



Octavia Foundation



The Octavia Foundation: Review 2006 - 2011

A research summary

The University of Manchester
Institute for Political and
Economic Governance (IPEG)

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The University of Manchester

Summary report of 'A Review of The Octavia Foundation'

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This is a summary of the full research report, published in June 2011. The full report is available online at our website: www.octaviafoundation.org.uk. To request a paper copy of the report, please telephone **020 8354 5500** or email info@octaviafoundation.org.uk.

Chair's foreword

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this summary review of the Octavia Foundation's work, undertaken earlier this year by the University of Manchester.

2011 marks five years since the Foundation became active in its aim to improve the quality of life for individuals and local communities in central and west London. In this short period, significant progress has been made in the development of the charity, and we are confident that a great number of people have benefitted from their participation and involvement with our activities and initiatives.

We decided to commission the research to review our progress so far and to evaluate the effectiveness of our model. Most importantly, by involving our partners, funders, stakeholders and beneficiaries in the research, we wanted to learn more about the direct impact of our work on the individuals and communities that we are committed to support so we can prepare and plan for our future.

The findings of the research are very positive. The impact of our work is recognised as empowering for many participants and beneficiaries, and interactions with the Foundation often lead to sustainable and positive personal changes that can be described and interpreted as transformative.

In addition, the findings also highlight a number of issues for us to consider as we plan for new developments and future activities.

In 2012 we will remember the 100th anniversary of Octavia Hill's death and celebrate the philosophy, vision and principles of our namesake and the founder of Octavia Housing. It is deeply encouraging to know that more than 150 years after she started her work with the poor of London, the Foundation is delivering a programme of work that remains true to her vision and aims.

I hope that you enjoy reading this summary and are encouraged by the progress that we have made since 2006. I look forward to updating you with our progress in the future.

Thank you to all of our partners, employees, volunteers, funders, participants and beneficiaries who were involved and supportive of this research, and to Liz Richardson and her team at the Institute for Political and Economic Governance at the University of Manchester.



Peter S Chapman
Chair of the Octavia Foundation



Octavia Hill's blue plaque in Southwark



Young people attend a plaque unveiling for Amy Ashwood Garvey, November 2009



One of 20 Octavia Foundation charity shops

An introduction

In 2011, the Institute for Political and Economic Governance (IPEG), a research centre at the University of Manchester, carried out a significant review of the work of the Octavia Foundation.

The research was commissioned by the Octavia Foundation to assess the organisation's progress to date, to document the impact of work so far and to reflect on ways forward for the future.

The Octavia Foundation is a registered charity established by Octavia Housing. The Foundation has worked in central and west London since 2006, to improve quality of life within local communities and for individuals. Some services are provided by the Foundation to Octavia Housing to support individual tenants and to increase the sustainability of tenancies.

Both organisations continue to be driven by the principles of Octavia Hill (1838-1912), a pioneering social reformer who was the Founder of Octavia Housing and whose philosophy was 'to make homes happy, lives noble and family life good'. The legacy and tradition of Octavia Hill's work are powerful and provide the organisation with its ethos, demonstrating its connection to a long history of innovation and help for vulnerable people.

The Octavia Foundation has five key themes to its work, and leads and supports a broad range of projects and activities that deliver outcomes in these areas:

- Older and vulnerable people
- Young people and children
- Employment and Training
- Financial inclusion
- Community involvement

An overview of the Foundation's current and ongoing projects (at the time of the research) is provided below. Many of these are referenced within the review.

Older and vulnerable people

Befriending service: for isolated and vulnerable adults and older people in Westminster, with funding from local government and the NHS

Lunch clubs: provided at Octavia Housing day centres for older residents of Kensington and Chelsea

Handyman service: a free, fast response service for tenants of Octavia Housing, delivered by Silver Saints - a professional handyman service

Garden Guardians: a free gardening service for older tenants of Octavia Housing, delivered by 'Age Concern Sixty Plus' - a local charity

Young people and children

Film and media work: the Foundation has facilitated a number of highly successful film and media projects in conjunction with other bodies, led by young people

Football Wembley: this free, weekly football club in Brent was initiated by young people aged 13-21

BASE: a free cultural and creative club for young people aged 13-21 that runs three times a week in Pimlico

Sports and health initiatives: the Foundation supports a range of health and sports initiatives throughout the year for young people and children, in partnership with Solidarity Sports - a local charity

Employment and training

Westminster Works: an advice, guidance and support service for unemployed Westminster residents funded by the European Social Fund and Westminster City Council

Gateways to Work: an employment and training initiative for Octavia tenants and local residents. Services include job clubs, work placements, CV and interview training

Financial inclusion

Educational and maintenance grants: funded by the Friends of Octavia. The Foundation awards grants for specific purposes to tenants of Octavia Housing

Welfare, benefits and debt advice: a range of services available to assist Octavia Housing tenants with financial matters, provided in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau

Kensington and Chelsea Credit Union: the Foundation has led and continues to support the development of a credit union for the people of Kensington and Chelsea

Community involvement

Community events: a range of annual events that include summer activities and Christmas parties

Disability arts festival: as part of this festival, the Foundation produced a guide to accessible venues in west London

Volunteering: the Foundation provides a wide range of volunteering opportunities in communities throughout west and central London

For more information about any area of the Octavia Foundation's work, please contact the Foundation.

Aims and methodology

The aims of the review were:

- To assess how successfully the Octavia Foundation's work to date has met its objectives
- To highlight lessons and learning from the work and approach
- To draw out implications for the future of the Foundation's work

The review considered the organisation's working models and practices, the impact of these methods to beneficiaries, and forthcoming strategic issues and implications. In particular, the following questions were considered:

- What is the Foundation's intended model of working, as perceived by staff, volunteers and trustees?
- In practice, does the organisation operate using this model/approach?
- Do beneficiaries and stakeholders value the Foundation's way of working?
- Does the approach match the preferences and needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders?
- Does the Foundation's work, and way of working, produce positive relationships with beneficiaries?
- If yes, do those positive relationships lead to an increased sense of empowerment for beneficiaries?
- Is the Foundation's work a catalyst for change for individuals?
- What strategic (short, medium and long term) issues does the Foundation face?
- How are these issues seen by the organisation, and by its stakeholders?
- What are the implications of the Review findings for the future of the Foundation?

The overall objective was to fully understand the Octavia Foundation's work across a diverse range of activities, and to understand the impact of the Foundation in the round, across a wide range of diverse activities and beneficiary groups.

Accordingly, the research did not follow a traditional hard outcome approach alone, since an isolated review of specific indicators like levels of debt, numbers in employment or the number and profile of participants in a youth project, would be unlikely to identify the common features of the Foundation's work.

Instead, the researchers focussed on common and less tangible aspects of the Foundation's activities and looked to explore unique elements of the Octavia Foundation's ways of working, processes and outcomes.

A range of qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to evaluate and to understand current activities and their impact. These included:

- A brief desk review of corporate documents
- Interviews with Octavia Foundation staff, trustees and key stakeholders
- Focus groups with volunteers and beneficiaries
- Written and telephone surveys with beneficiaries
- At-home, face to face interviews with a subset of beneficiaries

More than 100 people took part in the research, including nearly 25% of all participants and beneficiaries within a 12 month period.

Key findings

Current services and activities

The Octavia Foundation's fundamental working model which guides current services and activities is solidly based on meeting the needs and preferences of individuals.

The Foundation seeks to build positive relationships, built on respect, with participants and beneficiaries and believes that this approach and guiding philosophy is a model which is likely to be empowering for individuals.

New activities, projects and provisions are developed around and based upon the needs of potential beneficiaries which are established through dialogue. Feedback from Octavia Housing's consultation with tenants is also useful and considered.

A defining feature of the Foundation's work is the clear focus on building relationships with people at a human scale. Relationships with individual beneficiaries, participants, staff and volunteers are often built up over long periods of time.

The Foundation's activities, projects, services and programmes are often flexible and are tailored to meet the needs of individuals, and to be responsive to them. To enable the development of meaningful long-term relationships, the Foundation works at a relatively small scale within each activity.



Participants on the befriender programme enjoy baking and sugarcraft, August 2009

"Of the 75 beneficiaries and participants surveyed, 89% 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that activities and projects were flexible and take into account individual needs. Only 4 people disagreed with this statement!"

The Foundation's working model is supported by having board members with grassroots perspectives. These connections with the people likely to benefit from the organisation's services are valuable for maintaining perspective and for developing relationships. However, none of the participants or beneficiaries expressed a strong desire to be directly involved in the design, delivery or governance of services.

How people found out about the Octavia Foundation's services

Octavia Housing Association	21%
Family/friend	20%
Advert/letter	15%
Approached by Octavia Foundation	10%
Health professional	7%
Found out themselves	6%
Open day	1%
Other referral	1%



Befriending programme participants, August 2011

How beneficiaries and stakeholders see the Foundation's activities

Feedback from the focus groups shows that the Foundation is delivering a flexible, tailored, individually responsive, and respectful service. Users contrasted their positive experiences of working with the Foundation with less positive experiences of similar activities with other organisations.

"(it's about being) more long term and consistent... (this approach) is a unique selling point... it's personalised, a very supportive approach... that's why levels of relationship are maintained... That's unique."

Focus group participant.

Overall satisfaction levels of the activities included in the research sample were 72.4%. In an earlier survey carried out by the Octavia Foundation in April 2010, the befriending service recorded a 100% satisfaction rate.

There was an ongoing relationship between beneficiaries and the Foundation in the majority of cases. In our sample, 51% had been involved with the relationship for over a year, and 20% had had a relationship of five years or longer.

Length of involvement with Octavia Foundation

>6 months	21%
6 - 11 months	26%
1 - 4 years	31%
5 - 9 years	10%
10 years +	10%

Almost nine out of ten beneficiaries agreed or strongly agreed that the activities and services provided were flexible and took their needs into account. 91% of the respondents in the survey agreed or strongly agreed that staff go the 'extra mile'. Almost everyone agreed that staff and volunteers treated them with respect.

The impact of the Foundation's activities

All of the available activities and programmes could be described as life enhancing. Examples of these life enhancing activities might include receiving a hot meal and having social contact, taking part in a sports activity or being helped to sustain tenancies.

Participants and beneficiaries were often empowered by the activity, and benefitted from the opportunity to gain extra skills and confidence, to make significant changes to their lives, to go on to organise other activities and to grow into leadership roles.

In particular, the befriending service has helped many older people and vulnerable adults to overcome social isolation and to improve the quality of their lives.

"I can't put it into words how the befriending has helped me. I was never able to leave the house without having a few drinks... now, I go out with Simon and, I don't know, it's like, for the first time, I can hold my head up. The first time we went out, I noticed this tree outside my house. It's always been there but I must've walked past it and now I really see the beautiful way it grows. Honestly, all the things that other people find normal have been out of reach to me but, with Simon's visits and his help, I now do them."

Comment from a befriending scheme participant.

Focus groups, together with desk research, show that the film and media work with young people has generated an exciting set of follow-on activities. Some young people with disabilities who took part in Foundation projects have subsequently gone on to set up their own film company.

Between April 2009 and April 2011, there were a total of 20 successful journeys from unemployment to training through Westminster Works.

Westminster Works in action

'Alex' studied at university but struggled to find employment because he had no experience. He heard about the Octavia Foundation through informal networks and asked for help with his CV. The Foundation mentioned voluntary work opportunities with Octavia Housing so 'Alex' did some volunteering. This led to three days of paid work and then a long period of paid employment. He now works for Octavia Housing full time.

The Foundation considers relationships to be **empowering** when participants undergo some significant and positive personal change that enables and supports them to do things for themselves, that for whatever reason, they were unable or believed themselves to be unable to do previously.

The Foundation's model

The Octavia Foundation's working model has three key aspects:

- 1. the basics of a quality service:**
flexible, based on identified need and tailored to meet individual needs
- 2. relationship-centred:**
an extra dimension which involves the development of an ongoing and/or in-depth, holistic, problem-solving relationship
- 3. empowering:**
a relationship which supports sustainable and empowering personal change for participants

The activities that delivered across all aspects of the model most fully were:

Older and vulnerable people: Befriending project; lunch club

Young people: Football Wembley; film and media work

Employment and training: Westminster Works volunteer placements; Gateways to Work volunteer placements

The activities which delivered fewer aspects of the model appeared to be:

Older and vulnerable people: handyman service; gardening service

Employment and training: Westminster Works advice and guidance; Gateways to Work advice and guidance.

Financial inclusion: Friends of Octavia - Hardship and Education Grants.



Participants in the S.P.I.T. (Sending Positive Images Through music) project, November 2007

Both the handyman service and the gardening service meet an identified need amongst vulnerable Octavia Housing tenants. These services scored well in the survey for being flexible and tailored to need, and having good customer care.

Friends of Octavia grants were administered to a high standard, met identified need, and were significantly life enhancing for recipients.

Feedback from Foundation staff and trustees suggested that the rigid targets and prescribed funding for employment and training programmes limited their flexibility. Additionally, some stakeholders believe that there were numerous other providers in the field, which may be better placed to provide this type of service.

Strategic issues and considerations

The research project, which included focus groups with volunteers and interviews with staff, all indicated a good understanding of the Foundation's model, organisational ethos and a positive atmosphere.

It was noted that the quality, skills, and capacity of staff and volunteers are uniformly high. Staff and volunteers felt well supported by the organisation and were encouraged to make personal development.

Stakeholders and funders believe that the Foundation is a market leader, and offers a model of best practice for others in the voluntary sector.

Stakeholder relationships with the Foundation were based on trust and an expectation of quality outputs, and did not necessarily depend on extensive or formal monitoring arrangements.

The Foundation is well networked and seizes opportunities when they arise. However, all of the stakeholders felt that the Foundation had expertise to offer to other organisations which was not fully exploited and that the organisation was not as well known as it should be.

In addition, it appears that the Foundation's profile is not always distinct. In some instances, some participants (particularly those

who were also tenants of Octavia Housing) were unclear that they were involved with a project led by the Octavia Foundation rather than Octavia Housing.

Some stakeholders, whilst appreciative of the high quality of the Foundation's outputs, and intensive and empowering way of working with beneficiaries, were explicit about their desire to see this scaled up.

"The Octavia Foundation is ambitious, but not as much as we'd like."

Stakeholder interview.

Conversely, other stakeholders appreciated the small scale of project work as they felt this enabled the Foundation to deliver better quality outputs, by working intensively with individuals and building relationships.

"The Foundation is more focussed than other voluntary organisations... they were clear from the outset that the numbers (of participants) would be small and that (projects) would be tailored to people. Their targets are lower but their success rates are high. You need to work intensively to (deliver) a quality service that's tailored and personalised."

Stakeholder interview.

The future

The findings show that the Foundation's work overall is exemplary and of an extremely high quality. But there is always room for doing things even better.

Not all of the Foundation's activities are currently making fully effective contributions in terms of empowerment. Accordingly, there is a case to support changes to the Foundation's current commissioning practices to ensure that new activities and projects follow the model identified in this report.

The core model could be considered as the primary criteria when assessing potential and emergent activities. Necessarily however, other considerations, most notably the availability of funding and the fit within the charity's broader portfolio of activities, must also be prioritised when commissioning takes place.

Individual relationships with users offer a basis for personal development and empowerment. However, the assessment suggests that it would be naive to assume that strong relationships alone lead to empowerment. The empowerment of participants and beneficiaries as the ultimate goal is clear to all of the Foundation's employees; accordingly, the Foundation's manner of working and development will encourage and facilitate this shift.

A current weakness is that the Foundation's model is not made explicit in the organisation's own publicity and profile or written material. Admittedly however, for most funders and clients, their initial focus and concern is on tangible outcomes and targets, rather than the underlying principles and models of working that guide the organisation.

Partners are keen to see the Foundation engage in more promotional work, and would

want to support them in doing this. Some wanted the Foundation to transfer its expertise and experience to others in the sector. Some participants and beneficiaries also added that the Foundation was not particularly well known and explained how they had come to hear about opportunities by chance.

"It was luck and chance I met them, the building looked interesting!"

Project participant.

This type of promotion would raise the profile of the organisation, and establish it as a market leader. It is not clear whether there would be income generating possibilities for this work with organisations not directly connected to the Foundation.

Future growth is a significant issue for the Foundation.

There were suggestions that the Foundation could move more towards an infrastructure role, as an 'incubator'. The potential for an incubator role is an avenue worth exploring, but this should be in relation to projects the Foundation could directly help to develop.

The Foundation is in a strong position, and has been encouraged by feedback from existing funders.

"We would welcome a (funding) application! We see capacity to grow... the big question is where are they (the Octavia Foundation) going to go next?"

Stakeholder interview.

Director's conclusion

The findings of this research project have been deeply encouraging to all of us here at the Octavia Foundation.

The report successfully articulates the key strengths of the Foundation; in particular, the unique model of working that underpins all of our activities and initiatives. This model supports our goal of empowerment and positive personal transformation for the individuals and communities that we work with. The research is also important to us in highlighting significant areas for consideration and improvement.

It is fantastic to learn that our participants, beneficiaries and partners recognise and appreciate this model of working, which we have worked hard to develop and maintain. That is, treating people with respect, delivering excellent levels of service and working hard to develop and deliver sustainable and transformative experiences, opportunities and relationships.

Crucially, the feedback and contributions of our participants and beneficiaries and the partners and funders that work with us, confirms the strong impact of the Foundation and the important role that it can play in the local area.

The potential for our work to deliver real life enhancement to participants and beneficiaries is emphasised throughout the report and this is a huge motivation for me. I know that the Octavia Foundation can (and does) play a crucial role in the development of an individual's confidence, positivity and potential across a number of practical, emotional and social levels.

As we continue our work and plan new activities, it is important to remind ourselves of these goals and the responsibility that we have to continue to provide and encourage opportunities for empowerment and personal development.

The broader implications of the findings are also significant. We hope that the review will provoke discussion about the role that charities and voluntary organisations can play in helping to change lives and the importance of personal empowerment to people and groups that want to make positive changes for themselves.

We hope that it's a conversation that our partners, funders and supporters will join with us in!

I am grateful to all of the individuals and organisations that participated in the research project and for their continued involvement, support and contribution to our work – thank you.



Reena Mukherji, Director

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Young film-makers launch Hidden Herstories with a panel discussion at the Venezuelan Embassy, London, April 2010

About the researchers



Liz Richardson is a Research Fellow in the Institute for Political and Economic Governance at the University of Manchester. She has conducted research on youth empowerment, support for vulnerable families,

community self-help, democratic participation, and public services. She has worked directly with: practitioners; policy makers in local and central government; local politicians; the voluntary sector; as well as with hundreds of community organisations. Her work has been used to develop policy and practice.

Her book *DIY Community Action* was published by Policy Press in 2008, and a co-edited collection in 2009 called *Changing Local Governance, Changing Citizens*. She is co-author of *Nudge, nudge, think, think: using experiments to change civic behaviour*, published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2011.

Liz is a Director of a community charity, the National Communities Resource Centre, where she set up community training and small grant programmes which have since supported over 5,000 community volunteers.



Sarah Cotterill is currently a Research Fellow in biostatistics, in the Health Sciences Research Group at the University of Manchester. She supports NHS staff and other researchers to prepare high-quality research

proposals for competitive funding streams. Sarah conducted the research for the Octavia Review in her previous role as Research Associate in IPEG between 2007-2011.

Rebecca Askew is currently studying for her PhD at the University of Manchester, looking at perceptions of substance use and misuse. Rebecca previously worked as a Research Assistant at IPEG between 2006 and 2009.



Children at a summer tennis camp, supported by the Octavia Foundation, August 2011



A session for Westminster Works participants, September 2010



Storytelling at the Octavia Foundation Summer Festival, July 2009

The Octavia Foundation is a registered charity, established by Octavia Housing, that works to support individuals and communities throughout West and Central London.

We are always pleased to hear from people who are able to support our work, either through volunteering or by fundraising or from people who are keen to become involved with our projects and activities. Please get in touch to learn more about how we can work together!

Who we are

Board:

Peter Chapman, *Chair*
 Isis Amlak
 Debs Bourner
 Sue Caro
 Michael Johnson
 Laurie Soden
 Martin Young

Our shops

We have 20 charity shops across London. All of our shops are open from 10am-6pm, Monday to Saturday, and most are open on Sundays. Visit our website for a full list of locations. For further information, please contact Jim Brooks on **020 8354 5537** or jim.brooks@octaviafoundation.org.uk



Octavia Foundation

English

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Albanian

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Arabic

إذا كنت ترغب في الحصول على أي جزء من هذه المعلومات مطبوعاً بأحرف كبيرة أو بطريقة برايل أو مسجلاً على أسطوانة مدمجة أو شريط صوتي أو مشروحاً باللغة التي تتحدثها، يرجى الاتصال بنا على الرقم الموضح أدناه.

Bengali

যদি আপনি এই তথ্যগুলোর যে কোন একটির সম্বন্ধে বিস্তারিত জানতে চান, অথবা আপনার নিজের ভাষাতে ব্রেল, সিডি, অডিও টেপ-এ পেতে চান তাহলে নিম্নলিখিত নম্বরে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।

Farsi

اگر مایل به داشتن هر بخش از این اطلاعات به صورت چاپ شده یا حروف بزرگ، خط بریل، روی CD، نوار صوتی و یا توضیح داده شده به زبان خودتان هستید، لطفاً با استفاده از شماره تلفن زیر با ما تماس بگیرید.

French

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Portuguese

Se necessitar de parte desta informação em caracteres aumentados, em Braille, em CD, cassette áudio ou apresentada no seu idioma, por favor contacte-nos, através do telefone abaixo indicado.

Somali

Haddaad u baahan tahay warkan afkaaga-hooyo, afka loogu talagalay dadka aan arki karaan – afka faraha ama CD-ga ama ajeladda rekorka nala xirir. Namberkan isticmaal.

Spanish

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Tigrinian

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