Interchange is a member of the EU-sponsored Science Shop movement, which fosters knowledge for the community by facilitating affordable, grass-roots research. One of only two Science Shops in the UK, Interchange is a registered charity which was conceived and set up by social scientists at the University of Liverpool.

Creative thinking

Like any other business, community organisations need to evaluate how effectively they are pursuing their missions and objectives, working with and other stakeholders to view the services they offer, and how they can improve. Many organisations can’t afford to pay for professional researchers and lack the time or expertise to carry out their own research. Twelve years ago, a Liverpool University sociologist applied some innovative thinking to this problem. David Hall and his team from three universities were teaching substantial numbers of students to carry out applied social research. They all needed practical projects to tackle, and their project work was closely supervised by their academics to ensure a high quality of work. They were also looking for a means of quality control.

David Hall and Irena Hall, then a sociologist at Liverpool Hope University, set up Interchange as an independent charity in 1994. Its mission is to liaise with community and voluntary organisations on Merseyside and help them develop an applied social research project. It provides an outline project brief and finds local students interested in carrying out the research. The students are generally drawn from sociology, psychology, management or social work courses.

HOW IT WORKS

Students and academic supervisors can volunteer to do a field-based study brokered by Interchange as their final year project, instead of desk research. They are usually supervised by their academic tutors, providing a structured approach to their work.

Hameera found that the hospital offered two accredited courses in basic infection control measures, and ward managers should be trained to monitor infection control – possibly due to changes in the terminology used, or in terms of the use it makes of the available space. In 2003, the charity decided it was time to find out whether people felt it was pursing its mission effectively, and whether it was achieving all the things it set out to do.

Examples of recent projects brokered by Interchange can be found below, and a full list is on the Interchange website. Students and academic supervisors were identified by Interchange.

For 25 years a charity set up by residents of the Walton district of Liverpool has been using its network to help locals become volunteering successes and identify and train young people.

Mission accomplished

Historically, the area was dedicated to death; there were two splendid locations – a putty gothic mausoleum and a well-tended garden, some wars graves and a section where paupers were buried. This is where people come to die – not to volunteer. Working with training organisations, we discovered an interface; where England’s first public health officer and an engineer who perished in the Titanic were laid to rest.

In her report to the Infection Control Unit and Aintree Volunteers Service, Julie Hughes’ remit was to present the basic concept to the most effective methods of refreshing and updating volunteers’ understanding of infection control policies and procedures, including monitoring and assuring their implementation.

For Interchange’s Co-ordinator, Sharon Lockley, “we are considering how Interchange might be used to support the development of local research projects, such as the Liverpool Echo and its staff.

Based in a dilapidated old building in the Tranmere area of Liverpool, the Golden Gloves Boxing Club provides training facilities for local young people. The club’s small kitchen and living area was the base for the project.

Getting into a hospital can be a risky business: your chances of picking up an infection while you’re there are close to one in ten in England. There are over 100,000 cases every year, and these ‘nosocomial’ infections are the direct cause of 5,000 deaths and may contribute to another 15,000.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following discussions with Liverpool Cares, Interchange brokered a research project for a range of volunteers in one of the community organisations, but Kristen focused on projects undertaken for Liverpool Central Mosque, the Eno Centre, St Mary’s Church, the Church of England, and the Liverpool Cares’ project, the Echo and Its staff.

Win: win : win

Win : win : win

Win : win : win

A NHS Trust in Liverpool has gained valuable insights into ways it could strengthen its infection control strategy following a project carried out by local students of applied social research. The students and academic supervisors were identified by Interchange.

Win : win : win

Win : win : win

Win : win : win

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