

Appendix 1 - Managing demand and change through innovation

The workshop was chaired by Andy Gregg, Chief Executive of Lasa with a panel consisting of Margie Butler, Chief Executive of Mary Ward Legal Centre (MWLC) and Michael Ashe, Director of South West London Law Centre (SWLLC). The workshop provided an opportunity for those attending to ask questions.

Q: What challenges had the panel encountered within their organisations when appointed to their new roles.

Margie identified the introduction of the LSC's fixed fee system as a key issue for MWLC particularly in relation to cash flow and financial management systems due to the need to close cases before getting paid. Margie found that staff at MWLC had a good understanding of the fixed fee regimes and the importance of closing cases but the system still meant a significant change for staff to have to think about the financial implications of working with vulnerable clients. Margie also found that it was crucial to work with trustees in order to adapt quickly to the changes taking place.

At SWLLC Michael started as Director on day 15 of the LSC contract. He came to manage five branches that weren't networked together and to line manage over 30 people. He found there was good will and commitment from staff. He quickly learned that that commitment to quality at the Law Centre was unsustainable, with members of staff faced with a dilemma of how to fit quality into a new system.

Margie added that during this time staff had to face the reality of unpaid wages. She said because organisations are not paid until cases are closed it can have a repercussion on people's salaries getting paid. This can be a challenging situation for members of staff committed to helping more severely challenged people. She said that if you don't deliver a contract you can't pay wages.

Michael said that both the cost base and commitment to quality are high. If organisations don't have a culture of or a structure of new matter starts then organisations may be more inclined to not operate than become inadequate. Compromising the quality can be seen as a challenge to the purpose of the charity sector.

Q: How to performance manage and motivate people against the backdrop of bringing money in?

Margie responded by saying that as senior manager you don't have time to engage with staff as much as you want to. Some suggestions for doing this include:

- It is important to manage expectations and give as much clear information as possible. MB doesn't like personal targets but team targets.
- Don't cut back on training and always keep it in budget.

- Recognition and open culture that has co-ordinators closer to the team and reaches people.
- Have fun celebrations like Christmas lunches that bring different activities to the team.
- Create a culture of management that reaches people

Michael said that SWLLC has appointed managers for each of its sites so that caseworkers have direct access to management. SWLLC also has an operations manager. The Law Centre moved from open/closed matter starts targets to cash targets. Managers have enabled staff to talk about worries and have honest dialogue about quality and how are you going to deliver the targets. He said that the bottom line though is that you may need to tell staff that this is a publicly funded organisation and this is what is expected of you.

Q: Question on influencing

Margie said it was important to lobby Ministers regularly. She added that there is a need to be talking to them and using examples from frontline agencies. Organisations such as AdviceUK are important in terms of social policy and challenging decisions. We must continue to lobby. It is a waste of our resources to be appealing decisions that were bad in the first place.

Michael agreed that regular contact with Ministers was important. He recently had a meeting with Ministry of Justice who hadn't been briefed of the fact SWLLC had been bailed out and was a model for reforming legal aid payment systems. Michael said that he thought charities under the most recent new Labour government had turned in to Not-for-Profit businesses. He asked: Are we talking about clients where we have duties to them or are they customers? He added that he thought applying a market-consumer model doesn't work but that we have to play the game for as long as it takes.

Q: Question on finance

Margie said that having up to date financial information and cash flow is crucial. This information needs to be right every month so that you know if you are not meeting your targets. Early intervention is essential. She also said that Management Committees also need to have this information and referring to local councillors and MPs is also essential.

Michael said that in September 2009 SWLLC was on the verge of going into administration so being straight with trustees was crucial in relation to going ahead and knowing the risks involved. During this time he said that he brought together all information learned over last 2 years and put a plan in place with the help of an external consultant. He recommends the support available on pro-bono professional work as it is added value and opens up other opportunities for back office support.

Pro-bono is particularly useful in that it can provide out-of-hours services and work in different areas of law.

Margie said that their experience highlights the importance of partnership working with other organisations such as sharing back office costs between two organisations and financial management. She said that she thought partnership work can also lead to partnership support around bidding for funding.

- Q: What is there available for organisations not in a position to bid for contracts?**
- Q: Concerned how all the cuts and focus on productivity will result in discrimination by employers.**
- Q: People should reflect more on the issues affecting small community centres. LSC and local authorities discriminate small groups.**

Michael suggested that working closely with partners and making the best use of resources and trying to make agreements with other organisations over the type of work you do is important. He also said that it is important to be honest with partners as early as possible and to have frequent meetings about day to day tasks. He also said that family friendly work policies and working from home can help staff. He mentioned recent research from a solicitors' practice that had done three years of work trial that demonstrated that productivity went up.

A delegate attending the session said they were concerned about small organisations as the recommendations suggested by the panel don't apply to small organisations. Another delegate recommended that AdviceUK should develop other initiatives to support smaller groups. They said that there needed to be a new approach towards sustaining these dying out organisations.

Margie suggested that there was a need to -

- Prioritise limited resources
- Be clear to clients about the services that you offer and don't offer enabling you to better manage expectation
- Implement a triage service