



CASE STUDY: Anytown Women's Centre

History

Anytown Women's Centre (AWC) is registered charity and has been established for 10 years; it has provided the same services for women over that time: counselling (3 days a week), crèche (3 days a week), and IT and personal development training courses. Seven women's support groups also meet at the Centre. Demand for services has been steady, especially for the training courses.

Over the past two years the demographics of Anytown have begun to change with two different refugee communities moving into the area. To date they do not make use of the services of AWC.

Mission: To improve the quality of life for disadvantaged women in Anytown by providing support, advice and education.

Staff and Volunteers: AWC has 6 paid staff: Co-ordinator, crèche worker, counsellor (each working 3 days p.w.) and 3 sessional trainers. AWC has 10 volunteers – 2 are counsellors (newly trained but needing experience), 2 support the crèche, 2 support the training sessions and 4 volunteers do admin and reception tasks.

Management Committee

The AWC constitution requires that there be a minimum of 5 women on the management committee. At present there are six trustees, four of whom are active members of the committee. All trustees are required to be living in Anytown, two are ex service users, who are keen supporters of AWC and bring their own life experiences to the management committee.

Funding:

- Counselling service is funded by a charitable trust for another 2 years,
- IT and personal development training is funded by the local authority for another 9 months; however, this funding is unlikely to continue due to significant cuts in the local authority budget
- Crèche provision is funded partly through the counselling service grant and partly through local authority funding for training courses, so this service is also likely to lose funding.
- AWC also has some income from hiring out its meeting space to support groups and other organisations, membership fees and a few individual donations.
- AWC has a small reserve of approximately 3 months funding

Strategic planning

The AWC management committee meeting in June decided that a strategic plan needed to be developed to enable the organisation to plan ahead through the times of funding uncertainty and to make sure that AWC was still meeting its mission statement.

A strategic planning working group was set up over the summer including a member of the management committee, the coordinator and a trainer. The chair of the management committee let everyone know that a plan was being developed and that everyone would have a chance to comment.

At its first meeting in July the working group decided to organise a day for everyone in the organisation to discuss the mission statement and analyse the organisation’s strengths, weaknesses and the external environment.

In order to do this they made sure they had the following information:

Information on AWC: Data on who used the services, what services were most in demand, feedback from clients, the recent skills audit of management committee members, information from the funders on future plans, the current financial situation, information from a recent survey on training needs for women.

Information on the external environment: Changes to the demographics of Anytown, information on what other organisations were providing the same services, news of funders’ intentions regarding savings and cuts. The working group also looked at new central government policies to see how AWC might fit with their priorities

The meeting was organised for a Saturday in mid-September and the Centre was closed for the day. All 6 paid staff, 4 trustees, 5 volunteers and 3 service users participated in the meeting. After some discussion everyone agreed that the mission statement was still relevant and should remain the same.

After considering both external and internal information everyone contributed to a SWOT analysis which looked like this:

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of demand for counselling • Very good quality crèche provision (rated highly by OFSTED this year) • Free women-only IT courses receive positive feedback • Co-ordinator is very experienced and skilled • Premises are spacious and meet current service needs • Committed volunteers • Majority of management committee are actively involved • Good relationship with current funders 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsellor is overworked – 21 hrs p.w. post is not enough • Crèche is not fully used • Funding for training courses runs out in 6 months time • Core funding for Co-ordinator’s post is insecure – currently met by management costs in project grants • Premises are not centrally located • Co-ordinator does not have enough time to manage volunteers as well as she would like. • Need more management committee members • No experience of working with refugees
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Skills Funding Agency will be commissioning IT training in the next 6 months. 3-year contracts will be 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AWC has never gone through a commissioning process • Recession and increased levels of

<p>available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to increase earned income (could put in tenders for more training contracts and charge some women for crèche and/or counselling?) • Recession likely to increase demand for training and counselling services • New refugee communities need services 	<p>unemployment likely to reduce numbers of women able to pay for services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local training centre is also providing IT courses for unemployed people • National and local government making significant cuts in public spending.
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The group highlighted the following **strategic issues**:

- How can we meet the increasing demand for our existing services when we do not have enough paid staff?
- How can we increase the proportion of unrestricted income while continuing to meet our mission?
- How can we meet the needs of new refugee communities?
- How can we gain the skills we need to take advantage of new funding opportunities (particularly commissioning and social enterprise)?

The next step was to decide and prioritise AWC's main strategic aims. At this point there was a lot of debate, particularly regarding the possibility of charging for services, involving more volunteers and how to make links with new refugee communities. In the end, everyone agreed that AWC should prioritise the following **strategic aims**:

- 1 To deliver high quality counselling services to disadvantaged women
- 2 To deliver high quality training programmes for disadvantaged women
- 3 To increase access to AWC services by new refugee communities
- 4 To secure an increase in the proportion of unrestricted funds for AWC
- 5 To build a sustainable management committee and staffing structure

They wrote down the following ideas for how to address the above issues:

1. Increase fundraising from charitable trusts/foundations
2. Increase fundraising from individuals.
3. Expand the counselling service by recruiting and supporting (qualified) volunteer counsellors.
4. Ensure that the Co-ordinator (and a trustee?) attends training on commissioning and procurement.
5. Tender for contracts with the Skills Funding Agency.
6. Charge for an increased proportion of services (crèche, training and counselling).
7. Apply for consultancy support from the local business development agency to help AWC explore trading ideas and developing as a social enterprise.
8. Work to establish a partnership with other training organisations to increase the scope of training available to women and reduce duplication
9. Recruit management committee members that have marketing and financial skills
10. Employ a fundraiser
11. Recruit volunteers with experience of working with refugee communities
12. Investigate whether there are crèche services provided by other organisations locally.

The next step was for the working group to develop a plan of action for how the organisation will achieve their strategic aims.

They met in October and came up with a draft strategic plan:

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Responsibility
1. Deliver high quality counselling services to disadvantaged women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver counselling services as agreed with current funder • Seek funds for additional counselling hours from charitable trusts • Research market for counselling services to be provided on a fee basis 	<p>Counsellors</p> <p>Coordinator and management committee</p>
2. Deliver high quality training programmes for disadvantaged women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training programme as agreed with current funder • Approach funder for extension of funds for training programme • Work with local training centre to explore joint programmes 	<p>Coordinator and Trainers</p> <p>Coordinator and management committee</p>
3. Increase access to AWC services by refugee communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research needs of women from new refugee communities • Recruit volunteers from refugee communities 	<p>Coordinator</p> <p>Volunteers</p>
4. Increase proportion of unrestricted funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ fundraiser on contract to increase donations from individual donors • Establish a social enterprise committee to explore possibilities 	<p>Management Committee/Coordinator</p> <p>MC and Coordinator</p>
5. Build Sustainable management committee and staffing structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit new members of management committee • Develop and implement induction and governance training for new MC • Seek funding for core staff 	<p>Current members of MC</p> <p>Coordinator</p>

The working group sent the draft strategic plan to everyone who attended the planning day for comments. They met again in November to consider everyone’s comments, check that the aims and actions were SMART, met the needs of the organisation and were achievable.

The working group also checked and agreed that the strategic aims met the needs of women in the local community and AWC’s mission statement. They decided that a priority was to employ a fundraiser for a short time to put apply for funds to continue existing services and apply for a new volunteering project. Although this would involve some risk (spending the organisation’s reserves) it would free the Coordinator’s time to undertake the actions aimed at longer term sustainability, such as recruiting new MC members, improving her knowledge and skills for commissioning, exploring potential partnerships and developing ideas for selling services and earning income.

The revised strategic plan (including actions for the first 4 months) looked like this:

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Responsibility	By when?
1. Deliver high quality support and counselling services for disadvantaged women	• Deliver counselling services as agreed with current funder	Counsellors	ongoing
	• Employ fundraiser on contract to apply for funds from charitable Trusts to expand counselling service	Coordinator and management committee	Dec/Jan

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase involvement of volunteer counsellors 		March
2. Deliver high quality training programmes for disadvantaged women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training programme as agreed with current funder • Ensure full evaluation report is completed and sent to current funders and other relevant people. • Approach funder to check if training programme could be extended • Work with local training centre to explore joint programmes 	Coordinator and Trainers Coordinator and management committee	Ongoing March Jan Dec/Jan
3. Increase proportion of unrestricted funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Coordinator and at least one MC member attend training re: commissioning and procurement • Establish a social enterprise committee to explore possibilities for selling services • Research market for selling counselling and crèche services to the public 	Coordinator and management committee and volunteers	As soon as possible Jan/Feb Jan/Feb
4. Build Sustainable management committee and staffing structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit new members of management committee with commissioning and marketing skills and/or experience • Develop and implement induction and governance training for new MC • Employ fundraiser on contract to apply for funds from charitable Trusts to expand counselling service and develop a new volunteering project (including a part-time volunteer co-ordinator post) 	Current members of MC	Feb Jan/Feb Jan/Feb
5. Increase access to AWC services by refugee communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research needs of women from new refugee communities • Recruit volunteers from refugee communities 	Volunteers	March

Final Agreement

Once the working group were happy with the strategic plan it was circulated to all staff, management committee members, volunteers and interested service users. It was discussed at a management committee meeting and agreed.

The management committee asked the working group to meet quarterly and review progress towards achieving the strategic aims and objectives and to report back to the management committee. The working group would also be responsible for proposing follow up action and revisions to the plan – to be discussed and agreed by the management committee.