



THE COMMUNITY ORGANISERS EXPANSION PROGRAMME

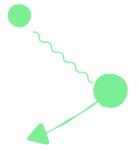
March 2017 - March 2020

Published July 2020

**Community
Organisers**



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



Summary of learning

The programme in numbers

3966

people were trained

in community organising - exceeding the target of 3,500 people

78

people enrolled

on Community Organising Qualification courses

1346

people attended follow on courses

in Listening, Action for Change or Building Power

341

young people were trained in community organising

The National Academy of Community Organising was established and grew to a network of Social Action Hubs in **22 places** and **43 quality assured trainers**

Five new one-day quality assured courses, **two Qualification courses** and a **certificated youth programme** were developed

An active peer network of over

1500

community organisers developed

20
new Local Organising Groups

formed to take local action

£1.25 Million

was leveraged to support community organising work locally

Introduction

The Community Organisers Expansion Programme (COEP) ran from June 2017 to March 2020. It was commissioned and funded by the Social Action Team in the Office for Civil Society, which is part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in the UK Government.

The purpose of the Programme was to recruit and train 3,500 community organisers, thus expanding the number of Community Organisers recruited through Government funding to 10,000 by the end of the Parliament.

A Community Organiser was described as a local leader bringing people together to take action on the things they care about.

The ultimate aim was 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 Community Organisers Expansion Programme represented a second phase of the original Community Organisers Programme (COP) which ran from 2011 to 2015. programme. As such, it was expected that the Expansion Programme would build on what was achieved through the Community Organisers Programme, as well as addressing any gaps.

Additional requirements of the Programme were to:

- build on the existing programme and especially support and deepen the impact of the most effective organisers trained in the first programme
- recruit and train 3500 new community organisers across England, particularly in deprived communities
- develop new approaches to sustaining community activity
- create opportunities for peer support and learning
- allow for local variation and flexibility of approach
- be inclusive
- look for synergies with other Government Programmes

This report describes how the Programme was delivered, what it achieved and what was learned for future programmes.



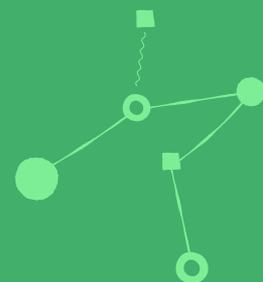
Who we are

Community Organisers Limited is the national, non-profit membership body and training organisation for people interested and involved in community organising in England.

We are a national body that is locally rooted and led by our members. Our members are taking action and inspiring thousands of people to get involved in community organising practice, and, join the growing movement of people up and down the country who are listening, building power and taking action to improve their neighbourhoods for good.

We are also the home for the National Academy of Community Organising which is a collective of locally rooted organisations (Social Action Hubs) committed to training and supporting people to develop their understanding and practice of neighbourhood community organising.

**Community
Organisers**



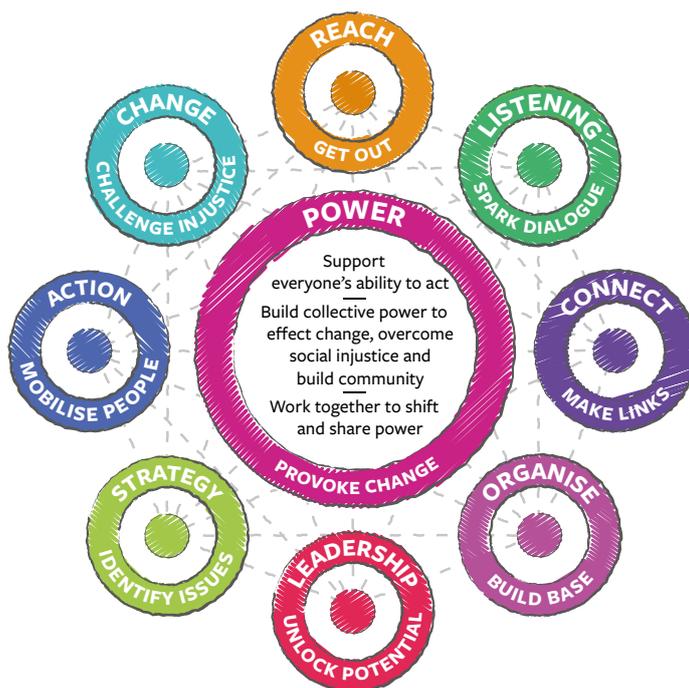
What is Community Organising?

We define community organising as:

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 for change.

Taken from <https://www.organisers.org.uk>

Our definition is explored in our community organising framework. The framework is not a rigid model. It is a map of the different elements of a community organising process.



Essential elements include building relationships through one-to-one listening, gathering and analysing stories and intelligence, bringing people together in a collaborative and organised way, nurturing people's strengths, resources, passion and leadership potential and planning and carrying out collective action which effects change in a variety of ways.

At the heart of community organising is an intention to build people power - the power of people working together for stronger communities and to effect change through the democratic system and through pressure on powerful institutions. We do this through building relational power, which comes from multiple one-to-one and group conversations to identify common interest and build trust.

Community organising can either support a community to build on its strengths and develop community assets or identify wrongs which need righting through campaigning. We teach this as a 'developmental approach' and a 'social change' approach to organising.

Our training is rooted in a grass-roots method of organising which starts with listening to individuals through door-knocking or in other community settings, but can also be applied in other ways such as working with and through organisations.



Why Government Support for Community Organising ?

There are many approaches to working in communities and catalysing local action.

Community organising is still relatively new as an approach in England, although its history as a recognised approach to social action goes back to the 1960s. Community organising has been deployed as one approach to social action in England since 1989, but mostly in London and a few other cities, and independent of Government support.

Community development has been the major method of supporting community action in England since the 1960s, often led by local Councils. Since the late 1990s a hybrid approach - Asset Based Community Development - has been taken up within parts of the public health service and local councils.

Since 2011, the UK Government has promoted community organising as an approach which is attuned to the agenda of Localism, reducing the power of the state and challenging and encouraging people in communities to do things for themselves. The Government's vision was outlined in the Civil Society Strategy:

"The government has a vision of the UK with better connected communities, more neighbourliness, and businesses which strengthen society. Technology enables strong communities rather than enabling disconnection and isolation. Young people and their contribution to a thriving society are recognised as vital, with the ability to help the country tackle its most urgent challenges and deliver a better future for all of us. People are empowered to take responsibility for their neighbourhoods.

Power is decentralised so that local officials and professionals are properly accountable to local people and trusted to do their job without bureaucratic interference. The provision of services is seen as the business of the community, not solely the responsibility of government, and providers are drawn from a broad range of suppliers from the public sector and beyond. All communities, regardless of levels of segregation and deprivation, are able to take advantage of these opportunities.”

Civil Society Strategy: Building a future that works for everyone - HM Government, August 2018

There have now been two Programmes funded by Government to train community organisers.

The first Programme which ran from 2011 to 2015 provided bursaries to enable individuals to work and train for one year, hosted in a local community. 500 community organisers were trained this way - and alongside them 6000 community volunteers were trained in some of the principles of community organising and learned about it through becoming organised.

These community organisers listened to over 150,000 residents, worked in 400 of England's most deprived neighbourhoods and supported over 1,500 community actions. Community Organisers put in more than 500,000 hours and mobilised more than 21,000 people to take action on the things that matter most in their communities.

Actions varied enormously: a patient-led campaign to improve cancer services in Sunderland; a market set up to revitalise a run-down area in Stockport; young people starting a festival to promote local musicians in Lincoln; students creating an app to help people with dementia publish their life histories in Kent.

Due to the success of the first Programme the Government made the decision to fund a second Programme. This was designed and commissioned in 2016/17 and began in April 2017 and was known as the Community Organisers Expansion Programme. This report explains what happened.



The Community Organisers Expansion Programme 2017-2020



The Community Organisers Expansion programme ran from 2017 to 2020 and was the second Government funded Programme. The programme was run by Community Organisers Limited, the legacy body established at the end of the first Programme.

The aim of the Programme was to train 3500 people in community organising. This would in turn enable 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.

This new programme was different to the previous one. The previous model employed Community Organisers centrally through the prime contractor and then invited locally rooted organisations to host them. People gained their experience of community organising through paid work experience in the community. The approach of the COEP sought to embed community organising at a local level working with and alongside locally rooted organisations; building their capacity to train and support local people to get involved with community organising. People were recruited and trained through one-day courses and longer qualification courses. In addition, to build on the growing interest and demand for community organising people were trained within different settings - community, public sector, youth services and voluntary organisations.

One of the main reasons the COEP took a different approach to the original CO programme was to focus on 'scaling deeper' rather than 'scaling wider'.

By concentrating the work in a smaller number of areas and over a 3 year period (rather than one year like the original programme) the ambition was to embed community organising locally and build the capacity and skills of local people and local organisations so that community organising could be sustained after the programme had ended. The previous programme, whilst effective in training individuals in community organising skills, did not seek to embed the work at a local level.

The Programme attracted a wide range of individuals from a diversity of backgrounds. Those who participated in the programme were not generally people looking to become professional community organisers, although some were. More often they were people who wanted to support or take part in community action within their work or home lives as citizens, volunteers, tenants, activists, councillors, professionals and workers.

Programme Headline Achievements:

3,966 people were trained in community organising - exceeding the target of 3,500 people.

1,346 people attended follow on courses in Listening, Action for Change or Building Power

78 people enrolled on Community Organising Qualification courses.

341 young people were trained in community organising

Over 400 organisations were introduced to community organising

The National Academy of Community Organising was established and grew to a network of Social Action Hubs in 22 places and 43 quality assured trainers.

Five new one-day quality assured courses, two Qualification courses and a certificated youth programme were developed

An active peer network of over **1500 community organisers** developed

20 new Local Organising Groups formed to take local action

30,000 people were engaged in one-to-one conversations and 3000 people were activated

£1.25 million was leveraged to support community organising work locally

Community organisers across the country supported social action on health, food security, transport, youth, social care, decent housing, street safety, loneliness, community cohesion, the environment and stronger communities.

See our Stories of action report which highlights some of the grassroots action that was inspired by the programme.



More Training Data



3,541 people attended an introductory course, of which, 1346 people continued their learning by attending a more in-depth course

2,512 people were trained by Social Action Hubs

735 people attended courses put on for local and national organisations

250 people in the public sector attended training

156 people attended public courses

More than 400 training courses were delivered as part of the programme

Training Reactions

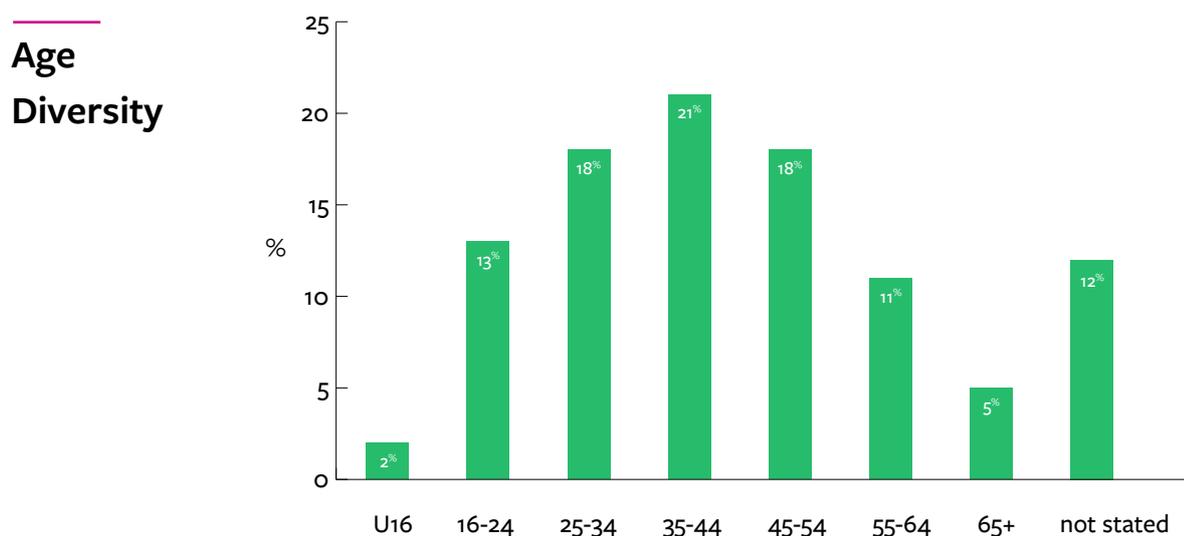
We analysed a random sample of 557 feedback forms from (accounting to 31% of total forms) from 131 courses between April 2018 and February 2020. Each course was attended on average by 10 participants.

Participants were asked to evaluate the training based on their experience:

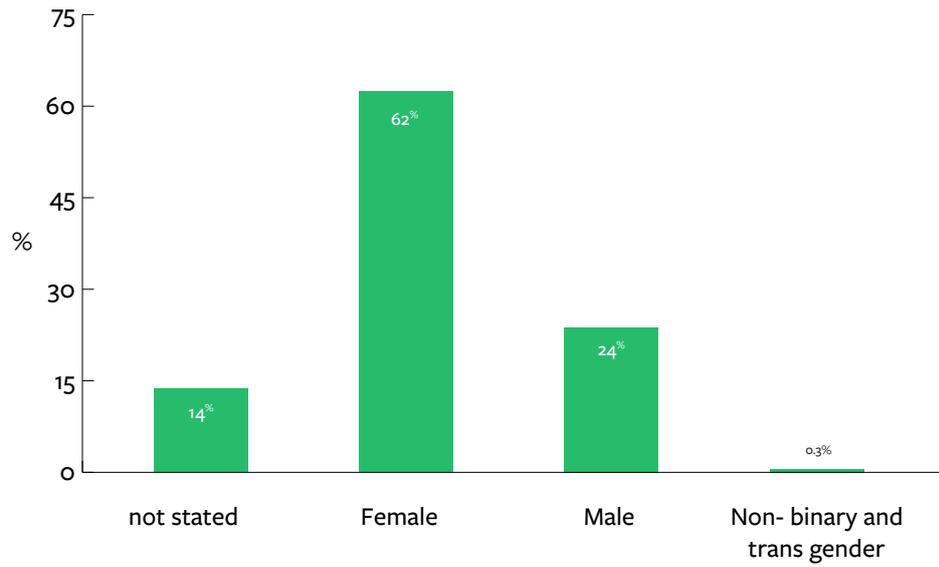
- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop met their expectations
- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that they gained new skills or rediscovered old ones
- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that They will use something I learned today in my work/community
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned something about community organising that they did not know to begin with and
- 83% were inspired to attend further training

Trainee Diversity

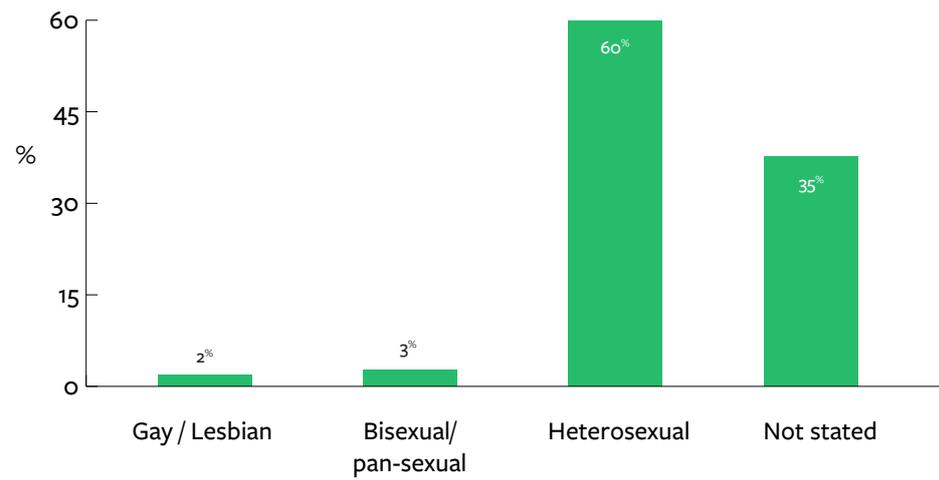
2812 participants who attended an Introductory training courses provided enough diversity data for us to analyse. This gives a rich picture of the diversity of our programme participants, demonstrating we have been successful at reaching many different types of people across England.



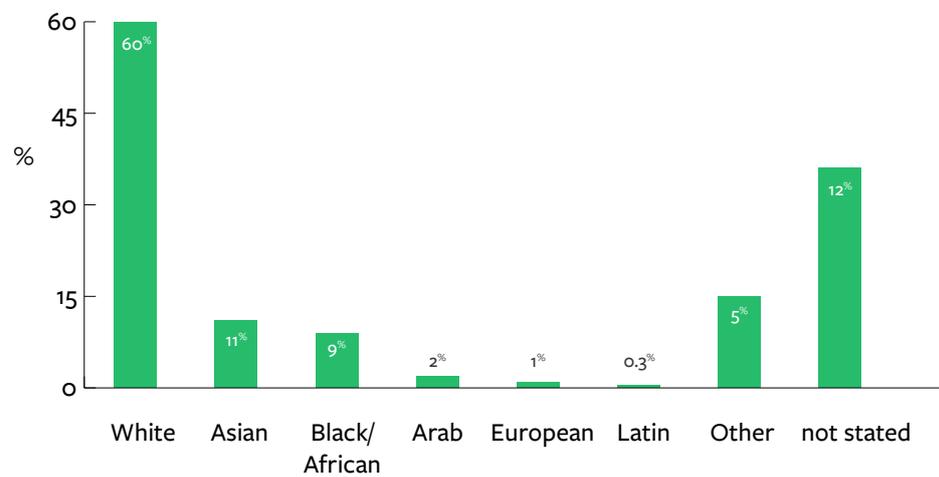
Gender Diversity



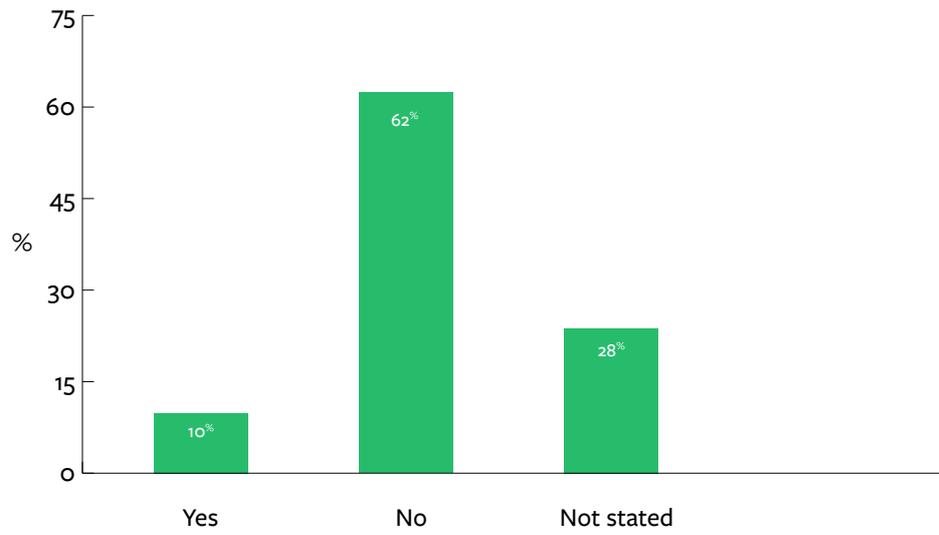
Sexuality



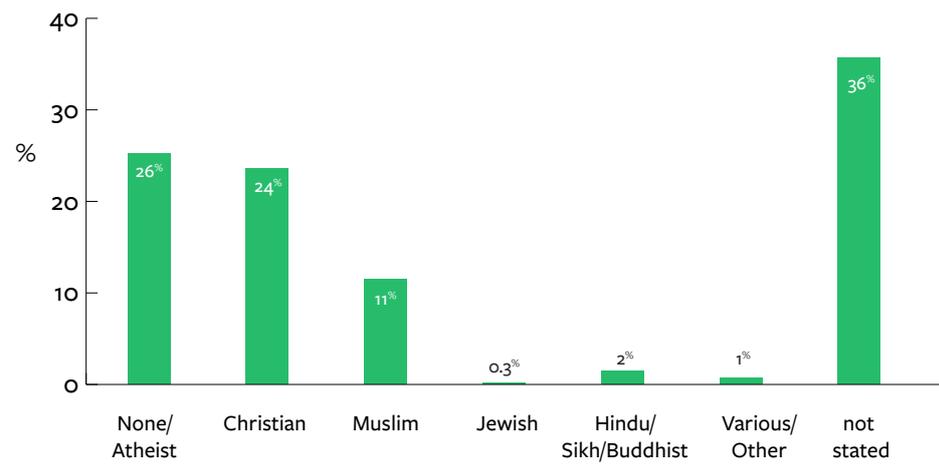
Ethnic Diversity



Disability



Religious Diversity



Structure of the Programme

Community Organisers is a membership organisation (now a charity) for community organisers and people involved in community organising.

Definitions:

a Community Organiser is the person who is leading the community organising process - they may or may not be in a paid role

A person involved in community organising is part of a community organising process or network - they might be a local leader leading a local initiative, or part of an action group taking a specific role

Community Organisers recruited a small programme team to deliver the programme. The Programme was delivered principally with and through:

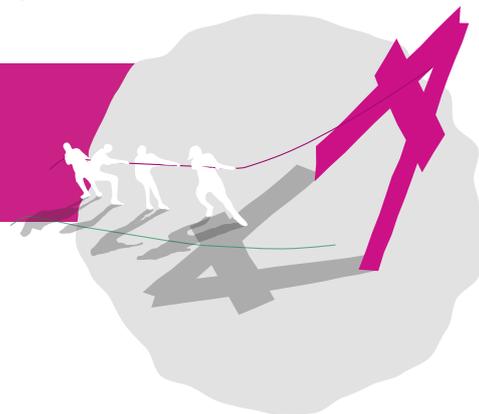
- Twenty five grant-funded Social Action Hubs: locally rooted community organisations with community organising at the heart of their work
- Forty three quality assured community organiser trainers: experienced community organisers training others in the skills, values and theory of community organising
- A suite of courses - taught by trainers at Social Action Hubs and by Associate Trainers organised and delivered by Community Organisers for local and national partners.
- Member Organisers putting on local network events and an online peer-to-peer network promoting community organising opportunities and sharing peer advice
- National events bringing together 200+ members, with training, workshops, plenary sessions and social networking
- In Year Three, a grant fund for Local Organising Groups.
- An active communications campaign, sharing news and stories of community organising and highlighting action and campaigns initiated by community organisers

Unlike the first COP, recruitment of community organisers was not focussed on paid, full-time roles, as these are often not sustainable.

Instead, the programme aimed to spread the skills and principles of organising to people already active in their communities, people working in frontline roles with communities and to people in relevant roles such as Parish councillors. Another important group of recruits was young people - the community organisers of the future.

Social Action Hubs -What they Are, How they Work and What They Achieved

2,512 people were trained by Social Action Hubs



The concept of a Social Action Hub was created for the Programme. Social Action Hubs were our most important delivery mechanism in the Programme. We began with a callout for organisations that could meet this definition:

Social Action Hubs are existing organisations that can demonstrate their understanding of, and commitment to, community organising through their existing approach. They are locally rooted and are accountable to their local community. They are required to be working in deprived neighbourhoods as defined by the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2015)

SAHs will be responsible for deepening, developing and embedding community organising at a local level and becoming the leading lights for other organisations in our network.

SAHs will be awarded a grant to recruit and train 100 community leaders over a period of 3 years and will then hold and work with those trained to bring about significant community action.

COEP Social Action Hub Grant Fund Briefing Document (2017)

Twenty local organisations were selected as Social Action Hubs, to receive grant funding for three years. Each organisation was located in or served areas identified as disadvantaged and each had a history of involvement in community organising. Some had hosted community organisers during the first COP and some had been established by community organisers trained during that programme.

The organisations varied in size, structure and scope, but all had a mission to support community and social action. Some but not all had a physical base. Some were 'pure' hubs of community organising and others mixed community organising with other types of community support including community engagement and development, operating physical community hubs, providing training or services, running enterprises and supporting volunteers.



National Academy
of
Community Organising

Collectively, the hubs make up the National Academy of Community Organising.

1. Brighton and Hove
2. Bristol (Barton Hill and Lawrence Hill)
3. Gloucestershire
4. Halifax
5. Hartlepool
6. Hastings
7. Lincoln
8. London (Hackney, Haringey, and Lambeth)
9. Luton
10. Newcastle
11. Nottingham
12. Rotherham
13. Sheffield
14. Stafford
15. Stockport
16. Stoke-on-Trent
17. Warwickshire
18. Wiltshire
19. Wirral



Each Social Action Hub committed to training 100 local people through a mix of formal quality assured training and applied learning. Each Social Action Hub was required to have an experienced community organiser able to train people up and to support them to put their learning into practice. These roles were shared between more than one person in some Hubs.

Each Social Action Hub is unique and operates differently. They use an array of community organising styles, from the 'developmental approach' to the 'social change' approach.

For example:

ACORN Communities (Bristol)

ACORN is a federation of locally accountable community organising groups. In Bristol, they have mobilised over 2,500 people to campaign to get hundreds of additional affordable homes built, and trained local leaders to represent the network on Bristol Homes Board. ACORN's organising work always begins with door-knocking and one-on-one conversations.

Community Roots CIC (Gloucestershire)

Community Roots CIC is a relationship-based organisation, formed by community organisers, with no agenda except that of the residents that it listens to. Projects include the Living Room, a new community hub in West Cheltenham, organising around Gloucester's main park and skate park, and training volunteers and local leaders from other community organisations.

English for Action (East London)

English for Action is a different kind of teaching organisation. Established in 2006 by a community organiser supporting hotel workers organise to gain the Living Wage, they realised they could make a real difference by teaching English by focusing on topics which are relevant to students' lives. Through listening and one-to-one meetings, workers help learners identify common problems, and together work out how to tackle this, perhaps through organising public events, liaising with local politicians or starting community projects.

Starting Point Community Learning Partnership (Stockport)

Starting Point uses enterprise (catering) to fund and provide a base for community activity. Community organising is used as an underpinning ethos for projects on individual and community learning, including digital literacy, financial resilience and wellness. Their partnership with a local GP practice has brought a focus on health and social prescribing to their community organising work.

The Wharton Trust (Hartlepool)

Based at The Annexe, a community hub, the Wharton Trust has been using community organising for 5 years and have listened to hundreds of local people, which has brought local residents together on projects from adopting flower beds to challenging anti-social behaviour and taking direct action.



Each Social Action received a grant of around £45,000 over three years or £15,000 per year, matched locally (through cash from charitable trusts and foundations including the National Lottery Community Fund, Power to Change and Local Government or in kind donations including staff time, volunteer time, and venue hire) to support training.

2,512 people were trained by Social Action Hubs. This is an average of 125 people per Hub. All Social Action Hubs ran Introductory courses. 16 Social Action Hubs ran follow-up courses, and 8 ran one or more Qualification courses.

The people trained at each Social Action Hub varied from local people new to community action through to young people, volunteers, community activists, voluntary and public sector staff and local councillors and decision-makers.

Social Action Hubs offered a range of support, dependant on their own community organising approach and work.

In some Hubs people built their skills following training by shadowing a community organiser on the ground, getting started with one-to-one and group listening campaigns and with supporting meetings or actions, not necessarily in their own community.

In some Hubs, people were recruited and trained as part of a community organising process led by

an organiser, so the training was rooted in their own neighbourhood or area of interest and they are actively engaged in the organising process as a leader or member.

In other Hubs, the focus was to change culture and ways of working locally and so a lot of the training was to staff and volunteers and members of partner organisations locally and to help them apply the principles and tools in their own context with advice from the Hub.

Most Hubs supported local networks of people they trained and developed a strong peer support approach. Some Hubs have supported Organising Groups to grow and gain funding themselves. ACORN have supported people to start new local organising branches in all three Social Action Hub areas.

Definition:

Organising Groups comprise a minimum 21 members (of Community Organisers), who through their organising practice are tackling issues that matter most to them. The groups work together, listening to their community, building their collective power and developing community led solutions.

At the end of the second year, three Social Action Hubs were no longer able to continue with the Programme - due to financial issues in two cases and in one a change of organisational strategy. These were replaced with three new Hubs which had an existing relationship with Community Organisers and were able to get up and running quickly. One of these hubs was a collaboration between two organisations - giving us a chance to test out a new model. In April 2019 we were also joined by our first non grant-funded Social Action Hub.

The Social Action Hubs

- Cedarwood Trust – North Tyneside (until March 2019)
- ACORN, Newcastle
- North Birkenhead Development Trust – The Wirral, Merseyside
- Wirral Development Trust – The Wirral, Merseyside (until March 2019)
- The Wharton Trust – Hartlepool
- Starting Point – Stockport, Greater Manchester
- Halifax Opportunities Trust, Halifax, West Yorkshire (from April 2019)
- ACORN, Sheffield
- Rotherfed - Rotherham
- Old Chapel Works CIC – Stafford
- All the Small Things CIC, Stoke-on-Trent (from April 2019)
- Grapevine, Coventry and Warwickshire
- Sneinton Alchemy – Nottingham and Nottinghamshire
- Lincoln City Sports & Community Trust – Lincoln
- Marsh Farm Outreach CIC – Luton
- Community Roots CIC – Gloucestershire
- Barton Hill Settlement – Bristol
- ACORN, Bristol
- Community First Wiltshire and Swindon – Devizes, Wiltshire
- English for Action – Hackney, London E2
- High Trees Development Trust – Lambeth, London SW2
- Pembroke House – Walworth, London SE17 (until March 2019)
- The Selby Trust – Tottenham, London
- South Coast CLTs Social Action Hub - Brighton and Hastings (from April 2019)

Social Action Hubs were asked to match fund the Grant from the outset to avoid grant dependency and maximise leverage from the Grant.

Grant was matched in all kinds of ways, from selling coffee to winning contracts for community engagement. ACORN raises money from membership payments and English for Action from ESOL teaching.

Over the three years of the Programme, it is estimated that Social Action Hubs collectively leveraged £1.25 million towards supporting and sustaining community organising into the future.



About the Training Programme

The Programme aimed to train 3,500 people in community organising, using accredited training wherever possible.

We registered 3,966 trainees and issued 4,887 certificates*.

*(Trainees who undertook further courses were given additional certificates but their unique learner reference remained the same and so were only counted once)

About accreditation

There was little accredited training in community organising available at the start, except for from the Level 2/3 'Foundations of Community Organising' unregulated units developed for the first COP and accredited by Awarding Body CERTA. We committed to converting these to the first ever nationally recognised Qualifications in Community Organising.

This was achieved in June 2017, working with CERTA who, are now part of the Skills and Education Group. These are called the Level 2 and Level 3 Award and Certificate in Community Organising.

Skills and Education group also have a Quality License Scheme for quality assuring non-regulated courses. This replaces 'accreditation' which is a term being used less and less in the education world as it is misleading and confusing.

Quality assurance means that our organisational policies and systems, our trainers and our training plans are all inspected against a quality framework and that provided we maintain standards we are able to award certificates of achievement to our learners which are supplied by the Skills and Education Group. All learners on our one day courses achieve a certificate. Quality assurance implies a high degree of standardisation of courses.

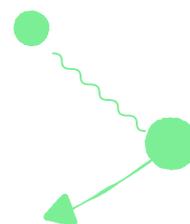
We are also registered with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme.

We launched with the intention that the new Qualifications in Community Organising which were developed for the Expansion programme would eventually be run at all Social Action Hubs, but we needed an introductory course to get people interested.

We began by developing a One-Day Introduction to Community Organising course as a light touch easy way for people to explore what community organising is and whether they would like to go deeper into it.

The introductory 6-hour course has these learning outcomes:

- what community organising is
- the importance of listening to build relationships and uncover issues
- power in communities and why it matters
- how to motivate people to take action
- next steps in community organising & social action



The Introductory course has been a popular course suitable for many different audiences. Here are some of the feedback comments on the course:

"Was really good, learned a lot and loved the power session"

"Everything we did can help my community - let's people see they can have the power from the bottom up"

"I will be able to understand and listen to people more about community work and organising"

"Improved my listening skills"

"Two sentences from the training programme that I will never forget are: 'don't do for others what they can do for themselves' and 'do not promise what you can't deliver'"

"I really enjoyed gaining knowledge of the four levels of listening"

"The main message that stood out for me was of community organisers gaining collective power of people. I find it very appealing to connect with other community organisers and community organisations"

"I think I feel empowered to make change whereas previously I felt alienated from community organising"

"Well paced, better understanding of community organising and have formulated ideas to move forward"

"Excellent facilitation by Tom who delivered the workshop"

"Practical, informative, relevant and thought-provoking"

"My input was noted and built on and felt like it contributed something positive"

"Very well run. It flowed easily and didn't feel too directed"

"It actually went beyond my expectations, very in-depth and inspiring"

"Very insightful training, very interactive throughout the day"

"Really interesting and informative material, very well delivered and empowering"

"Lots of rediscovery of courses/ content I've done in the past, especially around community engagement, power dynamics etc. New knowledge, deeper knowledge and listening.... Lots of food for thought"

"Great to have such detailed resources and focused discussions"

"A very useful and usable methodology for listening and working with others"

All Social Action Hubs ran the Introductory course. We also ran courses for external partners, both local and national and for young people and we ran some trial courses for public sector people to see if the course was relevant in that context.

We quickly realised that there was appetite for more practical learning to deepen knowledge and skills, as well as adaptations to increase relevance and inclusion.

Trainers have worked with us to develop 6 further one-day courses, a youth programme and to develop quality assurance for the Organisation Workshop course.

All one-day courses were trialled and then put through the quality assurance process.

Trainers

Our aim was to develop a network of at least 20 trainers, one based at each Social Action hub, who were quality assured to deliver community organising training.

It soon became clear we needed more to meet demand in other areas and to provide more capacity at hubs. We ran more trainer courses and put in place a development programme.

We take quality assurance seriously and the result has been excellent feedback from trainees.



At the end of the Programme:

66 people have attended a Trainer course

We have **43 fully quality assured trainers**

31 trainers are based at Social Action hubs and another 12 are part of the associate pool

What is a quality assured trainer?

- To become a quality assured trainer involves:
- Having experience and previous training in community organising
- Having a relevant accreditation or qualification (lead trainers) or submitting an assignment
- Having an Award in Education and Training (or equivalent)
- Attending our trainer course
- Being observed
- Taking part in regular CPD
- Submitting feedback and reflection after each course

Most trainers were trained during the first COP. This meets the objective of supporting and developing the most effective community organisers from the first Programme.

Some newer trainers have been recruited as volunteers or staff at Social Action Hubs or gained their community organising experience through other models or community organising training. Some were even hosts of trainees in the first COP.

Training Feedback

The follow-on or deeper courses are very popular, as demonstrated by a selection of feedback comments on what they most appreciated or took away from the course:

I will test out a listening conversation with volunteers

To make everyone feel empowered no matter what

Being given the opportunity to do exercises and reflect on how it went

Try to make more contacts with neighbours

Reach out to people who I would usually avoid, through fear or self-made barriers

Want to learn more about the other parts like leadership/ strategy development/ planning and taking action

I think with each course I attend it builds on existing knowledge and follows on nicely.

Learning and understanding different types of power

Self-reflection is always difficult

Really found it insightful and enjoyed it

Power mapping stakeholders was very useful exercise - will map groups and reflect more on what approaches have not worked in the past

I'm really looking forward to further action with the community

Really well thought through and organised

Felt Safe

Outstanding and human not clinical

Facilitation was excellent, great company and conversation, a fantastic workshop.

The workshop exceeded my expectation.

Great facilitation and great interaction from participants.

Targets and tactics and call to action, putting what we have learnt into practice most useful.

Facilitators were great, really enjoyed the case studies and following the themes through the day, really enjoyed the process and feel confident.

I found the facilitators really helpful as they had so much experience.

Reflecting on the picture and realising the common issues all our members are facing'

When we realised we could do something about our frustrations with the Job Centre

Watching the 'click' in fellow participants that I manage

Positive space to talk about real issues that are affecting our community

Loved the Power Flower

The workshop was broken down into bitesize chunks, with great facilitation.

Asking powerful questions was the most useful session from the day, it ensured we could get the most out of the people.

Role play is very good method of learning

Teamwork skills exercise most useful because I was able to see theory in practice

Quantifying methods and tactics



Qualifications Feedback:

Inspiring and Empowering. Lots to think about

Loved it! Nick was very supportive and created a good environment and learning and discussion

Loved it. Enjoyed learning and listening to other perspectives. I can use this in all aspects of my life. Thankyou.

Going deeper into new theories and experiences was very good.

Really interesting course and definitely needed. Inspirational.

Over too quickly!

I found some of the activities uncomfortable at first but as I took part I eased into them, and it me aware that there are simple ways to ease into big topics. Generally at the start of each I was taken out of my comfort zone but then I realised exactly what I needed to learn to gain extra skills and grow

Further Learning

The three main 'follow-on' one-day courses are

Listening Skills for Community Organising

This course covers:

- 'relational' listening and its importance in community organising
- how to plan a listening campaign to kick-start your organising work
- practical listening tools you can use to engage people, build relationships and find leaders
- how asking powerful questions helps people to tell their stories
- how community organisers reflect to improve their work

Building Power through Community Organising

This course covers:

- personal power and the ability to act
- how power is exercised in society
- what it means to organise for change
- how to begin to pinpoint the causes of social injustice
- how to build power with others through community organising

Action for Change through Community Organising

This course covers:

- what motivates people to take action in their community
- the purpose of action in community organising and different types of organised action
- how to develop a power map and a strategy for action
- developing confidence in leading collective action
- the importance of reflecting on action

These follow-on courses help to provide some of the practical skills and deeper understanding to enable people to get started with organising their community, but without going too deeply into theory or history of community organising.

Community Organising with Young People

The course covers:

- Feeling part of a team and national movement
- Appreciating your own strengths/talents as part of a team
- Understanding what community organising is and how it is done
- Believing in the possibility of change & appreciate own power to act with others
- Learning to listen and have self-awareness as a listener
- Gaining confidence as a leader who listens and can motivate other
- Listening to learn more about the community/society
- Identifying what you care about and want to change and take some action on it as an individual
- Planning and trying to take some collective action to tackle an issue or create some change based on the listening you did

Planning for Change through Community Organising

The course covers:

- Understanding community organising and how to use a community organising approach to mobilise your community for positive change around a Neighbourhood Plan / community led housing or development
- How to reach out, listen and build (consensus for) a vision for the future of your community
- Developing an analysis of where power lies in planning, development and housing and use your Neighbourhood Plan / Community Led housing/development project to build and shift power
- Planning tactics for action to get the housing and development your community needs

Storytelling for Change in Community Organising

The course covers:

- Understanding how stories can be used in community organising – how narrative is used for social change
- How to tell their own personal story
- Understanding the importance of listening to create and use collectively owned stories
- How to understand the context of the media, its power dynamics and where they sit within that - ownership of own stories and the power of their stories
- An exploration of the different ways that personal and collective narratives can be created and shared - by independent media and within communities

Qualifications in Community Organising

At the start of the Community Organising Expansion Programme we converted an unregulated set of units called Foundations in Community Organising into a nationally regulated set of Qualifications. There are two sizes of Qualification - an Award, and a Certificate. These can be taken at Level 2 or Level 3.



Qualification sizes and levels are regulated by OfQual and are standardised across all of recognised the qualifications on offer. The Qualifications are the first of their kind in the UK.

For each qualification we developed our own course which supports learners to achieve the qualifications. Learners must also complete assignments which evidence their learning.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE is a 35-hour taught course leading to a Level 2 or 3 Award in Community Organising

This course is for people who already have some relevant experience and want to build their knowledge of community organising so that they can be more effective. It is made up of 3 Units:

- Purpose and Principles of Community Organising
- The Community Organising Process
- Community Organising Practice

COMMUNITY ORGANISING: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE is a 138-hour taught course leading to a Level 2 or 3 Certificate in Community Organising.

This course is for who want to improve on what they already know about community organising and apply knowledge, theory, values and reflection to their practice. It is made up of 9 Units:

- Purpose and Principles of Community Organising
- The Community Organising Process
- Community Organising Practice
- Defining Community Assets and Needs
- Understand Power and Influence in Community Organising
- Developing Reflective Practice
- Developing Interaction Skills with Individuals
- Developing Community Organising Skills with Groups of People
- Understanding Decision Making Processes

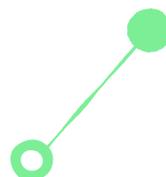
7 Social Action Hubs ran Qualification courses and 78 people enrolled on Qualification enrolled on Qualification courses against a target of 1030.

By the end of March 2020, 46 people had achieved their Award in Community Organising.

The Programme's ambition was to support people to develop their understanding and practice of community organising through the delivery of formal qualifications. It was envisaged that as well as training local people, the Programme would recruit and train those people in paid roles working with the community who would undertake the qualification. As the Programme developed, the training became focussed on training local people and those at the grassroots. Those in paid roles were interested in the approach, and undertook the training but did not have the capacity or freedom within their roles to undertake the qualification (despite being interested).

To respond to demand for further learning the additional one day courses were developed without the need to undertake a formal qualification. 1,346 people were trained in follow on courses to develop their understanding.

In addition, the delivery of the qualification required further resources to be identified at a local level to match fund the grant. The aspiration was to link the delivery of the qualification with local Adult Education Budgets, however, despite attempts to do this it was difficult to make the connection with existing budgets within adult education.



Adapting Training for Different Audiences

We believe strongly that community organising should be available to everyone. Adaptions were made whenever possible to ensure the courses were accessible and relevant including:

- Splitting courses to run over multiple days with shorter sessions
- Using different exercises which were easier to participate in
- Providing reading materials in advance
- Changing certain exercises - particularly the power exercise, to suit a context when participants may have power rather than lack it
- Adapting the courses for young people to make them more grounded in their immediate concerns
- Creating training plans for people who are learning English as a second language
- Providing scribes for disabled learners
- Creating accessible learning environments

ESOL Learners

English for Action is a Social Action Hub which teaches English by focusing on topics which are relevant to students' lives and supports them to take action on their concerns. Trainers at English for Action have adapted all four courses to make them suitable for these students. Courses are taught to ESOL classes in Colleges and other community settings.

During an observation we noticed that everything discussed was rooted in learner's lives and the language learning aspect of the class was expertly embedded within the training plan and delivery.

An ESOL teacher wrote: 'The training was truly inspiring, activities were varied and engaging and it was delivered in a very accessible way. Students expressed that they found it interesting and really enjoyed it.'

EFA Trainer Adela describes one outcome: "I delivered the introductory training to one of my colleague's classes. The training provided the teacher and the students with the language and concepts of community organising, it has also started conversations about problems experienced by the students and set a context for taking action to tackle them. All of this facilitated the teacher's work to resolve problems the students are having with the NHS, such as long waits, inappropriate staff behaviour and improper care. The teacher supported the class to write a letter to their GP surgery's manager, get this letter signed by several local influential institutions and prepare them for talking to the manager. For next year, they are planning to organise a meeting with their MP to talk about their issues with the NHS."

Disabled People

Training was adapted for a group of disabled leaders in Brighton taking part in Scopes' Local People Programme. The group were already developing a network and organising around things they cared about but wanted to do more. The training was to strengthen them as a group and give them more tools to work with. Trainer Dot worked with the group coordinator to plan and adapt the courses to suit the group. This included delivering shorter sessions, taking account of different learning preferences and needs and changing exercises where needed. Provision was also put into place to enable participants to catch up if they missed sessions due to health so that they could receive their certificates, and trainer/participant ratios were increased. The local coordinator said *"Feedback has been really good, and it's certainly already strengthened both relationships and skills for participants. We've had about 15 people at each session."* We asked people what helped them participate here are some of their responses: *"Time. Big Clear Materials. Empathic facilitation. Positive friendly environment. Big space. No pressure. Patience of others. Fidget toys. Time of day optional. Timekeeping attention. Gentle facilitation."*

Training Young People

341 young people were trained in community organising during the Programme.

The original plan was to work with National Citizen Service, offering training to graduates of the NCS Experience. The Programme target was to train 300 young people.

After conversations with providers and trialling of some training, it became clear that the scale and the timelines of the NCS Experience were not compatible with our capacity and training offer. We needed a different approach.

In the summer of 2018, we launched our own Youth Organisers Programme, putting out a call for local youth partners (youth clubs, schools, youth services) to work with to train young people over a period of 6 months. We received 29 applications and selected 10 partners, and eventually the programme ran in 8 areas.

The partners included youth organisations, a secondary school and a sports and activity based girls club. Each partner was allocated a trainer from the associate trainer pool.

Our first programme (2018/19) used the one-day courses as the basis for the training. These were often split into shorter sessions to fit into the school or youth club environment.

91 young people were trained during this first programme.

All 8 areas completed a One Day Introduction to Community Organising, some areas completed more than one course and others followed up with shorter sessions and practical application - developing listening campaigns or action plans. We also offered a residential at the end of the programme and this was attended by 28 young people from 4 different areas.

Raahima and Khadijah from Dewsbury shared what they got out of the programme

I liked all of it. I found it really helpful, you do learn a lot of new skills that you can actually put into everyday life that you don't realise. One of the things was the listening activity...it could come into conversation that you have every day; you wouldn't realise how much you don't actually listen! One of the listening activities showed how you could have different views and different perspectives and it helps you see things in a very different light. It was cool.

You get a certificate at the end of it, I think that's really good, because of qualifications and stuff. Generally, it's just really helpful so I think it's worth doing.

Personally, for me, being part of a school council, and having various issues in school, I've learnt how to deal with them better, so now I can go into school and into my meetings, and approach them in a different way, to be more effective.

You make lots of really good friends and become quite a tight knit community. You have a laugh along the way, but you also learn how to have an impact in your community and how to help the people you love the most and how to help your area and make it better for you and everyone else.

All the team activities where you work together to form one piece of work showed how you can bring everyone's opinions together to get one solution to a problem and how you can help include everyone's point of view. You can apply it all to everyday life.

Programme partners reflected on the Programme:

The flexibility to negotiate the training sessions was great, because our young people are particularly difficult to engage. The need to incentivise the young people was quite high for us as this is not something that they would voluntarily take part in usually. Overall the programme was really good and I am really happy at the progress that we made, despite it not resulting in action due to young people leaving country, becoming disengaged etc. I was particularly impressed with the enthusiasm and commitment of the trainer. Our young people responded really well to him.

We met weekly with our young people from Jan-Apr. We did a lot of work around what community is, how to bring people together, the listening campaign and listening skills (utilising some of what we did in intro training). We did our own residential as part of their training and we ran an event, where they shared the learning they had so far in relation to the project.

It has definitely impacted our programmes as a whole and we have implemented that each programme must now have an exploratory session related to what community is and the issues that they and their communities face in order to inform decision making within the project. It has also improved our consultation by young people, allowing them to use more community listening styles, rather than questionnaires. The listening elements have encouraged us to include more listening training for our Champions and Ambassadors too. These training days stimulated wide-ranging conversations on topics like race and poverty. The group reflected on the root causes of some of these issues and learned how to turn these reflections into action plans.

Every training session was interactive and included activities through which young people connected with and understood peers and community members with diverse backgrounds and views. For example, during our Power day, participants shared times at which they felt powerless, and used this to inform their perspectives on where power lies in communities.

One participant said the reason they wanted to learn more about community organising was to “understand my local areas’ interests and concerns, as I’d like to represent a constituency one day”. After the ‘Introduction to Community Organising’ session, they said “I understand listening to people’s concerns more effectively”.

Every young person who participated in this project has developed practical knowledge and skills for effectively leading campaigns and organising with and within their communities. The listening day particularly resonated with one young person, who said “the listening, questioning and observing was therapeutic.”

This participant came to us with no experience of social action. By the end of the training, she was equipped with the tools she needed to engage her community and had significantly grown in confidence.

There were teething problems with the implementation both with the school scheduling difficulties and with the appropriateness and fit of the programme content for its audience and there was limited movement taken on social

action. However, the young people gained a lot from the programme, enjoyed it a lot, built their confidence and awareness of local issues and their power to affect change.

I supported them with the practical steps to conducting a listening campaign which involved going into school assemblies for every year group and speaking about what they were doing, creating a survey which was completed by all students in the school and then helped them to collate and analyse results

I found the trainer we had to be incredibly engaging, relatable, confident and professional and I know the students who took part in the training feel the same.

We managed to get 6 of the 15 to attend the residential and they all LOVED it, so much so that they began to plan next steps for taking action where it had seemed unlikely previously.

We started off with 10 committed youths and they all completed their course. 2 of them have been actively involved in different events that we have had e.g. the hustings and campaigning against the closures of the libraries.

The residential was a great outcome, meeting other youths from other places was one of the highlights of the training.

The organisation was able to build more relationships with local young people in the area it is working, this helped us meet some of our aims in terms of offering training and work experience opportunities to local residents, gaining much needed support at our 6 monthly Resident Summits, being able to evidence our role in empowering local people to make their voices heard and take action on local issues as their neighbourhoods are (re)developed and showcase the key role that young people should be playing in that. Having a CO Ltd trainer supporting this work is incredibly helpful as our organisation has a limited number of paid staff so the extra support made all the difference in what were able to deliver in terms of added value.

Overall it was a very positive experience and I believe that in an ideal world every secondary school in the country / planet should have a community organiser based or partially based there to help build the social action skills of young people. I am glad that we are able to continue on this year and would hope for this programme to expand and continue so that we can keep adding and eventually connecting each cohort of learners with each other to make a stronger and more organised community locally. Thank you everyone involved!

Despite the evident success of the programme in many areas there were still challenges and improvements to be made.

Our second youth programme (2019/20) tested mostly shorter sessions interspersed with more coaching and practice so young people would have the experience of trying out community organising and learning-in-action - not just in the classroom. This meant reducing the amount of time spent on formal training and adding in more coaching and planning time. The new programme became a 30-hour structured course, delivered in 2 hour sessions, with the following aims for the young people:

- feel part of a team and national movement
- appreciate own strengths and talents as part of a team
- understand what community organising is and how it is done
- believe in the possibility of change & appreciate own power to act with others
- learn to listen and have self-awareness as a listener
- gain confidence as a leader who listens and can motivate others
- through listening learn more about the community/society
- identify what you care about and want to change and take some action on it as an individual
- plan and try to take some collective action to tackle an issue or create some change based on the listening you did

This programme has now been quality assured through our awarding body The Skills and Education Group as a certificated programme for 11 to 25 year olds. 16 young people have so far qualified for the certificate. Unfortunately, the second-year programme was curtailed by the Coronavirus crisis and most areas did not complete.

As well as these dedicated programmes, other young people were trained at Social Action Hubs and through partner organisations.

341 young people in all were trained in the three years of the Programme in 22 areas. As well as through our dedicated programme, young people were trained at Social Action Hubs through NCS Programmes and through youth organisations and

student unions, mostly completing the Introduction to Community Organising course.

We learned that ideally young organisers need appropriate training which starts from their own experience includes short sessions to fit into a school day or evening, dedicated local support from adult allies who understand community organising, and mentoring and coaching from a community organiser to support them to put learning into practice alongside adults. Ideally youth workers or other adult allies will receive some training at the start. In some ways this is no different to what adults need - but it's even more important to make sure that young people are supported and not set up to fail.

Public Sector Training

243 people from the Public Sector attended training that was specifically run for public sector organisations. Other public sector people also attended training at Social Action hubs and through partner training.

The programme aimed to train 360 people from the public sector in community organising. The plan was that they would be seconded to train and gain experience at Social Action Hubs. This plan did not prove workable due to the enormous pressures on such staff and on the public sector in general after several years of austerity, with far fewer staff in frontline roles.

We switched to offering in-house and open training for Public Sector organisations aimed more at widening understanding and culture change.

We ran a pilot training for Councils and other Public Sector organisations to see if the Introduction course needed adapting. This resulted in one adaption to the power section to enable discussion about sharing power, rather than building it.

We also worked with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to promote community organising to local town and Parish councillors - the most local level of democracy. Presentations at conferences and workshops (including through Associations of Local Councils in Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire and Warwickshire and at NALC's annual event, Lobby Day and Annual General Meeting) were very well received and we also ran a pilot training for NALC members. This resulted in us being asked to put on training for parish and town councillors by a number of County Associations including Derbyshire, Suffolk and Hertfordshire.

Sample Feedback from participants:

I thought about how best to use the 'power' invested in a local Council to improve life in the community'.
(councillor)

I became aware of shortcomings in the way I act in the PC and of shortcomings in the PC itself
(councillor)

I will use various techniques used in contacting people and mobilising them (councillor)

Discussion about power was fascinating and provided food for thought (prison officer)

Loved the code of conduct and the model, listening and the CO approach - if I can fit it into the prison
(prison leader)

I learned tools for holding a listening campaign but I will need more time to reflect on next steps with my team but this is something I will take on board in interactions with residents (council officer)

Realised I can still challenge internally and hold senior staff to more account (council officer)

Despite interest, take up of public sector training was slow. There was interest in Qualification courses but not the time to arrange or schedule them. Many councils had already invested in Asset Based Community Development and saw community organising as perhaps, 'not for them' despite clear synergies.

Recognising the gap in our understanding of how community organising skills may enhance the work of the public sector, we organised a Round Table discussion to try to understand more. Participants shared a range of views but there was strong support for the need for more culture change within public sector institutions - and for the role that training can play, especially in raising the issue of power.

The power stuff 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. LAs talk about empowerment, but not power. But it should be possible to have those conversations with communities. And Council staff need power training.

The challenge is nervousness at a political level. Councillors see themselves as community organisers. They don't fully understand the power dynamics at play. Language is another challenge – there are a lot of terms around.

There are lots of stories about people taking back ownership. But often people are concerned about permission: We are not allowed to do that. These perceptions have come from somewhere and as a LA

worker it is possible to challenge that. That is where training for the LA is needed – learning to let go. Too often they want to measure everything – how many hours etc. They take control of what is happening naturally.

The County Council is quite timid – it's some way off a large cultural shift to citizens as partners, co-production and a new social contract.

Support for community organising is support for people to take action and that is not always comfortable. In some cases there is buy-in from corporate management and political buy-in, but the key challenge is officers.

As a result of this conversation we developed a new half day introduction in-house course specifically for more senior staff in the Public Sector called 'Power and Participation' and began to offer this in Autumn 2019. This course has run at North Yorkshire Council, Wakefield Council and the TeachFirst Ambassador Programme. Here is one participant's feedback:

Discussions around power were very enlightening. I will read more around the subject, will look to become a member and will use this to re-think my approach to engaging/participation with communities.

Partner Training

760 people were trained through the Partner strand of the Programme.

The Programme target was to train 900 people through strategic partnerships linking community organising to existing Programmes such as Big Local and Neighbourhood Watch.

In the event, whilst we did run training for some of these types of networks that were identified before the Programme began, we also found there was strong interest from local and national partners in the voluntary and community sector without any previous contact with us.

We delivered in-house training directly to 56 organisations (in Annex 1) but through all our training strands we reached over 400 organisations, sometimes running just the Introductory course, but in many cases one or more of our follow-up courses too. 5 organisations completed all four courses. The organisations range from those working in a local community or neighbourhood to those that work with a community of identity and

interest, for example, women experiencing domestic violence, Somali people, people recovering from substance abuse, disabled people, climate activists, investigative journalists, prisoners, peer advisors and refugees.

Working through and with Partner organisations has enabled us to reach some of the individuals and groups who are most marginalised and whose voices are seldom heard.

A number of partner organisations have expressed strong interest in exploring with us how to become a Social Action Hub. Others are looking to employ a community organiser or start internal or external listening campaigns. Others would like to run a qualification course.

One organisation we worked with significantly was national charity KeyRing.

Case study: KeyRing

KeyRing is a national charity providing support in the community to nearly 1000 adults with a range of support needs. Their ethos is to support full inclusion and independence for their members, enabling them to take control and responsibility for their lives and achieve their full potential. KeyRing already take a strengths or asset based approach to their work but wanted to take this further by introducing the tools of community organising to enable members to tackle the issues facing them and show community leadership.

From June 2018, 149 staff took part in community organising training in 8 areas of the country. Here is what one member of staff took away:

When I attended the Community Organisers' training earlier this year relating to Building Power and Action for Change, there was a section of this training when we viewed pictures representing power and discussed who we thought held the power in each of the pictures. This session was particularly inspiring and I began to think how I could adapt this session to help self-advocates think of ways to help them recognise the imbalance of power in their lives.

Following this training, I developed a series of resource cards using photos to portray a range of situations where the person who held the power was sometimes obvious, sometimes not. These cards are now used in self-advocacy groups where

people are invited to choose a card and then asked a series of questions, ie, what is happening in this picture, who is in control, what do you think will happen next? The responses are interesting, unexpected, and often insightful – particularly when people talk about their personal experiences of a time when they felt powerless.

These Power cards are an important part of our self-advocacy packs and our aim now is to share this resource with community organisers to encourage conversations about power and to get people thinking how they can make a change in their lives and in their communities.

Over time a group of enthusiastic staff champions emerged, keen to introduce community organising to the members.

In October 2019 we ran the first training with KeyRing members. This was an Introduction to Community Organising course. A range of adaptations were made to accommodate various disabilities. However, the trainer found that members understood some elements of the training far more easily than the staff - for example powerlessness which is an everyday experience for many if not all people who depend on services and welfare benefits. The trainer reflected that:

Their future action plans were mainly very individualistic e.g. ‘Do more meetings’ (they meant training like these). It showed that they have a culture of focussing on themselves as needing to improve, focussing on a deficit model rather than a model of possibility. This possible comes from care planning which is very individual focussed.

In November 2019 we ran a co-design session for a group of champions - a mixed group of members and staff keen to bring community organising to all KeyRing members. The session was designed to review what community organising means to KeyRing, try out some training exercises and design some new ones which would fit with KeyRing’s way of working. The session was extremely successful.

I just wanted to say that I have really positive feedback from staff about the past 2 days. Frank said Helen and Paulette were perfect and the whole two days were amazing, the members really got to lead and it was great! Thank you so much for all your time and attention to get this right for us.

I just wanted to thank you both for an amazing couple of days in London with staff and KeyRing Members. It was brilliant to see everyone so engrossed and enthusiastic - that was all down to your skilful presentation, and ability to hold the crowd. We are not any easy bunch to engage with for such a long time! It really felt like real co-production, between KeyRing, its staff, its Members, and of course yourselves.

Participants at the session reflected on what they had loved about the community organising training and what they wanted to do next:

what we loved

Overcoming fears and pushing my boundaries.... Roleplay – using framework to save community centre.... Having a title “Community Organiser” and framework that people can use to help them to organise their organising.....Power codes....being challenged to think about things differently.....Hearing about people’s ideas and passions.....A tiny pebble sends out lots of ripples.....Came away feeling like we could do something.....Codes images from job centre group activity – generated really interesting conversation..... Meeting different people from different backgrounds doing different work and at different stages..... Hearing what is important for people so finding out more about people..... Overcoming obstacle of challenge to get to training



what next?

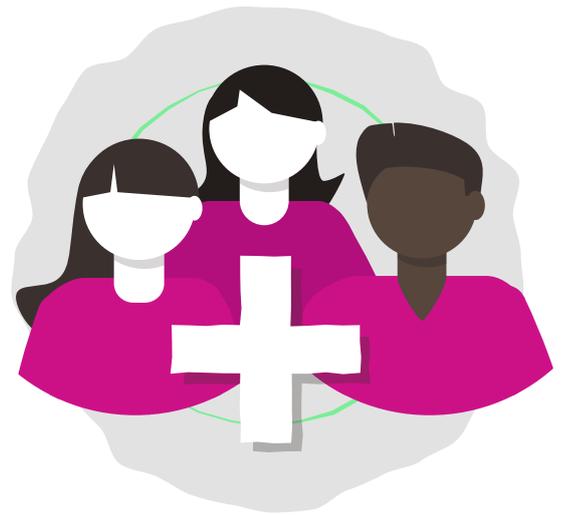
Give it a go!Go back and start to talk about community organising...More people to be trainers in our area – everywhere is different...Use the resources like the hubs to start to co-facilitate taster sessionsThe qualification training...Don't waste what we have already achieved so far.....Commitment from KeyRing, CO, each other and ourselves.....Other members need a taster in CO to get them interested first.....Each go out and do it

Our Head of Quality Assurance and Training Delivery summed up the next steps for the partnership between KeyRing and Community Organisers.

Developing 2-hour workshops, starting with what Community Organising is and the Framework, moving towards community organising skills, all of which can lead to a transfer of learning into action in the community, would likely be the most effective and empowering both for participants and for facilitators. KeyRing need to develop some stories of organising activity that has already taken place both as a call to training but also the inspire and encourage members of what is possible. The training must relate to the context of the learners. This is such an exciting piece of work in progress. The two-day workshop was inspiring, and it is important that we take the momentum and demonstrate that we are moving things forward, despite the challenges of time and funding for all involved.

Membership

The Programme objective was **to build on our newly developed membership infrastructure so that it becomes a self-sustaining member-led, regional peer support network to enable local people to work collectively through challenges and adversity**, supported by a team of national and regional Member Support Organisers.



Definition:

Member Support Organisers were individuals recruited to facilitate the growth of the community organisers network on a regional level. Their specific role was to engage current members, and those of the wider community organising network to strengthen local and regional organising networks through peer to peer learning and promotion of training opportunities

Everyone attending community organising training would be encouraged to join the network. 'Whilst peer-to-peer support is informal and voluntary it will be encouraged throughout the network as a way of improving community organising and helping

individuals achieve their personal goals'. Members who signed up were asked to agree to the Values and the Code of Conduct - now the Principles of Practice.

Where are we now ?

Over the three years of the Programme our membership has grown from 186 to 1,663 individuals.

Membership is mostly for individuals. Our only organisational members are Social Action Hubs - members of the National Academy of Community Organising. Our membership offer is based on five engagement channels:

- A digital platform which enables sharing of news, support and ideas
- Local networking opportunities and learning events
- A national annual gathering
- Funding and support for Local Organising Groups
- Voting for Board members



Member Support

In years 1 and 2 of the Programme we contracted 10 Member Support Organisers (becoming Member Organisers in Year 2) to contact local members, convene meetings and build local or regional networks of people involved in community organisers. This strategy had some success, with some vibrant member organisers putting in place the beginnings of a local structure for Community Organisers, mostly based around Social Action Hubs. However, it kept the convening power and resources in the hands of a small number of people and we wanted to move it directly to the members to encourage ownership and ensure we targeted resources where there was energy and demand.

In year 3 we therefore took the decision to invest in local groups rather than organisers. We created a new grant fund and invited local groups who have come together to organise around things they care about and to promote community organising. Newly formed groups could start by adopting a simple constitution whilst existing groups developed an affiliation agreement with Community Organisers. All groups had to start to adopt a simple constitution and start to develop a Local Organising Plan with support from a community organiser of their choice.

The Member Organising Fund was designed to support members to:

- Develop and share their community organising skills and knowledge
- Take organised collective action on issues they care about
- Promote community organising and build membership in their area using the Community Organisers brand
- Be part of a democratic structure which is accountable to the members through listening and which feeds upwards into Community Organisers' governance.
- Develop a funding plan that will enable growth and sustainability beyond the lifetime of the COEP

20 grants of £5,000 each were made available and by end of March 2020, twenty groups had been awarded funding in a two-stage process.

Each group identified an organiser who received funding to support the development of the group and to help produce an organising action plan.

Most groups are place-based groups such as Community Organisers Birkenhead and Community Organisers Staffordshire but some are also communities of interest in a place such as Latin American Parents Association in London, Moorlands Climate Action and Cancer Support Salisbury.

Member networking and peer to peer support

Key achievements:

440 participants in the national community organising meet ups

77 Local Network Meet Ups in the first two years of the programme supported by Member Organisers

20 Organising Groups established

Over 800 people have joined the Community Organisers online community

The creation of local, national and digital spaces for members to connect have encouraged and enabled greater participation in the organisation. In particular, the implementation of Workplace in Year 2 of the Programme as the online community enabled an increase in members using the platform across the second and third years from 78 people a month on average to 234 people a month by the end of the Programme

As the membership has grown over the course of the Programme we have learnt and can categorise those engaging with Community Organisers under three key headings:

- Professional – those who are from larger organisations, councils, established projects. These see the one-day training as good personal development and see the principles as a good methodology to support the work they are already participating in.

- Activists – those who see community organising principles and practice as a good way of galvanising support for issues and listening in their communities. These are keen to develop their skills more and get practicing.
- Observers – those who have attended the one-day training or discovered community organising online and are happy to be involved without currently taking action. Some may be growing in confidence and developing themselves personally but not yet practicing community organising.

By enabling spaces for those with diverse backgrounds to come together as part of local, regional and national meet ups has strengthened the connections between local people.

For example, in Nottinghamshire the network meets monthly in different locations around the County, exploring different topics each time, and convening a mixture of local people local voluntary organisations, County Council employees and those involved in Public Health. Some of the topics that they are seeking to address includes social isolation and creative ways to nurture community. Since the first meet-up, Dave and a group of volunteers have been working towards the sustainability of the network by employing different strategies, including providing food and travel costs to those who need it and letting members set the agenda for meet-ups.

Training has also been a major element in nurturing leadership within the group, drawing on the knowledge of other community organisers within the wider national network. In July, fellow organisers visited the group to share 'Tools for Meaningful Conversations' over a two-day course. The idea behind training such as this is to enable attendees of the network to become organisers and facilitators. The meet-ups also offer payment to new facilitators, valuing the work they are doing.

Communications and Promotion of Community Organising

As part of the Programme, Community Organisers set out that as well as developing the practice community organising through the training of 3,500 people in local communities, that the Programme would also act to build the wider 'field' for community organising. To do this, Community Organisers committed to a 'rebrand' of the organisation and to invest resources in developing a more powerful brand identity that resonated with local communities.

To undertake this process Community Organisers issued a competitive tender for the work and commissioned Yoke (a design and brand consultancy) to deliver the work. The process for the rebrand started with a 'listening exercise' engaging over 100 members of the organisation to understand what the organisation meant to the people involved, how Community Organisers was perceived by those on the outside and to understand what the public perception of community organising was. Out of this engagement with a wide range of stakeholders the core branding, messaging and imagery was developed.

The rebrand was acknowledged by a leading design publication as being an exemplary process of how to rebuild an organisation's brand imagery and messaging from the ground up.

The investment in the rebrand has proven successful with the new website and social media graphics attracting a much wider audience for both Community Organisers but the community organising process as whole.



Since launching the new website in November 2018 Community Organisers has received:

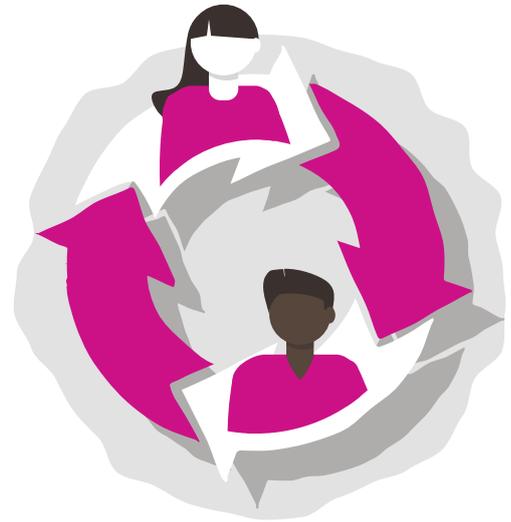
- 496 enquiries – as opposed to 26 in the previous 18 months
- Enabled 666 people to join as members via the website
- 33,952 unique visitors to the website

Over the course of the Programme Community Organisers has also used its social media presence to build the field for community organising. As well as steadily increasing the Twitter following from 7,300 at the start of the Programme to 10,900 at the end of March 2021, analytics from the Twitter account show

Year 1: 381k impressions
Year 2: 789k impressions
Year 3: 1.7m impressions

This steady increase in both web traffic and social media awareness has enabled Community Organisers to build both presence and credibility with other organisations.

What we learned



There is a huge democratic deficit in many communities, with people disengaged from politics and without faith in politicians to improve lives

People value enormously the opportunity to listen and be listened to and the core skills of how to listen are highly valued.

In communities which are struggling, it can be very hard for people to find the time and energy to organise social action. It needs time and patience and skilled and trusted organisers to support people to look beyond their day-to-day survival, but it can be done

There is a real absence of high quality training and education available in many communities today in community work. We have been one of the only organisations offering such training outside of the major metropolitan areas and the free training has enabled an easy way in for many people an organisations that would otherwise have struggled to pay for the training. This does not mean that it has not been valued.

98% of people attending training have found it valuable in some way.

Delivering short (mostly one-day) courses has worked well for us and our Social Action Hubs. Short courses are flexible and practically oriented and suit practitioners, community members and busy staff. However, jumping straight from a short course to practising as a community organiser can be hard and requires a lot of support and encouragement.

It is vital to get the right mix of formal 'classroom' training and practice learning through organising. Training and community organising go hand-in-hand - they can never be separated.

Delivering Qualification courses has proved more challenging. We learned that the dispersed Hub and Spoke model for delivering Qualifications in the heart of local communities goes against the trend of centralising and scaling up of Qualification delivery.

By working with small groups of learners in a local context enabled people to feel supported and their learning fitted in with the context of where they were. Existing funding models for the delivery of adult education have proved challenging to access for local Social Action Hubs which has reduced their ability to generate further income to support local community organising.

The Programme aspired also to develop an Apprenticeship in community organising. Due to financial pressures on local organisations it is difficult to create the employment opportunities required for an apprenticeship and therefore further financial support is required to grow the field for community organising through the creation of jobs.



It is important to teach principles and methods rather than a rigid or one-size-fits-all approach to community organising. There are many different approaches and we should trust people to adopt and adapt the one that works for them. The key principles and skills to be taught are:

- one-to-one listening and relationship-building
- understanding, analysing and building community power
- holding democratic structures to account and creating spaces for organising in communities
- planning, taking and reflecting on action

Our Community Organising Framework has been welcomed and seems to have been very helpful in demystifying community organising and enabling learners to see where they fit.

Community organising needs to be embedded in a locally rooted organisation - existing or new. This can take different forms, such as a Social Action Hub, a Local Organising Group, or a local chapter or branch of a national alliance. The organisation must have or build credibility and trust in the local community.

Community organising requires dedicated time and people - and it is a profession or vocation. It needs trained people. It's too important to be left only to volunteers.

Many public sector roles now require staff to engage or facilitate communities and often these staff have no community work background or training.

Community organising principles and approaches are very useful for frontline public sector staff but there may be some elements of the community organising process which create a conflict of interest or accountability for a public sector worker, especially if a community wishes to hold the same public sector organisation to account.

People can be imaginative, passionate and determined about their communities and the change they want to see locally and this can overcome divisions and conflicts.

People want to organise around their assets and the things they cherish in their communities as well as their concerns and what they are angry or sad about. People want to organise their own services and activities within their communities and they want to campaign and lobby and change the system. These are two sides of the coin - they are not contradictory.

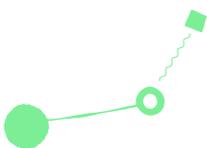
Many communities share similar issues and concerns and are struggling to tackle some of these at a local issue - there is a need for more joined up action at a national level. Sometimes this is being done through coalitions of national organisations, such as in the housing sector, but for other issues there is a lack of leadership nationally or the national organisations do not have mechanisms for hearing the voices of local people and involving them in national action.

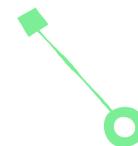
Organisations wanting to invest in community organising need to build in support for training as an integral part of the process. Training embeds the community organising into the community so that the knowledge of how to organise is not just with one individual. Training builds leadership within the community and improves the quality of the organising.

Investing in community organising also requires patience and an ability to step back and not try to control or pre-determine the end point. This can be very challenging for funders and commissioners who are more used to specifying outputs and outcomes.

The Social Action Hub model resonates and many organisations are interested in adopting or 'becoming' a Social Action Hub. Funding this is very challenging.

And lastly, the Covid-19 crisis which erupted just as this report was being written, demonstrated just how important it was for communities to be able to organise local support and connect with their neighbours together. Communities with existing trust and connections and with local organised infrastructure seemed to be able to organise help and mutual aid much more quickly for the most vulnerable in their communities, then some communities with very little existing grass-roots organisation. Social Action Hubs were all highly involved in coordinating or supporting such local efforts.





Annex 1

Partner Organisations Trained

Supporters Direct
CC Berkshire
Leicester Neighbourhood Watch
St Ethelberga's
Huntingdon?
Community Links
Co-op Bristol and Manchester
KCBC
Clitterhouse
Octopus Communities
Fairfield House
MAPS
Centre 4
KeyRing
Grapevine
Lets Co
Scope
Women's Aid
NALC
Power to Change
St Giles Trust
Hope Centre
Brighton SU
Feltham Prison
SALC
BITC Blackpool
APM
South Gen

Sanctuary
SCVO
Wargrave School
Warwickshire School
Meteor
Bromley by Bow
TBIJ
DALC
Grenfell
HAPTC
Kirkless Huddersfield
Kingswood Community Shop
Healthwatch
Greenwich SU
Living Faith International
Sustainable Warminster
Wakefield Livewell
Wakefield P&P
SOCOPA
Cambridge Climate Change
The Winch
Bullion Hall
Wyre Forest
Teach First
Hope Community Project
Selby Big Local
Toynbee Hall
Stonegrove



Community Organisers

www.corganisers.org.uk

twitter.com/corganisers | facebook.com/corganisers

hello@corganisers.org.uk | 0759 120 6913

10 Silver Street, Warminster, Wiltshire BA12 8PS

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