



2007-2008  
*Increasing Voluntary  
and Community Sector  
Service Delivery*



## **Case Study No. 5 – Croydon Community Access Service**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Croydon Adults Service's Community Access Service (CAS) supports people with physical disabilities and / or sensory impairments to access leisure, learning, employment and other community activities in Croydon, whilst developing healthy lifestyles and building social networks, confidence and self-esteem.

The service is currently administered by DisabilityCroydon, a voluntary organisation which offers information, advice and support to disabled people and their families living in Croydon, on all issues which affect their lives.

The organisation employs 12 (mostly part-time) paid staff plus volunteers and is governed by a management committee of eight people all of whom have a disability, and over 100 disabled people are members.

### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION**

In October 2005, Croydon Council approached the voluntary organisation DisabilityCroydon, because it was closer to understanding the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities. The council accepted that its day service was not as effective as it should be and commissioned DisabilityCroydon to have a hands-on role in restructuring and developing a more person-centred service. This included funding to manage a transition to more suitable premises (a network of five resource bases in different venues for meeting-up across the borough). Regular support and supervision was supplied to the DisabilityCroydon Project Manager, who was given full access to local authority office facilities (telephone, email access, etc) at the main council building, Taberner House, encouraging the development of mutual trust and confidence. This has helped build greater understanding on both sides about practices, procedures and cultures. Crucial to the project has been the authority vested in DisabilityCroydon to manage the CAS staff team and make decisions on the development of the service.

Through this process, the council has learnt more about the service user experience within the day service and is continuing to support the development of various other new partnerships with the voluntary sector (see examples of partnerships on p.3).

The White Paper, 'Improving The Life Chances of Disabled People' and the Independent Living Bill, together with the Disability Discrimination Act and more recently, the Disability Equality Duty, expects all disabled people to have equal access to services, and to have an equal chance to maximise their own personal potential by accessing lifestyle options enjoyed by others in the community who are without physical and / or sensory impairments. The majority of people using CAS needed activities or information which met their individual requirements.

CAS has addressed this with:

- A network of community resource bases in different parts of the borough for individuals to link with during the week.
- Organised activities in response to common need, such as computer activities, swimming, group trips, etc.
- The setting up of a volunteering project called EXPLORERS where volunteers are matched with individuals to help them make the most of a leisure centre's facilities (see examples of partnerships below).
- People who use the service having more say over activities which take place at the resource bases, including quizzes, games, bowls matches, craft projects etc.
- Staff in each resource base providing outreach support in the local community, enabling users to enjoy pub lunches, supported shopping and to find out about other local services.

Recent constraints on council resources mean that CAS has developed programmes and activities which are time-bound and have a specific goal. This can be anything from enabling a person to study at home, or at the library online, move to a new area to be nearer family, enrol at a local college or start voluntary or paid work. This approach has helped to stretch existing resources to more closely meet the needs of an ever increasing group of present and future service users.

The project has been successful with twice the amount of disabled users now accessing a wider range of services that are tailored more specifically to their needs. CAS is also achieving good value for money.

The redevelopment of CAS has been overseen by a programme board, chaired by the Director of Social Services (now Adult Social Services), with membership including the Council's Cabinet Member for Social Services, Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment (PDSI), older people divisional director, the operational manager for PDSI and a voluntary sector representative.

The board have decided that the service can now be fully run by voluntary sector agencies and a tendering process is underway. The commissioning of DisabilityCroydon has proved to be an effective stepping stone in the process of reviewing the service prior to decisions being made about its future. It has helped the council to learn from a relatively small local charity, and additionally DisabilityCroydon has increased its capacity and learned a lot by working so closely with the council.

## **Examples of partnerships**

The network of resource bases involves partnership working with two Healthy Living Centres in Croydon, one on the site of a leisure centre and one where a computer suite is used by a group to produce a newsletter for CAS, written by service users.

The leisure centre has asked service users attending the Healthy Living Centre resource base to be involved in delivering disability awareness training to customer service staff at the leisure centre. Some service users are also making use of the swimming facilities for the first time, with support from staff.

A new project called EXPLORERS has targeted the recruitment of volunteers to support service users at the leisure centre. DisabilityCroydon applied for a grant to advertise this project and pay for a volunteering expert to help recruit and set up support systems for new volunteers. The project succeeded in recruiting a volunteer co-ordinator to take forward this work. One volunteer has been recruited into the swimming project at the leisure centre. This will enable CAS paid staff to focus on more complex 1:1 casework with individual service users.

## **GOOD PRACTICE POINTS**

### **Increasing user involvement**

The contribution of service users was crucial in re-organising service provision from one five-day base into a range of community resource base locations. Continuing consultation with service users ensures CAS remains fit for purpose. New resource bases were visited, assessed and approved by service users. Service users who were unable to visit each resource base to check accessibility were provided with photos and testimony from other service users in order to make decisions. User groups at each resource base meet and request new activities. Service users and volunteers with disabilities carry out support roles, supporting and encouraging each other and welcoming new people into the service.

This dialogue ensures service users have a say in the design and an involvement in delivering activities linked to each resource base. For example, the St Oswald's Resource Base has set up an indoor bowls team and service users have successfully linked into other activities run by St Oswald's, including a weekly over-50's club.

### **Benefits of working in partnership**

Harnessing the skills of a voluntary sector organisation to improve CAS enabled DisabilityCroydon to contribute: passion; a service user focus; expertise in assessing individuals to help them set life goals; a knowledge of what is already out there in the community for disabled people to tap into; and the potential for further fundraising to help fulfil not just Adult Social Services' vision for day services for people with disabilities, but DisabilityCroydon and its service users' vision too.

### **Lessons in risk taking**

The partnership involved risk on both sides. For Croydon Council Social Services, the risk was entrusting one of their teams into the hands of a relatively small

voluntary sector, user-led organisation. For DisabilityCroydon, the risk was to take up the challenge of a service that was experiencing problems.

Paul Welch, Project Manager of CAS says: “We were somewhat apprehensive, but actually delighted to be asked, having the chance to really do something about the problems rather than just talk about them, and we commend Social Services for their decision, their vision, their trust in us, and the positive impact it has so far made on people who use the CAS.”

Additional key ingredients for the development of CAS:

- Placing the social model of disability at the heart of the service’s mission and operation.
- Developing strong community partnerships with voluntary and private sector organisations to encourage access to local community facilities and services.
- Ensuring clear, consistent and accessible information (according to preferred formats) is provided to people using the service.
- Producing an evaluation tool to measure what is required from the role of Community Access Service Officer; a wide-ranging multi-skilled role, far removed from the original day centre officer role.
- Promoting greater knowledge within the staff team of risk assessment processes, to ensure safety and wellbeing of service users in a variety of new settings.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION AND REFERENCES**

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