

Targeted youth support

Integrated support for vulnerable young people – emerging practice



Voluntary and community groups increase their influence in Southwark

Area: Southwark, London Borough, South East London, population approximately 250,000

“We help the 450 voluntary and community groups for children and young people in Southwark communicate regularly and collaborate with each other. By speaking with one voice they are able to really influence and improve the way Southwark supports children and young people” - **Natalia Sali, Assistant Director-Children’s and Families of Southwark Community Care Forum (SCCF), January 2008**

Challenges

- Engaging all voluntary and community sector (VCS) groups
- Ensuring all local VCS groups are fully involved in local developments for children and young people
- Helping 450 VCS member organisations increase capacity and work more collaboratively

Key Actions

- 2002: SCCF improves database - ensures all local VCS organisations helping children and young people included
- Natalia Sali visits VCS groups to see how they work, what they need and to identify any barriers to engagement
- SCCF provides free training and financial advice to VCS
- SCCF creates five year plan and more opportunities for VCS to sit on local partnerships, e.g. the Children’s Trust and Southwark Safeguarding Children Board
- Targeted youth support (TYS) pathfinder in one of four borough localities – learning from this to be roll-out
- SCCF events introducing children’s policy, e.g. Every Child Matters, TYS, Common Assessment Framework to find how VCS groups can best work with children’s services
- SCCF instrumental in developing first Southwark children and young people’s participation framework - NRF-funded
- Local strategic partnership decides to focus on children and young people, involve them in meetings and give them a say in decisions on education, crime reduction and health
- SCCF helps VCS groups incorporate the new Children’s Workforce Induction Standards into their own inductions – by training/employing a training officer to mentor groups

Key Implementation Tips

- Be flexible on meeting times and venues so smaller VCS groups come. VCS groups are diverse and have different needs, be responsive to these needs
- Talk and meet regularly with council and VCS groups. Good relationships are key to influence change. Always inform members of developments and encourage feedback
- Ask council departments what you can support and how you can work collaboratively to help VCS organisations
- Update your database on an ongoing basis
- Good communication – verbal, paper, electronic – allows everyone to input
- Invite council representatives to VCS meetings – especially those involved in funding and commissioning
- Maintain networks of different sub-sectors – e.g. disability, faith, early years, teenage pregnancy

Impact

The VCS is now much more an equal partner with the council. It has robust representation in key partnership boards where it inputs into plans such as the Children and Young Person’s Plan, the Local Area Agreement and children, young person’s and parent participation and information sharing plans. The strategic director of Children’s Services and lead commissioner are now regular attendees at SCCF meetings. There is much greater VCS representation on partnership boards, such as the Children’s Trust, the safeguarding board and its sub-groups with these individuals representing all VCS groups, ensuring a collaborative voice is heard.

The VCS is now more involved in working with organisations to shape local policy and support for children and young people and in developing and providing activities and support by involving children and young people in, for example, student and youth councils and on panels that prepare and review funding proposals.

Children and young people now have more confidence in services. In a recent pupils’ survey, they said they feel Southwark is now a safer place to live. SCCF is now working with all partners, e.g. the police, Youth Offending Team, youth service and the VCS, to ensure the needs of children and young people are responded to collaboratively and to ensure clear communication between partners and strategic buy in to the Children’s Trust.

To find out more, contact

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