

RAN Advice Forum Report

“Networking”

March 6, 2024

Introduction

1 The aim of this Forum was to introduce the four most recent RAN members to the rest of the member organisations, and then to enable all those attending to have a significant amount of time to network with each other.

2 The Forum began with a welcome by Richard Harrison, RAN Chair, and a short talk by Francesca Yates, CEO of Communicare and a RAN trustee, about the value of developing partnerships to support funding applications. We then presented Katherine Shepherd, CEO of The Mustard Tree, which had recently achieved the RAN Quality Standard, with their certificate.

Presentations

3 The four most recent RAN members - ABC to Read, Acre, Berkshire Vision and No 5 - each then gave short presentations about their work, which are summarised below. The presentations they used, which give more detailed information, are attached alongside this report.

A ABC to Read

4 Mike Edwards spoke about the charity's origins in 2004; their core activity - recruiting, screening, training and placing volunteer reading mentors in school; the additional work they do with parents of pre-school children, parent helpers, sixth form 'buddies' in secondary schools, and teaching assistants; and the overwhelmingly positive feedback about the impact of their work.

B Acre

5 George Mathew explained that Acre (Alliance for cohesion and racial equality) was established in 2012, but predecessor organisations date back to 1965. The organisation provides a Community Wellbeing Hub where they offer training, mental health support and a number of additional services; it engages with communities to build relationships and take action on key issues; and runs a wide range of core activities including a women's circle, a community health champions project, and a Hate Crime Forum.

C Berkshire Vision

6 Christine Cutts said that their key aim was to make visually impaired people independent, and the main focus of the range of activities they undertake was to reduce isolation. Following their recent merger with RAB Sightloss they now provide services across the whole of Berkshire. They undertake twelve main activities, ranging from adapted sports to transport, telephone befriending and technology support; have over 400 volunteers, and provide unlimited support to over 1500 people.

D No 5

7 Alyson Wylding explained that No 5 provided free, confidential, professional mental health support for young people aged 11-25 who are living, working or studying in the 'RG' postcode area (Berkshire West). They provide up to 20 sessions of 1:1 counselling for the young people, and information and advice to parents and carers: a clinical outreach counselling service in 6 local schools; a range of preventative outreach projects; and all their support is co-designed and co-delivered with the young people. In 2023 they supported 870 young people, and they currently have nearly 1000 on their waiting list.

Networking

8 After the presentations had concluded, the rest of the Forum was spent networking. Twenty of the twenty-two RAN members had set up stalls on tables around the Council Chamber and there were lots of discussions at these about current services and possible future collaboration.

Richard Harrison - Chair, Reading Advice Network