

The Value of a Partnership Model for delivering Family Support

Summary Findings from an Evaluation of the Newport / Barnardo's Model

1 Introduction

The Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University completed an evaluation of the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) in Newport in April 2016. The evaluation identified many very positive aspects and outcomes of the services on offer, in particular for children and families on the brink of or engaged with Social Care Services. For example:

- Very to exceptionally high quality whole family support services for vulnerable families – services which are strongly grounded in the existing evidence base about 'what works' and are actively seeking to develop further
- Family members who consistently recognise the high quality engagement and therapeutic as well as practical support skills of staff
- Referrals to Social Services that have more than halved and re-referral rates have reduced significantly
- A rate of children in need that has steadied and is now low compared with similar authorities in Wales
- A dramatic reduction in the number of children with disabilities requiring a Child in Need (statutory) intervention
- Newport now has one of the lowest and steadiest rates of looked after children per 10,000 population compared with similar authorities, and is below the national average

One key question identified and explored by IPC during the evaluation was the extent to which services and therefore children and families benefit from the Partnership Delivery Model applied in Newport but that is still relatively unusual in this field.

The Newport model is based on an integrated approach to the commissioning of services, forming a unique partnership between the public and voluntary sectors. There are many 'partnerships' in operation but it is believed that the Newport Collaborative Partnership is the only one of its kind in the UK, creating as it does a *legal framework between the local authority and a preferred voluntary sector partner with whom to jointly deliver the full range of family support services.*

This paper is produced (in partnership!) between evaluators at IPC, Newport City Council and Barnardo's. It explores:

Section	Heading	Pages
2	What is the IFSS Partnership Model	2
3	The reasons why this model was chosen for Newport and how it has evolved since	3 - 4
4	The value of a partnership model, including in comparison with more traditional commissioner / provider models	4 - 6
5	Key learning from the Newport experience	6

2 The Partnership IFSS Model

Building on a prescribed all-Wales model of support for families struggling with substance misuse issues, the IFSS Model in Newport is a continuum of integrated family support services for vulnerable children and their families, aiming to protect children from harm and promote family wellbeing.

The Newport Partnership IFSS Model has seen the creation of:

- A single early intervention service jointly delivered and including a single point of entry for all voluntary sector, youth offending, education and social services. The service includes core and grant funded services 'brought into' the Partnership by Barnardo's as well as those from other statutory and voluntary sector organisations in the area.
- A 'Children with Additional Needs' (CANS) service designed to provide early help to children with disabilities or additional learning needs and their families including a strong focus on inclusion and resilience building.
- Bespoke family support for children in need (including those with a Child Protection Plan) and their families that can be highly intensive, therapeutic and practical in nature depending on the needs of the family.

The Partnership IFSS Model has a number of key principles for practice including a person centred and outcomes focused approach with families. Other strong features of Partnership delivery are: its strong focus on evidence based practice and its emphasis on working collaboratively with front line social work teams, schools and other providers. Partners and staff describe their passion for being part of a learning community with intensive teaching and training programmes for practitioners, conferences and workshops, secondments and opportunities to share experiences at national conferences.

The Partnership arrangement between Newport City Council and Barnardo's includes a long term commitment to developing family support services jointly and a high degree of core funding commitment on both sides.

3 Why was this model chosen in Newport and how has it evolved?

Newport City Council and Barnardo's (Cymru) had experienced the traditional relationship of commissioner and provider for some years but together they conceived the possibility of a new kind of collaborative relationship – a strategic partnership that could develop shared services, foster innovation and aim to remove the barriers to wellbeing that vulnerable families experience.

The vision was for a shared service that would be a partnership of equals where services are designed and delivered in partnership such that it would be difficult to identify whether employees were local authority or Barnardo's staff. Together they would deliver seamless family support services from early to acute intervention and would have clear points of access for the most vulnerable families as well as for the prevention and early intervention offer.

Newport City Council put out a tender for a partner to bring a minimum of £200k per annum and all their existing services in Newport into a new partnership called Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS). A number of providers made enquiries but only Barnardo's (Cymru) applied and following a rigorous interview process, they won the contract.

In summary, the model was chosen in order to develop a seamless pathway of services co-operating under a single strategic vision drawing from the strengths of both the statutory and voluntary sector to create a new common identity. The table below shows what each partner brought to the table and the strengths of the IFSS model.

PROFILE OF PARTNERS	
NEWPORT CITY COUNCIL	BARNARDO'S CYMRU
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Big budget ■ Clarity of strategic focus ■ Statutory credibility ■ Corporate resources ■ Political sign up ■ An interface with Education, Schools, Adult Services ■ Stability but also a need for transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strong reputation, values and culture ■ Access to voluntary sector grant funding ■ Areas of excellence/evidence based practice ■ Strategic vision ■ Research dimension ■ Flexibility/fast moving ■ Influence on national policy development ■ Stable but need for secure contracts
KEY STRENGTHS TOGETHER	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Embedded, vibrant, growing, living partnership of equals ■ Constant constructive challenge - partnership transcends the tension to create an energy and a joy and innovations ■ The spark from two organisations creates a positivity about the best approach to work with children and families ■ There is a long term view giving capacity to evolve within the partnership 	

The partnership is now 6 years old, it is 'worth' £3m and is constantly evolving with new services such as integrated teams based around school clusters, educational social workers and innovations around support for families to avoid care.

There was never a particularly fixed management model - this has also evolved with services becoming jointly managed over time. Whilst this has at times been challenging for staff, it has gradually become an embedded approach with operational managers drawing on the strengths of staff and support functions of both organisations. Managers of services, who in a traditional model would have been viewed as 'Barnardo's staff', are now seen as integrated into and having the same status as local authority managers.

4 The value of the Partnership Model in comparison with more traditional commissioner / provider models

Forming a Partnership Model has resulted in specific requirements and ongoing demands, not least in terms of the legal framework, developing and maintaining shared values, having a joint vision; and maintaining trust.

The IPC evaluation identified that social workers, team managers, service leaders and others involved in this Partnership Model consistently agree that, in spite of these challenges, there are significant benefits over and above the 'obvious' value of having a voluntary sector organisation commissioned to support families facing statutory interventions¹.

The specific key benefits of the Partnership Model include:

- Unlike a more traditional commissioned arrangement, the Partnership Model has promoted a truly 'joint journey' in the continual development of the service to meet the needs of referred families, rather than a focus on monitoring the extent to which a provider has adhered to a fixed service specification.
- It has promoted a more effective ongoing use of resources, skills and experience of both the public and voluntary sector. By establishing 'pooled resources', the Partnership has been able to establish a seamless pathway of learning, health and wellbeing for children and young people, closing the gap between sectors, and removing the barriers vulnerable families face. Some service developments have built on Barnardo's strengths while others have built on the needs and knowledge of the local authority.

The interweaving of the two is important as a traditional model of commissioning does not allow for the same degree of growth or indeed shift in how we work.

- That practitioners and teams do not feel restricted in the same way in which they can with more standard contracts. The partnership culture appears to have stimulated genuine practitioner ownership and engagement in service delivery. The sparks of innovation are ignited at all levels.
- The ability to share experience and workforce development opportunities across organisations and pathways, so that a prevention arm of the service benefits from

¹ The evaluation did identify that families like having a known voluntary sector involved in supporting them

being exposed to effective ways of working developed within the arm dedicated to families with more complex needs, and vice versa. Training opportunities are routinely shared across the Integrated Service and Partnership.

- An ability to draw upon Barnardo's UK delivery experience and its research dimension which has clearly provided additional supports to services to consider evidence based interventions in response to service users identified needs. For example, the experience 'held' within Barnardo's led to the development of more effective rehabilitation home plans for children who had been brought into care in Newport. The Barnardo's Cygnet programme started in CANS but can now also be delivered for all families with complex needs.
- The promotion of a more shared strategic responsibility for outcomes for children and families locally so that, whilst the influence of Barnardo's is arguably stronger than that of a typically commissioned service, this also commits the organisation to understanding and taking ownership of local strategic challenges.
- A more active joint responsibility and enthusiasm for ongoing service development (rather than an interest in keeping the status quo which can be the case for many traditionally commissioned services). For example, the Partnership is currently actively seeking to address the issue of repeat care applications through the development of a new 'REFLECT' offer.
- Having a voluntary organisation involved on an ongoing basis in delivery appears to be reassuring for the case holding Social Workers.

It does feel more like a partnership than a traditional commissioning arrangement. It's the ability to develop organically. We're both 'in it' i.e. with some degree of joint responsibility. We've been able to grow into the gaps. It's allowed us to look at the research and become highly evidence based. We haven't let it become too cosy, there's still plenty of challenge.

5 Key learning from the Newport experience

From the outset, the Partnership has required a willingness to step outside of traditional roles and remits to ensure effective change. The expectations and belief systems of both organisations and the individuals within them have, and still, require exploration and challenge.

The day to day willingness to work flexibly has brought clear benefits. However, the model of delivery for IFSS has evolved and emerged over months if not years.

We did not run out of the starting blocks in Jan 2011 with a fully formed mode. Rather over time it has morphed into the current delivery as we have learnt, adapted and shifted. In terms of working to evidence based models this is crucial as it means the structure has the strength to continue to flex as we learn but also to develop with research and evidence from elsewhere. We should be very proud magpies as we take the best and use models and evidence to grow our own structures. Bringing together a voluntary sector organisation and a Local Authority in a way that gives a freedom to try new ideas and encourages meaningful challenge is hard work with a degree of tension that is not always easy to manage. The scope for misunderstanding is significant and balancing the needs of both organisations and the competing pressures is still challenging.

Key learning from Newport about how to make a Partnership of this nature work includes:

- Recognise that a commitment to an equal partnership will need to be adopted at every level and in every department of the organisations.
- Develop a shared vision and then translate that into what it will really look like for services, staff and service users.
- Be able to flex, negotiate and develop, particularly in the early stages of establishing a service like this.
- Integration means compromise but everyone needs to keep their eye on the prize which is improved outcomes for children.

Both sides have to let go a bit, have to cede control at times. Valuing the difference – we don't always see eye to eye.

- Senior leadership support and committed operational managers need to create the necessary conditions for workers to be effective - this is more than just training up individual workers in Motivational Interviewing and expecting them to deliver.
- It takes time to develop an effective new service, particularly when you have to develop a service with TUPE transferred staff.

The real advantage of a partnership model is the capacity to grow over time – grow people, staff who deliver the services. Continually starting from scratch can be the enemy of evidence based practice.

- Individual relationships can make or break the partnership so the commitment of key players is essential.
- More patience than you can probably imagine is required and a commitment to the time that it will take. This partnership has taken 5 years to develop.
- Be prepared to change course and respond flexibly. For example, a decision was made in Newport early in the life of the Partnership not to TUPE staff into Barnardo's but gradually transfer positions as they become vacant.
- Finding a common vision and purpose is necessary, but neither organisation should lose its sense of identity and principles. This can be challenging.
- Establish clarity on HR processes, finances, data responsibilities at outset.

The Partnership is still evolving and there are real areas of potential growth in the future both in terms of service delivery but perhaps more in an improved and shared understanding. Ultimately, the Partnership has made a demonstrable and positive difference with some of the most vulnerable children, young people and families.

“To reach a port, we must sail - sail, not tie at anchor - sail, not drift”
Franklin D Roosevelt.

6 Other papers in this series

Based on the evaluation of IFSS, IPC has also produced the following summary papers relating to NCC and Barnardo's work with vulnerable children and families:

- Evaluation of the Integrated Family Support Service in Newport – Summary Findings, May 2016
- The right help at the right time for Children with Disabilities in Newport – Findings from an evaluation of the CANS (Children with Additional Needs Service), May 2016
- Successful working with families in the statutory arena: an evaluation of the Newport Family Assessment and Support Service (FASS), May 2016

You can download a copy of any of these papers at:

- <http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications.html>; or
- http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do.htm

