

Derbyshire Voluntary, Community and Independent Sector Roadshow Events

Under the Children Act 2004, the local authority and their relevant partners have a duty to make long term arrangements to promote co-operation to improve the well being of children and young people. Statutory guidance on interagency co-operation makes it clear that VCI organisations should be involved at every level of Children's Trusts. This includes the involvement of the VCI sector in planning, commissioning and service delivery.

DFES 2005 advice and guidance on engaging the VCI sector identifies several key principles to consider for the Children's Trust when developing their relationship with the VCI sector:

- Diversity and Inclusion – the need to take into account diversity and ensure widest possible engagement across the VCI sector
- Fitness for purpose –appropriateness of organisations using their expertise without conflict of interest
- Accountability – Children's trust and representatives need to agree responsibility for sharing participation and information with wider VCI sector
- Transparency – information about the Children's Trust and how to engage is made available to VCI providers
- Building VCI sector capacity to be involved –Children's Trust recognises the contribution made by VCI providers and contributes to capacity building in the sector.

The integrated inspection framework for children's services will assess how well such partnerships agreements are working.

The activities of the Children's Trust should be delivered in line with the local compact agreement which is a locally agreed code governing the relationship between statutory sector and VCI organisations

Throughout December 06 and January 07 a series of Road show events were delivered to children and young peoples Voluntary, Community and Independent sector providers (VCI). More than 120 providers attended the area events ranging from playgroups to youth support from across the county, the events were all highly interactive with lots of ideas and suggestions for future arrangements to ensure a close working relationship between the Children's Trust and the VCI sector.

The events were designed to ensure that groups working with children and young people in the VCI sector across Derbyshire, gained further knowledge about the Children's Trust and the Children and Young People's Plan and had opportunity to begin to demonstrate their current contribution to the agenda.

There was an astonishing lack of knowledge about the Children's Trust and the Children and Young People's Plan, but eagerness to engage and clear evidence that the VCI sector is already contributing a vast amount to this agenda.

There was wide consensus expressed about the advantages to be gained by involving the VCI sector in the overall developments of the new children and young people's services model.

These refer to:

- Their strong community roots
- Their ability to be flexible and responsive to need
- Being trusted and valued by local communities and particular client groups
- Their experience and expertise in providing variety of services, including preventative services
- Their expertise in encouraging active participation of service users
- Their experience to draw on a range of funding sources that are not accessible to public sector bodies

The events were also an opportunity for the VCI sector to give their views on how they would like to be represented, communicated with and engaged in Children's Trust developments.

Proposals include:

Representation

- Small VCI reference group with representatives from across the county, ensuring a wide range of organisations, working with children and young people 0-19 years from universal to specialist provision.
- Identifying ways of ensuring VCI organisations for young people are represented and linked into the district and county youth forums.

Communication

- Children's Trust Newsletter to all VCI organisations across county.
- Access to an interactive website for VCI sector to share best practice, ideas, concerns and developments relating to the Children's Trust agenda.
- To consider holding a countywide showcase event championing of the VCI sector.
- A central database of all organisations that provide services to children and young people across the county.

Engagement

- Regular road show events in each district to provide ongoing information about the Children's Trust developments.

- The need for a named officer to coordinate work between VCI organisations and the statutory sector regarding the development of the Children's Trust.
- The need to invest in and build the capacity of the VCI sector to work towards a fair playing field across all sectors working with children and young people.

Whilst the organisations involved in the 6 road show events varied there were a number of additional common issues that were identified.

- It is important that the Children's Trust builds on existing good practice already covered with the sector and not to duplicate practice already taken place.
- The need to treat the VCI sector as equal professional partners and to utilise the expertise that the VCI brings to the Children's Trust.
- The need to ensure a stronger workforce development across the VCI sector, particularly around VCI youth provision extending the opportunities already available to early years and childcare providers.
- The need to have a recognised quality assurance system for VCI youth providers as a supplement to the national youth service scheme.

These events have been extremely successful. For the first time the contribution that the VCI sector is already making to the priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan has begun to be identified and collated and will form a significant part of the Plan Review documentation. The VCI sector participants have gained an understanding of the Children's Trust and are eager to be part of it. Proposals have been suggested for strengthening the relationship between the VCI and the statutory sectors and recognition has been given to the immense benefits that this has for all sectors, but most importantly for further improving the services received by children, young people and families in Derbyshire.