



Exeter Community Initiatives

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Newsletter

Autumn 2007

PREPARING FOR A LIFE IN A SMALLER ECI?

ECI's natural model of working is to develop and manage community projects, and then help them become independent, which means the size of ECI is continually changing. Our model is one we are proud of, as we believe it makes us different from many charities who feel the pressure to become ever-larger. We like to think that our way of working gives us credibility as 'an honest-broker', a view that the overwhelming majority of our partners share. As part of this process, St Sidwell's Centre is due to become independent on 1st April 2008. However, in recent months, more of our work has focussed on consultancy and facilitation, such as the Homelessness Collaboration Project, rather than project development, and current funding for key projects is coming to an end at similar times. Whilst we will continue to identify new resources for all existing projects, with ECI at its largest since March 2002 when St Petrock's and Turntable became independent, we are also preparing ourselves for life in a potentially smaller ECI after next April.

The news of Exeter City Council's progress with their Unitary Status bid has been the key political development of the past quarter, and will have a major impact on the future of our work. It highlights the importance of our relationships with the City Council, in particular our work on the Neighbourhood Engagement Pilot, and the potential for this to develop in future. However, there are still major challenges ahead, and a recent meeting of the Exeter Voluntary Sector Forum highlighted concerns about how any transition will be managed. It will also be important to maintain effective relationships with Devon County Council, both for our criminal justice work beyond Exeter, and our wider partnership working.

Other pressures on local authority funding, the impact of re-organisation (e.g. the introduction of Devon PCT), and the centralisation of the Big Lottery, all pose major challenges. A recent South-West Forum survey of voluntary sector organisations in the region confirmed that these pressures are not confined to ECI alone.

ECI trustees and senior staff spent our recent annual planning day beginning to shape our new three-year strategy from April 2008 onwards. Much of the 'raw material' came from the very helpful 'Effective Partnership Working' event on 19th June, attended by representatives from 15 of our key local partner agencies. Both events highlighted many exciting ideas for future ECI developments to meet local needs. We will be consulting further over the next few months and look forward to hearing your views.

Alistair Macintosh, ECI Director

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE QUARTER

- £152,000 raised from Devon Supporting People for PORCH and CARD Projects
- Representatives from 15 local partner organisations joined ECI staff for an event to learn lessons about Effective Partnership Working
- The Neighbourhood Engagement Pilot has been launched and received good support from residents at six community events in central Exeter
- Over 130 people who are homeless or vulnerably housed have been interviewed, to find out their views on the services available to homeless people in the city
- St Sidwells has supported 314 user groups sessions, providing a total of 4131 individual user sessions this quarter
- 103 families have registered to take part in Flying Start Childrens Centre's activities

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

EATS Project (Exeter Accredited Tenants' Scheme)

The tenancy skills training courses provided to Care Leavers in partnership with the Meaningful Occupation Project (MOP) have now come to an end, with 15 people benefiting from the training. Laura Callaway is now working on an evaluation, which, along with the evaluations of previous pilot courses, will be disseminated to others to inform future training provision.

"We've learned loads of things, and it was good to hear from the guy who had been homeless himself."

(A course participant)

A final Steering Group meeting has been arranged, and ECI is encouraging partners to take this work forward in a co-ordinated way. The Amber Foundation has secured funding which will enable a number of partners within Devon to deliver tenancy training in the form of their Practical Housing Units.

Homelessness Collaboration

During the last quarter we have been busy carrying out interviews with people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation, with the help of 15 trained volunteers. Over 130 interviews have been completed to date, but we are still keen to interview those who are 'sofa surfing' (staying temporarily on friends' or family's floors). However, this group, believed to be one of the largest sub-sets of homelessness, are referred to as the 'hidden homeless' and members are very difficult to identify. It is very much hoped that the results of this research, once analysed by Exeter University, will provide helpful clues into the ways in which services for homeless and vulnerably housed people can be improved.

Housing Project

We have held the first joint trustee meeting between ECI and Exeter Shilhay Community and are also talking creatively to the Christian Alliance Housing Association. There continues to be a growing need for new initiatives to house people on low incomes in the city, with now over 5000 households on the council's housing waiting list.

EXISTING PROJECTS

CARD Project (Close a Revolving Door)

We had a significant staff change in the summer with the welcome return of Gill Amos from maternity leave but also a sad farewell to Claire Paine who has made such a full contribution over the past year.

The level of mentoring activity remains strong with 18 current matches and their average length having risen to 18 weeks. The total number of mentees supported over the course of the project now stands at 134.

A recent award from Devon Supporting People will allow the project to continue until September 2008. This is good news and will take us into a new phase of closer operation with PORCH.

The prospect of working with women prisoners released from Eastwood Park prison in Gloucestershire is drawing closer, following a visit from some of their resettlement staff. We will also link with the local probation team for those prisoners released under supervision. This has posed different issues in view of the distance involved, associated with how contact can be established and maintained.

Flying Start Children's Centre

The centre is just four months old and already has 103 families registered, a weekly timetable of activities and support groups available to parents and children in central Exeter.



The Post Natal Support Group

We are now offering a Home Visiting Service to families when they report difficulties such as relationship problems or a child with challenging behaviour within their family. At a parent's request, a Family Support Worker will

assess the family's needs and help them to access suitable support.

This month the centre has launched a Baby Oasis Café in collaboration with the Central Health Visiting and Midwifery Teams. The café which was officially opened by Lady Mayor Hazel Slack. On Monday afternoons at St Sidwell's Centre the Baby Oasis Café provides a Health Clinic, Midwifery Clinic, Parents Café, and a relaxed session for breastfeeding mothers to feed their baby and receive professional advice and support.

Children and parents have now been attending Flying Start's Heuristic Play sessions for two months. Heuristic play is a session where children lead their own play in exploration of items which would not usually be considered toys, for example natural or household objects like pine-cones and cake tins.

"Alicia has learnt to share through Heuristic play. I can relax whilst Alicia has fun."

(Alicia's mum, Natalie Woolfenden)

There will be a Parent Forum Open Day as part of St Sidwell's Open Day on the 29th of September. There will be fun activities for the children to get involved in, and parents are invited to come along and find out how they can shape services available to their children.

Our Family Support Worker, Sonia Worthington, has begun her maternity leave. We are pleased to welcome Tanya Kokoszka who will be covering the post.

PORCH Project (Prolific Offenders' Resettlement through Co-ordinated Housing)

The project has been in operation for a year now and in that time PORCH has received referrals for 52 offenders. Colleagues in partner agencies within the Prolific Offender Unit have reported an increased level of engagement with the supervision process from those offenders supported by PORCH.

PORCH clients continue to benefit from the assistance and support of a few dedicated private sector landlords. Three of our offenders placed in private sector accommodation have successfully sustained their tenancies for over 10 months.

"When I got out of prison four months ago I was found accommodation in Exeter from a landlord called Dave who also works very close to PORCH. So, he knew exactly what he was getting himself into. Both my landlord and PORCH work very closely with me, giving me the support to continue to live a crime free life" (A PORCH User)

PORCH successfully secured funding from Devon Supporting People which will enable the project to continue until September 2008. This grant is linked to the integration of PORCH with CARD, and will also allow for some project expansion.

We have said goodbye to Tanya Hall who is due to have a baby in November. We would like to thank her for her hard work and wish her all the best. We welcome Nick Walker who has taken over as Community Support



Worker (pictured below).

SCDE (Supporting Community Development in Exeter)

Work on the new Neighbourhood Engagement project in partnership with Exeter City Council and Exeter CVS is progressing well. The project aims to give more power to people at a neighbourhood level. We have attended six events in each of the pilot areas, namely, Clyst Heath/Kings Heath; Exwick; St David's and Newtown/Polsloe in order to prom

At the events we used a technique called Tops and Pants to find out what people thought was good (Tops) and bad (Pants) about their areas. We had paper tops and pants for people to write on and then hung them on a washing line. Responses were good with over 80 residents signing up to hear more about how the partnership develops.

"We as a family really enjoy being a part of the St David's community. It is central to all amenities and where everybody knows each other and pulls together" (A 'top' comment from a resident of St David's)

The information that we gathered from the Tops and Pants exercise will feed into meetings to be held during the Autumn as an initial indication of what people value about their areas and what they see as priority issues. These meetings are open to all and we will be looking to involve as wide a range of people as possible in the Local Partnerships, on an on-going basis. If you live in one of the key areas and would like to be involved please contact our office.

'Ujima' Project (supports Black and Minority Ethnic communities in Exeter)

Over the last quarter some of Ricky's time has been spent meeting with the Devon & Cornwall Chinese Association (DCCA). Earlier this year members of the Chinese Hikmat group demonstrated the Unicorn dance at their Chinese New Year celebrations. Many of the children now wish to learn more about the dance and the Chinese culture, and so Robby Ho (the coordinator) has linked in with the Martin Lai, Chairman of DCCA to bring the Unicorn dance lessons to Exeter. Due to start mid October the classes will be open to all children aged 8 upwards. Robby tells me the classes will help raise the profile of the Chinese culture not only within the Chinese community but also to the wider community of Exeter. They are also considering adult classes as a way of keeping fit. Further details will be posted onto the web site: www.dcca.info



Dragon Dance performed at the recent DCCA Annual General Meeting

Over the course of the Ujima Project, Ricky has worked with 12 established groups/networks, and supported two new groups to develop with more potential groups forming from the Korean, African, Brazilian, and American communities.

St Sidwells Centre

This quarter, we have supported 36 different groups using the centre. The centre is used by a diverse range of community groups as well as organisations such as Connexions, Exeter Ethiopia Link and East Devon Volunteer Support Agency. Although there has been a slight decrease in evening and weekend bookings, these remain at over 100 sessions.



Taking a break in the St Sidwells' garden

Forthcoming events include another Vegetarian Food Day to be held on Saturday 29th September from 12 noon to 2pm and a Ladies' Pampering Day on 20th October in aid of Breast Cancer Awareness, with free complimentary therapies and makeovers. Pop along and support these events or the café on Wednesday or Thursday between 10am and 2pm.

Volunteer Lorna Ludgate has put in a massive amount of time and effort to give our website a long awaited facelift. We're delighted with the results and a big thank you to Lorna for all her hard work. We hope that you will enjoy paying the website a visit at: www.stsidwells.org.uk

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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