

**EVALUATION OF MANCHESTER ANTI-BULLYING  
POLICY AND PRACTICE NETWORK**

**Report 1 :  
Findings from a survey of network partners**

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## 1. Manchester Multi-agency Anti-bullying Policy and Practice Network

The Manchester Multi-agency Anti-bullying Policy and Practice Network (referred to as the Network) was established in 1999. It involves partners from a range of statutory, voluntary and not for profit independent organisations to provide support for schools within Manchester Local Education Authority (LEA).

In 2002 Guidelines produced by the Network were launched as part of the LEA's anti-bullying strategy. These are currently being piloted in one High School and 3 Primary Schools as part of the implementation programme, known as Creating Safe Learning (CSL).

## 2. The Evaluation

In early 2004, the Network, funded by Manchester Children's Fund, commissioned an independent evaluation. The approach of the evaluation is to support the development of evaluation processes and skills as an integral part of the Network's work in order to maximise learning. Network partners have jointly identified the issues for evaluation with the evaluator and been consulted about development of tools and in piloting them.

This report is the first of the evaluation. It is concerned with the experience of network partners ascertained from a questionnaire, which was sent out and completed in June and July 2004. The second report will focus on views about the Network of key school staff and staff from support agencies involved with the implementation of CSL. The final report will draw together the evaluation of the CSL project. It is anticipated that the final report will be available in December 2004.

More detailed results of survey results are available on request. Specific recommendations made by participants in questionnaire responses are included in the main body of the report.

There are two specific areas that need to be addressed concerning evaluation of partnerships, first the challenges inherent in collaboration (1-3) and second, the time it takes to achieve measurable outcomes (1,3,4).

Published research on effective health partnerships has mostly been undertaken outside the UK. Effective leadership is frequently identified to be a facilitating factor (1,2). Other facilitating factors relate to shared vision and goals and progress towards a shared vision (2,3), clear aims of the project (2) and efficiency (1). Dysfunction of the steering group can be an important barrier (2). The Local Government National Training Organisation (LGNTO)(5) has identified 4 key themes for effective partnerships:

- **Leadership** where partners share a vision and harness their energies to achieve more than they could on their own
- **Trust** where partners are mutually accountable, share risks and rewards fairly and support each other

- **Learning** where partners continuously seek to improve what they do in partnership
- **Managing performance** where partners put in place necessary practice and resources and manage change effectively’.

The Healthy Settings Development Unit (HSDU)(4) at the University of Central Lancashire suggest that indicators of process and outcome need to be established. Not only does partnership working take time to achieve change but also it can be hard to identify exactly what change was a direct result of its activity because they do not work in isolation. They identified the following as appropriate indicators.

**Process indicators** relate to the necessary conditions for success, which may include factors relating to the national and local context within which the work is taking place eg policy, facilitation and support, back up eg resources and a critical mass of interested people and support of others.

In terms of **outcome indicators** they suggest can relate to people, policies, environmental change, resources, ethos, communication and culture. Again these issues were addressed in the survey and analysis.

The survey and analysis aimed to obtain information and evaluate the partnership in relation to these areas. Some gaps in information were also identified.

### 3. KEY FINDINGS

#### 3.1 The Partners : Their organisations, involvement in the Network and in anti-bullying work in Manchester schools

A questionnaire was circulated to 30 network partners in June 2004. 16 completed questionnaires, which were analysed.

Just over half the people on the mailing list and just under half of questionnaire respondents came from organisations that are part of the LEA. Like other partners they were from organisations that support schools, not schools themselves.

Type of organisation	Respondents	Total number on mailing list
Part of LEA	7	16
Part of NHS	2	2
Other statutory	2	6
Voluntary Sector	3	4
Independent	1	2
Not answered	1	

**Table : Types of organisations of respondents**

The majority of the respondents had an input into strategic thinking and /or resource allocation within their organisations, which indicates that they have relatively senior positions in their organisations.

The majority of respondents (13/16) have been involved with the network for 12 months or more and had attended a meeting in the last 3 months (10/16).

For the majority of respondents anti-bullying in Manchester LEA was neither a major part of their or their organisation's work; Bullying was an important area along with other areas of work.

The majority of respondents felt they currently had or had in the past a middling to major level of involvement in the Network's work. 2 felt they had leadership roles and one thought (s)he contributed to leadership. 9 respondents thought that they were either active in the Network or had been at some time. It is likely that people who returned questionnaires felt a greater degree of participation than those people who did not.

#### 3.2 Overview of the network – views of strengths and weaknesses

Respondents were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Network. It was apparent that the majority of respondents, both active and less active partners in the network, held the network in very high esteem with more strengths than weaknesses.

Strengths have been grouped around themes of leadership and trust, organisational development and output.

**Leadership and trust** Several respondents valued both the quality of the leadership and the commitment of partners. The co-chairs were seen to be hardworking and to organise well-structured, inclusive meetings. Partners felt valued.

Several respondents identified a range of multi-agency qualities as strengths. These included commitment to a common cause, shared training methods, philosophies and ethics. There was also the coming together of different expertise and perspectives. The network was thought to have strengthened the role of the voluntary sector.

**Organisational development** The network was seen to be an organisation that had developed and grown both as an organisation and in terms of understanding the issues it was concerned to address. The evaluation was seen as a strength as were the link of anti-bullying with crime, looking both in and out of school and the development of a wider understanding of bullying and its link with hurtful behaviour.

**Output** The output of the group was considered to be very significant. It included the guidelines, which were considered practical. The large number of schools, which had sent delegates to attend the conference, illustrated the high profile of the group. The network was accessible and available to schools. One person described the Network

*'as a model of good practice that does tangible things.'*

S/he used the framework in his/her own and other educational organisations.

The main concern related to time issues. This included keeping everyone involved in the long-term. This was seen to create dependence on the co-chairs. There were tensions for some concerning central control and scope for partners to do more because of lack of administrative support. Meeting agendas were also considered overloaded but there was not always time to talk about everything that needed to be talked about. There was some concern about access to the guidelines and the complexity of delivering CSL in an integrated way with national initiatives.

### **3.3 Recommendations from partners for reducing weaknesses**

Suggestions for reducing weakness included

- having a rotating chairperson
- improve time management.
- Notice of meetings should be 1-2 months in advance of meetings by e-mail
- planning another training event/conference to remind schools that bullying is an important issue.

### **3.4 Being a network partner changed how partners worked**

Over two-thirds of respondents (11/16) thought that being a network partner had changed the way they work around anti-bullying issues. The main change identified was in terms of approaches, especially working with other agencies. Respondents also suggested being partners had:

- Broadened their view of anti-bullying 'as underpinning rather than a single issue.'
- Challenged their thinking and shaped practice eg towards systematic change in schools
- Had a big influence on what is offered through CSL

Partners felt the network had raised the profile of bullying both within their own organisations and in schools, which had made it easier to raise in schools.

*'Now schools see bullying as a problem every school has - not something to hide.'*

Using the guidelines produced by the network was another way that partners had changed how they work.

### **3.5 Suggestions for involving agencies who are not currently active**

Agencies were identified which partners felt could make a valuable contribution but are not currently involved. The most frequently mentioned were the police and Children, Family and Social Care, formerly Social Services. Other suggestions included front-line organisations – schools, governing bodies, parents groups and educational projects for young people not attending school and organisations, which had previously been active in the partnership as well as other statutory and voluntary organisations.

As already mentioned maintaining continuous involvement was identified as a weakness of the group. Six respondents who had not attended network meetings for over 6 months were asked about barriers to attending and how these might be reduced. Some of these 6 were very committed to the partnership and its work and made very useful suggestions, which are below.

It was apparent that the network had a critical mass of committed people and the support of others.

### **3.6 Recommendations for increasing involvement**

- The current practice of sending minutes to people even if they cannot attend meetings regularly was valued and gave people the option to attend a meeting if there was something on the agenda which they felt they could contribute to.
- For some partners from the LEA, the value or relevance of attending meetings needed to be made more explicit. Some previously active participants have time allocated to specific activities, which do not include

the Network. Another LEA partner needed it to be clearer that the Network meeting were high priority through

*' a clear deliverable work plan related to service activity plans or the Education Development Plan.'*

If the Network could feed back to their organisations the value of their input, this might influence time allocation. These suggestions are similar to those found by Shortell et al (2) who conclude that an important basis for participation is the perceived benefits and costs to membership organisations.

- Occasional meetings or seminars on particular topics. Someone with a specific area of interest suggested that s/he could both contribute to and attend these more easily than regular meetings.
- Hold meetings in Districts to involve schools and clusters

### **3.7 The Network as a learning organisation**

7 respondents felt that the network had learnt a lot from the work they have undertaken and 6 did not know whether they had or not. There were a range of suggestions of ways of learning more including:

- One felt the network *'had built learning into practice. The quality of the materials is good; now it is important to develop fuller access to them.'*
- Continued development, keeping in touch with changing agendas and other initiatives
- The evaluation
- 2 people wanted more opportunity for learning within meetings.

Having an agenda item for reflection eg 'since our last meeting what do members feel that they have achieved?'

One recognised the conflict between limited time and opportunities to share but would welcome longer sessions with opportunities to explore elements of the work, have unstructured time, brainstorm. One found the CSL Training Day useful. *'Perhaps have lunches before meetings hosted by different organisations, which might also increase ownership.'*

In general there was a sense that the network was a learning organisation and some constructive suggestions for developing that.

### **3.8 Awareness of the aims and objectives of the network**

The Network has aims and objectives but has not explicitly developed a shared vision. Given the importance of shared vision, goals, aims and objectives in the literature, partners were asked about their knowledge of aims and purpose to find out the degree to which purpose was shared.

According to the Guidelines the aims of the Network are general:

(1), 'the aim of the group is to bring together a range of agencies to co-ordinate support and training within schools, including work with staff, children, parents, carers and governors.' p4

The Network developed overall aims and objectives for 2002-3 and has objectives for Creating Safe Learning. The aims and objectives are not referred to frequently in an explicit way during the course of the work of the group. Seven respondents thought that they knew what the aims and objectives of the network were and nine either thought they did not know them or were unsure.

When asked to identify the aims and objectives, responses were grouped in the following categories:

- The most common aims and objectives cited related to policy, practice and strategy

This was commonly concerned with particular approaches such as holistic, inclusive, whole school and community, involving young people. They also related to the ethos of a school, systems development and the development of a safe learning environment.

Some saw the network as concerned with how to deal with bullying and to develop active anti-bullying policies. One person added that practices should be '*consistent, appropriate and effective*'

- Training

Several people mentioned training. One saw the network's role '*to develop a training pack to deliver anti-bullying packages to schools.*' Another respondent thought the purpose of the training, to develop strategy.

- Raising the profile of bullying issues

This was both in schools and with people who were influential in order to increase access to work in schools in this issue.

- Co-ordination and sharing practice  
Several people thought that the network was concerned with co-ordinating anti-bullying work in Manchester in terms of strategy and support to schools.

Another key objective was seen to be sharing practice, pooling expertise, sharing information and support to network members and to schools.

- Needs assessment, monitoring, research and evaluation

This included research on perceptions of bullying, effectiveness of strategies, monitoring resources and different initiatives and showing the impact of anti-bullying and children's safety on standards.

- One person felt that the aim was to reduce the frequency and incidence of bullying

Just under a half of respondents felt they did not know or were unsure about the aims and objectives of the group and those respondents who thought they knew what they were gave a broad range of answers. The answers may indicate shared purpose, while for some people certain areas may be of greater priority than others, which may or may not indicate a tension in priorities. This can be further explored at the review by the group of aims and objectives to be held in September.

### **3.9 Partners' priorities**

Respondents were asked to state their priorities in terms of support and training to enable schools to develop whole school anti-bullying strategies.

The majority mentioned some form of training, mostly awareness training on both the impact of bullying and effective strategies. Most respondents thought that the priority was to train people in schools. One person was also keen on link advisers being trained and that training for link advisers should include evaluation of school performance. One respondent mentioned whole school training as a priority. For one person it was important that bullying was looked at as an issue for adults first including bullying in the workplace and the relationships between staff, then young people because they felt that if there is bullying in the environment or perceived bullying work with young people will be ineffective. They were concerned, for instance, by the message in school if teaching assistants have a different staff room to teachers. Another person felt people needed opportunities to reflect on their own practice.

A number of respondents thought support to schools to develop strategies were a priority. Involvement of parents, young people and staff in strategy development was identified as a priority. The need for a toolbox to enable all parties to respond and prevent bullying was mentioned, as was dissemination of the guidelines. Help with developing action plans, translating policies into practice, non-punitive approaches and good resources were mentioned.

The need to see anti-bullying as a multi-agency issue was identified as was the link with the standards agenda and Every Child Matters.

When asked about the network's role concerning filling gaps and avoiding duplication, most respondents thought that the network had helped to identify

gaps and avoid duplication of work or had the potential to do so. One partner thought this should be an aim or objective. Some thought this was happening but one partner said:

*'there is a bit of a way to go. There is duplication of strategies with primary and secondary. We need more of a citywide overview.'*

## **4 Conclusions**

### **Operational issues**

One of the most important factors in the literature for effective partnerships is leadership. Partners had a very high level of confidence in the network leadership. It is not clear whether or not the group share a vision, goals and aims and objectives and this will be further explored at the meeting in September. The findings of this survey will contribute to this.

Less data was collected on aspects of trust as identified by the LGNTO (5, see p4). Although support was evident and people feel valued, information on whether partners feel mutually accountable, share risks and rewards fairly was not gathered. It may be that partners are content that the leadership take a higher level of responsibility although some suggestions of greater sharing of ownership were made. These issues may be important to consider in the future to ensure sustainability.

There was evidence that partners felt the network was a learning organisation and continuously sought to improve what they are doing in partnership.

Partners felt satisfied with the performance management of the network, despite problems of time and administrative support they felt the network achieved a lot.

### **Processes and outcomes**

In general partners were very positive about process and outcomes of the network both for their own organisations and schools. Data included useful information on involvement and ways to encourage it, although this is likely to be ongoing problem due to external factors. The external factors are important in the evaluation in terms of understanding the priority given to anti-bullying in schools locally and nationally; a context, which the network is influencing. Several partners contributed examples of how the partnership is successfully doing this, which is an important outcome for a partnership.

In particular, some partners described how involvement in the network had had a profound effect on their approaches to anti-bullying, change management, the profile of bullying in their own organisations and schools, the LEA guidelines and through use of guidelines, what is offered to schools. This indicates that the partnership has had effective outcomes in terms of people, environment, policy, practice, resources, ethos, communication and culture.

Partners also were aware of issues that need addressing for the future, for example improving access to schools of the guidelines.

Overall the evaluation indicates that the Network is working well as a partnership. A high level of commitment was evident from the majority of partners who participated which appeared to be associated with great confidence in the leadership and outputs of the Network. Throughout the findings there is evidence that a major barrier to effectiveness of the partnership is the wider context; that agencies involved do not see anti-bullying in schools as central to their work and can therefore be resistant to putting in resources. While the partnership has been effective in influencing this, it continues to disable participation from some potential partners. The main areas to focus on for review and development are ensuring there is shared vision and looking at involvement and ownership.

## **5 References**

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