

Civic Participation Network project

Case studies: costs and benefits of implementing inclusive communication

Introduction

People in Scotland have a **right to equality of access** to services, activities and opportunities for active citizenship.

People with communication support needs are **represented** in **all communities** and interest groups in Scotland. These are individuals who require support to:

- understand (verbal and written information)
- express themselves.

Effective communication plays a **vital** role in offering equality of **access** to all.

Many **service providers recognise** this. However they **do not** always **change** their **practice** to make communication more inclusive.

This may be because **organisations**:

- **do not know what** to do or **how** to do it
- recognise the needs of people with sensory impairments but are **unaware** of other types of **communication support needs**
- feel **overwhelmed** by the **size** of the task and possible **cost**.

Inclusive communication

Communication is **inclusive** if we **recognise** that:

- individuals **understand** and **express** themselves in **different ways**
- all communication should follow **basic good practice** and **additional support** is offered when required.

It is important to **establish** a clear and **shared understanding** of what basic good communication practice looks like.

Positive impact of adopting inclusive communication

Many organisations are facing **difficult financial conditions** at present. Many **may see changing** the way they communicate with service users as a **costly luxury**.

Effective and **inclusive communication** will:

- **help** a service provider **reach** a wider, more diverse **audience**
- help organisations **engage** better with their **service users**
- improve **customer satisfaction**
- make sure people with communication support needs can **access services** more effectively and take an **active role** in **civic society**.
- help organisations achieve their **equality obligations**.

There is **positive impact** for the service user, the service and the service provider.

How to develop inclusive communication

The **Talk for Scotland toolkit** offers **practical advice** to assist service providers to put communication support into practice. The advice is based on **6 Communication Support Principles**.

If organisations **adopt** these Principles their communication will be **more inclusive**.

Costs and benefits of implementing inclusive communication

We have produced a variety of **case studies** to highlight some of the **costs** and **benefits** of implementing **inclusive communication**.

The case studies provide a flavour of the **different approaches** that organisations can adopt.

They are not based on the development of a strategy document.

They **show achievable practical action** you can take as you progress towards an inclusive communication environment. **Some actions** have **minimal financial cost**.

They were done in **partnership** with:



Civic Participation Network Project Reference Group



Scottish Disability Equality Forum, Lochaber Access Panel



Inverclyde Council



Young Scot

The **results** show that:

- There are **significant benefits** as well as costs in adopting inclusive communication
- **Costs** can be **reduced** if accessible communication is **considered** in the **planning stage**
- There is **not always** a **direct cost** in offering communication support
- **All organisations** can take some **simple practical steps** to improve their inclusive communication

Top practical tips from the case studies

- Start taking **practical action now**. A **strategic plan** is **important** for the **longer term**. Don't wait until it is perfect.
- **Small actions** may **not cost** anything. They can make a **real difference**. For example: set ground rules for all meetings. This can make the difference between a service user being able to take part or not.
- **Costs** are often in terms of **time**. But taking time at the **beginning** to get it right **saves time** in the long run.
- **Include** training about **communication support** as part of general **customer care training**. **Find out** if front line **staff** are **reluctant to ask** if an individual requires support and why.
- People with communication support needs do **not** necessarily **need special equipment** to **access training**. But they may require **extra time**.
- When **reviewing** communication and **developing new materials** include **service users** with diverse communication support needs.
- When **procuring services** ask about a **provider's understanding** and **commitment to inclusive communication**.
- **Commission designers** who **understand inclusion** as well as good design.
- **Hire a loop system** if a venue does not have one (**about £20**).
- **Produce written information** that is **compatible** with **assistive technology** software. **Buy** computer **software** for **online training** that is **compatible** with **assistive technology**. This will **reduce** need for **alternative formats**.
- It is **every department's responsibility** to **communicate** in an **accessible way**. It is **helpful** to have a **champion** in an organisation to lead the initiative.

Process

This has been a difficult time for organisations in terms of **financial uncertainty** and restructuring. There has been **limited capacity** to undertake extra activities.

Changes of personnel have **reduced momentum** in some cases. Key individuals with communication support needs have faced **health issues**. However this is a reflection of **real life** and organisations have **made progress** despite the challenges.

In order to fit with an organisation's agenda **each case study** was **approached differently** and shows **different aspects** of working towards inclusive communication.

Recommendations to organisations

- **Audit** where you are now.
- **Involve service users** who have communication support needs in the audit.
- **Decide what** you want to achieve.
- **Identify the barriers**. Some barriers are easy to identify e.g. complex language. Others are more fundamental e.g. values and attitudes.
- Take **small steps immediately**. These will make a difference
- **Use the Talk for Scotland** toolkit to achieve it.

Thanks

To **everyone** who took part.