

Building Voluntary and Community Sector Involvement in Integrated Offender Management

**Integrated Offender Management:
The rural partnership challenge**

April 2012

Resource 7 of 7

Home Office

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work with offenders and their families

1. Introduction

This is the seventh in a series of resources that draw on the learning from *Voluntary and Community Sector Involvement in Integrated Offender Management*, a programme that was funded by the Home Office and managed by Clinks.¹

It is primarily intended to help key stakeholders involved in local Integrated Offender Management (IOM) arrangements to consider how best to involve local Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations as partners in more dispersed rural areas, but it may equally help VCS organisations based in rural locations to think about how they might develop a more effective partnership with statutory agencies. The other resources in the series include:

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- Resource 1** The added value of VCS partners in Integrated Offender Management arrangements
- Resource 2** Mapping and engaging with potential VCS partners
- Resource 3** The potential brokerage role of Local Support and Development Organisations²
- Resource 4** How VCS organisations can engage with local IOM arrangements and other Criminal Justice System (CJS)
- Resource 5** Strategic partnership working
- Resource 6** Operational partnership working

The series is accompanied by a number of online supplements which provide additional material to support all seven resources:

- Supplement 1** Integrated Offender Management: A briefing
- Supplement 2** Overview of the project: *Building Voluntary and Community Sector Involvement in Integrated Offender Management*
- Supplement 3** Glossary of acronyms
- Supplement 4** Bibliography and linked resources

¹ Clinks is a national membership organisation that supports the work that Voluntary and Community Sector organisations undertake within the Criminal Justice System of England and Wales. Their vision is to see an independent, vibrant and well-resourced Voluntary and Community Sector, working in partnership to promote the rehabilitation of offenders. For more information see <http://www.Clinks.org>

² LSDO: Local Support & Development Organisation – a charitable body such as a Council for Voluntary Service that typically provides a range of support services for all the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations within its area. This might include help with organisational development, funding advice, training, and co-ordinating the sector's engagement with and representation on local strategic groupings. Many LSDOs have Volunteer Centres attached to their organisations or work very closely with them.

2. Background

Levels of VCS involvement in IOM appear to vary considerably from place to place.³ A 2009 NOMS-commissioned evaluation of VCS involvement in four national IOM pioneer sites found that although in three of the four sites a number of larger VCS organisations were closely involved as full delivery partners within IOM arrangements, a much wider set were only engaged with more sporadically as referral agencies.⁴ The same three sites involved at least one VCS organisation on their project steering groups, but across all four sites the involvement of the Sector as a full strategic partner was negligible.

It was against this background that Clinks was invited to work in partnership with the Home Office between November 2010 and April 2011, to strengthen the role of the VCS in IOM in four different 'development and demonstration' areas: Bournemouth, Dorset & Poole; Croydon; Gloucestershire; and Leeds.⁵ Crucially, it was stipulated that grants could only be awarded to projects led by local VCS organisations. Statutory partners involved in IOM needed to give their support to the proposals, but could not hold the funds or direct the work undertaken. The Home Office was keen to use this mechanism to give the VCS a stronger foothold, and to see how far it enabled the VCS to develop a more equal role in strategic local IOM arrangements.

Each local programme of work was overseen by a VCS-led, multi-agency steering group. In three areas the lead agencies were Local Support and Development Organisations (LSDOs); in the fourth, the leading role was taken by a key local VCS provider.⁶ A wide range of activity was funded across the four areas, which could broadly be categorised under four main headings:

- Establishing strategic partnerships and capacity building within the VCS to engage with local IOM arrangements;
- Developing and delivering innovative services to offenders managed under IOM arrangements;
- Providing opportunities for volunteering and mentoring with and by offenders managed under IOM arrangements;
- Piloting the use of small seed-corn grants to involve small VCS organisations.

The Hallam Centre for Community Justice at Sheffield Hallam University was commissioned by the Home Office to undertake an evaluation of the project.⁷ One of the aims of the evaluation process was to capture the very diverse experiences of all the organisations involved in the programme which could be used to help others to develop the role of VCS partners in their local IOM arrangements. These factors were analysed and collated as part of the evaluation and have very much informed the development of this series of resources.⁸

³ See Supplement 1 for more information about IOM.

⁴ Kevin Wong & Christopher Hartworth. 2009. *Integrated Offender Management and Third Sector Engagement: Case studies of four pioneer sites*.
Online: <http://www.barefootresearch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Integrated-Offender-Management-and-Third-Sector-Engagement%E2%80%A6.pdf>
[Last accessed 24/1/12]

⁵ See Supplement 2 for more information about the project.

⁶ LSDO: Local Support & Development Organisation – a charitable body such as a Council for Voluntary Service that typically provides a range of support services for all the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations within its area. This might include help with organisational development, funding advice, training, and co-ordinating the sector's engagement with and representation on local strategic groupings. Many LSDOs have Volunteer Centres attached to their organisations or work very closely with them.

⁷ Kevin Wong, Caroline O'Keeffe, Linda Meadows, Joanna Davidson, Hayden Bird, Katherine Wilkinson & Paul Senior. 2012. *Increasing the voluntary and community sector's involvement in Integrated Offender Management*.
Online: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/horr59/> [Last accessed 14/03/2012]

⁸ This resource draws heavily on the practice learning from the evaluation of *Building Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Involvement in Integrated Offender Management*, undertaken by the Hallam Centre for Community Justice at Sheffield Hallam University. See also Kevin Wong *et al.* 2012.

3. The rural partnership challenge

Both statutory and VCS organisations involved in *Building VCS Involvement in IOM* identified real progress in consolidating local relationships and developing the potential to involve a more diverse range of VCS organisations as strategic and operational partners within local IOM arrangements.

The added value of involving the VCS in this way, identified through the programme, included:

- **Specific skill and knowledge located within the VCS:** VCS partners are able to contribute distinct knowledge and skills, including extensive professional networks and local databases of service providers. They can readily collaborate as equal partners and make a significant contribution to IOM, strategically as well as operationally, thereby challenging the perception of the Sector as 'well-meaning amateurs'.
- **Strong links to local communities and awareness of local needs:** VCS organisations are usually already embedded within local communities and provide access to invaluable informal intelligence on the unique features of local areas, and the challenges within them. They can be a catalyst for community development and are also able to consult service users and promote good practice in user involvement to inform IOM approaches.
- **Addressing specific gaps in meeting offender needs:** The VCS is well positioned to support and address the diverse nature of locally identified offender needs, helping to deliver more holistic, individually tailored approaches. Seed-corn grants may be especially helpful in this respect, as they allow a diverse range of smaller, grassroots community organisations, with expertise in niche areas, to apply for funding to meet identified needs of this kind.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness:** Key stakeholders involved in IOM arrangements particularly value the ability of the Sector to work flexibly and responsively, without being slowed by the perceived bureaucracy associated with the statutory sector. VCS partners can bring a fresh perspective to the IOM agenda which complements the more traditional approach of statutory agencies. In addition, because VCS organisations do not have a formal enforcement role, they are well placed to build more trusting and empathic relationships with the offenders they are working with, and thereby provide important support for desistance.

While clearly recognising these benefits, it was acknowledged by all partners that harnessing the added value of partnership working with VCS organisations was considerably more difficult in a dispersed rural location. One of the programme areas (Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole) therefore undertook a small piece of research focused on the shire county of Dorset to raise awareness of local IOM arrangements within community partnerships and to explore the potential for small, rural VCS groups to engage with them. The research was undertaken by Dorset Community Action, the county's LSDO. This Resource reflects the learning from that work.⁹

⁹ Rachelle Smith. 2011. *Working with Offenders in Rural Areas. Report on the viability of community engagement in the Divert programme. IOM Project Strand 3: Research into the involvement of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Integrated Offender Management in Rural Dorset.* Online: <http://www.clinks.org/services/localism-work/iom#res> [Last accessed 15/03/2012]

4. The Dorset challenge

Dorset is a sparsely populated area in the south west of England. It has approximately 410,000 residents spread over a mainly rural area exceeding 2,500 square kilometres.¹⁰ The number of older people in the population is above average compared with the rest of England, and the number of people of working age is below average. Although unemployment is low, wages are also lower than the national average, and there are relatively fewer jobs in Dorset than in other areas. The county has no motorways and few dual carriageways. It is difficult to get in and out of the county to the north and west because of poor roads and limited alternative ways to travel, and public transport is not readily available. For many people it is therefore difficult to get to jobs, training, health services, leisure, shops, and other services.

Although Dorset is an affluent county with relatively low levels of reported crime, the overall figures mask a number of areas with high levels of deprivation and associated concentrations of offending behaviour. All of these issues clearly impact on the operational delivery of local IOM arrangements, which in Dorset is realised through the DIVERT programme. Allocation of scarce resources and co-location of statutory staff involved in DIVERT represent a significant challenge when the county's market and coastal towns are typically small and at some distance from one another and from HQs in the adjacent urban areas of Bournemouth and Poole. Compliance with community sentence requirements may also be extremely difficult for offenders living in dispersed rural communities who are managed through DIVERT.

The ability of the VCS in Dorset to respond to the needs within the community confronts the same challenges, and the Sector is relatively under-funded and under-developed, with a preponderance of very small volunteer-led community groups and relatively fewer large, staffed organisations.

Within the programme, initial mapping undertaken across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole therefore revealed only a handful of VCS organisations working in rural Dorset whose sole remit is to work with offenders. The following case study describes the challenges faced by the best known of these, Footprints, in terms of its capacity to engage with offenders managed under IOM arrangements in outlying rural areas.

Footprints

Footprints is a charity that mentors men and women leaving prison and returning to Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole and South Somerset. Across this large area, the service is delivered by a pool of 20+ volunteers of whom around 30% are ex-offenders and / or substance misusers, and who between them are mentoring 30-40 people at any one time. The aim of the service is to enable users to re-integrate back into their local communities, re-build family relationships, get their lives in order, and to help them make a contribution to society without re-offending.

Within Dorset itself, Footprints currently has 6 mentors covering Weymouth, Dorchester and the surrounding villages, but none in the Lyme Regis / Bridport area or Purbeck. They have one mentor in Frome (Somerset) who covers any offenders in the Sherborne area. The prison effective resettlement co-ordinator in HMP Guys Marsh covers the Gillingham area, and the volunteers in Bournemouth and Poole cover East Dorset.

¹⁰ Data taken from the 2010 Comprehensive Area Assessment.
Online: <http://oneplace.audit-commission.gov.uk/infobyarea/region/area/areaassessment/pages/thelocalarea.aspx?region=54&area=339>
[Last accessed 15/03/2012]

Whether or not one knows this geography, the challenges of covering a rural county like Dorset safely and effectively with a relatively small pool of volunteers are clear. Although Footprints has the capacity to train, manage and supervise a larger number of more dispersed volunteers, they would need extra resources to do so. “Outreach volunteers” would need to be recruited in order to reach service users living in outlying villages, and their associated supervision and travel costs would be higher than in the urban setting.

Time would also need to be invested in building relationships with individual, locally based DIVERT staff, to develop mutual trust and ensure a good flow of information, appropriate referrals, and effective risk management.

The research identified a number of other VCS and user-led organisations already working with offenders in some of the larger towns in South Dorset that expressed an interest in expanding into the rural areas, if they could attract the necessary funding.

A number of Citizens’ Advice Bureaux in market towns across the county also recognised offenders as a particularly needy group and voiced interest in acting as a local ‘portal’ to a range of services, in partnership with other VCS providers such as the credit union and Shelter.

Other VCS organisations without any history of work with offenders indicated a willingness to be involved in local IOM arrangements. For example, the Unitarian Chapel in Bridport was already offering its premises to a peer support group of the Dorset Mental Health Forum and indicated it might be able to do the same for activities linked to local IOM arrangements.

It therefore appeared that there was considerable potential to involve VCS partners more actively in local IOM arrangements across rural Dorset, but that statutory partners would need to invest time to tap into and develop these resources, as well as helping to capacity build existing VCS organisations through, for example, advice on funding opportunities, direct help in preparing bids, and the provision of data about local offender needs.

One of the main challenges identified in this respect was the lack of awareness within rural communities of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) or its work with offenders. Dorset’s status as one of the safest places in England means that there is a relatively low fear of crime. The research therefore found that crime reduction did not feature as a high priority or high profile issue in rural community plans:

Parish plans, which are essentially the lowest level of community planning and are based usually on one village or occasionally a cluster of hamlets and villages, had relatively little to say on crime. The main community safety priority is road safety, with speeding through the village easily outweighing other issues.¹¹

¹¹ Rachelle Smith. 2011.

5. The potential for supportive community involvement

Despite these difficulties the research found that, once the awareness of community partners was raised, they expressed significant interest in, and support for, altruistic voluntary activity that would help offenders desist from crime and re-integrate into their local communities.

The potential for supportive community involvement

In seeking to raise awareness of local IOM arrangements (the DIVERT programme), the researcher managed to speak to and circulate information about DIVERT to a wide variety of community partnerships including the Blandford Area Partnership, Sturminster Newton Area Partnership, Beaminster and Villages Local Area Partnership, Dorchester Area Partnership, Portland Community Partnership and West Dorset Community Partnership. Information was also circulated via the Dorset Association of Town and Parish Councils.

Discussion in these meetings ranged over a number of issues in addition to DIVERT, including community payback schemes, restorative justice and young offenders. In general the response of the community partnerships was 'surprisingly supportive', and all considered they could think of members of their communities who would be interested in getting involved in supporting local IOM arrangements.

For example, in Sturminster Newton one active member of the committee had previously worked at the Princes Trust and helped with a scheme based in HMP Guys Marsh that had worked very well. Another member was a retired Probation Officer. This group therefore believed it could potentially offer an effective signposting service for offenders. Its community office was somewhere they believed offenders would always find a friendly face and wide range of information, as it was also the venue for the Job Club and credit union.

This goodwill was thought to need effective channelling and leadership, however, and community partnership members asked for more specifics about the kind of help that DIVERT was seeking from them. There was a strong feeling that, although there would be interest within the community in engaging with local IOM arrangements, a co-ordinating role (e.g. within Probation) would be needed to make it happen and to take a central role in risk assessment, vetting and the provision of guidance.

Members were also clear that local volunteers would need to be trained, managed and supported, and that offenders might not want to be mentored or supported by neighbours. They felt that, to be effective, all support would need to be immediate, starting in the courts or at the prison gate. One group highlighted the potential for funding to be sought from a local charitable trust to develop a properly managed volunteer scheme.

These were areas for potential development that the researcher felt could be readily picked up by the statutory partners involved in the DIVERT Team and through Dorset Community Safety Partnership, which had identified as one of its five priorities for the coming year "to work with those individuals and groups at risk of offending".

It was also recommended that interested VCS organisations and community groups should be encouraged to join the VCS Forum, newly established in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole to bring together organisations working with offenders, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending. This would enable more collaborative approaches and schemes to be developed, with appropriate support from statutory partners involved in the DIVERT programme.

6. Implications for partnership working in other rural areas

It would appear from this admittedly small piece of work that there is interest and potential locked up within diverse existing VCS organisations, and in rural communities, for the development of supportive work with offenders, explicitly linked to local IOM arrangements.

A pre-requisite for the success of such work will be the investment of time to raise awareness within VCS organisations and communities of the work undertaken by statutory CJS agencies with offenders, and to enlist their involvement.

Rural LSDOs are likely to have existing links with some very localised VCS groups and community partnerships, as indeed are Neighbourhood Policing Teams. There is therefore clear potential for collaborative work to be jointly planned and undertaken by rural LSDOs and statutory partners involved in rural IOM arrangements. For more guidance on partnership work of this kind, see Resource 3 - *The potential brokerage role of Local Support and Development Organisations*.

The focus of such joint work would initially be to engage with and raise awareness of local IOM arrangements among VCS groups and within rural communities and, in the longer term, to encourage the development of local networks of support for offenders managed under those arrangements.

It is clear however that the community's appetite to undertake voluntary work with, or to provide opportunities for, offenders managed under local IOM arrangements will need to be matched by in-kind or cash resources for their effective management and support, and clear systems to co-ordinate risk assessment, referrals, and the provision of ongoing guidance. At a time of scarce resources, rural VCS groups and communities may find it extremely difficult to access funding for new schemes in competition with their urban counterparts.

Existing VCS services in or adjacent to rural areas could also benefit from support to develop outreach strands of their existing delivery and to forge links with local communities or networks that could provide volunteers to support these functions. Statutory partners involved in rural IOM arrangements will therefore have a key role to play in providing advice on funding opportunities, help in preparing bids, and data about local crime and offender needs as well as providing support and in-kind contributions to facilitate effective partnership delivery.

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Author and editorial group

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Feedback or further information

If you have any feedback on the resources, are seeking further information about the programme, or would like to share your own advice/experiences on involving VCS organisations in IOM arrangements, please contact:

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