

Derbyshire CAN

Derbyshire Contracts Advice Network (DCAN) is a partnership project, which aims to increase the financial resources of VCS and infrastructure organisations by helping them win contracts and increase their skills and knowledge about procurement.

The project is led by and based at Links (the Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Council for Voluntary Service & Action) in partnership with North Derbyshire Voluntary Action, South Derbyshire CVS, Southern Derbyshire Mental Health Forum, Derbyshire County Council Adult Care and Community Enterprise Derby.

DCAN was developed to support VCS organisations who were unable to access public sector contracts in Derbyshire. In 2007/8 it directly supported 41 organisations, 10 of which went on to win resources through the contracting process.

Funded by the Big Lottery Fund BASIS programme and running from Autumn 2007 to Summer 2012, the network provides:

- One-to-one support for small local VCS providers, focusing on those who work in hard-to-reach communities.
- Mentoring for infrastructure advisors on procurement technicalities, enabling them to better support their members needs.
- Training events, forums and seminars to increase participants knowledge and technical competences of the contracting process.
- Proactive support for BME and rural communities, including the development of a BME toolkit.

- Support to a providers network, encouraging consortia subcontracting arrangements.
- Links with other services and projects, including sharing best practice from regional and national initiatives.

Other services provided by DCAN include a commissioned solicitor able to deliver training and provide specific advice on tendering and contract related issues, weekly email updates on tendering opportunities, and a free monthly newsletter.

In the past few years, the focus of the network has altered slightly to accommodate changes in the VCS commissioning landscape.

Despite efficiency drives in public sector procurement leading to increases in the size and value of some local contracts and a reduction in VCS organisations applying, DCAN believes that sub-contracting with the sector can still have a positive impact on communities. This has led them to developing a new work strand, linking contractors from outside of Derbyshire with VCS that can support contract delivery.

The success of the network has been down to its knowledge of the barriers faced by the VCS in bidding for public sector contracts, its development and maintenance of relationships with local public sector commissioners, and drawing on its partners existing links with local VCS and infrastructure organisations.

For further information on DCAN visit www.linkscvs.org.uk/contracts.htm.