



Service Level Agreement 2013-14 Report

**Prepared for Bridgend CBC
By Elaine Clayton, Chief Executive**

VALREC

The Valleys Regional Equality Council (VALREC) is a registered charity, company limited by guarantee and a not for profit organisation and have been in operation since 1997. We are a member led organisation with a diverse and growing membership of people drawn from local communities in the Valleys.

The County Boroughs we cover are Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Torfaen and they include some of Britain's highest levels of economic inactivity. Many groups and individuals do not or cannot participate in processes or access services because of barriers such as language, organisational culture, access, confidence and isolation. The work we do shows that the socio-economic groups we work with combined with factors such as disability; gender and ethnicity often results in very poor outcomes for people from working class backgrounds.

All the work we do is delivered in the form of a 'wrap around' service, helping people overcome issues that may directly or indirectly affect their everyday life. Everything we do is for and with the people we support and always with the aim of empowering them to take back control of their lives.

When someone asks for our help, we often find there are a number of other issues they are struggling to cope with and because they have taken steps to contact us, we will endeavour to help them as much as we can. This may be through telephone calls, form filling, transporting them to and from appointments. This is something other organisations do not have the flexibility to do and where we believe our service is unique.

As a regional equalities organisation working with those identified under the 2010 Equality Act as having 'protected characteristics', our overall aim is to engage with people who are 'excluded' or unequally treated because of their economic deprivation. These include people who are unable to get a sustainable job or a decent home; lack the skills or confidence to participate in their local communities.

A summary of how we achieve our aims is outlined below;

- Supporting those at risk of inequality and social exclusion through casework or activities.
- Engaging with other providers of specialist services to encourage development of mutual support systems.
- Liaising closely with service providers to raise awareness of the effects of isolation and exclusion.
- Identifying ways of addressing the vulnerability of individuals facing isolation and hostility.

We deliver various projects throughout the Valleys of South East Wales and are often recognised for our innovative methods of engagement and delivery which we are able to evidence, in particular our workshops/training and engagement. For example;

The Raising Skills and Aspirations of Young BME People Project in partnership with others; engages with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and European Economic Migrant (EEM) participants by assessing their needs, identifying appropriate support packages and provision of additional support to ensure their re-engagement in learning/employment processes and for some, re-engagement with society

The Increasing BME Employment and Tackling Economic Inactivity Project in partnership with others; enables economically inactive and unemployed black and minority ethnic individuals to gain sustainable employment by focussing delivery of training and support to people to raise their participation and progression in the labour market. This also complements and adds value to statutory provision and extends services to groups not engaging with the provision, which include a high proportion of the economically inactive, particularly women.

The Minorities are Wales Resources Project in partnership with others; enables people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and European Economic Migrant (EEM) communities to make a fuller contribution to the economy of Wales by raising their skills levels and improving their employment prospects, living conditions with the overall aim of contributing towards their development so they become less and less dependent on mentoring and support. The target groups' performance in employment has been enhanced through outreach, confidence building, mentoring and support, language support and referred skills training.

All of the above projects also work with people, who are not from BME and EEM backgrounds, including those that are disabled and/or elderly.

The following are an example of the methods we use which result in positive outcomes:

- **Mentoring** – participants have developed skills which have motivated them to progress to more testing learning routes and higher level qualifications.
- **Work Experience** – participants have gained access to a wider range of opportunities, including volunteering which has extended their knowledge of choice and progression.
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- **Volunteering** – participants have progressed to become translators/interpreters which have been utilised within their own projects; delivered their own Information Communication Technology (ICT) workshops.
- **ICT** – Participants have developed skills which have enabled them to deliver their own workshops to other participants; built their own computers; developed mobile apps; designed a local Civic Centre in 3D which has been uploaded onto Google Earth Maps so anyone in the world can see it.
- **Courses and Qualifications** – SIA Security; CSCS Construction; Food Hygiene; Beauty; Customer Care, all of which have resulted in participants gaining employment or starting their own businesses. VALREC also developed an innovative approach when arranging live interviews with employers which gave them the opportunity to identify areas they may need to improve when seeking employment.
- **Advocacy/Advice** - We also provide practical support in accessing social welfare services such as filling in forms and providing representation where need has arisen. This is done through regular one-to-one support/mentoring and often includes visits to homes or schools; through referrals and by signposting to other projects.

We believe the work we do makes a powerful contribution to individuals' lives, to their families, and to good relations between people of different backgrounds and with your help we continue to provide this level of service.

Bridgend County Borough Council

The financial contribution that VALREC receives from BCBC is used to sustain the organisation and allows the Chief Executive to not only manage the team of people and volunteers working within the organisation; manage existing projects; design and deliver training and support casework but also to identify additional funding with the aim of further sustaining the organisation.

Currently, VALREC are waiting to hear the outcome of 2 bids which have been submitted to the Welsh Government's Equality and Inclusion Grant. One is to run a pilot project in Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taff for Transgender people and their families; these areas have been identified through casework and also in recognition of the continued support that Bridgend has given us over the last few years. The second bid is as part of a consortium that will support the Hate Crime Framework for Wales and again, Bridgend are recognised within this bid.

I am also submitting a second stage bid to the Big Lottery for another Transgender project which will take over once the Pilot Project has come to an end. This project will cover all the Boroughs we currently work within and will be based on the work undertaken within Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

VALREC are currently supporting 106 people who are recognised as having 'protected characteristics'. These people either live or work in Bridgend and fall between the ages of 7 through to 60+. The support is currently being provided either through direct engagement; provision of advice and advocacy services or casework and is part funded through the Service Level Agreement that we have with the local authority.

Due to the diversity of the people we work with, the support offered is varied and often determined by individual needs. However, it is important to note that there are some similarities in issues such as poor access to education, health and social welfare services which affect all the people we support.

Casework

In this current financial year VALREC have worked with 15 individuals who have been the victim of ongoing low level hate incidence through to those suffering as a direct result of a hate crime. These are broken down as follows; Race 6, Disability 4, Homophobic 3, Transgender 2.

The provision of casework support has the largest impact on our limited resources and while there is an expectation that other organisations should provide the service, it is unfortunate that they feel they do not have the

experience or knowledge required and often results in them referring people back to us.

When talking about casework, there is often an assumption that this consists of a bit of letter writing and then the 'case is closed' and for some organisations this is the most they are able to offer. However, we are fortunate that due to the funding we receive from yourselves; our commitment and involvement goes much deeper.

The cost of funding Casework can range from £1000 for a straightforward case which would require approximately 10 hours staff time and would cover; receipt of referral, initial contact made with client through telephone/email and/or letter to arrange a meeting, travel to clients home or place where they feel most comfortable to meet, initial meeting which is never less than 2-hours, follow up telephone calls/emails and/or letters to relevant agencies while making sure the client receives copies of everything we do, meetings with other agencies if relevant and final meeting with client

More complex cases however, can cost between £3000 to £4000 as they will require a heavier investment of staff time (often 20-30 hours minimum) and while all of the above will still apply, this would increase due to the type of case and level of representation required; e.g. employment tribunals.

Using the examples given above, 2 complicated cases and 5 straightforward cases could cost us 11k and we have/are working with more than this in Bridgend.

Advice and Advocacy

All the work we do is delivered in the form of a 'wrap around' service, helping people overcome issues that may directly or indirectly affect their ability to look for work; retain employment; access services, etc.

Vocational support is provided in many ways but includes; assistance with CV writing, job applications, identifying work placements, volunteering and training opportunities.

We also provide practical support in accessing social welfare services such as filling in forms and providing advocacy representation where need has arisen; ESOL Classes and Volunteering opportunities, etc. This is done through regular one-to-one support/mentoring and often includes visits to homes or schools; through referrals and by signposting to other projects such as Victim Support, CAB, etc.

In addition to the varied support/advocacy services we provide, we have run a number of courses which are detailed below;

Food Hygiene x 3; First Aid x 2; Health & Safety; Manual Handling; European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) x 2; Customer Care; CV Writing; Interview Skills & Preparation.

We also ran a number of courses for shopkeepers with the aim of raising awareness about the law and the selling of goods to underage people, e.g. cigarettes and alcohol. These courses were attended by a number of shopkeepers from Bridgend and included an element of hate crime awareness raising. All those that attended confirmed they experience hate crime on a regular basis especially if refusing to sell goods to people. This is something that is being addressed through our project work.

All of these courses have been funded by VALREC including hire of venues, tutor costs, etc.