

LEAP – Community Engagement Project

The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington
Church & Communities Programme

Promoting community engagement, empowerment and support to local residents in Gainsborough

LEAP is a charity and social landlord providing housing and support to vulnerable individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in **Lincoln** and **Gainsborough**.

The organisation received funding to extend its community work through the employment of a Community Participation Officer within their Community Hub in the South-west ward in Gainsborough.

"I get out into the community and start breaking down the barriers...I talk to community about what they want and make them realise that if they want some change they need to talk to us and work with us... I am quite passionate now about what I do."
Community Participation Officer



Why the work is needed

The South-West Ward of Gainsborough experiences significant levels of poverty, deprivation, crime, unemployment and health inequalities, placing it among the top 3% most affected areas nationally.

Approach

LEAP engage and involve the local community in decision making and provide advice & support services to low-income households, through its Community Participation and Community Advice Officers based within the Community Hub.

The team at LEAP work in a person-centred way, listening to individuals' needs and tailoring the advice and support as necessary.

Key approaches include:

- Creating opportunities for volunteering in the local community
- Supporting local events and activities
- 1:1 meetings, drop in sessions and workshops with LEAP's Community Advice Officer
- Building partnerships with other local agencies (e.g. local council, police, GPs)
- Setting up a Participation Group made up of local residents, giving them resources to influence improvements to their community.
- Training sessions to help increase residents confidence and employability
- Signposting people to other agencies and training providers for specialist support

Impact



Growing Reach: The workshops have been well attended by residents and the community worker has helped provide targeted support packages to be put in place for individuals



Community: The project lead also reported having seen a difference in people's perceptions of the area and the extent to which residents had started to care more about the local area.



Advice and Support: The professional advice and support services have given the community access to provision they wouldn't have locally, such as; mental health, first aid, housing and debt advice.



Meaningful Change: The advice and support offered has made an incredible impact and in certain cases has changed people's lives.

"I was at rock bottom, I thought I've got to commit suicide...Because I'd gone so far. As I said, I'm 65 years old and knackered."

Beneficiary



Challenges

The organisation is seeing an increase in demand for its services from local residents, compounded by a reduction in resources and capacity in other organisations and statutory agencies, putting greater pressure on them.

"Whilst the issues that people are accessing the service are facing are changing and ...becoming more complex, I think the other thing that is having a real impact is the reduction in agencies [capacity] to make a difference for those people". Project Lead

Engagement in the community forums has been a big challenge, as the numbers attending have been low, however through the continued efforts of the community participation officer LEAP is confident numbers will continue to increase overtime.

Learnings

- Initially, the project operated with one staff member handling two roles. However, after staffing changes, the roles were separated to ensure each position was filled by individuals with the appropriate skills and expertise.
- Employing the Community Participation and Community Advice officers has increased engagement in the community.

The Future

- LEAP will continue to deliver its community engagement work through its Community Participation and Advice Officers.

"Very grateful that Mercers' funded this project because it's been a game changer for the community... having this project has helped us from our housing perspective as well" Project Lead