



THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY ORGANISING APPRENTICESHIP

March 2021



Community
Organisers



LISTEN POWER ACTION

We believe in the power of listening.

We believe in the collective power of people.

We believe that the actions of people are
powerful and can change things for good.



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Background information



What is community organising?

When communities work together, the possibilities for positive change are endless. Community organising is the work of bringing people together to take action around their common concerns and overcome social injustice.



What do community organisers do?

Community organisers reach out and listen, connect and motivate people to build their collective power. When people are organised, communities get heard and power begins to shift creating real change for good.

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.

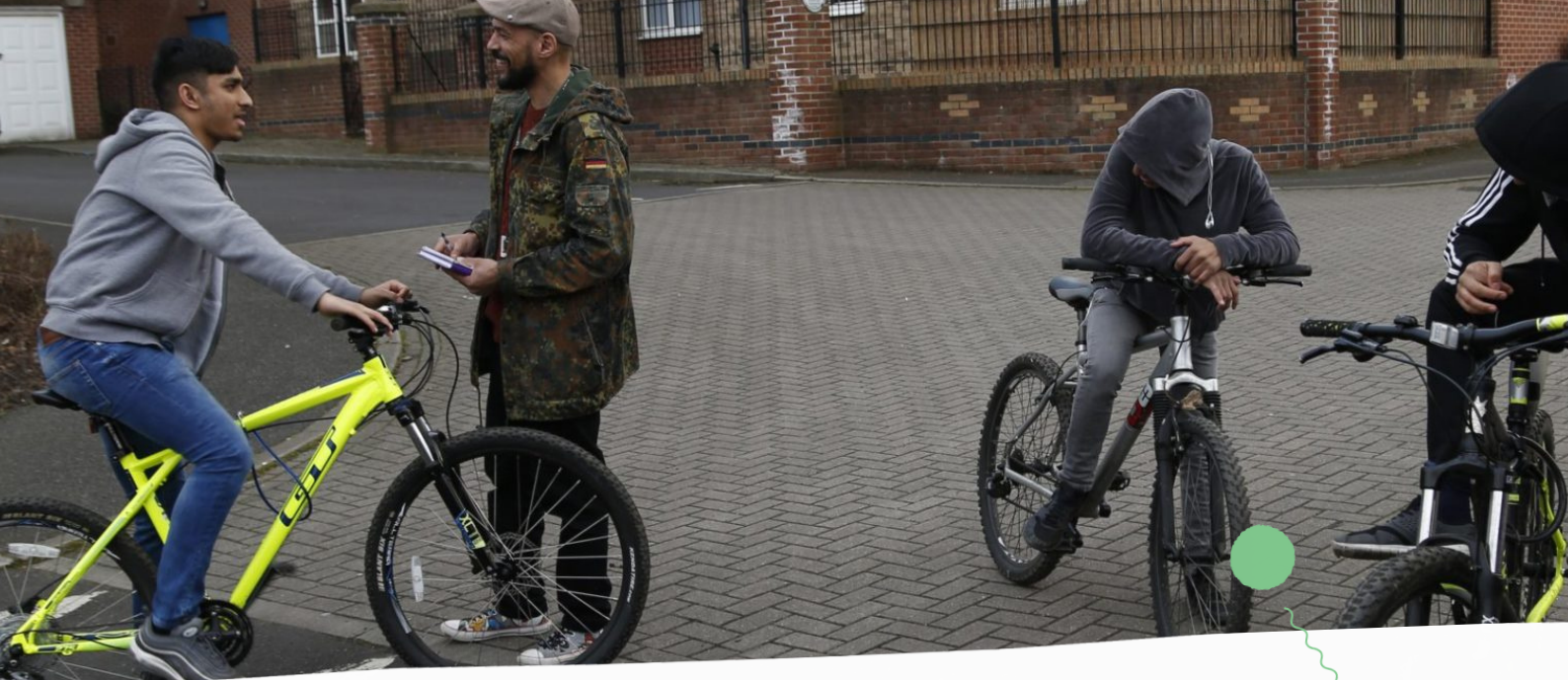
We are a national body that is locally rooted and led by our members. Our members are taking action and inspiring thousands of people to get involved in community organising and join the growing movement of people up and down the country who are listening, building power and taking action to improve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



National Academy
of
Community Organising



Context

Since 2011, community organising has been supported by the Office for Civil Society within the Cabinet Office and most recently as part of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. Support has come via two main programmes; the initial Community Organisers Programme (COP, 2011-2015) which funded the employment and training of 500 community organisers; and the Community Organisers Expansion Programme (COEP, 2017-2020) which funded the training of 3,500 people in community organising.

The COP provided one-year, full-time, paid training placements, whereas the COEP trained people as part of existing jobs and community volunteer roles through a network of training Hubs. In each programme, trainees were largely recruited from and trained in the communities they worked in.

The programmes demonstrated the considerable impact that community organising has on both a personal level (through the development of people's confidence and skills) and at community level (bringing people together to take collective action on the issues that are directly affecting them).

The COP evaluation found that the individual participants gained self-confidence and skills. The [Ipsos-Mori and NEF evaluation \(p9\)](#) highlighted that there was a notable increase across all participants in the following skills: working with people from different backgrounds, problem solving, leading other people, motivating others and digital organising skills.

Alongside this, the programme also had significant wider community benefit, as evidenced by the [2014 Community Life Survey](#) which showed that where community organisers were active people were more likely to pull together to improve their area and had a stronger sense of belonging to that neighbourhood.

Community organising has been recognised by Government and funders as an effective means of enabling ordinary people to effect meaningful change in their own neighbourhoods and communities and to engage in the democratic process. As well as the proven impact of Government-funded Programmes, a recent evaluation of a three-year investment by the [National Lottery](#) into community organising found the impact to be significant on leadership skills, relationship-building, engagement with decision-makers, listening to local people, and securing change.

The reach of community organising has increased over the last 10 years and we have clearly seen the value of investing in local places through the people that live there. The outcome of this has been demonstrated in the community response to COVID-19. In the places where community organisers have been active the networks and groups that had been developed were able to mobilise quickly and effectively to organise crisis responses. See: [Locally Rooted – The Place for Community Organising in times of Crisis](#)

As we look beyond the pandemic, it is widely recognised that there are going to be greater pressures on local people and communities caused by the economic impacts of the virus. Despite national measures, there will be increasing unemployment, which will create rising financial insecurity, and evidence from local conversations suggests associated rises in mental health conditions, declines in physical health, lowered aspirations and reduced engagement with, and trust in, democratic institutions.



The community organising years

(2011 - 2021)

**2011 -
2015**

Community organisers
launched as independent
body to support the growth
and development of
community organising

Community Organisers Programme *Funded by the Cabinet Office*

- 540 paid community organisers recruited
- 5,000+ volunteers recruited
- 125,000 people listened to in communities
- 1,500 community projects supported

**2015 -
2016**

Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund *Funded by MHCLG and Cabinet Office*

- 38 paid community organisers
- 1,229 volunteers involved
- 7,341 people listened to in communities
- 3,000 people mobilised in local communities

**2017 -
2020**

Community Organisers Expansion Programme *Funded by DCMS*

- 22 Social Action Hubs developed
- 3,966 people trained in community organising
- 341 young people trained in community organising
- £1.25 million leveraged to support local community organising activity

**2020 -
now**

Delivering through a pandemic *Funded by contracts and donations*

- 400+ people introduced to community organising online
- 509 people joining an online 3 day learning event
- 100+ organisations signed up to the #OperationWiFi campaign that is pushing for a national databank and is reaching over 10k people a month



Developing people and places

Despite the positive impact of the initial COP it was clear that:

- One year was not long enough to build an independent community network and bring about transformation in the community;
- Sufficient resources were not allocated to embedding the community organising approach at a local level within the existing infrastructure and local people, and
- One year is also not enough time to learn the craft of community organising whilst simultaneously securing a future job role to continue developing the skills of a fully confident community organiser in an emerging jobs market

The COEP sought to build on the original programme and address the elements of learning that came out of the first programme. To do this, it set out to build upon the community organising that had been initiated during the original COP and, over a sustained period of three years, grow community organising within and across these areas so that it became sustainable. The COEP was run by Community Organisers Limited, as an independent charity and the legacy body of the COP.

The approach taken in the COEP saw the creation of 22 local Social Action Hubs that collectively form the National Academy of Community Organising. These Hubs offer a range of community organising training courses, including national Qualification courses. The Academy is a brand of Community Organisers Limited, which quality assures this training and is approved by a national Awarding Body, the Skills and Education Group, for the delivery of Qualifications and quality assured training.

Social Action Hubs are locally-rooted civil society organisations and act as drivers for change at a local level, training and supporting people in community organising through the work of an experienced Community Organiser, developing new leaders and mobilising the community to take social action.

Since the beginning of the COEP, almost 4,000 people have been trained in community organising, over £1.25 million has been leveraged to support community organising training locally and a network of 40 Quality Assured trainers has been built.

Across these 22 areas, over 30,000 people were engaged in 1:1 conversations and almost 3,000 people mobilised to take a wide variety of community action.

What Next?

Building on the Previous Community Organising Programmes

The current context post-COVID has created the conditions for a 'perfect storm':

1. Economic insecurity and rising unemployment for those on low incomes
2. Rising numbers of individuals suffering from poor mental health caused by increased living pressures
3. Increased demand and reduced resources and capacity in local organisations and services

To weather this storm, there needs to be an investment in people and organisations in the most affected communities, that strengthens their leadership and problem solving capacity and catalyses community action. As Danny Kruger, MP, writes in his report for the Prime Minister, we need "horizontal networks, connected at nodes in the community which help people stitch together the combination of services and opportunities they need". Community organisers and Social Action Hubs do exactly this, helping communities identify collective goals and work together to achieve them. Kruger goes on to recommended "a further investment in Community Organisers to help bring about the transformation in places that will only occur if it is led, and co-delivered, by local people."

A Proposal for A National Investment in Community Organising

1. We propose an investment in the training of community organisers through a waged two-year apprenticeship

Year One would be primarily a training year, with recruits undertaking a national Qualification, the Award in Community Organising, whilst shadowing, supporting and being mentored by an experienced Community Organiser. Year Two would be a probation year, with a continued element of mentoring and completing the Certificate in Community Organising whilst starting to work independently as a Community Organiser in their own right.

Community organising skills are highly transferable. Our Community Organising Framework teaches essential skills valued by employers including listening, relationship-building, problem solving and strategy, leadership, organisation and teamwork. These skills are similar to those identified in the essential work skills framework developed by [Skills Builder](#) (backed by major employers such as Allen and Overy, UBS, Bank of America and Clarion Housing Group).





Recruitment could be targeted at the potential unemployment crisis facing school-leavers (building on the Kickstarter scheme which we are running), at supporting recent graduates to develop the core skills required for future employment (developing a scheme similar to TeachFirst or the NHS Graduate Management Scheme), or at those who have recently become unemployed, rebuilding their skills and confidence to retrain for a new employment market.

The community organising apprenticeship would meet the need identified in the Onward report for 'a new civic leadership programme to increase the quality of civic leadership in community organisations, local government and charities'.

2. We propose a parallel Investment in the National Academy of Community Organising, to host, train and mentor Community Organising Apprentices and continue to develop a high quality and relevant training curriculum.

The investment in the National Academy of Community Organising would go directly to the network of Social Action Hubs who make up the Academy. These local civil society organisations, with an experienced community organiser, would provide the training and mentoring of apprentices. As well as sustaining existing Social Action Hubs, the investment would enable the development of Social Action Hubs in new neighbourhoods, so that areas not currently able to offer community organising apprenticeships would be opened up, to give further geographic spread and ensure that the programme has national significance.

Expected Deliverables and Outcomes

Community Organising Apprentices, with the support of Social Action Hubs would be expected to:

1

Complete 70 hours of classroom and self-directed learning to achieve the Award in Community Organising in Year One

2

Complete a further 170 hours of classroom and self-directed learning to achieve the Certificate in Community Organising in Year Two

3

Undertake a listening campaign in the neighbourhood or community to uncover local issues and visions

4

Bring people together to tackle issues, building relationships and new networks and reaching out to existing civil society groups

5

Form and support local teams to solve problems, create enterprising and community-based solutions to issues, that build on the strengths of their community and develop community resilience

6

Train team members in the basic elements of community organising so that they can effectively lead change and responsibly hold and share power

7

Support and encourage people to make use of their individual democratic rights and their Community Rights

8

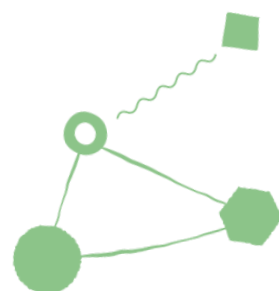
Develop new ways of working with and through decision-makers and local institutions and service providers, which change the power relationships and give people more power and resources to shape their places and to meet the needs of their community

9

Support the development of a constituted Local Organising Group, that can work towards becoming a sustainable and accountable community-level institution, able to engage with decision-makers

10

Support citizens and local civil society organisations to work collectively to redefine and clarify the new power relationship between local government, public agencies, community institutions and citizens.



The outcomes for Individuals and Communities would be:

1

Apprentices gain a Qualification and a set of transferable skills which are in high demand in the workplace including problem-solving, communication, team-work, leadership and organisation

2

Apprentices gain new insights into communities and local need - this provides a foundation for a lifetime of leadership, citizenship and volunteering

3

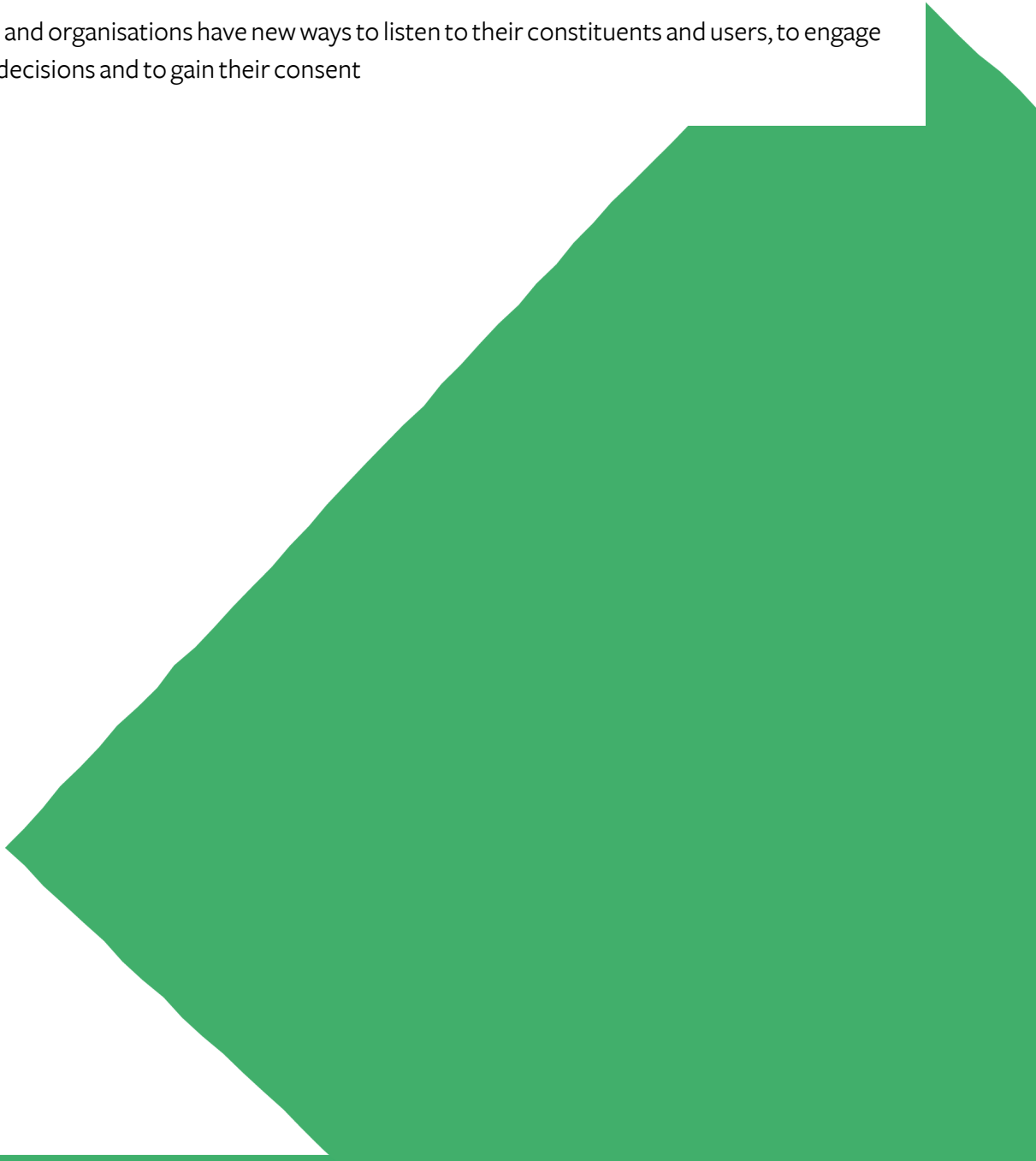
Neighbourhoods with community organisers are able to identify their goals and work together to realise them, forming new relationships with decision-makers

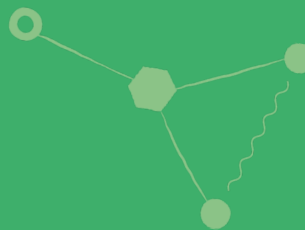
4

Communities that have Social Action Hubs are better connected and organised and have the tools to support and sustain social action.

5

Services and organisations have new ways to listen to their constituents and users, to engage them in decisions and to gain their consent





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