

Redcar and Cleveland Real Opportunity Centre (ROC)

Origins and evolution

Redcar and Cleveland Real Opportunity Centre (ROC) was established in September 2006 following a critical inspection by the Social Services Inspectorate of the local social care services for disabled people.

ROC took over the work previously carried out by Redcar and Cleveland Disability Access Group. Some of the trustees transferred to the new organisation, and a new director was appointed.

ROC serves the area covered by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. It is run by and for its service users, and has always considered itself to be a ULO.

Vision

The experience and engagement of disabled people drives the work of the organisation. It also helps to shape and influence the wider environment of Redcar and Cleveland – promoting social cohesion and celebrating diversity.

ROC trustees and staff see themselves as social entrepreneurs. The management committee is accountable to the constituents, and the organisation operates within the commonly accepted principles of a ULO.

ROC is a pan-disability organisation – in other words, it works with a wide range of disabled people.

ROC recognises the importance of being well managed, being locally responsive and accountable, and focusing on high quality service delivery.

The organisation aims to provide the support necessary for any disabled person over 18 to live independently as part of their community, including:

- Gathering information
- Making informed decisions about the options available
- Developing the skills and self-confidence to make positive changes
- Involvement in the running of the organisation and its services

Current legal status

ROC is an unincorporated association, and it has applied to become a registered charity.

Governance arrangements

ROC has a management committee of seven people/trustees, all of whom are disabled and live in Redcar and Cleveland. The director reports to the management committee and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Scale and scope of services provided

Staff and volunteers work alongside disabled people and support them to:

- Access information about local services, activities, training and networks
- Take advantage of a range of equipment and materials to assist in personal development
- Engage in group and individual activities that are planned to challenge, stimulate and inform

ROC currently manages and supports a number of projects and initiatives, including:

- Information service – a wide range of information is available via the resource centre at Shopmobility, website and quarterly newsletter. There is also a monthly 'hot desk' programme providing a confidential, free and independent service
- Shopmobility service – affiliated to, and accredited by, the National Federation of Shopmobility UK (NFSUK), the service provides a small fleet of mobility scooters, power and manual wheelchairs for hire that can be used in Redcar town centre
- Disability Equality Duty – leading public sector partners on engagement and progress
- Disability awareness training – 'Other People's Shoes' is delivered in collaboration with Experts by Experience (North East Equality Awards finalist, 2010)
- Consultation – a wide range of focus groups, action research and reports, to provide an evidence base that can inform service design by commissioners
- 'Putting People First' – a pilot scheme for the provision of support which will shortly be rolled out in partnership with Carers Together and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council
- Delivery of Citizen Support Exchange (with support from NE RIEP, Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough Councils)
- Right to Control trailblazer – ROC has been a key partner in making a successful local submission

Resources and support

ROC is mainly funded by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and through the Redcar and Cleveland Partnership.

The organisation has six full-time and four part-time paid staff, of whom three full-timers are disabled people and one is a carer. There are six sessional paid staff, four of whom are disabled people. Six disabled people currently work as volunteers.

ROC sees itself as well managed and professional, and this enables it to be responsive, creative and flexible. The organisation has developed a reputation for timely and high quality delivery, cost effectiveness, excellent project management, transparency and accountability.

The development of ROC has been sustained and organic. Through a culture of team work and partnership, ROC seeks to deliver outcomes that are driven by the needs of disabled people.

Sustainability is recognised as the key challenge – maintaining a number of reliable income streams, with time horizons that allow for effective planning, and underpin consistency and quality of service provision.

Partnerships and networks

ROC is an outward looking organisation that works with a wide range of partners at strategic, operational, organisational and individual levels. It has developed an excellent working relationship with the local authority.

ROC belongs to the Redcar and Cleveland Disabled People's Partnership which works to create 'A society in which all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens'.

Lessons learned

ROC considers that the key success factors include the following:

- It is important not to be overly prescriptive when defining a ULO. The ethos and values of the organisation are critical to ULO operation.
- Organisations should grow organically and not seek to become ULOs simply in response to outside pressure. Rather, they should review their vision and aspirations – reflecting on what they want to do and how they want to do it. Does the organisation have a shared vision? Are there other people who might like to be included? Are the responsibilities and accountabilities clear? ULOs should always be driven by the needs of their constituents, and not by the organisation's own interests.

SES: Sustainable Enterprise Strategies (2010)

- It may be helpful to review the organisation's governance arrangements – to check whether it reflects a diversity of interests, and to consider its capacity to cope with the demands of ULO operation.
- It is important to learn from others, and to learn together. An organisation must be confident in its own skills and abilities, and seek to build on its strengths. There should be a willingness to share, and not compete with other organisations that are trying to meet the needs of disabled people.
- Organisational structures should be kept as flat as possible. It is vital to work to people's strengths, communicate effectively and foster a team ethos. Passion and enthusiasm are vital ingredients, but are not enough on their own; stamina and resilience are just as important.
- It is vital to establish and maintain good contacts and networks, to be able to work in a variety of partnerships and consortia. Trust is a vital ingredient of effective alliances, based on accountable leadership and carefully nurtured staff skills. ROC always tries to be a constructive, critical friend, and to network with a purpose.

Further information contact

Jane Reast
Director
Redcar and Cleveland Real Opportunity Centre (ROC)
Coatham Memorial Hall,
7 Coatham Road
Redcar, TS10 1RH.

Tel 01642 774500

Email redcarroc@btconnect.com

Web www.redcarroc.org.uk