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Evaluation Framework Review
Open Doors: Help through Crisis (GIPSL and Getaway Girls)

Final Report

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1. Introduction

The Open Doors, Help Through Crisis Project (HTC) was set up in 2017 as a partnership approach between three third sector, community based organisations within Harehills and Gipton. The three partner organisations are:

- GIPSIL (Gipton Supported Independent Living Limited), providing accommodation and housing-related support, an advice service and support to access and sustain employment, education and training, principally to young people (16-24);

- Archway Resource Centre in Harehills (a project of Renew), providing 1-1 support, counselling, family work and mediation services as well as floating support to young people living independently;

- Getaway Girls in Harehills, enabling vulnerable young women aged 11-25 to build confidence, develop new skills and take positive risks in an environment which offers co-operation and support.

This report presents the findings from an evaluation framework review of Open Doors (HLC) conducted by the Centre for Health Promotion Research, Leeds Beckett University. It presents evidence about our methodological review and recommendations that emerge from this.

2. Project Background

The project aim is to achieve a 'no wrong door' partnership so that all young people approaching any of the three organisations, or those encountered through outreach services, can be offered prompt access to an initial diagnostic assessment with an Advice and Advocacy Worker and offered support to address the issue(s) which either have reached, or are threatening to reach the point of crisis.

As well as through self-referral, young people are able to access services through a range of referral and partner agencies, including Leeds City Council's Housing Options and Area Support teams; Job Centre Plus; and many voluntary, community and faith groups and organisations active in Gipton and Harehills. The priority client group encompassed within the service remit are vulnerable young people, including:

- Those who have experienced homelessness / rough sleeping
- Those who are ineligible for assistance or who have been sanctioned
- Those who have experienced domestic violence / sexual exploitation
- Those with complex needs, including mental health and substance misuse issues
- Gypsy & Roma young people and EEA migrants
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Victims of trafficking
- Victims of honour-based violence and forced marriage

This list is far from exhaustive or exclusive. As well as advice and advocacy to address the most immediate issues affecting the young person's wellbeing – such as access to accommodation, foodbanks and welfare support - the project conducts holistic needs assessment to establish service user broader support needs and how these can be met by the wide range of interventions delivered by the partners.

Project targets

1. Enabling people who have experienced hardship crisis to be better able to improve their circumstances.

Annually: 300 people each year present to the project or are identified via outreach / co-located services, and receive an initial assessment / triage intervention.

Annually: over 270 of those engaged in initial assessment / triage interventions report that their individual circumstances have improved.

By the end of the project: 750 young people receiving an initial assessment / triage intervention engage with appropriate ongoing support services following a referral / signposting from the project.

2. Enabling people who are at high risk of experiencing hardship crisis to be better able to plan for the future.

Annually: 225 people each year progress from initial assessment / triage intervention to engage in a 4-6-week intensive support plan to address the issue(s) immediately presenting as the cause of their individual crisis.

Annually: over 200 of those engaged in intensive support plans report that they are better able to plan for the future.

By the end of the project: a Peer Mentoring programme involving at least 10 young people who have experienced hardship crisis, will be established.

3. To create/support organisations who are better able to support people to effectively tackle hardship due to shared learning and evidence.

Annually: The project regularly co-locates Interventions Workers within / alongside at least 3 external services which have been prioritised as where young people experiencing or at risk of hardship crisis are likely to present / be identified.

Annually: A minimum of 12 external stakeholders, referral and support agencies engage in project consultation and information sharing events and exercises.

By the end of the project: we will commission an independent external evaluation of the project, demonstrating that that over 20 agencies and services have collaborated to address barriers faced by young people in hardship crisis in Inner East Leeds.

4. To ensure that those experiencing, or who are at high risk of experiencing, hardship crisis have a stronger, more collective, voice, to better shape responses to their issues.

Annually: over 200 young people who have engaged in intensive support planning will report that they felt heard and that their feedback was sought in all decision making / action planning.

Annually: we will involve 10 young people in responding to local and national policy consultation, facilitating their involvement in Leeds forums and initiatives, and in opportunities to engage with MPs / decision-makers.

By the end of the project: 25 young people with lived experience of hardship crisis will have participated in the design, delivery or evaluation of the service; through meetings and forums described above; peer mentoring; or participating in the project evaluation.

3. Evaluation review

The specific objectives of the evaluation review were to provide a methodological review of the current evaluation framework, against the outcomes specified below. Therefore, each outcome is discussed in turn following analysis of the Open Doors (HTC) approach.

- *Outcome 1* – To assess if there is a clear theory of change shared across the partnership

  Big Lottery has developed a Theory of Change for all Help Through Crisis projects, however the extent to which this is shared across the Open Doors partnership requires further exploration via stakeholder discussions.

- *Outcome 2* – To assess the tools, approaches and systems in use supporting the accumulation of evidence in relation to the project outcomes during the delivery period

  Monitoring data capture

  - The spreadsheet is an effective way to capture numbers accessing Open Doors (HLC) and to track progress against numerical targets.

  - The spreadsheet covers usual demographic details expected (gender, age, ethnicity, health conditions) so is well-designed to capture personal details and has nothing obvious missing that needs to be added from an external reviewer's consideration.

  - Enquiry topics are being captured which will ensure that the nature of service user issues can be listed and recorded.

  - The spreadsheet has a section for referral out and so can capture referral pathways and track service users journeys onwards. Is there space here to capture instances in which referrals are not possible – does that happen on occasion or are all supported into mainstream services?

  - The document also captures income maximisation resulting from Open Doors (HLC) support but this is limiting the scope of the impact to an economic realm under the heading as it is defined now. Whilst this is important there may be other broader outcomes that need to be captured.

  - Scoring is being used to track service user distance travelled which is good practice and can provide evidence of improvements (or not) depending upon circumstances.

- o Time is also being captured which can allow for more detailed analysis of project benefits versus staff time at a later point such as the end of the service.

- o Currently, the document does not have somewhere to clearly capture loses – those that start to engage and then disappear despite support. An additional column could be considered here in terms of charting loss to follow-up.

Questionnaire

Currently Open Doors (HLC) staff are working with an easy to answer questionnaire which covers several outcome domains such as support, money/budgeting, health and wellbeing, relationships, social inclusion and children and family, crime and safety, employment and skills and overall independence. The design uses a simple Likert scale to assess progress in several domains related to advice, and drawn from the outcomes star tool, a widely researched and used approach that can be tailored to specific service user group requirements. This will work well if done at baseline and then at a later date to track changes, so this will need careful implementation.   As a tool, this will provide evidence of quantifiable improvement (or not) across different domains which are broad in scope. However, as this is a tool to quantify progress, it limits the service user voice in terms of capturing their detailed perceptions.

Case studies

These are being captured by workers but not being done in a standard format which may limit comparison if more detailed analysis is planned. It might be useful for the team to consider using a template to facilitate comparison and more detailed reporting by workers for example, a specific template could be used to capture service user successes as well as less successful cases.

Advice Leeds Hall Aitken Framework

No standard validated tool for advice service monitoring exists so the team are using a common outcomes reporting framework designed for the advice sector but not all outcomes listed within this document are being recorded within the current approach for example, reduced risk of homelessness. Should all of the outcomes specified within the framework be included within the Open Doors (HLC) approach to internal monitoring?

Gaps in current reporting by Open Doors (HLC) when compared to the Advice Leeds Hall Aitken Framework are related to the softer service user outcomes mentioned within this document including:

- Increases in self-esteem
- More secure housing
- Better quality of life

This document also refers to ensuring that services capture the impacts of partnerships via using a common reporting framework. The current approach being used in-house including the questionnaire and monitoring spreadsheet contains all the recommended domains. The Hall Aitken document also mentions use of stories and recommends the use of questionnaire data to capture these. HLC has designed a questionnaire based upon this approach and so will be able to track stories using this mechanism (see pages 13-14). However, these are not likely to be fully detailed (given that the questionnaire limits the domains in which people can report progress), and are not fully participatory hence more open exploratory methods could be used to provide more detail.

The document also mentions the importance of staff observations in terms of professional viewpoints, which are frequently missed out despite them being a rich source of data. The document provides a template for staff to record progress against outcomes (see Appendix E), again in predetermined areas. This could be used as a case study template. Again, more exploratory methods could be considered to add further in-depth data here through the usage of qualitative approaches (see recommendations).

The Hall Aitken approach also pays attention to the social value that can be attributed to contact decisions in line with recommendations made in the Social Value Act (2013). There are now a wide range of robust tools available that can be used to map social value and therefore demonstrate the value of the third sector. This is currently not planned within the existing internal monitoring approach, but could be considered if specialist evaluation partners were involved as the data collection being done in-house can be tied into a more complex analysis involving social value.

- *Outcome 3* – To assess the partnerships approach to capturing learning and good practice as the project develops

  Currently the partnership is documenting learning and good practice in two main formats, via case studies as well as the notes taken in regular meetings. These mechanisms will provide some evidence of how the project is developing through the notes of meetings which could be analysed to provide commentary on the progress of the work and the strengthening of the partnerships. Case studies can also provide a more detailed set of examples of effective partnership in practice and therefore be used to illustrate good practice. Again, a specific template would aid documentation and reporting here.

- *Outcome 4* – to assess current mechanisms for data storage and management

  In-house data is currently held within by all partner organisations as part of on-going monitoring. Staff adhere to good practice guidelines in relation to data storage and confidentiality.

4. **Overview of review findings**

The approach to monitoring data developed by the project is one that will capture the necessary data required by funders to map progress against specified targets such as numbers of young people receiving an initial assessment, changes in individual circumstances illustrated through the distance travelled scores, and onward referral records. However, losses to follow-up should also be noted.

The questionnaire data will also provide evidence in terms of service users improving in the domains specified within the funding bid including initial issues being addressed via support. For example, service users reporting that they are 'better able to plan for the future' via the questionnaire tool. This is primarily quantitative in design, and therefore limits service user voice, in the form of open freer contributions.

The Advice Leeds Hall Aitken Tool has been used by the Open Doors (HLC) team in designing the internal monitoring and evaluation approach. This can be clearly seen in terms of the operationalisation of a common outcomes framework for monitoring data capture and questionnaire design. However, there are other potential sources of data that could be captured as noted in this document for example, service user stories in their voices, and staff observations. Other clear gaps relate to measuring softer outcomes as well as providing evidence of social value.

In terms of evidencing the other benefits noted in the bid i.e. the difference that project will make, the review team note that;

- Clearer documentation and evaluation of the proposed peer mentoring approach needs to be in place;

- The involvement of young people in responding to policy consultation (either locally, nationally or in both instances) needs to be recorded;

- The partnership should also have a tracking system to capture 'other' stakeholder involvement i.e. such as records of information sharing events and exercises and consultations to enable feedback to be provided to the funder in this area.

5. Lessons from the evidence base

- Patel et al (2012) illustrate the increased vulnerability to debt problems experienced by those in socially excluded groups and suggest a model of service delivery which offers debt counselling and advice as part of a broader array of service provision as well as working across organisations to target hard to reach groups, similar to the approach being developed here within the Open Doors partnership.

- The Money Advice Service (2012) reported high levels of customer satisfaction with advice as well as a range of benefits including improved financial wellbeing, more stable relationships, avoiding mental health issues, preventing homelessness, and avoiding criminal justice proceedings. The Open Doors approach is currently designed to capture a broad array of outcomes as discussed in the wider literature.

- Abbott and Hobby (2000) note the links between deprivation and poor health and argue that maximising individual income through advice may also improve health, yet this is often not effectively measured. Attention to health improvements are being captured within the current in-house monitoring tools being used within the Open Doors approach however, this could be developed further (see recommendations).

- There is a lack of published academic evidence in this area however, there are some specific toolkits available to support practitioners in evaluating the effectiveness of information and advice provision to facilitate good practice in this area. For example, The Money Advice Service has published a Debt Advice Evaluation Framework, mapping outcome areas against survey questions. As already discussed an existing tool has been consulted and used (Advice Leeds, Hall Aitken tool). No validated tools were found when reviewing the evidence.

6. Recommendations

Review of the Theory of Change: the project does not have a clear Theory of Change based upon its own approach. The Big lottery has its own TOC but this needs to be reviewed to assess its fit with this project. Are all outcomes and indicators clearly mapped against the projects aims, outcomes and reporting structures? Is evidence being collected in all domains? This is good evaluation practice to ensure a rigorous approach (Judge and Bauld 2001), and it is recommended that this work is undertaken to ensure that any gaps are identified and addressed.

Qualitative capture of service user voice: service user voice is being captured but a more detailed qualitative approach would add to this. Ensuring that people's stories are illustrated adds depth and detail to the quantitative data being collected. This should be considered by an external evaluation team going forward and could be captured via service user focus groups, or interviews which focus upon the differences that Open Doors (HTC) makes to people's lives. The Hall Aitken Tool also recommends involving service users to produce stories so this approach should be considered within a broader qualitative framework. Here focus needs to be given to the softer outcomes noted as relevant by Hall Aitken such as capturing increases in self-esteem, more secure housing and better quality of life.

More detailed statistical analysis: the distance travelled scores should be analysed statistically as part of the broader evaluation, using means values, standard deviation and statistical tests to determine significance. In addition, the time being spent with each client should be documented against income maximisation as part of a more detailed economic analysis, to illustrate the potential value of the service. Furthermore, the social value that can be attributed to specific outcomes should also be considered as part of a broader evaluation report. Further evaluation could include a social return on investment in which value is calculated going beyond purely financial benefits, by using performance measures to capture the social and other non-financial benefits of the service delivery, and evaluate the efficiency of the investment within the Open Doors (HLC) Project. Depending upon the data available, it would be ideal to calculate the financial return on investment (ROI) i.e. the number of times the investment for the project is earned back by the investor, and the social return on investment (SROI) i.e. the value of the social and environmental outcomes as well as the benefits associated with service use from the viewpoint of participants.

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Qualitative capture of partnership activity: attention should be paid to capturing the partnership work that is involved in Help Through Crisis and its associated impact. Documenting meetings is a start to this process, but more robust mechanisms of data collection would add to the learning captured. For example, through stakeholder interviews where space is created to discuss the positives and negatives of the approach taken, the learning that partners gained from each other and any issues that were experienced for example, in relation to data sharing, different in-house practices, perceptions of the Theory of Change etc. Learning and development workshops would also offer space for partners to capture learning (both positive and negative) therefore could be planned into key calendar points associated with project delivery especially given Open Doors, (HLC) 's remit to work with those experiencing multiple and complex needs.

More detailed quantitative data capture: larger scale evaluation should also consider plugging the existing gaps within in-house tools, for example, using tools such as well-being scales/quality of life tools to ensure that fuller health benefits are captured. There are several validated tools in existence that could be used and/or adapted for this purpose so these should be considered.

7. Appendices

7.1 How we did the review

We conducted a desk-based review of the internal tools that had been developed as part of the Open Doors, (HLC) project, examining them against each listed objective of the project and the objectives of the framework review itself. In addition, we also conducted a rapid review of the literature to assess the evidence base related to the evaluation of advice service provision, to facilitate further comparison of the Open Doors, (HTL) approach against published documents.

7.2 References

Abbott, S. and Hobby, L. (2000) 'Welfare benefits advice in primary care: evidence of improvements in health' *Public Health* 114, pp. 324-327.

Judge, K. & Bauld, L. (2001) Strong theory, flexible methods: evaluating complex community-based initiatives. *Critical Public Health* 11, pp.19-38.

Patel, A., Balmer N.J. and Pleasance, P. (2012) 'Debt and disadvantage: the experience of unmanageable debt and financial difficulty in England and Wales' *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 36, pp. 556-565.

The Money Advice Service (2012) *Annual Review 2011/12* available at https://mascdn.azureedge.net/cms/mas-annual-review_2012.pdf

The Social Value Act (2013) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources

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