

Exploring Partnerships on Thriving Minds

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.

Through collaborations with various statutory, voluntary, and community-based organisations, the grantee has been able to extend its impact, particularly in addressing issues related to youth mental health, poverty, and crime.

Partnership networks



The grantee, originally focused on offering services and support around sport activities, which were helpful in engaging young people particularly in group settings, building relationships and promoting physical well-being. The grantee has since expanded its offer to address more comprehensive social and mental health needs of young people. As noted by the grantee, the scope of their work is diverse, encompassing not just young people but also their families and the broader community. They have incorporated workshops focused on mental health, self-management, and online resources such as podcasts and music-based emotional expression tools.

These initiatives are made possible through partnerships with local authorities, community safety teams, schools, the police, and businesses. These strategic alliances have facilitated the creation of a "blended approach," where services for parents run parallel to youth programmes.

The grantee noted, "We've been working in partnership with the police and community safety," particularly in relation to crime prevention. This collaboration allowed them to engage young people in crime reduction initiatives, while supporting the broader community by linking with community hubs and addressing issues like antisocial behaviour.

Additionally, the grantee mentioned their involvement with VCAs (voluntary community associations) and community hubs, which were essential for providing continuity of care, particularly during the pandemic. They engaged with local food banks, where "parents were attending food banks, so it was like a joint approach" to support families facing financial hardships.

Another notable partnership revolved around the NHS recognising the value of the grantee's work, leading to a collaboration that allowed the grantee to expand its mental health support for young people. The grantee remarked, "Partnerships with NHS... they've seen the value of what we do." This has influenced the grantee's strategic goals and policies, allowing for more holistic care that addresses both health and social needs.

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Role of effective partnerships



Key characteristics of effective partnerships in the grantee's experience included (i) mutual respect, and (ii) clear communication. The grantee noted, "Both parties being valued and trusted... regular communication, but not overkill". Effective partnerships were described as those that not only meet immediate needs but also contribute to the organisation's long-term goals, such as providing sustained support for families dealing with issues like poverty and crime.



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The grantee highlighted their work with statutory services such as the police, community safety, and local authorities. They demonstrated mutual respect through this partnership by ensuring that they valued the roles each organisation played, allowing the collaboration to function smoothly. Even when there were challenging aspects, like engaging with politically motivated partners, mutual respect and understanding of varying views was necessary to continue the work and implementing a myriad of considerations into shared decision-making outcomes.

Clear communication was emphasised in several collaborations, especially with community hubs and food banks. The grantee spoke about the importance of regular meetings and transparent discussions with partners to make sure all parties were aligned in their approach. This was particularly important when addressing issues like food distribution and support for families. They stated: "Communication is key. We have regular meetings, and for each partnership, we make sure we know exactly what's expected and who is responsible". Furthermore, ongoing dialogue between partners maintains the health and internal workings of the partnership collaboration, with the grantee stating: "Regular communication is important... we make sure everyone knows what's expected, and that helps avoid misunderstandings".

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Managing power dynamics was a theme that arose alongside building trust and respect, particularly when reflecting on their ability to decline partnerships that did not align with their values. They shared, "We do say no. However, we are very aware of the power that all these big organisations have regards funding, and then you've got government policy that leads that, and we're just in the middle of that now". This reflects the grantee's ability to establish boundaries while still respecting the role of funding bodies, but also reflects the existing limitations to barriers created through power imbalances and how this may hinder the role and autonomy in decisions that support their organisational work, particularly in regards to gaining and sustaining funding.

One notable partnership involved the integration of services across statutory bodies, such as schools and the police, which enhanced the organisation's capacity to provide comprehensive support to young people with educational needs or in crime prevention. This collaboration resulted in a broader range of services being offered, including coaching for parents alongside youth activities. These efforts align with findings from a secondary analysis conducted by Dartington Service Design Lab looking into the scope of and impact of partnerships across the Thriving Minds cohort, which emphasise the importance of partnerships in addressing gaps in service delivery through coordinated and cooperative working. Further on this, effective partnerships have also influenced the grantee's organisational practices, driving changes to policy adaptations and new service approaches. For example, aforementioned partnerships with the NHS and local schools led to changes in internal policies, including updating insurance requirements to meet local authority standards, thus extending their operational capacity: *"[Partnerships] added growth... [we've] changes how we do business really in order to engage with local authorities"*.

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Long term sustainability and funding



A crucial aspect enabling the success of these partnerships is the multi-year funding provided through *Thriving Minds*. The grantee stressed that this funding model offered them the stability to build sustainable partnerships and avoid *"chasing the pound coin around salaries or overheads"*. This aligns with the broader secondary analysis conducted by Dartington Service Design Lab indicating that multi-year, unrestricted funding fosters the development of long-term partnerships and enables organisations to think more strategically.

In addition to statutory and voluntary partners, the grantee has strategically engaged with private sector partners, such as logistics companies, to diversify income streams and reduce reliance on short-term project-based funding. The grantee stated that they feel there is a misunderstanding from the wider cohort, and although at first their relationship with private sector partners was helpful, tensions had arisen. The grantee reflected on a moment where a private logistics company was donating food to the grantee, they had felt over a 6-week period that *"there was a definite offloading of anything that they needed to get rid of that didn't go into landfill"*. Although the grantee was grateful for this, they stated that eventually this donation did not sit within their remit overtime, and they had to say no which changed the relationship but for the better: *"for us it was about staying true to who we are. There was a couple of difficult conversations...we're not a food delivery service"*. This openness and clear communication allowed the grantee to maintain autonomy and turn down partnerships that did not align with their goals.

Conclusion



This grantee demonstrates the value of strategic partnerships in creating sustainable and impactful services for young people. As discussed, through clear communication, aligned goals, and a focus on mutual respect, the grantee has successfully navigated the complexities of partnership working to work towards their mission of providing varied support to the young people and families then engage with.