BUILDING THE VERY FABRIC OF THE COMMUNITY

Sarah Forster, June 2019

REPORT ON THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE MANCHESTER VOLUNTEER ADVICE PARTNERSHIP

CHEETHAM HILL ADVICE CENTRE – MANCHESTER MIND – MANCHESTER REFUGEE SUPPORT NETWORK CENTREPOINT – GREATER MANCHESTER IMMIGRATION AID UNIT – MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
The Manchester Volunteer Advice Partnership (MVAP) is a partnership of five voluntary sector organisations in Manchester – Manchester Mind (lead partner), Manchester Refugee Support Network (MRSN), Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU), Cheetham Hill Advice Centre and Centrepoint.

MVAP was set up to build capacity in Manchester by enhancing the provision of advice services in Manchester through training and supporting volunteers in community advice work organisations. It is currently funded by The National Lottery Community Fund until December 2019.

The external evaluation has gained views from volunteers, advice clients, staff and external stakeholders. These have used alongside project monitoring data to assess the outcomes and impact being achieved by MVAP and to investigate the key learning for the future about the MVAP volunteer approach and partnership working. The views expressed by all stakeholders have given a striking endorsement of the MVAP approach and its impact. Volunteer stories, quotes and practice examples are used extensively throughout the report.

**EVALUATION SUMMARY**

**MVAR impact**

The project is achieving its project outcomes:

- People who volunteer will have improved skills and confidence, increasing their ability to move towards employment
- Volunteers report improved wellbeing due to the impact of volunteering
- People will report reduced levels of stress and anxiety due to better access to advice provision and improved outcomes

It is having a lasting impact on volunteers through:

- Increased employment and volunteering; increased sense of belonging; increased sense of purpose and achievement; and having a wider sense of the world.

It is also having a lasting impact on people who have been advised through:

- Improved quality of life; and having trusted source(s) of good quality face to face advice.

The impact on the MVAP partners has been:

- Increased capacity of the partners to provide face to face advice services; freeing up other workers to do their roles more effectively; cross organisational learning, development and support; a source of consistently well trained volunteers; and strategic strength and resources. This has been achieved within a supportive, respectful partnership environment.

**IVOAR**

I know from my own experience how people suffer and how they struggle with language barriers and confidence, so I wanted to do immigration work. I know how people feel – I can read their faces straight away. I also use the benefits knowledge as it helps me to signpost people and sometimes make calls for people. Because I speak Arabic I am able to help many people in their own language.

- Omar volunteers for GMIAU

**Key Learning about MVAP**

The MVAP approach works: The provision of face to face advice work, having well trained volunteers in meaningful roles, having understanding of lived experience and building wider connections are all important factors.

The MVAP Project is strategically important in the city:

- The project is playing a unique role in the provision of training for advice work in the city. Services have been provided that would otherwise not be possible in the current economic environment. People are being trained and gaining good experience for taking paid roles in the advice sector and the project understands how to link volunteering to employment.

The MVAP Project is important for the wider community:

- The project is developing community networks, relationships and support. Many of the volunteers come from backgrounds which could lead to them feeling isolated and the project links them up, as well as giving volunteers the skills to help others they know.

Valuing the volunteers benefits everyone: The focus on the volunteers has been successful for people who volunteer and for client outcomes.

It takes time to build a successful approach: MVAP has been in existence for five years and it has taken much of that time to develop its approach so that it has the strength and depth of the outcomes it now achieves.

Linking values to outcomes, impact and social justice: The project values – collaborative communities, sharing and trust – have been explicitly used in the operations of the project. The achievement of the outcomes and the wider impact of the project is consistent with the values.

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**SOLOMION**

The MVAP training is really good. As well as learning about how to be an advice volunteer, we had employment training like how to be interviewed, letter writing and how to answer a phone call. I feel I have been given a skill set I can apply to any workplace. There’s ongoing training available from the partners so you learn about different topics such as immigration and mental health. You can also volunteer with any of the partners – it’s one bite, several flavours.

Through being a volunteer, I have really learnt how to empathise with people, to focus on their individual needs and circumstances and overcome my own prejudices. I pay close attention to detail because I have seen how just one small mistake – for example in a universal credit application – can lead to rejection and suffering. My supervisor is always there to support me and I can learn from his experience, which gives me extra confidence.

Now I’m not just a resident of Manchester, I’m part of the community and helping to solve situations in the community. Through MVAP, we are building the very fabric of the community.

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The Manchester Volunteer Advice Partnership (MVAP) is a partnership of five voluntary sector organisations in Manchester, set up to enhance the provision of advice services in Manchester through training and supporting volunteers in community advice work organisations.

The project defines its purpose as:

‘It’s all about capacity. Capacity of communities to thrive. Capacity of volunteers to support local people whilst being supported themselves. Capacity of our partner organisations to develop and provide high quality advice services.’

MVAP has commissioned this independent evaluation to complement the evaluation work it does itself, and particularly to gain views from a range of people involved with the project. The evaluation objectives are:

- To highlight the role of the project in developing volunteers and show the impact on volunteers
- To demonstrate the impact on the people who have been advised

The National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) initially funded the Manchester Volunteer Advice Partnership for two years from 2013 to 2015. It has re-funded the project through its Reaching Communities programme since December 2016, with the current funding period running until December 2019. This report covers the services delivered by the current funding. It gives details of the evaluation findings about the outcomes and impact MVAP achieves, the way it provides services and key issues for the future. It particularly uses the views of volunteers, MVAP staff and key external organisations to underpin these findings. All the people in the report have given permission to use their quotations and case studies, and names used in the case studies have been changed.
Centrepont – Cheetham Hill Advice Centre (CHAC) – 
advice provision: each with their own areas of expertise and need for 
project is a partnership of five voluntary organisations 
want to volunteer in advice and support services. The 
free training and support to Manchester residents who 
The Manchester Volunteer Advice Partnership provides 
Partners 
charity Young People’s Support Foundation in 2017 
neighbourhood advice centre in north Manchester 
support services to people seeking asylum, refugees, 
mental health support – lead partner 
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) 
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Homelessness Team to provide advice and assistance 
Since March 2018, MVAP has also been working 
in collaboration with Manchester City Council’s 
Homelessness Team to provide advice and assistance 
their contact centre in the city’s town hall. The 
main costs of this project are funded by Manchester 
Council.

These partners have been working together on MVAP 
since the first round of funding and have adapted how 
it operates as a result of their experiences. 

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Volunteer programme 
MVAP has developed a comprehensive recruitment, 
selection, advice work training and support programme 
to enable volunteers to gain the skills and confidence 
needed to carry out a range of roles within the partner 
organisations and more generally in advice work roles. 
The precise nature of the advice work done by 
volunteers varies between partners according to 
need and local procedures. Roles available to volunteers 
include: receptionists, digital support workers, 
advise workers, advice support assistants, interpreters, 
administration workers, recruitment & training assistants, 
immigration assistants. 

Four cohorts of volunteers – of about 20 volunteers 
each time – are recruited each year (except in the 
first year of the project, when three cohorts were 
recruited). Publicity material for MVAP is widely 
circulated amongst a network of organisations and 
places (including GP surgeries and charities, as well as 
online). The recruitment process includes information 
sessions and an informal interview with the volunteer 
development worker. The project does not require any 
prior qualifications or experience, but volunteers do 
need to live in the City of Manchester, have good written 
and spoken English, and be reasonably digitally literate. 
The formal training takes place over nine one-day 
sessions (one per week). The first four sessions cover 
areas such as the role of advice; safeguarding and 
confidentiality; empathy and listening skills, and good 
interview practice. After this, the group splits: 
– Volunteers who have been allocated to GMIAU leave 
the main group, for specialist immigration training 
– Volunteers allocated to the other partners receive 
training for the remaining five weeks on welfare 
benefits, debt, and housing, and in parallel they start 
attending their chosen partner agency, for a minimum 
of half a day per week. 

Volunteers receive a certificate for completing the 
training at award ceremonies. Once the initial training 
is complete, the project provides day-to-day supervision 
by advice supervisors, and on-going support and 
training. The expectation of MVAP is that volunteers 
will have a six month placement. 

Volunteers are assigned a partner by the volunteer 
development worker; the choice is led by the prospective 
volunteer’s wishes, but takes into account other 
Factors such as capacity of a particular partner to 
absorb new volunteers and proximity to the volunteer’s 
home address. In practice, a number of volunteers 
choose a partner based on previous experience: for 
example, people who have experienced the asylum 
system from the inside tend to choose to work for 
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU) or 
Manchester Refugee Support Network. It is also possible 
for volunteers to transfer from one partner to another, 
if this suits the needs both of the volunteer, and of the 
partners concerned. 

The volunteer training is also offered to other voluntary 
organisations in Manchester that are struggling to 
deliver generalist advice to hard to reach communities 
in Manchester and have volunteers who would benefit 
from the MVAP programme. 

The skills learnt by volunteers are transferable and 
can open up other opportunities through personal 
development and increased knowledge, as well as the 
experience and confidence to move on to paid work 
or further training. MVAP provides references for 
established volunteers who are applying for jobs.

The NLCF funded project outcomes are: 
– People who volunteer will have improved 
skills and confidence, increasing their ability 
to move towards employment. 
– Volunteers report improved wellbeing 
due to the impact of volunteering. 
– People will report reduced levels of stress 
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PROJECT OUTCOMES

Volunteer programme

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The skills learnt by volunteers are transferable and can open up other opportunities through personal development and increased knowledge, as well as the experience and confidence to move on to paid work or further training. MVAP provides references for established volunteers who are applying for jobs.
The evaluation methodology was created to collect mainly qualitative data and provide those involved with the project with a structured way of contributing their experiences, perceptions and reflections. Questions were targeted to gain information about the volunteering outcomes and learning about how MVAP provides its services. The project's monitoring data has also been used in this report where relevant, particularly qualitative outcomes data and data for those who have received advice.

The process has involved:
- Review of project documents including reports to funders
- Individual meetings with the strategic manager at each partner organisation
- Semi-structured meeting with the project manager, volunteer development worker and advice supervisors (eight people present)
- Meetings with volunteers: Face to face interviews with five volunteers for case studies; focus group (three volunteers); informal meetings at partner organisations (four volunteers)
- Consultation with external stakeholders: telephone interviews (six organisations); email responses (two organisations)

Data used in the report
The data presented is for the two years January 2017 to December 2018.

MVAP did not collect as much volunteer outcomes data in 2017 as would be desirable, partly due to staffing changes and the project manager post being vacant for some time. Outcomes data presented for the volunteering outcomes gives the actual data collected, and uses this as a sample to estimate total numbers of people.
WHO ARE THE VOLUNTEERS?

Key volunteer statistics

- 53% Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) Volunteers
- 35% Male
- 13% people with a disability

155 volunteers recruited in total for 2017 and 2018

IMPACT ON VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are not from the usual backgrounds:

- 53% White – 37%
- 25-64 years – 61%
- Unknown – 26%
- Female – 65%
- 65+ years – 2%
- 2-4 years – 11%
- Other ethnic group – 4%
- Male – 35%
- Unknown/ unspecified 7%

13% people with a disability

HOW LONG VOLUNTEERS STAY WITH MVAP

MVAP measured in January 2019 how long volunteers have been with the project. Of 136 volunteers:

- 23 volunteers did not complete the training
- 25 volunteers stayed for up to 3 months
- 55 volunteers stayed for 4 to 8 months
- 23 volunteers stayed for 9 to 14 months
- 10 volunteers stayed for more than 14 months

The main reasons (where given) for leaving were finding work, conflicts with studies and health issues.

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**Outcome 1:**

People who volunteer will have improved skills and confidence, increasing their ability to move towards employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome indicator</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Examples reported during the evaluation</th>
<th>Number volunteers who fed back with positive indicator (Out of 97 volunteers)</th>
<th>Estimated actual number of volunteers contributing to the target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The number of volunteers who report increased levels of skill | 75 volunteers | A range of employment skills, communication, giving advice, empathy | 2017 = 13  
2018 = 74 | 123 volunteers |
| The number of volunteers who reported increased levels of knowledge | 150 volunteers | Advice, law, government systems, society, debt, homelessness, benefits, disabilities | 2017 = 13  
2018 = 74 | 132 volunteers |
| The number of volunteers who report being better equipped for work | 146 volunteers | Skills and experience gained, professionalism | 2017 = 13  
2018 = 65 | 120 volunteers |

**Quotations**

“You sit at home and watch things on the telly and think ‘aw’ but don’t fully feel it. When you come here and meet people, you really feel for them – you can see the distress on their face, and some of the stories are very upsetting. I’m less ignorant about what’s going on – I’ve gained understanding that it’s not as easy as we think for people to get refugee status.” **MVAP Volunteer**

“This is a more meaningful, tangible volunteering opportunity (than others we know of) to really develop really good transferable skills and good knowledge that you can take to another opportunity. People get good understanding of answering questions, signposting, alleviating people’s fears, supporting with forms. Those are tangible things that people now have to do day in, day out. And they learn professionalism.” **Manchester Adult Education Service**

“Very often the volunteers are still there beyond the end of the day – they go above and beyond. They own every query, take it to the end, be as helpful as they can, and complete the process.”

— Commissioning Officer, Manchester City Council

**MVAP Volunteer**

Solomon, volunteers at MRSN

I came from Nigeria to London ten years ago, to join my wife who was studying there. I had a very good job in London, as well as being involved in volunteering for a community charity. I have a periodic visa and when it came up for renewal my company were worried about the risk and began to treat me like I was an illegal immigrant even though they were happy with my work. So I decided to take redundancy. I found London too capitalist and moved to Manchester because I knew it was a cosmopolitan city. I wanted to continue to give something back through volunteering and researched opportunities on the internet. Manchester Volunteer Centre told me about MVAP and I completed the training a year ago.

The MVAP training is really good. As well as learning about how to be an advice volunteer, we had employment training like how to be interviewed, letter writing and how to answer a phone call. I feel I have been given a skill set I can apply to any workplace. There’s ongoing training available from the partners so you learn about different topics such as immigration and mental health. You can also volunteer with any of the partners – it’s one of the things that makes MVAP special.

Through being a volunteer, I have really learnt how to empathise with people, to focus on their individual needs and circumstances and overcome my own prejudices. I pay close attention to detail because I have seen how just one small mistake – for example in a universal credit application – can lead to rejection and suffering.

My supervisor is always there to support me and I can learn from his experience, which gives me extra confidence. I always want to help someone to feel satisfied. Even if we can’t help them I will refer them to somewhere that I know I can trust – having the other partners really helps with that.

Many people fall through the council net that is supposed to protect people – even though they shouldn’t. MVAP is the net that catches people below the council net. We are like the last hope for them. There are many reasons why they might fall through – communication or language difficulties, ignorance of the system, or mistakes on either side. If there is no MVAP there is no hope for those people.

I am a better person because I volunteer at MVAP. It’s so fulfilling it’s a reason to live. I have realised that most people who make it in life follow their passion and volunteering has given me clarity of purpose. I have set up my work in a way that allows me to keep my commitment to MRSN. I believe so much in MVAP that I am happy to give extra time – if they ask I know it’s because they need it and it will be worthwhile. I have helped with the website, the magazine and the branding. I tell people around me about what I’m doing and encourage others to volunteer. I have also seen how MVAP has built up so many of the volunteers, who all have their own stories to tell.

Now I’m not just a resident of Manchester, I’m part of the community and helping to solve situations in the community. Through MVAP, we are building the very fabric of the community.
OUTCOME 2:
Volunteers report improved wellbeing due to the impact of volunteering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome indicator</th>
<th>Target Total for 2017 &amp; 2018</th>
<th>Number volunteers who fed back with positive indicator (Out of 97 volunteers)</th>
<th>Estimated actual number of volunteers contributing to the target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of volunteers who report increased levels of confidence</td>
<td>150 volunteers</td>
<td>2017 = 13 2018 = 72</td>
<td>127 volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of volunteers who report feeling valued</td>
<td>150 volunteers</td>
<td>2017 = 15 2018 = 80</td>
<td>147 volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of volunteers who report feeling more involved in their community</td>
<td>153 volunteers</td>
<td>2017 = 14 2018 = 76</td>
<td>136 volunteers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quotations

‘It really builds confidence. If someone can stick out the whole course, it shows their motivation and commitment.’ Booth Centre

‘Our volunteer has found the MVAP programme very beneficial and has gained greater confidence through being able to work with multiple people at the MVAP drop-in. The programme also really helps to improve a volunteer’s confidence before they get started as a volunteer.’ British Red Cross

‘We are doing real work, I feel the obligation and responsibility. It’s such a pleasure and I’m very happy. You have to feel useful to feel part of the country. You feel more part of the community.’ MVAP volunteer

‘It’s not easy to break through the veneer and cultural barriers to British society – this stops me from getting isolated and promotes connection and my well-being; I am getting to meet British people that I otherwise never would. I can talk to other people about my volunteering and they are interested – it gives us something to relate to and I can pass on my knowledge about social issues; otherwise I don’t have that.’ MVAP volunteer

Mohamed, volunteers at GMIAU

I came to the UK as an asylum seeker from Egypt seven years ago. In Egypt, I had a job doing public relations in a company. Now I live alone here without any family. GMIAU helped me to get my refugee status which happened four years ago. After that, most people I knew were through asylum seeker networks. I felt lonely and it is difficult to meet people. I have struggled with depression.

I wanted to give something back to GMIAU after they helped me and joined MVAP about 18 months ago. I wasn’t sure to begin with as I am quite shy and because I was feeling low in confidence. But they welcomed me. The course was fantastic and gave me a lot of experiences and knowledge – you couldn’t be a volunteer without it. There are a lot of things to learn about advice giving and also essential things like boundaries and safeguarding.

I know from my own experience how people suffer and how they struggle with language barriers and confidence, so I wanted to do immigration work. I know how people feel – I can read their face straight away. I also use the benefits knowledge as it helps me to signpost people and sometimes make calls for people. Because I speak Arabic, I am able to help many people in their own language – from places like Syria, Libya and Sudan. They learn English but it takes a long time to feel confident. People are happy that I can speak to them – it makes a big difference to them.

From the start of the training, I felt my depression begin to reduce. MVAP has helped me to get better and find relief. I get so much from helping other people and I enjoy coming. I feel happy more than that I’m coming to do some work. I have built my confidence through this project. I have learnt a lot as well as improving my language skills. I go to English classes but that’s not enough, you have to also practise. I would one day like to work in this kind of field, and am thinking about going to university to study social work. MVAP will give me a reference which will be needed. I know people who have got jobs from being an MVAP volunteer.

I have met other volunteers and built up friendships – the best way to make friends is to work with them, and bit by bit you get to know each other. MVAP have organised meals out which is good and makes you feel like you have a new family here. I feel a part of society now – I belong somewhere and to other people.

This feels like the right place for me to be. I came from the dark to the light; it’s a long journey and I have something to give. It’s my life.

"IF YOU HAVE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS THIS IS A REALLY GOOD WAY TO HELP YOURSELF AND FEEL STRONG AND EMPOWERED."

– MVAP volunteer

MOHAMED
Overall impact on volunteers

From the volunteering outcomes and discussions held, it is evident that the work of MVAP contributes to and so has an impact – long term changes – on volunteers in the following areas:

- Increased employment and volunteering
  Through giving people skills, knowledge, confidence and experience

This applies to both MVAP volunteers and those being trained for other organisations:* 

1. MVAP volunteers have been employed within MVAP partner agencies

2. MVAP volunteers have moved to volunteering roles in non-advice organisations

3. MVAP volunteers have found other employment

4. MVAP volunteers have been employed in advice roles in other agencies in Manchester

5. MVAP volunteers have been employed within MVAP partner agencies

6. MVAP volunteers have gone to study for a social work degree

7. MVAP volunteers have found other employment, for example in support work roles

8. External stakeholders reported volunteers who have done the MVAP training gaining employment, for example in support work roles

Achievement of project outcomes

For the MVAP volunteering outcomes the evidence gained from the evaluation suggests that MVAP is meeting these outcomes as follows:

Outcome 1: People who volunteer will have improved skills and confidence, increasing their ability to move towards employment:

Outcome being met, targets not met overall – worst case being target 82% met

Outcome 2: Volunteers report improved wellbeing due to the impact of volunteering:

Outcome being met, targets not met overall – worst case being target 85% met

Other outcomes for volunteers

Two additional outcomes have occurred for volunteers which are particularly significant:

- Increased understanding of social justice and politics
- Becoming aware of the injustices in society, through helping those in need
- Learning about the government systems and processes which impact on peoples’ lives
- Emotional responses to helping people who are struggling

‘There’s a lot of dire stuff going on in the news. This gives you a way to channel those negative feelings and channel them into something positive.’ MVAP volunteer

“I’VE BUILT A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON PROBLEMS IN THE WORLD”

- MVAP volunteer

“STATUTORY SERVICES CAN LEAVING PEOPLE FEELING NOT CARED FOR AND LIKE GARBAGE – WE GET TO SAY ‘WE CARE’ AND THAT MAY BE THE FIRST TIME THAT’S BEEN SAID.”

- MVAP volunteer

Not meeting targets

Where the targets have not been met for the volunteer indicators, this is due to a combination of factors:

- The project collected less monitoring data in 2017 than in 2018 and it is potentially less reliable. The data for 2018 is mainly close to or exceeding the targets.
- Success at retention of volunteers has led to fewer placements than expected, which has affected the numbers of people available for feedback.

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Two additional outcomes have occurred for volunteers which are particularly significant:

- Improved relationships with others through the volunteering body
- Teams have formed at the partner organisations
- Friendships have been built between individual volunteers

‘Volunteers at the different agencies bond as a team; they support and respect each other and their supervisor. There’s a lot of loyalty that goes both ways. That’s not been my past experience. People who wouldn’t have met otherwise develop good friendships.’ MVAP supervisor

‘When we came here we didn’t have family or friends. Plenty of the volunteers have a nature that they want to be friends and to connect. Now we do that independently of MVAP’.

MVAP volunteer [fled own country]

‘One of the volunteers was passing by one day when we were struggling a bit. He saw he could help and came in and knew what was needed. He was very supportive of a new volunteer.’ MVAP supervisor

‘We have had really positive experiences of people who’ve done the training and then gone on to get work. They’ve always reported back that the training has been useful. One of our volunteers did it then we employed them as our advice manager’ Booth Centre

- Increased sense of belonging

Through being part of the MVAP body of volunteers and through being more able to engage with the people around them

This is especially important for those who feel marginalised and/or newcomers to the city

- Increased sense of purpose and achievement

Through meaningful volunteering work where the immediate effect on people being advised is very often tangible

This is especially important for people who have had mental health issues and/or for newcomers to the city.

Several volunteers described the volunteering as ‘a reason to live’.

- Having a wider sense of the world

Through the supported and informed opportunity to look up and see people in different situations to themselves

*It should be noted that these figures do not include all volunteers who have moved on and there may be other examples that MVAP is unaware of.
Achievement of project outcome

The evidence gained from the evaluation suggests that MVAP is meeting this outcome with the targets being exceeded by between 10% and 19%.

'We know that even if an application appears straightforward, if you don’t read and write English as a first language it can be an almost impossible hurdle. The consequences of making a mistake can have a huge impact on your family, as well as a financial cost. Having someone else to look it over is really important.'

MVAP strategic partner

'It’s been invaluable as a service to my clients. The benefit forms are complicated – especially PIP [Personal Independence Payment], attendance allowance, and Universal Credit – it can be a minefield. People need help with completing the forms and there’s not much help out there that supports this, especially face to face.’

Be Well – The Big Life Group

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"CLIENTS HAVE CRIED BECAUSE WE HAVE SHOWN RESPECT AND CARING THAT THEY HAVEN’T RECEIVED FROM OTHER AGENCIES"
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– MVAP volunteer

**Impact on people who have been advised**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome indicator</th>
<th>Target Total for 2017 &amp; 2018</th>
<th>Number volunteers who fed back with positive indicator (Out of 97 volunteers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The number of people who access advice</td>
<td>10,000 people</td>
<td>11,033 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of people who report reduced levels of stress and anxiety due to accessing advice</td>
<td>75% of respondents who return questionnaires</td>
<td>89% (of 1737 people who returned questionnaires)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of people who report positive outcomes from advice leading to improved quality of life</td>
<td>80% of respondents to questionnaires</td>
<td>89% (of 1737 people who returned questionnaires)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Who has received advice?**

Key statistics

11,033 people have received advice from MVAP partners in total for 2017 and 2018

53% male

57% Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) people

24% people with a disability

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53% male

57% Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee (BAMER) people

24% people with a disability

**Outcome 3:**

People will report reduced levels of stress and anxiety due to better access to advice provision and improved outcomes

Achievement of project outcome

The evidence gained from the evaluation suggests that MVAP is meeting this outcome with the targets being exceeded by between 10% and 19%.

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– MVAP volunteer
MVAP Client

Martha went to Cheetham Hill Advice Centre

I am a 54 year old single parent, living with depression and bipolar disorder. Only my youngest child, Samuel, aged 16 years, is still living at home. I have been struggling financially for some time and feel trapped and hassled by creditors, to the extent I stopped opening letters, stopped opening the front door to callers, and stopped answering the phone.

Due to my health I am unable to work: I get Employment & Support Allowance, as well as Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit to support Samuel, plus housing benefit and council tax support. However, they take money off me because my house is considered too big for me and Samuel.

So I have to pay some of my rent. Also, my PIP was stopped because I didn’t score enough points at the medical assessment.

I ran up rent and council tax arrears and couldn’t afford my utility bills. I was also paying back a loan I got to replace my washing machine when it broke and was also feeling really guilty because I couldn’t afford to buy Samuel a new school uniform and shoes when he had grown out of everything. Things reached crisis point when I received an eviction notice from my landlord and an enforcement notice from the bailiff to collect my council tax debts. I finally plucked up the courage to ask for help and came to Cheetham Hill Advice Centre.

A debt adviser reassured me that something could be done and took immediate action, contacting the landlord and the bailiffs to halt legal action to allow me time to work out my income and expenditure. They also checked that I was getting all the benefits I should be, referred me to Wood Street Mission to get a new school uniform for Samuel, got me a food parcel from the foodbank, helped me to negotiate with everyone I owed money to and helped me to appeal against my PIP stopping.

The Revenue & Benefits Unit has included Samuel in my benefit claim and has backdated my award to the date when he turned 16. The council tax debt has been reduced and the bailiff’s action has been stopped. The adviser helped me to set up a direct debit to pay my future council tax bills. I have cleared my rent arrears with the backdated benefit so the eviction notice was withdrawn and, with the increase in my housing benefit, I am now keeping up with my rent payments. United Utilities Trust Fund awarded me a grant of £1243.17 to help pay off my water charges and they paid for a new washing machine to be delivered. The adviser helped me to set up a direct debit to pay for my water and I have not missed any payments.

Overall impact on people who’ve been advised

From the outcome and feedback given to the project, it is evident that the work of MVAP contributes to and so has an impact – long term changes – on people who receive advice in the following areas:

– Improved quality of life

Through better mental health and improved circumstances especially accessing better finances and housing

– Having trusted source(s) of good quality face to face advice

‘I was treated with professionalism, kindness, and understanding of my state of mind and a weak body.’

MVAP client

‘I feel embarrassed because of my situation and because I cannot read, but you were very helpful and treated me with dignity.’

MVAP client

‘I suffer with anxiety and the staff made me feel very calm and safe.’

MVAP client

‘If it wasn’t for this service, I wouldn’t have been able to make my citizenship application. I had only saved enough money for the fee, I couldn’t afford to pay a private solicitor and I didn’t have the confidence to apply on my own.’

MVAP client

“I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO (THE ADVISER) FOR HER HELP WITH MY PIP FORM AND DON’T THINK I WOULD OF RECEIVED PIP WITHOUT HER KIND HELP.”

– MVAP client

IMPACT ON PARTNERS

Comments from staff across the partnership

Increased capacity of the partners to provide face to face advice services.

For some this is complementary to their core service but an essential resource for service users

‘We have really reliable, really committed volunteers who have an interest in immigration and who want to follow it further. We have a good role for them. We have a set of immigration applications, routine by nature, that are important for people as part of settling into the UK. That solicitors elsewhere charge for because they know people need them.’

Cross organisational learning, development and support. Critical friend.

‘It gives more connection for workers – across different topics – and reduced isolation. We can get support from each other with situations.’

‘Support from partners with developing funding for projects/bids – makes them realistic and credible.’

‘We are creating a group of staff who can work in the advice field and have moved between organisations’

Frees up other workers to do their roles more effectively as have an internal resource for referral

It relieves advice workers of non-complex cases that others can do, to focus on what only they can do.

‘Volunteers have time to spend with people with trauma, language difficulties or understanding – we couldn’t do that otherwise’

Source of consistently well trained volunteers (don’t have sufficient resources to do themselves to this quality)

‘We have created a good volunteer role, based on our own experiences of being advice volunteers, with the support needed to make it work.’

‘It takes much longer for other volunteers – who don’t go through MVAP – to be trained and up to speed.’

A supportive, respectful partnership environment

‘We have identified shared values and priorities – we are like-minded partners.’

‘This is the best partnership we’ve been involved in – each organisation is involved and contributing.’

‘We have learnt what a meaningful partnership is and how it works.’

Strategic strength and resources

‘Each of us is out in our fields so we have five strategic tendrils and share the information – as a strategic team. It would be hard for each individual organisation to know all of it. Everyone is very generous with information rather than hoarding it.’

“We HAVE IMPROVED OUR PROFILE BY BEING ASSOCIATED WITH THE PARTNERSHIP”
MVAP’s practice: Involving the volunteers in the branding of the project

The values development work that MVAP carried out at the beginning of this funding phase led to the partnership re-considering its branding. The aim was to create an identity that represented the values of MVAP so partners and volunteers could develop, implement and take ownership of the project’s shared identity. In February 2019, MVAP volunteers and staff from partner organisations were invited to attend a workshop with Instruct, a Manchester based design agency. Developing a visual identity for the MVAP project was essential as a means of continuing recruitment to volunteer roles and of promoting the advice service.

The volunteers took part in a handwriting workshop. Characters were selected from different participants’ handwriting samples to create a new brand typeface that would be used in promotional materials. Characters were selected for their distinct variation but also to create the feel of a single font with all the letters working together. This typeface also features in the project strapline, the V of promoting the advice service.

Finally, a photographer was on hand to capture portraits of the MVAP volunteers which will be used for promotional posters.

The process was in tune with values of MVAP, volunteers were at the centre of the whole creative process and were encouraged to bring their unique experience to help others.

MVAP Volunteer

Emily, volunteers for Manchester Mind

I am 21 years old and studying for a psychology degree. At the beginning of my third year last September, I started to think about what I wanted to do afterwards and decided I wanted to work in the mental health sector. I didn’t have any previous experience and started looking at the Manchester Mind website. MVAP popped up and I thought it would be useful – to be working in the community. It’s not directly mental health but I feel the benefits system is closely linked to mental health. I wasn’t very confident and I thought it would also be a good opportunity to meet people whilst also giving advice. I pushed myself to join the project.

I began the training in September – it was very detailed and interesting. I started giving advice in December after I’d been shadowing people. I was really quite shy and scared to start with. I thought people might think I was too young and inexperienced to help them. But that hasn’t happened. I have met young people and old people. People come for a reason and even the little things can really help them. So if they feel that they can’t fill out a form, I’ll encourage them to do something they can, like make a phone call. I feel empowered by helping other people to be empowered. My own communication skills have really improved – my listening skills especially. And now I’m so much more confident. I expected that I might improve my confidence through volunteering but there have been multiple effects I didn’t expect.

I knew nothing about the benefits system before so learning about it has helped me understand more about society in general. People have such a negative view and there’s a stigma about that. There are some really unique about giving face to face advice – I don’t think if I was volunteering in a charity shop I would feel as good about it and there’s something selfish about that. You can see you’re really helping. One of my friends also came to MVAP because I told her about it, and she is just starting to volunteer at Centrepoint. This experience has really helped me with stress – especially during my exams.

I talk to my housemates about what I’m doing and they think it’s cool. Not many 21 year olds have this knowledge. I feel really proud. There’s something so unique about giving face to face advice – I don’t think if I was volunteering in a charity shop I would feel as good about it and there’s something selfish about that. You can see you’re really helping. One of my friends also came to MVAP because I told her about it, and she is just starting to volunteer at Centrepoint. This experience has really helped me with stress – especially during my exams.

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On the training I met other volunteers from different backgrounds – retired, out of work, other students, and people with experience of being on benefits. Before I only knew students. Now I feel a part of the wider community of Manchester by being part of the community at Manchester Mind. Sometimes I bump into people during the day and it’s nice to see familiar faces. I’ve also been able to access other training through Manchester Mind. I did an eight week mindfulness course which has really helped me with stress – especially during my exams.

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The views from volunteers, staff and external stakeholders lead to the following valued aspects of the MVAP model:

– Shared purpose
The partnership started from a shared belief in face to face advice work, and understanding of the needs and value of the volunteer role. It is deep rooted in community development and using volunteers as way to achieve that. There is shared purpose at all levels - strategic and operational, and the development of the project values has reconfirmed and strengthened that shared purpose.

'We have identified a group of organisations we can work with and have something in common with, to produce something really positive.' MVAP strategic partner

– Well established and secure partnership
The partnership had been in operation for four years prior to this funding round. Relationships have been maintained, even without funding being available, and key staff including the volunteer development worker have been retained.

'Partnership cooperation is consistent from steering group through to grass roots.' MVAP strategic partner

'We have learnt more about working with the volunteers - how they learn, how to deal with mixed motivations, abilities and backgrounds all at the same time.' MVAP strategic partner

– Committed lead partner
Manchester Mind has continued to place emphasis on the good functioning of the partnership at all levels.

'Manchester Mind hold the partnership together and make sure it happens. So even if partners or personnel change, the work is still held. All partners have huge things to deal with day to day, so there's a real risk something like this could get lost. Regular meetings agendas, constant looking forward - they're all important.' MVAP strategic partner

– Economies of scale by sharing training of volunteers
Partners and external organisations recognise that they would not have the resources to carry out this training alone.

'It's not each agency re-inventing the wheel.' MVAP strategic partner

'It gives us the capacity to deliver services through volunteers - that would be very expensive to do on our own.' MVAP strategic partner

'We have learnt more about working with the volunteers - how they learn, how to deal with mixed motivations, abilities and backgrounds all at the same time.' MVAP strategic partner

– Focus on volunteers
The project values the volunteers and places them at its centre. This is creating good outcomes and retention. The MVAP supervisors are experienced and very supportive of the volunteers. This is an essential component in achieving successful placement of volunteers. The supervisors are involved in recruitment, training, induction and on-going support of volunteers.

'The focus on volunteers gives better outcomes for clients. Ultimately we're all here to service the clients. It matters how they do it - so it's integral to how you value volunteers that what they're doing is valuable work and needs to be done right. The supervisors are more prepared now to insist on good boundaries. That's good for anyone who has aspirations for work and/or development. We've had the right supervisors who give love and care.' MVAP strategic partner

'What's unique is how much time you can give to volunteers as they are the primary focus of the project. I have created a safe, sane and gentle environment. I am able to protect and develop people and be honest with them. And can even help people who are not suitable: as they are the clients, I find some way to help them.' MVAP supervisor

– Comprehensive training programme
The training is thorough and well presented, and gives the right core foundation to volunteers. It is well structured, with people liking that it is threaded through with on the job placement.

'It's very effective. They have lots of resources and ways to train. Like role play and the chance to practice before being on placement. I couldn't have started my placement without it - I would have been too scared.' MVAP volunteer

– Well organised system that works.
'I couldn't have started my placement without it - I would have been too scared.' MVAP volunteer

‘The camaraderie runs throughout the project.”
– MVAP supervisor

“Everything is done very professionally, especially the training.”
– Commissioning Officer, Manchester City Council

“We all benefit from having the volunteers in multiple ways - their skills, knowledge, capacity and life experience.”
– MVAP strategic partner

“People who volunteer have a need for support and to be built and in turn they are able to offer support to others with different needs to be built.”
– MVAP volunteer

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– MVAP strategic partner

“People who volunteer have a need for support and to be built and in turn they are able to offer support to others with different needs to be built.”
– MVAP volunteer
Volunteers include people with lived experience and those who might not otherwise volunteer

The project is open to people with no experience and accepting of diverse backgrounds. It particularly values people with lived experience and makes the programme accessible to them. This develops the power of them helping others.

‘We have someone who’s just done the course who is quite challenging, not the easiest person to deal with. He’s absolutely thrilled at completing it and so proud of himself and so happy. He was street homeless during the time he was doing it as he had no recourse to public funds. MVAP obviously coped as they haven’t been in touch for help. I had really positive feedback from him and he’s still volunteering for us.’ Booth Centre

‘Sometimes I needed help. I never imagined there would be people who would volunteer to help. Having that help from others has shown me what is possible through volunteering. It’s amazing.’ MVAP volunteer

‘A lot of my clients have faced issues in their life and now they want to give something back. MVAP is ideal. I like that there are five partners with a variety of placements available. That’s good for my clients and for me as it helps me identify a choice for them. I like that the training programme runs several times a year.’ Be Well – YES Manchester

‘I have multiple disabilities and only work part time. I’m a very capable person if I can find my niche and a working style/environment that works for me. They have helped me to find ways that I can contribute and feel good about it and not feel rushed or that I’m not quite as good as other people. I’m able to take my time to do what I think is a good job and that makes me feel good.’ MVAP Volunteer

There are many volunteers who speak languages other than English. This provides a good resource for the diverse client base. ‘Our volunteers speak 26 different languages – we don’t even have to translate advice. Delivering advice in someone’s first language is an amazing thing to be able to offer. It gives a message to the community that we’re not wizards with special knowledge who have access to the secret cupboard with information in it. It is complicated but the information is there and we can all learn it.’ MVAP strategic partner

Partner organisations and the Manchester City Council funded work provide meaningful placements and there is a choice of placement. The project achieves good retention rates.

“I feel motivated. I’m satisfied in doing a thorough job of supporting someone.” – MVAP volunteer

MVAP Volunteer Case Study

Michael, volunteers for Centrepoint

I used to work in hospital stock control for the NHS. It was an interesting administrative job. But when my marriage ended, I became depressed. It was a difficult time for me – I left work in 2006 and moved back in with my parents, and have been unemployed since. I used to go to Back on Track and they told me about MVAP. I wanted to help people so I applied to volunteer. I thought it would help me feel better and get a reference to help me get back into work. I’ve applied for lots of jobs but often hear nothing back.

I chose to volunteer at Centrepoint because it is in the city centre and easy for me to get to. I am also very concerned about homelessness. I think it’s a scandal that the council are not housing homeless people and don’t believe that anyone in this supposedly wealthy country should be homeless. It makes me angry. And the council has approved the building of a lot of private flats in the city centre which are empty. Also I am on Universal Credit and know how punishing the system is. I once made a mistake because I was given the wrong information by a job coach and was sanctioned.

I appealed but it took five months for them to find in my favour – I was traumatised and it made me ill for a while. At least I live with my parents or else I could have been homeless and destitute.

On the MVAP training I learnt a lot about benefits and it was very interesting. In my volunteering role I chose to do admin because that’s what I know about. I do a variety of tasks including data input – keeping the records up-to-date – and filing. I’ve also shredded the confidential material.

I like to volunteer once a week and that keeps me in synch. I feel helpful when I’m here and I can keep my admin skills up-to-date. It’s quite flexible which day of the week I come so I can fit it in with when I have to go to the Job Centre and with when Centrepoint need me to come. Every other weekday I am sitting at home on the computer – looking for and applying for jobs and not feeling confident of getting the jobs. It can get me down. Centrepoint are happy to be a referee when I need one.

Many of the other volunteers have moved on now – I’ve lasted the longest. Being a volunteer gets me out of the house and makes me feel useful.
The evaluation has found that the MVAP project is providing a valuable resource to Manchester that is not otherwise available in the advice work field:

– Unique source of advice training for other voluntary organisations who don’t have sufficient resources to do themselves to this quality

‘We have sent about twenty volunteers to MVAP who are interested in getting work in this sector. We do some basic training here, but MVAP have more time to spend on the theory alongside volunteers getting practical experience with us. There is nowhere else we can get this training from.’ Booth Centre

‘If you get people engaged through training and you are demotivating to be told to go to work as a cleaner – admin, management, solicitors – it can be very valuable that they push for and recently secured funding. Five day working by MVAP will begin in July 2019.

In 2017 Manchester City Council were looking to improve the way they supported people and provide better preventative services within the Town Hall Homelessness Contact Centre. This was prompted in part by the imminent introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act. One idea they were exploring was to work with volunteers with lived experience of homelessness. Centrepoint – one of the MVAP partners – are involved in the city’s strategic work about homelessness and they were able to promote MVAP as a proven model for engaging and supporting volunteers with lived experience.

A tender was issued by the City Council and MVAP submitted a successful application. The commissioners were impressed with the model and the quality of support for volunteers as well as its proven track record. An initial contract of one year – as a pilot project – was offered up to 30th November 2018. This enabled MVAP to provide a service on three days each week. The total number of clients seen per month rose from eight in March 2018 to 62 in December 2018. The original funding was extended, and is currently in place until 31st March 2020. Council staff found the project to be so valuable that they pushed for and recently secured additional funding. Five day working by MVAP will begin in July 2019.

The environment at the Homelessness Contact Centre is a challenging one: most of the centre’s service users are extremely vulnerable, and many often exhibit aggressive behaviour. The majority have been found to have mental health problems, and many are asylum seekers or refugees. In addition, as a pilot project, there have been frequent changes of emphasis and procedure as MVAP, and the council, learned from experience. The team of volunteers on this project has risen excellently to the challenge, proving to be capable, empathetic, and resilient, as well as mutually supportive.

This project has shown the potential for MVAP to be replicated in other venues.

‘The MVAP team in the homelessness contact centre help people to be ready for their housing options assessment. People who are homeless are often in flux and there’s a lot of information they need to be ready with. The volunteers also help with other officialdom aspects like identity, benefits, refugee status and schooling. They often spot something that the person may not have realised is important. It saves our officers a lot of time so we can see more people. We are so pleased we have just increased funding so that the MVAP service here can now be provided for five days a week.’ Commissioning Officer, Manchester City Council
MVAP Volunteer

Tanesa, volunteers at Cheetham Hill Advice Centre

I came to England from Jamaica when I was 21. I studied accounting when I was younger and worked in finance. I always saw myself as being shy and not good with people. I wanted to volunteer but always thought you have to have experience to do it. Because I didn’t have experience I deleted it from my thoughts. Since my children have grown up and don’t need my time as much, I have decided it’s time to give something back. I first did some support work in a hospital and that led me to study Health and Social Care at university. As part of the course I have to do some on the job training – another student told me she’d done advice work and how great it is. I looked at Do-it.org and saw MVAP and that you don’t need experience to join.

I started the training course in January this year and chose CHAC to volunteer at as I wanted to get broad experience and insight into the issues that people face, because later I want to do a Masters in Social Work. I did a couple of weeks training, then the placement started and ran in parallel with the rest of the course. The first weeks I was watching what they do and learning about the organisation and the people who come here. Then I was gradually given more to do – like filling out forms or making calls on the client’s behalf. Now I’m doing ‘triage’ where we assess people’s advice needs before allocating them to a member of the team. The supervisor helps to train you and check the advice you give.

I have learnt a lot about social issues, about immigration issues, benefits, rent arrears and the problems that can occur and how to help. I’ve also learnt about how people think and about the diversity of clients. People might come with similar issues but because of their own circumstances something will change and you have to do things a different way. You have to find out bit by bit about each person. Communication is the key thing – people might come with one issue and you find out that’s not the main thing. On the training we were taught listening and questioning skills to engage people so we find out more information. And how to phrase things so that people don’t feel judged and feel safe to answer honestly. Sometimes I have to listen very keenly to ensure that I understand, especially when someone speaks with a strong accent.

My confidence has grown so much. I can now take a case from triage when I know what to do without having to check with the supervisor. I always reflect on what I’ve done with a client and try to improve. There are a small group of volunteers here on the same day and we support each other. One of things that I’ve learnt is how difficult it is to empower people and get them to do things for themselves. People that I know can do things still want me to do it for them. I think it’s about their confidence, especially if they are immigrants or feel socially excluded. I am going to research this a bit more. MVAP ask you to commit for six months as a volunteer. For me that’s not long enough. Now I have my confidence, I want to keep coming for as long as I can. It helps me and my family too – if I hear about problems they might have I can pass on what I know. Our local Law Centre has closed, so it’s harder to get support. I have helped a friend with an immigration problem. Being an MVAP volunteer has been so empowering for me – I’m more confident because I know what I’m talking about.

CONSULTANT’S OBSERVATIONS

The MVAP volunteers

In carrying out this evaluation, the consultant has met with eleven of the current active cohort of about 38 MVAP volunteers. The impact on the volunteers has been described in this report through statistics, quotations and case studies. It is particularly profound and moving to hear the volunteer stories, especially for those with lived experience of mental health issues, disability, seeking asylum and migration to the UK. The creation by MVAP of a good volunteering experience matches well with the findings of the national survey about volunteering experience carried out by NCVO and published in their report ‘Time Well Spent’ in January 2019. The diversity of the volunteer cohort is also remarkable. MVAP has found a way to increase access to volunteering that, according to NCVO is not generally happening – for them ‘diversity continues to be an issue.’

Whilst it is clear that the project was aiming to create good volunteer outcomes and welcomes diversity, they had not anticipated the depth to which these have occurred in this funding period, nor the extent of the wider community impact. The ability to create the conditions across the partnership for this kind of impact to occur is a good source of learning for other organisations developing their volunteer practice.

The political nature of advice work

Advice work is inherently political in the way it seeks to address social justice. Through doing this work, the volunteers have seen the power of effective information and advice and the extent of need and inequality in the city. They have made connections with the bigger picture and all of this has built political drive in the volunteers to a degree that the consultant has not previously experienced. This, alongside the recognition of the strategic nature of the MVAP, gives potential resource to the project in developing its strategic work further.

Maintaining strategic emphasis in partnership

The strategic partners, who make up the project steering group, have reported that they have not needed to be as involved in MVAP as in the first funding phase and that they know it is working well operationally. This may be inevitable in the current economic climate where voluntary organisations are constantly struggling for survival and resources are incredibly tight. Having identified the strategic importance of the project, the steering group has the opportunity to focus again on strategic planning, so that this successful partnership can further maximise its potential.

Evaluation

Gaining consistent evaluation practice is often a difficulty in partnerships. Whilst partners may have common general understanding about the monitoring requirements, they might interpret it differently in practice and have differing levels of resource and/or expertise in evaluation. There is some evidence that this inconsistency has been true for MVAP. There is scope for the project to further develop common monitoring and evaluation practice.
KEY LEARNINGS

ABOUT MVAP

The MVAP approach works
The provision of face to face advice work, having well trained volunteers in meaningful roles, having understanding of lived experience and building wider connections are all important factors. Learning from the first funding phase has been applied to the programme which has allowed it to be effective more quickly in this phase and the systems work well.

The MVAP Project is strategically important in the city
The project is playing a unique role in the provision of training for advice work in the city. Services have been provided that would otherwise not be possible in the current economic environment. People are being trained and gaining good experience for taking paid roles in the advice sector and the project understands how to link volunteering to employment.

Valuing the volunteers benefits everyone
The increased focus on the volunteers in this funding phase has been very successful for people who volunteer and for client outcomes.

It takes time to build a successful approach
MVAP has been in existence for five years and it has taken much of that time to develop its approach so that it has the strength and depth of the outcomes it now achieves (although it must be remembered that there was a 12 month gap where the project wasn’t funded). Time is needed to build relationships with key organisations – between partners at all levels and with other organisations. It has also taken time to build good relationships with volunteers and really understand how to make the project accessible.

Linking values to outcomes, impact and social justice
The values work undertaken at the beginning of this funding phase has been significant in giving an understanding of the culture of the project. The values – collaborative communities, sharing and trust – are known across the partnership and have been explicitly used by the lead partner and staff in the operations of the project. The achievement of the outcomes and the wider impact of the project is consistent with the values. The values may also have a role in attracting volunteers who have either an implicit or explicit belief in social justice which becomes further awakened as they work with MVAP.

The MVAP Project is important for the wider community
The project is playing a much wider role than purely training volunteers to deliver advice work. The evaluation has highlighted its role in developing community networks, relationships and support. Many of the volunteers come from backgrounds which could lead to them feeling isolated and the project links them up, as well as giving volunteers the skills to help others they know.

MVAP DEVELOPMENT

The main areas identified from the evaluation for MVAP to consider for development are:

Strategic work
– The strategic role of MVAP in the city to be promoted and further developed by partners to increase its influence with statutory organisations and their practice. The volunteer body could be included in this influencing role.
– Continuing emphasis on strategic review and planning in response to changes in the environment.

Strategic collaborations
– Have a mechanism for more relationships with voluntary organisations involved with advice work as partners/collaborators.

Training programme
– The core nine week training programme is highly valued. There is scope for additional shorter training courses for people who wish to volunteer but not in the advice work role and for people carrying out advice work in other organisations.
– The training could be accredited – as a stand-alone nine week course, and/or there are potential options for volunteers to gain existing accreditation in advice work through other agencies. This could be more widely promoted as a ‘volunteer passport’ which supports people to work in the advice sector.
– Increase the involvement of people and volunteers with lived experience in informing the training. There is potential for both internal and external training about peoples lived experiences.

More flexible, developed volunteer role
– There are a range of volunteer roles available within MVAP. These could be more flexible to individuals to make best use of their own knowledge, skills, lived experience and enthusiasm.
– The advice work role could be further developed to give more extensive support to people. This could be done flexibly as volunteers progress and gain experience.

MVAP Interpreter Service
– There is scope to make fuller use of the MVAP volunteers with languages other than English, many of whom are already providing an informal translation service. A more formal resource could be developed, including having a training module; again this could lead to a formal qualification.

MVAP culture and values
– Using the recent branding work to enable consistent and joined-up marketing, literature, and communications for use across the partnership.
– Being more consistently aware of the explicit link between the values and the project impact and embedding the values more fully.

Evaluation development
– Review and development of evaluation practice across the partnership to increase data from all partners and uniformity of evaluation approach. Build in processes to enable volunteers to gain feedback on what works with their clients. Consider measurement of the community outcomes aspects of the project.

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The evaluation has obtained views from a range of stakeholders of MVAP. The findings of the evaluation validate MVAP for the outcomes it achieves and its approach. The worth of the project has been proven, as has its uniqueness in the Manchester advice work sector.

MVAP is achieving its project outcomes for volunteers and people who receive advice. The evidence shows that: people who volunteer have improved skills and confidence, and increase their ability to move towards employment; volunteers report improved wellbeing due to the impact of volunteering; and people report reduced levels of stress and anxiety due to better access to advice provision and improved outcomes.

The outcomes targets have been mostly strongly met (and exceeded) for people who received advice, but all targets have been substantially met.

The overall impact on volunteers is: increased employment and volunteering; increased sense of belonging; increased sense of purpose and achievement; and having a wider sense of the world.

The overall impact on people who receive advice is: improved quality of life; and having trusted source(s) of good quality face to face advice.

The evaluation has also identified the impact of the project on partners especially: increasing their capacity to provide face to face advice work; having a source of consistently trained volunteers; sharing of skills and learning; and increased strategic strength and resources.

CONCLUSION

The MVAP volunteering approach has been found to have the many important aspects including: shared purpose; committed lead partner; economies of scale by sharing training of volunteers; and a comprehensive training programme. The project has demonstrated its significance in developing volunteers through its: focus on volunteers; including people with lived experience and those who might not otherwise volunteer; volunteers with other languages; and meaningful volunteer placements.

The key learning about MVAP from the evaluation is that: the MVAP approach works; the project is strategically important in the city; the project is important for the wider community; valuing the volunteers benefits everyone; it takes time to build a successful approach; and values can be linked to outcomes, impact and social justice.

The evaluation has provided areas for MVAP to consider in its development, especially for strategic work and collaborations, the training programme and volunteer role, having an MVAP interpreter service, continued emphasis of the MVAP values, and development of the evaluation systems.

In summary, MVAP is providing the people and city of Manchester with a much needed advice work resource and its impact is considerably beyond the project outcomes. It has scope for development to increase this resource and impact.

THANK YOU

As a partnership we are really very proud of what has been achieved over the last three years. We would like to thank everyone who has been involved – staff, partners, people who have used the service and given us feedback, the designers – Instruct, the evaluator – Sarah, organisations who have referred people to us, and especially Manchester City Council and the National Lottery Community Fund, for their funding commitments. Most of all we would like to thank our volunteers who have given their time, and in many cases shared their stories with us, they have contributed so positively to the advice provision of all five organisations and beyond. We know that they have gained from being involved with MVAP but likewise, so have we – the wealth of experience and knowledge brought to the project by our volunteers has been immense and we are really grateful for their time, commitment and involvement.

Photography: Jason Lawton