

Partnership Working

"Partnership Working" is one of the new catchphrases of the moment in this sector, and for good reason... As the sector becomes increasingly competitive, as cuts to Supporting People funding make financial efficiency more important, and as Added Value becomes vital to the future of any agency, Partnership Working has become one of the most effective ways for an agency to address all of these concerns, and more.

Homelessness obviously cannot be tackled by one agency alone; homeless clients frequently have complex or multiple needs, and therefore partnerships between statutory, voluntary and community organisations are vital.

First and foremost, voluntary agencies need close partnerships with local authorities to facilitate improvements to move-on in the region, encourage access to housing support for their clients and to ensure their voice is heard in times of local development.

Another important aspect of partnerships are those with PCTs and health care providers, whether statutory or voluntary. Because homeless clients have a greater risk of health care issues and histories of substance misuse, these partnerships are vital, in order to offer service users the support which they need. They are also useful because PCTs need assistance in finding appropriate ways to assist homeless patients, for example, if nurses at a hospital are aware of the risks long-term hospital stay poses to tenancies, they will be better able to identify patients who are in need of housing advice during their stay in hospital. Likewise, partnerships with agencies such as MIND, Drinksense and Alcoholics Anonymous will improve opportunities for service users.

Partnerships are extremely useful between agencies with similar remits, because they allow each agency to cut costs and develop Added Value. Areas which you might focus on for partnerships include sharing payroll and HR staff, and joint tendering for some contracts.

Rod Fanning, CEO of Colchester Quaker Housing Association, describes their Partnership with Colne Housing Association:

"Colchester Quaker Housing Association and Colne Housing Society began discussing ways of working together in mid-2005.

"We were both keen to look at efficiency savings in line with the Gershon agenda and also ways in which we could provide better services.

"CQHA needed a new payroll system, so this

was one area for co-operation. From April 2006, we will have outsourced our payroll function to Colne, who will also provide HR data for us (such as sickness, annual leave etc.). This will represent a saving for us and also offset some of Colne's costs

for their system.

"We are also looking at joint tendering for maintenance contracts as we both cover a similar geographical area.

"In Essex, there will be a restructuring of

Floating Support contracts in 2006/7. Again, CQHA and Colne have been keen to collaborate to provide efficient local services. We are looking at a joint allocations route into our services (now agreed with the local authorities) and CQHA have opened up our in-house training to Colne staff.

"We have also worked together to lay the ground for a possible consortium tender for the re-configured Floating Support service in 2006 and have facilitated meetings with smaller specialist providers in the area to canvass interest for this approach. We are still waiting for Essex to decide upon their model for delivery, so this is still

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at the discussion stage.

"Neither Association is interested in a merger or take-over, but we do appreciate the benefits of collaborative working to deliver quality and value."



Supporting People – A National Consultation

The national consultation on the future of Supporting People was launched by the ODPM in November 2005. This consultation relates to the biggest single source of government funding for our member organisations.

It is vital that networks like Space East get your feedback and respond with a clear and consistent message from the provider sector.

The good – The good news for providers is that the ODPM have underlined some key commitments which always were a part of the ethos and ambition of this programme but have been lost in the process:

- Valuing the diversity of provision and supporting small providers
- Recognising the added value of the VCS (voluntary and community sector) bring as providers and at a strategic level in developing strategies and commissioning services.
- A renewed commitment to service user involvement at every level of the programme; in the delivery of services, strategic development, and commissioning services.
- Vigorously asserting that every level of the programme must become more outcomes rather than process focussed: Strategies, commissioning, delivery and monitoring of contracts.

The ODPM have been listening to the concerns of providers which have been sought through the infrastructure providers in many ways. The good news items reflect a commitment for the programme to deliver the original vision for Supporting People – the improvement of services and outcomes for the most vulnerable in society.

The bad? – Some of our members and partners feel that there are some more worrying aspects to the consultation document which are the following areas:

- The ongoing instability which inhibits progress which has been created by the resurrection of the distribution formula – This is the formula which looked at how the national funding should be more fairly divided to administering authorities using various needs indices.
- There is felt to be the potential for statutory commissioners to use LAAs (Local Area Agreements) to fill funding gaps for clients to whom they have a statutory duty at the expense of vulnerable clients such as the single homeless.

The ugly – Scepticism and anxiety around the integration of Supporting People and Local Area Agreements from providers are perfectly understandable given the failure of some areas to implement LSPs or sub-regional housing arrangements with any effectiveness. Where local authorities have a poor track record of joint working, providers and their service users have been collateral damage in the past.

It also adds another level to the regional, sub-regional, district authority, county authority, LSP mix which currently exists and which small providers cannot possibly hope to engage effectively with or keep track of.

Understanding the client group mix

The ODPM developed this model with partners such as SITRA and the NHF and suggest the best way to view the Supporting People pot and the client groups that benefit is through the following diagram:

This diagram is useful in terms of understanding and grouping streams of funding and strategic decision making. It may benefit members especially to focus on campaigning via this consultation to maintain a ring fence around funding for socially excluded groups, which are often groups for whom there is no statutory duty. The ODPM also highlight that they appreciate that there are areas of overlap for these groups which is why they have chosen this type of diagram for illustration.

The Socially Excluded group accounts for 56% of the overall Supporting People pot and around 80% of this funding is spent through voluntary sector providers. The average unit cost for this group is £4,900.

Local Area Agreements and the Supporting People Programme

There are shared outcomes between different strategies (eg. Homelessness Prevention and Supporting People) and these vary from county to county depending on the needs levels and provision. The idea of Local Area Agreements is to pool these resources in order to meet shared outcomes through smarter working. Anxieties around the current funding being redirected towards other priorities are rife amongst providers but there are some clear potential benefits for providers and service users if LAAs work effectively:

Housing & Migrant Workers

Despite Britain's economic dependence on migrant workers, who bring skilled labour to services with skills shortages, their support needs are often not adequately met.

Migrant workers often arrive in the UK with no guarantee of work or accommodation, and sometimes health needs or drug and alcohol dependencies as well. They can easily find themselves in poor living conditions with exploitative or threatening work place conditions.

For accommodation and support providers, these clients have diverse needs to work on, including:

- obtaining information on workers rights from government organisations – information for Portuguese, Lithuanian and Polish workers can be found in their native languages at http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/agency/migrant_workers.htm
- providing non-judgemental links to support, including the chance for a key worker to attend public service support meetings (for example, GPs, housing advice, etc) with the client. Vietnamese families, for example, can possess great stigma on the issue of mental ill-health and therefore support is vital to ensuring treatment.
- Contacting other local agencies and finding out about any translation services they might use, or any staff they have who speak languages common to the migrant workers who use your agency.

Partnerships with other organisations are invaluable here. For example, if you were supporting a Vietnamese client with mental distress, who better to turn to than the Vietnamese Mental Health Service, who can provide leaflets in Vietnamese and trained advisers. Therefore, try and find out more about the national and local organisations offering support to migrant workers in your area.



- Providers have a single contract to manage in order to deliver a service in one area. E.g. If an agency provides services to reduce substance misuse they may get health, DAAT, Probation, and Supporting People funding for varying amounts and to deliver slightly different activities. The LAA model might provide the opportunity for all those funders to agree some outcomes such as:
 1. To reduce institutionalisation either to health or prison settings through services provided
 2. To reduce crime related to substance misuse
 3. To improve the health and the access to healthcare services of people with a substance addiction
 4. To prevent homelessness through substance misuse
 - This way of working would enable providers to be more flexible and innovative in delivery of services and activities because how the outcomes are achieved is up to them to manage as well as provide administrative savings and clearer communication with commissioners.
 - Underused funding might be better exploited through the LAA.
 - Greater agreement of statutory commissioners of priorities in an area which would allow for providers to have better informed business plans.
- The ODPM could decide that Supporting People funding could be 'aligned' with other funding sources through the Local Area Agreements rather than integrated

with other funding which would offer the benefits outlined above and reduce some of the risks which both providers and Supporting People Commissioners are concerned about.

Buying in?

The consultation paper has some positive background papers for our members to take heart from and familiarise themselves with, if they haven't already done so. Especially in terms of the sources that the ODPM are drawing from in terms of procurement of services. From Procurement essentials by I&DEA is the following quote:

"Contract management: Contract management is about ensuring benefits (outcomes) are delivered, continuous improvement and sound relationships as well as controls." (p2)

And: "Authorities should encourage a diverse range of suppliers to compete for their contracts. Often small and medium sized enterprises, social enterprises, ethnic minority businesses, voluntary and community organisations are discouraged from tendering..... These suppliers may offer greater innovation and value for money than their larger counterparts. They can be effective participants in the supply chain for larger partnerships."

The consultation also includes a clear message to commissioners that they need to utilise the expertise of providers, service users and the VCS in general in procurement of services.

Overworked

Are your staff achieving a healthy balance between work and the rest of their life or are they part of the 66% of voluntary sector staff identified by a recent report as working more than their contracted hours?

Although almost all staff agree that a culture of overwork leads to increased sickness and absenteeism, drastically affecting productivity, 1 in 5 employees take work home with them almost every day.

Suggestions for tackling the negative consequences of overwork include:

- Managing time off in lieu and monitoring hours worked
- Ensuring staff understand their flexitime work opportunities – this often leads to staff working harder and more efficiently!
- Encouraging staff to recognise when their work expectations are affecting their commitment and inform management
- Ensuring staff set work-life boundaries and refuse to compromise on them
- Requesting staff take a half-hour lunch break rather than skipping it or eating at the desk

The authors of the report, Working Families, have launched a free online guide [The Interactive Flexible Working Guide](#) covering legal, financial, workplace and family issues affecting working hours. It can be found on their website, www.workingfamilies.org.uk under the heading 'New Online Guide to Flexible Working'.

To read the consultation from the ODPM go to:
<http://www.spkweb.org.uk/Consultations/Supporting+People+Initial+Strategy.htm>

Achieve More with the Performance Hub

If you haven't already got a copy of *Achieve More*, the newsletter from the Performance Hub, a national hub of expertise devoted to helping VCOs achieve their missions, make sure you email info@performancehub.org.uk to ask for a copy, because the first edition of this quarterly magazine has some fantastic advice.

From "4 Ways to Achieve More" to "Success with Funding", the articles featured address concerns which are on the minds of a lot of our member agencies. The article about "How to Do a User Survey" and the related Case Study about Hanham Folk Centre is also likely to be useful to many of our members, who may be considering increasing user involvement in service provision or offering added value initiatives, such as the much discussed meaningful occupations project.

The Case Study particularly has good advice, for example that a survey needs to compare service users' expectations of a service with their perception of the service, in order to get a wide and useful range of answers.

In the case study, it was found that one of the greater benefits of user surveys was in providing trustees with a more realistic, "on the ground" perception of the services the organisation provided, and linking trustees more effectively to what frontline workers already know and do.

Press statement says Public Services Fail the homeless

Crisis have issued press statements highlighting the ways public services can fail the homeless, those in greatest need of support. Whilst services are mandated to offer essential support regarding housing, healthcare, education and employment, for many homeless people those services are too inflexible, bureaucratic and complicated to be of use.

We all know how difficult it can be to get an appointment with our GP, but for the homeless it can seem impossible, particularly with stereotypes tainting the way the homeless are perceived and leading to public services being unwilling to take on homeless clients. Likewise, access to training or employment opportunities and advice and support services are much more difficult for the homeless, and this urgently needs to be addressed.



Making A Scene

Local
Focus

Residents at a Norwich sheltered housing scheme are taking to the stage for the very first time and putting on a performance of *Sleeping Beauty*. The theatrical residents at Ashby Court in Ashby Street have even roped in friends and relatives to help with the pantomime that will run this weekend.

Sheila Moore, the scheme manager, wrote the script and has been directing the band of enthusiastic players after producing a number of successful performances for other sheltered schemes.

She said: "I have put on pantomimes before so have quite a lot of experience, but none of the residents have ever done anything like this before. We have got children from the Catton Grove Dance and Stage Workshop involved as well a number of the residents' grandchildren. Everyone has really pulled together to get the show on the road, the scenery has all been done by the granddaughter of a tenant and even the music is being played by the husband of our scheme cleaner. It's a real team effort."

The production has even managed to sell adverts in its programme meaning that after all the props and costumes, many of which have been made by the residents themselves, have been paid for, there will be some profit left over to help fund the Ashby Court amenities scheme and pay for days out and activities for the residents.

Ashby Court is owned and managed by leading Norwich Housing Association, Cotman Housing Association, and its Operations Manager, Jane Warnes, has even been enlisted to appear in the performance. She said: "The residents have really worked hard on this panto and have pulled together to get everything organised. Considering none of them have ever acted before I am extremely proud of their enthusiasm and dedication. I am sure it is going to be a tremendous success."

■ Photos show Harold Grieveson as Gobby the Goblin with Marjorie Bond as Fairy Bluebell, and Vanda Thorpe as the Queen Mother with Marjorie Claxton as King Henry and Gillian Claxton as Queen Isabella.



NewsinBrief

Who Lives in a House Like This?

Shelter have launched a new campaign focusing on the problems posed by children forced to live in poor housing. The online campaign mimics the television show *Through the Keyhole* and demonstrates how underprivileged children in the UK may be forced to live in substandard accommodation infested by rats and cockroaches. Banners on websites and emails will link readers to a webpage where they can join the campaign and donate money. www.shelter.org.uk

Cambridge Youth Foyer

In September, ECHG launched their new project in Cambridge, a Youth Foyer for 30 young people. The Foyer gives young homeless people the chance to stay in shared apartments with three others, or in move-on flats for one person, whilst they complete their education or training plans with support from ECHG staff.

The Foyer is in a brand-new, purposefully designed building which gives young people a safe and attractive home in which to live. ECHG service users were directly involved in the design and lay-out of the new buildings, ensuring they truly relate to the project whilst they live there.

The Foyer will also be hosting the Cambridge training Space-East are offering for 2006, see our 2006 Training Brochure for further details.

The Jubilee Project

Following the success of their Norfolk-based project, The Dawe Charitable Trust have opened a fascinating new initiative in Cambridge, the Jubilee Project. The project gives nine clients the opportunity to live in an incredible newly designed residence, which includes provisions designed to make the building wheelchair friendly, whilst they continue their employment or work for the project in a ceramics factory, learning transferable skills and developing their CV.

Support Needs Survey

Space members Julian Housing have recently published a survey on the housing and support needs of individuals with serious mental illness in Norfolk. From the sample of 864 people, only 19 said they had no current support, whilst only 51 believed they would no longer need any support in two years time. The majority, who believed they would still need support two years from now, mainly wanted assistance for Housing Support and help with budgeting and obtaining benefits. A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.julianhousing.org.

UK Housing Awards Champions

Congratulations to the Flagship Housing Group "HEART" service, a Foyer service for vulnerable young people in North Norfolk, for winning the UK Housing Awards Excellence in Support and Care Solutions Award.

Peterborough City Council, who sponsor our annual conference, were also recognised in the Awards.

Housing and Substance Misuse

Norfolk DAAT have appointed Kassie Melnyk to improve access for their clients to accommodation through working with key partners and accommodation providers. She will be reporting to a multi agency steering group this month, regarding her initial findings.

Choice-Based Lettings

As many of you will be aware, Greater Norwich, Rural East Anglia, Cambridgeshire and Herts & Essex Housing Options Consortium have been awarded bids for Choice-Based Lettings and are developing this at the present time. We will be working to assist providers in working closely with Local Authorities to ensure the CBLs in this region will be of use to those with greatest need and will not disadvantage the vulnerable.

Double Decker Life

If you were upset to see the end of an era, when London pulled the famed Routemaster red buses at the end of 2005, never fear. The buses are coming back as short stay accommodation for the homeless. Centrepoint used one of the buses over the Christmas period to accommodate young homeless people, who evaluated the suitability of using the buses as temporary accommodation. The buses are fitted with a shower room, kitchen, communal living area with sofas and a TV, and five bedrooms on the top deck.

Cold Weather Provision

This winter is predicted to be the harshest for at least a decade, we've already seen some snowstorms. It is vital that Local Authorities and voluntary agencies ensure that they are preparing to offer good cold weather provision to ensure rough sleepers' are brought into warm and safe accommodation.

The ODPM have issued advice on this issue, requesting that Local Authorities liaise closely with the voluntary sector to find out what problems and solutions exist in their region. They also request that Authorities be:

- brokering emergency places with hostels in their area
- encouraging a flexible approach by hostels to maximise referrals and minimise evictions
- negotiating with day centres to stay open at night if required
- identifying other suitable accommodation that might be used as a night shelter
- publicising contact phone numbers which the public can use to report rough sleepers
- partnership arrangements with neighbouring boroughs (e.g. Nightstop arrangements)

However, Cold Weather Provision and Cold Weather Protocols are currently under-developed and under-promoted, it is extremely important that the Eastern Region begins to work harder to address these needs, particularly responding to existing protocols around the UK.

One example of good practice is Westminster's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, operating since 2003. It has two aims, to prevent loss of life, but also to make the most of the opportunity to engage with entrenched rough sleepers. In response to an email from the Met Office advising the SWEPE team of temperatures below zero Celsius, about 60 extra beds will be made available by existing voluntary providers across Westminster for at least 3 days. High priority for these beds will go to the most vulnerable, for example those with mental health problems or who misuse substances.

During the clients' stay they will be supported, and follow-up work will be done afterwards, to try and make the most of the opportunity to engage with long-term rough sleepers.

Other examples of good response to cold weather provision include projects similar to the Westminster Cold Weather Provision Project, in which existing voluntary sector agencies open extra beds over the cold weather period, for example as exists in Manchester, as well as projects which open when the temperatures drop, such as the Below Zero Initiative in Darlington run by First Stop Darlington. Swansea offers a different response, with the Local Authority using a budget of £5000 to provide gloves, hats and even sleeping bags and tents, as well as paying for B&B accommodation in extreme weather conditions. Finally, one hugely important step is to welcome not only the homeless, but their pets. As hostels are increasingly recognising, if there is a choice between a warm bed and a trust companion dog, the entrenched homeless will often stay out in the cold with their pet.

Practical help with recovery for journeys through distress

Local Focus

Norwich MIND have launched their fantastic guide to "practical help for your journey through mental and emotional distress", The Recovery Book. This book gives contact details for a huge range of organisations which may help those who are experiencing mental distress or who are carers, by offering a chance to become involved in something they feel passionately about, whether that is volunteering, politics, creativity or exercise.

Whilst this book is designed for those experiencing mental distress or those who are carers, obviously it is extremely applicable for homeless clients looking for meaningful activities. Becoming involved in one of the activities the book details can be motivating, good work

experience, and give clients something to look forward to.

A volunteer for the RSPCA who has experienced mental distress for many years has explained that not only has his voluntary work given him something to look forward to in the week and improved his insomnia and distress, it has given him work experience which means he can look for a full-time job within the animal care sector.

Contact Norwich MIND for more information about The Recovery Book. Norwich MIND, 50 Sale Road, Norwich NR7 9TP.

www.norwichmind.org.uk The guide costs £8 per copy.

Supported Housing Scheme wins EcoHomes Accreditation

Local Focus

An Icen Homes supported housing scheme has won a coveted environmental award. Devonshire Place, a new supported housing scheme built by Icen for Cotman Housing Association earlier this year, was examined by EcoHomes inspectors and awarded an Excellent mark after meeting a number of stringent environmental tests.

Located close to the heart of Norwich city, the scheme offers independent living to long-term mental health service users in a departure from the usual institutional care setting.

Stuart Thomas, Icen's Regional Development Director, explained: "Supported housing schemes like this are not usually entered into the EcoHomes process so we are extremely proud to have been so successful. We believe it is important for all building processes to be as environmentally sound as they can as it is beneficial not just to those living there but ultimately to the whole community and the planet."

In order to get the EcoHomes accreditation, the building had to achieve a certain level of environmental performance through innovative design, as opposed simply through high capital cost solutions. Its inspectors had to be satisfied that Devonshire Place reduces its running costs through greater energy and water efficiency, is low maintenance, provides a healthy, comfortable and flexible internal environment and is located within easy access of amenities so that its residents need not depend upon cars. The development also gained points by being built in a regeneration area, helping to improve the local environment.

Vivien Farrow, Chief Executive of Cotman Housing Association, which now works together with Julian Housing to run and manage Devonshire Place, added: "This supported housing scheme is unique in that it offers mental health service users a much freer and more independent lifestyle; for it also to be an environmental award-winner is the icing on the cake."



Space Training 2006

Space has devised a regional training programme for 2006 which includes courses held in Norwich, Ipswich, Cambridge, Bedford and Luton. To receive our full training brochure, please contact our Events Co-ordinator, Fola Ogunnowo, by telephone on 01603 617 299, or email folo@space-east.org

Upcoming training includes:

Understanding Dual Diagnosis

3rd March – King of Hearts, Norwich

Participants in this workshop will develop a broad understanding of the complex needs of service users who have co-existing mental health and substance misuse problems. The course addresses this issue from the perspective of services and service users and recognises the need to develop our own attitudes in order to better meet the needs of the people we work with. The course will explore a variety of models and strategies to help support good practice.

Understanding Personality Disorders

17th March – King of Hearts, Norwich

Working with people who have personality disorders can be particularly challenging. Helping those whose unpredictable behaviour and intense, unstable emotions is compounded at times of stress is demanding and often frustrating. This workshop will help you understand personality disorders and provide a number of different perspectives on working with this client group.

Managing Aggression and Violence

22nd March – Cambridge Youth Foyer

This course will encourage participants to consider the origins of aggressive behaviour, become alert to signals indicating the possibility of violence, increase awareness of potential weapons and dangerous environments, explore methods of interviewing in potentially aggressive situations to avoid violence, practice breakaway techniques on an introductory basis, examine the legal framework, and consider good management practice on preventing violence and supporting employees who face aggression.

The QAF and Involving Service Users

31st March – Hat Factory, Luton

Involving people who use services is an indispensable tool in developing responsive services that people want to access. It is both good practice and a requirement of the QAF. Participants in the workshop will be able to understand the values and principles of the user movement, explore the challenges in making user involvement real, positive and productive for all, identify the necessary steps to effective user participation, and develop an action plan designed to improve user involvement which also meets QAF requirements.

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