 9,767 Twitter followers and In March our tweets received 64,500 views
- Our Facebook posts reached 9,984 unique Facebook users

## The launch of the National Academy of Community Organising



## Action

Some of the main issues, concerns and visions for change that people organised around this year in our network were:

- Affordable and decent housing
- Clean and green spaces and streets
- Isolation, loneliness and mental wellbeing
- Food poverty, welfare benefits and income
- Cost of living – funerals, water charges, car parking
- Safety of young people
- Local assets and services
- Racism, community cohesion and community spirit



## Training leads to community action in The Wirral

"Leah came on our Introduction to Community Organising training. She was taken by the idea, having experienced how it feels to be completely powerless. Following the training Leah organised The Great Together - an event across the U.K. in memory of MP Jo Cox, all about bringing neighbours together. Leah spent weeks out talking to people, and as their relationships built encouraging them to help at the event. Early this year, Leah approached us with another local resident Karen. Karen is another local mum. Both were concerned as the local school had ran a trip to a community centre and mosque in Birkenhead. Over half the parents in the class didn't allow their children to go. Leah and Karen were hearing on a daily basis, racist remarks particularly about those who look and live a different life in our community. Leah and Karen brought together more local mums who were also concerned. Together, they came up with 'Our Cultural Community', a project to celebrate the journeys people's lives have taken them on and brought them to the North End of Birkenhead.

"The North End is a historically white working-class community, and Leah and the group recognised that people are afraid because they don't understand, or have the opportunity to meet, people from different backgrounds. To do this, they started with 'Paddy's Day', celebrating the Irish roots of many families by encouraging them to look into their family trees with the help of the local genealogy group.

"The group went and visited Wirral Multicultural Organisation (WMO) for their coffee morning, meeting women and families from Pakistan, India, China, Russia and more. They have now created a questionnaire they are using to record people's backgrounds and life stories, taking photos, and these will be pulled together to be used a series of events for the whole community including their new friends from WMO.

"This is not only growing the idea of community organising in our local community, but also helping to develop genuine connections with other organisations. Leah has grown in confidence, and so have the other mums. Leah has recognised the experiences of her life, and their value to other people who may be going through the same, regardless of their background. One said: "I feel like I have some value to my community and to myself, over just being a mum, because we're doing something that's going to be important for so many people." It's early days, but local people having the confidence to have difficult conversations about racism with their friends, family and neighbours is huge progress for the North End."

**Eve Barrett**, community organiser, North Birkenhead.

## Background: The Community Organising Expansion programme

### 2017-2020

The Community Organising Expansion Programme was commissioned in March 2017 by the Office for Civil Society, part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with a target of training 3,500 community organisers by 2020, to bring the total trained through Government investment to 10,000.

[Community Organisers](#) was selected as the delivery partner for the programme, as the leading training and membership organisation for grass-roots community organising in England, established as the legacy body from the first Community Organisers Programme which ran from 2011 to 2015.

The ultimate goal of the programme as set out in the specification is for residents to take action together in and across England's most deprived neighbourhoods for social change – focused on the issues that matter most to them.

The programme contributes to the Government's Civil Society Strategy and to the Localism agenda. In June 2015 the Minister for Civil Society spoke about the vision for a Bigger and Stronger Society and announced the commitment to expand the number of Community Organisers recruited to 10,000 by the end of the Parliament:

*"We know that where community organisers are at work, people have a stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, they feel more valued, they become more likely to team up and improve their area."*

Civil Society Strategy, Cabinet Office (p37, August 2018)



## The Expansion programme is being delivered through a number of key workstreams:

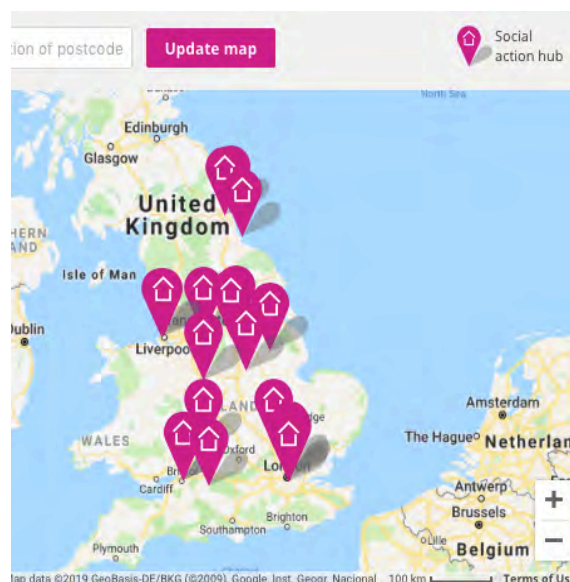
### The National Academy of Community Organising:-

The National Academy has been established to sustain the training of Community Organisers for many years to come. The National Academy operates as a hub and spoke model, whereby affiliated training hubs (Social Action Hubs) deliver training and Community Organisers provides quality assurance and external validation of training through our Awarding Bodies CERTA and ABC Awards. We have a range of quality assured courses from a one-day Introduction to a course which leads to the nationally recognised Qualification - the Certificate in Community Organising.

### Social Action Hubs :-

Locally rooted organisations committed to community organising and with the capacity to offer training courses in community organising to local people. Affiliated to Community Organisers and collectively making up the National Academy of Community Organising. Social Action Hubs are grant-funded for up to three years through the Expansion Programme to train and support 100-115 local people in their local area (neighbourhood/city/county). Each Social Action Hub has an experienced community organiser leading the courses. Our founder Social Action Hubs were in:

Bristol, Gloucestershire, Hartlepool, Hackney, Haringey and Lambeth in London, Lincoln, Luton, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Nottingham, Rotherham, Sheffield, Stafford, Stockport, Wiltshire, Wirral.



### Membership and Member Organising: -

Membership of Community Organisers is open to anyone involved in community organising and committed to our aims and values. Members are encouraged to get participate in local or regional networks. In years one and two of the Programme we funded Member Organisers to build networks of trained and active community organisers (people using community organising) in their region and to grow the membership of [Community Organisers](#). In year three we are investing directly in member organising groups who can use funding to engage a Local Member Organiser to support them.

### Targeted Recruitment and Training: -

- Public Sector organisations such as Local Authorities, Parish Councils and Schools, who we will work with to train frontline staff & members of their local community and commit to exploring how community organising can meet their objectives and be integrated into their strategy.
- Civil Society Partners - who will offer and promote training to members, staff and volunteers and embed community organising as a way of working in the organisation.
- Young People - One or more youth organisations who will help us train a cohort of young people in community organising.

We aim to train individuals, groups and organisations in community organising, recognising that not all community organisers will be in paid roles and many people can benefit from understanding & using community organising approaches in their lives and work.

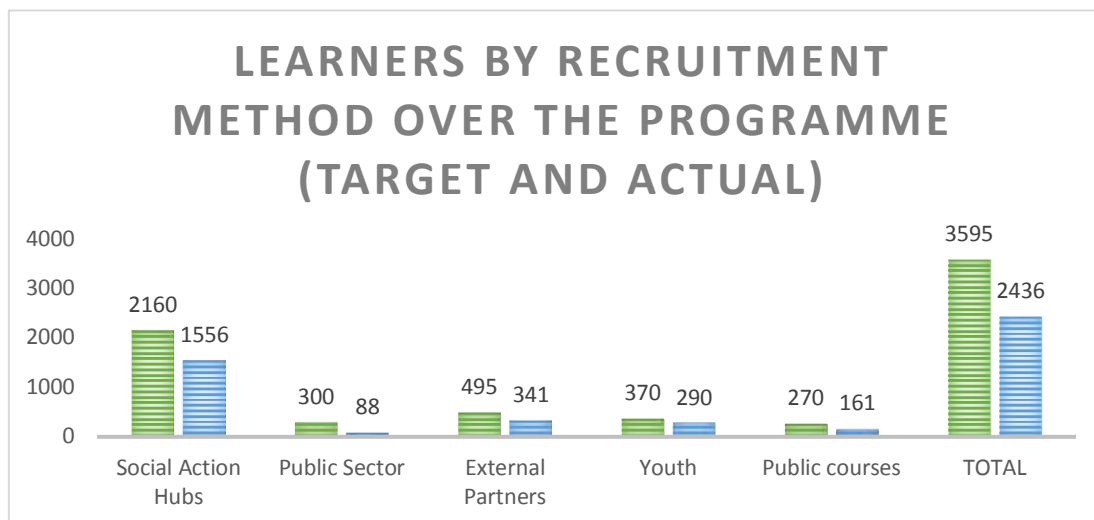
## About the Programme Targets

The major target for the three-year Community Organisers Expansion Programme is to train 3,500 people in community organising, thus bringing the total trained through Government investment to 10,000 since 2011.

In year one, 2017-18, we trained 1,172 people against a target of 760. Each of these people attended a one-day Introduction to Community Organising course.

In year two, 2018-19, we trained 1,264 against a target of 1,405. Each of these people attended a one-day Introduction to Community Organising course.

However, in addition, 380 people attended further, deeper training - either skills based one-day courses or a course of study leading to a Qualification in community organising.



The second major target in the programme relates to developing the membership network of Community Organisers, which provides peer support and a national profile for community organising.

The membership has grown steadily.

- Starting point: 120 members
- Year one: 424 members
- Year two: 1185 members



A third major target for the programme is to develop the curriculum and infrastructure for training people in grass-roots community organising.

We started in year one with twenty Social Action Hubs, each with an experienced community organiser with the capacity to develop as a trainer of community organisers.

We started in year one with a one-day Introduction to Community Organising course and two nationally recognised CERTA Qualifications in Community Organising, just accepted onto the Qualifications Framework: The Award and the Certificate in Community Organising.

Year one was all about building confidence in our twenty trainers at Social Action Hubs to begin training local people in community organising. It was also about starting to recruit and induct a network of associate trainers - also experienced community organisers - who would train people in other areas of the country.

## Year two has built on this achievement.

1. We have developed our quality assurance processes to ensure that our training is always of the highest standard.
2. We now have a pool of 40 quality assured trainers who have benefitted from 300+ hours of trainer development.
3. We recruited two new Social Action Hubs, based in Hastings and Coventry, and they started to train local people.
4. We developed three further one-day quality assured courses in community organising.
  - Listening Skills for Community Organising
  - Building Power through Community Organising
  - Action for Change through Community Organising
5. We developed the teaching content for Community Organising: Principles and Practice, the course which leads to the Award in Community Organising. Four Social Action Hubs launched the course in Year Two.

## About the Training

We now have four quality assured one-day courses providing skills and understanding of community organising. We also launched the Community Organising: Principles and Practice course leading to a Level 2 or 3 Award in Community Organising.

Training is delivered by our 20 Social Action Hubs for local people and by our network of quality assured trainers for partner organisations and as public courses.

- More than 160 one-day courses were run during the year.
- 1,252 people attended a course.

The new Community Organisers website

The screenshot displays the 'OUR COURSES' section of the Community Organisers website. On the left, a sidebar titled 'IN THIS SECTION' lists various resources: 'Our courses', 'Learning resources', 'The National Academy of Community Organising', 'Quality Assurance', 'Become a Social Action Hub', 'Become a trainer', and 'Meet the trainers'. The main content area is titled 'OUR COURSES' and includes a sub-header: 'Find out about our range of quality assured training courses in the principles and practice of community organising.' Below this, four course cards are featured, each with a photo, title, description, and a 'Find out more' link. Each card also includes a 'QUALITY LICENCE SCHEME' logo. The courses are: 1. 'Introduction to Community Organising' (photo of a person holding a sign), 2. 'Listening Skills for Community Organising' (photo of a group of people), 3. 'Building Power through Community Organising' (photo of a hand holding a sign that says 'POWER'), and 4. 'Action For Change through Community Organising' (photo of a group of people holding a banner that says 'OUR WEST HENDON').

**IN THIS SECTION**

- Our courses
- Learning resources
- The National Academy of Community Organising
- Quality Assurance
- Become a Social Action Hub
- Become a trainer
- Meet the trainers

**OUR COURSES**

Find out about our range of quality assured training courses in the principles and practice of community organising.

**Introduction to Community Organising**  
This course is the starting point for anybody who is interested in community organising.  
[Find out more](#)

**Listening Skills for Community Organising**  
On this course you will develop an understanding of why listening is essential in community organising...  
[Find out more](#)

**Building Power through Community Organising**  
This course will help you explore and develop your understanding of power including what power means a...  
[Find out more](#)

**Action For Change through Community Organising**  
On this course you will get to grips with how people come together to take action through community or...  
[Find out more](#)

**QUALITY LICENCE SCHEME**

## Course Feedback

547 feedback forms from 56 courses run directly by Community Organisers were analysed at the end of the year:

92% said the workshop met their expectations

90% gained new skills

94% learned something new about community organising

92% will use something they learned on the day

83% were inspired to attend further training

*“Very good & immediately useful and applicable training”*

*“It is so innovative & refreshing, but simple too. Getting communities really empowered”*

*“Gave me the inspiration to do more in the community and how it can make a difference”*

*“I feel inspired, empowered, connected, informed...I will think about how to create change and improve the communities I'm in”*

*“As someone completely new to the field...the course was structured so I felt I could still contribute in a meaningful way”*

*“Really interesting & informative learning experience. Very knowledgeable trainer”*

*“I will use the CO skills to bring people together as we often have issues in our area”*

*“Absolutely opened my eyes and horizons”*

*“I learned how to truly listen”*

*"I had to look at how I use power myself and think if I have power over other people"*

*"Re-energised and motivated now / This has awakened an interest to get out & make a difference/challenge/action"*

*"Brilliant, really enjoyed it"*

*"Discussion of power - thinking critically about it, not just existing within it (most useful)"*

*"I didn't anticipate the emotions it would evoke and desire for change / change = listening"*

*"Problem tree will help members to identify causes and consequences of issues affecting them"*

*"Loved generative listening"*

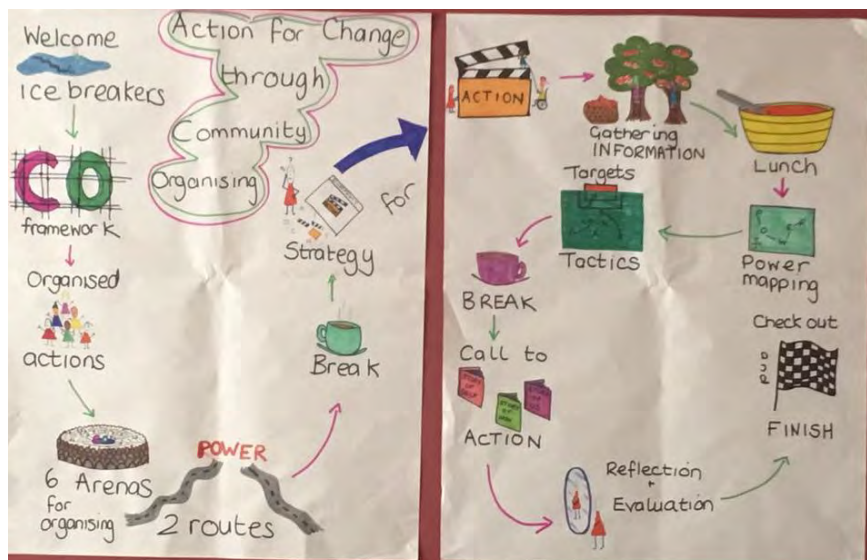
*"Want to learn more about listening/power/action and qualification"*

*"I have taken away the know-how of how to talk to people without an agenda...I'm really excited to get started"*





Training images



## Training Routes

There are 5 strands of training in the programme. These represent different routes to disseminating the skills and principles of community organising and to ensuring that training leads to listening and action.

- Social Action Hubs
- Young people
- Partners
- Public sector
- Public

## Social Action Hubs

Social Action Hubs are locally rooted community-based organisations who use community organising to engage, support and mobilise local people to take action.

20 Social Action Hubs are funded by the programme and are each training 100-115 local people in community organising over three years and supporting them to listen and take action on things they care about.

A funded Social Action Hub in North Tyneside was replaced in the final quarter of the year by a new Social Action Hub in Hastings.

- In 2018-19, Social Action Hubs ran 78 courses attended by 872 learners.
- 731 people took part in one-day introduction to community organising courses
- 136 people took part in one or more of the three follow-on courses to develop practical skills and deeper understanding of community organising
- 39 people at four Social Action Hubs started the Community Organising: Principles and Practice course which leads to the CERTA Level 2/3 Award in Community Organising, a recognised national Qualification.

As well as formal training, Social Action Hubs also supported people to put their learning-into-action through taking part in and starting community organising work.

- 300 people were supported across the 20 Social Action Hubs each quarter to engage in community organising activity.

- 130 hours per month have been spent across the Hubs supporting people with community organising. The support takes different forms, with the three most prevalent being:
  1. A one-to-one meeting
  2. help to strategise or plan action
  3. Support to lead or mobilise others in a collective action

"We have delivered leadership training, informally, through one-to-ones. We have involved people in ESOL campaigning and critical discussions about how to run the campaign and what to do next."

**Adela Belecova**, English for Action, Hackney Social Action Hub.

"I love community organising and at Old Chapel Works we may not have trained hundreds of people, but I'm sure we have trained the perfect number, for our capacity in providing the ultimate experience. We are well on target to ensure we train 100 in 3 years, but I believe in the importance of balancing the training with the amount of support and action. It is a difficult process and that can increase especially as the numbers trained rise, but I think we have managed to provide as even an equation as possible and perhaps that's why I believe our community organising tactics are working and encouraging more people to take notice of what we do. These are very exciting times for community organisers in Stafford. I feel with the new community organisers we are ready to take some leadership in Stafford."

**Eileen Jordan**, Stafford Social Action Hub.

A wide range of people were trained, including local community members, volunteers and staff from local voluntary organisations and the public sector, school children, adults with learning difficulties, students, prisoners, members of recovery and self-help groups, disability activists, refugees and ESOL learners.

Social Action Hubs also trained their own staff and volunteers to ensure that as organisations they are building community organising principles into everything they do.

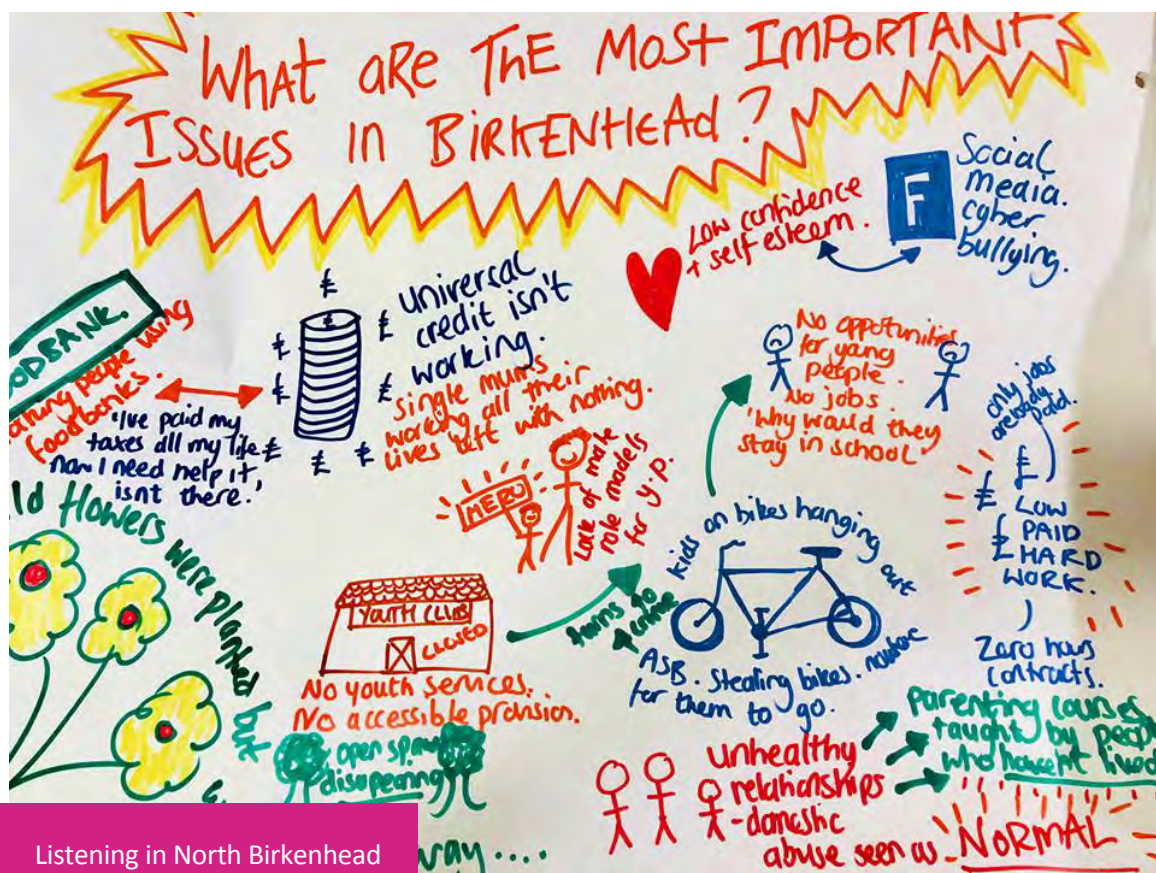
This is leading to new volunteers being activated, new community activities, groups and campaigns starting up, and community organising groups being established alongside services, to enable people to start to tackle the issues they face collectively as well as receiving services to help them cope and survive.



## Social Action Hubs listen regularly to their users and community members.

"Following an in house training I delivered to 26 members of Staff at Barton Hill Settlement, BHS decided to start doing a week of listening in the community where the whole team including finance, management, reception, etc headed out to the streets in Barton Hill, knocking on doors and opening conversations with people from the community to understand the issues faced by people in the neighbourhood and to connect with them as individuals, with their passions and ideas for change so that these can be incorporated directly into the work of the organisation. The purpose of the listening is not just to extract information but also to activate residents and invite them to work on those issues raised with staff from The Network and from the centre. This September the BHS team listened to over 200 people and the activity brought so much enthusiasm and energy into the team that they have now decided this will happen every year."

Jose Barco, community organiser, Barton Hill Settlement, Bristol.



Listening in North Birkenhead

Many Social Action Hubs developed strong relationships with **public sector organisations**, exploring how community organising could help with addressing the unmet need for services in many communities and better engage and activate people, as well as holding politicians to account.

"In April 2018, we had a participant called J attend our one-day training course. She became a member but hasn't been to meet ups because she volunteers at two organisations and works part time too for Stockport Council Neighbourhood Team. She has always been keen to tell me that she attended training during time off and uses personal email addresses. I have met her for coffee several times as she has told me that she has listened to staff, volunteers and customers of Re:Dish, a very small charity in Reddish focused on food poverty. As I was planning to go off, she told me that she has 12 people locally who would be interested in attending training. We shouted out to local Reddish third sector organisation to hire a room and Art In Recovery came forward, also interested in the training. Jo has encouraged local councillors and our MP to share information about the course online. Her enthusiasm has allowed us to still have an energy in our SAH while I have been off work."

**Nicola Dean**, Stockport Social Action Hub.

"We have now reached the end of the 2nd year of delivering community organising workshops and starting to deliver the Award in Community Organising course. I feel that over this last 6 months, awareness of the training and our reach has grown. We are still attracting residents to come on to the training, but we have also shifted our emphasis to reaching out to other voluntary sector organisations, with the aim of raising further awareness about community organising practice and also trying to influence those organisations to consider using our community organising process. We have seen how this can and will lead to helping us sustain community organising in Gloucestershire, not only with just spreading awareness and improving practice, but also leading to contracts for us to support other organisations to adopt community organising approach. Just recently we've had confirmation that we will be undertaking a 2-year contract with partners Hester's Way Neighbourhood project and Cheltenham Borough Homes, to support another 2 trainee community organisers that the project will employ and we will provide on the ground support and training to."

**Community Roots CIC** - Gloucestershire Social Action Hub.

## Training leads to listening

"In March 2018 we used the Introduction to Community Organising and the Listening Skills for Community Organising course as the foundations for a group of local people we recruited to go out in Brixton to do a listening campaign around the impact of regeneration and gentrification of Brixton. Since the project ended the peer researchers have had continued opportunities with High Trees and the Greater London Authority (GLA) to use their skills. The peer researchers have continued to be engaged in the GLA peer research projects that the GLA have been running since the pilot we ran ended. They have also been paid for their time by the GLA and had access to training on data capture, analysis and reporting. They have also worked with us on a Section 106 public art project, to go out and about in Tulse Hill, listening to local people to establish what kind of public artwork local people would like to see in the area, where it would be, what theme it would be inspired by. This work will leave a new landmark piece of artwork in the area. High Trees are strategically looking for continued projects that sit within the community organising framework to continue to provide this pool of local people with ongoing paid opportunities as peer researchers."

**Graham Butcher**, community organiser, High Trees Development Trust.

Dawn was socially isolated and lived with her young son in a deprived neighbourhood which had been blighted with drugs and antisocial behaviour; her one source of happiness was gardening and improving the area, but unfortunately due to antisocial behaviour in the area she was not able to move forward with improving the green space as it was constantly destroyed after she had done anything positive. Dawn came on the one-day introductory course, this not only helped Dawn understand community better but her place in it and how she could help shape the future for her child and neighbours. Though the course she developed a close working relationship with the community organiser/trainer who supported her when she relocated houses and started a new life in a new community. The training allowed Dawn to door-knock her neighbours and listen to them and their concerns, supported by the community organiser. Dawn's son then developed a real passion for the area and litter picking and the training helped Dawn to get involved with litter-picking in the area. He and a group of children known as 'the little collectors' who regularly litter pick across different areas of Wirral, have recently been featured on Channel 5 news, recognised locally and regionally for their hard work. The training has allowed Dawn to support her son's passion, as well as support him to become a community leader.

**Stephanie Hughes**, community organiser, Wirral Development Trust.

### Wiltshire Social Action Hub delivered training in Guys Marsh Prison

"The day finally arrived. Each and every one of the prisoners participated in every activity, which was so lovely to see, they supported each other through some of the difficult conversations around the talking photos. They were really interested in the power section, which came with some really great conversations. Also, the section on ideas to action, the prisoners came up with a project around isolation and loneliness with in prison, which to my surprise is huge. They came up with a couple of solutions with three of the prisoners saying they were going to start conversations and listen to those that don't seem to interact with others. All the prisoners were really keen to attend more training, they expressed the training was the best lesson day they have had since being in prison.

"Following on from the training in the prison, I have been able to support one ex-prisoner, D, linking him up with Gloucestershire Social Action Hub. D had been doing lots of activities and was a very active prisoner while he attended Guys Marsh. I hope that he can continue his good work in Gloucester. I received a message from D, after he met with Gloucestershire community organiser, Penny Liddicot. He is hugely thankful for me linking him up with the Gloucestershire Social Action Hub. This is exactly how I saw the relationship working, training and a little support to the prisoners and then be able to link up with other Social Action Hubs in the area that they are released to. Giving something back is what many of the prisoners want to do, also not to feel isolated from the community when they are released."

**Katrina Watson**, community organiser, Wiltshire and Swindon Social Action Hub.



Community organisers at Guys Marsh Prison



## Social Action Hubs support people to connect, organise and take action on the issues they care about

"After 4 years of working around Gloucester park, connecting residents up and forming of Friends of Gloucester Park and working with young people at the Skate Park, they have a win. They have managed to secure £85,000 of funding towards renovating Gloucester Skate Park. The funding was secured with joint efforts from organised young people, Friends of Gloucester Park Association and the Council, who needed to agree to it as they are the land-owners."

Gloucestershire Social Action Hub.

"Our community organiser has been providing support to a group of residents from Tulse Hill estate, supporting them to hold conversational spaces with other local residents to explore what their collective response to the ongoing youth violence in the area can be. He has provided them with training in group facilitation and supported residents to hold meetings in this context."

High Trees Development Trust - Lambeth Social Action Hub.

"We are in the progress of embedding CO within adult education within Hackney and Tower Hamlets. Working deeply with New City College has been excellent. From one training for one class, word spread and we ended up delivering five one-day trainings at the college. This was not part of the plan but actually it's an exciting approach. Teachers and students are able to connect to one another to do follow-up work. Teachers are learning tools and methods that they can repeat with other classes now and in the future. We are also working with the Ideas Store (Tower Hamlets council adult education) and with Hackney Learning Trust. In the next year we will work on bringing these organisations together for action on issues they have in common."

Adela Belecova, community organiser, English For Action, Hackney.

## ACORN members took action to gain more affordable housing in Bristol

"In October, dozens of ACORN members, led by others who had been trained and supported by me, mobilised to prevent the eviction of one of our members who had got into rent arrears as a result of Universal Credit delays. With only 24 hours' notice, trainees were able to mobilise several dozen people from all over the city to prevent bailiffs gaining access to the property and to engage with the Council to negotiate the tenant's situation. As of now, three months later, she is still in her house whereas without ACORN she would have been rough sleeping and her life destroyed.

"Following training from the Bristol Social Action Hub, ACORN members have conducted a listening campaign in the Bristol BS5 area, mobilising hundreds of residents in opposition to a housing development in the area with no provision for affordable housing. The campaign is ongoing but has so far included hundreds of people participating in protests, dozens of people listening to residents on doorsteps and participating in consultation events and a group of residents presenting a statement on the issue to the Council and Mayor's Cabinet."

Nick Ballard, community organiser, Acorn Bristol.



Campaigning in Bristol



## Luton Social Action Hub organised to tackle street homelessness

"The initiative to address street sleeping and homelessness in Luton arose from our interactions with and listening to the concerns of hundreds of local people who either attend or organise events at our Social Action Hub or engage in discussions on our social media platforms.

"The homelessness issue has been one of the main talking points in Luton as the numbers of street sleepers and dwellers has visibly mushroomed over the last couple of years. When several homeless and vulnerable people died in Luton and as winter approached, we were approached by a group of local musicians who wanted to organise a gig to raise awareness of the spiralling problem and lend support to the people suffering it. The musicians were part of a national homeless support project called 'We Shall Overcome' who's motto is 'Not Charity but Solidarity' so we were more than keen to make our social action hub available for these purposes.

"The gig was a great success, with an 'entrance fee' of bags of clothes, blankets, food and other useful items. Even though the event was held mid-winter it was a great night with dozens of bags of food, clothing and other stuff collected and handed to NOAH, our local homeless support charity, for distribution according to need.

"The event was also a great opportunity to raise awareness of the purpose of our new facility and the emphasis on it being a springboard for action. Further listening to and reasoning with local people after the event revealed a widely held view that one-off events, whilst nice to do and good for raising awareness, were just not enough.

"One of the most interesting suggestions arising from someone who flagged up the insulting image of street homeless people sleeping outside the long empty and ironically named 'British Home Stores' shop in Luton Town Centre.

"A Facebook post 'How Much Longer are We Lutonians Going to Let This Happen?' with an image of the empty BHS shop was an effective call to action, with dozens of people offering to lend their time resources and skills to a campaign to bring the disused shop into use as a homeless shelter for street sleepers.

"Support for the initiative came from all areas of the community, including the owner of an art studio near to the empty BHS shop. We organised a 'Community Organising Meeting' at the art studio which was attended by more than 90 people.



"A skills audit list was completed at the meeting which showed all of the necessary skills and talents needed to convert the shop and support users when it opened were present and available. The meeting also agreed to call the group 'Luton Community' and appointed a delegation to meet with the owners of BHS or any other suitable site. The idea is that the delegation itself shows owners the level of skills and capacity in the group so it includes representatives from a shop fitting business, a health & safety expert, head of a security firm, a lawyer, a school teacher, a former head of Luton's mental health, drugs and alcohol support service and a Buildings Maintenance expert.

"A decision to organise into work groups that would cover all bases was taken to assure ourselves and demonstrate to the store owners that the capacity to deliver such an important project was there, so strengthening the hand of the delegation. Volunteers nominated themselves for weekly 4-hour shifts and participation in specific groups: Management & Administration, Catering, Attendants, Cleaning & Maintenance, Health and Well Being and Community Outreach. With a total of 85 people organised into work groups, the group are now in a position to make an approach to owners of a suitable building. Working groups are being encouraged to self-organise in sub meetings which can then report back to the main group.

"Luton Community members met with the Housing Portfolio Holder and Housing Manager at Luton Borough Council. This led to an invitation to representatives of Luton Community to sit on the towns 'Homeless Advisory Group' which is made up of all of Luton's support agencies, allowing for co-operation and resource sharing with existing organisations.

"The power of this group even preparing for action was quickly highlighted when the owners of the old BHS store which had sat empty for most of the past 5 years or so moved to bring forward renovation and re-use. Undeterred by this response, Luton Community held another organising meeting to celebrate the power of collective action (which at the very least has forced the owners to get on with improving our high street and ending the insult) and to look at other options in and around the town centre for the initiative. "

Marsh Farm Outreach CIC, Luton.

ACORN Newcastle organised around rental conditions and licensing of landlords in Newcastle:

In Autumn last year the council announced that they were proposing to expand selective landlord licensing to 80% of the city's rented properties. At our Quarterly General Meeting shortly afterwards, our members voted to back the proposals and to launch a campaign to get people to respond to it.

As mentioned above, several attendees from earlier training days have been key to the planning and delivery of all the activity related to that. The members of the group attended all four of the council's public events and consultations about the proposal, and at each one we were the only tenant voice in the room. Without the work we've done supported by the COEP, I think it's fair to say there might not have been **\*\*any\*\*** tenant perspective at these events.

Many renters didn't hear about them and many feel that consultations are just "tick-box" exercises. So it helped a lot that we'd worked on this issue elsewhere in the country, and are grounded in the communities affected so we could mobilise people to attend.

At several the landlord response was extremely hostile both to the council and, at times, to our members. We were shouted down sometimes, interrupted, and talked over. However, being there with a supportive group made a big difference, and we'd prepared beforehand in case some of the conversations became hostile, and the members did a great job of staying calm and explaining their reasons clearly and persuasively. A significant one for us, that is very hard to argue with, is that the licensing allows the council to inspect a property without the tenant having made a complaint, and this protects tenants who may feel too scared of their landlord to ring the council about it. Through this process the members also educated themselves about the legal rights around contacting environmental health and now feel in a much stronger position to tell others about these rights too.

Our group ran an online campaign to get people to fill in the consultation online, held a street stall with a laptop so members of the public could do it on the high street, and even arranged for an additional consultation event with the council and private renters, held in an accessible location in central Newcastle. After one event a council officer approached the group and said he was very glad we were there to give the counter perspective from a tenant point of view.

The consultation closed at the end of January, and whatever the final outcome, the members of the group feel proud of the work they've done and the number of people they got involved in this process. It's been great for their development and organisational experience, has helped build relationships with the Council, and put the network in a stronger place to take on the next issue.

**Tom Scott**, community organiser, ACORN Newcastle.

## Young People

The COEP aims to train 370 young community organisers aged between 12 and 21. 2018 saw the launch of our targeted Young Community Organisers Programme. We decided to work with youth partners to recruit and train young people as community organisers. Ten partners were selected across England but one of these later dropped out.



Each team of young people start with the Introduction to Community Organising course and have the option of attending all four one-day courses provided by Community Organisers. They are also being supported to plan and run listening campaigns before starting to take action on things they care about. In July they will attend a residential.

Their ages range from 12 to 21. They come from a wide variety of communities including inner city London, Derbyshire, Dewsbury and Colchester. A range of youth partners are supporting the young people, for example:

- Youth clubs in London, Colchester, and Derbyshire
- A girls' sport and activity provider in Yorkshire
- A school in East London
- A multi-faith centre in Derby

79 young people started their training on the Youth Programme.

73 other young people attended an introduction to Community Organising course

*“I found the power most useful, as I feel like you don't have to be famous to have power”*

“We had a great day on Saturday at our introduction training with trainers Georgina and David. The group really responded to the listening and power elements of the training. Fingers crossed now as we move forward!”

Ellie Rudd, Fitzrovia Youth in Action, London.

“We had a fantastic day one training for the start of our community organising programme. We had a full house - all 12 girls attended and found it really useful and interesting. They're excited to see what the rest of the programme entails.”

Rashida Salloo, Ready Steady Active, Yorkshire.

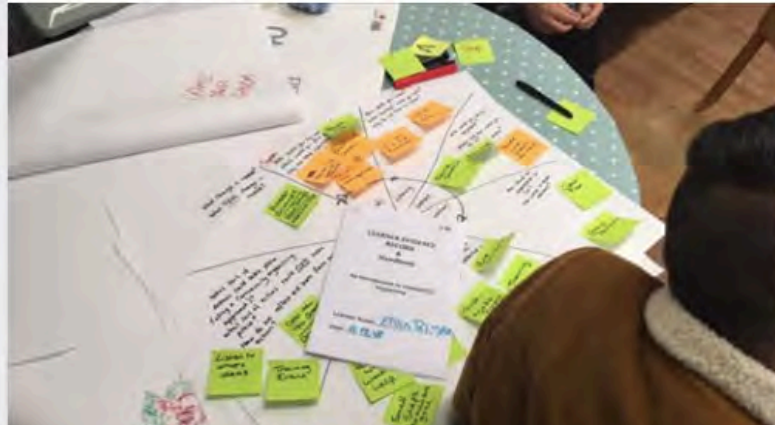
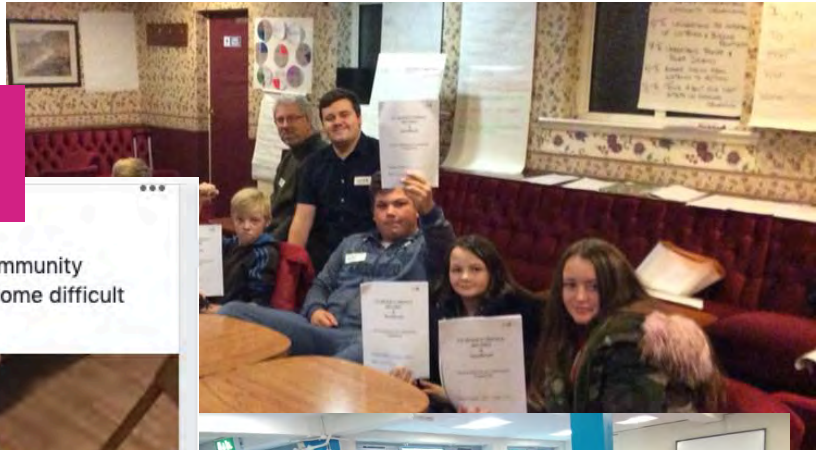


## Amazing Young Community Organisers!



10 December 2018

So proud of our young people learning how to become community organisers. Some great ideas of how they want to tackle some difficult social issues in their communities. Good things to come!





"The young people we've recruited are diverse bunch, some just starting secondary school, others at University level. One thing that has really been inspiring to see, is how clued up all the young people are, with what's going in the world.

This is what is one young person had to say:

*'I have a strong desire to give back to the world as much as it has done for me.'*

In discussions, the young people conduct themselves differently; some are more ready to talk, others not so much. However, the community organiser facilitator has been able to encourage everyone to share their ideas.

It has really been pleasant to see such a diversity in opinions and everyone being so respectful and reflective!"

Israel Aguirre Taïpe, Creative Opportunities CIC.

*"Last year I gained lots of experience in training a variety of people, which gave me more confidence. I have trained many young people connected with NCS projects, local residents and members of different local organisations.*

*Whilst I found training young people difficult at times, it was still very rewarding. Having met many young people over the year gave me more insight on how they view their communities and what tools might work better to reach out to them and get them engaged. "*

## Partners

- 238 people have taken part in an Introduction to Community Organising course through one of our local or national partners this year.
- 133 of these people have taken part in follow-up courses.

We have worked this year with a number of local and national partners to make training in community organising available to their members, staff or volunteers. This enables community organising practice to be used to change the way that services are delivered, or groups engage with their local community.

Our key partner this year has been the KeyRing charity. KeyRing provides community-based support for vulnerable adults, aiming to help people to achieve their 'good life' and integrate into society. The training so far aims to provide the staff with more tools to work with their members to achieve change in their lives.

106 staff have now attended a one-day course and 22 staff have now attended three of the courses. Recent feedback from the Action training was extremely positive:

*"The whole day was very interactive and generated lots of discussion and debate.*

*It was fun and everyone engaged with it"*

*"This is definitely something we can take into the work we do with our members and it is hoped that we will be able to deliver community organiser training for members in the near future"*

*"I will be endeavouring to lead the members I work with to do more for themselves rather than do things for them"*

Other partners we have worked with this year include St Giles' Trust, a charity which works primarily with people with lived experience, particularly those with experience of the criminal justice system. Following a pilot training, St Giles' Trust have since been successful with a four-year Lottery bid which includes Community Organisers as a key partner. This will see us offering community organising training to St Giles' Trust peer mentors as part of a bigger training programme.

We provided training to community members in Berkshire for the Community Council of Berkshire and we are now developing a bespoke course for local groups wanting to move a Neighbourhood Plan into action to create positive change for their community.

We provided two days of training for SouthGen, a group in Suffolk seeking to take over a redundant hospital building for the community. Following training, the group gained a £100,000 grant offer from Power to Change to match a community share offer they have now launched. They will use community organising techniques to mobilise the community around the project.

Other partners we have worked with to provide training include Octopus Community Network in Islington, Grapevine in Coventry, Women's Aid, and Sanctuary Housing. Working with Sanctuary Housing we began running all four one-day courses to local teams in four areas as part of a project to develop community-led solutions to getting people active in their communities. We all also worked with Sussex University Students Union to train students in community organising.

*"Following the success of the first training with Monique's team we'd like to put some more dates in the diary for a Power training and potentially for a second training for new volunteers that will start in February. This new group will be small but is really exciting as it's linked to a module and the students can choose community organising and get credits for their volunteering."*

*"The training last Friday went really well, I am pleased to say we had a good turnout. I will forward the feedback forms to Fausto. Everyone was very complimentary about his talents and the way he led the session."*

*"The training was spot on. Accessible, stimulating and relevant. "*

*"Thank you so much for arranging the workshop. The feedback from our staff is that it was great and it has made them re-think their approach to meeting the needs of their service users."*

Students door-knock in Brighton



## Public Sector

In 2018-19 we trained 55 public sector workers against a target of 100.

The aim of offering training to the public sector is to 'grow the market for community organising by creating a cohort of workers from public, statutory and third sector bodies' and to 'help develop community organising skills in the working practices of large organisations such as local authorities'. Our programme target is to train 300 public sector workers.

55 people from public sector organisations (mainly Local Councils but also from education and health), attended introductory courses in community organising arranged by Community Organisers. These were a mix of: frontline community workers, councillors, teachers, Parish and Town clerks and policy or managerial staff.

11 staff from Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea attended both Introduction to Community Organising and Listening Skills courses.

*"Thanks again for putting on a really good training day- it really made an impact on the team and we have already had a sit down about how we can make that change inside the organisation (as well as out!)."*

**Officer, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Council.**

Over the past 12 months Community Organisers has worked with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to raise awareness of the principles and practice of community organising with parish and town councillors, clerks, and other officers. During the year, there was a successful joint Community Organisers/NALC webinar (April 2018); Community Organisers gave presentations at the NALC Lobby Day in Parliament, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils, NALC's National Conference and their 2019 Spring Conference and Derbyshire ALC annual event; we delivered training to Suffolk Association of Local Council members. Community Organisers is currently drafting case studies for a new NALC Good Councillors Guide to Community Engagement. Feedback from the NALC conference included:

*"I have attended the NALC conference for many years, and this was by far the best workshop we have had at any of them."*

*"Your workshop brought some real energy to the conference."*

*"Positive, enthusiastic presenters sent delegates away energised to do more listening."*

*“The Community Organisers session was by far the best session in the two days- should be compulsory training for all councillors. All councillors should become community organisers.”*

Relationships between Councils and their local Social Action Hubs grew stronger in a number of areas.

Rotherham Social Action Hub held a community organising showcase attended by the CEO of Rotherham Council followed up by a networking event attended by the Mayors of Rotherham and Sheffield.



Wiltshire Social Action Hub ran training for Parish and Town Clerks. Selby Trust and High Trees Development Trust Social Action Hubs were contracted by the Greater London Authority to run 'A Space to Think' bringing together grass-roots community organisers with policy-makers.

Lincoln Council and Lincoln Social Action Hub work closely together, council staff have attended training and together they submitted a successful second stage Place Based Social Action Bid based on community organising.

Gloucestershire Social Action Hub received a community engagement contract from Stroud Council and another from Cheltenham Borough Homes.

Social Action Hubs also engaged with other parts of the Public Sector.

Stockport Social Action Hub worked closely with a local GP practice and North Birkenhead Social Action Hub also trained members of a Social Prescribing team.

*" I was really pleased to hear from Alvanley GP practice about their early days of social prescribing. Other practices mocked them for encouraging patients with COPD to go for walks. I think without Starting Point as a Social Action Hub, and the resources we could offer – from training to just being a sounding board - they would have become quite disheartened quite quickly. A number of organisations have tried to pass their work off as their own but Alvanley repeatedly credit Community Organising and Starting Point. This video was created to show what social prescribing means to us. I'm really pleased that they have understood organising and have become a great advocate for the work. "*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLxzD4xKRj0>

Nottinghamshire County Council adopted community organising as an approach in its new Framework for Investing in Communities Strategy: 'Investing in skills and aspiration, Increased community led development through promoting a community organising model, the aim will be to upskill workforce development and build community capacity/resilience'.

The Nottinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board are also looking at using the CO approach to mobilise people around health and wellbeing.



Nottinghamshire Social Action Hub worked with Nottingham City Council to engage people in the development of the Local Plan, resulting in much improved housing design standards. The work was led by Laura, a community organiser trained by the Social Action Hub who works for Nottingham City Council in the planning department:



Nottingham Design Standards Engagement Event led by community organisers

*“House builders were saying that there is no evidence that it makes financial sense in Nottingham to improve housing standards, and that there is no evidence that we need it. We had the social stats to counter that, but the examiner thought that the strongest piece of evidence was actually the community consultation that we did through community organising.”*

*“Placemaking shifts power naturally because of what is it, but if you don't do it properly through the way you engage, it won't work. The power that community organising has is that you don't have to force answers, it's open and it's equal - everyone is given an opportunity no matter what their skillsets are or what their background is - so I think that's the shift in power.”*



Bristol City Council and Bristol Social Action Hub held a joint training and networking event for activists and staff.

"In Bristol, the Social Action Hub worked with the community development team at Bristol City Council to run a 3-day training called the Art of Building Power and Self-organisation in Communities. This included 20 participants from Bristol City Council Community Development team and a number of other voluntary sector workers and residents. This was a blend of Community Organising, Art of Hosting facilitation and Asset Based Community Development, with an emphasis on power (drawing on the CO one-day power workshop for content). Part of the commitment from Bristol City Council is to support the creation of a follow up space led by participants to meet and explore how to continue to improve their practice in what they learned at the training. Another part of this partnership includes plans to run a Social Action Festival in June."

Jose Barco, community organiser, Bristol Social Action Hub.

*"Excellent training - a big thumbs up from community development team - wow it was an awesome, challenging, learning, relationship building three days - thanks to all the facilitators. "*

**Terry Black, Bristol City Council Community Development.**

A number of Councils have contacted us about their interest in developing a Social Action Hub in their area and we are continuing to build on this interest. We started to work with Warwickshire County Council to train local people in 5 areas of the county to enhance community resilience.

We held a Round Table with 12 Councils and other Public Sector partners in January 2019 to explore the relevance of community organising to the public sector and the role of training for staff, councillors and local community.

Key messages from the Round Table were that there is real need and appetite for the skills and approach that Community Organisers bring but a reduced capacity to engage with us. This means we need to target our message and stories well and develop some bespoke offers, but that training local people rather than staff maybe more realistic in the current climate.

*"Local authority staff who have participated in the training themselves felt that the power sessions stood out. Just having the conversation about power really provoked a lot of discussion and this is not easy to do inside the authority: 'We lack the confidence'. Local Authorities talk about empowerment, but not power. Council staff need power training and to have such conversations with communities."*

Imagine, Round Table Report.

## Public Courses

98 people attended 'public' Introduction to Community Organising courses, in a variety of areas including Northampton, Brighton, Colchester and Barnet.

These courses are generally openly publicised and organised by one of our associate trainers. They enable us to offer training in areas and communities where do not have Social Action Hubs or partners. They can be the start of a journey and can sometimes lead to further training in the area via a partner organisation.

In Colchester, initial training has led to the start of a youth community organising programme and a new local community organising network.



In Wellingborough, Council officers attended from Warwickshire Council, leading to them inviting us to deliver a programme of community organising training in Warwickshire.

## Community Organisers Membership Network

During the year membership of Community Organisers grew from 424 members to 1,185 members.

A key target of the Programme is to develop 'a sustainable local infrastructure for community organising' and to 'build the capability of our network into a critical mass'. A related aim is to 'facilitate peer-to-peer support and learning between Community Organisers, enabling them to learn from and support each other.'

This is primarily achieved through our membership offer. Membership is free and open to anyone who has attended our training and who has an interest in community organising.

In 2018-19 we funded a network of 13 regional Member Organisers - whose role was to recruit and support members in their area, organise events and listen to the members.

This growth was driven by the spread of our training, the work of the Member Organisers and the launch of our new website in November 2019.

Member Organisers organised regular local and regional events throughout the year – 41 events were held attracting between 5 and 50 members per event.



Member events provide members with an opportunity to meet their local Member Organiser, gain support, share skills and hear from speakers on relevant topics. Member events can also be a place to engage with local stakeholders – politicians, police and public, voluntary and private sector organisations – to build relationships and listen to each other's views.

"The network we are creating is very organic, self-organised, decentralised and in its early stage. There are however some small pockets of people who begun to create connections and collaborate in various ways and actions. This includes people supporting each other to facilitate meetings in a more participatory way within their organisations and local meetings, such is the case of C and K within The Bristol Cable and at Hartcliff and Withywood Community Trust. "

Bristol Social Action Hub.

Staffordshire Community Organiser Network was formed and is growing, with over 70 people attending over the last 3 meetings held. The members have agreed to map a skill set and look for joint funding bids, to commit to work together on regional and local projects. Meetings are held quarterly in venues, suitable to those attending.

Eileen Jordan, Member organiser, Stafford.

Citizens First Foundation C.I.C, in collaboration with COLtd invites you to a community organising network and discussion forum.

## Exploring the Future of Community Organising in Northamptonshire

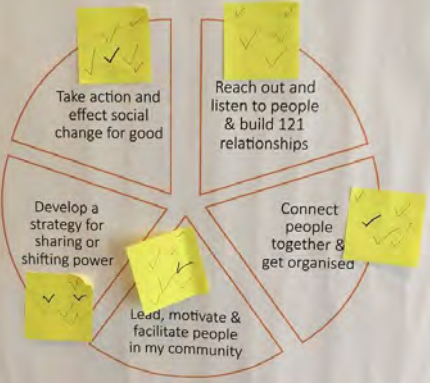


- **Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2018
- **Time:** 10.00am – 2.30pm
- **Venue:** Victoria Centre, 46 - 50 Palk Road, Wellingborough NN8 1HR
- **Contact:** Chris Ihejirika – [christian.ihejirika@citizensfirst.org.uk](mailto:christian.ihejirika@citizensfirst.org.uk)



How much has today's Community Organising meet-up helped you with your community organising practice ?

Has it inspired you to:

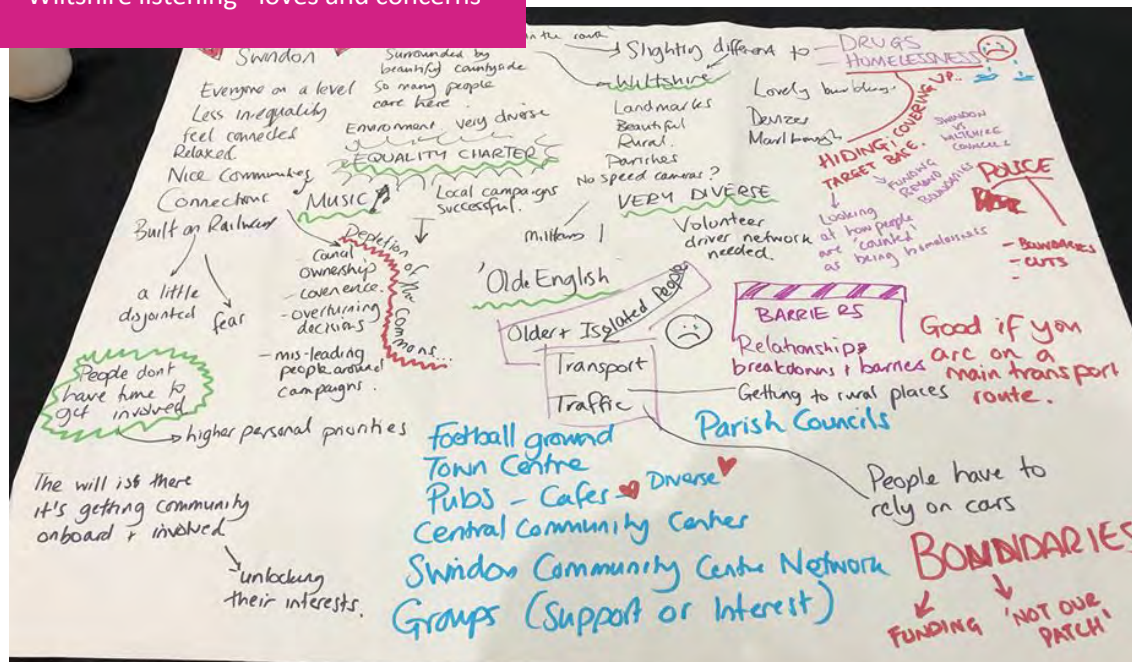


Please put a tick in every segment of the orange that you agree with.



We also conducted a member listening exercise at member events at the start of 2019.

### Wiltshire listening - loves and concerns



"37 people completed a community organising listening at our Staffordshire Member Meet-up last Friday. Thanks to everyone who gave up your precious time to come spend the day and share your thoughts. I will put a report together of all the findings. Six new members signed up to Community Organisers and eight people completed their Expression of Interest forms for the community organising qualification course."

Eileen Jordan, community organiser, Stafford.

This year Member Organiser funding was based on the size of area and number of members in each area, with the aim of investing in and rewarding where there was most energy and activity. This has seen the continuation of uneven growth in the membership but equally some really thriving networks have developed.

Particularly active networks were seen in East Midlands, Colchester, Brighton, Manchester, London, Bristol and Stafford. Other areas, particularly rural counties – have been more difficult to organise due to transport barriers and local identities. Member networks are most successful where there is a critical mass of members in a small enough area. This has led us to reshape the member organising investment for Year 3 (see below).

“The network has strengthened though the listening campaign. The work together to try and identify the ways people support each other was enlightening and showed the group that there is a real community spirit in the area. Although each of the people involved have, on the whole, pretty difficult lifestyles they were able to create the conditions whereby they all contributed to gathering the information that will be used to promote the way people in the area look after each other on a daily basis.”

Hartlepool Social Action Hub.



This year saw an exciting exchange between members from Haringey in North London and members in Newcastle - the poetry exchange.

"The poetry exchange between Newcastle and London members has been an inspiring experience, not only as an opportunity to meet and collaborate with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, but also as a chance to re-evaluate the power of spoken word. As a result of this project, we believe that poetry can be used as a means of spreading positive messages and questioning issues of social justice in our own communities. This was an excellent process, an exchange where the two respective collectives each organised a programme of activities when hosting the other crew in their city."

Moussa Amine Sylla, community organiser, Tottenham.

Donald Jenkins, poetry facilitator, Born Lippy:

*Our visit to London in October helped draw together the different poets from the North East into writing with a purpose - we each researched and then wrote on the themes that the London collective had set us. This helped us share ideas on content but also helped us inspire one another in our approach to writing when trying to convey messages about injustice, oppression and wanting our audience to feel moved by our words. In particular, as a group of white poets we were given the topic of Black History Month to write about. The task in itself made us question our own legitimacy to write on issues of race when we are privileged not to be affected by it, the same way as people of colour. It made us think more about celebrating what influence black culture has had on our lives- valuing the impact that black people, activists and artists have had on us, inspiring and affecting our own identity.*



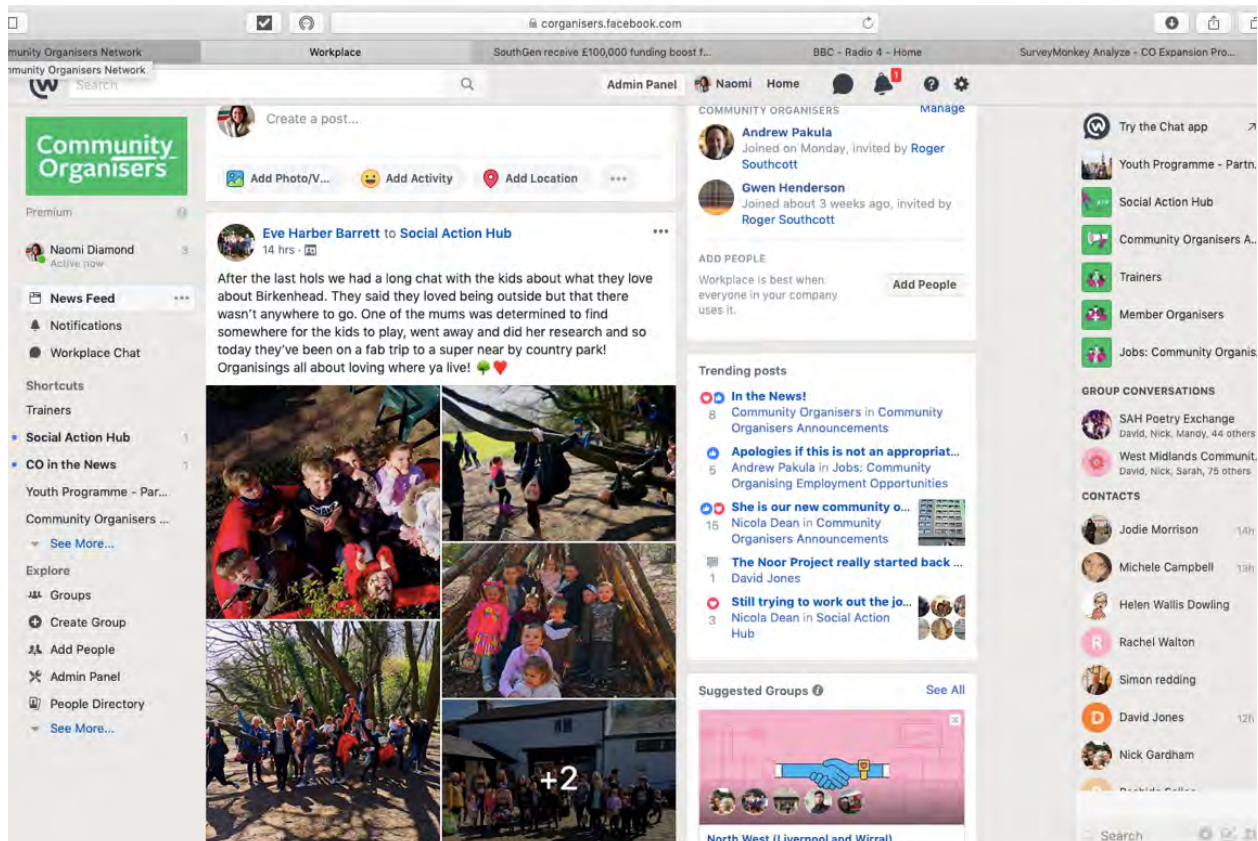
**Ellen Moran, community organiser and poet, Newcastle ACORN:**

"In Newcastle we felt it was important to stage a political action to focus on one of the themes we had agreed for our part of the exchange – homelessness. We held an event at central location in Newcastle. We performed topical poetry to engage passers-by into signing a consultation form, demanding that private landlord be regulated. We wanted to raise awareness for the need for landlords to have license to prove their competency, and safeguard tenants who are most at risk in the private sector from eviction, the leading cause of homelessness. It was a great to see such a nice spread of people drawn in by the poetry and speeches. They resonated with private tenants including asylum seekers who are badly affected by substandard private accommodation. "



"We did it! The second leg of the poetry exchange was amazing. I'm so proud of all the members who took part in this very special meetup! Together we moved through the listening and connecting stages into action, taking on the housing crisis by using our poetry to publicly make a statement in favour of ACORN's landlord licensing campaign. There's the power of the network, right there! 💪"

In addition to face-to-face meetings, 594 members joined Workplace, our vibrant online member platform, where jobs are shared, people seek ideas and help and we share news about training and networking opportunities.



a vibrant platform for online networking & sharing of stories

## Trainers

We now have 40 quality assured lead and support trainers based both at Social Action Hubs and in their own community organising projects.

Trainers received 300+ hours of support from our training and quality assurance team.

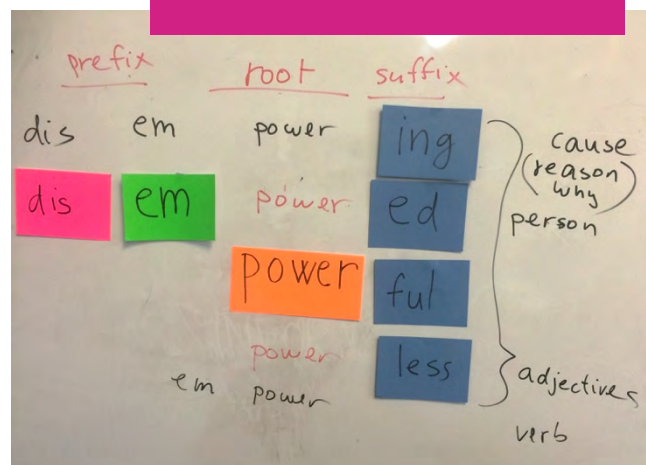
This includes online action learning sets, trainer development workshops, an online content site, training plans, observations and 1-2-1 support.

Reflection is a key part of the role, both for trainers and also for community organisers.

*“Having the opportunity to run the Award course, whilst daunting, has given me the opportunity to revise a lot of theory and really expand my theoretical knowledge whilst preparing to deliver the course, as I felt the need to really go through all the handouts which participants would have access to as well as the material I needed to revise preparing my lessons. I would like to mention how grateful I am for the opportunity to run the Award in Community Organising course as this is definitely built my capacity exponentially and opened my mind to many new perspectives on the work.”*

*“I am possibly most comfortable with the trainer role. I enjoy the practical element and tailoring activities and tools to the specific needs of the group. Training is fun, empowering and is essential to social action. I have improved as a trainer over the last few months and am receiving good feedback from trainees and the teachers I am working with.”*

Training adapted for ESOL learners





"I have learned that the hands on, practical training - knocking on doors, shadowing people, practicing and then reflecting afterwards - is really important. I think people are more likely to learn the skills and stay motivated this way than they are from any classroom training. The formal training can provide the framework and ideas, but to actually do organising, people have got to practice it.

"I think this is because by doing it, people have more of a real connection with their community than just thinking about it, because you see and hear the actual challenges people face and the impact this has on them. I think this gives an urgency to the work which motivates people."

"To me, being a social action hub is a process of classroom training and in-the-field experience. We have found that One Day Trainings are a good way of upskilling key, active members, and bringing new ones. Several people joined ACORN after the Feb 9th training and have become active in the landlord licensing campaign. The

combination of formal training and on-the-ground support has been an asset to us this last three months in particular, where we have seen a growth in activity. "

"People are different, we need to be mindful and self-aware that some need to be taken by the hand, some don't want you to assist them too much and want to immediately take the lead, while others need to feel part of a bigger group, wanting to connect with others in order to feel empowered and so on."

"Overall, it is key and crucial as trainers and organisers that we self-guard ourselves, we have passion, commitment and dedication. When we talk about training, we tend to focus on what happen in the room, yet so much of the learning takes place beyond the classrooms and outside courses. We need, therefore, to exploit and create learning opportunities. However, the core of our work is the fostering of conversation, working so that people can engage with, and learn from each other and the world."

*"People that I have trained in community organising are now the leadership of ACORN Bristol, which at 600 paying members is the biggest branch of ACORN nationally. They administer the branch, organise meetings and events, plan campaign and actions and support others to get involved and become active themselves. At the present time, members that I have trained both formally in accredited training and through informal coaching are running a city-wide campaign for affordable housing and organising regular direct action.*

*"They regularly liaise and negotiate with decision makers such as Council officers or elected politicians and with business owners. Other are running local groups in the BS5 and BS3 areas both of which are running their own campaigns against poor street clean-up and unethical business practices respectively. Members I have trained have stopped dozens of evictions, won thousands in repairs and returned deposits and administer peer to peer support networks on and offline."*



"This year, delivering training in Community Organising in Hartlepool has been making an impact on three levels. Firstly, the Wharton Trust's in-house community organiser has grown and developed significantly in her own ability and confidence to deliver training. She has now co-delivered the Introduction to Community Organising course, sharing the activities at least 50:50 with me. She has also nearly completed her Award in Education and Training, which will enable her to deliver training in community organising on her own in the next few months.

"She has so impressed an organisation she met in Grimsby that they have decided to appoint their own community organiser as they see the need for someone to do what she does!

"Secondly, we have trained local residents and organisations in the Introduction to Community Organising, with some interesting impacts. One attendee has just started as a parent liaison for a local school in Hartlepool. She commented at the end that she had decided to totally change her approach to the role now she had completed the course. She was planning on putting on a range of events and inviting parents to join in. However, after learning about the principles of community organising, she is instead going to listen to the parents first and find out their ideas and empower them to lead, rather than imposing her own agenda.

"In a similar vein, attendees from a local arts organisation were just about to move in to a new premises and had planned to run a number of creative events for the community. Their reflection at the end of the course was that they instead were going to listen to residents and build projects with them rather than for them. Finally, staff from a community centre realised the need to create a listening and empowering culture within their own organisation and with the volunteers who attend the centre.

"These examples show the impact of the training on various individuals who are going to apply the principles of community organising in different ways.

Thirdly, we have also gone into much more depth of learning with staff at the Wharton Trust as well as local residents who are linked in there. Exploring listening and power has led to considerable personal development and catalysed action as discussed in the other stories. We are now well placed to deliver the Award course next year with a solid group of people who are continuing to form a community organising team."

**Nick Laffan**, trainer, Hartlepool Social Action Hub.

## Challenges

This year has not been without its challenges. These can be summarised as:

- challenges with our delivery model
- challenges with ensuring consistent training quality
- challenges with recruitment
- challenges with developing a membership model

### Challenges with our delivery model

We have chosen to work through a hub and spoke model. Our training is delivered through our network of Social Action Hubs and associate trainers. This enables us to get training and community organising to where it is needed – into some of the most deprived neighbourhoods and communities. It also allows for flexibility and innovation – rather than a one-size-fits all model. Each Hub is different - locally grown, meeting local need and adopting the model which best fits its local circumstance.

However, many of the Hubs we deliver through and with are small, sometimes fragile community-based organisations. They rarely have long term income sources or financial stability. They often have small staff teams who are overstretched and often filling in for colleagues.

This year we have weathered the loss of three of our lead organiser/trainers at Social Action Hubs. Several trainers have needed time off sick – some for stress, due to the demands of working for small community-based organisations in communities suffering from real hardship. We also saw transition at the top of four, Social Action Hubs with CEOs being replaced.

As the year ended, we lost three of the original 20 Social Action Hubs – due to financial and organisational changes.

Fortunately, we have been nurturing new Social Action Hubs and we have a number of organisations that are in a position to step in and replace. However, the threat of losing Hubs or trainers will continue as long as we continue with this model of delivery, but we strongly believe it is the only way to reach people in the most marginalised communities which are most in need of community organising skills and support.

## Challenges with ensuring consistent training quality and content

We started with experienced community organisers, not professional trainers, and we work with them to develop their training skills and confidence. We have seen enormous growth and personal development amongst our trainer pool but inevitably some people take longer to develop than others. There is the challenge of starting to train not just local people, but professionals, experienced workers and sometimes councillors – who can be challenging and sceptical and often come with pre-conceived ideas and prejudices about community organising that have to be overcome. Sometimes it feels we need to adjust our message for different audiences, but this can undermine the key principles we are promoting.

We have also faced the challenge that our Social Action Hubs are varied and use different approaches to community organising – and want to make sure that the training they are running prepares people to get involved in organising ‘their way’. This means time has to be spent agreeing modifications to the training plan to make it ‘fit’ whilst still meeting the agreed learning outcomes of the course. However, this has also enabled us to adapt the courses to deliver to young people, adults with learning difficulties and ESOL learners, within prisons, to councillors and within the context of the highly campaign-oriented approach used by ACORN.

## Challenges with recruitment

Meeting our targets in some of the training strands has been challenging.

In the Youth strand we had to completely change our approach after our it became clear that our original plan to train graduates from the National Citizens Service (NCS) was not viable. Although we had positive feedback after piloting training with a small number of graduate groups, our offer did not fit the framework which NCS have created for the graduate programme.

Therefore, we designed a new approach to reaching and training young community organisers. We decided to do this through working with youth partners. This would ensure there were qualified people available to support the young people to put their learning into practice – whilst enabling us to work outside existing Social Action Hub areas. We put out a call and selected ten Youth Partners in the summer of 2018. We launched recruitment in the Autumn, with the aim of training starting before Christmas.

Recruitment of young people was more challenging than anticipated in some areas. Young people did not understand what community organising was and why they should sign up for training in it. They sometimes wanted to see how it would benefit their UCAS forms or CVs. Once that hurdle was overcome – scheduling training became the next challenge. Many of the young people have long school days, after-school activities, weekend sports clubs and exams. Only three areas had held introductory training by Christmas. One area had dropped out altogether. Eight areas have now run their Introduction to Community Organising training, and some have also held Listening Skills

training courses or sessions to plan listening campaigns. We are not as far forward as we hoped to be at this point in the year but we are planning for our big residential weekend in July.

The Public Sector strand has perhaps proved the most challenging. It was originally envisaged that councils would be able to put forward staff for community organising training – enabling them to have time to spend shadowing community organisers at Social Action Hubs and putting their learning into practice out in the field. However, we reckoned without the severe impacts of austerity on Local Authorities. Few frontline staff have the capacity to release staff for the training and frontline work required by this model. Many local authorities no longer have frontline community staff or if they do, they are covering such large patches that the idea of door-knocking is far from the reality of their roles.

In addition, many Local Authorities have adopted and are heavily committed to an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and see community organising as either conflictual or irrelevant to them. Councillors can see it as threatening.

So, whilst we continue to promote the community organising training to public sector organisations, we are also looking at other ways to encourage councils and other public sector organisations to see community organising as relevant and necessary – but to think about where and to who training might best be provided – to staff, councillors or to community members.

## Challenges with developing a membership model

The COEP is investing £100,000 per year into member organising and this has the aim of developing a sustainable peer network for community organising which can continue beyond the lifetime of the programme. We have seen good membership growth this year, our Member Organisers have become clearer about their role and some excellent work has taken place.

Nevertheless, there have been ongoing challenges about delineating roles between trainers at Social Action Hubs, and Member Organisers. It has not always been clear whose role it is to provide support following training – the Social Action Hub or the Member Organiser.

In addition, finding the right scale and sense of place to organise members in has been a challenge. In some areas the right scale has been a town like Stafford, whereas members in Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Lincoln have decided to come together as East Midlands Community Organisers. The North East has been too big and so has Wiltshire. London is also too big for one network. The Wirral has suffered from competition from an existing ABCD practitioners' network, as has Gloucestershire.

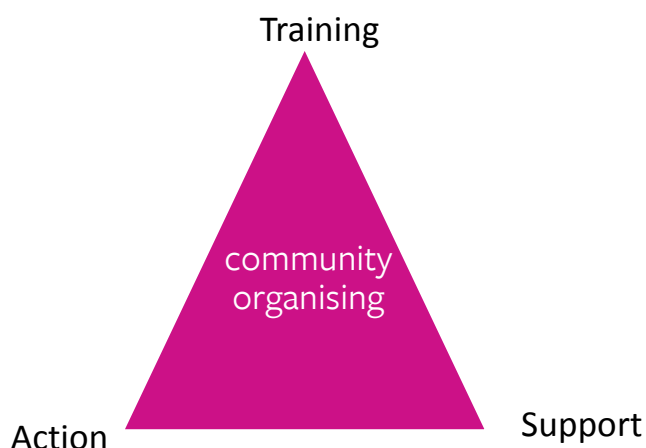
Getting the right balance between standardisation for member events and local flexibility has also been a challenge – the usual tension of local vs national. Our response to this will be to create a clearer structure for member organising next year – based on local groupings defined by members – and based on 5 key purposes that the groups must fulfil.

However, we want each group to define its own priorities and develop its own organising plan which enables the members to share skills, network and take action. Groups will appoint their own Local Member Organiser – rather than us appointing centrally – thus allowing for local autonomy.

## Learning

This year we have learned a number of really important things:

Training in community organising does not and should not take place in a vacuum. There needs to be a reason why people want the training and there needs to be follow-up support to enable people to put into practise what they learn. The sooner people get the chance to see organising in action and take part in it, the more effective the training will be. Getting the right balance between training, follow-up support and opportunities to take part in action is critical.



A quality training experience is essential, and this is made up of trainers with great skills and experience, good training plans, the right ratio of trainers to participants and good communication in advance which sets expectations and enables participants to come to the training in the right frame of mind. Acknowledging the experience in the room and drawing on it is also essential.

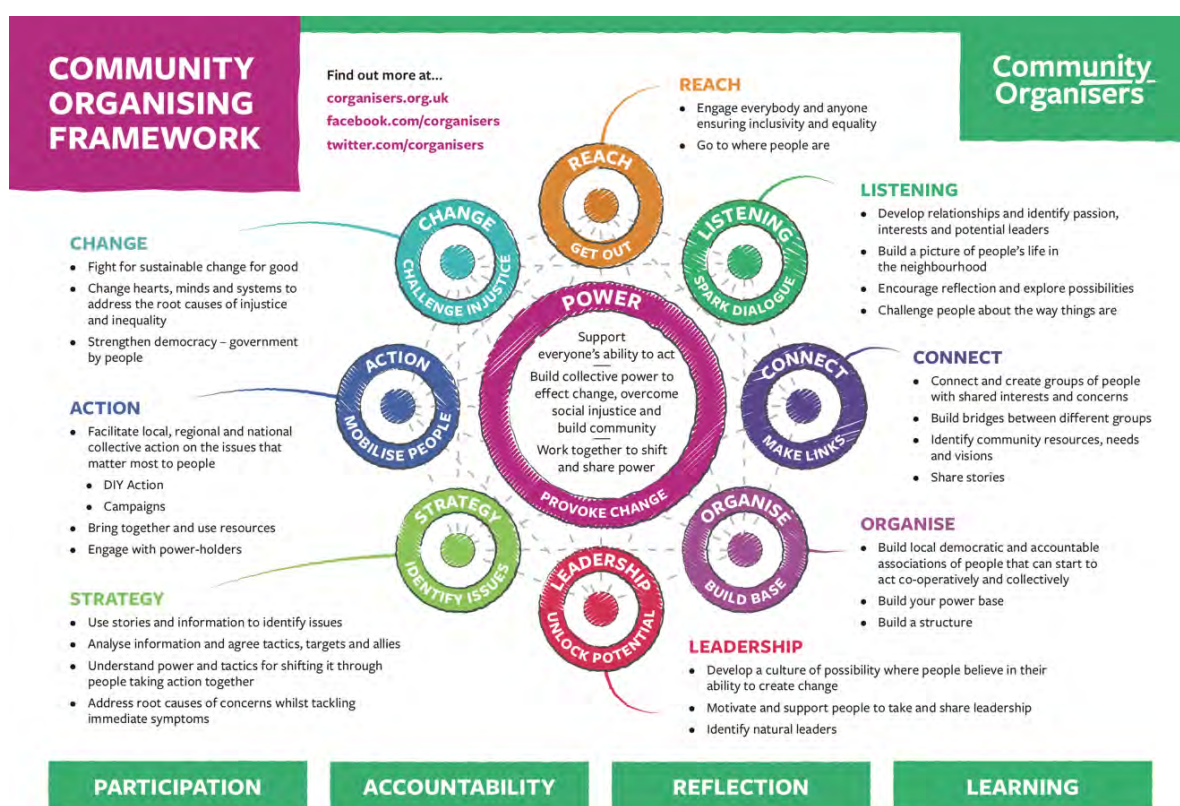
Free training is essential in many of the areas we work in - it's unlikely that people would be able to come to training otherwise. However free training needs to be managed well to ensure that people turn up, that the right people turn up and that people value the training and do something with it afterwards.

Even a one-day training can be transformational. We have many stories of people coming away with a new mindset - that they can do something about the things they want to change. However, a one-day training does not make a community organiser. Deeper training and/or the opportunity to get



involved in a community organising process - learning-in-action - is necessary to build on the initial learning and give people the skills and confidence to 'become' community organisers.

Our community organising framework has become a powerful tool, both for training and also for helping people start to look at their own practice and behaviour as community organisers, leaders, workers and members of a community. It is also suggesting where we need to develop further courses or resources and has helped us to reshape our member organising investment for year three of the programme.



Thinking about how people organise and the sort of structures people develop in community organising has led us to introduce more structure into our own membership network - with constituted local member organising groups which have an advisory role in the governance of Community Organisers itself as well as being better positioned to raise funds locally and to plan and take action on the things they care about.

## Year Three Plans

Our core targets in 2019-20 are to train 1080 individuals, broken down as follows:

- 535 through Social Action Hubs
- 155 through civil society partners
- 80 young people
- 210 through public sector partnerships
- 110 through public courses

We aim to see 200 learners complete an Award in Community Organising and 50 learners complete a Certificate in Community Organising

### In addition, we will:

- Achieve charitable status
- Grow our membership to 2000
- Recruit another 5 Social Action Hubs to join the National Academy of Community Organising
- Develop 5 strategic partnerships to further embed community organising principles and practice
- Support all 20 Social Action Hubs to generate further funding for community organising and training
- Deliver a great national training event for 185 participants
- Ensure we have 45 quality assured trainers who can deliver our courses including 15 with assessment qualifications who can teach and assess qualifications
- Develop and launch at least 3 new quality assured courses
- Support the establishment of 20 local member organising groups such as 'community organising Stafford'.
- Secure investment to enable us to continue and grow the national academy of community organising, develop new Social Action Hubs and expand our membership
- Ensure we have a bank of 50 stories which illustrate the work of our members and the social action they have animated