



# STORIES OF ACTION

A collation of stories of grassroots action inspired by the Community Organisers Expansion Programme funded by the Department for Digital, Culture Media and Sport.

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**Community**  
**Organisers**



# LISTEN

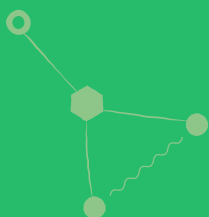
# POWER

# ACTION

Although the Programme was a training and development programme rather than a social action programme, 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.

Through reporting by Social Action Hubs we know that as a result of the Programme, 30,000 people were engaged in one-to-one conversations and 3,000 people were activated or mobilised in social action.

What did that action look like?



# ACTION ON SAFE HOUSING

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## Wiltshire

Hannah turned to community organising to tackle the problem of rising tensions between local residents and homeless people using communal areas for illegal drug use.

After attending a training course in community organising, she listened to and worked with her neighbours to hold the local housing association to account. The issues were resolved within three months.

“The trainers were perfect and the whole two days were amazing, the members really got to lead and it was great!”

Partner feedback

# ACTION ON HEALTH

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## Stockport

Working with a local GP practice, the Social Action Hub has been developing community organising with local patients. Groups of local people have connected over what they love or their concerns, built leadership and launched new projects e.g. singing, walking & cooking.

One woman reports that because of her involvement she has been able to reduce medication, stop smoking and attend a cervical screening appointment for the first time in 10 years.

“We have stopped using the term volunteering, we are just neighbours helping neighbours in an organised, not professionalised way!”

Trainer





## ACTION ON FOOD POVERTY



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### Staffordshire

In Stafford, listening demonstrated a concern around access to good quality food as a result of poverty, a concern about food waste and local food banks struggling to cope.

In response, local community organisers set up a social supermarket selling waste food sourced via FairShare and local produce. They now have over 1,000 members and are supporting 100s of families each week with access to food and essential supplies.

“Our social supermarket delivers hundreds of food parcels each week via a volunteer team of over 50 people including drivers, shop and warehouse workers.”

Trainer



## ACTION ON DECENT HOMES



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### Newcastle

In Newcastle, Acorn, built a community union of 200 private renters and trained them in community organising.

A listening and lobbying campaign on the state of private tenancies helped secure the passing of new landlord licensing regulations by Newcastle City Council. This will ensure stricter oversight of properties plagued by unsafe and unsanitary conditions.

I didn't think I could do it (door knocking). I thought that people were going to be horrible or that I would freeze. But having a short introduction to door knocking meant that I had the confidence to try it, and I enjoyed it more than I ever thought I could.”

ACORN trainee

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## ACTION ON LIVELIHOODS

### Hackney

English for Action teaches English as a Second Language through community organising, using the issues that most matter to students. Students wanted to tackle issues caused by the asylum system and build power with others.

They joined the campaign for the right to work for asylum seekers and called on the Home Secretary to 'Lift the Ban' and allow asylum seekers to work.

“Since completing the community organising training, students have been talking about problems they face when using the NHS as well as concerns they have about Islamophobia.

Whereas before students may have felt resigned about these issues, now they are eager to discuss possible solutions.”

EFA trainer

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## ACTION ON YOUTH AND COMMUNITY

### Hartlepool

A group who took part in community organising training started to listen in the community. They found that many parents worried about getting through the long summer holidays.

The group raised money and mobilised volunteers. Over the summer, they provided 1,000 dinners and 600 breakfasts for local people, organised trips for 500 people, and put on regular arts and cookery activities.

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

Qualification learner, Hartlepool





# ACTION ON DEMOCRACY

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## Luton

Samantha, a local artist, took part in community organising training and began to engage individuals in one-to-one conversations about democracy and how it could be made more accessible and creative.

Samantha recruited a group of ‘artists’ to help ‘spice up democracy’ and make it a pleasure not a chore, ‘something people look forward to doing rather than avoiding it’. 40 artists have now been recruited to help imagine and create Marsh Farm’s first ever People’s Assembly in April.

“Important decisions affecting our community, our children, our schools, the services we use and our quality of life generally shouldn’t just be left to be made by officials who don’t know what it’s like to actually live here.”

Trainer



# ACTION ON DISABILITY

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## Keyring

Over 120 staff and members have taken part in community organising training at KeyRing, an organisation for disabled and vulnerable adults.

KeyRing are now starting a listening campaign and developing their own in-house training to support members to take action. One group of KeyRing members have already taken action on litter in their area.

“Being able to do the workshop in two halves on separate days due to disability helped.”

Trainee

## ACTION ON POVERTY

### Birkenhead

Community organisers gathered stories about food poverty and submitted evidence to a Parliamentary Inquiry into Holiday Hunger. They were invited to give oral evidence.

A group of mothers came to London to give evidence. This was the furthest some had ever travelled. Karen, Dawn, and Ann shared their experience of living with food insecurity. An MP said she had never heard such powerful testimony.

“I feel 6ft tall as no one that important has ever listened to me before.”

Birkenhead trainee

## ACTION ON ENVIRONMENT

### Rotherham

Green Hill beauty spot was under threat from anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping, and a threat of excavation. Concerned local people had started a petition to save the site when Community Organiser Sarah started listening in the area.

Through the listening, several people got together to create a winter lantern walk. The event attracted 85 people and brought the community together around their common love of Green Hill. The excavation plans are on hold and the community is taking more care of the site.

“Using the power map was really useful in demonstrating how we can work together to share power & shift people’s perception on where power lies.

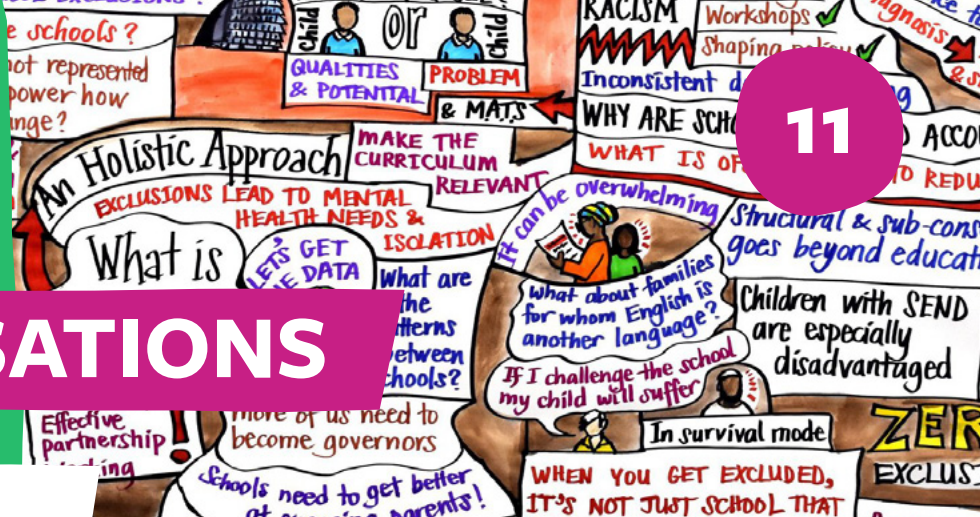
This has been very useful on my work with Springwell TARA as this assisted with setting the strategy with the community, by building collective power to effect change and build community power.”

Rotherham trainee



# HOSTING CONVERSATIONS

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## London ‘Space to Think’

Community organisers hosted events for diverse groups of people - activists, members of civil society organisations, people with lived experience, and policy makers from the GLA – to discuss ‘wicked problems’ that London faces, such as school exclusions.

The events allowed participants to think big, talk openly, find common ground, and condense the ideas generated into a series of actions that can be taken forward.

“Thank you for our training day and our group is eager to do more training. We would if possible like to do pro-active training out in the neighbourhood practicing our skills alongside the trainer if possible.”

Partner feedback

# ACTION ON HEALTH

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## Haringey

A new partnership with Macmillan Cancer Care and an NHS Trust has been formed to apply the tools of community organising to building cancer friendly communities.

The Selby Trust and Macmillan will train a team of health and wellbeing organisers to help create a more integrated approach to cancer care and support people to take control of their own health. The Social Action Hub will become a hub of health and wellbeing too.

“The training was fantastic and a huge eye opener to staff and students on the principles of community organising and how it can be embedded into our work and student community.”

Partner feedback



## ACTION ON TRANSPORT

### Wirral

The 106 bus, which serves many of the communities' isolated and vulnerable residents, was removed locally.

Through community organising, local people door knocked, petitioned, and called local meetings attended by over 100 people who were passionate about "saving our bus". They lobbied the local MP who agreed to help them hold the private company to account and reinstate the bus service.

"I've never had such an interested and inspiring training. It has taken me out of comfort zone, questioned my own opinions and assumptions and inspired me to take it back to our organisation and find where it fits."

Wirral trainee

## ACTION ON VOICE

### Birkenhead

Members of a drug recovery project took part in a community organising course. The group were inspired to form a social action team and begin listening to other members. The members now have greater influence in decisions and retention has improved.

The listening brought out frustrations about the labels they face as people in recovery. The team encouraged those people to explore this through the project's creative arts group and they created 'Beyond the Label' - an art exhibition.

"Using the power map was really useful in demonstrating how we can work together to share power & shift people's perception on where power lies."

Trainee

## ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

### Luton

Community organisers heard widespread concern about a crisis in rough sleeping.

The organisers identified a vacant student housing block and a local charity submitted a planning application to convert it to a hostel. To ensure Council support, organisers mobilised the community and won. The local paper wrote:

“Passionate support for rough sleepers in the town persuaded Luton councillors to overturn planners’ recommended rejection of the project.”

“I learned that I could easily learn to be more understanding and I can listen in a more effective way to help empower people even more.

I would highly recommend this training to anyone who works within their community or has an interest to improve the lives of people.”

Trainee

## ACTION ON ENVIRONMENT

### Lincoln

The River Care and Litter Picking group was initiated by Barbara, after completing a community organising course, to address her concerns about the local environment.

The group attracts more people for each litter pick and is building collective power to make the neighbourhood a better place for everyone. One Saturday a group of 20 volunteers collected over 20 bags of rubbish along with 50 invasive Himalayan Balsam Plants from the river.

“I had the opportunity to learn the power of people in a community. It is very important to know that with a simple attitude we can improve other people’s life and the place where they live.

It was very important learning more about respect, values, beliefs and culture. The training showed how important are compassion and respect.”

Lincoln trainee



## ACTION ON HOUSING

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### Brighton

Community organisers at Brighton and Hove Community Land Trust have supported NUB, a community-led housing group, to organise a hard-hitting campaign. The campaign calls on the City Council to prioritise affordable housing over private development when allocating land for housing.

The campaign is a direct response to door-knocking and listening around potential housing sites in Brighton. A petition has gathered 1292 signatures and will be presented to the Council on March 11th.

“I am 100% in support of the CO training, and feel it is perfect for capacity building of people, groups and communities, as next steps towards better things.”

Partner feedback

## ACTION ON YOUTH

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### Gloucester

Listening work in Gloucester identified a major concern about the state of Gloucester Park. Community organisers listening to young people heard about their vision to renovate the skate park to make it safer and better.

Two young leaders came forward, listened and mobilised 150 young people, gained the support of the Council and the Park friends group and raised £100,000 for the renovation. Young people were also involved in the design of the new skate park areas.

“They listened to my vision – they didn’t tell me what to do; they just mentored me through it.”

Young Person Trainee

## ACTION ON COMMUNITY

### Stockport

A group of men have come together to revitalise a disused building and take action on loneliness.

Stockport Community Shed group are being supported by community organisers to take on a disused 1970s toilet block in the town and convert it into a full time 'Men's Shed' for local makers and menders to come together. The group have been trained in community organising and are used their new confidence to take forward a planning application to the Council.

“Our training this week was absolutely fantastic. Following it, I am completely sold on us sticking with the community organising approach, and the benefits of that.”

Partner feedback

## ACTION ON HEALTH

### Stoke-On-Trent

Breast and the City, a breastfeeding peer support group, faced the closure of a highly valued community health service in a rapid and controversial decision, in a city with very high rates of infant mortality.

Community organisers connected the group to local councillors and MPs. They got their story in the local paper, organised a protest of over 100 people and a 5000-signature petition, and triggered a full Council debate of the decision.

“Candi realised her own Power Within and took immediate action to contact her MP during the break on the Introduction to Community Organising training session.”

Stoke trainer



# ACTION ON DRUGS

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## Stafford

Simon, a volunteer community organiser, helped create the 'outdoor classroom' in the neglected area outside the Social Action Hub's base.

A former drug user, he began listening to members of the homeless community using the space, and in a cafe used by the homeless from across Stafford.

Through listening, a common interest in growing vegetables surfaced. The "outdoor classroom" opened a weekly horticulture class run by a local volunteer. A local project is supplying lunch for all who attend the weekly growing sessions.

"I used to be a rebel without a cause - now I have a cause."

Stafford Trainee

# ACTION ON COMMUNITY

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## Lincoln

Local group Maze Matters completed a community organising course and are using the skills they gained to build on what they love about the neighbourhood.

In October, the community came together to celebrate the Hindu Festival of Light for the first time. Over 150 people across the neighbourhood took part in the workshops, celebrations and light parade. "Maze Matters made great effort to ensure the event was welcoming for everyone, creating an encouraging space for community members to meet, have fun and celebrate diversity."

"I had the opportunity to learn the power of people in a community. It is very important to know that with a simple attitude we can improve other people's life and the place where they live.

It was very important learning more about respect, values, beliefs and culture. The training showed how important are compassion and respect."

Lincoln trainee



# Community Organisers

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