

Norfolk County Council - Bespoke Packages and a Community Based Approach

Introduction

This learning example shows how Norfolk developed their short breaks provision in their first year of funding from the Department for Education's Short Breaks Innovation Fund. Norfolk became involved during the second year of the Innovation Fund, following a successful bid and are aligning the project to support their Short Breaks Strategy's [10 Big Objectives](#) which includes:

- *"Parent carers, children and young people can access a community short breaks clubs and activities offer, making friends and having their needs met enabling good outcomes."*
- *"Providing community short breaks and respite for families at the right point in time, reducing escalation of need and reducing chances of families reaching breaking point."*

This learning example highlights two key themes of innovative practice which aims to embed provision in the heart of the community and offer bespoke short break packages to improve the outcomes of children and young people with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

Aims and Objectives

Following from the aftermath of COVID-19, Norfolk identified a 75% increase in referrals into their short breaks service; most of which is understood to be for children with SEMH needs. There was further recognition that in order to meet the increase in SEMH needs, a new approach was required for this specialist support. The funding from the Short Breaks Innovation Fund provided several opportunities to:

1. Develop an enhanced SEMH offer which aligns with the interests of children and young people and allows them to actively participate when personalising support to empower the young person and ensure that their needs are being met.
2. Commission a bespoke short break package in the community setting to ensure the sustainability of support beyond acute SEMH need and allow local provision to address gaps in support need.

In doing so, Norfolk aimed to develop a short break offer which was in alignment with the presenting needs in their area and allowed community-based providers to tailor their approaches to meet demand in a sustainable manner.

Approach

Norfolk County Council worked with Health and Education Colleagues and aimed to adopt a spectrum approach to meeting the needs of children and families. This was achieved by developing a sustainable model which tackled the acute, long-term, and preventative risks associated with needs arising from SEMH difficulties. The funding opportunity allowed Norfolk to address the current acute SEMH support and update their commissioning approach to enable community-based provision. The criteria for obtaining

support included: child or young person must live in Norfolk, aged 11-18, currently known to social care and at risk of or previously had a CAMHS inpatient admission.

It is anticipated that future iterations of the project will be required to develop ways of prioritising children and family's needs as they expand from supporting acute crisis presentations to identifying children and young people's SEMH needs from a preventative perspective.

Bespoke packages

The innovation team and stakeholders in Norfolk recognised the importance of developing a short break offer that was needs-led with an outcome focus and addressed acute SEMH support. To facilitate the alignment of needs and support, co-production with young people and their families was placed at the centre of multi-agency meetings. A Short Breaks Inclusion Coordinator was recruited as part of the project. The Inclusion Coordinator's role was to support each young person and enhance their participation with their plans in order to ensure they were responsible for their own support. The Inclusion Coordinator brings together multiagency meetings with the aim to untangle the emerging concerns and develop outcomes that are person-centred and align them with health and social care plans. By recognising the complexity of each case, the aim is to empower the young person through co-production of suitable provision that will ultimately foster community reintegration, increase confidence and independence, as well as forge potential pathways to returning to education. It is widely understood the comfort families experience by not repeating their story to multiple professionals and Norfolk's efforts to working from a joint organisational approach allowed this to happen.

After the multi-agency meetings, the support packages are structured to ensure the young person received short breaks that were closely aligned with their interests and delivered in either 1-1 or small group settings. The funding allowed Norfolk to expand their framework for sourcing provision by including yoga, art and creativity-based packages as well as develop provisions that were either delivered 1-1 or in small groups; as shown in our community-based approach below.

Community based approach

A flexible commissioning approach embedding community-based provision and providing opportunities for sustainable long-term provision was central to the innovation project. The innovation team and stakeholders developed a framework agreement for SEMH needs that allowed providers in the community to receive funding with the view to promoting a more inclusive community-based approach to short breaks provision. Norfolk worked with existing providers that offered specialist wellbeing support through yoga and movement in a non-judgemental way and supported them to work with us in Short Breaks. This allowed the young person accessing the service to self-regulate and feel more content but also provides a future resource for other young people as they now provide 1:1 specialist and group sessions as well as workshops for teachers and parents to support their families as part of our short breaks offer.

The community-based commissioning approach not only meets the needs of young people but provides routes for families to sustain provision once the immediate short-term needs are met. In addition, it supports local businesses to become more inclusive to everyone in the community and allows them to address the gap in SEMH provision whilst having consistent funding through the commissioning framework.

Challenges and Successes

Key challenges

Building Norfolk's short breaks provision brought initial challenges:

- Norfolk aims to support a cohort of children and young people with severely acute SEMH need which requires considerate assessment of their readiness to partake in the short breaks package as well as compatibility. A young person may initially decide to engage and then withdraw due to relapses and retriggers. In addition, there was a need to balance providing offering high levels of support whilst minimising the risk of families becoming reliant on the provision in the long-term.
- Transitioning from the ideation phase to set-up phase of the project took longer than expected as the ambitious nature of the project compressed the timescales between planning, designing and delivery phases.
- Developing a robust evidence base for the project became challenging in early stages due to the fluctuation of SEMH needs and recognising that working towards outcomes for the specific cohort of children and young people is a non-linear journey.

Key Successes

Despite the challenges, Norfolk has experienced multiple successes in their first year of funding:

- **Flexible commissioning:** Norfolk developed a commissioning framework which successfully brought in novel provision to meet the growing need for SEMH support. Maintaining flexibility with commissioning was a key component to its success as it meant that sourcing and delivering services could be done efficiently and avoided trying to reinvent the wheel.
- **Community-based:** Sourcing provision in the community offered dual benefits by allowing children and young people an opportunity to reintegrate back into the community as well as allow local businesses an opportunity to engage with the Norfolk council to offer targeted support.
- **Led by children and young people:** The funding provided an opportunity to enhance co-production efforts when tailoring support plans and ensuring that they complemented existing health and social plans. This approach recognised the importance of cultivating agency and ownership among young people in an effort to increase empowerment and self-efficacy.

Key Learning

- **Flexible approach:** The project ensured that there is a flexible approach to funding and commissioning structures as it is crucial during the set-up phase of an innovative project. This ensures that where iterations are made to fit needs of the cohort, it can be implemented swiftly.
- **Strategic planning:** Norfolk recognised the importance of getting the right people in the room who have the operational expertise of knowing how to get a service and commissioning structures running during a short time frame by early identifying bottlenecks in the system for implementing the project and working within council procedures.

- **Joint Working:** The project provided an opportunity to enhance the working relationship between Norfolk County Council and ICB health colleagues as part of the referral and consultation process. This alongside input from families and provides created a clear triangulation of a joint working approach which provided better focus on understanding the impact of the project on reducing tier 4 admissions and reducing children going into care.