



Service Level Agreement 2013-14 Report (October – March)

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

Organisational Background

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.

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 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

Finance - 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.

Because of the further tightening of expenditure in the next financial year and onwards, VALREC as with many others in the third sector, will continue to face some difficult challenges for which we are already addressing through the formation of new partnerships and innovative working practices.

VALREC is the only locally based provider of equality services in the South Wales Valleys; and unfortunately, the area we cover is one of the greatest pockets of deprivation in Western Europe which is evidenced by the continuation of European funding.

Undoubtedly this economic decline can fuel jealousy, intolerance and bigotry in hard pressed communities. The current staff of VALREC are in the front line in resisting this trend and are determined that the valuable work undertaken to date will continue.

Projects - 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;

Identity Project - Although our consortium bid to the Welsh Governments Equality and Inclusion Grant to support the Hate Crime Framework for Wales was not successful; an additional bid (in partnership with Swansea YMCA) was successful for a project which aims to support and empower young people aged 14-25 years with the protective characteristics of:

- Race (including ethnic or national origin, colour or nationality, to include Gypsies and Travellers and Asylum Seekers and Refugees)
- Sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment

This project will operate for 3 years and will provide confidence-building to enable young people with protective characteristics to gain the confidence & skills to exercise their rights & make informed choices, combating isolation during their often difficult transition to adulthood, employment, training or further education.

Hate Crime Advocacy and Empowerment Project - The Hate Crime Advocacy and Empowerment Project is a three-year project to pilot the use of independent advocacy for victims of hate crime and empower communities affected by hate crime in the South East Wales area. A consortium application made to the Big Lottery has been successful and we are due to start recruiting very soon.

Transgender Project- This project will seek to improve the lives of transgender people and their families and to raise awareness of a complex subject matter. As a result of Transgender people being satisfied with the support they have received from VALREC, there are a number of people waiting to access our services but without additional resources we are not able to work with them in an effective manner.

We will know if this application has been successful on 6th August 2014.

Advice Giving Project – A consortium bid has been submitted for the provision of a service which can offer direct advice relating to welfare benefits; housing; debt; money management and discrimination.

We will know if this application has been successful by 25th July 2014.

Raising Skills and Aspirations of Young BME People - This project which engaged with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and European Economic Migrant (EEM) young people ended in January 2014.

Increasing BME Employment and Tackling Economic Inactivity – This project enables economically inactive and unemployed black and minority ethnic individuals to gain sustainable employment which should have ended in August 2013 has now received a further extension until March 2015.

Minorities are Wales Resources - This project enables people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and European Economic Migrant (EEM) communities to make a fuller contribution to the economy of Wales which was due to end in June 2014 has now been extended until December 2014.

Casework - During the last 6-months, VALREC opened 35 case files as a result of supporting 21 individuals. It is worth noting that the number of case-files processed reflect the resources and capacity of VALREC and are not a reflection of the extent of discrimination or of the level of demand on our services.

Race 11

Disability 4

Homophobic 4

Transgender 2.

These cases include;

- IPCC appeal against South Wales Police
- Grievance against employer – racism x 2

These figures do not include the number of people who have accessed the same services through VALREC's individual projects. Taking this additional information into account increases the overall figure to over 60.

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.

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.

Advice and Advocacy - In the last 6-months VALREC have supported 175 people who are recognised as having 'protected characteristics' (this in addition to the 21 cases). 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.

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.

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

- Managing Underage Sales Prevention Level 2*
- Food Safety Level 2
- Manual Handling Training 2
- Health & Safety Training Level 2
- First Aid Training Level 2
- CSCS Card
- Customer Care

**The managing underage sales prevention courses continue to be popular and awareness of the level and types of hate crime shopkeepers face on a regular basis, especially when refusing to sell alcohol is proving to be a useful discussion point.*

Several workshops have been run throughout the Borough to assist people with; CV writing, job searches and completing applications forms to secure employment.

A number of individuals have been provided with support and guidance to access bespoke training which is allowing them to establish and further develop their own businesses.

Partnership working has been undertaken with the following, either through training or direct guidance/support;

- Bridgend Coalition of Disabled People
- Mental Health Matters
- Bridgend Deaf Club & Bridgend Deaf Association
- Stroke Association
- Bridgend People First
- ABFABB
- South Wales Police
- Bridgend College
- Disability Sports Development
- AMBU Health Board
- Transgender Wales
- Bridgend County Borough Council

VALREC continues to attend and actively contribute to the following groups/forums;

- Hate Crime Review Group
- Bridgend Equality Forum
- LGBT Bridgend Forum (Chair)
- Community Cohesion Group