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University of Bradford Community Choices 4 All: Get Out Be Active




Profile

- Higher Education
- 11,235 students (includes full and part time students)
- 1675 staff
- Urban

About the project

Choices 4 all was established out of the legacy of Cycling 4 All (C4A) to enhance and diversify the activities offered to disabled students, graduates and members from within the local community. The project is a leadership programme that provides training and skills through student volunteering that introduces disabled people to sports, activities and social networks with a mixed ability approach. Through this, students become community leaders who are part of a Student Leadership Gamification Strategy enabling engaged students to gain accredited qualifications that allow them to deliver inclusive activities to the community.

The tagline for Choices 4 All is “Nurture, Maximize and Enrich” by creating environments that are accessible, sustainable and inclusive this enables disabled students to be at the heart of activities and services provided. Our coproduction and multi-agency approach is not only innovative for the university but also the sector; the sharing of knowledge and resources impacts health, socio-economic, wellbeing and sustainability.

Project partners

- Bradford Disability Sports Leisure
- IMAS (International Mixed Ability Sport)
- University of Bradford
- Inn Churches
- All Saints Primary School
- Southfield Grange Trust
- Leonard Cheshire Disability



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The results

The problem

Students with disabilities in Higher Education (HE) are a marginalized group with complex needs that are frequently not met by the institution. Many academic studies demonstrate that students with disabilities do not always have a positive HE experience and show that the university system is, in fact, amongst the least inclusive environments in terms of access and long term success (Govira and Morina, 2014).

Disabled students are significantly more likely to feel isolated when at university. In a consultation conducted at the beginning of this project 100 disabled students were surveyed and 73% of respondents said that they felt isolated at least one time a week with 86% stating that non-academic provision was lacking in the university. Similarly, 73% felt that there were not enough opportunities to interact with non-disabled students outside of lectures.

The C4A project was the first ever disability inclusion project at the University of Bradford. The diverse nature of disability makes engagement difficult yet prior to 2012, non-academic engagement with this demographic was under 5% but is currently at 26%. The impact that this has had on the lives of many disabled students has been significant and the project takes an approach that ensures inclusion is at the heart of policy development and is implemented across all student and staff networks.

The approach

We took a partnership approach, sharing resources and expertise with local organisations and within the university to deliver a range of programmes targeting disabled and non-disabled students and community members. The Bradford district has become a Hub for inclusive sports and disability provision through funding by various streams, our partners such as Bradford Disability Sports and Leisure (BDSL) who are a local charity which aims to provide disabled people with high quality sport and physical activity. They run various clubs and activities across the district every day of the week for over 400 disabled people. BDSL's provisions have assisted 20 students volunteers to not only get to know their local community but also serve at summer and half terms camps, weekly activities and the crowning achievement Special Olympics GB national games.

With both BDSL and C4A being public funded projects collaborative work has been imperative; our successful collaboration has allowed us to have a common purpose, strong insistence on a whole systems approach, shared power, and used the service user's and volunteers perspective to stimulate change. Using the service user's perspective to stimulate change has been revelation for our organisations getting service users and volunteers into the heart of governance and listening to the needs communities has shaped our planning and delivery of activities.

The 'common purpose' for collaboration can be significant, with financial gains to be had, alongside improved customer experience. The trouble is that collaboration is often fraught with challenges. Power struggles, systems that are not designed for collaboration, leadership change, impatience for quick results, all threaten collaboration.



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Our goals

1. Sports Activities: Cycling, wheelchair sports, integration of disabled members into mainstream sports teams thereby improving health, wellbeing and fitness
2. Recreational Activities: Gardening, day trips, social events, integration of disabled members into mainstream society groups, signposting members to community groups thereby improving social mobility, reducing isolation and improving self-esteem
3. Community Engagement Activities: School outreach events, integration of members of the public into Choices 4 All activities, charity support events, local event organisation and participation thereby promoting the outreach activities and promoting collaboration and communication
4. Learning and Employability enhancement Activities: final year and master's student research project development, product development, social learning (to increase awareness of inclusion, sustainability and the green agenda), volunteering opportunities and employment opportunities for disabled members, thereby improving employability.

Obstacles and solutions

Bradford contains some of the most deprived areas of the UK. According to Public Health Bradford, 12.5% of Bradford residents stated that their health was 'not good, compared to the district average of 10.1%. Choices 4 All is a student led. It was set up by a disabled student who wanted to take part in cycling activities with his non-disabled friends. From this we spoke to disability groups, charities (such as Bradford Disability Sports and Leisure) and other disabled students and identified two barriers to integration in university extracurricular activities. Barriers identified were a lack of understanding of disabled people and their needs and a lack of equipment to permit participation. The feedback we received allowed us to establish a social cycling club linking disabled and non-disabled students. Subsequently, disabled students were surveyed regularly to find out what activities they would like to participate in. This led to establishing a wheelchair accessible allotment on campus, provide disability awareness training to all sports and society students in executive roles and work with the university, students union and disability services to identify other areas of need, such as wheelchair rugby league, the only wheelchair sport that disabled people can participate in in Bradford.

Throughout the project we have identified what doesn't work in terms of disabled student participation. A significant barrier is having events labeled as "disabled" events or for disabled people only. This had the impact of creating stigma that deters participation. It became apparent that a mixed ability approach had the biggest impact creating supportive in groups providing a sense of participation and social cohesion. Similarly, we have found that having student only events had the impact of reducing participation. By offering our events and activities to the wider public both disabled and non-disabled students had access to a broader social group and learning about what other activities were on offer in the community. This community approach is also beginning to attract potential new students to the University of Bradford, which was an unexpected benefit.

By delivering activities that enable disabled people to meet new people they experience less social isolation at the University of Bradford via engagement in this project, resulting in them taking part in other university and wider community provision. One of our student participants Ryan Milne who has Autism, life has truly been transformed by his participation with Choices 4 All. Ryan was first involved with the project when it was Cycling 4 All he trained and partook in a 180 mile coast to coast bike ride in June 2015. This gave him the confidence



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to continue his involvement with the project in its current form; he has organized a bike ride from Bradford to Edinburgh with 15 participants of varying cycling ability. The biggest transformation has been Ryan moving away from home living independently in student halls.

Performance and results

During the first weeks of June 2017 two delegations from the University of Bradford Students' Union visited Bradford's twin town of Hamm Germany. The delegation consisted of seven students from various faculties and year groups; the programme saw students from the University deliver co-produced volunteering projects with German students from Hochschule Hamm-Lipstadt University and refugees living in Hamm.

The second delegation was group that consisted of a disabled and non-disabled students and the local community on a disability cycling challenge of 200 miles to Hamm. Bradford, and specifically the local district of Shipley, has been twinned with Hamm in Germany since 1976, and it's a link that has lasted and prospered. The Bradford-based disability cycling hub, collaboration between Bradford Disability Sports and Leisure, the Bradford Youth Service and Choices 4 All at the University Of Bradford Union Of Students, organises a cycle challenge between Bradford and Hamm every two years, with this year's event taking place on 12-18 June 2017. The ride is over 450 km and provides a real challenge with riders using hand cycles, tricycles, tag-alongs and wheelchair transporter bikes

The University of Bradford is well known for its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusivity; and for its friendliness and interdisciplinary approach. Our student body is one of the most diverse in the country; the opportunities that are presented create a vibrant atmosphere where students excel both academically and socially.

The University of Hamm-Lippstadt is a relatively new technology university in Northern Germany with 3,500 full time undergraduate students studying a range of dual honours degrees. A key difference between Bradford and Hamm was the diversity of the student body which, in Germany, is lacking students from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. This was complemented by the Bradford students, the majority of whom were BME students. This facilitated interactions with the refugees as the project developed. Furthermore, in Germany there is no formal Students Union to facilitate extracurricular student development. Volunteering, and other student activities, are run on a voluntary basis by students who receive a budget from the University. This allows a 100% student led approach to activities with little staff support but can limit the scope of the potential opportunities.

The collaboration with Hochschule Hamm-Lippstadt University was created by Dr Adam Tasker, through civic and governmental connections that Bradford has with Hamm due to the twinning of both cities and the active exchange programme that currently runs in relation to inclusive sport. Through discussions with academics there was the possibility of creating international collaborations between our organisations in regards to volunteering. This project was developed further and involved Dr Jane Booth from the Faculty of Social Sciences who helped design a model of co-production, utilised to success during the Impact Project in 2015/2016, in which, students work at ground level, with service users. This model was key to the Hamm collaboration.

Adjacent to the University in Hamm, is a processing centre for refugees in Germany. Refugees live at the centre while they are assigned a city of residence. The students in Hamm have been interacting with refugees by



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providing German language classes, running cross-cultural cafes and increasing public awareness of the plight of refugees by hosting events such as a lecture series on refugees and the reason for their increase in numbers in Germany. However, the student body in Germany is less culturally diverse than it is in Bradford and they have been struggling with communication. Similarly, staff time on such projects has been very limited as staff volunteering couldn't impact upon work commitments, which was an issue raised by the staff on a previous visit in 2016.

The visit to Hamm was the first stage for establishing international volunteering links between our organisations. Stage two is for the German students who hosted our UK students, to visit Bradford for a week long period and to volunteer with the refugee volunteering programs here in Bradford. This would feed into the University of Sanctuary project and would broaden the international development of the university and students union. In the 2016 – 2017 academic year, UBU Volunteering tracked 273 volunteers who provided 7,130 hours of volunteering across 87 registered organisations across Bradford. From these organisations, many provide support for refugees. These are Bradford Action for Refugees, Beacon, the Red Cross and Bradford City of Sanctuary. Latest student data shows that there are 21 Syrian Students at the University of Bradford who have formed an active Syrian Society and a total of 218 students from Arabic speaking countries. There are also a significant number of Arabic speaking home students.

A C4A survey conducted in 2017, demonstrated a strong desire amongst the student population of Bradford to volunteer abroad; something not previously offered. Similarly, there are a significant number of home students who regularly volunteer with refugee organisations in Bradford and who would like to volunteer abroad

Prior to this year, UBU offered no international volunteering opportunities. This year, C4A have orchestrated three international volunteering opportunities; the two trips to Hamm, and a volunteering opportunity to Spain with the England Team for the Mixed Ability Rugby World Cup. These opportunities have been seized upon by the student body.

International volunteering is something that can have a dramatic impact on the lives of volunteers. There is a significant amount of research into the benefits and motivations of international volunteering for students but the majority of opportunities often involve external organizations who provide high cost volunteering; often during the summer months in developing countries. These can cost the student thousands of pounds and there is an increasing concern that a large number of international volunteering projects do more damage than good to local economies, while giving the volunteer a poor experience when engaging with the local community is involved. Students realize the need to have a personal developmental advantage post-graduation and this project achieves that by providing real life volunteering opportunities that impact positively in the community, provides students with certification of their volunteering activities, creates international collaboration and develops a young person academically and socially. As such, there is a massive demand for international volunteering opportunities from the student body, and is something that C4A will be working on to expand as the relationship with Hamm develops.

The future

Lessons learned

During the lifespan of this project we have discovered that the needs of our student volunteers are to gain employability skills that are tangible post education and for the hours they volunteer to make a difference. This

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discovery made us evaluate how we would recruit students. Through consultation with students and taking the learnings from managing the volunteering sector of the union we decided to focus on volunteering as a employability pathway but also as a stream to gain extra accreditation outside the mainstream university degree. Every student who graduates from the University of Bradford is competing with thousands of other students who also graduating with the same qualification; what makes them stand out is the extracurricular activities they are involved in. Volunteering has always been a niche within the student community; by rewarding students for their volunteering we give them the opportunity to gain qualifications outside of their degree and a employability certificate that has documented the training and volunteering hours they have done. As seen in the facts and figures section we believe this approach has been instrumental to the sustained engagement we have with students.

There has been a long running perception that the university/ students union alienates itself from the wider community that surrounds the wider community. One of the biggest learns has been that the community desires a relationship with the university/ union. Through the partnerships built with our community partners we have been able to build relationships, the co-production model has helped to create a sense of a joint community. Co-production is a way of working whereby service users and decision makers, or service providers work together to create a decision or service which works for them all. The approach is value driven and built on the principle that those who use a service are best placed to help design it. This principle is key to our outcomes both students and community want to benefit from what Choices 4 All is providing, by being student led and community focus gives us the ability to hit markers of equality, diversity, accessibility and inclusivity. As an ongoing measure to evaluate each project we are have invested financially we ask the community and students to write separate reports we believe this allows us to assess each projects impact on the community and students.

Top learnings from implementing your project

The biggest change we have experienced has been on changing the perception of disability amongst the student and staff body. This has taken a lot of hard work, reflection and trying a wide variety of activities. This is how we drove actual change such as promoting cycling, healthy living and the gardening site. The key however, is in changing perceptions. By changing the perception of key influencers, and presenting nothing but positive news items to these people has been the key to adaptation. We have a great story to tell of a home grown project but people didn't know about it. Once they found out, word got around.

The project has encouraged people to be independent. It can push people to do things that they wouldn't normally do. For someone with a disability, this could be a simple thing like travelling across campus by themselves, or going to a social event by themselves to meet new people, a lot of things that can be taken for granted.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

The University of Bradford is honored to be a finalist in the EAUC Green Gown Award. We are inspired to use social innovation to strengthen our community engagement. From the University's standpoint this recognition verifies that we are on the right track in our work to bring transformative change.

Professor Brian Cantor, CBE FREng
University of Bradford Vice Chancellor



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Further information

We have featured on many various media platforms; we have featured in the national Sustrans magazine and have heavily influenced the British Universities and College Sports (BUCS) inclusive booklet that is due for publication over the summer.

MEDIA LINKS

<https://www.facebook.com/choices4alluk/>

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/14527052.University_project_secures_310_000_lottery_funds_boost/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/14932895.Official_start_of_a_39_fantastic_project_39/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/14994439.Students_confident_they_have_smashed_new_cycling_world_record/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/sport/15173658.Pedal_powered_challenge_set_to_benefit_Bradford_Bulls_Foundation/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/15200016.It_will_be_brutal_Cyclists_take_on_tough_600_mile_challenge/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/15224357.Businesses_rise_to_cycle_challenge/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/15180528.Bradford_students_to_create_Pokemon_Go_inspired_augmented_reality_app_for_cyclists/

http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/15256470.Tour_de_Yorkshire_proves_huge_success_in_Bradford_district/

Videos:

<https://vimeo.com/207280481>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isJ36O7HSc>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FmaTF_w7Yo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URlp-ukHVgE&t=10858s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBFBV0dXEGw&t=72s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBFBV0dXEGw&t=72s>

<https://www.facebook.com/choices4alluk/videos/1420217541332617/>

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