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FAMILIES WITH MULTIPLE PROBLEMS

PLUGGING THE GAP

CLARE TICKELL
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Plugging the Gap

The UK is facing the largest public sector spending cuts since the 1970s. Faced with the challenges this brings, there is a need for rapid and focused thinking. If citizens are expected to ‘do more’ we are going to need new kinds of services in order to support them to this end. As further tough policy and funding choices are made, can new forms of community engagement and social enterprise help to bridge the gap, ensuring that the most vulnerable and poorest are not left behind?

Through a series of papers published throughout 2012, Plugging the Gap will address these questions and develop ideas for practical responses to the shrinking state and cuts to services. The project will focus on how local services, citizens, networks and community assets can be better deployed to plug the gap of a shrinking state, while speaking to longer term questions around the shape of services and citizens roles in delivering these. It will seek to generate debate and action amongst RSA's 27,000-strong Fellowship and broader stakeholders and identify opportunities and barriers to innovation in austerity.

In this paper Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive of Action for Children, asks in the face of cuts and persistent problems, what can be done to better support vulnerable families with complex needs.

This essay was drafted in Spring 2012. Since then, the financial framework for the payment-by-results scheme has been published by the Troubled Families team. Louise Casey has also published a report – *Listening to Troubled Families* which describes the problems families face.

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About the author

Dame Clare Tickell, Chief Executive, Action for Children.

As Chief Executive of Action for Children since January 2005, Clare is responsible for one of the UK's largest and most important charities. Action for Children employs over 6,000 people in nearly 450 projects across the UK, supporting more than 185,000 children, young people and their families within their communities. Clare qualified as a social worker at Bristol University in 1984 and since then has worked within a number of social care and housing organisations including Centrepoint and Stonham Housing Association.

In July 2010 Children's Minister Sarah Teather asked Dame Clare Tickell, to carry out an independent review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and this was completed in April 2011.

Clare is a member of the Public Interest General Council of the Office of Public Management and the Board of The Guinness Partnership, the social housing landlord. She was a commissioner for the 2020 Public Services trust at the RSA. Clare also chairs the recently established Commission into the Future of Hospice Care sponsored by Help the Hospices.

Clare was awarded a DBE in the New Years Honours 2010 for services to young people, holds an Honorary Doctorate in Laws from Bristol University and is a Fellow of the City and Guilds Institute.

Introduction

This is the first paper to be published as part of the RSA's Plugging the Gap series. The RSA's approach informs our work on how we respond to austerity, reduced public spending and the challenges these bring; whether this is increased unemployment, slow growth or the changing shape, role and size of the state. These require us all not just to seek new ways of doing things in the short term, but also to ensure that we remain focused on our longer-term aspirations and are tapped into broader trends, so that we emerge from the current fiscal crisis 'facing the right way'.

It is only right that arguments continue about where the impact of the economic crisis and reductions in public spending are being felt most keenly, about the speed of deficit reduction and the optimum level of debt and size of the state. But while they have taken on an urgency in the current environment, even before the financial crisis, there was a broad consensus behind a need for a fundamental shift in public service productivity but that this depended on better leverage of individual and community self-help.

For the right this would happen through increased localism, as the state withdraws the centre. For the left, change would occur through redesigning the state as an agent of empowerment. For the RSA the question is this: faced with having to make rapid, top down cuts, are local authorities not just making short-term efficiency savings but re-thinking and re-engineering how they approach services with an emphasis on engaging local people and developing community-based provision?

The risk is that the economic climate and the hardship it is causing, crowds out important questions about the extent to which modern public services can meet our needs and expectations. In the face of cuts, there is some understandable suspicion that issues like citizen empowerment – and talk of the Big Society – serve at best as distractions. But as cuts continue to bite, engaging the public in delivery, and being clearer about the desired outcomes we want, becomes even more pressing.

The funding squeeze should prompt us all to ask not just what can we do differently, but whether there are new things we should be doing. Business as usual – however many efficiency measures are made – will not do. We need to continue to ask deeper questions about what longer term outcomes we seek and the role of individuals, communities and the market – alongside public and voluntary services – need to play in achieving these.

Before the credit crunch of 2008, the RSA had been exploring how public services – largely developed in the post-war period – needed to be reshaped if they were to respond to the modern world, the changing expectations and needs of the public and the major challenges of the 21st century. This paper draws on work of the 2020 Public Services Trust

hosted by the RSA, in particular the 2020 Public Services Commission, which it hosted and which published its concluding report in autumn 2010

The Commission started its work before the financial crisis hit. However, its deliberations took place against the backdrop of economic crisis. It articulated a longer-term vision of post-Beveridge public services and made the case for why this vision was not a luxury – to be set aside in times of austerity – but necessary if we are to emerge from the lean years on the right path.

It concluded that public service reform should be driven, and its success measured, by the extent to which services increased social productivity: the degree to which services enable people to contribute to meeting their own needs individually and collectively. The Commission argued for the need for three major changes to take place in the way we reform and deliver public services: a shift in culture; a shift in power; and a shift in finance.

It argued for a culture of democratic participation and social responsibility with services doing much more to engage and involve people and their communities in securing better outcomes. The state alone – big or small – cannot achieve this and neither can the market. By way of illustration, the Commission argued that rather than allow cash strapped public realm services such as libraries, parks and leisure centres to close, wherever possible these should be run as mutuals by local people.

The Commission argued that the current Whitehall model could not deliver the integrated and personalised public services that citizens need. It recommended that citizens not just be enabled to participate more, but allowed to take more control of the money spent on services such as long-term care, health and skills, backed up by choice advisers or mentors.

Underpinning these changes – both of which ‘implicate’ ordinary people more in the delivery and value of public services – should be a shift in finance so that communities become more aware of the cost of services and use them responsibly. The Commission argued for roll out of use of payment by results and the extension of social impact bond approaches to preventative services.

The Plugging the Gap project takes these themes and some of the Commission’s core insights and attempts to apply them to discreet areas. At the heart of the notion of social productivity is the empowerment of local citizen and community.

Increasing the social productivity of public services – particularly in times of austerity and where resources in some areas are being squeezed significantly – requires better participation and stewardship by local citizens, enabled not just by local authorities but by the range of organisations working at the local level. Indeed, part of the justification for the government’s Big Society strategy was recognition that the community and voluntary sector are often effective at engaging with service users and the broader community, particularly ‘harder to reach’ groups.

Since 2010, the RSA’s Connected Communities programme has been exploring new forms of community regeneration. It has emphasised the need for ‘whole person’ approaches and, in particular, those based on a deeper understanding of the powerful role that social networks can play in helping individuals and communities to make positive change. All the Plugging the Gap papers chime with this agenda, not least Clare Tickell’s

plea for national leaders and local authorities to understand and support those approaches which enable ‘troubled and troublesome’ families to help shape and deliver solutions.

Families with multiple problems

The nuclear family that is still the norm in the UK needs to be a resilient unit

Many of us face difficult times as we raise children and there have always been parents who particularly struggle; some people need more support with this than others. Parenting can be intensely challenging and rewarding, and some of us have more resources to call upon.

The nuclear family that is still the norm in the UK needs to be a resilient unit. Often it is physically distant from extended family and support. Some families are headed up by one parent and an increasing number of children have to accommodate change as parents separate and new relationships form. Most of us are fortunate enough to be supported through this; we have family and friends, employment, learned skills and high levels of resourcefulness and resilience. In the main, we will have experienced effective and positive parenting which frames our own approach to child rearing.

However, there is a small but persistent number of families who have not experienced effective parenting themselves, are poorly educated, and may struggle with personal problems including mental health, disability and drug or alcohol misuse. Add to this the pressures of economic deprivation and living in communities that experience high rates of crime and unemployment, and the multiplicity of problems facing some families can be overwhelming. Without effective interventions, these problems can be inter-generational, passed on through families where aspirations and achievements are low.

The policy response

The narrative around vulnerable families has had a high and evolving profile. This agenda really took hold after the 2005 general election with the ‘respect agenda’: the Labour government developed a strong policy narrative around anti-social behaviour, emphasising their commitment to tackling this in a robust way, with a specific focus on families. There are concerns – exacerbated by the costs of the welfare bill – that some of the underpinning principles of the post-war Beveridge settlement have unwittingly created unnecessary welfare dependency. We have seen the narrative around vulnerable families toughen as policymakers look to recent American models of residual and conditional financial support. These do not give the same primacy to protecting children as had previously been the case, concentrating instead on getting parents into work on the assumption that this will, by default, improve the lot of children.

In launching the current coalition government’s Social Justice Strategy, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith,

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emphasised the need to take a ‘whole family’ approach, placing tackling worklessness at its heart. It is difficult to discern huge differences between these policy narratives.

Both recognise that some families with the greatest levels of disadvantage have been let down by the system and need support if they are to get themselves on track. However, the nature of our political culture and public debate too often creates a simplistic populist narrative ill-matched to the realities of what are complex and deep-rooted social problems. When this reductionism spills over from the political message to delivery, the risk is that we lose sight of the needs of the children in these families.

Decision makers understand the costs of non-intervention and this has driven the urgency for change, especially at a time where resources are reduced. The impact of a wider system failure can be very high: drug misuse in the UK is estimated to cost £77.7 billion;¹ the current total costs of children in care is estimated at £2.9 billion,² and the cost of youth crime in 2009 alone was estimated at £8.5-£11 billion according to the National Audit Office (NAO).³

Whilst these problems are not confined to the most troubled families, their needs are acute and complex. Concentrating on meeting these is highly cost effective and there are models that we know work.

What works?

One example is the service that Action for Children developed 15 years ago, a pioneering family support programme aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour in Dundee. The Dundee Project was developed in response to the council facing pressure to take action on people who caused problems to their neighbours. Up-rooting families and implanting them elsewhere was not solving the problem. Families experienced agencies and individuals coming and going with promises of help or threats of sanctions that never materialised.

The project worked with families where the stakes were very high; most faced eviction because of rent arrears, complaints from neighbours about the disruption they caused, and the possibility that their children were to be taken into care. Typically these families were in touch with a multiplicity of agencies: social care, housing, the police, health, education, youth offending services and so on. Co-ordination between agencies was patchy and the support that families did receive was often confusing and contradictory. Crucially, families felt disempowered and almost incidental to decisions made about them.

The Dundee Project changed this. Highly skilled key workers work with the families and act as a bridge to other agencies, co-ordinating responses where necessary. Families come to the project knowing that the choices they face are bleak, and that they have to change but not possessing the skills, knowledge and confidence to know how.

The key worker role helps to shape the relationships that develop between agencies and families. By understanding the circumstances families face, they are able to listen, challenge and work to support them in taking control of their lives. The project helps parents develop basic skills, such as how to get children up and fed in the morning, clear up, prepare meals and institute bedtime routines. Families were often learning these things for the first time.

We have probably never been better informed about what works in supporting vulnerable families and the effects of not doing so

This was a new approach to a clearly defined problem and formal validation from an external evaluation resulted in the model being adopted by the previous Labour Government.⁴ Initially piloted and then evaluated again, the model was rolled out across the country more widely, linked to a specific funding stream, the Think Family Fund.⁵

An analysis of services for families at risk of eviction due to anti-social behaviour, found that 85% of complaints about anti-social behaviour either ceased or reduced to a level where the tenancy was no longer deemed to be at risk.⁶ The families who were involved in anti-social behaviour had decreased from 89% to 32% and the number of families with four or more anti-social behaviour problems declined from 45% to 5%.⁷

Furthermore, an analysis of social return on investment, found that for every £1 invested annually in intensive family support projects, society benefits by between £7.60 and £9.20.⁸ One family support service run by Action for Children reduces the number of children going into care by more than half, saving the local authority more than £37,000 per year for every child. If life-changing services such as these are cut across the UK, we calculate it will cost the UK economy £1.3 billion per year.⁹

Scaling up effective intervention

Despite all this, the issue of families with multiple problems or troubled families persists. The government believes that just over 120,000 families in England are experiencing multiple problems, categorised as experiencing at least five of the following characteristics:

- no member of the family is in work;
- the family are living in poor or overcrowded housing;
- neither parent has any qualifications;
- the mother has mental health problems;
- at least one parent has a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity
- the family is living on a low income; and
- the household cannot afford a number of food and clothing items.

The problem here is scale; projects had supported just over 8,841 families between February 2007 and the end of March 2011; of these¹⁰ 5,461 families received support in 2010/2011.¹¹

So, there has been a significant increase in reach. However, the key to ensuring that innovative ideas like Dundee make a widespread impact is to embed a clear trajectory from invention, to comprehensive and high-quality implementation. The big challenge we face is not about the idea but delivery. We have probably never been better informed about what works in supporting vulnerable families and the effects of not doing so. To maximise the benefits of that knowledge we must coherently define the problem we are seeking to solve, with national leadership and local application.

A highly reactive political environment inhibits an agreed and consistent definition of the problem, which in turn, coupled with increased localism, limits the capacity for consistent delivery. There are ‘lucky’ families whose local authority delivers the service, if they meet the eligibility

We now have a national mainstreamed commitment to the importance of early years development that cuts across party political lines

criteria and where there are adequate universal services to support their on-going needs. However these are in a minority and the state continues to pick up an eye watering large bill for failure each year.

As the model that we developed in Dundee proliferated, the tensions immediately became apparent. At the time there was a strong national debate about anti-social behaviour and this approach, which talked about both challenge and support as fundamental to the model's success, made some councils uneasy. Politicians were expressing an ambition that there should be a similar project in every town. Of course, the Dundee project worked specifically in Dundee; transporting the approach elsewhere meant that its core assumptions would be tested in different local contexts.

A key paradox of localism emerged. A top down edict to diverse communities as a single solution to intractable problems is highly problematic. Local councils rightly want to develop a model that resonates with their particular arrangements, populations and social problems. However, if we are to understand what works and measure the impact of interventions, and just as importantly, quality control the implementation of effective models, we need to be able to measure and compare outcomes. When central government is paying directly for these interventions, it understandably wants this accountability. The local adaptation of an approach makes qualitative comparison and evaluation at scale difficult but not impossible.

The importance of leadership

We now have a national mainstreamed commitment to the importance of early years development that cuts across party political lines, has clear standards for delivery and has remained relatively sheltered in the face of austerity. How can we secure an equivalent consensus for all the pressure points across family life, from when problems begin, to when families face problems spiralling out of their control?

Political leadership on this issue is critical. But in the face of austerity, there is a need to ensure that narrative translates into action and that we transfer the passion we have for the discourse of new and untried ideas towards the implementation of, and a fidelity to, the core of proven techniques. We need to learn from the history of a political will let down by delivery needs. Both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have conceded that more should have been done to support these families. David Cameron has now taken on the agenda pledging to turn around the lives of the most 'troubled' families. And the need to do this is acute and growing.

Those parents in these families who have been brought up in a similar environment are 34 times more likely to need drug treatment, and eight times more likely to need treatment for alcohol abuse. There are concerns about child protection in a third of such families. Action for Children's research suggests that child neglect is a growing concern.¹² Last year¹³ we found that the needs of families eligible for Intensive Family Support services have increased, with 64% of our service managers reporting that compared to six months ago, they are seeing greater need in individual families.

The 120,000 figure itself dates back to work undertaken by the previous administration and represents a huge challenge for government. Is it possible to reach this many families by the end of the parliament in 2015,

especially as we know this figure is likely to increase. Considering only 8,841¹⁴ families were supported during the last four years (5,461 families in 2010/2011)¹⁵ the government has an uphill struggle to reach the missing 111,000 families. That is not to say it is impossible.

The impact of austerity

The Action for Children experience, against the backdrop of the cuts in government spending, (before the launch of the Troubled Families programme) found that in 2011, 73% of our Intensive Family Support services have had a budget cut. Services had been forced to merge in order to remain viable. This is not necessarily a bad thing but they reported larger caseloads with fewer staff and accessibility was reduced because families no longer met new higher eligibility criteria. Services were faced with uncertainty about their future and crucially that of the universal services on which they rely.¹⁶ Government figures said that there are increasing numbers of Family Intervention Projects, This increase in families receiving support between 2009/10 and 2010/2011¹⁷ is a positive development but we fear that the statistic masks the fact that these families received differing, often lower, levels of service; a compromise in delivery that impedes outcomes. A further complication is the current focus on employment as the favoured pathway to breaking cycles of disadvantage.

Most of the families we work with need to concentrate initially and exclusively on the now in order that they can get some basic structure, safety and stability into their lives and those of their children. Many have very poor numeracy and literacy skills, have had poor experiences of learning and little or no experience of working. Parents need to concentrate on developing their parenting skills before they will be able to get into work, as well as stabilising their debts, housing situation and working on substance misuse and so on. Families cannot solve profound inter-generational problems with the assistance of a volunteer and a bit of work experience.

The £448 million available to local authorities is a significant investment. While this does not represent the full budget that is required to deliver an Intensive Family Support service to each of the 120,000 families, given the estimate that £15,000 per family is required, the funding is leverage to incentivise councils. Unless they put money in themselves, they will not benefit. This is clearly an issue given the huge financial challenges facing local authorities. For those who do take this challenge, it will be important not to fall into the trap of seeking to work with those families who are easier to reach and support, whilst reserving more draconian measures for the families who could benefit.

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Plugging the gap

We know that for every family who successfully exits our projects, there is another waiting in the wings to take their place

The economic forecast for the UK suggests that we could have a long way to go before growth picks up, and we know that the reductions in public spending will continue for some years to come. While the family intervention model is critical, in the context of austerity and increased pressure on resources, it is more important than ever to develop a broader strategy for helping troubled families.

We know that for every family who successfully exits our projects, there is another waiting in the wings to take their place. We must think about how we cut off the flow. In doing this, three things need to happen.

Leadership in learning from early years

First, we need to learn from the policy shift that has taken place around early years intervention and its importance to social mobility. Prevention is key, and if we are to reduce the need for the services outlined here, there needs to be much greater focus on reducing the flow of families coming into the system in the first place.

The existing early years infrastructure was born of successive years of political commitment. The same level of commitment is needed when it comes to vulnerable families and this means directing our leadership towards the broader definitions of early intervention (not just early years): the need to step in quickly to address the early signs of a problem and prevent escalation.

This is both intuitive and ultimately saves money. These savings can and should be reinvested in communities. They provide a potential resource for building social and community capital, so that citizens are able to take some control over where and how they live, directing and supporting local infrastructures that have resonance and relevance to their lives.

The good news is that there is a clear consensus across the political spectrum that vulnerable families need extra help and guidance. Successive Prime Ministers have ‘owned’ this issue and pledged to resolve it. The case for doing so is compelling, both in terms of financial and human capital. Targeting resources specifically is very welcome but presents difficulties as localism plays out and councils develop their own priorities in very difficult financial circumstances.

We must therefore get the national policy narrative right, and accept individual and collective responsibility for ensuring that enough is done for the children in these very troubled families. This must start from a shared understanding and a compelling narrative about the social benefits of having all our children supported in order that they can grow and develop into happy, secure and productive adults. Once articulated, this becomes a prism through which we prioritise and evaluate effectiveness, both nationally and locally. As a citizen, I want to be able to judge the

performance of my politicians measured against this. Further, I want to understand the choices that have been made to protect this ambition.

Currently, there remains an absence of courage for real debate about choices, both nationally and locally in this area of policy making. We are appalled when children or vulnerable adults are failed by the system but do not connect this with our own behaviour, community engagement or financial contribution as taxpayers or philanthropists.

In filling this void, we need a clear set of local and national conversations that establish these aspirations for all our children. This needs to be followed with an articulation of the duty of care that we have to those who have no responsibility for where they find themselves, and then think about how we can deliver that.

Increasing community capacity and deploying assets

Second, we must do much more to ensure that there is increased capacity in the communities where these families live, examining carefully the points where targeted and universal services meet.

Most of our families come to us feeling isolated and stigmatised, sometimes defiant at what they experience as wholesale rejection from their wider community. Helping them develop links within their communities and positive experiences of using universal local services is incredibly important if they are to develop feelings of belonging and accountability to those around them.

Our intensive family support services have thrived when they have been able to embed or surround themselves with other services such as children's centres, youth services for teenagers and community mental health services. Local commissioners and providers of services equally need to respond by thinking more flexibly and creatively about the assets, both material and human, that they have at their disposal.

Despite the determination to do things differently, it is still the case, after 15 years of providing intensive family support, that agencies do not co-ordinate their activities, wasting time and energy on multiple assessments and engagements. We should start from an assumption that the help provided to a child or family is seamlessly delivered from birth through to adulthood.

A pre-requisite to thinking differently – to welcoming ideas and people – is openness. Buildings can be used for lots of different things at different times; a children's centre has an ebb and flow during the day and is a potential resource during the evenings. Small organisations that are struggling financially can be co-located in larger buildings, bringing efficiencies in more ways than one. Churches and other faith groups are amongst our most valiant supporters, loaning buildings, volunteering and much more besides. Other public organisations should think about the facilities that they have and consider how best they can be used for the wider community, not just in terms of opening hours but also as assets, which are jointly owned.

As we close down our youth clubs and other facilities because of the squeeze on public finances, are we automatically considering how the community can be helped to do more? The prerequisite of this is co-production and the sustainable development of social capital. Local agencies need to

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enable this dynamism, tapping into the will, commitment and energy of local people who, after all, own these community assets.

Children's centres

While these measures could make a sizeable impact, the third thing we can do is to focus, in particular, on the role of children's centres, which provide a site for both local leadership and a considerable untapped resource for the future.

Children's centres are incredibly well placed to act as effective hubs in local communities where people come together. The key to sustainable progress in community cohesion is an organic blend of personal, social and community capital, rooted in accessible multi-functional community assets where stigma is minimised through a universal offer. This makes it clear to the most advantaged in communities, not just what they get, but what they can give as part of the deal.

This happens most effectively when innovation is allowed to thrive, when the people using the centres become the co-designers and co-creators of what is on offer. We have often seen very isolated families successfully brought into these services, initially for specific appointments and then more generally, welcomed and supported by staff, volunteers and other members of the community.

Children's centres offer a wide range of 'volunteer opportunities' for members of the local community. These are beneficial to users of their services and are also helpful in enabling parents and members of local communities to share in support for families. While some volunteers may use this as a stepping stone into employment, others may find it useful in developing social and community capital. Helping develop the confidence of adults to undertake good quality parenting is a key building block in the building of community capacity.¹⁸

The impacts of volunteering on children, families and communities are tangible and tested. Evaluation has found that volunteers bring extra capacity and provide an informal reassuring presence for families. It found volunteering in children's centres strengthens people's links with the local community and increases the use and reach of children's centres by helping to break down any stigma associated with use, as well as creating routes to employment, education or training.¹⁹

Children's centres offer real opportunities to bring communities together. If they are resourced to be universally accessible and allowed the space to be user-led, the possibilities are there for the taking. However, we must find a way for them to become genuinely community-wide assets and not ghettos for the most disadvantaged. Getting that balance right is crucial as we seek to secure sustainability through a more diverse portfolio of funding and support.

Replicating models that work

The Action for Children Cowgate Family Support Volunteer Project would be a good place to start if we want to replicate – adjusting for local context – best practice. The project is at the heart of the local community. Focused on providing children from birth to 12 with a good start in life, it is based at the children's centre, which provides a place for families to meet, play, learn and find out about other local services they can use. Like many children's

centres, this includes good quality learning integrated with childcare, parental outreach, child and family health services, support for families where there are children with additional needs, links with the local job centre, training and education providers and broad family support services. Examples of work include a baby social, a community baby clinic, family drop in, a workclub, a sensory play area and access to a library.

The children's centre focuses on pre-school children, but has programmes to support older children and parents, and provides specific advice about health, welfare, housing and employment. The centre is located in a deprived area and the play sessions, parenting clubs, work training and welfare advice on offer, provide invaluable support for many families.

The volunteering project recruits and trains local people from the Cowgate and Blakelaw estates in Newcastle to help support local families. Referrals come from universal and targeted services operating within the voluntary and statutory sectors. Volunteers support local families to make positive changes in their lives and to build their parenting capacity. At the same time volunteers strengthen their own confidence and employability skills. The project recruits, trains and matches volunteers with families at an early stage, visiting them in their homes to provide peer support and helping access other services before issues become complex and reach crisis point. This transformational work was rooted in the creativity and passion of the staff who were given the space and support to follow it through.

Our Leamington and Warwick West Children's Centre offers a wide range of activities to fit in with the needs of their community, all free of charge. This includes pregnancy and postnatal advice about children's health and development, adult learning and parents' wellbeing. There is also access to specialist family services such as speech therapy and help with managing money.

The centre works on the premise that the building of supportive and trusting relationships is key to accessing both formal and informal support, for both the parents and their children. Based on this mediatory model, the team has set up a coffee shop for parents with children under 5 to act as a place in which such relationships could be formed. The shop has been purposefully set up on the end of the high street closest to areas of disadvantage in order to catch the parents from such estates as they walk into the centre of Brunswick. We provide the facilities for a volunteer run vegetable store at the neighbouring children's centre. Whilst we have helped with the set-up, it is the volunteers who use the children's centres, who work with a wholesaler. They bulk-buy vegetables, divide them into individual packs, and then on a Friday, sell them. The vegetables are very cheap for the children's centre users to buy and they cook the vegetables together, for the mothers (and a few fathers) to take home.

Another model is our Newcastle Family Support Service, which is commissioned by Newcastle City Council to deliver targeted family support services in central children's centres. The service aims to reach those children aged from birth to five years old, who are most vulnerable to the poorest outcomes. This is an outreach home visiting service working directly with children and indirectly with parents to achieve positive change for the children. The service works as part of Integrated Services delivering support to children and their families through the Common

Assessment Framework (CAF). As part of the CAF process Family Support Workers act as Lead Professional and co-ordinate the delivery of services for a child that has been identified as having additional needs. Referrals for support come through the Sure Start Supporting Families pathway, an integrated, consistent, citywide approach to allocating resources to support children and families.

Building community capacity is central to all of these examples and they provide models for a broader much more ambitious approach. Building capacity in communities takes time because it starts with building capacity in people. People who do not start with the confidence and resilience to power ahead from a standing start, with the right investment and time, can do just that and take others with them. These are the people, who have the ideas, who know their community and the issues it faces, and who have the relationships needed to get things moving. These are also the people who welcome those who have been continually excluded, taking pride in what they are building and are a part of.

Conclusion

This paper outlines some models that work for those families who are the most troubled and troublesome and it is one that can be used flexibly depending on local circumstances. Projects like the Cowgate Family Support Volunteer Project are dependent on high-quality inputs including qualified and experienced staff who can navigate their way through complex issues, and a multiplicity of different interests, bringing families along with them, always mindful of the primacy of keeping children safe. If this model is working with the right families, employment is a goal to be achieved once the family unit is stable and routines established. That employment might be via volunteering in the local community, a children's centre or other resource.

Our experience is that this has strong, positive and enduring impacts in some of the most disempowered communities and that, far from reinforcing intolerance and stigmatisation of the most troubled families, it does the opposite.

In building on this, we need strong national leadership, as well as creative and innovative work responding to local issues, with children's centres providing an excellent place to start. Our aim must be to extend our understanding of prevention beyond early years and – like the best children's centres and family intervention projects – develop a broad, inclusive and imaginative response for extraordinary times.

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8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

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