

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 works closely with both statutory and voluntary agencies, recognising that integrated, multi-agency partnerships are crucial for offering the holistic support young people need. Their work is funded through a variety of sources, including the *Thriving Minds* fund, which has acted as a key enabler in supporting the development of structured, long-term partnerships aimed at addressing the diverse needs of the young people they engage with.

Initiating and managing partnerships



As many are, the grantee's partnerships are carefully selected based on alignment of shared missions and areas of work/support offered to young people. The grantee emphasised the importance of working across sectors, "*it's so important to not work in silos*", highlighting the collaborative approach they take in assessing goals to build towards positive outcomes for young people in the local community. The grantee has built strong relationships with a range of partners, most notably is the CYP network (a coordinated consortium of voluntary, youth, and charity organisations) under YO Solihull, which was formed through the grantee and other organisations noticing a gap in provision for young people. "*We started putting one [partnership] together, and then we were chosen by YPF to do a youth partnership pilot*". This partnership grew to include around 70 community and voluntary organisations, allowing them to jointly pursue funding and collaborate on projects and develop service provision, such as counselling services and sporting events.

A major collaborative partnership that emerged is the *Connected Care Network*, created with another organisation, Ordinary Magic (offering early intervention mental health and wellbeing support for 'unreachable' young people), and a local paediatric doctor, combining support from local voluntary and statutory organisations, and local council input. The grantee explained how this partnership helps to address long waiting times for mental health and autism services, connecting families with community organisations through a referral system.



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The grantee approaches partnerships informally at first, often through simple networking. When speaking to the process of creating a partnership, the grantee stated *“You just start chatting... when you meet an organisation, you just know, and you just think, oh my gosh, it’s about shared values”*, illustrating how many of these relationships begin organically and needs are aligned before becoming more formalised through service-level agreements or memorandums of understanding (MOUs).

This approach to engagements reflects putting relationships first within partnership development, where trust and shared values are the foundation of collaboration. The transition to formal agreements like service-level agreements (SLAs) or MOUs provides a framework for accountability and scalability, essential for the longevity and sustainability of partnerships over time.

Defining effective partnerships



For this grantee, an effective partnership is defined by *“good communication and mutual respect”*. They highlighted that effective communication enables greater *“transparency”* in their decision-making process within the partnership, allowing them to clearly explain their choices and *“share the wealth”* of different opportunities with colleagues. Moreover, the grantee emphasised the tangible benefits of partnership working achieved through clear communication, noting, *“partnerships are always better. You can achieve so much more”*.

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These principles have been central to the success of their work, particularly in joint projects like the *Connected Care Network*. As previously mentioned, this initiative has been instrumental in helping the grantee streamline its mentoring services for young people, providing a more integrated support structure in collaboration with local health services.

The grantee reflected on the importance of mutual respect and acknowledges that not all partnerships are easy, recounting one challenge where a clash of personalities arose with a new partner: *“I don’t see eye to eye with one person... but it’s understanding that personalities are different”*. Despite these personal differences, which the grantee recognised as a natural part of working with others, they noted that this particular partnership valued and fostered open communication through regular meetings and rotating Chairs of said meetings to find common ground. As a result, the partnership continued effectively, with differing opinions seen as an opportunity for alignment and growth. The grantee emphasised that compromises could help further organisational development, highlighting the significance of professional respect and shared outcomes in support of the young people they engage with over personal feelings. As they put it, *“I think you have to sometimes put your personal opinions aside if there’s a greater good”*.

Additionally, the grantee surfaced the importance of peer support through their CEO network. *“I would argue the most useful partnership was really selfishly for my own personal support network”*. The CEOs of partnering organisations formed strong relationships, offering emotional and practical support, such as sharing staff and resources when needed. They have formed an online group where they regularly reach out, particularly through challenging times such as post-COVID recovery.

Challenges and mitigation strategies



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A key challenge the grantee faces is ensuring that partnerships remain balanced, and leadership roles are shared. In the past, the grantee often took lead in partnerships but have since learned the importance of stepping back to let others take on leadership roles. As the grantee explained, *“I had to step back... it should never be about one person or one organisation”*. This shift has fostered a more collaborative approach, allowing other voices to be amplified and included in the decision-making process. By encouraging partners to collectively own outcomes, this approach creates a more sustainable partnerships dynamic through diverse perspectives, shared ownership and accountability, where leadership is not concentrated in one organisation.

Another challenge has been navigating funding processes. The grantee shared an example where they secured £60,000 in funding within their first week of joining a new partnership under a new role but were unable to access the funds immediately due to internal bureaucratic hurdles. *“I found £60,000... but I was told, ‘No, you can’t use it’”*. This delay contradicted the grantee’s initial expectations and reasoning but underscored the importance of having clear, formal structures and procedures in place for resource allocation. Such processes are essential to prevent delays, reduce frustrations and tensions between funder and partner organisations, and ensure that partnerships can execute projects efficiently and in a timely manner.

Impact on organisational practice



The grantee’s partnerships have profoundly reshaped how they deliver their services, particularly through the *Connected Care Network*. Previously, the grantee ran its own standalone mentoring projects to support the mental health and wellbeing of the young people they engage with, but due to increased demand within the Connected Care initiative and fleeting capacity, they shifted their focus entirely to this partnership. The grantee explained *“We had to stop our non-connected care mentoring programme and focus it all into that”*, highlighting the scale of the transition. This change required hiring a dedicated mentoring manager and safeguarding lead, demonstrating the programme’s growth and need for specialised roles.

Through this network, the grantee has supported over 150 young people facing social isolation and mental health challenges. For instance, one young person initially came to the programme for mentoring due to *“low-level mental health”* concerns and low school attendance. After joining a peer group, they gained the confidence to participate in further activities, expanding their engagement from one hour a week to daily involvement in open access support: *“They’d gone from getting one hour of support from us to getting every single day, four hours a day.”*

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This reflects the programme’s ability to offer flexible, tailored support based on diverse needs of each young person. The grantee clarified that the programme is not meant to replace statutory services but instead serve as an early help offer, providing crucial support while young people wait for more formal services.

Additionally, the collaborative nature of these partnerships has shifted the grantee’s funding strategy. *“Before, we were quite grabby... now, we tend to try and do everything in partnership”*.

This shift from a competitive, siloed approach to a more collaborative one has allowed them to secure joint funding and share resources more effectively with other organisations in their local proximity.

The shift in service delivery and funding strategy reflects how external partnerships catalyse changes in internal practices and strategies. The *Connected Care Network* has prompted the organisation to transition from isolated, self-contained programming to a more integrated service model, demonstrating the capacity of partnerships to drive innovation and service improvements. The move from a competitive to a collaborative funding approach also highlights the benefits of collaborating with competitors, which allows organisations to pool resources and secure funding for joint initiatives that would be more difficult to achieve independently.

Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity (EDI) within partnerships



The grantee has demonstrated how EDI is integrated into the grantee's strategic planning, with deliberate efforts to diversify its leadership and represent the communities they serve. For example, the grantee emphasised the importance of EDI in their work but noted how *"It's really hard not to be tokenistic in these sort of things"* reflecting on how the team *"was quite white"* but they consciously included members from diversified background, ensuring representation.

Furthermore, following local social unrest, the grantee quickly formed a working group through their partnership to provide *"safe spaces to have these conversations"* about race, identity, and religion, addressing young people's fears of being impacted by hate and harm or being *"called far-right or racist"*. They also organised a "Play Day" event, where over 2,000 attendees celebrated diversity through performances like Bangla dancing and a disability choir. Despite the area's reputation for racial tensions, the turnout was wholly positive from those in the local community. These insights demonstrate how partnerships can collate efforts and resources to adapt to community needs.

Conclusion



This case study illustrates the importance of partnerships in delivering comprehensive support to young people. Key themes include collaboration as a strategic imperative, the evolution from informal to formal partnerships, the need for effective communication and mutual respect, and the impact of shared leadership and resource allocation. While challenges around personality clashes and funding processes persist, the grantee's commitment to integrated, multi-agency collaboration has significantly enhanced its ability to meet the diverse needs of young people.