



supporting voluntary organisations that work with offenders and their families

“Clinks is a top-class infrastructure body. It brings a whole new level of credibility and standing to the Voluntary and Community Sector working with offenders.”

AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT

2013



AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

“If you want to find out what’s going on in that world, you talk to Clinks. They keep us informed about what is going on in that world because they are closer to it than we are and closer to their membership.”

Clinks is the membership body that supports, represents and promotes the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector working in criminal justice.

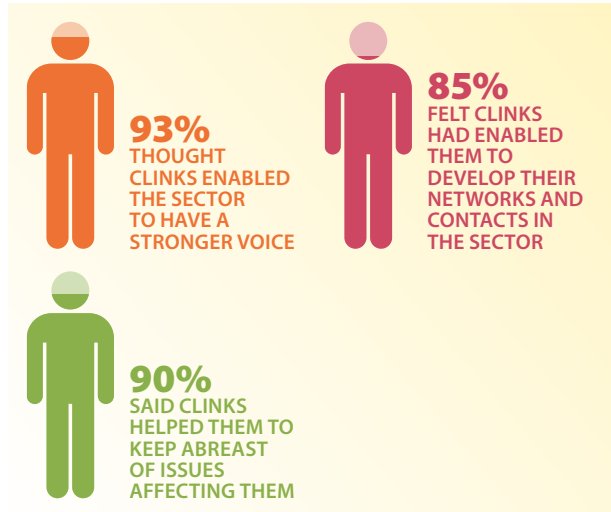
The overall picture from the impact assessment was overwhelmingly positive, Clinks is clearly held in high regard, well respected and trusted by their stakeholders. 93% of those who responded to the online surveys or who were interviewed felt that Clinks enables the Sector to have a stronger voice, 85% felt that Clinks had helped them to develop their personal networks and contacts in the Sector and 90% said that Clinks helps them to keep abreast of issues affecting them.

CLINKS’ IMPACT

This impact assessment has shown that Clinks is having a significant impact across three of the key impact areas:

- Strong organisations
- A dynamic Sector
- Supportive external agencies.

Clinks is clearly playing a vital role in helping to strengthen VCSE organisations in the Criminal Justice System by enabling them to work more effectively and become more sustainable. In particular, Clinks enables organisations in the Sector to keep up-to-date with issues and respond to opportunities as well as to network with other organisations.



“My understanding of issues like the threats and opportunities posed by current government policy would not be the same without the briefings, networking opportunities, and sensible leadership shown by Clinks.”

Clinks is also contributing to a more dynamic Sector by enabling it to have a stronger voice, develop and shape its thinking and become more unified. The importance of Clinks’ role in representing the views and experiences of VCSE organisations and advocating for the Sector emerged particularly strongly.

“Clinks’ responses to things like Transforming Rehabilitation are really useful because they are able to source and collate what the feeling is out there into something which adds a bit more kudos and power when it’s fed back as a single voice.”

“The smaller organisations need Clinks to speak with integrity on their behalf, particularly now the Sector is finding its voice is being constrained in terms of core funding or having to work with corporate partners.”

Finally, Clinks is enabling commissioners, funders, policy-makers and private sector agencies to work more collaboratively with the VCSE Sector. It does this by helping them to better appreciate the diversity of the Sector and the issues it faces as well as to consult and communicate more effectively with VCSE organisations.

“Clinks have been a very useful sounding board both in terms of their knowledge of the voluntary sector but also their own expertise in criminal justice.”

CLINKS' SERVICES

Generally, the majority of stakeholders feel that Clinks is providing the range of services and activities that they want and need, and that Clinks should continue to provide more of the same. The overarching theme in much of their feedback was the need for Clinks to equip the Sector for the changes ahead. Their suggestions for development suggest that Clinks' services need fine-tuning rather than fundamental change.

In particular, they suggested that Clinks should consider:

- Reviewing its training programme in terms of the range of topics covered, the methods used and the locations in which training is delivered
- Diversify the ways in which it shares information with its stakeholders (e.g. by using social media and new technologies)
- Providing more networking opportunities and more support for VCSE organisations, particularly in preparing for the changes facing the Sector
- Developing more regional activities
- Carrying out lobbying on specific topics such as the impact of PbR on the Sector, security clearance for staff and volunteers
- Providing a co-ordinating and support role for VCSE organisations wishing to tender for contracts
- Developing quality standards for VCSE organisations in the Sector.

As an organisation, Clinks should also consider:

- Strengthening its relationships with other infrastructure organisations
- Improving the way it promotes itself and the role of infrastructure organisations more generally.

MAXIMISING AND SUSTAINING ITS IMPACT

Clinks' effectiveness in meeting its stakeholders' needs enables it to have considerable impact. In order for it to maximise and sustain this impact, it is important to highlight the factors that contribute to Clinks' impact, in particular:

- The trust and respect Clinks has established amongst its stakeholders
- The relevance and accessibility of the services it provides
- The reputation of its staff.

It is also important for Clinks to take account of various factors which may limit its ability to have a greater impact. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the challenge for Clinks of representing and consulting effectively with its large and diverse membership as well as the risk that its ability to lobby and campaign may be weakened by the substantial funding it currently receives from government.

In order to maximise and sustain its impact, Clinks should therefore focus on preserving what it does best:

- Maintaining a wide and diverse membership base
- Representing its members through effective consultation
- Providing high-quality, relevant and accessible services
- Sustaining the culture and reputation of the organisation through investing in its staff and succession-planning
- Maintaining and demonstrating its neutrality and independence in all its work.

CONCLUSION

This impact assessment was set within the context of the significant changes taking place across the VCSE Sector and, in particular, within the Criminal Justice System. Infrastructure organisations such as Clinks have a vital role to play in enabling VCSE organisations to cope with these changes and take advantage of new opportunities.

Our assessment showed that Clinks is having a significant impact in the Sector and is fulfilling a vital role in supporting VCSE organisations working in the CJS. It is therefore well-placed to continue helping the Sector respond to the challenges it faces. In the words of one of its stakeholders:

“Clinks is a top-class infrastructure body. It brings a whole new level of credibility and standing to the VCS working with offenders.”

APPROACH TO THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Clinks is the only infrastructure organisation specifically supporting VCSE organisations working in the Criminal Justice System. M & E Consulting was commissioned by Clinks to carry out an impact assessment with the aim of helping Clinks establish:

- What difference it is making to its external stakeholders
- Whether it is providing the range of services and activities that its external stakeholders want and need
- Whether it is focussing its resources correctly and where its services are having the greatest impact.

The assessment was based on a model developed by the Value for Infrastructure Programme¹ to help infrastructure organisations demonstrate their impact. Feedback from stakeholders was gathered through in-depth telephone interviews carried out with 32 people, representing Clinks' key stakeholders (partner organisations, funders and commissioners, private sector contacts and key individuals in the Sector).

A series of online surveys publicised to all contacts, was completed by 46 of Clinks' Members, 72 of Clinks' VCSE Sector contacts and 53 non-VCSE Sector contacts. Feedback gathered by Clinks at recent events and training courses was also analysed.

The number of people who participated in our interviews and who responded to the online surveys was relatively small. The findings therefore cannot be taken as a representative view of all Clinks' stakeholders but they do provide a valuable insight into perceptions and experiences of a range of Clinks' different stakeholders.

1. VIP was developed by NCVO, Triangle Consulting and the Third Sector Research Centre.

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