

making a case

impact report 2013-14



Community
Action Southwark

a year in numbers

215

215 individual cases of intensive support (9% increase on 2011/12)



425

425 participants at 35 training sessions – an increase of 58% and 52% on previous year

58%



35

74%

74% agree CAS-hosted events are valuable because 'they enable me to engage meaningfully with the VCS'.

57

CAS supported over 57 organisations to access £750k in funding

£750K

29%

29% increase in visits to www.casouthwark.org.uk (28,424)



28,424

78%

78% of members feel CAS is a credible voice for the sector in Southwark

89%

89% of stakeholders said CAS has improved cross-sector working

Message from CAS's Chair

In *CASework*, our last annual review, we asked: is CAS making a difference? This was a question we knew we would always fall short of answering sufficiently - not because what we were doing was not useful or relevant, but because we just didn't have the means to fully measure the difference we are making. We do now, so it's crunch time. Is CAS making a difference?

This short impact report describes the contribution that we think CAS has made to support the creation of strong and resilient voluntary and community sector organisations in Southwark. We want to demonstrate the impact CAS has had in developing partnerships with individuals and organisations – including the public sector – in order to collaborate and learn from each other. There is more detail on our website (www.casouthwark.org.uk/about-us/our-impact).

We are not perfect - there are plenty of ways in which we can improve - but we are 100% committed to always acting in the voluntary and community sector's best interests. We exist because you do and we will always listen to what you want.

I want to thank all our funders for their continued support. Like many, we cannot rely on that support to continue at the same level over the next few years. I hope this report makes a case for the important role CAS plays in supporting and working on behalf of the voluntary and community sector in Southwark.

Verinder Mander (Chair, Community Action Southwark)



Increasing Resilience

One of CAS's strategic priorities is to help voluntary and community organisations be ready and prepared for change - as well as ready to take advantage of opportunities.

What were the issues?

At the start of 2013, we found that just over half of organisations we talked to were facing challenges, but were ready and willing to deal with them in a productive way. Getting funding was, as always, the biggest challenge. The desire to collaborate was expressed by over 50% organisations we asked – but examples of sharing and genuine collaboration were relatively few. Over three quarters (78%) of organisations that CAS worked with had inadequate skills and systems in place to report on their outcomes.

Our analysis of funding trends in Southwark highlighted two inter-related issues which, if not already impacting upon organisations, had the potential to change the way they were funded in the future. There was a clear shift from grants to outcome-focused contracts (and a greater reliance on personal budgets) set against a reduced pot of funding. This has led to funding streams being combined and often reduced, meaning that collaboration and joint working is increasingly important.

How we responded

Despite these changes, 65% of organisations still felt that getting grant funding was the biggest issue they faced. We didn't ignore this but we felt that we could have more impact by improving organisations' capacity to tackle the funding challenge. For example, by helping organisations to find new ways to generate income; improving governance; strengthening strategic and business planning and developing collaborative ways of working. We also decided that we would focus on helping those organisations which had the best chance of making a sustainable difference, not just those who felt they were most in need.

We also recognised that relationships need to change and worked with funders to improve the impact and sustainability of funding recipients. We tried to understand how we might support organisations to better articulate the impact of their work.

What we did

We developed resources and briefings, and provided free 1:1 advice, generic and tailored training, and detailed consultancy. Overall we provided 215 cases of intensive support (9% increase on 2012/13) – the main topics were governance and fundraising. 57% stated that this support made a positive difference to the management of their organisation.

We provided 35 training sessions, workshops and action learning sets to 425 participants. Our approach covered the building blocks of stronger and more resilient organisations, such as governance, income generation and strategic planning. Overall 86% of participants stated that they were more confident and able to apply the knowledge and skills they received as a result of the training (up from 63% in the previous year).

“I remember having this great meeting [with the CAS development team] and I couldn't believe that this service was free. I got this hour, I was there in the room with her and she gave me incredible advice.”

A CAS member

Our annual conference, which focused on governance and leadership, resulted in 75% of participants feeling more confident in their role as a trustee or a leader.

In partnership with Southwark Council, we developed a new approach to the fifth round of the Transition Fund. We sought to help organisations achieve longer lasting sustainability - rather than short term funding solutions - through a detailed diagnostic process and external consultancy support to implement action plans. The work is ongoing so we will report on its impact next year, but early results have been encouraging.

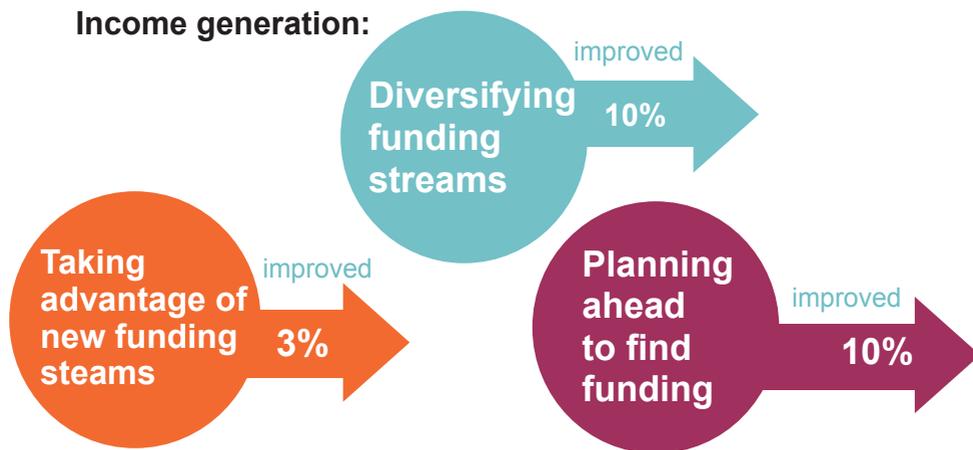
CAS also worked in partnership with CLINKS and NPC to develop an impact measurement tool for six organisations working in the criminal justice system. This was ground-breaking work and followed a summit (hosted by CAS) on the role of the VCS in the criminal justice system. This will inform our wider work to support organisations to measure and increase their impact.

Did we change anything?

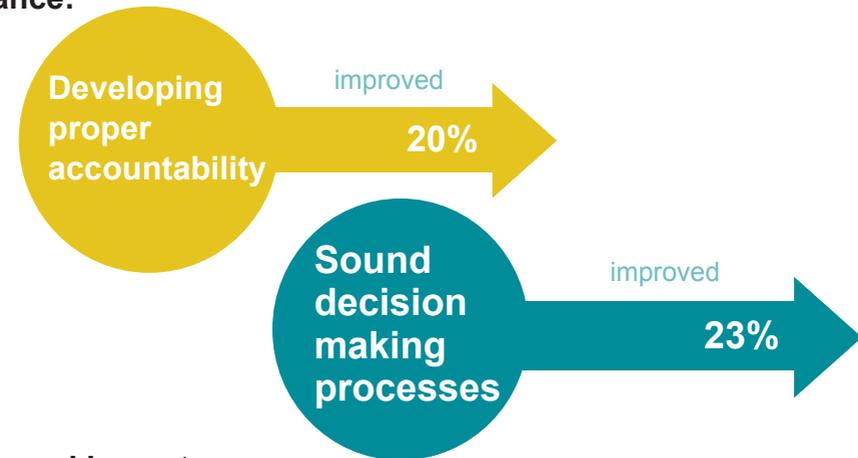
So has all that activity translated into a difference in how organisations operate, develop and respond to change?

At two points over a fourteen month period, we asked organisations to assess (on a scale of one to ten) how they felt they were performing in eight areas (income, governance, communications, people, managing resources, impact, strategy, and learning). In several areas we saw improvements that were directly aligned to support provided by CAS. We understand that organisations receive guidance from a variety of sources but we believe CAS made a strong contribution to these changes. Overall we found improvement in the following areas:

Income generation:



Governance:



Strategy and impact:



What's next?

There is still lots to do but here are some of the areas we will be working on:

- supporting organisations to understand and implement the personalisation agenda
- developing genuine consortia and partnerships
- supporting organisations to measure impact
- growing our small groups network to support small and emerging community groups
- improving financial management processes in organisations.

“We have received quite a lot of support from CAS. Particularly with our business plan, the support has been invaluable – it has helped us focus on what we need to be saying about ourselves and how to communicate that to other people.”
A CAS member

The single biggest lesson we have learnt is that investing in relationships and supporting groups over the long term has the biggest impact. It is resource intensive and it takes longer but it gets results. The way we are funded by Southwark Council allows us to do this – without it we couldn't operate in this way.

In order for this approach to work we have to develop a culture of early action, both in CAS and in the wider sector. If organisations come to us in crisis the difference we can make is limited. Our approach to supporting organisations is based on partnership and it requires both sides to work together. Sometimes it means that we have to give difficult messages but they are always focused on doing the best for organisations and the sector - we take our role as critical friend seriously.

Building relationships

CAS aims to create equitable and influential relationships between the public and voluntary and community sectors.

What were the issues?

The changing nature of local government and the NHS meant that many of the certainties of partnership working, funding and relationships were being challenged. Demands on the voluntary and community sector also changed, with the expectation that we could do more with less. Decisions made against this backdrop often had unintended consequences for the people who rely on our support. There was therefore a need for a strong and coherent voice from the sector. However, a few years ago in 2010, only 18% of charities in Southwark were very or fairly satisfied with their ability to influence local decisions relevant to them .

How we responded

CAS sought to realign the relationship between decision-makers and the sector. We knew that cuts to funding were going to happen regardless of anything we did, so we wanted to change the narrative.

The sector is sometimes accused of having a sense of entitlement, particularly when organisations have been funded to do the same thing for years. We wanted to take a more proactive approach to showing the massive contribution of the voluntary and community sector, and make sure that those who held the purse strings knew what would be lost if ill-considered decisions were made. We approached this in a positive and collaborative way and focused on dealing with the obstacles that prevented good cross-sector relationships. We felt that this would yield better results for the sector than confrontation.

What we did

First we needed to know the scale and scope of the voluntary and community sector in Southwark. Research led to a better, deeper understanding of the different parts of the sector, how they operate and what their impact is. Using this evidence we developed our Value the VCS campaign to highlight the impact and preventative value of the sector across five areas – health and wellbeing, children and young people, older people, community safety and economic wellbeing.

We lobbied local councillors and presented the evidence at a special breakfast meeting where we asked for an independent Early Action Commission to be established. We wanted the commission to look at how the public and voluntary sectors could work together to shift the focus from coping with problems to doing more to prevent them from arising in the first place.

CAS was also commissioned by Southwark Council to conduct research into the prevalence of co-production, and awareness and attitudes around it. The results fed into the Council's strategy on co-production. We held a series of On Location events, which mapped community premises across the borough. CAS was also a partner in the 1,000 Lives consultation exercise.

“Around key strategic themes the partnership has been excellent but it does take a major policy shift to bring partners together.”
Southwark Council Officer

We consolidated the work of the original Thinking Allowed Summits, and enhanced cross-sector working, contributing to service re-design and co-productive relationships. Specifically we worked in partnership on the Dulwich Hospital re-development, Southwark Council's Children and Young People's Plan, on mental health, prevention and inclusion and on SEND redesigns.

This was the first full year for our elected voluntary and community representatives, working for more meaningful influence in key partnerships such as the Children's Trust, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Safer Southwark Partnership.

Did we change anything?

Building relationships and working in partnership means changes are often difficult to quantify. So rather than dealing with specific changes, we have used the results from our members' and stakeholder (public sector partners and funders) surveys to see if we have fostered and developed more meaningful and impactful relationships.

Voice and influence

- 78% of members feel CAS is a **credible voice for the sector** in Southwark
- 65% of CAS members agree that CAS is clear about what it is **advocating on behalf** of the sector
- 7% of stakeholders feel that **CAS only speaks on behalf** of a select few organisations or groups

Providing solutions

- 89% of stakeholders feel that CAS has **improved cross-sector working**
- 50% CAS members agree that CAS's influence means the **sector is engaged with more often** by policy makers/ commissioners
- 45% of stakeholders feel that CAS has **provided solutions** to challenging issues

“I always feel that CAS is trying to bridge the gap between providers and the council and CCG.”

A CAS member”

Representing the sector

- 91% of stakeholders feel that the VCS representatives make a **meaningful contribution** to partnership boards
- 46% of CAS members felt that CAS acts as a **critical friend**
- 9% CAS members feel that the influence of CAS is **limited and tokenistic**

There are both positive and negative messages in these results. However, in 2013 the proportion of Southwark charities which were very or fairly satisfied with their ability to influence local decisions relevant to them had risen to 32% from 18% in 2010.

“CAS plays a key role in knocking down the council's door and helping to build relationships with the right people.”

A CAS member”

What's next?

As a direct result of CAS's research and lobbying, the first ever Early Action Commission in the UK will run between November 2014 and March 2015. It will work across traditional service boundaries and across public, voluntary and community-based organisations to:

- improve the wellbeing and opportunities of people in the borough, especially those more at risk of harm,
- reduce demand for statutory services, and
- avoid wasting scarce public resources on coping with avoidable needs.

“CAS was very successful in getting a seat at the Health & Wellbeing Board, I think it would have been difficult for them not to have voluntary sector representation on other boards. The way CAS works has brought a lot of respect for the sector and credibility.

A CAS member”

We will continue to attempt to influence the very challenging budget decisions for 2014/15 and to work with partners on service redesign and co-production, social prescribing and developing social value policies in commissioning. We aim to be proactive in shaping agendas and driving change from the voluntary and community sector's perspective.

Making connections

An ambition of CAS is to increase collaboration, sharing and coordination of resources, skills and knowledge within the voluntary and community sector.

What were the issues?

It is a simple equation: fewer resources plus spiralling demand equals an increased need to work together. However, CAS believes that collaboration should be driven by a desire to have a bigger impact for beneficiaries, not simply to save money.

There is a desire to collaborate more but it is difficult for some organisations to do. The problem is often something as basic as not knowing what others are doing, or what collaboration opportunities exist. Trust and building relationships are really important.

What we did

CAS plays a pivotal role in providing the space, resources and information that allow organisations to connect with another. We do this in a number of ways, ranging from hosting networking events and conferences, through to providing an online database of organisations working in the borough.

CAS supports communications between the voluntary and community sector and public sector partners. 74% of external stakeholders see CAS as reliable conduit for information with a further 85% believing that CAS plays a key role in informing the sector about new policies.

We held a number of forums and sub-groups to inform organisations about changes in social policy, funding programmes and ways of working. Areas covered have included personalisation, the Work Programme, children's safeguarding, affordable housing, localism and troubled families. Across all the forums, over half of all attendees said their attendance was extremely important to their organisation

Did we change anything?

Showing direct impact in this area is difficult but we have looked at survey results to give an overview of CAS's contribution to making connections:

- 74% of public sector stakeholders agree that CAS-hosted events are valuable because they enable them to **engage meaningfully** with the VCS.

“I'm very impressed by the number of people that turn up for meetings now, that shows that people really want to be involved and that you're able to offer them something, give them something that they can take away and that they can be part of.

A CAS member”

- 60% of CAS members agree that CAS is the **central point** that brings everything together in one place.
- 41% of CAS members feel there aren't enough opportunities to **get together and share** with others.
- 44% of public sector stakeholders agree that CAS's **reach into the entire VCS** in Southwark is strong.

What we didn't measure is whether people feel better connected with others and as a result collaborated more. We will work on this gap in our knowledge next year.

What's next?

We started from the premise that there is a need for more collaboration because of the merging of local authority contracts. The voluntary and community sector needs to prepare and adapt. We tried to run a collaboration support programme aimed at equipping organisations with the skills and abilities to collaborate better. This was not as successful as we had hoped. Only when we linked collaboration directly with a particular income stream did we see more interest. As a result we will take a more targeted approach concentrating on specific areas of collaboration (such as social care) – setting up consortia in advance of contracts being released so that organisations are prepared for the change and have built up trusting relationships.

However, much of the debate surrounding collaboration, we feel, is coming from the wrong perspective. We understand why many organisations are most interested in collaborating for income, not impact. But we think CAS should next year work to understand and publicise the wider benefits of collaboration, encouraging it when it can result in improved outcomes for users.

Next steps

To make things simple, we thought we would provide you with six areas CAS will be focusing on over the coming months. You can remind us if we are falling short on any of these:

1. Supporting small emerging community-based groups
2. Supporting impact measurement
3. Demonstrating the preventative value of the sector
4. Supporting better financial management
5. Influencing commissioning and procurement processes
6. Supporting collaboration





Vision

Our vision is of stronger Southwark communities that fulfil their potential

Mission

We work to create and support the conditions for a strong and thriving voluntary and community sector of Southwark

Values

- We believe in the voluntary and community sector's ability to bring about social change
- We believe that change - even if challenging - creates new opportunities
- We are a critical friend always acting in the best interests of the voluntary and community sector
- We believe in helping the voluntary and community sector to help themselves
- We value clarity, transparency and honesty in everything we do
- We are approachable, open and inclusive



@casouthwark



Community Action Southwark



Community Action Southwark

Creating a stronger voluntary and community sector

Community Action Southwark, 1 Addington Square, Camberwell, London SE5 0HF |
phone: 0207 7358 7020 | web: casouthwark.org.uk | email: info@casouthwark.org.uk
| Reg charity no. 1105835 | Company Ltd by guarantee no: 5090324