

Via Wings and Compass Advocacy Network

June 2025

Circular Resources Shared Learning

Case Study

Introduction

This case study explores the purposeful collaboration between Compass Advocacy Network, based in Ballymoney, and Via Wings, located in Dromore. The focal point of this shared learning project was a structured visit, during which Via Wings staff engaged with Compass Advocacy Network to gain insights into effective charity shop management, as well as the delivery of comprehensive services for children and adults. This case study provides an overview of the activity, organisational backgrounds, findings from the visit, and an analysis of outcomes, before concluding with recommendations for others seeking to foster collaborative growth within the reuse and repair sectors.



Background

Compass Advocacy Network (CAN) is a well-established organisation in Ballymoney, recognised for its innovative approach to supporting individuals with learning disabilities and autism. Its service portfolio encompasses charity shop operations, social enterprises, and a range of tailored programmes for both children and adults. CAN's charity shops is not only a fundraising vehicle but also a skills development hub for its members.

Via Wings, based in Dromore, is a dynamic charity dedicated to supporting individuals and families facing crises or disadvantage. Their services include a charity shop, food support, and community outreach, with a growing interest in expanding their operational knowledge and enhancing their impact through best practice sharing with peer organisations.

The CRL, Shared Learning Project was initiated following recognition within the network of the mutual benefits to be gained from sharing operational expertise, particularly around inclusive service provision and sustainable charity retail.



Presentation of Findings

The visit took place over a full day at Compass Advocacy Network's facility in Ballymoney. Via Wings' staff, including their general manager and community engagement officer. The itinerary was designed to offer immersive exposure to both the charity shop's daily operations and the wider support services run by CAN.

- Charity Shop Operations: Via Wings observed stock intake, pricing, merchandising, and sales processes. Emphasis was placed on CAN's systems for maximising reuse and minimising waste.
- Children and Adult Services: The visit included sessions with CAN's support workers and programme participants. Via Wings learned about structured activities for life skills, social inclusion, and personal development. Staff shared methodologies for adapting services to a range of needs and abilities.
- Knowledge Exchange: Both teams engaged in discussions, sharing challenges and successes in volunteer management, donor engagement, and safeguarding practices.



Analysis

Benefits and Impacts

- Increased Efficiency: Via Wings identified immediate opportunities to adapt CAN's sorting systems, which is expected to increase product turnover and reduce waste within their own operations.
- CAN staff reported that the process of preparing for and hosting the visit prompted internal reflection, leading to renewed motivation.

Lessons Learned

- Peer learning is most effective when both parties are open and transparent about challenges, not just successes.
- Practical demonstrations and hands-on observation offer richer learning than presentations alone.
- Tailoring visits to include time for informal networking and discussion boosts relationship-building and the exchange of ideas.

Opportunities for Future Collaboration or Scaling

- Both organisations identified opportunities for further knowledge exchange, including reciprocal visits.
- Joint advocacy on issues such as sustainability and inclusion could amplify collective impact.



Conclusion

This collaboration between Compass Advocacy Network and Via Wings underscores the tangible benefits of peer-to-peer learning within the NIRN network. The visit facilitated the transfer of practical knowledge in charity shop operations and inclusive service delivery, resulting in measurable outcomes such as anticipated increases in stock reuse and the adoption of improved training materials. Both organisations also experienced less tangible, but equally valuable, gains in staff motivation and cross-organisational learning.