



2009

Annual Report

Working together to build a stronger voluntary and community sector in Reading



www.rvsforum.co.uk



Chair's Report

Rajinder Sohpal Chair of The Forum

About The Forum

The Forum is the voice of Reading's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). Our representatives work with statutory partnerships to formulate strategy and instigate positive change.

All voluntary and community sector groups working in Reading are automatically members of The Forum.

The Forum is part of the **Stronger Together** consortium of Fora (including the Reading Faith Forum, RCVYS, Sakoma, in addition to Reading Voluntary Action) that ensures that the voluntary and community sector is able to influence strategic decision-making.

My first year in the Chair has proved eventful, I mean that literally, activities range from chairing committee meetings, including those of Stronger Together, to welcoming participants to the partnership events, to representation of The Forum on key committees such as Compact where important relationship matters with statutory agencies are discussed.

Meeting so many people gives the Chair of The Forum a good feel about the concerns of many voluntary and community agencies; an important factor when discussing issues with statutory partners.

The Forum has used the year to look at many of the priority issues identified a year ago and a hard working sub-group did take forward and develop these issues. The resulting work programme responded on the key issues such as : media skills; addressing young people's issues in a positive way; older people and their health; and a fairer playing field in procurement and funding. Some of these matters remain to be addressed and some have an ongoing agenda.

I should like to offer thanks to Anna, the Forum Co-ordinator for her enthusiasm and hard work as well as the Forum Committee who have worked with Anna and myself to ensure that the programme goes forward. One other key group is the Forum Voices who keep a weather eye on the constant changes within strategic delivery partnerships and bring their knowledge back to share with us all. A big thank you to you and keep up the good work.

Rajinder Sohpal



Partnership Development Manager's Report

Anne Laing, Stronger Together

The Stronger Together programme is supported by the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) with a staff team, see below, linking The Forum, Reading Faith Forum, Sakoma and Reading Children's & Voluntary Youth Services (RCVYS) into a consortium with Reading Voluntary Action to take forward strategic engagement with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Reading 2020, themed and other key partnerships in Reading.

Major steps began with the 2008 AGM season when the larger team of Forum Voices were appointed from the forums to represent the voluntary and community sector (VCS) at a myriad of meetings. Forum Voices play a critical role for the VCS and the Stronger Together Team has provided support by enabling access to Impact Skills training as well as the sharing of best practice at regular 'Gatherings'.

A full calendar of events has included:

- ❖ Consultation on the Sustainable Communities Strategy
- ❖ Priorities for the VCS
- ❖ Young People in a Different Light – highlighting marketing & media skills
- ❖ LSP Forum with over 50 VCS groups exhibiting their work and how it links with Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets
- ❖ Individual budgets
- ❖ Supporting other fora on events such as Greening Faiths, Locality Working and First Aid courses.

The team played a major role in VCS input to the development of the reformed LSP. The 12 new Board members, including 2 VCS representatives, agreed to the election of a Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) representative from the VCS at its first meeting in September 2008. The BME representative took up his position in March 2009 providing a 3rd VCS vote at this senior partnership.

The VCS representatives come together with a wider group of VCS representatives to discuss LSP issues prior to Board meetings to ensure that they are able to take a more collective and constructive viewpoint to the table.

The team proposed and facilitated participation in LAA project reviews with cross sector partners demonstrating the contribution of the VCS to delivery of targets. Further meetings are planned for the coming period aiming to ensure improved access for groups to be involved at the planning stage of projects.

The work of the Social Inclusion Advisory Group is covered in another part of this report but I am pleased to note that after many false starts this particularly challenging area is now progressing with an LSP approved programme.

Many thanks to the staff team and Forum Voices who have represented the sector throughout the year. Thanks too to Reading Borough Council and Berkshire West PCT who recognise the need to support inclusion of VCS in strategic and operational service programmes by joint funding of the Partnership Development Manager post.

Anne Laing, Partnership Development Manager

Reading Voluntary Action 0118 958 4849

Anna Fowler, Forum Co-ordinator

Other team members

Yasmin Bador, Joint Co-ordinator

Jan Hearn, Joint Co-ordinator

Joanita Lwanga, LSP Development Worker

Paul Harper and Alan Magness in temporary roles.

Forum Voices

The Forum is at the heart of representation, influence and networking across the Reading's voluntary and community sector.

Forum Voices

The Forum's representatives on statutory partnership bodies are called 'Forum Voices'. Voluntary and Community Sector organizations may nominate paid staff, volunteers or trustees to partnership bodies, with elections taking place at the Forum AGM.

Forum Voices work on several initiatives including: the Local Strategic Partnership, the Social Inclusion Advisory Group and the Reading Compact; and on statutory/voluntary and community sector partnerships working for children and young people, older people and for people with drug, alcohol, disability and health-related issues.

Forum Voices report back issues and developments via the Stronger Together newsletter. To subscribe, please contact Anna Fowler, The Forum Co-ordinator on 0118 958 4849, annaf@strongertogether.org.uk



Statutory and VCS delegates working together at the 'Individual Budgets and Self-Directed Support' Joint Forum event, March 2009

How the Forum Voices can help you

- 1 If you have a Voluntary and Community Sector issue that you would like discussed at statutory level, contact the Forum Voices through the Forum website www.rvsforum.co.uk where you will find a full list of representatives
- 2 If you would like to raise an issue, but are unsure where to take it, please contact Anna Fowler at Stronger Together 0118 958 4849 annaf@strongertogether.org.uk

Faith Forum



In 2008/9 Reading Faith Forum have:

- Called for all people to vote in the European elections in order to reduce the chance of extremist groups gaining undeserved victories and publicity.
- As part of a new consortium, Building Strength, obtained a grant which should provide a part time RFF development worker for three years, to work with less involved faith communities.

We have organised three conferences since the summer of 2008:

- A conference for RE advisors about what faith communities can do for schools in helping deliver Religious Education held last autumn. A CD with 15 audio visual presentations about faiths in Reading was presented to each school. Progress was made in relationships with the Reading SACRE which advises schools.
- A conference called GREENING FAITHS about climate change. A Muslim Eco-network was established and a Christian network strengthened.
- A conference called HEARING VOICES about hearing voices of the faith and statutory sector on mental health is organised for July.

We have participated in two other events:

- Running a stall at the LSP Forum (as did many faith organisations).
- Helping RCRE run the Holocaust Memorial Day.

We hold three open Forums a year which:

- Receives reports from Tim Clewer, the faith and voluntary sector rep on the LSP.
- Receives reports from John Rogers, our representative on LINK (Local Involvement Network to health service etc.)
- Receives reports from Andrew Taylor, our representative on the Community Development Strategy Steering Group.

- Discussed possible multifaith chaplaincies to the University and Courts.
- Made representations to local government about parking near places of worship.
- Carried out an exercise identifying how faith communities contribute to Local Area Agreement targets.
- Plans a meeting with Michael Coughlin, chief executive of Reading Borough Council at the next RFF meeting in June.

We have produced:

- An 8 page leaflet describing the attitude of 6 major faiths towards the environment.
- A directory of all faith based organisations in Reading.

Is working to improve electronic information sharing by:

- Putting faith organisations on the RVA database
- Investigating revision of website to fit into the Stronger Together / RVA format.

We are grateful for finances from:

- Subscriptions from faith communities.
- Miss M F Wright's Will Trust for funding the leaflet about faiths and the environment and publicity for the conference GREENING FAITHS.
- The Stronger Together Consortium and their funders that have paid for our Forum Coordinator and the conferences.

Thanks are due to Jan Hearn our Forum Coordinator, all the Stronger Together Team who have been a great help, and to our partner forums and to RVA.

Nigel Hardcastle, Secretary, Faith Forum

SAKOMA

This has been an important year for SAKOMA as it has sought to review and renew its objectives to meet the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups throughout Reading.

The new Executive appointed at the AGM in October 2008 has held brainstorming and other sessions in order to prepare a revised Constitutional document in readiness for the 2009 AGM. The Executive also looked at their future action plans using evidence gathered from various directions including the activities that took place during the year.

SAKOMA has held a number of events during the year including:

- In October 2008, a World Café workshop was held at the Annual General Meeting. This was an informal workshop that consulted members on their needs and the future activities that they would like SAKOMA to be involved in.
- ABC of Grants workshop was held in February 2009. This was well attended by small organisations who wanted guidance in basic finance and grant applications

The Executive hope to provide support to groups in various ways, not least in enabling a greater level of networking opportunities for BME groups. This includes holding further events that will include training to groups and improving communications between the public, SAKOMA members and the SAKOMA Executive Committee.

As part of this initiative, the SAKOMA website has been commissioned and is currently under development. This will allow updates on SAKOMA that will include latest news and events planned. Minutes from past meetings, reports and other relevant documents will also be available for download by members of the public.

Membership is open to a wide range of groups meeting basic criteria. If your group is interested and would like to join the network please contact Yasmin Bador, the SAKOMA forum coordinator at SAKOMA, Stronger Together, Reading Voluntary Action, 35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS or telephone 0118 958 4849. Alternatively you may email Yasmin at yasmin@strongertogether.org.uk

**Yasmin Bador, Multi-Forum Co-ordinator,
Stronger Together**



Sakoma Exec Members,
from left – Cecily
Mwaniki, Vip Mair
(Chair), Elizabeth
Nyawade, Mignon
Michael

RCVYS



Some of the key highlights from the last year include:

- **The restructure and transition of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) into Reading Children's Trust**
 - Reading Children's Trust now consists of 15 main groups, with elected RCVYS Representatives sitting on each of them.
 - The 4 locality-based (N, S, E & W) Children's Action Teams (CATs) are now in place and are providing multi-agency integrated services for children, young people and their families. Their work is guided by Locality Steering Groups which all have RCVYS Representation. These seek to meet specific local needs.
 - The new Children and Young People's Plan is being developed and consulted on, and should be published towards the summer.
 - Reading Children's Trust is moving towards a commissioning framework. RCVYS is very much involved in ensuring that the perspective of the VCF sector is very much included in the implementation plans.
- **The Joint Area Review (JAR), its fall-out and the resignation of Cllr Pete Ruhemann as Lead Member for Children's Services**
 - The recent JAR presented a mixed picture of services for Children, Young People and their families within the Children's Trust, with some areas receiving praise (including the work of a couple of particular VCF organisations), and other areas (in particular services for safeguarding children within Reading Borough Council) receiving some very negative comments. This led to an immense amount of activity to try to address these weaknesses, and the resignation of Cllr Pete Ruhemann as Lead Member for Children's Services. There were also many changes within the management of the Directorate of Education and Children's Services.
- **The Reading 2020 Annual Meeting with the Locality Working Showcase and the Schools' SENCO Conference Showcase**
 - RCVYS helped to organise this year's Reading 2020 Annual Meeting in November which included a focus on Locality Working, and again provided a showcase for many different VCF organisations which were able to provide support to families here in Reading. This included several workshops looking at different aspects of the Locality Working agenda. Unfortunately, the schools workshop was particularly badly attended. As a direct result, we were asked to help organise a similar Showcase event specifically for schools. From this meeting, and working in partnership with the School Improvement Team, we organised a VCF Sector Showcase for School SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) which was attended by 40 different VCF organisations, with many good contacts made.
- **The large number of applications to the RCVYS Training Bursary, the First Aid Training and the opportunity for nearly 500 people to receive training they might not have otherwise received**
 - The RCVYS Training Bursary distributes money from Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to VCF organisations in Reading that work with children and young people, for their staff and volunteers to undertake training. More information is available from www.rcvys.org.uk.

Ben Cross, RCVYS Development Worker. More information about the work of RCVYS is available from www.rcvys.org.uk, by e-mailing info@rcvys.org.uk or by calling 07872 958501.

A full list of RCVYS Representatives/Forum Voices is available from the RCVYS website.



Reading 2020 Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

The shape of the Reading 2020 Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has changed over the past year to become more strategic in focus. A new slimmed-down Board of 12 members representing public, private and voluntary sectors met for the first time in September 2008; following an election process a 13th member has now been added as envisaged to represent BME communities.

The intention is to create more time at the bi-monthly Board meetings to concentrate on strategic themes that link to the broader Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). At an away day in March 2009 three themes were agreed to concentrate on in the coming months:

- Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET's)
- Childhood poverty and locality-based working
- Environmental issues and actions

These are not the only priority themes around of course, but the LSP Board is looking to see where it can add value beyond the work already being done by each organisation or sector. Work will continue to explore what can be put in place to help this process, with full input from voluntary, community and faith sectors.

Whilst there is ongoing work to oversee progress towards targets in Reading's Local Area Agreement (LAA) the Board will deal with these on an exception basis where specific remedial actions are required to address performance issues.

The annual stakeholder event (LSP Forum), which took place in November 2008, again showcased the role the voluntary and community sector plays in the town. However, the event did not prove as successful as hoped for in terms of connecting the many inputs the sector makes towards achieving LAA targets with the relevant target-holders in statutory bodies.

A workshop in January 2009 around LAA targets did include representatives from VCF groups for the first time, so new ways of deepening engagement with the sector are being explored. There is still a long way to go, however, to get this happening consistently across all services areas, and at all stages of the process of addressing issues – from initial planning through to post-implementation reviews.

The voluntary sector-led Social Inclusion Advisory Group (SIAG) is building on the successful pilot study into the issue of bullying and harassment of children and young people and has agreed a programme of reviews for the year ahead with the LSP Board. These will cover further work on the anti-bullying strategy and the use of the *Sentinel* programme to record such incidents, and reviews of the provision of Police custody and the Primary Care Trust's policy on safeguarding adults.

Mike Martin, Reading Voluntary Action
Tim Clewer, RCVYS/Faith Forum
Rajinder Sohpal, RCRE

Forum & BME representatives on Reading 2020 Local Strategic Partnership

Reading Compact

The Reading Compact is about promoting understanding and co-operation between providers of local services whether statutory or voluntary. It is a well-attended grouping, which has seen considerable progress this year. This includes:

- The Compact successfully investigated and dealt with a challenge that Compact principles had been breached, and new policies were put in place in order to help prevent a similar incident occurring again
- Anne Laing of Reading Voluntary Action and Grant Thornton of Reading Borough Council are working together to produce a more accurate measure of the N17 National Indicator for a Thriving Third Sector. Although this indicator is not in the top 35 indicators selected for the LAA, it reflects the local importance of the voluntary sector in the town
- The Compact has been briefed on changes in the commissioning environment, a major issue for the Voluntary and Community Sector both locally and nationally. The intention is to increase the amount of service delivery by the third sector, but there is a divergence between government statements and what is happening on the ground e.g. encouraging the use of “small organizations”, when the driver is for large contracts that achieve cost efficiency that can't be accessed by a small group. It is also notable that nationally the proportion of funding via grants is decreasing, while commissioning is increasing
- A leaflet has been produced to inform on how the Compact works, who is involved, how it can be contacted and how to access Compact minutes

Mike Martin, Reading Voluntary Action

Social Inclusion Advisory Group

SIAG was created by the Reading 2020 Local Strategic Partnership for the promotion, influencing and monitoring of social inclusion policy and practice of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Following on from the recommendations arising from the SIAG pilot study in 2008 the constitution and terms of reference were amended and approved by the LSP board.

A management group has been established with senior management representation from the VCS and statutory bodies, which will conduct its work through panels set up to examine particular service areas. Those proposed for 2009 were approved by the LSP Board as follows:

- Borough Council policy on bullying and harassment of children, including the implementation of the Sentinel recording and management system
- Thames Valley Police policy and provision of custody of alleged offenders in Reading
- Berkshire NHS (PCT) Safeguarding Adults policy

The panels will generally approach their work through the framework of Equality Impact Assessments where available. The panels aim to examine the extent to which policy takes account of the potential for differential impacts, across the six equality strands, and reflects this in the arrangements for practical delivery or implementation of the service in question.

Work is ongoing in all three service areas with reports to the SIAG management group due to be delivered by the end of 2009

Paul Harper, Stronger Together

Forum Consultancy Project

As a component of the Big Lottery funded Stronger Together project, The Forum commissioned Just Ideas in February 2009 to carry out a consultancy project to assess and enhance the work of the Forum. The brief for the consultancy focused on the following aims:

- To assess the support needs of voluntary, community and faith based organisations in relation to the Forum's aims
- To address the future strategy and sustainability of the Forum
- To audit current Forum activity to establish what it does well and what it could do better

The research for this development consultancy took place during March and April 2009 and incorporated telephone and email surveys and focus groups.

Recommendations include new communication, promotion and membership initiatives; developing and showcasing the Forum's expertise in forging collaborative working between voluntary organizations and statutory partners; and partnership development.

The full report can be downloaded from www.rvsforum.co.uk and is also available from the Forum Co-ordinator Anna Fowler, annaf@strongertogether.org.uk, 0118 958 4849



Mary Tindall of RISC picks the winner in our survey prize draw while Paul Harper and Jan Hearn of Stronger Together look on. Every group who helped with the research component of the Forum Consultancy Project were entered into the draw.

Congratulations to Home-Start Reading, our winners of the £100 prize.

**The Forum
Statement of Financial Activities
for the Year Ended 31 March 2009**

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2009	Total 2008
INCOME				
Membership	-	-	-	25
Donations	-	-	-	400
Donations: in-kind	-	-	-	804
Consultancy	3000	-	3000	-
Prior Year Adjustment	8	-	8	-
TOTAL INCOME	3008	-	3008	1,229
EXPENSES				
Web-site development	130	-	130	112
RVSF meetings	39	-	39	1,283
Other Expenses	-	-	-	500
TOTAL EXPENSES	169	-	169	1,895
Net movement in funds	2839	-	2839	(666)
Total funds b/fwd	1,203	-	1,203	1,869
Total funds carried forward	4,042	-	4,042	1,203

Balance Sheet at 31 March 2009

	31 March 2009		31 March 2008	
	£	£	£	£
Balance at bank and in hand	1,042	-	1,303	-
Current assets	1,042	-	1,303	-
Debtors	3000	-	-	-
Creditors	-	-	100	-
Net assets	4,042	4,042	1,203	1,203
Represented by:				
FUNDS				
Restricted	-	-	-	-
Unrestricted	4,042	4,042	1,203	1,203
	4,042	4,042	1,203	1,203

Note:

Transactions for the year to 31st March 2009 in respect of support services to The Forum formed a part of the Stronger Together Restricted Fund within the accounts of Reading Voluntary Action. It is estimated that both income and expenditure in respect of the Forum Co-ordinator and training for Forum Representatives may be valued £20,053 for the purpose of financial reporting.



The Forum Committee are:

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