

# LEARNING VISIT REPORT

## Voluntary Action Harrow 13191

<b>1.1 Date of visit:</b> 15/04/18	<b>1.2 Name of visiting Grants Officer:</b> Jemma Grieve Combes	<b>1.3 People met with:</b> AB
<b>1.4 Programme Area &amp; Outcomes:</b> Strengthening London's Voluntary Sector More organisations with improved capabilities in monitoring, evaluation and impact reporting		
<b>1.5 Purpose of the award:</b> £85,200 towards the salary of a part-time Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Development Manager and project running costs.		
<b>Grant start date:</b> 01/10/16	<b>Grant end date:</b> 01/10/19	
<b>MONITORING INFORMATION</b>		
<b>2.1 Project Outcome 1:</b> At least 80% of groups will have improved knowledge, skills and resources to design and implement monitoring, evaluation and impact reporting systems.		
<b>2.2 Project Outcome 2:</b> At least 80% of groups will have increased their confidence and ability to implement monitoring, evaluation and impact reporting systems.		
<b>Progress made:</b> In the first 1.5 years of the grant the organisation has delivered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tailored 1-2-1 support and advice to 35 groups covering aspects such as monitoring frameworks, evaluations and focus groups.</li><li>• Quarterly half day training sessions (plus an extra 3 in year 2) covering topics including theory of change, needs assessment, and monitoring and evaluation for grant applications.</li><li>• Ad hoc phone, email and online support to over 30 organisations</li></ul>		
100% of organisations have reported an increase in knowledge and confidence has demonstrably grown. For example, after being supported to design a feedback form for one project, a group had the confidence to design their own for other projects. This has reinforced their confidence in the work they are carrying out more widely.		
<b>2.3 Project Outcome 3:</b> At least 80% of groups will have embedded good practice in demonstrating and reporting their performance and social impact.		
<b>2.4 Project Outcome 4:</b> At least 80% of groups will be better equipped to implement an outcome-based approach in their work and future project design.		
<b>Progress made:</b> 70-80% of organisations have reported that they are better able to implement monitoring and evaluation. For example, some groups have set targets or SMART objectives. Embedding good practice can be challenging as it is often about change management and using new ways of working. Good documentation and engaging trustees has been important.		
<b>2.5 Project Outcome 5:</b> At least 80% of groups will recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluating in improving impact and performance.		
<b>Progress made:</b> Generally, organisations are keen to improve their monitoring and evaluation, but time is a limiting factor. Funding applications can be a driver, but an		

important finding has been the internal benefit of better outcome reporting. It is motivating for staff and volunteers to see the difference they are making. Others have been able to use it to improve their external communications. For example, one organisation now includes a line in their email footers 'what did we do last week' e.g. 'we helped a client that was suffering from stress at work by providing counselling and they have just gone back to work'.

### GRANT OFFICER COMMENTS

Your officer met with the post-holder funded by the grant at the organisation's offices in Harrow. The offices are shared with other local organisations which has been beneficial for joint working.

1. **Impact:** Voluntary Action Harrow is an interesting organisation. Their cooperative legal structure gives a sense of shared ownership that shows through the dedication to their work. The postholder met with was clearly both very knowledgeable and passionate about monitoring and evaluation. Work delivered to date has had a positive impact on the groups that have taken part and 121 advice has been particularly effective. Training sessions have had the unexpected outcomes of creating networking opportunities that have led to collaborations and of providing respite to staff from day-to-day operations.

The organisation has recently become a grant administrator for a local fund. Rather than change their relationship with local organisations they have found this to be a helpful process for working with organisations, particularly smaller groups, to improve their monitoring and evaluation systems.

2. **Learning:** The organisation works with many small groups run by volunteers. Training has had to be flexible to meet their needs. For example, advice to a walking group was provided during a walk, and they are looking at the possibility of out of hours training sessions. They have identified that some groups struggle with using technology though this is often more about confidence than skills.
3. **Knowledge:** GDPR has had a massive impact on groups locally who are worried about complying with the new legislation. Health and safety and safeguarding are of similar concern to organisations. There appears to be an emerging gap locally in meeting staff and volunteer CPD needs, particularly around advice as organisations' lack training resource. This is accompanied by an increase in demand and cut in resource causing stress within teams.
4. **Total assets:** there is value in bringing organisations working on similar themes together, but it needs to be purposeful.