



Transforming Lives

Rochdale Literacy Champions

Costed case study

Rochdale

The borough of Rochdale in Greater Manchester is home to 206,600 people, 14% of whom are from minority ethnic backgrounds. 16 of Rochdale's 135 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are in the 3% most deprived nationally. Over 25,000 people are resident in these areas, which are characterised by significantly worse health outcomes, of which communication and poor health literacy are a feature along with high levels of unemployment and lower levels of wellbeing, lower skill levels amongst adults and generally low aspirations.

Rochdale has a higher proportion of children and young people than the national average, accompanied by higher indicators of child poverty and greater risk of unequal life chances as a result of growing up in areas of high deprivation.

All-age literacy policy

In 2006 Rochdale Borough Council launched its all-age literacy policy 'Literacy Changes Lives', which recognises literacy as a key to wellbeing and a basic entitlement of its residents.

The policy laid a foundation for strategic partnership approaches to literacy development across public services, providing relevant and accessible opportunities to those residents most at risk of social exclusion due to poor or underdeveloped literacy skills. With notable improvements in Key Stage 2 literacy results, schools' involvement in family learning and increased enrolment on adult literacy courses, Rochdale is seen as a national standard-bearer in this field.

Literacy Champions programme

Literacy Champions are non-professional learning mentors who support others in their community who struggle with reading, writing, speaking or listening. They are well placed to help address the needs of these people who do not traditionally engage with services and act as trusted advocates or brokers between them and relevant services. Each Literacy Champion is recommended and recruited individually before being given an induction which provides the confidence and skills they need to fulfill the role.

A wide range of residents receive support from Literacy Champions, with low literacy levels the key factor in their referral through a variety of routes. Referred to hereafter as 'clients', these people are supported to improve their literacy through an individualised process that aims to empower continuing personal development to improve individual lives and build stronger, more prosperous communities.

Whilst Rochdale's Literacy Champions programme is managed through the council's Economic Affairs Unit it is seen as independent and community-led. The programme incorporates an understanding of the priority client groups and how attitudes to literacy can



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differ according to different backgrounds, cultures, and individual traits and characteristics. As such it provides a clearly visible, impartial and accessible means for individuals, families and communities to define and realise their literacy priorities.

In order to maximise its impact, the Literacy Champions programme links with wider strategies to increase equality, skills and community engagement and aims to affect how priority groups feel about themselves, their communities and the Borough.

This case study has been developed with a snap-shot of data relating to 80 active Literacy Champions, although this figure is growing constantly and at the time of writing is thought to be closer to 100. Literacy Champions include those with key skills (typically retired professionals) alongside those with lower levels of skills and experience (including those currently unable to work and seeking meaningful activity as well as those seeking to enhance their experience as a route towards employment). Some are professionals with the ability to “reach” priority client groups, including social care and health workers; children, family and community workers; housing, benefits, advice and employment support workers.

In coming together to develop practical understanding, knowledge and skills, Literacy Champions have established a community of practice based on sharing ideas, resources and solving problems as a collective. This fits with the notion of Participatory Action Research, adding value to local community infrastructure and with the potential to influence policy change.

Literacy Champions:

- Understand the importance of literacy
- Value and respect people as peers
- Reach people well
- Know how to identify literacy as a barrier
- Know how to promote literacy to vulnerable people
- Understand the basic elements of literacy and can help people start to develop
- Know what is available
- Share ideas and experiences with each other
- Identify barriers or gaps in provision and influence change.



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Outcomes

Literacy Champions record their engagement with clients through a formalised process that captures qualitative information on personal challenges, progress and achievements over time. The journey of each Literacy Champion is also recorded, mapping their 'journey' in similar detail.

There is evidence of the programme creating significant direct and indirect benefits for clients, their families and the Literacy Champions, as listed below.

Changes experienced by clients:

- Improved literacy and communication skills
- Improved qualifications
- Employment and improved employability
- Reduced social isolation
- Better parenting
- Reduced criminal behaviour
- Improved health
- Reduced drug and alcohol abuse
- Improved family relationships

Changes experienced by Literacy Champions:

- Improved qualifications
- Increased personal employability and ability to gain, keep or improve employment status
- Better parenting

Changes experienced by the families of clients:

- Children improve literacy/communication skills
- Children perform better at school
- Children's challenging behaviour addressed
- Increased interaction and communication between children and parents

It should be noted that additional outcomes could emerge through future evaluation and further consultation. This is particularly relevant with regard to outcomes for the families of clients, which may not have provided a focus for discussion for client feedback or recording thereof to date.



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Costings

The National Literacy Trust has developed a prototype tool, based on a Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology, to measure and account for value. The tool provides a framework to quantify the value of an activity, in this case the Literacy Champions programme, using money as a useful and widely accepted way of conveying that value.

Having mapped out the changes resulting from the Literacy Champions programme and attributed monetary values to represent their value (see the attached Impact Map), we can see what kind of value is being delivered, how much there is and who benefits, as well as calculating the ratio of benefits to costs (the SROI).



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Having applied this to the Literacy Champions programme, headline findings are:

- The total value of programme inputs was **£216,776**
...of which **£194,880** was volunteer time and **£21,896** was funding, management and support from Rochdale Borough Council
- The total net value of the outcomes resulting from the programme was **£16,284,413**
- **£2,441,114** of the total net outcome value relates to changes experienced by clients
...of which **£1,860,884** refers to their 'improved literacy and communication skills' and **£470,250** to their 'improved qualifications'
- **£13,833,182** of the total net outcome value relates to changes experienced by Literacy Champions
...of which **£13,050,000** (the vast majority) relates to additional lifetime earnings resulting from their improved levels of qualifications and **£739,488** relates to employment and employability outcomes
- Only **£10,119** of the total value relates to changes experienced by the families of clients (although this may reflect a shortage of data as mentioned above)
- On this basis, every £1 invested in the Literacy Champions programme generates a SROI of **£75**
- The changes created by the programme continue to generate value in future years. Extrapolating these over four more years (taking account of their reducing value and a continuous level of input) gives a total value of **£74,804,471** with an overall SROI of **£69** for every £1 invested. This relates only to the residual value of outcomes achieved to date. The real value of the programme's continuation would be significantly higher given that new clients would be supported to achieve additional outcomes
- The **£13,050,000** additional lifetime earnings for Literacy Champions (resulting from their improved qualifications) has a significant influence on the above calculations. Withdrawing this from the calculation gives a total net outcome value of **£3,224,293** and a SROI of **£15** for every £1 invested. This is still an outstanding return by any standards and in comparison with other literacy and/or community development activities