



Medway VCS Collaboration

*A Case Study: KCC's Kent & Medway
Listens Contract July 2021*





The Challenge

Contract – Kent County Council’s ‘Kent & Medway Listens’ – an engagement contract split into 4 lots across Kent (Medway & Swale ICP footprint – value = £45k)

- Commissioned at ‘system’ level, with accompanying tendering processes, but specifying place-based delivery
- Relatively short timescales for tender process (& to form partnerships)
- Budget needed to provide full cost recovery for all partners
- Working with vulnerable client groups, so low cost/low quality delivery never an option

Our VCS Partners

Partner	Engaging with...
MEGAN CIC	Adults aged 18+ who experience mental health issues in Medway and Swale
Medway Diversity Forum	Black Asian Minority Ethnic groups in Medway (representing 15 ethnicities from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, China, Africa, West Indies, Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Roma community). They will also connect with a Swale based BAME partners to participate in their activities.
Medway Plus	Roma, Eastern & Central European families primarily based in Medway. They will also aim to engage families based in Swale
Medway Gender & Sexual Diversity Centre	The LGBTQIA+ community across Medway and Swale; working with young people, adults, Parents and Carers and partners of community members.
Centre for Independent Living Kent	People living with a disability or long term health condition in Medway and Swale.
Befriending Together	Isolated (both in terms of loneliness and digitally) older people and/or people living with mental health, learning or a cognitive disability in Medway and Swale

The Opportunity



- To access contracts usually ‘out of reach’ (scale/scope, tender requirements, relationships)
- Services delivered to our beneficiaries (in this case, giving ‘voice’ to most seldom heard)
- Partners and the value they bring – shared experience, learning, resources (e.g. MEGAN’s Mental Health signposting and experience, MVA’s Researcher Skills Training)
- Income – current and future
- Ability to offer something unique (combined, the partners were able to offer a unique level of diversity and reach for any engagement activities)
- To test and learn from a placed-based VCS collaboration securing a system issued contract.

Our Approach

- **Partnership:** our combined 'offer' for tendering was far better than anything we could do alone.
- **Play to our strengths:**
 - MVA infrastructure role – excellent for initiating and supporting the partnership
 - MEGAN's mental health role – providing guidance to partners and safeguarding participants
 - MDF, MGSD, CILK, Medway Plus – work every day with seldom heard communities
- **Honesty, Transparency and Shared Understanding:**
 - First 'quick chat' online meeting – shared details of specification and budget
 - All partners agreed with principle of working together – went away and identified their costs (which were subsequently shared with all partners) and their approach/reach.
 - By agreement, MVA acted as lead partner – but acts more as a facilitator and all partners lead on their own elements
 - Tender documents drafted by MVA and approved by all partners (at pace)
- **Clear & Appropriate Communication:**
 - On award of the contract - Mobilisation and delivery timescales developed and agreed by all partners
 - MOU drafted, agreed and signed by all partners (detailing aims, specific targets, budget and payment dates)

Why we did it

- None of the partners are generating a huge income from this contract – but all agreed:
- It would give their service users a much needed ‘voice’ at the table
- It was a great opportunity to work with their VCS peers on a shared initiative (and share their experiences with the wider sector)
- It is an opportunity to test a collaborative model that enabled effective tendering and delivery of ‘system’ level contracts (traditionally out of our reach)

“We have enjoyed getting to know more about the project partners as the bid was developed. Having worked together with some of the partners previously on an informal basis, we are now looking forward to working collaboratively as a partnership.”

(MEGAN CIC)

- By awarding us the contract, commissioners will be able to see the benefits of our place-based collaboration.

“It was wonderful to hear such a diverse group of people come together for a collective purpose. Everyone seemed very energetic and engaged and mindful of the strategies and overall outcomes. It was lovely to be part of a meeting with people who care so much!”

(Senior Project Officer, KCC Commissioning)

