



FirstPoint Community Interest Company (CIC)

End-point feedback report by the University of Bristol

19 February 2013

Date of visit: 26-27 November 2012

Key learning points: How Social Work Practice has developed at FirstPoint

1. Delivering specialist training

FirstPoint specialises in delivering social work, interpreting services and advising services to d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing communities. It is broadening its services to include specialised training to clients and service providers. The following are two specific types of training currently being planned or delivered.

‘Living with hearing loss.’ The ‘Living with hearing loss’ course is a five-week reablement course that aims to give people the strategies they need to deal with hearing loss. This could include types of equipment, managing hearing aids and learning about the Equality Act and the types of support people may be entitled to, such as note takers. The course was devised after the Hard of Hearing Forum asked for a lip reading course. The local authority commissioner was unable to fund the lip reading course, so FirstPoint came up with the idea of structuring its own course. Initial feedback from the course includes the following:

Do you think it is a good outline for the course?

- Would have liked to have learned about hearing dogs, theatres and cinemas.
- Meeting people with similar problems has been good, means no hang-ups. Well worthwhile.
- We are getting advice all the time = helpful.
- The greenflag text number was very helpful.
- Mixed feelings about lip reading. Find it tough to improve.
- The equipment is very helpful, didn't know about the equipment before. Course definitely worthwhile. Not sure if it would be suitable for a non-technical person.
- Re lip reading. The course is not only about lip reading, but also managing situations, big groups, where to sit etc. Also lip reading is not something people get straight away and most people go for years.

Would you think this course could be longer?

Five weeks enough?

- As an introduction, yes.

Training for staff from external agencies and care homes. FirstPoint staff, in collaboration with its carers and clients, identified a need for communication training for care agencies and care home staff. This training would be tailored to the individual needs of the care staff, but could include looking after hearing aids, what equipment is available in care homes and how to slow communication or how to position oneself when working with clients who are deafened or hard of hearing. The training could be formal half-day training or shorter 'on the spot' training. The agencies will be required to pay for this specialised training.

2. Marketing, branding and sustainability

The Business Development Manager is exploring, with the rest of FirstPoint staff, how to build the business and to ensure sustainability beyond the pilot, by looking at the three points of Social Work Practice (SWP): social work, interpreting and hearing loss and equipment.

Social work. FirstPoint is looking at providing specialised social work services to neighbouring boroughs that might not have d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing services. It is currently looking at opportunities for outreach on how to reach clients in the community. The social work team consists of two qualified social workers and two assistants as well as a senior practitioner/manager who is a qualified social worker. FirstPoint would like to employ one more qualified social worker and one social work assistant.

Interpreting. FirstPoint has realised that it is able to work more efficiently and increase profits if it employs in-house interpreters. It is therefore advertising for an additional in-house interpreter to work alongside Fiona McIntosh, a FirstPoint employee. The interpreting service is being advertised through different media sources. For example, the service is being advertised through Google Ads within Surrey, Berkshire and London. If you Google 'Interpreting Services Surrey' then FirstPoint will come up at the top of the list. FirstPoint has also opened up a LinkedIn page to assist in building up the database of professional, qualified interpreters. This has led to an increase in interpreters, from 50 to 100 within one month. FirstPoint is aiming to build a Facebook page and a Twitter account that links into the LinkedIn page. This will have to be done when it moves out of the Surrey premises and does not have the IT restrictions.

Hearing loss and equipment. As stated above, FirstPoint is developing a 'Hard of hearing awareness' training programme that can be delivered to care workers, either within care homes or to carers who go into someone's own home. This is particularly important for those who do not have an awareness of the needs of hard of hearing people and particularly for those care workers who do not have English as their first language. Hearing loss assessors are often required to attend homes to assist in setting up hearing loss equipment, which might be helping someone use the equipment or changing batteries in existing equipment. FirstPoint is looking to build a pool of volunteers who could assist in these types of tasks. It is currently considering recruitment strategies and funding to assist in the training of volunteers. FirstPoint is considering marketing to the clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to see if they can collaboratively hire a private audiologist to give care home residents a hearing service as well as possibilities of linking up with GPs who might want to commission FirstPoint services.

3. Communication with clients

FirstPoint staff are specialised in how to communicate with d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing clients. The staff are trained in knowing what questions to ask and how to phrase questions.

FirstPoint is able to use the Video Relay Service (VRS) and Skype to communicate with clients, which might not be possible within local authorities because of the security settings on their IT systems. Skype is actually still difficult to use in FirstPoint's current location, as it is restricted within the local authority. This issue will be resolved when FirstPoint moves to its new location. To most effectively use Skype, FirstPoint is considering setting up a Skype morning, when people know staff will be available. FirstPoint also has an office-based mobile on which clients can contact staff.

FirstPoint has also devised a new resource for clients called a communication profile. This is a written document that d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing clients develop with FirstPoint staff to indicate to other professionals their preferred modes of communication. FirstPoint keeps a copy of the communication profile and the clients have a copy to take with them when attending other services.

As FirstPoint is not restricted by Surrey eligibility criteria, it is able to work with whomever it chooses. FirstPoint is looking to increase the working time of a social work assistant (Tina) who specialises in assisting d/Deaf people in filling out Disability Living Allowance (DLA) forms. This is in place (or sometimes in addition) for clients having to fill out the paperwork on their own or with Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) assistance. d/Deaf clients often struggle with understanding and completing the forms correctly, which results in the DLA claim being denied. Tina is able to reduce the number of denied claims by working with the clients directly to fill out the forms. This also saves adult social services money as many clients going to CAB need an interpreter (paid for by social services). Then, if the claim is denied, clients have to go through the process again. Increasing Tina's time will save time and money for adult social care, and also get services to clients quicker and reduce the anxiety and stress of having to wait and go through the process more than once. Tina provides the following case study as an illustration of her work:

When I assessed her I noticed she had been turned down for DLA but was not asking for any support with her claim. This was because she was not aware that she could appeal or ask for the decision to be looked at again. A lot of people who have literacy problems are not aware of this. She was very stressed when applying, as her first language is sign language. I wrote to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) asking them to look again at their decision. Again they refused. I completed GL24 appeal papers and added extra information and she was awarded middle rate care and low rate mobility on 30 November 2012, backdated to 12 June 2012. (The time it took me was approximately three hours.) The client was very stressed and worried about having to appeal and almost gave up as she believed she was not entitled to it. I have just received an email from the client thanking me and expressing how relieved she was that it was all over.

4. Access to reablement

FirstPoint is working with the local charities that are providing a form of reablement to clients. It provides interpreting services when this would otherwise have been too costly to provide. An example includes where d/Deaf people are on a work programme course (based on Employment Support Allowance), but need an interpreter to complete the course. In one case, a man could not attend training because it cost £30, but the interpreter would have cost £150. FirstPoint was able to provide the interpreting service so that the man could attend the training. FirstPoint invests in this type of reablement and preventative service because it promotes independence and possibly prevents future social work services, and it provides a quicker service for d/Deaf people.

5. Community involvement

FirstPoint is actively engaged in the communities that it serves, which include the d/Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing communities. The Surrey Deaf Forum and the Hard of Hearing Forum are consulted for ideas on the developments of the practice, and the chair of the Surrey Deaf Forum is one of the FirstPoint directors. Members of the community also sit on FirstPoint's steering group. FirstPoint holds two community forums a year and the first had a mixed group of 50 people in attendance. FirstPoint provided multiple communication sources, such as BSL, speech and text. It has multiple external organisations in attendance to provide additional information and advice to the d/Deaf and hard of hearing communities, and aims to hold a larger Community Forum in 2013.

How are the values of social enterprise being evidenced at FirstPoint?

The following list was compiled through communication with the staff at FirstPoint and attendance at the steering group:

1. There is an openness to ideas and developing the business. There is a 'can do' approach – the approach is 'let's find a way to do this'.
2. The practice is informed by working forums (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) that have a say in the direction of the services. Additional input in the direction of the service comes from the steering group and the Community Forum.
3. FirstPoint is governed by a board of directors, which is comprised of a mixture of executive and non-executive directors. The non-executive directors consist of one hearing person who is an employment expert and one d/Deaf person who is the chair of the Surrey Deaf Forum. The executive directors consist of two FirstPoint employees, David Rose and Fiona McIntosh. Once two other non-executive directors are appointed from the community, then two more executive directors will be appointed from FirstPoint. There were only two board meetings before November 2012.
4. Encourage equality among the team as much as possible. The Managing Director sends out PowerPoint presentations and other information from steering group meetings to keep all staff involved.
5. It is hoped that the end of year 1 surplus will be reinvested back into the business through additional posts of an assistant social worker, and a hearing loss adviser assistant, through a marketing/communication advertising budget, community activities and reserves. Surrey County Council will first have to agree the use of the reserves by FirstPoint.

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