

Evaluation of the Bedfordshire Children's Fund

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Executive Summary

Bedfordshire Children's Fund commenced on 1 April 2003 and is a third wave Children's Fund area. It aimed to provide an opportunity to build new partnerships and services that have historically been constrained by limited funding opportunities in the development of preventative services.

The specific objectives of the Children's Fund were as follows:

- To promote attendance in school and achieve improved educational performance by 5-13-year-olds
- To ensure fewer young people aged 10-13 commit crime and fewer children aged 5-13 are victims of crime
- To reduce child health inequalities
- To ensure children, young people and their families feel the services provided are accessible and to develop services which are experienced as effective.
- To involve families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty

These were later subsumed into the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes:

being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; economic well-being.

The projects supported were chosen with both a geographical spread and a diversity of character in mind, with different target outcomes to capture the needs of young people in different ways. Based on the fact that there was more provision in the north of the county, they looked to concentrate on the other areas in the county where there were gaps.

The projects supported comprised:

Mid-Bedfordshire Healthy Living Initiative	Bedfordshire Heartlands PCT
Pilot Transition Project	Christian Family Care
Early Reading Research	Bedfordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service
Young Carers	Spurgeon's Child Care
Family Friends	(formerly Northfields Partnership Pyramid)
Bedford After School Clubs	Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Assoc.
Substance Misuse Outreach	Alcohol Services for the Community

Vandyke Pyramid Support Project	c/o Vandyke Upper School
Bedford Nurture Group	c/o Shackleton Lower School
Kempston After School Club ('Charlies')	Spurgeon's Child Care
Junior Youth Inclusion Programme	Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service
Mentors and Peers	CSV Bedfordshire
Youth Inclusion and Support Panels	Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service

The Centre for Social Action at De Montfort University, Leicester was appointed as the independent project evaluator in mid-November 2004 and started 1st January 2005 on an 18 months contract. The aim of the evaluation was to enable an understanding of:

- The achievements of projects working to reduce the social exclusion of children, young people and their families and improving life chances, or conversely which projects are not working and why?
- The extent to which the Children's Fund projects are making a difference as opposed to other initiatives in the area and the lessons to be learnt

The role of the CSA was to work with projects to devise methods for evaluating their work and assessing their impact on the 5 ECM outcomes. The CSA considered with projects, via a training workshop, what evaluation tools might be appropriate for this task, also taking into consideration the time and resources that were available.

Evidence used in this evaluation comes both from the projects' self evaluation: case studies, feedback from children, young people and their families (via questionnaires, group discussions, video diaries etc), feedback from schools and reports prepared by the projects themselves; and from the questionnaire survey carried out by the Centre for Social Action, completed by 87 young people.

Findings

Key qualities of work with children and families

- Whilst most projects were expected to address behavioural issues affecting children and young people they also had a keen concern to identify and work on changes in young people's lives which might be contributing such as bereavement, family separation, domestic violence and school transition.
- Many projects have identified enhancing the coping strategies and resilience of children and young people as a major focus of their work

- Whilst the Bedfordshire Children's Fund did not have a specific group for disabled children and young disabled people, projects seem to have been quite successful in supporting children and young people with special needs.
- An important asset of the projects appears to be that some of them were small, well known to children and families, easily accessible and thus able to be responsive to specific localised needs.
- Some projects work with the family to support parents in their role as parents often in difficult circumstance – for example poverty, domestic violence, inability to read and write, being new to an area, indeed the country. Mutual support and parents helping and advising each other has been key to this in some projects.
- Overall the Bedfordshire Children's Fund programme was able to offer a variety of early intervention services for children and young people which were distinct in their delivery and approaches. The project reports show the commitment and dedication of the project workers to create innovative work.
- With its focus on prevention and early intervention the programme was able to respond to and address very localised needs through targeted projects with focused responses. These localised and focused responses engaged successfully with a range of children and families.

Work with schools

- There is much evidence from head teachers, teachers and project workers that there have been very good and productive working relationships between Bedfordshire Children's Fund projects and schools, particularly helping to create more coherent strategies and also to advocate for the children. It seems that the advantage of some projects, which were not too embedded within the schools, was that they could play a mediating role between parents, pupils and teachers.

ECM Outcomes

- Overall there has been evidence of impact on the 5 ECM Outcomes, particularly with regard to the 'Stay Safe', 'Be Healthy', 'Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a Positive Contribution' outcomes. There is less evidence that the 'Achieve Economic Wellbeing' outcome was met, although there were benefits in this regard for some children and young people and their parents.

Involvement of children

- It is evident that project workers put substantial thought into the ways they can engage with children, make their voices heard and shape their activities taking young people's views into account. This focused mainly on the involvement of children in deciding the project activities.

Partnership work

- There has been an ongoing partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors in the delivery of services. Overall the programme supported voluntary sector projects in developing their work through careful monitoring and working towards the Children's Fund and Local Authority's benchmarks. Equally the voluntary agencies brought their knowledge and flexible approaches to the statutory services. This reciprocity quite often led to new collaboration and new approaches to work.

Strategic focus

- The Bedfordshire Children's Fund has embedded itself well and successfully within the structures of the Local Authority and hopefully within the future Children's Trust.

Recommendations

- In addressing the 5 ECM outcomes there seemed to be a strong emphasis on the 'enjoying and achieving' outcome. We feel that the 5 ECM outcomes should be seen as a whole and addressed as a package rather than a mix and match.
- Where tensions are identified between the different working cultures of the statutory and voluntary sectors, these issues need to be brought out into the open and discussed
- Projects are often more reactive than proactive in the pursuit of engaging 'hard to reach families'. The involvement of children and young people within this process is also very limited and there is much room for improvement
- At the practice level we would recommend more workshops to share good practice and to promote partnership between the different projects. On an organisational level there is a need for managers to integrate the learning and good practice within the management and ethos of the organisations and on a strategic level there is a need to involve the projects and their knowledge in a proactive way.
- Whilst there has been a level of participation of children, young people and parents within the programme more needs to be done to explore:
 - the meaning of participation and its different levels
 - practical ways to enhance the participation of children and young people particularly with regard to management and decision-making in the organisation
 - Funding should be set aside to support the involvement and participation of children and young people and more attention given to evaluating this
- Ways of sustaining the funding for early intervention preventative work will need to be given careful consideration to avoid the loss of expertise and potential future alienation of children and families.
- The good partnership work has to be nurtured, enhanced and maintained.

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Acknowledgements

A special thank to all the children and young people who have attended the discussion groups and have filled in the questionnaires. Without their input we wouldn't have been able to gain the rich insight into the projects and we hope that this report reflects their views and concerns.

We would like to highlight the hard work done by all the projects of the Bedfordshire Children's Fund to the evaluation. Their collaboration was paramount to this report and to the successful writing of their own reports.

We also would like to thank Christine Cole for her ongoing support, guidance and understanding. Her input was essential for the successful completion of the evaluation.

Introduction

Bedfordshire Children's Fund commenced on 1 April 2003 and is a third wave Children's Fund area. Bedfordshire County Council is both Lead Agency and Accountable Body for Bedfordshire Children's Fund. In Bedfordshire, the Children's Fund is overseen by the Sure Start/Children's Fund Group which has a line of reporting and accountability through to the multi-agency Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

The Children's Fund has brought additional resources to Bedfordshire through ring-fenced funding from the DfES over and above those provided through statutory and other funding streams, to provide a range of services that aim to meet the needs of children and young people age 5-13 years at risk of social exclusion. An average of 1,800 children and young people per quarter, in the year 2005-06, regularly accessed support through services provided by Bedfordshire Children's Fund.

The aims and objectives of the Children's Fund driven by the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes have provided a clear framework on which targeted intervention work has been further developed locally in schools and community settings across the county.

As a result, a range of services were provided, utilising the expertise and experience of different provider agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors. The Children's Fund aimed to provide an opportunity to build new partnerships and services that have historically been constrained by limited funding opportunities in the development of preventative services.

The projects were chosen with both a geographical spread in mind and a diversity of projects with different target outcomes to capture the needs of young people in different ways. Based on the fact that there was more provision in the north of the county, they looked to concentrate on the other areas in the county where there were gaps.

"Children's Fund has been able to tackle very localised needs – local services allow for very specific needs to be addressed". (Assistant Director for Commissioning)

Aims and objectives of the Children's Fund

The Children's Fund was launched nationally in November 2000 as part of the Government's commitment to tackle disadvantage among children and young people. The programme aims to identify at an early stage children and young people at risk of social exclusion, and make sure they receive the help and support they need to achieve their potential.

The Children's Fund provides a responsive approach to developing services that address the difficulties faced by some children and their families. It encourages voluntary organisations, community and faith groups to work in partnership with local

statutory agencies, and children, young people and their families, to deliver high-quality preventative services to meet the needs of communities.

The Children's Fund has three underlying principles:

Prevention

To address the gap in preventative services for children and young people at risk of social exclusion, by providing increased and better coordinated preventative services for 5-13-year-olds and their families.

Partnership

To take responsibility at local level for the delivery of the Children's Fund plan, involving partners from the statutory and voluntary sectors, community and faith groups, and ensuring that the views of children and young people are represented.

Participation

The voices of children and young people are at the heart of the Children's Fund, with children and young people being involved in the design, operation and evaluation of the programme.

Outcomes and objectives

The original outcomes envisaged by the Children's Fund were that children would grow up:

- Healthy
- Emotionally secure and confident
- Having succeeded at school
- Having stayed out of trouble
- Living in a safe place
- Having the opportunity to succeed in achieving their dreams

The specific objectives of the Children's Fund were as follows:

- To promote attendance in school by 5-13-year-olds
- To achieve improved educational performance among 5-13-year-olds
- To ensure fewer young people aged 10-13 commit crime and fewer children aged 5-13 are victims of crime
- To reduce child health inequalities
- To ensure children, young people and their families feel the services are accessible
- To develop services which are experienced as effective
- To involve families in building the community's capacity to sustain the programme and thereby create pathways out of poverty

(The above is drawn from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/childrensfund/ accessed 12/5/06).

However in 2003 the Government released a Green Paper entitled *Every Child Matters* (ECM). The paper formed the basis of legislation and government guidance to reform children's services.

The summary of the Green Paper states that:

“Our aim is to ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential by reducing levels of educational failure, ill health, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, abuse and neglect, crime and anti-social behaviour among children and young people” (2003: 7).

Following a Government consultation, five outcomes were highlighted as outlining what it was that young people wanted for themselves:

- **being healthy:** enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
- **staying safe:** being protected from harm and neglect
- **enjoying and achieving:** getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
- **making a positive contribution:** being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour
- **economic well-being:** not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life

(Every Child Matters Summary, 2003:7).

It is intended that the outcomes have equal status – no one outcome is to have primacy. The ECM outcomes became those that the Children’s Fund was to work to. It was felt that the original outcomes sit well with the five outcomes of Every Child Matters, and the work of the Children’s Fund was now to make a significant contribution to the Every Child Matters agenda. By the time the CSA was involved in the evaluation of the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund all the projects funded by the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund contributed to meeting the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes. Some projects felt that some outcomes were more appropriate to their project than others.

Settings

It was interesting to see the diverse nature of the projects which the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund is supporting. This diversity reflects the multiple needs which are experienced by children and their families within the area.

Projects Supported by the Children’s Fund from April 2003 to March 2006

Mid-Bedfordshire Healthy Living Initiative	Bedfordshire Heartlands PCT
Pilot Transition Project	Christian Family Care
Early Reading Research	Bedfordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service
Young Carers	Spurgeon’s Child Care
Family Friends	(formerly Northfields Partnership Pyramid)

Bedford After School Clubs	Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Assoc.
Substance Misuse Outreach	Alcohol Services for the Community
Vandyke Pyramid Support Project	c/o Vandyke Upper School
Bedford Nurture Group	c/o Shackleton Lower School
Kempston After School Club ('Charlies')	Spurgeon's Child Care
Junior Youth Inclusion Programme	Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service
Mentors and Peers	CSV Bedfordshire
Youth Inclusion and Support Panels	Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service

Because of how it was set up Bedfordshire Children's Fund has been able to tackle and address very localised needs.

There is a continuum between the school focused and community focussed projects:

- Early Reading Research, Substance Misuse, Bedford Nurture Group, Pilot Transition Project, Van Dyke Pyramid and Family Friends are mainly within the school orbit
- After School Clubs span the school into the community
- More community based projects are the Mentors and Peers Project, Junior Youth Inclusion Programme, Charlie's After School Club, Young Carers Project, Mid Beds Healthy Living Initiative.

Priorities and arrangements for Local Evaluation

The Centre for Social Action at De Montfort University, Leicester was appointed in mid-November 2004 with a contract start date of 1 January 2005. A contract for 16 months was issued in the first instance and extended for another two months. The aim of the evaluation was to enable an understanding of:

- Which projects are working in reducing the social exclusion of children, young people and their families and improving life chances
- How and why they are working
- Which projects are not working and why not?
- The extent to which the Children's Fund projects are making a difference as opposed to other initiatives in the area
- What lessons can be learned?

The independent Local Evaluation was also expected to take particular account of the views and experiences of service users and this is an intrinsic part of the contract requirements and evaluation reports. This brief fitted well with the Centre for Social Action's philosophy and approach.

The Centre for Social Action

The Centre for Social Action is based at De Montfort University, Leicester. A training, research and consultancy unit, the Centre has its roots in practical work with communities, employing social action methods to ensure that community members of all ages can play a full part in the setting up, management and maintenance of the services developed to meet their needs; evaluation is a crucial part of this process.

The Centre staff team are experienced professionals from the fields of research, community development and youth work. A team of four people coordinated and carried out the evaluation of the work done by the Bedfordshire Children's Fund. The evaluation team was familiar with the issues facing vulnerable children, young people and their families having considerable experience in undertaking research into these issues. The evaluation team was led by Thilo Boeck and Jennie Fleming who undertook the training, support to projects and information collection. Alison Skinner and Hannah Goodman contributed to the analysis of the data and report writing.

Evaluation and Monitoring within the Bedfordshire Children's Fund

The Programme had several means by which it managed performance and quality and monitors progress towards outcomes. These included service level agreements, Service Specifications, quarterly reporting, monitoring meetings and visits to the projects by the Programme Manager. It was hoped that this framework would provide a clear and structured approach for both ensuring appropriate delivery of the Programme and clarifying in advance the expectation from service providers.

Whilst all projects undertook continuous evaluation of their work locally the brief of the independent local evaluator was to work with the projects in a participative way to provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to see whether services are starting to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

From our conversations at the start of our contract, with project workers and from the evaluation examples projects provided us with, we could see a range of existing evaluation approaches in place. All the projects seemed to be collecting monitoring data e.g. attendance figures; most of them had after session evaluation sheets which tend to be staff completed and everybody contributed data as required by the DfES.

The initial visits by the evaluation team to the projects also highlighted that there were different degrees of confidence in evaluation especially in participative evaluation and using qualitative and participatory methods.

The school based projects seem to have evaluation procedures with mainly quantitative information being gathered and an outcome focused evaluation, for example:

- Early Reading Research
- Bedford Nurture Group

A middle ground was represented by some projects which had a mixture of qualitative and quantitative evaluation, e.g.:

- Mentors and Peers Project
- Mid Beds Healthy Living Initiative
- Substance Misuse Outreach
- Bedford After School Clubs
- Van Dyke Pyramid Support Project
- Youth Inclusion and Support Panel

Projects which are community based found it harder to attribute outcomes directly to themselves because their programmes are more open and it is not so clear what their measurable outcomes are. Understandably they tended to have more qualitative approaches to evaluation. They include:

- Junior Youth Inclusion Programme
- 'Charlies' Out of School Club
- Young Carers
- Pilot Transition Project (school based)
- Family Friends (school and community based)

Something which presented some of the projects with a challenge was the establishment of indicators which might show their impact. It seemed the projects with harder targets (e.g. increasing the reading age) had more quantitative evaluation systems, while the softer objectives rely more on qualitative methods. This reflects the concerns presented at the National Conference of the Children's Fund in Birmingham (2005) that it is harder to attribute diverse outcomes to single projects, especially if they support children and young people more generally within broader social and long term activities. We suggested that within the requirements of the Children Fund, educational projects might need to look beyond the very individualised findings they produce and community based projects might need to consider some appropriate tangible indicators.

Initially there were 13 projects involved in the programme and the evaluation; however this report concentrates on the work of the 9 projects below that will continue to receive funding to March 2007. These nine projects have produced reports of their work and its evaluation. They are:

- Bedford After Schools Clubs
- Family Friends
- Bedford Nurture Group
- Pilot Transition Project

- Vandyke Pyramid Support Project
- Young Carers
- Junior Youth Inclusion Programme (YIP)
- Youth Inclusion and Support Panel (YISP)
- Mentors and Peers Project

This report is an overview evaluation of the Children's Fund Programme in which we are combining the evidence gathered by the projects themselves and evidence of our own evaluation. Therefore, when using quotes from the project reports we will refer to them as such. However because of being an overview of the programme we will use generic attributes when we are using our evidence.

We have also produced a report for children from the evaluation.

Methodology

What have we done?

The evaluation of the Bedfordshire Children's Fund was devised under a participative framework. It was hoped that this approach would ensure that all stakeholders were involved in the process of evaluation. Service users (children, young people and parents) and service providers should feel that they have an active input into the evaluation thus reflecting their views and experiences. The approach is based on partnership and one that facilitates working across boundaries and promotes dialogue and discussions between and across different groups of people.

Foci of the evaluation

It was agreed with the Programme Manager and the projects that the role of the Centre for Social Action in the Local Evaluation would have two main foci:

- **Project evaluation** supporting the projects in evaluating themselves with regard to the ECM outcomes (see 'Findings' section).
- **Overarching evaluation of the Children's Fund Programme**, including information collection ourselves in regard to the 5 'Overarching Themes' that were developed from the participative-evaluation agreements the projects completed and also in part from issues that were arising in the work undertaken by ne-cf (National Evaluation of the Children's Fund). These themes were refined and agreed by the projects.

Data collection

Quantitative

Quantitative information is generally gathered by projects in the form of registers taken by all of the groups. The names of parents or carers, names and ages and ethnicity of the child as well as any special needs are taken by most of the projects.

However, all projects make quarterly returns on the age, gender, ethnicity and special needs of children seen on a regular basis which is required by the Children's Fund monitoring process.

Some organisations complete statistics forms on a termly basis to record their sessions. Information recorded includes age, gender, ethnicity of children and young people, the type and regularity of contact and main presenting issues.

After a discussion group with young people in which we explored the overall evaluation and young people's priorities, the CSA devised an evaluation questionnaire for young people exploring some of the impact on the ECM outcomes (response = 87). The questionnaire comprised quantitative and qualitative questions.

Qualitative

Projects identified that the main form of qualitative evaluation undertaken in the past has been verbal feedback in order to gain the views and experience of those accessing the projects. Quite often this verbal feedback was looking at whether the children and young people were satisfied with the project and whether they had enjoyed themselves or not. They all identified the need for different and more innovative ways of gathering evaluation, including more interactive and participative evaluation exercises and techniques for the children and questionnaires for the parents and staff.

Some projects selected children or families with whom they have been working for case studies. People felt that these illustrate the breadth of their effectiveness and they enabled also some projects to reflect upon short, medium and long term outcomes for the client, most were focusing on the achievements of the project.

Team members are encouraged to reflect upon their experiences and to make changes to improve the effectiveness of their work if necessary. In some projects team members complete a regular report in which they analyse the main issues covered, look at the benefits and challenges of their role and reflect on their position within the team.

The participation of children and young people in the evaluation

The notion of young evaluators is a familiar one to the Centre for Social Action and fits in with our key principles. We hoped that our participative methodology would complement the structures and processes already in place in the Children's Fund projects to involve children and families in the creation and delivery of services. To this end, in our orientation visits to the projects we asked about the potential for children, young people and parents to be actively involved in the evaluation. In our initial proposal we suggested the possibility of training and supporting young people and or parents to be active evaluators themselves. In partnership with two of the projects we facilitated one meeting of a young person's Steering Group for the evaluation. Six young people attended the meeting and we explored with them some aspects of the evaluation and their priorities regarding the 5 ECM outcomes. We would have liked to have more meetings with a steering group and to have organised an event for young people to shape the evaluation. However with the exception of one steering group meeting, this proved not to be possible to organise due to limited staffing, time and money resources. This aspect of the evaluation never developed to its full potential.

Listening to the voices of children and young people

Children in most projects gave feedback on activities. Some projects used a number of ways to engage children and young people in this process from videos, photos or evaluation activities. However we found that most of this evaluation focused on whether young people enjoyed the activities and sessions or not; only a few explored other issues like educational achievement, bullying, school satisfaction or general well-being. As has been explored above, one of the main tasks for the CSA team was

to negotiate with the organisations how they could involve children and young people in the evaluation of the ECM outcomes. We explored this in one of the workshops and developed with the project workers ways and tools to encourage the participation of children and young people. Whilst there has been an improvement within this area we think that more could have been achieved in the active participation of young people and children in the evaluation. (This will be further discussed in the 'Findings' section of this report).

In order for our evaluation to listen to the voices of children and young people we organised several discussion groups with children and young people and designed an evaluation questionnaire with quantitative and qualitative data to encourage them to explore freely what they perceived as benefits from the participation in the projects.

Ethics

All research conducted by De Montfort University takes place within an established research governance framework and this evaluation was undertaken in accord with the university's research ethics framework. This work therefore had ethical approval from the Faculty's Ethic's Committee. In relation to this evaluation it meant that issues of informed consent, written agreements, interview rules, the right and option not to participate and confidentiality were robustly addressed.

The process of our evaluation

The process of our evaluation fell into four main areas, with the 'Project Support' taking the majority of our time. For this reason we set out in detail below how this was delivered. The areas of our work consisted of the following:

- Orientation:
 - Visits to all the projects and meetings with key staff about evaluation
 - Explored the potential for children, young people and parents to be actively involved in the evaluation
 - Initial set up meeting
 - Devised and sent out a form to be filled in by each of the projects to find out about the existing evaluation and the projects' aims and objectives
 - Read material sent and given by the projects and Programme Manager
 - Attended the National Conference of the Children's Fund in Birmingham
- Project support:
 - Facilitated 2 workshops with all the projects exploring evaluation tools and themes
 - Devised a participative Evaluation Agreement to guide projects through developing their own evaluation in relation to the ECM outcomes

- Supported projects to establish their indicators for evaluation and techniques
- Ongoing meetings with projects to support their evaluation
- Ongoing support via e-mail
- Devising a report format in consultation with the projects for them to report back the findings of their evaluation
- Offering support and feedback on project reports (alongside the Programme Manager)
- CSA Evaluation:
 - One discussion group with young people exploring overall evaluation and their priorities
 - Interview with project workers of all the projects to “evaluate overarching themes”
 - Four discussion groups with young people exploring participation
 - One discussion group with parents
 - Participation in 5 sessions with young people
 - Evaluation questionnaire for young people across the projects (response = 87) exploring the ECM outcomes and levels of participation with qualitative and quantitative data
 - 11 interviews with commissioners, partners, head of schools and teachers.
- Feedback:
 - Presented projects with two interim reports which were altered taking their feedback into account
 - One presentation of Draft Findings in order to get the views of the projects and give an opportunity to make any changes
 - Final Presentation
- Had regular meetings with the Programme Manager.

Project visits

A key feature of the evaluation was that project workers and managers were fully involved in planning, steering and carrying out the evaluations. Each of the projects was visited by the evaluation team in order to establish where they were in their own evaluation and what kind of data they had been gathering. Special emphasis in these early meetings was given to the following subheadings:

- Are there specific outcomes and impacts of your project you would like to evaluate?
- Could you identify specific activities where the most learning can be gained?
- What are you doing, or could you do to ensure the views, opinions and voices children, young people and parents are captured in a rigorous way.
- Which of the five outcomes from ECM is your project targeting?
- Do you have parents or children who would like to get involved in the evaluation process?

Some projects were more confident than others in undertaking evaluation. To help the projects to undertake their own participative evaluation we facilitated workshops bringing projects together to help them to consider how best to evaluate their work and to identify aims and indicators, as well as looking at how the existing evaluation information could be integrated, particularly regarding the ECM outcomes.

All the projects expressed an interest in finding out more about creative ways of involving children and young people in evaluation (e.g. one project was wondering how to best evaluate with a group of chaotic young people at the end of an informal session). Therefore a workshop was held on this topic where people could share their knowledge and experiences as well as having an input from the CSA. (This issue of 'staff development' was identified at the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund Conference of 2005)

Some concerns were expressed by the projects regarding evaluation, these included:

- How to capture all aspects of their work, including 'unintended' benefits
- How to identify with children, young people and parents what indicators could be used and what are the areas where most learning could be gained.
- Who best to undertake what roles in evaluation
- Support in the evaluation of specific aspects of their work

In order to address some of these issues the CSA team offered on-going support throughout the contract to help deal with any issues or difficulties that arose and encourage the active involvement of children, young people and parents in the evaluation processes.

Participative Evaluation Agreements and reporting

Each project produced a participative Evaluation Agreement (Appendix 1), detailing their aims, indicators and methods used for evaluation. Part of the agreement looked at how children, young people and parents would be involved.

A standardised template was sent out with space for each project to identify their specified aims and methodologies, requiring projects to report evidence against each of them. All projects completed these.

Workshops with all the projects

Workshop I: Developing self- evaluation methods relating to the ECM outcomes

The role of the CSA was to work with projects to devise methods for evaluating their work. When considering the 5 ECM outcomes as a framework for evaluation, it was necessary to ensure that it reflected the aims and objectives of the practice of the projects. We worked with the projects to develop methods for assessing their impact on the 5 ECM outcomes. Methods needed to be consistent with their style of work and understandable to the people with whom they worked. The CSA considered with projects what evaluation tools might be appropriate for this task, also taking into consideration the time and resources that were available.

The workshop encouraged people to consider a variety of methods; some projects used session recording sheets, specially designed questionnaires, workers' diaries, team discussions, photos and video and report writing to evaluate their work.

The CSA devised a planning chart to help projects think all of this through. An example of how projects used this form is set out below:

ECM Outcome	Project activity that will contribute to building that category	Indicators – how will we know?	Measurement – evaluation tools or methods
Be healthy (Family Friends)	Playground Friends	Children taking part in active outdoor physical and social recreation and enrolling in after school physical activities More children able to address and deal with issues and concerns	Children 'Tick the Healthy Option' poster Questionnaires to supervisors and attendance at clubs Interactive questions and answers to children and questionnaire to parents and staff
Enjoy and achieve (Young Carers)	Social clubs: Provide sports and recreational facilities, activities and opportunities. Trips and contact with Independent Visitors.	How much the facilities provided are used, do the children and young people follow this up outside the project? Attendance, participation, opportunities taken up outside the project.	Reports, case studies and observations Attendance records, club reports, young carer's feedback. Attendance records, reports group and individual. Young carer's achievements.

Participants were given handouts and also materials produced during the workshop were typed up and circulated so the projects had resources about evaluation that they could draw on.

Workshop II: Evaluating overarching evaluation themes

This workshop was about looking at the overarching themes identified through the project visits, which the Centre for Social action team was to evaluate. (A full report of this session was produced). The following themes were explored:

- Involvement and participation of children and young people

- How to engage with 'hard to reach families'
- Embeddedness of projects in the main stream
- Individual and collective experiences

These themes emerged from the project visits, orientation report and responses to the orientation report. Each project was visited and they identified key people who we could then approach to contribute to the evaluation.

On-going support for self-evaluation

As with evaluation methods the exact role and level of advice and guidance given by the CSA varied. For some projects, the CSA team helped to define the indicators and frame the questions to find out the things projects wanted to know. Sometimes CSA were asked to check that questions would lead to the information wanted, or they might draft some questions that the project would then adapt and make their own, based on discussions with workers and volunteers in projects. We attended team meetings, planning, review and evaluation meetings and occasionally, events or sessions, offered feedback on draft reports etc. The reports produced by nine of the projects have been reproduced separately.

The Findings

The findings of the evaluation are presented in the following sections. We have divided them into:

- Approaches to work
- Impact on ECM outcomes
- The Participation of Children and Young People
- Engaging ‘hard to reach families’
- Partnerships

Approaches to work

The different projects that were part of the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund used a variety of approaches to their work with children, young people and families reflecting the different aims and areas of work. These include:

- Education/reading theory
- Educational psychology theory
- Social work/casework type support
- One-to-one counselling/befriending
- Youth work/social education methods
- Experiential learning
- Group based activities and discussions

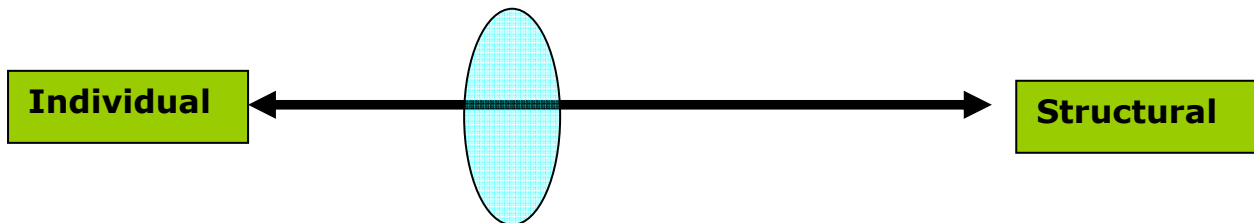
The diversity of approaches reflect the overall ethos of the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund which was about supporting projects which would directly target localised needs. These needs required different types of projects with different foci.

Individual and Contextual experiences

It seems that some projects present themselves as a counter balance to the present focus on individualisation which is very much present in the current government policy. However, some research on youth transitions shows that young people face a range of social, cultural and economic constraints that make contemporary life particularly challenging, many of which are beyond their ability to influence and control. An important question to ask is, does the emphasis on troubled childhoods and youth lead to a perception of young people as victims or problems, rather than as competent citizens capable of meaningful participation?

We observed that some projects within the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund were able to contribute to a better understanding of the context within which youth transitions occur. Therefore it is not only about working with children and young people on an individual level but also focusing on empowerment, resilience and the influence on organisational and local policies. At the 2005 ne-cf Conference in Birmingham this aspect of work was highlighted as a very important but somewhat neglected aspect within the work of the Children’s Fund.

We interviewed all the project workers in order to ascertain their position and thoughts about this. Most projects would agree that whilst their primary focus is on the individual they can't dismiss contextual constraints on children's and young people's lives. Therefore if there would be a continuum they would locate themselves more towards the individual but also trying to influence and change some of the contextual constraints which are depicted in the diagram below.



An example from Family Friends shows how a project has balanced attention to individual children but also works to create systemic change in environments the children are in.

“A lot of Family Friends work is about trying to change school environment e.g. playground friends is about trying to alter experience of play. We hope to change the whole ethos of play time and school. It is the same with the transition work and buddying we do – it is about developing systems of support and ethos in school, not just individual support.”

Whilst most projects identified that in their work there was a strong focus on behavioural issues they also were aware that there was a constant need to look at and to try to address the causes. There was a strong feeling and commitment to not blaming the individual and thus identifying the external factors before they become engrained in the behaviour of the children and young people. Some workers also spoke about the fact that they have to deal with children and young people who almost become swamped by the problems they face. Some of the more salient challenges facing children and families were:

- Changes in young person's life: bereavement, family separation, domestic violence and school transition,
- Parenting issues: some parents seem to blame only their children, other parents do not want to take any responsibility and blame everybody else. Some parents treat children without authority but others give too much authority.
- Family responsibilities such as tackling the pressures and isolation of young carers.
- Negative peer pressure and bullying
- Difficulties at school
- Economic and social deprivation

Providing children and young people with safe environments

The projects have identified that the environment, within which the interventions happen is very important. A huge asset of the projects appears to be that some of the projects were small, well known to children and families and easily accessible and able to be responsive to specific needs.

Responses within the School (Bedford Nurture Group, Vandyke Pyramid Support Project, and Pilot Transitions Project Family Friends):

“Playing; doing nice handwriting. It’s a happy place. Helping me to play outside better...” (Bedford Nurture Group report)

“With regular weekly Play Therapy in the same room at the same time T was allowed to experience continuity in her disruptive life and to allow her to build trust with another adult and work through her emotional needs. By creating a safe place for T that was unthreatening; this was helpful for her to begin to feel valued through the therapeutic process and work through many issues that presented themselves”. (Vandyke Pyramid report)

“Breakfast club provides a structured and calm environment at the start of the school day” “it feels like being at home and you are the dad”. (Child in Family Friends report)

Responses within Community (Junior YIP, Mentors and Peers, Young Carers):

“Child said that his mentor had helped him learn to control his temper and given him a chance to get away from home which was busy and noisy and it was nice to have someone to talk to who was just for him.” (CSV Bedfordshire Mentors and Peers Project)

“Social clubs are up and running on a regular basis...This is an extremely important part of the young carers’ lives as they meet others in a similar situation and can express themselves freely.” (Young Carers Project)

Supporting disabled children and young people

Whilst the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund did not have a specific group for disabled children and young disabled people, projects seem to have been quite successful in supporting children and young people with special needs.

“Mentor worked productively as possible with young person who had learning difficulties and a speech impediment including seeking advice from special educational needs advisers re activities, but experienced some difficulties with this relationship as child has very short attention span.” (CSV Bedfordshire Mentors and Peers)

From the project accounts it seems also that the advantage of some projects is that they can focus on the individual needs of the children and young people. This has, in some cases led to the identification of an impairment which was not recognised before and led to difficulties in their home or at school.

“It became evident that there were difficulties in making myself clear and coherent throughout the counselling sessions. I later progressed this issue and discovered she had existing hearing difficulties...I met with the head of the school to discuss a referral for further assessments for J to ensure she would receive the support she needed to help her with her educational needs relating to her hearing difficulties. My work with her came to an end...it was acknowledged that her hearing difficulties were more acute than previously thought and had been preventing her from accessing her educational potential.” (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project)

“During the time D was receiving support from his mentor he was sent to a pupil referral unit where it was discovered he was partially deaf. The mentor involved him in a wide range of activities. He returned to mainstream school, was able to sit nearer the front of the class and his attendance improved, as well as behaviour in and out of school.” (Bedfordshire CSV Mentors and Peers)

Working with schools

There is much evidence much from head teachers, teachers and project workers that there have been very good and productive working relationships between Bedfordshire Children’s Fund projects and schools. However, there were also some occasions where there have been tensions between the different cultures. Some projects work very closely with the school focusing mainly on the integration of the children and young people into the mainstream environment. Other projects try to work with schools in order to tackle not only the behavioural problems of the children but also in identifying if there are some underlying problems between the school and the children which could be addressed.

Focusing on Resilience

Some projects were very aware that their resources are quite limited and their work will only have a slow and limited impact on the contextual constraints and difficulties children and young people face. Because of this many projects have identified enhancing the coping strategies and resilience of children and young people as a major focus of their work. Projects have developed a range of different activities aimed at promoting the resilience of children and young people.

“It is not all about the one problem and it is focusing on the positives of the young person. Rewarding the good things...” (Project worker)

“As the weeks progressed, M experienced less panic attacks as he began to understand his thoughts and feelings and move towards more understanding. M chose to end counselling at that point as he felt that he was able to cope more effectively by himself and the panic attacks had reduced significantly. M’s self esteem

has increased and he felt more confident about his future and exams.” (Project worker)

“...creating resilience, rewarding positives, and strengthening the young people to cope... It is about building coping strategies. Focus on solutions...” (Project worker)

“Young people need to be able to assess their risks. Manage their risks and have control over it. This is about the young person’s success and achievement and making sure that parents and schools appreciate that achievement.” (Project worker)

From our conversations with children, young people and project workers it seems that some adults and professionals expect huge changes in the young person rather than focusing on small achievements. One project worked with a school on this issue. They negotiated that if the child or young person would change a bit, the school would encourage him or her and recognise that though improvement might seem slow, it could be helped by setting small achievable targets and praising the young person for them. The worker set up formal contracts with the school about what they expect from the child but also what they would invest.

“It was about sticking both to the contract...and both being able to use it. School had to make compromises...and quite often are reluctant but it helped.” (Project worker)

Some projects offer support for students who need time to explore issues such as bereavement, loss, relationship issues with family and friends, bullying, stress from exams etc that are affecting their learning. These projects have been successful in not only providing the students with the appropriate support but also involving schools in developing coping strategies to promote resilience.

“Child was partial attender. Mentor discussed strategies for coping with bullying and attendance at school improved after this.” (CSV Bedfordshire Mentors and Peers)

“(Project workers) will work “one-to-one” with children to talk to them about issues that are affecting their lives and teach them strategies they can employ themselves – Protective Behaviours, which will enable them to be more assertive or positive in responding to situations they find themselves in.” (Education Welfare Service letter of support to the Vandyke Pyramid Support Project)

“Anger management helps children develop socially by learning the skills to abstain from anti-social behaviour.” (Family Friends report)

“The Vandyke project is working with all the Middle Schools in the town to look at issues surrounding bullying. The project produced a questionnaire that all pupils answered... following this (project worker) has been working with a group of pupils to put on a play that looks at bullying issues.” (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

Mediating Roles

There are examples of good practice of Children's Fund projects working with schools to create more coherent strategies and also to advocate for the children. They were also able to tackle some of the frictions between pupils and teachers. It seems that the advantage of some projects, which were not too embedded within the schools, was that they could play a mediating role between parents, pupils and teachers.

"Mentor went into school and had a discussion with teacher about ways that they could both help child, which helped with his behaviour in class as child felt that the teachers were very negative towards him. Mother claimed that things had improved at school after the mentor spoke to his teacher to put his side of things." (Mentors report)

Teachers and project workers highlighted that this happened especially within schools where they had good communication systems and mutual respect and trust. Some projects found it more difficult to play this role because of clashes between working cultures and professional expertise.

Work with parents

Some projects work with the family to support parents in their role as parents often in difficult circumstance – for example poverty, domestic violence, inability to read and write, being new to an area, indeed the country. Mutual support and parents helping and advising each other has been key to this in some projects.

"SAS (Support Advice Sharing) allows parents to share their anxieties with other adults enabling them to feel less isolated and more able to deal with the difficult behaviour of their child in a controlled manner." (Family Friends report)

"Project offers family therapy, Speakeasy courses for parents on speaking to your children about sex, home visits to give advice, support and strategies to families with any issue that is affecting their child's access to learning, setting up and facilitating specific support groups for parents e.g. ADHD support group. We are actively involved in encouraging parents to create their own networks and to use their experience and expertise to support others." (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

Some projects help to improve relationships between parents and young people, often acting as mediator, giving practical advice to both parties and putting strategies in place to enhance relationships. Trying to counteract the 'blaming culture' in which some young people are also seen by their parents as the problem has been an issue for some projects.

"Our child has been transformed by the realisation of my husband and I that it is all about 'us and how we communicate'". (Parent who first of all saw her child as 'the problem' - Vandyke Pyramid Support project report)

Some projects highlighted that the families benefit if interventions draw parents more closely into educational involvement being sensitive to their own educational skills and experiences.

“Care is taken not to inadvertently embarrass or exclude parents where they have insufficient literacy skills themselves to feel confident to share in child’s reading. Rather, ways are found to enhance parents’ skills and confidence, e.g. through modelling by staff of how to hear a child read and ways of sharing a story with them”. (Bedford Nurture Group report)

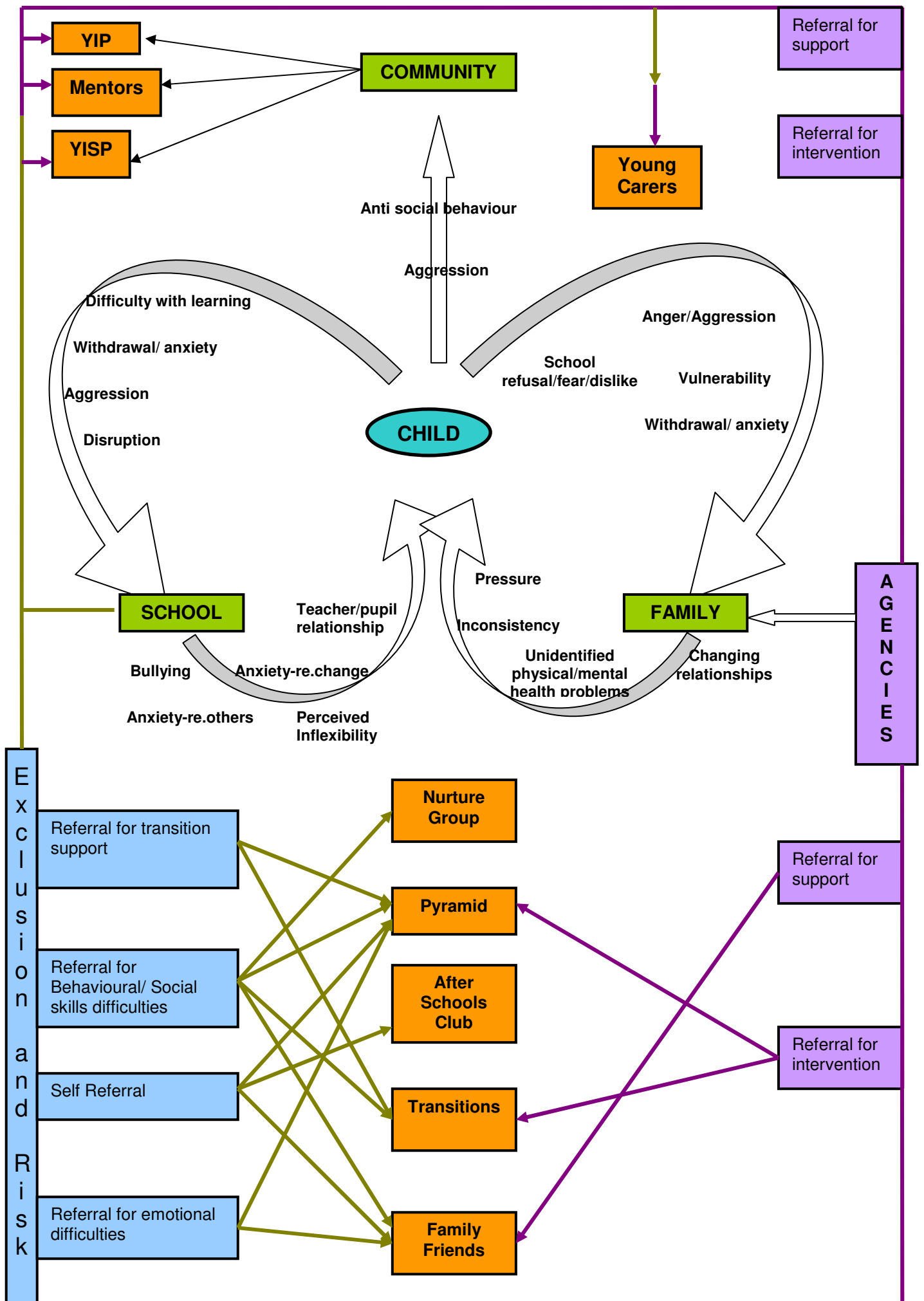
“Sometimes it is difficult to engage parents into a basic skills course but if ‘learning’ is introduced in an informal way through Family Learning then parents enjoy themselves and are keen to learn more. As a result of this it is important future plans include Family Learning courses.” (Family Friends report)

Towards an Overview

The following chart represents the overall directions of working of the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund. In the centre is the child and the arrows coming out from the child are the individual aspects which the projects are addressing in their work. These issues and attitudes can relate to the school, the family or the community. The arrows pointing towards the child represent the outside pressures and are the more contextual issues the projects are trying to address in their work.

The projects on the top are those who are not located in the schools but might receive referrals from the schools. The projects on the bottom are those who are located within the schools.

The referral systems and priorities are highlighted in the different boxes and point towards the projects which see as their task to address these priorities.



Every Child Matters Outcomes and the Bedfordshire Children's Fund Projects

ECM outcomes

The significance of the ECM outcomes to the Children's Fund is set out on page 5.

The ECM outcomes are:

- **being healthy:** enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
- **staying safe:** being protected from harm and neglect
- **enjoying and achieving:** getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
- **making a positive contribution:** being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour
- **economic well-being:** not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life". (Every Child Matters Summary, 2003:7)

Evidence of projects' impact on the ECM outcomes

Evidence used in this evaluation comes both from the projects' self evaluation: case studies, feedback from children, young people and their families (via questionnaires, group discussions, video diaries etc), feedback from schools and reports prepared by the projects themselves; and from the questionnaire survey carried out by the Centre for Social Action, completed by 87 young people. Some evaluation data is quantitative and demonstrates the number of young people who have felt particular benefits. Other data is qualitative and can be seen as demonstrating the effect that projects may have on their service users.

Projects were mostly likely to meet the 'Be Healthy', 'Stay Safe', 'Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a Positive Contribution' outcomes. It was harder for projects to demonstrate meeting the 'Economic Wellbeing' outcome, although many still tried to meet this. Projects impact on the ECM outcomes was not always clear-cut and projects might have an impact on several outcomes at the same time.

Adopting the ECM outcomes had one of three effects on projects. Some projects felt that the ECM outcomes help **direct** their work:

"By working on all five outcomes it has helped the project to stay focused and address its own aims and objectives. This has enabled the project to develop further by looking at the activities contributing to each objective and deciding on the evaluation tool or method most suitable to evidence its effectiveness". (Family Friends report)

"Working within the ECM framework has enabled us to crystallise these ideas and plan an exciting and innovative future for the Pyramid Support Project delivering and signposting the Extended Schools agenda". (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

The ECM outcomes were introduced after the Children's Fund had started, however many of the projects found that their work **already met these outcomes**.

"We had been working along these lines since the inception of our project in September 2000 but what was new was this specific way of measuring our outcomes using these categories. When 'Every Child Matters' was published and widely discussed we felt vindicated as we had been working independently to these priorities". (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

"The five outcomes did not change the direction of the project but highlighted specific areas of support that we provide. It also enhanced the evaluation techniques and methods used to collate information". (Young Carers report)

Others **altered their aims** to take account of these in order to meet the requirements of the funders:

'Aims and focus of project has had to change as funding changes, when part of pyramid then 'inclusion' in school was focus, then had to move to Children's Fund objectives and then they were subsumed into ECM.' (Project Workers)

Impact of adopting ECM outcomes

The common outcomes of ECM for all agencies working with children and young people meant that staff from different agencies had a common goal:

"In our school we are looking to ECM outcomes and so are they so we are all pulling together anyway". (Head of School)

"All our work (in the school and Family Friends) is about creating an environment where the ECM outcomes can be achieved, we are all about the safety of children, their enjoyment and achievement". (Head of School)

The ECM outcomes have also become the basis of developments of Children's Services such as the Children and Young People's Strategic Plan, so tying the Children's Fund projects into these developments is easier (see section on Partnership for more about this).

For one interviewee, meeting the objectives of ECM seemed to correlate with being successful, whereas projects that did not meet these aims were seen by the interviewee as not very focussed and not delivering what they were meant to.

Several projects felt that they met most of the ECM outcomes because their work covered a wide range of activities depending on each child's needs. For others, the outcomes highlighted gaps, for example one agency felt that they met four outcomes and so wanted to work to meet the fifth outcome in the future.

Be Healthy

The projects appear to be working to a broadly similar set of criteria concerning what constitutes a healthy lifestyle on the part of children, young people and their families and are taking action to remedy perceived aspects of a healthy lifestyle.

From the reports prepared by projects, the following themes have been identified. These include factors important for both physical and emotional health.

Children

- personal hygiene and cleanliness
- have access to correct treatment aids and medication they might need.
- receive correct diagnosis of any health difficulties and appropriate treatment.
- healthy diet at home and making informed healthy choices when selecting meals at school.
- regular exercise and take part in a range of activities.
- watch age appropriate videos.
- receive appropriate consistent parenting
- not be subjected to stress from family or school circumstances and should be helped to overcome this where it manifests itself in psychological distress.

Activities that projects undertook to achieve these outcomes include healthy breakfasts at Breakfast Clubs, activities, exercise, counselling.

Young people

- encouraged to eat a healthy diet
- take regular exercise
- encouraged to stop smoking or refrain from taking it up
- encouraged to avoid taking drugs or too much alcohol, or indulging in risky sexual health activities
- helped to deal with stressful feelings and experiences via counselling and other support

Activities the projects undertook to achieve these outcomes included education, advice, outdoor activity opportunities, counselling (bereavement counselling and health advice) and mentors have encouraged young people to keep appointments, for example with drug workers. Projects have encouraged young people to attend athletics classes.

Parents

Parents are seen by the projects as key to improving the mental and physical health of their children and a number of projects focused on supporting parents to do this well and more consistently. The projects had a variety of activities they undertook to support parents in promoting the health of their selves and their children:

- Sessions on healthy eating and encouragement to implement this at home via more balanced meals.
- Sessions about the benefits of regular exercise and the need to encourage their children to do more and get involved themselves.

- Supported if having difficulties with their child's behaviour offering access to training and self help groups with those in similar position
- Supported to get involved more directly in the education of their children e.g. learning how to share reading with them
- Offer specialist help to deal with especially distressing circumstances which are affecting their wellbeing
- Working in partnership with other projects to ensure that their child's health needs are met

Work on the 'Be Healthy' outcome appears therefore to take place in two ways, by providing information about improving health, and by undertaking activities set out to improve health. Some groups use both methods to meet this outcome. For example, Family Friends have held workshops for parents providing information on health and exercise. The project has also set up activities which help the young people to 'Be Healthy' such as the breakfast club.

"Playground Friends encourages physical and social recreation, i.e. children are more willing to go out to play and do not ask to stay in. This has been a successful Family Friends initiative which has now been handed on to the school (Handing on good practice)". (Family Friends report)

Work is also carried out that looks at emotional wellbeing, for example, the Vandyke project has counsellors that work with young people. This work is often important for children and young people whose families are breaking up.

"I thought it was good they set me up with a 1-2-1 visitor who helps me a lot, I have four brothers and we don't always get on and we can't talk about some things but I can talk to my 1-2-1 visitor. She is really nice has helped me to cope with problems I have had, I can talk to her about a lot of stuff." (Young person)

'He has been really uplifted by the first session and came out buzzing and boosted! He really liked the counsellor. I have a lot of faith in her as well after our meeting and have a much greater understanding of the positive benefits of counselling. I feel that this will have a very positive effect on my son's self-esteem.' (Comment from the parent of a 7 year old boy after his first session of play therapy - Vandyke Pyramid Support project report)

"T really enjoyed the activities especially athletics and has now joined the Biggleswade athletics club". (Parent's comments in YIP report)

"There is an obvious improvement in his behaviour since he has been attending Breakfast Club". (Learning Support Assistant - Family Friends)

Findings from CSA Questionnaire

Findings from the questionnaire completed by children support the evidence presented by the projects and highlight the impact they had on the physical health. Over 50% of the respondents stated that within this area there has been a positive change. Within this:

- 31% of children and young people felt that the project helped them to understand effects of smoking
- 26 % understand effects of alcohol
- 35% enjoy some food they know is good for them
- 33% do more sport

(Some respondents marked more than one option)

Apart from the physical health it is important to highlight that projects made a direct impact on the emotional wellbeing. We explored this by looking at children's access to help and advice. Many children and young people felt that there was someone at the project that they could talk to if they were worried or concerned about something. 33% of the children and young people using Children's Fund projects felt that they could talk to a paid worker, 25% could talk to a volunteer and 38% could talk to another young person. Only 12% of them felt that there was no one that they could talk to at their project. It has to be noted that some of the children might have ticked several boxes reflecting on the fact that there might be several different people they can talk to.

Stay Safe

All projects worked hard to address any potential threats to staying safe in children and young people's lives. The areas given most consideration were threats to safety from the physical environment or from other people.

Physical environment

Projects check their safety procedures to ensure buildings are safe – do risk assessments for outdoor activities, or help young people learn about possible household dangers (see the Junior YIP, Mentors and Peers and Bedford Nurture Group reports for more details).

Projects also provide safe environments that allow children and young people to new experiences. The Mentors and Peers Project offers *“safe opportunities to go out and explore new places, develop new interests”*.

“I do think the trips are quite well organised by the staff, they like do everything they possibly can to make sure you have a good trip, there are no complications”. (Young Carers report)

Projects also worked by providing a safe environment within which issues can be tackled:

“Working on a 1-1 with the child the HSLO (Home School Liaison Officer) encourages the understanding of being safe in school and highlights the dangers of removing themselves from that safe environment before addressing the underlying problems”. (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

“I’m worried I will get bullied in the Middle School. I know now what I need to do”.
(Child in Family Friends report)

Other people

Projects raise awareness with children about ‘stranger danger’, requests or pressure from adults that would make young people uncomfortable, family pressures and difficulties. The Projects support children and young people to learn coping strategies. Projects provide staff who are CRB checked and can provide help and support.

Much of the work for children was around issues to do with bullying by other children. Projects offer sessions to children and young people in coping strategies, provide sources of support, playground buddies and safe adults. This can take the form of self-esteem or anger management training which *“informs children of key risks and provides them with the knowledge to be able to use coping strategies to protect them from harm”*. (Family Friends report)

Playground Friends have a Bench Stop which allows vulnerable children to access support from peers and stay safe. Projects offer coping strategies for children and young people to use when they feel angry or out of control. Projects also help young people to understand the effects of bullying if they bully others themselves (see Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report for more details). Projects offer advice re drugs and sexual health to older young people (see Junior YIP report for more details).

Many of the projects contribute to helping children and young people ‘Stay Safe’ by providing opportunities for them to be able to talk to safe people about issues that are affecting them (see Pilot Transition and Mentors and Peers reports for more details). Evidence to support this can also be found in the findings of the questionnaire carried out by the Centre for Social Action.

The evidence provided by the project is confirmed by a high percentage of young people replying in our evaluation questionnaire that they feel safe within the project. 94% of children and young people reported feeling very safe or safe within their project. Only 4% reported feeling a bit unsafe, however 2% reported feeling very unsafe within the project.

Pro-social behaviour

Projects also worked hard to create safe environments where children and young people felt safe regarding respectful and caring behaviours with the groups. Children and young people felt that being part of a Children’s Fund project helped them in a number of ways. They identified:

- Being able to control anger better (25% of children and young people),
- Understanding the effects of their behaviour on others (28%),
- Trusting more people (45%).
- Enjoy playing and being with other young people (43%)

Parents and professionals noticed similar benefits.

“I hated the school and thought it was all their fault. Now we have a great relationship and I don’t want him to leave.” (Parent)

“The impact on pupil’s attendance, behaviour and emotional well being as well as supporting parents cannot be overstated. As the workers are based in one area their local knowledge of the schools and families in the town is such that they can target the support effectively as pupils grow older and change schools.” (Deputy Head - Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

“The HSLO (Home School Liaison Officer) has been working with children who are reluctant to come to school or have problems within the family that cause them to try to leave school premises. Working on a 1-1 with the child the HSLO encourages the understanding of being safe in school and highlights the dangers of removing themselves from that safe environment before addressing the underlying problems.” (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

Enjoy and Achieve

Activities undertaken by the projects as part of the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund promoting the ‘Enjoy and Achieve’ outcome for children and young people could be seen as fitting into three key types:

1. Activities which are designed to be educational and develop skills but done in such a way that is highly enjoyable for the child and parent e.g. Family Friends and Bedford Nurture Group. Reasons for their success are likely to include – small groups, one-to-one attention, away from pressure of classroom, more use of games and exercises – fun learning.

An example of this is the Vandyke Pyramid Support project which considers it has had an impact on the ‘Enjoy and Achieve’ outcome because the HSLO (Home School Liaison Officer) works with children *“By motivating children to come to school. By working with the children to raise their aspirations and encourage them to access other interests in and out of school. By raising their self-esteem and thus giving them the confidence to enjoy school and think about what they can achieve”*.

This is carried out by *“Addressing the wide range of emotional and developmental needs, confidence and self-esteem, social adjustment and skills and protective behaviours through discussion, games, worksheets, quiet time. Lower school children have commented that they have learnt that they have influence over how others act and by acting positively they will enjoy school more and achieve more”*.

Family Friends achieve this outcome by holding pottery classes, story sacks, breakfast clubs which provide the opportunity for young people to talk to each other, and coffee mornings for parents and toddlers to “develop friendships”.

2. Activities designed to be recreational, provide enjoyment, provide challenges for young people, build self esteem through achievement, provide opportunities to be part of a group and interact with others e.g. Junior YIP, Mentors and Peers,

Family Friends. These benefit young people who do not routinely have the chance to get out and do things much because of lack of money, transport, large families etc.

Family Friends is an example of this as it offers activities such as pottery classes for parents and pre-school children and sessions for making Story Sacks. The breakfast clubs also offer children the chance to socialise with each other.

The Young Carers offers this through the opportunity to go on trips such as to the theatre, zoo, outdoor activities and parties:

“Due to the nature of the role of a Young Carer for many this will be the first time they have an opportunity to experience an event, activity or trip without the responsibility of another person, albeit a parent or sibling. They are able to enjoy it for themselves. The trips enable them to have fun and behave as children free from responsibility”. (Young Carers report)

“I think the YIP has done that really successfully albeit with a small group of young people. I think there is evidence from the projects of people’s confidence, their self esteem being increased and from the ‘enjoy and achieve’ perspective being involved in a range of creative activities they would not have had exposure to”. (YOT manager)

3. Therapeutic groups designed to build resilience and mental health e.g. Vandyke’s and Family Friends self esteem work. The reasons for their success included small groups, game and exercise approach, personal attention, focus on underlying fears and anxieties.

The Pilot Transition Project and Mentors and Peers Support work *“encourages children to support their vulnerable peers and develop broad skills for dealing with changes.”*

Lower school children have commented that they have learnt that they have influence over how others act and by acting positively they will enjoy school more and achieve more. They say they have learnt:

‘That I can stop others from being unkind.’ (Child)

‘I have learnt the golden rule – Do be gentle – don’t hurt anybody.’ (Child)

‘If we treat others well they will treat us well.’ (Child)

Children said that the Nurture group had helped them ‘Enjoy and Achieve’:

“With my reading and writing. Playing with other children. Better at everything!” (Child)

“Playing; doing nice handwriting. It’s a happy place. Helping me to play outside better.” (Child)

Children were asked about the impact the Nurture Group had had for them. All children reported that their reading, writing and maths were better, and 78% reported that they were getting on better with other children in school:

“She never used to like coming to school. She loves it now!” (Parent)

“The activities are excellent and challenging and without the JYIP club we’d never survive the school holidays”. (Parent)

Young people also had positive comments to make about the impact that the Transitions project had for them:

One Year 8 student commented:-
“I have gained a lot of confidence.”

Feedback on the Pilot Transition Project ‘Moving On’ session included:
“This made us feel supported and gave us confidence for when we moved up”.

Feedback from CSA questionnaire

The survey indicates that the projects have enabled young people to ‘Enjoy and Achieve’ at school. 29% of children and young people felt that their project had helped them to find school more exciting, 33% had found that school was more interesting, and nearly half found that school was more enjoyable.

These findings reflect the level of work that is being carried out by Children’s Fund projects looking at supporting children and young people within schools and helping them improve their basic skills.

Make a Positive Contribution

The projects consider that children are given opportunities to and encouraged to ‘Make a Positive Contribution’ by enabling them to take part in a variety of activities. These included work on personal skills, helping children to tackle issues that were affecting them, and by offering themselves to help others.

Personal Skills

Family Friends set up a project called Playground Friends where children volunteer to help others in the playground, they have training and are supported in their role. This has contributed to them making a Positive Contribution by *“encouraging positive interaction whilst trying to discourage anti-social behaviour and developing social skills”*. (Family Friends report)

The Vandyke project feels peer mediators are a good example of young people ‘Making a Positive Contribution’.

“They feel valued by school and their confidence increases and spreads to the children that they in turn work with. As a result of the initial training they are now eager to access more training with the paired reading tutoring programme. This is also good for younger year groups. As well as the support they enjoy, they are also

looking forward to volunteering themselves to take on those roles". (Vandyke Pyramid Support project report)

A further example given by the Vandyke project is that working with children on a 1-1 basis on *"self-esteem and behaviour management encourages them to feel more positive about their school and home life. In turn these children are encouraged to work with the more needy younger children which increases both children's self-esteem. The positive contribution is that the children are learning to help and teach others". (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)*

Opportunities

The YOT described their overall perspective as being to engage with young people at an early stage and *"stop embryonic problems from escalating and to finish our involvement with young people leaving them in a position to be able to make a positive contribution, so any barriers to that have been removed."* (YOT manager)

The Pilot Transition project felt that it had helped young people by engaging them in a range of activities, including involvement in the making of a DVD in which young people from local schools appeared. The DVD entitled **'thiswasme!'** together with the additional learning resources developed enable the project's work to be sustained and delivered in other schools to support the emotional health and well being of children and young people at times of significant change, including school transition.

The Young Carers project offers *"Trips and outings [to] provide opportunities for physical activities and for the young people to take part in new experiences"*.

Tackling Children's Issues

The Mentors and Peers project also aimed to meet this outcome by providing support that enables young people to be active within their communities, and thereby to engage in "constructive activities".

Parents and the wider community

Projects felt that many of their activities also helped parents and schools to 'Make a Positive Contribution'. An example of this is the Vandyke Pyramid Support project which is beginning to look at ways of involving parents who are not usually involved with the school. This would include parents working to support each other. Positive contributions can also be made by the wider community.

"Story Sack workshops provide an opportunity to develop skills with a sense of achievement whilst making a positive contribution to the schools involving the wider community." (Project worker)

"When I saw B getting cross I pulled him away from the other boy and told him to ignore him". (Child)

"I am so happy with the results. My son has become a beautiful happy boy, no more problems with getting him to school and his academic ability has been a overwhelming success". (Parent)

“Both my boys have benefited hugely from JYIP. They are taken at face value, as individuals, not pushed into or excluded from any activity. Their confidence and social skills have blossomed”. (Parent)

Feedback from CSA questionnaire

Positive feedback from young people included that:

- 32% had become involved in another group because of their involvement in their original Children’s Fund project
- 36% felt more relaxed at home
- 42% had discovered things that they can do for others which is fun.

Achieve Economic Wellbeing

Projects found this one of the more difficult ECM outcomes to feel they were having an impact on. Some didn’t feel that they did contribute to this outcome. Others contributed to this indirectly for children by supporting their parents to feel empowered to undertake further education or work opportunities.

Work with Parents

Examples of work with parents include Family Friends who have invited various agencies to meet the groups of parents attending the community rooms. These have included representatives from adult education and training to inform parents of courses available to them and to listen to their requirements;

“Improving Prospects’ a joint initiative between Bedfordshire County Council, Bedfordshire Police and the European Social Fund which included various modules to encourage people to return to work, i.e. interview techniques, team building, CV preparation, etc. 4 parents from Lower School completed this training”. (Project worker)

Indeed, Family Friends state that the number of parents who have started education courses is one of their greatest achievements. Parents also comment that this work with parents allows them to support their children’s education.

The Vandyke Pyramid Support project believes they contribute to the ‘Achieve Economic Wellbeing’ outcome by:

“In the long term we would anticipate that team support and input in time of need will enhance the ability to develop the desire to achieve in all its guises... Our plans for 2006-7 include running Financial Literacy courses to parents and also to teenagers.” (Project worker)

Work with Young People

Work that is done to improve young people’s basic skills should also have a knock on effect for their economic well being in the future. Many projects work to improve the basic skills of those young people referred to them, for example the Mentors and Peers project and the Bedford Nurture Group.

The Youth Offending Team refer young people on as needed for additional support to what they themselves can offer. They explain that:

“YOTs have a better handle on multi-agency work than some others anyway, there is lots of cross referencing to other agencies to refer on, on issues we cannot address ourselves and that links in with the economic well-being as it is all laying the foundations where that can be a reality for the young people as well.”

The Mentors and Peers Project says that it aims to help young people be prepared for working life.

“A Mentor is a role model and a source of advice and experience of working life for the young person to refer to. The relationship with a Mentor provides the young person with the opportunity to develop social and communication skills, confidence and self-esteem, vital elements for preparing for working life. Also, the mentoring relationship can develop practical skills. For example, the mentor and mentee have a small budget for activities that they can spend each time they meet up. The young person learns the value of money and the need for budgeting and planning in the use of this money (i.e. saving for some weeks in order to do a particular activity later).”

The Junior YIP reports meeting this outcome by having “discussions around future opportunities that will be available to the YP [young person] and the importance of gaining a good education to enable them to succeed in their chosen field.”

“Support(ing) a young person in making appropriate changes and decisions which affect their future. This includes transition to college, seeking work etc. The project signposts where necessary and actively involves other organisations to support the young person... Financial assistance can be sought for the project to aid the young person”. (Young Carers Project – worker)

“Now I’ve finished the level 1 English I think I will do level 2”. (Parent)

Feedback from CSA questionnaire

This was perhaps one of the hardest outcomes for groups to demonstrate meeting. However, 14 % of young people strongly agreed and 22% agreed that workers in the project had helped them to look after their money. 13% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed that this had happened for them.

Some young people had also had the opportunity to help with the finances of their project. 9% had looked after petty cash, 33% had had a say in how money was spent, and 15% had helped with fundraising.

The views of people who work with the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund Projects

The CSA carried out a series of interviews with those who worked with Children’s Fund projects or within Children’s Services in the authority. Below are some comments from these with regard to how interviewees saw projects contributing to meeting the ECM outcomes.

There was a feeling amongst some interviewees that projects were most likely to meet the 'be healthy', the 'stay safe' and the 'enjoy and achieve' outcomes. However there were some projects where it was felt that all ECM outcomes were being met.

"... I can give examples of where particular projects are making an impact, like the Transitions Project which is considered to be good practice, and the DfES are very interested in it". (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

"I think some of the [projects] fulfil all the indicators of ECM. For example the transition projects and the nurturing groups I think are fantastic and are examples of what you can do if you get in early and have some resources." (YOT Manager)

Some people recognised that their knowledge about how well the Children's Fund overall was meeting the ECM outcomes was limited (though adequate for their positions and needs).

"To be honest, it might just be what I know about. It obviously is having an impact on economic well-being with the two after school clubs enabling parents to work, it depends how you look at them." (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

One person did have some doubts about how well all the projects were addressing the ECM outcomes.

"I am not sure some of the others are doing so well on the CF aims, let alone the ECM. I think some of the after school clubs were not very focused." (YOT manager)

Interviewees were able to identify particular areas of practice that contributed to meeting these outcomes for example workshops for parents or self-esteem work for children which were discussed earlier in this report. Evidence for these opinions came from meetings attended by the interviewees and reports that they had access to.

Children's priorities and perceived benefits

In an exercise with young people in which we explored some of their experiences and perceptions around the ECM outcomes we asked them to come up with three things that are important to them within each of the outcomes, discuss it within the group and then rank it according to their priorities. The young people were asked to reach a consensus as a group and they could move the ideas around as many times as they liked until they reach an order with which they all agree. The following picture illustrates the outcomes of this exercise:



Whilst we are aware that this only represents the view of a small number of young people it is interesting that ‘being listened to’ is one of the top priorities followed by ‘trust’ and ‘not being bored’.

We introduced in our evaluation questionnaire a section for young people to continue some sentences with their own words, to explore whether the projects had helped them in recognising skills and enhancing their outlook in life. The sentences were as follows:

1. The project helped me to discover that I am good at.....
2. The project helped me to discover that I enjoy.....
3. The project helped me to discover that I would like to be.....
4. The project helped me to discover that my aim is.....

Predominantly the children and young people identified in the first question that the project helped them to discover that they are good at social skills such as listening, making friends talking and understanding. Playing, sport and drama came second.

Within the second question children and young people said they had discovered that they enjoy being with other new people, being with friends and again doing sports, arts and playing games.

When young people talked about what they would like to be there is a big group which would like to go into the ‘helping professions’, another group into very specific and diverse professions such as electrician, hairdresser, scientist, teacher, farmer etc. Some young people mention sports.

In the last question children and young people focused on improving attitudes such as being happy, be kind, working hard, not fighting, and be helpful.

It is recognised that a more positive outlook in life can provide resilience and the resources necessary to enable the navigation of key life transitions. The responses of the children and young people suggest that the projects are effective in providing young people with new skills which they can relate to future aims and aspirations. However we found that the focus on social skills and behavioural improvement might reflect the focus on individual psychological aspects of the interventions. We are very aware that the picture from children and young people is only a snapshot but it is worth considering if there are other skills which could be enhanced. We also think that focusing on behavioural improvement is important however this should not be the predominant focus of the project work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Projects tended to rely predominantly on qualitative evidence to show how they were meeting ECM outcomes. The assertions made in the project reports tend to be backed up by anecdotal evidence from children, young people and parents, recorded by workers. However, the CSA questionnaire backs up the assertions made by the projects to some extent; particularly with regard to the 'Stay Safe', 'Be Healthy', 'Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a Positive Contribution' outcomes. There is less evidence that the 'Achieve Economic Wellbeing' outcome was met, although there were benefits in this regard for some children and young people and their parents.

There seems to be an overwhelming emphasis on enjoying and achieving. Whilst we recognise that this is important, it also has to be highlighted that this is not the only priority of the Children's Fund programme. We are suggesting that a more focused strategy could be used with two different approaches:

1. Projects could use all the 5 ECM outcomes as a framework to organise their activities. This would mean that each project would actively try to address each of the outcomes in some way.
2. The Bedfordshire Children's Fund as a whole adopts a strategic view and organises its projects around the 5 ECM outcomes. This would mean that specific projects would target one or more of the outcomes but the sum of them would target all of the outcomes. This strategy is in our view less effective since the ECM outcomes should be viewed as a unity important for the well-being of each individual.

The more strategic adoption of the ECM outcomes would have some practical implications:

1. Projects should get participative training where they could share with other projects innovative ways to organise activities
2. Evaluation should be more focused and ongoing
3. A core evaluation format could be agreed

The Participation of Children and Young People

Introduction

The participation of children and young people within projects and organisations is not straightforward and quite often it proves not only difficult to define but also to initiate and sustain. The underlying assumption is that participation is a good thing that leads to increased self-efficacy, and self-esteem, which in turn lead to an increased awareness of choices and an increased control over social life, all of which contribute to increased 'well-being' and in turn health (Morrow 2005).

Participation is one of the 3 key principles of the Children's Fund (the others being Prevention and Partnership). The ne-cf (National Evaluation of the Children's Fund) website sets out the role of the Children's Fund in promoting participation:

"Participation: exploring strategies for the involvement of children, young people, families and community members in the development, implementation and evaluation of children's services." (ne-cf website accessed on 12/5/06)

In addition the Government has made a special commitment to children's participation in several documents and especially through Every Child Matters.

'The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use.' (CYPUP, 2001)

On the Every Child Matters website there is an emphasis on the participation of children in multi-agency working especially in

- Involvement in service development
- Involvement in service delivery
- Letting children and young people know about the services

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/participation/multiagencyworking/>

There are now many requirements for organisations to involve children and young people:

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Children Act 1989 and 2004
- Health and Social Care Act 2001
- Modernising Local Government
- Education Act 2002
- Learning to Listen Core Principles (CYPUP, 2001)
- Emerging Children's National Service Framework.

The reasons for the participation of young people within organisations are well documented and recognised. Amongst others are:

- A child's right to be involved in matters that affect them;

- The recognition that children are users of services and should be involved as other users are;
- The better allocation of resources if services are informed by users;
- The growing evidence of positive outcomes from young people's involvement – for organisations, for adults, for children.

(NCB Handbook, Building a culture of participation)

In order to explore children's participation within the Bedfordshire Children's Fund programme we adopted the **Hear by Right 7s Standards Framework**. The standards are generally recognised and can be used to ensure children and young people's participation in all the ECM outcomes are reached.

Hear by Right 7s Standards Framework	
Shared values	Children and young people's involvement is valued Children and young people have equal opportunity to get involved The active involvement of children and young people is of benefit to them, the wider community and the organisation and what it wants to achieve.
Strategy	A strategy for involving children and young people is most likely to succeed if it involves them directly in its development and review.
Structures	Structures to set up and sustain active involvement need to be accessible to a range of children and young people, avoiding over-reliance on a small group and responding especially to those most often left out.
Systems	Systems are needed to support and sustain activity and record outcomes.
Staff	Staff support and contribute to the development of policy and practice on the active involvement of children and young people in decision making. Children and young people will take an increasing role in recruitment and induction processes.
Skills and knowledge	Successful approaches include building the skills and confidence of CYP to participate fully and make change happen. They need accessible information to make informed choices and decisions Training and support is needed for the adults involved.
Style of leadership	Leadership with courage and clout is required among staff, elected members, trustees and CYP themselves. Leadership style will become increasingly based on partnership and cooperation.

Young people's and children's levels of participation in the Bedfordshire's Children's Fund

Whilst project workers found the 'Hear by Right' standards good, they also felt that they were quite complicated to use and contained too much jargon. They felt that they would prefer a framework which they could more readily understand and apply to their work. However, whilst recognising these views and concerns it also has to be highlighted that the standards are already adopted by many organisations with

positive effect. Therefore considering the importance of the participation of children and young people in the Children's Fund project workers need to have training and time to be able to familiarise themselves with frameworks such as the 'Hear by Right'. The rich reflection about the different layers and levels of participation presented within this framework might otherwise get lost.

Generally the project workers viewed the involvement of children and young people as very important within their organisations and projects. From the reflections given in the project reports it is evident that project workers put substantial thought into the ways they can engage with children, make their voices heard and shape their organisations taking young people's views into account. The reasons for this mainly were related to the general well being of children, building their self esteem and providing better and more child focused services.

"Ownership of the club by the young people is important so they take responsibility for the resources; they get more and become a team." (JYIP report)

"...to consult with the Year 8 pupils on the best way to develop the project to support their transition to Upper School... They wanted to find out about their hopes, fears and expectations of going to Upper school.....the team planned interactive games to ensure involvement and participation as well as to listen to the views of pupils." (Pilot Transition Project report)

"Young people are involved in the interviews for every post in the Vandyke Pyramid Support Project. Young people's opinions of our services are canvassed frequently and their views noted and acted upon. Young people are also involved in planning and directing some of our projects." (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

"The child/young person must want to take part in the mentoring scheme – it is not something they are forced to do. The young person is involved in making decisions and agreeing an Action Plan with their mentor for the period of the relationship. The child or young person is encouraged to actively make choices about their future and can be involved in completing the diary sheet with the mentor after each meeting." (Mentors and Peers report)

"The ethos of the project is that the child/young person's voice is paramount. This is determined from their first decision to join the project through to when they leave. Throughout this time it is a partnership between the young carer and the project staff. We actively seek to listen to and act upon the young carers' opinions, both as a group and individually. We are responsive to positive and negative feedback, thus instilling confidence and regard for the young carer." (Young Carers report)

This strong commitment to the participation of young people in deciding about the shape of the activities is reflected by the responses of the young people in the evaluation questionnaire. 86% of children and young people feel that if they disagree with what adults in the project have agreed on they can speak out about it. This truly reflects the projects aim to listen to children and young people and make their voices heard.

Even a higher percentage of children and young people (93%) strongly agree or agree that they can influence how the project is run which also was reflected in our focus groups with young people and children. Another important aspect which was mentioned by the children we talked to was that they felt that in other places they 'have to do as they are told' whilst in the projects they felt that if they had an idea, often the workers would support them to pursue this.

Complexities of Participation

Some young people expressed that they liked and preferred to come into a somewhat 'structured' environment where they didn't have to make all the decisions. Children and young people talking about 'rules that keep us safe' and 'people to look out for us' should not be underestimated. A safe and structured environment which sometimes is organised by adults might be important within the lives of some children and young people.

We think that overall some projects face a major challenge when it comes to promoting participation on all levels within the organisation. Some projects felt that there is a tension between structured environment and participation. This seems to be prevalent in organisations such as the YOT or sometimes in schools where participation is viewed as contributing to a lack of concentration or discipline. Projects identified that the participation of children and young people cannot be seen as a straightforward process for the following reasons:

- **The layers of the organisation:** projects said it depends if you look at participation on a project level or organisational level. They felt that sometimes there is a big difference between these levels. Some projects working within schools felt this clash especially strongly and whilst recognising that they might have a role in challenging the school and encouraging more participation they clearly did not feel confident in doing so.

"The experience of working within the three schools varied enormously. The school that the team felt would be the hardest to engage was in fact easier than the two more rural schools. One of the schools found it extremely difficult to allow the young people to express themselves and be interactive." (Project worker)

- Projects were often doing a number of **different activities** that had different levels of involvement of children and young people according to their age or their particular needs.
- **Younger people** might participate less in the organisational level of activities because of the need to provide a safe and structured approach.
- Sometimes projects believe they have to **start to set boundaries**. Whilst young people will have choices, the boundaries are more important at an early stage (especially if it involves work with children with serious behavioural challenges). The boundaries prepare the young people to take on responsibilities and fuller participation within the project later on.
- Some projects viewed younger children as not having the skills, abilities and experience to be involved in decision making about the project's design and delivery.

- **Participation is a process**, and therefore there has to be recognition of continual improvement. Participation might change over time when the children become more confident and trusting, to the workers and to each other.

These issues reflect the complexity of evaluating participation of children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of the Children's Fund projects.

However, we also would like to highlight some of the areas where we have seen no or very limited participation of children and young people:

- None of the projects have a specific policy supporting or promoting the involvement of children and young people. Generally participation is somewhat taken for granted and left to the criteria of each worker or project manager. The involvement of children and young people is hardly discussed within most of the projects and there are no formal means of recording the levels of involvement and the impact of young people's involvement in the organisations. Whilst some projects are very good in evaluating and reviewing their impact on different outcomes there are no such reviews looking at the involvement and participation of children and young people.
- Generally young people are not involved in the management of organisations or making decisions about how the organisations are run. We found in some projects that young people were involved in the appointment of their workers. Projects highlighted that to a certain extent the decisions about what services are needed is already defined through the Children's Fund and the ECM outcomes. They would question if choices do really exist and at what level. They also highlighted that even their work is restricted by government policy and constraints imposed by some organisations within which the projects are located.
- Whilst projects were keen on seeking the views and feedback from children and young people this mainly was through conversations, sometimes activity evaluation and feedback from their parents. It was stated that these views shape the project, mainly in the type of service delivery and not on a more organisational level. In these kind of evaluations the views of children and young people are sought and integrated but young people were not the drivers, they are not actively involved in deciding how to act on the findings, and hardly any of the projects informs children and young people of the decisions made by the management team.
- None of the projects had any funding set aside to support the involvement and participation of children and young people. Whilst initially workers from ne-cf and Dynamix Ltd. were commissioned by Bedfordshire Children's Fund to provide training and resources for workers in innovative ways to engage with children and young people, this has not been on-going or systematically applied to sustain the active involvement of children and young people. Only one of the projects had used a national toolkit to assist them in new ways of involving children and young people.
- In some projects there seems to be some misunderstanding of what participation means. The understanding seems to be that participation means young people can

do what they like. Therefore it is understandable that these projects have a problem to see how young children can participate to a greater degree or that setting boundaries is somewhat contradictory to participation. We also recognise that this might contribute to the difficulties of promoting participation within schools. However misunderstandings seem to be around both the level and ability of children particularly to be actively involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of services – more than one project worker expressed reservations and said for example, ‘an 8 year old cannot do that’.

- Overall in terms of the Hear by Right 7 S Standards framework beyond ‘Shared Values’ there would have been little to report under most of the other sections. Bedfordshire Children’s Fund programme employed just one core member of staff and this might have had an impact on the support that could be given to projects to promote children and young people’s participation; however, the appointment of a Children’s Participation Development Worker in the County Council’s children’s services directorate to work with 5-13 year olds (funded through the Children’s Fund budget) will hopefully begin to address some of these issues.

“We always made it (participation) an intrinsic part of every agreement and every service specification. We had a real requirement that children or their families needed to be engaged in the design, delivery and review. . . . I don’t think as much has been possible as I had originally hoped for and we have lacked resources to provide the necessary support to develop this (participation) to its full potential. I suppose in some Children’s Fund Programmes they have had the benefits of much bigger teams – more core staff. Some larger programmes have 6 or 7 members of staff, they have development officers, monitoring officers, participation workers – well we haven’t got any of that – there is just me.” (Programme Manager)

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is a danger of abstracting children’s participation as an end in itself and thus losing sight of the way in which children and adults are interconnected, and the ways in which adult structures and institutions constrain and control children in important ways. It might be helpful to return to basic questions about what children’s participation means in the context of hierarchical structures in which their lives are conducted. (Morrow 2005)

- The meaning of participation and its different levels has to be explored
 - Children have the right to participate
 - Structure and boundaries are not contrary to participation
 - Wants and needs of children and young people should not be confused
- Practical ways to enhance participation have to be explored
 - There are many ways to involve children and young people in different types of decisions.
 - Participation should be seen as a process, and not one off activities or events

- Cultural clashes within organisations have to be addressed
 - More discussion with schools, training and joint approaches to avoid cultural clashes
 - Change needs to happen within senior management, as well as within frontline staff, and across agencies and policy and practice.
 - There is a need for a strategic long term view
 - Projects and organisations might think of developing specific policies supporting or promoting the involvement of children and young people
 - Recognition that all organisations that work with children and young people are bound by the same requirement to involve children and young people
- More attention has to be given to evaluate the involvement and participation of children and young people, both in itself, but also its impact on services and outcomes
- Funding should be set aside to support the involvement and participation of children and young people
 - Special training in order to learn new and innovative ways for this engagement to happen
 - On-going support and training to sustain the active involvement of children and young people.

Engaging 'hard to reach families'

Introduction

One of the themes which emerged through our project visits and workshops was how to engage 'hard to reach families' and whether any lessons from the Bedfordshire projects could be learned or shared. We explored the notion of 'hard to reach' and project workers felt that some fundamental questions have to be asked:

- Who defines and who decides who needs to be reached?
- Why are they 'hard to reach'?
- Is there an empowering element to it or does it further disempower people?

The Children's Fund project workers identified that usually they work with a range of different families and some might be hard to reach because of:

- Being part of a discriminated group: disability, travellers, young people
- Socio economic position: deprivation
- Settings: physical environment, housing
- Experiences: personal history, deprivation, having been let down before
- Personal attitudes (usually as a result of previous experiences): negativity, denial, fear, disinterest

Project workers identified a number of slightly different 'types' of hard to reach families. Within these there are those who want to engage but because of different

reasons cannot engage. The reasons often are down to economic deprivation and negative peer pressure. There are also those families and children who do not want to engage. This group is much more difficult to reach and often before any engagement the workers have to break down barriers such as stereotypes about services, fear, anger or simply disinterest.

Practitioners identified also a group which over engage but with little effect.

Within all these types, different family members can have different positions. Also 'hard to reach' often means 'hard to keep involved'.

Within the school setting

Heads of schools and other teachers highlighted that the projects played a crucial part in engaging with children and families which otherwise are very difficult to reach through the traditional school routes.

"So many of our parents have had poor experience of their own of education and school, they can be very reluctant to come into school, we wanted them to understand they are valued members of our school community and welcome in school." (Head Teacher)

"They are very effective in talking to children and parents which we can't reach." (Teacher)

This engagement with parents and their children has often led to improved services and new initiatives.

"We can offer more opportunities for parents and children than we would be able to without them. We are building up relationships between the parents and the school (it is slow, but we are getting there)." (Head Teacher)

However it was also recognised that the school referral to projects might not always be the best for the children and young people. The reasons for this are complex; sometimes it might be because of the stigma attached to it and the feeling (from parents and children) that the school might be targeting or 'stigmatising' certain pupils; another reason might be because the projects themselves do not want to appear to be seen as simply an extended arm of the school.

"It became clear to us not to ask the schools for pupils they may find difficult. We agreed referrals in the future would be self referrals via the drop-in sessions or from parents. The teams developing the sessions in schools would also be able to identify anyone they felt might experience difficulty with the transition". (Project Worker)

These examples highlight that referrals are not always straightforward and might not necessarily guarantee that those who need the services will also be able to gain access or will be informed about it. There are many sensitive issues which have to be taken into account and obviously organisations will have different priorities and pressures to reach their targets. However there is a need to involve children, young people and their parents within this process.

Good practice

There are different ways in which the projects try to reach families and children. Some of them are about positive attitudes towards people, talking to the parents; giving them time and sometimes also trying to be less formal (even in the dress sense). Some projects work with families and children to build their self esteem and break down institutional barriers. Sometimes this is being done through literacy and numeracy courses, having events within the school where families are invited to attend or outreach work.

However work with parents takes time and needs continuity, consistency and building up of trust. Sometimes workers had to accept the fact that some parents will still stay away despite a lot of encouragement. Turnover of professionals in different agencies was a major concern because the development of trust needs time and commitment.

“The families get frustrated that so many professionals move on so quickly – they have just got to know them and they are gone. They feel let down and are reluctant to form new relationships and find it hard to trust – in the past they have just built up trust and then someone has gone.” (Project Worker)

Workers talked of it being a ‘drip drip’ effect that sometimes did culminate in parents coming to the project.

“It is time – that is the main thing – time to give to the parents, but also just time passing. One parent is now coming to English Basic Skills – it has taken over a year from our first contact with her, to her feeling able to join the class.” (Project worker)

“Some mums start by coming to Mum and Tots, then months later said, ‘Can I have a word . . .’ we felt this was such an achievement. It is time – time being around and consistency.” (Project worker)

One project did a survey of parents at the beginning of the school day to find out what parents know about the groups and opportunities to be involved, and asking them what they would like to have in school and what they are interested in. This helped to engage parents and increase their interest.

Some projects pointed out the fact that being part of the voluntary sector was very important in their ability to engage with families who had perhaps had previous bad experiences of statutory agencies.

“Also we are NOT part of the school, I think that helps, we are not in authority and we are not part of education. A number of our families, particularly the traveller families have had very bad experiences of education themselves and they do not trust people from school or education easily”. (Project worker)

Others said that other parents were themselves very effective in bringing in parents that the workers might find difficult to make contact with.

Peer mentors also have been very proactive in engaging with other children and young people. Some projects have developed this approach in order to work with other young people in school settings to support them in the development of different skills. Young people working with other young people seemed to be a good way of engaging with a number of children which otherwise might not have been reached through a more adult led approach.

Areas for Improvement

Only two projects identified that reaching 'hard to reach families' is part of their regular planning. Some projects haven't thought about this at all and therefore said that there is room for improvement. There is the danger that by relying only on referrals from other agencies or from within the school the projects become stagnated and lose their positive impact on children's lives.

We mentioned above that there is a group of people who have been identified as wanting to engage but have not been able to engage. Money and transport were identified as two of the reasons for this and children are being excluded because either they can't afford bus fares, the events or payments of the club. We think that this is of major concern and it is important to explore further the extent of this problem.

There is only a limited extent to which children and young people themselves are being involved in reaching other children and young people. Whilst some projects had not considered this, when prompted they viewed it as something to pursue which reflects our comments on the participation of young people within the Bedfordshire Children's Fund. In an ethos of participation children and young people should play a major part within the process of engaging other families.

Partnership

Partnership was one of the underpinning principles of the Children's Fund; in Bedfordshire partnership working happened at a number of levels - with parents and children, between agencies at a local level and strategically. The local organisational level has been about the partnership work between different organisations in the delivery of services and with multi-disciplinary teams. At a strategic level this has happened in the commissioning process and the development of the services. This section will consider the more organisational level partnerships both locally and strategically.

Partnership at a Local Organisational Level

At the local organisational level there is much evidence of good partnership work.

- Involvement of different agencies was recognised as good practice and a means to deliver better services to the children and young people

“Success re low re-offending rate is directly as a result of the hard work and dedication of the staff who have and are working with the YISP (Youth Inclusion and Support Panel). The relationships that have been forged with statutory and voluntary services to provide support and intervention to the young people underpin these achievements. The attendance of representation from these agencies at YISP meetings and the commitment to carry out work with young people has been at a consistently high level.” (YISP report)

“We work very closely with other agencies and professionals to provide an integrated service that works positively to empower our clients and which fills gaps in existing statutory provision. Team members communicate frequently with local School Nurses, Health Visitors and GPs, Social Services, Educational Welfare. In total we work with approximately 30 other agencies.” (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project)

- The Children’s Fund was seen as creating opportunities to consider and develop partnerships some of which existed before, but many of which were new and innovative.

“The Children’s Fund has opened the doors for some innovative partnerships that may not have happened without it. An example is the support the Children’s Fund has given the Young Carers... For example, Home-Start is sometimes working with the same families, but with a focus on the younger child in the family and we are aware of the needs of the older children – their need to have space to be children. The Young Carers Project gives them these opportunities such as the camping trip, the Easter activities etc and Home-Start can up the support to the younger children in the family when the older ones are away.” (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

- Working with schools

In some cases the partnership between the schools and the voluntary sector projects from the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund has enabled a better delivery of the services especially the participation and involvement of parents.

“The CF has been based on partnership, participation and prevention and has encouraged and further developed some existing work and pushed some boundaries further. Some work was very school based, just working with the school and the pupils. We asked them to change their work focus and to include more development of partnerships with parents.” (Programme Manager)

“Parental involvement is something we would do as a school anyway, but we get so much further with the work of (project workers).” (Head Teacher)

“Education has been brought in more closely – developing stronger links between education and family support. There has been some bridging of gaps between families’ needs and education, the Children’s Fund has played an influential role and it is now feeding into the extended school agenda”. (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

Some projects seemed to have a positive influence in changing attitudes towards children and giving specific training to all staff members.

“Mentor attended school meeting to act as advocate for child to try and improve his school behaviour. Child told the project during review that he was now allowed to have a “time out” card at school since the meeting with the mentor so that when he felt anxious or upset he could go to another room and talk to someone and this had really helped him.” (CSV Bedfordshire Mentors and Peers)

“Teachers now have a much better idea of the main issues with each phase and have established more contact with one another as a result of our linking them. Schools are beginning to work together to produce documentation with a more consistent approach... Our Behaviour Support Co-ordinator is working with the Middle schools on their PHSE curriculum in ensuring there are clear objectives and outcomes and adequate training for school staff on topics such as emotional literacy.” (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project)

“The training session on Protective Behaviours you ran for the whole staff was received very well. Staff commented that it had helped their personal and professional expertise when dealing with children.” (Middle School letter of support to Vandyke Pyramid Support project report)

- Working with the voluntary sector

The Children’s Fund was seen by many to have had a pivotal role in working with voluntary sector organisations and bringing them into relationships with other organisations and the Local Authority in a new, dynamic and productive way. Over 50% of original projects were voluntary sector projects. The supportive framework of the Children’s Fund and particularly the Manager were seen as important in this process.

“With my Voluntary Sector hat on the Children’s Fund has funded a number of voluntary sector organisations and enabled the development of work with a supportive structure which (Programme Manager) has led. (Programme Manager) has been very good at this leadership role and she has enabled some organisations to flourish. . . . For a small organisation that structure of support can be really helpful. (Programme Manager) has been an additional person to bounce ideas off about the development of the service and help with project management, planning and things like that.” (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

“The Children’s Fund shared training opportunities with voluntary organisations. There was training about consulting with children (Dynamix) that was open to the voluntary sector, it was good quality training and the organisations could cascade it throughout their organisations – a quality approach to engaging with young people”. (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

“The Programme Manager has been really committed to the involvement of the voluntary sector; she has kept us up to date with the achievements and the challenges

of the programme and projects. The CF has opened the doors for some innovative partnerships that might not have happened without it". (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

"I think it has supported innovative projects and created positive opportunities to bring together new and different partnerships, a chance for different organisations to understand each other better. For example the voluntary sector and education. It has had strong leadership which has been highly effective and very supportive. (The Programme Manager's) commitment to interagency work has really contributed to that." (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

The Programme Manager felt that the clear structures and expectations have been really helpful in this regard.

"We have set up a clear process in terms of monitoring and review, the outcomes we expect from projects and how the service will be delivered. This is pinned down in the service level agreements, which we had to create from scratch. It was probably the first time some of the organisations had been really clear about what it was they were going to be doing and the way they were expected to do it. We asked for service information on a 1/4ly basis and also had a very in depth one to one review at the year end and sought details of their plans for the next year. Some of the comments that came back to me when we did this for the first time, were that no one had ever asked them questions like this before – it was a complete revelation but at the same time not unwelcome." (Programme Manager)

- Partnership at an Inter-organisational Level

Multi-professional and inter-professional teams were identified as very helpful in their ability to deliver holistic services which could address all the 5 ECM outcomes within the same locality.

"Multi disciplinary nature of our team is significant in our effectiveness. Often one team member will hand over to another for more intensive support or for a less intensive monitoring role (e.g. team members who work with children in small groups offering self esteem raising courses may refer an individual child for play therapy, or a child who has had counselling support may be monitored afterwards by a Home school Liaison Officer)." (Vandyke Pyramid Support Project report)

Partnership at a Strategic Level

The original Children's Fund Working Group set up in 2002-03 was multi-agency with partners from organisations including Sure Start, Connexions, Primary Care Trusts, Education and Social Services Policy/Strategy, YOT, Drug Action Team and Early Years and Childcare and the voluntary sector. They were able to set the foundations and develop the programme; they agreed the commissioning process, the criteria for selection of providers and the monitoring arrangements. However, one significant gap in this initial partnership was that for most of the time Children's Social Services was not represented on the group. This has only been in place for the

last 18 months following the reorganisation of Bedfordshire County Council's Children's Services. All those involved in the Children's Fund Working Group (now incorporated into the Sure Start and Children's Fund Partnership) had found the experience valuable, finding it gave them links with other agencies they may not have otherwise had, and a broader perspective on children's services.

"From a strategic point of view it enables me to link the work that is going on for example with Children's Centres which involves the provision of health and family support services for 0-5 and link those in terms of strategic planning into the Children's Fund and this is really only now coming to terms with all that that means, in terms of using the re-profiling the funding from the CF so we can provide a more coherent approach to family support for the 0-13 age group It is about trying to deliver more coherently in the future." (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

"Partnership work is not always comfortable, but we have some pretty good working relationships now. Many of the people we are working with in the Children's Fund we are also working with in the former EYDCP, so we are talking about some of the same people feeding into the same agenda, so we have good links with health, social services, the YOT and with the voluntary sector. It is broadly similar colleagues for both agendas." (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

"Greater integration with other agencies locally has enabled the YOT to raise its profile. It made me aware of different aspects of the work in the County that I might not have heard about and I think that has been very useful as we are now moving towards producing the Children's Plan with ECM links have been established that will be useful as that process carries on. I did not have the links to some of the education projects for example the Transition projects which we are hoping to get more involved in now we have more capacity. As the Children's Fund Steering Group has now metamorphosed into the Sure Start Children's Fund Group it means it is a whole other range of people bringing in new things in. So for example it has become apparent to me from a YOT perspective I need to link in with the whole extended schools agenda, which I hadn't up to now. It provides opportunities to create links where they might not have existed before." (YOT Manager)

"I think it has had a big impact in that it brought people together and people are able to look at things from their perspective and so others are developing greater understandings of others perspectives, we are much less in our silos now. People have strengthened existing links and new links have been created . . . Demonstrating it is possible to develop partnerships that are outside the traditional silos. Many people I meet in the YOT arena regionally are amazed that the CF and the YOT have worked so well together." (YOT Manager)

Others pointed to the commitment of key people around the programme whose drive to change things has been crucial in the development of innovation and partnership.

"There are a number of people who have seized the opportunity to be able to put in place things they were passionate about, but had not been able to do before, and convey that enthusiasm to other people and then it gains momentum as others

consider things they might like to do or consider things they had not before". (YOT Manager)

Role of the Children's Fund Programme Manager

Many people pointed to the important role the Children's Fund Programme Manager had had in the success of the development of partnership working at all levels – locally and strategically. Her clarity of purpose, organisation skills, commitment and ability to offer constructive support even when needing to challenge people were all commented on, as well as her ability to understand the systems within the voluntary sector and the Local Authority to ensure the promotion of the Children's Fund and its projects

"It is so important who you have as the co-ordinator of your Children's Fund, the value of that is immense, she is so organised. She is part of the system; she has never not been part of the system. I have been here for 18 months and from day one she made sure she saw me, gave me a copy of the action plan, recent reports – very proactive." (Assistant Director of Commissioning)

"I feel (Programme Manager) does an excellent job, she is clear in terms of what she wants to achieve with the projects. I think she is well respected, and has developed excellent relationship with the projects. She has handled some tricky situations in terms of the funding being cut, keeping people informed and working well in partnership with them. I think she has done an excellent job." (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

People also commented on how the Programme Manager supported the projects and helped them understand and meet the requirement of the Children's Fund and develop capacity within the organisation.

"The projects are well monitored and supported, good practice has been shared, opportunities to make the best use of any underspends have been seized on or any bits of money to share good practice. That has all added value to the project. Her leadership has been central to it working extremely well." (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

"The co-ordination has been really important. People have needed help to do what was required of them over and beyond the service delivery, and how to work with the strict framework and to have the co-ordinator help them think through what are they going to do when the money ends.." (Assistant Director of Commissioning)

"It is not just about the interventions but about providers and what they need which is important too. It has also shown us the importance of the co-ordination role. You can't expect people to just do it, they need support. In early intervention work people are often very focused on the work they are doing with young people and I think they need help to turn that into outcomes, they are not working in the Local Authority mindset. They say the kids are having a good time, it is really good, but they need to think about it a bit more and they need support in that. With help they can come up with some brilliant stuff, but it isn't easy for them." (Assistant Director of Commissioning)

The way forward: The Children's Trust

Nationally it is a time of enormous change for Children's Services, Children's Fund money is available in Bedfordshire until 2008, but the environment in which the projects and the fund will be working is changing. This has a number of implications for the Children's Fund; these include the future of the projects, particularly those in the voluntary sector, and of early intervention work and also the role and place of the Children's Fund within the new structures.

Currently it seems likely that projects will have to argue that what they are doing is worth mainstreaming and will be competing with many other projects within this process. A note of caution was expressed by the Chair of the Voluntary Organisations Consortium who was concerned that some of the voluntary sector projects may not know enough about the commissioning process to be able to gain funding this way:

"There is not enough money to mainstream every project... Voluntary organisations need to have an understanding of the Local Authority commissioning process. The Voluntary Organisations Consortium is a forum used to disseminate information regarding commissioning and other issues and we have voluntary sector representation on the key strategic groups, including the Commissioning Group."

"Mainstreaming is not just a local issue, it is a national one – the Children's Fund money is pump-priming money from central government – it is not permanent. Bedfordshire is currently working towards a joint commissioning strategy- Smaller projects cannot rely on statutory funding, and they will need to get involved in and understand the commissioning processes and present their services alongside others. It may be a challenging issue for some of the voluntary organisation but the Voluntary Organisations Consortium can offer information and support. The process needs to be transparent so unrealistic expectations are not raised. Just because a project has been successful it will not necessarily guarantee further funding – it will depend on where they fit in the overall strategy".

Therefore it has to be recognised that the commissioning strategy has to look at what works and what needs to be replicated on a longer term basis. There is a need to look with at a multi-agency perspective how funding is being allocated. The point raised by the Chair of the Voluntary Organisations Consortium Services Committee is important: *Smaller projects cannot rely on statutory funding, and they will need to get involved in and understand the commissioning process and present their services alongside others.* This challenging process should be supported within a transparent system. The Children's Fund money continues to be ring-fenced for at least one more year, but after that things are uncertain. The projects having to be part of the main commissioning process is seen as both an opportunity and a challenge.

"The Children's Fund money is ring-fenced, certainly for this year – it will not yet be part of a pooled budget. I think there are real opportunities to be part of a bigger commissioning picture. We are being pushed into a LAA which I think in the fullness of time will result in pooled budgets for services for children and young people. In

many ways it could be a very positive thing in terms of mainstreaming the work that we do. This is the whole concept around encouraging Children's Fund Programmes nationally to be part of the LAA's with a view to work being mainstreamed. However part of the risk of such a development is you have to argue that what you are doing is worth mainstreaming, but I don't know yet how that is going to work." (Programme Manager)

"I think it is about competing priorities, I think there will be a recognition of the projects that have worked well, but I don't see that as guaranteeing survival in the main stream as there are so many other competing demands." (YOT manager)

Once more all decisions have understandably not yet been about the commissioning processes and the allocation of funding, however it appears a discrete budget for early intervention work is a possibility.

"We are very clear that early intervention is a central part of our plans. Funding earmarked for early interventions is essential for our refocusing strategy. As a commissioner I think ring-fenced budgets are important in protecting some of the quite innovative things that have happened particularly via the Children's Fund." (Assistant Commissioner of Services)

However, Children's Fund money is already being used to move the Children's Services agenda on as it is contributing to the funding of both a Children's Participation Development Officer and some Family Workers posts (to work in schools – building on the successes of the Children's Fund Projects like Family Friends and Vandyke Pyramid Support Project in this area).

"In terms of the future I think we are still demonstrating we are thinking innovatively and forwardly and with the creation of the Family Worker posts, with the creation of the Children's Participation Worker post". (Programme Manager)

"I have discussed the need for the Children's Fund projects to fit in with the priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan and obviously making the best use of resources available to us. I guess an example of that is we are developing early intervention services in a multi-agency way across the county particularly in the form of home to school workers but from different disciplines – health education, social care. The Children's Fund is funding a small number of these posts to pump prime the service." (Assistant Director for Commissioning)

"I think certainly the partnership working will deliver on the ways we use Children's Fund money in the future, there are some good examples of practice out there and the partners are agreeing on the way in which we can support that in the future." (Head of Early years and Extended Services)

Whilst there are still uncertainties about what will happen in regard to the development to the Children's Trust in Bedfordshire the Children's Fund Programme Manager is part of the developing structures as a member of the Sure Start and Children's Fund Group; this group has direct input into the Change Management Board.

“There is a voice from the Children's Fund and (Programme Manager) has the skill, experience and confidence to feed that in and influence developments at the subgroup which are reported to the Change Management Board. So it does have some influence. (Programme Manager) is a good report writer and she makes coherent arguments about the lessons learnt and good practice.” (Chair of Voluntary Organisations Consortium)

“One of the sub groups of the partnership is the 0-13s which is called the Sure Start Children's Fund group, so we are there. The Management Team I am now part of is responsible for the development of the Children's Centres, the Extended Schools and Early Years Education so I feel quite pleased where I am positioned now in terms of the management structure and the way the Sure Start Children's Fund Group feeds in to the Partnership. I don't know what will happen in regard to the development of the Children's Trust, but the fact the group I am part of is part of the commissioning arm within the Directorate of Children's Services is also very positive.” (Head of Early Years and Extended Services)

Lessons Learned

In this section we will highlight some of the main areas from which important lessons can be learned from the Bedfordshire Children's Fund programme. We would like to point out that this report has a conclusion which explores in detail lessons learned, examples of good practice and areas for improvement at the end of each of the section.

Good Practice

- Overall the Bedfordshire Children's Fund programme was able to offer a variety of early intervention services for children and young people which were distinct in their delivery and approaches. The project reports show the commitment and dedication of the project workers to create innovative work.
- This is not only visible in the project activities with children and young people but also in the work that has developed around the projects which are based in schools and working with families.
- With its focus on prevention and early intervention the programme was able to respond to and address very localised needs through targeted projects with focused responses. These localised and focused responses engaged successfully with a range of children and families.
- Whilst most projects identified that in their work there was a strong focus on behavioural issues they also were aware that there was a constant need to look at and to try to address the causes and contextualise children's experiences and responses to their environment. Thus they enabled groups of children and young people to have support, have their skills enhanced, broadening their opportunities and giving them tools for coping and managing the often difficult contexts of their lives.
- Overall there has been evidence of impact on the 5 ECM Outcomes, particularly with regard to the 'Stay Safe', 'Be Healthy', 'Enjoy and Achieve' and 'Make a Positive Contribution' outcomes. There is less evidence that the 'Achieve Economic Wellbeing' outcome was met, although there were benefits in this regard for some children and young people and their parents.
- It is evident that project workers put substantial thought into the ways they can engage with children, make their voices heard and shape their activities taking young people's views into account. This focused mainly on the involvement of children in deciding the project activities.
- Those projects that worked with families were successful in supporting them, engaging them and giving them new opportunities and skills. There are examples of projects being especially well placed in engaging with families because of their position within the voluntary sector and not being seen as part of the statutory services.

- There are different ways in which the projects try to reach families and children. There is much time invested in building consistent and trusting relationships with parents and their children.
- There has been an ongoing partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors in the delivery of services. Overall the programme supported voluntary sector projects in developing their work through careful monitoring and working towards the Children's Fund and Local Authority's benchmarks. Equally the voluntary agencies brought their knowledge and flexible approaches to the statutory services. This reciprocity quite often led to new collaboration and new approaches to work.
- The Bedfordshire Children's Fund has embedded itself well and successfully within the structures of the Local Authority and hopefully within the future Children's Trust. This increases the possibility of the lessons learnt from the programme being integrated into the developing commissioning and services delivery within the new Children's Services structures in Bedfordshire.
- The role of the Children's Fund programme manager appears to have been a key factor in the overall success of the programme, having strategic vision but also engaging with each of the projects giving regular support, advice and encouragement.

Areas for improvement

- In addressing the 5 ECM outcomes there seemed to be a strong emphasis on the 'enjoying and achieving' outcome. Whilst we recognise that this is important it also has to be highlighted that this is not the only priority of the Children's Fund. We have made some suggestions on having a more focused strategy within the subsection of the report stating that the 5 ECM outcomes should be seen as a whole and addressed as a package rather than a mix and match.
- Whilst there have been good working relationships between voluntary and statutory organisations and problems often were overcome through effective partnership work, there have been cases where the tensions between the different working cultures are more prevalent with workers finding it difficult to address these issues. These issues need to be brought out into the open and discussed.
- Whilst there has been a level of participation of children, young people and parents within the programme there is still much to learn. Some suggestions have been explored in detail in the subsection of this report some of them are:
 - The meaning of participation and its different levels has to be explored
 - Practical ways to enhance participation need to be explored
 - Cultural tensions and different perceptions of participation between organisations have to be discussed

- More attention has to be given to evaluate the involvement and participation of children and young people, both in itself, but also its impact on services and outcomes
 - Funding should be set aside to support the involvement and participation of children and young people
- Projects are often more reactive than proactive in the pursuit of engaging ‘hard to reach families’. The involvement of children and young people within this process is also very limited and there is much room for improvement.

Challenges for the Future

- There are clear lessons to be learned through the Bedfordshire Children’s Fund programme. There is a need for this not to get lost at the different levels of work and in the re-organisation of Children’s Services. At the practice level we would recommend more workshops to share good practice and to promote partnership between the different projects. On an organisational level there is a need for managers to integrate the learning and good practice within the management and ethos of the organisations and on a strategic level there is a need to involve the projects and their knowledge in a proactive way.
- How to sustain the funding for early intervention preventative work will need to be given careful consideration. The danger is that services are short term and therefore not only the expertise and knowledge get lost but also this can alienate further the children and families who have benefited from these services.
- The good partnership work has to be nurtured, enhanced and maintained.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Evaluation Agreement

The aim of this agreement is:

- To help projects plan their evaluation
- To help CSA to support the projects with their evaluation
- To keep the evaluation focused

Project name:

Form completed by:

What the project is aiming for

- The overall aim

To achieve this aim, the project works on several levels:

-
-
-

How evaluation information will be gathered

- Qualitative/ Quantitative
- Involvement of children, young people, parents

The Five Children's Fund Outcomes and the Project

- Which ones apply? (If you agree what Christine has written for the mapping exercise, you can just cut and paste in here)

ECM objective	Project activity that will contribute to that objective	Indicators – how will we know?	Evaluation tools or methods
Be healthy - project outcomes			
Stay safe - project outcomes			
Enjoy and achieve - project outcomes			
Make positive contribution - project outcomes			
Achieve economic well-being			

Bedfordshire Children's Fund Pilot evaluation questionnaire

All the information you will give is strictly confidential

What is your gender?

Male
Female

Are you disabled?

Yes
No

What is your ethnic origin? *(please tick box that applies to you)*

I am White of

UK origin
Irish origin
Other origin *Please state:*

I am Black of

Caribbean origin
African origin
Other origin *Please state:*

I am Asian of

Indian origin
Pakistani origin
Bangladeshi origin
Chinese origin
Other origin *Please state:*

I am of 'mixed race' dual heritage

Please specify:

What is your age?

1) I think the project has helped me to: *(mark as many as you like)*

understand the effects of smoking
understand the effects of alcohol
enjoy some food I know is good for me
do more sport

2) If you are feeling worried or concerned about something happening in your life, is there anybody in the project you could talk to about it?

a paid worker
a volunteer
another young person
none

3) How safe do you feel in the project? Do you feel ...

very safe
fairly safe
a bit unsafe
very unsafe

4) Because of being involved in the project I can now

control my anger a bit better
understand the effect of my behaviour on others
enjoy playing and being with other young people
trust more people

5) I think the project has helped me to find school more: *(mark as many as you like)*

Exciting
Interesting
Enjoyable
Worthwhile
Easy
Fun
Supportive
Safe
It hasn't helped me at all

6) Please continue the following sentences

- **The project helped me to discover that I am good at ...**
- **The project helped me to discover that I enjoy...**
- **The project helped me to discover that I would like to be...**
- **The project helped me to discover that My aim is...**

7) I feel valued by my

Project workers
Young people of the project
Both, staff and young people

8) If I disagree with what adults in the project have agreed on, I can speak out about it.

strongly agree
agree
disagree
strongly disagree

9) I can influence how the project is run (activities, ideas, outings, trips etc)

strongly agree
agree
disagree
strongly disagree

10) Because of being involved in the project I have now

become involved in another group
become involved in a volunteering group
become more relaxed at home
discovered that I can 'do things for others' which is fun

11)The workers in the project have helped me to look after my money.

strongly agree
agree
disagree
strongly disagree

12)I have been involved in the project to:

look after petty cash
have a say in how money is being spent
fund raising

**Thank you very much for taking your time and
completing this questionnaire.
All the information you have given is strictly
confidential and will be treated as such.**