

Report of Evidence and Build phase of Independent Support

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Executive summary

Background

This report presents the findings of the initial Evidence and Build phase of the Independent Support programme which is intended to support families with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) during the transition to a new system of assessment and support from September 2014.

This phase of Independent Support seeks to identify potential models and relevant effective multi-agency practice and protocols in help inform the development and implementation of the Independent Support programme and share best practice with delivery organisations and key stakeholders. The investigation took place between 7 April and 13 June 2014. Thirteen Voluntary, Community Sector and Private (VCS&P) organisations and twelve Parent Partnership Services (PPSs) contributed reports, the findings of which have been collated by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre and Council for Disabled Children (CDC) team.

Development of viable workforce models

The report sets out some common ideas and likely challenges that will be faced by sector providers who in the future may be delivering a local or regional Independent Support offer. Examples of singular, multi-agency and consortium approaches have been suggested with a variety of staffing options involving paid and/or voluntary staff, but usually involving at least one paid professional staff member able to provide the significant expertise required to respond to the more complex needs of parents/carers and young people.

Organisations refer to an Independent Support workforce that is local, skilled and readily accessible to parents and young people. Feedback from the 25 contributing organisations demonstrated that the model most appropriate and able to meet such a requirement will depend on local area context and needs. For example, whilst a single agency model might work better in smaller areas, one model that is potentially well suited for meeting diverse needs across larger areas, is a multi-agency approach that involves a workforce based at more than one agency which exists as part of a wider co-ordinated consortium network. A key perceived advantage is the ability to draw on a broader range of specialist resources than is possible from just one organisation, and deploy them more flexibly to meet diverse

needs. In addition, management, recruitment, training and continued professional development costs and risks can potentially be shared across agencies, with the potential to also draw flexibly and cost-effectively upon pre-existing training and recruitment capacity of consortia members and support quality and consistency across the workforce.

Whatever the model, though, local level decision making in the day to day delivery of support has much to recommend it, for example, this could be achieved via a locally based Independent Supporter and/or volunteer support officers recruited from within the local community, who should be well placed to understand local complexities and respond to the local needs, particularly among socially diverse communities.

The reports suggest that parents/carers want the delivery of Independent Support to be designed around key points when parents/carers feel it is most needed, particularly during the early years leading up to diagnosis and at key educational transition points, but also at times of crisis. Another key 'stress point' was considered to be the transition from youth to adult services.

This perhaps mirrors the viewpoint of older young people who also want the service to be available to them during important transition points in their life. Organisations may need to manage peaks in the Independent Support offer, for example, the end of the school year, where young people and families may require an increased level of support, alongside the more continuous flow of new referrals throughout the year.

A strong emphasis has been placed on the importance of the role of 'volunteers' with the suggestion that much can be learned from Parent Partnership Services and other key organisations with a history of deploying volunteers successfully in similar roles.

The report mentions parents as a group who could undertake the role of an Independent Supporter if provided with the knowledge and skills in both a paid and voluntary capacity and this would come with benefits, particularly given the strong value that parents place on the benefits of peer to peer support of parents, by parents. Therefore, it may be worth exploring further the reasons why volunteers come into the service and how volunteers might support the programme initiative once Government funding ceases in March 2016. However, broader consideration of sustainability issues is also important, given that funding for Independent Supporters does not cover the full three years of the transition to the new SEND assessment and support system. Management of large volunteer workforces at local level is by no means a cost-neutral option. Planning ahead for viable future funding options, such as on a charitable or grant basis, or via the building in of funding capacity within local multi-agency commissioning arrangements as they are restructured in the implementation of the SEND reforms generally is therefore recommended. It will also be helpful to ensure that effective mechanisms are

established to generate local evidence regarding the benefits and impact of Independent Supporters, for example, dovetailing with national evaluation plans.

Whilst organisations were able to put forward overarching ideas for potential workforce models, few organisations set out accurate, detailed, costed models for Independent Support. Therefore it may be that organisations could benefit from advice and support regarding the development of viable costings.

Ideas regarding effective local protocols and practices

The report presents some of the outcomes presented by organisations in light of local consultations with parents/carers, young people and other key stakeholders. A range of views were sought to understand what works well in local practice and protocols and what does not work so well. Given that the evidence and build was over a thirteen week period, it is fair to say that an impressive number of individuals were consulted.

On what works well, parents placed good multi-agency working highly on the list of what makes a good support service, and they appreciated this when it was happening. However, they were more aware when it was not happening as poor partnership working had often left parents feeling frustrated, annoyed or confused. Another finding was that although a wide range of methods of communication with families and young people were considered as having merit, a person centred approach, supported with social interaction and face to face sessions, is identified as the best way to build up a trusting relationship. The reports suggest that parents/carers want to feel confident that the support that they would be receiving from Independent Supporters would indeed be independent; so that they could trust the advice they were being given. Some parents/carers reported feeling that some of the existing support services with which they are involved were not transparent, with many suspecting that budgetary considerations restrained some services from recommending what may be best for their child and family, for example. In order for parents to feel confident about the Independent Support offer, organisations must provide clarity about how the role is independent and, if embedded into existing services (an approach which has clear benefits for ensuring that effective skills and practices for supporting personalised user-led support are embedded for the long term), how the role will maintain its independent status.

When consulting on what does not work so well, the themes that materialised for both children and parents were around a lack of personalisation. It was noted that support for parents/carers and young people cannot be delivered effectively via a one-size-fits-all approach. It is important that staff have the expertise, time and resources required to deliver tailored personalised support. Consideration of this must be taken into account by Independent Supporters whilst undertaking this role.

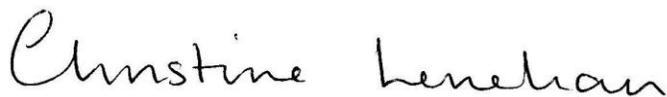
Independent Support services should also focus particular attention on ensuring that the voice of children and young people and a focus on supporting them to build on their strengths achieves sufficient prominence, especially if parents are risk adverse. A failure to listen to young people and recognise their capacity to contribute and progress to greater independence (if appropriately supported) was a strong feature in some young people's feedback.

Conclusions

The report provides a fuller overview of the range of workforce delivery models, local protocols and practices put forward by organisations in the Evidence and Build phase, as potentially helpful for organisations developing and delivering an Independent Support offer from September 2014. However, the breadth and depth of ideas and evidence submitted was substantial. Readers will benefit from referring to the original report sources for fuller information and learning regarding specific models and practice examples, of most interest and relevance to them. The original source material will become available on the Council for Disabled Children Website shortly.

A copy of the full report can be found at
<http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/independent-support>

Best regards,



Christine Lenehan

Director

Council for Disabled Children

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