

Assessment Report

Signpost (Colchester) Limited

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	
Assessment Type	Accreditation Review
Assessor's Decision	Standard Met
Assessor's Name	Andrew Davey
Evidence Gathering/Assessment Date/s	16/04/2025 – 17/04/2025
Client ID and Assessment Reference	C19192; PN202914
Accreditation Review to be conducted by	12/04/2028

METHODOLOGY	
Evidence gathering	On site assessment using a combination of face to face, Google Meet, and phone interviews.
Staff interviews	7
Recipient interviews	12
Partner interviews	3
Document review	Signpost Business Plan 2025-27; Signpost IAG Offer February 2025; Feedback Overview procedure; Appointment Booking procedure; follow-up survey responses; case studies; CRM extracts; organisation chart; Signpost website.

About the organisation

Signpost (Colchester) Limited, (Signpost from here on), is a charity that has, for over 30 years, been helping people prepare for employment, develop the skills needed to apply for a job and support them through the application process.

Signpost strategic planning and delivery is overseen by the Management Team who report into the Board of Trustees.

Initially Signpost delivered their provision from Colchester, and this has grown over the years to deliver from their centre in Jaywick which covers the Tendring area and from their centre in Basildon. In each case, Signpost locates their delivery centres within communities that are suffering deprivation and where their services are most needed. This is a primary way that the community become familiar with the organisation and the support they can offer.

As the landscape changes over time, for example the effect on communities and employment caused by the pandemic, Signpost respond and tailor their provision to meet the challenges within the communities. This requires appropriate funding to support current and developing needs. Signpost have historically focused on maintaining a diverse income portfolio which supports a variety of different initiatives while at the same time helping to protect the organisation financially compared to having just one or two large, funded projects. This model requires ongoing promotion with funders to maintain multiple smaller, community focused, funding pots. To support this the organisation has recently employed a member of staff dedicated to fundraising. This report will touch on how effective Signpost's relationship is with funders and partners, and that it is based around a successful delivery model.

The provision delivered by Signpost at any one time is arrived at by determining needs within their communities along with the cohorts of people they aim to support. By working closely with the local authority, the DWP and other funders, Signpost are equipped to fulfil local needs and gaps in provision. At the time of this Accreditation Review (assessment) against the **matrix** Standard, Signpost had just completed some productive projects. Two were funded by Essex County Council, one to support the Multiply programme initiative, and the other directed at helping people to move into employment in the Social Care sector. A current ongoing project working with the DWP is to support people to develop their CV and to understand and develop employability skills such as interview techniques.

Signpost is also embarking on an exciting project in Basildon. With support from the local authority, they are refurbishing a building in the town centre into which they will move their delivery. The building has significant space available, and the plan is for additional organisations, potentially including the local authority and DWP, to also move in representation along with other charities supporting the local communities. The building and its occupants will be managed by Signpost. There are many potential benefits to this delivery model, of housing multiple organisations in one location, an aspect which is new to Signpost and moves away from their historic delivery model.

Some of the services being provided at the time of this assessment included: supporting beneficiaries to write CVs; providing training for employability skills through one-to-one support and by means of group workshops; providing training around IT, especially to help people with job applications and accessing services such as the doctors and benefits; ESOL speaking clubs and talking sessions to help asylum seekers, immigrants, and people who have moved into the UK from Ukraine.

Signpost has as their aim, *'The relief of the non-employed in the areas of deprivation we serve. We want to empower people and help them maximise their potential'*.

Their objective is, *'To secure grants, contracts and donations to bring services to the communities we serve. Rebuilding our diverse income portfolio. To return the number of beneficiaries to pre-Covid levels'*.

The organisation's delivery is centred around their IAG provision. This is at the heart of the service provided by Signpost and is the vehicle they use to achieve their aim.

Signpost refer to the individuals they support as 'beneficiaries' and they pride themselves on being a beneficiary centric organisation. Everything they do is to support beneficiaries in line with their aim, and to do that they spend time identifying the needs of each beneficiary before planning an effective delivery centred around the individual. It is this ethos and the passion of all members of staff to care for the needs of their beneficiaries and help them progress upon their desired pathway, that was constantly apparent throughout this assessment and evidenced by staff, beneficiaries, and partner organisations.

Resources are managed effectively and carefully by senior management who are very focused on keeping their 'finger on the pulse' to ensure sufficient staffing with the right experience and qualifications are maintained. Managing resources effectively also applies to maintaining appropriate facilities and a welcoming environment. This is achieved by maintaining a rapport with the local authorities as well as benefiting from funding for specific requirements such as supporting members of staff for defined roles, and the provision of IT equipment.

The Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Beneficiaries find out about the offer at Signpost through a variety of avenues. One way is through the Signpost website. The website has a twofold purpose. One is to speak to funders and the other to communicate with beneficiaries. Beneficiaries can find out about the offer on the Signpost website which contains videos and pictures with easy-to-understand descriptions. The website also contains a section about the Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG). The description of the IAG identifies that Signpost provides a 'client centred service' and explains what this means for the beneficiary. The IAG and its aims are described along with the benefit for the beneficiary. The organisation also makes it clear where their priorities lie, which are around helping people who are on their journey to seeking employment. It is clearly identified that the organisation is constantly trying to develop their service and to this end they rely on beneficiary feedback at different points throughout the beneficiary

journey with them. The Website has recently been enhanced with a section demonstrating the measurable impact of Signpost's provision. The impact measures include Social Return on Investment (SROI) and the positive impact on beneficiaries' wellbeing. Two aspects that funders in particular, will recognise.

One off Signpost's strengths is their links with other organisations to whom they refer people requiring specialist support. This is clearly a benefit of the support available at Signpost.

The description of the IAG on offer is also available on an A4 flyer which is made available in public areas around the local community.

Descriptions of the programmes on offer and the IAG support that Signpost can provide to the community is made available at multiple locations that the public access. This includes libraries, community centres, the Citizens Advice Bureau, supermarkets, community cafés, and community events, to list a few. Staff maintain a register of where they promote their services and current projects, revisiting the locations on a regular basis while also noting how their promotion is displayed. Working closely with the DWP to support people requiring CVs is a good vehicle to provide additional resource to the Work Coaches as well as at the same time supporting the promotion of other programmes that may be appropriate to some beneficiaries.

In addition to the above methods of promotion Signpost use social media which some beneficiaries highlighted as their introduction to the organisation. Signpost also email organisations that supply support in the community, who then refer into Signpost.

Many people in the communities around Signpost's delivery centres are aware of the organisation due to their historical support within the communities and share this knowledge by word-of-mouth.

When people engage with Signpost they are given an appointment for an interview during which the support and provision available at Signpost is explained, and through relaxed conversation the needs of the beneficiary are determined. There are no restrictions on the number of sessions that a beneficiary can book with the organisation, or the length of time that Signpost will continue to help them on their journey. Some programmes, due to the nature of their funding have specific delivery requirements and constraints, but support for the beneficiaries using core funding, some of which comes from trustees and other organisations, continues to provide an ongoing support and listening ear for beneficiaries. Specific programmes will have a start and end which beneficiaries are made aware of. Also, due to constraints around resource combined with needing to provide an effective delivery environment, Signpost book training sessions and workshops with controlled attendance to ensure that they best meet the needs of each individual.

Simply put, the process of delivering IAG and support at Signpost can be described as a client centred, bottom-up approach. Beneficiary needs are identified, the support that can be provided by Signpost is agreed and planned, signposting and

referral to specialist organisations is arranged, and the journey of each beneficiary is recorded against planned actions and outcomes as they progress toward their goal.

Some beneficiaries commented:

“Signpost are helpful in all areas that I need help with, Universal Credit, Mental Health, my asylum claim”

“I like the people at Signpost, they are so helpful. Their centre is conveniently located, the environment is pleasing and quiet, and I feel at ease”

“You feel you have gained confidence when you leave”

“When you come through Signpost’s system, they don’t forget you; they ring you or text you with opportunities and support”

“Signpost helped me to explore what to do next and how to do it. They provided me with new horizons and to explore multiple options”

The difference the IAG makes to recipients and the overall impact

Signpost maintain a focus on identifying the impact of their service and in doing so look for opportunities for development. Early in the beneficiaries’ journey is gaining an understanding about the support available at Signpost. This is monitored with all new beneficiaries who attend and subsequently analysed. Where it is noted that types of, or geographical areas of promotion, as noted on their register, are not yielding applications, they revisit these to identify if there is an opportunity to improve their method of promotion in this area. This especially applies to the work they carry out with organisations such as the DWP (JCP).

Each programme delivered by Signpost has specific defined outcomes and impact measures. Although these vary, there are common factors of supporting people to develop their CV, gaining employability skills, and moving into employment. Supporting beneficiaries along their journey is heavily influenced by the identification of their own individual needs, the support of which will result in outcomes that will in turn enable them to stay on their journey towards their end goal. As such Signpost monitor the outcomes of each beneficiary on their CRM. These outcomes often include aspects such as, improving individuals well-being, gaining an accurate CV, enabling a beneficiary to understand the need to tailor their CV to an application, understanding and gaining employability skills, helping an individual to gain confidence, improving English-language skills, and understanding where to find appropriate support for their individual needs such as housing, finances, and improving their maths skills.

The CRM has been developed to the point where the organisation can now extract reports to show hard outcomes for beneficiaries, combined with individual beneficiary journeys identifying their progress and outcomes.

Signpost have a structured feedback system with six specific strands. The strands include 1) Phone Surveys which are used to report hard impact for core services and

promoting their service. 2) feedback emails to identify issues and achievements. 3) feedback during one-to-one visits and workshops which are used to monitor customer satisfaction. 4) case studies which are used to inform bids and proposals, support publicity, and help future beneficiaries to appreciate how the service has helped others. 5) soft outcomes survey, which is used to track individual progress over time and soft outcomes. 6) specific project reporting, for reporting back to programme funders.

Examples of impact for delivery programmes were identified and corroborated by funding partners. One good example that stood out related to the project funded by a local authority to support individuals into employment in the Social Care sector. The local authority had spent a lot of money using social media to promote available roles within the sector but despite analysis showing that many people had accessed the information, it was not resulting in roles being secured or an increase in applications. Working with Signpost to deliver outreach work through their Job Clubs resulted in significant results. Signpost were able to support the beneficiaries in an ongoing manner along their journey to employment. This was due to their client centred approach and the knowledge and experience available at Signpost. Through meetings with the authority and planning and development of the processes, it was even possible to change elements of the application process to better suit the applicant's needs. The support from Signpost resulted in 91 beneficiaries gaining employment over a twelve-month period. The funding partner identified that it was the *"long-term ongoing client focused support that is what made it work"*.

Another example of high-level impact from their service was a project in the community to support mental health and financial well-being which referred people to the Multiply programme that experienced excellent results. Signpost were described as the *"best organisation referring beneficiaries to the programme. They go the extra mile to support individuals and meet their needs"*. Discussion with this funding partner identified that the individuals referred to the programme were of the correct calibre, stayed on programme, and always met the eligibility criteria.

Signpost have been focusing for some years on improving their methods of measuring impact. This has now developed to a stage where they have a page on their website that demonstrates impact through four specific categories. These are Social Value, Project Performance, Improvements in Well-being, and Case Studies & Feedback.

For the 2023 - 2024 financial year Signpost have been able to use a framework that demonstrates a SROI of 11.13:1. This shows that for every £1 spent they are delivering £11.13 of measurable social value. Details of the analysis are available in a report.

Outcomes for beneficiaries around improvements in well-being are significant and clearly demonstrated in graphical form on the website. Signpost gather data from each beneficiary when they first engage with the organisation, and then again at defined time periods along the beneficiary's journey. The analysis using the well-recognised and respected Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale indicates that

over the past year, initially their beneficiaries identified that 86% had a low level of well-being and 12% with a moderate level of well-being. After their support from Signpost this moved to 31% having a low level of well-being and 63% having a moderate level of well-being. When compared to the normal population these numbers are a lot closer to the statistical spread. This is not only an excellent use of a recognised and respected measurement scale but demonstrates emphatically the benefit of the client centric support provided by Signpost and their staff.

The case studies and feedback provide a good flavour of where beneficiaries were at the start of their journey and how Signpost supported them to achieve successful outcomes.

Using the CRM records an example report was extracted to show the successful journey of one beneficiary. The beneficiary initially attended in person, registered and arranged a CV appointment. They attended their appointment and were also helped to register on the Social Care website looking for part-time work. The following day they attended a Financial Well-being Course. The beneficiaries progress continued with attending a Social Care CV appointment, having an interview skills training session, being offered an interview with Mencap which resulted in a job offer but the shift pattern had changed and was conflicting with childcare arrangements. Ongoing support from Signpost resulted in appointments and assistance to apply for employment, signposting to different organisations that would support the beneficiaries needs and then eight months after initially developing their CV the beneficiary secured employment.

Impact is also identified by follow-up phone calls. For the previous calendar year 949 beneficiaries were registered, and for the current calendar year to date 342 beneficiaries have registered.

The previous calendar year 34.6% achieved hard outcomes. Of these 33% progressed into education and training, 63% progressed into employment, and 4% into volunteer roles.

For the current calendar year to date, 50% have achieved hard outcomes. Of these 31% have progressed into education and training, and 69% into employment.

There were many examples of how the organisation have focused on community needs and their own performance to inform continuous improvement. A few examples include:

- To measure well-being, beneficiaries are asked to complete the well-being survey when they register with Signpost, with the intent that they will complete subsequent surveys every thirty days. Regular data collection is important to measure well-being improvements accurately. Although the date for the next survey was recorded in the CRM it was difficult to extract. The CRM system was modified resulting in Signpost staff being able to extract a report to indicate which beneficiaries are due to complete a three month survey, as well as calendar reminders being provided for when surveys are due.
- With different centres delivering in different communities, it was identified that

consistency and standardisation of delivery is important. To achieve this a booking and delivery of appointments process was developed which includes, organisational activities around updating calendars, files, and the CRM, ensuring that data protection aspects are covered, and beneficiary needs and progress are suitably recorded.

- The system noted previously that is used to monitor publicity and how partners are enabling it, was a new system developed by the staff at one of the centres.
- It was noted that development occurs between Signpost and their partners as they work along with them. A good example was the development of the programme for the recruitment into the Social Care sector noted previously. Another example related to the DWP and how their observations of the success of youth support sessions by Signpost has resulted in developing a similar programme for all age groups.

Despite limited resources, the passion staff have to support beneficiaries along with their focus to continually enhance their provision, is clearly evident in the way the organisation follows a plan, do, review model to continually improve their offer.

What is working particularly well

A number of strengths/areas that are working particularly well were identified during the assessment, which are detailed below. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- The organisation maintains a sufficient staffing resource who have the appropriate skills, knowledge, experience and qualifications to deliver an effective service. (2.2, 2.6)
Signpost deliver their provision using both paid staff and volunteers. To achieve their service effectively requires staff who are not only experienced in the different strands of IAG being delivered but also have a passion to help people as well as personal qualities and a personality to engage effectively to deliver a facilitative management model. It was clearly evident while speaking to staff, beneficiaries, partners, and reviewing impact and outcomes that Signpost management understand this and have effectively appointed staff who can deliver their role well. Talking to the beneficiaries identified that they felt the passion, empathy and professionalism while being supported at Signpost.
- Systems are in place for signposting and referral. (4.7)
The model of delivery used by Signpost to support beneficiaries effectively, uses their provision around providing CVs and support to employment as a vehicle to engage with beneficiaries, identify their underlying needs, and then providing added value through signposting. Supporting these needs is often critically important for the beneficiary to develop and progress along their pathway to employment. By identifying needs, and providing support and encouragement for the beneficiary, motivates them to follow referrals and signposting to other

specialist organisations. In doing so they provide a holistic wraparound support that enables beneficiaries to advance along their journey. Partner organisations commented positively about how effectively this approach is working.

- Effective links are made with others that enhance the IAG offer. (2.7)
As noted during this report, Signpost work well with partner organisations resulting in a synergy that would not be possible if the organisations worked in isolation. Partners described good communication and an 'easy relationship'. They identified that Signpost respond well and provide data when it is asked for. They also described a flexible approach enabling both organisations to work productively together. One large organisation with multiple departments identified that all the other teams with whom Signpost partner in the organisation provide positive recommendations. A partner described working with Signpost as *"A real partnership, and that Signpost exude a 'can do' approach, and that they will make suggestions work"*.
- The impact of the IAG is measured and evaluated. (6.2)
Signpost achieve their measurable objectives well. This was clearly demonstrated and reported on both within the organisation and by partner organisations who monitor impact in line with funding requirements. As noted previously in the report, Signpost have used their 'can do' approach to identify methods of delivery that result in achievement, where another organisation may have previously failed. This is recognised by funders who explained how they want to work with Signpost to achieve their goal and as funding allows start new projects with them. The recent introduction of a webpage showing four categories of impact based around their provision, two of which are community based and two which are beneficiary based, is a good practice which many similar sized organisations could benefit from emulating.

Development suggestions

Development suggestions are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement and a way for an Assessor to add value e.g. where the service is of a high quality, development areas are offered to help the service be even better than it already is, or to give insight into practices seen elsewhere. There is no correlation between the number of strengths and development suggestions. Where development areas are greater in number this is not intended to indicate that the information, advice and guidance service is in any way lacking. These will form the basis for discussion at the Continuous Improvement Checks (CIC) conducted twelve and twenty-four months from the date of this Assessment, along with any other notable developments. The numbers in brackets refer to the element and criteria of the **matrix** Standard.

- Actual outcomes are monitored and evaluated. (5.2)
Signpost clearly define the outcomes they support their beneficiaries to achieve along their journey. They record the outcomes as beneficiaries achieve them in

their CRM system. It is to be noted that as an organisation Signpost have made significant strides forward in recording and being able to collate and report on beneficiary outcomes. They have also developed their mechanisms well to capture and a facilitate the capturing of outcomes. Signpost are encouraged to continue to focus on capturing outcomes from the start of each project in a way that will demonstrate the impact gained by beneficiaries. It is encouraged that even if these outcomes are not part of the requirements of a funding programme, that the organisation captures them where possible. The benefit of this may be that it will identify opportunities for development and also support SROI measures and future funding applications.

- The organisation uses its resources effectively to deliver IAG. (2.8)
Signpost effectively use their resources to deliver IAG and promote their services. This is explained in the report. A suggestion to further develop their reach maybe to consider how beneficiaries could access resources that will support them outside office hours or to save them engaging with the centre. The organisation may wish to consider developing a digital IAG hub on their website that carries information and formats that beneficiaries can be encouraged to use as a tool during their support with a Signpost advisor. The benefit of this may be that it will help beneficiaries to be able to progress independently enhancing their outcomes, as well as potentially freeing up resource within the organisation.

Conditions of Accreditation

Holders of the **matrix** Standard Accreditation must:

1. Maintain and continually improve upon their services.
2. During the period of accreditation satisfy The Growth Company that the organisation continues to meet the requirements of the **matrix** Standard via the annual continuous improvement checks and the three-year accreditation review.
3. Complete annual continuous improvement checks in a timely way, it is expected these will be carried out annually by the accreditation anniversary date.
4. Inform The Growth Company or their Assessor if the key contact name/contact details change.
5. Submit their Booking Form for re-accreditation to the **matrix** Standard at least 3 months prior to the accreditation anniversary date ensuring all pre on-site activity is completed in a timely way including planning, payment and interview scheduling. Accreditation Reviews are due 3 years from the anniversary accreditation date; it is expected that organisations will be assessed by this date or will risk being de-accredited.
6. Inform The Growth Company of any significant changes made to the organisational structure, senior management or systems that may impact on their accreditation; email: matrixStandard@growthco.uk.
7. Inform The Growth Company immediately if they wish to extend or reduce the scope of their accreditation.
8. Inform The Growth Company of any serious complaint or rise in numbers of complaints received (within the scope of the accreditation).
9. Not undertake or omit to undertake any activity that may be misleading and/or may cause The Growth Company and/or the **matrix** Standard to be brought into disrepute.
10. Only use the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark for the areas within the scope of the accreditation and in accordance with the guidelines. For example, if a certain department is successfully **matrix** accredited, the Quality Mark can only be used on that department's letterhead or on that department's page on their internet homepage.
11. Ensure in cases where accreditation is withdrawn or where they do not come forward for accreditation review, remove from display any certificates or plaques issued by The Growth Company and do not display the **matrix** Standard Quality Mark nor refer to be a former holder of the **matrix** Standard.
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