

# Exploring Partnerships on Thriving Minds

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## Background



This case study examines the insights from an interview assessing a grantee's approach to and experiences of partnership working, reflecting on effective partnerships and the conditions that have enabled them, as well as focusing on how collaborations have enhanced the services they provide to young people.

The grantee involved in this case study, working primarily with young people who are outside mainstream education and employment, has navigated multiple partnerships across statutory and voluntary sectors. Their partnerships range from service-level agreements with local authorities to informal relationships with other youth organisations. These partnerships have provided critical support, allowing the grantee to expand their services to a wider reach of young people, share resources with neighbouring organisations, and enhance the mental health outcomes of the young people they serve.

## Development of partnerships



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The grantee expressed that true partnerships are built on equality. The grantee highlighted that when their organisation feels valued and their contributions respected, the partnership thrives. However, they noted that in certain partnerships, particularly with local authorities, power imbalances often occur. As stated by the grantee, *"If we're not seen as equal partners, we question whether we should be in that partnership at all"*. This underscores the importance of equity in decision-making, ensuring that all partners have a voice and influence in shaping outcomes.

The grantee reflected on both successful and failed partnerships, with trust being the determining factor. They stated that transparency in dealings had fuelled this level of trust and emphasised that it is crucial that partner organisations are *"above board"* and avoid doing anything *"dodgy behind the scenes"*. Transparency in intentions and actions fosters long-term trust. For example, in a partnership where the partner organisation failed to deliver on promises, the project nearly collapsed. The grantee also highlighted learning from past experiences and

how these teachings can foster trust, reflecting on one experience where a partnership had “poached staff” the grantee explained how this experience taught them the importance of setting up clear boundaries and agreements, ensuring alignment before entering a partnership.

The grantee has seen tangible benefits from collaborative partnerships, particularly in areas where resources or expertise are shared. Their long-standing partnership with a mental health charity, Growing Space, exemplifies this. The partnership allowed both organisations to extend their reach and services, with Growing Space focusing on adults and the grantee working with young people, particularly NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) individuals. This complementary approach enabled both to serve a broader age range without competition. The grantee stated “We work with young people, they work with adults... between us, we are able to offer an 11-60+ service for people. So it’s a good strategic fit”. By pooling their resources, the two organisations were able to offer a continuum of support to both adults and young people that was originally only offered to adults, creating a holistic approach to mental health. This type of partnership is not only strategic but beneficial for young people, as it fills gaps that neither organisation could address alone.

## Learning from partnerships



Through successful partnerships, the grantee has been able to innovate their service delivery. For instance, the development of a summer transition programme aimed at preventing young people from disengaging over the long summer holiday was funded through a partnership. The grantee highlighted: “The six-week summer holiday for the kind of young people we’re working with... it’s almost like it undoes all the good work we’ve done with them all year”. This initiative, supported by UK Youth funding, has been instrumental in keeping young people engaged in learning and development throughout the summer months, “They come to us because they like it. Whether they go somewhere else or not, we don’t know. But certainly, our experience is that if we maintain that link, they stay on track and achieve more”.

Misaligned goals between partners, particularly with local authorities, were frequently mentioned as a barrier. The grantee often found themselves attending partnership meetings that were driven by local authority agendas, which did not align with their mission of directly supporting young people. This created frustration: “It’s all about their agenda, their objectives, and what we’re going to do to contribute to those objectives”.

The grantee’s experiences with partnerships have shaped their approach to future collaborations. They now perform rigorous due diligence on potential partners, ensuring that there is alignment in values and objectives. As noted by the grantee, “We’ve learned to research our partners thoroughly, asking around about their reputations before we commit”. This more cautious approach has helped them avoid pitfalls and has strengthened their ability to form meaningful, impactful partnerships.

## Conclusion



Partnerships that are built on trust through shared purpose and commitments, as well as openness and transparency, and partnerships built on equality, in this instance, significantly enhance the services delivered to young people. However, systemic issues such as power imbalances and short-term funding cycles present ongoing challenges.

Additionally, the grantee highlights the need for strategic alignment in partnerships. Organisations should be mindful of how partnerships serve their mission and avoid collaborations that dilute their focus or place them in a subordinate role. As demonstrated, the most successful partnerships are those where both parties benefit and where the young people they serve, are the ultimate beneficiaries.