

Case Study – Aquarius Leadership Programme

Why Action Learning Associates

Aquarius selected Action Learning Associates because of their practical, experiential approach to leadership development. Rather than delivering a generic programme, they worked closely with Aquarius to understand their culture, leadership challenges and desired outcomes before designing a bespoke leadership journey.

Their approach combined:

- Practical leadership & management development
- Experiential learning and reflection
- Real workplace application
- Coaching skills development
- Action Learning methodology
- Internal capability building to sustain change

The result was a programme designed not simply to develop individual leaders, but to strengthen leadership culture across the organisation.



CHALLENGE

Aquarius is a charity supporting people across the Midlands to change behaviours and improve lives. Their work requires leaders to navigate complexity, support people through change, manage demanding services and create positive outcomes for the communities they serve.

Like many growing organisations, Aquarius recognised that leadership capability would be critical to delivering its strategy and maintaining a positive culture.

Whilst leaders across the organisation were committed, knowledgeable and passionate about their work, several common challenges had emerged:

- Confidence levels varied across the leadership population.
- Difficult conversations were often delayed or avoided.
- Decision-making was frequently escalated upwards.
- Teams sometimes operated in silos rather than collaboratively.
- Leaders wanted greater consistency in how they led and managed others.

This wasn't about creating perfect leaders.

It was about creating confident ones.

<http://www.aquarius.org.uk>

- There was a desire to strengthen leadership capability in a practical and sustainable way.

The organisation was not looking for another theoretical leadership programme.

They wanted a development experience that would create meaningful behavioural change, strengthen leadership confidence and leave a lasting legacy.

THE APPROACH

ALA designed a three-day immersive leadership development programme supported by Action Learning Sets and internal facilitator development.

The programme aimed to:

- Build confidence and trust in leadership judgement
- Develop conscious leadership behaviours
- Create a shared leadership language
- Strengthen collaboration and accountability
- Improve communication and leadership conversations

- Equip leaders to support and develop others
- Create sustainable learning capability within the organisation

Importantly, every leader participated in the programme, demonstrating organisational commitment and creating a shared leadership experience across the leadership community.

THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY

Day One: Leading with Purpose and a Coaching Mindset

Leaders explored:

- Leadership purpose and intention
- Coaching conversations using the GROW model
- Active listening and powerful questioning
- Self-awareness and personal leadership style
- Leadership Playbook reflection

Participants began shifting from reactive problem-solving towards more intentional leadership and coaching-based conversations.

Day Two: Conscious Communication and Feedback

Leaders developed practical skills in:

- CLEAR conversations
- SBI and AIID feedback models
- Emotional awareness and regulation
- Managing challenging conversations
- Applying learning to real workplace situations

The focus was on increasing confidence, clarity and consistency in leadership communication.

Day Three: Culture, Development and Resilience

Leaders explored:

- Building a positive learning culture
- Supporting development through meaningful PDP conversations
- Strengths-based leadership
- Mentoring and coaching approaches
- Resilience and wellbeing through change

The day reinforced the important role leaders play in shaping culture through everyday behaviours and interactions.

THE ROLE OF ACTION LEARNING

Whilst the workshops provided practical frameworks and leadership tools, Action Learning created the conditions for lasting behavioural change.

Following the programme, leaders participated in structured Action Learning Sets where they brought real workplace challenges and explored them through disciplined inquiry, reflection and peer support.

"I am so pleased to have worked with Charlotte and find people and an organisation that understood us as a charity, as people and helped us to bring a vision to life"

**Ruth Spencer - Aquarius Quality Systems
Lead Area Manager**

Rather than giving advice, participants learned to:

- Ask better questions
- Challenge assumptions
- Reflect more deeply
- Take ownership of solutions
- Support one another's learning

This helped leaders embed new behaviours, apply learning in practice and remain accountable for action.

As we often say:

Training sparked the change. Action Learning sustained it.

BUILDING INTERNAL CAPABILITY

A key objective for Aquarius was ensuring the learning continued long after the programme ended.

To support sustainability, internal facilitators were trained in Action Learning facilitation.

This enabled Aquarius to:

- Continue running Action Learning Sets internally
- Develop future leaders
- Create ongoing reflective practice
- Strengthen collaboration across teams
- Embed a culture of continuous learning and improvement

Rather than relying on external support indefinitely, Aquarius invested in building capability from within.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Participant Feedback

- 91% rated the programme as Excellent
- 100% said they would recommend the programme to others

The most frequently cited benefits included:

- Increased confidence
- Greater clarity
- Trust in leadership judgement
- Practical tools that could be applied immediately

Behavioural Changes

Leaders reported:

- More confidence in decision-making
- Earlier and more effective conversations
- Greater self-awareness
- Increased ownership and accountability
- Reduced reliance on escalation
- Improved collaboration across teams

Organisational Impact

Aquarius developed:

- A shared leadership language
- More consistent leadership behaviours
- Stronger cross-team relationships
- Increased confidence across the leadership community
- Sustainable internal capability through trained Action Learning Facilitators
- A stronger culture of reflection, learning and continuous improvement

THE OUTCOME

The programme helped Aquarius create a more confident, connected and capable leadership community.

Leaders developed practical skills, greater self-belief and stronger leadership behaviours. Through Action Learning, those behaviours were embedded and sustained over time.

Most importantly, Aquarius created the foundations for ongoing leadership development through internal capability, ensuring that learning and improvement continue long after the original programme concluded.

This wasn't about creating perfect leaders.

It was about creating confident ones.



"Going through the programme together helps reinforce a collective culture of leadership in the organisation that is supportive, collaborative, and positive about our workforce. It has also developed the capacity and ability to develop and progress our leaders and be able to support emerging leaders in the organisation to bring new talent through."

This contributes to effective succession planning for leadership in the organisation and to make the organisation fit for the future."

Richard McVey
Aquarius Head of Service

I originally reached out to ALA to explore AL training in order to invest in reflective practice in the organisation and up skill leaders with practical skills to help them support people across the organisation. This led to a realisation that we wanted to look at leadership across the organisation and support for people so that we could lead in a way that aligned with our values and could share ideas on what good really looked like.

Charlotte worked with myself to develop the initial idea and then with the Aquarius senior leadership team to really explore our needs, our vision and how this could be achieved.

What started as a seed idea developed into a whole leadership training programme, with a playbook, workbooks and a train the trainer system to ensure the training could also become part of the organisations legacy and inspire current and future leaders.

I am so pleased to have worked with Charlotte and find people and an organisation that understood us as a charity, as people and helped us to bring a vision to life. I hope we get the opportunity to work on more projects in the future. **Ruth Spencer**

Aquarius Quality Systems Lead Area Manager

The leadership development programme has improved the level of confidence and skills of Aquarius leaders in supporting the workforce to be the best they can be. They have a greater appreciation of what it is to be a collaborative leader who helps nurture and draw out the talent and potential that staff have rather than viewing them as empty vessels to be filled up with advice and direction. We had a range of levels of experience in leadership and management in our teams and the programme has helped consolidate the competency of newer leaders and extend the competence of more experienced leaders.

Richard McVey
Aquarius Head of Service

PARTICIPANT QUOTES

"Has helped me feel more confident in effectively supporting people I line manage and address concerns with them in a more productive manner."

"I think this training should be completed by all people wanting to move into management"

"It promotes motivation and growth within a team"

"I am conflict avoidant and it doesn't have to be 'compassion or directness, but rather it can be a blend, and that I can stand firm in both"