

Exploring Partnerships on Thriving Minds

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Background



This case study examines the insights from an interview assessing a grantee's approach to and experiences of partnership working, reflecting on effective partnerships and the conditions that have enabled them, as well as focusing on how collaborations have enhanced the services they provide to young people.

The grantee highlights key strategies, challenges, and the impact of these collaborations on service delivery and organisational practices. This grantee applied a focus upon the introduction and expansion of a well-being panel, created in a response to the rising number of young people presenting with low-level mental health challenges. The impacts are discussed further throughout the case study.

Overview of partnership development



The grantee primarily focuses on prevention and early intervention in mental health for young people within schools across their borough. A focus on partnership formation was driven through a change in service model due to reduced funding from the Big Lottery. The grantee noted that *"schools pay for our services now, and for what they pay, they get a member of staff for a full day per week"*. Through this, the grantee shifted from a reliance on grants to a part-paid service model with schools, demonstrating the adaptability of the grantee in developing outreach and sustaining work.

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Moving towards a hybrid funding model means the grantee can rely on partnerships not only for financial stability but also for maintaining service quality. By integrating their mental health support within schools, they increase the reach and depth of their impact. The inclusion of volunteers and the formation of group interventions is not just a tactical move to manage resource scarcity, but also a strategy to expand service delivery without diluting impact. This demonstrates the value of partnerships in filling funding gaps and maintaining service provision. Partnerships that provide flexible funding or shared resources, such as this hybrid model with schools, enable organisations to continue their mission despite financial constraints.

Partnership typologies and mechanisms



A key component of one of the grantee's partnership strategies and subsequent contribution to the success of the organisation is the "well-being panel," a collaborative initiative formed with local schools and the primary care network. The panel was created in response to increasing referrals of young people who did not meet statutory service thresholds. The grantee explained, "they weren't meeting criteria for CAMHS, but they still needed support, so we came together to form this panel". The primary care networks approached the grantee, and in response, they "formed a well-being panel," which includes schools, children's services, and local agencies. This new panel allows for more collaborative triaging and referral of young people to appropriate services, streamlining the process and reducing delays in care.

The well-being panel represents a shift towards a needs-led approach that prioritises early intervention for young people who might otherwise fall through service gaps. It illustrates the grantee's proactive stance in addressing unmet needs by creating a collaborative structure where all partners can contribute their expertise. Further, the integration of services with the wellbeing panel has influenced the grantee's approach to family support, extending the grantee's focus to a more holistic family perspective. This amplifies how partnerships have influenced internal processes of the grantee to support them in being more adaptive in their support strategies.

This partnership model exemplifies how cross-agency collaboration can overcome service limitations. By pooling knowledge and resources, the well-being panel ensures young people receive timely support. It highlights the importance of shared decision-making in partnership working, as no single organisation can adequately meet all needs. The panel's success underscores the role of partnerships in creating a more responsive and adaptable system of care.

Enablers of effective partnerships



Face-to-face interaction emerged as a critical enabler of effective partnership working. As the grantee noted, "you can't build genuine collaboration over email or Zoom; it's those conversations over coffee where ideas really develop."

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In an increasingly digital world, the grantee's emphasis on in-person interaction highlights the need for relationship-building in partnership working. This outlook suggests that strong partnerships are not just built on formal meetings but also on informal, trust-building conversations. These interactions foster the creativity and openness needed to innovate solutions for shared challenges.

This speaks to the relational aspect of partnerships, where interpersonal dynamics play a crucial role. Trust built through rapport and mutual understanding are foundational for tackling more complex issues like mental health. In youth work, where outcomes are often difficult to measure and impacted by numerous variables, having solid interpersonal relationships between partners ensures smoother collaboration and more consistent support for young people. The grantee stated "We're stronger together" reflecting their belief that working in partnership is more effective than competing for resources. The grantee focussed on achieving shared outcomes: "Whatever we've set up in this charity or whoever we work with in this organisation with children and young people, we want the same outcomes".

Collaborative working has contributed to the continuation of monthly meetings with a large network of around 60 organisations, forming the Community Action Network. The grantee

described this as a sustainable way to continue partnership work beyond the pandemic, bringing together a wide range of service providers: *“Everybody wanted to continue with the way of working... it’s now the Community Action Network”*.

Challenges in partnership working



Despite the positive outcomes, challenges around competition for funding and protective organisational behaviours persist. The grantee observed, *“funding tends to encourage us to be in competition with each other rather than collaborate.”*

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This reveals a critical tension in the sector, where organisations are often forced into competition for scarce resources. The competitive landscape can prevent partnerships from forming or operating effectively because organisations may prioritise protecting their own interests over shared goals. The implication presented by the grantee is that funders need to reconsider how their models encourage or inhibit collaboration. A shift towards collaborative funding models, where organisations are rewarded for working together rather than competing, could foster stronger, more effective partnerships. Without this, there is a risk that partnerships may remain superficial or limited in their impact, unable to fully realise the potential of shared resources and expertise.

Impact on organisational practice



Partnerships have had a profound impact on the grantee’s internal processes, particularly through knowledge-sharing and adopting best practices. As the grantee explained, *“if we see an area of good practice in another organisation, we’ll sit down and say, ‘Shall we try this? Could this work for us?’”*

Partnerships offer the grantee a platform for learning and innovation. By observing and integrating successful practices from partners, the grantee continuously improves their service delivery. This learning process goes beyond simple resource-sharing; it influences organisational development and capacity-building.

The role of partnerships in driving internal change is crucial for organisations looking to evolve and adapt to new challenges. The grantee observed that partnerships allow smaller organisations to benefit from the expertise and experience of larger or more specialised entities, helping them to refine their own strategies and practices. This knowledge exchange creates a more dynamic and resilient youth sector, capable of responding to the complex needs of young people.

Conclusion



The grantee highlights the transformative potential of partnerships in youth organisations. Through collaborative and coordinated efforts, the grantee has not only expanded their reach but also deepened the impact of their interventions.

The key takeaway is that partnerships are essential for sustainability in youth work. They enable organisations to pool resources, share expertise, and address service gaps that no single entity could manage alone. However, the competitive funding landscape remains a significant barrier to the full potential of these collaborations. Funders and policymakers must recognise the need for more collaborative incentives to fully unlock the power of partnership working.

By fostering stronger relationships, encouraging face-to-face interactions, and prioritising shared goals over competition, youth organisations can achieve more sustainable and impactful outcomes for young people.

