social research

CRIME AND JUSTICE

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Evaluation of the

Reducing Reoffending Change Fund

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Introduction

The Reducing Reoffending Change Fund (RRCF) has two key aims:

- to provide prolific young male offenders and women offenders with substantial one-to-one support through evidence-based mentoring schemes;
- to promote strong, equal partnership working between third and public sector organisations.

RRCF funding was allocated to six Public Social Partnerships (PSPs) to deliver mentoring schemes for offenders.

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the PSP model delivers effective mentoring services that reduce the risk of reoffending.

Key findings

- There is strong evidence that mentoring is an effective approach which helps mentees to learn constructive, non-criminal ways of addressing problems and which reduces risk factors associated with offending.

- In combination with a wider system of support – and mentoring also helps engagement with other services – the evidence suggests that this will, in the long term, contribute to a reduction in reoffending. There is therefore a strong case for the continuation and expansion of mentoring services.

- Whether mentoring services are best provided by PSPs (as opposed to other models of funding and delivery) is less clear. One element in the assessment of whether the PSP model has been successful is whether the services are sustained beyond the current funding period – and that will not be known until after funding expires in 2017. What is clear, however, is that the model has led public sector partners to a significantly increased appreciation of the expertise and potential contribution of the third sector.

Background

The RRCF is one of three change funds created by the Scottish Government in 2012 to help drive a decisive shift towards preventative spending. The RRCF has two key aims:

- to provide prolific young male offenders and women offenders with substantial one-to-one support through evidence-based mentoring schemes;
- to promote strong, equal partnership working between third and public sector organisations.

RRCF funding was allocated to six PSPs – strategic partnerships between third sector and public sector organisations – to deliver mentoring schemes for offenders. Each PSP was led by a third sector organisation, designed to give the third sector a primary role within each partnership.

The aim of the independent evaluation was to provide a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which the PSP model delivers effective mentoring services that reduce the risk of reoffending and support reintegration. The lessons learned about mentoring and PSPs will inform the future use of these approaches.

Methodology

The mixed-method evaluation was carried out in three phases between September 2013 and November 2015. It included:

- analysis of data collected by PSPs, including surveys of mentees;
- in-depth interviews with mentees;
- focus groups and in-depth interviews with mentors;
- in-depth interviews with representatives from each PSP's lead organisation and a sample of partner organisations;
- an online survey with organisations involved in each PSP;
- in-depth interviews with national stakeholders.

The evaluation was structured around the programme logic model which showed the planned resources (inputs) and activities that were intended to lead to short, medium and, ultimately, long term outcomes.

Findings on resources

Resources were, broadly speaking, invested as planned and were generally sufficient. However, managers in lead organisations found that the time involved in setting up the services was considerably greater than they had anticipated; some services therefore took longer than planned to become fully operational.

The findings suggest that six months should be the minimum period of engagement for most mentees and many would benefit from a longer period.

Findings on mentoring activities

Although there is no single definition of mentoring, a common feature of different approaches to mentoring in practice is that the mechanism of engagement is based on a one-to-one relationship where two people come together to form a bond (Social Mentoring Research Group, University of Brighton, 2015).

In general, mentoring services were implemented as planned. The timing, frequency and format of contact varied depending on the needs of the individual mentee. The approach used by mentors also varied and depended on the needs and goals of the mentee and the preferred style of the mentor.

However, the most important factor was the development of a close one-to-one relationship between the mentee and the mentor. The following qualities, skills and behaviours were key to building relationships and were consistently demonstrated by mentors: regular contact; being non-judgmental; treating the mentee as an equal; being easy-going; being a relaxing, calming influence; listening; challenging; being persistent; encouraging the mentee to set goals; encouraging mentees to think through consequences; praising and building self-esteem; sharing their own personal experiences and difficulties they have overcome; caring; respecting confidentiality; and encouraging engagement with other services.

Mentees felt that mentors were different to many staff from other services because they were non-judgmental and were focused on *them* and on *their* needs and goals.

Findings on exits and attrition

The ending of the relationship could be difficult for both mentees and mentors and the extent to which mentors prepared mentees for the ending of the relationship varied. This suggests that PSPs should give more guidance and advice to mentors to help them ensure that mentees are prepared for exit.

Of those who had exited the service, 44% had planned exits and 56% had unplanned exits. Comparison with other literature suggests that the proportion of unplanned exits is not out of line with those of other mentoring services for offenders.

Findings on outcomes for mentees

Mentees who engaged were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of mentoring and it was clear that some mentees had experienced very significant, transformational change. Others had experienced less significant changes but had nonetheless worked with their mentors to address some specific problems.

The outcome areas that showed most improvement were those linked with attitudes and motivations and those which were more in the direct control of the mentee. These are areas that may help in the initial stages of the change process such as increased problem solving and emotion management skills, increased motivation to

engage with the mentor, increased motivation to change behaviour, and increased social skills.

Areas that showed less improvement were more connected with external factors such as family, accommodation, work or education, and substance use – and often require the input of external agencies. It may require a longer period of mentoring to support engagement with these other agencies.

Length of engagement was the key factor that influenced the amount of progress made by mentees: those who engaged with the mentoring service for longer were more likely to make progress on outcomes.

Findings on outcomes for mentors

Feedback from mentors indicated that mentoring can be an immensely rewarding role. It can also be very demanding and mentors require: specific induction and training on the role; the opportunity to share experiences with other mentors; and the opportunity for clinical supervision.

Findings on PSP outcomes

There are clear advantages to the PSP model and 85% of partners would choose to be part of a PSP again.

The short term outcomes in the PSP logic model have very largely been achieved. There was evidence of increased co-production of services, increased awareness of services provided by partners and other stakeholders, increased trust among partners and, in particular, increased understanding among partners of their respective expertise and potential contribution. The intended short term outcomes of increased inclusion of the user voice and improved communication between partners have been achieved in part.

The medium term outcomes in the PSP logic model have also been achieved in part. There was evidence of improved relationships among public and third sector organisations and improved coordination of services. The intended medium term outcomes of more effective and more efficient services for offenders have been achieved in part. It is too early to say whether the model leads to more sustainable services for offenders or increased involvement of a wide range of partners in service development.

However, the application of the PSP methodology was not the only means by which these outcomes could have been achieved, as they could potentially have been achieved through other funding mechanisms (such as the direct commissioning of services by public sector partners) and other models of working (such as third sector partners collaborating to deliver services outwith the PSP model).

Broader lessons on mentoring services for people who offend

The extent to which findings are generalisable to other settings will, of course, depend on a number of factors including the approach used and the target group.

Development of a close one-to-one relationship is the most important factor. The qualities, skills and behaviours listed under 'Findings on Mentoring Activities' above were key – and should be emphasised in other mentoring services for people who offend.

Detailed matching may not be necessary for effective delivery. Few PSPs undertook detailed matching of mentee to mentor but this did not appear to be necessary and almost all mentees felt that they were well matched.

Mentoring with people who offend will often require a level of practical support that would not be expected in mentoring with some other groups. The provision of this support helps address immediate priorities (such as housing and money) which is often essential if the mentee is to move on to tackle medium or longer term goals; it helps develop the mentee's trust in the mentor; and it provides the mentor with an opportunity to model appropriate behaviour and ways of dealing effectively with other services.

Areas most likely to show improvement. In the relatively short time-span of the RRCF mentoring relationship (generally up to five or six months at most), areas that showed most improvement are those linked with attitudes and motivations and those which are more in the direct control of the mentee. Areas that showed less improvement are more connected with external factors, such as family, accommodation, work or education, and substance use – and require the input of external agencies. This indicates that a longer period of mentoring may be needed to secure and sustain engagement with these other agencies.

Availability of other services. Mentoring can play a key role in linking mentees with other services and encouraging engagement with them. However, this is necessarily limited by the availability and the effectiveness of other services.

Length of engagement. The evaluation has suggested that many mentees would benefit from a longer period of engagement than six months. Future evaluations should therefore weigh the potential benefits of a longer period of engagement for fewer individuals versus a shorter period of engagement for more individuals.

Mentors require clear guidance and training on how to prepare mentees for exit.

Broader lessons on the PSP model

Scale and the extent to which services are 'new'. The advantages and challenges of the PSP model varied quite considerably depending on the size and the starting point. In deciding whether to use the PSP model for future initiatives, it is therefore worth considering the likely size and starting point of the potential PSPs. If they are likely to be small and developed from existing services, having a PSP model (as opposed to direct commissioning) may provide some advantages but is likely to have less of an impact. If the potential PSPs would be large and new, then the PSP model may convey more advantages in comparison with direct commissioning, but more time will be needed for development and set-up.

Sharing information and networking. The PSP model facilitates the sharing of information among partners. Where there are a number of PSPs working in the same field, having the opportunity to share information *across* PSPs is also valuable.

Funding criteria can limit co-production. The PSP model can increase the co-production of services by third sector and public sector partners. However, this is potentially limited by the initial funding criteria: the stricter the criteria for what type of service should be provided for whom, and how that service should be delivered, the less scope there is for co-production by partners.

Ensuring the inclusion of the user voice. There does not appear to be anything about the PSP model, in itself, which encourages the inclusion of the user voice in the design or development of services. Services therefore need to give specific thought to how this might be achieved on an ongoing, strategic basis, beyond the work undertaken in the initial stages of service design.

Relationships between third sector partners. Where PSPs involve more than one third sector body, this leads to increased trust and understanding of each other's expertise. However, there was acknowledgement that the long-term benefits of this might be limited if, and when, they revert to being 'rivals' for future funding of the service.

Need for clear accountability and decision making. The lead partner needs to be empowered and prepared to make operational decisions and to take prompt action when appropriate. There may be occasions where difficult or contentious decisions require to be made outwith the PSP board meetings and, as far as possible, partners should agree in advance how these decisions will be handled.

Having a mix of both national and local PSPs in the same field is potentially problematic. The potential for geographical duplication of service provision needs to be carefully worked through. There are also implications for sustainability with both local and national PSPs feeling they are disadvantaged: the former because they fear their voice will be lost at a national funding level, and the latter because they fear that local commissioners will favour the local service.

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:
☐ are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics.

☐ are available via an alternative route.

☒ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.

☐ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

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