

Submission: Giving Green Paper

Background

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. We do this by working with a network of organisations, practitioners and individuals who come into contact with the families, friends and carers affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use. We provide direct support to families through publications, training, prison visitors' centres, outreach work and signposting to local services, and work extensively with professionals and Government to improve and expand the support available to families.

Adfam represents the views and interests of small organisations across the country working with families affected by drugs and alcohol, runs an online database of over 130 such groups and keeps over 1,300 subscribers up to date with latest policy and practice recommendations relating to families, drugs and alcohol. Adfam also provides good practice training and guidance to community-level organisations.

Key themes

Though the Giving Green Paper is broad in scope and covers many areas, the response below contains several running themes:

- Small voluntary organisations are key agents in community resilience and social capital, and working with these neighbourhood groups is of the highest importance, and initiatives for increasing levels of giving should properly consider these community-level organisations
- Working alongside umbrella organisations and infrastructure bodies to build capacity within different areas of the voluntary sector would be an effective, efficient and arm's-length route to supporting a stronger civil society
- The Government has an important role in promoting and incentivising giving and skills transfer between businesses and voluntary organisations, and should also lead by example in terms of easy payroll giving and volunteer days per year, for example.

Introduction

Adfam welcomes the sentiment contained in the Green Paper of wishing to 'increase levels of giving and mutual support in our society and catalyse a culture shift'. The focus of the paper is on ways of increasing the contribution that many Britons make voluntarily to their communities, both in terms of money and time.

Around the country people already regularly give both money and time, often with little recognition or reward. As the Green Paper states, levels of giving in the UK stand at 0.73% of GDP, which is substantially more than Germany, France and New Zealand but some way off the USA (1.7%); also that in 2009, 71% of people gave in some way. This is a solid foundation, so the paper rightly concentrates on how to improve and facilitate this giving, and make it more productive.

Organisations which support families affected by drugs and alcohol are often reliant upon voluntary contributions of time or money to support their funding and operations. Many rely on volunteers or giving up their time for free to support those currently in need. Family members give up countless hours and suffer multiple stresses in caring for loved ones using alcohol and drugs – reports estimate families save the state £750m per year in this way¹. Although this support may not fall under the traditional definition of giving used in the report, it is important to remember the large amount of people who give up their resources, both financial and emotional, to look after members of their families. Sometimes this is at the expense of their own health and happiness and often it is without feeling they have a choice in the matter.

Whilst the aim contained in the paper is clearly laudable, the processes by which it is implemented are what remain to be decided and present some problems; a balance should be struck between retaining the independence of the voluntary sector and ensuring the Government plays a valuable and appropriate role in creating the culture of giving outlined in the Green Paper. Adfam would agree that we must get to a point where ‘individuals and communities are empowered to act together to make a positive difference to their own lives and those of others’, but the challenge is in finding appropriate mechanism to empower local people and enable them to make real contributions.

Great Opportunities

It should be noted that, when creating a culture of giving in the local community according to Big Society principles, many charities – particularly small ones – do not have attractive opportunities involving endangered animals, sporting events, summer camps, overseas aid work or star-studded fundraising events: they need help with more everyday issues like governance, training, finances and planning for future funding streams at community level. It is not a competitive fault of smaller voluntary organisations that they are unable to provide these opportunities: it is more a reflection of the scale of their work, or the more unpopular causes (such as drugs and alcohol) that many indispensable community organisations work around. There are of course both supply- and demand-side factors at work and charities have to make their opportunities attractive, but in the case of small social organisations the main selling point is the difference they make to the community, rather than the activity of the volunteering work itself.

Affordable, convenient giving is of course an area that should be built on, and the Green Paper is right to identify it as a key direction. However if the scale of an initiative is too large, there is a risk that fundraising will continue to be dominated by a tiny minority of large charities. The example of the Pennies Foundation is an admirable one, but the named charities currently on the Pennies

¹ [Supporting the Supporters: families of drug misusers](#), UK Drug Policy Commission, 2009

Foundation website are what are widely considered large charities: they are not struggling financially as much as many others, have large and dedicated fundraising departments and are known more for national campaigning activities than community-based social action. This is not to say that the money earned by larger charities is gained unfairly in any way, but that a large-scale giving system (for example at cash machines) is skewed towards those organisations that already possess a financial and institutional advantage.

Also, if there are too many charities to choose from (for example at a cash machine) or too large an intuitive gap between the donation and what it supports (such as an intermediary grant-giving body) then people are put off donating. In line with Big Society principles, affordable giving should be as locally focused as possible, so people are encouraged to become involved in civic society within their communities and can see the difference it makes locally.

‘Volunteering can play an important role in helping unemployed people keep in touch’, the Green Paper states; however, research by the UKDPC found that ‘almost two-thirds of employers would not employ a former heroin or crack user, even if they were fit for the job’². The opportunities created by volunteering are of particular relevance to those in recovery or current substance users. Unemployment rates amongst substance users are higher than average and the encouragement of a commitment to equality and sensitivity from organisations to the histories of all volunteers is certainly something Adfam would encourage.

Information

According to the Green Paper, the Government is ‘particularly interested in how smaller charities and community groups can make their presence felt’. As the paper also notes, larger charities, especially ones with a national profile, are already savvy in spreading their message and promoting the giving of time and money to their cause. Smaller voluntary and community sector organisations, however, often do not have the time, money or expertise to focus on profile boosting activities and consequently have less success in this area. In a climate of funding cuts small services are likely to focus on ‘core’ activities of service provision and may be reluctant to spend time on something perceived as secondary, or not central to their frontline activities.

Educating local communities about the realities of supporting families affected by drugs and alcohol (and similar types of community support) could help demystify the process, add human stories and faces to a process of support that people may not know much about and increase the likelihood of local volunteering. Open days, leaflets in community spaces and the cooperation of local media could all help in promoting the idea that services supporting families and substance users are part of the community and make a valuable contribution to it. There is a role for Government here in sponsoring this low-level activity – governance and good practice tips can be available at an arm’s length level for local organisations to use as they wish. Infrastructure bodies and umbrella organisations, including Adfam, can also have a key role in disseminating such information to their supporters and partners.

² [Getting Serious About Stigma: the problem with stigmatising drug users](#), UK Drug Policy Commission, 2010

Adfam supports the development of any local mechanism which promotes the giving of time or resources to smaller voluntary and community sector organisations. This should ideally happen with the close cooperation of commissioners, third sector partners and Government policymakers. The production of toolkits or resource packs for small third-sector organisations, with guidance on how best to engage with volunteers and ensure there is better awareness of their important work locally, would help; again these could be delivered through - or in partnership with - specialist umbrella bodies. A centralised database such as www.do-it.org.uk providing information on local volunteering opportunities is also useful, and an information push for local charities could be beneficial in promoting the use of such databases by organisations needing volunteers. Brokering support at local level is an area where there is a key role for Government support and investment.

The Green Paper is quite right that 'providing great opportunities to give is only relevant if people know about them', and the growth of new media represents a key opportunity for the promotion of volunteering, particularly for smaller organisations. Information and guidance particularly aimed at smaller voluntary organisations on effectively using new media would also be something appropriate for inclusion in an information campaign or toolkit. Government and umbrella bodies can work together to combat the idea that new media is the preserve of the large, well-resourced charities that have run successful campaigns through it; in fact these methods of communication have the benefit of often being free, which is crucial for agencies with smaller budgets.

Social impact reporting is mentioned in the Green Paper, and is something that is an important area for focus. Research from the Third Sector Research Centre has indicated that problems currently exist in the ability to calculate social return on investment: for example how to quantify broad social outcomes, how to attribute credit to different organisations working with the same people (for example those with multiple needs) and the expense of the data collection – a point particularly relevant to smaller organisations³. Efforts must be made to ensure that appropriate methods do exist for effective data collection in community organisations, and that smaller organisations are able to demonstrate their worth. A policy steer from Government would be welcome here to ensure that the playing field is level, and all organisations have a chance to be involved and provide services for their communities, regardless of size. Capacity building around social return on investment – led or commissioned by Government - could enable smaller organisations providing a public service (such as supporting families affected by drugs and alcohol) to raise money from a wider variety of funders.

Visibility

Visibly celebrating giving must recognise not just the act of giving as desirable, but the real difference that it made, and the impact of the organisation's work – particularly in the local community. Celebrating giving is extremely important and helps to encourage others, but this should focus on the difference the money, time and organisation makes, rather than simply the amount donated. To increase levels of giving in the overall population, smaller and non-monetary contributions need to be celebrated and shown to be valuable: seeing the difference a million-pound museum donation has made is all well and good, but not many people are in a position to replicate

³ [The Ambitions and Challenges of SROI](#), Third Sector Resource Centre, 2010

that and would be more influenced by a success story of a more modest donation of time, expertise or money.

As mentioned in the Green Paper, social welfare only represented 7% of the activities volunteers were most likely to participate in in 2007. As per the point above, the difference made by these organisations should be celebrated and built upon as a cornerstone of community resilience and social capital. Social return on investment should be celebrated when the input is the giving of time and money from individual donors, just as it is with more institutional funders such as charitable foundations.

Though giving publicly and entrenching the practice is of course important, those charities working in controversial or stigmatised areas may be quite happy raising funds more discreetly. As the Green Paper states, 'people are more likely to give if they feel a strong sense of connection with the cause'; and people who then give money to causes related to drug and alcohol use (particularly in the family) may not want to make this known publicly. As noted previously, not all voluntary work will appear equally attractive to potential volunteers; stigma still exists around services that support families affected by substance use⁴ and although some people may be happy to provide time or money, not all are.

The Green Paper is correct that Government and its employees should lead by example: it shows not only that ministers, MPs and civil servants are committed to acting on the ideals they are proposing for others, but also that a culture of giving can run throughout a large administration for the benefit of all. By virtue of its size and visibility, Government can be a key agent in establishing norms of giving, such as a number of volunteer days per year or an easy 'give as you pay' wage system.

Business has a key role to play, and this is rightly recognised in the Green Paper. The document states that 'successful businesses are responsible businesses', but this is not a universally acknowledged maxim. Government should work with business leaders to improve the visibility of Corporate Social Responsibility and show that rather than being a luxury, it is a key part of doing good business. This also links to the point made previously about the employment of those in recovery from drug and alcohol problems, or with a history of mental illness or offending behaviour: businesses should be encouraged and incentivised to take a lead in these areas. Volunteering can be a key route back into the workplace for the long-term unemployed, and increasing the levels of such volunteering would pay dividends for individuals, businesses, communities and the welfare state.

Exchange and reciprocity

As the Green Paper correctly states, 'it is helpful for people to see and feel the benefits they can derive from contributing as well as the impact of their contribution has on others'. The idea that volunteers should see a tangible benefit and outcome from their volunteering is a good one and something likely to encourage giving. The best way to help volunteers understand the positive impact their time and money has is to share the success stories or everyday practices of the organisations involved; local media could be useful in publicising the good that comes of volunteering, and the valuable work done by third sector organisations.

⁴ [Getting Serious About Stigma: the problem with stigmatising drug users](#), UK Drug Policy Commission, 2010

An increased public recognition of those who do volunteer would also help establish a link between the act itself and the benefit it can bring to a community. If the act of giving up time or money was visibly celebrated, especially around areas often seen as 'unglamorous' such as drugs and alcohol, others may be inspired to give themselves. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has an online resource called [Share Street](#) which both provides information about volunteering opportunities and offers recognition of those who have volunteered through case studies. Share Street covers only volunteering opportunities around children and young people, but it may be a source of interest and ideas for a similar resource around family support. The other online resources the Green Paper mentions such as Zopa, IndiGoGo and Sponsume are also resources with the potential for attracting new volunteers. The worry remains, though, as to how appropriate they are for the community support organisations that Adfam represents.

Support

Though the Green Paper's 'main lesson' is to 'acknowledge the limits of Government', there are areas where state contribution can make a difference to charities in an arm's length, responsible and useful way. Government support for small organisations is not about 'hand-holding' but equipping dedicated, if under-resourced, community organisations to make the most of their potential.

The Green Paper is exactly right that 'more needs to be done to support small, informal volunteer-run groups and associations': these grassroots groups, for example those supporting families affected by drugs and alcohol, are the cornerstone of community activism and the major determinants of social capital. The Community First programme is an extremely positive step in that it recognises the need to concentrate resources in areas with low social capital and significant deprivation – it is in these communities where small voluntary organisations really make a difference. The Community Organisers scheme also has great potential to link up the often separate work of different small charities and social organisations in local areas.

Smaller voluntary services often do not possess the resources and institutional stability to make the most of willing volunteers, for example relating to insurance, CRB checks or health and safety. A clear role for Government, therefore – alongside key partners such as umbrella organisations - is in building capacity within neighbourhood-level agencies to deal with these bureaucratic issues. Similarly, Government has a role in brokering non-financial support between businesses and voluntary organisations, ensuring that adequate mechanisms exist for skills exchange at a local level.

Further information

Adfam also made a submission to the Government's 'Building a Stronger Civil Society' consultation, which can be found [here](#).

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