



CONSULTATION ON A NEW FUND TO SUPPORT THE SUSTAINABILITY OF VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SECTOR ORGANISATIONS

Adfam response – July 2014

1 – What support is needed, by who and where?

Adfam works with many VCSE organisations, from national policy and membership bodies to small, grass-roots family support organisations created by the family members of drug and alcohol users who could not find the support they needed.

We are therefore very pleased to see the role the VCSE plays recognised in this consultation - Adfam believes that voluntary organisations have a key role to play in promoting the health and wellbeing of all UK's citizens. The family support groups mentioned above provide essential support for people whose needs typically have not been well met by statutory provision. Many drug treatment services in the UK are delivered by organisations (some quite large) which are classed as social enterprises or charities.

Reflecting on the journey to sustainability, what types of support will have the greatest impact and why?

The four suggestion measures do look like appropriate topics which many VCSE organisations would welcome attention on. However it's worth noting that the size of the organisation is essential when considering the relevance of these four points. The VCSE sector is a highly varied one, with some of the family support groups we work with very small, with perhaps just a single paid member of staff. The second topic – 'Specific cost cutting measures' – would therefore be of little use to them, with no option of downsizing, and little capacity to devote to some of the other activities detailed.

Any support which can be provided to help VCSE organisations build an evidence base on their effectiveness would be especially welcome, since this kind of data is very useful for work with those commissioning and funding services. This means support on 'demonstrating impact to funders and/or investors' would be very welcome, as would the allied topics of 'writing quality bids/tenders' and 'developing core business skills'.

The other area Adfam would highlight as being of real importance given the structural reforms and changes of the past few years is the 'support to engage with local funders/commissioners to ensure that opportunities are opened up to voluntary organisations'. This is, we believe, of high importance, especially to some of the smaller VCSE organisations which may not have the capacity or expertise to needed to devote large amounts of time to researching the new structures and forging new relationships.

Are these the right factors for identifying those in-need?

This is a good list of criteria. Naturally not every organisation will need support in each of the four areas – some flexibility regarding which sections they would become engaged with would therefore be appropriate.

Also worth noting is that some areas of work which aren't directly based on assuring financial sustainability can and do contribute to the overall sustainability and health of the organisation. Developing networks and relationships with partner organisations and local decision-makers, for instance, is of great importance in this, and could be added to the list. Although 'engage with local funders/commissioners' is listed it has a strong bias towards the financial and not the wider relationship building.

Lastly, collaborative work could be stressed more. Sustainability can be achieved through the sharing of good practice and contingency planning with partner organisations.

What might be an effective approach to identifying those 'in-need', particularly given that these factors could be seen as negative and organisations might be unwilling to admit to them?

Although these factors could be perceived as negative given they are generally characterising deficiencies, many small or young VCSE organisations would not necessarily reject them as inaccurate descriptions of their organisations. Those who work in the sector are generally very open to new opportunities to increase their capacity and skills and would therefore be happy to engage with the suggested programme of development despite the language used.

Additionally, the criteria themselves can be expressed in an aspirational manner without compromising their meaning – so rather than 'do you lack a robust forward business plan?' the organisations can be asked 'do you want support to make your forwards business planning more robust?'

We intend to use the DWP definition of 'vulnerable and disadvantaged'. Should we also include any additional groups?

Adfam welcomes the commitment to 'working with 'vulnerable and disadvantaged groups'' and the implicit recognition the overlapping, compounded issues are often present in, or indeed the cause of, the areas of most vulnerability and disadvantage. There is increasing recognition that entrenched problems cannot be treated alone, that to support a person regarding their, say, homelessness may not lead to a sustained positive change if their drug and alcohol use is not also tackled. There is a huge crossover between these two issues, as well as mental ill health and involvement in the criminal justice system which is being recognised by the work the alliance Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM).

This list is a good start but does not cover some crucial areas. **Employment** is of vital importance to the overall health and wellbeing of any individual, especially one dealing with some of the other issues on the lists, and we believe that a lack of sustained employment should therefore be added to the list. **Physical and mental ill health** is one of the most common components of multiple needs and as such should be recognised on any list. Mental health has a very significant overlap with substance use, usually referred to in combination as dual diagnosis, and although an extreme manifestation of mental ill health is recognised in the list – 'suicide and/or self-harm declaration' – there are many other forms that should be recognised. Anxiety, depression and other mental health

conditions are all commonly experienced by people with multiple needs and Adfam therefore suggest they should be added to the list under a wider mental health heading.

What evidence is there of need in particular locations?

Evidence suggests that the provision, funding and stability of family support services in the UK is patchy. DrugScope, in discussing the results of their substantial 2013 'State of the Sector'¹ survey note regarding family support - 'responses here were equal between improved and worsened access to services'. Anecdotal evidence from Adfam's regional development work – which uses training, forums and resource sharing to develop capacity and share good practice – echoes this finding, with the availability and sustainability of family support varying significantly not just within government regions but cities and towns.

2 – How should support be provided?

Could we use existing local knowledge to identify appropriate organisations, for example by utilising a nomination approach?

Is there an appropriately sized and experienced body of potential intermediaries available to fulfil this role?

Which local bodies or partnerships could best provide local knowledge? E.g. local infrastructure such as Councils for Voluntary Service, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities?

An effective way of identifying these organisations in need is to use infrastructure, umbrella or second tier organisations to cascade information. Adfam plays this role regarding drug and alcohol family support with equivalents existing for drug and alcohol treatment (DrugScope), domestic violence services (AVA), homelessness (Homeless Link) criminal justice organisations (Clinks) etc.

National voluntary sector membership or representative organisations would also be appropriate partners for the promotion of the scheme and the attracting of applications – Compact Voice, the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA), the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) could all fulfil this role for instance. Regional Voices would be an excellent national portal into regional networks, made up, as they are, of regional networks based on England's nine historic government regions.

On a local level Councils for Voluntary Services and similar organisations will have good networks of and communication with local voluntary sector services. These exist across the country.

Adfam believes that without adequate support from second-tier infrastructure organisations the overall efficiency and health of the smaller VCSE organisations is at risk. Infrastructure organisations, whether formally constituted as membership bodies or not, play a vital role in supporting services, sharing good practice and championing the needs and vision of the many passionate grass-roots organisation making a real difference in communities around the country.

These organisations, for instance the family support organisations Adfam works with, naturally have a local, and often practical, focus, and as individual services lack a voice in the national debate.

¹ Available at: www.drugscope.org.uk/Resources/Drugscope/Documents/PDF/Policy/SOS2013_Main.pdf

Infrastructure organisations provide that voice. They are national champions but also act as conduits, and channel to their members or supporters information, news, policy and resources from the national level.

How could a model like this be made to work effectively?

Given the significant range in the size, capacity and structures of the many VCSE organisations in the UK, the model needs to be readily accessible to all applicants regardless of size. In practical terms this means having an application form that is not, at least at the initial stage, hugely long and demanding. If an organisation passes this first stage it could perhaps receive some support if further details are needed. Adfam also suggests that comprehensive, jargon-free supporting documents are developed to assist applicants.

Should we apply upper and lower turnover limits to focus efforts on those organisations in need and which are achieving impact?

If so:

- **What upper limit would ensure that organisations that shouldn't need support are excluded?**
- **Should we have a phased upper limit with higher turn-over organisations considered in exceptional circumstances?**

Some of the VCSE organisations that Adfam supports have a very low annual turnover. Family support groups are often set up by experts of their own experience – that is to say family members who have themselves experienced the severe effects that having a loved one who uses drugs or alcohol can lead to. Often this loved one has not just one but multiple needs. These groups are, then, driven by passion and experience, and are found by those who use them to be credible, adaptable and most of all effective. Many people have described them during consultation as ‘a god-send’ or ‘a life-line’. Similar support groups exist in the related field of mental health and beyond. A social return on investment undertaken by Adfam on a family support group indicated that for every pound invested in the service a social value of £4.70 was created.

Adfam suggests that no lower limit is adopted to cover this type of small, nascent organisation which may be just starting, or indeed working effectively at a ‘low’ level, but which would nonetheless benefit from advice, support and guidance on how to become more sustainable, how to build an evidence-base and how to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work to local decision-makers and commissioners.

Regarding an upper limit Adfam suggests a level is used which allows larger turnover organisations to be occasionally considered for funding and development but which means the majority of support and resources are devoted to enhancing the sustainability of smaller VCSE organisations.

What average level of funding would enable appropriate depth of activity for individual projects, whilst ensuring a broad reach for the fund across the sector?

Adfam supports the establishing of a medium level of funding which gives recipients sufficient resources to make a real difference in their structures, working and evidence gathering but can be spread across a sizable spread of organisations. We suggest a model which encourages ongoing development and support through the awarding of multiple, small grants to organisations, with an expectation of strategic implementation of agreed change, feedback and tracking of progress against

a pre-determined structure. We feel this multi-stage approach is more likely to encourage sustainable growth than one-off payments.

Are these the right ways to incentivise effective engagement?

Which of these are likely to be most effective?

What other ways could ensure effective engagement from all parties?

The list of suggested solutions contains some sound measures. Adfam supports the use of the 'ongoing external challenge of plans and activities by a panel of experts and peers' to assess and ensure the quality of the work conducted as long as conducted in a meaningful way and with a truly accurate panel of peers.

Whilst an element of output-based payment has a place in the resourcing of VCSE organisations Adfam believes it can only work if sufficient funding is awarded at the start of the process to enable the development of the organisation to a level where they can realistically deliver those outputs.

3 - How can the design and the fund ensure long term impact?

Adfam welcomes the commitment to sustainability and echoes the importance stressed in the consultation for the funding to continue beyond the initial period. For real social change to be effected VCSE organisations need to have the stability and continuity in staff, funds and infrastructure to plan, carry out, evaluate, revise and re-implement programmes of work.

**Which of the proposals for achieving sustainability do you think are likely to be most effective?
How else can we ensure lasting impact?**

The proposals most likely to ensure some sort of lasting impact and increased sustainability are the measures suggested in Section 1.1. If these were effectively targeted and worked on with VCSE organisations then solid foundations for sustainability would be laid.

As mentioned in section 2 Adfam believes that one of the most important measures that can be taken to ensure sustainability is the working with, and funding of, infrastructure organisations. These organisations will be vital partners in supporting and monitoring the work of the many VCSE bodies around the country.