

# Looking to the future: Ready to deliver

The contribution of the voluntary and  
community sector in providing services for  
children, young people and families in the West Midlands

A report for Children England and RAWM

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Children England

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## Contents

<a href="#"><u>1. Introduction</u></a>	3
<a href="#"><u>2. Methodology</u></a>	4
<a href="#"><u>3. The breadth, depth and quality of voluntary and community sector provision for children, young people and families living in the West Midlands:</u></a>	6
<a href="#"><u>3.1 Silkmore Partnership for Youth</u></a>	7
<a href="#"><u>3.2 611s</u></a>	7
<a href="#"><u>3.3 The Gap Community Centre: Action Dads &amp; Dad's Aloud</u></a>	8
<a href="#"><u>3.4 Life: Walsall LIFE House</u></a>	9
<a href="#"><u>3.5 brap: Equalities Engaging Young People</u></a>	10
<a href="#"><u>3.6 Solihull Leisure Opportunities</u></a>	11
<a href="#"><u>3.7 Family Support Network</u></a>	12
<a href="#"><u>3.8 The Children's Society: Reunite</u></a>	13
<a href="#"><u>3.9 Transition to Adulthood</u></a>	14
<a href="#"><u>4. The current challenges facing voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families</u></a>	15
<a href="#"><u>5. Conclusion</u></a>	20

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**Vicky Odams**  
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# 1. Introduction

RAWM's *Sustaining Influence and Change* programme is a three year project working to build the voice of the West Midlands' voluntary and community sector, its confidence to engage with policy makers and capacity to influence regional decision making. The programme began in 2008/9 and is supported by Big Lottery BASIS funding until March 2011.

Within this programme of work RAWM supported the establishment of regional thematic policy groups which included a policy group G:Up (Growing Up in the West Midlands<sup>1</sup>). G:Up as a policy group brought together groups and organisations working across the spectrum of children, young people and family services. In this final year of the programme RAWM, on behalf of G:Up, commissioned Children England in December 2010 to produce a report. This report showcases the breadth, variety and the added value of work being undertaken by voluntary and community sector organisations as well as highlighting the key issues currently being faced by this part of the sector.

Organisations within the voluntary and community sector as well as local authorities and other public bodies are facing huge uncertainty and difficult choices over the coming months. Ensuring that children, young people and families have access to the high quality services they need, while dealing with significant budget reductions and changing government policy, will be testing for all. Although, the landscape is complex and challenging, it is important through reports such as this that the actual and potential contribution of the voluntary and community sector is not lost.

For this reason the aims of this report are to:

- highlight the role of the voluntary and community sector in providing services and meeting the needs of children, young people and families in the West Midlands;
- showcase the breadth and quality of services the sector can offer; and
- place the voluntary and community sector firmly on the radar of commissioners, councillors and decision makers as a sector which is able and ready to deliver high quality, high value and high impact services.

There are a vast array of voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families in the West Midlands from small neighbourhood groups to large national charities. The breadth and quality of voluntary and community sector provision are showcased in this report through the presentation of nine case studies. The case studies have been selected to be representative of the diversity of provision by the sector in their work with children, young people and families reflecting a range of organisation size, geography and focus.

Following the methodology section the nine case studies are presented before the report turns to considering the key challenges facing voluntary and community sector organisations in the West Midlands.

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<sup>1</sup> G:up is an alliance of West Midlands children and young people's voluntary and community sector organisations and networks as well as public sector and national partners. G;up works regionally to develop networks, communications and collaboration, build capacity and shape policy and strategy. For more information visit [www.gup.org](http://www.gup.org)

## 2. Methodology

Work with children, young people and families cuts across many service areas, issues and other specialisms. The three tiers of service ('windscreen') model was selected as the most useful approach to collating case studies to showcase the breadth of voluntary and community sector provision within the children young people and families sector; enabling organisations to be identified as providers of universal<sup>2</sup>, targeted<sup>3</sup> or specialist<sup>4</sup> services.

### 2.1 Case study selection

An overview of the research objectives and 'expression of interest template' were widely circulated through respective member organisations and networks asking interested organisations to submit an overview of their service for consideration and to confirm their ability to complete a more in-depth case study template and follow-up telephone call in the required timescale if selected.

Although the very tight timescales for this piece of work (organisations had only two days to respond to the initial call for case studies) and it's timing (early December at a time when some organisations were dealing with funding cuts) over 75 organisations submitted information for consideration.

From these organisations 11 case studies were selected to showcase the breadth and contribution of voluntary and community sector provision for children, young people and families in the region. The case studies were selected to be representative of the range of organisational size, and level and type of work undertaken by the sector collectively providing:

- examples of the quality of work focussed on children, young people, and parents and families that is on offer;
- work across a number of areas and issues including: volunteer led club work; positive activities for children and young people; equalities; disability; homelessness; runaways; family support; young parents; parenting support; young offenders; young mums; and work with dads;
- a range of universal, targeted and specialist services;
- a geographic spread across the West Midlands (West Midlands; Birmingham; Coventry; Stoke on Trent; Staffordshire; Solihull; Telford & Wrekin; Walsall; Warwickshire; and Wolverhampton); and
- a variety of small, medium and large voluntary and community sector organisations.

Two selected case study organisations subsequently had to withdraw from the research due to unexpected capacity issues and, due to the tight timescales involved, were not able to be replaced.

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<sup>2</sup> **Universal** services are open to all children, young people and/or families and meet the needs that all children, young people and/ or families have.

<sup>3</sup> **Targeted** services are aimed at particular groups of children, young people and/or families with additional needs who need extra or more focussed support.

<sup>4</sup> **Specialist** services work with children, young people and/ or families with specialist, acute, complex or very high level needs.

Selected organisations completed a more in-depth final case study template from which the final case study was written up before being signed off by the organisation. Where names of children or young people have been used these have been changed to protect identity.

## **2.2 Supplementary information collated**

In light of the current economic environment, it was agreed that a snapshot survey should be undertaken to look at the likely implications of the cuts on organisations, the services they provide and the individuals and families that access these services. Follow-up telephone interviews were carried out with each case study organisation to identify the key challenges facing their organisations in the next six months and in the slightly longer term (18 months) and to explore what they felt would make the biggest difference in enabling their organisation to be in a position to meet these challenges.

Findings from these telephone interviews were collated to identify common issues across the sector. These common issues were then cross-referenced with information gathered through a brief proforma from the 55 delegates from the children, young people and families sector attending the '*Looking to the Future*' event on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011. Although just under half of the delegates completed and returned the proforma this did provide some opportunity for comparing the findings from the small sample of the case study group with a slightly wider group and identifying common trends.

### **3. The breadth, depth and quality of voluntary and community sector provision for children, young people and families living in the West Midlands**

This section provides a range of case studies from across the region selected to give an overview of the breadth, depth and quality of services being provided by the voluntary and community sector for children, young people, parents and families. There is a vast array of provision by the sector addressing many different needs and issues on a variety of levels - the individual, family or wider community. The case studies presented here give an overview of this diversity but are by no means an exhaustive list of the services being provided in any locality or the regional as a whole.

#### **3.1 Silkmore Partnership for Youth (SPY), Staffordshire**

A small volunteer led organisation providing *universal* positive activities for children and young people

#### **3.2 611s, Telford & Wrekin**

A small volunteer led organisation providing *universal* positive activities for children

#### **3.3 The Gap Community Centre, Warwickshire**

A small organisation providing a range of *universal* services including parenting support to dads/male carers

#### **3.4 Life, Walsall**

A medium sized organisation providing *targeted* services for young women who are homeless and pregnant or have a young child

#### **3.5 brap, West Midlands**

A medium sized equalities organisation working with young people around issues of equalities particularly *targeted* at young people living in 'disadvantaged areas'

#### **3.6 Solihull Leisure Opportunities (SoLO), Solihull**

A small organisation providing a range of both *targeted* and *specialist* services for children and young people with learning and other disabilities

#### **3.7 Family Support Network, Stoke on Trent**

A network of families organisations providing a range of both *targeted* and *specialist* support services to parents and families

#### **3.8 The Children's Society, Coventry**

A local project of a large national organisation delivering *specialist* support to young people in Coventry who run away from home or care

#### **3.9 Transition to Adulthood (T2A), Birmingham**

A medium sized organisation providing *specialist* support to young offenders/ex offenders

### 3.1 Silkmore Partnership for Youth

#### Organisation Overview

Silkmore Partnership for Youth (SPY) is a volunteer-led youth group working to provide a safe environment for young people in Silkmore aged 7-17 to come together and take part in various activities and sports. SPY also runs projects for older people to try to strengthen relations between younger and older community members.

#### Project Description

SPY meets once a week, including in school holidays, in the local primary school and its onsite Children's Centre and works closely with the school and Community and Learning Partnership. Volunteers strive to provide interesting activities and also bring in guest speakers to address a variety of subject and issues faced by the young people they work with. The group fundraises to cover its costs and occasionally applies for grants for specific projects. SPY is supported in its work through its membership of both Staffordshire Council for Voluntary Youth Services (SCVYS) and Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs (bayc).

SPY gives children and young people a sense of belonging in the local community and seeks to improve their confidence and self esteem through the activities it provides. It is recognised as a provider of youth activities by the Youth Service and as a valuable asset by the wider community.

### 3.2 611s

#### Organisation Overview

611s is a volunteer-led, community based youth club for children aged 6- 11 in the Wrockwardine Wood area of Telford. Volunteers work to provide safe, informal and fun activities for local children in this age range and to involve local people in the running of the club.

#### Project Description

611s meets once a week and provides a friendly and safe place for local children to meet and have fun. Funds for activities are raised through grants and a small weekly contribution from each child. The club has further benefited the community through building community spirit as the adults involved get to know each other, providing support for parents and increasing community skills and involvement. The experience and skills gained through volunteering has enabled one previously unemployed volunteer to secure a job as a teaching assistant in the local school. 611s is helped in its work by Telford and Wrekin Council's Voluntary Sector Support Team who provide support, advice and access to resources and training.

#### Personal Story

Chloe and her family were being severely bullied in their street. Chloe could not play out safely and started to miss school. Her mum became very stressed and had to have time off work, take medication and receive counselling. The local police officer suggested 611s as a safe place for Chloe to play and make new friends, he also challenged the bullies. Chloe settled in quickly and really enjoyed herself at 611s. Before long her mum had a CRB and checked references and joined the volunteer team as a leader. Chloe is not being bullied in the street anymore. Her mum is off medication and is back to work. She feels the club saved her and her daughter.

### **3.3 The Gap Community Centre Fathers' Projects: Action Dads & Dad's Aloud**

#### **Organisation Overview**

The Gap works on the Percy and Emscote estates of Warwick providing a range of high quality activities for children, young people and families including: Stay and Play with parenting support; youth work sessions; youth volunteering schemes; and holiday activities for all ages. The Gap has also established a social enterprise, The Gap Creative, offering bespoke youth work sessions to other local voluntary and statutory sector organisations.

#### **Project Description**

The Gap runs two projects which aim to increase fathers' confidence in parenting through providing opportunities for them to spend time with their children, learn about their development, parenting and ways to engage with their children, as well as the chance to meet other fathers, share experiences and make new friends. Both groups are staffed by male workers who encourage the development of peer support.

Dad's Aloud, a fortnightly Stay and Play session run in partnership with the local Children's Centre, works with fathers and/or male carers and children aged 0-5 years. Action Dads, delivered in partnership with Adult and Community Learning, provides more structured sessions for fathers and/or male carers and children aged 5-8 years with a theme and specific age appropriate learning activities for each session.

Dads really value these sessions. Through evaluations and feedback they have reported being more confident to play with their children; improved relationships with their children and, where applicable, their partners; and feeling much more involved with the family. Mums also report an improvement as well as valuing the opportunity to have some time for themselves away from the children. Dads from the projects now also socialise together.

#### **Personal Story**

Dave was very hesitant when he was asked to sign in his son in at Action Dads, scribbling something illegible on the paper. Because the Gap were working in partnership with Adult and Community Learning they were able to quietly draw their attention to this and ask for some advice. A worker spent time getting to know Dave and eventually he disclosed that he was unable read or write. He was then referred to Adult and Community Learning for literacy classes. Because they had already built a relationship with him at Action Dads this was not an issue for Dave and he started classes. Dave's son is now too old for Action Dad's and has moved on to attending youth club at The Gap.

#### **Added Value**

The Gap is the only project working with fathers on a long term basis in the local area. Its approach is long term, working with fathers and their children from birth to develop well established relationships with the hope of continuing to support families as children grow and progress through the other services they provide. Working in partnership with Warwick Children's Centre and Adult and Community Learning enables the projects to signpost parents to other services where relationships have already been developed. The Gap is also looking to develop work with young fathers in partnership with Respect Yourself and Warwickshire Clubs for Young People.

### 3.4 LIFE: Walsall LIFE House

#### Organisation Overview

LIFE exists to save lives and transform the futures of some of the most disadvantaged children and young people in the UK by supporting vulnerable pregnant mothers and young families through difficult times. The charity runs a number of projects across the UK: supported accommodation for homeless, pregnant young women; non-directive counselling; practical support to families in difficulty; educational talks in schools and colleges; and a more natural alternative to traditional fertility treatment.

#### Project Description

Walsall LIFE House is a Life homelessness project providing a safe, secure 'home from home' environment for young women aged 16-25 years who are pregnant or have a young child and are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The project focuses on working with young mothers to ensure they have the skills to cope independently, to keep their child safe and to give them a healthy start in life.

Through LIFE's innovative client involvement work, each young person shapes the service they receive to meet their unique needs in a way that works best for them. A dedicated support worker then provides therapeutic support to the young person for between 6 and 18 months. This support focuses on overcoming the emotional and psychological damage that the young women have experienced, enabling them to re-build their confidence and self-esteem and helping them to learn the basic life and parenting skills they need to go on to successful independent living in the future.

Walsall LIFE House goes well beyond giving vulnerable young women in Walsall a safe place to stay and start to bring up their baby, away from any potential harm or abuse, to helping young people to address deep-rooted underlying issues and learn the skills they need to make a better future for their young family. 75% of those they support go on to successfully live independently on leaving the project.

#### Personal Story

Amy was 19 years old, pregnant with her first child and had experienced severe domestic violence when she was referred to Walsall LIFE House. Working with Amy and giving her a positive role model enabled her to become a great parent and break the cycle of negative consequences associated with a disadvantaged start in life. After six months Amy was ready to move into her own accommodation. Amy now has a lovely three year old son, has successfully maintained her tenancy and wants to join the LIFE House team to help other young women in the situation she was once in herself.

#### Added Value

Walsall LIFE House is able to support women who are over six month's pregnant, filling a gap in services as other homelessness projects are unable to offer support to these vulnerable young women. The team works closely with a range of local agencies including Social Services, Sure Start, Walsall Street Teams and The Hope Centre in Wolverhampton. The project has also adapted LIFE's national *Relationships, Sex and Sexual Health* programme to address the high occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases in Walsall and to educate service users on how to build 'healthy' relationships.

### 3.5 brap: Equalities Engaging Young People

#### Organisation Overview

brap is a Birmingham based national equalities and human rights charity which works to highlight the need for a more forward thinking understanding of equality, to promote the skills and knowledge needed to create a more equal society and to encourage individuals to play their part in making our society a fairer place.

#### Project Description

brap's *Equalities Engaging Young People* (EEYP) project works with young people from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds in Birmingham. The project aims to establish the skills, knowledge and understanding young people need to promote equality in their own lives, peer groups and communities through supporting them to understand: the environment they live in, their own prejudices, behaviours and actions; 'different' communities and the impact of their actions on community tensions; the importance of critically analysing information; and the relevance of politics to equalities issues.

The project works through active, innovative and participative learning and development sessions which explore issues such as racism, combating religious and cultural intolerance, understanding our use of language, conflict resolution, and individual and collective rights and entitlements. brap creates a safe and open environment where young people can air their views and have them challenged without fear of judgement, and hear different points of view from other young people from 'different' backgrounds.

Without EEYP young people would have fewer spaces to talk, think and learn and would not be exposed to sophisticated and forward thinking understandings of human rights and equality. The project has made a real impact with young people reporting that the tools they learnt enabled them to move on and resolve conflicts in their families, peer groups or communities in a positive way where before they would have lacked the skills to express their frustrations constructively. Others have gone on to be elected to Birmingham's Youth Parliament and to represent their community on television.

#### Personal Story

Martha was so shy when she started to volunteer at brap's office on the EEYP project but as her confidence grew and with brap's support, she delivered sessions aimed at exploring young people's attitudes regarding homophobia, 'postcodeism', sexism and other issues. Martha has since gone on to complete an MA in Social Work and is pursuing a career in this area with a strong recognition of the need to place equality and human rights at the heart of everyday work.

#### Added Value

In addition to working with young people from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds and exploring issues which are often under-discussed, brap have also delivered training to workers in other youth projects and services who felt ill-equipped to challenge homophobic, sexist and prejudiced comments, behaviour and attitudes. The EEYP project also benefits from brap's other work: its networks and contacts to reach the most socially excluded young people; lobbying for change and feeding learning from its work into the development of public sector services; and involving young people in the design and delivery of the programme.



## 3.6 Solihull Life Opportunities

### Organisation Overview

Solihull Life Opportunities (SoLO) was established to address the gap in suitable activities for children and young people with learning disabilities who find it difficult to access universal provision. They are now able to cater for the full range of disabilities from mild learning difficulties to profound and multiple disabilities. SoLO provide a wide range of activities through their ten term-time projects (including after school, evening and weekend sessions) and four holiday schemes. They can also provide a support worker to accompany a child with additional needs to a main stream setting of their choice and deliver training to that setting to encourage it to become more inclusive.

### Project Description

One example of SoLO's many high quality services is their specialist holiday scheme for children and young people with profound and multiple disabilities and/or complex health needs. This scheme incorporates tailored activities such as sensory play, swimming reflexology and trips out and caters for the children's medical needs and conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, tube feeding and oxygen. All activities are provided by specially trained staff and with a high number of staff to service users. This means parents can have a break - secure in the knowledge that their children are having fun in a safe environment where their specific needs are being met to a high standard.

SoLO have an excellent reputation in Solihull and are highly valued by the children and families benefiting from their service. In addition to giving the child and family some time apart from each other, SoLO's work in developing the self-confidence, esteem and social skills of the children they work with often results in a marked improvement in their behaviour and independence. SoLO believe without their work in Solihull parents would not have sufficient respite, children would lose social interaction and stimulating activities and more families would end up in crisis.

### Personal Story

When Jack, aged 14 joined Drumtastic, SoLO's African drumming group, he had significant behavioural difficulties. Through getting to know Jack and understanding his needs, SoLO were able to use drumming to help him express his individuality, recognise his strengths and abilities and become aware of himself in relation to others. Jack has moved forward in his personal and social development, learning how to make and work with friends in a team setting, understand rules and control his emotions. His behaviour is now excellent and Jack now has responsibilities within the group which are further developing his respect for himself and others.

### Added Value

SoLO also provide supported volunteering opportunities for young people with disabilities as well as paid work involving them as ambassadors for the organisation. They provide training to external providers on making their settings more inclusive. This training is co-presented by two of SoLO's service users. SoLO organise an annual *Transitions Event* to support parents as their children make the transition to adult services. Here, parents can meet providers of education, work and training, leisure, transport, finance and family support. They have also established an email based forum to enable parents to support each other and feedback on services.



## 3.7 Family Support Network

### Organisation Overview

Family Support Network is a consortium of twelve voluntary and community sector organisations providing intensive support to families in Stoke-on-Trent who: have high and complex needs but do not meet the criteria for Social Services; have a combination of issues affecting the family (e.g. substance misuse, housing, and mental health issues); and are most unlikely to engage, or have previously disengaged with other services. Consortium members include: Arch North Staffordshire; Home-Start; Gingerbread; Mind, CAB, Adsis, YMCA, Dove Service, Savana, PLA, VAST, Crossroads.

### Project Description

Family Support Network consists of organisations with a wide variety of specialist services, support and expertise which the consortium is able to draw on to address the needs of all family members at the same time through a holistic service providing immediate support and no waiting lists. The Network has a budget for spot purchasing additional services outside of their existing provision to ensure this service.

The service is delivered in the family home and with the whole family, considering each individual's needs and their impact on the family as a whole to develop an action plan of support. Families then receive 12 weeks of intensive support which may involve several members of the outreach team providing different services to different family members (e.g. counselling for parent and child, debt management, domestic violence support, and practical help to access other services). Volunteers will also provide one-to-one support and mentoring for children and young people in the family out of hours.

When their needs are reduced to a level which can be addressed by other practitioners arrangements are made to refer the family on to other services. These services include, among others, children's centres, health visitors, education welfare, CAMHS, parenting programmes and other local voluntary and community organisations. Families requiring longer term support may also be re-referred into the Family Support Network service.

### Personal Story

Sarah was 21 years old, eight months pregnant, homeless and had no form of income when she was referred to Family Support Network. The service helped Sarah to apply for maternity benefits and income support. They gave her housing advice, supported her to rent a home using the rent deposit scheme and arranged for furniture to be provided through other community organisations. Family Support Network also supported Sarah to attend appointments, made her aware of the domestic violence support available through the service and arranged for a tenancy support organisation to continue to support Sarah in the longer term. Following the work of Family Support Network Sarah said she felt more confident that she would be able to take more control of her life.

### Added Value

Family Support Network is unique in its approach of providing specialist services to individual members of the family at the same time. Drawing on the breadth of expertise across its member organisations Family Support Network provides a diverse and multi-skilled team, providing swift access for families to a wealth of specialist services, including an out of hours service and additional support to families through their team of volunteers. This approach and breadth of service reduces the need for other specialist services.

### 3.8 The Children's Society: Reunite

#### Organisation Overview

The Children's Society is a leading national children's charity committed to making childhood better for all children in the UK. They provide specialist support through their projects at a local level for those forgotten children who face the greatest danger and disadvantage in their daily lives; children who are unable to find the support they need anywhere else.

#### Project Description

Reunite is a Children's Society project for young people (mostly aged 13-17 years) who go missing overnight from home or care in Coventry and have other risk factors such as difficult family circumstances, substance misuse or risky sexual activity. Reunite works with these young people, who generally have complex, high or very high level needs, to reduce the incidence of running away and the risk whilst they are on the streets.

The Children's Society has developed the *Intensive Support Framework* for working with the most marginalised and at-risk young people which focuses on building safety, resilience and stability. Reunite use this framework with a young person to assess the positive and negative factors in their life and agree a young person's plan. The project worker then delivers support sessions individually tailored to addressing the issues identified in the plan, integrating the young person back into education, helping them keep appointments and signposting to other partners and services as well as participating in CAF and child protection meetings as appropriate.

Of the 81 young people Reunite has worked with in the last year there have been no further running away referrals in 55% of cases. Where young people are still running away frequency has reduced in 12% of cases. In 9% of cases running away was so frequent and risky that young people needed to be accommodated in therapeutic or secure settings. This reflects the seriousness and complexity of the cases Reunite work with.

#### Personal Story

Abda, aged 15 ran away from the very strict Wahhabi Islam that her parents wanted her to observe. Reunite talked to Abda about assertiveness, human and children's rights, and safety outside the home and negotiated with her family for her to attend an Islamic school. They alerted the police, social services and the Forced Marriage Unit when concerns of a forced marriage were raised. Reunite talked to Abda about the difference between forced marriage and arranged marriage, all the options available to her, including leaving home if she wanted to, and gave her a USB stick with important contact numbers in case she found herself in a forced marriage situation. Abda decided not to leave home and with support of the Reunite project negotiated with her parents to attend all-girl activity sessions at school and all-women swimming lessons. There have been no further running away episodes.

#### Added Value

Reunite is the only specialist project for runaways in Coventry. Workers are highly skilled and have controlled caseloads which allow the time to offer a high level of support and to try several times to engage a young person. Without this project many of the young people the project works with would not receive support as they would not meet the threshold for intensive support from social services. It is likely that these young people would continue to go missing and may be at great risk on the streets.

### **3.9 The Transition to Adulthood Alliance**

#### **Organisation Overview**

The Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A) is a national coalition made up of fourteen voluntary sector organisations working to improve the life chances of young people who are making the transition to adulthood (17-24 years) and are at risk of committing crime and becoming involved with the criminal justice system. The Alliance was brought together by the Barrow Cadbury Trust which believes that the division between the youth and adult criminal justice system makes it difficult for the particular needs of young adult offenders to be effectively addressed. Nationally, T2A teams are piloting more effective approaches to working with young adult offenders based around tailored interventions to meet their individual needs, reduce their risk of re-offending and address social exclusion.

#### **Project Description**

In Birmingham, the T2A team works in partnership with four core partners (Key Birmingham, City United, Holistic Therapies, and Kajans) and other services to support low to medium risk young adults who are involved in the criminal justice system. The project provides intensive, person-central and solution focussed support working with young people to develop and implement a bespoke action plan focused on needs they consider a priority. Action plans address the key areas of accommodation; education, training and employment; health; drugs and alcohol; finance, benefit and debt; children and families; and attitudes, thinking and behaviour. T2A also facilitate young people's engagement in voluntary projects and activities, helping them feel part of the community, and support young people to engage with their Statutory Orders, reducing breaches.

Young people often comment on how much they value the supportive relationship with their T2A worker, the chance to feel valued, to give something back and be part of their community. All of these aspects can support their life chances and reduce offending. There is no other support like this in the local area and without it the practical and welfare needs of young adult offenders would likely go unaddressed.

#### **Personal Story**

Mike had already been visited twice by his T2A worker prior to his release from custody. T2A were there to support Mike when he was arrested and subsequently absconded putting himself at risk of being recalled for a breach of his licence. T2A were able to contact Mike, offer an alternative perspective and motivate him to change his attitude, comply with his licence and attend a special appointment with his Offender Manager resulting in his recall being avoided. A further custodial stay was averted. Mike has since gone on to complete a course with City United, is actively applying for jobs, has regular support and contact with his mother and is able to support his partner through her pregnancy.

#### **Added Value**

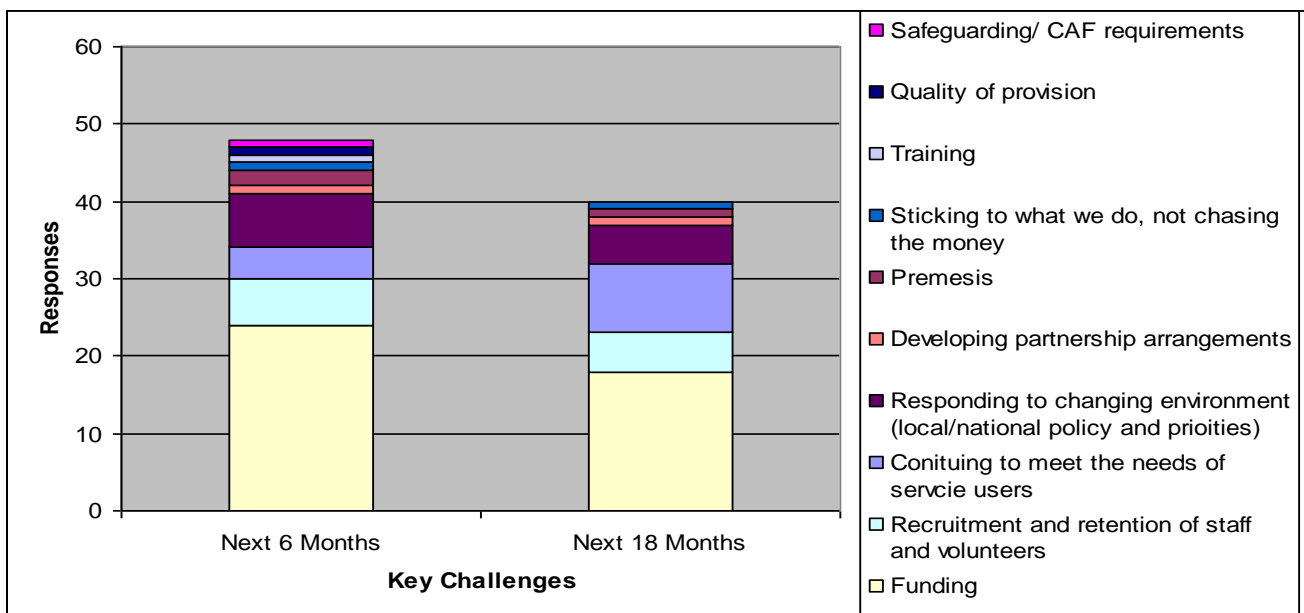
The Birmingham T2A team is unique in that it is based in the Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Service. The project is improving and strengthening local links between the Probation and Youth Offending Services and has successfully improved the arrangements for transfer of cases from youth offending to probation. It is able to benefit from improved sharing of contacts and information between partner agencies (e.g. housing) as well as using its voluntary sector approach to influence how the Probation Service itself works with young adults. Birmingham T2A also works with, and has strong links with local grassroots organisations.

#### 4. The current challenges facing voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families

Whilst the organisations involved in this research are committed to continuing the vital work detailed in section 3, this study has also revealed the considerable challenges the face in the short and medium term.

Both the telephone interviews with case study organisations and data collection from the *Looking to the Future* conference asked organisations, through open questions, to detail the two biggest challenges facing their organisation in the short term (next 6 months) and longer term (next 18 months). A summary of collated responses is provided in figure 1 below:

Figure 1 : Key challenges facing respondent organisations



Generally there was little variation in the main challenges organisations reported in both the short and long term. Challenges anticipated in the longer term tended to be a continuation or development of the immediate challenges being faced. As can be seen above the challenges can be grouped into four closely linked key areas:

- Funding;
- Continuing to meet the needs of service users;
- Recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers; and
- Responding to a changing environment (local/national policy and priorities).

## 4.1 Funding

Funding was cited by almost every organisation as a key challenge facing their organisation in both the next 6 months and 18 months, this was by far the most pressing issue identified. It should be noted that at the time of the research (between December 2010 and January 2011) the vast majority of organisations in the sector were facing huge uncertainty about funding post March 2011, far above and beyond the everyday struggle to secure funding faced by many organisations.

Many organisations had contracts or grants for the delivery of public services which were due to come to an end in March 2011. Many of these contracts and grants represent a significant proportion of their overall delivery budgets. In the current economic climate with local authorities facing unprecedented budget reductions and still in the process of finalising budget allocations, there was significant concern as to where cuts would fall, whether services would continue to be funded, contracts renewed and local grants available. Coupled with a reported reduction in funding from individual giving/donations, this intensifies the funding challenge faced.

*“Funding is top of the list. I expect to have to give out redundancies at the end of the month.”*

*“Funding cuts to contracts will increase competition for local grants and donations.”*

*“Funding, you can’t get away from that, groups don’t run on thin air.”*

Concerns were expressed that a reduction in public sector funding (whether contracts or grants) would increase the competition for alternative sources of funding to the sector from trusts and foundations bodies. In addition, competition would also come from new service providers (principally the private sector) who have the size and capacity to take up the opportunities arising from an increase in large scale contracts covering a range of services.

For some, the current funding climate had already resulted in redundancies, for others they had no guarantee they could continue at all post March 2011. At best, the vast majority of organisations were expecting a reduction in funding which would impact on their services. Although the survey looked at cuts in funding to organisations, concerns were expressed about the impact on individuals arising from the potential increases in thresholds at which individuals would be eligible to receive public services.

## 4.2 Continuing to meet the needs of service users.

*“I’m not sure if our organisation will be able to keep up with the change in needs that our community has because we don’t have spare cash to invest in developing our services. There is a risk that we get out of touch with what the people we help want.”*

Voluntary and community organisations exist to serve their beneficiaries. The commitment from organisations to continue to meet the needs of the children, young people and families in their communities was clear and of paramount importance to respondents. Maintaining current levels of service with reduced funding was highlighted as a real and significant challenge expected to grow in scale over the next 18

months. This is particularly challenging as many organisations identified that over this period they were expecting to face increasing levels of demand as the economic climate takes its toll on

families in the form of increasing levels of unemployment, financial difficulty and other pressures alongside a real or expected reduction in the public services available.

For a number of organisations demand for their services had grown and they commented that they would like to expand or develop their services over the next 18 months to enable them to be responsive to the needs of the children, young people and families they work with.

*“The project would like to invest in the services we offer to meet growing demand for family units so partners can be involved with their family. I can’t see how we can meet this growing demand without investment”*

*“We need to keep moving forward, to be able to run with new ideas and develop the new services that people want”*

### 4.3 Recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers

A consequence of the funding uncertainty facing organisations was the challenge of recruiting and retaining staff with the skills and experience required as existing staff leave to find more secure work; and potential staff are reluctant to take on short-term contracts with an uncertain future.

*“We need to find and keep more volunteers. People who will come every week so there are enough staff to split the age groups which would encourage older young people to attend.”*

*“More people coming forward [to volunteer] is great but we don’t have a volunteer manager who can bring it all together, ensure proper processes, proper supervision and properly match volunteers to tasks.”*

Recruiting and retaining sessional staff with the right skills is also a challenge for organisations as turnover tends to be higher, and the cost of training staff is increasingly becoming prohibitive especially where staff with specialist skills are required. Interestingly, it may well be that the supply of sessional workers increases as the impact of the cuts gathers pace.

Recruitment of volunteers posed a key challenge for a number of organisations, particularly small community organisations reliant on volunteers to enable their activities to continue and to expand. An increase in volunteer recruitment was considered by some to be a necessity even though this course of action was resource intensive. These organisations recognised the impact and added value a committed volunteer can

make to a service. However, the process is resource intensive because the costs of training, supporting and supervising volunteers are rarely funded. Though highly valued, volunteers are not a cost-free benefit to organisations who must ensure the safety and quality of services, manage, train and supervise volunteers as well as reimburse expenses. Little has been mentioned of the support to be made available to cover the costs of a dramatic increase in levels of volunteering should it materialise.

There is much work to be undertaken to address the increasing concern that the push felt towards replacing paid work with volunteers in the sector leaves organisations open to considerable risk and can also undermine the strength and quality of services, particularly services requiring specialist skills and experience.

#### 4.4 Responding to a changing environment

The overall context for the above challenges is the changing policy environment in which the sector is trying to continue its work of meeting the needs of children, young people and families and advocating for change on their behalf. Catching up with the Big Society framework and the resultant localism agenda that signals huge change in the way voluntary and community organisations have been funded to provide services in recent years is a challenge that cannot be underestimated. Nationally the Government's commitment to deficit reduction resulted in a wide range of changes in priorities both in the short and medium term set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review. This added to the push to "redefine the relationship between the state and the individual" and has left little time for the sector to understand, engage and respond appropriately.

Although there has already been significant change, there is more to come with the increasing move towards Individual Budgets, GP Commissioning and payment by results all of which are good examples of the need for thematic policy groups such as G:up, RAWM and the work of Children

*"We need to look at new ways of responding [to the Big Society and localism agendas] recognising that this is the new direction but without selling your soul. There is a need for maintaining standards and integrity. There is a push towards volunteerism but volunteering is not free and needs to be funded. Without this there is a fear that the quality of services will suffer."*

England to navigate the environment. Keeping up to speed, planning and preparing an organisation for change on such a scale requires a deal of time and resources from organisations whose main focus is service delivery.

Whilst challenges have been highlighted regarding the impact on organisations, there are challenges for the many partnerships and relationships that have been built between the voluntary and community sector and the public sector. Local authorities themselves face challenges in responding to the current 'policy churn', dealing with huge budget reductions and developing clarity on how these changes will be implemented and affect children, young people and families locally and the voluntary and community sector organisations which support them. Restructures and redundancies and general turnover of staff disrupt (in some

cases) previously well established routes for the sector to information and influence decision making in local authorities. The change in status of children's trusts (i.e. from statutory to non-statutory) also adds to the challenge.

#### 4.5 Meeting the challenge, the biggest difference

*"We're just doing what we can with what we've got."*

Despite the significant challenges facing voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families over the next six months and into the future the sector is not giving up or giving in. Rather there is a commitment to continue meeting the needs of children, young people and families in their communities - come what may.

When asked what would make the biggest difference in enabling their organisations to meet the challenges ahead respondents were clear and united on the need for further funding with clear guidelines and longer term agreements.

*“If I’ve got sustainable funding, say three years, I know I can keep my staff and we can keep developing what we do.”*

*“It all comes down to money at the end of the day”*

There was also a strong trend of organisations recognising the need to develop and do things differently to be fitter for the future by:

- evidencing outcomes more strongly;
- evaluating projects and learning the lessons resulting from evaluations,
- planning for the future
- developing stronger partnership arrangements and more sustainable models of funding

All of the above was necessary to strengthen organisation position, prove the quality of the services they provide and the impact they have for families and communities.

*“What would make the biggest difference...time to be able to make the plans to move our organisation forward while maintaining the current levels of service.”*

*“More resources to dedicate to fundraising. We need to invest the time to reap the reward but we have limited capacity with all energy going into delivery and ensuring children and young people have enjoyable and safe experience of the service.”*

*“Professionals who work with young people that’s their main focus, what they’re paid to do. Asking people to broaden their view to include influencing/ promoting, this is a lot to ask from people. Either you have to have a paid post to do this or have to free up capacity to do this within existing job descriptions”.*

In recognising the need for this work and the opportunities it presents, many cited that the time, resource and capacity to carry out these activities while maintaining their current level of service delivery posed an additional challenge. This is due to few organisations having the resource to dedicate a role to strategy and policy with staff focus being on service delivery and time spent at meetings, developing business plans or writing bids.

More generally in the West Midlands at both regional and local level, voluntary and community sector organisations are exploring new models of operating such as consortia approaches which could put them in a stronger position to compete for public service contracts. However, these new partnership and models will take time and resource to develop and establish. Children England in their national role and RAWM within the West Midlands are looking at consortia models, the outcomes of this work will be used to develop further learning, training and support for voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families and will be cascaded across all regions in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

This report has presented a range of case studies which showcase the quality, variety and value added and breadth of work undertaken by voluntary and community sector organisations working with children, young people and families in the West Midlands. The case studies show a vast array or provision across universal, targeted and specialist services and highlight the unique ability of the sector to reach deep into local communities with services which are highly responsive to need, locally appropriate and person centred. Many organisations and their services have been developed in response to a gap in other available services and offer innovative and flexible approaches which break away from a 'one size fits all' provision.

These features of their work, alongside an ongoing commitment to encouraging, involving and supporting volunteering and service-user involvement, position the sector well to respond to developing policy agendas such as the Big Society, localism and the personalisation of services. Particularly given that the core tenets of these agendas such as self-help, community engagement, local decision making, community action, early intervention and reaching out to those most in need have been the foundation of the voluntary and community sector for hundreds of years.

In addition, work undertaken by the sector often reaches into other specialisms beyond the 'pure' children, young people and families work such as health, housing, social care, criminal justice and others. This breadth requires a varied, well trained and supported workforce which includes volunteers and paid staff with the appropriate knowledge, experience, qualifications and training to provide the high quality services children, young people and their families deserve.

Despite the key challenges faced by organisations in the next 6 months and longer term (funding; recruitment; changes in policy and priorities; and continuing to meet the [increasing] demand from service users) the voluntary and community sector are looking to the future, committed and ready to deliver.

## Appendix

### Children England

Children England is the leading membership organisation for the children, young people and families voluntary and community sector in England. Our mission is to create a fairer world for children, young people and families by championing the voluntary organisations which work on their behalf.

We work alongside our members and partners to achieve our collective vision of a society where children and young people are able to achieve their potential and where families and communities are supported and properly resourced. We believe that the voluntary and community sector has a vital role to play in achieving this vision both in the delivery of child-centred services and in the advocacy and campaigns required to highlight need, challenge discrimination and change public perceptions.

Children England is in a unique position to influence and make a difference with our extensive reach into the sector and well established links to central and local government decision makers. Our members range from the largest children's charities in the country to small local groups working with children, young people and families in one neighbourhood. Beyond our membership our in depth work to improve the effectiveness of the wider children, young people and families voluntary and community sector gives us an excellent understanding of the issues facing organisations and the children, young people and families they serve across every region.

Children England's strength is in using the collective voice of the children, young people and families voluntary sector to achieve change for children. Work with us to help make a difference. To find out more visit [www.childrenengland.org.uk](http://www.childrenengland.org.uk).

### RAWM

RAWM is a regional infrastructure organisation serving the interests of the voluntary and community sector in the West Midlands through: articulating voice; supporting influence; facilitating engagement; and unlocking resources. RAWM's mission is to enable a sustainable, effective and inclusive voluntary and community sector.

RAWM's work is divided into four broad programmes:

- Developing Infrastructure;
- Supporting Communities;
- Influencing Policy; and
- Sector Intelligence.

Common to all four programmes is RAWM's strategic role in lobbying for and negotiating third sector inclusion in the policy development and delivery in the West Midlands. This strategic role involves making links across the programmes as well as building cross-sector relationships in the West Midlands. This enables RAWM to respond quickly to regional strategic issues that require a sector perspective, and to provide direct links into the most relevant organisations or networks.

RAWM also contributes to supporting the wider third sector by working in partnership with key regional agencies. To find out more visit [www.rawm.org.uk](http://www.rawm.org.uk).

*This report has been produced as part of RAWM's Sustaining Influence and Change project. Sustaining Influence and Change has provided support to a number of voluntary and community sector policy groups and has increased the impact of their work and helped to strengthen relationships with decision-makers in the West Midlands. The report is the result of close collaboration between RAWM and Children England.*

For more information about RAWM please visit [www.rawm.org.uk](http://www.rawm.org.uk).

