



The Role of Third Sector Innovation: Personalisation of Education and Learning

Children England submission to the Office of the Third Sector

January 2010

About Children England

Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families voluntary sector. With member organisations working in all parts of the country, ranging from small local groups to the largest household names in children's charities, Children England is in a unique position to use the collective voice of the voluntary sector to achieve positive change for children. Children England provides capacity building, support and information to its members and the wide range of voluntary sector organisations working with children, young people and families. It does this by building active networks, promoting good practice, stimulating policy debate and ensuring that the issues that matter most to its members are taken up with decision makers.

Over the past nine months Children England has been building up a portfolio of work on the personalisation agenda in order to raise awareness of the potential opportunities and challenges it poses for our membership. We have held in depth discussions and seminars with members at a national and regional level in order to gauge their views and understanding of the agenda with the aim of equipping members with the best advice and support for them to become a vital part of moves in this field at all levels of decision making. Moreover, we have been working with pioneers in the field such as In Control and pilot Local Authorities on the budget holding lead professional sites to ensure that the voice of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the children, young people and families it supports is heard and acted upon.

In this submission we are taking a sector-wide view of the potential opportunities and challenges that the personalisation agenda poses for our members. Whilst we have offered some distinctive points about education and learning, the majority of this

submission builds on comments and thoughts raised by our members about the nature of personalisation more widely and how this has and may affect them.

Introduction

Children England's members are already providing tailor-made, individual packages of support to the children, young people and families they work with. It is an inherent aim of the children and families voluntary and community sector to empower service users to identify their aims and aspirations, and to work with them to make this a reality. As such, the core principles of personalisation are nothing new to our members.

Children England's members offer flexible, tailored packages of support to children and families with the aim of empowering them to make informed choices, increase their confidence and well-being, raise aspirations, build resilience, and enhance social inclusion by being embedded in their local communities. The proposed joining up of existing services to provide integrated packages of support around the needs of individuals through the personalisation agenda is something that voluntary and community sector projects lend themselves particularly well to. Members are often commissioned as part of a holistic package of support for individual children, young people and families in a range of settings e.g. through Sure Start Children's Centres, in educational settings, and through peer mentoring schemes for children in care or in the youth justice system. Our members work in and across the full-range of services for children, young people and families and often work with those who have been let down or disengaged from statutory services.

In discussions with members, it is clear that they welcome the principles upon which the personalisation agenda is based: citizen empowerment and control for the individual through the tailoring of support to personal levels of need alongside greater involvement in the design and delivery of services. Crucially, there is support for seeing children and families as individuals with capacities and aspirations, rather than traditional statutory models where they are seen as having 'problems' 'conditions' and 'gaps.' This should come as no surprise as the voluntary and community sector has built itself on a long history of empowering children and families, taking a flexible needs-based approach in supporting them and building long-term relationships with the people who use services.

However, we are also aware from members and the projects they run that there are challenges and concerns that need to be addressed and solutions found in order for voluntary and community sector organisations to fully engage in the personalisation agenda. We do however believe that the voluntary and community sector will make a vital contribution to the personalisation of services with the right information, structures and support in place.

Priority 1: How can the third sector offer choice and influence to children and young people through greater participation.

Participation should form the corner stone of any personalised approaches. Without genuine and meaningful participation becoming embedded in all services the voices of children and young people will not be heard and the ambition of empowering service users across the service spectrum will be lost. It may also lead to organisational stagnation in improving outcomes if the needs and wants of the client groups – in this case both children and young people and their parents/carers are ignored.

It is only through enabling children, young people and their parents and carers to become active participants in service design, delivery and evaluation that the core objectives of the personalisation agenda can be met: to give individuals greater control over the services they use, and to tailor services to meet individual needs and aspirations to achieve better outcomes. Yet personalisation should not be about turning children, young people and their parents and carers into consumers. Personalisation should enable services users to become co-designers and co-producers of a service. By enabling children, young people and their families space and support to find their own solutions in conjunction with service providers, collectively we empower them to foster a sense of citizenship. This can only begin to happen with good models of partnership working and participative activities from the bottom up.

In the main, statutory services including schools, have not empowered children and young people to become participants in identifying their goals and aspirations and in suggesting service solutions. Families often feel disengaged from the school experience – particularly families that are parenting under pressure, who are disadvantaged and who may have had poor experiences of schooling themselves. All too often, children and young people are not seen as participants and have only engaged in participative activities when these have suited the organisation. Participation methods employed by organisations are often not child-friendly, are undertaken without reference to a child's timeframe, and can be highly tokenistic which often results in children and young people having little faith in such activities.

The voluntary and community sector has a strong history of empowering children, young people and families to make decisions, to be involved in the design and delivery of services and crucially to act on feedback received. There are many good practice examples of how voluntary and community sector organisations encourage and promote the participation of users. Some key methods include: use of user focus groups and evaluation of the groups, annual surveys, user feedback which is fed into future improvements and design of service, steering groups made up of the client group, having a trustees who have used or do use the service, outcome-based commissioning and support planning. One example of supporting participation can be seen through Norwood's Young People's Focus Group which offers choice and influence to children and young people through greater participation. Although the group does not have a

specific formal education focus, the young people engaged in this group develop decision-making skills alongside a whole host of other benefits which will stand them in good stead for the future. Norwood's Young People's Focus Group is constituted by under 18s with a wide range of disabilities, who collectively evaluate Norwood's services and make suggestions directly to the senior management body. The case study is below.

Norwood Young People's Focus Group

Set up in 2005, the Young People's Focus Group (YPPFG) is made up of young people under the age of 18 from Norwood's disability services - Unity and its Buckets & Spades short breaks service. The Young People's Focus Group ensures that children and young people using Norwood's disability services have their voices heard, regardless of their disability. The young people meet every two months, putting forward their views, ideas and suggestions to relevant Service Managers and Directorate. The group works on the principles of inclusion, participation and empowerment. Young people on the group all live with a variety of disabilities, ranging from mild to severe – yet this is secondary to the contributions they make as individuals acting as representatives for their peers on Norwood's disability services. The contribution of the young people on the YPPFG directly impacts upon the strategic direction of the organisation for the benefit of its users.

The group was awarded 3 year funding from the Big Lottery to continue and expand the project – this enabled the group to recruit a participation worker, to run events and projects. The Big Lottery funding has now ended yet Norwood will be continuing the group as it has proved to be so influential and important for the young people, their families and the direction of Norwood's disability services more widely.

Projects undertaken by the group so far include:

- Creation of the YPPFG webpage, including input from young people.
- Planning and evaluation of Norwood's short breaks service
- Completion of questionnaires on recruitment with results showing that they would like to be more involved in the recruitment process.
- YPPFG met with the Norwood Directorate to share the views of young people on healthy living and recruitment.
- Production of a twice-yearly newsletter led by young people on the YPPFG.
- Organising events for young service users.
- A Staying Safe project has been completed in which young people expressed their views on what makes them feel safe and unsafe.
- A Sports Day was held on Tuesday 18th August 2009.

Priority 2: How can the third sector be supported to work together, tailoring services around the needs of individual children and young people.

a. What are the barriers to working together and tailoring your services?

Members have raised a number of concerns about how to work together with other partners and services to deliver personalised approaches for children and young people. The main barrier that has been consistently mentioned by members has been the competitive commissioning process they have to undergo. It is very difficult for VCS organisations to work in partnership under current commissioning arrangements as they are in direct competition with other local organisations. Over the past few years where competitive tendering has become the norm, VCS organisations have struggled to form consortia to put in collective bids – the current commissioning landscape does not facilitate joint working.

The lack of information poses large challenges for VCS organisations seeking to work with others to provide individual packages of support for children, young people and families. Too often, VCS organisations are the last to know about new developments or funds which could support these moves. This is in part due to the continuing reluctance of many local authorities to engage with their local VCS as strategic allies in identifying need and proposing solutions to problems – often they are seen merely as delivery partners.

The lack of representation at decision making boards in a local area such as the Children's Trusts compounds both of the above barriers. If the VCS is not heard, or seen as a strategic ally, it will become increasingly difficult to both join up existing services, and to create new innovative ways of working with the child at the centre. The lack of representation can also lead to local authorities not being aware of just how many projects and programmes are already delivery personalised approaches in their local communities.

In many areas schools have limited involvement in both collective decision making bodies and in partnership working with organisations outside the statutory sector. Despite positive moves through initiatives such as the Extended Schools agenda, all too often schools 'insource' whereby they mirror existing successful external programmes in the community and deliver them inhouse – by teachers or staff. There is a real risk in times of public sector spending cuts that this 'insourcing' continues to the detriment of very successful VCS programmes that are able to engage with the most vulnerable and often disengaged children and young people.

To provide personalised approaches and joined-up working there needs to be an 'unbundling' of local authority funds, so that finance can be placed to provide individualised support to children and young people or to the programmes that work on their behalf. Linked to this there is a need to provide greater information to the VCS

about local opportunities to provide personalised support, including the financial mechanisms available to support this.

An example of strong partnership working between the VCS, parents and schools is the Pyramid after school clubs, run by Continyou. The case study is below:

ContinYou's Pyramid Clubs

Pyramid helps its local partners to run therapeutic activity clubs that are specially designed for children in schools who are quiet, shy, anxious, isolated, withdrawn or finding it difficult to make friends. The aim of the clubs is to provide children with a fun, positive experience, in a group, with lots of new experiences and chances to develop friendships. The clubs are run by fully trained, often volunteer, club leaders. Pyramid clubs are designed for children of all sorts of ability and background and use a systematic approach to ensure that the children who need support are identified early so that the support given is low-key and non-stigmatising.

Pyramid clubs run after school for an hour and a half and involve fun games, cooking, circle time discussion and art and craft activities. The outcomes for the child have been identified as:

- a sense of belonging
- increased self-esteem and confidence
- ability to make new friendships
- improved academic performance
- more willing to participate
- better relationships with peers and adults
- improvement in self-concept/locus of control
- better social skills
- improved attendance and attitude towards school

In addition to clubs for children, Pyramid also offers a complementary or standalone model of support for parents/carers through ContinYou's Pyramid for Parent programme. Parent for Parents groups are specially designed to enhance the skills of parents to promote their child's emotional well-being for the benefit of the whole family. The groups provide an opportunity for parents to get together and share experiences, supporting each other to enhance their relationship with their child. There is evidence that parents are finding the course a confidence-building stepping stone that helps them move on to other more targeted parent support programmes, or to family learning or work

b. What could commissioners and Government do to enable third sector organisations to overcome these barriers?

Funding

For the voluntary and community sector to play its rightful role in developing and expanding personalised approaches, commissioners must provide adequate levels of sustainable funding for a wide range of voluntary and community sector projects of differing sizes. Funding processes should be Compact compliant in all cases. Personalisation is about offering greater choice to children, young people and families and this will not be possible if local VCS organisations close their very successful, well-liked programmes. If smaller voluntary and community sector organisations are not supported to engage in the agenda by continuing the high quality, locally-focused work they do, children and families will lose out.

More specific support and funding for smaller voluntary and community sector providers to enable them to adapt their delivery to fit with forthcoming changes would be welcomed. One way of doing this which has been explored in the adult social care world has been through provision of bridging funds over two to three years to allow for the implementation of new ways of delivery without losing staff or resources and to seed fund small providers whilst the market adjusts to the changes in its service provision. Without this specific support there is a danger that the smaller providers will be unable to keep up with the changes effectively and the range of choice for individuals will be restricted as the bigger, more generically based projects survive. This would be a real loss as the personalisation agenda and its focus on community-engagement through citizenship has a very local focus, something which often the smallest of providers are best placed to do.

Partnership working

Sharing of good practice between the voluntary and community sector and local statutory partners would be beneficial and in particular models of personalisation delivery that are already working and could be replicated elsewhere. As the agenda has a very local focus and is likely to be tied in to local priority setting through Children's Trusts and Local Area Agreements – it is vital that the VCS in a locality is engaged from the earliest stages of discussion and can raise opportunities and challenges in a conducive environment. It is clear that mistakes have been made in adult social care where local VCS providers were not engaged in discussions and local authorities have taken an 'adapt or die' approach to providers. This approach is likely to lead to poor outcomes for users of services as without early dialogue and support VCS providers are unable to make the changes necessary resulting in users having less choice. This situation is wholly incompatible with the aspirations of the personalisation agenda.

By actively seeking the engagement of the local VCS, statutory partners are able to build up a stronger picture of the contribution the voluntary and community sector already

makes in creating tailor-made packages of support. It is only by early engagement that collectively ideas can be made as to how any new reforms will work in practice.

Improved communication and information

More detailed explanation of way commissioners envisage personalisation to work at a local level across the service spectrum is needed with more public and transparent debate. Concerns need to be discussed and addressed and smaller providers should be sought out and spoken with directly by local commissioners rather than changes imposed from above. If personalisation is truly to mean a double devolution of power and control from central to local government, and from local government to service user, commissioners should not be able to dictate the nature and method of personalised approaches in a locality. A predominant concern repeatedly raised by members is the fear that the voluntary sector will bear the brunt of cost-cutting and that the true personalisation principles of user choice and control may be lost to fit with shrinking local council budgets. This concern we feel could be tackled by clearer information dissemination, further debate and an open discussion of the issues at all levels.

Continue to support infrastructure

As a membership organisation Children England has a dually pivotal role in communicating information and evidence to members about new agendas and changes in policy, and in feeding member's experiences of these agendas to local and national government. We are a major communication channel with ready-made networks linking with local members which can offer clear communication and explain the changes in a way that projects and people can understand. Our personalisation work is bringing together commissioners and VCS providers locally to exchange ideas and to learn from one another about the benefits and challenges of the personalisation agenda. We have provided briefings on the topic to members, and are working on a case study paper which highlights a wide range of roles that the VCS can play in moving towards personalisation.

In order to continue to have a well-informed, dynamic and thriving voluntary and community sector across the country, Government should continue to support vital national and local infrastructure bodies. It is only through support at this level that we can free up voluntary and community sector resources for frontline activities.

Priority 3: How can the third sector scale up and mainstream innovative personalised services?

a. What are the barriers to scaling up personalised third sector services?

The main barrier to scaling up personalised activity within the VCS is financial risk. The lack of long-term sustainable funding means that too often personalised activities have to be ended to focus on the organisation's core business. Many VCS organisations are currently running pilots looking at how they can personalise elements of their programmes to offer tailor-made support to individual children and families. Pump priming, grant funding and bridging funds will be crucial to support VCS organisations to expand their client base and programme of personalised activity in scaling up services. However, finding the funding to expand and mainstream these activities is problematic, particularly as the personalisation is not yet embedded across service areas and there is still much confusion as to what personalisation means. There is concern that as local authorities scale back their spending, finance for these newer approaches will not be found.

Without strong lines of communication between strategic commissioners and providers, it is unlikely that the aspirations of the personalisation agenda will be met. A full articulation of some of these problems can be found in our response for question 2.

b. What could commissioners do to enable third sector organisations to scale up personalised services?

The answers to this question are largely the same to those in question 2. Sustainable, long-term, Compact compliant funding is crucial. There is a need to share resources and support across sectors if the personalisation agenda is to take hold, for example local authorities should offer training to local VCS organisations around person-centred planning and their expectations of personalised approaches.

Commissioners must prepare the ground with VCS providers, so that providers are confident in scaling up their personalised work and can be confident that there is a demand for this. There is a danger that such a task may appear overwhelming, and commissioners have a responsibility to shape and support the provider market so providers are confident enough to move forward with the agenda. Relationship building in local areas between statutory bodies and the VCS is therefore crucial.

Local commissioners should also open doors for VCS organisations who may not decide to provide personalised approaches in the form of services, but who want to provide independent information, advice and advocacy. In short, those who are able to provide some sort of brokerage services to children and families seeking personalised support with education and learning. Without these services scaling up would not be appropriate, as there needs to be a system of signposting and support in place before any provider would be willing to expand their personalised approaches. More broadly, commissioners need to keep an open mind about the variety of roles the VCS could play as community

bridge builders, support brokers or specialists in building particular types of community capacity.

To overcome some of the problems surrounding communication between the VCS and statutory partners and to encourage the scaling up of personalised activity, commissioners should:

- share the vision and communicate with the VCS about how they can be involved to achieve this;
- ensure continuous dialogue, eg network lunches, online forums, provider and commissioner events;
- involve the VCS in developing a local personalisation strategy;
- share information from pilot activity, early provider programmes; and
- honestly articulate concerns and constraints about the implementation of the personalisation agenda.

Further information

For further information on this submission, or for any queries regarding Children England's work on personalisation, please contact Emilie Whitaker, Policy Officer, emilie@childrenengland.org.uk 020 7833 3319.