

Building for Strength Background

Building for Strength is a unique partnership that brings together six of the main Voluntary and Community Sector infrastructure support and representation organisations in Reading in a 3-year project to engage, support, develop and build capacity within African and Caribbean groups, new immigrant communities, harder to reach Faith communities and other small under resourced community based groups.

The partners:

- Reading Council for Racial Equality (RCRE), which works to empower local communities, collaborates strategically to improve equality and provides advocacy and support to individuals. RCRE is lead agent for the project and also manages the Uni Regional BME Step Up Project in the South East. www.rcre.org.uk
- The African Caribbean Community Group (ACCG) formed to address the disjointed working of the African and Caribbean voluntary organisations in Reading. It aims to bring organisations together to network and share resources and build infrastructure support to strengthen and enable them to develop services to better meet local need and to increase their confidence and influence. www.accqcentre.co.uk,
- SAKOMA is the main forum for Black and other ethnic minority groups in Reading, comprising 30+ member organisations, providing a platform for the voice of minority groups to influence decision makers. www.sakoma.co.uk
- Reading Faith Forum (RFF) is a broad based and growing forum for groups of all faiths in Reading, which is seeking to engage more deeply with harder to reach faith groups in established communities and those within the newer immigrant communities of Reading. www.readingfaithforum.com
- Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) is the largest provider of office, meeting space and other facilities to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Reading. www.risc.org.uk
- Reading Voluntary Action (RVA), as the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), is the leading voluntary sector infrastructure organisation for Reading, currently managing the BASIS 1 Stronger Together Project. www.r-v-a.org.uk

Strategic Context and Needs

Reading is a compact urban area with one of the most diverse communities in the South East, especially in relation to African groups, and stark contrasts between affluent and disadvantaged neighbourhoods and communities. With an estimated population just under 150,000, Reading serves a population up to twice this level from the surrounding areas, especially in respect of faith, cultural and social activities and other support services for BME groups.

In recent years there has been further significant immigration into Reading from the A8 EU countries, particularly Poland, East and Southern African countries and from parts of South Asia. Whilst it is well established that there is an urgent need to support the development of new groups from some of the African communities, conversely little is known about some other groups' needs, particularly in the major Polish community.

The BASIS 1 funded *Stronger Together* programme, has put in place the resources to support and develop key infrastructure and representation bodies, including SAKOMA and RFF, to strengthen the Voice of the Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors in Reading and their capacity to engage with and influence strategic partners.

Whilst this has facilitated the development, capacity and reach of these fora, there remain groups that are harder to reach for cultural reasons and require intensive focused engagement and support, that cannot be offered through mainstream fora resources.

The Change Up Reading consortium (CUR) has identified 4 key elements needed to further develop and support the voluntary sector, especially with regard to communities and underrepresented groups that have the greatest infrastructure needs:

1. The needs of African & Caribbean Communities to build capacity and skills to successfully provide community facilities and support.
2. Researching the needs and using community development techniques to engage new immigrant communities and harder to reach Faith Communities.
3. Addressing the needs of small and under resourced community based groups for accessible and flexible use of facilities to support their group activities.
4. Analysis and provision to meet the specific training and development needs of these target groups in a way that is relevant and accessible to them.

Building for Strength will complement the *Stronger Together* programme through directly addressing these needs.

Project Aims and Delivery

The Partnership will establish support and development services to improve the quality and availability of infrastructure support and representation for Reading's African and Caribbean, Asian and first generation EU immigrant communities, together with access to basic office services for numerous under resourced community based groups.

Building for Strength will be delivered through a number of complementary and interlocking strands, with extensive joint working by the project partners who are able to approach grassroots engagement from a number of cultural and faith directions, but clear responsibility for the lead on each of the main project areas:

- SAKOMA will take the lead on the mapping and researching needs of new immigrant communities, with follow-up development work shared between partners.
- ACCG will take the prime role in providing development work and support services for the African and Caribbean groups that are engaging with the provision and future use of a new community centre.
- SAKOMA will lead on work with groups from some African countries who have been identified as self excluded from engagement with mainstream support and infrastructure.
- RFF will lead on the engagement, support and development of hard to reach Faith groups.
- RCRE will lead on provision of the hot-desks facilities and associated training and support, but deliver the service in conjunction with RISC.
- RISC will lead on the development and delivery of the comprehensive training programme

Three development workers will be employed as the key project resources to map new communities and groups, identify needs, build knowledge, skills and capacity and facilitate engagement with mainstream fora and effective representation of their communities'

needs. A full time development worker will be employed by

ACCG, with half-time workers employed by RVA and RCRE on behalf of RFF and SAKOMA respectively.

A valuable additional outcome of the project will be the mutual skills sharing, learning and support that takes place between Building for Strength partners.

Project Management

The Partnership has been formalised through a Partnership Agreement, which sets out the individual and collective roles and responsibilities of the respective members. There will be quarterly meetings of the Partnership; the Partnership Board, this will exercise a strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation role in ensuring the effective delivery of the project, working through an agreed Annual Plan derived from the overall project plan.

RCRE is the lead organisation and has substantial experience in partnership working and project management. RCRE will be responsible to BIG Lottery for delivery of the project in accordance with the BIG Terms and Conditions and will provide overall management, co-ordination and administration services for the project.

Individual development workers will be managed by their respective organisations, supported by employing partners as appropriate. However, to ensure coordination and consistency there will also be a development workers group meeting monthly.