

Local Area Coordination in York

The Partners' Perspectives

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Introduction and Background

In April 2024, a comprehensive online survey was conducted capturing insights from 107 partners who have been actively introducing people to City of York Council (CYC) employed Local Area Coordinators (LACs). This report looks at those responses in depth and provides analysis and insights for each section of responses.

The Local Area Coordination approach¹ has been in York since May 2017. At the time of writing, 12 LACs and 1 Community Facilitator were in post covering just over half of the city. Over 6000 individuals, families, and community groups had been introduced to the team so far.

The survey, designed by partners Community Catalysts CIC in collaboration with the CYC LAC team, explored the perspectives of those partners at the forefront of introducing people to LACs and partners/stakeholders who work closely with LACs in other ways. The respondents represented a diverse range of professions and roles.

This report is split into sections reflecting the way the survey was structured. At the end of each section are some short 'insights and observations' to summarise the results/findings of that section.

¹ Local Area Coordination is a 'strengths-based' approach (building on what's strong in people's lives and communities), originating in Australia that has developed globally over the course of 30+ years. Local Area Coordinators are employed by councils, based in communities and are recruited together with the input of local people. After completing their induction and training, Local Area Coordinators proactively meet with individual citizens and whole families in their neighbourhoods, building trust and connection with people over time. This creates the conditions where people feel able to open up about what a good life would look like for them and any current issues and barriers that are stopping that, before planning the actions needed to make change happen. Any person or family can be introduced to their Local Area Coordinator by anyone. There is no assessment process, no time limit and no prescribed eligibility criteria (see [here](#) for more).

1. About the Partners (The Survey Responders)

Of the 107 partners completing this survey, around three quarters worked for CYC and local NHS services (see list below). The vast majority (62%) had been making introductions to the LACs for more than 18 months.

1. Local Community Organisation: Approximately 23%
2. CYC Adult Social Care: Approximately 22%
3. Other CYC Team: Approximately 16%
4. Mental Health Team (TEWV): Approximately 14%
5. Police: Approximately 9%
6. Education / School: Approximately 8%
7. National or Regional Charity: Approximately 5%
8. Housing Provider: Approximately 4%
9. Faith Organisation: Approximately 4%
10. Social Prescribers: Approximately 2%
11. Not Applicable / Local Person, Citizen or Community Leader: Approximately 1%
12. IDAS Domestic Abuse Practitioner: Approximately 1%
13. Local Councillor: Approximately 1%
14. Foodbank: Approximately 1%

This part of the survey also provided a free text box for people to comment on how many people the partner had introduced to Local Area Coordinators. Respondents used this in a variety of different ways. Here are some insights into that data:

1. Responses span from a few to hundreds of introductions. Several respondents' express uncertainty about the exact number of introductions, using phrases like "unable to say," "not known," or "NA."
2. Many responses mention a collaborative approach, with LACs often introducing people to the respondents' organisation/service or vice versa. Some respondents mention working closely with LACs as partners, rather than making direct introductions.
3. Many respondents used this box to emphasise the importance of LACs and their role in supporting their work, indicating that they view LAC as a vital offer in their communities.

Insights and observations:

The diverse range of organisations represented by the individual partners completing this survey suggests a comprehensive integration of Local Area Coordination within the broader support system in York. Engagement spans across a wide spectrum of service domains and organisations which is a positive indication of LACs being seen as relevant and valuable within the formal system of supports.

2. How the Partners Heard about Local Area Coordination in York?

The next question asked how the partners completing the survey had heard of LAC in the first place. For this section we have categorised their responses through an analysis of a free text component of the survey:

1. **Through CYC Engagement:** Approximately 35%
2. **Professional Networks and Collaborations:** Approximately 28%
3. **Personal or Direct Engagement:** Approximately 23%
4. **Miscellaneous:** Approximately 14%

Through CYC Engagement

Many responses indicated people learned about Local Area Coordination through various initiatives, presentations, or communications directly facilitated by the council. This suggests official system channels for dissemination of information about LAC in York are effective.

Professional networks and collaborations

This category includes responses where individuals became aware of Local Area Coordination through professional connections, collaborations, or specific projects involving community engagement. This suggests the importance and success of LAC networking and partnerships in spreading awareness about the offer.

Personal or direct engagement

These responses reflect instances where people encountered LACs directly through their work, personal experiences, or introductions. This demonstrates the value of personal interactions and direct engagement in promoting awareness of Local Area Coordination.

Insights and observations:

Overall, the responses to this and the previous question suggest a diverse range of pathways to awareness of Local Area Coordination in York, which is positive. This highlights the significance of both formal channels and personal connections in spreading awareness and facilitating introductions.

3. Reasons for Introduction

The partners were asked to identify the typical reasons that triggered an introduction to a LAC. The table below represents the perceived goals and ambitions of the person at the point of introduction. This is according to the partner making the introduction, it is worth noting that the focus may have transpired to be quite different after the introduction was made. One of the well evidenced benefits of the Local Area Coordination approach is that it works with the whole person in the context of their wider natural supports, networks and community around them. This means LACs are not limited to working with only one specific set of problem or deficits, rather they can start from someone’s strengths and vision for a better life, ‘walking alongside’ them in their pursuit of it. Often this vision only emerges over time as trusting relationships build.

Goals/aims of person at point of introduction	Mentions
Achieve and stabilise basic needs (housing, heating etc.)	76
Improve mental and emotional health	68
To get more involved in groups of interest	60
Sustain accommodation/tenancy	55
Make new friends and form positive connections	53
Become more self-confident and build self-esteem	52
To advocate for change in their or someone else's life	45
Positively change benefits situation	46
To feel safer and more secure in their personal environment	44
Achieve more suitable accommodation	37
Recognize skills/strengths and utilize them more	33
Get involved in formal volunteering opportunities	28
Overcome or reduce behaviours termed ‘hoarding’	25
Explore and access formal learning opportunities	21
Improve/change relationships with family and existing friends	19
Achieve a new job	15
Deal with a pressing legal concern	10
Sustain job/increase house/pay	10
Improve physical health	11

Insights and observations:

The majority of mentions (76) highlight a desire for people to achieve and stabilise basic needs such as housing and heating. This suggests fundamental challenges associated with income that many people are facing when interacting with services.

Close behind, with 68 mentions, is the ambition to improve mental and emotional wellbeing. This indicates a significant demand for support in coping with psychosocial challenges and associated impacts on quality of life.

Linked to the previous point, the aim to get more involved in groups of interest (60 mentions) and make new friends (53 mentions) suggests a strong desire for a greater sense of connection, inclusion, and friendship.

Connected with the goals relating to basic needs, there is also a focus on sustaining accommodation or tenancy (55 mentions) and achieving more suitable accommodation (37 mentions). This indicates ongoing challenges in housing stability for people connecting with LACs.

There is a notable emphasis on personal growth and empowerment, with mentions of becoming more self-confident (52 mentions) and recognising and utilising skills/strengths (33 mentions).

The desire to advocate for change (45 mentions) points to a desire for people to build their power, agency, and strategies in navigating personal and systemic challenges.

While not quite as prominent, mentions related to positively changing benefits situation (46 mentions) and sustaining or increasing job/house/pay (10 mentions each) highlight the importance and interconnectedness of financial stability in overall wellbeing.

Feeling safer and more secure in their personal environment (44 mentions) is another significant factor, indicating the importance of addressing safety issues for people and their families to be able to live their good lives.

While not as prevalent, there is still a clear ambition for people to explore ways to get involved in formal volunteering opportunities (28 mentions), indicating a desire for community involvement and contribution.

Improving physical health (11 mentions) is touched upon, though it appears less frequently compared to other concerns, suggesting that whilst important, it may not be the primary focus for many people initially connecting with their LAC.

Overall, the data highlights the breadth of reasons why people might be introduced to a LAC in York, ranging from basic necessities to broader aspirations for personal growth, social connection, and empowerment – all of which are linked and cannot be considered separately of course. The breadth of reasons for introduction suggests that Local Area Coordination is well utilised and understood to be a broad source of support. Whilst LAC in York is not set up or designed as a crisis response service, the high number of people experiencing concerns relating to basic needs and mental health suggests that York LACs are being routinely introduced to people experiencing crisis. It would be worth exploring to what extent this does or doesn't have a bearing on longer-term Local Area Coordination capacity building work with people and their families.

4. The Partners' Perspectives on LAC

In this section we look at the respondents' perspectives on some statements. They were asked to score on a scale of strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree - strongly disagree.

1. Local Area Coordination is a valuable resource in our communities

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	83%
Agree	11%
Neutral	5%
Disagree	0%
Strongly disagree	1%

2. Local Area Coordinators are clearly part of their local communities and are seen as a community resource

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	79%
Agree	16%
Neutral	4%
Disagree	0%
Strongly disagree	1%

3. Local Area Coordinators build strong relationships and partnerships with services, voluntary/community organisations, people, and their families

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	77%
Agree	19%
Neutral	3%
Disagree	1%
Strongly agree	77%

4. Local Area Coordinators are easily contactable and accessible

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	56%
Agree	27%
Neutral	7%
Disagree	9%
Strongly disagree	1%

5. **Local Area Coordinators will have a conversation with anyone of any age**

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	64%
Agree	16%
Neutral	19%
Disagree	1%
Strongly disagree	1%

6. **Local Area Coordinators make a positive difference to the lives of individuals and families they walk alongside and help people create positive change**

Response	Percentage
Strongly agree	80%
Agree	18%
Neutral	1%
Disagree	0%
Strongly disagree	1%

Insights and Observations

For each question, the overwhelming majority of respondents express strong support for Local Area Coordination in York.

1. Around **94% of respondents either strongly agree or agree that LACs are a valuable resource in their communities**. This suggests a widespread recognition of the importance and value of LACs.
2. Around **95% of respondents either strongly agree or agree that LACs are clearly integrated into their local communities and are viewed as a community resource**. This indicates that LACs are seen as actively engaged and embedded within the fabric of their communities.
3. A significant majority, around **96%, strongly agree or agree that LACs build strong relationships and partnerships with various stakeholders**. This suggests a strong effectiveness of LACs in fostering collaboration and cooperation among different groups and services.
4. While the majority, **83%, believe that LACs are easily contactable and accessible**, there is a notable proportion, around 10%, who express disagreement or neutrality on this aspect. This suggests an area for further exploration.
5. A substantial portion, about **80%, strongly agree or agree that LACs are open to conversations with individuals of any age**. However, there is a relatively higher percentage of respondents who express neutrality on this statement compared to others.
6. The vast majority, around **98%, strongly agree or agree that LACs make a positive difference in the lives of individuals and families**. This significant level of endorsement highlights the perceived effectiveness of LACs in helping to facilitate positive change and support within their communities.

Analysis of Partners' Commentary

In this section, we provide some analysis of free text component at the end of the survey. This was where people could offer any further comments about LAC in York. This section was well used with over 4,500 words of commentary provided. What we present below is an analysis of the recurring themes as well as some highlight example quotes.

What seems to be working well?

Theme 1: LAC in York is a valuable community resource with deep reach

Across all feedback, York LACs are consistently described as invaluable resources within local communities and the wider system of supports. Respondents felt LACs play a crucial role in reaching people labelled as 'vulnerable' who may otherwise fall through the cracks of traditional support systems.

Quotes in this theme included:

"They provide a valuable service within the community, providing support often where other services are unable or unavailable to."

"[our LAC] has been an invaluable addition to our school support system. She has worked closely with families to fill a void. These families have now been able to achieve better outcomes. This has made an enormous difference!"

"In my view, LACs are the 'glue' that hold together a disparate and precarious range of provision for vulnerable people. Without them, the diminished resources that serve the community would be seriously damaged and we collectively would be hampered in our ability to do so much of the work that is coordinated either informally or formally in the community and with CYC. To switch metaphors, they are a vital cog in the wheel."

"I would not know where to send many of the vulnerable people I speak to as part of my work were the LAC service not available, and would fear that many people would be left without that essential link between accessing help and being left to struggle."

Theme 2: The LAC offer in York is highly personalised and caring

Feedback consistently highlights the positive impact of Local Area Coordination on people's lives and the broader community around them. They were praised regularly for their responsiveness, communication skills, caring nature, and ability to help people facilitate tailored support that meets their own specific needs and vision for a better life.

Quotes in this theme included:

"The LACs provide such a broad, person-centred service and they have greatly enhanced the wellbeing and confidence of many people that make contact with adult social care who we then signpost towards their support. I have linked in with many of the LAC's and I have found them all to be so helpful, responsive, compassionate and knowledgeable."

"She takes time to listen and understand their concerns and makes everyone feel valued."

“...everybody I know who has worked with them has only positive things to say...it genuinely improves and enriches people’s lives”

Theme 3: LAC in York offers a unique bridge between services and communities preventing service demand

LACs in York evidently serve as a bridge between formal services and the community, facilitating access to support and resources that otherwise would be difficult to achieve. They are commended by partners for their collaborative approach, working closely with social workers and other professionals to help people alleviate what are often complex and social issues compounded by multiple concerns.

Quotes in this theme included:

“...without them, mental health care provision would be significantly impacted due to a high level of relapse from people with chronic social problems which fall outside the standard remit of our services.”

“They meet the gap in the criteria for a Social Care Assessment but where people still require support. Without the LACs there would be a lot more pressure on the ASC Community Team and the surrounding services.”

“I suspect it saves a lot of money too by preventing small issues growing into much bigger ones and maybe diverting people from having to access emergency services which cost more.”

“LACs are trusted by communities, including those communities where many people are cautious about trusting and engaging with council services. These relationships have taken years to establish. LACs play an essential role in helping to facilitate work of other council services by opening up channels of communication with harder to reach groups.”

Theme 4: LACs in York work flexibility and are adaptable

One of the standout reflections was of York’s LACs’ flexibility and adaptability. This was mentioned in contrast to traditional service models which responders suggested typically have more rigid boundaries. LACs in York are described as responsive to the unique needs and gifts of each person and working beyond bureaucratic constraints.

Quotes in this theme included:

“They can work with people in a flexible way, have no thresholds or bureaucratic referral mechanisms and are tenacious. Other services seem too willing to close cases as soon as possible which is not helpful for people...”

“They are really good at engaging with people who otherwise would fall through the cracks despite needing help. They help people to navigate complex systems. They are a very valuable asset and I would hope to see more of them.”

“No other council based service approaches the accessibility and flexibility as that provided by the LAC team. Their client led approach facilitates high levels of engagement and

promotes a more proactive response, and moreover the LACs are especially a lifeline for people who would otherwise be socially and digitally excluded due to lack of mobility, access to technology, and lack of self-confidence or communication skills to articulate their specific challenges.”

How could things be even better?

Theme 5. There is a high demand and perceptions of consistency

While LACs receive overwhelmingly positive feedback, there were also a few perceived challenges raised and suggested areas for further consideration. These include perceptions of inconsistencies in approach among different LACs or areas, difficulties in introducing due to demand, and a perceived need for clearer communication.

Quotes in this theme included:

“The LACs I have worked with have been brilliant. The only issues I have come across is the high caseloads they have and therefore it isn't always possible for them to do certain tasks or provide as much support as they would like or the customer would like. Also now SERVICE X has ended they are being introduced to more to try and fill the gap in services.”

“It is disappointing that not all areas are covered by LACS but the ones who are nearest have done their best to help often with what they know. I am concerned that the service is struggling to keep up with demand.”

Theme 6: There is a need for expansion and increased capacity

Many respondents advocate for the expansion of LAC services to meet the growing demand for community support. They emphasise the need for greater recognition of the role played by LACs in preventing crises, reducing the burden on statutory services, and promoting community well-being.

Quotes in this theme included:

“A LAC for every ward/area would be helpful.”

“We need more LACs. They are an invaluable resource.”

“I feel there should be a LAC within each ward.”

“To have more LAC areas.”

7. Conclusion

The feedback provided throughout this survey has reinforced the critical and impactful role of LACs in York's communities and the wider system of supports. It is evident that the vast majority of the 107 Partners contributing to this survey evidently see LACs as valued, skilled, and trusted community-based resources who can work with people in a highly personalised, unconstrained way tailored to their individual strengths focused on their vision of a better life.

While there are common systemwide demand challenges that are evidently impacting on Local Area Coordination too, the overwhelming consensus is that LACs are essential assets in promoting good lives, social inclusion, wellbeing, and resilience at the local level whilst being the glue that binds the system together in a positive way around people and families. It is also evident that Local Area Coordination is offering a different approach away from formal pathways of support promoting more practical, personalised and sustainable outcomes as a consequence. Finally, there is clearly widespread support for Local Area Coordination's continuation and expansion across the city.