

Collaboration and Merger Newsletter 2009



Issue 3 December 2009

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Welcome to NICVA's Collaboration and Merger Newsletter, the third issue in the series. Our main feature in this issue is a successful collaboration project, comprised of five learning disability organisations in Northern Ireland - Mencap, ARC NI, Positive Futures, Prospects and Triangle. The Centre of Real Excellence on learning disability (CoRE) project focused on improving services to people with a learning disability through collaboration and joint working.

Also in this issue, we bring you an update on a project NICVA is working on with Supporting People as well as a reminder of some of the services NICVA can offer, if you are thinking about merging or working collaboratively.

Thinking about merger or collaboration?

NICVA can help, via a number of services including:

- One to one meeting with NICVA Chief Executive, Seamus McAleavey, as an independent advisor and intermediary, where necessary.
- Governance support and advice on existing structure, and proposed new structure with partner organisation.
- Training courses including: problem solving and decision making, conflict handling and negotiation, strategic planning in the recession, marketing your organisation and working in partnership and collaboration training.
- Guide to other resources available on this subject eg NICVA's online Recession Toolkit (**www.nicva.org**)
- Databases available on the voluntary and community sector, grouped by area of work to help you find other organisations to work collaboratively with.

Starting a conversation on mergers can be the biggest challenge. For advice or assistance please contact Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive on 028 9087 7777

Contribute to the next issue

If you've had any first hand experience of working collaboratively or going through the merger process, we would like to hear from you. Please submit your article or case study to **caroline.magee@nicva.org**, and we will include it in our next issue or within our online resources on **www.nicva.org**.

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The Centre of Real Excellence on learning disability (CoRE): improving services to people with a learning disability through collaboration and joint working.

About the CoRE Project

The CoRE, Centre of Real Excellence, project comprised of 5 learning disability organisations in Northern Ireland - Mencap, ARC NI, Positive Futures, Prospects and Triangle.

CoRE was created to test the feasibility of a “virtual” Centre of Excellence to support organisations in the development of high quality services for people with a learning disability across Northern Ireland.

Through CoRE we aimed to reduce duplication and increase collaborative work in learning disability services. The result has not only been enhanced opportunities and improved methods of inter-agency working but also the establishment of a virtual networking centre of excellence known as NILD Network - Northern Ireland Learning Disability Network (www.nildnet.net).

What is a virtual networking centre of excellence?

This is a place in which co-operation, joint working and the sharing of resources by partners is a core purpose.

This includes:

- Partners benefiting from the sharing of information and learning and the creation of a repository of expertise and knowledge
- Accessing support and advice from partners
- Learning from the administration and management systems of partners
- Being able to draw on the support of partners
- Striving for excellence and quality through continuous improvement

CoRE work streams

The overarching aim of the CoRE project was to be realised through its five work streams, each led by one of the partners. The work-streams looked at:

1. Information, led by Mencap: explored the nature and sources of relevant information that will help partners to analyse the wider policy and business environment to support their decision making and forecasting.

2. Workforce, led by ARC (NI): investigated developing the skills and capacity of the workforce to embed the values of citizenship and inclusion in services, meet regulatory standards and to use new approaches and technologies.

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3. ICT, led by Positive Futures: examined the potential for ICT systems to enable work carried out by other partners and facilitate collaborate working.

4. Person centred planning, led by Prospects: explored systems for reporting progress on achieving person centred services and monitoring service performance.

5. Business improvement, led by Triangle: looked into documenting processes and learning, benchmarking and process improvement.

Partnership working:

For the partners, working together through CoRE has meant:

- reduced effort and duplication
- joint action and lobbying together
- opportunity to be involved in each other's activities
- collaborative work, effectively releasing more resources to front-line services
- sharing of facilities between partners - regional networking
- sharing of information, learning and access to resources
- sharing the costs of testing applications
- improved methods of inter-agency working

Development of the virtual network

The NILD Network, which has stemmed from the CoRE project, is for organisations that have an interest in learning disability and wish to work collaboratively and share knowledge, news and views. The NILD Network website provides organisations across the sector with the opportunity to work more collaboratively on a number of key themes. If you wish to get involved or find out more information about a particular area please contact the network directly:

- **News and Events** - Mervyn Bothwell:
mervynb@prospects-uk.org
- **Resources** - Paul Roberts:
info@positive-futures.net
- **Political Environment / lobbying**
Rebecca Shea:
Rebecca.Shea@mencap.org.uk
- **Business Improvement** - Mervyn Garrett:
mervyn.garrett@trianglehousing.org.uk
- **Practice and Staff Development**
Siobhan Bagues:
siobhan.bagues@caresector.net

We believe that collaboration is going to be the key for our sector going forward. We realise the great potential of collaborating and feel that this network holds potential for improving and enhancing the lives of people with a learning disability.

Please take some time to visit the website at www.nildnet.net and tell us what you think. You can email any comments to:

lynsey.murray@mencap.org.uk

By Lynsey Murray, Senior Communications Officer, Mencap.
Issued on Behalf of the CoRE Project Partners: ARC NI, Mencap, Positive Futures, Prospects and Triangle.

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Working together:

Exploring the potential for collaborative working in Northern Ireland

The idea of working together is not a new one in the voluntary and community sector. The very essence of the sector is based on individuals coming together to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable in society.

Today, in a financially tight and complex funding environment, the policy agenda is promoting collaboration as a useful tool to assist voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland to face these current demands. The sector has always been credited with being responsive and flexible to a changing environment. For this reason the sector is beginning to fully scrutinise this idea of collaborative working.

Recognising the importance of this issue, NICVA has been commissioned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's (NIHE) Supporting People team to explore the potential of collaborative working with Supporting People providers. Supporting People is the largest, single funder of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland.

In 2008/2009 it funded the voluntary and community sector approximately £55 million to provide support to some of the most vulnerable individuals in society. This includes homeless people, women affected by domestic violence, mental health, learning and physical disability and

older people. For the last two years there has been no inflationary uplift on Supporting People funding and this will not change for the financial year of 2010/2011. This is having an impact on providers and it has led to them examining the services they provide.

In light of the current difficult economic environment, NICVA is working with these providers to examine any potential areas of collaborative working that could assist them to deliver high quality services within their current restrictions.

To date NICVA has interviewed 75 senior managers in 58 Supporting People organisations. This has given a detailed insight of where providers feel they could benefit from more collaborative working. These include more opportunities to share best practice, training, policies and procedures, quality assurance, general back office, human resources, service delivery and potentially bank staff.

The challenge now is to develop the infrastructure to make more collaborative working possible. NICVA is working closely on this project with the Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland (CHNI), NIHE Supporting People team and providers.

It is hoped that through this process organisations can be offered practical advice and support if they wish to engage in any aspect of collaborative working.

Key learnings on issues of collaboration from this project are available from NICVA. Contact Leeann Kelly, Research Officer at NICVA.
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