

local area coordination **BLOG** network

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When is a service not a service?



Samantha Clark is Chief Executive of Inclusion North, a wonderful organisation that promotes the inclusion of people with learning disabilities, their families and carers.

Sam and Inclusion North have supported Inclusive Neighbourhoods to build Local Area Coordination right from the start.

*Here, Sam reflects on the uniqueness of Local Area Coordination as an approach **embedded in both the community and the system** - supporting individuals, families and communities stay strong,*

connected and contributing - whilst also driving change in the system. A service that's not a service?

I was recently asked to talk about Local Area Coordination at an event where I would be following [Cormac Russell](#) talking about [Asset Based Community Development](#) (ABCD). The prospect was daunting: anyone who knows Cormac knows he's a tough act to follow - but I was also concerned about how my message might be received. I did not want Local Area Coordination to come across as an easy option for the room full of service providers & commissioners who might only hear about tweaking the system & not all the important good life & community building principles.

I am a massive believer in ABCD & I think it is at the heart of a Local Area Coordinator's practice, but I do think they are different things, and we should recognise what makes them different. I see them as different parts of the same jigsaw, that would include people's skills, passions & contributions being shared & communities leading & delivering their own solutions.

Asset Based Community Development

ABCD is about institutions stepping back & not getting in the way of local people doing what they can for themselves. ABCD practitioners actively supporting community building whilst very clearly knowing their place – but it is definitely **not** an excuse for letting institutions or the welfare state off the hook, or to abdicate their responsibilities. For anyone who has lingering doubts, I urge you to read Al Barnett's brilliant blog on the [politics of ABCD](#)

Creating connections, and growing community might sound pretty straightforward, but doing it well is a rather confusing mix of simple theory, and complicated and

sophisticated practice. I suggest if you want to know more you check out the [ABCD institute's site](#) as well as [ABCD Europe](#)

Local Area Coordination

Local Area Coordination fits with ABCD's approach to broad community building, & I believe enhances it. It does this by looking at what someone can do for themselves in connection with other people they know or have connections with, before any other formal service thinking or response. Standard Community Building approaches often struggle to include people who are at the edges of the community or whose life experience or disability makes it harder for them to connect. This is where Local Area Coordination has a bridging role.

I think the best kind of Local Area Coordinators are those building community 1 person at a time. In my perfect world they would be doing that whilst connected to community builders and connectors.

Local Area Coordination is a fantastic way of reforming the service system to truly support asset based approaches – which are both individual & community focused. When I described Local Area Coordination as a service response, my colleagues from Derby & Thurrock (rightly) shouted at me: they are working hard to make sure Local Area Coordination is not recognisable as a health or social care service we know today. I also know they will admit to being 'of the service system' whilst trying to not resemble other services in how they act or talk.

They are doing that by

- Meeting people rather than taking referrals
- Asking 1st 'what makes a good life for you?' rather than what needs someone has
- Talking and thinking about a good life rather than service provision
- Having a shared agreement not care plan
- Walking alongside people to help them achieve the good life rather than care managing

So I think it's OK that Local Area Coordination is funded & connected to the service system so long as it & the people involved remember these [principles](#) in their journey alongside people who might otherwise be deemed vulnerable or 'in need'.

***To find out more about Inclusion North,
go to <http://inclusionnorth.org>***

