

Local Area Coordination – Stories from Local people and Community Partners (Ralph Broad and Carol Taylor)

What makes Local Area Coordination work? What helps it to deliver the wide range of outcomes alongside individuals, families and local communities and also drive reform in the service system?

Local Area Coordination (LAC) first started in Western Australia back in 1988, aiming to support people to build and pursue their vision for a good life, build personal resilience, strengthen local communities and reform services. It has subsequently developed across Australia, New Zealand and internationally, including a number of emerging sites in England

It is underpinned by powerful principles relating to Citizenship, Relationships, Information, Gifts, Expertise, Leadership and Services as a back up to local solutions.

Over the past 24 years, there have been many, many reviews and evaluations showing the range of outcomes and possibilities presented by Local Area Coordination where designed, developed and implemented with integrity and supported by strong and principled leadership at the service and community levels.

Middlesbrough was the first place to start Local Area Coordination in England. The first (very early) evaluation showed a range of positive outcomes consistent with international studies and best practice. It has now been recommended that LAC is expanded across Middlesbrough.

However, perhaps the most significant and relevant feedback is that of local people who have been supported by Local Area Coordination.



Local people in Middlesbrough coming together, with David Boyle, Maria Nyberg (Cabinet Office) and Carol Taylor (Middlesbrough LAC Manager) to talk about Local Area Coordination

Recently (4th September, 2012), local people in Middlesbrough who have been supported by LAC came together to meet David Boyle and Maria Nyberg (Cabinet Office) to talk about their experiences of Local Area Coordination and the impact on choice.

It was a very powerful and moving discussion where we were privileged to hear their stories – thank you to everyone who was there.

Partners from statutory and community services, including local police, adult social care, children's services, housing, first contact and adult education also came along to talk about their experiences of working alongside Local Area Coordinators to improve outcomes for local people.

Below is a summary of the key themes that local people told us

Individuals and families

- LACs take time to get to know us, our family, our community and our circumstances
- They listen, they don't judge or assess
- We have more choices – it's not just about services, but more about friends, family, neighbours, community options
- They help us to look at our whole life, not just try to fit us into a service "pigeon hole" – they "deal with it all together"
- They support and challenge us to do things for ourselves – this has helped me build confidence, to solve more of my own problems and to need services less
- I now know who to go to if I have a problem – it used to be so difficult to find the right person or I'd have to wait until my problems were even worse before someone would listen
- They provide continuity and consistency – other services keep changing
- They help me to have a voice, speak up for myself
- They help me to understand and coordinate services – there used to be so many people involved, it sometimes made things feel worse
- "In the past, I felt excluded, now I feel more in control"
- They have saved my life
- I don't know what would have happened if Carol, Janet and Stuart hadn't been there
- They are always there for me – someone on my side
- They keep their promises – they do what they say, when they say

Statutory and Community Partners

- We have a great working partnership with LAC – mutually beneficial support
- Having the LACs has made our jobs better
- They are able to work across service types and ages – cradle to grave. This makes a big difference to families and builds continuity across transition and service types
- They are a single point of contact, not only for local people, but also for services. They help effectively coordinate services for local people
- They have and share a huge knowledge of local people, resources and connections – this is also really helpful for people we support
- They are amazingly creative – they find innovative ways of helping people overcome problems or achieve their aims
- LAC is becoming even more important as services are reduced – a focus on prevention, capacity building – reducing pressure and demand for statutory services
- LACs work differently to other professionals – it's about taking time to listen, learn and find creative ways to solve problems. It's long term
- If LAC wasn't there anymore, there would be an increase in crises, family breakdown, service costs, unmet need, deprivation, drink/drugs related issues, homelessness, unreported crime
- The LACs have made a significant contribution to our communities
- The LAC programme must be protected and expanded
- It's really important for LACs to be embedded in the community, working alongside local people and community partners

- We need to be thinking about building this for the next 10-15 years, not just 12 months

Also, check out Stephen's story in the Evening Gazette. Stephen suffered from bullying in the school system and has a passion to use his experiences to help others who may also experience bullying and spread an anti bullying message.

You can see Stephen's story and dvd via <http://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/2012/08/25/middlesbrough-cerebral-palsy-sufferer-aims-to-beat-bullies-video-84229-31696351/>

So, whilst it is still early days for the LAC programme in Middlesbrough (and elsewhere in England) and there is much to learn and improve, local people have told us clearly they highly value the personal, flexible nature of Local Area Coordination and the focus on being supported to become less dependent on services in the future. This is a really encouraging start – well done to Middlesbrough Council, Carol, Janet, Stuart and all partners and citizens who have contributed to make a real difference.

We are currently putting together a new paper on Local Area Coordination stories – we'll let you know as things develop

Also, look out for some interesting partnership work with Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute.

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To find out more about Local Area Coordination and the LAC Network call or email Ralph

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