

Transforming Services for People with Complex Needs
Report of a consultation convened at St George's House,
Windsor Castle
5/6th September 2012

On 5/6th September 2012, a 24 hour consultation was held at St George's House, Windsor Castle. The consultation was hosted by the Comino Foundation¹, in partnership with Local Solutions², a Liverpool-based charity.

The purposes of the consultation were:

- to share with participants the outcomes of a particular approach to working with young homeless people in one local context – Liverpool
- to invite participants to set this work alongside other similar ventures in order to identify significant common features in the approaches used
- to provide an opportunity for participants to consider together any wider implications for practice, policy and funding
- to establish networks of organisations using comparable approaches, to share practice and to accelerate change in delivering effective models of support.

¹ www.cominofoundation.org.uk

² www.localsolutions.org.uk

Participants in the consultation were:

1. **Meriel Box**, Head of Staff Development, Liverpool John Moores University
2. **Ranjit Burnam 'Badda'**, Intense Mentoring Service User
3. **Fiona Carnie**, Education Consultant and Director of Partnerships, RSA Academy
4. **José Chambers**, Development Fellow, Comino Foundation
5. **Jarina Choudhury**, Development Manger Networks and Learning, The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
6. **Penny Coombe**, Senior Policy Adviser, Social Justice Strategy, DWP
7. **Julian Corner**, Chief Executive, LankellyChase Foundation
8. **Anthony Darbyshire**, Administrator, Comino Foundation
9. **David Ellis**, Senior Manager for Strategy, Local Solutions
10. **Julia Grant**, Portfolio Director, Impetus Trust
11. **Marie Hardman**, Project Officer, Liverpool Supported Lodgings
12. **Tom Harrison**, Homeground Operational Manager, Local Solutions
13. **Damian Harte**, Lead Social Consultant, Omnisoft
14. **Oliver Hilbery**, Project Director, Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM)
15. **Sean Hollinghurst**, Intense Mentoring Service User
16. **Richard Johnson**, Independent Consultant, Former Managing Director of Serco Welfare to Work
17. **Sophie Manning**, Social Investment Manager, ThinkForward Private Equity Foundation
18. **Robert Owen**, Chair, Local Solutions
19. **Ken Perry**, Chief Executive, Plus Dane Group
20. **Paul Pritchard**, Comino Trustee
21. **Yvonne Roberts**, Chief Leader Writer, The Observer and Fellow of The Young Foundation
22. **Alison Seabrooke**, Chief Executive, Community Development Foundation
23. **Katharine Sacks-Jones**, Head of Policy, Crisis
24. **Sue Shelley**, Intense Mentoring Coordinator, Local Solutions
25. **Aileen Shepherd**, Trustee, Local Solutions and Former Head of Liverpool Youth Offending Service
26. **John Slater**, Chair, Comino Foundation
27. **Doug Strycharczyk**, Managing Director, AQR
28. **Ivor Sutherland**, Chair, The Gordon Cook Foundation
29. **Viveen Taylor**, Business Development Manager, Reachfor (formerly Connexions, Thames Valley)
30. **Kath Wallace**, Health and Wellbeing Commissioning Manager, Liverpool City Council
31. **Dominic Williamson**, Chief Executive, Revolving Doors Agency

Background to the consultation - one local response

Local Solutions, a Liverpool-based charity, has been working in the field of youth homelessness since 1986. It provides a range of accommodation and support services across the North West including a hostel and six Supported Lodgings services (where a young person lives in the home of a householder in the community). In total, there are 165 accommodation places available and in a typical year Local Solutions will provide accommodation and support interventions for over 300 young people in need.

Local Solutions' experience of helping homeless young people is that there is a persistent cohort of individuals that are referred to them on multiple occasions, often over a period of years. These are young people who seem not to make any progress out of homelessness, but instead move between various short-term accommodation options. This is not due to a lack of support. Indeed many of these young people are accessing numerous services and engaging with significant numbers of professionals, but somehow this multitude of interventions fails to produce positive outcomes or achieve sustainable change.

In an attempt to break this cycle, in 2009 Local Solutions established the Intense Mentoring service, which supports these challenging and damaged young people, helping them to move out of dependency. It is a practice model aiming to break the cycle of exclusion by delivering intense and sustained one-to-one support. It works to bring these vulnerable young people to a position of independence that includes stable relationships, accommodation, training and employment.

The service began with funding from the JP Getty Jnr Trust. Subsequently, the Comino Foundation provided further funding, enabling two full time Mentors to be employed to work with the young people. Additional elements of the service are also supported by other trusts, enabling some personal development activities to be offered in addition to one-to-one mentoring.

What's different about this approach?

This is a different style of service because:

- The level of intervention is intensive and involves a significant amount of time spent with each service user – each young person is given time and space in which to engage with a Mentor
- Mentors provide a continuity of support whatever the changing circumstances of the individual – the support travels with the individual
- The engagement by the young person is purely voluntary, which changes the dynamic between Mentor and service user
- The service delivers a genuinely holistic approach, creating longer-term relationships built on trust and recognition of the individuality of each service user
- It is 'needs-led' – support is not restricted by a service specification or driven by the need to meet external targets
- The Mentors are allowed to exercise professional judgement and respond to the specific circumstances of the service user, rather than always deferring to systems and procedures
- The service always aims to identify and build on young people's personal strengths and capacities
- The service recognises that most users have already undergone numerous systemic and formal 'assessments.' It therefore adopts a more conversational and informal approach to understanding the personalities, needs and aspirations of young people

- The processes of administration and recording are completed discreetly – they are seen as a by-product of interventions, not as the principal focus.

Here's how the approach is described by two service users:

"In comparison to key workers that I have experienced in the past, although they have meant well, they haven't had the skills or the time to actually do the stuff that needs doing... usually nothing gets done either because they haven't got the insight in what needs to be prioritised, or they haven't had the time. Other workers tend to work on specific things and deal with that one thing, and whilst this is being dealt with there are a multitude of other issues that arise... which get out of control..

This project, actually deals with priorities... and does everything at once rather than dealing with one at a time.... this then enables you to move on quite quickly from all of the negatives and get some positive stuff in your life quite quickly....whilst keeping on top of the negatives that have been dealt with so you begin to learn how to do certain stuff yourself.....

Also from the experience I have had with the workers it has made me realise how this has helped me so much and in such a short space of time that I already have aspirations and am working towards a career, I have also brought a friend to the project as she is having trouble in her life and getting no real help.....

This is unique - how the workers take a relaxed approach to our stressful issues and our complicated background.... And also they are able to adapt, as I have witnessed, to each client differently...

I am confident that I will be able to come here for as long as it takes and feel that my future looks slightly brighter as my unaddressed issues will come at a later date...."

(James)

"I have been involved in services over the past couple of years as my life has gone out of control due to me having serious drug issues that have led me to become homeless and jobless. I think this project is different from my other experiences as this has helped me to tackle my specific issue and yet it has dealt with my other problems that are a consequence of my issues. I feel now I am being re-integrated back into society!

The service is different also because the workers treat you as an equal, they get to know you properly so understand your problems and help you to tackle them whatever way they can. The workers do not easily give up on you if you stumble off your path they will try to get you back as fast as they can. I think they believe that I have the ability to turn my life around so that gives me hope. They are also on hand at the weekend if you are in trouble and you know that they will be there for you whenever you need them. They offer a place to go where you can be yourself!"

(Mark)

What outcomes has Intense Mentoring achieved so far?

In initiating this work, one intention was experimental - to test whether a focused one-to-one approach could help produce more effective outcomes for young people than those achieved by existing modes of support.

The young people that use the Intense Mentoring service are acutely aware of the difference in the model. There have been some notable successes. Getting alongside vulnerable young people, developing long-term trusting professional relationships, can help stabilise and transform lives. Intense Mentoring is indeed having an impact on breaking the cycle of homelessness, as clients move from years in multiple hostel placements into supported accommodation and/or individual tenancies.

The service has delivered a range of soft and hard outcomes that provide a platform for young people to be able to move into independent living. Such outcomes mark the direction of travel for an individual. More than 75% of the Intense Mentoring service users have demonstrated improvements in these areas. In the last formal evaluation, it was demonstrated that 64% of service users made sufficient progress to secure and sustain their own accommodation after years of short term housing and only 3% had committed an offence. Given that these clients come from the most complex section of the young homeless community, this represents a significant impact.

Outcomes include evidence of the young people achieving:

- Regular voluntary engagement with the service
- The capacity to sustain relationships not only with peers, but also, as their chaotic behaviour and experience of crisis reduces, to rebuild relationships with parents and other family members
- The capacity to trust people
- Improvements in self-esteem and confidence
- Interest in and improvements in self-care and personal appearance
- Reduced dependence on drugs and alcohol
- A reduction in offending and anti-social behaviour
- Developing ambition and aspirations for the future.

Two service users were participants in the consultation – here are some of their comments

“The support systems out there - that are meant to help you - seem vast and mass produced, so you get lost in them and the people that work in them appear disconnected. It is like ‘pass the parcel’ with bits of paper and you end up not going anywhere, not doing anything productive and then lose hope. I see a total difference in the way that Intense Mentoring communicates with you – they are like translators helping you through the system. I appreciate the face-to-face work, being there for you as people and being there consistently.

This service is all about solving your problems, whatever they are – so many other services and people seem to have their own priorities or goals rather than dealing with what you actually need.

The consultation was a great opportunity to be heard and speak face-to-face with people who could affect the issues and make a difference.

Seeing Windsor made you go 'Wow', the place was amazing, and the atmosphere for the consultation was mellow and informal which made for a good discussion.

What I didn't like about the consultation is that people seem to get caught up in the terminology when talking about the issue, they try to define things by putting a label on it; in my opinion this complicates it.

Workers in the project will not easily give up on you. If you stumble they will try to get you back on board. They believe in your ability to turn your life around. This helps because you know that there is someone who believes in you."

(Badda)

"I was pleased to go to Windsor to highlight how good the service has been for me and how it has made me progress.

I liked the fact that the people at the event were welcoming and appreciative of what we were saying.

Windsor was different from what I am used to – my house is next to an alleyway. Windsor was spotless, a different world – it was good to be there.

The Mentors I have worked with are consistent, sometimes even pushy, they are enthusiastic about what they do and what they want for you, not just accepting the way things are.

More services should be like Intense Mentoring.....they get really involved, they listen rather than tell - and understand what you are saying. Services need more people who are good at that.

Workers I have had in the past, you turn up every three to four weeks for a half hour appointment, then that's it – see you in another month, there was so little involvement, but in this service there are people on hand to guide you and advise you as and when you need it."

(Sean)

Background to the consultation - the national context

The national context for the consultation was captured succinctly in a Fabian Society pamphlet published in 2010 - **Hardest to Reach? The politics of multiple needs and exclusions.**³ Contributions, from politicians and academics, addressed the urgent question of how to provide services that could make a positive impact on the lives of those in our communities who are living 'deeply chaotic lives'.

Recurring themes are: the persistence of the problems; the need to tackle them differently; the ways in which existing service structures seemed often to exacerbate these problems rather than tackle them:

"For those affected, facing multiple needs is just part of the problem. The real difficulties arise when they try and seek help from a range of services that are designed to deal with one problem at a time. When that predictably fails to work, they are excluded, or exclude themselves, as services and agencies compete to avoid responsibility. The situation is particularly difficult for individuals who have no 'main' need but a multitude of lower-level problems which together are a serious cause for concern."

"...at the local level, as outlined above, agencies are often bad at communicating with each other and everyone avoids responsibility. Inflexible cultures, targets, budgets, staff attitudes, strict eligibility criteria and a lack of suitable assessment lead to this group being ineffectively served."

Tom Hampson and Oliver Hilbery⁴

A number of contributors identified that a key element that was missing in many services was a longer-term, stable, one-to-one relationship between a lead **practitioner** and **service user** as a model of good practice through which to generate change in people's lives:

"At the individual level, the key ingredient for making change happen seems to be a lead practitioner – a trusted consistent person who comes to understand the individual in a rounded way, cares about them, and gets them the help that they need....in many areas this kind of practical coordination is much needed. As one recent study of poor families in Sheffield showed, there often remains a bewildering complexity of different teams and services, constrained by local, regional and national targets and reporting to different central departments."

David Halpern and Akash Paun⁵

*"To make services truly personal, people with multiple needs should be able to interact with one 'lead' provider. Service users are clear they need to be seen regularly by one person who can help guide them through the system based on a single case history and not have to start from scratch in every new service."*⁶

Alasdair Murray

The need for change was endorsed by Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:

³ Fabian Policy Report, 63, edited by Tom Hampson – *Hardest to Reach – The Politics of Multiple Needs and Exclusions, 2010.*

⁴ Op.cit

⁵ Op.cit

⁶ Op.cit.

“If we are to truly transform the lives of people experiencing multiple needs and exclusions then a radically different model is needed; for too long this group has been left behind. We must start seeing people as individuals and, rather than delivering services in silos, take a holistic approach to addressing their often complex needs. Sustainable reform demands a preventative, evidence-led approach with truly multi-agency working.”⁷

Iain Duncan Smith

The themes developed in that report remain pressing and persistent. The current Government says it has identified 120,000 families whom it intends to support through the new ‘Troubled Families’ initiative. The ‘Riots, Communities and Victims Panel’ established following the 2011 summer riots highlighted ‘500,000 forgotten families’.

Iain Duncan Smith has continued to voice his commitment to the need to challenge existing practices and look to new ways of supporting vulnerable people. Speaking at the Social Justice Strategy Launch on 13 March 2012, he highlighted the “failure to look at the individual”, and went on to say:

“When services for the most vulnerable aren’t joined up they tend to collide, each pursuing its own narrow ends and failing to see the whole person or family caught in between.”

“...a family in the North-West who – in a single year – were the subject of a huge amount of disconnected state activity. The police, the ambulance service, A&E, the council, youth offending teams, and more. Each tried to deal with the problems in their own particular area. But no one saw the whole family – there was management and maintenance of their problems, but no VISION for helping them change their lives.”

Iain Duncan Smith

(The Social Justice Strategy sets out five key principles in tackling poverty. The focus is on addressing root causes of disadvantage, joining up services and helping people move towards independence rather than remaining trapped in difficult circumstances or stuck on benefits. The Social Justice Outcomes framework, published in October 2012, outlines how progress will be measured against key indicators, and a report on progress made against the Strategy is due to be published in the Spring 2013.)

⁷ Op.cit.

The consultation

Questions considered during the consultation were:

- How can services be more effective in delivering sustainable outcomes for people with complex needs living chaotic lives?
- Can models like Intense Mentoring be successfully replicated on a larger scale or does scaling up inevitably dilute potency?
- What lessons can be learned from programmes like Intense Mentoring?
- How does local and central government foster innovation and encourage providers to test ‘what works’ and, in this, what implications are there for statutory services?
- How can organisations build a convincing evidence base for the outcomes of this type of work that will be persuasive to policy makers, funders and commissioners of services?
- Can local and central government commit to and trust services that purposely reduce their deference to bureaucratic systems?
- How can mainstream services be more effective in delivering sustainable outcomes for people with complex needs?
- Would services like Intense Mentoring benefit other client groups such as families, care leavers or offenders?

“Foster innovation; provoke change” – a summary of responses give by participants

In considering these questions, participants agreed that the Intense Mentoring approach developed by Local Solutions, and similar approaches developed elsewhere, such as by the Making Every Adult Matter⁸ coalition and Revolving Doors⁹, helped to reinforce their sense of the urgent need for change in the services offered to people with complex needs.

They were especially impressed by contributions to the discussion made by the two service users, Sean and Badda.

The group emphasized that we should be working to achieve:

- Recognition of the limitations of current provision
- National and local government readiness to test the long-term impact of innovative approaches
- More effective use of increasingly scarce resources
- Long-term transformational change for individuals and their families, with less inter-generational collateral damage
- Co-ordinated approaches that break down ‘silos’ in working effectively with individuals
- Improved community cohesion.

⁸ www.meam.org.uk/

⁹ www.revolving-doors.org.uk/

So what needs to change? - Practice; policy; funding models.

Practice

“The support systems out there - that are meant to help you - seem vast and mass produced – so you get lost in them and the people that work in them appear disconnected. It is like ‘pass the parcel’ with bits of paper and you end up not going anywhere, not doing anything productive and then lose hope.” (Badda)

Many participants stressed that, to improve the chances of achieving long-term personal transformation, practice must have as its starting point:

‘What is it really like to be this individual?’

Practice must work with the grain of the human being. The one-to-one mentoring approach, with its emphasis on building a lasting relationship of trust, places the individual at the centre of practice. Each person with complex needs has to feel the security of being known personally and acknowledged as an individual. Thus we should aim for services that approach the individual as a whole, instead of always seeing him or her through different specialist lenses.

To achieve this, delivery models need to be person-based and person-shaped - rather than starting from the shape of the services as currently constituted. Services also need to be better coordinated with each other. When delivery is segmented into a set of separate elements offered by specialist services, each with their own focus and ‘thresholds’ for access, service users do not experience continuity of support from one known individual. They do not feel accurately known and acknowledged as individuals.

It follows that delivery models must also allow scope for professionals to exercise judgement in the context of each set of differing personal circumstances. Participants felt that we have to guard against the negative impact of standardised systems, which are often driven by the need to install quality control mechanisms designed to make large scale services accountable. Inevitably such systems tend to focus on measures of success which are geared to itemised short-term results, rather than longer-term whole-person outcomes.

Policy

Of course practice is driven by policy, both at national and local levels. And policy tends to work to timescales which are politically useful.

Many participants felt that policy and commissioning had become too risk averse – too driven by control mechanisms, intended to improve efficiency, but producing instead an emphasis on short-term outcomes. We need new narratives – and new metrics – which identify and trace long-term change in individuals, families and communities. We need to move from notions of ‘maintenance’ to expectations of significant and lasting ‘change’.

So, effective policy would encourage innovation and provide resource for tracking and evaluating long-term outcomes and settled lifestyle / behaviour change. There are some emerging signs that this need for long-term evaluation is being recognised. The Social Justice Outcomes Framework provides measures against which progress may be judged over a number of years. Large packages of funding where

outcomes are to be monitored over the next 8 or more years have also recently been announced by the Big Lottery Fund¹⁰.

Funding models

“Behaviour follows funding” was a frequent assertion by some participants, who felt that funding models need to provide strong incentives for collaboration between specialist agencies if there is to be any likelihood of achieving a more holistic service to individuals.

There is also an urgent need to find ways of estimating and taking into account all the savings that will eventually be made if clients are able to establish secure long-term outcomes. So, effective policy would encourage innovation and provide resource for tracking and evaluating long-term outcomes such as settled lifestyle and behaviour change. It would enable savings to be made and identified across the full range of services. Commissioning would need to be based on agreed outcomes to which a range of services might well contribute. The nature of this joint contribution would need to be clearly agreed, understood and its progress tracked.

Funding dilemmas – the problem of cross agency working

Participants stressed that interventions which help individuals and families to make transformational life changes do not enable us, in the short-term, to make dramatic savings in resource allocation, or to shift radically processes and culture in service delivery organisations. Before we can achieve such savings, evidence of the kind of outcomes that can be achieved through an approach such as Intense Mentoring needs to be collected at scale and over time.

Participants highlighted all those services that would recognise the benefits of a more person-led approach - for instance, Registered Social Landlords, local authorities, social services, NHS, the police. All these services draw on different pots of money which are allocated for tightly defined purposes. If the changes suggested were brought about, each service would benefit to some degree – but these benefits, in terms of savings to those services, would initially be partial “thin slices”, while the overall gains to each individual might well be massive in their scope and significance.

It will always be difficult for those providing effective small-scale interventions to assemble a convincingly robust financial case - there are so many variables to take into account. We need to find ways of identifying potential cost savings collectively –through improved health, social benefits, benefits to families, especially children - in order to be able to demonstrate the savings that might be achieved across the long-term – say over a period of at least 5 years. There is some evidence of increasing interest in the kinds of outcomes which may be achieved through pooled budgets and commissioning for joint outcomes. For instance the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Association (LGA) have championed a programme of pilot projects funded by Neighbourhood Community Budgets. This programme is due to end in March 2013. As the LGA website makes clear:

“It is hoped that the pilots will be able to continue their work, though without the additional resource provided by DCLG that may or may not be possible. Establishing a community budget is quite a burden for a small neighbourhood council/organisation on top of the conduct of normal day-to-day business, particularly at this early stage when everything is new to most people and organisations. The questions perhaps are: will the Government see enough benefit being derived from the pilots to warrant continuing formal support beyond March and is one year sufficient time

¹⁰ (http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_complex_needs)

to really identify the benefits? It may be that we will need several planning and delivery rounds before the real risks and rewards of this approach are revealed.”¹¹

Charities too are working to establish more coordinated approaches. Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of four national charities – Clinks, DrugScope, Homeless Link and Mind – formed to influence policy and services for adults facing multiple needs and exclusions.

Participants at Windsor felt that we must look to establish rapidly larger-scale pilots, with shared evaluation processes, in order to provide evidence of how change is achieved in people’s lives, so that we may start to allocate resources accordingly.

How might we accelerate such changes?

Participants were therefore keen to find ways of working together. They felt that progress might be accelerated by:

Identifying the key features of the model – working towards an alternative model for practice

- Participants felt that the Local Solutions model offers more than one-to-one mentoring – it also enables clients to sit within a network of resources and relationships that makes it easier – more feasible – that their long-term problems can be addressed and, eventually, resolved. It provides advocacy, but it also helps the clients find their own voices.
- Participants were keen to emphasise the need for a range of services to fit the diversity of individuals, not a one-size-fits-all approach. However they felt that there are some elements of one-to-one mentoring that may be vital for all – and that we need to define these elements clearly.

Identifying the qualities and behaviours vital to the mentor role

- Participants agreed that the two Local Solutions mentors seemed to them to have rare qualities and to have achieved remarkable results, but participants – and the mentors themselves – believed that the main difficulty would not be finding people who “could adjust to this way of working”. Several participants suggested that the mentor role sounded “like social work used to be.” They felt that it was the way of working that was special – and produced special results. The main difficulty, it was felt, would be finding the funding, not finding the mentors.
- Participants speculated that mentors should be “experienced, probably older, approachable, personable characters with leadership qualities” who know the locality and the local services provision.

Giving service users a voice – genuinely engaging with them

- At Windsor some participants were initially uneasy about having individual service users present – it made us starkly aware that, in our usual conversations about “service users”, their individuality can be set aside.
- Participants agreed that we need to recognise and draw out the many talents service users have – enable them to know their own strengths and enlist their voices to help change the way public services are delivered.

¹¹ (http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/community-budgets/-/journal_content/56/10171/3691921/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE);

Recognising and defining the importance of “meaningful activity”

- For the Local Solutions’ service users the range of activities that have come to be significant has been surprising. As their comments quoted above demonstrate, the experience of new contexts and of learning new skills can provide an important motivational boost – simply “getting out” from one limited context has been part of the changed lives which these service users have achieved.
- It is vital not to underestimate the importance of helping individuals to build social and cultural capital – and, with that in mind, perhaps we should incorporate into the model help for each individual client to develop a personal profile based on the “meaningful activity” that he or she has undertaken – outdoor activity, sport, drama, dance, volunteering, social engagement.

Collecting and pooling evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of alternative approaches

- Participants all agreed that to make further progress we need to build an independent evidence base of the effectiveness of alternative approaches
- To help make the case, we would need to enlist the help of agencies specialising in outcome and impact measurements
- Some people thought that live case studies – evidence that is “person-focused and person shaped” would be helpful; others suggested the use of techniques such as appreciative enquiry.

The consultation celebrated what is being achieved through alternative approaches to complex needs, but how to spread this good practice?

Think local, at least initially

- Infiltrate training for commissioners – encourage commissioning for long-term outcomes
- Build connections between commissioners and agency staff?
- Win the argument locally – prove the effectiveness of the model in a specific context – persuade those who fund and lead on the commissioning of services – make sure they know how much certain clients cost their local communities
- Get the issue on the Mayor’s and Police and Crime Commissioner’s personal agendas
- Enlist and train volunteer mentors?
- Use service users as ambassadors for the service, reach out to communities through them?
- Promote the service through community networks
- Seek to influence politically – through local MPs
- Work with local and national media.

Build local and national alliances of people using innovative approaches

- Exchange practice between organisations – use peer reviews
- Work together to establish a national profile.
- Continue to search for additional sources of funding, such as the Big Lottery
- Use any available independent funding to demonstrate the outcomes that can be achieved by alternative approaches.
- Actively share evaluation and research results. Inspiring Impact (<http://inspiringimpact.org/>) offers a 'common language' for evaluation and research that may be valuable to many organisations working in this sector.

Conclusions

“This service is all about solving your problems, whatever they are – so many other services and people seem to have their own priorities or goals rather than dealing with what you actually need.” (Badda)

These are challenging times. Resources are diminishing; needs increasing. Resources are spread thinly. We do a little, intermittently, for a lot of people.

In such circumstances resource allocation comes into sharp focus. The danger is that intervention is resourced only at the point of crisis. Resources tend to be allocated in such a way as to maintain people and communities in a state of vulnerability, chaos and disadvantage.

The human cost of this ‘maintenance’ approach is entrapment in a cycle of disadvantage and poverty – both material poverty and poverty of experience and aspiration. There are communities where this poverty is all pervading and inter-generational.

There have to be significantly different approaches – we need to identify and put to use interventions that offer the possibility of making a profound change in people’s lives: that help them to recognise their own potential, become more capable, secure, skilled, and, crucially, better equipped to contribute positively to the next generation.

It is vital that we use scarce financial and human capital to find solutions that really work to help people redefine their lives – that have the potential to build individual and community resilience, to promote aspiration and to widen active and responsible participation in community life.

If you are interested in joining with us to continue the debate and accelerate change, contact Local Solutions.

With thanks to the Comino Foundation and to all who participated in the consultation.