

The Catalyst project, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and monitored by the Office for Students is a partnership between the University of Essex and the County Councils for Essex and Suffolk.

Using cross disciplinary expertise in data analytics, big data and evaluation, the University of Essex is supporting both County Councils to assess risks for vulnerable members of the community and provide evaluation techniques to fully understand the impact of Council initiatives.

Catalyst Evaluation Case Study

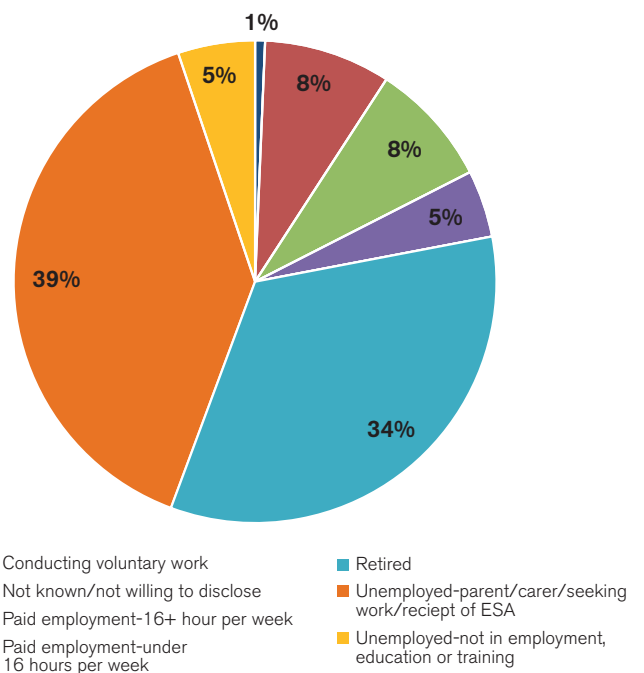
Pilot Programme for Local Area Coordination (LAC)

The Local Area Coordination (LAC) Programme is an integrated evidence-based approach to helping people with disabilities and mental health issues, older people, and their families and carers. Suffolk County Council (SCC) is one of the few Councils in the UK to run an initial pilot phase (December 2015 to May 2018).



Taken from www.centreforwelfarereform.org, a free on-line resource from the Centre of Welfare Reform Limited © Ralph Broad & Simon Duffy 2012.

Employment status of LAC users



The programme had 6 key project aims:

- Enable users to easily access support and services if required;
- Help users to identify personal strengths, goals and needs;
- Help users reduce their demand on services not best placed to meet their needs;
- Help users to feel less isolated;
- Help users to connect and feel part of community life;
- Advise users of and if necessary refer to yet untapped services.

The pilot had 8 Local Area Coordinator individuals (LACs), looking after specific districts in Ipswich, Sudbury, Beccles serving 16.4% of the entire County population. The LACs were approached or had people referred to them by the local community, and then directed users towards services relevant to them.

The Catalyst Project University of Essex ImpacTeam evaluated the LAC pilot programme by using mixed evaluation methods and analysing LAC data sources, stakeholder testimonials and survey responses. This evaluation indicated significant results in the following areas:

Facilitating access to support services:

- LACs linked 1 in 5 users to needed services, such as housing, employment and veteran's benefits thereby stratifying an effective and economic use of service.
- 1 in 10 users reported to have stopped using additional services after engaging with LACs.¹
- LACs referred 1 in 40 users to public health initiatives unknown to them, thereby providing health benefits to users that had previously been unmet.
- Visits to GP's were reduced by 20 visits per week indicating potential savings of approximately £625 weekly or freeing up appointment availability.

Reducing isolation:

- The project has increased perceived engagement in the community, and helped users overcome barriers related to living in rural areas.
- The project has helped 1 in 10 users share skills in the community.
- The project has directed users to volunteer and work experiences improving individual's perception of their contribution and role within their communities.

Improving wellbeing:

- Users reported an overall improvement in their perceptions of wellbeing increasing from an average 3 to an average 6 (on a scale of 1-10, where 10 means improved wellbeing).
- 1 in 2 users who set a goal to do more exercise reported that they had increased exercising.
- 1 in 5 users who set a goal to improve their eating habits reported that they are eating a healthier diet.

The Catalyst ImpactTeam at the University of Essex made the following recommendations for the LAC Programme:

- Maintain programme momentum and increase the number of Local Area Coordinators. This will allow for future initiatives to be built on existing LAC networks and knowledge. It will also allow continued saving through reduced GP visits.
- Review and expand user engagement to reach out to a more representative sector of the population. By increasing the number of LACs and therefore the areas they cover, LACs will be able to reach out to a more representative part of the population.
- Continued and improved measurement of performance metrics and key performance indicators in order to effectively monitor the programme's impact.
- A further evaluation of the programme one year after the pilot to capture further impact and experiences.
- Measure service use in LAC areas before and after LAC implementation.

¹It is unclear at this stage whether this was only thanks to LAC facilitation, or whether other circumstances also helped improve users' lives and wellbeing.

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